

The planning application for a tap at Rowardennan

Description

The planning system in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park is so bad that normally it can be difficult to laugh. But regular readers might just enjoy this tale of an application to install a glorified tap at the back of the toilet block at Rowardennan.....



The front of the toilet block January 2015 before the LLTNPA let it fall into disrepair

The story, I believe, begins in 2018 when the Cabinet Secretary for the Environment, Roseanna Cunningham, launched the first Scottish Water public water refill point in Scotland ([see here](#)), a few months after a similar initiative to create refill points in every town in England ([see here](#)). The idea, to reduce consumption of plastic bottled water, was a good one and seems in this case to have flowed from the civil servants in England to the civil servants in Scotland. But I thought at the time it was a perfect example one hand of government paying no attention to what the other hand was doing: while public water re-fill stations were opening, public toilets with a ready supply of drinking water were being closed all over Scotland (185 between 2013-19 ([see here](#))). Little did I imagine, however, that the

Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA) would demonstrate a perfect example of this folly.

In December Scottish Water submitted a Planning Application ([see here](#)) for a tap, dressed up in its logo, by the junction of the West Highland Way and the main tourist path up Ben Lomond. This is just at the back of the toilet block at Rowardennan, which has been closed for most of the last 18 months and is gradually falling into a state of dilapidation ([see here](#)). The proposed tap almost certainly draws off the water supply to the toilets but unlocking them and allowing people to use the facilities would cost the LLTNPA money. Far better to get Scottish Water to take over responsibility for the costs of providing a drink and snaffle some planning fees to boot!

You might well ask why a planning application would be needed for a glorified tap but Rowardennan is at the heart of the National Park, a perfect location for a bit of corporate branding, and the tap is particularly garish. The attention to detail in the Planning Report is considerable:

“The water bottle refill station will be a round stainless steel structure 1.626m in height and 0.254m in diameter and it will appear prominent in its selected position due to its blue colour (which is the corporate colour of Scottish Water). Whilst the water refill station will be identifiable as a water refill station due to its corporate branding, it will have a visual impact on the immediate area.....Overarching Policy 1 requires development to be sympathetic to local built forms and materials

..... In terms of Overarching Policy 1, the immediate area is forestry with public footpaths and a Public Toilet building to the east of an adjacent car park. There are currently way markers providing direction to Ben Lomond and the West Highland Way, it is important that the structure harmonises with these existing items so that it does not have a significant detrimental visual impact on the existing arrangement. Despite the vibrant colour of the proposed refill station it is not considered that the landscape would be unduly impacted by the refill station’s installation due to the presence of the way markers.

The logic, I am afraid, escapes me. How does a Scottish Water Re-fill Station harmonise with a West Highland Way sign? It goes on to provide a classic example of the LLTNPA using one “development”, however small, to justify another.....

“Further it is considered that the positioning of a drinking water facility at the beginning of two very popular walking routes would be welcomed.”

Open and functioning toilets even more so!

“Overarching Policy 2 requires development to protect and enhance the character and setting of the historic environment; considering the immediate vicinity and landscape within which the refill station is being proposed to be installed, it is not considered to negatively impact on the setting of the landscape. The presence of the existing way markers and the appropriateness of having a drinking water refill station are considered to be acceptable at this location.”

Nowhere among all the convoluted parkspeak considering the application, which led to it being approved, is there any reference to the abundant clean water supply on the other side of the locked toilet block doors.

A trivial example, but also a perfect illustration of what is wrong with the planning system in the National Park. Typically each case is considered by the planners in isolation, without any consideration of whether there might be better alternatives or working with colleagues, for example in the estates department, to find solutions. Scottish Government Planning Guidance puts lots of emphasis on the importance of “place” but this is constantly undermined by applications which take no account of this. It was exactly the same with the Hunter Foundation planning application for a Global Leadership Centre on the shores by Ross Priory ([see here](#)). In that case the Board and senior management of the LLTNPA proved incapable of envisaging and advocating alternative solutions that would benefit everyone, such as directing the Sir Tom Hunter to one of the derelict sites or abandoned buildings in the National Park rather than a prime bit of loch shore.

The problem is not the fault of front-line staff, they have little choice how the system operates and are constantly forced into convoluted arguments to justify “developments”. The problem is a lack of leadership and vision. Loch Lomond may be polluted and suffering from algal blooms, but hey ho the LLTNPA can tell the Cabinet Secretary for the Environment that people can now re-fill their bottles with H₂O courtesy of Scottish Water.

Category

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Tags

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