

The LLTNPA & WDC's proposed plan for the Pierhead at Balloch – why now and what are the implications?

Description

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Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park

26 November at 17:33 · 🌐



Don't forget, if you'd like to share your thoughts and ideas on the development of an Improvement Action Plan for Balloch Pierhead, come along to the on site public engagement event this Saturday from 9am - 3pm.



This Saturday Page/Park architects, who are acting on behalf of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA) and West Dunbartonshire Council (WDC), are holding a public “engagement event” at the pierhead in Balloch. What is now described as an “Improvement Action Plan” was, back in June, called a masterplan – as I explained in recent my post on the Rescue Boat planning application which lies within the area covered by the plan ([see here](#)). This post will take a further look at why the LLTNPA are pushing this plan now and the potential implications.

Page/Park have set up a website for the consultation ([see here](#)), which contains some useful background information, and a short online survey ([see here](#)) which is open until 13th December. While Page/Park were the architects who designed the LLTNPA's **headquarters Balloch, which were recently subject to a major retrofit ([see here](#))**, they were apparently appointed to do this work by WDC.

Background and need for the plan

The Page/Park website contains a Q and A section which explains the origins of the proposal:

Q. A Charette was carried out in Balloch back in 2016. How does this work differ from that and what has been done in Balloch since then?

The Balloch Charette engagement and subsequent report identified opportunities and actions to make Balloch a better place for visitors, residents and businesses.

As a result, improvements were implemented by West Dunbartonshire Council at Village Square and Moss O'Balloch in 2019.

The report also identified a need to take a fresh look at the pier, and to do so in a collaborative way. The Improvement Action Plan for the pier is the next step in making that happen.

This is true as far as it goes but omits to mention the review for the pierhead area should have been COMPLETED by 2021 at latest and the collaborative design was intended to maximise integration with the other developments:

Project	Short Term (Years 1-2)	Medium Term (Years 2-5)	Long Term (Years 5+)
Collaborative review of pier area		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborative design to maximise integration of development proposals and supporting infrastructure/facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement development proposals.

Nor did the answer mention that one of the short-term actions from the charrette was to "Develop Riverside Site". At the time, in 2016, the LLTNPA and Scottish Enterprise had secretly appointed Flamingo Land as preferred developer for the Riverside Site but kept this news from the public ([see here](#)). Unbeknown to those who participated in the charrette, therefore, the Pierhead Review appears to have been originally intended as a means of helping to make the Flamingo Land development happen.

It is possible that the Pierhead review was then shelved because, as criticism of Flamingo Land's proposals developed, going ahead with it would have created a forum for the opposition. The origins of the proposed plan therefore stink and the LLTNPA, having failed to deliver on so many other actions

from the charrette ([see here](#)), now needs to explain why it wishes to press ahead with this one.

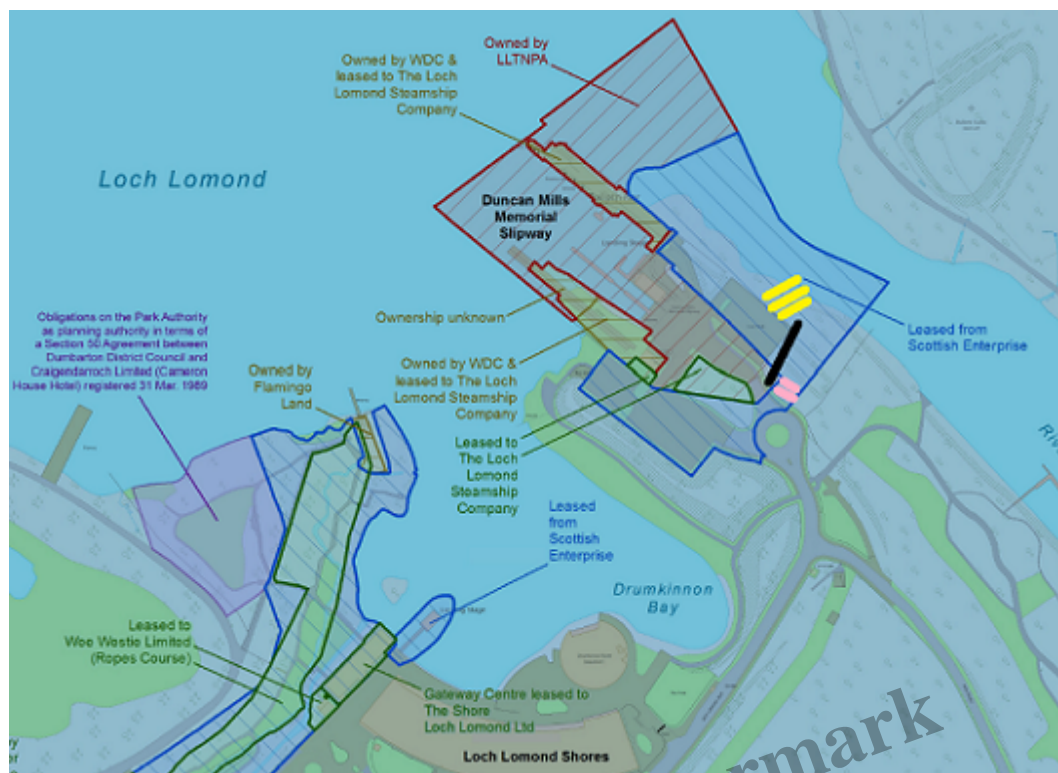
The need for the LLTNPA to explain this is reinforced by the fact that the scope of the plan, described as the “Study Area” on Page/Park’s website, excludes that part of the Pierhead earmarked for Flamingo Land’s aparthotel and leisure complex:



Screenshot credit Park/Page with annotations in red showing approx position of the buildings proposed by Flamingo Land at the pierhead and the recently approved location for the Rescue Boat.

Why? From a planning perspective it makes absolutely no sense to leave out this key area of land which fronts onto Drumkinnon Bay.

In my view the likely explanation is probably not that the LLTNPA doesn't want to be seen to put barriers in the way of Flamingo Land appealing their decision to refuse planning permission. Developers have three months to appeal and that period will be up mid-December so the LLTNPA could have easily waited to see what happened. Rather, I think its because when it comes to “improvements” the LLTNPA is focussed on the land they control and manage to the exclusion of almost everything else:



Map showing landownership and management at the Pierhead and how the LLTNPA has no interest in the land by Drumkinnon Bay that is owned by Scottish Enterprise and was to be the site of the Flamingo Land development. The yellow, black and pink annotations show the approx location of the rescue boat development. Map credit LLTNPA 2018.

Park/Page's Q and A may therefore be correct when it says:

Q. How does this relate to the Lomond Banks planning application?

The Improvement Action Plan for Balloch is unrelated to the Lomond Banks planning application.

Q. How does this relate to the Rescue Boat Planning application?

The Improvement Action Plan for Balloch is unrelated to the Rescue Boat planning application. If that planning application is approved, the Improvement Action Plan would seek to fully integrate the Rescue Boat site when considering the multiple demands on the site and would maintain safe access at all times to the Rescue Boat.

The wording in these answers is, however, revealing. Note how the first answer describes the Improvement Action Plan as being “for Balloch”, when it is actually just for the land the LLTNPA and WDC own and manage at the Pierhead. The two public authorities are equating their interests to those of the village of Balloch when they are not the same!

And if the Improvement Action Plan is seeking “to fully integrate” the Rescue Boat site, why doesn't it “fully integrate” the land owned by Scottish Enterprise fronting Drumkinnon Bay?

Another fake consultation

With the scope of the improvement plan limited to the areas where the LLTNPA and WDC have a direct interest, it is inconceivable that they don't already have ideas of what they want to do with it. Indeed, as I argued in my post on the Rescue Boat planning application, LLTNPA staff could not have asked their Board to approve an indicative budget of £2,400,000 unless they had a reasonably clear idea of what they wanted to do.

There is, however, absolutely NO mention of the LLTNPA and WDC's ideas and intentions in the "consultation" documents. Instead, the public are being asked a few vague questions the answers to which the LLTNPA will be able to interpret any way they choose. A real consultation would have come with a non-exhaustive list of potential options for using the land – including the future of the Maid of the Loch, the use of the Duncan Mills slipway, the potential for a watersports centre ([see here](#)) etc – but there is no mention of any of that. At present therefore the evidence suggests the LLTNPA and WDC's real intention is another very expensive car park upgrade as has happened at Tarmachan ([see here](#)).

It is worth noting here that before the public consultation event Page Park was asked to organise a two and a half hour private workshop with selected stakeholders on 11th November to which, I understand, the locally elected member of the LLTNPA Board for Balloch was not invited. I have submitted an FOI request to try and find out what is really going on.

While the LLTNPA has advertised the consultation event on social media, both the Balloch and Haldane Community Council (BHCC) and Save Loch Lomond only appear to have been informed about the event recently and its only appeared on their FB pages this week. With the consultation finishing in December the BHCC has been given no time to arrange their own consultation so that they can represent local opinion. That is wrong.

The BHCC, through the Lomond South Community Development Trust, has also I understand registered an interest in taking over the assets at the pierhead. As the key stakeholder they should have been consulted about the need for a plan for the pierhead in the first place and then its scope. Instead, the LLTNPA appears to be trying to rush through a plan for the pierhead BEFORE the Community Development Trust is fully up and running, putting its interests before those of the local community.

A Local Place Plan for Balloch and outdoor recreation plan should come first

Q. How does this relate to the Local Place Plan being initiated by the Community Council?

The Improvement Action Plan relates only to the site at Balloch Pierhead and is being led by the National Park Authority and West Dunbartonshire Council. The Local Place Plan is a community-led plan setting out proposals for the development and use of land, covering the whole area of Balloch. The Community Council has not yet started to prepare their local place plan but they are engaging with us on their plans for this.

A Local Place Plan might include identifying sites and land which support climate change adaptation, sites for affordable housing or community facilities, improvements to the neighborhood and town centre, for example. Both the Improvement Action Plan and Local Place Plan will be considered by the National Park Authority in preparation of the Local Development Plan.

Source: Park/Page pierhead website

The suggestion in the answer above there is nothing wrong in having two separate plans, one led by the LLTNPA and one led by the local community is totally wrong. Whatever happens at the pierhead affects the rest of Balloch, particularly as a large part of the area is used for car parking. Whatever decisions are made about those car parks, whether they are expanded, reduced or retain their current capacity, has consequences for traffic and parking in the rest of the village.

The interconnectedness of parking capacity and traffic was in fact recognised in the charrette and WDC was meant to lead on the development of a "parking strategy" for the village:

Parking strategy to maximise parking availability Project may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Undertake parking survey during summer 2016 to properly understand the situation, with community input use this to shape action plan. ▪ Increase awareness of rail travel to Balloch. ▪ Maximise number of parking spaces at Moss O'Balloch, West riverside, Balloch Pier, Balloch Castle, Old Luss Road, Balloch Road and Drymen Road - without damaging the area's character. ▪ Improve walking routes and signage around the village, including a bridge or ferry across the River Leven at the mouth of the loch. ▪ Investigate high-quality shuttle connecting car parks, railway station and destinations. ▪ An 'Event Parking Strategy' should be investigated and developed ▪ During major events, maintain vehicle access to businesses in the village centre. ▪ Redesign Balloch Road in village centre to minimise indiscriminate parking. ▪ Create coach drop-off space at proposed 'Station Square'. 	PP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Undertake summer parking survey, with input from Community Council and businesses. ▪ Commission parking strategy for village as a whole, using Charrette report as the brief. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Begin phased implementation of parking strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continue phase implementation parking strateg
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WDC never referred to any parking strategy for Balloch in their response to the Flamingo Land Planning Application and failed to acknowledge or act on local concerns of local people about the traffic implications for the village. That was despite the local MSP, Jackie Baillie, conducting a survey which found that traffic and parking were the number one concern local residents had about the

Flamingo Land application.

There would likely to be similar concerns about the Pierhead. However, without any indication of what the LLTNPA's and WDC's intentions are for the Pierhead and whether WDC's overall goal remains "maximising parking availability" (see here), there is nothing for local people to go on. All that the "consultation" survey asks is whether people have experienced problems with traffic and parking.

Read through the spin and the jargon in the explanatory materials for the consultation and it becomes even clearer the plan is really all about the parking arrangements on the land owned and managed by WDC and LLTNPA

Welcome

Welcome to the website for **Balloch Pierhead Improvement Action Plan** where you can find out more about the project and take part in our online survey. Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority and West Dunbartonshire Council are developing an Improvement Action Plan for Balloch Pierhead and we want to hear your views.

The goal of this Improvement Action Plan is to enhance the functionality and appeal of the Pierhead area through community engagement and collaborative place-making, focusing on thoughtful landscaping and orientation improvements rather than any large-scale built development.

Part of the Park Authority's commitment to improving places within the National Park to deliver greater benefits for communities, visitors and businesses, this project has been an ambition for several years and now has the support of landowners and the resources allocated for an Improvement Action Plan to be developed to help enable work to begin. Listening to the views of the community, businesses, tenants, and users with an interest in the site, the new Action Plan will illustrate what success looks like for the Pierhead, prioritise actions, support funding proposals, and be used as a planning guidance reference for any future development proposals.

Improving the "functionality" of the pierhead basically means how people get there; improving the "appearance" is code for landscaping the car parks; and the reference to the support of the landowners tells you this is something the LLTNPA and WDC want. So why not just say so?

The answer I believe is that if the LLTNPA and WDC did so openly the need to develop a Local Place Plan for the whole of Balloch first would be obvious.

Assuming the Flamingo Land development doesn't go ahead, there are two main sources of demand for parking at the Pierhead. The first is the Maid of the Loch which has always seen parking as being essential to attract visitors. In my view there are alternatives, such as electric transit vehicles connecting the pierhead area to the railway station and the Lomond Shores car parks, but that requires a wider plan for the whole village.

The second main driver of demand is the Duncan Mills slipway which is now the ONLY public launching point for boats onto Loch Lomond since LLTNPA senior management closed Milarrochy Bay without any consultation six years ago ([see here](#)). Two boat launching were never enough but instead of dispersing demand by creating more public slipways, the LLTNPA have concentrated it in one place. That has created problems for boaters, local residents and other visitors to Balloch. On popular days at the beginning and end of the main boating season there is simply not enough space for all the vehicles and trailers to park at the pierhead. Botched visitor management has created chaos.

I understand there is now talk of creating provisions to force people who need to park their cars and trailers after launching their boats to do so in the overflow car park on the far side of Drumkinnon Woods. That could increase the congestion further and have knock-on impacts for Lomond Shores. It will also create further inconvenience for the public who want to launch their boats.

If the LLTNPA really wants to solve the problems it has caused by forcing lots of cars and boat trailers into one place, it needs far more than a plan for the pierhead or indeed for the whole of Balloch. It needs to revive the former Outdoor Recreation Plan which it scrapped ([see here](#)) and build into that proper provision for boat launching.

Undermining the local community

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📢 Exciting News for National Park Communities!

We're proud to share that 11 communities within Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park now have validated Local Place Plans (LPPs), with plenty more in progress - a big thank you to the volunteers and community members for their hard work! 🏡 ✨

LPPs aren't just plans; they're community-driven blueprints for a sustainable, resilient future. From improving local services to fostering a greener economy, these plans help shape policies that prioritise our community needs and ambitions within the National Park. We strive to understand the challenges communities face and work collaboratively to listen to and empower local voices in National Park Authority decision-making. LPPs are an excellent example of this partnership working in action.

Check out the unique Lochgoilhead Place Plan, which even champions land use changes to support nature and climate action! This Plan reflects the community's vision but can also foster collaboration with landowners to tackle climate challenges and enhance biodiversity - <https://www.lochlomond-trossachs.org/.../local-place-plan/>

If you represent a community within the National Park and would like to discuss what how a Local Place Plan can benefit your community, please contact us at community.dev@lochlomond-trossachs.org

In the meantime, have a read how these plans are shaping policy, supporting sustainable living, and building community wealth and read our latest column in the Helensburgh Advertiser from Stuart Mearns, our Director of Place with the National Park – https://www.helensburghadvertiser.co.uk/.../24714965...

In the Q

and A above, it is claimed that the Local Place Plan "is a community led plan" and that "The Community Council has not yet started to prepare its local plan plan" – as if the entire responsibility for Balloch not having a Local Plan Plan lay with the local community,

The truth is that while the LLTNPA was helping local communities all over the rest of the National Park to prepare local place plans (see above) Balloch, which is the largest settlement in the National Park, was left out. That was not an accident. The LLTNPA's senior management did not want to do anything that might have got in the way of the Flamingo Land application going ahead or to assist the local community in Balloch to develop an alternative.

The LLTNPA owes it now to Balloch to make up for that but, having provided resources to other local communities to develop their local place plans, the LLTNPA now appear to be saying they don't have the resources available to help Balloch! That is complete poppycock. The LLTNPA, if it so wished, could divert all the resources its devoting to the Pierhead Plan and the £2.4m it has identified for implementing that to the Community Development Trust. Instead of helping develop a local place plan before the pierhead plan the LLTNPA has chosen to put its own interests first and before those of the local community.

No surprise there! This provides another example of why the Scottish Government should create no

new National Parks in Scotland until it has commissioned an independent review of the LLTNPA and its many failures.

The BHCC and Community Development Trust meantime needs to respond to the challenge, call a public meeting to discuss the needs and idea for the whole of Balloch and demand that the development of the Pierhead Improvement Action Plan is put on hold until a Local Place Plan and Outdoor Recreation Plan which address the wider issues have been agreed.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. flamingo land
2. LLTNPA
3. Local communities
4. planning

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