The Local Plan – Inspectors’ Hearings

Having succeeded in forcing the LDNPA to remove any references to ‘Gondolas’ from its Draft Local Plan, we have been fighting hard against renewed LDNPA attempts to circumvent national planning policy guidelines to allow ‘back door’ approval for a gondola in the Final Draft. First via written submission and then verbal testimony to HM Government Inspectors at meetings in November at Murley Moss, we argued that:

- LDNPA must include a Major Development Policy within its Local Plan;
- Forestry England’s (FE) ideas for Whinlatter (uncovered by our Freedom of Information requests) viz. cafes / toilets and a second Gondola on top of Seat How, mountain lodges, viewing platforms and extended bike trails, must not be allowed to ‘dodge’ this policy (FE’s own estimates indicate a 78% increase in footfall from 225,000 to 400,000 visitors a year);
- There is no evidence base or need for such large scale development at Whinlatter; without which there is no significant transport issue in Braithwaite;
- In the event of increased visitors to Whinlatter, the LDNPA / FE must use existing infrastructure (roads) and genuinely ‘sustainable’ solutions like e-mini-buses to manage traffic through Braithwaite, instead of promoting artificial tourist attractions, masquerading as sustainable transport solutions.

We await the Inspectors report in the New Year to see what changes they require the LDNPA to make to the Plan...
The Forestry England Traffic Survey

This 72 day survey of traffic (Spring 2019) at the entrance to Whinlatter VC is the first substantive piece of work on this much discussed issue. FE were reluctant to publish the results, but following repeated requests from us, they did so in November. The results may explain their reluctance, since this report shows that on average only 30% of the traffic using the pass is actually going to / coming from Whinlatter Forest Centre. The rest is traversing between Braithwaite and Lorton. (Due to the location of the survey cameras traffic to and from Coledale could not be included, if it had then the 30% figure would be even lower). So a Gondola could only ever reduce traffic levels through the narrows to a very small degree. While we understand that there are occasional ‘log jams’ in the narrows, it’s really important that we as a community don’t allow the LDNPA and FE to exaggerate the seriousness of this ‘problem’ in order to spuriously justify a gondola. It is NOT a solution to a traffic problem (still less a ‘sustainable’ one). Their real motivation is to create a new tourist attraction to transport tourists in a way which would lend credibility to a re-launched Whinlatter as England’s only Mountain Resort.

Transport Options Evaluation Survey (TOE)

In spite of the results of the Traffic Survey, the Whinlatter Mountain Centre Working Group (LDNPA and FE’s new name for the group trying to develop the Gondola) commissioned an engineering consultancy to evaluate the best ways to ‘solve the traffic problems at Braithwaite narrows’. They’ve given 12 different possible ‘solutions’ for the consultancy to look at. 5 of them involve Gondolas, with the route from just outside Thornthwaite being cited as the ‘most obvious’ option; while the ‘Park & Ride’ from Keswick option (in the Local Plan draft) was not mentioned! FE sought to reassure locals at a public meeting in Braithwaite in November, suggesting that a Gondola was not necessarily the preferred option. Both the Parish Council and NoGo Gondola have requested hearings with the consultancy or their appointed ‘engagement’ sub-contractor. So far we have not been contacted...
World Heritage Watch

Acting in unison with 3 other community pressure groups fighting against inappropriate LDNPA developments in the Park (4x4 damage in Little Langdale; Zip Wires at Honister and the Keswick:Threlkeld Railway Path) we have submitted a paper to the annual World Heritage Watch conference to be held at in Paris in January 2020. UNESCO World Heritage officials will attend this conference and it is hoped that we will increase the pressure on them to force HM UK Government (who are responsible to UNESCO for the protection of WH sites) to bring LDNPA into line.

Stop Press! FOI Hearing

After a 12 month battle, NoGo Gondola has succeeded in bringing the LDNPA to Tribunal over its withholding of information relating to the Gondola. LDNPA claimed that the commercial interests of the project’s stakeholders outweighed the public interests of disclosure (in relation to, for example, the feasibility study carried out in 2018). We’ve objected to this and succeeded in forcing the LDNPA to explain their position more fully before a judge. The hearing will be scheduled for a date sometime after February 14th.

December 2019