

NEWS RELEASE - 2 December 2008

Strathard Community Council & Loch Katrine Community Trust

Local community fights to save iconic Loch Arklet view

The tiny communities of Inversnaid and Stronachlachar in the Trossachs have attracted worldwide support in their fight to keep the most spectacular view in their local area at Loch Arklet, in the heart of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park. Loch Arklet and its surrounding moorland are under threat of being planted over by Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) to become part of the 'Great Trossachs Forest'.

For the last year locals have been requesting that the magnificent open view at Loch Arklet is left unchanged. This panorama opens up at the end of a forested route to provide a contrasting moorland vista, much loved by the many tourists, photographers and walkers who visit the area. Graphic representations supplied by Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) show that the trees will have a significant effect on the scenery, with the final impact being described by an FCS expert as a 'semi-natural' view.

Loch Arklet and its surrounding moorland have been the subject of extensive PR and publicity over many years in all types of media. The views at Loch Arklet have been photographed and filmed on numerous occasions: among others, Billy Connolly and Bill Oddie have praised the scenery under threat at Loch Arklet.

Quotes by Billy Connolly:

'this has remained my favourite place, for many years'

'this is the same as it's been for centuries - people should be able to come and see this and enjoy themselves and breathe in this extraordinary clean air'

This planting scheme at Loch Arklet will help FCS meet Scottish Government tree-planting targets by creating the 'Great Trossachs Forest'. The communities have only objected to 312 hectares of planting at Loch Arklet, less than 2% of the Great Trossachs Forest of 16650 hectares. Plans also involve forestry planting at historic Loch Katrine, but locals decided to focus on, and object only to, the loss of the Loch Arklet view, where they believe the scenery is world-class and should be protected for future generations. Their request is that these trees be located elsewhere in Scotland in a less visually sensitive location. This is an exceptional action for them to take as they value the economic benefits that FCS brings to their rural area, and normally try to work with FCS, rather than against it.

Local people are not against forestry planting in general, particularly when native species are involved, as in this case. They recognise the positive benefits of trees and what they contribute to the environment. However in their eagerness to attract external funding, (e.g. from BP and the Heritage Lottery Fund) FCS and other publicly funded organisations seem to

have forgotten that a moorland view famous the world over will be lost for future generations. Moorland environments also have an important environmental role, and contribute effectively to carbon sequestration to tackle global warming (see note 7).

The community is keen that alternative ways to manage the land, such as using animal grazing instead of planting trees, be fully explored and used at Loch Arklet, to preserve the distinctive views and minimise uncontrolled regeneration.

When challenged to provide formal evidence that there was wider support for Loch Arklet remaining unplanted, the Forestry Commission Scotland official responsible for making the decision (Mr Syd House, FCS, Perth), gave the communities only three weeks to back up the feedback they had received over past months which had supported their belief they must fight to save the view.

A website www.locharkletview.org.uk was therefore quickly developed and within less than a week of its launch, with no press coverage or PR, the related e-petition has attracted well over 500 signatures, with 100+ signatures on a paper petition locally. Perceptive comments have been left on the petition by a third of respondents who have taken the time to add depth to their vote, so the community is hoping that this demonstration of widespread support, which was requested by FCS, will be sufficient for the matter to be reviewed further by those who can influence the matter before a decision is taken. *[Note: comments shown on website].*

The community organisations are keen to bring the website and e-petition to the attention of a larger audience, in order to reach the many visitors from elsewhere who visit the area on a regular basis, and who enjoy and value the view. This feedback from the public petition is aimed at not only FCS but:

- The Scottish Government
- Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park (LLTTNP)
- Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH).

The above public bodies all have influence on the final decision regarding planting at Loch Arklet, should FCS decide to proceed with the plans.

There has been local concern about the scale of Loch Arklet planting since details were first provided a year ago. Nothing FCS has done during 'consultation' has substantively altered the extent of the proposals for Loch Arklet. FCS Scotland appear now to want to start planting at the earliest opportunity since, after moving slowly on the matter up to this stage, they have recently advised they wish to make a final decision on 3rd December. Local people have limited ability to make any formal objection or to influence the result - the decision process means that individual and communities have little effective say in such matters.

Despite assurances in writing to the contrary that the forestry operations in designated areas surrounding Loch Arklet would not go ahead before any decision, in an action that has angered many people, FCS has provocatively started to dig up land to the east of Loch Arklet, and therefore has already scarred the land surrounding the loch. (see website for photos).

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park (LLTTNP) has been singled out for particular criticism by the local community. The National Park are keen to promote the concept of a 'Great Trossachs Forest' while at the same time using the famous view of Loch Arklet, which would be massively altered, in a two page spread in their 2007-12 strategic plan. Local residents believe the National Park should not be supporting plans to change the special qualities and uniqueness of this view, but should be ensuring its conservation for future generations. They believe that LLTTNP should take heed of its own Guiding Principle 1, printed directly below the Loch Arklet view. Web link [here](#). We believe the National Park is not heeding the 'Sandford Principle' it quotes there - explained [here](#):

Section 62 of the Environment Act 1995 makes clear that if National Park purposes are in conflict then conservation must have priority. This is known as the 'Sandford Principle' and stems from the Sandford Committee's recommendation, in 1974, that enjoyment of the National Parks 'shall be in a manner and by such means as will leave their natural beauty unimpaired for the enjoyment of this and future generations'

Notes:

1. Strathard Community Council covers a large area, from Aberfoyle along the B829 to Inversnaid and Stronachlachar.
2. Loch Katrine Community Trust represents the residents of Loch Katrine and Loch Arklet.
3. Full details of the campaign and supplementary information are available on the website www.locharkletview.org.uk
4. The e-petition link is:
<http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/save-the-loch-arklet-view.html>
5. The Scottish Government has set Forestry Commission Scotland a target to plant 10,000 hectares of trees per annum.
6. Regarding the benefits of moorland environment see:
http://www.moorlandassociation.org/carbon_lockup.asp