

The malfunctioning LLTNP Board and its obsession with camping

Description

After a morning looking around west Loch Lomond (to be covered in future posts) I attended today's LLTNPA Board Meeting as an observer with Peter and Mary Jack from the Loch Lomond Association. A member of Buchanan Community Council had also turned up to see how the Board operates. In governance terms the March meeting should be the most important of the year, it agrees what the Park will do for the next year and sets the budget.

Although the meeting started late, about 2.15, it was all over by 3.30. Not bad for a meeting with 17 agenda items. The only semblance of any debate was over Board Member's remuneration where the Board agreed it was very unfair they had to set their own remuneration as there were pressures on them not to increase this. Instead they wanted an independent review body, which presumably would agree that because like our MPs they are all such good people, they would require a percentage increase over what the rest of the population receives. To me this missed the main point which is why pay 17 members to attend meetings where there is no discussion or debate.

The papers though were of interest. The Park has only had a 2% cut in Government grant this year, much less than most other bodies financed through the Scottish Government's Natural resources directorate. I was tempted to think this was a reward for delivering the byelaws but I checked and the Cairngorms NPA had a similar cut. The Park has responded to these cuts partly by dragging staff vacancies – staff comprise 80% of its costs – but also by planning to increase income. While they can charge for planning applications, income from this is forecast to drop and one of the ways the Park is intending to increase income is through charges to visitors. There were no questions about the implications of this but a section in the Operational Plan indicates that a contract is to be let in the summer to manage parking at Balmaha – so we can predict parking charges there. There is no



as in return.

The increase in income forecast for next year however is

not great – about £65k in the budget – and does not appear to warrant the employment of an estates team to lead on producing more income and delivering capital projects. They appear to be being paid for out of the capital budget presumably in order to progress the stalled campsite programme. This is obviously unsustainable and my suspicion is that the Park is hoping that once the camping permit system is up and running this will generate the income to pay for the estates team. If this is the case, in

effect the Park is going to charge for access in order to pay for its own services. This is totally wrong, needless to say, and contrary to our access legislation.

The Operational Plan openly emphasises that delivery of the camping byelaws is the Park's number one priority for the next year: "Following approval by Scottish Ministers on 26th January 2016 for the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Camping Management Byelaws, our top priority will be the delivery of Your Park in time for the byelaws coming into force in March 2017". The main thing to appreciate about this is the considerable shift of resources away from other projects to camping provision and management as set out in the Park's budget [Agenda Item 10 – Draft Budget 2016-17](#):

- conservation revenue expenditure decreases from £525k to £71k- no Board Member asked if the wildlife organisations had been consulted or were happy with this.
- visitor experience (tourism) capital expenditure drops from £525k to £44k – no Board Member asked if tourism businesses had been consulted or were happy with this.
- Expenditure on litter management drops from £38k to nil – no Board Member asked if the community at Arrochar, which is blighted by the worst litter problems in the



Litter at the Head of Loch Long

- Park, had been consulted or was happy with this.
- Even the increase of expenditure on camping to £505k is not as good as it looks. £100k on this is to be spent on signage – ie signs saying camping is now a criminal offence – and another £200k on developing a single campsite on Forestry Commission land at Loch Chon. This is hardly the transformational investment in camping facilities the Park promised.

My guess is that as the implications of this shift in expenditure become evident over time, support for the byelaws which has been grossly exaggerated anyway will evaporate. The resources that are to be devoted to trying to make the camping byelaws work would be much better spent on other things.

Meantime pages 4-5 of the [Agenda Item 9 – Appendix 1 – DRAFT Annual Operational Plan 2016-17](#) set out a timetable for implementing the byelaws. The Board to their credit asked for quarterly update reports which means that progress on this should be public.

The one interesting piece of additional information that did come out in the meeting was – to give her credit – in response to a question asked by Linda McKay, the Park's Convener: the Scottish Government never responded or gave any feedback to the Park's review of the east Loch Lomond byelaws. The point I think of Linda McKay's question was to ascertain whether the Park is ever likely to receive feedback on the reports it will have to make in future on the operation of the byelaws.

I too asked the Government about their response to my critique of the report on the east Loch Lomond byelaws and have never had a reply. The Park is not the only body that is unaccountable and it seems to me fundamentally wrong that Aileen McLeod, as Minister for the Environment, can act in this way. We need MSPs to ask her questions about this in the Scottish Parliament.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs
2. Uncategorized

Tags

1. Camping bye laws
2. Governance
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Date Created

March 15, 2016

Author

nickkempe

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