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# CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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

**Prepared by: ANDREW TAIT, PLANNING OFFICER (DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT)**

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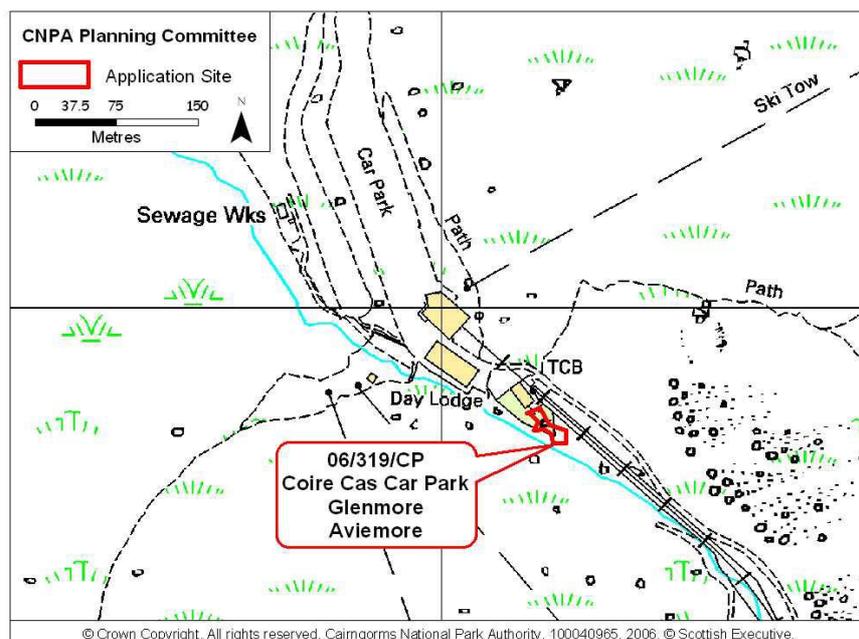
**DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED: ERECTION OF A CAMERA OBSCURA WITHIN MOUNTAIN GARDEN AREA, CAIRNGORM MOUNTAIN. (FULL PP)**

**REFERENCE: 06/319/CP**

**APPLICANT: CAIRNGORM MOUNTAIN TRUST C/O FERGUS PURDIE ARCHITECT, 26 MELVILLE STREET, PERTH.**

**DATE CALLED-IN: 10<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2006**

**RECOMMENDATION: APPROVAL**



**Fig. 1 - Location Plan**

## SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL

1. Full planning permission is being sought for the construction of a camera obscura within a tunnel/dark chamber to form an additional tourist facility within the Cairngorm mountain garden area above the Coire Cas car park and Day Lodge.



**Fig 2 view of site (centre of photo)**

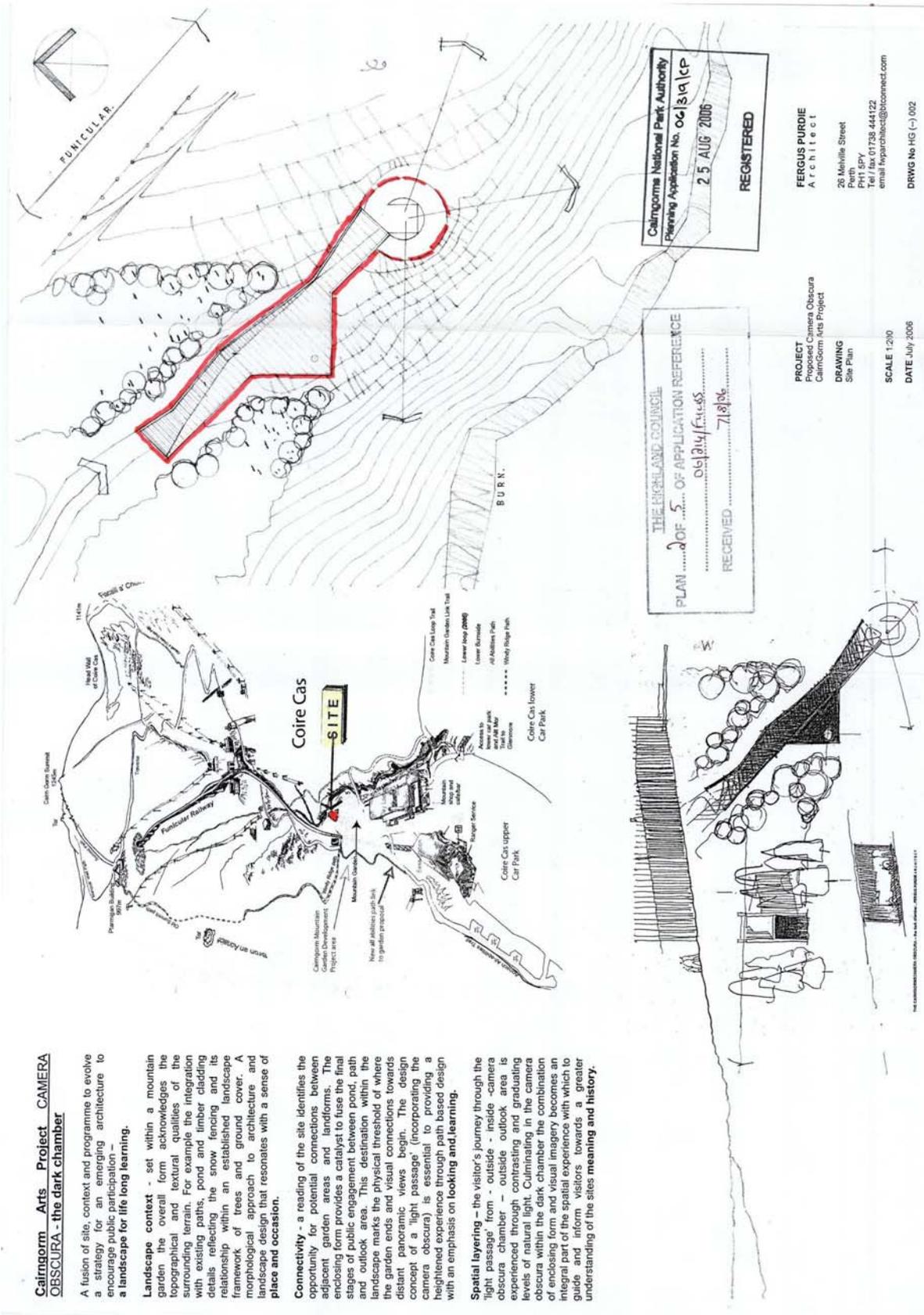


**Fig 3 looking down to site**



**Figure 4 building would be seen end on between the two tree groups.**

2. The proposed structure will be sited on the top end of the footpath over part of the path and terminating just before the existing viewpoint which will remain as part of the proposal (see fig 3). The existing levels will be largely unaffected and the building will follow the sloping topography of the land, essentially forming a 19 metre long tunnel (see fig 5). The camera obscura would be sited mid way along the chamber then visitors could move up the path to the existing viewing area. The external materials proposed for the structure are recycled, weathered oak cladding for the walls and timber slats for the roof.
3. Additional tree planting has been proposed, to help the structure sit more comfortably in its setting. Access to the building is via the existing footpath which leads up to the top of the mountain garden. The building can also be accessed by a new link into the all abilities path connecting the area to be landscaped (approval for landscaping recently granted by CNPA Ref 06/258/CP) above the car park with the mountain garden.



**Cairngorm Arts Project CAMERA OBSCURA - the dark chamber**  
 A fusion of site, context and programme to evolve a strategy for an emerging architecture to encourage public participation - a landscape for life long learning.

**Landscape context** - set within a mountain garden the overall form acknowledges the topographical and textural qualities of the surrounding terrain. For example the integration with existing paths, pond and timber cladding details reflecting the snow fencing and its relationship within an established landscape framework of trees and ground cover. A morphological approach to architecture and landscape design that resonates with a sense of place and occasion.

**Connectivity** - a reading of the site identifies the opportunity for potential connections between adjacent garden areas and landforms. The enclosing form provides a catalyst to fuse the final stages of public engagement between pond, path and outlook area. This destination within the landscape marks the physical threshold of where the garden ends and visual connections towards distant panoramic views begin. The design concept of a 'light passage' (incorporating the camera obscura) is essential to providing a heightened experience through path based design with an emphasis on looking and learning.

**Spatial layering** - the visitor's journey through the 'light passage' from - outside - inside - camera obscura chamber - outside outlook area is experienced through contrasting and graduating levels of natural light. Culminating in the camera obscura within the dark chamber the combination of enclosing form and visual imagery becomes an integral part of the spatial experience with which to guide and inform visitors towards a greater understanding of the sites meaning and history.

Fig 5 Sketch Plans

## DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONTEXT

4. **Policy L4 (Landscape Character) of the Highland Structure Plan** considers that the Council will have regard to the desirability of maintaining and enhancing present landscape character in the determination of development proposals, including off shore developments.
5. The **Badenoch and Strathspey Local Plan** regards Cairngorm as a sensitive area where there should be a presumption against non-essential development for winter sports. The Local Plan supports consolidation and upgrading within the existing lease area.
6. The **Cairngorms National Park Plan** has recently been approved by Scottish Ministers. Strategic objectives for conserving and enhancing the National Park include an objective to ensure that development complements and enhances the landscape character of the Park.
7. Strategic objectives within Understanding and Enjoying the Park include improving and maintaining the quality of experience in the Park for all visitors, communities and those working within the tourism industry; developing and maintaining a wide range of opportunities for visitors to experience and enjoy the special qualities, distinctiveness and natural and cultural qualities of the Park.

## CONSULTATIONS

8. **Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)** Scottish Natural Heritage does not object to the development but makes recommendations to ensure that the structure avoids any unnecessary landscape impacts at this sensitive location. SNH note that the site lies within the Cairngorms National Scenic Area (NSA). Consideration should be given to the construction methods, including potential de-commissioning and materials/colour and treatment of materials to be used on the structure.
9. **The CNPA Landscape Officer** considers that the proposed site of this application is well within the built area of Corrie Cas and as such it will be perceived as an addition to the various items already there. Overall, the accumulated 'clutter' of the various elements has had a big impact upon the visual amenity of the corrie and this particular proposal will not remedy that. However, when considering the physical nature of the proposal one must consider the context of the corrie as a developed site. As such it is generally well contained from other parts of the mountain. The proposal will not be particularly visible except from the surrounding developments and as such it will not be a detractor from the mountain as a whole; over and above the ski development itself. In addition, its small size means that it is unlikely to be clearly seen from outside the corrie and so the impact upon the wider landscape is negligible.

10. **Highland Council Landscape Officer** raises concerns about access to the facility, particularly for the less able. Questions are raised regarding the gradients within an area where the path would be subject to low light levels.
11. The agent responded to these concerns and points out that the physical relationship to the landscape has been determined by the existing ground conditions both in terms of gradient, width and material. The project therefore attempts to avoid excessive remodelling of the site and its immediate surrounding area. The agent points out that at the detailed building warrant stage the detailed design of handrails, use of materials and landscaping will allow all visitors to gain a full and comprehensive experience of the camera obscura where it will be reasonably practical to achieve this.
12. **Highland Council Landscape Officer** responded to this by pointing out that she accepts that such issues can be dealt with at Building Regulations stage, but should be dealt with at the earliest opportunity as part of the planning process. As a result of these concerns a meeting has been held with the project manager and a way forward has been agreed based upon the meeting.
13. **CNPA Visitor Services and Recreation** comment that without specific interpretation aims it is difficult to comment on the proposal from this perspective. It is also unclear whether the camera will present solely the image to the viewer or whether this will be supplemented with additional written or audio interpretation, or whether it is intended that groups will visit the camera with a guide.
14. However, Camera Obscura's can be very good at encouraging visitors to take time to look at and appreciate a landscape in detail: to see it in a new way. On this basis we feel that the project has the potential to positively contribute to the following Raising Understanding and Awareness outcomes in the National Park Plan:-
  - i. Residents and visitors will appreciate the special qualities of the Park and understand more about their special management needs.
  - ii. More people who have visited the Park will have high quality experiences and will tell positive stories about the area.
  - iii. There will be more opportunities to learn about and enjoy the Park and its special qualities – especially for young people, people with disabilities and people on low incomes.

15. To gain the most from this project we would recommend the following:-
- That a high quality system is used to enable a clear image to be projected in the camera.
  - That if the image is static then careful consideration is given to the view chosen so that it best represents the special qualities of the Cairngorms.
  - That visitor evaluation is undertaken to determine how visitors see the area differently after being in the camera and the results are used to determine what additional interpretation (if any) is needed alongside the image.

## REPRESENTATIONS

16. A background letter responding to concerns from Highland Council Landscape Officer is attached at the back of the report. An e-mail from the project manager relating to the resolution for all abilities access to the structure is also attached.

## APPRAISAL

17. As with previous proposals there is little in the way of direct, principle policy guidance with regard to this actual site. The Badenoch and Strathspey Local Plan holds a presumption against non-essential development for winter sports. Conversely the plan supports upgrading and consolidation within the existing lease area. Policy L4 Landscape of the Highland Structure Plan considers that development should have regard to maintaining and conserving present landscape character.
18. The key consideration is the appropriateness of this land use at the site and the environmental impact of the building itself. Particular issues relating to access have been raised and these will also be addressed.
19. While recognising the mountain nature of the site it is clear that the site and operation at Cairngorm Mountain is a commercial recreation/tourist attraction. The proposed building is essentially within the developed envelope in the mountain garden and close to other facilities that the site has to offer. Therefore, a proposal for what is essentially an interpretive feature would seem acceptable in principle at an existing tourist site. The camera obscura is intended to provide an additional attraction at the site and is intended to aid in the interpretation of landscape in the area.
20. The site is located within the Cairngorms National Scenic Area and the environmental and landscape impacts of the building area key. What is designed as essentially a lightweight tunnel would result in an absolute minimum of intervention with the existing slopes and contours of the site. A small projecting element will require some level of support with

additional material but apart from this the building simply functions as a cover over the existing path (subject to a small section of modified slope to improve access around the camera itself), light would progressively diminish as the centre of the building is approached where the camera obscura would be sited, the top end of the building opens out onto the existing viewing area.

21. The landscape importance of the area is recognised by the NSA designation. However, the building proposed is sited close to much larger existing buildings and when viewed from the west is backed by the funicular railway line. The lower section of the building is screened on both sides by scots pine trees and it is proposed to plant further pine trees around the upper section (although in this upland environment it must be recognised that they would take many years to mature). There is a footpath along the western bank of the burn that cascades below the site. From here the building would be viewed against the funicular line and when viewed from further up the path looking down the building would only be visible end on between two group of trees and set entirely against the day lodge and funicular terminal below as illustrated by figure 4.
22. Our own landscape officer has looked at the proposal in detail and notes that on one level the building will be perceived as an addition to what is already there. Despite this, the proposal will not be particularly visible except from the surrounding developments and as such it will not be a further detractor from the mountain as a whole; over and above the ski development itself. In addition, its small size means that it is unlikely to be clearly seen from outside the corrie and so the impact upon the wider landscape is negligible.
23. The detailed design of the structure means that it functions as a shelter and its flat roofed nature at just 3.3 metres in height reduces its prominence. A projecting section above the main roof of the structure on one side creates a visual foil and is regarded as representative of the snow fencing in the area. This would in any case effectively screen a small section of the concrete base of the funicular. The building will be finished in recycled oak cladding that is already weathered this will help the building to blend into its surroundings more quickly. As noted, the building is close to other, much more significant elements such as the funicular line, day lodge and funicular terminal. The overall feel is that the building is a lightweight structure with a certain level of impermanence which in my view is appropriate for the site.
24. In terms of impact on the site and the design of the structure the lightweight approach and minimal intervention to landform is welcomed. However, this approach has raised a difficult issue with regard to access for the less able and this has been well brought out by the consultation response from Highland Council's Landscape Officer who specialises in such matters.

25. Concerns have been raised that the proposal does not afford clear all abilities access based on the current application. This has been put to the architect who has pointed out that such issues will be addressed in detail at Building Warrant stage. The Landscape Officer was correct in pointing out that this may result in changes to the design of the proposal. The CNPA are not the Building Regulation Authority and must determine the application upon the basis of the planning acceptability of the land use and the environmental impact of the building proposed. However, I was uneasy with leaving such considerations entirely to the building warrant process given the CNPA's role in promoting enjoyment and access for all. Because of this, I requested that the project manager meet with the Highland Council Landscape Officer specifically to discuss access issues. As a result a range of detailed features have been agreed for inclusion in the proposal. These involve keeping the path straight inside the structure, ensuring that the path is flat in the dark chamber, a change in pathway surface within the structure of a light colour which would aid light reflection and a handrail will also be incorporated within the structure. The slope within the dark room area will also be alleviated and some low level lighting would also be provided by leaving some small gaps in the wall of the tunnel to create a gradual transition between outside light conditions and the darkness required for the camera. Highland Council Landscape Officer is in agreement with these measures and now has no objection to the proposal. However, a condition is recommended to ensure that the features to assist all abilities access as discussed are clearly delivered on the ground.
26. Overall the proposal is considered to comply with policy and make a good contribution towards the aims of the park and is supported by the Visitor Services and Recreation Group. The scheme is recommended for approval subject to the conditions at the end of the report.

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

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

27. The actual structure has few implications for the natural and cultural heritage of the area. In landscape terms this does result in an additional building at the site but it has been located so that it has little or no additional landscape impact being backed by the funicular on its east side with scots pine to the west above the burn. The structure will be seen head on from higher up the corrie but would be seen against the much bulkier buildings as shown in figure 4. The Camera Obscura itself would provide a new aspect to interpret the natural and cultural heritage of the area particularly for the less able.

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

28. This is a simple structure built in salvaged oak and results in a further attraction at an existing tourist site.

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

29. The proposal will assist in the interpretation of the area's landscape heritage and will assist in promoting the enjoyment of the area for those visiting the site. A meeting has been held to ensure that the proposal will allow access for all abilities.

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

30. The proposal adds to the attractions at Cairngorm Mountain and as such will add to the economic development at the site giving visitors in summer reasons for spending longer at the site. The proposal will also aid in the interpretation of the landscape heritage for the less able in particular.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

31. That Members of the Committee support a recommendation to: **GRANT** Full Planning Permission for the Erection of a Camera Obscura Building within Mountain Garden area at Cairngorm Mountain subject to the following conditions:
- I. The development to which this permission relates must be begun within five years from the date of this permission.
  - II.A full report detailing the methods of construction and timing of construction and methods/location and storage of materials for all landscaped areas shown on the approved site plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Cairngorms National Park Authority, acting as Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved. This report shall also identify all waste streams associated with the work and practices should be identified to minimise the use of raw materials and maximise the use of secondary aggregates and recyclable/renewable materials. This statement shall also include methods to prevent erosion, sedimentation and discolouration of controlled waters, along with contingency proposals. Measures should be incorporated to ensure that any fuels/chemicals from machinery do not result in pollution. The report shall also provide information regarding sources of seed and plants to be used (sources should be local to the site). The report should also set out a monitoring and maintenance programme for the development.

- III. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved a full plan outlining how access for all abilities shall be provided to the camera obscura building in accordance with the project managers e-mail of 16 March 2007. The development shall then be implemented in accordance with the agreed access details.
- IV. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved samples of all external materials to be used in the construction of the tunnel shall be submitted to and approved by the CNPA acting as planning authority.
- V. Details of landscaping for any areas of vegetation to be disturbed during the construction of the tunnel, including new proposed planting of scots pine shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the CNPA acting as planning authority. Landscaping shall be implemented in the first planting season after the completion of the development.
- VI. A detailed interpretation strategy, including selected viewpoints for the camera and evaluation of interpretation measures required shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the CNPA acting as planning authority. The strategy shall include arrangements for monitoring the number of visitors and their perceptions.

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26 March 2007

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.