**HEART 200 – Tearing the Heart out of Scotland**

**For Immediate Release**

Launch date of Heart 200 Monday July 1st 2019 at Loch Leven’s Larder, Kinross, Perthshire.

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**Reasons to be Wary of Yet Another Tourism Driving Route (Heart 200)**

* Are the rural roads covered by this venture fit for purpose? Can they cope with increased numbers of cars, mobile homes and motorbikes? Who will pay for the inevitable road repairs?
* Why have lessons not been learned from the North Coast 500 about the impact on the lives of residents along the route from noise, intrusion, rubbish (and worse), traffic hold ups etc?
* Why is public money being used to promote an initiative that will increase carbon emissions in the countryside when we have a Climate Crisis?
* Who gains from increased through traffic, constantly on the move, looking for the next Instagramm-able photo, and displacing those who used to come to enjoy the peace and quiet?
* Why is public money being used to support a venture that, if successful, will simply kill the goose that lays the golden egg?

**Introduction:**

Heart 200 is a proposed new touring route of approximately 200 miles around Perth, Stirling, The Trossachs and Highland Perthshire, and modelled on the North Coast 500 (<https://www.heart200.scot/>). Most of the route is through beautiful countryside, much appreciated by locals and visitors alike, who already flock to these areas to enjoy the peace and quiet. Many stay in small enterprise B&Bs or self-catering lets where they may stay for 5 – 14 days exploring the area, often on foot or by bicycle along the quiet, single track/narrow roads.

**Roading:**

The 200 mile route guides you round on a mixture of roads – some are standard A roads, but much of it is along a network of single track and fairly elderly A and B roads that are already struggling to cope with the current levels of local and visitor traffic (ie. local business traffic, farmers, wood lorries, construction vehicles, touring coaches, mobile homes, and other tourist traffic). Even on the A-roads, an increasing number of vehicles are so big that they no longer fit on one side of the road and spill over the white line, creating problems for on-coming traffic and further erosion of the road edges and verges. On our single-track roads, the problems are magnified.

Increased traffic will have a detrimental effect on the condition of the roads used and a likely increase in rubbish left behind. Air and water pollution (from water run off) will be increased, and carbon emissions will increase.

Also a strong likelihood of an increase in accidents, particularly between motorised traffic and pedestrians, cyclists, animals – but the emergency services will struggle with access particularly on the single-track roads as these will quickly become blocked.

**Misquoted Tourism Statistics:**

Heart 200 frequently quotes a '**17%** drop in visitor numbers since 2011 in Perthshire’ in media releases. It also used this in its funding application to Perth & Kinross Council. This statistic comes from combined national data, published by Visit Scotland (<https://www.visitscotland.org/binaries/content/assets/dot-org/pdf/research-papers-2/regional-factsheets/perthshire-.pdf> ). However the 17% drop is for Domestic visits only for the whole of Scotland for 2011 – 2017: if you add in the International figures it drops to 10.8% Nationally. And in the introduction it clearly states that this data is less reliable at Regional level due to small sample size. And to reduce these error margins it's best to use a 3 year rolling average to increase the sample size.

When calculated as suggested it shows that although the figures are down over the period, the difference between the 2011-13 average and the 2015-17 average is a drop of only **5.5%.**

**Social Costs:**

It is not just the road infrastructure that is the problem. People who live on the North Coast 500 route say that it has changed their whole way of life and decreased amenity value to residents and for those visitors who come to enjoy a tranquil rural setting. They have experienced increases in traffic hold ups, road wear/damage, noise, pollution, rubbish, and free camping on road verges with its associated problems of rubbish and dumping of human waste. A review of the NC 500 route found it has also had a detrimental effect on some businesses, particularly self-catering and other businesses reliant on a peaceful rural environment and quiet roads, like farming.

It's been shown repeatedly that circular routes with a 'number attached' are used by many as a fast route, or even as a speed test or racetrack. This carries many dangers in itself, but it definitely does not contribute to the local economy or to the livelihoods in rural communities.

Perth & Kinross Council are providing a significant sum of public money to be invested without the Council appearing to have taken on board any of the lessons that might have been learned from NC500. Nor has any preparatory work been undertaken to make the roads fit for purpose or to put in place the kind of infrastructure required to support a busy driving route (fit for purpose roads, toilets, rubbish bins, signage etc). In other words there is a significant social cost that is currently being ignored by the operators and the Council.

**Climate Impact:**

Heart 200 will add to Climate Change and conflicts with current National Policy. At a time when the Scottish and UK governments have both declared a Climate Emergency, this is a proposal that will actively increase carbon emissions.

Support of a road touring route, a repeat of the same flawed marketing exercise, is fundamentally against current climate policy and is certainly not the right way to create sustainable tourism into the future.

**An Alternative Approach – Putting the Heart back into Scotland:**

Why can't tourism be approached in a new way? One that reduces even the current level of carbon emissions? One that uses our abundant supply of Scottish green electricity?

Time to ditch the old ways and be creative – think outside the box – as this is the only way for a sustainable future.

True 'slow' tourism, run with public transport. Maybe a distribution of mini hubs of smaller electric buses, with provision for carrying bikes, pushchairs and luggage, linking up with more major hubs. What a great way to reduce carbon emissions, subsidise local transport provision for local residents, and become a model of tourism for the future! It also sits comfortably with other slow paced road users, farmers' road use and local wildlife. And it would benefit an even greater range of businesses. What a great way to promote Perth & Kinross and Scotland!

Attached docs:

* copy of this press release in word format FYI
* photo of coach stuck on one of the many singe track roads in this area. Permission given for reproduction of this photo and credit to Ronald Owens, 'Bespoke Highland Car Tours' Tel: 07979 412831 / email: [rowens55@rocketmail.com](mailto:rowens55@rocketmail.com)
* small photo as eg of current number of vehicles on our small roads

**Additional Notes for Editor:**

Background:

* The HEART 200 is a mini version of the NC500 through popular, busy routes and single-track roads within Highland Perthshire (see website for route map: <http://www.heart200.scot/> )
* It is a private business venture based at 'Fortingall Hotel', promoting a driving route through Fortingall and many other small communities over a 200 mile route.
* The organisers' website states that it is a 'suggested' route, to allow for 'slow tourism' (exactly how the NC500 is marketed). But realistically there is no way to control how visitors use it: as soon as a route is published it can be used in any form.
* It has been awarded a £45,000 grant by PKC in staged payments.

Likely Issues and Impacts of proposed Heart 200 if allowed to proceed:

1. A conflict with current 'slow' users of many of these roads - cyclists, walkers, horse riders, dog walkers, farmers moving stock, farm vehicles and children getting on and off the school buses.
2. Visit Scotland, Highland Perthshire and PKC already actively promote Highland Perthshire for 'slow' tourism – and with signed Tourist Routes - especially for those who enjoy family holidays, quiet roads, wildlife, cycling, walking, dog-friendly self-catering lets and hotels, and beautiful scenery away from urban noise and pollution. A driving/touring route would destroy these very same quiet roads - you can't have both.
3. A large increase in traffic, particularly along single-track roads and roads that are already struggling to manage the volume of visitor and business traffic (eg. campervans, logging lorries and current road damage and drainage issues) causing:
   * increased wear on roads that already need repair,
   * an increase in noise pollution and road run-off pollution affecting local waterways,
   * probable increase in wildlife injury and death - with vulnerable native species like the Red Squirrel and Black Grouse of particular concern,
   * probable increase in accidents between vehicles, and between vehicles and pedestrians or cyclists.
4. Feedback from residents on the NC500 highlight its negative impact on local communities, including:
   * an increase in traffic and noise (causing decreased amenity value for residents and visitors alike),
   * a decrease of privacy for residents,
   * a decrease of income for some businesses, especially self-catering lets - and there are many along the proposed Heart 200 route,
   * an increase in rubbish on roads and on adjoining properties,
   * an increase in free camping on roadsides and problems of rubbish and human waste,
   * disposal of chemical toilet waste on public land (eg. Beaches, picnic areas)
   * an increase in road damage - so increased cost burden for local Councils and their communities,
   * complaints about the above issues made to the 'owners'/promoters of the NC500 route… They say it's not their problem.
5. There is no responsibility or requirement for Heart 200 to help fund the additional maintenance and repairs that their 'venture' will undoubtedly cause, and no compensation paid to residents and businesses who have reduced amenity value and lost business due to it.
6. It is an undemocratic process: there has been no public consultation process and no information to local residents or Community Councils - yet this will have a detrimental effect for years to come on many hundreds of individuals, and possibly their livelihoods, and it will probably decrease their property values and will certainly adversely affect the area they live in.
7. Climate Change: this venture adds to Climate Change and conflicts with current National Policy. At a time when our governments have declared a Climate Emergency, the PKC is happy to promote and support a proposal (by providing a grant of £45,000) that will actively increase carbon emissions. This is not the right way to create sustainable tourism into the future.

Current Initiative by local Community Group for sustainable, slow tourism:

It is interesting to note that local initiatives addressing these very issues are already underway by The Upper Tay Valley Transport Group. This group is a local initiative to improve  provision  of community transport ,especially for the rural area. It has been supported by the Out-of-the-Box Rural Wisdom Project which is funded by The Big Lottery.

'Fun on the Number 91' is a local initiative by the Upper Tay Transport Group to make an existing bus service more sustainable for its rural community. It promotes a genuine slow-tourism route by   
encouraging visitors to use this bus to visit sites of interest and local tourist-related businesses. Info here: <http://www.spanglefish.com/UpperTayTransportGroup/>

**Press Release Info**:

This press release has been compiled by representatives of ‘Glen Lyon & Loch Tay’ and ‘Kenmore’ Community Councils, and the ‘Fearnan Village Association’ with Jenny Penfold as their spokesperson. We are concerned about the local issues it will produce for small and even medium sized communities throughout its route, as well as the larger issues of climate impact and lack of consultation, considering it will impact many hundreds of people and their businesses – some of whom are still totally unaware of what is in store for them over the coming years.

Glenlyon & Loch Tay Community Council covers the Loch side area from Fearnan to the Stirlingshire boundary, North to Keltneyburn and the whole of Glenlyon including the villages of Lawers, Fearnan, Fortingall and Bridge of Balgie.

‘Glenlyon & Loch Tay Community Council's first responsibility is to its communities for their welfare and sustainability. The Heart 200 venture aims to increase tourism without considering the negative effects on the resident population, and there is no balance between the interests of the favoured businesses and the needs of those who live here or who are regular visitors.’ Sue Dolan-Betney, Chair of GL&LT CC.

Fearnan Village Association was formed in 2007 to provide a means through which those who live in the village can come together to discuss and respond to issues of importance to the village, particularly those that will have an impact on our quality of life. We also organise social events. (<https://fearnanvillageassociation.com/about/> )

**A Parting Thought…**

Although the owners of Heart 200 keep saying this is for 'slow tourism', once the monster is out of its box it can't be put back in again. Ironically the Heart 200 Facebook page has a prime example of how many will be approaching this 200 mile circuit - as a fast day trip from the main urban areas that are within easy reach of Heart 200:

* Person 1: *'Are there any plans to add the route to devices, for making navigation easier? It looks one of the most tricky routes to follow 'on the fly'*.
* Person 2: *'is this a new thing mate it looks good for a sunny day ride out !'*
* Person 1: *'Well, it's not new new, but yeah. Another attempt for touristy bits. But it is a great days ride on a Spyder for sure..! Done the top half many times, the Kenmore/Killin is beautiful.'*

(<https://www.facebook.com/Heart200Scotland/> : comments from May 13th 2019)