

The sorry story of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park's upgrade of its car park at Tarbet

Description



Photo of cafe area, with new shelter on left, still cordoned off from the car park with Heras fencing 28th October

On 26th January the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA) announced its "Tarbet Visitor site" would be completely closed for 8 weeks from the 29th January as part of a £2.1m upgrade and after that the car parking area would be limited until late summer ([see here](#)). Eight months later the works were still far from complete, as anyone who has passed the site on the West Shore of Loch Lomond will know, and access to the car parks has on occasions been completely blocked off.

The photo tells a tale, this is another example of failed project management following on from the LLTNPA's botched and much delayed upgrade of its headquarters at Carrochan ([see here](#)).

What was the plan?



An unfinished section of coloured asphalt path crossing the car park one of dozens of bits of snagging work that remained to be completed on 28th October. The black path behind is due at a later date to be upgraded to coloured asphalt.

The works announced for this year were part of a wider masterplan for the Taret site ([see here](#)) to be delivered in phases. In July 2023 the LLTNPA granted planning permission to itself (the Head of Planning, Stuart Mearns, is also the Director of Place responsible for the development) for the “upgrade”:

Planning – Planning Application Documents

2023/0011/DET

Redevelopment of Tarbet visitor site comprising: Alteration and extension of toilet block; erection of cafe building; installation of 2no. shelter structures; alteration to pier and erection of pier shelter; expansion and alteration of vehicle/coach parking; provision of cycle path; alteration to A82 road to form bus stop; upgrade of Pier Road; formation of formal parkland; woodland management and ancillary landscaping works

Loch Lomond And Trossachs National Park Visitor Site Tarbet Argyll And Bute

Details Comments Constraints (14) **Documents (29)** Related Cases (4) Ma

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	<u>Date Published</u> ⇅	<u>Document Type</u> ⇅	<u>Description</u> ⇅
<input type="checkbox"/>	13 Jul 2023	Decision	Decision notice (final)
<input type="checkbox"/>	11 Jul 2023	Document approved	Bat activity survey report
<input type="checkbox"/>	11 Jul 2023	Recommendation	Delegated report final
<input type="checkbox"/>	19 May 2023	Document approved	Protected Species Surveys
<input type="checkbox"/>	18 May 2023	Document approved	Maintenance Schedule
<input type="checkbox"/>	18 May 2023	Plan approved	Tarbet Visitor Site Masterplan
<input type="checkbox"/>	18 May 2023	Plan approved	Tree Management, Removal and Protection

Snapshot 14th November – none of the documents required by the Decision Notice have been published. The maintenance schedule is about how the site would be managed post-completion.

The Decision Notice required the Park to provide to itself a Construction Environmental Management Plan before work started which included a “Construction timetable”. That has never been published on the planning portal ([see here](#)) as would normally be the case – why not?

The work planned for this year was limited in extent to the cafe and toilets, the car parks and the area immediately around them. To quote the LLTNPA:

Improvements being made to the visitor site at Tarbet this year include:

- a new shelter and viewpoint
- additional native woodland
- improvements to internal paths, roads and car parking to ensure easier and safer movement
- a range of measures to establish the site as a sustainable travel hub: a cycle hub with repair stands for electric vehicles and e-bikes, more accessible pedestrian facilities and improved cycling routes
- improvements to motorhome facilities including better parking and waste disposal facilities.

That should have not been unduly difficult to deliver. However, there appears to have been relatively little progress since May, when I had last visited, and October:



View of new campervan parking area in May with the unfinished pavement on left



View on 28th October; the pavement has been completed (in black not the coloured asphalt shown

The main change to this part of the car park in the last five months, apart from the completion of the pavement, appears to be the new corporate National Park signage:



Part of the reason the Heras fencing remains in place is to protect areas re-seeded late in the year because of the delays. Contrary to what the sign suggests don't need a permit to stop overnight in a campervan within a camping permit area although the LLTNPA does have a right to charge for parking.

I am told, however, that part of the delay has been caused by the NEW surfacing having to be ripped up and replaced but have not been able to verify this,

Keeping a lid on what has gone wrong

Until government in Scotland starts being open and honest about when things go wrong it will never improve. Formally, the body responsible for such governance in the National Park is the LLTNPA board and the formal means of keeping them informed about whether things are going to plan is through the updates on the Corporate Plan made at Board Meetings. They may be dry but what those reports say about the Tarbet Visitor Site development is instructive:

Theme 2: Promoting sustainable low carbon destinations with people, places and communities at their heart		
Improve visitor infrastructure and enhance visitor experience across the National Park	Deliver phase 1 of a multiyear plan to reconfigure the Tarbet picnic site to better serve users (including better campervan and motorhome management), whilst also making greenspace improvements.	The project continues to... and we are working with... the Phase 1 project on... Phase 1 is running 2 weeks... because of the Christmas... before then is not practical... of one month is now expected... on the early summer season... seeking to manage the...

Report to LLTNPA Board last December.

While slightly behind schedule, in December staff reported the work should start after the Xmas/New Year break. In fact it only started at the very end of January so, by that time, appears to have been running not two weeks but six weeks behind schedule.

By the March Board Meeting the project appeared to have caught up a bit:

Theme 2: Promoting sustainable low carbon destinations with people, places and communities at their heart		
Improve visitor infrastructure and enhance visitor experience across the National Park	Deliver phase 1 of a multiyear plan to reconfigure the Tarbet picnic site to better serve users (including better campervan and motorhome management), whilst also making greenspace improvements.	Site set up commenced in late... underway. Clark Contracts (work under the supervision of... Use Consultants, LUC, (Glasgow... Specialist works under the supervision... ecologist and arboriculturist... Stakeholder relations remain... finalising the Community Benefit... Contractor. A delay to completion of one... and we are actively seeking to... occurring and to manage the...

At the June Board Meeting, progress on the project was reported in two places, the first the annual report on the operational plan for 2023-24. This showed that originally the project was supposed to have been completed in 2023/24 and came up with some new reasons for the one month delay before year end, rock breaking and Japanese Knotweed:

Theme 2: Promoting sustainable low carbon destinations with people, places and communities at their heart		
Improve visitor infrastructure and enhance visitor experience across the National Park	Deliver phase 1 of a multiyear plan to reconfigure the Tarbet picnic site to better serve users (including better campervan and motorhome management), whilst also making greenspace improvements.	Tarbet Visitor Site's first cons works was successfully hand the Easter weekend, as plan Routine, proactive communi with community stakeholders

Agenda Item 13 Appendix 1 2023/24 Annual Operational Plan Progress to Year End (31 March)
10 June 2024

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		Package of community bene contractor included school er experience for young people opportunities. Unforeseen increase to Japa breaking out of rock contribu month, continued to work wit potential impact of this.
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The second report considered at the June Board was for the first quarter of the new financial year (or part of it). It stated the project had caught up and it was still expected to open "late summer":

Complete Phase 1 of the works at Tarbet and complete the design of Phase 2.	The anticipated delay in completing the north car park and moving to the next stage of the works has occurred. We are working with the contractor and site operators to manage the site during this period – with boat operators moving some scheduled sailings where appropriate to
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Operational Plan Progress to May

	Luss and Inveruglas. The delay incurred to this section 2 opening is not expected to impact the project's overall completion, which is still expected late summer. Commencement of detailed design of Phase 2 is scheduled for end of Q2 into early Q3.
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At the Board meeting on 30th September, however, without any explanation of what had changed, it was reported the “main works” would be completed by early October:

Complete Phase 1 of the works at Tarbet and complete the design of Phase 2.	The final programme shows the main works completed October.
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Annex 1 2024/25 Annual Operational Plan Progress to September

	<p>Heras wire construction site fencing will remain around lawn area for a further 6-8 weeks (weather dependant) to protect the grass and wildflower seeding whilst this established. Remaining works of site furniture, EV chargers and tree work will continue into the autumn. There should be minimal disruption to site operations and all works are expected complete by the end of the calendar year.</p> <p>Some preliminary in-house progress has been made on detailed design of Phase 2. The progression of further work that would involve consultancy support and therefore spend this financial year is subject to review in line with additional controls around discretionary spend issued by SG.</p>
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This new completion date was just a few days after the Board Meeting and clearly completely off the mark given the state of the site at the end of October and the continued “disruption to site operations” caused by facilities being closed at the end of the month (see below). Either the staff who contributed this to the report had not checked what was going on or it was a deliberate attempt by senior management to mislead their board.

What these extracts from the LLTNPA’s corporate planning documents demonstrate is that the public should have no faith in the corporate governance in the National Park. The project development at Tarbet has allegedly been delayed by various factors such as Xmas, Japanese Knotweed and the weather, then has miraculously made up time – suggesting the original timescales allowed plenty of leeway – before losing it again without explanation.

It is possible of course that the LLTNPA Board has considered the reasons for the delays in secret at their Audit and Risk Management Committee and has considered the lessons learned. If so, those considerations and lessons deserve to be made public.

There is a hint, however, of what may have caused some of the problems in the report on the Place Strategy given to the June Board Meeting – costs have escalated considerably:

Scale of investment required.

3.4. Costs have been recalculated from the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure in construction costs since they were prepared, and they focus only takes a cautious approach and shows the investment need at the up required along West Loch Lomond is £5.86 million, within the Nation allowance of £1.25 million for work underway at Tarbet in 2024-2025

West Loch Lomond	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
Average required investment adjusted for inflation	£1,250,000	£1,100,000	£1,140,000	£1,140,000

Notes 1. Except for 2024-25, investment costs are works only, which may be sub potentially an additional 42.5 %. Inflation is accounted for.

Disputes about those construction costs could have caused all sorts of delays with the contractor and will have significant implications for the rest of the “place” programme on West Loch Lomond.

Failing to inform or help visitors

The main impact of these delays is on the public, local people from the village of Tarbet and visitors at what is an important stopping off point at the junction of the A82 and A83. What is an important site has been mostly unavailable for a whole year, contrary to the LLTNPA’s stated intentions.

In January the LLTNPA promised it would “provide regular updates about facilities to visitors and the local community between now and then” (i.e late summer) has never materialised and they have not updated FAQs webpage ([see here](#)) about the development since the Spring:

▼ How long will it be closed?

Our popular visitor site, Tarbet, Loch Lomond, remains under construction while improvement

The site will partially reopen ahead of the Easter holidays, with limited facilities: Very limited parking capacity, Toilets open, Cafe open, Cruise access, No cycle path access, No picnic area, no waste disposal, very limited parking, the site is not suitable for motorhomes and campervans at this time.

The works are due to be complete by late summer.

While there have been occasional announcements on Facebook, eg announcing the toilets would be closed on 24-25th and 28-29th October when I visited ([see here](#)), there was nothing on site to say this let alone inform people of the location of the nearest public toilets. I saw people trying to get around the heras fencing to the toilet block. (Incidentally while the toilet block is being revamped as part of the plans my understanding is there is no increase in capacity, a missed opportunity given the popularity of the site for coach visits)..

Answers to other FAQs provided back in January were equally unhelpful:

“As the Grey and Black motorhome waste is closed for the duration of the works, visitors in Motorhomes and Campervans need to plan ahead and find a safe way to dispose of their Grey and Black waste.”

Your problem, guv, not ours!



There are lots of posh new signs in corporate livery designed to control people but no temporary signage to help people.

Conclusion and lessons for local communities

The LLTNPA have made grand claims about its upgrade of the visitor site at Tarbet claiming this will “transform it into a sustainable low-carbon destination with expanded facilities for the community and for visitors”. In truth, a cycle storage and maintenance facility along with an expanded car park with some Electric Vehicle charging points is going to do nothing to transform Tarbet into a low carbon destination. Nor is planting a few trees going to create new native woodland as the LLTNPA has claimed – that takes time.

That it has taken a whole year for the LLTNPA to deliver these relatively minor “improvements” is incredible and the public deserve to be told why. On past record, the LLTNPA are unlikely to do so willingly but others could force them to do so.

Given the project has been “supported by a £750,000 grant from VisitScotland’s Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF)” they could start asking some questions about how their money has been used. And the local Arrochar and Tarbet Community Development Trust could use the rights created by the Community Empowerment legislation to engage with with the LLTNPA about how it has managed the asset and whether handing it over to the local community might be better. The CDT could hardly do worse than the incompetent LLTNPA has done to date.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

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