
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: CONSULTATION FOR HIGHLAND COUNCIL ON THE PROPOSAL FOR A HOUSING & MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT (02/00230/OUTBS) [in the Creag Bheag woodland to the south of Deshar Road].

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Purpose

To inform the CNPA Planning Committee of a proposed development in Boat of Garten, and agree a consultation response to the Highland Council.

Recommendations

Our recommendation to Highland council is that this application be refused on the following grounds:

Executive Summary

This (outline) planning application was originally submitted to Highland Council in July 2002; determination has been delayed due to environmental investigations (capercaillie habitat), as well as concerns over the capacity of the sewage treatment works. Both of these issues remain as pertinent reasons for refusal.

We consider the determination of this application to now be premature to the publication of the CNPA Local Plan. Determination in line with the Badenoch & Strathspey Local Plan 1997, with which the proposal appears to comply, would however completely disregard the new National Park context. At the CNP Local Plan community consultation meeting, in Boat of Garten on 29 Nov. 2004, there was general community opposition towards the scale and location of this proposal, particularly as the site is currently used as amenity woodland.

This development would represent a significant loss of valuable habitat; approximately two thirds of the site is registered under the Ancient Woodlands Inventory (see Appendix 1 for explanation). A development of this scale would require a comprehensive Environmental Assessment to investigate **all** of the possible impacts, within the National Park context.

The CNPA Local Plan, and associated design guidance, will seek to facilitate development that enhances and contributes to the character and structure of the Park's highland villages. The proposed scale, site layout, and suburban style of the housing 'groups', bear no relation to the existing structure and density of the village, and thereby are unlikely to contribute to its character and amenity.

This (outline) planning application, No. 02/00230/OUTBS, was originally submitted to Highland Council in July 2002; determination has been delayed since then due to environmental investigations (particularly SNH concerns over loss of capercaillie habitat), as well as issues relating to the lack of capacity of the local sewage treatment works. The Highland Council have now requested a consultation from the CNPA relative to this proposal, dated 11th March 2005.

This proposed development exactly matches the zoning and allocations in the Badenoch & Strathspey Local Plan 1997, which is of course now considerably out of date; determination in line with this plan would disregard the new National Park context, which did not exist when the B&S plan was formulated in the early/mid 1990's. Accordingly, we would consider the determination of this application to be premature to the publication of the CNPA Local Plan, the Finalised Draft of which will be put on deposit in March 2006.

At the CNP Local Plan community consultation meeting, in Boat of Garten on 29 November 2004, there was general community opposition towards the scale and location of this proposal, particularly as the site is currently used as amenity woodland. In developing the CNP Local Plan, the CNPA will be paying serious attention to the needs and wishes of the local communities, as well as all of the groups and bodies who have an interest in the Park area. Underpinning, and central to the Local Plan, will be the four Aims of the National Park.



Figure 1: Location Plan for development proposal; the site is outlined (approximately) in red, the area recorded in the Ancient Woodlands Inventory is outlined in green.

This outline proposal is mainly for housing (120 units as allocated in the B&S Local Plan 1997) with additional sites for lorry-parking and commercial use at the entrance to the scheme; these semi-industrial uses would be somewhat unsightly 'gateways' at the entrance to the development, and the village. No mention is made of affordable housing quotas, but the Highland Council's objective target-ratio of 25% would hopefully be applied as a minimum. We would however ask for a study of general housing needs in the Boat of Garten area to be carried-out, to justify the basic need for this proposal, and that study would also be used to determine whether a higher quota of affordable housing was required. As the B&S Local Plan is out-of-date, its housing allocation numbers can no longer be used to justify housing developments.

This proposal would represent a significant loss of valuable habitat; approximately two thirds of the site is registered under the Ancient Woodlands Inventory (see Figure 1, and Appendix 1 for explanation). This site is also a known lek and main brooding habitat for capercaillie, which is of course a heavily protected species, and as such any loss of habitat is unlikely to be viewed favourably.





A development of this scale within a National Park would most likely require a comprehensive Environmental Assessment, to investigate **all** of the possible impacts. This assessment should not just focus on the natural environment, but also look at the social and economic impact on the village; Boat currently has approximately 225 houses, adding another 120 will make a considerable impact on services and facilities within the community (e.g. the school). There will also be a considerable increase in car-traffic, the impacts of which should be carefully considered. One of the reasons for this application being un-determined, is the lack of sewage treatment capacity (and water supply) within Boat of Garten; according to Scottish Water this is currently the case, and there is no programmed upgrade/extension of facilities planned for the foreseeable future.

The CNPA Local Plan, and associated design guidance, will seek to facilitate development that enhances and contributes to the character and structure of the Park's highland villages, while making the minimum impacts on the Park's environment and landscape. This proposal's site layout, and suburban style of the housing 'groups', bear no relation to the existing structure and density of the village, and thereby are unlikely to contribute to its character. The scale of this proposed development, enlarging the village's housing units by more than 50%, is not how we would envisage the Park's communities growing; development of the Park's villages should be smaller-scale and low-impact, designed to be organic growth by incremental measures. As noted above, we would require to see a housing study that proves the local need for this development, and shows how much of it should be apportioned for affordable housing.



Figure 2: Site plan for the proposed development.

KEY:

-  Areas of Housing
-  Service business and replacement lorry parking
-  Commercial use
-  Woodland/ planting/ amenity.

Summary:

This (outline) planning application was originally submitted to Highland Council in July 2002; determination has been delayed due to environmental investigations (capercaillie habitat), as well as concerns over the capacity of the sewage treatment works. Both of these issues remain as pertinent reasons for refusal.

Determination in line with the Badenoch & Strathspey Local Plan 1997, with which the proposal appears to comply, would however completely disregard the new National Park context. This plan is which is now considerably out of date, and as such we consider the determination of this application to now be premature to the publication of the CNPA Local Plan. At the CNP Local Plan community consultation meeting in Boat of Garten, on 29 Nov. 2004, there was general community opposition towards the scale and location of this proposal, particularly as the site is currently used as amenity woodland.

This development would represent a significant loss of valuable habitat; approximately two thirds of the site is registered under the Ancient Woodlands Inventory (see Appendix 1 for explanation). The site is also a known lek and main brooding area for Capercaillie, whose level of protection makes any loss of habitat highly un-feasible. A development of this scale would most likely require a comprehensive Environmental Assessment to investigate **all** of the possible impacts, within the National Park context.

The CNPA Local Plan, and associated design guidance, will seek to facilitate development that enhances and contributes to the character and structure of the Park's highland villages. The proposed scale, site layout, and suburban style of the housing 'groups', bear no relation to the existing structure and density of the village, and thereby are unlikely to contribute to its character and amenity.

Appendix 1: Explanation of Ancient Woodland Inventory (adapted from the-woodland-trust.org.uk website)

Definitions

Ancient woods are those where there is believed to have been continuous woodland cover since at least 1600 AD. Before this planting was uncommon, so a wood present in 1600 AD was likely to have developed naturally. In Scotland, ancient woodland sites are strictly those shown as semi-natural woodland on the "Roy" maps, (a 1750 military survey and the best source of historical map evidence), and as woodland on all subsequent maps, however they have been combined with long-established woods of semi-natural origin (originating from between 1750 and 1860) into a single category of ancient woodland to take account of uncertainties in compilation of the ancient woodland inventory.

Ancient semi-natural woodland (ASNW) is composed of native tree species that have not obviously been planted. **Planted ancient woodland sites (PAWS)** are ancient woods in which the former tree cover has been replaced, often with non-native trees. Important features of ancient woodland often survive in many of these woods, including characteristic flora and fauna, and archaeology.

Records of ancient woodland

Ancient woods over two hectares in size are recorded in **Ancient Woodland Inventories (AWIs)**, compiled in the 1980s and 1990s by the Nature Conservancy Council in England, Scotland and Wales and maintained by its successor organisations in those countries. The AWIs have helped increase awareness of the importance of ancient woodland and have become an important tool for policy makers and planners. It was expected that by their nature, the AWIs would always be provisional. However, in some ways their initial production was superficial, relying on limited archive work that varied in quality, and subsequently their development has failed to keep pace with their increasingly important role.

The extent and distribution of ancient woods less than 2 hectares in area in Great Britain is unknown, although broad estimates might be extrapolated from the Millennium Guide to Scotland's Forest Resource, which includes native woods less than 2 hectares, and the NIWT. The extent and distribution of ancient wood pasture is also unknown since many ASNW and PAWS wood pastures and parkland, particularly those with low canopy density, have not been included on the AWIs.

Importance of ancient woodland

As the terrestrial habitat most representative of original, natural, stable conditions, ancient woodland is home to more threatened species than any other habitat in the UK; this is supported by the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

Long undisturbed, ancient woods are historical treasure troves. Bronze and iron age earthworks, Saxon range boundaries, ancient park boundaries, ridge and furrow, park pales and woodbanks are all preserved to give a picture of past land use. Old coppice stools and pollards point to past woodland management practices, and charcoal pits, ore furnaces and kilns are clues to local industrial history.

Last, but not least, ancient woods are timeless places of great beauty and tranquillity. The importance of woodland, and especially ancient woodland, to our quality of life should not be underestimated. **Our remaining ancient woodland covers less than 2 per cent of the UK, and is irreplaceable.**