

Stop the sale of the Riverside Site to Flamingo Land

Description

By Bruce Biddulph



Photo accompanying petition

(This text was included in an update to a petition to the Scottish Government to stop the sale of the Riverside Site in Balloch to Flamingo Land)

Drumkinnon Bay, along with its Woods and the river bank along the Leven which flows from Loch Lomond, are steeped in history. This history was almost destroyed in less than 100 years, and in the past year, an attempt has been made to obliterate it completely.

The woods, the bay and the riverside are three sacred cows really. The woods have stood here since the early 1800s as managed plantations, and before that, they were a small wood naturally growing in the fields and drumlins of Drumkinnon, through which the burn gently led to the bay, a sandy expanse that was a jewel in itself, opening up to the grandest view of Loch Lomond possible at low level.

Through the 19th Century the railway encroached, but did not destroy Drumkinnon, it could be argued the pretty steamships enhanced it. And then came the 20th Century, and the previously small sand pits

that had been dug at one end of the now extensive plantation, were ruthlessly exploited by a local and by the 1960s he had left behind spoil heaps and pools that nature quickly rushed in to claim. Meanwhile a factory was built further towards Balloch, behind the woods and then in the 1950s a pipeline was laid from Finnart to Grangemouth, resulting in a broad line of trees being hacked down.

By the 1980s the factory was gone, and quickly a housing estate followed. The railway line closed too. In the 1990s work then started on Lomond Shores and by the 2000s the shape is as you see it now.

In all that time, the woods still grew, the bay was still swam in, the riverside was even opened up as a walkway and the former railway was levelled and turned into grasslands where families have played and picnicked for years now. Industrial wasteland it is not.

The success of Lomond Shores was deemed in itself a problem, in that Balloch the village was not benefiting from the million pairs of feet going there. So it was determined that a plan needed up to join up the village with the Lomond Shores – it seemed that a tasteful pruning of the riverside, with perhaps some form of attraction all year might suit. The idea being to have people walk in a circular way from one end of Balloch to another, there was even talk of a bridge over the Leven's mouth to connect Balloch Park.

At no time did anyone stand and say, what a dump let's sell it.

Except Scottish Enterprise. And so to balance their own books they fabricated a tale of post industrial decline, scrubland and contamination, requiring some great saviour to come in and clean it all up and convert it into something productive. Quite the opposite story that the village was telling or knew.

Over the past year their tale has clashed with the village's. And their sale proceeded with barely a recognition until the signs went up and suddenly, it was a done deal. Or so we screamed!

We were told we were talking nonsense. That it was all very open and that the company Flamingoland were the only ones who had an idea and we should all be, in effect, grateful.

Fast forward to this week, and a Freedom of Information request was responded to, in mean and miserable spirit. No details of an Exclusivity Agreement -yet one was made. No details of the price. No details of the other bidders, however, admission there was that there HAD been other approaches, strangely!

But now, no details. The exclusivity agreement itself and the excuse of commercial sensitivity meant that they deemed it right that the public interest could not be served by releasing any information at all. The rights of the buyer far more important than the rights of the people to know just what has been going on.

And so it seems the woven tale (of Scottish Enterprises) has led us to a chapter we may not read, until they have closed the book forever and sold the rights on the back of a poorly thought and detail-lite development. One that will kill the three sacred cows. One that will open up the floodgates.

This is the tale you wont hear. So far ,the media are not too interested, believing this is about local NIMBYs protesting about viewing towers. (Another narrative well spun by local politicians, who, perhaps understandably, dont want to get their hands sullied in this). So no real input from, them either

locally or nationally.

And nationally, its a story that does not feel comfortable either. It hurts a government quango. Therefore, government ministers would be hurt also. Party goes before politics. People mind their own backs. And the locals? Those who have seen this are ignored, patronised, even told the narratives of the SE, that run contrary to their own memories, their own knowledge, and tell them that the bay, the riverside and the woods are not anything to get emotional about.

Well, perhaps not. Perhaps this is the age of no emotions, no heritage, no care for anything except the bottom line. Perhaps when all is wiped away and no real history is left, no-one need care.

We believe, those of us who DO care, that the line of decency has been crossed, that this is a sale too far, and that the loch – and the locals – deserve better guardianship than this. And most certainly do not deserve contempt.

We also believe that land in public hands is our gift to ourselves and our nation. And that it's better we, the people, decide its future, than a speculator landowner shooed in by a secretive and unaccountable quango.

This is the history and story you wont hear. I urge you to let others hear it too.

Keep Loch Lomond's Public Lands in Public Hands. Sign the petition [here](#)
Stop the Sale. Share the Tale.

Category

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