

PLANNING APPLICATION FOR TESCO SUPERMARKET, AVIEMORE

Wednesday's (14 September 2011) article in the Strathy prompts me to write to clarify the position regarding this planning application.

Firstly, I can reassure you that the CNPA is well aware of the urgent need for a larger supermarket facility in Aviemore; that is why we granted outline planning permission for one in early 2008. We have, and will continue, to do everything we can to help the development of a new facility progress as quickly as possible. But people rightly expect us to deal with all planning applications in an even handed way, making sure all relevant matters are properly taken into account; and that is what we are doing.

Because this is now a live planning application we are in no position to say anything that could be seen as prejudicial ahead of a decision being made. It is therefore disappointing that the article makes a number of suggestions which could be misleading and seems to be criticising us for a recommendation not even made, and a judgment that has not been reached. It is important I put the record straight:

- We have not reached a decision on this application; we have only just received all the consultation responses (required by statute). It is simply untrue to suggest otherwise.
- The application is about much more than damselflies. But interestingly, Tesco's own ecological report states the pond is "of high conservation value", which sits oddly with the notion of a "cess pit".
- We met Tesco's planning team last October, and flagged up the potential for moving the pond and its wildlife as a pragmatic option if it were not possible to retain it. For some reason they have chosen to ignore this; but it is now being portrayed as the reason holding up the application. We've only had the current application less than three months.
- Outline planning permission for a supermarket on this site has been in place since April 2008. A considerable amount of work and consultation was expended at the time this outline application was considered to ensure that the permission reflected the character of Aviemore and the National Park, and provided a service for the local community. All the complexities of the site, and all views expressed about the development, including the wish of the community to have a larger supermarket in Aviemore, were taken into account.
- In June this year, Tesco chose to submit a completely new application, with the store in a different position on the site, effectively ignoring the outline permission which was granted in 2008. They are perfectly entitled to do this; but it is their decision to in effect take the application back to the start point.
- The granting of outline planning permission in April 2008 considered a whole range of issues – design, traffic flow, flood risk, pedestrian and disabled access, cycle provision etc, of which the natural heritage was but one. All will need to be considered in any granting of planning permission.

- We are always willing to work with developers to ensure a good outcome but in this case the suggestion that “Tesco and the Park authority have been in discussion since then” does not reflect reality. There has been precious little discussion.
- There have been many calls in recent years for a high standard of design in the National Park (underpinning the local tourism-based economy), and specifically a more attractive streetscape in Aviemore. This all means taking considerable care over proposals for new buildings in prominent locations. The principle of the development is not at issue (we have already granted an outline permission) – however, the nature of the development, and ensuring we get something which does Aviemore proud, is of primary importance.

Pressure appears to be being ratcheted up regarding this application, and as usual in these cases, the implication is that the planning authority is dragging its heels and/or being unreasonable. We are dealing with the application as quickly as we can, but not at the expense of everything else – good design, impacts on others, etc. More to the point, we haven’t reached a view yet, and neither should we until we have seen all the consultation responses. The application, of major importance, has been with us barely 3 months; the outline application has existed for over 3 years.

We have approached Tesco and there now seems to be a willingness to talk to us further about ensuring a design that is right for Aviemore and the National Park. I am therefore hopeful that we can move things along smoothly and quickly.

Jane Hope
Chief Executive
Cairngorms National Park Authority
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