

Planning blight in the National Park â?? the Arrochar torpedo range

Description



Part of torpedo range dump, Ben Lomond far distance

Thanks to reader Fiona Mackinnon who sent me this link about crackdown on fly tipping at the former torpedo range on Loch Long by Arrochar ([see here](#)). While I welcome this belated attempt to tackle rubbish in the National Park (the torpedo site has been used as an unofficial dump for years) â?? a far greater problem, incidentally, than has ever been caused by campers â?? the way this is being done appears wrong and it will not deal with the real problem, the derelict site.

In August 2016, following the June Board Meeting where Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park staff told Board Members that the new Fixed Penalty Notices for litter could not be used to tackle flytipping, but that other powers were available to do this, an amenity notice was served on the owners of the former torpedo site ([see here](#)). This gave the owners, Clydebank Developments Ltd, 4 weeks to remove all the flytipping, level the piles of rubble on the site (but NOT the ruined buildings) and implement a road closure to the standard required by Argyll and Bute Council. The required actions do not appear to have taken place within the required timescales.



Torpedo range road, a public road, which had now been blocked off to vehicles.

I was not aware of this road closure when I suggested in a post that the torpedo range road was one of the places in the National Park camping management zones where people could legally stop off and sleep overnight in campervans ([see here](#)). However, I can find nothing on the Argyll and Bute website ([see here](#)) to indicate that, as Roads Authority, they have agreed this a road closure although, back in 2013, they did agree for temporary traffic restrictions on the road to enable the proposed development of the site to take place ([see here](#)). It appears therefore that the road closure may be unlawful.



Much of the fly tipping on the site is likely to have been done by local people a consequence of the charges imposed by Argyll and Bute Council for bulk uplifts of domestic waste (£59.70 for ten minutes collection).

I have not re-visited the site since the gates went up to see if the flytipping has in fact been removed and the piles of rubble levelled.



Even if the Amenity Order is properly implemented, the site will remain strewn with materials from the demolition that has taken place and the upright buildings will remain. The torpedo range closed in 1986 (for an excellent history compiled by the Ardlui, Arrochar and Tearbert Heritage Group ([see here](#))). Demolition on the site, which included housing for the workforce, did not start until over 20 years later in 2007 but soon after it commenced a major fire occurred and site clearance never re-started. The site has been a dump and eyesore ever since.

The major responsibility for this planning blight lies with the Royal Navy which operated the site. Instead of restoring the site once the torpedo testing stopped, it abandoned it and then eventually sold it to a private developer. I cannot find the date for this but in effect this handed over the responsibility for the site clearance from the Government to private business. The Royal Navy that spends Â£billions on weapons, was not prepared to find the relatively small sums needed to restore this site â?? what does this say about how much it cares about the environment?

This failure by the state to restore the land itself but instead transfer it to the private sector to do so, in my view inevitably resulted in a large-scale development proposal. It was the only way to pay for the clear-up of the derelict site. The National Park was basically handed a big bomb: either agree the development or accept responsibility for the site being blighted for evermore. There are strong parallels with the situation at Balloch where Scottish Enterprise, having owned the Riverside site for many years, expect Flamingo Land to restore any polluted land there as part of the development of the site and the LLTNPA has gone along with this. Anyway, back in 2013 the LLTNPA granted planning permission for a 130 bed hotel, 36 holiday lets, 16 houses and a chandlery. This was only part of the development. The other part, which was the responsibility of Marine Scotland to approve, was for a 245 place marina.



The site plan which was granted planning permission

Work was due to have started three years ago but never did and the planning permission lapsed last year. This did not prevent the LLTNPA including the site once again in its Development Plan, which was approved last year, as a major tourist development (V.E1).

ARROCHAR & SUCCOTH

Arrochar and Succoth lie in a stunning setting at the top of Loch Long and surrounded by hills and mountains.

The Villages have grown along the lochshore. The area has fantastic opportunities to develop more as a marine gateway with the redevelopment of the former Torpedo site. Additionally, there is new housing being built in Succoth and a proposal to create a new village 'centre' for the community beside the Three Villages Hall. This area offers great opportunities for a range of new homes, employment, community and visitor infrastructure.



PROPOSED SITE & USES

HOUSING

- H1
- H2
- H3

VISITOR EXPERIENCE

- VE1

MIXED USE

- MU1
- MU2

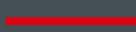
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- ED1

TRANSPORT

- TR1

VILLAGE BOUNDARY



CORE PATHS



OPEN SPACE



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This was a major opportunity to undertake a re-think for the whole site and to consider a use which would be appropriate for a National Park – an opportunity missed.

The original site proposal approved by the LLTNPA illustrates to me what is going wrong in the National Park:

- The idea that large-scale private business investment will be the saviour of places and people. Once again it failed to deliver.
- The focus on the luxury market – the 130 bed hotel was seen as being the core attraction – no doubt linked to the yachting community who tend to have lots of money – rather than the people who actually enjoy the area at present.
- The failure to consider the housing implications of job creation. The Developers promised 300 new jobs in all, 260 on site, but no consideration was given to where all these people would live. House prices in Arrochar are expensive and opportunities to rent almost non-existent. Most of the workforce therefore would probably have had to commute in from Balloch, or further afield, spending a significant proportion of their low wages (and of their lives) on travel to work. If there was a case for this development, there needed to be a plan to house the workforce: instead, a requirement of the LLTNPA's planning approval was that the holiday accommodation on site could not be turned into permanent accommodation
- The 500 car parking places and heliport which tells a story about unsustainable travel.

The development proposal was all about money (from saving the Royal Navy from picking up the restoration tab to someone becoming rich). It appears to me to have been parachuted onto the shore of Loch Long Arrochar without any consideration of the people who live there (how many would work in the development if it had taken place?), the people who now visit and most importantly the place – and as a place it should be very special, for the thousands who live within the Clyde conurbation and who enjoy the wonderful combination of hill and loch, as well as for visitors from further afield.



View from the Cobbler to Clyde Estuary November 20

The problem at present is that, despite good work on hill paths, the potential of Arrochar is not being realised:

- basic tourist facilities, suited to the people who visit at present, are almost non-existent. The consequence is the local community gets very little benefit from the hundreds of people who go hill walking in Arrochar
- the creation of a camping management zone and the conversion of the campsite at Ardgarten into luxury holiday lodges epitomises this. If people cannot stay locally, they won't spend money,

and its the campers who will visit pubs and cafes.

- there are obvious opportunities to make more of the nearby public transport links, so people could hill walk or come camping, after taking the train or bus to Tarbert?!
- there is still far too much plantation forestry, which makes for a poor walking experience on low ground, and has had an adverse impact on wildlife
- the place has an interesting history as the torpedo range illustrates so why not make something of this?

What should the LLTNPA do?

Its time the LLTNPA should develop a new vision for Arrochar, that should be fitting for a National Park and built around public investment in the area:

- So why not compulsorily purchase the old torpedo range and call on the Royal Navy to do the right thing and restore the land it has blighted?
- A community development trust could then provide a much needed campsite and some basic holiday accommodation (eg wigwams) on the site as well as transport links from Tarbert.
- The proposal, in the original plans, for a path linking the site to Arrochar should be retained
- Forest Enterprise should be called on to take out the conifer forests as it is doing on the east shore of Loch Lomond with a view to enabling native woodland (atlantic oakwoods) to develop

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. camping
2. Development Plan
3. flamingo land
4. LLTNPA
5. Local communities
6. planning

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Author

nickkempe