

The blingy banks, Flamingo Land and camping

Description

The proposed Flamingo Land development of the west riverside side at Balloch was covered by an interesting [article](#) in the Sunday Herald (and I say that not just because I was quoted in it) which made links between the proposed camping ban and the proposed development. Ultimately this is about what National Parks are for and what sort of public enjoyment the National Park Authorities should be promoting. That this an issue of major concern to the public appears to be confirmed by the petition on 38 degrees which last night had 29,176 signatures.

Judith Duffy, the Sunday Herald Chief Reporter managed to extract a couple of interesting statements from the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority.

The first was from Gordon Watson, the Chief Executive, was about the Flamingo Land Development:

Watson said a planning application or detailed proposals had yet to be submitted for the Flamingo Land development, so the authority was "reserving its position" to see if the plans are acceptable or not. Gordon Watson was then quoted as saying: "We can obviously assess a development and if we feel it is not appropriate, doesn't fit in for whatever reason, or there is environmental issues, then obviously we have the power to refuse planning permission."

To me this suggests that somehow the LLTNPA has been neutral in this process up till now, knows almost nothing about what is being proposed and will then take a decision. Actually, as my previous post showed the LLTNPA has been in discussions about this site for sometime and this has basically been confirmed by the excellent comment on my post by James Fraser, Chair of Friends and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, on the history of public agency involvement with the west riverside site which I recommend everyone interested in the future of this site reads ([see comment](#)).

In this, after stating that hopefully there will be a chance to influence the final plans, James says that the Friends of Loch Lomond and Trossachs "suggested this to a representative of the company prior to the Charrette getting underway more than 6 months ago and for whatever reason this wasn't followed through at that time." If FOLLAT were talking to the developer six months ago, the LLTNPA must have been too, yet instead of being open and using the Balloch community planning event (the charrette) to develop ideas for the whole site (and not just the walkway), the LLTNPA kept discussions with the proposed developer secret from the local community. Why? How does this

secretive process fit with the Scottish Government Minister Kevin Stewart's statement that "Decisions affecting local communities should be made by those local communities"?

What concerns me about the development is not the sort of aspirations that James outlines, which appear to me things that both local community and people who care about the National Park could support, but the way Scottish Enterprise and the LLTNPA are going about this through appointment of a preferred private developer, with a track record in bling and what appears to be poverty wages, whose interests appear very different to those of the National Park. Flamingo Land's failure to participate in the community planning event, despite apparently being asked, just set off even more alarm bells. The risk here, and I would judge it very high, is that Flamingo Land ask for more development than anyone wants and types of development that are both inappropriate, bling! This will then have an adverse affect on existing local businesses but all of this will be justified by the LLTNPA as being the only way to finance further "improvement" of the site. In my view its therefore imperative that both local and national organisations are involved in discussions with Flamingo Land now, before any further detailed plans are developed.

The second interesting statement in Judith Duffy's piece was about camping:

The park authority says it has not yet been decided if charges will be made for permits, but insist any will be "minimal".

This is not true (and I would be very happy to publish a statement from the LLTNPA if I have got this wrong). In the Board Paper that approved the byelaws para 5.8 read as follows:

"A camping permit scheme will provide the opportunity for sustainable levels of informal camping within a camping management zone. This form of provision requires minimal capital investment, little or no new development of facilities, allows for a reasonable level of provision subject to a defined maximum number and would be centrally administered by the National Park Authority with a small administration charge for booking a permit."

A "small administration charge", however "small" is defined, is a charge and I can find nothing in subsequent Board Papers to say this has changed. Now of course the LLTNPA may still be deliberating camping permit charges in its secret monthly meetings "which have no doubt also discussed the west riverside development" but officially it decided 18 months ago to impose charges for camping under permit in places where currently people camp for free. Its a charge for access, nothing less.

If Scottish Ministers want another good reason to suspend the implementation of the proposed camping byelaws they would do well to read an excellent piece that appeared in the Guardian comment is free yesterday ([see here](#)). This is the first major critique of the proposed camping byelaws that I am aware of that has appeared in the press south of the border. Do Scottish Ministers really want the LLTNPA, which was set up in no small part to promote public enjoyment of the countryside, to destroy Scotland's reputation as having world class access rights?

Category

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