

New visitor infrastructure at Tarbet – welcome investment but for whose benefit?

Description



The main investment in new visitor infrastructure that the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority has made this year is in upgrading facilities on their land at Tarbet and Inveruglas on the west shore of Loch Lomond.

Priority	YTD p
G. Estate & Tourism Infrastructure Development & facilities (toilets, car parks, services)	Refurbishment of and 24-hour access Inveruglas, upgrade of the car park at disposal point at Tarbet and improvem amongst other improvements at these end of November. This work is being p Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF). Refurbishment of the public toilets at B December, also under our RTIF Progr

Extract from Annual Operational Plan progress report

Tarbet featured in no less than 6 different sections of the Annual Operational Plan Progress Report submitted to the December LLTNP Board Meeting ([see here for paper](#)). On my way north on Saturday, I stopped to take a look for myself.



The creation of a chemical disposal point at Tarbet is extremely welcome. The camping byelaws were intended to apply to campervans – although this has proved impossible to enforce – and should have been accompanied by a major expansion in the provision of new infrastructure. Parkswatch blogged about the dire situation on west Loch Lomond in May 2017 ([see here](#)). Two and a half years later – or four years since Scottish Ministers gave the LLTNPA time to prepare for the new byelaws – this is the FIRST example of new campervan provision that the Park has delivered. (The creation of “permit spaces” in car parks and along roads where campervans previously were able to stop for free, which involved a few white lines being painted, shouldn’t count as new infrastructure).

The Rural Tourism Infrastructure fund, created by the Scottish Government, appears to be the main source of funding. This is only half welcome. The Scottish Government has been financially strangling public authorities so almost that all investment, as in this case, is now dependant on grant aid from them. Our National Park are just minor branch offices of the Scottish Government which has been extremely slow to acknowledge the need for investment in new tourist infrastructure across Scotland. Hence the crises on the North Coast 500, Skye etc where tourists, including those in campervans, are overwhelming local facilities and public authorities have no resources with which to respond.

The LLTNPA has – perhaps in return for its punitive actions against campers? – done relatively well financially compared to other public authorities. Its been awarded standstill budgets while the budget for SNH, for example, has been reduced by 40%. It is still, however, dependant on the Scottish Government for all investment. As a consequence its not clear whether a second chemical disposal point, say on the Trossachs side of the National Park, is anywhere on the funding horizon.

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Its also welcome that the LLTNPA is making no charge for using the chemical disposal point.....for the time being. There is ample evidence that compulsory charges act as a deterrent and have adverse consequences (just a with litter where charges for waste disposal feed the fly tipping problem).

AOP Activity	NPPP / 5-Year Plan Priority	AOP Measurement of Success	YTD progress	Rating
1. We will identify ways to supplement our core funding to help sustain and improve the services we deliver in the National Park	5-YP Priority 6: Fundraising	- Deliver agreed preferred option for our vacant building, landholding and responsibilities in Luss;	Review of works required to bring building up to basic standard carried out. Informal community consultations undertaken. Options to gauge potential operator interest during Q3 to inform final proposed offering.	On track
		- Maximise the generation of toilet income in 2 (Luss and Balmaha) of our 8 public toilet facilities following upgrades to charging mechanisms;	Upgrade works behind schedule – West Loch Lomond to complete by end of November 2019. East Loch Lomond on track to complete end of February 2020	On track
		- Tender to secure a tenant for the Inveruglas/Tarbet following completion of the RTIF work;	Aim to secure new tenant leases commencing by 2020 season.	Behind schedule
		- Secure the lease of Balmaha Car Park and regularise the land tenure at Milarrochy Bay in order to support an automated car park charging system;	Lease of Balmaha Car Park no longer available. Milarrochy Bay conversations with Landlord continuing constructively.	Behind schedule
		- Introduce automated car park charging systems in Tarbet, Inveruglas and Milarrochy;	Scoping of project completed. Cost benefit analysis of charging mechanisms to be complete Q4 for delivery beginning of 20/21.	Behind schedule

Extract from Annual Operational Plan (AOP) Progress Report December 2019

The free campervan chemical disposal point is, however, out of kilter with the LLTNPA's general approach to tourist infrastructure which is to instigate charging wherever possible (see above). So far the LLTNPA's record in trying to charge for facilities has been a miserable failure. Its now three years and four months since the LLTNPA tendered for an Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) system for Inveruglas, Tarbet and Milarrochy ([see here](#)). This was intended to provide a quick source of income for the National Park. Its still classified as being "behind schedule"! The report to the Board also reveals that the plan to introduce an ANPR system at Balmaha have fallen through while a cost-benefit analysis is "to be complete Q4 for delivery beginning of 20/21". So, why, one might ask was a tender issued in 2016 BEFORE there had been any cost benefit analysis? Why too did the Board at their meeting endorse the new timescales to introduce charges (not a single Board Member questioned the plan) BEFORE they know whether it makes any sense?

Just why the LLTNPA thinks that aiming to "maximise the generation of toilet income" is a worth policy objective for a National Park is unclear, as is why staff are only working to introduce charges at Luss and Balmaha but not at the other 6 toilets we, the public, own?

Small mercies there, plenty of people were using the toilets at Tarbet – although when we dropped in to Inveruglas 10 minutes later the new 24 hour toilets there were locked.



Tourists on the LLTNPA's land at Tarbet 28th December

The LLTNPA still seems to be in denial that the tourist season now lasts all year. While there is still a high season, there is now a steady stream of people year round, with various tourism peaks. On Saturday the weather on Loch Lomondside was miserable but there were hundreds of people on the publicly owned land at Tarbet. The LLTNPA's cafe was, however, closed – perhaps as a result of the lease being put out for tender again (see above)?



Full bins at the new Tarbet car park 28th December

Given the visitor numbers, it was not surprising to find the bins were overflowing. Whether the smart bins which are being tested will solve the issue is less clear:

9. Prioritise investment in the key Visitor Sites on our own estate to improve the visitor experience	7:1 Growing Tourism markets	- Completion of the RTIF West Loch Lomond Project, including upgrades to the public toilets at Inveruglas, Tarbet and Luss, the car park at Inveruglas, and bins at Inveruglas and Tarbet;	Estimated completion by end of November 2019. Smart bins from the preferred bidder are being tested.	On track
	8:1 Visitor Management 5-YP Priority 2: Visitor Infrastructure 5-YP Priority 3: Sustainable	- Completion of the RTIF East Loch Lomond Project (if funding is approved);	Estimated to complete end of February 2020	On track

Extract from Annual Operations Plan Progress Report

While the LLTNPA is belatedly doing some good things at both Tarbet and Inveruglas, their motive for doing doesn't appear to be because they see it as their mission to serve the public. Rather they see Scottish Government infrastructure funding as an opportunity to raise income to keep themselves going. I doubt this will be successful. The amounts raised are likely to small, even if the LLTNPA

follows the example of Argyll and Bute Council at Arrochar ([see here](#)), and the unintended adverse consequences are likely to be significant. The LLTNPA would be far better to drop its plan for this hotch potch of charges and return to its fundamental principles which are about serving the public, local communities and the natural environment.

There are, however, other factors going on at Tarbet. The LLTNPA's land, where the newly upgraded parking area, cafe and chemical disposal point are located, has been included in Mouldsdale Properties new development proposals for Tarbet ([see here](#)). The LLTNPA Board should have discussed whether they would agree to allow public land to be used by a private developer BEFORE any new investment in their property went ahead. By failing to do so the LLTNPA appears once again – as they did with Flamingo Land ([see here](#)) – to be putting the interests of private developers before the public interest.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. camping
2. LLTNPA
3. Tourism
4. visitor management

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