

The stushi about social housing in Balmaha, nimbyism and camping

Description



The protest about plans for new social housing being proposed at Balmaha has received a fair amount of media coverage (see also <http://www.glasgowlive.co.uk/news/glasgow-news/housing-plan-destroy-ruin-west-12509029>). While there has been some excellent follow-up in the Herald's letter pages, there are a number of twists to the story which illustrate the hypocrisy going on in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park at present.

The alleged threat to the West Highland Way is, if taken to refer to the main route, complete nonsense: the main route taken by the Way traverses up and behind Conic Hill and if you stick to it you won't see much of Balmaha. This is not an accident. At the time the Way was created the then Duke of Montrose did not want to see walkers spoiling the view from his house and only agreed to the West Highland Way crossing his land if it was kept well out of sight of the settlements below. Nimbyism has been around for a long time. A large amount of money was spent upgrading the Conic Hill section of the Way a couple of years ago but it still runs behind the hill. There is not even a sign to tell West Highland Way walkers about one of the best views in Scotland and as a result many pass by without realising what they are missing. I am not sure though that for people who do go to the top of Conic Hill this development will spoil the view any more than the large modern houses on the south side of the road to the village. (There is though a variant of the Way, which most people would regard as vastly inferior to the path over Conic Hill, that follows the road from Milton of Buchanan to Balmaha which passes the site so it is true to say the Way will be affected)

Proposed Balmaha housing development would be no threat to West Hi

I WAS surprised to read the ludicrous suggestion by some "Nimby" campaigners that "Scotland's most famous long-distance route faces being devastated if a controversial housing development goes ahead" ("Threat to West Highland Way", The Herald, January 26).

This is simply not the case as the walking route is some distance away from the site in Balmaha, which has been earmarked in the National Park Local Development Plan for affordable housing, and after extensive local community consultation over a number of years.

It is important that some balance is brought to the debate on the proposals for building 22 much-needed affordable houses on the plantation

site near the entrance to the village. Rural Stirling Housing Association has been working with the local community for some time now to address the lack of affordable housing in a community where more than 50 per cent of the housing stock is used for holiday accommodation and the rest is well beyond the means of ordinary working people and young families. More than 100 households have lodged expressions of interest in the proposed houses, with around 50 per cent of these being from the immediate Buchahan and Drymen community council areas.

A sensitively designed scheme, well set back from the main road, is planned and a large number of trees on the wider plantation site will

remain, so Balmaha will retain its intrinsic charm.

Balmaha, like many other small rural communities in the National Park, is facing major challenges in retaining young people, and people of working age, due to the lack of affordable housing with tourism operators and well-heeled commuters and retirees continuing to snap up any housing that comes on the market.

It is important the national park is a place for people of all ages and socio-economic backgrounds, as well as nature, and this modest social housing development will help achieve this.

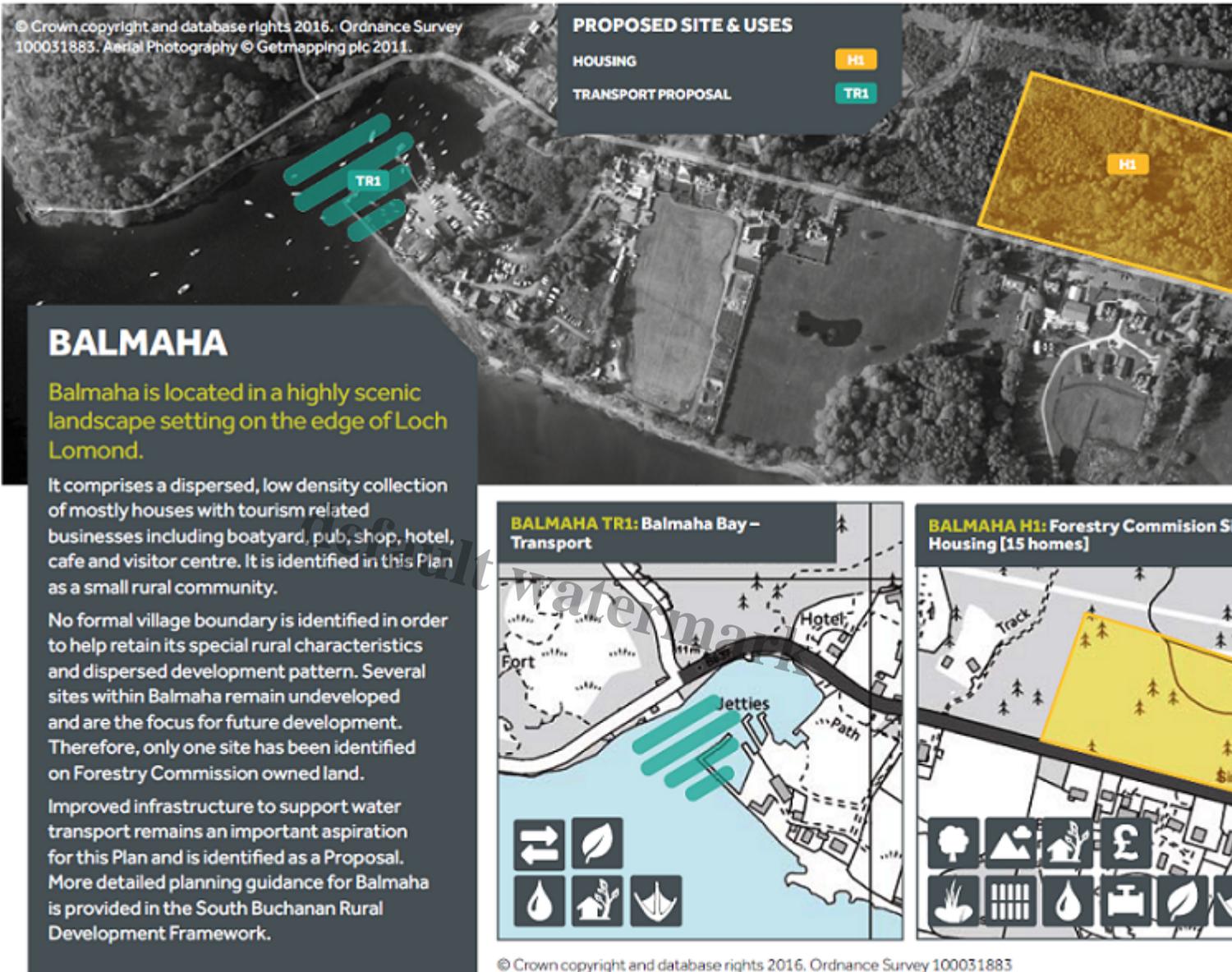
James Fraser,
Chairman, Friends of Loch Lomond
and The Trossachs, Carrochan,
Balloch.

AS a resident at Salloch for some 25 years I wish to give my support to the proposed plan to build affordable housing on the Balmaha Plantation Site. There is a great need for youngsters belonging to the area and people with a social reason to live here and who are not part of the affluent middle class to find housing here and are unable to do so as the very limited availability of properties are far beyond their financial means.

Balmaha Plantation site was chosen because the land owner, Forestry Commission, was in the position to release the land for affordable housing for a modest sum. The number and mix of units was carefully chosen in order that the project could be financially viable.

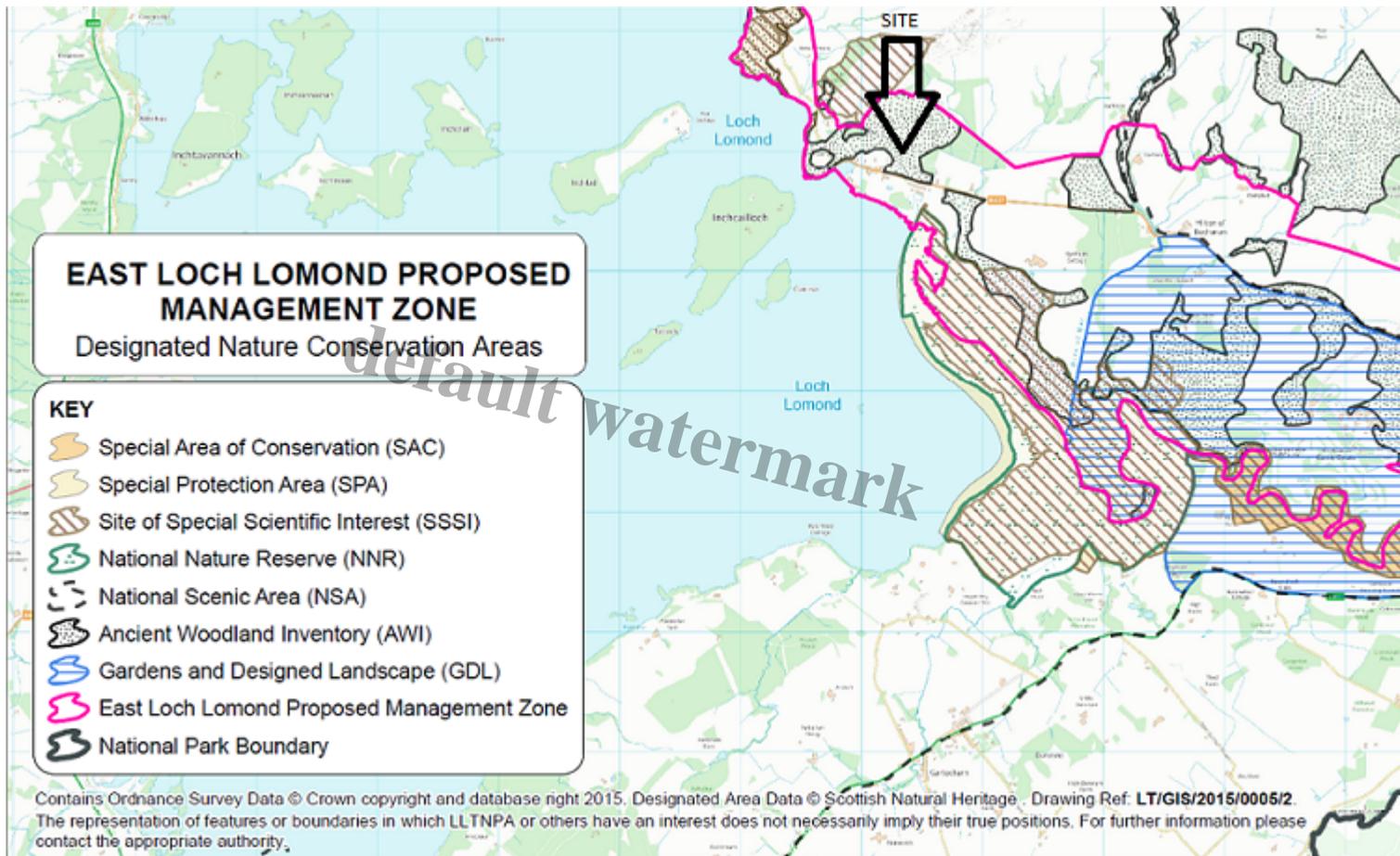
While media reports and letters indicate the plan is for 22 houses, the Local Development Plan which was finally approved just a few weeks ago shows just 15 houses on the site (see below).

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What's more the local Development Plan is very vague about other developments in the village claiming no boundary has been marked in order to maintain its 'dispersed development pattern'. The Community Council has reason to be very sceptical about this ever since last June the Planning Committee approved an application in the centre of the village for a new tourist development by Sandy Fraser, owner of the Oak Tree Inn and Wayne Gardner, for 20 holiday lodges. The last development plan stated that 'support will only be given to small-scale improvements to existing tourism and visitor facilities in Balmaha' although prior to this the Planning Committee had agreed to 13 holiday chalets (more on this in a future post). So much for dispersed development and so much for consistent applications of plans on the part of the Loch Lomond National Park Authority.

The biggest hypocrisy about this proposed development is the LLTNPA's approach to Ancient Woodland Inventory Sites. If you look at the map below of "Designated Nature Conservation areas", the site where the housing will be located is clearly part of the ancient woodland inventory. The interesting thing about these sites is they include any remnants of ancient woodland and may, as Arthur Honan stated in his letter above, have been used as farmland. The LLTNPA in its development plan was clearly quite happy that such a site should be completely destroyed.



The map above is an extract from a suite of maps sent to the Minister of the Environment as part of the case the Park made for the camping byelaws. By including Ancient Woodland Inventory sites in its list of designated Nature Conservation Areas the LLTNPA made it appear as if camping was taking place in areas particularly important for nature conservation. In fact AWI are not designated or protected like other sites. The pink boundary shows the proposed extension of the east Loch Lomond Management zone which the Minister subsequently approved - remove the AWI sites from it and it suddenly starts looking a lot less sensitive.

In fact, in the Trossachs West Management zone map (see below) the predominant designation is the AWI sites - and as confirmation of the high regard the LLTNPA holds for these sites its been busy destroying part of that woodland by Loch Chon to create camping places on a hillside where no-one camps <https://parkswatchscotland.co.uk/2016/12/02/parkspk-camping-destruction-started-loch-chon/>. Balmaha and Loch Chon show the LLTNPA is quite happy to see AWI sites developed, so isn't it about time they told Ministers who justified the camping byelaws in large part because of the need to

protect sensitive sites? Wild camping of course has far less lasting impact than either of these developments will . More double-thinking on what goes on in our National Parks.

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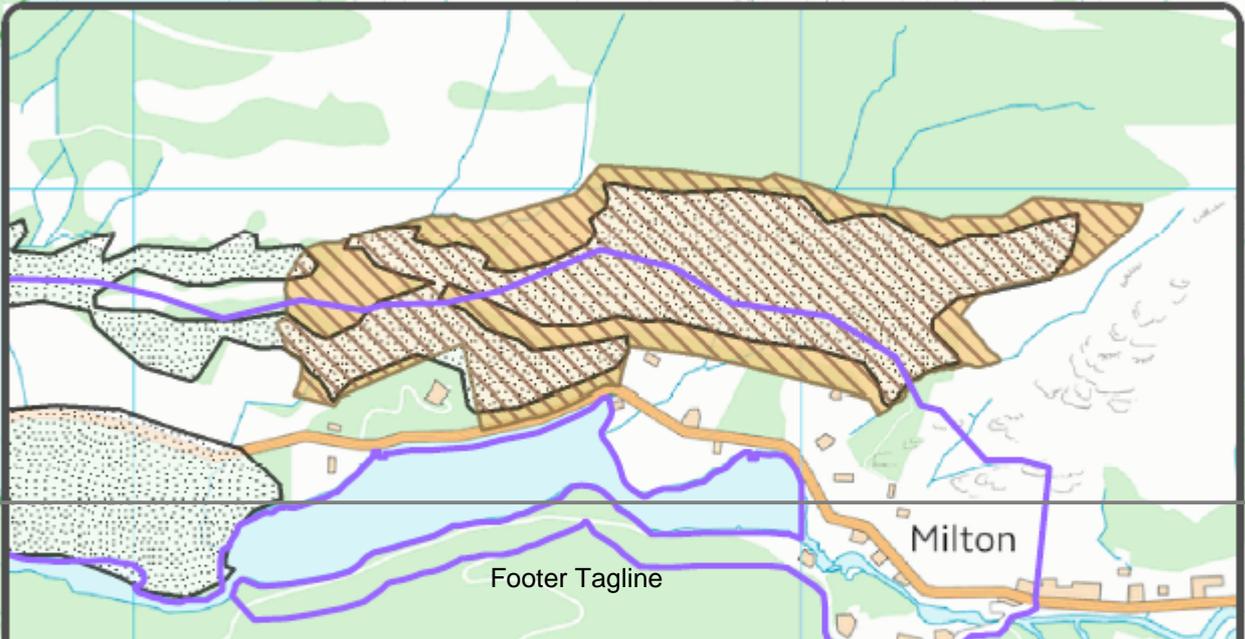
TROSSACHS WEST PROPOSED MANAGEMENT ZONE

Designated Nature Conservation Areas

KEY

-  Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
-  Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
-  Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI)
-  Trossachs West Proposed Management Zone
-  National Park Boundary

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Postscript â?? correction

In the first version of this post I claimed the West Highland Way went nowhere near this site. My apologies, this was wrong, and I have corrected the error. The main route is nowhere near the site but a variant, which is marked on maps as the West Highland Way, passed by it.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. Camping bye laws
2. Development Plan
3. LLTNPA
4. Local communities
5. planning

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