

## The con at Loch Chon and the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park's disappearing camping plans

### Description

Last week I received [EIR 2016-003 Review Response](#) from the LLTNPA which confirmed their decision not to release information about why they had decided to develop a campsite at Loch Chon <https://parkswatchscotland.co.uk/2016/03/27/con-loch-chon-proposed-trossachs-west-camping-management-zone/>. I will appeal to the FOI Commissioner (my fourth appeal, the first two of which have resulted in the Park releasing information and the third of which is in progress) but meantime its worth explaining how this fits into their failure over the last three years to deliver the campsites they have promised and failure to account for how decisions are made.

The basic issue here is the Park Board should be able to account publicly about why they have decided to develop a campsite at Loch Chon, which will require a large investment from them, in the proposed management zone which has the lowest demand of all for camping. What's more the Park appears to be devoting its entire camping budget for the next year to this campsite.

The Park has tried to obscure this in their response claiming that because the full details of the campsite development have not been agreed (or is incomplete) they cannot release information about **why** they chose this piece of land for a campsite. They are also claiming there are elements of this decision which are "commercially confidential" when the owner of the land is another public authority, Forestry Commission Scotland. Both bodies could and should operate transparently.

So what is going on? One interpretation is that the Park wanted to be seen to have made progress when the Minister, Aileen McLeod, announced she had approved the camping bye-law proposal in January and, in the absence of anything else to report, decided to announce the campsite at Loch Chon in their own press release. Then, realising one small campsite might not look good, they announced it would be a big one, 30 places. Unfortunately, as the Park's latest letter indicates, they had not done any proper financial planning and the consequence is that they are now backtracking on the 30 places. Truth or conjecture? If the Park released the information I had asked we would have a much better idea.

What we do know though is that the LLTNPA has a history of failing to deliver the campsites it has promised and changing its plans in secret. In 2012, as a result of efforts from Grant Moir, now Chief Executive at the Cairngorms Park, and Kevin Findlater, Chief Inspector of the Police (and the person who first drew attention to the civil liberty implications of the proposed camping bye-laws) the Park

produced the excellent [5 Lochs Visitor Management Plan](#) for the Trossachs area.

It included costed proposals along with detailed plans for four new campsites to be delivered at Loch Lubnaig (2012-13), Loch Venachar North (2013-14), Glen Oglehead (2014-15) and Loch Earn (no date given). Loch Chon was not thought important enough in 2012 to be included in the Five Lochs Plan – which is another reason why its in the public interest to know now why the Park has chosen this area for a campsite. Of the campsites in the 5 Lochs Plan, only Loch Lubnaig has been delivered, and that over a year late.

Its been very hard to establish what has actually been decided about the other campsite proposals and the basis for any decisions that have been made, just like Loch Chon. After some investigations, I did my best in a document I sent to the Minister, Aileen Mcleod, on 1st October 2015 [Appendix 1 – LLTNP plans for camping development at Loch Venachar and Glen Oglehead](#) . The story reads:

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|---------|--|
| 2012    | Five Lochs Visitor Management Plan published   |
| 2013-14 | New campsite north Loch Venachar due to be delivered; budget available but proposal delayed due to delays delivering Loch Lubnaig campsite |

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The site at North Loch Venachar which is owned by LLTNPA and therefore one might think easy to c

2014-15 Again budget said to be available north Loch Venachar (FOI 2015/026) but **this is contradicted** by minutes of Five Lochs Visitor Management Stakeholder Group of 1/4/15 right at the beginning of the financial year (provided as appendix C to FOI 2015/026) which indicates that the north Loch Venachar development is now likely to be in 2015-16.

October 2014 Launch of Your Park consultation on new camping bye laws and camping places. There is no no mention that LLTNPA owned land which had been identified for campsites in the Five Lochs Management Plan at both north Loch Venachar (within the proposed management zone and a priority area) and Glenoglehead (outwith the proposed zones)

3/12/14 At a poorly attended Visitor Management Stakeholder Meeting (Appendix D to FOI 2015/026) Bridget Jones, the member of staffing who was chairing meeting, said in response to a question that camping provision at north Loch Venachar was “no longer part of any plans”.

2/7/15 FOI Review 2015/026 Response LLTNP states that “the Park authority has not shelved any camping developments”; that Glenoglehead remains a potential development and “the Loch Venachar campsite has not been abandoned”. In explanation of this it stated the then Chief Executive, on the advice of her staff, had decided to look at alternative sites around Loch Venachar due to concerns about the suitability of the site: the one concern mentioned in the FOI was potential impact on ancient woodland. (This is another area where more damage to trees by the roads department than by campers). The letter states a decision will be made once the Minister has made a decision on the bye laws.

The Environment Minister, Aileen McLeod, has never responded to the concerns I have set out in that letter.

There is an easy solution. It should not be difficult for the Park to produce a camping development plan which it then consulted on with relevant interests instead of taking decisions in secret. The Five Lochs Plan shows the way. First identify areas of highest demand for camping from the ranger patrol records (which the Park failed to use in the Your Park consultation). Second, outline a range of options for campsite facilities, taking account of the Loch Lubnaig experience but also of campsites outside the Park (there are wonderful campsites with simple composting toilets). Third, list the land owned by public bodies that might be suitable for campsites and private landowners who have indicated an interest. From this it should not be difficult to produce a prioritised list for campsite development on the Five Lochs model. Unfortunately, I suspect that until someone tells the Park that they need to act openly and transparently and stop responding to behind the scenes lobbying its going to be continued smoke and mirrors about every aspect of their camping proposals.

Time therefore to submit another FOI asking if the Park have now taken a decision, as they said they would in FOI 2015/026 response, about Glenoglehead and Loch Venachar North.

**Category**

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

**Tags**

1. camping
2. Camping bye laws
3. Freedom of Information
4. Governance
5. LLTNPA
6. secrecy

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**Author**

nickkempe

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