

New Investment in Visitor Facilities on East Loch Lomond – at a price!

Description

What do we, the public, have to look forward to when our Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park eventually re-opens?

Excerpts from Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park (LLTNPA) ‘NEWS’

“Following a successful bid to Visit Scotland’s Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund, Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority is investing £135,000 to upgrade visitor facilities in busy East Loch Lomond tourist destination of Balmaha this spring. The project is part of a significant programme of investment in visitor sites around the National Park, including those recently completed at Luss, Tarbet and Inveruglas”.

Although, according to LLTNPA Planning Portal, the work at Tarbet would appear not to be complete as, it was only on 27th February that approval was given for the *“Replacement of septic tank for existing public toilet” at **Firkin Point*** ([see here for planning application](#)).

Or perhaps this is a retrospective approval like so many other Planning Applications published on LLTNPA Planning Portal? A recent example is the *“Erection of replacement agricultural shed (retrospective) Location Blairnyle Farm Arden Alexandria”* ([see here for planning application](#)).

Back to the LL&TTNPA “NEWS”:

“The upgrade work, including fully modernised toilet facilities and ‘smart bins’, will significantly improve the experience of visitors and help with improving the management of the destination.

At Balmaha Visitor Centre the toilet facilities will be reconfigured and modernised, increasing the number of toilets available and installing new paddle gates to take contactless card payments”.



Balmaha Visitor Centre Photo Credit: LL&TTNPA website

“Gordon Watson, Chief Executive Officer at Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park said: “East Loch Lomond is one of the most popular visitor destinations in the National Park. It is an important tourism hub that attracts many thousands of visitors each year.”

We know that the provision of things like high quality toilets and bins can make a real difference to a visitor’s experience. We are pleased to be investing in our facilities to ensure they are sustainable for the long term and continue to match the standard expected of Scotland’s first National Park.”

To facilitate the construction works, the Visitor Centre at Balmaha will be closed from Monday 20th January until the end of March. While we recognise that closures are not ideal, this work is being scheduled to minimise impact as much as possible and will be completed in time for the start of the busy visitor season at Easter.

Notes to Editors (not mine this is part of the LLTNPA announcement!)

The project is part funded through [VisitScotland’s Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund](#).

Over the last four years we’ve seen a 50% increase in visitors using our toilet facilities around Loch Lomond.

The new paddle gate system being installed at the Visitor Centre toilets will allow for contactless card payments, matching those installed elsewhere in the National Park last year. The accessible toilet will still retain a coin payment option.

Once the construction work is completed, there will be a 50p charge to use the toilet facilities at the Visitor Centre. Funds collected will go towards the continued maintenance of visitor facilities.”

So, there will be a monumental increase in the charge to use these toilets despite LLTNPA having proudly announced their successful bid. The cost of ‘spending a penny’ at Balmaha Visitor Centre

before refurbishment was, I believe, 30p. Quite a percentage increase!! A day out in Balmaha for a family of, say, two adults and three children will cost £2.50 to use these loos!!

Why the increase in charges when substantial funding was secured?

The answer lies in the Board Papers Dec'19 Agenda Item 9 Appendix 1 – Annual Operational Plan (AOP) 2019-20 Progress Report – 21 November 2019:

“We will identify ways to supplement our core funding to help sustain and improve the services we deliver in the National Park. Maximise the generation of toilet income in 2 (Luss and Balmaha) of our 8 public toilet facilities following upgrades to charging mechanisms; East Loch Lomond on track to complete end of February 2020.

Secure the lease of Balmaha Car Park and regularise the land tenure at Millarochy Bay in order to support an automated car park charging system; Lease of Balmaha Car Park no longer available. Millarochy Bay conversations with Landlord continuing constructively.”

The idea had been to extract one set of money for parking changes at Balmaha then another for the toilets but this fell through when Stirling Council decided not to lease the car park to the Park/local community ([see here](#)) and ([here](#)) for background. Having failed to secure the car park for their own use, an application for another car park then appeared on the LLTNPA Planning Portal ([see here for planning application](#)):-

“Delegated Officer Decisions Week number: 8 Date: 24 February 2020 – Ref No 2019/0252/ Proposal Change in the use of vacant land to car park (70 spaces) including engineering works and installation of boundary fence (retrospective) Location Land Adjacent And To West Of Balmaha House Balmaha Stirling Applicant Mr Sandy Fraser The Oak Tree Inn Main Road Balmaha Stirling G63 Application Type Detailed Planning Permission Date Decision Issued 26 February 2020 Decision Approve (NOTE the retrospective)“



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Application Reference:

All that is left on the planning portal is this map, the delegated report and decision notice which gives temporary approval for a car park for three years. Can you tell from this where the car park is located?

Whether there will be charges for using this temporary car park is unclear. But this is a further example of the completely disjointed approach to the provision of visitor facilities in the National Park. So, having possibly been stuck in a traffic jam on the Balmaha road from Drymen and anxious to 'spend a penny' (or considerably more!), do you go to Stirling's paying (?) Car Park and the National Park's paying toilets or to Sandy Fraser's temporary car park and into the Oak Tree Inn for a penny?

LLTNPA Board Meeting Annual Operational Plan (AOP) 2019-20 Progress Report – 21 November 2019

Section 2: Detailed activities

“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

*– 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***

*– 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***

*– Develop options for investing strategically in our wider sites to generate additional sources of income; (i.e. Tarbet)..... **At risk***

For once, we should perhaps be thankful that the LLTTNPA are so far behind schedule with their Plans. The cost of funding this National Park is huge and one way or another it all comes out of the public purse. Now, we the public, are being asked to pay even more via toilet and car parking charges throughout the National Park. We may be free to roam but that's about it!!

... and there's more to come!!

*“- Build/share or recruit knowledge and expertise to maximise leveraging alternative sources of funding and considering different schemes such as crowdfunding, community payback. Internal group established to examine fundraising opportunities. **On track**”*

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. LLTNPA
2. planning
3. visitor management

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