

# Flamingo Land and the proposed development of Drumkinnon Woods

## Description

By Bruce Biddulph, local resident of Balloch and amateur historian

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Mackinnon Wood

Photo Credit Bruce Biddulph

Whilst we await the first views of any precise plans that the developer has for Balloch's Drumkinnon Woods and the west bank of the River Leven ([see here](#)) and ([see here for example](#)), we can only guess and fear what these will be.



Drumkinnon Woods is the green upside down horse-shoe shaped piece of land in the middle of the river Leven.

What does not seem to be an outlandish concern however is the question of access and what will happen to areas of this large parcel of land, which will also be linked to the lands around the old Woodbank Hotel, formerly the medieval estate of Stuckroger.

It may be helpful in this vacuum to pause and consider the history of this area, as the commonly accepted belief is that all of this land is a result of industrial decay, which of course means that the justification for Scottish Enterprise's plans is 'anything is better than dereliction'.



The wood is rich in plantlife, a sign of its age Photo Credit Bruce Biddulph

Even among locals there is the persistent idea that this is simply waste ground where trees have took root. That is true in the riverside area beside the Leven, for here sat the railway sidings up until the 1950s and the railway to the pier itself was uprooted back in the 1980s.

However in the middle of this swathe of land from the Leven to Woodbank is Drumkinnon Wood.



Drumkinnon Wood has kept its boundaries by and large since the early 18th Century and was a wooded area with fields surrounding it in the 1700s. This much is easily gleaned from maps of those times.

The popular misconception, one that has permitted SE to even think about selling off the woods to a private developer, is that these trees only grew from the ruins of the former British Silk Dyeing Co factory as well as the destruction of the sandy bay itself by quarrying for sand in the middle of the 20th Century.

However true that may be it is not true that the wood itself was a product of these two 20th Century disruptions to the once beautiful and idyllic lands of Drumkinnon.

Where the factory stood is more or less where houses stand now. The perimeter of the wood between the factory and the quarrying of sand was fixed and follows the line of the access road that was expanded during the infilling of the ‘pits’ left by the sand-mining and the creation of Lomond Shores.



In short, the factory was demolished and houses were built on its site, whilst the scarred remains of the sand pits were turned into a deep lagoon and Lomond Shores. Between the two lies and forever did lie since the 1800s, the Drumkinnon Wood. Both the factory and the extensive sand mining were products of the 20th Century.



The development of the Lomond Shores project included the woods

and paths were created through them for residents and visitors to the new 'attraction' alike. Since then the old wood has been a firm favourite with dog walkers, families showing their children the wonders of nature and for anyone who simply enjoys a stroll in the woods. Unlike Balloch Park the wood does not suffer from huge amounts of visitors and retains a sense of 'the wild' that the Park cannot always deliver or obvious and even welcome reasons, as it is so well used and loved.

Like the Fisherwood which sits between the railway and the Leven further down, Drumkinnon is a survivor of 19th and 20th Century upheaval.

It and the much diminished sandy beach are the last remnants of what was once a beauty spot with a history of common involvement that survives to this day.

Handing these two remnants of Drumkinnon that have come through the years still with us and being passed into the hands of a profit-making corporation is a prospect that should alarm all of us.



Having put signs up at the edge of the wood saying 'no camping', one of Scottish Enterprise's ideas for the development of Drumkinnon Wood is to provide glamping pods

At the very least we need assurances that the developers are not given carte blanche to do as they wish, and the untold history of Drumkinnon is an omission that should shame a public body such as Scottish Enterprise who have done little to find out what the property itself is all about except as 'derelict land'.

This has poisoned public opinion against the woods themselves as they are seen merely as painful reminders of a lost factory that was the source of stable employment in Balloch since 1930.

It is imperative that we recognise this is a distortion of our history and leaves Drumkinnon Wood in a position it does not deserve and we the people should be ashamed for permitting the sale of a wood to a private developer. There is adequate land for developments elsewhere in the immediate area that at present are poor fields of little apparent value, having themselves been disrupted by the building of the by-pass, perhaps these should be looked to as possible sites for hotels and restaurants and whatever else the developers and SE have in mind, instead of the destruction, however minimal, of a wood that is at least two centuries old and has loyal visitors to it young and old today.



The moorings along the Leven from the Riverside site

There are other issues here, such as mooring rights in the Leven as well as the sandy beach itself, which appears to be zoned for the developer's use as well. That these three areas are areas that have been enjoyed by locals and visitors freely, in some cases for centuries, with no need of deep pockets, perhaps we have to ask if we are looking here at another form of Highland Clearance. It seems as is the case with the priorities of the LLTNPA, that upmarket middle income earners are preferred to people with little or no income in this National Park of ours.

### **Category**

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

### **Tags**

1. access rights
2. flamingo land

- 3. LLTNPA
- 4. Local communities

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**Author**

bruce-biddulph

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