
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: REPORT ON CALLED-IN PLANNING APPLICATION

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(DEVELOPMENT CONTROL)

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED: ERECTION OF THREE STOREY STAFF ACCOMMODATION BLOCK, AVIEMORE CENTRE, AVIEMORE

REFERENCE: 04/083/CP

APPLICANT: AVIEMORE HIGHLAND RESORT

DATE CALLED-IN: 27 FEBRUARY 2004



Fig. 1 - Location Plan

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL

1. The site lies within the Aviemore Highland Resort between Grampian Road and the A9. The resort in general is currently subject to a wide range of development activity with several buildings currently under construction. This particular site is accessed off a link road, which is currently being laid out. To the south of the application site is the Highlands Hotel and an older staff accommodation block, to the west is the A9 embankment, and to the north a proposed car parking area, beyond this is the Scandinavian Village. To the east is an open area of ground where construction is underway on a staff accommodation block.
2. At the Committee Meeting of 21 May 2004 a recommendation was made to approve the application. However, members raised concern in relation to two particular issues, the first related to the exclusive nature of single unit accommodation provided by the proposal and the implications for this on the balance of community, members particularly raised the question as to whether accommodation was available for couples. Secondly, members raised more detailed concerns regarding the design of the building, particularly in relation to environmental/sustainability issues.
3. As noted by the previous report the design of the building proposed is very much based on the building currently under construction that was approved by Highland Council and is positioned approximately 15 metres to the west of that building. The block would have an 'L' shaped footprint, with three storeys and a standard centrally pitched roof with square windows. Materials would include Marley slate coloured roof tiles, with an off-white render finish to external walls to match the nearby hotel. Windows would be uPVC.
4. The block would provide 48 bedrooms for staff working at the resort with communal kitchen and lounge facilities on each floor. The car parking capacity is also proposed to be altered by this application. The original site around the existing staff block had 77 car parking spaces, two new areas of parking are added to the capacity with one parking area either side of the access road to the accommodation blocks bringing the total car parking spaces in this area up to 101. This results in 24 in total for the block proposed.



Fig. 2 - View of Site from North East



Fig. 3 - Staff Block under Construction

DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONTEXT

5. The **Highland Structure Plan (Policy T2)** states that it will support high quality tourism development proposals, particularly those which extend the tourist season, provide wet weather opportunities, spread economic benefits more widely, are accessible by means other than private vehicles and provide opportunities for the sustainable enjoyment of the area's heritage. **Policy 2.2.10 of the Badenoch and Strathspey Local Plan** encourages the development of tourist facilities at suitable sites within or immediately adjoining communities. The Aviemore section of the Local Plan supports the redevelopment of the Aviemore Centre to revitalise the village and reaffirm its status as an international visitor destination.

CONSULTATIONS

6. **Aviemore Community Council** at their meeting felt that the application would provide an excessive staff requirement for the number of guests to be served.
7. The Director of **Technical Services** for the Highland Council has expressed no objection to the proposal.
8. The **Area Roads and Community Works Manager** has suggested conditions on the application that no development shall commence until the appropriate reserved matters as contained in Highland Council Planning Permission No BS/02/00007/OUTBS have been addressed to the satisfaction of the planning authority; that no development shall commence until the appropriate terms of the registered minute of agreement, dated 18 December 2003 between Highland Council, Aviemore Highland Resort and others, have been addressed to the satisfaction of Highland Council; and that dedicated parking and manoeuvring space and access shall be provided within the curtilage of the site commensurate with the scale and nature of the development proposed and shall satisfy Highland Council's Road Guidelines for New Developments.

REPRESENTATIONS

9. No representations have been received in relation to this proposal.

APPRAISAL

10. The proposal is essentially part of the wider development of the Aviemore Resort and is linked to the tourist facilities being provided. The proposal is simply to house staff that will be employed to service the site. The proposal consists of a 48-bedroom staff accommodation block in addition to the one adjacent and already under construction. The Community Council considers that this amount of staff accommodation is excessive. However, recent press reports have indicated that up to 4, 000 staff could eventually be employed at the site. It is important to note that this issue is largely one for the management of the site and presumably the proposal

would not have been put forward if the building were not required. The resort has responded stating that this is part of an initial staff requirement. The applicant's also point out that to open the resort with appropriate staffing levels leaves the company with a temporary burden to provide accommodation given a shortage of housing in the Aviemore area. The building is intended so that interim accommodation can be provided until employees can secure permanent homes in the area. The resort further points out that the number of residential guests could be 1, 000 per day plus visitors to the resort, and that the staffing levels represent the minimum level of service throughout the portfolio of MacDonalds Hotels.

11. Given the leisure nature of the resort it would seem reasonable for the appropriate level of staff accommodation required to be provided. However, at the earlier meeting members raised concern regarding the overall mix of accommodation at the site and the potential for a large influx of short-term workers. The applicant's have supplied more information in relation to this element setting out that the resort is recruiting from the immediate and surrounding vicinity including the Spey Valley as well as more widely and it is the intention of the company that in the long term employees would be able to reside in their own homes and not in property provided by the company. Regarding the employment of couples/families the company have stated that they are in discussions with the Local Authority and housing developers in the interim and hope that they can come to some arrangement where couples and young families can reside prior to permanently settling in the valley and purchasing their own homes.
12. The building is to be sited behind an accommodation block previously approved by Highland Council. There are birch trees in the vicinity of the proposed building and on the A9 embankment, but not on the site of the building proposed. Initial concern was raised with the applicant regarding the buildings position in relation to the A9 and whether it would be effectively screened from there. The applicant has provided a cross section plan that shows the building set below the A9 embankment, so any visual impact from the A9 would be limited, from any other views the building would be seen in the context of other development and is partly screened from the link road around the development by the accommodation block under construction.
13. The design of the building is simple in nature and while not of any special architectural merit it functions in terms of its design. However, members raised concerns in relation to the environmental design of the building. In response to this the applicant has provided a sustainability statement on the building, which sets out the following information. The document points out that the building is of a timber frame construction and states that wood is effectively a full cycle carbon neutral material, pointing out that the process of converting raw material for building products involves low embodied energy. The frames have been computer designed to minimise section sizes and timber weight to reduce waste. In addition, the statement considers that the proposal maximises the amount of locally sourced materials with the frame utilising home grown timber with the sheathing and sarking manufactured locally in Inverness in the form of boarding utilising composite technology from local Scots Pine and other indigenous species. The statement further points out that lightweight flooring joists are constructed locally in Forres. The flooring is constructed from reconstituted/recycled material made in Stirling.

14. In terms of the energy consumption, the building is heated by demand only driven direct electric heating minimising energy consumption and the extent of on-site materials in the system, i.e. minimisation of use of copper and wiring. High levels of insulation and double-glazing ensure maximum energy containment within the fabric. Low energy light bulbs are to be used throughout with movement detection systems fitted to ensure lights are not left on. No ventilation systems other than for kitchens and bathrooms are proposed and gas consumption is supplied by the use of on demand boilers.
15. Members had also previously raised the issue of the design quality of the building and some suggestions have been made to the applicant's that the fenestration be improved by the addition of more detailing and an emphasised entrance. However, given that the design for phase one of the staff accommodation facilities has already been the subject of approval from Highland Council the applicant argues that there is no valid reason why the design of the building should be altered when one next door of similar design has been approved as a result of negotiations with Highland Council.
16. In terms of access and parking issues the Highland Council Area Works and Community Manager has responded by raising no objection to the proposal providing that the conditions of the outline consent are met. The number of car parking spaces proposed around the two blocks has been raised to 101 from 77, allowing a total of 24 for the new block. However, it may well be the case that a significant number of staff will not necessarily be car owners and it is relevant to point out that Aviemore is served by buses and trains enabling staff to use public transport. The Area Roads Manager, ultimately raises no objection to the proposal, but recommends conditions that development should not be commenced until the reserved matters contained in Highland Council Planning Permission No BS/02/00007/OUTBS have been addressed to the satisfaction of the local planning authority. It is also recommended that no development shall commence that the terms of the registered minute of agreement, dated 18 December 2003 between Highland Council and Aviemore Highland Resort and others has been addressed to the satisfaction of Highland Council. However, further discussion with the Roads Team has revealed that they consider that granting planning permission on the same basis and conditions for the approved block would seem a reasonable way forward.
17. The Area Manager also recommends a condition that the dedicated parking and manoeuvring space, commensurate with the scale and nature of the development proposed, and a suitable access road, shall be provided within the curtilage of the site and that such details shall satisfy the requirements of Highland Council's Guidelines for New Developments. The applicant's have confirmed that one car parking space for each room can be provided and this is recommended as a condition.
18. Members have raised concern regarding the effect of the application in terms of a balanced community and in relation to the design of the building. Additional information has been provided that indicates that there is an intention to seek accommodation for couples family's at the resort through local authorities and housing developers. It is the intention that family accommodation is being pursued with the intention that single employees will evolve into such accommodation in

future. The nature of the employment opportunity at the whole site means that it is likely that there would be some influx of younger, single employees, but to insist on the provision of family accommodation at this stage would essentially be insisting upon changing the applicants employment policy to provide a type of accommodation that there may well be little demand for. There is a danger that this could be considered unreasonable and probably beyond the realms of the planning system, it should also be noted that the rejection of this application would be unlikely to affect the mix of employees at the site, as ultimately accommodation could be supplied within the hotels but on a much poorer basis in terms of the facilities for those staff.

19. The sustainability statement for the building sets out some of the positive aspects of the proposal in terms of the sourcing of some of the materials (within the Highland Area). However, the applicant has refused to change the design of the building given that the block next door is of the same basic design. Members have raised concern that advent of the Park coming into being essentially means the proposal currently under consideration should not necessarily mean that the same design as the existing building should be regarded as acceptable. This point is recognised and the additional information provided on the materials and energy management for the building should enhance the perception of the building in terms of promoting the sustainable use of natural resources aim of the Park. In addition to this it should be noted that the level of information now provided goes well beyond what would normally be requested in relation to a planning application, and beyond what could be reasonably controlled by the imposition of planning conditions. Such issues would normally be dealt with under Part J of the Building Regulations legislation which by 2006 must be amended to take account of EC Directive 2002/91/EC to further improve the environmental performance of buildings, particularly in relation to energy performance requirements.

CONCLUSION

20. The fact that the applicant has declined to make changes to improve the visual quality of the building is disappointing. However, ultimately, it must be recognised that this application is being considered under the same planning policies as the building recently granted permission by Highland Council on the neighbouring site. In visual terms this building is largely set behind the approved block being constructed and further sheltered by an older staff block, The Highlands Hotel itself and the A9 embankment, in short the building is hardly visible in the wider public realm. Given this, the proposal is recommended for approval. Should the application be refused it is your officer's view that any subsequent appeal would be extremely difficult to defend given the policy background of the previous decision, and the fact that the building under consideration here is much less prominent in the public realm than that already approved.
21. In order to achieve consistency in the terms of the approval similar conditions to those applied by Highland Council have been proposed. However, additional conditions are suggested in relation to securing the block for occupancy by employees in Aviemore and for the provision of refuse storage/recycling facilities for the building.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AIMS OF THE PARK

Conserve and Enhance the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Area

22. The proposal would have little effect in terms of the natural and cultural heritage of the area, the proposed building is close to trees but no felling is proposed.

Promote Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

23. Information has been supplied for the proposal, which shows that the timber for the timber frame structure is sourced from British forests and that some more specialised materials/items have been sourced from Stirling and Forres. Information has also been provided on energy management measures. While the building is of a standard design the supplementary detail provided shows that some account has been taken of the resource implications of the building (which has probably also based upon financial costs) and the proposal in a small way illustrates that environmental considerations can be taken into account to some level without requiring a high general build specification for a proposal. Drainage will be provided by means of a Sustainable Urban Drainage System for the wider site.

Promote Understanding and Enjoyment of the Area

24. The facilities proposed are part of the wider leisure proposals for the resort to attract visitors and may contribute to promoting understanding and enjoyment of the area.

Promote Sustainable Economic and Social Development of the Area's Communities

25. The proposal is part of the wider and considerable investment in the Aviemore Highland Resort and as such contributes to the economic development of the area, both in terms of the initial construction and the ongoing economic investment of bringing jobs and visitors to the area.

RECOMMENDATION

26. That members of the Committee support a recommendation to:

GRANT Planning Permission for the Erection of a Three Storey Staff Accommodation Block at Aviemore Centre, Aviemore, subject to the following Conditions:-

- (i) The development to which this permission relates shall be begun within 5 years from the date of this permission.
- (ii) That the external finishes to the building shall match those of the existing staff accommodation block to the east of this site unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Cairngorms National Park Authority.

- (iii) Notwithstanding the details contained within the application, one car parking space per bedroom shall be provided adjacent to the building and sheltered parking for cyclists shall also be provided at a rate of one space per bedroom and nine spaces for visitors. The cycle parking space for residents should ideally be made within, failing which sheltered external spaces should be provided adjacent to the building. All the aforementioned shall be completed and available for use prior to the first occupation of the building.
- (iv) No trees on or adjoining the site shall be lopped, topped, or felled without the prior written approval of the Cairngorms National Park Authority.
- (v) A site landscaping plan shall be submitted to and require the approval of the Cairngorms National Park Authority prior to the occupation of the building hereby approved showing the species, number and size of all plants. The approved planting scheme shall be implemented in the first planting season following the completion of the building and all plant failures in the following 5 year period shall be replaced in kind to the satisfaction of the Cairngorms National Park Authority thereafter. The developer shall use predominantly mature plant species for the said landscaping scheme.
- (vi) The building hereby approved shall be used as living accommodation for persons employed in Aviemore, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Planning Authority.
- (vii) Prior to the first occupation of the building hereby approved details of refuse storage and recycling storage facilities within or adjacent to the building shall be submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority. The agreed details shall be provided and be ready for use prior to the first occupation of the building hereby approved.

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