

Roadside litter, rubbish and fly tipping – a blight on the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park

Description



The Trossachs Community Council organised litter pick at the weekend collected 46 bags of rubbish between Coilantogle and the Forest Drive. As well as the usual drinks cans and food packaging, this included a pair of car floor mats, a 20lt hydraulic oil can – council ditching contractors ? – and packs of “pike-pro” bait. Photo credit anonymous

A couple of weeks ago the Environment Secretary, Roseanna Cunningham, announced the Scottish Government would create a new law to make it illegal to throw litter out of cars ([see here](#)). Funny, I had thought that littering was already an offence, whether or not thrown out a car window. It was also announced that the Scottish Government was working on a “national litter strategy”, to be implemented “as soon as possible”. This time peculiar. I had thought that a National Litter Strategy ([see here](#)) had been launched back in 2014 by the then Minister responsible, Richard Lochhead. Maybe, however, nothing has happened in the intervening five years. The evidence from the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park at the weekend certainly suggests that NO progress has been made towards a litter free Scotland, which was the main aspiration of the last strategy.

On Sunday, I drove – somewhat guiltily – from Glasgow to Arrochar. All along the A82 and A83, between Balloch and Ardgarten, litter was strewn along both sides of the road. Tonnes of it. Its clear that the one-off clear-up reported at the last Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Board Meeting is nothing like sufficient to keep the National Park’s roads litter free. When Transport Scotland appears to pay for litter pickers to clear up our motorways on a daily basis- the BBC news story revealed that *“Some 1,300 bags of rubbish, weighing almost seven tonnes, are collected from the sides of the M8 and M9 each month”* – the question is why there are not such regular clean-ups of our A roads and in our National Parks? Why do they deserve less than the M8?

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Litter by side of A83 west of Ardgarten – 1-2 items per every metre of verge

A new law on littering from cars is unlikely to have much impact on the amount of roadside litter unless there are cameras covering every metre of road, clever software to detect automatically when stuff gets thrown out of windows and tough penalties – e.g loss of driving licence for five years – to act as a deterrent. All of that has civil liberties implications. With the Scottish Government trying to cut n costs in all areas, its hard to see it investing to save.

Indeed the last national litter strategy was partly driven by the Scottish Government's wish to reduce the costs of clearing it up. To avoid incurring new costs that strategy put the whole onus on the individual to stop littering. It contained no provisions to reduce waste or to provide better infrastructure for recycling. The predictable consequence is that it hasn't worked.

Nor are the new proposals announced by the Scottish Government for a [a deposit return scheme](#) likely to have much impact. Cans and paper cups, along with packaging, generally form a far higher proportion of roadside litter than bottles. A deposit return scheme will only affect a small proportion of the problem.

What is conspicuously lacking from the Scottish Government's various strategies is any attempt to understand why people litter and what might get them to change their behaviour and conversely what might encourage most people to do the right thing. One of the main challenges is that people want an easy way to dispose of waste and, in the absence of infrastructure to do this, tend to dispose of it in the easiest way possible. For people in cars that often means chucking it out the car window.



Sign at Forestry Commission Scotland car park at Ardgarten – the nearest bin is three miles away. How much of the litter along the A83 between Ardgarten and the Rest and Be Thankful would have been prevented if there had been litter bins at

The surest way of addressing this problem is to remove the source. Create a zero waste society so there is nothing to chuck out. That would require far more than bottle recycling. It would require a ban

on disposable cups and all disposable packaging, deposits on cans and other containers that could be recycled, businesses being forced to provide recycling facilities for all the products they sell etc etc.....and on top of that enforcement. Until such time as they decide to introduce meaningful proposals to stop waste being produced, the Scottish Government should ask a couple of questions:

- why do people appear to prefer a clean car to a clean countryside? and,
- why do most people visiting or travelling through the countryside fail to take their rubbish home as continually exhorted?

I don't have the answer to those questions but what the evidence does show is that many people, when out their cars, do many of the right things.

On Sunday, away from the road and over the hills, I hardly saw a piece of litter. Its not that hill goers never drop litter, rather its that the people who litter up in the hills are generally outnumbered by the people who don't. The non-litterers then influence the litterers – excuse me why are you leaving it that there? – and what's more a minority also pick up the litter they find (I collected the banana skin, the one piece of rubbish I found on the summit of Ben Donich). The result is that apart from some litter hotspots – the summit of Ben Nevis is a prime example – is most of our hills are generally litter free.

The problem comes when people return to their cars. The Scottish Government needs to learn from the camping byelaws, the main justification for which was to stop litter and flytipping.



Litter and bagged waste (there were two neatly tied bags by the coca cola box) by the

Suie Field camping permit area layby

The byelaws haven't worked. Despite people being issued with camping permits that require them to take their litter home, people are still bagging their litter and then leaving it beside the road. That shows first just how hard it is to get people to comply with rules on littering. The risk of ending up in Court and being fined £500 for breach of permit conditions is clearly NOT acting as a deterrent. Second, that until such time as the LLTNPA in partnership with other Public Authorities agree to install litter bins at all the most popular roadside stopping off points the problem is going to continue. Unfortunately, there are still no signs of progress although over the weekend I discovered that the LLTNPA do have PLENTY of bins in stock.

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Another scandalous failure by the LLTNPA to use resources properly. Why can't these bins be used

in the top forty litter hot spots in the National Park which lack bins and then the Council bin lorries empty them on their way past?



Burnt out caravan and flytipping beyond at first layby on A82 heading north from Luss

There was another demonstration of the failure of the camping byelaws on Loch Lomondside. One of the main justifications for the camping byelaws, before someone realised their provisions to ban overnight stays in vehicles were unenforceable, was to stop encampments of vehicles in laybys and all the consequent mess (this was particularly a problem on the north shore of Loch Earn). The LLTNPA now says they have agreed with the police that they should deal with inappropriate vehicle stays in laybys through existing powers. Unfortunately, as the photo demonstrates, its almost impossible for the police to prevent all such problems and the issue is how quickly burnt out wrecks such as this which blight the layby will be cleared up. That requires resources. Unfortunately, the LLTNPA lives in a world of neo-liberal spin, where everyone can manage better on less resources and issues such as this can be dealt with by people taking personal responsibility.

At the head of Loch Long at Arrochar, another six weeks have gone by ([see here](#)) and the litter is as bad as ever, evidence of the failure of another Scottish Government Strategy – that on marine litter. Unfortunately, the Scottish Government refuses to acknowledge that WE as a country and IT as a government need to SPEND resources on clearing litter if there is to be any difference.

I now rage for the people of Arrochar. Their situation is not dissimilar to many people living in places in third world countries where there is NO rubbish collection and people effectively live in large rubbish

tips. The ideology that is responsible for creating these rubbish dumps in the first place is the same. Its not the role of the state to spend money on removing waste.



The head of Loch Long by Arrochar

Local communities face an uphill and unwinnable battle in these circumstances. That in Arrochar has, like that in the Trossachs, organised regular litter picks but the volume of waste is far far too great to be addressed by voluntary effort. The rubbish blows up from the shore and into the village. Neither relying on individuals or communities to take responsibility will be sufficient to address the problem.



Litter in the car park at the head of Loch Long that appeared to have been blown up from the shore

The state of the car park at the head of Loch Long, like the beach, was a disgrace and worse than last time I visited. Argyll and Bute Council now charge £1 an hour to stay in these car parks – £7-8 from hillwalkers who are out for the day – but while employing someone to issue fines, don't employ sufficient people keep the place clean. From what I saw on Sunday there were enough cars parked by the Cobbler for Argyll and Bute to employ two people from the local community to work on removing litter full-time. That would benefit everyone and might even half justify this exorbitant tax on access. But instead the Council turns a blind eye to what is effectively an unmanaged rubbish dump.



View from the inside of the torpedo station towards the A83. The volume of fly tipping on this side of the gate has reduced considerably.

A little further down the road was an example of how another measure taken to stop rubbish has failed to work. Parkswatch has previously covered how the LLTNPA required the owners of the torpedo site, which has been derelict ever since the MoD sold it, to install gates to stop fly tippers ([see here](#)). The LLTNPA's main tactic for reducing rubbish in the countryside appears to be to lock gates to car parks at night and block off laybys. Besides making it much harder to exercise access rights, it doesn't work. Predictably the tippers simply go somewhere else.



Tipping outside the torpedo station gates (visible top left)

In this case, just a few metres on the main road side of the gate.

What needs to happen

I agree with Roseanna Cunningham, the Secretary for the Environment, about one thing on litter. *“Scotland is a beautiful country that is being blighted by litter.”* The Scottish Government need to learn, however, from the failures of the last five years, including the failures of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park. If she wants to take a look at the evidence at what the problems are and how NOT to address them, she could do worse than take the tour I did on Sunday. In the company, however, not of the National Park but of a local community organisation or say the Friends of Loch Lomond and Trossachs who last year produced a five point action plan on litter ([see here](#)).

For that to work the Scottish Government needs to do far more to stop waste being generated in the first place, to make it easy for people to dispose of waste responsibly and to recognise that where people don't, resources are needed to clear up litter and waste.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

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