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Culzean Country Park – *How an iconic Scottish landscape used designation to secure a sustainable future*

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Abstract

When in 1969 Culzean, Ayrshire, was designated as Scotland's first country park, it utilised legislative provisions intended to provide countryside recreation space for motorists. This paper offers a critical review of the designation process, revealing how this was used by the National Trust for Scotland as a mechanism to manage their prime property, and particularly to achieve a financially sustainable future. It shows how creative financing, bending rules, manipulating expectations, and flexibility were applied through partnerships with public authorities that were beneficial to all parties, while not quite adhering to the intent of the legislation. Culzean achieved acclaim, offered an exemplar to be followed by its counterparts, and informed perceptions and definition of the British country park. A review of this experience is critical in that austerity is now threatening the existing funding model and new funding models are needed. An understanding of historic processes may help inform present solutions.

Key words: country parks, countryside recreation, Culzean, designated landscapes, visitor management, visitor attractions, partnerships.

Introduction

When the term ‘country park’ was first used as a specific landscape designation in the United Kingdom in the late 1960s, new legislation identified these as areas of land set aside for outdoor recreation. These were to be distinct from the National Parks first designated in the 1950s, which similarly provided for the public, but were also intended for conservation of natural and cultural heritage. As in many other legal areas within the UK, separate legislation was required to extend the provision to Scotland (*Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967*; *Countryside Act 1968*). Country parks were smaller than National Parks, and had a defined purpose of catering for increased car ownership and enthusiasm for leisure motoring, which had fuelled demand for countryside recreation space. This demand, it was suggested in the 1960s, was causing intolerable congestion on the roads and at popular scenic sites, damaging the interests of farming, forestry and field sports, threatening an idyllic rural quality of life, and compromising the scenery itself through a proliferation of parked cars, caravans and unseemly behaviours by people with little understanding of, or sensitivity to, aesthetic values or the rural way of life (Dower, 1965).

The issue had been profoundly summarized by Michael Dower in a report entitled *Fourth Wave: The challenge of leisure* (1965) and was so convincing that it led to the countryside legislation of 1967-68. This aimed to deflect the threat to the countryside by establishing strategically-located recreation sites, dedicated space with facilities for motorists to enjoy outdoor recreation without compromising more vulnerable sites elsewhere. These ‘country parks’ would provide an alternative to roadside parking and inappropriate picnicking in the countryside. They would cater for the casual motorist and would have facilities including toilets, parking space, litter collection, and a ranger service (delivering both information and enforcement). Their advocates did not think they needed to be

particularly 'scenic'; for example, in *New Lives New Landscapes* (1970) Nan Fairbrother argued that any countryside would do, as long as it looked like 'the right place' to a motorist, and had effective boundaries (Fairbrother, 1972, pp.103, 149). The parks would provide a 'clear-cut division' between 'urban recreation and farming', confine the cars and their occupants, and isolate their by-products of noise, litter, and pollution (Fairbrother, 1972, p. 103). The parks were expected to be readily accessible to motorists, to reduce countryside congestion on the roads and at parking places, but would be located so as not to interfere with landscapes of production (Ministry of Land and Natural Resources, 1966, pp. 3-4). This would meet the casual motorists' demands, while enabling the 'natural beauty of remote places' to be preserved (Fairbrother, 1972, p. 145). So, while the country park designation offered no protection to the site itself, it provided a vicarious protection to the more scenic sites from which it was expected to distract its audience.

Within this context, the selection of Culzean, a country house estate on the Firth of Clyde, seems a remarkable choice as the first Scottish country park. It was remote from the urban populations country parks were intended to serve; it was a designed parkland and gardens rather than countryside; and was already open to the public. Moreover, it charged a fee for entry. It did not fit the profile of freely accessible countryside, suited to noisy and unmanaged recreation, apparently intended by the legislators. But it was held up as an exemplar, described by Jean Balfour, the Chair of the Countryside Commission for Scotland, as 'a model for all Britain' (Stormonth Darling, 1985, p. 30), and celebrated in the *Shell Book of Country Parks* as 'the most magnificent [country park] in Britain' (Waugh, 1981, p. 211).

This anomalous choice of Culzean merits further exploration, particularly since the choice informed policy and established expectations elsewhere within Scotland, where it helped towards the development of a working definition of the country park, a definition left largely blank by a somewhat hesitant government. In the end, 21 of the total of 36 parks designated in Scotland had their origins in country house estates. An examination of Culzean's origins as a country park now has added piquancy in view of the recent decision of its main funding body, South Ayrshire Council, to withdraw financial support, a decision expected to lead to the abandonment of the 'country park' label at Culzean after 50 years of designation (McLaughlin, 2019).

Current knowledge and understanding

While country parks appear in broader reviews of post-war UK countryside policy, very little has been written about them *per se*. David Lambert has produced the only paper that investigates them as a landscape type, rather than as part of a wider policy framework. He identifies three phases in the evolution of the country park; the notion of the 'honeypot' resulting from the fear of a recreation explosion in the 1960s; 'reorientation and partnership' that recognized the failure of the early country parks to deliver recreation to working-class communities as well as to middle-class motorists; and eventually the idea of country parks as 'gateways' for the urban population to explore the countryside beyond the park boundaries (Lambert, 2006). Over time, the country park emerged into a more holistic and positive concept which sought to attract rather than to contain; moved beyond recreation to embrace environmental conservation, heritage protection, interpretation and education; and sought to promote notions of social inclusion and well-being, and to stimulate interest in the countryside beyond its boundaries (Lambert, 2006, pp. 49-53). Lambert's analysis is limited to England and Wales, however, and his three phases, though evidenced in Scotland, are less well demarcated chronologically. But in

the late 1960s, when Culzean was being considered as a possible country park, the creation of a ‘honeypot’ was still the dominant purpose, and the first tranche of country parks designated might thus have been expected to align closely with this approach.

Aside from Lambert, literature has tended to focus on wider English countryside policy, with Scotland either overlooked completely, or conflated with its larger neighbour. Carolyn Harrison's *Countryside Recreation in a Changing Society* is an honourable, but rare, exception which touches on the Scottish portfolio (Harrison, 1991). In much other literature, country parks are at best tangential to the story being told, but two recent publications narrow the focus down to country parks more specifically. Ian Rotherham's *The Rise and Fall of Countryside Management* is welcome in placing the English country park front and centre. His conclusions, based on English examples (of which there are over 200), assert that they have been highly successful and massively influential in raising environmental awareness. However, he overlooks the indisputable fact that, while some parks may be ‘successful’ (a term Rotherham defines in terms of visitor numbers); others – including some in Scotland - are manifestly much less so (Rotherham, 2015, pp. 48, 53). A more nuanced understanding is therefore needed. Unfortunately Luis Paulo Faria Ribeiro's recent work *Country Parks* does not provide this; he describes, *inter alia*, the history of the UK portfolio, and provides lavish illustration of comparable spaces elsewhere in the world, but his work contains historical errors and oversights, including reproducing the Countryside Agency's 2003 published data and commentary without attribution, and as though it were current to 2015 (Faria Ribeiro, 2015, pp. 10-12, citing Urban Parks Forum et al, 2003). A more careful appraisal of the portfolio, willing to define and recognise both success and failure, is needed, and the diversity of provision

under the country park umbrella means that this might well begin with studies of individual sites, especially those which blazed a trail for their successors.

Thus, there are significant gaps in our understanding and perception of country parks. This is particularly true in Scotland, where the country park has only recently begun to receive academic scrutiny. A reappraisal is timely because of contemporary concerns; there are challenges in funding and skilling of country parks, and new, less demanding, provision standards. Sustainable models will have to be developed that address these challenges and provide policies that will guarantee the parks' current quality and their future viability. These needs are by no means unique to Scotland, but may become more urgent if Scotland becomes more financially and politically independent of the UK in a post-Brexit scenario. This paper therefore aims to fill an important gap in our understanding of landscape designation, how it has affected (and to some extent altered) an important heritage site, and how it has been manipulated towards other aims related to funding and sustainability. It thus provides not only a historical insight into the process of securing designation, but also illustrates the value of designation as a means to additional, and even contrary, ends, an insight that may have a bearing on future designation policy.

This paper draws on the archives of the various bodies concerned (both directly and indirectly) in country park provision in Scotland. It does not therefore depend on a single organisational perspective, but rather draws from complementary and competing assessments of the process of designation. It stands alone as a case study of the early days of the Scottish legislation, but, because Culzean was presented to the wider world as an exemplar, it also serves to highlight exactly what was being exemplified. However,

the paper will also consider Culzean as an attempt to ‘game’ the rules to fit the demands of the specific situation being addressed; an approach which also has potential for replication in future policymaking. Culzean’s status as an icon of Scottish heritage and its prominence as a visitor attraction can be qualified by a perception that this status depends, at least to some extent, on co-operation and connivance in the way legislation was exploited to create a sustainable funding base for the site (Campsie, 2019).² Moreover, as a park now facing enormous financial pressure as a result of the reorientation of public finances in the UK, Culzean’s history can illuminate a debate currently under way in Scotland as to the ongoing sustainability of this type of provision in an age of financial austerity.

Culzean Castle and Country Park

Culzean Castle has been a prominent landmark on the west coast of Ayrshire for centuries, and during the late Middle Ages its estate was the largest in the region. It belonged to the Kennedy family from the 1400s until 1945 (NTS, 2008, p. 2). The development of the building and landscape reflect the fortunes of the family, with the main developments taking place after it became the principal seat for the family in 1759. In 1776 Robert Adam (1728-1792), who had introduced a new classical style to replace Palladianism and was then the ‘most fashionable architect in England’ (Colvin, 1978, pp. 46-55), was asked by the 10th Earl of Cassillis to transform the castle to better reflect the status of the family. An ambitious programme required demolition of large sections of the mediaeval tower house and its compound, or barmekin as it is called in Scotland, followed by extensive rebuilding that created a large castle, connected with the grounds

² Culzean was featured for many years (until the end of paper currency) on the Royal Bank of Scotland £5 note and is the third most popular NTS visitor attraction.

over a huge viaduct (Figure 1). Terraced gardens were created over a network of caves that extended underneath the castle; Adam also designed an ornamental ruined arch and a new Home Farm. The dramatic cliff-top position provided a perfect location for this edifice to create a fashionable Picturesque setting described as ‘sublime’ and ‘romantic’ (Historic Environment Scotland, n.d.) (Figure 2).

The extent of Adam’s involvement in further landscape proposals at Culzean is unknown, but his work there left the estate with enormous debts. It was the resources of the American-born Captain Archibald Kennedy (d. 1794), who had made his fortune during the Seven Years War (1756-63) and took over the estate in 1792, which helped to revive it. His son, also Archibald, the 12th Earl and later 1st Marquis of Ailsa (1770-1846), took advice from landscape gardeners Thomas White Senior (1739-1811) in the 1790s and his son Thomas White Junior (1764-1836) through the 1820s, prompting a programme of improvements that resulted in a series of new carriage drives through the parkland, with lodges; they also created a swan pond, bath house, Chinese pagoda, aviary, Camellia house, kitchen gardens and new estate buildings. A further phase of development occurred from 1875-9 when Charles Reid added a new wing to the castle and provided a porch. His work also included the making of ornamental gardens in Fountain Court, while part of the kitchen gardens was later transformed into Lady Ailsa’s Pleasure Garden. Lady Ailsa was the wife of the 3rd Marquis, and together they put a significant stamp on the estate, conforming to contemporary garden fashion. (Historic Environment Scotland, n.d.). As with many estates, though, Culzean went into decline during the twentieth century, and in 1945 the estate was split up by the 5th Marquis of Ailsa, with the castle

and policies immediately surrounding it made over to the National Trust of Scotland (NTS), who accepted it without endowment.

Today Culzean Castle is a category A-listed building, the highest rating determined by Historic Environment Scotland, recognised for its national and international architectural and historical interest, set within a Designated Landscape (since 1987) recognized for its outstanding interest in all assessment criteria: artistic, historical, horticultural, architectural, archaeological, scenic and for nature conservation. Its main claim to its rating is the connection with Robert Adam, as an internationally renowned architect, while the house and its setting were exemplary of the Picturesque paradigm, widely recognized as such at the time. (Figure 2). Additionally, this landscape contains numerous other 18th and 19th century buildings and structures that have been separately recognized through listing, several of them within the A-listing category, including the Home Farm (Historic Environment Scotland, n.d.).

The origins of the country park idea

While this official recognition emphasises the importance of the site, its acquisition put great pressure on the NTS. At the time Culzean was offered to the Trust in 1945, the NTS was a small organisation, with just over 1,000 members, yet it determined to accept the site without the benefit of an endowment to finance its continued maintenance, ‘rather than see the whole achievement of Culzean deteriorate or disintegrate’ (Stormonth Darling, 1968a, p. 2). Jamie Stormonth Darling, the dynamic secretary who led the NTS from 1949 - 83, characterised this decision as an ‘act of faith’ justified not only by the innate significance of the property but also by the support of members and funding bodies

who, over the subsequent 23 years, contributed over £300,000 towards its restoration and upkeep (Stormonth Darling, 1968a, pp. 3-4).

Yet the legacy of some thirty years of neglect inherited with this new acquisition was always going to remain an issue (Wm. Gillespie, 1969, p. 1). By 1961 Culzean was running at a substantial loss (NTS, 1961). Raising revenues by increasing visitor numbers was one way of addressing this, and Stormonth Darling emphasised the importance of stimulating the widest possible access to NTS properties, not only through casual day-trippers but also through organised and structured activities such as educational group visits. He considered that Culzean was ideally placed to meet these objectives, and this approach ultimately made this site an NTS honeypot which now receives about 300,000 visitors annually (Stormonth Darling, 1968a, pp. 3-4; Behan, 2019). However increased revenue through visitor numbers alone was never going to be sufficient, and an appeal had to be launched in 1968, aiming to raise £100,000 (the equivalent of £1.72 million in 2019) (Stormonth Darling, 1985, p. 18; Morley, 2019).

It was against this challenging background that Stormonth Darling creatively sought alternative approaches with the architect and landscape architect Elisabeth Beazley (1923 - 2018), who as a member of the Executive Committee of the National Trust had an established pedigree relating to countryside sites and visitor management, and who had already acted as an advisor to the NTS on other sites including Bannockburn and Culloden; the idea that Culzean might become a country park seems to have originated with her (Stormonth Darling, 1985, p. 18). Stormonth Darling introduced this idea in 1968 in a short unpublished report entitled *The "Prospect of Culzean" as a Country Park*, which provided a future context in the shape of proposed developments, such as the New

Town at Irvine (25 miles away), the forthcoming European Conservation Year (1970), the expanding demand for countryside recreation, the legislative preference for provision that was easily reachable from population centres, and the new countryside legislation that introduced the concept of the country park (Stormonth Darling, 1968, pp. 3-4). He clearly expected this legislation to open new funding streams for recreation in the countryside and saw an opportunity for Culzean.

With Culzean's finances now an urgent issue, Stormonth Darling lobbied extensively to facilitate the country park idea (SDD, n.d., p. 2). He courted the new Countryside Commission for Scotland (CCS) which had been formed by the legislation that created country parks, and which was charged with enabling local authorities to implement the Act's provisions. The CCS was answerable to the Scottish Development Department (SDD) who held the country park funding until this was devolved to CCS in 1981. Its freedom to act independently was thus severely curtailed, especially in the early years when it was seeking to establish itself, and to justify its existence against a background of scepticism, but its endorsement of the project would be essential to securing release of funds (Stormonth Darling, 1968b).

He had already done a lot of groundwork. In October 1968 he had invited Lord Hughes, a junior Scottish Office minister, to the site, in which he would have undoubtedly discussed the opportunity of creating a country park (NTS, 1968a). He brought his executive committee in line with the reassurance that country park designation would secure the financial future of Culzean, by enabling cost-sharing with the CCS and surrounding local authorities, but without compromising the NTS' statutory obligations or its operational model, or disrupting the income stream from admissions and car parking. Noting the legislative requirement for local authority involvement, he had

already met with Ayrshire County Council, and by December 1968 had held exploratory discussions with both Ayr and Kilmarnock Burgh Councils, when he was able to report to his Executive Committee the burghs' unanimous support for the idea in principle (NTS, 1968b, 1968c). The CCS were also supportive, and having recognized that Culzean had 'first-class' potential as a country park, commissioned the landscape consultant William Gillespie and Partners to carry out a feasibility study (CCS, 1968; Foster, 1968; NTS, 1968c).

The consultant's terms of reference illustrate the very limited understanding, in these formative years, of what a country park might need to offer its audience, but also reflect the optimism of those behind the project. Gillespie was cautioned that criteria for funding were yet to be determined, but was nevertheless encouraged to come up with a proposal that would be both comprehensive and imaginative. His study should anticipate an increase in visitor numbers as a result of the appeal of the country park designation, but this should not be allowed to adversely impact on Culzean's essential rural and country estate character. He was also asked to cost his proposals. For their part, the CCS claimed to be open to the possibility of revolutionary ideas on visitor management and admission arrangements, although this was not a view shared by the other partners, who, like the NTS, wanted retention of character rather than innovation (NTS, 1968b).

Gillespie's pioneering study was produced against a tight timetable and a lack of clarity as to what might need to be covered – although Stormonth Darling evidently provided some informal guidance behind the scenes (NTS, 1968d). The report noted the possibility that Culzean's remoteness might make it ineligible for country park designation, but focussed more on potential rather than on trying to second-guess the eventual criteria, which CCS had yet to develop (Gillespie, 1969, p. 11). It provided a limited, and selective, assessment of alternative recreational facilities in the region, concluding that

Culzean could be complementary to these, and suggested a focus on countryside education and conservation as the basis for the country park (Gillespie, 1969, p. 13). Visitor management was a prominent aspect; Gillespie noted the popularity of the castle, and the desirability of spreading visitor numbers across the wider estate and not just around its historic centrepiece – an observation Beazley had already emphasised (Beazley, 1969b, p. 1). To assist with this, he suggested locating other attractions and opportunities elsewhere on the site, including the provision of a visitor centre with improved catering facilities, separate from the castle. His financial appraisal, however, was very vague, and clouded by uncertainty over the allocation of revenue between the castle and the country park, while his visitor assessments seem to have relied heavily on unconvincing projections from limited data supplied by NTS. These weaknesses, and the failure of the report to address some other CCS interests, were not allowed to impede progress; a press release from NTS early in 1969, widely reported in Scotland even before formal approval of the feasibility study, indicated that Culzean would probably be the first country park to be designated in Scotland (SDD, 1968; “Country Park proposed”, 1969; “Plan for new Country Park”, 1969).

The legislation expected most country parks to be provided by local authorities, supported with funding of up to 75% of eligible costs from the SDD; the balance would be provided by the local Council. In the late 1960s the local planning authority for Culzean was Ayrshire County Council, while the neighbouring main towns of Ayr and Kilmarnock had their own separate Burgh Councils. All three councils took an active interest in Culzean, and a partnership was cemented between NTS and the local authorities early in 1969, though not without some challenges. Local authority involvement implied financial support for the park, and although the County Council was supportive, Ayr Burgh was concerned about the open-ended nature of the financial commitment initially

proposed (Richmond, 1969). Moreover, several Kilmarnock Burgh councillors quite reasonably questioned the value of a park some 27 miles distant as a recreational resource for its ratepayers (Ryan, 1969). Nevertheless, both Burghs eventually gave the project their blessing, and the three bodies came to an understanding about the extent of their annual contribution, which was to be substantial, and which would represent the 25% of eligible costs not provided through the legislation (NTS, 1970). Stormonth Darling was justifiably proud of his achievement in brokering this partnership between the Burghs and the County Council, not least because the three authorities traditionally had had awkward relationships and there was no history of collaboration. This partnership also survived two local government reorganisations, in 1975 and 1996.

Besides the issue of costs, there were concerns about the formal agreement to manage Culzean Country Park. A major issue was the need to protect the Trust's statutory obligations under its own governing document from dilution, or compromise, by the involvement of other bodies with their own, potentially conflicting, legal or political obligations. An early distinction was made between the house and its immediate surrounds, which would remain exclusively under NTS management, and the wider country park- effectively the parkland and gardens, which would be managed by a committee including representatives of the three local authorities alongside the NTS. The public, however, would not be aware of this arrangement, which was purely fiscal in nature (Aldridge, 1970) (Figure 3). The eventual agreement mandated maintenance of 'the character and atmosphere of Culzean' (something on which the Trust and the local authorities were strongly agreed) and allowed the NTS to exercise day-to-day

management within a budget agreed by the signatories, with the local authorities making good any revenue deficit (NTS, 1970).³

Stormonth Darling was clear that the underlying motive was to raise capital to provide better visitor facilities, thereby increasing income potential and reducing the revenue deficit. He justified the partnership with local authorities by identifying Culzean with its constituency and giving a degree of democratic legitimacy, as well as reinforcing links with educational and adventure projects run by the authorities. A private letter underscores the essential purpose of country park designation for Culzean as a calculated route to an essentially financial end, but it is interesting that Stormonth Darling does not highlight the somewhat open-ended commitment by the local authorities, which was clearly advantageous to the Trust's financial challenges (Stormonth Darling, 1969a).

Formal designation took place in late 1969, creating the first country park in Scotland ("Council backs Country Park scheme", 1969). Shortly after this, the NTS entered into a long-running contractual agreement with Beazley, who had concentrated much of her career on public landscape and countryside recreation, publishing some of the key textbooks in this field including *Designed for Recreation* (1969) and *The Countryside on View* (1971).⁴ One of the most urgent issues Beazley confronted was the establishment of a visitor centre; rejecting the suggested location, she instead proposed a sympathetic conversion of the Home Farm buildings (Beazley, 1970, pp. 1-3). These Robert Adam buildings, of evident architectural value (Beazley described them as 'a joy to any

³ The archives make clear that Ayr Burgh initially sought to limit their liability for the deficit, but eventually conceded the point.

⁴ The NTS archive includes many of these reports, scattered throughout the collection. Elisabeth Beazley visited Culzean no less than 80 times before her retirement in 1984, submitting 61 reports on a very wide range of issues and concerns.

architectural soul') were ideally located for this new purpose, which would provide an opportunity to restore them and bring them back into use (Beazley, 1969a, pp. 27-34). It took three years to complete the conversion, at a cost of over £250,000, then a major sum, and the resulting centre won five architectural awards (Beazley, 1976, p. 4) (Figure 4).⁵ As the main arrival point for visitors, it now houses catering, retail and information outlets, offices, toilets and an exhibition/auditorium space (Waugh, 1981, p. 211). But this was not the end of expenditure on Culzean; in total, between 1971 and 1996, a total capital investment of over £3 million was made in the country park, of which two-thirds came through the country parks programme (Campbell, 1996, App. B).⁶ This made Culzean the second most expensive country park in Scotland; only Strathclyde, a land reclamation project in the former Lanarkshire coalfield requiring disproportionately expensive decontamination, cost more.

Most of the resources at Culzean were used for new infrastructure; car parks, access roads, and footpaths, followed by picnic sites and outdoor facilities including a children's play area. Stormonth Darling claimed that 'at Culzean, the visitor...can find peace and quietude...intellectual exercise...or outdoor pursuits' (Saltire Society, 1970). This was a little disingenuous, since the only outdoor pursuit on offer was walking, while the peace and quiet could easily be shattered by the arrival of a coach party. There was still work to be done to fully achieve Beazley's initial goal of 'something more than a day in the country', and she highlighted several further improvements to be made, both immediately

⁵ The figure shown here is the 1976 amount and equates to around £1 million of Campbell's estimated total spend when recalculated at 1996 values. The awards included a European Architectural Heritage Award for 1973, but the others won are unknown.

⁶ Campbell's work required him to standardise costs, and all his figures, including this one, are 1996 equivalent values.

and in a series of regular visits and reports over the subsequent fifteen years. (Beazley, 1971a, 1971b, 1976).

Any assessment of the effectiveness of this investment depends on agreeing criteria by which effectiveness can be measured. In one sense, the continued existence of Culzean, following its financial peril in the 1960s, is evidence in itself; but since Stormonth Darling's original argument focussed on using capital investment to generate increased visitor revenue, it is appropriate to look at changes in visitor numbers at the site following designation. Attendance figures for countryside sites are often both notoriously unreliable and generously estimated; the NTS' policy of charging for admission, and the remoteness of Culzean from non-paying pedestrian visitors, mean that Culzean visitor numbers are more dependable than most. Moreover, they were accumulated and reported using a consistent methodology, at least from 1970 onwards.⁷ The development of visitor numbers is shown in Figure 5.

In the mid-sixties, Culzean attracted around 100,000 visitors a year, a figure that was increasing, albeit slowly. In 1970, the first year of designation as a country park, visitor numbers began to rise sharply, and they were given a further boost when the visitor centre was opened, rising to around 300,000 through the late 1970s and '80s. The numbers show year-on-year increase over six years from 1970 - 1976, largely sustained thereafter, suggesting that designation, associated publicity, and the resulting greater attention to the country park and its opportunities, contributed significantly to the change.

⁷ Figures from before 1970 do not distinguish between visitors to the castle and those visiting the areas which later became the country park, and thus overstate the latter; after 1970, the data are reported separately in NTS Annual Reports.

The essential purpose of designation was financial security, however, and it is therefore also appropriate to explore whether the capital investment, and the increased visitor numbers, achieved Stormonth Darling's objective of covering the revenue costs of the park. Financial information is available for 1970 – 1984 and is analysed in Figure 6.

The deficit (which represents only those costs allocated to the country park, and excludes the upkeep of the castle itself) rose steadily over the period, despite – or perhaps partly because of – the rise in visitor numbers. A deficit of less than £10,000 in 1970 had increased nearly ten-fold by 1984, accelerating rapidly in the later seventies, and the growth of that deficit was almost unchecked across the entire period. The increase in the cost per visitor represented a ratepayer subsidy of £0.08 per visitor in 1970, which remained steady until 1973 and then rose slowly to £0.32 per visitor in 1984 (NTS, 1970-84). Inflation, a serious problem in the UK in the mid-seventies, accounts for half of these increases, and the effective subsidy per visitor from the local authorities actually reduced in real terms; an inflation-linked subsidy would have been closer to £0.40 per visitor (Morley, 2019). Designation did not change the fact that each visitor represented a cost to the enterprise; but may have kept it in check; the key to success was the remarkable agreement with the local authorities which ensured that any revenue deficit would be covered. Thus, while the visitor numbers alone might be taken as an indicator of success (*pace* Rotherham 2015, pp. 48, 53), value for money merits a more circumspect assessment. The annual contribution made by the three authorities and their successors rose from £14,000 in the first full year of operation, 1970-71, to £84,000 by 1980-81, a substantial sum in a local authority budget at this time, even when split between the partners; inflation alone would have produced a 1981 expenditure closer to £50,000

(Hutcheson, 1984).⁸ Yet this commitment only seems to have caused intermittent doubt among the local authorities concerned. But Ian Gillies, the Chief Executive of Kyle and Carrick District Council, was still able in 1984 to describe Culzean as 'one of the bargains of the century', even though his authority now carried half the financial burden of the local authority partnership (Gillies, 1984).⁹ It must also be noted that, for every £1 contributed by ratepayers to Culzean's costs, the park received more than £2 through the CCS (Hutcheson, 1984). Whilst other sites received both CCS and local authority funding without also being designated, it seems highly unlikely that support of this magnitude would have been forthcoming had it not been for formal country park designation.

Not everyone was happy, of course. Some NTS members regretted the diversion of attention towards the wider public, and the new visitor management system, which included withdrawal of motorised access to some areas to protect the increased numbers of pedestrians on the estate's roadways (Stormonth Darling, 1971). While conservation of the asset was always a prominent dimension of his Culzean project, Stormonth Darling also recognised, and stressed, the need for NTS properties to be accessible and attractive to the wider public and not just an elite *cognoscenti*. Culzean exemplifies this combination of priorities *par excellence*.

⁸ The original three authorities were superseded in 1975 by successor authorities under Local Government Reorganisation, and the allocations of financial contribution were changed, but the principle of partnership remained.

⁹ Kyle and Carrick DC superseded the Burgh of Ayr and included a large part of rural Ayrshire, including Culzean, after local government re-organisation in 1975.

Discussion and conclusions

Culzean was an interesting, even controversial, choice as the first country park for Scotland. Stormonth Darling acknowledged as much in 1969 when he claimed to be 'establishing a prototype of a country park' (Stormonth Darling, 1969b). But at the same time, Culzean was seen as a potential exemplar, 'blazing a trail for others to follow', and 'a model for all Britain' (NTS, 1969b; Stormonth Darling, 1985, p. 30). It was thus to be both a radical departure from the expected norm, and an example to its successors, an unusual, and challenging, combination of expectations. Although it met many of the country park criteria then in existence, being essentially rural in character, large enough to accommodate visitors in significant numbers, and sufficiently attractive in its own right to draw an audience, it was also a somewhat subversive choice on several grounds, where it clearly fell short of the intentions of the country park legislators – as Stormonth Darling acknowledged when he described Culzean as a country park 'of a very different nature to that conceived by those who thought up...the Countryside (Scotland) Act.' (Stormonth Darling, 1969b).

Firstly, and as has already been noted, it was by no means easily accessible to a large resident population. Ayr, the nearest settlement of any consequence, with a population of around 50,000, was 15 miles away, Kilmarnock a similar size but 27 miles distant, while the Clydeside conurbation, for whose residents country parks were more directly intended, was over 50 miles away, well beyond the 25-mile distance generally accepted in the UK as being the typical range for a day trip to the countryside. Gillespie was aware of this issue and flagged it up in his feasibility study, but Stormonth Darling sought instead to present Culzean in a different light, interpreting Culzean as close to a large resident population that would grow further through New Town development further north along the Ayrshire coast.

Secondly, Culzean was already open to the public, and attracting over 100,000 visitors a year even before designation, so it could scarcely be seen as new provision. This was no diversionary honeypot in an expendable landscape; rather it was an undeniably scenic and attractive site that might have been considered under threat from the predicted expansion in motoring, not least since it could only really be reached by car. Moreover, although it came to be provided with some of the facilities that became typical of country parks – visitor centre, improved parking, toilets and catering - it never offered anything more recreationally active than a country walk, and set itself out to be a centre for countryside conservation and appreciation – an objective that, however meritorious, was not central to the legislators’ thinking. This was in fact a site for conserving, not for compromising, and this motivation was clearly uppermost in the minds of both Stormonth Darling and his local authority partners when they insisted that the management agreement should expressly resist any change to Culzean’s character.

Stormonth Darling was especially proud of the shared responsibility with the three councils, which he described as 'the most spectacular example to date' of partnership working (Stormonth Darling, 1969a); it was an early example of a type of cross-sectoral, and cross-boundary, partnership which would become more commonplace in the UK later in the twentieth century, and may be considered ground-breaking in that respect. It certainly emerged as a strategy in Scotland well ahead of Lambert’s ‘reorientation and partnership’ phase in England, which he dates to the early to mid-1970s (Lambert, 2006, pp. 49-51) . It also crossed political differences between the three Council partners; Stormonth Darling privately expressed reservations about dealing with ‘Socialists’, his description of the two authorities that were Labour-controlled at this time. But the partnership seems to have worked well, at least up to the 1975 reorganisation. (Stormonth Darling: 1969a). He had taken a risk with this approach, which proved difficult to

integrate with the Trust's statutory responsibilities over its property and which depended on the local authorities' agreement that the character of the site should not be changed, their willingness to accept a junior role in management, their preparedness to allow co-operation to supervene their different political convictions, and their ongoing preparedness to cover rising revenue deficits. His powers of persuasion, with usually sceptical local authorities, and with his own management committee, must have been formidable.

However, the model created in the Culzean partnership was only followed at one other Scottish site, the NTS property at Brodick Castle on the Isle of Arran, which became a country park in 1982 with a similar agreement between the NTS and its local authority, Cunninghame District Council (NTS 1980).¹⁰ A third NTS property, Haddo in Aberdeenshire, was never placed in such an arrangement, with the two entities of the country house and the country park managed completely separately by NTS and the local authority respectively. South of the border, there are several examples of joint National Trust/local authority management in the north-west of England, such as at Daisy Nook (Manchester) and Styal (Cheshire) which may have been influenced in their approach by the success of Culzean, but also many other National Trust properties where no comparable partnership was established (Waugh, 1981, pp. 83, 88). Culzean undoubtedly provided some inspiration to other projects: for instance, the remodelling of Home Farm was deployed to illustrate what might be done at Chatelherault in Lanarkshire, where a problematic building needed a similarly creative solution (NTS, 1974; CCS, 1974; SDD, 1974). But, Brodick aside, it was never a model for other

¹⁰ This agreement limits the contribution to be raised from the Council in a way that the Culzean document does not.

country parks in Scotland; each country park developed its own character and visitor offer without much reference to others.

Culzean also highlights the way in which policy on Scottish country parks evolved over time. Designation occurred before the visitor centre and much of the other infrastructure were created; CCS would later insist on withholding this level of recognition until basic visitor facilities were completed, to avoid raising public expectations over standards of provision. CCS would also come to insist on a formal management plan before conferring designation (although it operated this obligation inconsistently throughout its life); Culzean had no agreed management plan. In both these respects, Culzean stood outside what were later regarded as essential requirements. But in 1969 nobody considered these as prerequisites, so perhaps it is unfair to describe Culzean as subversive; in reality, at this point in the policy's life, there was very little to subvert. Gillespie's difficulties in drafting a feasibility study with no formal guidance to follow illustrate this well. Culzean benefitted greatly from being conceived and created before any clarity had been reached on what a country park should be, or offer, and this vagueness allowed the CCS and the SDD to admit whatever work, or expense, they felt appropriate, even if it seemed at variance with legislators' objectives, or if, as in the Home Farm conversion, the costs were 'staggering' (Huxley, 1971). Later country park projects faced more rigorous criteria and tougher financial negotiation; but at this time, the CCS could claim that the level of demand that had driven the legislation itself justified approvals (Foster, 1970).¹¹

What is absolutely clear, though, is how fortuitous and convenient the Culzean arrangement was for all the parties involved. For the NTS, it promised to achieve the

¹¹ Foster is being more than a little disingenuous; by this time CCS had received many expressions of interest, many of which proved easy to turn down.

vitaly important objective of rescuing Culzean's perilous financial position, and saving the property for the nation. Country park status justified significant levels of funding for the wider estate, which allowed NTS to redistribute its own resources away from the grounds and into the castle (Figure 7). For the local authorities, it addressed any legislative duty they might have had to provide country parks, and did so in a spectacular fashion at a much lower cost than would have been involved in developing alternative provision. For CCS, it allowed the reasonably quick delivery of a country park, one of the organisation's primary challenges in justifying its existence. And for the SDD, who disbursed the funding, and the politicians who allocated it, it showed a willingness to grasp the opportunity offered by the countryside legislation and secure significant, and highly visible, resource for Scotland, a part of Britain which saw itself as neglected by the Westminster government. Little wonder, then, that every opportunity was taken to show the project off, even to the extent of a royal visit, and the featuring of the castle on Scottish banknotes.¹²

What Culzean does offer by way of exemplifying good practice is in the importance of networking and the building of partnership. Again, Stormonth Darling admitted this when he later acknowledged those whose influence had helped to secure the project, including local and national politicians and civil servants, as well as other influential Scots (Stormonth Darling, 1985, p.17). He also paid fulsome tribute to Beazley, for her ideas and her work (Stormonth Darling, 1973). But while it is true that many others were involved in bringing the project to fruition, this does not diminish the pivotal role of Stormonth Darling himself, whose vision and determination ensured that the opportunity

¹² Prince Philip visited in 1970, as part of European Conservation Year. Culzean featured on the (old, paper) Royal Bank of Scotland £5 note.

created in the countryside legislation was utilised to the fullest possible extent. Culzean is, essentially, his work, and his legacy.

Culzean was, and remains, one of the most popular visitor attractions in Scotland, contributing significantly to tourism, employment and the wider local economy; arguably, this might not have been possible without the country park project, and the flexibility that evidently came with being the first scheme to be considered. Yet what is most remarkable about Culzean Country Park is that, although it was conceived as part of a package of measures aimed at tackling recreation, it was never really a recreation project at all. Recreation was a means to a different end – resolution of the financial challenge, and designation was sought directly as a means to addressing this. Similarly, the expenditure on the Home Farm visitor centre was directed not simply to improve the visitor experience, but also to develop the revenue stream from visitors. There was always a subtle, underlying agenda at Culzean, a financial agenda, and much of the project's success is attributable to this, and to the innocence, or connivance, of those who enabled it. Only now, with the withdrawal, after nearly fifty years, of a large part of the regular financial support, is the extent of this dimension coming to wider notice. If Culzean was an exemplar, it also created a further, and unexpected, example through creative financing, bending rules, and manipulating expectations, exposing a degree of flexibility that was later exploited by several of its counterparts elsewhere in Scotland.

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The authors have no interest to declare, other than that one is an ordinary member of the National Trust for Scotland.

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Figures





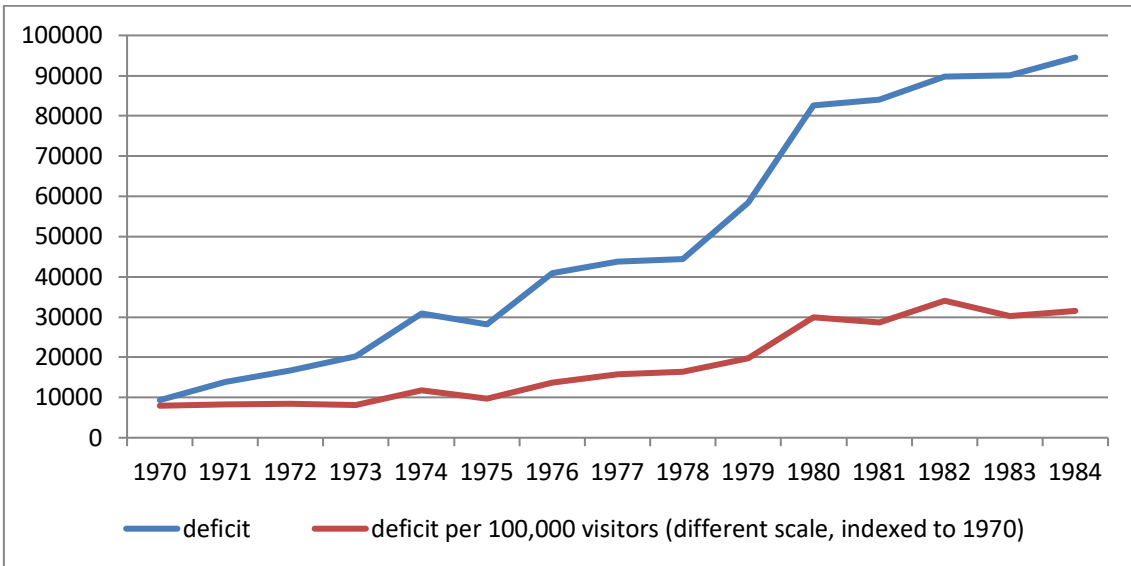
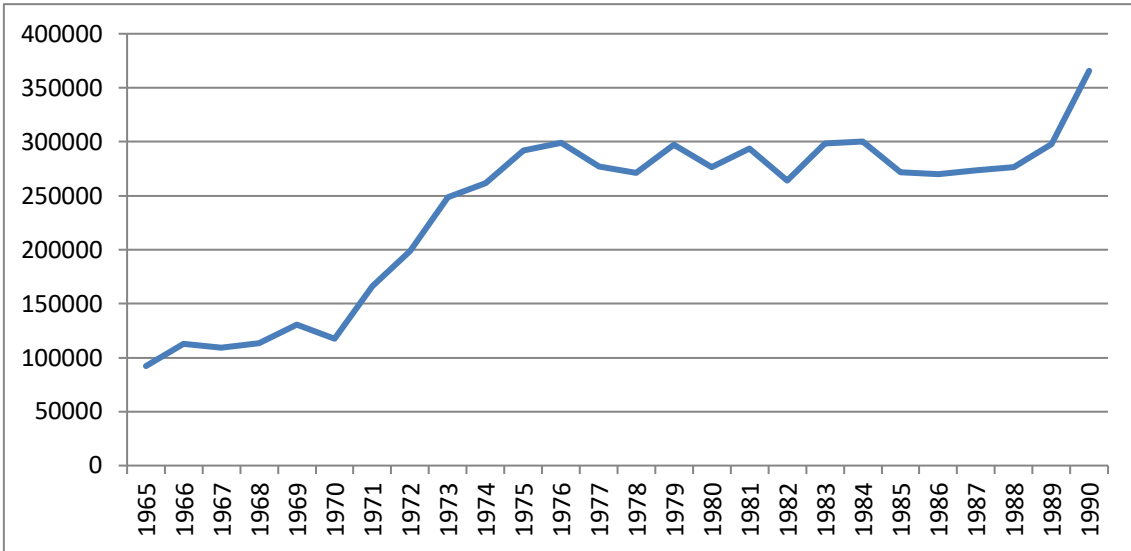




Figure Captions

Figure 1: *Culzean was featured for many years (until the end of paper currency) on the Royal Bank of Scotland £5 note, and is the third most popular National Trust of Scotland visitor attraction. It was UK's first country park, designated in 1969. (Culzean Castle, viewed across Robert Adam's viaduct. Authors' collection, July 2019).*

Figure 2: *The dramatic cliff-top position provided a perfect location for Culzean Castle to create a fashionable Picturesque setting described as 'sublime' and 'romantic'. (Authors' collection, August 2017).*

Figure 3: *While the castle and its immediate surrounds would remain exclusively under NTS management, the wider country park - effectively the parkland and gardens - would be managed by a committee including representatives of the three local authorities alongside the NTS, without the public being aware of this arrangement (The Walled Garden, Culzean, Authors' Collection, July 2019).*

Figure 4: *Architect and landscape architect Elisabeth Beazley, who acted as an advisor to the NTS, argued against the proposed location of a visitor centre for the country park, instead suggesting a sympathetic conversion of Robert Adam's Home Farm, which was done to great acclaim (Authors' collection, July 2019).*

Figure 5: *Visitors to Culzean Country Park 1965 - 1990 (Castle and grounds before 1970)
Source: National Trust for Scotland Yearbooks, 1965 - 1990.*

Figure 6: *Revenue deficit at Culzean Country Park, 1970 - 1984
Source: Edinburgh, NTS Archives: 01/0041/32/03: Culzean Country Park expenditure profile, 1970 - 1984.*

Figure 7: *The Pagoda, Culzean, originally used as a viewing point and menagerie, was restored with public funds, but is now struggling to find a purpose (Authors' collection, August 2017).*