
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: REPORT ON CALLED-IN PLANNING APPLICATION

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(DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT)

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED: FULL PLANNING PERMISSION FOR THE REMOVAL OF A DILAPIDATED DEMOUNTABLE CLASSROOM AND ITS REPLACEMENT WITH DOUBLE CLASSROOM UNIT AT ALVIE PRIMARY SCHOOL, KINCRAIG.

REFERENCE: 09/060/CP

APPLICANT: THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

DATE CALLED-IN: 6TH MARCH 2009

RECOMMENDATION : APPROVE WITH CONDITIONS

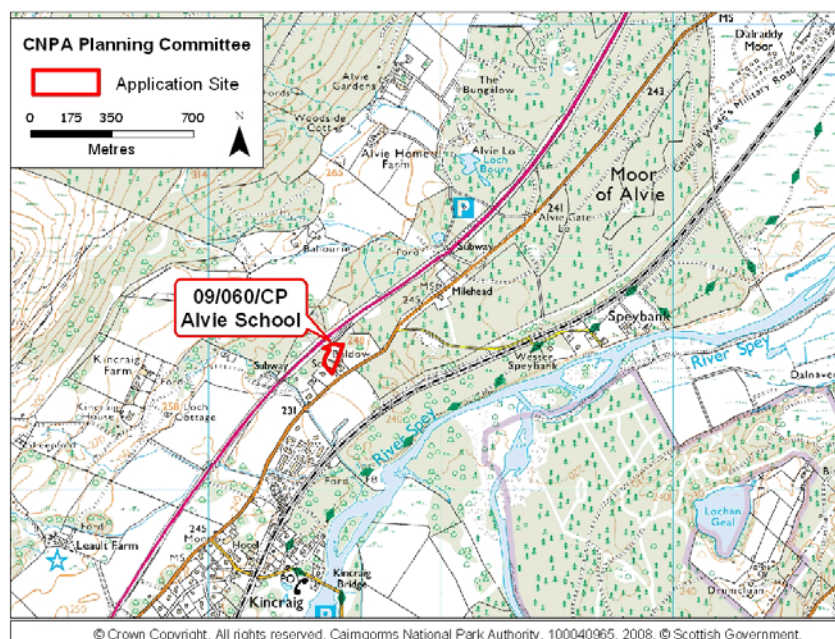


Fig. 1 - Location Plan

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL

1. Full planning permission is being sought in this application for the removal of a demountable single classroom at Alvie Primary School in Kincaig, and its replacement with a new double classroom unit. The existing single classroom unit is located within a hard surfaced area, some of which is used for car parking, and is in close proximity to the main school building. The exact age of the building is not known, although information received from the Highland Council indicates that it may be in place in excess of 40 years. The building currently accommodates the canteen facility for the school.
2. The proposed new unit is a single storey flat roof modular portakabin. It is intended to accommodate a dining / general purpose room with a small servery, as well as an additional classroom, storage areas and an accessible toilet. The unit would measure approximately 16.5 metres x 9.5 metres,¹ with a height of approximately 3.5 metres. The entrance is proposed to be centrally positioned in the front elevation. Details provided by the applicants indicate that the new building would have a lifespan of approximately 60 years, although it is conceded that it may require maintenance after 25 years dependent on prevailing conditions. The drawings provided do not include specifications of external materials. However, it is understood that the unit would be of a standard portakabin finish, where the external walls of the building would be galvanised steel cladding, while the roof covering would be aluminium – zinc coated steel. Portakabin structures also generally incorporate steel faced doors, and double glazed U-PVC windows.
3. The new portakabin is proposed to be positioned to the north of the main school building, immediately to the rear of a single storey extension which was developed at the school several years ago. The area currently occupied by the existing classroom structure is a short distance further west and upon its removal it is proposed to reinstate the surface to form additional car parking facilities. The installation of the new structure would necessitate some realignment of a grass bank at the edge of the hard surfaced area. In conjunction with this realignment, the applicants have also indicated that they would be willing to provide additional landscaping to the east of the new structure, in order to provide

¹ Total floor area of 155.83 square metres.

screening from the public road. Tree planting, using indigenous species of 2 to 3 metres in height is proposed in order to screen the corner of the new building which would otherwise be visible from the B9152 public road. In addition to the demolition of the existing dilapidated classroom structure, it is also proposed to demolish a small brick built storage building and remove a timber shed from the area.

Justification for the proposed classroom facility

4. Having regard to the nature of the proposed structure, which is effectively temporary and moveable, and its relationship with the existing traditional Victorian school building, the CNPA raised a number of queries with the applicants to ascertain the background to the need for the proposed development at this time. In the response from the Housing and Property Services section of Highland Council reference is made to the rising pupil roll at the school and the resultant necessity to increase the capacity of the school. In their submission, Highland Council have referred to data available from the General Register Office (GRO) for Scotland which suggests that the school roll will remain high for the foreseeable future, with figures indicating a roll of up to 60 pupils in the future. In the event that the proposed new double classroom unit is not in place at the start of the new school year in August 2009 "the Council will not have sufficient physical space to accommodate the Primary 1 intake."

5. Reference is also made to the replacement of the existing building being necessary as it has come to the end of its useful life. In terms of the condition of the existing portakabin, which is described as dilapidated, the roof and walls are described as poor and displaying evidence of rot, which it is suspected has entered the framing of the building. In addition the building design does not lend itself to adaption to comply with current disabled access legislation. Highland Council is of the view that the building has "gone beyond its useful life and works to improve the condition of the building and its accessibility would be a wasteful application of funds."



Fig. 2 : Proposed location

Fig. 3 : Existing portacabin to be demolished

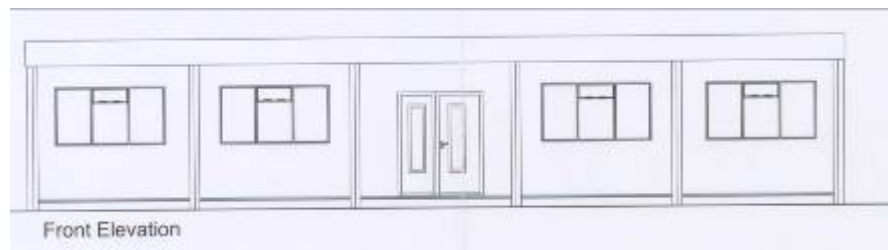


Fig. 4 : Proposed new structure

6. The requirement for additional classroom accommodation has arisen due to the increase in the school roll from within the school catchment area. At present all years from Primary 1 to Primary 7 are accommodated within the main school building in what has been described in the submission from Highland Council as “cramped accommodation.” The additional classroom space is intended to allow the Head Teacher the flexibility to form class year groups.
7. Details of the timescale for the intended construction programme have been provided in supporting information recently received from the applicants. On the basis that the new structure is required to be operational by the start of the new school year on 17th August 2009, it is necessary to commence arrangements for the purchase of the portakabin unit in early April, in order to allow sufficient time for the off-site construction to be carried out. The remainder of the period between April and June is scheduled for the preparation of tender documentation and securing the building warrant. Enabling works at the site are scheduled to commence at the start of the school summer holidays on 2nd July. The works would include the dismantling of the old building, the demolition of the brick built shed and the removal of the small timber shed. Following this, other enabling works would include excavating to the required level and formation of foundation pads, as well as making good the area under the dismantled portakabin. Landscaping would also be undertaken at the site at this time. All of the enabling works are scheduled to be completed by 31st July, in order to accommodate the arrival of the new building on the site on Monday 3rd August. The two week period prior to the commencement of the new school term is programmed for the completion of works at the site, including connections to essential services, the installation of fitting and equipment in the new structure, construction of access ramps and steps, and also the erection of new fences and gates within the school yard in order to separate pupils and vehicular traffic.

8. The provision of the demountable double classroom unit is considered by the Council to provide a cost and time effective solution to the upsurge in pupil numbers expected for the start of the new school term in August 2009. It has also been confirmed in the supporting documentation recently received from the applicants that the proposed double classroom unit is considered to be a permanent solution to the requirement for additional accommodation at the school. While the long term intention for Alvie Primary School is to maintain the village school within the existing site "there are no plans to expand the school in the future."



Fig. 5 : Proposed site layout plan

DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONTEXT

Highland Council Structure Plan 2001

9. Section 2.4 of the Structure Plan, entitled Services and Facilities notes that access to a range of services and facilities is an important aspect of quality of life. The Structure Plan strategy supports the role of existing settlements, based on an assessment of the provision of shopping, social, cultural, health, business, recreational and other services and facilities upon which communities of different sizes depend.
10. The Structure Plan includes a specific section on Education, in which it is noted that such facilities are an important focal point in local communities. Educational services are also vital to the future economic prosperity of an area. **Policy S2** refers specifically to education facilities, stating that "the Council will actively support the development of educational and associated facilities throughout the Highlands.....particularly where they contribute to the social and economic development of communities."

Badenoch and Strathspey Local Plan (1997)

11. Alvie School is located within the settlement of Kincaig, as shown in the Badenoch and Strathspey Local Plan. The majority of the school site is on land which is identified for infill purposes. In a section of the Plan referring to Services and Infrastructure it is stated that the Council is continuing its regional investment priorities with a major school building / refurbishment programme, as well as attention to roads, water and sewerage deficiencies.

Cairngorms National Park Plan (2007)

12. In a section entitled 'Living and Working in the Park' the Cairngorms National Park Plan notes that the social and economic development needs are similar to those throughout rural Scotland. Strategic Objectives for Sustainable Communities include promoting the provision of local services that meet the needs of communities through Community Planning and other community development initiatives. The Plan recognises that "the provision of services should contribute to thriving communities that have the appropriate facilities to meet their needs" with access to services including schools, health care and social infrastructure all being recognised as key to the long term sustainability of communities.

CONSULTATIONS

13. **Kincaig and Vicinity Community Council** has written to express strong support for the application. Four reasons for the support are set down in the consultation response and include reference to the present structure having reached the end of its useful life; that the planning application has arisen as a result of the capacity of the school coming under stress – reference is made to the capacity currently being "overstretched by five places"; further evidence of capacity issues is provided by reference to the current situation of a composite class of 20 covering four age groups all being accommodated in one classroom; and the final comment is a request that the application be processed quickly in order to allow the building to be put in place over the summer holidays. The response from **Kincaig and Vicinity Community Council** also refers to the application being called in by the Cairngorms National Park Authority in part due to concerns about making a more permanent improvement to the school. The sentiments are described in the consultation response as being laudable but the Community Council comment that "the point at issue is that this would have to be put in the forward budget, with the build then taking up to two years to complete" and that there is a "serious and growing

problem now and respectfully cannot afford to wait that long for a solution."

14. An additional minor point is also raised in the response from **Kincraig and Vicinity Community Council**, where it is noted that the proposed new unit has only one door. It is suggested that consideration should be given to the addition of fire doors in the two large classrooms. This point has been raised with the applicants and it has been confirmed in the response that the design of the proposed new structure is compliant with all current legislation and relevant standards, including egress in the case of fire. The response from the Highland Council also suggests that the introduction of an additional means of access could be detrimental in the case of young children "in that it is better to keep them together under the control of an adult than allow them to make their own way out of a building to a muster point."
15. A second consultation response was also received from **Kincraig and Vicinity Community Council** on 25th March 2009, again stressing the need for a quick decision on this application. It is also suggested in the response that the new building would be largely shielded from public view by the original school building and should not therefore impinge on the cultural heritage of the area to any significant degree, particularly from the angle visible to passers by on the B9152 public road. Finally, the Community Council response point out that the new structure is demountable and could be removed at a later date in the event that the school roll decreases.

REPRESENTATIONS

16. Four letters of representation have been received in respect of the proposed development, the majority of which are from the parents of pupils attending Alvie School. Concern has been expressed in the letters that the planning application was called in by the Cairngorms National Park Authority together with requests that the application be approved without further delay. Reference is made in some of the letters of representation to the level of house building which has occurred in Kincraig village in recent years, resulting in an unforeseen increase in demand for local schooling. The capacity of the school is detailed as being 45, while there are currently 50 pupils enrolled at the school, with additional pupils registered to start in September 2009. Concern is expressed that children from Kincraig may not get a place in the school in the future.
17. It is speculated in one of the letters of representation that the 'calling in' of the application by the CNPA could delay the process

by up to two to three months. In the event that a summer installation of the proposed new unit is not met the "consequences of this will have a very serious impact on the children's education as a result of overcrowding."

18. Comment is also made in one of the letters of objection to the proposed siting and design of the new structure, where it is suggested that the new portakabin is much more attractively designed than the one which is currently in place, that it is fit for purpose and more sensitive to the traditional architecture of the Victorian school building.

APPRAISAL

19. The proposed development is for the replacement of an existing dilapidated demountable classroom with a new double classroom unit, also of the same demountable nature. The new unit is proposed to be positioned within the Alvie School complex, in relatively close proximity to the existing position of the unit that would be dismantled. The principle of development of the nature proposed has already been accepted in this location, with the existing unit thought to have been in place for over 40 years. Despite the historic acceptance of the use of temporary structures as a means of providing additional accommodation at education facilities, it is necessary to consider the proposal in the current context of its location within a National Park, adjacent to a traditionally designed school building which has its origins in the Victorian era, and to assess whether or not the current proposal represents an appropriate design solution. Consideration will be given to the latter aspect from both an aesthetic point of view and also in the context of the contribution that a development of the nature proposed would make to the social and economic development of the area.

20. In terms of the design of the double classroom unit, there is little to disguise the fact that it is a portakabin, and as such is a standard form, being a low level single storey modular structure. The applicants have however verbally indicated that they are open to considering a colour finish which would assist in minimising the visual impact of the structure. Although recognising that the design of the proposed structure does not reflect the architecture or materials of the adjacent school building, as an immediate solution to the accommodation problems at the primary school I find the design to be generally acceptable and not dissimilar to many other examples found at education facilities elsewhere within the national park.

21. However, in accepting the design on the basis that it fulfils a proven need for immediate additional accommodation at the school, this does not imply that it represents the most appropriate long term solution to the accommodation needs of the school. It is concerning to note that in the recently received supporting information from the Highland Council that the proposal is considered to represent a permanent solution. Having regard to the first aim of the national park which includes conserving and enhancing the cultural heritage of the area, the most appropriate solution to the long term accommodation needs would appear to be a suitably scaled and sensitively designed permanent extension. From the point of view of future users of the school facility a permanent structure would also appear to be a more appropriate long term solution than a portakabin. A permanent extension to the school would also be more consistent in the long term with the aim of promoting the social and economic development of the area.
22. Notwithstanding my concerns about a permanent design solution being more appropriate for the long term development of the school, it is necessary to make a recommendation on the basis of the current proposal. In summary, I accept the case advanced to demonstrate that there is an urgent need for additional accommodation facilities at the school in order to accommodate rising school rolls, and I also accept that within the time constraints (where the accommodation is essential for the start of the new school year in August) a portakabin facility represents a practical and time efficient solution. It is within the confines of the existing school complex and is effectively an addition to the facility and does not therefore offend planning policy. On a temporary basis the portakabin structure would have a limited impact (which could be further minimised through a scheme of appropriate landscaping, as well as an appropriately coloured external finish) and due to its demountable nature, it could be removed from the site reasonably quickly and its visual impact as well as its impact on the setting of the school negated. I therefore consider that the most appropriate course of action at the present time is to recommend that a temporary planning permission be granted, thereby addressing the immediate need for accommodation at the school and also allowing the applicants to reconsider the position further with regard to the strategy for the long term improvement and expansion of Alvie Primary School.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AIMS OF THE NATIONAL PARK

Conserve and Enhance the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Area

22. The provision of a replacement classroom unit within the existing school complex does not raise any issues in respect of the natural heritage of the area. Having regard to the traditional character and fabric of the main school building, the proposed portakabin unit is not considered to enhance the setting or cultural heritage value of the school. However, as it is not a permanent structure its impact is temporary and can be eradicated by the removal of the unit at an appropriate time in the future. In the shorter term, appropriate landscaping works in the immediate vicinity would assist in minimising the potential visual impact, particularly as viewed from the B9152 public road to the east.

Promote Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

23. The proposal does not make any contribution towards this aim.

Promote Understanding and Enjoyment of the Area

24. The proposed development would result in improvements to the education facilities available to children in the area and could therefore indirectly assist in promoting their understanding and enjoyment of the area.

Promote Sustainable Economic and Social Development of the Area

25. Information has been provided to demonstrate that Alvie School is currently operating above its intended capacity, and that school roll figures are expected to continue to rise in the immediate future. The provision of the proposed new classroom unit would address this immediate problem, and provide improved educational facilities, which would be of immediate benefit to the social and economic development of the area.

RECOMMENDATION

That Members of the Committee support a recommendation to :

Grant Full Planning Permission for the removal of a dilapidated demountable classroom and its replacement with a double classroom unit at Alvie Primary School 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. This permission is for a temporary period only, for a maximum of five years, after which time the unit shall be removed and the site shall be restored to its original condition, unless prior to that date permission has been granted for its retention.
3. Prior to the commencement of development, a detailed landscaping plan shall be submitted for the written agreement of the Cairngorms National Park Authority, acting as Planning Authority, to include proposals for the provision of planting to the east of the proposed new structure.

The landscaping shall be carried out in accordance with the agreed plan and shall be completed within two months of the positioning of the classroom unit on the site. Any trees or shrubs that die or become seriously damaged or diseased within a period of five years from the time of planting shall be replaced with others of a similar size and species, suited to the climate of the area, within the next planting season.

4. Prior to the commencement of development details of all external finishes, including colour finishes, shall be submitted for the written agreement of the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Planning Authority.

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25 March 2007

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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.