

Forest and Land Scotland's mismanagement of campsites in Scotland's National Parks

Description



Entrance to Cashel campsite 25th February

When Forest and Land Scotland (FLS) announced in November they had awarded the lease for the Glenmore campsite to Twinflower ([see here](#)), they said nothing about the leases for the two campsites in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park. These had been advertised through CDLH at the same time after FLS had bought back all three leases from Camping in the Forest early last year.

Stung perhaps by the adverse publicity which followed their decision to exclude the Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust from the bidding process for the Glenmore campsite ([see here](#)), there has still been no announcement from FLS about the other two campsites. Information on the CDLH website ([see here](#)), however, shows the leases for the Cobleland campsite in the Trossachs and Cashel on the eastern shore of Loch Lomond, have now both been let. There is also information on the websites of both campsites which confirms they are under new management but does not state who the new leaseholders are.

The cost to the public purse of the Camping in the Forest venture

Last year FLS refused to release information on what it had cost them to buy out the Camping and Caravanning Club from the leases for the three campsites previously managed by Camping in the Forest on the grounds it would be published in their accounts. Those accounts are now public ([see here](#)) and show that the cost was £1,958,000:

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Note 9: Investment in Joint Ventures

Until 28 February 2022, FLS accounted for its interest in Camping in The Forest (CiTF) as an available for sale asset as it had no significant influence over the activities of CiTF as disclosed in note 10 below. On 28 February 2022, FLS, together with Forestry England, took joint control of the net assets of CiTF, and the investment in CiTF is being included in the financial statements using the equity method at 31 March 2022.

| Investment in joint venture | £000 |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| At 1 April 2021 | 1,090 |
| Additional investment | 1,958 |
| At 31 March 2022 | 3,048 |

CiTF has a reporting date of 28 February. The summarised financial information in relation to CiTF is presented below:

| As at 28 February | £000 |
|--|--------------|
| Non-current assets | 8,677 |
| Current assets | 2,863 |
| Current liabilities | (2,204) |
| Non-current liabilities | (1,500) |
| Net assets (100%) | 7,836 |
| FLS share of net assets (24.8%) | 1,943 |
| Included in the above amounts are: | |
| Cash and cash equivalents | 2,797 |
| Current financial liabilities (excluding trade payables) | 1,528 |

This is further explained

in Note 10 to the accounts:

“Until 28 February 2022, Camping in the Forest LLP (CiTF) was a limited liability partnership between the Forestry Commissioners, the Scottish Government, Natural Resources Wales and the Camping and Caravanning Club (CCC). The combined interest of the government bodies was held within a limited liability partnership with designated members representing each public organisation. On 28 February 2022, there was a restructuring of the arrangement where FLS and Forestry England purchased CCC’s interest in CiTF for which FLS paid consideration of £1.9 m [Note: £1.958m?]”

On the same day, the limited liability partnership transferred its only asset, being its interest in CiTF, to its remaining members under a member interest transfer agreement. As a result of their restructuring, the interest in CiTF at year end is accounted for as an investment in a joint venture and disclosed in note 9 above.”

It would be in the public interest to know how much income FLS had received from Camping in the

Forest since February 2006 and how this compared to the £1.958m it cost to buy the business back. That was far more than FLS had ever received from Camping in the Forest in rent:

- 1) Current rent, as agreed by Camping in the Forest and Forestry Scotland/Forest and Land Scotland for the campsites at a) Glenmore b) Cobleland c) Cashel

| | | |
|------------------|---------------------|---|
| Ans: 1. Glenmore | Annual Rent £35,000 | Total for 20/21 with RPI CHON will be £53,669 |
| 2. Cobeland | Annual Rent £ 5,000 | Total for 20/21 with RPI CHON will be £ 7,667 |
| 3. Cashel | Annual Rent £10,500 | Total for 20/21 with RPI CHON will be £16,100 |

All increased using the RPI CHON index, Feb 2020/Feb 2006 as applied at 8th May annually.

From FOI response August 2021

While FLS also received a share of Camping in the Forest's profits over the 16 year period of the lease there were several years when they received nothing as Camping in the Forest made a loss (this was not only during Covid). It would require more detailed analysis to establish the facts but a sample of Camping in the Forests accounts suggests that the total profits distributed to FLS during the period are unlikely to exceed £2m. If right, that means FLS' buy back represents terrible value for money, a repeat of HIE's outsourcing disaster to Natural Retreats where they bought back the bankrupt company for more than they sold it. (I will now ask FLS to provide detail of all income they received under these leases).

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Cashel 25th February

Having rewarded the Camping and Caravanning Club, who managed Camping in the Forest, with £1.958m despite their refusal to re-open the campsites after the first lockdown, FLS have paid that money to recover assets which are generally in very poor condition:



Glenmore Campsite 2nd February – photo credit Alan Bratney

The draft heads of terms in the leases for the three campsites (obtained through FOI) stated:

“The Tenant will accept all the Landlords’ buildings, structures and fittings as being in and substantial good condition and will return the same in such condition at lease expiry.”

The new leaseholders, whoever they may be, appear to have been handed a poisoned chalice by FLS.

Missed opportunities

FLS' agreement with the Camping and Caravanning Club was they would continue to manage the three campsites until the end of November. That probably explains why they announced the award of the contract for the Glenmore Campsite, which remains open over the winter, first. Cobleland, which opens on 1st March and Cashel, which opens on 1st April, were treated as less urgent.



That left very little time for Twinflower to prepare for taking over Glenmore and unsurprisingly there were various teething problems, e.g. with the online booking system. They now have a new website ([see here](#)) and appear to have rebranded themselves as “By the Loch”. One thing they have got better are the charges, which are lower, but despite this appear to be suffering from the poor winter season and today were offering further discounts on stays:

Results

Forest - Grass Pitch Non Electric

Max 3 pets Tents

Availability calendar

Standard Rate 2 nights from Sun 26 Feb 2023 was £42.10 now **£35.79**

The Standard Rate includes 2 adults in the price shown, and the additional adults and any children are charged extra.

Alternative dates

Family Deal Rate 2 nights from Sun 26 Feb 2023 was £52 now **£44.20**

The Family Deal Rate includes 2 adults and 2 children in the price shown, additional adults and children are charged extra.

Alternative dates

Age Concession Rate 2 nights from Sun 26 Feb 2023 was £33.60 now **£28.56**

The Age Concession Rate includes 2 adults over 65 in the price shown, additional adults and any children are charged extra.

Alternative dates

The new website for Cobleland, which is due to open this week, is now up and running too ([see here](#)) and while unfinished contains some interesting information:

Our Mission

In order to help our local community we will be undertaking the following:

- Opening of a community accessible shop to help replace the recently closed community shop in the village of Gartmore
- Regular prize draws for gift vouchers to give to our guests for the Black Bull Inn in Gartmore. Again this is a community asset in the village of Gartmore.
- Training and skills-based learning for hospitality students studying at local colleges in the Stirlingshire area.

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greatest lost opportunity, however, is at Cashel which is due to open on 1st April (and where the new leaseholder has lots to do to return the campsite to a fit state):

At a Glance



- Open 1st April - 17th October 2022
- 2023 dates coming soon!
- Toilets and showers available
- 168 pitches
- Hardstanding and electric hook up available
- Pets welcome
- West Highland Way passes the site entrance

I walked along part of the West Highland Way on the east shore of Loch Lomond on Saturday and was surprised at the number of backpackers carrying tents. In three days time, on 1st March, the seasonal byelaws banning camping along the shoreline come into effect making it illegal to camp outside designated areas. While FLS's campsite at Sallochy opens on 3rd March, two days after the byelaws come back into force, that leaves nowhere to camp near to Balmaha. The new leases were an opportunity to address that issue but FLS has completely failed to do so.

FLS' wasted public assets

No sooner had they taken back these three campsites a year ago at significant public expense than FLS decided to outsource them again for the maximum price possible. This was done without any consultation of whether this was in the public interest or not and ignored:

- the impact that campsite charges have on people's willingness to stay in campsites (higher rents imply higher charges which directly contribute to levels of roadside camping);
- local communities, most notably the interest from the Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust;
- both National Park Authorities
- the potential in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park to create a network of publicly managed campsites whose primary purpose would be to support public enjoyment of the countryside year round (Loch Chon, Loch Achray, Sallochy as well as Cobleland and Cashel).

This should have given both Scotland's National Park Authorities grounds to object to Scottish Ministers about FLS' outsourcing exercise and to make the case that these campsites should be managed in the public interest. Unfortunately, the management of both organisations, like FLS, appears so wedded to neo-liberal thinking that the idea there might be a better way to manage public assets than outsourcing them appears beyond their ken. Not even financial disasters like the Natural Retreats or Camping in the Forest debacles appear sufficient to get them to think differently. It will take

pressure from the public to change that.

Category

1. Cairngorms
2. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. camping
2. CNPA
3. Forest and Land Scotland
4. LLTNPA
5. Scottish Government
6. visitor management

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Author

nickkempe

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