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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: OUTLINE PLANNING PERMISSION FOR THE  
ERECTION OF A VISITOR FACILITY AT  
STRATHMASHIE, LAGGAN

REFERENCE: 08/280/CP

APPLICANT: LAGGAN FORESTRY TRUST, FOREST  
OFFICES, STRATHMASHIE

DATE CALLED-IN: 8<sup>th</sup> AUGUST 2008

RECOMMENDATION: APPROVAL

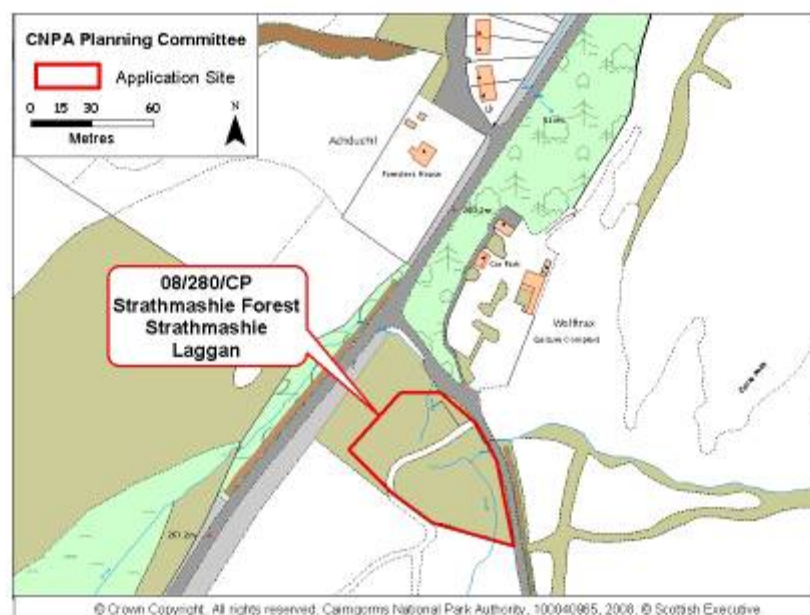


Fig. 1 - Location Plan

## SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL

1. The site is located immediately to the South of the existing Wolftrax cycling facilities off the A86 Trunk Road at Strathmashie, 3 km. South West of Laggan. The site is a cleared area of forest bisected by a small burn, an existing track and overflow car park. The site is steeply embanked up to the South. Mature forest fringes the banks to the South and South West. To the North West between the road and the site, the land undulates and is characterised by semi-natural and regenerating scrub. The site is only partially visible from the road through deciduous trees. To the North lies the car park and buildings of the existing Wolftrax Centre. The car park is informally laid out and the buildings comprise a small shop, café, toilets and staff facilities. They are essentially portakabins disguised with timber facings. They are in a poor state of repair. Various mountain bike technical challenge tracks and longer distance cycle routes leave the car parking area adjacent to the proposed site for the new visitor facilities.



Fig.1 The existing Wolftrax facilities (The site in the foreground)



Fig. 2 The proposed site from the existing car park

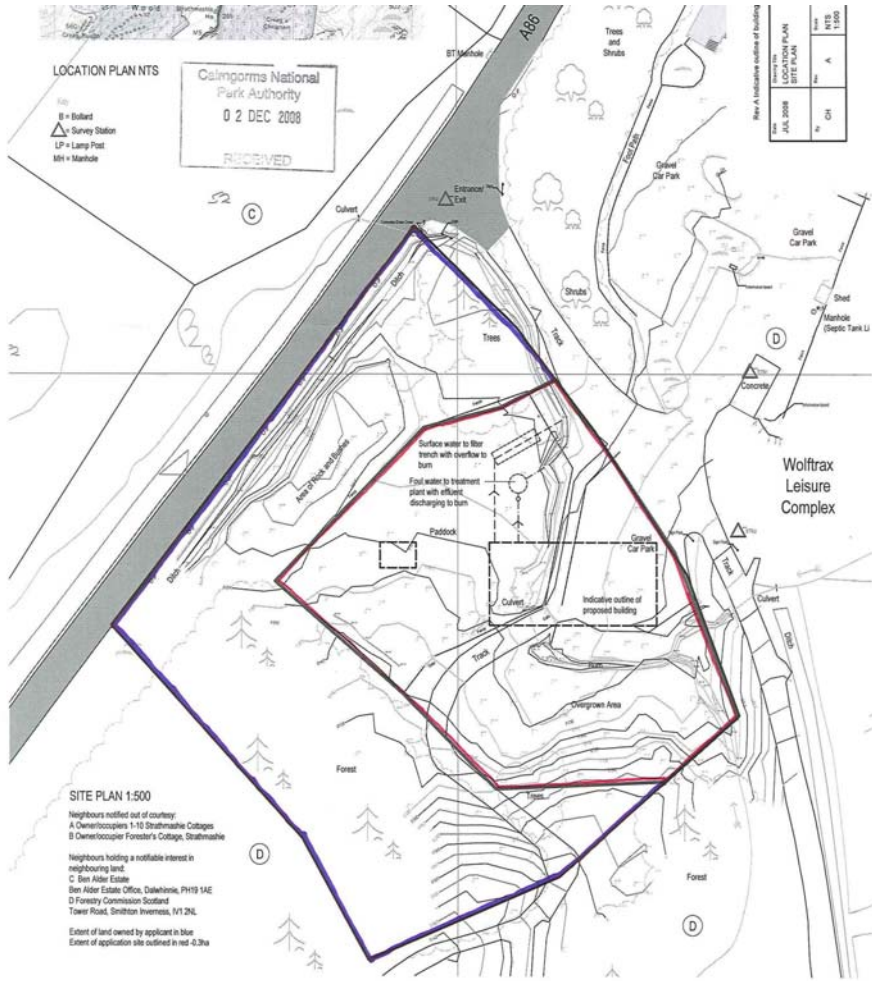


Fig.3 Site Layout

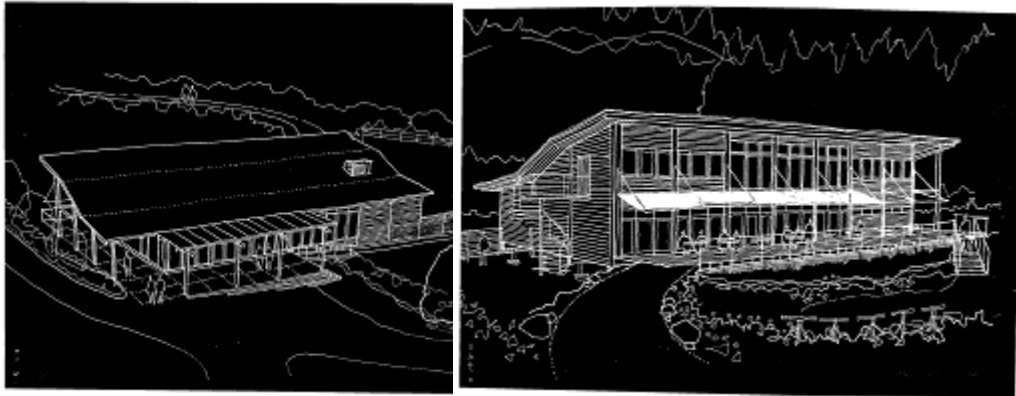


Fig. 4 Indicative front elevation Fig. 5 Indicative rear elevation

2. It is proposed to replace the existing temporary facilities with a permanent visitor centre. The visitor centre would combine the cycling activities with a more general visitor facility for the Laggan Forestry Trust. The application is in outline but the indicative designs show a single storey structure to the front and two stories to the rear in a contemporary timber and steel design with a sedum roof. The building would be designed to allow the free flow of the burn underneath. The building would provide approximately 420m<sup>2</sup> of floor space including the following accommodation:

135m <sup>2</sup> café incorporating 10m <sup>2</sup> retail area	(25%)
42m <sup>2</sup> kitchen	(9%)
50m <sup>2</sup> bike shop	(11%)
60m <sup>2</sup> changing facilities	(14%)
106m <sup>2</sup> office and meeting space	(20%)
23m <sup>2</sup> circulation/internal partitions	(5%)

3. The existing temporary buildings would be removed and the space incorporated into the car park to increase capacity by around 20 spaces (60 in all plus 2 coach spaces). The existing overflow parking of around 10 spaces would be lost.
4. The indicative plan also shows a small horse stable and a bike wash area. Camping is shown on the land between the site and the road. The camping is not part of the current planning application.

## DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONTEXT

### Cairngorms National Park Plan 2007

5. Strategic objectives for Landscape, Built and Historic Environment include ensuring that development complements and enhances the landscape character of the Park. Strategic objectives for integrated land management of forestry and woodland promote multi-objective management that delivers environmental, economic and social benefits, including those from recreation and tourism delivered in a manner that protects the environmental qualities of the woodland. Strategic objectives for Sustainable Communities include the encouragement of year round employment opportunities arising from year round recreational activity. Strategic objectives for Sustainable Tourism include strengthening and maintaining the viability of the tourism industry in the Park and the contribution it makes to the local and regional economy. Strategic objectives for Outdoor Access and Recreation encourage people of all ages and abilities to enjoy and experience the outdoor environment.

### Highland Structure Plan 2001

6. **Policy G2 Design for Sustainability** considers that proposed developments will be assessed on the extent to which they are compatible with service provision; are affected by risks from significant hazards; impact on individual and community residential amenity; impact on non-renewable resources. Consideration is also given to how proposals impact upon habitats, species, landscape, scenery, freshwater systems and cultural heritage. Proposals must also demonstrate sensitive siting and high quality in-keeping with local character and historic and natural environment.
7. **Policy L3 Areas of Great Landscape Value** In these areas the Structure Plan **Policy G6** to conserve and promote highland heritage including high quality landscape, archaeology and nature conservation, will apply.
8. **Policy T2 Tourism Developments** supports high quality tourism developments particularly those that extend the tourism season, provide wet weather opportunities, spread economic benefits and are accessible by means other than private vehicles and provide opportunities for sustainable enjoyment and interpretation of the area's heritage.

**Badenoch and Strathspey Local Plan 1997**

9. **Para. 2.2.9 Tourism and Recreation.** Broadening the range and quality of facilities is to be balanced with protecting the area's exceptional scenic and heritage qualities.
10. **Para. 2.3.1 Countryside Recreation** is encouraged where it is compatible with rural land use, nature conservation and heritage interests.
11. **Para. 2.5.2 Forestry.** The amenity conservation and recreational value of commercial forests is recognised, with special attention to the main tourist routes and corridors

**CONSULTATIONS**

12. **Trunk Roads Authority** No objection  
**Highland Council Area Roads Manager** No comments.  
**SNH** No objection subject to compliance with SEPA recommendations.  
**SEPA** Objected to the application. They advised that the bike wash area and stables should be fully contained to prevent any contaminants from entering the watercourse. An oil interceptor may be required in the bike wash area and the Control of Pollution (Silage, Slurry, and Agricultural Fuel Oil) (Scotland) Regulations 2001 must be met. Discussions are likely to lead to a withdrawal of the objection. A verbal report will be made to the committee.  
**Forestry Commission:** Any changes to paths and tracks and new parking arrangements must be integrated with the existing network.  
**Highland Council Archaeology** comments that the application lies within an area where important historic remains are located. These relate to the Newfoundland Overseas Forestry Unit (who operated in the area between 1939 and 1945 in support of the British coal mining industry). The full nature and extent of features should be identified and recorded before destruction.  
**Visitor Services and Recreation:** the proposed permanent building will provide a better visitor facility. Independent research has demonstrated the positive economic impact that Wolftrax makes in the local economy. The development of recreational cycling is supported by the CNP Outdoor Access Strategy.  
**Economic and Social Development (Sustainable Tourism Officer):** comments on concerns from local businesses about the displacement of trade but nevertheless makes similar comments to the above.

**Heritage and Landscape Management:** no comments.

## **REPRESENTATIONS**

13. Two letters of objection comment that the land is not designated for the proposed purpose in the local plan. The parking is insufficient to cater for event days when parked cars spill onto the adjacent A86. Access up the sloping site will be difficult for disabled persons.

Copies of the letters are attached for member's information.

## **APPRAISAL**

The main issues are the principle of the development, landscaping, parking and drainage and environmental protection of the watercourse.

### **The Principle of the Development**

14. Wolftrax has become established as a well known mountain bike and general off-road cycling facility. It is managed by the Forestry Commission in partnership with the Laggan Forestry Trust. The proposed facility would widen the visitor facilities to a more general audience who wish to enjoy the forest. It will also improve the facilities available. This is supportive of the tourism policies of the Structure and Local Plan as well as the economic development aims of the Park, provided that these are implemented in a manner that sustains the high quality landscape and environment in the area.

### **Landscape**

15. The building will be erected in a sloping bowl, largely surrounded by trees to the South. Views from the public road into the area and the car park are partially screened by deciduous vegetation. The indicative drawings for the building suggest that a high quality design well integrated into the proposed site is intended. Removal of the existing temporary facilities will significantly improve the appearance of the parking area as seen from the road.

### **Parking and the existing buildings**

16. The site occupies an area of overflow parking but the removal of the existing buildings will allow more parking to be formed in the main area and more effective use of current space beyond the temporary buildings. There is expected to be a net increase in parking of around 20 spaces and specific provision will be made for two coaches. Arrangements for the removal of the buildings and reorganisation of parking outwith the application site would require an agreement with the Forestry Commission.

### **Drainage and Environmental Protection of the Water Course**

17. SEPA have been discussing drainage options with the agent. A soakaway cannot be achieved due to the high ground water level. The burn through the site discharges into a tributary of the Spey and prevention of water pollution is paramount. Subject to a site inspection, SEPA has indicated that they are prepared to accept a direct discharge provided that it is via a treatment plant e.g. a Klargestor Bio Disc. A final position on this will be reported to the Committee. A full oil interceptor is also likely to be needed. The building would straddle the burn and no design proposals for this are currently available. SEPA expect that a



design for the building and drainage system can be achieved and could be capable of meeting the CAR regulations. The removal of the existing foul septic tank and soakaway system at the temporary toilets and café is likely to be beneficial as it is thought that they are substandard. The stable and bike wash could be located in the car park area away from the burn. SEPA require a full SUDS surface water drainage scheme for the car park and access road. These elements are outwith the application site boundary so must be incorporated in an agreement with the Forestry Commission.

### **Conclusions**

18. The proposal represents both an improvement in and intensification of existing facilities. The indicative drawings and an assessment of the site suggest that with a good design and suitable reinforcement of the existing vegetation in the area, the proposal can enhance the local landscape and is capable of installation without detriment to the local water environment. It is therefore recommended for approval subject to conditions and an agreement with the Forestry Commission relating to requirements for areas outwith the application site.

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

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

19. The proposal indicates a high quality building that will replace substandard temporary facilities. It is capable of integration into a high quality landscape without detrimental effects.

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

20. There is an opportunity to develop a building with a low carbon demand and high energy efficiency, however cladding and steel materials for the building are unlikely to be obtained in Scotland at the present time.

#### **Promote Understanding and Enjoyment**

21. The building will provide a general visitor facility as well as a base for Wolftrax. The understanding of and recreational enjoyment of the Laggan Forest will be enhanced.

**Promote Sustainable Economic and Social Development**

22. The proposal will enhance an existing facility so will contribute to the diverse range of tourism and recreation in the area. It would be compatible with amenity, landscape and conservation objectives for the area, so contributing to local economic opportunities and recreation.

## RECOMMENDATION

**That Members of the Committee agree to a recommendation to:**

**Grant Outline Planning Permission subject to:**

- (i) A Section 75 Agreement pertaining to the removal of the existing buildings, landscaping and the reorganisation and drainage of the car park and access road and;
- (ii) Subject to the following conditions:
  - 1) A formal planning application and detailed plans indicating all matters relating to the siting, design and external appearance of all buildings, means of access thereto, means of enclosure, foul and surface water drainage and landscaping proposals shall be submitted for the prior approval of the Planning Authority within 3 years of the date of this consent and the development must be commenced within 5 years of the date of this permission or within 2 years from the date of final approval of all the foregoing Reserved Matters.
  - 2) The reserved matters application shall include an energy statement pertain to the construction (materials and energy saving methods) and future operation of the building. The approved energy and CO2 saving measures shall be implemented in full to the satisfaction of the Planning Authority.
  - 3) Prior to the commencement of development, arrangements for an archaeological watching brief to be carried out on site clearance an excavation works, in accordance with the specification of the Highland Council Archaeological Service, shall be submitted to and require the approval in writing of the Planning Authority. No site clearance or excavation works shall take place until that approval has been given and all such works shall thereafter be implemented in accordance with the approved arrangements.
  - 4) For the avoidance of doubt the permission hereby granted is for a visitor centre comprising a mix of visitor related uses. At no time shall any single use, as defined by the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Scotland) Order 1997(as amended), utilise more than 50 percent of the total internal floor space of the building hereby approved.
  - 5) The building hereby approved shall comprise no more than two stories and 450 square metres of gross floor space, measured

externally. The burn shall be bridged only in a manner satisfactory to the Cairngorm National Park Authority in consultation with SEPA.

- 6) Notwithstanding the details on the plans hereby approved, drainage shall be entirely in accordance with the advice provided by the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency in their letter dated (final letter awaited).
- 7) The bike wash area shall be equipped with an oil interceptor system to the satisfaction of the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency and shall be located a minimum of 5 metres from the water course running through the site. There shall be no direct washing of cycling equipment in the water course at any time.
- 8) For the avoidance of doubt, the camping area shown on the indicative drawings is not approved without the further express permission of the Planning Authority.

#### **ADVICE NOTE**

The advice of SEPA and the Highland Council Archaeological service are attached for the applicant's information.

**Hilary MacBean**

**24<sup>th</sup> March 2009**

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