

The torpedo site at Arrochar – time for a U-turn by the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park

Description



The area at the former torpedo site in Arrochar where the LLTNPA has used an amenity notice “to good effect” – Photo Credit Nick Halls (all photos taken November 2018)

“An Amenity Notice is used where the condition of land is having an adverse effect on the wider public amenity of the area. For the reporting period of the PPF [Planning Performance Framework] , the case in question related to.....Killin – and prior to that we have also used this notice to good effect at the former Torpedo site by Arrochar.”

(Report to Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Planning Committee October 2018 [\(see here\)](#).)



“To good effect” – currently the slopes by the entry gates are still being used as a local dump by fly tippers. Photo Credit Nick Halls

While much of the more recent fly tipping at the torpedo site has been cleared up ([see here](#)) and ([here](#)) the LLTNPA Committee Report fundamentally misses the point. The problem of the torpedo site as a whole remains. The LLTNPA Planning Committee should get out there and take a look for themselves.



Looking north west from concrete area towards Ben Narnain. The former torpedo site covers a very large area – Photo Credit Nick Halls

You don't have to look very far from the cleared up areas to see further evidence of recent flytipping or places which the clear-up missed.

Look the other way and you see this:



View across Loch Long to southern end Arrochar village – Photo Credit Nick Halls

Buildings have been demolished and the rubble left in situ – an amenity issue. As we predicted back in March 2017 ([see here](#)) *“Even if the Amenity Order is properly implemented, the site will remain strewn with materials from the demolition that has taken place and the upright buildings will remain.”*



Photo Credit Nick Halls

The Buddleia and trees growing out of demolished buildings only give a small indication of the length of time this site has lain derelict. Demolition by Clydebank Developments Ltd started in 2007 but was halted by a fire. The site had been closed by the MOD over twenty years before that in 1986 prior to being sold by Clydebank Development Ltd (c1995?).



Halted demolition – Photo Credit Nick Halls

After forty years of abandonment, the former structures are hanging on, literally in some cases:



The derelict structures on the concrete platform by the shore of Loch Long cover an extensive area Photo Credit Nick Halls

While our public authorities appear generally very reluctant to address planning blight, the torpedo site is also a landscape and a health and safety issue.



Photo Credit Nick Halls

The one remaining building unaffected by the stalled demolition works is in a poor state and appears to be used for barbecues and bevvying



The torpedo site site is already a visitor attraction of sorts.....Photo Credit Nick Halls

The amenity notice issued by the LLTNPA has not addressed the real amenity issues at the former torpedo site. Indeed, its as if its main purpose has not been to clear up the site but hide it more effectively from public view. The main effect of the notice has been the installation of gates at either end of the former public road.



The fundamental at stake here is the impact that the derelict torpedo site has on the natural beauty of Loch Long and on the local community and the future planned for this site.

The LLTNPA now has an online map on which you can check the current state of play for land earmarked for development in the Local Development Plan – a great initiative, and one that potentially will bring greater transparency to development planning. It say this about the former torpedo site:

Actions

- LLTNPA to encourage prospective developer 'Ben Arthur Ltd' to submit a planning application for renewal of 2012 permission [lapsed in 2016] or attract other developer to submit a planning application for a new proposal.
- LLTNPA to work with owners and partners to improve the appearance of the site and prevent fly tipping.

Progress

- LLTNPA and ABC [Argyll and Bute Council] are having ongoing discussions with the owner.
- Amenity Notice served in July 2016 to clear up site and close road which has been complied with.

We have already had 30 years of intermittent discussions, 15 since the National Park came into existence, and nothing significant has been done to improve the site. Effectively, there is no plan on the table.



Photo Credit Nick Halls

While the industrial dereliction is extensive, a competent demolition firm could probably dispose of this in a week, grind into landfill, or foundation material, with a significant recovery of recyclable metals. The concrete platform could be left in place, at least temporarily.



View from pier, which extends into deep water, looking back to derelict upright structures – photo credit Nick Halls

The pier is solidly built of concrete and at present only used for fishing. It is possibly within large shipping e.g. cruise liners which currently bus people from the Firth of Clyde to places like Luss. The site therefore has potential for dropping off cruise passengers, to take bus trips or even train journeys to places like Oban where they could be picked up. This is a feature of Norwegian Cruise experiences, where passengers are taken far up the Fiords, then taken for bus/train journeys through the mountains and picked up later.

What's going wrong

The LLTNPA at present appears wedded to neo-liberal ideas of development. Public land is sold off, as in this case by the Ministry of Defence, to private developers. They then develop proposals for 'exotic' developments, in this as a hotel and leisure complex or Flamingo Land at Balloch, which are marketed as 'investments', which will bring jobs. Whether they are then implemented depends in large part on "market forces", a euphemism for "private profitability". Intervention to correct "market failure", as here, is not on our Public Authorities agenda. Instead they offer extensive financial and other support to developers to try and get developments off the ground.

In the hunt for profit, these developments undervalue and destroy vernacular architecture and local culture and introduce alien features to the local environment. Flamingo Land, Natural Retreats, the

Aviemore Centre are all the negation of what our National Parks should be about, an indigenous authentic quality experience. Places such the head of Loch Long are valuable precisely because they lack these sort of developments.

Whether the former torpedo site remains derelict or whether the LLTNPA manages to resuscitate the former planning permission, it will have failed as a National Park, failed visitors and failed the local community.

An alternative vision for the torpedo site

Bring the land back into public ownership – we don't see why the MOD should not buy it back, clear the site as they should have done back in 1986 and then gift it to the local community – and an alternative vision becomes possible.

In the short-term, if tidied up, the torpedo site it could be made into a valuable camping facility. This could help replace some of the hundreds of camping places lost in the last thirty years, including those at Ardgarten. The number of places with hard standing sufficient to provide foundations for huts, as on the West Highland Way, at Loch Katrine or as proposed for Flamingo Land, is extensive.

There is almost power and sewerage infrastructure in place that could be bought up to standard. A large burn/river flows through the site, bringing water straight off the hill that could also be used as a run of water hydro generator, sufficient to provide lighting and hot water.

There are significant opportunities for a museum/interpretation centre, again using current infrastructure, building on the fantastic work that the local community in Arrochar has done:

- the history of the torpedo station itself
- the history of hydro generation in the area and the post war employment of ex service-men
- the massacre of the Lamonts and the McGregors, which broke these clans, and how their names were anglicised to White, Green, Fletcher & Brown etc
- a clan Museum, for the MacFarlanes and MacArthurs
- the impact of the introduction of the sheep. Cowal was the first locality north of the Highland Boundary where farm towns were converted into single tenancies under incomers from the Borders (Kennedys, Kerrs, Laws etc)
- the story of the Rest and Be Thankful as an important transport route
- the local geology, with the Cowal Anticline providing fantastic opportunities to interpret the mica schist and the later impact of sheet and alpine type glaciation being visible from local viewpoints.
- the history of Forestry Commission activity in Argyll over the last century possibly linked to an arboretum for climax indigenous vegetation and guide to exotics and commercial forestry species
- the evolution of climbing and mountaineering in the area, with references to WH Murray and Creag Dhu, personalities like John Cunningham, and the Narnain Cave etc

A site with all these sorts of small attractions would be almost invisible, unlike the large hotel complex endorsed by the National Park. (Large cruise liners, attracted to such a facility, would be far more prominent but their impacts would be temporary and passing).



View from Arrochar Church, which shows how little impact the site would have if the superficial industrial dereliction were to be cleared, and camping and interpretation facilities were to be located on the 'brown lands'. Photo Credit Nick Halls.

Using the land in this way could attract flows of visitors each of which would provide a specialist and local employment that preserves local heritage and memories – rather than having them eradicated and replaced by pastiche imitations of elsewhere. At the same time it would help fill beds in local hotels at all times of year rather than introducing new competition for existing provision.

It would not take much to make such a development fully accessible by public transport, instead of the occasional bus service on the A83. Two options would be a new boat link in summer from the Clyde (which would be very attractive if there was a high quality visitor centre) or a minibus linking the Arrochar and Tarbet railway station and the more frequent bus services along the A82.

Further to Argyll and Bute's access tax at Arrochar ([see here](#)), an FOI request has confirmed that Clydebank Developments Ltd, the owners of the torpedo site, also own the land on which the main Cobbler carpark is located. They entered into a 25 year lease ([see here for lease](#)) with Argyll and Bute Council which will be up in 2020, offering an ideal opportunity for the local community to take over the running of that too.

Such a development could be done piecemeal with each element generating the income to help fund the next. Having waited almost 40 years for nothing, a gradual plan that took 20 years to achieve would be nothing in the scheme of things. Having just overseen the construction of one hydro scheme

and with their extensive work on local history and path infrastructure, the local community would be in a great position to do this. They would need however both practical support and funding, of the type our public agencies seem only too happy to give to private developers ([see here](#)), to be able to achieve this.

Such a vision would be in keeping with the statutory duties of the National Park, to conserve landscape, wildlife and the local cultural heritage, to promote public enjoyment and sustainable economic development unlike what is (not) happening at present. Its time the LLTNPA Board visited the site and started to have a fundamental re-think about what its trying to achieve at Arrochar.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

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