

Charging for access at Arrochar – Argyll and Bute Council’s grubby deal

Description

The Herald yesterday revealed that Argyll and Bute Council have had an offer to buy the car park at the foot of the Cobbler accepted. The sum has not yet been disclosed. Unfortunately what should have been good news, bringing a piece of private land into public ownership for the benefit of the public, is anything but.

Argyll and Bute had been leasing the car park and had used their lease to extract money from visitors, both in the form of charges ([see here](#)) – £9 for many to walk up the Cobbler – and through the imposition of an extraordinary number of fines ([see here](#)). Now they are buying it, the situation may get even worse.

The Herald story was based on a report which is to be considered by the Helensburgh and Lomond Committee of the Council, which covers the Arrochar area, on Thursday ([see here](#)). The report is from the Commercial Services section of Argyll and Bute Council and is called “property updates”. It says this about the Cobbler car park and the “tourist” car park at the head of Loch Long:

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Glen Loin car parks, Arrochar

- 4.17 The council leased 2 areas of ground in Arrochar which were developed as car parks in 1995. The leases were due to end in 2020 but continued on a short term basis while discussions were ongoing with the owners. The council was keen to continue to operate the car parks as they provide a valuable public service however this does require to be based on terms which reflect the costs and benefits of operating the service.
- 4.18 Luss Estates marketed the car park which they own with a closing date set for 12th February 2021. However they subsequently removed the car park from the market having decided to operate it themselves and have been working with the council to ensure a smooth transition of the service.
- 4.19 Clydebank Developments, who own the majority of the other car park in Arrochar marketed it for sale with a closing date of 30th April 2021. The Estates team submitted an offer on behalf of the council which has been accepted in principle. Accordingly Legal Services have been instructed to conclude the acquisition which will allow the service to continue to operate.

The car parks, as managed by Argyll and Bute Council, have NOT operated “a *valuable public service*” in the sense that they have been of any benefit to the public. Argyll and Bute offered no facilities for visitors using the car parks and this summer the local community were forced to step in and provide public toilets at the two of them with financial support from NatureScot ([see here](#)). Nor do Argyll and Bute appear to have used any of the income to pay for the continuing problem of marine litter at the head of Loch Long:



Marine litter February 2020 with the car park owned by Luss Estates visible on left. Photo credit local resident.

But the two car parks have indisputably been very valuable to the Council as a source of revenue. That is why while flogging off other assets, Argyll and Bute wants to acquire this one:

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Policy – None.
- 5.2 Financial – Continue to pursue sale, lease or development of properties shall generate a financial income for the council.
- 5.3 Legal – The terms and conditions of any property transactions are intended to be delegated to the Executive Director with responsibility for Legal Services.
- 5.4 HR – None
- 5.5 Fairer Scotland Duty
- 5.6 Equalities – Individual projects will be assessed for equalities issues.
- 5.7 Socio economic Duty – None
- 5.8 Islands – Projects which impact on island communities will be individually assessed for impacts.

Section 5.2 of the report confirms the Council’s only interest is income and that it has failed to consider its socio-economic duty – the implications for tourism – or equalities – access rights are supposed to be for all and not just those who can afford to pay the Council’s access tax.

Luss Estates’ decision not to renew the lease for the “tourist” car park at the head of Loch Long and to manage that itself will result in a significant loss of income to the council and already appears to have resulted in a significant drop in fines:

H&L Area Scorecard FQ1 2021/22

Performance element	Status	Performance Trend	Target FQ4	Actual FQ4	Target FQ1	Actual FQ1	Owner	Comments
Corporate Outcome No.2 - People live in safer and stronger communities								
H&L - Number of Parking Penalty Notices Issued (Streetscene H&L)		↑	No Target	411	No Target	1,611	Hugh O'Neill	FQ1 2021/22 H&L Glen Loin 1 Car Park now no longer leased by ABC. Luss village lack of signs and lines causing visitors to park in area by mistake. Lomondside very busy. FQ4 2020/21 H&L Visitors receiving PCNs despite Covid restrictions.

Extract from Area Scorecard report to Helensburgh and Lomond Committee on Thursday. Last year in the second quarter £2301 was collected from the Luss, Duck Bay and Arrochar car parks and the remark about the loss of the car park could explain why fines have dropped by 25%.

Having decided not to sell the car park at the head of Loch Long and manage it itself, one hopes that

Luss Estates is going to be more public spirited than Argyll and Bute Council and not use it as a milch cow for the estate. One hopes too they will not repeat the mistakes they have made at Luss, where their outsourcing of the management of the car parks to Parking Eye has alienated many visitors (as you can see from the comments on my post on parking fines [see here](#)).

Given that the services of Parking Eye were dispensed of by the Lake District National Park Authority back in 2012, after concerns about how it was operating ([see here](#)), one would have hoped that the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA) might have warned Luss Estates about the risks. But the LLTNPA appear too busy arranging with Parking Eye themselves to run an Automated Number Plate Recognition system at their own car parks to have noticed!

There is sadly no evidence that the LLTNPA have taken any interest in the future of the car parks at Loch Long whether to benefit the local community (its sustainable development duty), promote outdoor recreation (fair charges with facilities for visitors) or protect the natural environment (help clear up marine litter). There was no mention either of what has been happening in any of the papers for the Board Meeting that took place on Monday. Whenever leadership might make a difference, the National Park Authority appears to be absent.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. access rights
2. LLTNPA
3. natural environment
4. outdoor recreation
5. visitor management

Date Created

September 15, 2021

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