

The LLTNPA and the Cononish goldmine – keeping board members in the dark

Description

On 9th November, two days after Scotgold announced ([see here](#)) it had been unable to find a new investor for the Cononish goldmine and it was likely to go into administration, the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA) informed me their Planning Committee had noted without amendment the “annual report” on the mine. It was, as I explained in my last post ([see here](#)), no such thing having been brought forward two months and was fundamentally flawed as it failed to consider the LLTNPA's options should the mine go into administration.

Having failed to get an answer from Dr Heather Reid, the Convener of the LLTNPA, as to whether members of the Planning Committee had been made aware of the issues I had raised, a response to a Freedom of Information at the end of last week stated the “annual report” was the only written information that had been circulated to board members about the mine in the last year. In other words Dr Reid and senior LLTNPA staff have deliberately kept from planning committee members information that was relevant to their ability to scrutinise the report.

This situation could not have occurred in the Cairngorms National Park Authority where every board member has a public email and can be contacted independently. As a consequence of the way senior staff in the LLTNPA control access to board members, whistleblowing by staff or the public is almost impossible.

Another fact omitted from the LLTNPA “annual report” on the mine

In compensation for the environmental destruction caused by the mine, the LLTNPA's legal agreement with Scotgold required them to invest in conservation initiatives in the area around the mine, through what is known as the Greater Cononish Glen Management Plan (GCGMP). That investment was supposed to be guaranteed through a restoration bond.

The March monitoring report for the mine published in September reported in the section on the GCGMP that:

” Aspen, Scots pine etc. have arrived on site and are being stored in the cow shed at Cononish Farm, trees will be planted within the next two weeks – Scots pine at 600m off-set from the boundary of the SSSI. Planting will also infill the river terraces. SSSI Fencing has been agreed and can now be done, costs to be recovered (£10k) from SGZ.

With the mine in serious financial difficulty I was concerned the money might never be recovered from Scotgold's operating company, SGZ Cononish. It turns out that the failures were deeper than I had envisaged. On 17th November, in response to an information request on this matter, the LLTNPA stated:

“The SSSI fencing work has been delayed due to the landowner putting the land up for sale. The £10k funding from Scotgold has been agreed but has not yet been required and therefore has not been paid.”

With Scotgold heading into administration and with the LLTNPA having failed to uprate the restoration bond as it had been advised to do in June 2022, that money would now appear likely lost.

In one sense that might be a good thing as the proposal was to use the £10k and a further £20k in public grants to fence the Coille Coire Chuilc Caledonian Pine wood remnant in protect it from the deperadations of red deer ([see here](#)). The £20k would have been a complete waste of public money as fencing only works a few years and is an excuse to avoid the real problem, the far too high deer population in the local area. This is what has also resulted in the use of plastic tree tubes in Ewich Forest ([see here](#)).

The LLTNPA would have been better using Scotgold’s £10k to employ a stalker for a few months but now that opportunity would appear to have gone too. The key point here, however, is that LLTNPA staff knew the £10k had not been spent at the time they drafted their “Annual Report” for the Planning Committee but failed to mention it:

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4.26	The GCGMP Advisory Group held its se the requirements of the section 75 legal ag National Park Authority prior to the meet been undertaken in compliance with the Plan since the last meeting; and the works in compliance with the Greater Cononish 12 months. GCGMP works which have b an area of land adjacent to Coille Coire C the river terraces along the River Conon planted in these locations, with wet he additional trees have also been planted w
4.27	Through discussions of the GCGMP advis of fencing and planting have been ration benefit from the spend. Due to increased group continues to assess best value fo developed.

Extract from "Annual Report"

Reading this no Committee Member could have guessed that part of the GCGMP had not been delivered according to plan.

In fact the decision to spend £10k from Scotgold on fencing the Coille Coire Chuilc pinewood was first referred to in the Mine Monitoring report of 20/12/21, so the failure to deliver what had been agreed goes back a significant period of time. Board Members should have been alerted to this along with all the other actions relating to the mine that were way behind schedule but instead have been kept in the dark by senior staff. A fundamental failure in governance.

It is clear the governance of the LLTNPA is completely unfit for purpose and Lorna Slater, the Minister responsible, needs to step in and sort this out before progressing any new National Parks. Addressing the goldmine disaster would be a good place for her to start.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. Deer
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