

The failure of community empowerment in the National Park – the case of Luss

Description

Motion S5M-20986: Jackie Baillie, Dumbarton, Scottish Labour, Date Lodged: 24/02/2020
Luss Tourist Traffic Nightmare

That the Parliament understands that residents of the village of Luss on Loch Lomond are campaigning to restrict the flow of traffic through the village, following years of problems with the scale of visitors over the tourist season which can lead to tailbacks as far as the A82 when the village becomes gridlocked; notes that the village is home to 120 residents and that it was made famous by STV's *Take the High Road*; understands that the village welcomes over 750,000 visitors each year, ranking it as number nine in the list of the most visited attractions in Scotland, ahead of Stirling Castle, the Falkirk Wheel and Edinburgh Zoo; believes that residents are concerned that the continued influx of tourist traffic is destroying the essential character of the historic village, and that there are serious road safety issues for pedestrians in the heart of the village, most of which is pavement-free, as well as a very significantly reduced quality of life for residents; understands that Argyll and Bute Council accepted a blueprint drawn up by locals to manage tourist traffic but has since failed to act to further its implementation through a traffic regulation order, meaning that residents face a new tourist season without any measures in place to control traffic and calls on the Scottish Government to intervene and ensure that there is no further delay in bringing forward a traffic regulation order to more effectively manage tourists through a much-loved, iconic village at the heart of the Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park.

Where motions to the Scottish Parliament get sufficient support, they may be debated in the chamber. As of 12th March Jackie Baillie's motion had not attracted support from any other MSP, including any of the 7 Lists MSPs for the area. (NB Update: to be fair to MSPs they probably did not know the motion had been submitted and Ross Greer the Green MSP has now signed).

The Scottish Government claims to be doing lots to empower local communities in Scotland ([see here](#)) but the reality is rather different. For every community that has managed to acquire land to great public fanfare, there are a hundred that have been trampled over by the planning system. Power in Scotland is arguably as centralised as anywhere else in the world and our community councils almost completely powerless.

A perfect illustration of this is at Luss, a small historic and scenic village on the west shore of Loch Lomond that for much of the year is overrun by tourist traffic. The local community living there have for years been campaigning for restrictions on tourist traffic through the village. Four years ago Argyll and Bute Council responded by developing a plan to install parking meters and allow residents to apply for parking permits ([see here](#)). That might have stopped tourists parking outside houses but would have done nothing to stem the flow of traffic along the narrow one way Pier Road. The local community responded by developing their own travel plan. This concluded the best way forward would be to close the narrow one-way Pier Rd, where many residents live, to tourist traffic.

Argyll and Bute Council have been very reluctant to accept the plan from the local community, hence Jackie Baillie's motion to the Scottish Parliament.

In other countries, this could never happen. In France, for example, the local mayor has the power to regulate both parking and traffic, including shutting off public roads. There, almost every local small

local community has its own “Mairie” – Mayor’s office/town hall – and streets are regularly shut to limit traffic and allow events like street markets to take place. In France, Luss would have its own Mairie and this problem would have been addressed years ago.

The centralisation of power in Scotland, however, means that other interests come into play. Argyll and Bute Council has been abusing its powers to regulate traffic to raise funds for itself without distributing any of the income to benefit local communities ([see here for Arrochar](#)). I have been informed the Council raised £50k from Luss between July and September last year. It is at present trying to impose yet further new parking charges at Duck Bay contrary to local wishes.

While Argyll and Bute have been disempowering the local communities they are supposed to represent, the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority has remained quiet. The LLTNPA has no powers to regulate traffic BUT it is the lead public authority for visitor management and, given the lack of public transport in the National Park, cars are central to that.

Moreover, on its website ([see here](#)) the LLTNPA makes the following claim:

“Having active, informed and involved communities is at the core of our work as a National Park Authority”.

So why are they not supporting the local community in Luss?

The answer appears to be that having “active, informed and involved communities” is NOT the same as saying local communities should have real power to decide what happens in their area.

Moreover in Luss, the LLTNPA has allowed its Visitor Centre – which should be playing a role in managing tourist pressures – to remain empty for two years now. Were it to complain about Argyll and Bute’s record, its hypocrisy would soon become apparent. Like Argyll and Bute Council, the LLTNPA appears far more interested in cutting costs and raising money to keep itself going than in empowering local communities.



The Luss Visitor Centre in 2016, showing signs of neglect “LU VIS TO CENTR “

I understand the local community in Luss have been considering whether or not to take over some of the publicly owned assets in the village. This is a daunting task as the processes involved are complex and very time-consuming for volunteers who could spend years of effort for not return. However, even if the local community were successful, it would not address the traffic management issues as powers to control traffic are not included in community empowerment.

What Luss illustrates, therefore, is that we need to devolve far more powers to Local Communities in Scotland, as happens in other European Countries. Devolving the power to control traffic would be a start and the LLTNPA could have been advocating for this. Perhaps if Jackie Baillie broadened her motion about the traffic nightmare in Luss to include a call for communities to be given control over traffic, she would get support from more MSPs in the Scottish Parliament?

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