

## Rural development and the National Park Partnership Plan

### Description

#### WHAT OUTCOMES WILL WE FOCUS OUR EFFORTS ON TO ACHIEVE THIS VISION?



Are the symbols for the National Outcomes the LLTNPA claim to be delivering useful?

The third and final section of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority Partnership Plan (the official consultation [\(see here\)](#) closes today) is entitled "Rural Development". The statutory objective of the National Park is rather different, to promote sustainable use of natural resources and sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities. Its quite possible to have rural development which does not achieve either of these aims, whether this is continuation of unsustainable land uses or new development such as the Cononish Goldmine.

### The LLTNPA's vision

The Park's vision for rural development is infused with neo-liberal values and thought processes:

*"In the National Park businesses and communities thrive and people live and work sustainably in a high quality environment"*

Implicit in this vision is that development is dependent on business, there is no mention of the role of the public sector despite the fact that Forestry Commission Scotland, a public authority, is the largest landowner in the National Park. There is no vision at all about what the public sector, including the National Park Authority – whose staff incidentally are paid far more than most people who work in the National Park (a good thing, reasonable pay) – have to play in sustainable rural development. Significant amounts of research is undertaken in the National Park – for example by the SRUC's research station in Strathfillan – but this, like other evidence is simply ignored. I would suggest that any consideration of sustainable economic development that does not put the public sector at the heart of the vision is meaningless, its simply a charter for business.

There is no recognition either that the interests of business owners and local communities may not be the same. So, the LLTNPA's main focus is on tourism businesses which may deliver good returns to their owners but are dependent – perhaps exploit would be a better word – a low paid workforce who earn so little they cannot afford to live in the National Park. There is no discussion of what is basically a rentier economy, which is based on the provision of tourist accommodation (all those chalet parks) or the financial subsidies paid for by the public for hydro power which are flowing to the City of London. Most of the income generated within the area provides no benefit to the National Park or the people who still manage to live there. In the Cairngorms National Park Authority Plan there was at least implicit recognition of this in the statistics which demonstrated average pay in the Cairngorms National Park was well below the Scottish average. The LLTNPA plan is devoid of evidence and the only indication that this might be an issue is a reference to the total population and population of working age in the National Park declining.

The vision also says nothing about sustainable development. The vision is of people working IN a high quality environment, which just happens to be there, there is no recognition this natural environment has been moulded by people and there is NOTHING about sustainable land-use. This fits with the conservation and land-use section of the plan ([see here](#)) which similarly has no vision or plan for how land-use could become more sustainable. The natural qualities of the National Park are simply there to be used: the “Park's unique environment and special qualities provide many opportunities for economic growth and diversification.” I couldn't find a single proposal about how land-use or wider economy could be diversified in this section of the plan – its all being left to the private sector, the miracles of the market.

The complacency of the LLTNPA and its unwillingness to look at the real issues is staggering:

*“Overall, our rural economy in the Park is performing well with growth in accommodation, outdoor recreation, infrastructure improvements, and food and drink offering over recent years. We have also seen a notable rise in development activity, particularly in renewables, housing and tourism investment. However, we are still facing significant challenges for the rural economy of the National Park.”*

If the economy of the Park was really thriving one would expect there to be an increase in population, not a decrease. There is no proper analysis of what the challenges are or that the economy in the Park is benefitting the few, not the many.

## The LLTNPA's priorities

The very first action point under Rural Development shows the Park's true priorities:

*“Delivery of the key sites and infrastructure in Arrochar, Balloch and Callander, as well as villages identified as **Placemaking Priorities** identified in LIVE Park, the National Park's **Local Development Plan**”.*

This is parkspeak for the delivery of Flamingo Land at Balloch ([see here](#)) and the development of the torpedo site at Arrochar ([see here](#)). Neither has anything to do with sustainable economic development.

The other main development priority appears to be hydro schemes – the number of new hydro schemes being a measure of success. Nowhere in the plan is there any indication of the impacts of such schemes on landscape or river catchments.

Almost all the other action points either re-inforce the Park's development plan, are so vague as to be meaningless or miss the point.

Outcome 1 is basically a repeat of the Local Development, which (apart from the Flamingo Land and Torpedo site) is about matters such as enhancing the environment in existing settlements.

Outcome 2 is about providing support for business, from improving broadband to provision of workshop space – there is not a proposal in it about how the Park could help businesses based on the National Park's special qualities (eg timber businesses) or how the LLTNPA could use its purchasing power to assist local businesses (e.g it has purchased shipping containers for toilets rather than commissioning local businesses to provide buildings fitting for the local environment). The Park says it wants to increase the number of business start up when the reality is that a few businesses are actually increasing their grip on the economy in the National Park particularly in the tourism sector ([see here](#)).

Outcome 3 sees the answer to population decline as training young people and getting more affordable housing provision. Actually, its investment in the economy that creates jobs and the problem in the LLTNPA is that while there has been investment (eg construction of hydro schemes) this has been short-term and generates very few long-term paid jobs. Requiring a proportion of new housing to be “affordable” will do nothing to address the basic issue.

Outcome 4 is about empowerment of local communities. There is no mention of the Park's track record on this (when it matters, they have consistently ignored view of local communities (e.g giving the go-ahead for new housing by the LLTNPA HQ in Balloch and ignoring the Strathard Community Council's concerns about the size of the Loch Chon campsite). As with the CNPA Partnership Plan there is no mention of supporting those communities to take over control of land, which is the main resource in the National Park, not even in areas where the FCS is the main landowner. Until our National Parks grapple with Land Reform, claims to be empowering local communities should be taken with a large dose of salt.

## **What needs to be done**

Here, in a nutshell, is an alternative agenda for rural development in the National Park:

1. The public sector and public sector investment needs to be put at the centre of sustainable rural development but everything the public sector does (from new roads to land-use) should be tailored to the National Park's conservation and recreational objectives.
2. There should be no place for large scale tourist developments which destroy the special qualities of the Park (Flamingo Land) and the focus within tourism should be on improving pay and conditions (including living conditions) of those who work in the sector.
3. The National Park Plan should be driving forward changes in land-use from large scale intensive conifer forestry, sheep farming and hunting to alternative uses. This could start with the Forestry Estate and the production of a plan to change the way the Argyll Forest Park is

managed, so landscape and biodiversity are put first, and new community models of forestry which would create new jobs locally.

### **Category**

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

### **Tags**

1. Development Plan
2. flamingo land
3. Forestry Commission Scotland
4. land reform
5. LLTNPA
6. planning
7. Resources

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