

An alternative vision for Loch Venachar

Description



Rubbish in the field opposite Park Convenor, Linda McKay's House, at the east end of Loch Venachar

On Saturday I went rock climbing on Ben An, the first time in many years, with my friend Mike who had never climbed there. En route from Callander I checked whether anything had been done about the farm litter beside the road opposite Loch Venachar House, home to the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority Convener, Linda McKay. As you can see, its still there, 18 months after I first photographed it (and there is more of it than is in the photo). To my mind this is worse than any of the photographs of abandoned tents that is being used to justify the camping ban and would take a lot more effort to clear up.

However, to the LLTNPA this rubbish is a non-issue. Its rangers, who patrol the shores of Loch Venachar on a daily basis, pass this festering pile every day during the summer but two summer seasons have gone by and nothing has been done about it. The Park Convener must have seen it too, but her only concern appears to be to stop the campers camping on the loch shore near her house. What counts as a problem, is ideological and the LLTNPA has made political choices about this. Rubbish left by campers is photographed to justify the removal of access rights, while rubbish left by farmers is simply left to rot and has no consequences for them at all. The LLTNPA could be making the argument that we should stop paying public subsidies to farmers who dump rubbish in our National Parks but its not, it would rather focus on getting rid of campers.

A couple of miles further on we dropped in to look at the second north Loch Venachar site, owned by the LLTNPA. The two carparks provide the best bases for roadside and lochside camping between Callander and Loch Katrine, being located away from houses and with a number of good spots to pitch a tent. The LLTNPA had been going to provide a campsite here, under the visionary Five Lochs Plan, but those plans appear to have been scrapped without explanation ([see here](#)) and I will be very surprised if the site features on the camping plan which will be up for formal approval at the next LTNPA Board Meeting on Monday 24th October. It should be.



As I wanted to take a photo, we walked over to the campers to have a word with them. They turned out to be fishermen, who go camping all over Scotland and who were out to enjoy themselves. One had come to camping through Fairbridge Drake, as it then was, which helped inner city young people to enjoy the countryside. A success you might have thought



The fire pit in this picture was caused by earlier visitors. The campers had brought their own wood.

I asked the fishermen if they knew about the proposed byelaws and this could stop them camping here in future (if they wanted to camp before 30th September). There was a chorus of no-one will stop us camping! I was then asked why someone who was English – I am afraid I have not lost my accent in 25 years – was taking an interest in this and when I said I was from Glasgow, rather than Glesga, I was given a right ribbing!

There was a pile of empties on the ground, which the campers unprompted said they would clear up afterwards, and besides the logs the campers had brought pallets for burning. Now I am not naive enough not to have wondered where the logs might have come from, although they were definitely not from around the campsite, but it seemed to me that the pleasure these guys were getting from being

out in the countryside far outweighed the impacts they were having, and in any case these should be easy to manage.

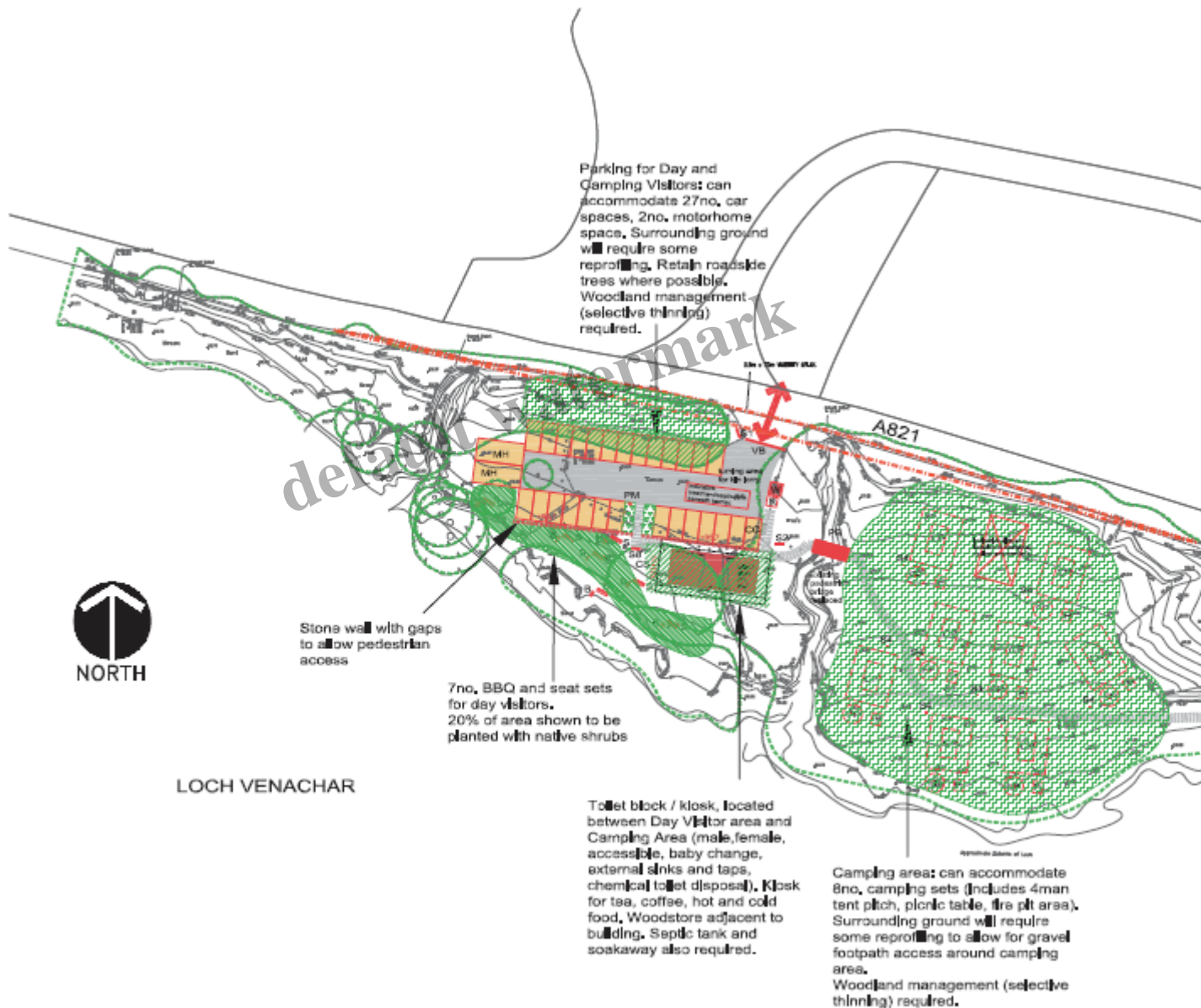
Worried that rubbish might be left? I took the guys at face value, but things can happen, people can drink a bit too much and feel hungover, it starts to pour with rain and people rush to their vehicles without clearing everything up. The solution is simple. Get the Rangers to take a photo of the vehicle, as the police used to do, as insurance and evidence that could be used to impose a fixed penalty notice. You can guarantee the place would be spotless the next day.

Worried about the source of the wood? Well the original plans in the Five Lochs Plan were not only to create barbecue pits at these carparks but also create wood stores which would have removed any temptation for people to cut down trees. The wood store was not included in the revised plans although Forestry Commission Scotland has a huge supply of wood just down the road by Ben An.



The FCS has been removing alien conifers from Ben Avon and leaving whole tree trunks on the ground to rot. It would be very simple to provide some of this to allow people to enjoy campfires.

The solutions to problems that can be caused by people camping are very simple. First you put in infrastructure and for north Loch Venachar the best starting place would be to implement the 5 Lochs Plan (see below) instead of abandoning. Second, the Park's Rangers need to talk to anyone, whoever they are. The focus of this needs to be on what people are enjoying (we talked to the fishermen about their fishing) rather than focussing on might they might be doing wrong. But that I am afraid requires tolerance, a quality that the LLTNPA Board and senior staff appear to be lacking.



Extract from original Five Lochs Plan showing the North Loch Venachar camping area and toilet

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

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2. Camping bye laws
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Date Created

October 11, 2016

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