

Dissatisfied with the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority? Complain!

Description



The ladies toilet at Firkin had the door shutter down last Sunday

After my visit to Firkin Point last Sunday ([see here](#)), I submitted a formal complaint about the toilets still being locked two days after the snow had gone when on the LLTNPA website it had said: "Opening toilets at Firkin Point from 1st March to be in line with the start of the camping season". At the time of the byelaw consultation I submitted a number of complaints to the National Park but these got nowhere, with the Convener Linda McKay directing complaints about the Chief Executive Gordon Watson to be investigated by staff line managed by him, so I had given up. Over the last few months however a number of people have contacted Parkswatch to tell me about their fruitless experiences of trying to complain to the National Park, so I thought I would test the system and sent a complaint to Gordon Watson, copying in the new convener James Stuart.

On Friday, I was pleasantly surprised to get a response from Estates staff, which was signed and included an apology- brilliant. Some of the content though left me feeling concerned:

Dear Mr Kempe

I refer to your email of 6th March 2018 where you raised concerns about the closure of the public toilets at Firkin Point. I believe that the date of your visit was Sunday 4th March.

I can advise that plans were indeed put in place to open our public toilets at both Firkin and Inveruglas from 1st March, in line with feedback received from the public in relation to the

camping permit areas at these locations. Due to the extreme weather conditions experienced in the area from 28th February, our contractor was unable to access either of these sites on either 1st or 2nd March, however I can confirm that the toilets at both of these locations were open between 9am and 4pm on Saturday 3rd and Sunday 4th March and they have been opened daily since then.

In addition to this, the disabled toilet at Firkin is being left open on a 24-hour trial basis to meet the needs of any campers outwith the normal opening times. This has been in place since Monday 5th March when the extreme weather had subsided. Unfortunately, due the layout of the building at Inveruglas and associated security measures, we are currently unable to provide 24-hour toilet opening at this site at present, however this is something we will be looking into if the trial at Firkin proves successful.

I am sorry if you were inconvenienced when you visited Firkin on Sunday, which I can only presume must have been after the toilets had been closed, however I can reassure you that the toilets were open during the day and that we continue to look at all practical measures available to maintain and improve toilet provision within the National Park.

My concerns are pretty obvious, when the LLTNPA had announced the toilets at Firkin would be open I had assumed they would be available to campers to use. Locking the toilets at 4pm is not really much use to anyone staying overnight and having opened them on the Saturday, it would have been easier (and cheaper) to leave them open than lock them. At least though I thought after this spluttering start they now keeping the disabled toilet open 24 hours (as happens at places like Ralia and Glen Clova in the Cairngorms National Park). Then, today, I read the Your Park Update for the Board Meeting which will take place on Monday ([see here](#)), which included this under Permit Areas:

From the start of the new season there will be 24 hour access to the disabled user toilet facilities at Firkin Point, to improve the visitor experience and help with the sustainability of this permit area.

Ignore the parkspeak about sustainability, the truth is that numbers camping at Firkin have vastly increased since the LLTNPA started forcing people to camp in a few specific areas and locking toilets overnight in permit areas (those at Inveruglas won't open at all till 1st April) would be criminally negligent. Compare the message to the Board and what actually happened: instead of the disabled toilet being open 24 hours from the start, when the snow went, the toilets were only open for a limited period and on a trial basis. It appears the senior management team are telling the Board one thing and at best failing to communicate this to staff and at worst implementing something very different. (This is not the member of staff's fault, they appear to have tried to tell me openly and honestly what they are doing and this is welcome as it helps to flush out the difference between parkspeak and reality).

This example illustrates in a small way why the Board should treat everything they are told by the senior management team with a healthy degree of scepticism, whether this is big things such as potential toxicity of the Cononish gold mines stacks or little things such as toilet opening times. A fundamental part of the Board's governance role should be ensuring that what Park officials claim reflects reality. There is a long way to go.

This would be helped though if the public submit complaints whenever they see something is not right. There are signs this is now happening as, also on Friday, I received a list of complaints made to the LLTNPA last year about 130 in all many of which concern issues on the West side of Loch Lomond and which I will consider in a future post. While it has been a frustrating experience trying to complain up till now, I do believe how the Park is being run is changing and I think if you copy in a Board Member, you will have a reasonable chance of a complaint being properly answered. Those who answer truthfully, as has happened in this case I believe, should be applauded.

And if you don't have contact details for a Board Member do feel free to copy in or contact parkswatch. One of the changes I would like to see this year is for the LLTNPA to allocated and publish an email address for every Member of the Board, as happens in the Cairngorms National Park Authority, so the public can contact them more easily. That would be a small step towards greater accountability.

Category

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Tags

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