

Councillor Fergus Wood, the interests of LLTNPA Board Members and the camping bye-laws

Description



Ledard Farm, by the southern path to Ben Venue off Loch Ard, home to Board Member Fergus Wood

In my first post on the proposed campsite at Loch Chon and camping in Strathard, I included the two photos below and questioned why, since its since its impossible to camp along most of the north shore of Loch Ard, this area had ever been included in the proposed camping ban?



The flat headland opposite Ledard House, at the start of the southern path to Ben Venue



Most of the Loch Ard shoreline looks like this

I had not appreciated at the time that Board Member and SNP Councillor Fergus Wood has a 50% share in Ledard Farm Ltd <http://my.stirling.gov.uk/councillors/view/3> and the land in the first two

photos. I should have because, although Fergus Wood was not present at the Board Meeting of April 2015 where the Board endorsed the proposed byelaws without any Board Member making a declaration of interest about owning property in one of the proposed management zones, he was present at the meeting in October 2014. At this meeting, unlike that of April 2015, Board Members did declare whether their properties were in the proposed management zones and Fergus Wood was one of four members to declare “a potential interest” [Minutes of meeting held on 6th October 2014 Draft v1](#). The other members to declare ownership of property in the zones being Convener and member of the Management Board of the civil service in Scotland, Linda McKay, fellow Stirling Councillor for the Teith and Trossachs ward, Martin Earl, and the disgraced Owen McKee.

Recorded in the minute is the following:

- “Members discussed the areas included in the proposed management zones”, **and**
- “Members proposed that page 19 of the consultation document be updated to clarify that we are interested in hearing from all landowners interested in campsite development within the National Park i.e. those inside and outside the proposed management zones.”

There is nothing in the Minute recording any member leaving the meeting for this part of the discussion or making any further statement about their interests.

This is quite a contrast the Board meeting in June 2016 where the Park’s camping plan was on the agenda and Councillor Fergus Wood declared an interest at the beginning of the meeting, without to my recollection specifying what this interest was, and then left the meeting for the camping discussion. While I will ask the LLTNPA to clarify the exact nature of this interest and this may eventually be recorded in the Minute (which is not due to be published until a few days before the next Board Meeting), it seems likely that Fergus Wood was in discussion with the Park about provision of a campsite on his land – most likely the land in the first two photos above – and as a consequence his interest was of a financial nature. (If Fergus Wood had been going to provide land for free, whether for a formal campsite or for people to camp under permit, its hard to see why he would have had to leave the meeting). It was entirely appropriate that if he had a financial interest he left the meeting. It would appear from Gordon Watson’s statement (see previous post) that there are now no plans for further campsite provision in Strathard apart from Loch Chon and the proposed permit area on the south shore of Loch Ard, that whatever discussions took place with Councillor Wood have now terminated.

Now the point of reporting all of this is because it raises questions about the nature of Councillor Wood’s interests in the Your Park proposals at the time they were being developed. That he did have interests has been demonstrated by his leaving the June 2016 Board Meeting. If it was appropriate for Fergus Wood to have excluded himself from that discussion, why does he appear to have participated in the Your Park discussion in October 2014 which explicitly considered the boundaries of the proposed management zones and landowners role in campsite development? As the co-owner of Ledard Farm Ltd, which has plenty of suitable land for a campsite, throughout this period how could he

have sat through that meeting without a thought about the potential for him to develop a campsite on his land – particularly when landowners were explicitly encouraged to come forward with proposals? Or how ensuring byelaws were in place along the north shore of Loch Ard might not help make such a campsite a financially viable proposition? After all Gordon Watson, the Park’s Chief Executive, is on record as saying that one reason for the camping byelaws is that without them the Park did not believe people would use campsites.

The LLTNPA’s Code of Conduct for Board Members states:

“You must, however, always comply with the objective test (“the objective test”) which is whether a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard the interest as so significant that it is likely to prejudice your discussion or decision making in your role as a board member of the Authority.”

Fergus Wood clearly acted appropriately in terms of the Objective Test in June 2016. The question is whether he did so in October 2014 and, one might add, all the other secret discussions that took place on the development of the Your Park proposals? The Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life is formally tasked with answering such questions but normally only considers alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct within a year of their occurrence. It is now almost certainly too late for him to consider this matter.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. camping
2. Camping bye laws
3. Governance

Date Created

July 29, 2016

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