

Argyll and Bute's access tax – the implications for the National Park

Description

PROPOSED OFF STREET PARKING PLACES AND CHARGES IN LOMOND					
Parking Places- Off Street Car Park					
Plan Ref No.	Location in Lomond	Parking Place Name	Category/Class of Vehicles Permitted	Tariff	Charging Hours
T454	Duck Bay, Auchendennan,	Duck Bay Car Park	1,2,3,4	A	1 st January to 31 st December Monday to Sunday 9am to 6pm
Tariff	Charges			Season Tickets/Permits	
A	15 minutes – 30 pence 30 minutes – 50 pence 45 minutes – 80 pence 60 minutes – £1.00 £1.00 per hour thereafter or part thereof Charges for single bay occupancy			Quarterly - £135 6 monthly - £250 9 monthly - £360 Annual - £475	
Category Number		Vehicle Type			
1		Motor Car Car-derived van Dual Purpose Vehicle			
2		Motor Cycle			
3		Invalid Carriage			
4		Light commercial vehicle			

While Argyll and Bute Council's decision to raise car parking charges at Arrochar by 800% ([see here](#)), has received much media attention, it also transpires that they intend to introduce this level of charges at their car park in Duck Bay, one of the most popular places for visitors on the west shore of Loch Lomond. This follows the introduction of a similar charging regime at Luss last year. Some of the background to this decision was given in an excellent article by the Lochside Press in early August ([see here](#)) which revealed that Argyll and Bute Council hoped to raise £90,000 a year from the new charges at Arrochar to compensate for central government cuts. Whether this amount of money will be raised of course is another question. Not many hillwalkers and other visitors will be prepared to fork out up to £9 a day, the sort of charge you might pay in a town centre, to enjoy the countryside and are likely to move elsewhere, shunting the costs of visitor management onto other landowners.

The position at Duck Bay



While Argyll

and Bute now apparently owns the car park at Duck Bay, people also park along the shore road and its quite predictable that unless plans are also afoot to charge for parking along what is a public road, people will park there and, if there are no free places, will move elsewhere. This will create further traffic chaos both at Duck Bay and at the junctions with the A82.



The former public toilets at Duck Bay at the south end of the car park

The public toilets at Duck Bay have long been abandoned, a reminder of the times when Councils saw it as their responsibility to provide services for the public. Now they are run only with an eye only for budgets with no proper consideration of the consequences of decisions allegedly taken on financial grounds.



The sign on the abandoned toilets at Duck Bay – a reminder of past times

Argyll and Bute Council's budget included no proposals to improve services, such as re-opening the toilets, with money raised from these charges. They are thus effectively a tax on access, whether by the "Day tripper" as at Duck Bay or the hillwalker as at Arrochar.

Argyll and Bute's access tax and the National Park

Argyll and Bute Council decided to raise these charges for access at their budget meeting earlier this year. The Council is run by a minority Lib Dem administration but the budget was agreed with SNP support. The Council nominated two new councillors onto the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority after the last Council elections, Ellen Morton who is part of the ruling Lib Dem administration and Barbara Morgan, who represents the SNP. Two councillors who now sit on the LLTNPA have therefore been involved in the decision to create what is effectively an access tax.

Both these councillors should in my view have ensured the LLTNPA was consulted before taking this decision because of the implications both for rights of access and visitor management. I suspect this never happened because Argyll and Bute has for years been failing to co-operate with the LLTNPA on simple issues such as providing sufficient litter bins and then emptying them at places like Duck Bay.

Among the serious implications of this decision are:

- There are now two members of the LLTNPA who apparently think charging £9 to park and enjoy the countryside is acceptable. That will make it far easier for the LLTNPA to increase the charges at its own car parks (such as Inveruglas and Balmaha) and for Forestry Commission Scotland to do so too.
- If these two councillors believe £9 is acceptable for car parking, then what do they think about charging £3 for a camping permit ? In their eyes that presumably seems ridiculously low and will open the way for the LLTNPA to increase its charges for permits (another charge on access).
- And if this doesn't transpire and the two Councillors turn out to be in a minority, what does this say about joined up approaches to visitor management? The LLTNPA was set up to ensure an integrated approach to visitor management and clearly totally failed to do this with vastly different charges and services in place across the National Park. The model of councils being represented on our National Park Boards to ensure joined up working has failed miserably.

What needs to happen

The SNP Government's response to Edinburgh City Council's proposal for a tourist tax to help pay for the infrastructure in the city which supports tourism has been negative. They have claimed it would deter tourists. On this logic they should be stepping in now to overturn Argyll and Bute's decision to tax access, although in my view it is equally important they do so to protect our freedom to roam and to ensure joined up visitor management. If you cannot get to places for a reasonable cost, then there is de facto freedom of access only for those who can afford to pay exorbitant charges. If you don't know what to expect in terms of charges, what will that do for tourism?

Meantime however we need the LLTNPA to take a lead on this. I would like to see them debate the issue of car parking charges at their next meeting, ask Argyll and Bute Council to reverse their decision and then develop a policy on car parking charges across the National Park based on the principle that any car parking charges should clearly relate to the costs of providing visitor infrastructure in the place concerned. Whether the new Board will have the courage to do this remains to be seen.

If you want to add your voice to those protesting against the charges there is a petition about Arrochar [here](#)

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. access rights
2. Camping bye laws
3. Forestry Commission Scotland
4. LLTNPA
5. visitor management

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