

Accessibility of Board Members – if in the Lake District, why not in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park?

Description

James Stuart

Address:

4 Burleigh Place
Darlington
Co Durham
DL3 7SR

Telephone number: c/o 01539 792637

E-mail address: James.Stuart@lakedistrict.gov.uk

Appointed by: Secretary of State (National)

Until: 30 June 2026

First appointed to the Authority: 1 July 2022

Current Committee membership: [Park Strategy and Vision Committee](#), [Governance Committee](#)

[Register of Member's Interests as of 29 June 2022 \(pdf\)](#)

Extract LDNPA website

As I mentioned in my recent post on greenwashing ([see here](#)), James Stuart, the soon to depart convener of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority, was in July appointed by UK Government Ministers to the Lakes District National Park Authority. On the LDNPA website ([see here](#)) Board Members are portrayed as “the voice of the people”. Stirring stuff! Perhaps because of that the public are provided with several means to contact the people who are supposed to represent them: a home address, a dedicated email and a contact phone number c/o the National Park Authority (as above).

I found this particularly interesting because Mr Stuart has consistently refused to act on my calls that all LLTNPA Board Members be given a Park email address, as happens in the Cairngorms National Park Authority. The result is that residents in the National Park have no means of contacting their locally elected members – unless they happen to know them personally – while hardly anyone in Scotland is able to contact Board Members appointed by the Scottish Government who are supposed to represent the national interest. The only people who are readily contactable are local councillors on the Board: their contact details are published on their local authority's website. Such democratic accountability as exists should be valued and is well worth defending.

One reason this matters is illustrated by certain issues that have arisen as a result of the Board's decision to put Luss Visitor Centre on the market. Following the last Board Meeting I wrote to Gordon Watson, CEO and the accountable officer for the LLTNPA, raising some questions about how Luss Visitor Centre came to be presented as a surplus asset in the accounts for 2021-22 before the local community had been consulted. In both my original letter and then in a follow up to Mr Watson's initial response – about which more anon – I asked that my correspondence be passed on to Ronnie Erskine, the nationally appointed member who is chair of the Audit Committee, and Sid Perrie, the locally elected member for Luss.

Four weeks after my original correspondence I still have no idea whether they have been given sight of my correspondence or not. Contrast that with Audit Scotland whom I copied in to the correspondence and who by return confirmed that they had passed on my concerns to the auditors for the LLTNPA (in my view their contact details should be public too).

Such issues would be easily resolved if all Board Members had email addresses, as happens in National Parks elsewhere. That would promote good governance and it would also make it far easier for staff to whistle blow. It appears that that is exactly what senior management at the LLTNPA fear, which explains why they have been so resistant to making Board Member contact details available. It would risk opening up what LLTNPA senior management do to more public scrutiny.

Unfortunately, James Stuart has been too weak a convener to challenge the closed way in which the LLTNPA operates, as is highlighted by contact details for him now being available on the Lake District National Park website. It is not too late, however, for Mr Stuart to propose, perhaps as part of a valedictory address to his final Board Meeting, that the new LLTNPA Board starts following good practice elsewhere! If not, it will probably take an intervention from the Minister responsible for National Parks, Lorna Slater, to fix a long-standing failure in democratic accountability and governance.

Category

1. Cairngorms
2. Loch Lomond and Trossachs
3. National Parks

Tags

1. Governance
2. LLTNPA
3. secrecy

Date Created

November 10, 2022

Author
nickkempe

default watermark