

A new approach to litter by the Loch Lomonds and Trossachs National Park Authority?

Description



Fly tipping Loch lubhair, east of Crianlarich 18th October 2018 Photo Credit Dave Morris

Last week I was contacted out the blue by the press to comment on the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority's new £40k a year Litter Manager. The Herald gave this extensive coverage ([see here](#)) – and even referred to my views in their Leader calling on the Park to take tougher action. While the online version of the Herald recycled the much used photo of a Highland cow standing by a tent floating on a loch, which gives a totally misleading impression of what the real issue is, the Leader was much stronger. Without referring to the camping byelaws by name, it stated that the initiative taken three years ago to tackle litter had not worked, that more needs to be done and a strategy needs to be developed. That was spot on. This post takes a look at what progress the LLTNPA has made

since they made litter the first priority in their five corporate plan earlier this year ([see here](#)).

Back in 2012 the excellent 5 Lochs Visitor Management Plan developed by Grant Moir, now Chief Executive of the Cairngorms National Park, Chief Inspector Kevin Findlater and others provided a succinct summary of what needed to be done to address litter in the Trossachs and committed to developing a litter strategy for the area by 2013-14.

Issue No.	Issue
01	Litter: Need for a consistent and agreed litter management plan. Implement solutions for day and overnight use of the area and bin provision across the area.

Unfortunately, instead of taking a holistic approach the then Convener, Linda McKay, led her Board down the line of blaming all the litter problems in the National Park on campers as a way of introducing the camping byelaws. That of course has failed but it has wasted over four years and the LLTNPA still has no litter strategy. As the excellent letter to the Herald from James Lindsay put it last Friday the problems have got worse, not better, since the National Park was created and local communities have been left to pick up the mess:

Solve litter

THE announcement that The Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park has appointed a litter manager (“Loch’s latest weapon in the war on trash ... a £40k a year litter manager”, The Herald, February 7) will come as no great comfort to the long-suffering residents of the park.

As litter is a major problem throughout our lovely country it can only be a matter of time before all councils follow suit.

That we are still grappling with this issue generations after children were taught not to drop litter indicates that the message and penalties are not working. We are a nation of clarty middens, and appointment of people to manage

The first letter is quite right, the wider problem is how we reduce waste

Another good example is at Arrochar where the local community has long been at the forefront of attempts to clean up marine litter at the head of Loch Long with relatively little support, till last year, from our public authorities.

Back in September a (secret) LLTNPA Board strategic development session was devoted to litter. It considered a “starter paper” ([see here](#)) six years after committing to develop a strategy and despite a number of honourable attempts by individual Board Members to get staff to act at Board Meetings.

The cause of the inaction has been that the LLTNPA senior management team have not seen it as their responsibility to bring all their partners together to address the litter issue and, until this year, basically ignored exhortations from Board Members to work more closely with local councils. The appointment of a well paid Litter Manager appears to be an attempt to remedy this deficiency. Whether it will work, as I explained to the Herald (see link above) remains to be seen.

The litter problem in the National Park



Fly tipping at Loch Lubhair on 2nd December 6 weeks after first photographed – Photo Credit Dave M

The starting point for any strategy should be an accurate account of the extent of the litter problem in the National Park. The LLTNPA has always been reluctant to do this because doing so would confirm that campers are NOT the main cause of litter.

Fly tipping is a major issue and, as Dave Morris' photos of Loch lubhair show, the problem is still being largely ignored. Its shocking that at a major Park promoted layby/stopping off place such as Loch lubhair piles of dumped materials can remain in place for six weeks or more.



Tyres dumped at Loch lubhair on 2nd December which had not been there on 18th October – Photo Dave Morris

Much of the fly tipping in the National Park is likely to be the responsibility of local residents and businesses. I don't blame them. If Councils don't offer proper waste disposal facilities they, like people driving along the major roads in the National Park, will simply dump their litter. Charging for special litter collections simply incentivises people, particularly when most jobs in the National Park are so low paid, to dump stuff.



Fly tipping 14th December at first layby on A82 heading north from Luss

Fly tipping is thus partly a by-product of neo-liberal ideology, which tries to make individuals responsible for paying for everything, and austerity. The LLTNPA has recently tried to stop it by blocking off sites used for dumping, like the former torpedo range at Arrochar. All that happens, as the above photo illustrates, is people go elsewhere: I don't think its a coincidence that, just along the A82, that part of the Culag layby which was used for fly tipping has now been blocked off by boulders:



Blocked off section of Culag layby where dumping used to take place

Just like with camping, the LLTNPA seems to believe the solution to problems is to blame people and then ban not just the trouble makers but everyone else. That is the opposite of what they should be doing.

The fundamental issue is how to get the Local Authorities to provide proper facilities for the collection and recycling of litter both for local residents and visitors. That means placing adequate litter bins in every layby and popular stopping off place and ensuring these are emptied regularly.



Layby lower Glen Prosen February 2019 – with not a sign of litter

The Minister responsible for National Parks, Mairi Gougeon, should be inspired by the example of her own constituency where Angus Council even provides litter bins in unofficial laybys on minor roads. She and the public should be demanding the LLTNPA gets its member Councils to agree to deliver similar provision.

The LLTNPA's focus is still misplaced

The paper on litter discussed at the September Board strategic session ([see here](#)) was not primarily about litter in the National Park as a whole, though senior staff had “*recently stepped up engagement with partners*” and held a meeting with Argyll and Bute Council (not before time!). Instead it focussed on how the LLTNPA manages litter on the sites it owns. That appears a consequence of the paper being produced by the Corporate Services Manager, Jaki Carnegie, rather than the Park's Director responsible for conservation and visitor management, Simon Jones. The paper provides some interesting information but rather than taking a critical look at what the Park has done to date blames others: “*The biggest challenge in managing litter on our sites is public attitude*”, for example people leaving rubbish by bins that are full; and has a section on “*Businesses behaving badly*”.



Bins not emptied – blame the punters. Photo take June 2018

In terms of litter prevention and enforcement, there is a huge contrast between the effort the LLTNPA has put into banning campers compared to stopping litter. The September Board Report states that the Park Ranger service issued just 3 Fixed Penalty Notices for litter between January and September 2018. Shortly after that meeting, the LLTNPA issued a news release ([see here](#)) about one case it had taken in relation to fly tipping, as if to persuade the Board staff were doing something.

Section 5.14 of the Annual Report to Ministers on the Camping byelaws ([see here](#)), which the Board approved in December, shows the LLTNPA has done very little suggests that almost all action taken to date has been against campers:

- *“As part of standard practice for byelaw management 931 individuals’ details were taken and advice given in relation to alleged contraventions of Camping Management Byelaws 2017.*
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From this total 12 byelaw cases were reported to the Crown Office, four by National Park Rangers and eight by Police Scotland.

- *Three of these reported cases (one reported by the National Park and two by Police Scotland) also included offences under the Environmental Protection Act for camping related fly-tipping.*
- *During the same time period National Park staff issued one Fixed Penalty Notice for camping related fly-tipping which was subsequently paid and reported one camping related fly-tipping case to the Crown Office.”*

Out of 931 people whose names were taken for camping without a permit, 12 were reported to the Procurator Fiscal and of these three involved littering. In total five campers were suspected of dumping litter, three by the Park and two by the police. That's five out of 931 or less than 0.5% of campers creating serious litter issues.

What this also means, coupled with the September Board paper, is that until September the Park Ranger service had taken not a single action against any other member of the public for leaving litter. In other words if you are a day tripper who drops litter or someone travelling through the Park who chucks it out the window – and you only have to walk a few metres down the A82 to see how many people do this – the chances of being apprehended are NIL. The reason? The Park is too busy policing campers. This demonstrates that the Park's efforts to address the litter issue are totally skewed. As a result they will never work.

A much better starting place would be the Friends of Loch Lomond and Trossachs Five Point Action Plan for litter which they issued in May:

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.*

A Chief Executive out of control?

The Board appear to have had no say in the creation of the Litter Manager post, unless this was agreed at a secret meeting. Normally in public authorities creation of new posts requires Board/Committee approval (in Glasgow City Council where I used to work only Councillors could create, delete or regrade posts). Yet in the LLTNPA there has been no paper to the Board about the new Litter Manager post or what it is intended to do.

Nor is there anything in Board Standing Orders saying when decisions like this are delegated to

officers. At the end of last year, therefore, I asked the LLTNPA under FOI about what governance arrangements are in place for decisions such as this. Their response ([see here](#)) pointed me to the Financial Memorandum ([see here](#)) prepared by the Scottish Government. This gives the Chief Executive delegated authority to implements decisions or programmes of work agreed by the Board.

There is, however, no mention of either a new budget to manage litter or the need for a Litter Manager post in either the Annual Operational Plan agreed in March or the new Corporate Plan agreed in June which put a new focus on litter:

<p>6.1 Water Facilities</p> <p>6.2 Waterbus Network</p> <p>6.3 Water Recreation</p> <p>7.1 Growing Tourism markets</p> <p>8.1 Visitor Management</p>	<p>7. Prioritise investment in the key Visitor Sites on our own estate to improve the visitor experience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Secure tenants for Inveruglas and T - Continue the long term programme water/waste supplies, public toilets improving accessibility, - Trial different local litter management and West Loch Lomond sites through - Introduce payment-friendly car park Milarrochy Bay, Inveruglas and Tar - Trial targeting staff to enforce the E - Utilising support from Zero Waste 3 and communities advocate the dev <p>National Park Litter Strategy</p>
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Extract from Annual Operational Plan

Corporate Plan

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.

I cannot see anything here that could be taken as authorising the Chief Executive to create this post. It appears therefore that either the Board has agreed this post in secret or the Chief Executive has done so without their say so. I suspect the latter explanation is more likely and, excepting the complete failure in governance, is not a good sign for the future. If the Board has so little control of what posts exist within the LLTNPA, its unlikely they will bring much influence to bear on what any post holder does.

The root of the LLTNPA’s failure to tackle litter

Litter is of course a Scotland, indeed a UK wide issue. The National Park cannot solve it alone or in isolation from actions elsewhere. It should however be in a powerful position to improve the situation in the National Park and indeed give a lead across Scotland. People care deeply about National Parks and if we are going to address successfully a Scotland wide problem there is arguably no better place to start.

The problem is the current Chief Executive has played a large parting in taking the LLTNPA down the blind alley of persecuting campers rather than addressing the much wider issues facing the National Park, including litter. That accounts for four years of failure to tackle the litter issue. He also, as the creation of the Litter Manager post shows, appears accountable to no-one. I would like to be proved wrong but, until these issues are addressed, I doubt the appointment of a litter manager will have much impact on any of the fundamental issues.

Category

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Date Created

February 13, 2019

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