

The Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority latest attempt to wipe history

Description

If you have been onto the LLTNPA website recently you will notice it has been totally revamped. While its a lot faster than it was, the information available on it has been greatly reduced. I did not appreciate to what extent until last night. While working on my piece on the Glen Falloch hydro schemes, I went to check the papers for the planning committee in 2009 which approved the proposals and found they have all gone.

In fact the LLTNPA appears to used the website re-vamp as an opportunity to wipe history – something that normally only dictatorships attempt to do. Here are a few examples:

1) All Board Meeting papers pre-2014 have been removed completely and replaced by this message:

If you'd like information on meetings which have taken place before 2014, please contact us: email: infomailbox@lochlomond-trossachs.org or tel: 01389 722 600.

2) All links with the Your Park consultation about the camping byelaws have been removed although the your park website still exists at <http://www.thisisyourpark.org.uk/> – for how long one wonders? – and there is still an active “Your Park” facebook page.

3) There is now a page headed “Freedom of Information responses”, which is welcome, but there are just two responses which have been published one on black grouse and one on dark skies. None of the Freedom of Information requests submitted by myself and others which uncovered the Park's manipulation of police data in the Your Park consultation or the Owen McKee cover-up have been published. The rationale for this is given on the webpage:

“Information related to very specific, individually focused issues may not be suitable for wider publication, as without understanding the context of the information, it wouldn't necessarily be useful to anyone other than the original requester”

4) Search for the Five Lochs Visitor Management Plan – which contained excellent plans for campsites which the Park has since abandoned – and you get “page not found”.

Take all this together and its quite clear that the LLTNPA is deliberately trying to avoid publishing information which would help hold it to account. The replacement of information about Board

Meetings pre-2014 by a facility to request these is a huge step away from transparency because without having a good idea of what might have been discussed or decided its impossible for any member of the public or researcher to know what to ask for. It also makes it much harder to question the Park because instead of being able to access the information immediately you are likely to have to wait 3 weeks to obtain it under FOI. So, on Glen Falloch, while I know the hydro schemes were discussed by the Planning Committee in 2009, its very difficult to find out whether the significant changes that have been made to those schemes were agreed by the Board or not. There are lots of other examples where knowing the history of decisions (or lack of them as the Park decides so much in secret outwith Board Meetings) is absolutely in the public interest: the collapse of the camping proposals in the 5 Lochs Management Plan; the Owen McKee case; the increasing commercialisation of the National Park.

The only historic information that is still available relate to planning applications and associated papers (although these do not include Planning Committee Reports which contain information on all the important decisions). This is because information on planning applications is published on a national planning data base – as part of a drive to greater transparency – and is outwith LLTNPA control. It demonstrates just how out of step the LLTNPA is when it comes to transparency and provides more evidence that it has a lot to hide.

Luckily, I think this attempt to wipe history can be reversed. Every public authority in Scotland is required to adopt a publication scheme by the Information Commissioner (the LLTNPA's publication scheme incidentally is not on its new website). The Commissioner requires each public authority to publish certain classes of information and this includes a category of "**How we take decisions and what we have decided**" which is described as "**Information about the decisions we take, how we make decisions and how we involve others**". There is no time-limit put on this and, given that many of the current issues in the National Park go back many years, it seems to me that the LLTNPA should be publishing this information on its website and are falling foul of this requirement from the Information Commissioner.

Something therefore that I and other activists will take up with the Information Commissioner. Something too that the Scottish Government should be telling the LLTNPA it needs to get sorted and quick.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. Freedom of Information
2. Governance
3. LLTNPA
4. Scottish Government
5. secrecy

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