

The outcome of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park local member elections

Description



New Board members announced following National Park elections

Heather Reid, Scottish Government nominated Board Member with David Mackie, David Fettes, Richard Johnson and Gordon Watson, Chief Executive pictured outside the National Park HQ at Balloch. Local man, Sid Perrie, who was elected for Balloch and Councillor Shonny Paterson, who was elected for Arrochar and Cowal aren't in the photo.

Following the local member elections on Thursday, the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA) issued a news release with some brief biographical details about the successful candidates ([see here](#)). You can read the full results [here](#).

The LLTNPA news release announced that turnout was 31% across the National Park but did not mention this was down from 32.5% four years ago. Nor did it say only 14 people stood this time, compared to 24 last time (with the proportion of women candidates dropping from 1 in 8 to 1 in 14).

The small number of candidates has helped conceal the unfair first past the post voting system. In three wards there were just two candidates, so the transferable voting system used by local authorities could have made no difference to the results. And in Balloch (Ward 5), where four candidates stood, Sid Perrie got over half the votes. Only in Ward 4, where David Mackie was elected on 359 out of 901 votes, might a more proportional voting system have made a difference to the outcome. The fewer candidates also meant no-one could be elected with less than 20% of the vote, as happened when Bob Darracott won Ward 1 (Arrochar and Cowal) last time round. The flaws in the electoral system may have been concealed this time, but that doesn't make it right and could have contributed to so few people standing.

Four of the five local members elected last time round did not stand again. Two, Bob Darracott – who had chaired the planning committee – and Billy Ronald, had only served one term. It is interesting that

they did not stand again and reasonable to ask whether this says anything about how the LLTNPA is being run.

Another, Martin Earl, is a conservative councillor for Stirling and has, so I have heard, got himself nominated as one of the two new Stirling councillors on the board with support from labour. Martin had previously served on the LLTNPA Board as a councillor so has gone from council nominee to locally elected member to council nominee. He is not the only councillor who appears to be gaming the system.

Councillor Shonny Paterson, who last year joined the board as one of the Argyll and Bute council nominees, has now been elected local member for Ward 1. One of the two Argyll and Bute council positions on the LLTNPA board has now been advertised as vacant so at least he is not getting paid twice. It is surely time, however, that the Scottish Government gave some thought about whether councillors for wards that lie within the National Park should also be able to stand as local members.

Willie Nisbet, the vice-convenor of the LLTNPA who had been on the Board for the last 16 years was the one local member who did stand again. He was unsuccessful. Perhaps he paid the price for having ignored local opinion and supported Tom Hunter's planning application for a Global Leadership Centre at Ross Priory before it was withdrawn? Perhaps too, the broadcasting of board meetings during Covid enabled more constituents to become aware of what Mr Nisbet was actually contributing?

Five new local members should be an opportunity

The new blood should provide an opportunity to reform how the LLTNPA operates and make it more democratic. The first thing the new local members could demand is that the LLTNPA make recordings of board meetings available on the web, as happens in local authorities, so constituents know what they are doing. Being recorded can only help those local members who are committed to representing their constituents and doing a good job, while it might actually help increase local interest in what the National Park does. Judging by the turnout this is dangerously low.

Second, the new local members could push the LLTNPA to make representations to Lorna Slater, the Minister responsible for National Parks, about the need to reform the electoral system. The issues, which I have blogged about in the last couple of months, were all quite apparent four years ago ([see here](#)) but nothing has been done to address them and it is no surprise that democratic participation in the National Park continues to decline.

What the National Park needs is local members prepared to speak out for the people they represent – the majority of whom care passionately about the place – but no-one should underestimate the pressure that the new locally elected members will be put under to conform, starting with an induction process designed to instill corporate rather than democratic values.

[Correction, the original version of this post stated Willie Nisbet had been on the LLTNPA since it was created. He was first elected at the second local member elections four years later]

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Author

nickkempe

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