
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: CONSULTATION REPORT ON PLANNING APPLICATION TO ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL

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DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED: EXTRACTION OF GRANITE, PROCESSING, STOCKPILING AND RECYCLING OF CONSTRUCTION WASTE, AT CRAIGLICH WOODLANDS, NEAR TARLAND, ABOYNE (FULL PLANNING PERMISSION)

APPLICANT: ALEX SIM PLANT HIRE LTD, YALBERTON TOR QUARRY, PAIGNTON, DEVON, PER ATKINS, THE OCTAGON, PYNES, HILL COURT, RYDON LANE, EXETER, DEVON



Fig. 1 - Location Plan

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL

1. This application lies outwith the boundaries of the National Park (approximately 8km from the eastern boundary). The proposal is for full planning permission to develop a new quarry in an area of 8.1 hectares of land, situated about 8km north of Aboyne. The nearest settlement is Tarland about 4.5 km to the south west of the site (also lies outwith the National Park). The land is currently woodland and heather moorland on a north-western facing hillside, elevated above the open countryside to the south and west, the Howe of Cromar. The significant local viewpoint – “Queen’s View” – is situated just to the west of the application site near to the junction of the B9119, Aberdeen to Tarland Road, and the minor road to Coull.
2. The applicants propose to extract approximately 1.5 million cubic metres of pink granite over a period of 35 to 40 years, extracting up to 50,000 cubic metres a year. The estimated maximum depth of the workings is stated to be 75metres. The site is also proposed to act as a recycling centre for surplus construction materials, mainly from demolition contracts. The first phase of working will be to carry out the accommodation works – general site clearance, the construction of bunds and the extraction of rock which will create a level base for offices, parking (20 spaces), accommodation structures and other processing plant (crushers, a granulator, screening plant and washing facility), a weighbridge, and plant storage area. Temporary stockpiles would be formed behind the bunds or form part of the bunds. All washing water would go through temporary settlement lagoons before being discharged to ground. The main excavation period would be in years 3 to 25 creating a hole of approximately 350m by 270m. Restoration of the site to woodland and agricultural use is proposed.
3. The applicants state that due to the topography of the site and orientation, properties to the south will have no sight lines to the site, and properties to the west will have no or limited views. A temporary bund is proposed behind the natural screening provided by the existing slope of the hill. A stoned earth wall is proposed along the eastern boundary to add to screening, and additional planting is planned to the north to help ‘break up’ the view. Additional planting along the access to the east will require the agreement of the mutual landowner. The applicants state that they do not consider that there will be a view from the “Queen’s View” into the quarry.
4. Hours of operation are 7am to 6pm Monday to Friday, and 7am to 1pm on Saturdays. Access outside those hours will be only for emergency work or for exceptional contracts. 5 to 10 personnel will be employed on the site.
5. Access to the site is using an existing forestry track that comes off the B9119 Aberdeen to Tarland road. Drainage will be to a large soakaway trench for surface water from the site, with foul drainage to a closed system.
6. An Environmental Assessment (EA) has been submitted with the application and has been advertised for public comment. There are some photographs of the hillside from a few local viewpoints and rough cross-sectional sketches of

the quarry in relation to local houses, roads, tracks and woodlands. The EA includes a plan showing a visual envelope for the development which only extends as far as Tarland to the west, and other open land round to the north.

7. A similar proposal was refused planning permission by Aberdeenshire Council in 2003, for a number of reasons. It is understood that the revised submission has reduced the size of the quarry. The previous proposal was considered to be in an area where planning policies sought to protect the special natural and cultural values of the area. The site was within an area of landscape significance, and there were concerns about the additional traffic generated on the local roads, as well as noise and water pollution concerns. With several of these issues there was a failure to demonstrate that concerns could be overcome.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONTEXT AND THE AIMS OF THE PARK

8. Planning policies which relate to the proposal are contained in the Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Structure Plan 2001-2016 (NEST) and the Finalised Aberdeenshire Local Plan 2002. However, with the site lying outwith the boundaries of the National Park, the role of the CNPA in this instance is a consultee. As such, our response relates to any impacts on the interests of the National Park, specifically the implications of the development for the aims of the National Park, and how it relates to any relevant CNPA Interim Policies.
9. The Cairngorms National Park Authority Interim Planning Policy No.4 Mineral Workings, Consultation Draft (11 October 2004) states that there will be a general presumption against new mineral workings and extensions to existing mineral workings within the Park. However, there is no specific policy on mineral working proposals outwith, but in proximity to, the Park. Nevertheless the document does state in its text that:-
“The support of constituent and adjacent Local Authorities should be sought to protect the Park from intrusive and unsightly mineral working proposals outwith its boundary, which adversely affect its setting or detract from important views”.
10. The aims of the National Park are defined in the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000. They are:-
 - a. to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area,
 - b. to promote sustainable use of the natural resources of the area,
 - c. to promote the understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public, and
 - d. to promote sustainable economic and social development of the area’s communities.

APPRAISAL

11. For the CNPA, the main issues are visual and landscape impact, sustainable environmental impacts of traffic movements, and potential for social and economic development of some of the Park's communities. Being outwith the Park, other important issues of direct impacts on local biodiversity, site archaeology, pollution and nuisance to neighbouring properties etc. are matters for consideration by Aberdeenshire Council. Natural drainage and the local water catchment area all lie outwith the boundaries of the National Park, flowing into the River Dee near Aboyne.

Conserve and Enhance the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Area

12. Standing at, or around the application site ("Queens View"), there is one of the most impressive views of the eastern side of the National Park – with Morven in the middle distance and Mount Keen, further to the south. Visitors travelling into the National Park, coming from Aberdeen towards Tarland, will view this panoramic view of the Park at about the same time as viewing the application site. Although the actual Park boundary is still about 8km away, the hillsides around Tarland are clearly important elements in the creation of the local landscape setting around the edges of the Park, and the "Queen's View" is a very significant tourist and local feature. From the Park itself, on the higher areas of ground, most particularly on and around Morven, the site of the quarry would be visible. The developers are proposing measures to ameliorate the perceived early impacts of the quarry – creating bunds, construct a stone earth bank, and carry out additional planting. However, bunding and extraction into the face of the hillside could create features that could detract from the current landscape character. In this locality the actual boundary of the Park follows an irregular line on low ground (in the main), and it may not be apparent to many people that the application site was outside the Cairngorms National Park. Since the locality provides such an impressive view into the National Park, and is elevated and open to the west, the location is linked visually to the National Park. Any significant physical impact on the landscape here could have an impact on the setting of the Park.
13. The EA provides some photographic views of the site but only within a 5km radius Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI). Even within this zone there are only a very limited number of viewpoints shown. The views therefore do not extend to include ones from the National Park and therefore it is not possible to fully assess the significance of the visual and landscape impacts of the development on the setting of the Park. It is the applicants responsibility to provide convincing evidence to demonstrate their opinion that the scale of the visual and landscape impacts are not significant. This has not been done satisfactorily. As such, while there are no direct impacts on the Park's natural and cultural heritage, in the absence of the information, it is submitted that there is the potential for negative implications in terms of the first aim of the Park and that it has not been demonstrated that support can be given in terms of the CNPA Interim Planning Policy No.4 on Mineral Workings. If further visualisations detailing views into and out of the Park, which also show

mitigating measures, are submitted then it may be possible to review this stance.

Promote Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

14. The development would provide a supply of basic raw material for the construction industry. The EA states that the theoretical market area would be a 50km area around the site. This would include parts of the Park. However, from the information supplied, the bulk of the material is likely to be for the Aberdeen market, rather than the needs of the National Park area. The recycling of demolition material is also likely to be largely sourced from market areas outwith the Park, having to be transported a considerable distance to be recycled back into the Aberdeen area. This said, the CNPA's Interim Policy on Mineral Workings does presume against new mineral workings within the Park and this could provide the opportunity for a source of constructional material in a location, outwith, but in proximity to, the Park. Nevertheless, the actual principle of quarrying for new stone as opposed to using recycled material is not seen as representing the sustainable use of natural resources.
15. At the time of the previous application, the Council's Transportation and Infrastructure Service stated that a Traffic Impact Assessment was required in order to fully assess how traffic from the development would distribute on the road network. This has still not been submitted. As stated above, while it is unlikely that there would be a significant market from this location, for hard rock within the Park, there is no information to assess the levels of usage, and the environmental impact of quarry traffic movements on roads within the Park. In relation to this aim, the recycling facilities can be seen as having some positive implications but the overall conclusion is that the development may result in negative impacts.

Promote Understanding and Enjoyment of the Area

16. The B9119 (Aberdeen to Tarland road) is an attractive tourist route used by travellers taking an alternative road to and from Aberdeen and the National Park. Although not a "gateway" to the Park, the local viewpoint known as the "Queens View" provides an important vista and setting for the eastern part of the National Park, with a view indicator interpretation feature. Craiglich Hill is also a popular location for outdoor recreational activities. There are several tracks and footpaths which cross the hill and allow access to the summit where views towards the Park are outstanding. The vista towards the Park of open countryside with a broad mixture of agricultural land, moorland and woodland against the backdrop of the eastern Cairngorms, provides a very enjoyable and memorable experience for visitors. An operating quarry in close proximity has the potential to detract from the quality of the experience and enjoyment of the views towards the Park at this location. While there are no direct adverse impacts, the development cannot be seen to be generally positive in terms of this aim.

Promote Sustainable Economic and Social Development of the Area

17. Quarries provide a valuable source of a raw material used in all construction works. The greater emphasis on recycling construction and demolition wastes necessitates more of these reprocessing sites becoming available. As stated in paragraph 14 above, the development of a quarry providing pink granite, outwith but in close proximity to, the eastern part of the Park, is potentially supportable in principle, in terms of the CNPA's Interim Policy on Minerals Workings. The submitted EA claims that pink granite is a commodity where shortages of supply are known and many traditional and historic buildings in this part of the Park are constructed in this material. If there is a market, a new source could benefit new build and restoration projects within the Park. It could also be argued that some local businesses in the construction industry in the Park may benefit from the development. The supporting information with the application states that there will be 5 to 10 personnel on site. While any employment opportunities are welcomed in principle, the level of direct new jobs created is not particularly high and there is no specific requirement for workers to live in close proximity to the site. The nearest settlement within the Park to the site is Dinnet (over 12km away) and the nearest larger settlement is Ballater (over 21km away). In addition, the adverse environmental impacts that the development may produce eg. changes to the landscape, plant and machinery, noise, dust traffic, etc. could have negatives affects on local tourism employment and businesses. In relation to this aim, it is submitted that there is the potential for some positives in terms of social and economic development of the nearest communities within the Park. However, this is not deemed to be of a significant level and is balanced by the potential negative affects on tourism.

CONCLUSION

18. While the planning application and its accompanying EA were prepared before the existence of the Cairngorms National Park, the updated EA and new application were prepared in September 2004. There is no reference to the Cairngorms National Park and its aims, and yet the documentation outlines planning policies for Moray Council and Angus Council as well as those for Aberdeenshire Council. The submission is lacking in a number of ways but with specific reference to the National Park and its aims:-
- a. **Lack of information to determine the scale of visual and landscape impact on views towards and from the National Park. In the absence of the information, there is the potential for negative implications in terms of the first aim.**
 - b. **Unlikely to be significant markets for the raw material and the recycling facilities from the development, within the Park. While a source of pink granite outwith the Park but in close proximity could provide a valuable resource for the construction industry within the Park, the principle of new quarrying is not deemed as sustainable as using recycled material. Lack of information on traffic movements**

does not allow an assessment of the sustainable environmental impact of the traffic movements within the Park. While potentially some positive implications, overall conclusion is negative in relation to the second aim.

- c. The development is likely to lead to an adverse impact on views towards the Park from popular tourist and recreational viewpoints and locations in the vicinity. This is construed as negative in terms of the third aim.
- d. There is the potential for some positive implications in terms of the fourth aim. However these are not deemed to be of a significant level and is balanced by the potential negative implications for the tourism industry.

RECOMMENDATION

- 19. That Members agree the findings of this report as the CNPA's consultation response to Aberdeenshire Council.

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