CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: REPORT ON CALLED-IN PLANNING

APPLICATION

Prepared by: ANDREW TAIT, PLANNING OFFICER

(DEVELOPMENT CONTROL)

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED: CONSTRUCTION OF KART TRACK AND

RACE CONTROL BUILDING, SITE OF FORMER DRY SKI SLOPE, AVIEMORE

HIGHLAND RESORT (FULL PP)

REFERENCE: 05/360/CP

APPLICANT: AVIEMORE HIGHLAND RESORT LTD

DATE CALLED-IN: 12 AUGUST 2005

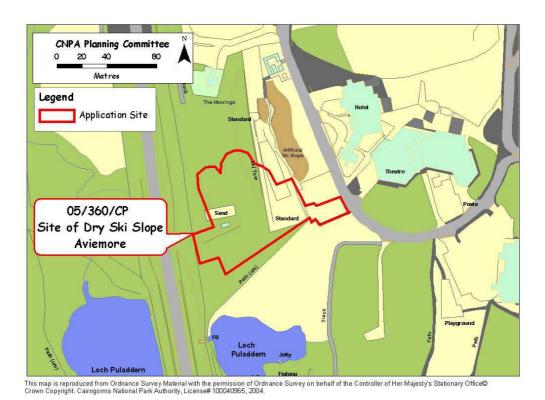
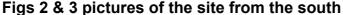


Fig. 1 - Location Plan

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL

1. The site for this application is located between the new swimming pool building and the woodland lodges area within the Aviemore Highland Resort complex. The east and west boundaries of the site are formed by the complex loop road and the A9 embankment respectively. The site is undulating mown grassland with occasional birch tree cover. The site also comprises the former dry ski slope area and part of a children's outdoor play area, although the play area would remain unaffected by the track. To the south of the play area is Loch Pulladern which is dry for much of the year.







2. In terms of background an application was submitted to Highland Council in 2003 for a similar development with a track and ice rink to be in a building. However, the building was considered not to be acceptable in terms of design. This application was withdrawn and replaced by another proposal for an indoor kart track/ice rink. That application was called-in by the National Park and several requests for further information on landscaping and drainage were made. This information was not supplied and the application was refused by the Planning Committee earlier this year based upon that lack of information.

- 3. In dealing with the previous application it became clear that the applicant was interested in an outdoor kart track with smaller servicing and control building which is proposed formally by this application. The provision of an ice rink is not included in this proposal.
- 4. This scheme involves an outdoor track with a series of 3 tarmac racing loops between the swimming pool site and the children's play area. The adjacent car park would be extended to accommodate a total of 50 car parking spaces. The control and servicing building measures approximately 25 by 14 metres with a sloping roof that has a maximum height of 3.9 metres. The external facing would be of vertical larch cladding with a zinc colour coated roof similar to that of the Osprey building and the retail pavilion. There would be several rooflights. There would be a range of doorways from the control building out onto the track and there would be a glazed pedestrian entrance for the reception area which would include some snack machines. The proposal is designed so that the northern section of the track could be covered over in the future. A small children's karting area is proposed between the car park and the main track. Lighting is proposed which would be of the same nature as the car park lighting for the resort. The kart track requires some form of fencing at around 2 metres in height. Green see-through mesh fencing is proposed. However, another part of the application also mentions solid timber fencing.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONTEXT

In the Highland Structure Plan 2001, General Policy G2 (Design for 5. Sustainability) states that proposed developments will be assessed against certain criteria, including the extent to which they, contribute to the economic and social development of the community and impact on resources such as habitats, species, landscape, scenery, freshwater systems and cultural heritage. Policy T2 (Tourism Developments) states that support will be given to high quality tourism development proposals, particularly those which extend the tourist season, spread economic benefits more widely and provide opportunities for the sustainable enjoyment and interpretation of the area's heritage. **Policy** L4 Landscape Character of the Structure Plan considers that the Council will have regard to maintaining and enhancing present landscape character in the consideration of development proposals. Policy N1 Nature Conservation of the Structure Plan considers that in relation to sites of national importance developments will only be permitted where the objectives of designation and overall integrity of the area will not be compromised or any significant adverse effects on the qualities for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by social and economic benefits of national importance.

- 6. Policy 2.2.9 (Tourism and Recreation) states that tourist activities will continue to make a vital contribution to the economy. The priority is to ensure that broadening the range and quality of facilities is balanced with protecting the area's exceptional scenic and heritage resources. The Local Plan also states that the more accessible intermediate lowland areas have potential for a broad range of activities and that provision should be made in the more robust locations better able to absorb visitor pressure, for upgrading facilities for recreation, tourism, interpretation and education/research. Multiple uses of forest areas in particular are encouraged.
- 7. The area is zoned by the **Badenoch and Strathspey Local Plan** partly as amenity woodland and partly as an area of commerce and tourism. **Policy 5.1 Amenity Woodland and Trees** considers that the Council's main objective is to create a major landscape framework within and adjoining Aviemore to achieve extensive and robust improvements in the structure and amenity of the village and better integration with the surrounding environment. With regard to **Tourism and Commerce Policy 6.2.4 centre (west)** the land is allocated for extension and refurbishment of the main leisure, conference and exhibition complex, upgrading existing hotels, new residential and potentially a new interpretive/visitor centre by Loch Pulladern: and associated commercial parking facilities.
- 8. For information the **CNPA Consultative Draft Local Plan** allocates part of the site under Policy E1 "a number of sites within Aviemore have been zoned to protect them from development; general landscaping works and environmental improvements could be carried out within the village. Part of the site is allocated for tourist development. Policy T1 considers that Aviemore Highland Resort will continue to enhance its facilities and grounds, closer links access with the community area should be developed, and will be highlighted by the new Aviemore Masterplan.

CONSULTATIONS

- Scottish Natural Heritage has provided detailed comments upon the application with regard to natural heritage interests. SNH have no objection to the proposed development but have some recommendations regarding public access, noise levels, landscape, SUDS and the setting of Loch Pulladern.
- 10. The proposed development lies within 100 metres of Craigellachie Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and National Nature Reserve (NNR). Craigellachie is designated for its vascular plant assemblage, moths, upland birch woodland and breeding bird assemblage. The site also lies within 400 metres of the Cairngorms National Scenic Area. SNH note that Craigellachie hosts a pair of breeding peregrine falcons.

- 11. The car parking in this planning application is currently used by people taking access to the NNR. Discussions were held some time ago with regard to securing access across AHR lands. SNH is particularly keen to safeguard parking at this site as previous discussions involved the upgrading of the footpath to all abilities standards. Mr Bain who is the operator for the track has informed SNH that car parking would still be available for people taking access to Craigellachie. SNH recommend that the footpath be signposted and safeguarded from development and that the path should be improved to all abilities standard.
- 12. With regard to landscaping, this is a significant issue at the entrance to the NNR, SNH have now received the landscaping details and have no further comment to make.
- 13. In terms of breeding peregrine falcons, the falcons that breed in the NNR are tolerant of the noise of people on the footpath beneath the crag and the traffic on the A9 but they are vulnerable to disturbance from sudden, unusual or loud noises such as those which can be caused by heavy machinery or building works. After a site visit and go-kart demonstration by Mr Bain (operator) SNH's opinion is that the noise from the operation of the karts will be mostly disguised by the background noise from the A9 and unlikely to have a significant impact on the peregrines. However, they will still be at risk of disturbance from heavy construction work. In order to minimise the risk of disturbance to peregrines SNH recommend that no construction works shall be carried out during the peregrine breeding season 1 March-1 July.
- 14. SNH previously suggested an opportunity to improve Loch Pulladern by using it as a SUDS pond. This may increase water levels which are generally low as water is lost from the Loch faster than it enters. SNH have discussed this with the operator who is content to proceed with this option. The kart track is kept free of contaminants; therefore the water entering the loch should be of acceptable quality. SNH point out that care should be taken to avoid spoiling the setting of the loch.
- 15. SEPA had concerns about the proposal initially as no information was provided on surface and foul drainage proposals. However, SEPA have received revised drawings showing drainage proposals and how run-off will be dealt with (directed to porous surfacing then filter drains to soakaway). This is acceptable in terms of surface water. SEPA are aware that discussions are ongoing regarding the potential of discharging run-off to the nearby Loch Pulladern. Because of this SEPA requests a condition that final details of surface water drainage arrangements are agreed by the planning authority in consultation with relevant parties prior to the commencement of the development. SEPA also suggest a construction method statement condition and that SUDS measures are in place prior to the track first being brought into use.
- 16. **Highland Council Area Roads Manager** recommends that the following condition is attached to any grant of permission- No development to

commence until such time as the appropriate reserved matters contained in Highland Council Planning Permission Ref BS/02/0007/OUTBS have been addressed to the satisfaction of the Planning Authority. In addition no development shall commence until 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. This essentially requests that the northern link road and roads through the resort are brought up to adoptable standard.

- 17. Further conditions are requested that the car parking arrangement is in accordance with the drawing provided and that visibility splays are provided on each side of the main entrance.
- 18. **Highland Council Environmental Health Officers** have been consulted and have no objection provided that the area is constructed in accordance with guidance provided in the HSE document "Go Karts Guidance on Safe Operation and Use"
- 19. With regard to the noise issue it is important to note that the previous kart track within AHR operated for many years without complaint. However, a condition should be applied that the background noise level is not exceeded by more that 5db(A) measured from Grampian Court and the Scandinavian Village (these are the nearest residential properties in separate ownership to the site). An assessment is not made of the potential noise effects upon AHR hotels as the applicant is AHR.
- 20. The Park's Visitor Services and Recreation Group have provided a detailed response on this application and consider that a key concern is the access from the site to the wider footpath network, particularly the Aviemore Orbital Footpath and the path out from the application site under the A9 to the Craigellachie National Nature Reserve. VSRG recognise that the application could provide an opportunity to formalise non-motorised access to the Nature Reserve by the use of planning conditions/agreements and recommend that the following conditions be attached to any planning consent.
 - that provision is made within the proposed car park for permanent public car parking for accessing Craigellachie NNR. The number of spaces to be agreed with the CNPA.
 - that this car park is advertised as an access point to Craigellachie NNR for people with disabilities
 - that a path for non-motorised access is made from the car park, linking with the existing path to Craigellachie NNR.
 - that the whole of this route is brought up to the required all abilities specification
 - that appropriate signage and/or waymarking is installed to guide the public from the car park entrance to Craigellachie NNR entrance

REPRESENTATIONS

- 21. **Aviemore Community Council** comment that at their meeting in September it was agreed that the Council are suitably impressed by the good use of space within the Resort lands and are delighted to see that the building will be clad with local timber. The Community Council feel that the track will be a great asset for the community.
- 22. A range of correspondence has been received from an objector to the scheme setting down concerns about the relationship between the AHR site and the Craigellachie National Nature Reserve. Some of the correspondence is between the objector and SNH. Both parties have confirmed that they are happy for the letters to be in the public domain. (see back of report). Particular attention is drawn to the potential impacts of the proposal upon peregrine falcons and why the track has to be located on this site.
- 23. A letter has been received from the operator of the kart track setting down the background behind the proposal with particular regard to whom by and how the track would be operated. Information is also provided on noise levels. Two letters referring to technical details from the architect are also attached.

APPRAISAL

Principle

The site is part of the Aviemore Highland Resort complex and was formerly the site of a dry ski slope (it is also understood that this area has been used as a kart track in the past). The site is allocated in the Local Plan partly as amenity woodland and partly as an area for commercial tourist development. Mention is made in the plan that perhaps an interpretation centre would be feasible for this site close to Loch Pulladern. Given the policy context I had initial concerns regarding the positioning of a kart track on this site. However, given the loss of the track next to what is now the MacDonald Academy, there would be a range of public and tourist benefits, in principle, from the provision of another leisure use next to the swimming pool. This would accord with development plan policies in terms of increasing the diversity of visitor attractions and providing attractions that are perhaps less weather dependent than more traditional forms of outdoor pursuits. In addition, the most logical other area within the AHR lands for such a facility would be to the north of the Academy, which would be on the area reserved for the village green. Given this, and the previous formal recreation (dry ski slope) use of part of the site, my view is that the site is acceptable in principle for such a use, providing that the interests of Craigellachie are

protected and that range of benefits in terms of access to Craigellachie, and landscaping are delivered.

Highways Issues

- 25. Concern has been expressed by the Area Roads Manager that the development shall not commence until the appropriate terms of the registered minute of agreement dated 18 December 2003 between Highland Council, Aviemore Highland Resort and others has been addressed to the satisfaction of the Highland Council.
- 26. The agreement referred to is the Section 75 Agreement signed between the various parties when the outline planning consent for the AHR site was issued. What is being referred to by the Area Roads Manager appears to be a requirement that the northern link road and the distributor road is brought up to adoptable standard prior to the commencement of this, or any other development within the AHR site. However, the relevant section of the agreement referred to states as follows " the northern link road shall be completed prior to or no later than the proposed supermarket and that in any event the proposed supermarket should not commence trading until such time as the Northern Link Road is completed and available for use by the public all to the reasonable satisfaction of the Council and (Second) that certain other developments including aspects of strategic infrastructure and aspects of the development related to tourism should be commenced no later than the commencement of the development of the proposed supermarket" From the agreement it is clear that there was no requirement placed on the developer to provide a finished road system prior to the opening of the supermarket. Indeed, the second part of the agreement outlined above clearly encourages the commencement of the development of the tourist elements before the supermarket and therefore before any requirement to provide finished roads to adoptable standards. Because of this, in my view the request that this kart track should not be allowed to commence is difficult to justify in this instance and contrary to the sentiments of the agreement that the tourist facilities should be provided before the greater commercial element that the supermarket represents.
- 27. In addition to the above, it is clear that the kart track has a level of support from the community and provides a community as well as commercial facility. There is a reasonable route already in existence to/from the site of the kart track and given that its capacity will be limited by the size of the track and the number of karts that can be in use at any one time in my view it would be unreasonable to hold this development up without justifiable grounds for doing so. The other conditions requested by the Area Roads Manager are included in this report.

Natural Heritage Issues

- 28. As noted by the SNH response the site is close a range of natural heritage designations. SNH are now content with the application in terms of landscape considerations and the landscape planting proposed. SNH requested that a reasonable distance of at least 3 metres wide be kept between the landscaping for the kart track and the existing children's play area. The plans provided show that this is easily achievable.
- The close proximity of Craigellachie NNR is noted. This is mentioned 29. with particular regard to peregrine falcons and the potential for disturbance to the falcons from construction and operation of the kart track. An extensive record of complaints from an objector to SNH has been passed to the Park and despite the nature of the correspondence between SNH and the objector he would be happy for these to form part of his representation. Deep concern is raised by the objector regarding potential noise disturbance to peregrines. Much of the evidence relates to historic complaints between the objector and SNH. In my view it is not appropriate to take account of these complaints (being dealt with by SNH) in the determination of this application. The key issue is will this application result in any unacceptable level of disturbance to the falcons ? SNH are the Government's statutory advisor on such issues and their response is that no significant level of disturbance would occur providing that construction works do not take place in the peregrine breeding season. It is important to note that in coming to this conclusion SNH have taken part in a kart demonstration at the site to address concerns that they had in their original consultation response regarding noise disturbance to the peregrines. The karts will result in some level of noise; however, this is likely to be masked by the traffic on the A9. The falcons are used to the background levels of disturbance from the A9 and from people walking around this popular reserve. It should also be recognised that at the end of the day this site is at the edge of the settlement where some level of development would be expected. Indeed parts of the site of this application are allocated by the Badenoch and Strathspev Local Plan for development. The applicant also points out that the area was used as an off-road kart track in the 1980s and there has also been clay pigeon shooting on the site. A condition will also ensure that the karts are fitted with extra silencers in accordance with the applicant's letter of 14 October 2005.
- 30. With regard to Loch Pulladern it has always been suggested that this should be reinstated as part of the landscaping proposal and that the loch could be used as a SUDS pond for the development. The operator is happy with this approach and investigations into the possibility of doing this are ongoing. A condition is suggested that best efforts are made to incorporate the Loch into the scheme, but in my view insistence upon this issue at the current stage could jeopardise the project as a whole. In any case, two levels of treatment are proposed which is acceptable to SEPA in principle. Contaminants cannot be allowed onto the track as this would affect the safe passage of karts.

Design

- 31. The kart track would have limited impact as it is a flat development laid out on the ground, parts of it may be visible from Craigellachie but this would be seen in the context of what is a commercial holiday resort. Additional landscaping will help to blend in the track with its surroundings. Approximately 6 trees would be removed but many more would be planted around the development as indicated by the landscaping plan.
- 32. The entrance to this area currently lacks a focus and the enlargement of the car park will include stone dyking at the entrance. The control building is of a simple, but pleasing contemporary design, glazing to the reception area will form a focus at the front of the building. Some limited signage would help to provide a focus for the start of the footpath over to Craigellachie. I would have preferred to receive a cross section drawing of the excavations prior to the determination of the scheme explaining the detailed levels proposals but this has not been provided. This can be provided by condition prior to the commencement of the development. With regard to this issue it must be recognised that much of the area where levels would be changed is ground that has been disturbed previously for the construction of the dry ski slope.
- 33. The kart track will require to be lit at night and some form of enclosing fence would be required. Details on these items can be sought by condition. However, the intention is that the lighting would be the same as that used for the resort car parks. Security fencing would also be required around the track, see through mesh fencing would perhaps be most appropriate and this is suggested by the landscaping plan. Overall, I am content with the design of the track and the kart building.

Access Issues

34. Concern has been expressed by SNH and VSRG that access across the site to Craigellachie is safeguarded as part of any development. The small car park has been used for many years by people accessing the Nature Reserve; SNH is keen to ensure that some level of parking is available for people wishing to access the reserve. The kart track operator has been consulted upon this issue and has agreed to ensure that some parking is reserved for such users and this is achieved by planning condition. However, it should be recognised that 50 car parking spaces are proposed which should be adequate given that the kart track will have a limited capacity at any one time. Part of the same planning condition will also ensure that access through the site to Craigellachie is retained and adapted to all abilities standard where it crosses the site.

This should improve access in the area over and above what is available currently.

Noise

- 35. With such applications potential noise impacts on environmental amenity (particularly residential amenity) are always a concern. Because of this the Environmental Health Officer of Highland Council was consulted and had detailed discussions with the operator.
- 36. With regard to this issue it should be noted that a nearby site hosted a kart track for many years up until last year and no complaints about the operation of this facility were received by the Environmental Health Officer. The new site is just 150 metres from the original site. The new site is close to the A9 and much of the noise would be masked by the background noise of traffic on the A9. The two most sensitive points for noise are the Grampian Court flats complex approx 200 metres (through woodland) from the site and the Scandinavian Timeshare Village located over 300 metres away from the site, which is much further than it was from the original track. It is considered that these properties would be unlikely to be affected in any significant way. The noise condition suggested by the Environmental Health Officer will ensure that adequate control can be retained over noise issues.

Conclusion

- 37. This proposal for the kart track includes a level of information that allows me to support the scheme; landscaping details have been received as have drainage details. A range of conditions retains satisfactory control over the technical details of the scheme.
- 38. Overall, it is considered that the track will provide a good tourist attraction but also an important facility for the local community and I am mindful of the Community Council's support for the scheme. The track will provide a positive addition to Aviemore and would be one of very few purpose built tracks of this type in the UK. Natural heritage considerations have been protected by consultation with SNH and the conditions proposed. Therefore, I have no hesitation in recommending approval of the application.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AIMS OF THE NATIONAL PARK

Conserve and Enhance the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Area

39. The resort has had a kart track for many years and this proposal represents the replacement of that facility a short distance away from its original site. Some concerns have been raised regarding natural heritage with particular regard to the falcons nesting at Craigellachie.

Conditions proposed should ensure that there is no significant effect upon the birds. In a positive sense the additional landscaping provides an opportunity for enhancing the immediate area and its approach. The scheme still provides some opportunity for the regeneration of Loch Pulladern.

Promote Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

40. It is not clear where all of the materials would be sought. However, the larch cladding for the control building would be locally sourced as would the surface for the car park.

Promote Understanding and Enjoyment of the Area

41. The proposal would clearly promote the enjoyment of this area. As part of the proposal conditions seek to formalise the route from the car park out to Craigellachie, signage and an all abilities route through the site are required by condition. This will provide better access to Craigellachie and help to promote the understanding and enjoyment of that area.

Promote Sustainable Economic and Social Development of the Area

42. In my view the proposal clearly helps to promote the social and economic development of the area. The track provides an attraction to visitors that is not provided elsewhere and should contribute towards the economy of Aviemore and beyond. In addition, the track is to be run by a local operator who operated the previous track at AHR. Local employees who worked on the original track can also be employed.

RECOMMENDATION

- 43. That Members of the Committee support a recommendation to: **GRANT** Full Planning Permission for the construction of a kart track and race control building, site of former dry ski slope, Aviemore Highland Resort, subject to the following conditions:
 - i. The development to which this permission relates must be begun within 5 years from the date of this permission.
 - ii. No construction shall take place at the site during the peregrine breeding season (1 March-1July).
 - iii. The landscaping details indicated by drawing No 03311-90-08 shall be implemented in the first planting season following the completion of the development, The landscaping shall then be maintained in perpetuity with replacement trees being provided for those that are dead, dying, becoming seriously damaged or becoming seriously diseased within 5 years of the planting, being replaced by trees or shrubs of similar size and species to those originally planted.

- iv. Notwithstanding the details contained within the application full details of boundary treatments for the site shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the CNPA acting as planning authority prior to the development being first brought into use. No other means of enclosure shall be erected at the site without the prior written permission of the CNPA acting as planning authority.
- v. Prior to the commencement of the development a construction method scheme for the kart track shall be submitted to and approved by the CNPA acting as planning authority. The statement shall include details of proposed levels, details of destinations of any materials to be excavated and details for protection of trees to be retained at the site. Tree protection measures shall be in place prior to the commencement of groundworks.
- vi. Final details of sustainable urban drainage arrangements (including details for ongoing maintenance) for the site shall be submitted to and approved by the CNPA acting as planning authority in consultation with SEPA prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved. All possible efforts should be made to ensure that Loch Pulladern is utilised and landscaped as part of any final SUDS proposals. SUDS proposals shall be in place and operational prior to the track first being brought into use.
- vii. Parking shall be reserved within the car park for visitors wishing to access Craigellachie, the number and way in which the parking spaces are reserved shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the CNPA acting as planning authority prior to the kart track first being brought into use.
- viii. An all abilities footpath to standards to be submitted to and agreed in writing by the CNPA acting as planning authority shall be constructed between the car park and the Aviemore Orbital Footpath within 6 months of the track first being brought into use. Direct access from the car park (including signage) to the path for less able users shall be provided in a manner to be agreed by the CNPA acting as planning authority.
- ix. Noise levels shall not exceed 5dB(A) above background levels as measured from the nearest points of the Scandinavian Village and Grampian Court. If complaints are received an assessment shall be carried out by a suitably qualified independent consultant. Any assessment shall include measures to reduce noise to an acceptable level. Any measures suggested shall be implemented by the applicant to the satisfaction of the CNPA acting as planning authority in consultation with Highland Council Environmental Health Officers. In addition, the karts shall be fitted with silencers as outlined in the applicants letter of 14 October 2005, the silencers shall be maintained on the karts at all times while in use.

- x. Notwithstanding the details contained within the application a full statement for any lighting of the track shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the CNPA acting as planning authority.
- xi. The kart track shall not operate outside of the hours of 0900 to 2200 Mondays to Saturdays inclusive and outside of the hours 0900-2100 on Sundays and public holidays.
- xii. Parking and manoeuvring space shall be provided in accordance with the details of submitted drawing No 03311-90-02 Rev A. Within the parking area construction of the access road and aisles shall comply with the requirements for a Minor Access Road as detailed in Highland Council's Road Guidelines for New Developments. Individual parking bays shall be clearly delineated to the satisfaction of the CNPA acting as planning authority in consultation with the Area Roads Manager. Construction of parking areas shall consist of a minimum 350mm thick Type 1 sub base on a sound formation.
- xiii. Visibility splays shall be provided and maintained on each side of the access. These splays are the triangles of ground bounded by the first 4.5 metres along the centreline of the access road (the x dimension) and the nearside edge of the main road (the y dimension) measured 60 metres in either direction from the intersection with the access road. Within the visibility splays nothing shall obscure visibility between a driver's eye height of 1.0 metres positioned at the x dimension and an object height of 1.0 metre anywhere along the y dimension.

Advice Note

You are advised that the kart track should be constructed and operated in accordance with Health and Safety Executive Document "Go Karts Guidance on Safe Operation and Use"

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10 November 2005