

Two pieces of ancient woodland, two National Parks, two different fates

Description

School Wood, Nethy Bridge

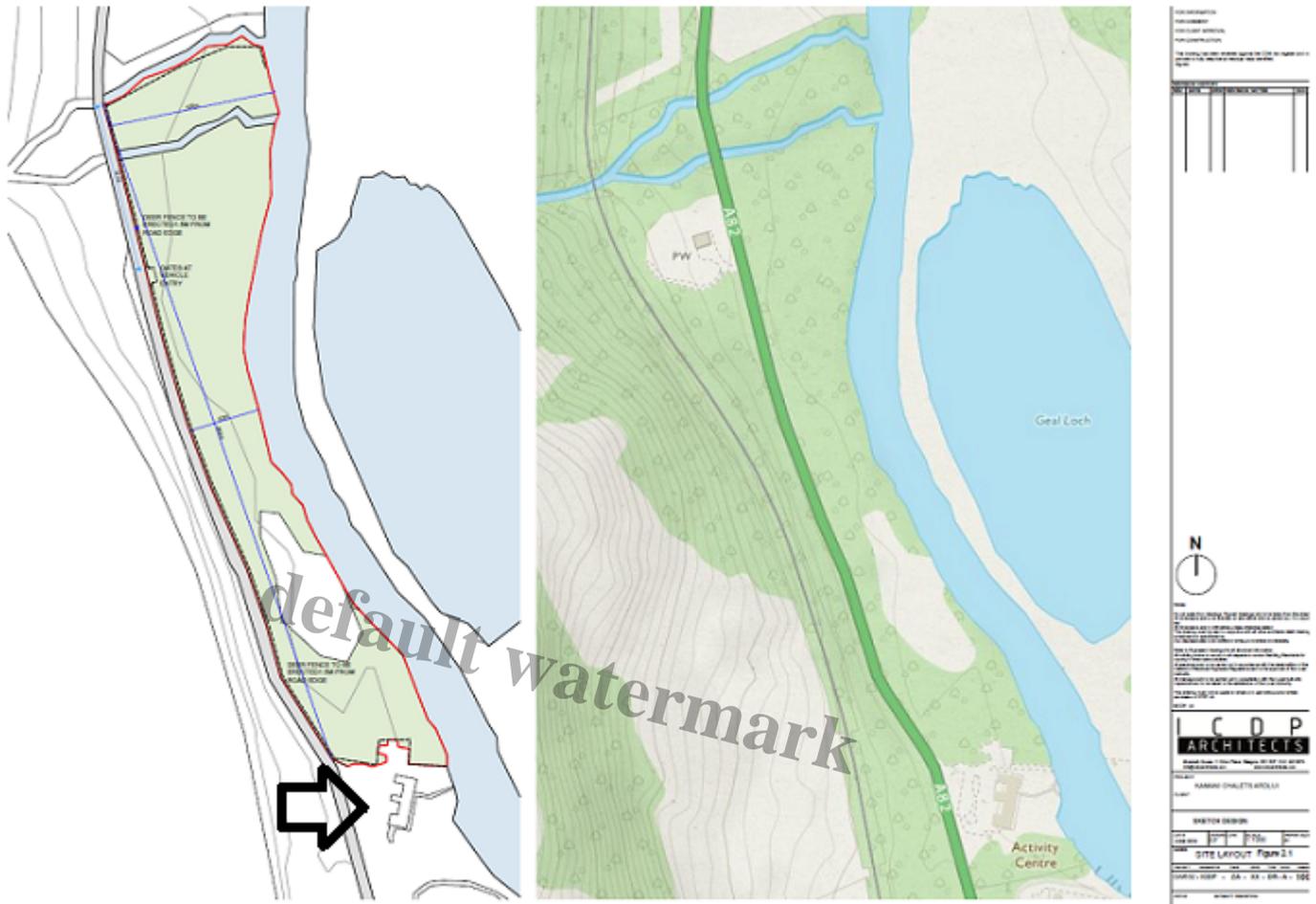
On Friday ([see here](#)), after a long campaign by local conservationists, the Cairngorms National Park Authority Board decided by a vote of 14-2 to reject the recommendations of their planning staff and refuse the application for housing at School Wood. They are to be congratulated. This was a major test for the protection of ancient woodland in the National Park and a small victory for democracy over a planning system designed to promote development.

The two Board Members who voted for the proposal to go ahead were John Kirk and Willie McKenna. Both are directly elected to the Board and represent the parts of the National Park where there is highest demand for affordable housing. That may explain their votes and I would defend their right to disagree. The state of democracy in the Cairngorms National Park, where the Board quite often changes staff recommendations and has split votes, is far healthier in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park where I cannot recall the last time Board Members disagreed either with staff or among themselves.

But it shouldn't be a choice between conservation and affordable housing. The CNPA is actually doing quite well at present in delivering what fits the official definition of affordable housing, unlike the LLTNPA which last year completely undermined its own policy on affordable housing at Luss ([see here](#)). At the meeting last Friday the CNPA approved applications for 22 affordable apartments in Kingussie and a further 10 affordable house as part of a development just north at Kinraig. At this rate, there is absolutely no need or justification for the enormous An Camus Mor development ([see here](#)) to go ahead and it, like School Wood, could be removed from the Local Development Plan

The underlying housing challenge in the Cairngorms National Park is to increase wage levels in the tourism industry and reduce the numbers of holiday homes that are vacant for much of the year.

New development proposed at Ardlui at the north end of Loch Lomond



Arrow points to former outdoor centre just north of Ardlui. Site boundary outlined in red. Credit LLTNPA planning portal)

Meantime, down in the Loch Lomond National Park a company want to build to build 33 chalets and a childrens playground just north of Ardlui. SSH Trading Ltd is based in Manchester and according to Companies House has been dormant up until now. It has submitted a formal request to the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority on whether an Environmental Impact Assessment is required as part of any planning application ([see here](#)). The whole of the 7.73 hectare site, which lies between the A82 and the River Falloch, was, until recently, covered with ancient woodland. The name of the landowner is not revealed.



Photo taken in torrential downpour 19th February 2020 from the entrance to the former outdoor centre at Ardlui

I had actually stopped off at the site in February to look at the fly tipping by the former Ardlui outdoor centre and noticed a large area of felled trees (just beyond the flooding). I then, mea culpa, completely forgot to investigate further until reminded about this by the Screening Report that has been submitted to the LLTNPA:

â??The majority of the Site has been felled. Related discussions with Scottish Forestry are ongoing.â??

And

â??Recent felling activity may have resulted in the loss of much of the woodland featureâ??

This appears code for saying that a large area of ancient woodland has been destroyed unlawfully prior to the screening opinion being submitted.



Incidentally, as the photo shows, a large part of the site floods and is totally unsuitable for any development.

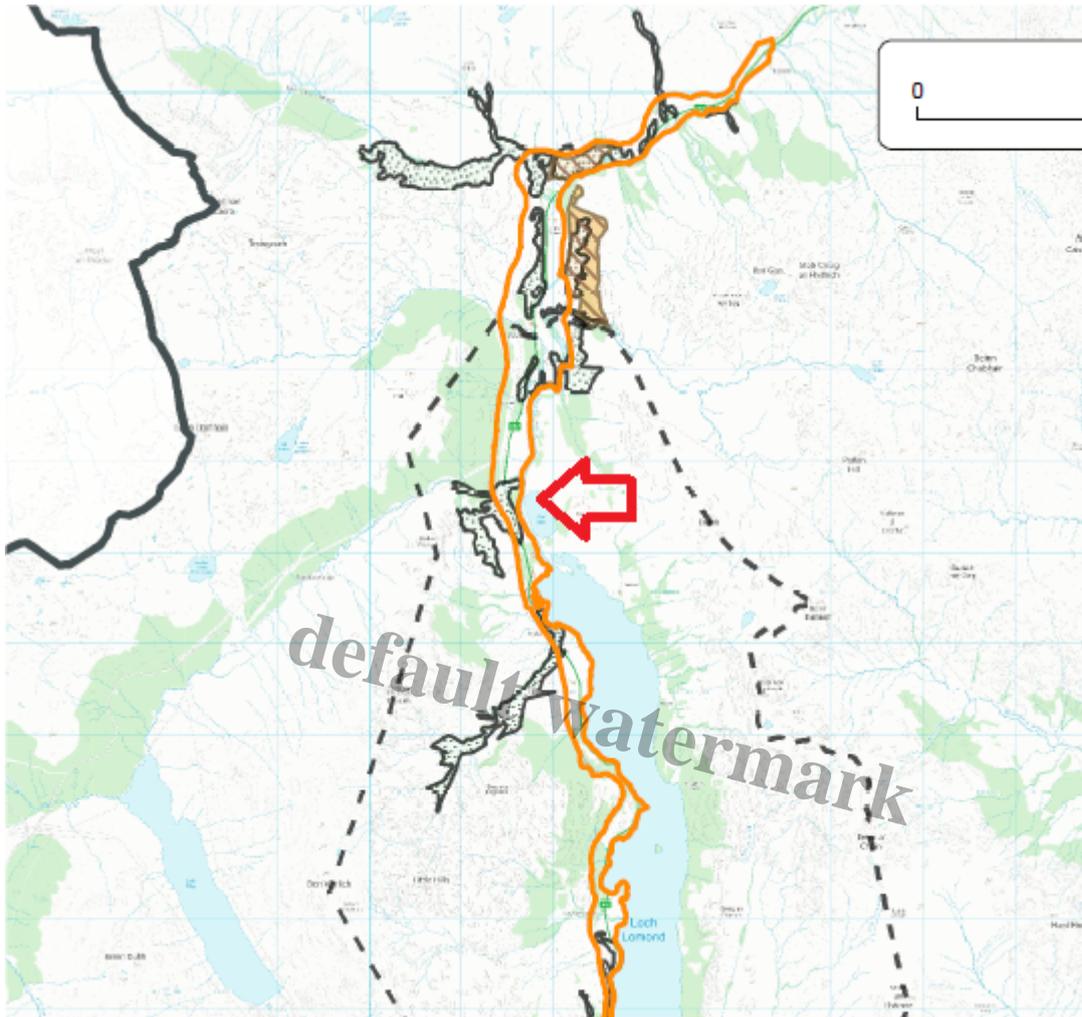
How the National Park Authority is even giving this screening opinion the light of day and why the destruction of the ancient woodland here has not been subject to any LLTNPA news release is beyond belief. Perhaps, having learned that the LLTNPA had made no fuss at Ardlui, this is what prompted Mouldsdale Properties to fell so many trees at Tarbet during lockdown ([see here](#))? It now appears that developers from all over the UK know the LLTNPA is easy game and will do nothing to defend the principles which led to the creation of the National Park.

This is a National Park that puts photos of abandoned tents and litter all over social media but when a large area of ancient woodland is destroyed, apparently to facilitate a development, does nothing.



Here are three simple reasons why the LLTNPA should tell these developers and their consultants where to go.

First, Ardlui is already blighted by the outdoor centre that has been empty since 2015. The LLTNPA needs to focus developers on using sites that have already been allocated or are derelict. Rather than destroy a greenfield sites on the south shore of Loch Lomond ([see here](#)) the Hunter Foundation could have used this site at Ardlui or the abandoned torpedo range at Arrochar to meet its aspirations for a "world class" leadership centre.



Extract from Conservation Designations Paper accompanying the report to Scottish Ministers on the camping byelaw consultation. The red arrow points to the site; the speckled brown marks areas on the Ancient Woodland Inventory and the orange line the boundary of the camping management zone.

Second, in the justification for the camping byelaws which the LLTNPA sent to the Scottish Government it included a map of all the ancient woodland sites it said needed protecting from campers. That included this site. Now I disagree it needed protecting from campers – almost no-one camped along this stretch of the River Falloch anyway – but having claimed this, if it even contemplates development in the same area it will lose its last shred of credibility. The National Park needs more areas for people to camp, not more chalet parks.

Third, this site is not in the Local Development Plan and contravenes all the Park's policies on development in rural areas (I am not even going to bother spelling them out). That should be enough.

It's time the LLTNPA told developers wishing to develop sites of this where to go. Ardlui is as much a test for the LLTNPA as School Wood was for the CNPA. I am not optimistic and predict yet another battle.

Category

1. Cairngorms
2. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. ancient woodland
2. Camping bye laws
3. CNPA
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6. planning

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