

Crap, permits and the byelaws, the hypocrisy of the LLTNPA and some real solutions

Description

Table 6 – Total recorded instances of fouling

Area	Fouling overall
Trossachs North	49
Trossachs West	25
West Loch Lomond	67
East Loch Lomond	4
Overall	145

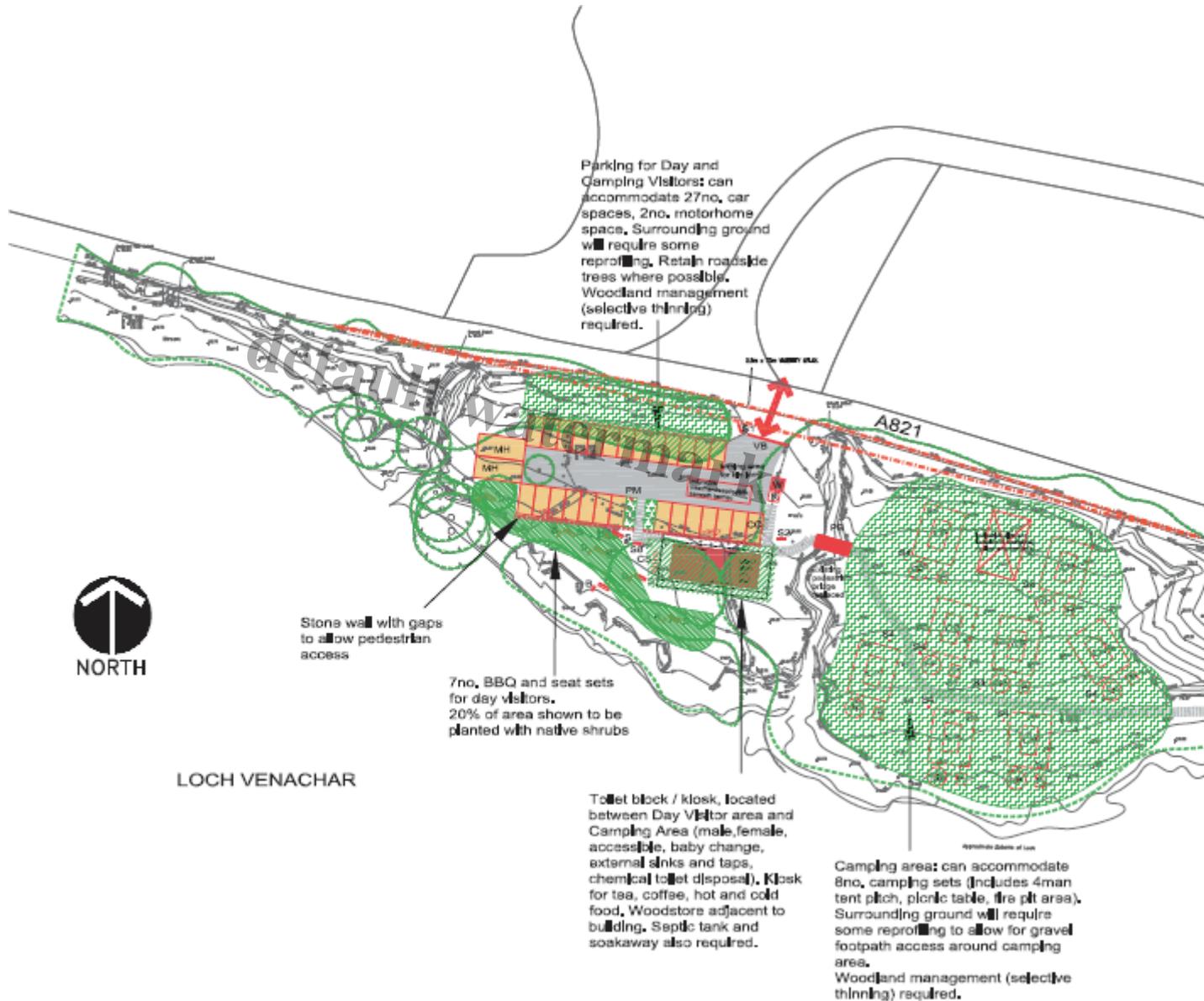
Keep Scotland Beautiful Environment Quality Audit 2015 published by LLTNPA November 2016 a year of litter

Forgive my third post in a row on the camping byelaws but I think its time the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Board was exposed to some public scrutiny before it takes decisions rather than afterwards.

I have vivid memories of the meeting which approved the byelaws in April 2015, the first I had attended. There were only three members of the public present but the Park had called in its own police officer to watch over us. The camping byelaws were decided in under 1/2 hour, which made me realise the whole process had been a charade and the decision had been taken beforehand in secret. There was one eloquent speech though, from Stirlingshire Tory Councillor Martin Earl.

Cllr Earl described how he had been out recently on a community litter pick on the shores of Loch Venachar and had been disgusted by the levels of faecal waste and toilet paper. His passion for the

place was clear. You could hardly fail to be moved and any tabloid present would no doubt have used crap as the clinching argument for the need to ban campers. What Councillor Earl did not mention, and not a single other Board Member referred to was the campsite and public toilets planned for the north shore of Loch Venachar which had been timetabled in the Five Lochs Visitor Management Plan for delivery in 2014.



The 2012 plan for the campsite on Park owned land on the North Shore of Loch Venachar.

PROPOSALS:

- Upgrade existing car parks to 40 bays
- 2no. motorhome spaces
- 1no. car charging point
- Toilets (male, female, accessible, baby change, external sinks and taps, chemical toilet disposal)
- Kiosk for tea, coffee, hot and cold food
- Firewood store
- 8no. camping pitches towards shore
- 8no. picnic tables next to camping
- 8no. fire pits next to camping pitches
- 12no. seats next to car park
- 12no. BBQs next to car park
- 1no. recycling point in car park
- 6no. cycle stands

Note not just the toilet block but also the chemical disposal point and the number of parking places including two larger ones for motor homes.

If the Park had delivered on the Five Lochs Management Plan, I suspect most, if not all, of the faecal waste Cllr Earl complained about would not have been on the shores but quietly composting away below the new facilities. However, what I did not know then, but the Board must have known, was that a revised planning application ([see here](#)) had been approved in 2014 for a smaller carpark without motor home spaces, no campsite and no toilets. There appeared to be not a single Board Member who was able to make a link between the crap Martin Earl saw and the lack of facilities/change of plan.



Over the next year I tried to find out what was happening to

the North Loch Venachar campsite through a number of FOI requests. In May 2016 the LLTNPA was denying it had taken a decision about the campsite at North Loch Venachar [EIR 2016-017 Response camping](#) although it was quite clear from my visit last May that the new car park had been constructed and in such a way to preclude the installation of toilet facilities.

Roll on another five months to the LLTNPA meeting this October and the Board, including Cllr Earl, unanimously approved the camping development strategy. The included permit areas *without any facilities* along the north shore of Loch Venachar where the campsite and toilets had been planned.



The LLTNPA agreed permits for 17 tents and 5 motorhomes on the north shore of Loch Venachar, despite the Park owned carparks and despite places for motorhomes being planned there originally. There is a road - why just 5? The LLTNPA either changed these plans in secret or allow their Chief Executive

My question to Cllr Earl and the rest of the Board is how is the permit system going to do anything to change the crap on the shores of North Loch Venachar you were so concerned about in April 2015?

Now the Park has said in its paper to the Board on Monday that it will issue information about the Scottish Outdoor Access Code along with the permits. It didn't need permits to do this. One might wonder too what likelihood there will be of people reading this information as they pay to camp through their mobile phones. Back when I was President of the Mountaineering Council of Scotland Mike Dales and the Access and Conservation Committee produced a leaflet called *How to go in the Great Outdoors* which is still years later the advice recommended by SOAC. The LLTNPA rangers could have been giving this out to campers for years though this would have meant acknowledging the expertise of recreational organisations something they have consistently refused to do along with a friendly word. Even better, the Rangers could have taken a stock of plastic trowels with them for sale for a fiver to encourage everyone to bury their waste. The permit system will not change any of the historical failure of the Park to educate people. When a ranger finds a pile of crap and toilet paper in a permit area, trying to find out who did it will be rather like trying to find out which wean stuck the chewing gum to the teacher's chair!

Putting the problem into perspective



There are now two important pieces of evidence which put the problem into

perspective. The first is the Keep Scotland Beautiful Litter Audit. This was focussed on sites popular for camping and suggests (see table at top above) that people leaving crap in the open is a less prevalent practice than one might have thought from Councillor Earl's speech (it of course biodegrades quite quickly) and from the number of campers recorded at these sites. It appears that lots of campers are doing the right thing and burying their waste. The second equally important piece of evidence is a recent scientific study of water pollution along the West Highland Way [Recreation impact water quality West Highland Way](#). It found no evidence of pollution. That doesn't mean we should get complacent but it puts the problem in perspective.



It would be wrong though to suggest that campers are the only source or even main source of crap in the Park. I was reminded of this a couple of weeks ago going up to do a winter climb on the Cobbler. Near the top of the zig zags my climbing partner needed a crap and headed off into the woods with his ice axe. I stopped and noticed several pieces of toilet paper below the path â?? I went to have a look and almost ten people had crapped there. Mike came back and said there was a similar amount of crap on the other side of the path. Shocking? No, a fact of life.

Despite the Cobbler car park being very well used there are no toilets. After a drive of an hour or more in the morning its not surprising many people need to relieve themselves so what happens is they go up the path, come to a more densely wooded area and think this is a good place to go and they do. Now before anyone blames hill walkers, this is just the same for day visitors. While the Park asked KSB to record crap in the popular areas, you can find crap anywhere (just look in the bushes at the back of laybys) and the KSB audit found crap on two occasions by the turning for the Balmaha pier. The simple fact is that most people have at least one bowel movement every 24 hours, its quite predictable therefore that many people will need to have a crap when people visit the Park â?? indeed in the days when the LLTNPA still conducted proper Visitor Surveys these all showed the main complaint about the National Park was a lack of public conveniences. The LLTNPA has never acted on this.

The issue that the Park needs to address is not just campers crap, but that any visitor to the outdoors may need to have a crap. I would suggest the central challenge is how install adequate toilet facilities for all visitors in the Park. The byelaws and permit system is a complete irrelevance when it comes to this. Anyone who drives north or south through Crianlarich and Tyndrum will know that the toilets there are a godsave. They are basic, not in good condition but very well used. By contrast the LLTNPA has more modern facilities at places that would be equally good for stopping off (Balmaha, Firkin Point and

Rowardennan) but these are locked for much of the time. Useless!

What needs to happen

- All existing toilets operated by the National Park should be opened 24 hours a day 365 days of the year (eg Rowardennan, Firkin Point) and those that can only be accessed through other facilities which close (eg Balmaha, Inveruglas) should be redesigned so they can be accessed from outdoors
- The LLTNPA should develop a plan to install toilets at ALL the popular car parks in the National Park over the next five years (e.g Arrochar) and expand capacity where needed (e.g Luss)
- The LLTNPA should ensure that a number of these toilets have waste disposal points for campervans/motorhomes and these are well advertised (as per the original plans for Loch Venachar)
- In the most popular camping areas, the LLTNPA should install temporary portaloos over the summer months
- Elsewhere, it should encourage all wild campers to carry lightweight plastic trowels and bury their waste

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Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

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