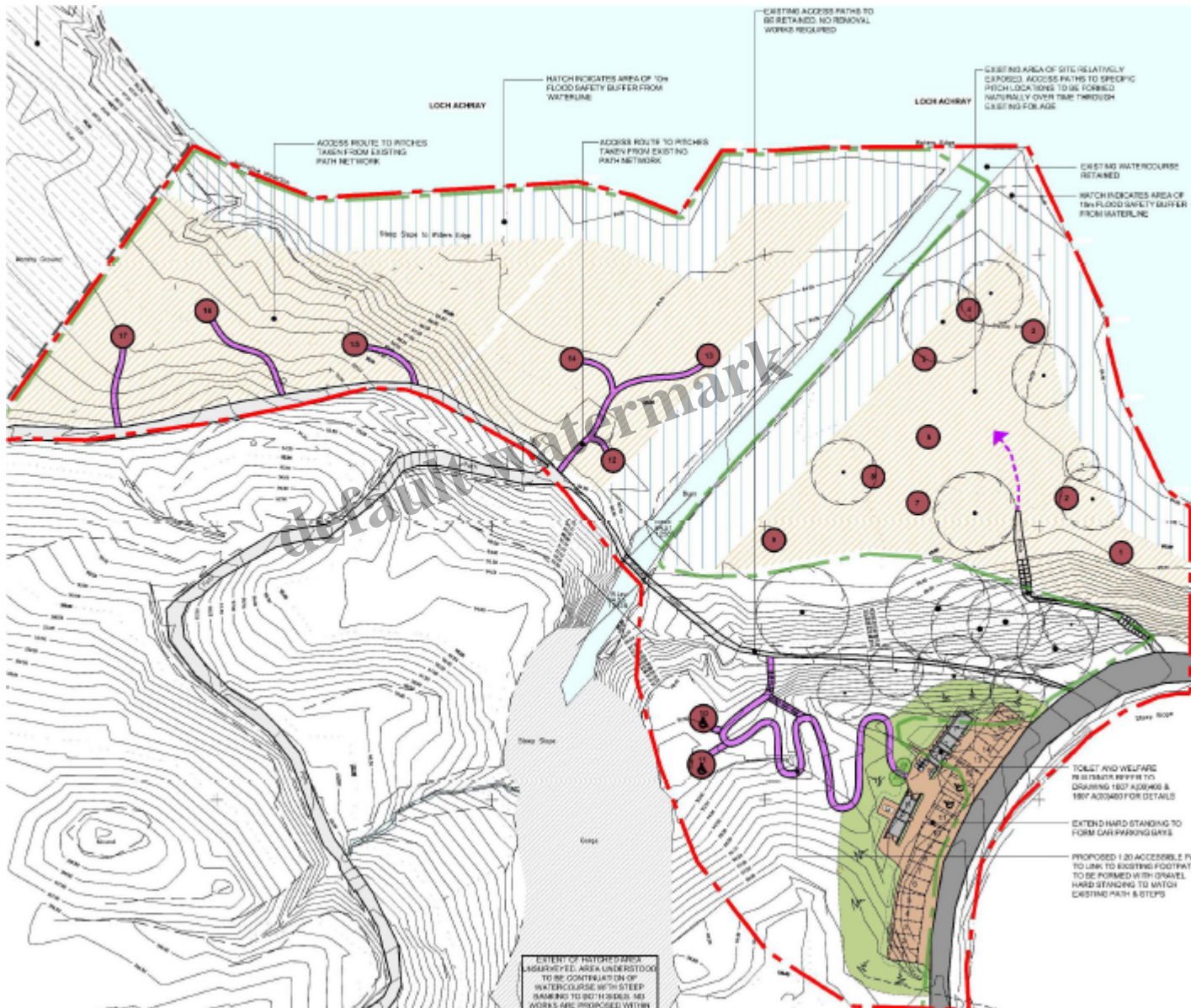


The proposed campsite at Loch Achray – what lessons has the National Park learned?

Description



Forest Drive is the grey road bottom right of map (its one way) while the Dukes Pass Rd lies a few hundred metres to the left of the map. Map from LLTNPA planning portal.



Map showing
location from
planning portal

In September the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority submitted a planning application ([see here](#)) to itself as planning authority for a new campsite on the south shore of Loch Achray on Forest Drive in the Trossachs. There is widespread agreement that new campsites with basic facilities are needed in the National Park. So far the LLTNPA has been poor at delivering these. It appears to have abandoned the excellent Five Lochs Plan ([see here for example](#)) which proposed a number of new campsites in the Trossachs and has also failed to deliver a new campsite this year on the south shore of Loch Earn. This application therefore is welcome. In this post I will look at what the LLTNPA has learned from its experience at Loch Chon and the camping byelaws to date.

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The main camping area will provide for 9 out of the 17 proposed places

The area to the east of the burn is excellent for camping, being a well drained grassy sward. It is owned by the Forestry Commission and has previously been managed by Forest Enterprise as a Youth Campsite without facilities for Duke of Edinburgh expeditions and Scout groups. Its far better for camping than most of the permit areas at Forest Drive ([see here for example](#)). What is also good about the proposal is it allows people to camp by the Loch shore – a contrast to Loch Chon where the Park tried to force campers away from traditional camping places by the loch up onto the hillside.

PROPOSED TRADITIONAL CAMPING PITCHES TO BE FORMED WITH BARK FINISH. NATURAL EDGE TO BE FORMED WITH EXISTING FOLIAGE & VEGETATION.

Extract from plans

However, you can see from the campsite plan above that the LLTNP is still wedded to the idea of fixed camping pitches and what is even worse they appear to wish to replace the grassy sward with

bark. That is not a traditional camping pitch, its suburbanisation. The Park would be far better to abandon any idea of fixing camping pitches in this area and allowing people to camp where they choose. This would also enable areas of bare ground to recover. All the Park would need to do to manage this is to put up signs by worn areas asking people to choose a less worn area to pitch their tent (this is how it should be dealing with erosion throughout the Park – there is no need to ban people to protect vegetation).

Another positive is that this campsite is significantly smaller than Loch Chon. At Loch Chon, Park Chief Executive Gordon Watson insisted ([see here](#)) that the minimum viable size for a campsite would be 26 – he reduced the numbers from 33 after pressure from the Local Community. At the time Parkswatch said this was rubbish and Gordon Watson did not know what he was talking about. That the Park is now proposing a 17 place campsite provides proof of this. Its good someone has listened but don't expect any apology to the Strathard Community.

Having visited the site, I do think the recreational community should have concerns about some of the areas where it is proposed to locate the other 8 pitches.

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How many people would choose this as a place to camp?

Three of the places (far left of map above) are in woodland up on the hill well away from the loch. To provide camping places here will require the creation of paths and pitches like at Loch Chon. I suspect the main reason for these pitches is to enable the Park can claim to have provided a certain number of new camping places – its target, which it has failed to meet, was to provide 300 new camping places in the first year of the camping byelaws.

The LLTNPA appears to be repeating the mistakes it made at Loch Chon, which was its failure either to consult campers about where they are likely to camp or to check whether the pitches, as depicted on the map, were campable or not. At Loch Chon many were too sloping or covered in tree roots to provide good camping places. They also failed to provide sufficient space, with many only providing for a tent and no suitable space for sitting or cooking round about. Unfortunately there is still no sign

of the Park consulting campers about what type of camping places are needed but the LLTNPA at least needs to undertake thorough checks before agreeing to the three places here, including that there is sufficient space. I would argue that its money would be better spent on creating camping pitches elsewhere, e.g. at Inveruglas, where the camping permit area is rough and not good for camping at present, similar to these three places, but is much closer to the lochshore and the toilet (if it was opened). If the LLTNPA are going to engineer new camping places, they should consult campers about where best to do this.



Area on left (west) side of burn



On the low-lying area on the west side of the burn (upper centre part of

site plan) the LLTNPA is proposing to provide a further 3 places. This is much closer to the loch than the proposed pitches on the hillside but the edge of the lochshore here is boggy, the ground itself boggy in places and has become overgrown. This perhaps explains why there is little sign of people camping here at present. It could though potentially provide good camping places with some engineering. While not designated as ancient woodland some of the fungi on the trees are fantastic. I would like to see minimal path creation, with importing of hardstanding materials limited to the boggy areas., to keep it as natural as possible.

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Looking up hill from camping area on east side of burn towards where disabled camping pitches will

The site includes proposals for two camping pitches suitable for people with wheelchairs (bottom of site plan). Its very positive the Park is including facilities for people with disabilities, who are too often excluded from enjoying the countryside, but its unfortunate because of the very steep approach to the loch shore disabilities that people with disabilities will in effect be segregated from other campers (bottom two places in diagram). I hope the places get used. What the LLTNPA should be doing is consulting organisations representing people with disabilities to ensure it has got this right (there are no disability or recreational organisations on the list of those consulted).

The proposed facilities at the campsite



Evidence of site investigations at Loch Achray – September 2017

The LLTNPA appears to have learned from its Loch Chon experience and conducted more thorough site investigations for utilities prior to the planning application being submitted. This is to be welcomed. Six months after the LLTNPA had got a certificate signed at Loch Chon stating the work on the campsite was complete, there was still no water. As a consequence bottled water had to be provided to campers for most of the year and the stench from the toilets was at times terrible – another own goal for Gordon Watson, the Park’s Chief Executive, who had claimed to Strathard Community Council that composting toilets don’t work properly.

However, having checked with the LLTNPA, I can confirm that at present there are NO plans for a chemical disposal point to be included with the toilet block. This is despite the LLTNPA trying to encourage more campervans to Forest Drive. The consequences are predictable. At some stage

someone in a campervan will empty the contents of their toilet out on Forest Drive (as has happened elsewhere in Scotland where there are no facilities). If the Park and Forest Enterprise are going to promote Forest Drive as somewhere to stay, they have a responsibility to ensure the right infrastructure is in place and the Park Planning Committee should insist on a chemical disposal point here.

Another aspect of the application which needs to be changed is there is no provision for any campervans in the parking area. While there are permit places for campervans on Forest Drive, none offer toilets and smaller campervans don't have their own internal toilets – so why not allow them to stay here? In addition, groups of people wanting to enjoy time away together often include both campervanners and campers. The Park still appears to have an unwritten policy of trying to segregate the two – it was still impossible by the end of September to book to stay at Loch Chon if you were a campervanner despite there being lots of parking space there. It's time the Park abandoned this approach which appears to have developed out of a desire to divide campers from campervanners in order to rule.

Finally, given all the publicity about the toxic effects of diesel, it's very disappointing the National Park are proposing a diesel generator to pollute the atmosphere along with what may or may not be an aerobic digestion system. If this behaves like the one at Loch Chon it will fill the surrounding air with a malevolent stench. There is no detail on the cycle time of the generator running times, fuel consumption or fuel storage and any bunded facility to prevent environmental pollution in the event of a spill incident. There is no detail on the effects of air pollution in the way of diesel fumes presents to the local environment the environment. The diesel generator is not eco friendly, and it is a missed opportunity for the National Park who claim to champion the environment to provide a solar/ wind powered combination. There was however a diesel generator at Loch Chon, even after the connection to the National Grid had been made and it appears that the LLTNPA may be trying to re-use equipment it has already bought.

Restrictions on vehicle access at Forest Drive

At present the gates to Forest Drive are locked at 4pm over the summer months which prevents people turning up on spec. In addition Forest Drive is one way at present and it's about a 6k drive round Forest Drive to get to the site of the proposed Loch Achray campsite. If the campsite is to be a success, both of these restrictions need to be changed. I look forward to seeing proposals about two way access between the main road and the campsite – which would reduce carbon emissions and disturbance to other people staying along Forest Drive – and how current access restrictions could be lifted in the Planning Report when the application goes to Committee for decision.

Comments on the planning application

While welcoming the proposal for a campsite on Loch Achray, the planning application shows the Park has still not learned all the lessons it should have about campsite development and I have therefore objected to a number of aspects to the proposal. This helps ensure these will be properly considered by the LLTNPA. I would encourage others to do so. You can make a comment online ([here](#)) – click on the comments tab.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

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2. Camping bye laws
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