

The housing crisis and the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park

Description



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TOWNS in Scotland's national park are to undergo a major housebuilding boom in a bid to attract more young families into the area.

The move is part of a five-year plan aimed at regenerating the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park to increase visitor numbers as well as boosting the local population.

The masterplan reveals concerns about population decline and has outlined moves to attract and retained "skilled working age and young people" within the National Park with the help of a "better range of housing options".

The plan designed by National Park Authority and approved by Scottish ministers aims to build 375 homes over the next five years with one-in-four to be "affordable".

The authority warned that drops of population within "economically active age

"The plan sets out how we can tackle some really key issues

groups" was creating an "increasingly imbalanced age profile".

The authority said: "We need to make focused efforts to ensure there are more opportunities for younger people and those of working age, to remain and move into the National Park."

"We also need more homes in the National Park to sustain and support our rural economy, as well as meeting communities' housing needs."

The National Park is home to some of the most iconic wildlife and landscapes in Scotland and attracts four million visitors a year from across the world.

Its famous lochs, forests, mountains and heritage are an historic part of the Scottish culture and 67 sites across the park are designated for their special nature conservation value.

But the authority warned that its popularity has made it a hotspot for commuter, retirement, second and holiday homes, making it one of the most expensive areas in the country to buy a house.

It means that nearly three in four homes



■ The five-year plan aims to increase visitor numbers as well as boosting the local population in the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park.

being sold were going to people from outside the National Park.

The authority said that that made access to housing "extremely difficult" for many local people, younger households and those not able to afford full market value for a home.

"While our local development plan identifies that an increase in housing in the park is required to address this, there needs to be a continued focus on funding for rural housing and support for infrastructure costs which are higher within the rural areas," the plan said.

The National Park Partnership Plan was launched by environment secretary Roseanna Cunningham, who said it was "great" to see the ambition to try and tackle

issues that are key to young people, "by providing skills and training opportunities as well as creating more affordable housing within the park itself".

She added: "That's particularly important during 2018 - the Year of Young People." Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Convenor James Stuart said: "The plan sets out how we can tackle some really key issues."

"This raises the level of ambition the park and its partners share. We can deliver huge benefits for Scotland."

In 2011, the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park had a population of 17,752, a drop of 4.1 per cent from 2001, which is in contrast to the population rise in Scotland of 4.6% over the same period.



■ Minister Roseanna Cunningham, centre, helps launch the plan with pupils from St Monan's High School in Stirling.

The day of my post about the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority becoming a camping management authority ([see here](#)), the article above appeared in the Herald. Proof, if you want, that what I said is not the whole story and a reminder – if one is needed after the Cononish gold mine decision – that the LLTNPA does continue to operate as a Planning Authority. What both its visitor management and planning functions share in common, however, is that both favour the rich over the poor and development interests over conservation.

Judging by the article, at the launch of the National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) which the Board agreed in December last year ([see here](#)), the Minister, Roseanna Cunningham, made not a mention of conservation which is supposed to be the primary purpose of our National Parks. Indeed, the caption beneath the recycled photo from the LLTNPA website used in the article as it appears there reads: *"We do many things, and we have many [aims](#) – but at the heart of it is conservation"*. Now one could understand why Roseanna Cunningham avoided mentioning visitor management, given the camping byelaw disaster. Someone though should have asked her about how the claim in the caption used in the article that the LLTNPA wants to increase visitor numbers fits with it's claim that there are too many campers – the answer is you need to be the right type of visitor with plenty of money in your pocket. But not to mention conservation? Confirmation that the LLTNPA is not planning to deliver a single worthwhile conservation initiative over the next five years?

While housing is a very important issue in National Parks, the focus on housing at the NPPP launch was a dreary recycling of old news which is more important for what it does not say than what it does.

First up, the housing target of 375 homes was basically set by the Scottish Government – so here is the Scottish Government using the NPPP to announce something it decided some time ago. Talk about vacuous news.

National park housing proposal is absurd

ANOTHER hands-off non-governmental agency has gone rogue and taken Government ministers hostage ("Housing boom plan for national park to boost falling population", The Herald, March 15). The plan designed by National Park Authority and approved by Scottish ministers aims to build 375 homes over the next five years with one-in-four to be "affordable".

This follows from the plan last week to build a high-speed road from the Butt of Lewis to the southern tip of Vatersay in the Outer Hebrides. Now we are going to cover Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park in asphalt and concrete.

If we let our imaginations soar perhaps we can have a gondola ride to the top of Ben Lomond with alpine style ski chalets on the upper slopes.

This plan is absurd and does not hold up to the briefest of scrutiny.

The article points out that the park is "a hotspot for commuter, retirement, second and holiday homes. Nearly three in four homes being sold were going to people from outside the National Park".

How does building 375 new homes with one-in-four to be "affordable" address the problem? It will create more homes for commuter, retirement, second and holiday homes and the proportion of "affordable" homes will actually stay the same.

Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park under convener James Stuart has lost sight of its remit. It is not about visitor numbers. It is about visitor experience.

Clogging the roads in the national park will do nothing to enhance visitor experience. The park is readily accessible from the central belt and workers regularly travel from Wishaw, Motherwell and the like to do work in Helensburgh which lies just outside the park boundaries.

That this plan was endorsed by Roseanna Cunningham, the Environment Minister, is another illustration that the SNP doesn't have a clue.

It doesn't understand why visitors come to Scotland and the nature of the visitor experience. It has lost the plot.

John Black,
6 Woodhollow House, Helensburgh.

WHETHER by accident or design Highland Council has been given a bit of breathing space to reconsider the possible development of a site adjacent to, or even part of, Culloden Battlefield ("Culloden homes plan put on hold after planning committee mix-up", The Herald, March 15). Let us hope it thinks again and decides that any development would be inappropriate for such a historic site. The council and the Scottish Government must surely bring this land into public ownership and ideally provide the National Trust for Scotland with the means to make this site part of its Culloden property so that its future may never again be in doubt. We cannot go on putting so many aspects of our cultural history at risk. Our Scottish Government seems to have little concern for our heritage. One expected better.

Dr Gilbert T Bell,
8 Mains River, Erskine.

I AM sure Marianne Taylor ("No generation has it easier than others", The Herald, March 14) meant well, but most people seem to overlook the truth about the supposed value in a house/home that has been mortgaged over a prolonged number of years – usually 25.

Using my own home as an example, the value of £200,000 takes no account of the fact that to own it, my wife and I have had to pay in the region of £120,000 in interest and compulsory life insurance, as well as re-modelling during that period, so the net value is small by comparison.

Most people of our generation are at best comfortable but only in the context of history.

And we are certainly not well off by any modern standard of living – though we could perhaps be very comfortable if we charged for all the childcare and transportation to school and after-school activities.

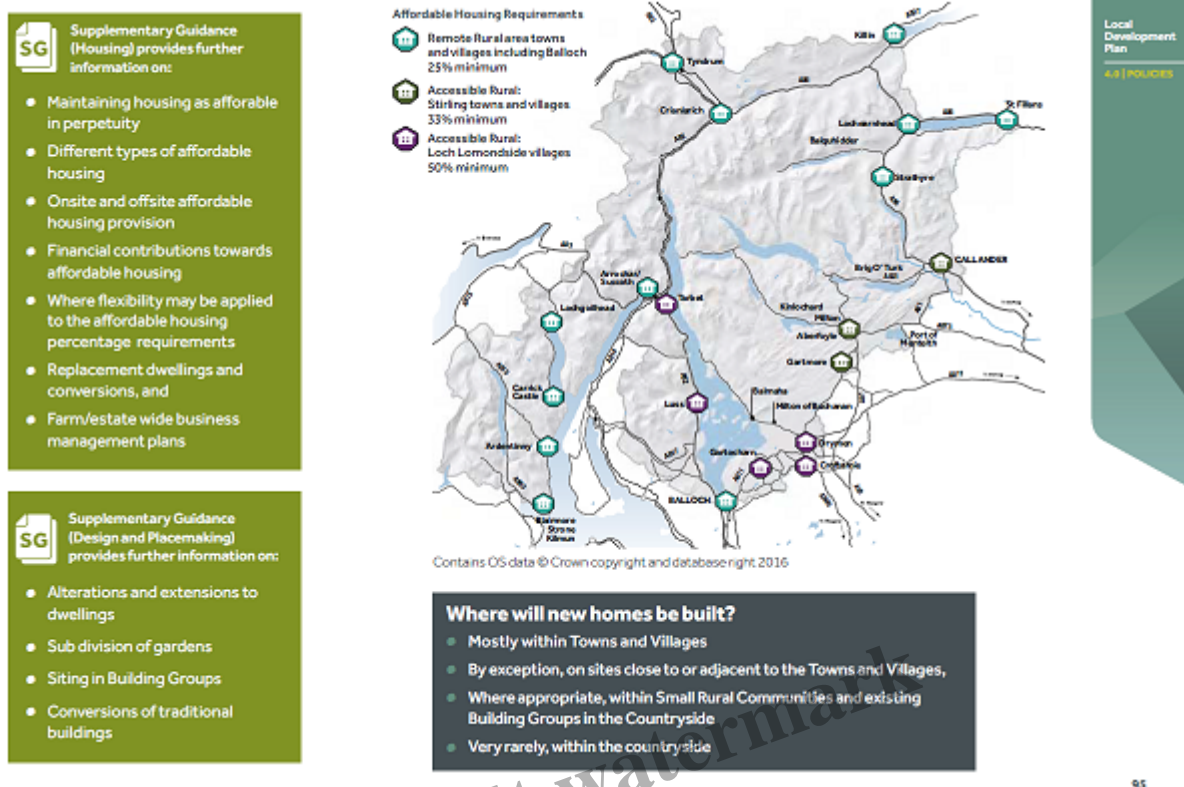
Just a thought.

Francis Deigman,
12 Broomlands Way,
Erskine.

Letter to Herald 16th March (no connection with Parkswatch nicely exposed the claims that the Plan will address the affordable housing problem though I disagree with the implication that more housing is not needed in the National Park.

The second thing that wasn't said is that the housing crisis in the National Park has been exacerbated by the LLTNPA which a number of years ago decided to relax local occupancy conditions on new housing. Back in 1965 a local occupancy requirement was introduced to protect the south Loch Lomond villages of Tarbet, Luss, Gartocharn, and Croftamie in Dumbartonshire and was subsequently extended to include Drymen in Stirlingshire. This restricted the granting of planning permission and subsequent sales of houses to local people and a Section 75 agreement ensured this went on in perpetuity. What this did was to protect the areas of the National Park closest to urban conurbations from housing developers and to limit the number of holiday homes. While the occupancy condition may have been unduly restrictive – it made it very difficult for people with jobs in the National Park boundary to move in with the result that many people commuted from outside – it also sheltered the National Park from the housing market and kept housing prices relatively low. That has all changed since the LLTNPA lifted the occupancy conditions from most types of housing development (its still in place for farms etc which allows landowners to continue to build new tied houses).

The LLTNPA's response to the growing housing disaster has again been conditioned by the Scottish Government and has been to require a certain percentage of housing to be affordable – "in perpetuity". Interestingly the article states 25% of housing in the National Park will be affordable – this is the official Scottish Government target – when the LLTNPA Local Development Plan says otherwise:



The LDP states the proportion of affordable homes in towns and villages will be 50% on Lomondside, 33% Stirlingshire and 25% elsewhere though in small rural communities and cases of singleton houses 100% affordable housing will be required.

One wonders therefore if the LLTNPA targets for affordable housing have now been abandoned?

While outwardly the LLTNPA targets for affordable housing look more impressive than those in the Cairngorms National Park Authority (25% except 35% in Ballater and Braemar, and to 45% in Aviemore and Blair Atholl) all is not what it seems because the LLTNPA will allow a Financial Contribution, also known as a Commuted Sum, to be made instead of these targets:

We accept that in some instances that funding may not be available or some proposals such as conversions do not lend themselves to on-site delivery and in these instances we may consider taking a financial contribution. The financial contribution will be used to provide affordable housing elsewhere in the area.

While this would dilute the overall proportion of affordable housing provided (because if you are building 4 houses and provided a commuted sum for a further house to be built elsewhere, you have 5 houses in total and the affordable proportion has become 20%) the real problem is the small size of the Commuted Sums:

Table 1: Value of Financial Contribution (Commuted Sum)

Location and Size of Plot	Unrestricted Land Cost per unit (based on 3 bed house) £	Social Rent Land Cost (3 bed house) £	Commuted sum per unit
Accessible Rural – Loch Lomondside >4 units	£30,000	£0	£30,000
Accessible Rural – Loch Lomondside <4 units	£27,500	£0	£27,500
Accessible Rural – Stirling towns and villages >4 units	£27,500	£0	£27,500
Accessible Rural – Stirling towns and villages <4 units	£25,000	£0	£25,000
Remote Rural >4 units	£20,000	£0	£20,000

So, if you are a developer and want to build four “luxury” – developer’s houses are always luxury – houses for say £400k each it will only cost you £20-30k extra to build a fourth profitable luxury house instead of something affordable – whatever that means! In my view therefore the Park’s policy is extremely weak, exercises very little control over the open market and will be totally dependant on rural housing associations and other social housing providers to meet its targets. They still fall far short of the level of social housing that is needed in the Nation (as I demonstrated for Strathfillan and the numbers of people who will need housing if the Cononish gold mine ever goes ahead ([see here](#))).

So what are the solutions to the housing crisis in our National Parks?

Thankfully, there is a lot of really good work going on at present to develop alternatives to the current housing market, which benefits the rich and developers, and makes it impossible for all the people working in the tourist industry and for landowners in our National Parks ever to be able to afford their own house.

Politically, the Green MSP Andy Wightman has been driving this – and the Greens have political clout as the SNP are dependent on them to stay in power and his blog piece last week was nicely timed for the launch of the NPPP ([see here](#)).

As significant however the Scottish Government’s own agency, the Land Commission, has been paying a great deal of attention to the relationship between Land and Housing and an excellent blog was published last week by Professor David Adams on Public Interest Development ([see here](#)) – it also appeared in the Herald). This explained how housing development used to be done by public authorities and suggested that only by doing so again will we address the housing crisis. I

recommend it and it should be required reading for National Park Planning Committee Members and Planning staff. There is even time to incorporate this work and approach into the new Cairngorms National Park Authority Local Development Plan.

Category

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