

Forest and Land Scotland's cuts at Sallochy and the review of the camping byelaws

Description

A couple of hours after my post on FLS yesterday ([see here](#)) I received a response from FLS to a Freedom of Information request I had submitted on 24th February about the Sallochy campsite. I can find no acknowledgement from FLS of that request in my emails so the timing of their response is interesting! The content is informative too, confirms what I was arguing in the post and has serious implications for the future of the camping byelaws.

FLS' response confirms they have unilaterally decided to withdraw from operating the Sallochy campsite, which is on its land, because of cuts:

"FLS has operated Sallochy as a campsite under various staffing models since 2012. With reducing resources the decision has been made to cease this operation and look for a new model for the site. I have attached a redacted Options paper regarding the site..... We are hoping to conclude discussions with the relevant party in the next few weeks however if these negotiations do not conclude FLS may have to consider alternatives including going to open marketThere are no plans for a public consultation.....We haven't had any discussions with Stirling Council or Police Scotland but I have enclosed some redacted e mails between FLS and NPA [National Park Authority]. [My emphasis]."

The redacted emails ([see here](#)) and options paper ([see here](#)) clearly show the "relevant party" is the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA). They also confirm that FLS is trying to shunt the costs of the Sallochy campsite onto the LLTNPA ("they want camping provision but want us to contribute"). However, if the LLTNPA fail to co-operate, FLS is prepared to outsource the facility to the private sector even though the "site would likely become more expensive and no longer provide an affordable camping provision along the ELL [East Loch Lomond] corridor."

Putting corporate interests before the public interest

The Options Paper also shows that FLS is prepared to end all camping provision on its land at Sallochy in favour of a car park and four motor home spaces (which are far more profitable) and how the site has been mismanaged for the last 5 years:

Option 1

Pros –

FLS have not received charged parking income from Sallochy between March-October since 2019 as the main gates were closed due to Covid and that has continued for the last 4 years.

Car parking charges are £[Redacted] per day and £[Redacted] for 1 hour. The car park provides approx. 45 parking spaces and it is assumed the site would likely be full during the peak season between April-Sept similar to Millarochy Bay and Rowardennan.

The site provides an excellent day visitor location with toilets on site, it's popular with wildlife watchers and has access to the beach for watersports, picnicking and walking and cycling opportunities along the WHW and the FLS promoted Sallochy Trail which provides an excellent summit viewpoint across Loch Lomond.

Looking at our current payment honesty rates being 87% across QEEP and visitors staying for the day rather than 1 hour, it is estimated the site could make £[Redacted] a day in charged parking 6 months of the year with a significant decrease between Nov-March. Averaging at 30% occupancy, potentially £[Redacted] per day. For the full year this could bring an annual income of £[Redacted].

The addition of x4 Stay the Night designated campervan/motorhome spaces at a premium site with toilets available would be £[Redacted] per stay. We know that we have campervans and motorhomes staying at all car parks along the ELL corridor on a daily basis (current messaging is 'no overnight parking' but we can't enforce this) so providing a provision for this would be a positive. Sallochy would be a popular site all year round so if these x4 spaces were occupied every day could bring a maximum income of £[Redacted].

FLS' site at Sallochy was originally a popular public car park – as Option 1 states “an excellent day visitor location” – and became even better when toilet provision was added to help cater for camping. For seven years camping and car parking co-existed without any obvious problems. However, the Covid pandemic was used as an excuse to lock the gates and day visitors have been denied access ever since. That has deprived FLS of the car parking income and has contributed to the current crisis.

FLS' response indicate the LLTNPA want to manage the site “for camping only” which suggests the National Park bears primary responsibility for Sallochy being closed to day visitors:

This model is based upon **option 4** which operational teams have explored, where site is managed for camping only. Option 3 is a similar model but includes car park charging for 10 spaces for day visitors however we believe that this adds complexity to site management (closed gates etc), public marketing and messaging, which the forecasted £[redacted] in FLS car parking income does not justify.

The option of Motorhome permits and projected [redacted] income could be supported if operational teams agree. This option also includes an option from FLS to generate parking income through the winter months.

Extract from email from the LLTNPA to FLS dated 11th February

The explanation for this appears to be that operating Sallochty as a dual purpose facility, for both campers and day visitors, appear too much bother for management despite the loss of income. As a result the gate to the car park at Sallochty has been kept locked for five years even after the camping season has ended. That is a public disgrace and beggars belief.

The Sallochty campsite and the review of the camping bylaws

When Grant Moir, now Chief Executive of the Cairngorms National Park Authority, first proposed camping byelaws as a temporary limited measure on east Loch Lomond, he received this response from Scottish Natural Heritage (the body with lead responsibility for access rights):

SNH supports, in principle, the National Park Authority's proposal to introduce a camping byelaw for East Loch Lomond. However our support is conditional on the adequate provision of informal camping within the restricted area being fully operational before the date byelaws come into effect. Plans have been drafted to develop the site at Sallochty. However, the issues relating to the development of informal camping 'pods' within the Loch Lomond Woods Special Area of Conservation and Rowardennan Woodlands Site of Special Scientific Interest have not been concluded, and final plans, budgets and site management arrangements have not been fully agreed and received all necessary approvals. Any delay in the provision of the informal camping facilities will necessitate a delay to the commencement date stated in the Park Authority's application to Ministers for confirmation of the proposed byelaws.

Extract from letter to Grant Moir dated 30th April 2010

As a result of SNH's position the provision of a campsite at Sallochty by Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS), as it was then, was a precondition for the east Loch Lomond camping byelaws being approved.

The need to provide more basic campsites was also a precondition for Scottish Ministers agreeing to extend camping byelaws to cover most of the popular loch shores (and best places for camping) in the National Park. The LLTNPA agreed to provide a minimum of 300 camping places (to increase year on

year) prior to the byelaws coming into effect. The LLTPNA only achieved this target due a commitment from FCS to achieve it:

3.6. Amongst the supportive responses received were key delivery partners Police Scotland, Forestry Commission Scotland and SNH. These key partners' consultation responses each provided guidance on areas they felt would improve the proposals further. These can be summarised as:

Police Scotland

- Review nuisance, damage and litter byelaw wording
- Query over Forest Drive inclusion in Wider Trossachs zone !
- Police will continue to utilise current laws and support collaborative approaches e.g. Operation Ironworks

Forestry Commission Scotland

- Camping provision essential
- Request additions to zones
- Prepare management plan for areas outside zones e.g. Argyll
- Need to consider resources to help with management

SNH

- Camping provision and plan is essential
- Review nuisance and damage byelaw wording
- Minor zone reductions and amendments
- Management Plan for Loch Lomond islands
- Keen to support further work

Following Salloch, FCS provided further land for campsites at Loch Chon and Loch Achray and agreed to the creation of "camping permit areas" in other areas it owned, most notably Three Lochs Drive. This was an area most of which was unsuitable for camping, which is why Police Scotland queried it (see above), but was made available so the LLTNPA could meet its target of 300 places.

It appears that FLS has now abandoned even that commitment and without any public consultation. This decision has serious implications for the continuation of the camping byelaws which need to be reviewed by 2026. Indeed, according to the LLTNPA website ([see here](#)) Three Lochs Drive is currently "closed while work is being carried out", along with the campsites at Loch Chon and Achray and the permit area on FLS land a Tarbet Isle. The temporary withdrawal of these facilities means the LLTNPA is currently failing to deliver what it promised to Scottish Ministers and provides further evidence that FLS no longer sees it as its role to assist with the management of essential recreational infrastructure on its land.

Instead of reporting what is clearly a crisis to the LLTNPA Board Meeting on 10th March, the Joint Response Visitor Management Plan 2025 stated:

“Pilot new management arrangements at Salloch to enhance visitor experience and create efficiencies across partners. Estimated delivery date April 2025.”

That was despite emails released by FLS clearly showing that LLTNPA senior management are fully aware of what is going on:

From: Redacted <[REDACTED]@lochlomond-trossachs.org>
Sent: 31 January 2025 15:42
To: Redacted <[REDACTED]@forestryandland.gov.scot>; Redacted <[REDACTED]@forestryandland.gov.scot>
Cc: Redacted <[REDACTED]@lochlomond-trossachs.org>; Redacted <[REDACTED]@lochlomond-trossachs.org>
Subject: 2025 Salloch Management Discussions

Hello Redacted

In just wanted to give you a quick update following a presentation and discussion Redacted gave to the NPA Exec on Wednesday.

In a nutshell, we have Exec approval to progress discussion on NPA Management of the site this season. This is on the basis that it's a useful pilot as part of wider FLS/NPA efficiency discussions, clearly offers FLS an efficiency saving, and that it ensure that camping provision is protected at this key location for the season ahead. This comes with the caveat that NPA are not willing to incur costs beyond staffing (covered by projected camping revenue income) and expect FLS to continue to cover site maintenance costs for the season pilot. So we have something to work from but we also need to meet next week to discuss site costs, FLS and NPA red lines and next steps and tight timeline.

The Exec have also asked me to set up a Director level discussion for NPA/FLS visitor services on Teams asap to discuss challenges, strategic alignment, and steps towards efficiencies for the ELL corridor. Possibly with a CEO/Director March/April site visit to move discussions forward.

Moreover, the Chief Executive of the LLTNPA, Gordon Watson, appears to have agreed to the transfer of costs from FLS to the LLTNPA for the next year without any approval from his board. While cutting out duplication should have happened long ago – the emails show, for example, FLS and the LLTNPA have different arrangements for cleaning the toilets at Salloch and Milarrochy – assuming responsibility for operational costs currently met by FLS sets a very dangerous precedent. What the LLTNPA should have been doing is demand FLS provide and manage visitor infrastructure on its estate but instead is endorsing the cuts.

In the Operational Plan for 2024/25, which the LLTNPA Board agreed in March 2024 ([see here](#)), it was agreed “to Conduct an internal review of the Camping Management Byelaws and begin early stakeholder engagement in preparation for the statutory review due to take place in 2026?”. A year later on 10th March 2025 this internal review was reported as being “behind schedule”, with workshops scheduled ([see here](#)). Given the time that would be needed to get FLS to reverse their decision to cut support for camping provision the LLTNPA appear to be heading for another outdoor recreation disaster.

The good news is that unless the LLTNPA can guarantee sufficient camping places in the camping management zones for the whole of the period the camping byelaws operate, from 1st March to 30th September, which requires FLS to co-operate, the logic is both NatureScot and Scottish Ministers should withdraw their support from the camping byelaws. All the money that has been wasted on trying to enforce the camping byelaws would be far better spent on restoring a police presence to the countryside – to deal with anti-social and criminal behaviour of all types where it arises – and providing better infrastructure for visitors.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. camping
2. Camping bye laws
3. Forest and Land Scotland
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