

## National Park Board clearout – an opportunity?

### Description

The results of the Local Government elections last Thursday are likely to lead to a significant change in the composition of both National Park Boards over the next few months which provides an opportunity for all who care about how our National Parks operate at present. The headline is that eight of the thirteen current nominees from Councils appointed by the Scottish Government to sit on the National Park Boards either lost their seats or failed to be re-elected last week and their term of office on the National Park Board is due to finish soon.

#### Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park

- Hazell Wood (Lab) West Dunbartonshire Council – lost seat
- James Robb (SLD) Argyll and Bute – lost seat
- Fergus Wood (SNP) Stirling – lost seat to Tory
- Bob Ellis (SNP) Perth and Kinross – did not stand
- Martin Earl (Con) Stirling – re-elected
- George Freeman (Ind) Argyll and Bute – re-elected

#### Cairngorms National Park

- Jeanette Gaul (SNP) Angus – lost seat to Tory
- Fiona Murdoch Moray – did not stand
- Kate Howie (SNP) Perth and Kinross – did not stand
- Gregor Rimmell (SLD) Highland – lost seat
- Bill Lobban (Ind) Highland – re-elected
- Peter Argyle (SLD) Aberdeenshire – re-elected
- John Latham (SLD) Aberdeenshire – re-elected

Two individual results will stand out to regular readers of Parkswatch.

### Re-election of Bill Lobban

Bill Lobban was re-elected to the Speyside Ward of Highland Council at the first count (along with a Tory) with 1,189 votes. It appears that local electors have not agreed with the Cairngorms National Park Authority that local councillors allegiance should be to the National Park Board rather than their

local electors or their own Council ([see here](#)). I hope that strengthens the ability of more Board Members to speak out like Bill on important matters and forces the CNPA to re-think their current doctrine of corporate responsibility which means they require Councillors to agree with decisions even when their own Council has adopted a diametrically opposed viewpoint.

Whether they will do so is less certain. On 18th May the CNPA is running corporate social media training which *“includes ‘rules’ for how to use your personal social media accounts as a CNPA employee / Board Member”*. The trend in our National Parks, as with other public bodies, is that it is being made ever harder for Board Members to speak out or disagree. The Board needs members like Bill Lobban who are prepared to speak out and I hope Highland Council will nominate him again and the Minister will appoint him.

## **Fergus Wood**

Fergus Wood, the former SNP Councillor for Strathard, received 776 votes, significantly less than his colleague Evelyn Tweed who received 1090 votes and far less than the Tory Martin Earl on 2027 votes. Earl's fellow Tory, who gained 662 first round votes, benefitted from the STV system and replaced Fergus Wood.

While there has been a general swing to the Tories, I believe much of the explanation for Cllr Wood's defeat appears to lie in his proposals for a new campsite at Strathard ([see here](#)). There have been a large number of local objections to the proposal ([see here](#)) which basically argue that this is not the right location for a campsite. Many are not against camping, and indeed a number of objections suggest the campsite would be better located closer to Mr Wood's own house to preserve the open fields by the lochshore.

28.04.2017

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# Ex-provost's camp site plan faces opposition

## Proposal to open facility on farm in national park



Camp site plan Cllr Fergus Wood

Kaiya Marjoribanks

**A proposal to create a new tourist facility on a farm within Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park has attracted some objections.**

Stirling councillor Fergus Wood and his wife Francesca have applied to the Park planning authority for a change of use at land at their home, Ledard Farm, in Kinlochard.

The couple want to create a camping site including tent pitches, camping pods and motor home parking, plus a reception building including toilets, a shop and manager's accommodation and car parking.

Agents for the Woods say the plan is to provide overnight or short duration stay holiday accommodation in small purpose-made chalet units, sites for camper vans and a tent pitching area for a maximum of 10 tent sites.

The toilet accommodation in the centre building would be available not just to site users but also for the general public and signposted from the main road.

Fergus Wood, former Stirling Council provost, who is bidding to retain his Trossachs and Teith seat at the council poll next Thursday, said the site would cover between five and six acres and create two or three jobs.

He currently has about 1000 blackface ewes on the 200-acre farm and there are plans for both hydro-electric and solar panel energy schemes.

He did not think the camp site development would significantly increase traffic and added: "These days, for farmers, it's all about diversification. Making a living from sheep is hard unless you have about 2000 ewes.

"We are still going to run sheep but I want to create a viable business that will also provide employment for my children."

Fergus Wood sits on the board of the park authority but said he would take no part in the determination of the application.

He said the park authority was encouraging landowners to provide camp sites and added: "I hope more of them take up that offer so when people come to the area they have decent facilities. Some people want to 'glamp' rather than camp."

However, neighbour Anne McNally has concerns about sewage going into the Loch Ard, and said: "The loch... is very different in character from Loch Lomond and enjoyed by sailors and swimmers."

"Farm land should be kept for food production and not used for tourism. The national park will want to keep the peace found in such a rural area, which is what people come here for."

Locals James Kennedy and Lester, who are also among objections submitted, said the proposal effectively changes the character of the space within an area of Natural Beauty to a built-up area and does not show how, if community needs are considered, it can be met.

"Specifying the provision of toilets barely meets the needs of the people who live and work in the area, a poor 'payback' for the disruption of the quiet, open space and the field provides or the noise it supports."

"It is very likely future development and promotion of this could bring more traffic and vehicles to the area of Strathard, the heart of which is already at capacity at peak times, which are mostly on weekends and holidays. This proposed development with the formal National Park status at Loch Chon and South of Kinlochard is at risk of being known as a large car park, a tourist venue, rather than a safe, quiet residential village." SEPA (Scottish Environment Protection Agency) has not yet addressed the objection if their queries are addressed.

However, I believe the perception locally is that Strathard, which was formerly very quiet, is being made to pay for the camping byelaws and the shortfall in the places where people can now legally camp in the National Park through the creation of an excessive number of campsite places: both the Park's Loch Chon campsite and now the Fergus Wood campsite. Added to that there appear to be concerns Fergus Wood may be putting his private interests before those of the community. He appears to have paid the price for those perceptions. It will be interesting to see whether Martin Earl, the Tory Councillor who is not on the planning committee, now speaks out against the National Park consensus if officers fail to listen to what the local community are saying – as they did over Loch Chon.

## The overall picture

While legally Councils are not bound to nominate elected members to the Minister to sit on the National Park Boards (they can nominate members of Community Councils or local residents), it appears unlikely they would nominate someone is not a Councillor (sitting on the Board provides a significant income to councillors who are generally underpaid for the work they do). Hence, there is likely to be a clearout in the next few months.

While the Tories generally gained in all the Councils concerned – mainly at the expense of the SNP - and within the Council Wards that cover the National Park, whether the political make-up of the National Park Boards change will depend both on power deals in local councils and on whether the Minister, Roseanna Cunningham then accepts their nominations. This could involve some interesting political twists. Generally the Tories have been far strong advocates of National Parks than the SNP ([see here](#)) but they are much closer to landed interests which wield so much power within our National Parks.

The clearout of existing Board Members provides an opportunity to reform the way our National Parks currently operate such as:

- putting an end to secret Board meetings in the LLTNPA
- recording all Board Meetings as webcasts to enable more members of the public to find out what is going on in our National Parks and in the case of the LLTNPA returning all past minutes of meetings to the National Park website
- refocusing the work of the Board Audit Committees so that these tackle fundamental issues of governance (such as failures in planning enforcement and failures to declare interests)
- holding chief executives to account e.g ending the practice of complaints against the Chief Executive being investigated by staff managed by them
- ensuring that there is proper consultation and engagement with recreational interests and visitors to the National Park, instead current practices which favour landowners and business interests

Local Councils, before nominating anyone to serve on our National Park Boards, should first ensure that those people publicly commit to improving the way our National Parks operate. It would be a bonus if they also nominated people who were prepared to speak out on matters such as raptor persecution, the recreational importance of our National Park and sustainable economic development (instead of the current large scale developments driven by business interests).

### Category

1. Cairngorms
2. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

## Tags

1. camping
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## Date Created

May 9, 2017

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