

Conservation, Heritage and Access Charities Dismayed at Setback for Lomond Banks Development at Balloch

Wednesday 11 June, 2025

Misleading social media campaign has duped thousands into signing a petition to save Loch Lomond which was never under threat

Three charity groups - the Friends of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, Maid of the Loch Steamship Company and Helensburgh and District Access Trust- with long histories of delivering countryside access, conservation and heritage projects in and around Loch Lomond, have expressed concern that the Scottish Government has buckled to pressure arising from the Lomond Banks planning application becoming a political football in the run up to the Scottish Parliamentary elections next year. This follows thousands of people signing very misleading Save Loch Lomond petitions led by the Green Party with an image from the slopes of Ben Lomond, some 20 miles away from the proposed development site.

The charity groups contend the Scottish Government's decision to call in the planning application for Ministers to determine is contrary to what both the First Minister and Planning Minister indicated recently when they accepted the findings of their independent Reporter who recommended approval.

The groups had all previously welcomed the independent Scottish Government Reporter's decision to overturn the National Park's refusal of planning permission for the £42million Lomond Banks development on brownfield sites in Balloch which they considered would provide a much needed boost to the local economy and for important natural and cultural heritage restoration initiatives at the southern end of Loch Lomond.

They believe, contrary to the deluge of emotive misinformation put out by Ross Greer MSP and others, that this development was never going to threaten the special qualities of Loch Lomond. The reality is that this tourist development is largely on sites that have been zoned for tourism and recreation use for many decades and degraded 'brownfield' land which was previously used for sand and gravel extraction, railway lines and sidings connecting the centre of Balloch with Balloch Pier, a holiday caravan park with loch frontage and the now derelict Grade A historic Woodbank House Hotel set well back from the loch. It will also have a very limited loch frontage on previously developed land.

It will be confined to the already heavily developed southern end of Loch Lomond and will do little or no harm at all to the local or wider environment with many positive spin off benefits including the protection and expansion of the small fragment of the ancient Drumkinnon woodland which still survives on the site after centuries of agricultural, industrial and recreational usage.

The groups have identified more than 20 direct and indirect benefits that will arise from the development if Ministers grant approval and they include the regeneration of centre of Balloch and Balloch Pierhead with the creation of a quality gateway to Loch Lomond and visitor destination that we can all be proud of; the re-connection of the village centre Balloch with the pierhead with a rail link which is crucial to the future viability of the Maid of the Loch and Lomond Shores; the creation of many good quality jobs on site and help with sustaining many existing jobs nearby in an area with very high unemployment, the improvement of the local footpath network; improved management and expansion of woodlands; and the generation of substantial funds from commercial rates and visitor levies annually to support local public services and a wide range of visitor management, conservation and heritage initiatives including the restoration of Balloch Castle and other improvements in Balloch Castle Country Park.

Stewart Gibb, Vice Chair of Helensburgh and District Access Trust, said: "As the volunteer body which was responsible for bringing two popular long distance National Great Trails through this site, we have been looking forward to working with Lomond Banks who were keen to help us with

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improvements and ongoing maintenance and signage of the routes through the site.

Naturally we are dismayed to hear that the development may now be in doubt once again after the Independent Reporter appointed by the Scottish Government came out in favour and comprehensively demolished the grounds for refusal."

John Urquhart, Chairman of the conservation charity, The Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs: "Our long standing support for this development has always been based on the area being consistently zoned for tourism for more than 40 years on former industrial land in planning policy documents as well as the many considerable conservation and economic benefits which the project promises .

We continue to have major concerns about the very misleading information and imagery being used by the Greens Save Loch Lomond Campaign led by Ross Greer to try and undermine the high quality development in Balloch and it is somewhat ironic that the view from the slopes of Ben Lomond used in the petition looks onto the 11 mile stretch of the west banks of Loch Lomond where there are plans by Transport Scotland to create a realigned A82 with giant causeways, rock cuts and the removal of acres of ancient woodlands and he and other objectors to Lomond Banks development such as the National Trust for Scotland remain largely silent on this ."

Iain Robertson, Chair of the Loch Lomond Steamship Company whose volunteers are working hard to restore the "Maid of The Loch" paddle steamer, said: "The Maid of the Loch was the last paddle steamer to be built in the UK and she remains an icon of Loch Lomond at Balloch Pierhead. We see the Lomond Banks scheme as key to our efforts to preserve her for future generations and ultimately bring her back into service when she can help address some of the loch's serious transport and visitor pressures and we are also looking forward to being reconnected by rail to the rail network which is crucial to our efforts to restore the ship and sustain a viable operation."

Ends

Notes:

Given the go ahead, potential direct and indirect benefits of the development include:

1. Creation of many high quality job opportunities for local people including plumbers, joiners, electricians, engineers, trainee brewers, guides, marketing and accountancy specialists, lifeguards and hospitality staff and in an area that suffers from high unemployment, but with good transport links to the site to get to work.
2. Helping to sustain existing businesses in Balloch Main Street and at Lomond Shores supporting existing and new jobs with over 600 additional visitors staying on site every night nearby on an almost year round basis.
3. Generation of over £1 million per annum in commercial rates and visitor levies to support local public services and a range of transport, visitor management, conservation, heritage and public realm improvement projects.
4. Bringing the Old Balloch Station building back into use with the re-opening of a visitor information centre there to welcome visitors to Balloch and the wider Loch Lomond area. re-establishing a visitor information service there.
5. Creating an attractive village square broadly in line with the community charette plans and at no cost to the public purse.
6. Reconnecting the centre of Balloch by rail and public transport with Balloch Pier and the introduction of other transport initiatives to ensure visitors and locals can get around the village easier.

- 7.Improving traffic flows on the A82 by helping to finance additional filter lanes at the busy Stonymollan roundabout and to deal with the additional traffic generated by Lomond Banks and the recently announced £250 million expansion of the nearby Faslane Naval Base.
8. In partnership with local groups creating additional woodland on the site and nearby in areas such as Balloch Castle Country Park which will improve wildlife corridors around the southern end of Loch Lomond.
9. In partnership with the “Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels” initiative the introduction of a grey/red squirrel monitoring/management system throughout the site.
- 10.The creation of pond and wetland habitat in Drumkinnon Wood by partially flooding the old sand quarries.
11. Linked with the ponds and wetland described above, re-establishment of a naturally meandering nature friendly course for the canalised and culverted Stonymollan Burn.
12. Sensitive development of mountain biking trails through the woods while addressing dangerous slopes at the edges of the old quarries.
13. Improvement and linking up of walking/cycling trails throughout the woods and along the river bank.
14. Helping to maintain and improve the John Muir and Three Lochs Way National Great Trails which run through the site, including some re-routing through woodland wherever appropriate.
15. As part of the Balloch Station Square proposals helping to provide a suitable item of public art to mark the southern terminus of the Three Lochs Way Great Trail.
16. Helping to providing a wildlife friendly pedestrian bridge near the entrance to the River Leven to improve linkage between the West Riverside area and Balloch Park.
17. Restoration of the derelict Grade A listed former Hamilton House (Woodbank House) Hotel building.
18. Contribution to the restoration and conservation of Balloch Castle and other Country Park improvements through the visitor levy funds generated annually from the tourist accommodation planned as part of Lomond Banks.
19. In partnership with others, providing high quality site interpretation and education initiatives.
20. Contributing to the better management of the River Leven and dealing effectively with abandoned boats in partnership with others.
21. Support a range of visitor management initiatives in Balloch and around the loch concerned with issues such as litter bin and public toilet provision and regular maintenance with visitor levy funds generated by Lomond Banks.
22. Supporting efforts to help preserve and restore the Maid of the Loch and piers around the loch as part of the creation of a sustainable transport network possibly with funds generated from the visitor levy on Lomond Banks accommodation which is likely to exceed £500,000 per annum.
23. Where appropriate on the site, improving the quality of beach surfaces and access to the loch shore and riverbank.
24. Working in partnership with others to identify and implement a range of measures designed to promote natural diversity within and around the site, including control of damaging non-native invasive vegetation, provision of nest boxes and holes, hedgehog hibernation sites, otter holt banks, invertebrate “hotels” etc.

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