
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: REPORT ON CALLED-IN PLANNING APPLICATION

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DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED: ERECTION OF LUNCH HUT TO THE NORTH EAST OF AULD CUMMERTON, BELLABEG, STRATHDON (RETROSPECTIVE)

REFERENCE: 07/054/CP

APPLICANT: CANDACRAIG ESTATE C/O ROBB KEIR DESIGN, BRIDGEND, BRIDGEVIEW ROAD, ABOYNE, AB34 5HB

DATE CALLED-IN: 23 FEBRUARY 2007

RECOMMENDATION: APPROVAL, SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS

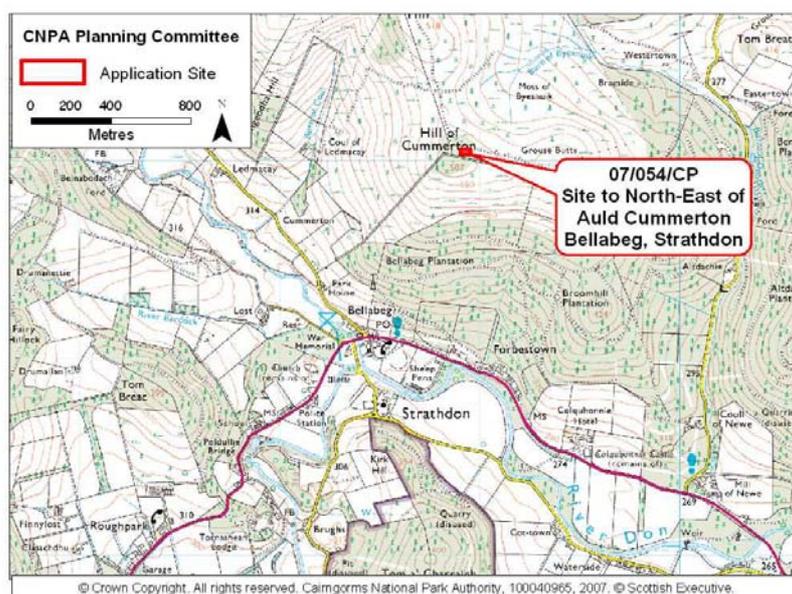


Fig. 1 - Location Plan

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL

1. Retrospective planning permission is being sought for the retention of a Lunch Hut at Auld Cummerton in Strathdon. The purpose of the Hut is for traditional upland sporting activities and it is to be used as a retreat in the event of adverse weather conditions (FIG 2).



Fig. 2 – Photo taken in a southern direction showing the Hut in relation to the surrounding area. The Hut is visible between the hill's two peaks.

2. The Lunch Hut is constructed of corrugated steel and vertical timber cladding. It sits on wooden stilts in a heathermoor land surrounding, which is designated as an Area of Landscape Significance within the Aberdeenshire Local Plan (FIG 3).



Fig. 3 – Photo taken in a northern direction

3. The Committee will recall two previously approved retrospective planning applications from Candacraig Estate for a Lunch Hut on the site to the North West of Rhinstock, Glenbuchat and the site North of Invernettie, both in Strathdon.
4. The application has been subject to one revision. Due to the negative impact the Hut has on the landscape of the area, the applicant has agreed to relocate the Hut closer to the existing track.



Fig. 4 – Photo taken in a south eastern direction showing the Hut in relation to the existing track. The red arrow shows the direction and relocation site of the hut.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONTEXT

5. The **Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Structure Plan 2001-2016, Policy 19 (Wildlife, Landscape and Land Resources)** concludes that development which would have an adverse effect on regional/local designations, including Areas of Landscape Significance, will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that any damaging impact is considered acceptable overall or there is a public interest which outweighs the conservation interest.
6. In the **Finalised Aberdeenshire Local Plan** there are a number of relevant planning policies. The Lunch Hut lies within an **Area of Landscape Significance (Policy ENV5B)**. Development within such an area will not be permitted where its scale, location or design will detract from the quality or character of the landscape, either in part or as a whole. In all cases the highest standards of design, in terms of location, scale, siting, aesthetics and landscaping will be required.

7. **Policy ENV\21 Vehicle Hill Tracks** states development involving vehicle hill tracks will be refused unless it can be integrated satisfactorily into the landscape and minimise detrimental impact, such as soil erosion, on the environment including habitats and watercourses.
8. Other policies include **EMP\10 Sports, Leisure and Recreation** where participation sports and recreational activity facilities requiring unimpeded access to remote open countryside will be approved in principle, if they respect the character and amenity of the surrounding area. **GEN\2 The Layout, Siting and Design of New Development** states that new development will be approved in principle if, it respects existing natural and built features on or about the site which are worthy of retention and the characteristics of landscape in which it will be situated. **GEN\5 Landscaping Standards** advises that development will be approved, in principal, if the provision of landscaping and proposals for its subsequent maintenance conform to the requirements in Appendix 5.
9. The recently approved **Cairngorms National Park Plan 2007** highlights the importance of the '**Economy and Employment**' within the Park as well as '**Enjoying and Understanding the Park**'. Under **Strategic Objective (a)** the plan encourages the 'creation of conditions conducive to business growth and investment that are consistent with the special qualities of the Park and its strategic location'. The Plan also details the strategic objectives for the '**Enjoyment and Understanding of the Park**' includes the promotion and management of outdoor access, recreation and visitor services, all of which are seen as an integral part of developing a sustainable approach to tourism, in line with the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism. **Strategic Objective (f)** under '**Sustainable Tourism**' states the importance of 'developing and managing a wide range of opportunities for visitors to experience and enjoy the special qualities, distinctiveness and natural and cultural heritage of the Park'.

CONSULTATIONS

10. **Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)** recommends that the location for this type of structure is chosen so that the hut relates to suitable landscape features, or 'enclosing' landform. This is so that it does not appear to be 'on its own' without any 'context'. It is also recommended that a condition is attached to any planning consent requesting that the external materials chosen to build the structure are unobtrusive and appropriate.
11. **Natural Heritage Group (NHG)** have commented on the close proximity of the Hut to the ridge line of the hill and the general lack of context given the Hut is not dug into the landscape and at a distance from the nearby track. As a result, the Hut appears on the skyline from

many directions. The angular nature of the structure contrasts with the natural curves of the landform, and this again emphasises the Hut's lack of context within the landscape in its current location. Thus, **NHG** recommend refusal for this Hut due to the visual impact upon this exposed site and consequent reduction in visual amenity.

12. **Economic and Social Development Group (ESD)** outlined two factors which were used to assess the impact of the development. Firstly, the monetary worth of shooting to the local economy and secondly, the visual effect on the landscape as regards to visitor enjoyment of the area and hence any impact on tourism business income. In view of the size of the hut it is felt that there is no detrimental effect on the landscape in relation to visitor enjoyment. Therefore, due to the importance of shooting to the local economy and the additional infrastructure which is beneficial to this activity, **ESD** approve of the retention of the Lunch Hut.

REPRESENTATIONS

13. Although no objections have been made, background information was sent by the applicant and is attached as an appendix to the report.

APPRAISAL

14. The applicants, Candacraig Estate, have provided information on the background of the Lunch Hut and the importance of the building in relation to traditional outdoor sporting on the Estate and the general health and safety of estate management. The importance of traditional sports to the local economy has also been supported by the CNPA's **Economic and Social Development Group**.
15. There are no specific policies in relation to traditional outdoor sports and sporting estate management within the relevant Development Plans and the Cairngorms National Park Plan 2007. The development at its current scale and use of materials complies with all the relevant policies, as detailed in paragraphs 5-9 of the report. However, key issues relating to this proposal involve the consideration of the Hut against the siting of the proposal and landscape impact.
16. The Hut lies in an Area of Landscape Significance. Under **Policy ENV5B** a development within such an area will not be permitted where its scale, location or design will detract from the quality or character of the landscape. Although the scale and design of the Hut is acceptable, issues in relation to siting have been outlined below.
17. This Hut is located just below the summit of the Hill of Cummerton. This hill has two peaks of similar height linked by a shallow saddle. It is on this saddle that the Hut sits.

18. At present the function and colours of the Lunch Hut is well suited to the local environment. However, these two mitigating factors do not outweigh the visual impact of the Hut, which in its current location is breaking the skyline.
19. SNH have recommended that the location of the Hut should be positioned within enclosing landform, so that the Hut does not appear to be on its own without any context. While, the CNPA's Natural Heritage Group has concurred that the current location of the Hut is inappropriate, due to the visual impact and high exposure of the site from various directions.
20. Due to the significant issues raised in relation to landscape impact, an initial recommendation of refusal was proposed. If the Hut is refused, the CNPA would have no option but to recommend enforcement action to remove the hut. However, a pro-active approach has been adopted through negotiations with the applicant over the relocation of the Hut to a more appropriate site. In this respect, the applicant's agents have submitted revised drawings showing the relocated site of the Hut and have agreed to a condition ensuring the hut is moved within 3 months of the date of any forth coming permission. Relocation would reduce the Hut's exposure from the surrounding area and give context to the Hut if sited by the existing track to the north. A condition as also been attached in relation to the reseeding of the area where the Hut is currently situated.
21. Although the Hut, at its current scale and use of materials complies with all the relevant planning polices, as detailed in paragraphs 5-9 of the report. The development does raise issues in relation to the natural heritage of the Park in it current location. However, relocation of the Hut closer to the existing track would mitigate some of the most significant effects that the hut has on the landscape of the area. Thus, the Lunch Hut at Cummerton 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

22. Continued impact on the landscape of the area would occur if the Hut was to remain in its current location. However, relocation would significantly reduce the hut's exposure from the surrounding area and give context if sited by the existing track.
23. In terms of cultural heritage, traditional outdoor sporting activities are an important part of the cultural heritage of the area and the retention of the Hut would encourage further growth of outdoor sports in the area.

Promote Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

24. The Hut is built using reclaimed corrugated steel and timber cladding from structures which were originally placed elsewhere on Candacraig Estate.

Promote Understanding and Enjoyment of the Area

25. Improvement of or additional infrastructure in relation to traditional outdoor sports are beneficial in retaining and promoting this activity, thereby, improving visitor enjoyment and understanding of the Park.

Promote Sustainable Economic and Social Development of the Area

26. Outdoor sporting activities and other land management aspects of the estate are an important part of the local economy. The Hut, therefore, would encourage wider use of outdoor sporting opportunities. This in turn should continue to improve the local economy and also help to create a safer working and recreational environment for all.

RECOMMENDATION

27. That Members of the Committee support a recommendation to:

Grant Retrospective Planning Permission for the erection of the Lunch Hut on Candacraig Estate at the site to the north east of Auld Cummerton, Bellabeg, Strathdon, subject to the following condition:

1. Within 3 months of the date of this decision notice, the Lunch Hut shall be relocated to the agreed site as shown on the site plan (revised survey drawing no. 2006-209/B), registered by the CNPA on 22 Oct 2007.
2. Within 6 months of the date of this decision notice plans shall be submitted for the reseeded of the Lunch Hut's original location and any other areas which may have been damaged during the use of the Lunch Hut, for the written approval of the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Planning Authority. Seeding shall take place in the first planting season following the approval of the seeding plan. Further to this, the area surrounding the new location of the Hut and the existing track shall be regularly maintained to the satisfaction of the Cairngorms National Park Authority.

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7 November 2007

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