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## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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**Title:** REPORT ON CALLED-IN PLANNING APPLICATION

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(DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT)

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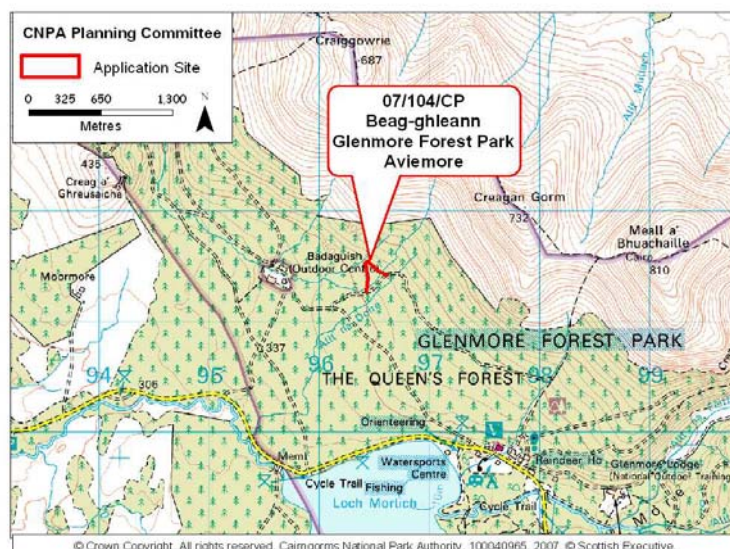
**DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED:** FULL PERMISSION FOR THE ERECTION OF A 725 METRE FOOTPATH AND THE ERECTION OF AN INTERPRETATION PANEL AT BEAG - GHLEANN, GLENMORE FOREST PARK, GLENMORE, AVIEMORE.

**REFERENCE:** 07/104/CP

**APPLICANT:** FORESTRY COMMISSION SCOTLAND,  
TOWER ROAD, SMITHTON, INVERNESS,  
IV2 7NL.

**DATE CALLED-IN:** 23<sup>RD</sup> MARCH 2007

**RECOMMENDATION :** APPROVAL, SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS



**Fig. 1 - Location Plan**

## SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL

1. Forestry Commission Scotland are seeking full permission in this application for the creation of a new 725 metre footpath at Beag – Ghleann, in Glenmore Forest Park. Permission is also sought for the placing of one interpretation panel at the start of the footpath. The subject site is located in a relatively central position with the Forest Park and is approximately 1.4 kilometres north of the public road which leads past Loch Morlich. Badaguish Outdoor Centre is approximately 675 metres to the east of the proposed path.
2. The 725 metre path is proposed to link with a section of existing forest road, to create a circular walking route around the ruins of the Beglan Township. The ruins are on land which was cleared of commercial forestry during 1998 and 1999, although the area is currently covered with brash and tree stumps. In addition the land is quite boggy in places and is difficult to traverse. A small burn, Allt Coire Beag-ghleann, which was dry in several places at the time of a recent site visit, runs from north to south past the township remains, adjacent to the forest road.



Fig. 2 : View over the proposed site from the adjacent forest track

### Beglan Township History

3. Documentation accompanying this planning application includes an archaeological study, which concludes that although the origins of the settlement are uncertain, it is possible that Beglan was a late township, created during commercial working of the forest of Glenmore in the late 17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> century. The settlement was deserted by the third quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
4. Beglan was part of the lordship of Badenoch and barony of Kincardine. It was first documented in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> Sixteen features were

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<sup>1</sup> The archaeological assessment refers to documents dating from 1765 and 1776 referring to problems over the lease of Beglan. Alexander Grant of Tulligorm was granted a lease in 1765. Grant retained the lease for several years in dispute with the landlord, the Duke of Gordon. Further documentation provides evidence that Lewis Grant of Balnafettach built a house for the father of James Grant, Clerk of

identified in the course of the archaeological study, including seven boundary walls, seven houses and enclosures. Cartographic evidence indicates that the area consisted of four houses and two yards / enclosures, divided equally by a road around 1766. Three arable strips of grass were attached to the township, containing 22 acres of cornland and 21 acres of open grass. A later map (which is undated but prior to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century) shows Beglan consisting of 15 smaller parcels of land and the settlement consisting of eight buildings. The OS First Edition in 1875 shows that the township was deserted by that time. Its remains consisted of seven unroofed buildings, one enclosure and three dykes spread over the land.



**Fig. 3 : example of some of the remains of the Beglan township**

### **Background to the proposal**

5. Following the uncovering of the ruins of the Beglan Township during forestry operations in 1998 and 1999, a report was prepared by the Heritage Officer for the then Area Cultural and Leisure Services in Nairnshire in 2001 on the Badenoch and Strathspey Community Archaeology Project, in which the potential for a heritage trail to the Beglan township was indicated. The aforementioned archaeological survey was subsequently carried out in 2003. Since that time, there have been on going discussions with the Badenoch and Strathspey Local History Group regarding the future management of the site. At the request of that group in 2006 a survey was undertaken by environmental consultants to examine the possibilities for improving access in the area. Forestry Commission Scotland are keen to develop the proposed path “to assist with this locally important cultural site during 2007, as Scotland’s Year of Highland Culture.”

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Castle Grant, in 1770. Further detail concerns the construction and improvements made to a house at Beglan. There is evidence that John Grant was permitted in 1812 to build a house of complete stone and lime.

## Physical Details

6. Detailed information on the proposed path construction has been submitted as part of the application documentation, and includes a bill of quantity, maintenance schedule and specification drawings. The proposed path is intended to be an All Abilities path, passing close to various features of interest which formed the historic township of Bheag-Ghleann and which represent a theme for the walk. The path would be of aggregate construction, conforming to All Abilities standards.
7. It is indicated that the working path width during construction would be a maximum of 3 metres and would ultimately have a finished width of 1.5 metres. It is stated that the finished path would be as unobtrusive as possible and would fit comfortably into the terrain it crosses with a minimum of impact and disturbance to the surrounding flora, fauna, wet flushes, geological features, archaeology and mature trees and vegetation. The path margins would be re-vegetated to avoid the appearance of bare ground or spoil. Turf from the excavation of the path line is proposed to be used to narrow in the path to the finished width. It is also proposed that well dug in blocking boulders would be installed at irregular intervals along the margins of the path to contain path spread. The creation of the path also includes the construction of two wooden footbridges, each of 4 metres in length and incorporating a continuous length of handrail, crossing a small burn. The interpretation panel is proposed to be a lectern style, located adjacent to the forest road at the start of the path. It would be in standard corporate Forestry Commission Scotland style.
8. Supporting information indicates that the proposed path would be constructed using excavators, tracked dumpers, narrow access dumpers, a vibrating roller and a standard range of hand tools. All machinery would have a track base width of less than 3 metres.

## DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONTEXT

### Highland Council Structure Plan 2001

9. One of the strategic themes of the **Highland Council Structure Plan** is 'adopting a proactive approach to the wise use of the natural environment.' The environment is recognised as a key strength of the Highlands and the Plan acknowledges that it makes economic sense to promote good stewardship of the natural environment. The Plan suggests that there is huge potential to maximise economic opportunities from supporting better interpretation and investment in public access, amongst other things.

10. Section 2.5.10 of the Plan concentrates on the subject of informal recreation and access, noting that it is of very high importance, underpinning a range of recreational pastimes and their associated quality of life benefits, as well as being a key component of the tourism industry. The Plan however recognises that increasing demands for access necessitates the achievement of a balance between accommodating the needs of countryside users and protecting the fragility of the Highland countryside. Section 2.5.13 of the Plan notes that the “protection of rights of way and provision of an integrated system of well maintained and signposted paths catering for walking, cycling and equestrian use are a valuable resource for local communities and visitors, both in terms of providing access and heightening appreciation of the wider environment.
11. The **Highland Structure Plan** also includes a number of detailed policies on Tourism which are considered pertinent to the development proposal. Section 2.7.1 of the Plan describes tourism as a vital element of the Highland economy, and notes that opportunities to participate in outdoor pursuits are amongst key visitor attractions. The Structure Plan strategy aims to build on the Highland identity and take a proactive approach to the wise use of the natural environment as a primary resource for tourism. Section 2.7.1 also highlights the fact that community needs should also be considered in order to ensure that facilities and opportunities are provided which serve the needs of both visitors and local residents.

#### **Badenoch and Strathspey Local Plan (1997)**

12. The **Local Plan** details a number of pertinent conservation objectives and states that the priority is to promote sustainable development of the areas’ resources and ensure an acceptable balance between economic growth and safeguards for the outstanding heritage. The conservation strategy advocated for the countryside includes provision being made for the restoration and expansion of the core Caledonian Forest, and the upgrading of facilities for recreation, tourism, interpretation and education / research in more robust locations. In particular, multiple use of forest areas is encouraged.
13. The subject site is identified as being within the Glenmore Corridor in the **Badenoch and Strathspey Local Plan**. The Plan recognises the integrity of the corridor which provides a link from the Spey into the Cairngorms. The policies and proposals in the Plan pertaining to Glenmore Corridor are intended to form the basis for co-ordinated action and management of the area in future years. Section 4.14.1 of the Plan states that whilst reasonable consolidation and improvement of established businesses is acceptable in principle, a strong presumption will be maintained against further new development throughout the area, except where such development is considered essential for the proper management of visitors.

14. Section 4.14.2 of the Plan refers to interpretative facilities within the Glenmore Corridor area and requires that “basic information and other facilities for visitors should be concentrated at a limited number of locations related to the principal habitat / landscape zones which can be entered.”

#### **Cairngorms National Park Plan (2007)**

15. The Strategic Objectives that provide a long term framework for managing the National Park are set out in the **Cairngorms National Park Plan** under three broad headings – (i) conserving and enhancing the Park; (ii) living and working in the Park; and (iii) enjoying and understanding the Park. In terms of conserving and enhancing the Park, section 5.1.2 refers specifically to natural and cultural heritage, particularly landscape and the built and historic environment. The Plan advises that all new development and management of the landscapes and settlements within the Park should be based on a sound understanding of the natural and cultural heritage of the area. Strategic objectives for landscape, built and historic environment include ensuring development complements and enhances the landscape character of the Park, understanding and conserving the archaeological record, historic landscapes and historic built environment, and raising awareness and understanding of the influences of natural processes, land management and culture on the landscape character.
16. In relation to the broad heading of ‘enjoying and understanding the Park’, the Plan alludes to the fact that the Cairngorms National Park is known for its outstanding environment and outdoor recreation opportunities and that visitors come from many different places, with different interests and levels of knowledge about the area. It acknowledges that the experiences of residents and visitors enjoying the National Park should be of the highest quality. On the theme of enjoying and understanding the Park, section 5.3.3 of the Plan deals with outdoor access and recreation. Strategic objectives of relevance to the current proposal include encouraging people of all ages and abilities to enjoy and experience the outdoor environment; the promotion of high standards of responsible enjoyment of the Park so that its special qualities are understood and appreciated; safeguarded now and for future generations to enjoy and the respecting the interests of others; and planning for future outdoor recreation needs and opportunities in a co-ordinated way across sectors.

## CONSULTATIONS

17. **Scottish Natural Heritage** examined the proposal and the consultation response states that there is no objection to the development. **SNH** note that the proposed development lies adjacent to, but outwith, the Cairngorms Special Protection Area and the Cairngorms Special Area of Conservation. At its nearest point the subject site is approximately 330 metres from the boundary of the European designated sites. The response details the qualifying features of the sites – capercallie, Scottish Crossbill and osprey in relation to the SPA and caledonian pinewood, bog woodland and juniper in relation to the SAC. The response also notes in terms of National interests that the site is approximately 330 metres from the boundary of Glenmore Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest, which is comprises “of a mosaic of woodland and bog woodland” and where, in addition to supporting the SPA and SAC interests, it also supports nationally important populations of crested tit, narrow headed wood ant and vascular plants. **SNH** also note that the proposed site lies within the Cairngorm Mountain National Scenic Area.
18. In terms of European and National interests, the development is not considered by **SNH** to have any significant negative impact on the adjacent SPA, SAC, SSSI and NSA, nor do **SNH** consider that it would result in significant disturbance to other nearby designated interests.
19. The development proposal is welcomed by the **Archaeology Section** of Highland Council and it is noted in the consultation response that the path has been designed to avoid the main features of the township. It is stated that no archaeology condition is requested for this application.
20. **Aviemore and Vicinity Community Council** state in their consultation response that they are “delighted to see that this important historical site is going to be accessed by a well constructed path and enhanced with a much needed interpretation panel.”
21. A detailed response on the proposal has been received from the CNPA’s **Visitor Service and Recreation Group**. The proposal has been examined in particular in the context of outdoor access and interpretation. The application has been reviewed in the context of the Outdoor Access Strategy and VSRG are supportive of the proposal, as it meets a number of the policies and priorities of the strategy. One of the policies mentioned is OAS Policy 3 - provision for people of all abilities and multi use paths, and also Action Area H (Cairngorm, Rothiemurchus and Glenmore) where relevant priorities include developing further opportunities for less-able people and working to remove barriers to access to allow a broad range of users, for example, people with pushchairs.



22. In terms of interpretation, VSRG support the intention of connecting people with the cultural heritage of the area and highlight the fact that it is in accordance with the **Cairngorms National Park Plan** which aims to ensure that “there will be more opportunities to learn about and enjoy the Park and its special qualities.” Reference is also made to the CNPA Interpretation Framework, where subject areas identified at stakeholder workshops where interpretative themes for the National Park were developed included themes linking human activity to the landscape and themes celebrating the cultural heritage of the area.
23. The consultation response from the **Visitor Services and Recreation Group** raises some concerns in relation to the construction details of the proposed path. The ‘Countryside for All, Good Practice guide’ states that a path built to an all abilities standard in a rural location should have rest areas every 300 metres and passing places every 150 metres. The submitted specifications and bill of quantities makes no reference to these features and **VSRG** recommend that provision is made for such features and that they are included in a revised bill of quantities.
24. Given that there is a lack of information regarding the details to be provided on the proposed interpretation panel, **VSRG** recommend that any interpretation must comply with good practice guidelines. For example, it is suggested that interpretation should be respectful of the ‘sense of place’ and that this can be achieved by minimising sensory intrusion and using materials that are sympathetic to the integrity of the site and in keeping with visitor expectations of site ambience. A further point which **VSRG** make in this respect is that interpretation should allow for intellectual as well as physical access, for example using simple, non technical language and a direct, active style, and using a maximum of 200 words per panel.
25. The CNPA’s **Natural Heritage Group** has examined the development proposal from the perspectives of landscape (including the impact on the archaeological remains) and ecology. It is noted that the felling of the plantation in the area has resulted in a “rough landscape of large ploughed ridge and furrow, coarse grasses with spruce stumps and brash left around.”
26. In terms of landscape impact, existing paths and tracks are a common feature in this area of Glenmore Forest Park and consequently **NHG** do not consider the area itself to be particularly natural in character. It is commented that it is a well visited area and that the expectation of a footpath is high. Nonetheless, **NHG** acknowledge that the proposed footpath could be quite prominent as the site is visible from surrounding areas. This effect could however be minimised due to the fact that replanted trees and regeneration are occurring and combined would make sufficient cover to screen the proposed path in the future. Based on the design details supplied as part of the planning application, the proposed path is considered to be of sensitive design and a good use



of material. In summary, the proposed footpath is not considered to detract from the character of the area and due to its sensitive design and the associated vegetation in the area, any landscape impact would be short lived and acceptable.

27. In commenting on the archaeological implications of the development proposal, it is assumed that as the purpose of the path is to give access to the site for its historical interest, that considerable care will be taken to place the path away from any significant remains. It is however noted that there are instances where the path will cross boundary walls and it is suggested that it may be appropriate in such instances to consider a path detail that bridges the wall so that none of the structure is removed or damaged in any way. In the concluding comments in relation to archaeology, it is considered that the path should not damage significant remains providing that the remains are clearly marked on site prior to construction. It is also recommended that a suitably qualified archaeologist assist in the layout of the path.
28. From an ecological perspective, **NHG** comment that the area in which the development is proposed does not include any habitat of particularly high conservation value and similar to the response from **Scottish Natural Heritage** reference is made to the its position within 300 metres from the boundaries of the SSSI, SAC and SPA. It is also noted that the burn which runs through the site (and which would be crossed by two bridges) ultimately joins the River Spey SAC some way downstream of the proposal site.
29. The **Natural Heritage Group** caution in their response that care should be taken during construction of footbridges and culverts, and when storing construction materials on site, in order to ensure that sediment and pollutants do not enter the watercourse, as this could have a detrimental impact on aquatic life both in the stream itself and ultimately on the qualifying interests of the River Spey SAC, such as Atlantic salmon and freshwater pearl mussel. It is recommended in the event of consideration being given to the granting of planning permission that a condition be included requiring that the storage of path material, the mixing of concrete and the refuelling of machinery all occur away from the watercourse. It is also recommended that no bridge construction activities should take place in the burn itself. In conclusion **NHG** consider that “providing steps are taken to protect the integrity of the watercourses on the site, this development would very likely have a low ecological impact.”

## REPRESENTATIONS

30. No representations have been received in respect of the proposed development.

## APPRAISAL

31. The main issues to be considered in this application relate to the principle of the development, the nature of the proposal including its construction and the associated implications, and also consideration of its contributions towards the provision of access in the area.
32. The principle of the development is acceptable in planning policy terms. Although there is a general presumption against further new development throughout the Glenmore Corridor area, exceptions are accepted where a development is considered essential for the proper management of visitors. Given that an existing forest track traverses close to the subject site and is already a route used by pedestrians, the addition of the proposed 725 metre all abilities path, could offer the potential to guide and manage visitors to the area along an appropriate route, providing an opportunity to view the remains of the township, without being within damagingly close contact with the structures. In addition to creating increased all abilities recreational opportunities in the area, the second aspect of the proposal - the development of an interpretation panel - is also to be welcomed as it would provide an opportunity to heighten the general public's awareness of the cultural significance of the township remains. As mentioned in foregoing sections of this report, details of the information content on the interpretation panel has not been provided at the present time. However, in the event of consideration being given to the granting of planning permission, this is an issue which could be easily addressed by way of a condition requiring agreement with the CNPA on the content of the panels, prior to the commencement of development.
33. The proposed site is some distance from any of the European designated sites in the area and would not have any impact on their qualifying interests. From a visual perspective, the introduction of a man made feature such as the path into the landscape would have some initial impact. However, a comprehensive construction method statement has been submitted outlining the measures (such as the re-vegetation of path margins in order to avoid the appearance of bare ground or spoil) that would be undertaken to minimise the impact, and in conjunction with the existing vegetation in the area, any landscape impact would be short lived and acceptable.

34. The comments of both **Scottish Natural Heritage** and the CNPA's **Natural Heritage Group** indicate acceptance of the development proposal. The proposal is also welcomed by the CNPA's **Visitor Services Group** particularly from the perspective of providing further recreational opportunities for less able bodied people. The concerns expressed by **VSRG** in relation to construction details and the lack of rest areas or passing places, can be resolved by relatively minor modifications to the path proposal.
35. In conclusion, the overall proposal represents the opportunity to provide enhanced access to the rural area, and the all abilities aspect is therefore to be particularly welcomed. It would also serve to highlight the cultural heritage of the area and allow the general public to gain a greater insight into the special qualities of this area of the National Park.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AIMS OF THE NATIONAL PARK**

### **Conserve and Enhance the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Area**

36. The proposal has no negative impacts on species or habitats in the nearby designated sites of European or national interest. The proposal is of benefit in raising awareness of the cultural heritage value of the area and the route of the path has been designed to avoid interference with the township remains.

### **Promote Sustainable Use of Natural Resources**

37. There are no implications on this aim.

### **Promote Understanding and Enjoyment of the Area**

38. The proposed development would assist the general public in understanding the cultural significance of the area and would provide increased opportunities for access in an area of rich cultural heritage value.

### **Promote Sustainable Economic and Social Development of the Area**

39. The all abilities path and associated interpretative panel represents an improvement to the network of paths in the area and may result in more walkers in the area which could have spin-offs for existing facilities and services in the Glenmore Corridor area.

## RECOMMENDATION

That Members of the Committee support a recommendation to :

**Grant Full Planning Permission for the formation of a 725 metre footpath and the erection of an interpretation panel at Beag–Ghleann, Glenmore Forest Park, Glenmore, Aviemore, subject to the following conditions -**

1. The development to which this permission relates must be begun within five years from the date of this permission.
2. The route of the footpath shall avoid the remains of the Beglan Township and no part of the township remains shall be damaged.
3. The footpath shall be constructed in accordance with the standards for All Abilities paths as set out in “Countryside for All, Good Practice Guide”. Prior to the commencement of development, a revised bill of quantities, as well as a detailed site layout plan, shall be submitted for the written agreement of the CNPA acting as Planning Authority to include the provision of rest areas every 300 metres and passing places every 150 metres. The path shall be constructed in accordance with the agreed revised details.
4. Prior to the commencement of development, details of the extent of interpretation on the proposed panel shall be submitted for the written agreement of the Cairngorms National Park Authority, acting as Planning Authority.
5. In the event that any further features are noted in the course of construction which are suspected to be of archaeological / historical interest, all details shall immediately be reported to the CNPA acting as Planning Authority and to the Archaeology Unit of Highland Council. Where deemed necessary all relevant features shall be adequately recorded prior to any further development proceeding in the vicinity of the feature.

**Mary Grier**  
**23 May 2007**

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