

June 2005. Update on proposed new zoo at Loch Lomond.

Merlin Entertainments Group Limited of 3 Market Close, Poole, Dorset BH15 1NQ have placed an advert in The Dumbarton & Vale of Leven Reporter newspaper of 1<sup>st</sup> June 2005 to give notice of their intention to apply, at a date not less than 2 months from 1/6/05, to West Dunbartonshire Council, Council Offices, Roseberry Place, Clydebank G81 1TG for a licence to operate a proposed zoo at Drumkinnon Tower, Ben Lomond Way, Balloch, Loch Lomond G83 8QL.

A written notice of the intention to make application for a zoo licence, giving details about the proposed zoo has been sent to the Council and can be inspected, free of charge, at the above Council offices between 08.30 and 16.30 Monday to Friday.

You can learn more about these proposals at:

<http://www.animalconcern.com/lomond.html>

I would expect the full zoo licence application to be submitted very soon after August 1<sup>st</sup> as it is intended to close Drumkinnon Tower in September and build the concrete and glass tanks and other displays over the winter. Scottish Enterprise Dunbartonshire is reportedly going to splash out £3.4 million on this makeover. That sounds like public money to me.

I have seen the new zoo plans and it is basically a Sea Life Centre with some freshwater tanks to display trout, salmon, eels and other freshwater species from Loch Lomond plus seawater tanks to display species found in the Clyde Estuary and Atlantic. This gives them the excuse to display members of the shark family and to have "touch tanks" where people can touch the fish. The most controversial aspect of this project involves housing a family of Asiatic otters in a concrete run built into the side of Drumkinnon Tower. Planning Permission for these alterations was given by the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority at the end of 2004.

If you live in the area or are going to be near Clydebank before the end of July 2005 please make a point of going to the Council Offices and asking to see the zoo plans. It is very important that opposition comes from locals as well as individuals living further afield and, of course, from pressure groups near and far.

Although objections should be submitted after the licence application is made you can lodge your protest with John Stevenson, Team Leader. Commercial and Licensing Section, West Dunbartonshire Council, Council Offices, Roseberry Place, Clydebank G81 1TG: [environmental.health@west-dunbarton.gov.uk](mailto:environmental.health@west-dunbarton.gov.uk)

Ask him to keep your protest on file as an objection to the licence application when it is submitted.

You cannot formally object to a zoo on moral grounds although there is no harm in mentioning your objection to zoos on moral grounds in your submission. The key facts to raise are:

- 1: The risk to the local ecology should non-native species of otter escape into the environs of Loch Lomond.

- 2: The unsuitability of keeping otters in a totally artificial environment.
- 3: The negative educational value of displaying non-native creatures in artificial conditions.
- 4: The hygiene/health risks and negative educational value of encouraging the public to make contact with fish in touch tanks.
- 5: The possibility of introducing disease into Loch Lomond by displaying and encouraging visitors to touch animals and fish brought in from other areas.
- 6: The extreme risks posed if trout or salmon are brought in from fish farms where disease is rampant and fish are genetically inferior to wild stock.

Let the Council know that if the project goes ahead you will boycott Drumkinnon Tower and Lomond Shores and only visit the area to picket the new zoo.

Although it is not really our job to do so you could suggest alternatives. We have already outlined lots of non-exploitive and truly educational ways to turn Drumkinnon into an attractive asset to the wildlife and ecology of the Trossachs. Merlin Entertainments also run other attractions such as Dungeons. Drumkinnon Tower would be a perfect setting for such a project showing the history of the area. You could reconstruct a crannog in the bay, moor a Viking Longship outside the tower and scatter some robotic dinosaurs and prehistoric sharks around the place. Inside the tower you could acknowledge the local trade in whisky distilling and cattle and sheep rustling, recreate the Glencoe massacre, have a graphic depiction of the gralloching of William Wallace (the kids would love that) and a display of once world famous local industries including fabric dyeing operations and the Argyll Motor Works.

This might sound a bit extreme for a National Park but you have to remember the planners think it is a commercial theme park and quite happily plonked a concrete castle and 1960's style prefabricated shopping mall on the banks of Loch Lomond. They encourage visitors to enjoy a taste of Scotland by providing a French Market and Spanish Tapas Bar. If you put forward plans to turn Ben Lomond into the biggest helter skelter in the world or propose carving the face of Rab C. Nesbit into the Cobbler mountain you would not only get permission, you'd get a grant and charity status as well!

Please act now to try and stop Scotland getting a new zoo.

Thanks.

John F. Robins,  
Campaigns Consultant to Animal Concern