

National Park Charity Reflects on Another Successful Year

Thursday 30 May, 2024

The Friends of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs recently held their AGM in the beautiful surroundings of Ross Priory in Gartocharn. The event was well-attended by members and included senior business figures from around the National Park from Cameron House Hotel, The Oaktree Inn and Luss Estates.

John Urquhart, who became Chairman of the Friends at their AGM in 2023 provided an overview of the Friends' activities and projects and delivered his Chairman's Report and presentation, which included an update on planning activities in and around the National Park.

John said "It has been a busy year on the planning front with no less than 6 major applications either current or pending. After a huge amount of pre-application consultation, Flamingoland's Lomond Banks holiday and leisure development proposal was finally lodged and is about to be determined. West Dumbarton Council has changed its position on it, deciding finally to support the scheme. A new application to develop the former torpedo testing range site at the head of Loch Long has been submitted, Simply Blue is appealing against the National Park's refusal of its Loch Long fish farm application, the renewable energy company, Coriolis, has lodged an application for a 10 turbine wind farm on the western end of the Kilpatrick Hills and Scottish and Southern Electricity is about to apply for permission to partially upgrade its 75 year old Sloy hydro-electric facility to pumped storage. Strathclyde University is also currently working up an application for a sizeable photovoltaic array at its Ross Priory property.

Recently the Friends, in tune with its founding principles, has tended to support planning applications which were deemed would not unduly harm the environment and would benefit the local economy. Thus, we supported the Flamingoland, Loch Long fish farm and Torpedo Range schemes and still do. However, the urgent need to respond to the global warming crisis has spurred trustees into a change of direction in relation to renewable energy. Having previously argued against large scale wind turbines, we will now support applications outside the park even if the turbines can be seen within the park. We have therefore publicly supported the Coriolis Vale of Leven wind farm scheme. We will also support the Sloy and the Ross priory applications when they become live. It is worth emphasising that our support for all of these applications is conditional upon the developer investing in the natural capital of the area within and around the National Park and it is with that aim in view that we have begun discussions with Simply Blue, Coriolis and SSE regarding potential community/environmental benefits they might be able to offer if their applications are successful. Local Energy Scotland is assisting with the procedural aspects of the process of identifying and involving other community organisations who may wish to become stakeholders in relation to the two energy related projects. I am delighted to report that, even before they have dipped so much as a toe in Loch Long, the Loch Long fish farm company, "Simply Blue", has already agreed to sponsor one of the A82 Visitor Management Scheme litter bins as part of our Bonnie Banks Bin Scheme project."

In his review of the year, John also highlighted:

- The 2023 Two Lochs Visitor Management project – temporary toilet provision at Duck Bay and Arrochar (supplied by Honeywagon), employment of a seasonal visitor warden and the provision of 20 litter bins along the A82. 2023 was the third year of this successful project.
- Young Friends work has had excellent success last year with many local youngsters learning about the National Park through outdoor fun adventure activities.
- Heritage projects including working to keep Tom Weir's Rest at Balmaha a beautiful area for visitors and residents.
- Three successful volunteering "Make a Difference Days", litter picking on some of Loch Lomond's islands, working at Trossachs Pier, Loch Katrine and helping to tidy the grounds and gardens at Callander Primary School.
- The continued campaigning and lobbying on matters affecting the National Park such as the proposed A82 upgrade.
- Friends' role as financial broker and project manager of the replacement Tarbet "Faerie" Bridge which was funded by the Dr Hannah Stirling Loch Lomond Fund

John commented, "With a new man at the helm, the Friends are adding another "P" for "Positive" to their existing 3"Ps" – to Provide, Promote and Protect the National Park. Regarding urgently needed renewable energy schemes, the Friends will no longer be "NIMBYS", but will now be "YIMBYS". To protect the park we must take a positive stance towards renewable energy"

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“The surprising thing is that the National Park itself does not seem to understand the importance of encouraging renewable energy if Scotland is to meet its declared decarbonising targets.”

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