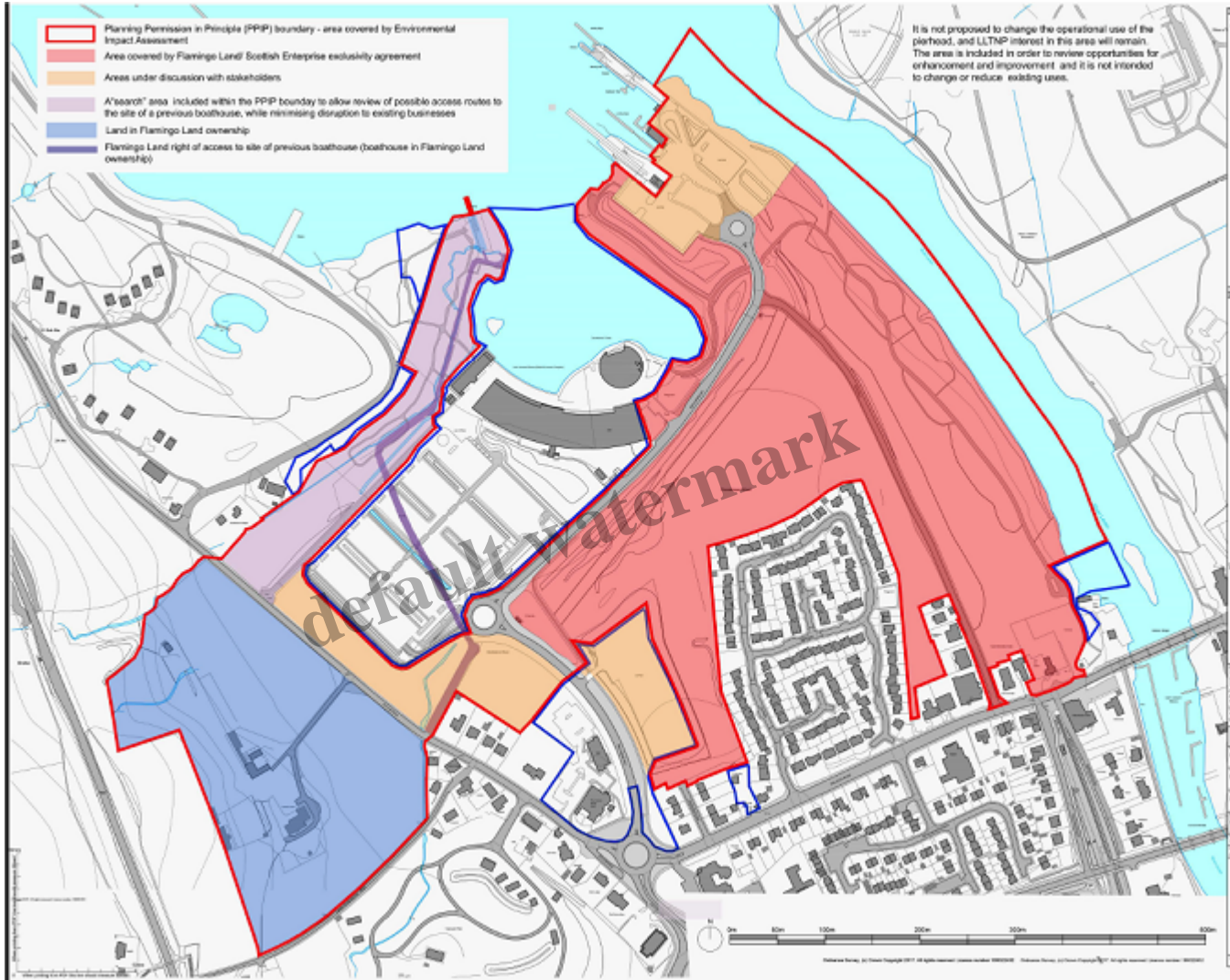


Scottish Enterprise's planning application with Flamingo Land at Balloch

Description



Extract from planning papers showing site boundary in red. Note the other areas, outlined in blue, which are described as “Other land within the control of the applicant” and include Loch Lomond Shores and the overflow carpark.

Last week, the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority validated an application for planning permission in principle for the Riverside and Woodside sites at Balloch ([see here](#)). This is a massive application, the details of which I will come back to in further posts, which has been submitted in the names of both Flamingo Land AND Scottish Enterprise. This post will take a look at the major issues.

Planning and democracy

While the LLTNPA unsurprisingly failed to meet the deadline for validating planning applications, the application has been made public before the deadline for nominations for people to stand in the forthcoming elections to the LLTNPA Board which closes tomorrow. There is a chance therefore that the Flamingo Land will become an election issue locally.

On the same day my post on those elections appeared ([see here](#)) the LLTNPA published a video on Facebook featuring their convener, James Stuart, encouraging people to stand ([see here](#)) and a further video has been posted since then. This is to be applauded, even though in my view its extraordinary that there was no paper presented about these elections at the March Board meeting. Fundamental decisions, such as how to promote democratic participation, are still being taken by the LLTNPA in secret. One test of success for James Stuart's plea for people to stand in elections will be whether any candidate is nominated for Balloch whose election platform is opposition to Flamingo Land. Democracy in the National Park has, to date, not been issues based and been de-politicised in favour of a management approach which has enabled neo-liberal thinking to permeate much of what the LLTNPA does.

There is considerable local feeling against the proposed development and by this morning 13 objections had been lodged, most of which come from local people (for extracts of these see below). Those voices, I believe, deserve a chance to be represented on the LLTNPA Board but the likelihood of that happening is linked to the time local people have had to organise.

The nature and size of the development and our National Parks



Outline of the proposal from the planning portal.

While the proposal to construct a high viewing tower has gone [\(see here\)](#) most other elements floated at the pre-consultation event remain while new parking areas have been added. Don't be fooled by the light green on the maps: both Drumkinnon Woods and the shores of the River Leven are to be filled with no less than 105 holiday lodges, a monorail and walkway through the trees while a large new carparking area is to be created – so much for sustainable transport.

The description on the planning portal, which is repeated every time an objection is lodged, is a long list which lacks clarity about what is being proposed:

The erection and operation of a tourism and leisure led mixed use development including hotel, bunkhouse accommodation and self-catering holiday lodges; self catering boathouse accommodation; residential development; leisure and recreational facilities including swimming pool, water park, visitor reception and education/interpretation facilities; hot food/café restaurant uses; brewery; ancillary uses including retail; façade retention of Woodbank House and conversion of existing outbuildings; public realm enhancements including public square improvements, footpaths and cycleways; external activity areas including forest adventure rides, tree top walkway, monorail, events/performance areas, picnic areas and play areas; staff and service areas; landscaping; new access from Ben Lomond Way and Pier Road; and site development infrastructure (including SUDS, and parking).

The short description, tucked away in the Planning Application, is much clearer about WHAT is being proposed:

Description:

PPiP (Planning Permission in Principle) Application and EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) for proposed tourism and leisure-led mixed use development at West Riverside and Woodbank House (Site area 27.9 hectares (69acres), including:

- *Refurbished tourist information building;*
- *60-bedroom Apart-hotel;*
- *32-bedspace budget accommodation;*
- *Up to 105 self-catering lodges;*
- *20 houses;*
- *900m2 brewery;*
- *Leisure / pool /water park area up to approximately 2,500m2;*
- *Restaurants/Cafe & Retail areas up to 1,100m2 in total;*
- *Visitor reception areas & hub building up to approximately 2,000m2;*
- *External activity areas including tree top walk, events/performance areas, children's play areas, monorail, forest adventure rides, picnic / play areas;*
- *Staff and service area of up to approximately 900m2;*
- *Associated parking (up to 320 additional spaces),landscaping and infrastructure development works;*

and,

- *Access to be taken from the surrounding road network including Ben Lomond Way and Pier Road. The proposed development also includes the remains of the Grade A listed Woodbank House and attendant structures. The conservation and redevelopment of the Woodbank House façade and other listed structures within the site will be subject to future applications for planning and listed building consent.*

What this show is that the proposed development is huge. Basically the public are being asked to consent to the development of the rest of the accessible green around Loch Lomond Shores and on the River Leven in what is supposed to be a National Park. Its to the shame of the LLTNPA that they ever went into partnership with Scottish Enterprise – and remember they were on the interview panel which appointed Flamingo Land as preferred developer – and developed a plan such as this. They have basically failed to preserve the green parts of the area and have consented to development on the shore of the Loch. The only way, however, that the LLTNPA will reverse what in effect they have already been decided is if there is a vast public, and political, outcry.

The privatisation of publicly owned land

Scottish Enterprise currently owns the Riverside Site on behalf of us, the public, the people of Scotland. In announcing an exclusivity agreement with Flamingo Land to develop the site they indicated they might sell the site to Flamingo Land in due course. This now appears to have moved on because the planning application covers states it covers land which “*will be purchased by Flamingo Land*”:

“An area covered by an exclusivity agreement between Scottish Enterprise and Flamingo Land; this land is currently owned by Scottish Enterprise and will be purchased by Flamingo Land;”

What’s more, there are:

“Further areas within Scottish Enterprise’s ownership which are under discussion with Flamingo land”

Publicly owned land along the loch shore and River Leven is being privatised without any consultation with the local community – so much for community empowerment – and without any consideration of the public interest. Without public or community control in future, there will be nothing to stop Flamingo Land coming back with proposals to develop the whole area with housing, potentially a far more profitable use. Their ability to do this will be increased by the amount of land that they now control at Balloch (see top map). Where are the politicians protesting about this?

The whole future of the Riverside site has been planned the wrong way round, top down rather than bottom up and driven by neoliberal orthodoxy which maintains that public assets are best sold off to private interests. Experience shows this is inevitably on the cheap and justified on the grounds that the pitiful proceeds can or need to be reinvested to reduce the impact of austerity. Scottish Enterprise appears far more interested in helping what is now a £28m business and rapidly expanding ([see here](#)) rather than local people or businesses. The LLTNPA’s participation in this process has been a betrayal of their legal duty to promote sustainable use of resources and sustainable economic development as well as the whole National Park ideal. The problem is they have no vision, no idea of

alternatives, so simply go along with the interests of big business.

While all of this could be deeply depressing, the papers on the planning portal show there is room for hope.....first a laugh!

Will the proposal drown in a lack of water?

Despite years of behind the scenes manoeuvring and the extensive Environmental Impact Assessment (which I will come back to) Scottish Enterprise and the National Park appear to have failed to address a basic issue. The response to the application from Scottish Water says they are NOT in a position to confirm at present whether there is sufficient capacity locally to provide water or process sewerage to the site!

Local voices

Bruce Biddulph, who has contributed to Parkswatch previously ([see here](#)), has made a succinct and powerful argument for alternative approach linked to his petition ([see here](#)):

“28 May 2018 — This is Balloch and Loch Lomond at its pitch as far as I am concerned. What we have now is just about bearable in terms of the balance between beauty and human activity. If we allow a giant foot to come crashing into our midst, then this balance that is precarious enough, but still the cheerful balance Balloch always managed to tread, will become upended and we will rue the day, I mean it, rue it so hard we will be reviled for all time. We need to think long term, for ourselves and not follow a lead that is imposed from Edinburgh. Balloch IS successful. The area is teeming with activity and things to do. More than it needs at times. We need LOCAL enterprise, piecemeal, appropriate and organic. We have the talents and the skills. Why then would we support a ‘plan’ that removes us, our local businesses and our charms? For what?? For the sake of one developer’s dominance? We know that is not a good idea – vast swathes of the vale have been destroyed because we leaned too heavily on one industry and a few hands in control. Let us not repeat that mistake with our natural asset and our tourist trade, please.”

Please sign and promote the petition: it will need at least 50-100,000 signatures for the Scottish Government to take notice.

And here are some extracts from the objections lodged by local people so far (you don’t need to be local to object):

“Building a theme park, with no thought on local residents is unbelievable. Your plans seem flawed, local residents (myself included) that moved here for the lovely green area, and natural surroundings, now face unwanted noise pollution, poorer roads and congestion around our already lovely area.”

“The last few nice days show that balloch is already struggling with the numbers of visitors. The

parking is lacking and the plans do not add to parking resource while increasing numbers. The A82 cannot cope with the traffic now.....Any upgrade needs to be phased to assess the impact. Start with the upgrade at the woodbank and give that a few years to see if balloch can cope with it. Only then should another small phase be considered.”

“I am dumbfounded at how extensive these plans/proposals are and how much the area will be impacted by this. So much of the natural beauty and ambience will be lost. I particularly object to the idea of a water park and a monorail! The other less objectionable plans/facilities exist already without the destruction of even more ancient woodland and wildlife! I imagine local businesses will be hoodwinked into thinking that this will be of some benefit to them but we all know where the tourists will be spending their money – it certainly won't be going into the pockets of existing local businesses. This is completely out of keeping with what Loch Lomond represents. If these plans are allowed to go ahead, Loch Lomond will be lost to us forever, and the next development proposal a decade or two down the line will be even more intrusive and destructive..... Why can't we capitalise on the magic and history of this amazing place instead of just exploiting a piece of land for the sake of yet another overly commercialised family attraction which you can find anywhere. There is still so much history and beauty that tourists are not exposed to in this area. Exploit that instead! Shameful and disappointing!”

“I have absolutely no doubt that in three to four years' time this whole sham will be reevaluated and the land (once precedent has been set) will be used for housing development. The profit margins for this are astronomical”.

What happens next?

While in theory there could be a short time to lodge objections, in practice there is likely to be plenty of time to do so because of the size of the application and the time it will take for other public authorities to respond.

While Parkswatch will be keeping an eye on what comments are made on the application, I would welcome contributions on various aspects of the application, from a local or national perspective. .

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. flamingo land
2. LLTNPA
3. planning
4. Scottish Enterprise
5. Tourism
6. vision for National Parks

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