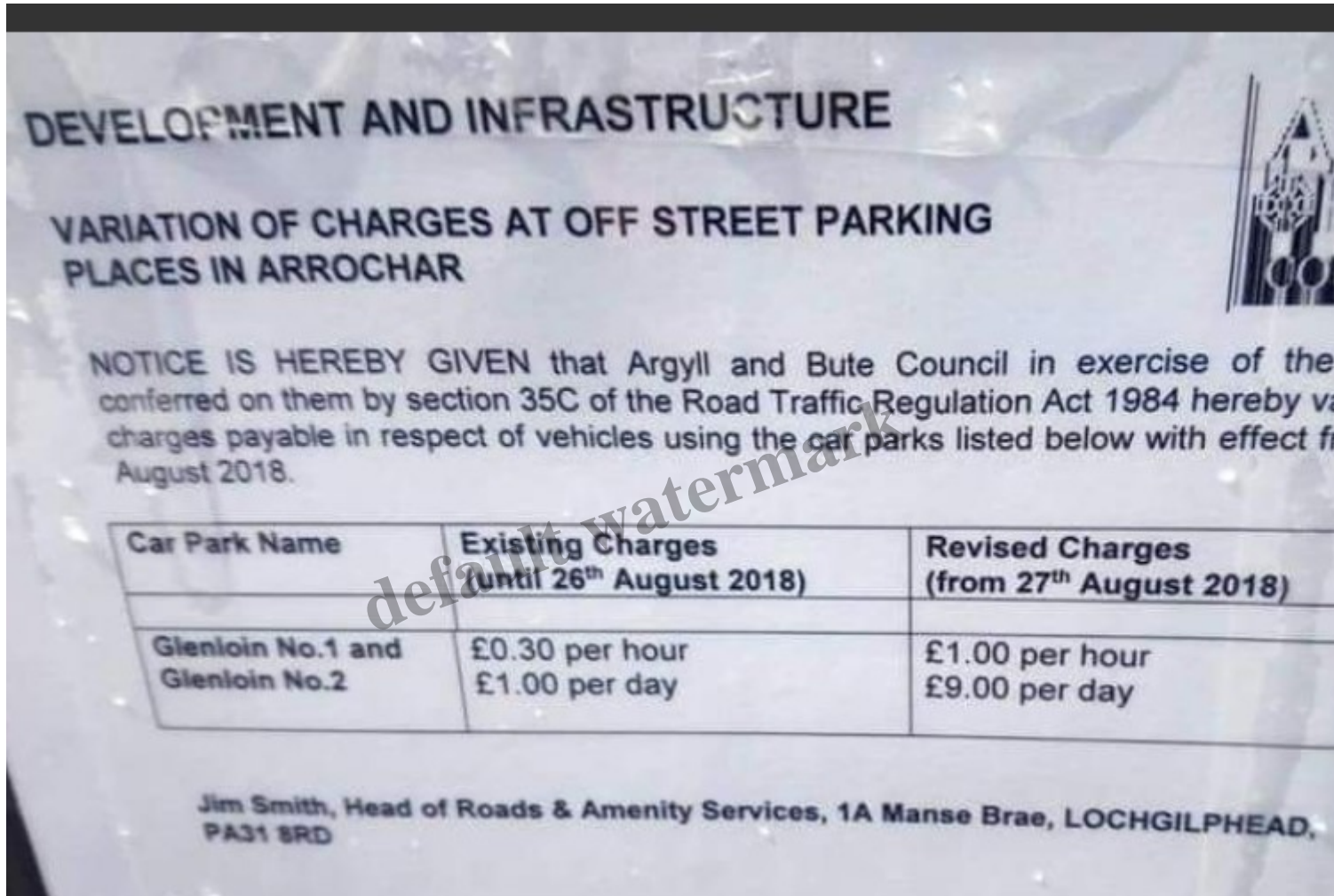


Argyll and Bute's access tax at Arrochar

Description



Argyll and Bute Council have just announced that they are going to increase daily car parking charges at the main Cobbler car park (Glenloin No 1) and the neighbouring car park at the head of Loch Long (Glen Loin No 2) from £1 to £9 a day from the end of August. That's a 900% increase and, just to make it harder for hillwalkers and climbers to avoid the charge (and to protect local residents), they are introducing parking restrictions in Succoth at the same time.



Its not so long ago the car parking here was free. Earlier this year Argyll and Bute increased charges at the car park in Luss to £1 an hour, which effectively penalised anyone wanting to walk over the Luss hills. They got away with that because walkers can still park for free in Glen Douglas but their proposals for Arrochar have already created a storm on social media ([see here](#)) and rightly so.

In return for paying these new charges visitors will get.....nothing. The current £1 a day charge in return for the Council keeping the car park litter free is just about justifiable. Hence, why in my view this new charge is effectively a tax on access and poses a serious threat to our right to roam.



crap and paper by the Cobbler path

Toilets are sorely needed at the Cobbler car park. Like everywhere else in the National Park, most people arrive after a drive and a proportion of them need to go.....step into the woods alongside the main path up the Cobbler and you will find crap and paper everywhere. Most walkers would not mind paying a few quid for some proper toilet facilities within reasonable distance but there are none.

Walkers might also be prepared to make a financial contribution to the maintenance of the footpaths or even the clean-up of Loch Long, a notorious trap for marine litter ([see here](#)). Argyll and Bute Council however don't appear to have any proposals to improve visitor infrastructure in the area, instead they are charging because they can.

While I appreciate our Councils are close to financial collapse as a result of years of austerity, following the example of city financiers and extorting charges while offering little or nothing in return, is shortsighted in the extreme. The consequences are predictable:

- the Pay and Display machines get trashed by people angered at the charges and the Council then brings in surveillance cameras to stop this happening again
- most people won't use the car park because of the charges and will park at the nearest free or cheap place they can find, creating problems for other people which Argyll and Bute Council won't have to pay to sort out
- new routes will develop up the Cobbler and Beinn Narnain from wherever its possible to park cheaply or free. That will create new paths and erosion undermining all the investment into the main Cobbler track which was made last year and creating new problems for the Forestry Commission – but why should Argyll and Bute care, its not their budget?
- Argyll and Bute won't raise nearly as much as they expect and the local economy will see a drop in tourism revenue

I understand that Argyll and Bute does not own either of these car parks, it leases them. Perhaps its just trying to extract every penny it can before those leases run out?

What is needed is a coherent visitor management plan for the area which starts with what infrastructure is required and is developed on the basis that it is the duty of public authorities to make this happen. The Public Authorities could then consult visitors on what it might be reasonable to ask them to contribute to this (either through car park charges or maybe a bednight tax – those in place on the continent are a trifle, £1-2, compared to the charges Argyll and Bute Council want to extort here).

That infrastructure should include better public transport links:the 6 times daily Campbelltown bus does not even stop at the Cobbler car park and there is scope to run a minibus service connecting Tarbet bus and train stops with Arrochar making it much easier for people to access the Arrochar Alps by public transport.

Unfortunately, the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority has provided no lead on how to address the improvements in visitor infrastructure needed at Arrochar or elsewhere in the Park. After Grant Moir, now Chief Executive of the Cairngorms National Park, had overseen the creation of visitor management plans for east Loch Lomond and the 5 Lochs Area (now abandoned by staff without consent from the Board) the LLTNPA should have developed a visitor management plan for west Loch Lomond and Loch Long. However, instead of trying to create an overarching framework for visitor infrastructure, to which the various councils and other public authorities would contributed the LLTNPA has led the Public Authority free for all, where all anyone cares about is budgets and if its possible to off-load costs and problems onto someone else, so much the better. Parking charges is a good example with the LLTNPA trying to extract what it can from parking charges, just like Argyll and Bute, without any consultation or agreement on what services should be provided in return.

What needs to happen

Much as I have advocated for a more rational and strategic approach, I cannot see the LLTNPA delivering this (they have shown themselves so far to be totally incapable of even getting Argyll and Bute Council to install litter bins). I think the solution at Arrochar therefore is for the local community to take matters in their own hands.

The local community have for some time been trying to tackle issues and improve infrastructure such as paths around the head of Loch Long with the support of the local MSP, Jackie Baillie, who chairs the local forum for this. The development of the Arrochar Community hydro scheme, which has just opened, was in large part motivated by a wish to be able to finance local projects. With new powers for local communities to take over and manage land recently coming into effect the community at Arrochar could now take over the ownership and/or manage both of the car parks at the head of Loch Long.

Were the local community to commit to working with the outdoor community about improvements to visitor infrastructure and to consulting on what reasonable charges might be, Arrochar could end up with a decent plan from which both communities would benefit.

And if you want to object:

Meantime complaints about the charges can be made to Argyll and Bute Council ([see here](#)), the responsible department you want is “Development and Infrastructure Services.” It would be worthwhile copying your complaint or complaining separately to the two Argyll and Bute Councillors who sit on the LLTNPA Board, Cllr Ellen Morton ellen.morton@argyll-bute.gov.uk and Cllr Barbara Morgan barbara.morgan@argyll-bute.gov.uk

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. access rights
2. Forestry Commission Scotland
3. LLTNP
4. LLTNPA
5. Local communities
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