

National Park or marketing hype of the year?

Description



The former torpedo range by Arrochar is just one big rubbish dump – is the LLTNPA ever going to do something about this?

The Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park has been nominated by BBC Countryfile presenter as National Park of the year ([see here](#)) There are four other nominees, South Downs, Peak District, Snowdonia and Yorkshire Dales. The LLTNPA was quick to get in on the act, issuing its own press release and then arranging for this motion to be lodged in the Scottish Parliament:

Motion Number: S5M-03569

Lodged By: Dean Lockhart

Date Lodged: 22/01/2017

Title: Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park

Motion Text:

That the Parliament congratulates everyone at Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park on it being shortlisted for the title of National Park of the Year 2017; notes that it is the only Scottish park in the final of the competition, which is run by the BBC Countryfile magazine; understands that the competition, which is in its sixth year aims to celebrate the importance of the British countryside and its people, nature reserves and heritage attractions; notes that the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs park covers over 720 square miles and includes 21 Munros, two forest parks and the Great Trossachs Forest, which was recently been named the UK's latest and largest national nature reserve; understands that the park is renowned, not only for its undoubted beauty, but also as a living, working landscape that offers a home to unique wildlife as well as providing a range of activities for visitors and locals alike, and wishes all of the nominees, and the rest of the UK's national parks, continued success.

This interest in National Parks in the Scottish Parliament is a positive thing. However, both the motion and the Countryfile nomination confuse the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, the place, with the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority, the body responsible for running it. They are quite distinct.

While National Parks, as places, change a little each year, this is not enough to explain why a National Park should be nominated one year rather than the next. If thought, the Award, is supposed to be about the performance of National Park Authorities, there is no information provided by the BBC to enable people to compare how each of the National Park Authorities nominated for the award are doing. The result is people will vote for the place they like, rather than what any National Park Authority is doing. This will suit the LLTNPA, which does not like its performance to be scrutinised, and will be hoping that everyone in Scotland will vote for it simply because its a nomination from Scotland.

Before rushing headlong into supporting this piece of marketing, I hope our MSPs will consider the LLTNPA's performance in 2016. The LLTNPA has a large communications team of, I believe, 8 staff to sing its own praises, so here I will only list some of the things they try to avoid mentioning:

- In April the Standards Commission found against Board Member Owen McKee, the planning convener who traded in Scotgold Shares after the Cononish goldmine was approved. Unfortunately the Standards Commissions did not have the powers to investigate how the Board

covered this up.



- The destruction of landforms and landscape in Glen Falloch, on an industrial scale, in order to construct new hydro schemes reached its apogee. With staff having previously reversed the decision of Board Members that all the access tracks should be removed, these tracks now form permanent scars on the landscape. The LLTNPA has failed to enforce its own standards for hydro schemes, including landscaping, colour of material used and width and design of access tracks.
- The LLTNPA conducted a community planning consultation in Balloch – called a charrette, funded by the Scottish Government – without telling the local community that a company called Flamingo Land had been appointed to develop the large Riverside site and that as the National Park Authority it had been on the selection panel for that developer.
- The secret and unaccountable Board Briefing sessions LLTNPA continued throughout the year –
- The LLTNPA's promise that it would provide new camping places if the camping byelaws were agreed collapsed. The Five Lochs Visitor Management Plan, which included specific plans for campsites, along with the Stakeholder Group which contributed to it, appears to have been abandoned entirely. It has been replaced by a series of vague promises that the Park is

continuing to work to develop new campsites in the proposed camping management zones.

- Instead the LLTNPA committed to spending £345k on a new 26 place campsite at Loch Chon, which is inaccessible to anyone without a car, and where there is little demand. The campsite was totally overspecified, which explains the cost, and the only justification for spending this money was so the LLTNPA could satisfy a promise to the Minister that they would develop new camping places before the camping byelaws commenced.
- The LLTNPA developed a new permit system to control camping in the management zones which had not been subject to public consultation and then failed to consult its own Local Access Forum, a statutory consultee, on the implications for access rights. Freedom of Information requests demonstrated that the LLTNPA's decision to "create" 300 places where people could camp, was not based on any evidence about the impact of campers.
- The Scottish Information Commissioner forced the LLTNPA to make public all but one of the slides that had been presented at the Secret Board Meetings which decided the camping byelaws and was investigating the failure of the LLTNPA to declare all the information it held about these meetings at year end.
- The LLTNPA diverted a considerable proportion of its resources into a single issue, how to ban campers, and consequently failed to progress many far more important matters. This was epitomised by the non-appearance of the new Park Partnership Plan (the Cairngorms National Park draft plan was consulted on over the summer) which is due to be signed off by Ministers in 2017
- One year late, the LLTNPA published the Keep Scotland Beautiful litter audit. During the course of Board Meetings it emerged that once again the LLTNPA had again failed to take any meaningful initiatives with its local authority partners on how to address litter problems in the National Park. The litter strategy, promised in the Five Lochs Visitor Management Plan, is now several years overdue.
- The LLTNPA planning committee refused to delay consideration of a planning application for housing next door to their HQ in Balloch until after the community planning event and instead approved the housing plans.

This is not intended as a balanced appraisal, for that one would need to add some positives and then look at how the overall scorecard squared with the performance of the other National Parks nominated by John Craven. However, information like this needs to be put into the public arena if we are to have any chance of our current National Parks improving and meeting the objectives for which they were created. Our MSPs, instead of accepting the marketing hype issued by the LLTNPA, should start scrutinising what it is actually doing.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

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2. camping
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5. Freedom of Information
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Date Created

January 24, 2017

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