

Democracy and planning – almost 400 objections to Flamingo Land and rising

Description

The gulf between the rhetoric of the Scottish Establishment on the need for community involvement in planning and reality has created a massive crisis for the Flamingo Land Planning Application at Balloch. This post takes a look at people's response to the Flamingo Land application, considers the key issues and the implications of what is going on both for the Planning Bill, currently being considered by the Scottish Government, and neo-liberal models of economic development which still rule how the Scottish Establishment thinks and behaves.

The objections to the Flamingo Land Planning Application

You would never know from looking at the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority Planning Portal that, in the four weeks since the Flamingo Land Application appeared ([see here](#)), there have been almost 400 objection to the Flamingo Land consultation:

default watermark

Planning – Planning Application Documents

2018/0133/PPP | The erection and operation of a tourism and leisure led mixed use development accommodation and self-catering holiday lodges; self catering boathouse accommodation; residential recreational facilities including swimming pool, water park, visitor reception and education/interpretation restaurant uses; brewery; ancillary uses including retail; façade retention of Woodbank House and outbuildings; public realm enhancements including public square improvements, footpaths and cycleways including forest adventure rides, tree top walkway, monorail, events/performance areas, picnic areas, service areas; landscaping; new access from Ben Lomond Way and Pier Road; and site development (roads and parking). | Land At Pier Road, Ben Lomond Way And Old Luss Road, Known As West Riverside

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Details

Comments

Constraints (17)

Documents (478)

Related Cases (0)

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	Date Published ▾	Document Type ▾	Description ▾
<input type="checkbox"/>	21 Jun 2018	Contributions	Correspondence from Mr Alan Cooper
<input type="checkbox"/>	21 Jun 2018	Contributions	Correspondence from Miss Eilidh Little
<input type="checkbox"/>	21 Jun 2018	Contributions	Correspondence from Ms Julie Logan
<input type="checkbox"/>	21 Jun 2018	Contributions	Correspondence from Mrs Jane Forrest
<input type="checkbox"/>	21 Jun 2018	Contributions	Correspondence from Mrs Dawn Gait
<input type="checkbox"/>	21 Jun 2018	Contributions	Correspondence from Miss Alison MacF
<input type="checkbox"/>	21 Jun 2018	Contributions	Correspondence from Ms Joy Macnaug
<input type="checkbox"/>	21 Jun 2018	Contributions	Correspondence from Ms Joy Macnaug
<input type="checkbox"/>	21 Jun 2018	Contributions	Correspondence from Ms Karen MacCa
<input type="checkbox"/>	21 Jun 2018	Contributions	Correspondence from Ms Lindsay Grah
<input type="checkbox"/>	21 Jun 2018	Contributions	Correspondence from Miss Isobel Mitch
<input type="checkbox"/>	21 Jun 2018	Contributions	Correspondence from Mr William Smith

Screenshot of Planning Portal

The vast majority of the 478 documents now on the LLTNPA Planning Portal are objections but you cannot tell this just from looking at the Portal as, without exception, they are classified as a Contribution and then described as "Correspondence". The planning portal software, however, allows all contributions to be classified as SUPPORT or OBJECTION as this extract from the Cairngorms National Park planning portal shows:

<input type="checkbox"/>	18 Apr 2018	Contributions	SUPPORT - KATIE JACHACY
<input type="checkbox"/>	17 Apr 2018	Contributions	SUPPORT - MARJORIE DEANS
<input type="checkbox"/>	16 Apr 2018	Consultation	CNPA OUTDOOR ACCESS RESP
<input type="checkbox"/>	16 Apr 2018	Contributions	SUPPORT - ANDREW LOCKERB
<input type="checkbox"/>	16 Apr 2018	Contributions	OBJECTION - CAIRNGORMS CA
<input type="checkbox"/>	12 Apr 2018	Contributions	OBJECTION - ALAN BRATTEY
<input type="checkbox"/>	11 Apr 2018	Contributions	DR CHARLES COOK
<input type="checkbox"/>	10 Apr 2018	Contributions	OBJECTION - MARK CRICHTON

Extract from contributions from public to the Artificial Ski Slope Planning Application at Cairngorm. N system also allows neutral contributions as in contribution from Charles Cook second from bottom.

So why has the LLTNPA, a self-proclaimed beacon of planning excellence, not classified all the contributions its received to date as Objections or Support like the CNPA? It appears the LLTNPA wants to make it as difficult as possible for the public and the media to understand what is going on.

The local public consultation held by the Community Council

The Balloch and Haldane Community Council held a local consultation event a week ago on the Planning Application. It was a packed meeting, with 167 local people apparently attending, although Gordon Watson, Chief Executive of the LLTNPA, Scottish Enterprise and Flamingo Land all gave their apologies. The locally elected LLTNPA Board Member, David McCowan, and West Dunbartonshire representative on the Board, Councillor Diane Docherty, however, were both there as were local councillors, Jonathan McColl (who is the SNP Leader of the West Dunbartonshire Council) and Sally Page (Conservative and Unionist) .

The reports I have had from people who attended the meeting is that 35 to 40 people spoke about the Planning Application and there was not a single voice in favour. In other words there is now massive opposition locally to Flamingo Land and my informants reported that the locally elected representatives present were visibly shocked by the strength of feeling. A report on Commonsense [\(see here\)](#) – the mainstream media are still to report on what is going on – also confirmed what my informants told me, that Jonathan McColl, the WDC SNP Council Leader, said at the end of the meeting he had totally changed his view about Flamingo Land since listening to the passionate and well articulated

objections. (Since writing this I have learned there has been extensive coverage in the Daily Record [\(see here\)](#)).

Whether this leads to West Dunbartonshire Council opposing the application – this would be an ideal opportunity for local SNP councillors to demonstrate they are capable of standing up against the Scottish Government – or whether the Balloch and Haldane Community Council, which had previously supported the development of the Riverside Site, now lodges an objection remains to be seen. One local elected representative has, however, lodged an objection to the application:

Customer Details

Name: Mr Jim Bollan

Address: Endrick Way Alexandria

Comment Details

Commenter Type: Councillor

Stance: Customer objects to the Planning Application

Comment Reasons:

Comment: This is the last piece of publicly owned land which should be retained in public ownership to allow unimpeded access for visitors.

The environmental impact on the southernmost tip of the island if development is approved.

Councillor Bollan is from the West Dunbartonshire Community Party.

Planning and democracy – the gulf between rhetoric and reality

My own local community was, like Balloch, a year or so ago involved in a community planning event – a charrette – at the end of which our local MSP, who just so happens to be Nicola Sturgeon, spoke passionately about the need for local communities to drive planning processes. The Scottish Government consultation “Places, People and Planning” which was supposed to be all about involving people in creating better places and making economic development more sustainable transmogrified into a Planning Bill which would give even more power to developers. The nub of the problem is that while the Scottish Establishment sees economic development as their top priority – rightly some of them want to see new jobs – they believe only private enterprise can deliver this and that any constraints on private business (whether through tax or the planning system) will drive investment elsewhere.

The consequence is we end up with tick box planning exercises in which any old development, even in National Parks, is dressed up to appear as “sustainable” and as “meeting the needs of local communities”. The Cononish gold mine is a case in point ([see here](#)). The truth is that the Scottish Establishment, including the LLTNPA Board and senior management team, have not a clue about what sustainable economic development would look like and, what’s worse, are not prepared to hand over real power to local communities to decide this for themselves. Flamingo Land provides a perfect example of all that is going wrong.

After Scottish Enterprise acquired the site, their first major proposal was to use it for housing – that would have achieved maximum sale value – but this was defeated not least by opposition from the Friends of Loch Lomond and Trossachs who rightly thought that the shores of Loch Lomond and the River Leven should not be covered by a housing development. The site was then earmarked for recreational and leisure development in the LLTNPA’s Local Development Plan. This is all in line with the Scottish Government wanting to put more emphasis on Local Development Plans with the idea being that once something has been agreed as part of a Local Development Plan it should go ahead with as few constraints as possible. The problem is that earmarking land in the Local Development for recreation and leisure could mean anything, from low intensity development to Flamingo Land’s 125 or so holiday lodges, hotels and leisure complex: what has happened at Balloch shows is that until people actually see what is being proposed they don’t object. The whole idea therefore -that vague allocations of space in Local Development Plans should be the be all and end all of the planning system is therefore fundamentally flawed.

The LLTNPA, Scottish Enterprise and the Scottish Government, however, took the lack of objections to the Local Development Plan as a green light to push ahead with intensive development of the Riverside site all the while advising the local community NOT to comment or object until they saw exactly what was being proposed. Meantime the LLTNPA was on the interview panel which selected Flamingo Land as the preferred developer of the site – determining the type of development that would be proposed – while the LLTNPA and Scottish Government included development of the Riverside Site as one of its key performance indicators for the National Park’s Partnership Plan. None of this is accidental – Petra Biberbach, Convener of the LLTNPA Planning Committee, was one of the three authors of the review of the planning system which led to the current Planning Bill – but it most

certainly prejudices the whole planning process..

That such a gulf has developed between the local community and others who care about our National Parks and our public authorities over Flamingo Land should give the Scottish Parliament all the evidence they need about why the processes being proposed in the Planning Bill are so flawed.

The ideological gulf between developers and planners and the public

I have looked through quite a few of the objections to the Flamingo Land Planning Application. They vary from just a sentence to detailed critiques (within the context that the number of words that can be submitted online are strictly limited). What most objectors have in common however is a belief that nature is very important to people and an understanding that National Parks should be special places. Here is one example:

Comment: As a frequent visitor to the area this proposed development is an outrage. Not only will it destroy a vast area of natural beauty, tranquility and a historic part of Scotland but it will also impact greatly on this areas infrastructure. People visit Loch Lomond to enjoy what it has to offer at the moment, to destroy that and replace it with a glorified funfare will certainly act as a deterrent to so many existing and potential visitors. This area deserves to be protected not exploited. Once it has been destroyed we can never get it back.

The LLTNPA is likely to depict such objections as rants which they will contrast with the “measured” “assessments” of professionals but the real contrast, I believe, is between the public’s understanding of the importance of nature and the planning speak which is being used to justify the development



and then compare what is on offer at present from Flamingo Land:

4.4 Zone D: Drumkinnon Wood and Bay

Strengths

- Established existing mature woodland with a complex tapestry of older and newer semi mature woodland, offering a variety of spaces.
- Some exotic trees scattered throughout the woodland including, Beech, Sycamore, Douglas Fir.
- Good quality backdrop to the existing developments, quality setting for new lodges. ★
- Well screened and recessed car park that can be utilized by future development

Weaknesses

- Weak access gateway points, in need of upgrading.
- Overall less capacity for lodges to be located than the riverfront woodland.
- Level changes result in accessibility issues in some areas.
- Smaller substations are ugly within the landscape and require screening.

Opportunities

- A chance to enhance the current biodiversity and management of the woodland ★
- Some open glades provide opportunity for lodge locations.
- Level changes can be used to screen play areas and adventure facilities
- A chance to create high tree walk to celebrate existing mature trees. ★

Threats

- Wayleaves for underground utilities and INEOS pipeline could impact on development proposals.
- Significant level changes, and the need for minimal intervention could impact on accessibility
- Consideration needs to be given to adjacent houses overlooking the space. .
- Sensitive nature of the biodiversity and soil

People aren't stupid, this is complete and utter crap:

- There is no reference to who uses the woods at present or what they think about it – local people love to walk there – but instead they are a “quality setting for new lodges”.
- Instead quiet enjoyment of the wood from the ground is to be replaced by a high tree walk which will “celebrate existing mature trees”
- And somehow, despite the Lodges, which will destroy lots of the ground vegetation and remove lots of trees, and the tree top walkway there is a “chance” to enhance biodiversity.

I am reminded of the LLTNPA's claims that 450,000 tonnes of spoil from the Cononish goldmine will improve the natural landscape and area of wild land.....

And if you are still not convinced of the gulf between development speak and reality read the Transport Assessment – all eight documents. Lots of sophisticated models predicting a tiny percentage increase in traffic in Balloch but which totally misses the point: the place is gridlocked most holiday weekends, local residents and visitors unable to move, but despite those facts Flamingo Land wants to provide for and therefore attract more cars to the place.

Its no wonder local people are up in arms.

The Way Forward

The Riverside Site is all publicly owned land (though Flamingo Land does own the land around Woodbank House). If the Scottish Government can give the tiny community on the isle of Ulva over £4m to buy their island, they can invite the people of Balloch to set up their own Community Trust and then instruct Scottish Enterprise to gift it the Riverside Site on the condition its maintained in community and public ownership for all time. That would then enable a bottom up planning process which I believe would result in “sustainable” economic development rather than the current model of development at any price.

Our Public Authorities need to be brave enough to admit they have got it totally wrong at Balloch, compensate Flamingo Land for any expenses they have incurred and re-start the planning process.

Any proposals for the site should, I believe, start by looking at what areas would be important to retain in a natural state/keep free of development because of their importance to the local community and to the wider public. Drumkinnon Wood is the obvious example but I suspect there would be strong cases made for other areas. Instead of a single intensive development there would be low intensity developments. The local community might then decide to keep or adapt some of Flamingo Land's proposals – for example a number of holiday lodges accessed by foot or a walkers/cyclists hostel – while ditching other elements and coming up with ideas of their own . That might then help create a National Park worthy of the name.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. conservation
2. LLTNPA
3. Local communities
4. planning
5. Scottish Enterprise
6. Scottish Government
7. secrecy
8. Tourism

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