

“Lomond Banks”, the local community and calling out the claims made on behalf of Flamingo Land

Description



Here's why Flamingo Land's plan must be opposed, no matter what it's called

default watermark

CONGRATULATIONS to Vicky Allan and Kevin McKenna for their excellent coverage of Flamingo Land's proposed development at Balloch (The Herald, August 17).

Unfortunately, Flamingo Land's agents and supporters continue to sow confusion about the development, including Fiona Robertson from Streets-UK, who is quoted on your front page as claiming: "Those people who are opposed to the development continue to misrepresent it by calling it Flamingo Land and by perpetuating the theme park description."

The facts are that the planning application, which is to be considered next month, is from Flamingo Land Ltd, a company which operates a resort of that name in Yorkshire. There was no legal entity called "Lomond Banks" until July 4, 2023 when a new company of that name was registered at Companies House with a share capital of £2. Until then Lomond Banks was only the name Flamingo Land had chosen for the proposed development after it withdrew the application. Should planning permission now be granted it is Flamingo Land Ltd which was given the legal agreement with Scottish Enterprise to buy the Riverside Site in Balloch and Flamingo Land Ltd which has agreed with Transport Scotland to pay for some minor road upgrades in the village.

Flamingo Land Ltd's business is described on the Companies House website as "activities of amusement parks and theme parks". In claiming that Flamingo Land's offering to Balloch has been mischaracterised, Ms Robertson fails to explain this or to mention the proposed monorail running through the trees or the proposed water park. Unfortunately, since the application is at this stage only for planning permission in principle and Flamingo Land has failed to disclose further details of what it is considering, it remains to be seen whether the development would be best described as a glorified chalet park with hotels or an amusement park, possibly themed "on Lomond banks".

Quibbling about the description and whether people are justified in still referring to it as Flamingo Land distracts from the main issues. The proposed development is far too big and



conflicts with the policy aspirations in National Planning Framework 4. It has major implications for the village of Balloch, the gateway to the national park, from dramatically reducing the amount of green space to increased traffic. That is why the overwhelming majority of residents in Balloch, whom we represent, oppose this planning application.

We are very grateful to Ms Allan and Mr McKenna for giving voice to our views.
Lynne Somerville, Chair, on behalf of Balloch and Haldane Community Council, Balloch.

■ I CANNOT take seriously any of the people you interviewed who are against the current planning application for Loch Lomond ("Passions running high in battle over plan to develop the Bonnie Banks", The Herald, August 17). The surrounding area is in dire need of the jobs. The brownfield site is currently used primarily by dog walkers.

The nimbies are up in arms in case the proles spoil their unfettered access to the area. And, Loch Lomond Shores is moribund, it could use the competition.

The objectors are that classic combination of Nimby types, along with the entitled walking, climbing and cycling fraternity. I

sincerely hope, for the sake of job creation and the local economy, that the plans are approved. If Kevin McKenna ("It's an idyllic scene but it's hard to escape a feeling of despondency", The Herald, August 17) ever interviews Ross Greer, who's keen on stymieing several hundred jobs, can he ask him how many jobs he's been responsible for creating in his time as a politician? I suspect it's the middle of a doughnut.

Stuart Brennan, Glasgow.

Letter to Herald 20th August

Following the Herald's excellent coverage of Flamingo Land's plans for Balloch at the weekend ([see here](#)) – which gave both sides of the “argument” and in which I was pleased to be quoted – it was very good to see the Balloch and Haldane Community Council (BHCC) challenge some of the misinformation being put about by the developer. Ms Robertson's claims, that objectors are misinformed about the development and don't understand what it is really about, are patronising guff. It is precisely because local residents in Balloch do realise what the development will do to their village that there is so much local opposition.

Up until the last year, however, there has been no means of giving voice to that. The previous Community Council was firmly controlled by a small minority who supported Flamingo Land's development and, after calling a public meeting where the vast majority of voted against the development, ignored that vote and sent a letter of support to the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA) before resigning ([see here](#)). The letter to the Herald is an indication that that situation has changed but most people who are concerned about the development will probably be unaware that beneath that the BHCC has been extremely active, challenging the various interests that are behind the development (such as the labour councillors on West Dunbartonshire Council), submitting objections to the LLTNPA and setting up a Community Development Trust (CDT) to develop alternative proposals for their village.

There is information about the CDT on the BHCC web page ([see here](#)) and they are asking local residents in the Balloch and Haldane area to sign up and join the trust ([see here](#)) and the wider public for donations ([see here](#)). If each of the 120,000 plus objectors to Flamingo Land's development gave just £2 that would raise a significant sum.

More disinformation – a brownfield site?!



Flamingo Land's planning application proposes to fill this public park, which sits on the flood plain of the River Leven, with lodges

It is interesting that Stuart Brennan, whose letter in support of the development is also featured above, describes the area Flamingo Land wants to develop as a "brownfield site". Clearly, Mr Brennan – like others who keep repeating this claim – has not visited for some time. The land on the West bank of River Leven may once have been covered by railway sidings but has long been a public park – as the size of the trees in the photo show.

Flamingo Land's supporters, however, need to convince LLTNPA board members that this public park, within a short walking distance of their HQ at Carrochan in Balloch, is still a brownfield site to have any chance of being granted planning permission in principle for the development. This is not just because Scottish Government policies in National Planning Framework 4 are supposed to protect greenspace, its because NPF4 (rightly) raised the threshold for what in planning terms should count as flood plain as a result of increased rainfall caused by climate change.

A significant part of the West Riverside Site, where Flamingo Land wants to build chalets, has now been assessed as being at risk of flooding and should now be protected against development because of this. There are, however, as always in Scottish Government planning policy, some exceptions. One of these allows "redevelopment of previously used sites in built up areas where the LDP [Local Development Plan] has identified a need to bring these into positive use and where proposals demonstrate that long-term safety and resilience can be secured in accordance with relevant SEPA advice".

SEPA, in their response to Flamingo Land's proposals to build on the flood plain ([see here](#)), have said its up to the LLTNPA to decide whether the site needs to be brought "into positive use" and as a consequence Flamingo Land has been arguing that the Riverside Site is not in positive use, hence all

the claims about the site being derelict and a brownfield site! Its nonsense of course but even if the LLTNPA were to accept this claim Flamingo Land would then have to show to SEPA that the chalets they plan to build won't get swept away!

More disinformation – from the Rev Ian Miller

The Sunday Herald gave a whole page to the Reverend Ian Miller to make the case for the development. This followed the same patronising line as Fiona Robertson “I do hope the public can separate fact from fiction” ([see here](#)).

Unfortunately it is the Rev Miller appears incapable of separating fact from fiction. He starts by quoting from the former community council's survey of local opinion (see link above) and disparaging that by saying “only 14%.....bothered to reply” before going on to claim “and that is perhaps a true reflection of how people feel”. The Rev Miller is clearly unaware of how opinion polls work and the fact that 75% of those replying stated they opposed the development says something very important about local opinion., He also failed to mention the survey from local MSP Jackie Baillie that returned similar results!

Instead of supporting his fellow Community Council – he is chair of the neighbouring Alexandria Community Council – he disparages the efforts of the reformed community council and the efforts of members of the local community, implying they have no chance of success. This ignores the fact that members of the establishment locally have worked to under the local community at every turn. The Rev Miller's reference to “Respected groups like the Friend of Loch Lomond (sic), the previous Balloch Community Council [the one that conducted the survey and ignored the results] and Alexandria Community Council (an apparent reference to himself!), are a giveaway.

While rhetorically exclaiming “Let us lay aside emotion” and hoping that “the public will separate fact from fiction” the Rev Miller appears incapable of doing so himself, particularly when it comes to the economic benefits he claims will flow from the development:

“Lomond Banks will create hundreds of jobs. They have agreed to pay the National Living Wage and committed to employ locally”.

This does not bear critical scrutiny. While estimates of the number of jobs, permanent and temporary, to be created by Flamingo Land have steadily reduced and are questionable that misses the main point. There are actually plenty of jobs in Scotland, with thousands of job vacancies in the care sector for example, which is why business and the Scottish Government are so keen to attract inward migration. A large proportion of tourism jobs in Scotland are now filled by people from abroad, from Australia to Eastern Europe. This means that at the local level whatever jobs Flamingo Land creates in Balloch are likely to be to the detriment of other local tourism businesses, particularly those where local people are required to travel, like Cameron House.

The real problem is not the availability of jobs, as Rev Miller claims, but finding a job that pays enough for people to have a reasonable quality of life and meet their aspirations for a better future. Increasing the number of jobs paying the national Living Wage won't do anything to address the poverty trap

where young people cannot afford to buy their own home and as a result are either forced to live with their families or spend a large proportion of their income on rent. At the public meeting organised by Save Loch Lomond in Balloch ten days ago a number of people in the audience made this very point. They don't want yet more poorly paid jobs.

While the National Living Wage is little enough, the Rev Miller's claim that Flamingo Land have agreed to pay it appears only partially correct. My reading of the "promise" they made to the local community is they have committed to pay the National Living Wage to staff they employ directly but not to ensure that contractors, who will carry out all the construction work, do so. You can see how this might go: all the cleaning, gardening and other such jobs subcontracted leaving only the bosses!

The truth of course is that the main interest of businesses like Flamingo Land's is on generating profits which will then be extracted out of the local area. Like many other businesses they make those profits by exploiting the workforce. Perhaps the Rev Ian Miller is unaware of the £25k donation to the Conservative Party recorded in Flamingo Land's most recent accounts? How does that donation, to a party whose policies while in government helped the rich to get a lot richer and almost everyone else a lot poorer, fit with making life better for people in Balloch?

There are of course good businesses as well as bad businesses but, had the local community in Balloch ever been given the choice rather than told what is good for them, the Flamingo Land development would never have got this far. Following on from the first part of the Flamingo Land story, which I told yesterday ([see here](#)), the second part will explain further how the local community were deliberately sidelined and excluded from the whole process. The letter in the Herald, however, was a great opportunity to show that the local community, as represented by the new community council and a re-invigorated Save Loch Lomond campaign, is now a force to be reckoned with, whatever people like the Rev Ian Miller claim. If you are concerned about Flamingo Land's proposals and want to help please consider joining the Community Development Trust, if you live locally, or making a donation (links above).

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. flamingo land
2. LLTNPA
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