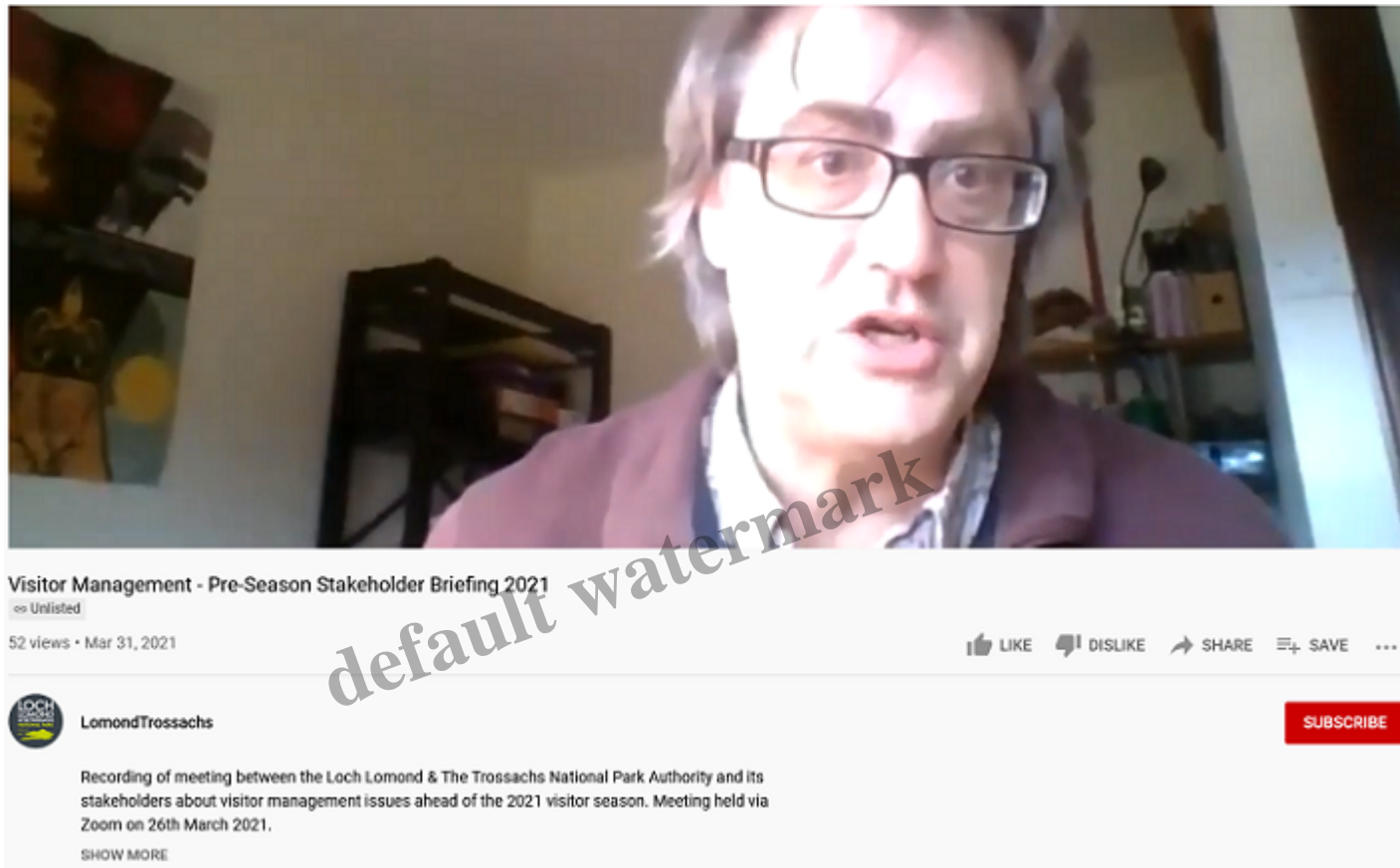


The Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority's plans for visitors

Description



Martin Earl, locally elected Board Member for the Trossachs, chairing the stakeholder meeting. He did so very competently, so why won't Board Convener James Stuart allow recordings of Board Meetings to be made public?

After its Board Meeting, which approved a large increase of expenditure on visitor management ([see here](#)), the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority held a pre-season Stakeholder Briefing Session on 26th March to tell people about their plans *"to manage visitor pressures when lockdown restrictions begin to ease"*. Too late for genuine consultation, it appears that attendance was not that good because, a few days later, the LLTNPA distributed a zoom recording of the proceedings ([see here](#)).

This is particularly welcome because it shows up the continued refusal of the LLTNPA to publish recordings of its Board and Committee meetings, unlike more democratic institutions, as both hypocritical and unjustified.

The LLTNPA's attitudes towards visitors

The stakeholder meeting recording may disappear now the link is public but, if not, its worth watching Simon Jones, the Director of Conservation, articulating the LLTNPA's corporate approach to managing informal camping (at 1 hr 12 mins). First he talks about "finding a way to allow people to enjoy the Park". The LLTNPA operate as if neither access rights nor their statutory duty to promote public enjoyment of the countryside had ever existed. Second he refers to the problems caused by private campsites not opening last year and expresses the hope they may do so this summer. No explanation is given of what the LLTNPA has done about this in light of their statutory duty. Where essential facilities to support this are missing, the National Park Authority's job should be to put in place replacements and find solutions but instead, they "hope". Third, a telling phrase, "*where wild camping is causing irresponsible behaviour*".

This is nonsensical. Camping doesn't cause behaviour, imagine anyone saying "where staying in a B and B is causing irresponsible behaviour". The problem, however, is that LLTNPA staff act as if it is true and that wild camping somehow causes otherwise responsible citizens to suddenly become irresponsible. Camping in itself then becomes, per se, a problem. All of this betrays a wider mindset in which the LLTNPA starting point for visitor management is that people visiting the countryside are perceived as a problem before anything else.

Report visitors, don't help them!

A "pack" for stakeholders was distributed after the meeting. It consisted of a brief slide show and a revealing write up of the Question and Answer half of the meeting ([see here](#)).

The six slides in the pack consist of: a title page; a description of what the National Park Safe Recovery Group does (co-ordinating visitor management between public authorities); a summary of actions being taken at national level; two maps (see first link above); and a final slide entitled "Who do I contact about visitor pressures?":

Details of how to report specific activities or make complaints are provided below:

Criminal, antisocial or dangerous behaviour – Police Scotland 101 or in an emergency dial 999

- when a life is in danger, a crime is in progress or a suspect is nearby. Please do report these behaviours and incidents to Police Scotland so that they can be recorded.

Litter and flytipping – Litter and flytipping (more than a single bin bag) on public land should be reported to the relevant Local Authority using the following links:

- ▶ [West Dunbartonshire Council](#)
- ▶ [Argyll and Bute Council](#)
- ▶ [Stirling Council](#)
- ▶ [Perth and Kinross Council](#)

If you are not sure if the area is public land please report flytipping to Dumb Dumpers at:

[Dumb Dumpers - Report flytipping](#) | [Zero Waste Scotland](#)

Irresponsible or dangerous parking – This should be reported to the relevant local authority or if the parking is dangerous and causing an obstruction to Police Scotland on 101.

Irresponsible camping/toileting and access issues – National Park Authority 01389 722600 or feedback@lochlomond-trossachs.org

Dangerous or wild fires – Scottish Fire and Rescue dial 999

The information says

nothing about how a local resident might ask for better facilities in their area, only how to complain about visitors. In doing so the LLTNPA is fostering division, which will then inevitably results in more calls for visitors to be kept out, which then justifies the LLTNPA investing even more money in enforcement.....

Policing visitors

Asked “*Is it feasible that people will stick to the government guidelines and stay within their local area until the 26th April*” Gordon Watson responded:

“that the role of the National Park is eyes and ears and to report anyone that is obviously out with the local area and have breached travel. This will be shared with Police colleagues. Restrictions will also be communicated in our camping booking system and various channels as required.”

The message is that if you live in the Glasgow conurbation but need to get out to the countryside for a walk ([see here](#)), the area of Scotland where you are most likely to be harassed is the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park. Instead of advocating the benefits of outdoor recreation, LLTNPA management are happy to accept it should be treated in the same way as all those indoor venues that will be allowed to open on 26th April and where the risks of spreading Covid-19 are far greater.

The LLTNPA didn't need to use its rangers like this – the briefing revealed that the LLTNPA is employing 45 this year, a record number – but have chosen to do so. Then, after 26th April, they intend to move them over to enforcing the camping byelaws. This is likely to result in a record number of fines being issued because the Park has made no provision to increase camping capacity. More “proof” that visitors are a problem, on top of all the fixed penalty notices issued at Balloch last year ([see here](#)).

Empty promises about improved transport infrastructure while making it harder to travel

The Stakeholder Briefing confirmed the LLTNPA is actively working to make it more difficult for people to travel to the National Park. They have been working with Councils, Stirling in particular, to create new clearways to make parking illegal. Without alternative parking provision – and none of the extra parking capacity being introduced this summer is the LLTNPA's initiative – this creates enforcement problems or shunts the parking issues elsewhere.

The problem was put in a nutshell by Sandy Fraser, owner of the Oak Tree Inn at Balmaha (who on his own initiative created extra parking in the village last year ([see here](#))).

“17. Sandy Fraser, Oak Tree Inn

Q: Would like to mention the C6 from Balmaha to Rowardennan. The harsh facts are that there is around 700 parking spaces less than there were 18 years ago and because it's now a Clearway cars can't stop in between Balmaha to Rowardennan. Sallochy car park is now closed. Is there some additional car parking at Rowardennan, how much and will Sallochy stay shut for the season?”

A: Kenny [Auld, Access Manager] commented that they are aware of the capacity issues, and we are actively looking when guidance is lifted at enhanced shuttle bus options and transport options along with FLS overflow car park, conscious of the sheer volumes of people that want to enjoy East Loch Lomond.

A: Gordon [Watson, Chief Executive] confirmed that Rowardennan is a priority in terms of looking at future capital investment and as mentioned there are parts of the nearby forest estate that can be used as overflow, however these will still not meet the demands. The Clearway is needed because of the need for access of emergency vehicles. Last year there was a major issue that there was a number of rescues were hampered so there is the need for access. Not sure where 700 spaces comes from. We certainly can't build more and more car parks so will need to look other transport options including water access.

The traffic problems on east Loch Lomond have been around for thirty years now and the solution, a shuttle bus service as you find in National Parks all over Europe ([see here](#)), obvious. What the LLTNPA were referring to by “enhanced shuttle bus options”, when none exists, is unclear. What is clear is that, even if Mr Watson is totally unaware of the history, he has done nothing to address the problems on his watch ([see here](#)). Indeed, he has made them worse, through reducing parking capacity and abolishing (without consulting his Board) the one mechanism which was available to address the issues, the east Loch Lomond visitor management group.

The public should take Mr Watson's claim, therefore that (we) “will need to look at other transport options including water access” with a large dose of salt. At the last Board Meeting, in response to similar issues being raised, Mr Watson stated “we are not a transport authority” clearly indicating he believes this is someone else's problem to sort out, despite the LLTNPA having helped make matters worse. Real National Parks, in other parts of the world, do take a lead on transport issues and the

LLTNPA has the statutory means to do so through the National Park Partnership Plan. It has failed to do so.

The LLTNPA's response to requests from the local community for better infrastructure

The Question and Answer session clearly revealed the need for better visitor infrastructure, but that while many local people and organisations understand this the LLTNPA is resistant to doing anything to improve the situation. Here are a few examples.

a) James Fraser, Friends of Loch Lomond & Sir Walter Scott Steamship Trust

Q: Has concerns around West Loch Lomond side and the A82 corridor regarding litter management , conscious that volunteers can't tackle that and there is a desire to experiment with litter bins.

A: Simon [Jones, Director of Conservation] explained that with regards to litter on West Loch Lomond there are some real issues. As well as being technical it's an incredibly challenging place due to a safety perspective. This has been flagged with relevant partner authorities and discussions are being held around the best way to tackle it. Litter messaging will also be a key part of our communications plan

Comment: excuse the pun, this is garbage. It should be simple matter to put litter bins into every layby and increase capacity in car parks. Why is this a technical and safety issue on west Loch Lomond when in the Cairngorms, for example, there are litter bins in almost every stopping off point and layby?

b) James Macintosh, Wits End

Q: James has a farm in Strathyre which is on the cycle path from Strathyre to Balquhiddier. There is a layby at their entrance which is always filled with litter and defecation and never seems to get picked up. As there are no public toilets in Strathyre people using the gateways where livestock are and farm yard area for toileting. Who is responsible for picking up litter from the farm yard and field gates?

A: Simon [Jone] explained that NFUS or SLE states the landowner has responsibility for most of these things which is the way things currently stand. As we touched on earlier the easiest thing is to take off line and have discussions with Nik Tuner (sic) who works on our litter prevention and to have a discussion with ourselves and local authorities on how we can look at specific site based issues.

Comment: actually, the layby on the public road is the responsibility of our public authorities and a litter bin there, along with a mobile toilet, could probably solve almost all of Mr Macintosh's issues. Although it has £965k unspent this year, instead of promising immediate action the LLTNPA offers "a discussion."

c) Marilyn Moore, Callander Community Development Trust

Q: There is no campervan space in the town, however Station Road car park is underused and could take quite a lot of motorhomes with relatively minimal spend. Currently it is in the Callander Parking Management Plan which hasn't yet started, is it possible to extract motorhome parking from that Parking Management Plan so that we can accelerate the facilities needed? This would help Callander

businesses as well because if we could accommodate more motorhomes within the town then more local business are likely to be used stimulating economic growth.”

A: Bruce Reekie at Stirling Council will pick this discussion up with colleagues in the parking service.

Comment: contrary to the constant propaganda in the media that campervans are a problem, many local people see the opportunities and have ideas for practical solutions. Instead of “we will sort this out”, however, the discussion will be “picked up”. This provides no confidence that anything will happen. It would be nice to be proved wrong.

d) Kelly Clapperton-Bates, Strathfillan Community Development Trust

Q: With regards to the additional staffing, will rangers just be going to key areas or across the National Park? Strathfillan CDT are in the process of looking at the Better Places fund with a view to employing two local rangers in the Tyndrum and Crianlarich areas because they felt there was no ranger support at all last year in their area. Will the NP be willing to work in partnership with them in terms of coordination, some help with recruitment and training for rangers – what support will the National Park give individual communities who are looking to help themselves?

A: Simon explained that even with one of the biggest ranger services in the UK as well as all the partner staff it's a big place to cover and staff have to concentrate on the absolute busiest places, and that has been Camping Management Zones. There have been parts of the park that don't get as much ranger presence as the busiest areas do but that doesn't mean that patrols don't pass through the area. The Park Authority have made additional resources available to the ranger managers this year to try and recruit for additional capacity for places like Breadalbane, Cowal, Killin etc. so there will be some additional roving capacity. There's been a bit of a rush in Scotland for new rangers as it's quite a busy market place. We are clearly looking for people with good visitor experience.

Comment: the Scottish Government should be asking why, with the biggest ranger workforce in Scotland, a local community in the National Park – one which was supposed to benefit from the goldmine – is being left to raise money to recruit their own. (And no response is recorded about whether the LLTNPA is willing to help train those rangers if the CDT is successful). There should, however, be enough Ranger capacity in the National Park to cover all areas. The problem is the Ranger workforce is still wasting lots of time checking of whether campers have permits and filling in forms about this, an enforcement bureaucracy that has changed nothing.

e) Fergus Duncanson, RYA [Royal Yachting Association] Scotland

Q: Should anticipate an upsurge on water activity, all good and healthy although this may cause problems with regards to safety on Loch Lomond and Loch Earn but also aspects of access as some craft need to be able to unload near the waterside. Hoping that clearways and parking are taken into account.....”.

A: Kenny [Auld] fully agrees that there are opportunities but considerations around vehicle access and safety behaviours will be taken into account and will make sure that we talk to RYA and the Scottish Canoe Association.

Comment: shouldn't considerations about access points, for walkers, watersports or people simply

wanting to stop and enjoy the scenery have been planned for BEFORE any new clearway was even considered?

Did anything positive come out of the Briefing Session?

Despite these continued failures, a consequence of a general perception that visitors are a problem and an unwillingness to invest in the infrastructure necessary to support them (and the local economy), the session did reveal a couple of signs of possible change.

First, it appears the Covid crisis has forced various public authorities within the National Park to start working together after years in which their primary concern has been to shunt (budget) responsibility onto someone else. There were representatives from Councils, the Police and Forestry and Land Scotland present, some of whom were clearly enjoying the opportunity to work with others. (The failures in co-operation lie not with front-line staff but senior managers and above them Board Members and Councillors).

Second, there was some acknowledgement of the need to develop local area based plans through local forums. That could provide a mechanism for people to work together longer term and to involve both local people and recreational organisations.

No-one should get too optimistic, there is a long way to go for the LLTNPA even to get to the position it was eight years ago. The Five Lochs Visitor Management Plan ([see here](#)), a plan for infrastructure investment, was abandoned in favour of the camping byelaws and an enforcement approach. There have been occasional signs of change since, but all have petered out through lack of leadership and resources. This will only really change when the LLTNPA commits to producing transparent costed plans for improvements in visitor infrastructure across the National Park, developed in partnership with public authorities, recreation organisations and local people.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. camping
2. Camping bye laws
3. LLTNPA
4. Scottish Government
5. Tourism
6. visitor management

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