

Yet another Loch Lomond and Trossachs Authority plan â?? this time a
â??masterplanâ?• for Rowardennan

Description



The public toilets at Rowardennan owned and managed by the LLTNPA. Photo 25/2/22.
Why were the toilets open in February 2022 but closed in January 2024?

Following Peter Pageâ??s post on 18th January ([see here](#)) showing the consequences of the failure to provide basic visitor infrastructure at Rowardennan below Ben Lomond , on 6th February the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA) published a notice on the Public Contracts Scotland portal ([see here](#)). This showed the LLTNPA had awarded a contract worth Â£67,887.86 for a masterplan at Rowardennan:

V.2.1) Date of conclusion of the contract

07/12/2023

V.2.2) Information about tenders

Number of tenders received: 7

Number of tenders received from SMEs: 5

Number of tenders received from tenderers from EU Member States: 0

Number of tenders received from tenderers from non-EU Member States: 0

Number of tenders received by electronic means: 7

The contract has been awarded to a group of economic operators: No

V.2.3) Name and address of the contractor

Land Use Consultants Limited

37 Otago Street

Glasgow

G12 8JJ

UK

NUTS: UKM

The contractor is an SME: No

default watermark

V.2.4) Information on value of the contract/lot (excluding VAT)

Total value of the contract/lot: : 67 887.86 GBP

The award notice gives a link back to the original tender advertised on 13th October 2023 ([see here](#)). This shows the LLTNPA's estimated value of the contract, i.e the level of bid they were looking for, was £50k. The lowest bid they actually received was c£62,622 k and the highest bid was £118,709.00 almost twice what Land Use Consultants offered.

The process of awarding small contracts is time-consuming and costly, both for the businesses that respond and for the LLTNPA, which has to prepare all the documentation, respond to questions and then evaluate the tenders received according to strict rules. Staff then need to engage with appointed consultants and engage with them on the final product. The total cost of all this to the LLTNPA will be over £80k for a plan which will in itself change nothing on the ground.

The origins of this masterplan lie in another plan, the East Loch Lomond Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Framework published in March 2022. This outlined some broad concepts and principles for specific areas along the shore of east Loch Lomond, including for Rowardennan:

Visitor Infrastructure Requirements:

										
✓*		✓*			✓*	✓	✓	✓*	✓*	✓

* Areas for development

Pressure Points:

- High Parking Demand/ Congestion/ pressure on Safety
 - Ben Lomond and access to the loch generate a high level of car park use. Demand for parking at peak times results in overflow onto the single lane approach road, creating road safety issues & congestion.

Principles for Development:

- Improve facilities to encourage sustainable transport use/ reduce parking demand & better control parking to position Rowardennan destination as a sustainable destination
- Protection of Memorial Landscape
 - Accommodate shuttle bus turning
 - Reorganise car park and access
 - Strengthen facilities setting & Ben Lomond walk starting point
 - Enhance facilities (including changing, toilets, drinking water, shelter, bin storage, office space)
 - Develop stronger arrival, setting, water front (picnic location) and pedestrian environment
 - Renew pier to provide for water based transport

Key Elements:

- Facilities supporting high levels of visitor need:
- Shuttle bus infrastructure & real time information
 - Expanded facilities to support destination role for visitors without personal transport. Shelter, changing, Wi-Fi etc.
 - Reorganised parking and access
 - Improved place quality and water front appeal
 - Cycle facilities: secure parking etc.
 - Pier repairs to facilitate water-taxi or water-bus
 - Full visitor signage infrastructure and identity building

The Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Framework stated that “Future Development of concepts will follow to develop area masterplans/ detailed designs” i.e further masterplans would be needed to implement it. While a masterplan was explicitly mentioned for Balmaha, none was mentioned for Rowardennan.



The Invitation to Tender document ([see here](#)) shows the LLTNPA is basically asking the consultants to re-design the car park to enable a minibus service to run along east Loch Lomond, put in cycle parking (including possibly electric bike recharging facilities), look at whether new toilet provision was needed, create a coherent signage and re-landscape the area. Most of this is good although I would question the amount of landscaping being proposed by the LLTNPA. A large part of the charm of Rowardennan lies in its informality and the fact that nature is always encroaching on the visitor facilities:



The war memorial in 2020, a place being re-wilded by nature

The sort of suburbanised car parking and public space being developed at Tarbet ([see here](#)) would wreck Rowardennan. Instead of imposing top-down visions of how places should look, designed to meet lots of policy statements, the LLTNPA should in places like Rowardennan be taking a far more organic approach to how visitor infrastructure might best be developed and managed.

The likelihood, however, of any new masterplan for Rowardennan going ahead now appears very small. The LLTNPA's Strategic Tourist Investment Framework was totally dependant on funding from the Scottish Government and more specifically from Visit Scotland's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund. That was slashed in the Scottish Government's budget announced just before Xmas. It looks as if there will now be no money to implement the masterplan for Rowardennan.

While there are serious questions to be asked about whether spending Â£80k on a masterplan basically intended to re-design the car park at Rowardennan was sensible use of public money at any time, now it appears utter folly. And if, as proposed in the Invitation to Tender (ITT), it were to result in submission of a planning application from the LLTNPA to itself this April, that would result in yet more costs being incurred without anything actually happening.

The ITT reveals that while the LLTNPA is committed to public toilet provision at Rowardennan in the long term, it decided to close the toilet block this winter (the landscape consultants can get the keys from the LLTNPA if they want to have a look inside). For £80k it would, with a bit of imagination and will, have been possible to address the issues highlighted in Peter's post i.e open the toilets, return the bins and fix the broken parking meters. That sum of money should also have been enough to install a bike rack and shelter so long as it wasn't procured through an expensive tender process and pay for one of Forest and Land Scotland's contractors working on east Loch Lomond to create a turning areas for minibuses.



Parking meter out of use February 2022.

The car parking meters at Rowardennan appear to be out of use most of the time despite there being no obvious signs of vandalism. As long as charges were kept low, most people would pay willingly and the chances of vandalism would be kept low. Fixing the parking meters would provide revenue which could then be used to fund the costs of keeping the toilets properly maintained and the bins emptied in the longer term.

What needs to happen

Using car parking charges to fund revenue costs at Rowardennan would require co-operation from senior management at Forest and Land Scotland to use the money for the benefit of local area. For the last ten years and since the earlier East Loch Lomond Visitor Management Plan (yet another plan that was secretly dropped) there has been no sign of that happening. This is a "political" issue that won't be addressed by any outside master planners and should be the responsibility of the LLTNPA Board to sort out.

In order to make best use of resources, rather than engaging consultants to produce plans most of which never actually happen, it is time for the LLTNPA Board to consider how they might empower their staff on the ground to provide better infrastructure for visitors. Imagine how the LLTNPA Ranger Service based on east Loch Lomond might have reacted had they been given £80k to spend at Rowardennan?

After the initial shock of actually being allowed to work on their own initiative, given a little encouragement from LLTNPA Board Members I believe they could have used their local knowledge and contacts to spend the £80k on sorting out the most pressing the issues. If they needed any further assistance, the Friends of Loch Lomond and Trossachs has a good record on grass roots initiatives which make a difference, would I am sure be only too happy to help. Its worth a try!

The Minister responsible for National Parks, the Green MSP, Lorna Slater, could help support the development of a bottom up approach driven by people on the ground rather than plans. Before she agrees to create any new National Park she could ask one of her civil servants to undertake an audit of all the undelivered actions set out in plans produced by the LLTNPA and the associated costs of producing the reams and reams of paperwork. That, I believe, would help prove the case.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. landscape
2. LLTNPA
3. planning
4. Scottish Government
5. visitor management

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