

Addressing litter the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National

Description



National Park Authority bins at Firkin Point morning Sunday 10th June

“As the National Park Authority, we aren’t responsible for collecting all litter in the Park but we are working to tackle this issue across the area as best we can. We are doing this by trialling different approaches to managing litter on our own sites.....”



Keep Scotland Beautiful campaign message on roadside litter

In May the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority issued a joint [New Release](#) with Keep Scotland Beautiful on roadside litter. Now, in the new 5 year corporate plan to be considered at the Board Meeting this Thursday Litter is the 1st of 8 priorities (while the camping byelaws get not a mention!).

This focus on litter is welcome and is something that I, other organisations and indeed a handful of LLTNPA Board Members have been calling for for some time.

The problem is the main solution mooted in both documents is “Take your litter home”. This has been the message for the last fifteen years in the National Park and the LLTNPA shows no understanding of why this has failed:

“The only real solution is for those responsible to change their bad habits and dispose of their rubbish responsibly when on the road. This means holding on to it in the vehicle until they find a suitable bin. In other words: Give your litter a lift, take it home!” (Excerpt from News Release)

Any health promotion expert will tell you that lecturing people about their unhealthy lifestyles doesn't work and similarly lecturing people about their bad litter habits is likely to fall on deaf ears.

The conflation of putting litter in a bin with taking litter home also show little understanding. A significant percentage of people driving through the National Park are travelling, whether for work or for leisure, and won't be going home that day. People who are passionate about litter might keep it in the back of a vehicle for days, but most won't. People want bins, hence all the litter piled up at Firking Point yesterday.



I went back to the litter bins at Firkin Point on Sunday 10th June at 6pm to see if they had been empty. They hadn't but some person – probably a Ranger – had tidied all the litter up. Well done them. They would have had to do spend time doing this if either collections were more frequent or the bins bigger (see

The amount of litter left by these bins is, as far as people are concerned, actually a success. Where we are at at present is most people, if they see a bin, will leave their litter in it or beside it. The challenge is, I am afraid, that if there is no bin a significant minority simply chuck stuff out the window or leave it at the side of the road. Its the same with dog walkers hanging those little black plastic bags with dog poos often the branches of trees. I don't condone any of this BUT If you want to understand the difference between the amounts of litter on the verges of the A9 and A82 along Loch Lomond, I suggest it lies with the bins. The bins are obvious along the A9 and so, believe it or not, people stop and put their litter in them; the bins are non-existent in Argyll and Bute, so out the window it goes. The focus of the LLTNPA approach to litter therefore needs to be on fixing the lack of bins.

Unfortunately, the priority as worded in the corporate plan gives a muddled and mixed message:

Priority 1: Litter

Working in collaboration, we will support a Marine Litter Strategy and drive the development of a cross-organisation National Park Litter Strategy which better utilises our collective capacity with our partners to deal with the litter generated by visitors. We will invest our passion, commitment, resources and powers to deliver positive behaviour change to prevent, and reduce litter in the National Park.

Now I welcome the commitment to a litter strategy. The LLTNPA committed to doing this five years ago in the Five Loch Management Plan and had gone silent on this. So, developing a proper strategy would be a welcome first step and the fact that they wish it to cross organisations is a good thing. There is however no commitment to new infrastructure and the emphasis is all on behaviour change.

Its not just me that thinks this is wrong. The Friends of Loch Lomond and Trossachs put out their own hard-hitting [news release](#) later in May, apparently in response to the National Park, setting out what they believe needs to be done (note what they say in point 2):

1. A more joined up approach should be taken to tackling litter issues including more frequent litter clearance at busy weekends and during holiday periods;
2. More and larger bins should be provided at busy locations throughout the National Park as exhortations to take litter home in isolation of other measures simply doesn't work;
3. Implementation of the same policy for the A82 on Loch Lomondside as exists along the A9 in the Cairngorms National Park where litter bins are provided in every layby and emptied regularly;
4. More rigorous enforcement of litter fines as part of a wider effort to change people's bad habits and attitudes in relation to discarding litter in the countryside and alongside road verges; and
5. More hard hitting litter education campaigns on topics such as single use plastic, recycling and the impacts of irresponsible litter disposal in the National Park.



Overflowing litter bins 1st May – photo accompanying FOLLAT news release

What's going wrong and what needs to happen

The unspoken issue which underlies much of the litter problem in the National Park is austerity, along with a small dose of neo-liberal ideology. The pressure on resources means that instead of investing in the infrastructure needed to support public enjoyment of the countryside (bins, toilets, paths etc) Public Authorities squabble amongst themselves and will do anything to pass the costs on to another body. Then, to justify cuts/lack of investment the individual is told to take responsibility for their own behaviour, from litter to toileting. Its time to stop pretending this has any chance of working and, instead, clearly set out what resources are needed. This should be the central plank of the new litter strategy and the LLTNPA and its partners should not be afraid to tell the Scottish Government what it would cost to deliver (accepting that if they removed all the duplication – its mad that the LLTNPA has separate arrangements for its own bins to those local authorities are responsible – there could be some savings).

There are of course some issues about people's behaviour but, as FOLLAT says, this is not going to change through exhortations. An indirect educational approach is likely to be far more effective: instead of blaming people, explain the impact of litter on the natural world as David Attenborough did in the Blue Planet. This has already a huge impact, not just in what people do with their own plastic but in reducing and changing packaging. The LLTNPA could show a lead locally by doing things such as

getting tourism businesses in the National Park to sign up to using/accepting re-usable cups. Why not start engaging with visitors, residents and businesses on what they see as the issues and solutions instead of lecturing people and treating them as the problem?

I am pretty sure that part of most responses would include something to the effect that bin provision and servicing in much of the National Park is a public disgrace but people would also come up with lots of other ideas and creative solutions for how to tackle the litter issue.

Category

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