

The fundamentally useless National Park Authority and its useless National Park plan

Description



Herald 9th December



John Urquhart (left) with bin installation contractors (Image: Contributed)

By happy timing, John Urquhart's agenda

article for the Herald on the end of funding for the A82/A83 litter bins and loos (which might be easier to read [here](#)) appeared two days before the meeting on the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA) on Monday.

There is nothing in the papers for that meeting ([see here](#)) to alert board members that this highly successful project is at risk. That is par for the course.

Of all the projects funded following Covid in the National Park it has arguably had the greatest impact. The previously litter strewn laybays of the A82, a disgrace to Scotland, are now almost entirely litter free. This is a consequence of a very simple measure, the installation of bins, long advocated by Parkswatch, but now proven to work without doubt. The LLTNPA know this because some of their frontline staff have helped with the scheme and their management have contributed some funding. Strangely, however, as I pointed out in July ([see here](#)) there was not a mention of the project in the LLTNPA's annual report on visitor management presented to their board last December nor of the lessons that might be learned from it.

This year's 'Visitor Management Season Review', like that for last year, is not a separate agenda item but hidden away as Appendix 1 to the Chief Executive Officer's Report ([see here](#)). There is nothing in the CEO's report about the end of funding for the project, while once again there is no mention of the project in the annual review, despite litter still ostensibly remaining one of the LLTNPA's key visitor management themes, along with water safety, car parking, fires and camping:

Litter and toileting



Litter remains an issue that unfortunately needs to be addressed each year and the 2023 season saw 1138 bags of litter removed from the Park by the Ranger Team and 199 bags removed by volunteers. This is slightly less than in 2022, a 12% reduction overall and this can be attributed to less litter picked by volunteers this season.

Partners also report ongoing issues with litter. Strathfillan Community Development Trust for example collected 240 bags of litter (including human waste) this season along the shores of Loch Lubhair, Loch Dochart and the surrounding areas.

Meanwhile at the RSPB reserve in Gartocharn, wardens report consistent problems with dog waste, as well as some camping related litter. Their Wardens have focused on providing Scottish Outdoor Access Code messaging to visitors.

Litter continues to be a focus for our visitor management services and is addressed primarily through employment of Environment Officers and targeted clean ups outside our estate.

The title is misleading, this section says nothing about toileting

While it is positive the LLTNPA has employed an extra Environment Officer to pick up litter and their Rangers are now also doing so, there is no analysis in the review of where the litter was collected or its cause. What proportion of the 1138 bags, for example, was roadside litter, thrown out of cars, picnic litter, camping litter, litter dropped by walkers and marine waste? As importantly, how much of the litter was picked up from laybys, picnic sites, camping permit areas or tourist walks with no bins? And how much human excrement was found in places with no toilets?

The annual review is completely silent on the infrastructure needed to reduce littering and the number of people who need to have a crap in the countryside. It appears the LLTNPA has now given up on even attempting to address these issues and is happy to allow the one project that was addressing them to go down the pan.

I have talked with the Friends of Loch Lomond and Trossachs in the past and know they would have preferred not to have had to run this project. In fact they recognised the £70k wasn't particularly good value for money but applying for Green Recovery monies was the only way anything was going to change. Their hope was hoped that having shown that bins worked that the public sector would assume responsibility for managing them.

It would have been far cheaper for the Argyll and Bute Council refuse lorries, which trundle down the A82 to pick up domestic waste, to pull into the laybys and empty the bins. The marginal costs to the Council of doing so would have been very low. And as for the mobile toilets at Duck Bay and Arrochar, Argyll and Bute Council extract a fortune from visitors and offered almost nothing in return ([see here](#)) until the green recovery project when FOLLAT managed to get a small grant from them. That it appears will now go too. Argyll and Bute have now, unbelievably, had the cheek to make an

application to the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund for toilets at Succoth – out of which they will no doubt extract even more money from visitors!

Rather than the LLTNPA's Chief Executive challenging Argyll and Bute Council's senior management to take over this project and using Monday's meeting to get backing from his board, which includes two Argyll and Bute Councillors, to do so he has sat on his hands and is allowing the project to collapse.

The LLTNPA's Local Place plans, litter bins and toilets

The irony here is that the LLTNPA has recently been patting itself on the back for developing 'Local Place' plans. Four have been adopted to date ([see here](#)) in Arrochar, Luss and Arden, Callander and Drymen but not Balloch (no doubt because developing a local place plan there would show the Flamingo Land development is NOT wanted by local people).

In all four of the adopted plans there is a call from local communities for MORE LITTER BINS although there is no commitment from any of the public authorities involved to do so! In two of them, Drymen and Luss/Arden, there is a call for more/larger toilets and there probably would have been in Arrochar too if the local community had known the mobile toilets were about to disappear and might not be replaced.

The disconnect within the LLTNPA is extraordinary: one wonders whether the staff responsible for Visitor Management ever talk to those responsible for 'place'?

Litter and the National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP)

Having spent much time over the last ten years considering issues of litter and toileting and achieving remarkably little, there are just two references to litter in the whole of the new NPPP which is being put before the LLTNPA Board Meeting. One is a passing reference to marine litter and the other:

“People feeling connected to nature benefits not only their wellbeing but inspires them to act in ways that are more likely to benefit the environment. That connection can mean different things to different people, from feeling the benefit of taking in a spectacular view, to ensuring they take their litter home after a visit, to taking part in conservation volunteering.

However, we know that the range of people currently visiting the area does not reflect the diversity of our society!

That is it, a plan that is not a plan. The nearest that the NPPP comes to saying anything about what it will do about litter is in the section on 'Creating a Low-Carbon Place'.

<p>3. Support safe, responsible access</p> <p>A wide range of enjoyable and safe visitor experiences which are managed in a way which is compatible with nature and climate considerations and supporting thriving communities.</p>	<p>Taking a partnership approach to visitor management to ensure co-ordination of the work of all public bodies with a role in supporting the safe and responsible enjoyment of the National Park.</p> <p>Operating and keeping under review the Loch Lomond and Camping Byelaws to encourage positive behaviour and protect the National Park's sensitive environment.</p> <p>Co-ordinating a multi-agency approach to promoting visitor safety across responsible bodies to ensure the safe enjoyment of publicly managed and other popular visitor sites.</p>	<p>Lead/Enable</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Park Recovery Group partners • National Visitor Management partners • Water Safety Scotland 	<p>In Delivery</p>
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Supporting safe responsible access represents a move away the LLTNPA's statutory duty to promote public enjoyment of the area and the primary reason it was created in the first place, to enable people from the central belt to enjoy the wonderful landscape on their doorstep and to manage the pressures through the provision of appropriate infrastructure for visitors.

Yes, visiting would be a far more enjoyable experience if laybys and places like the head of Loch Long weren't smothered in litter, but the LLTNPA's only commitment in the NPPP is to take a partnership approach to litter and similar issues. There is not even a commitment to retain its three Environment Officer posts to help with clear-ups.

Co-ordination of the work of public authorities by the LLTNPA would be great if it resulted in the better infrastructure people want, like toilets and bins, but there is nothing in the plan to explain how after years of failure epitomised by the fiasco John Urquhart describes the LLTNPA is going to change this

The other two commitments in this section are very specific: a reference to maintain the camping byelaws, which the LLTNPA cannot drop without losing face; and a reference to water safety, because the LLTNPA cannot be seen to ignore the levels of public concern about the number of people who have drowned in Loch Lomond. What this shows, however, is that far from incorporating the work on their abandoned outdoor recreation plan in the NPPP, as they promised ([see here](#)), the LLTNPA have moved away as far as they can from doing anything for visitors apart from on its own land.

Nothing has changed as a result of the consultation on the NPPP earlier this year.

Instead of developing its plan around its four statutory objectives, conservation of the natural and cultural heritage, public enjoyment, sustainable development and wise use of resources, which were agreed after a great deal of public debate and scrutiny in the Scottish Parliament, the LLTNPA has developed its new plan entirely around the need to address the climate and nature emergencies.

National Park Partnership Plan on a Page

Vision for 2045	By 2045 Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park is a thriving place that is nature positive and carbon negative								
Chapter	RESTORING NATURE			CREATING A LOW-CARBON PLACE			DESIGNING A GREENER WAY OF LIVING		
Chapter sections	Restoring Nature for Climate	Restoring Nature for Healthy Ecosystems	Restoring Nature through Sustainable, Regenerative Land Use	Connecting Everyone with Nature and Climate	Improving popular Places and Routes	Low Carbon Travel for Everyone	Transitioning to a Greener Economy	Supporting Thriving Rural Communities	Developing and Investing in the National Park
OUTCOMES BY 2045 By 2045 the National Park is/ has...	A natural carbon sink	A restored landscape for nature	An exemplar of regenerative land use	A place for all to enjoy safely and responsibly	High quality visitor infrastructure and facilities	An inclusive, low carbon travel network	A greener, more diverse rural economy	More resilient rural communities	A responsive approach to new development

The parkspeak is a shot in the foot: if the aim is that by 2045 the Park is to be a thriving place by implication it is NOT thriving now begging the question of what the LLTNPA has actually done in the 20 years.

Three green objectives have effectively replaced the four statutory aims. Its not that this green agenda is unimportant, its vital as parkswatch has long argued. But these three themes, Restoring Nature, Low Carbon Places and Greener Ways of Living have always been covered by the LLTNPA's statutory objectives. Repackaging them as the 'NPPP on a page' won't in itself do anything to change the LLTNPA's lamentable record but what it will do is allow the LLTNPA to drop responsibility for basic issues like litter. Note that the commitment is only to 'Improving Popular Places', which on the Park's definition doesn't include places like the A82 laybys.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. Litter
2. LLTNPA
3. outdoor recreation
4. Scottish Government
5. Tourism
6. visitor management

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