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## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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### DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED:

Installation of Four Person Chairlift at Glenshee Ski Centre, Braemar,  
Aberdeenshire

**REFERENCE:** 2016/0442/DET

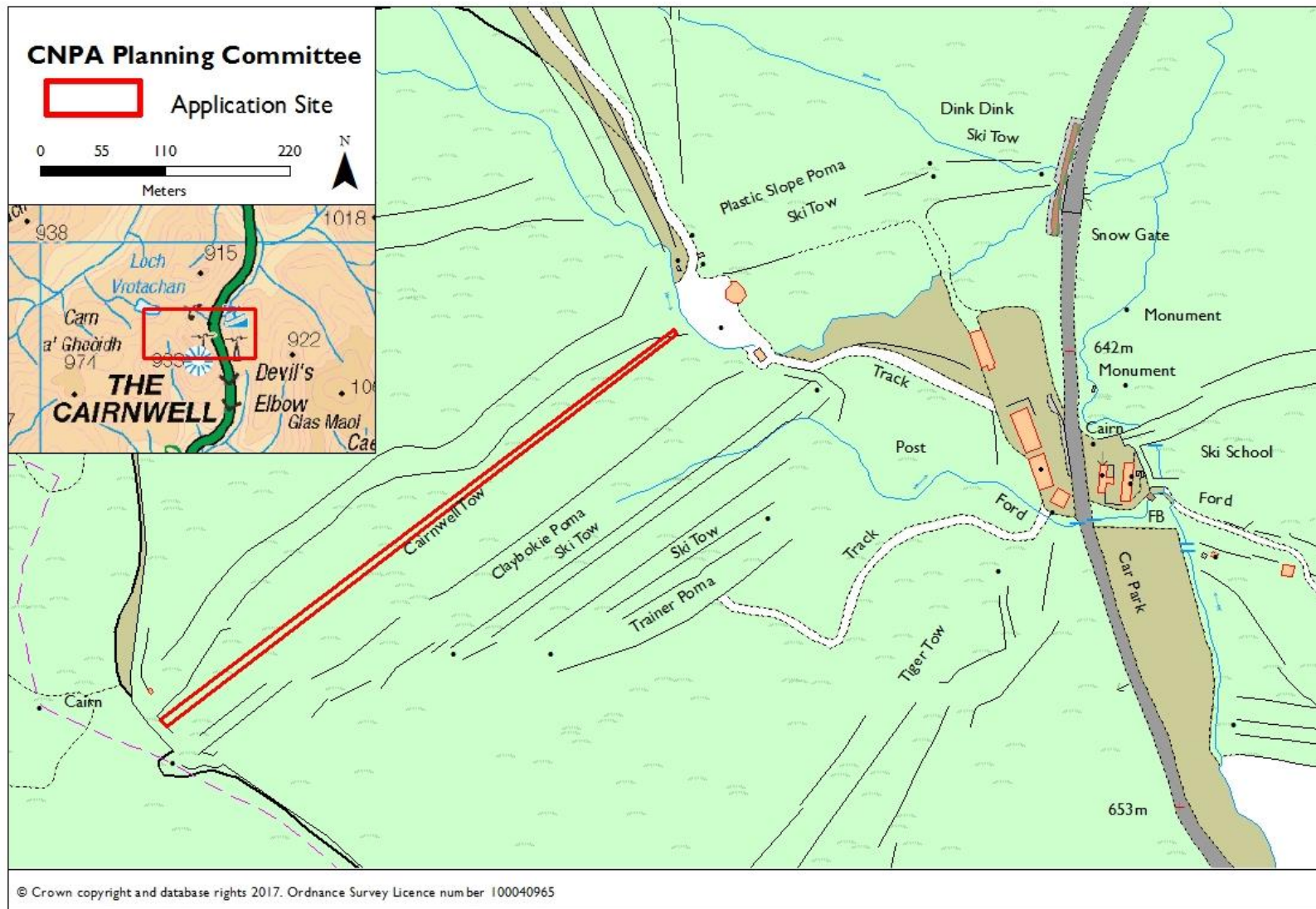
**APPLICANT:** Glenshee Limited

**DATE CALLED-IN:** 12 December 2016

**RECOMMENDATION:** Approve Subject to Conditions

**CASE OFFICER:** Katherine Donnachie, Planning Officer

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## SITE DESCRIPTION, PROPOSAL AND HISTORY

### Site Description

1. Glenshee ski centre is located on either side of the A93 scenic road from Braemar to Blairgowrie, some nine miles south of Braemar. The application site lies to the west of this road sloping up westward to the ridges here. There are a number of minor watercourses on this hillside. The context of the site is shown in **Appendix I**.
2. Glenshee is a long established ski centre with a series of ski runs and lifts comprising the largest ski area in Britain. The application site is part of this network of ski runs, tows, fencing, and buildings at Glenshee. It is located immediately adjacent to the existing Cairnwell tow, and runs westwards uphill. There is an existing track at the top leading to telecommunications services at the top of the Cairnwell summit.
3. The site lies within the Cairngorms Massif Special Protection Area (SPA) designated for golden eagle interest. The Cairnwell SSSI designated for alpine calcareous grassland is close by and the Cairnwell burn flows into the River Dee Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Other watercourses in the area flow into the River Tay Special Area of Conservation.

### Proposal

4. The drawings and documents associated with this application are listed below and are available on the Cairngorms National Park Authority website unless noted otherwise:

<http://www.eplanningnpa.co.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=summary&keyVal=OI2XMHSI0CA00>

Title	Drawing Number	Date on Plan*	Date Received
Ski Centre Site Plan	PL01 Revision B	November 2016	
Location Plan	PL02 Revision D	November 2016	
Design Statement	PI03 Revision A	14/08/17	
Photomontage Images	PL05	17/01/17	
Construction Method Statement	PL06 Revision A	14/08/17	

Location Plan extract of main car park temporary site compound information	PL07	August 2017	
Drive Station Layout, Plans and Elevations	PL10	August 2017	
Return Station Layout, Plans and Elevations	PL11	August 2017	
Ecological Baseline Report by Atmos Consulting	45000	14/08/17	
Export Sales Direction Poma	30097	15/11/16	
Technical Data Pomo Unifix 4	-	-	
Profile Data	P30097-1	9/11/16	

\*Where no specific day of month has been provided on the plan, the system defaults to the 1<sup>st</sup> of the month.

5. The proposed development seeks full planning permission to replace an existing T Bar surface lift/tow with a four person chairlift. The existing tow bar is supported by goal post pylons of around ten metres high and dates from 1967, Each T bar of the existing tow accommodates two people and up to 700 people per hour can be transported by it. It is the principle access to the race track area at Glenshee and also provides access to a range of pistes from easy to difficult. Its return station is located in a natural dip making it more difficult for users to exit the dismount area.
6. The new chairlift and return station at the top, will be located some 31 metres to the north of the existing tow, as it heads west from the base station. The new drive station will be largely in the same location as existing, beside the Cairnwell Café. The existing tow will be removed and the ground reinstated. This is part of an ongoing programme at Glenshee to replace the older infrastructure to improve the visitor experience. The topography of the new location allows for an easier dismount area.
7. The new tow will be supported by seven pylons of maximum height 15.6 metres and the chairlift can transport up to 1500 people per hour. The speed of the chairlift can be adjusted to accommodate the needs of children and disabled users. Some ground works will be required to create the new tow.
8. A new drive station and operator/plant room building are proposed at the foot of the new tow close to the existing Cairnwell Café. The new building measures some 8 metres by 5.5 metres with pitched roof. Proposed finishes are natural stone base course, larch walls and green sheeting roof. This building will house plant and operator's room.
9. A new return/top station and a small operator's building of similar finishes and measuring some 5 metres by 3 metres is proposed at the top of the tow. This is shown in the site plan and elevations included in **Appendix I**. The new stations will be standard modern ski infrastructure. Photomontages to show the new

development in comparison to existing have been provided and are included in **Appendix I.**

10. No changes to access and servicing are proposed with the chairlift to be powered by existing electricity connections. A construction compound will be located beside the Cairnwell Café and a storage compound and landing site for helicopter formed in the centre of the main car park. Construction is programmed for out with the winter season when the Cairnwell Café is not in use.
11. During consideration of the application further information was sought by CNPA officers and consultees to properly assess the impacts of the development, including detailed plans of the new buildings and site layout. A number of supporting and/or updated documents were submitted in August 2017 as follows:
  - a) Updated Design Statement setting out the economic benefits of the ski industry and Glenshee itself in terms of employment opportunities, the background to this proposal and the rationale for the new chairlift
  - b) Ecological Baseline Report which mapped habitats and ground water dependent terrestrial ecosystems (GWDTEs); occurrences of Lindbergs bog moss; surveyed for water vole and carried out a peat depth survey. The work concluded that impacts on vegetation were low to negligible if environmental safeguards detailed in the construction method statement were followed; there was no evidence of water vole; and that peat was shallow in the development area whereby impact was minor and could be reduced to negligible by careful micro siting of pylons.
  - c) Glenshee Peatland Restoration Report detailing works undertaken previously at the ski centre in liaison with the CNPA Peatland Restoration Officer to test restoration techniques on high level exposed hillsides. The project was initiated following consideration by CNPA officers of another application for replacement tow at the Tiger Tow – see planning history section. It involved restoration of around 11.3 km of peat hags or gullies and around 5.54 hectares of bare peat.
  - d) Updated Construction Method Statement (CMS) setting out the programme of works. It outlines that specialist equipment bought for previous works and designed to minimise environmental damage will be used. Existing tracks will also be used. It is proposed that all concrete will be flown in by helicopter from the storage compound as will the pylon components. Construction of pylon foundations will be informed by further ground investigations and topographic surveys to identify the optimum location. The existing T bar tow will be retained during the first year of construction of the new chairlift so that it can continue to be used. In the following spring work will begin on removal so that the new drive station can be constructed. Thereafter the old tow will be removed and the trench below it reinstated in accordance with plans and details contained in the CMS

## History

12. There have been several planning applications over the years for infrastructure at the Glenshee ski centre including replacement ski tows as follows:
13. APP/2010/0972 – Application for new chairlift to the east approved by Aberdeenshire Council in 2010 running from the car-park to the Cairnwell Cafe.
14. 2014/0309/DET - Installation of Replacement Chairlift at the Tiger tow to the south approved by CNPA Planning Committee in December 2014.

## DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONTEXT

### Policies

<b>National Policy</b>	Scottish Planning Policy 2014	
<b>Strategic Policy</b>	Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan 2017 - 2022	
<b>Local Plan Policy</b>	Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan (2015) Those policies relevant to the assessment of this application are marked with a cross	
POLICY 1	NEW HOUSING DEVELOPMENT	
POLICY 2	SUPPORTING ECONOMIC GROWTH	X
POLICY 3	SUSTAINABLE DESIGN	X
POLICY 4	NATURAL HERITAGE	X
POLICY 5	LANDSCAPE	X
POLICY 6	THE SITING AND DESIGN OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT	
POLICY 7	RENEWABLE ENERGY	
POLICY 8	SPORT AND RECREATION	X
POLICY 9	CULTURAL HERITAGE	
POLICY 10	RESOURCES	X
POLICY 11	DEVELOPER CONTRIBUTIONS	

15. All new development proposals require to be assessed in relation to policies contained in the adopted Local Development Plan. The full wording of policies can be found at:

<http://cairngorms.co.uk/uploads/documents/Park%20Authority/Planning/LDPI5.pdf>

### Planning Guidance

16. Supplementary guidance also forms part of the Local Development Plan and provides more details about how to comply with the policies. Guidance that is relevant to this application is marked with a cross.

Policy 1	New Housing Development Non-Statutory Guidance	
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Policy 2	Supporting Economic Growth Non-Statutory Guidance	X
Policy 3	Sustainable Design Non-Statutory Guidance	X
Policy 4	Natural Heritage Supplementary Guidance	X
Policy 5	Landscape Non-Statutory Guidance	X
Policy 7	Renewable Energy Supplementary Guidance	
Policy 8	Sport and Recreation Non-Statutory Guidance	X
Policy 9	Cultural Heritage Non-Statutory Guidance	
Policy 10	Resources Non-Statutory Guidance	X
Policy 11	Developer Contributions Supplementary Guidance	

## **CONSULTATIONS**

17. A summary of the main issues raised by consultees now follows:
18. **SEPA** initially objected to the application on the grounds of lack of information in relation to potential impacts on wetlands and peat. The Agency was re-consulted following submission of additional information and notes that the surveys have shown that there are no ground water dependent terrestrial ecosystems present on site. Also that the M6 (mire) communities are surface water dependent with impacts upon these areas avoided by the site layout and design. Similarly they are content that the development will not compromise areas of deeper peat with micro siting ensuring that the infrastructure is suitably sited. Continued peat restoration work in line with the previous work summarised in the applicant's appendices is welcomed.
19. In relation to the Construction Method Statement, SEPA has expressed concern regarding proposals to discharge concrete wash waters to the parking area explaining that such wash waters cannot be discharged to surface or ground water due to its high PH. Washout areas must be located away from watercourses and be impermeable to avoid groundwater being polluted. Washout water needs to be pumped out by a specialist contractor and disposed of in accordance with waste legislation. The CMS should be revised accordingly and also revised to explain how waste is to be minimised and managed.
20. On this basis SEPA has no objection providing either a revised construction method statement is provided or an appropriate planning condition is attached to secure changes covering their concerns.
21. **SNH** initially objected to the application on the basis that there was insufficient information to consider the effects on the Cairngorms Massif Special Protection Area (SPA) and the golden eagle interests.
22. They also noted that the development could affect the River Dee Special Area of Conservation (SAC), designated for its freshwater pearl mussels, Atlantic salmon and otter interests. Accordingly they highlighted that the CNPA was required to consider the effects of the proposals on the SAC and SPA. They provided advice in this regard concluding that whilst there was likely to be a significant effect on golden eagle the proposal was unlikely to have a significant effect on the qualifying interests of the SAC, providing systems were put in place to

minimise the risk of polluted run-off to watercourses as per the provisions of the construction method statement.

23. SNH also considered the fact that the site is close to the Cairnwell SSSI, designated for alpine calcareous grassland and assemblage of vascular plants. Providing there were no proposals to substantially increase non-winter use which could increase pressure from walkers or cyclists, it was considered that the objectives of designation and the overall integrity of the SSSI were unlikely to be compromised.
24. SNH was re-consulted following submission of additional information and advised that activities at the development site are unlikely to have a significant effect on golden eagle. However it is still necessary to establish whether golden eagle elsewhere within the SPA may be affected by helicopter flights en-route to the development site. SNH can provide advice on this once a helicopter flight path is provided. On this basis they do not object to the application.
25. **CNPA Ecology Advisor** initially sought additional information in relation to water vole survey and a phase I habitat survey concentrating on GWDTEs, including survey for lindbergs moss. The advisor also highlighted the need for a monitoring plan post restoration to be agreed to ensure that should restoration of works be unsuccessful then remedial action would be taken.
26. Following consideration of the additional material supplied the advisor considers that the revised construction method statement satisfactorily addressed issues raised previously with the proposal to supervise the works welcomed. In relation to the GWDTEs the Advisor notes that these were identified as surface water fed and not from springs and seepages. However the Advisor would prefer to see the proposals including preservation of these habitats and retention of the channels – this could be achieved by micro siting pylons which could also assist in avoiding peat areas.
27. Given the relationship of the proposed development to designated Natura sites, and as advised by SNH, an Habitat Regulations Appraisal (HRA) has been undertaken to assess the likely impacts of the development on the River Dee and River Tay SACs and the Cairngorms Massif SPA. This is attached as **Appendix 2**. The HRA concludes that will be no adverse impact on the integrity of designated sites subject to mitigation by way of pre-construction checks for golden eagle; submission of helicopter flight path to SNH for agreement and updated construction method statement to address any impacts from washing of concrete. Conditions are therefore required to ensure implementation of a site specific construction method statement covering these points.
28. **CNPA Landscape Advisor** notes that the proposals will result in a somewhat larger visual impact on the skyline of the Cairnwell ridgeline, but that the change in mass and experience will be small with ski lifts being an intrinsic part of the landscape here. The advisor considers that, overall, the replacement of the tow lift and associated trench by a chairlift is an improvement noting that restoring the existing trench and landscaping all ground works in order to integrate with



the hillside is required as mitigation for the development. It was therefore recommended that the CMS be amended to include information on restoration and that plans showing position of pylons and sections be supplied. The importance of care with restoration was stressed.

29. **CNPA Economic Development Officer** notes that the ski centre is an important visitor attraction in the Eastern Cairngorms and one of the larger visitor attractions in the National Park with Glenshee accounting for around 30% of all Scottish skiers. It is also an important part of the visitor economy out with winter providing good access to Munro's for hillwalkers. The Officer notes the importance of the snow sport sector to the Scottish rural economy in terms of users and associated spend, helping keeping investment within rural communities. The sector is fragile with the visitor market having growing expectations of product quality driven by overseas skiing experiences.
30. The Officer concludes that the proposal would be a welcome addition to the product available at Glenshee, greatly increasing uplift capacity. In addition ski centres and their associated expenditure and employment help support regional equity, being location specific so that investment remains within rural communities where development opportunities may be more limited. It is therefore expected that the development will have a positive economic impact.
31. **Braemar Community Council** supports the application, noting that it has the potential to attract more visitors and so support the local economy. Also that it is has a smaller footprint than the existing tow. A copy of their comments is attached as **Appendix 3**.

## REPRESENTATIONS

32. The application has been advertised and twelve representations have been received, eleven in support of the application and one objection. They are attached as **Appendices 4 (a) and (b)**. Letters supporting the application raise the following points;
  - a) Excellent addition to area improving snow sport facilities;
  - b) Development will attract more visitors of value to local economy and employment opportunities;
  - c) It will provide better value for money as well as reducing queues, being more efficient;
  - d) More user friendly especially for families and snowboarders;
  - e) Development will be less polluting as, not being a surface uplift, vegetation below will not be damaged.
33. The letter of objection raises the following concerns whilst highlighting that the benefits to the Glenshee and winter sports are fully appreciated:
  - a) Lack of method statement to show how works will be carried out without detriment to environment given the type of terrain;

- b) The need for live time monitoring of works to ensure that the operator complies with any method statement and ensure adequate enforcement. (Reference is made to an application at Cairngorm Mountain as evidence of the need for the CNPA to review its practises and ensure effective enforcement).

34. The applicant has requested to be **heard** at Committee.

## **APPRAISAL**

### **Principle**

- 35. Glenshee, as one of the National Park's key attractions, is of economic importance both locally and nationally with the existing centre employing thirteen permanent staff and four temporary staff all year round, together with around eighty seasonal staff depending on weather conditions. The proposed development will provide modern infrastructure of increased capacity, effectively doubling the capacity of the existing tow, replacing an existing tow with a chairlift more suited for use by all abilities of users, including children.
- 36. Accordingly the proposed development will help to support the ongoing viability and operation of the centre. This is considered to comply fully with the principles of Local Development Plan Policy 2: Supporting Economic Growth which supports tourism and leisure development providing there are no adverse environmental impacts; it makes a positive contribution to the experience of visitors and adds to or extends the core tourist season. Also with Policy 8: Sport and Recreation which supports the development of sport and recreation facilities where they demonstrate best practice in terms of sustainable design, operation and future maintenance and where there are no adverse environmental impacts, and they meet an identified community or visitor need, and maintain and maximise all opportunities to link into the existing path network.
- 37. As there are no particular servicing issues raised by this proposal (which is essentially replacement infrastructure) the key planning issues to consider are therefore the impact on the environment and landscape of the National Park.

### **Environmental Impacts**

- 38. The site is largely located in an already disturbed area within the existing ski centre. New pylons/support towers will be required so there will be some disturbance of soils and potentially peatland on the line of the chairlift and satisfactory surveys have been carried out to consider the impacts on these habitats along with water vole surveys. These have demonstrated that subject to appropriate construction methods being followed the development will not adversely affect the environment, and that there is no evidence of water vole on site.

39. The development may also represent an opportunity to secure some enhancement through potential restoration of some areas of exposed peatland in the vicinity of the chairlift. Whilst a construction method statement has been submitted, some more detail to ensure that peat restoration and minimal disturbance is achieved by way of micro siting is required. An appropriate planning condition can be attached to achieve this in the event of the application being supported. It is also recommended that planning conditions be imposed to secure full compliance with the approved method statement together with ongoing monitoring of the success of restoration works.
40. The impacts on Natura sites have been fully assessed in the Habitats Regulation Appraisal attached as **Appendix I**. Providing mitigation is secured by way of a revised site specific construction method statement covering matters such as agreement on helicopter flight routes with SNH and control over any concrete washing at construction the development will not have an adverse impact on the integrity of designated sites, whilst species of interest can be readily protected by appropriate planning conditions and construction techniques.
41. In these circumstances the development is considered to comply with Local Development Plan Policy 4: Natural Heritage which seeks to ensure that there is no adverse impact on the integrity of designated sites and that impacts on biodiversity and species/habitats are reduced or mitigated. It also complies with Local Development Plan Policy 10: Resources which seeks to ensure that disturbance to soil and peat is minimised.

### Landscape Impacts

42. Whilst the site is prominent in relation to the public road, in terms of landscape impacts the impacts of the new chairlift are limited particularly given that this is a replacement facility. Careful attention to restoration and construction should also help ensure minimal disturbance/impacts over time.
43. With regard to the main pieces of replacement infrastructure, it is considered that both the drive and return stations along with operators' buildings are of satisfactory design, in keeping with the location. Overall it is considered that these will represent a visual improvement upon existing infrastructure at the Cairnwell tow.
44. In these circumstances it is considered that the proposed development will not give rise to any detrimental landscape impact and in addition more modern infrastructure has the potential to secure some improvement overall. Accordingly it is considered that the proposed development complies with Local Plan policy 5: Landscape which seeks to ensure that the development conserves and enhances the landscape character and special qualities of the National Park. It also complies with Local Development Plan Policy 3: Sustainable Design which requires submission of a design statement to demonstrate how the proposal has been designed to deliver a number of objectives including complementing the setting of the development.

## Other Issues Raised in Consultations and Representations

45. Issues raised by in the objection letter in terms of the need for an adequate construction method statement to be provided are covered by the proposed planning conditions. Concerns regarding ongoing enforcement are noted and indeed shared in relation to the fact that, as with all new development, the need for effective enforcement to ensure compliance with approved conditions is key to a successful development which does not adversely affect the environment. Again proposed planning conditions regarding monitoring and reporting will assist in this regard.

## CONCLUSION

46. This proposal to enhance the facilities at the Glenshee ski centre is welcomed, with some public support for the proposal as evidenced in the supporting letters received from users of the centre and the Community Council. Landscape and environmental impacts are considered to be acceptable with opportunities for enhancement. The application is therefore considered to comply with all relevant Local Development Plan policies and approval subject to appropriate planning conditions is recommended.

## RECOMMENDATION

**That Members of the Committee support a recommendation to Approve the Installation of four person chairlift at Glenshee Ski Centre, Braemar, Aberdeenshire subject to the following conditions:**

Those conditions listed below in bold text are suspensive conditions, which require to be discharged prior to implementation of the development.

- I. **No development shall commence until a revised site specific Construction Method Statement has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Planning Authority in consultation with SEPA. This statement shall cover the following points:**
  - a) **Details of the micro-siting of pylons to ensure that any damage to vegetation and peat is minimised;**
  - b) **Details of inclusion and protection of existing drainage;**
  - c) **Details of species of seed for any revegetation works;**
  - d) **Details of the extent of the construction corridor and the taping/fencing of this corridor prior to work starting on site to prevent spillage of construction works;**
  - e) **Details of the proposals to liaise with SNH on helicopter flight paths to ensure no disturbance to golden eagle and for a pre-**

**construction check of the historic Golden Eagle nest site to check for any signs of recent occupation;**

- f) Details of the proposals for discharge and disposal of concrete wash waters reflecting the requirement for all washout areas to be impermeable and located away from watercourses;**
- g) Details of the minimisation and management of waste including details of the disposal of the existing tow infrastructure;**
- h) Measures for the restoration and enhancement of exposed peat in the area (vicinity of existing chairlift) to compensate for any peat disturbance on site including a timetable for these works;**
- i) Details of a suitably experienced party/contact person supervising the works on site to ensure compliance with the construction method statement; the scope of their brief; the programme for monitoring and management of the construction works; and a timetable for preparation of monitoring reports;**
- j) Timetable for removal of construction and storage compounds.**

**The construction and restoration works shall thereafter proceed in accordance with the approved, plans, sections and timetable.**

Reason: To ensure that impacts upon the environment are minimised and mitigated and that the development conserves and enhances the landscape character in accordance with Policy 4: Natural Heritage and Policy 5: Landscape of the Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan 2015.

2. No development shall commence on the construction of the drive station or return station until details, by way of samples or brochures, of the proposed external finishes have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Planning Authority. The development shall thereafter be constructed in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To ensure that the development conserves and enhances the landscape character and is sympathetic to the character of the area in accordance with Policy 5: Landscape and Policy 3: Sustainable Design of the Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan 2015.

3. Monitoring reports in accordance with the approved Construction Method Statement timetable, including details of any remedial works required, shall be submitted to the Cairngorms National Park Authority within seven days of any monitoring visits.

Following completion of the works the party supervising the works shall submit to the Cairngorms National Park Authority a report confirming compliance with the approved Construction Method Statement. Thereafter annual monitoring

and inspection reports to demonstrate compliance, with the restoration details of the approved Construction Method Statement, with any remedial actions necessary identified together with a timetable for their implementation, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Planning Authority for a period of five years following completion of the development.

Reason: To ensure that impacts upon the environment are minimised and mitigated and that the development conserves and enhances the landscape character in accordance with Policy 4: Natural Heritage and Policy 5: Landscape of the Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan 2015.

### **Informatives**

1. The development hereby approved must commence within 3 years of the date of this decision notice. If development has not commenced within this period then this planning permission will lapse.
2. The person undertaking the development is required to give the Planning Authority prior written notification of the date on which it is intended to commence the development. Attached to this decision notice is a Notice of Initiation of Development for completion and submission. Submission of this information assists the Cairngorms National Park Authority Monitoring and Enforcement Officer in monitoring active work within the area to ensure compliance with the approved details and to identify and correct any potential problems, as they arise, rather than later when it may be more difficult and more costly to rectify. Failure to give notice would constitute a breach of planning control which may result in enforcement action being taken.
3. Following completion of the development, a notification of the completion shall, as soon as practicable, be given to the Planning Authority. Attached to this decision notice is a Notice of Completion of Development for completion and submission. Submission of this form will assist the Cairngorms National Park Authority Monitoring and Enforcement Officer in making a final inspection and checking compliance with the approved drawings and conditions. If the development hereby approved is to be carried out in phases, then a notice of completion should be submitted at the completion of each phase.
4. If any construction works are undertaken during the bird and mountain hare breeding season (April to August in any year) then a walkover check should be undertaken for breeding bird and mountain hare nest sites and appropriate mitigation carried out as necessary.

The map on the first page of this report has been produced to aid in the statutory process of dealing with planning applications. The map is to help identify the site and its surroundings and to aid Planning Officers, Committee Members and the Public in the determination of the proposal. Maps shown in the Planning Committee Report can only be used for the purposes of the Planning Committee. Any other use risks infringing Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Maps produced within this Planning Committee Report can only be reproduced with the express permission of the Cairngorms National Park Authority and other Copyright holders. This permission must be granted in advance.