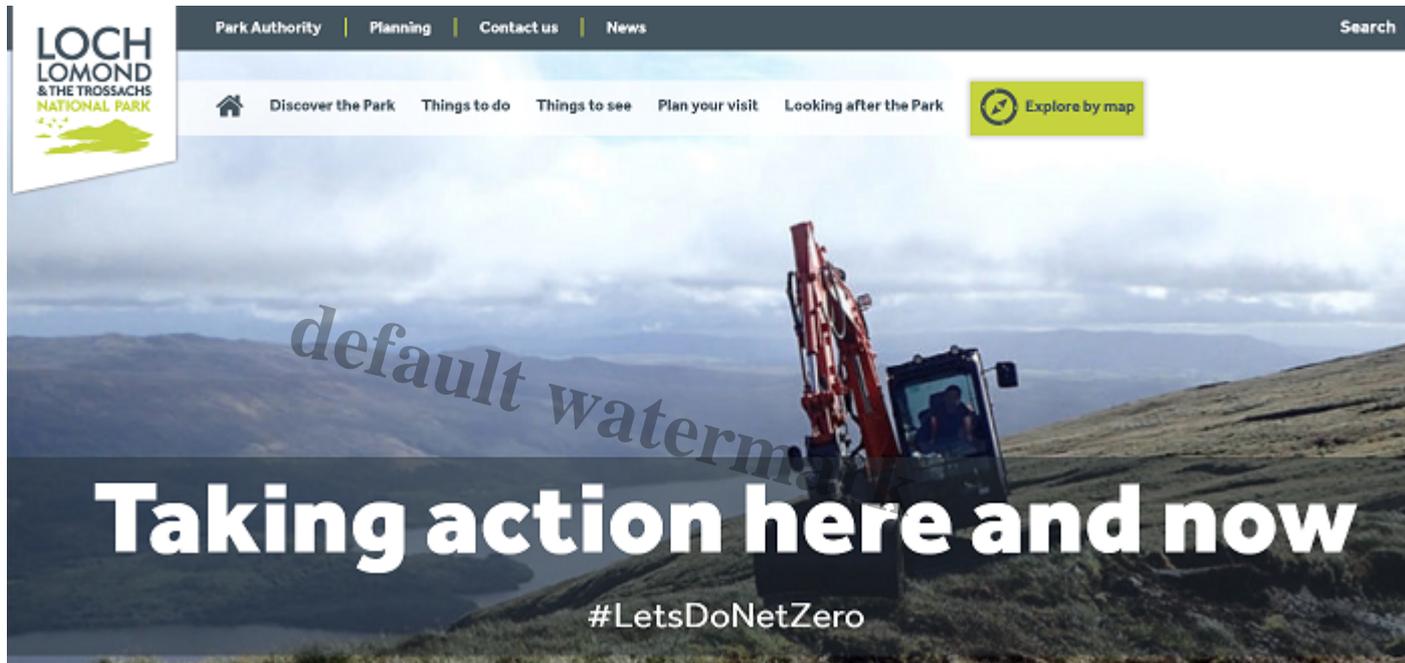


The leadership of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority and their response to the climate emergency

Description



Are photos of diggers in the uplands really the best way of signalling a commitment to tackle climate change?

The Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA) website has had a makeover. If you click on their site address <https://www.lochlomond-trossachs.org/> you are greeted by a photo of a digger in the uplands, the hashtag slogan "Let's do net zero" and a page of links to information on various aspects of the "climate emergency and nature crisis". Some of the content was also included in the LLTNPA's latest "Update to Stakeholders" which is all about the climate emergency and was issued on 12th November, the last day of COP-26 in Glasgow. This post takes a critical look at the LLTNPA's claims to be "Taking action here and now" and the interests at stake.

The Climate Emergency according to the LLTNPA

The Climate Emergency page ([see here](#)) starts as follows:

The National Park has evolved over many thousands of years, creating a landscape that's alive: home to wildlife, plants and people, and loved by many more. However, this precious place is at threat from one of the defining challenges of our time: the global climate emergency. The impacts of climate change are already being felt across the National Park. Whilst we have very real challenges to overcome, tackling the climate emergency is possible. But we all must act now.

Really? Does the LLTNPA know of anywhere on earth that hasn't evolved over many thousands of years? Does the LLTNPA know of any landscape on earth that isn't alive?

Well there may be some but even the site of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor is now a wildlife reserve. However, come to think of it, if I was forced to choose between which term best described the landscape of the National Park, 'alive' or 'dead', I would choose the latter. The landscape has been trashed through industrial forestry, overgrazing by sheep and deer and inappropriate developments, from badly designed hydro schemes to Transport Scotland's current proposals to upgrade the A82, while meantime the rural depopulation continues with local people priced out of the market by second homes!..

Then there is the staggering claim that 'the impacts of climate change are already being felt across the National Park'. The first COP summit, held because of scientific concerns about the impact of climate change, took place in 1995 in Berlin. But to admit that the effects of climate change were being documented before the LLTNPA existed would be to admit that it has failed to take any meaningful action since it was created in 2002.

The LLTNPA is a stronger ground when it states the impacts of global warming are increasing and, having blogged extensively about landslips in the National Park, it is good to see the LLTNPA acknowledge their impact:

The growing impacts of the climate emergency have been all too real to those living, working and visiting the National Park. There have been more frequent flooding and landslips, seriously damaging people's homes, communities and businesses. Our warmer and wetter climate also threatens nature, where ecosystems, once stable and able to support many species, are struggling to adapt to these quickly snowballing changes. It's clear that doing nothing is not an option: we must act now.



Another digger, this one definitely needed!

But despite the numerous landslips in the National Park ([see here](#) for example) the LTTNPA Board has still failed to discuss what needs to be done about them, and in the case of the Rest and Be Thankful (photo above) has in 15 years never criticised the stupidity of allowing grazing to continue on the disintegrating slopes above the A82 ([see here](#)).

The LTTNPA's statement that ecosystems were "once stable and able to support many species" is just wrong. Our ecosystems have been in a constant state of flux since the last ice age, partly due to variations in climate but also because of the way landowners have used the land since people were cleared from it: hunting reserves, sheep ranching, industrial forestry etc. It is those land-uses, rather than climate change, which account for the lack of biodiversity in the National Park.



As a place, the National Park is ideally suited to tackle the climate emergency at landscape scale. With partners, we have delivered actions for a number of years which place [nature-based solutions](#) at the core of tackling climate emergency, such as peatland restoration works to sink carbon or supporting riparian habitat restoration to improve resilience to flooding. Not only does this 'net zero with nature' approach strengthen the National Park's resilience to climate change, it also delivers tangible benefits to nature and helps to divert the other ecological emergency we are facing: the nature crisis.

Another digger!

As a place is meaningless parkspeak. What reasonably large area, Glasgow, Argyll and Bute, Scotland, wouldn't be ideally suited to tackle the climate emergency at the landscape scale?

Still, setting aside the spin, the poor science and the ignorance of history, one could argue it is a step forward that the LLTNPA are now acknowledging so publicly the climate emergency and nature crisis.

What about the action?

As a public body, we here at the National Park Authority have a moral and statutory obligation to play our part in helping Scotland achieve its ambitious plans. We believe we must lead by example in tackling the climate emergency and that's why we are weaving a net zero approach across the fabric of our entire organisation. This is our Mission Zero: our plan for transforming how our organisation operates and invests, with the ambition to be a net zero emitting organisation by 2030.

The first two lines are good but the LLTNPA then commit to almost nothing. Their grand plan, branded 'our mission zero' ([see here](#)), is to go carbon neutral in their own operations by 2030 (while excluding any consideration of the emissions which result from staff getting to work or working from home). After screeds of guff, the actions required to achieve this limited carbon neutrality are set out their Mission Zero route map:

6.7 Proposed timeline for emissions reduction

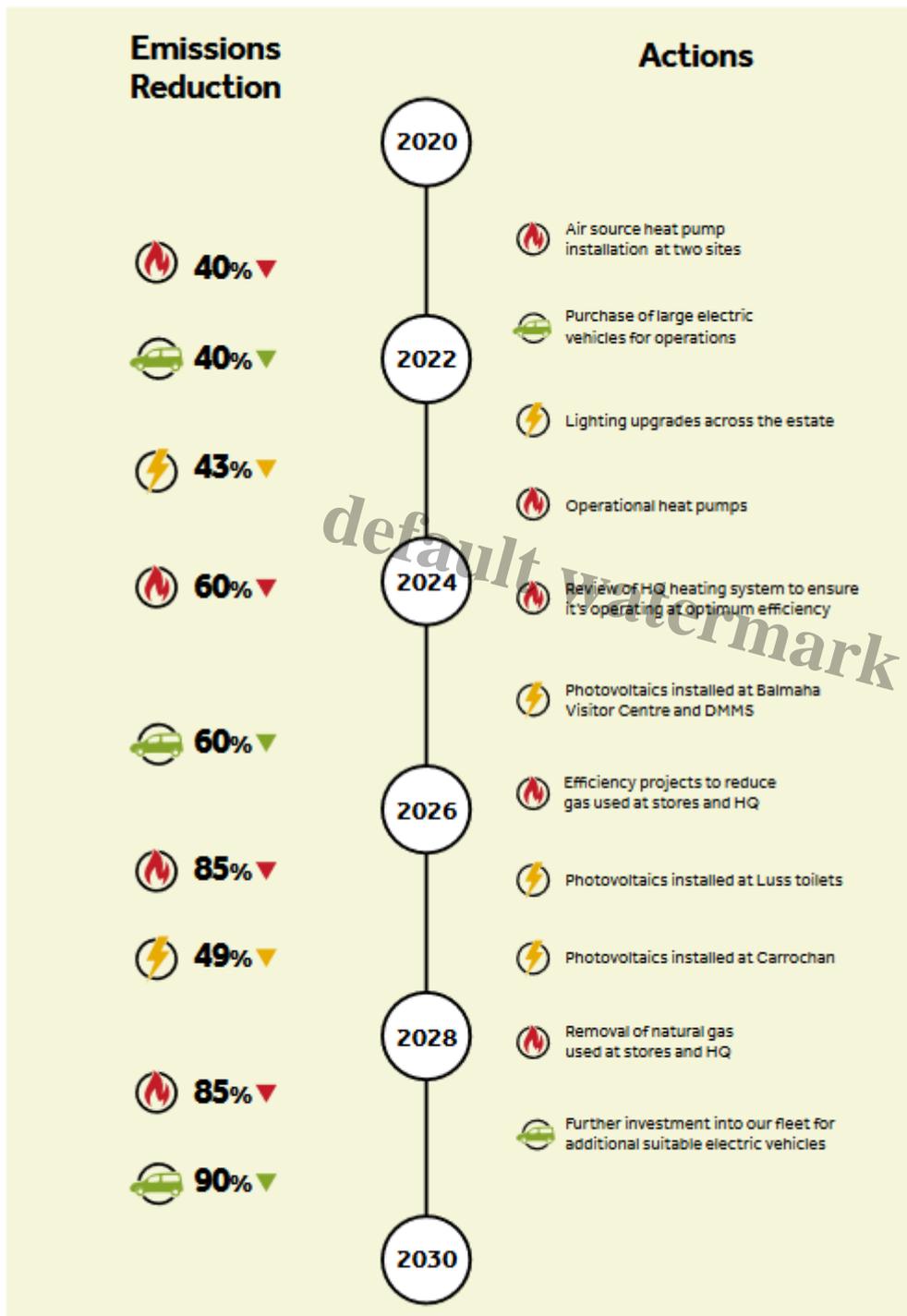


Figure 5 is a visual representation of the proposed timeline for emissions reduction (subject to change)

This can be summarised as change the light bulbs, install heat pumps and photovoltaic panels and use electric cars. All this could be done in the next two years, given the will and if those responsible acted as if there was an emergency. After lots of blah, blah, blah the actions are thinly spread.

The timing of these investments will, however, have been determined by likely future allocations of capital expenditure from the Scottish Government. It appears that the LLTNPA has agreed with officials

to spend these on going carbon neutral. Whether the money might be spent elsewhere for greater impact does not appear to have been considered. But as long as current spending limits and the pitiful levels of public investment apply, I would expect the LLTNPA to have less money to invest in carbon friendly activities like outdoor recreation over the next 8 years.

In fact, the best way now of understanding what the LLTNPA does and doesn't do (or says and doesn't say) is to follow the Scottish Government funding. For example, the LLTNPA is promoting peatland restoration (hence all the photos of diggers), because that is funded through the Scottish Government, but meantime failing to exercise its moral and statutory obligation to speak out about issues like industrial forestry and overgrazing which are bad for nature and bad for carbon.

By contrast ([see here](#)) at least the Cairngorms National Park in their new draft Partnership Plan is prepared to consider carbon emissions across the National Park as a whole and, however weak their targets, and does have half a plan. The new Minister for National Parks, Lorna Slater, really does need to get a grip of the LLTNPA.

Inspired leadership

At the bottom of the newsletter to stakeholders ([see here](#)) there is an article about how the Convener of the LLTNPA, James Stuart, brokered a joint statement on the role of protected areas in combating climate change that was launched at the COP summit day on youth and public empowerment:

Protected areas around the world join forces to take climate action



The organisations in charge of some of the largest areas of protected landscapes and marine environments across the world have come together for the first time to urge world leaders to support their work at the vanguard of the fight against climate change and biodiversity loss. The joint statement was launched last week at COP26 by our Convenor James Stuart on behalf of UK National Parks and signed by National Park Youth Committee member Catriona Manders on behalf of the next generation.

Orchestrated by James and the National Park on behalf of National Parks UK, the statement has been signed by, amongst others, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)/ World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), EUROPARC, Parks Canada, the United States National Park Service and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. The statement has been welcomed and endorsed by UK, Scottish and Welsh Governments.

It may be the first time organisations managing protected areas have called on world leaders to support their work and combat BOTH climate change and biodiversity loss, but the International Union for the Conservation of Nature has been doing work on climate change and National Parks for quite some time ([see here](#)). For example “Natural Solutions: protected areas helping people to cope with climate change” was published back in 2010. But when it comes to spin and self-promotion, people will claim

anything.



Catriona Manders, the young person photographed alongside James Stuart, spoke at the youth day at COP ([see here](#) at 40 mins) and said very little about the bullet point "Board Representation". I was not surprised as I cannot recall a young person attending the Board since early 2019, despite James Stuart staking his reputation then on meaningful youth involvement.

Unfortunately, there is no transparency about who is on the youth committee, how often it meets and what it discusses ([see here](#)). I had assumed, maybe wrongly, that after the young people who were involved two and a half years ago had identified the lack of public transport as their number one priority, the LLTNPA had taken fright and shelved the committee. The LLTNPA website claims, however, it meets four times a year.

Catriona Manders also wrote a blog for the National Park ([see here](#)) in which she warned against tokenism:

That's why youth voice groups are so important, especially in places like National Parks – because it does affect us and it affects the places we live in and care about. In a survey recently, we, as the youth committee, identified climate change as the key priority for young people in the National Park – and now, it's our role to try to act upon that in everything we do.

Young people deserve to be listened to in every room. We aren't tokens or symbols of the future, we're just slightly less aged adults and it would be great to be treated as such more often. When you look around at 'youth engagement' programmes, it often becomes hard to draw the line between meaningful conversation and tokenistic consultation.

Perhaps the LLTNPA could now come clean about whether they have been putting as much effort into responding to what young people have been saying as arranging high profile photo opportunities for their convener?

James Stuart is also a director of National Parks UK Ltd which is currently being liquidated ([see here](#)) and chair of National Parks UK. He used that organisation to orchestrate the agreement. It issued a considerably longer news release ([see here](#)) than the IUCN and contains some additional information which should be of public interest:

â??In October this year, National Parks UK announced its unique Revere nature restoration facility in collaboration with global impact firm Palladium. Through Revere, businesses and investors can fund Nature-based Solutions (NbS) in UK National Parks and support land managers to develop nature restoration models that can generate revenue through sale of ecosystem services. Revere aims to leverage Â£240million of private finance for nature recovery projects by 2030.â?•

Stuart commented: â??Revere is a good example of the sort of new thinking that can be created in one country and shared with other protected landscapes worldwide. In the UK we see the role of National Parks as innovation engines for green recovery. We can trial new approaches at a scale that makes an immediate impact and because we already have the management structures in place, we can do this rapidly to prove concepts that can then be used in other landscapes either in the UK or around the world.â?•

James Stuart appears to want to increase the involvement of private finance in our National Parks, through â??nature based solutionsâ?•, and then offer those solutions to the rest of world. Indeed, he has been working on this for some time through his business, One Planet Consulting ([see here](#)), based down in Darlington. Whatever the other reasons for being there, James Stuartâ??s attendance at COP will have also presented a business opportunity. How he managed the potential conflicts of interest is unclear. But it seems to me that given his business interests and given that he has apparently moved to Darlington, the right thing for him to do would be to resign from the LLTNPA Board and National Park UK.

As for the protected areas statement itself ([see here](#)), the founding signatories are predominantly from the richer English speaking world and exclude most of the poorer countries that will be most affected by climate change. Despite the delegations from indigenous peoples to the COP summit and despite the IUCNâ??s recognition in 2019 that 37% of the carbon in protected areas across the world are on indigenous peopleâ??s lands ([see here](#)), none appear to have signed up. While the statement includes a reference to indigenous peoples, perhaps those at the summit werenâ??t asked? Or maybe they objected to the content ([see here](#) for an indigenous critique of National Parks)?

Whatever the explanation, I suspect that the top down â??western leadershipâ?• and lack of engagement, exacerbated no doubt by the wish for a photo opportunity at COP, may sadly rebound on the IUCN.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. climate change
2. conservation
3. Deer
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