

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: REPORT ON CALLED-IN PLANNING APPLICATION

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DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT)**

**DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED: Installation of Replacement Chairlift at
Glenshee Chairlift Braemar**

REFERENCE: 2014/0309/DET

APPLICANT: Arthur McCabe Glenshee Ltd

DATE CALLED-IN: 13 October 2014

**RECOMMENDATION: APPROVAL SUBJECT TO
CONDITIONS**

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL

1. The plans and documents submitted by the applicant and under consideration for this application are identified in the table below.

| Title | Drawing Number | Date on Plan | Date Received |
|---|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Untitled Site plan | no number | | 30 Oct 2014 |
| Intermediate Pylons, A McCabe | no number | 13 Oct 2014 | |
| Drive Station Foundations | no number | | 17 Oct 2014 |
| 1:10,000 Chairlift Replacement sections | no number | 13 Oct 2014 | |
| Construction Method Statement by Glenshee Ski and Snowboard | | undated | 5 Dec 2014 |
| Technical Data Sheet by Poma | Sheet X 8312 | undated | 30 Oct 2014 |
| Alpha Drive Unit 1:100 scale | no number | | 30 Oct 2014 |
| Return Unit 1: 50 scale | no number | 13 Oct 2014 | |

2. Supporting information in terms of visualisations and photographs of the existing chairlift infrastructure were also considered along with manufacturer’s specifications and construction method statement
3. This application seeks full planning permission to replace an existing chairlift at Glenshee ski centre located to the south of Braemar, beside the Braemar to Blairgowrie A93 road. The existing chairlift is known as the Cairnwell Chairlift (Tiger Tow) and is prominently located as viewed from the public road. There are presently 22 lifts at Glenshee and the Cairnwell chairlift provides for easy access to the higher slopes. The site is part of a network of ski runs, tows, fencing, and buildings at Glenshee and lies adjacent to the Cairngorms Massif Special Protection Area (designated for golden eagles). It is not covered by any other specific environmental designations with the Cairnwell SSSI being located some 600 metres to the northwest.
4. The drive station for the lift is presently located within a wooden building located directly to the south of the existing cafe, shop, sales and office complex at Glenshee on the west side of the public road. The lift runs south westwards to the top of the Cairnwell Mountain for a distance of around 630 metres. At this point (the return station) there was an existing building housing the infrastructure, but the roof of collapsed and there is only the

structure of the building remaining. The general site layout is shown in **Figure 2** below.

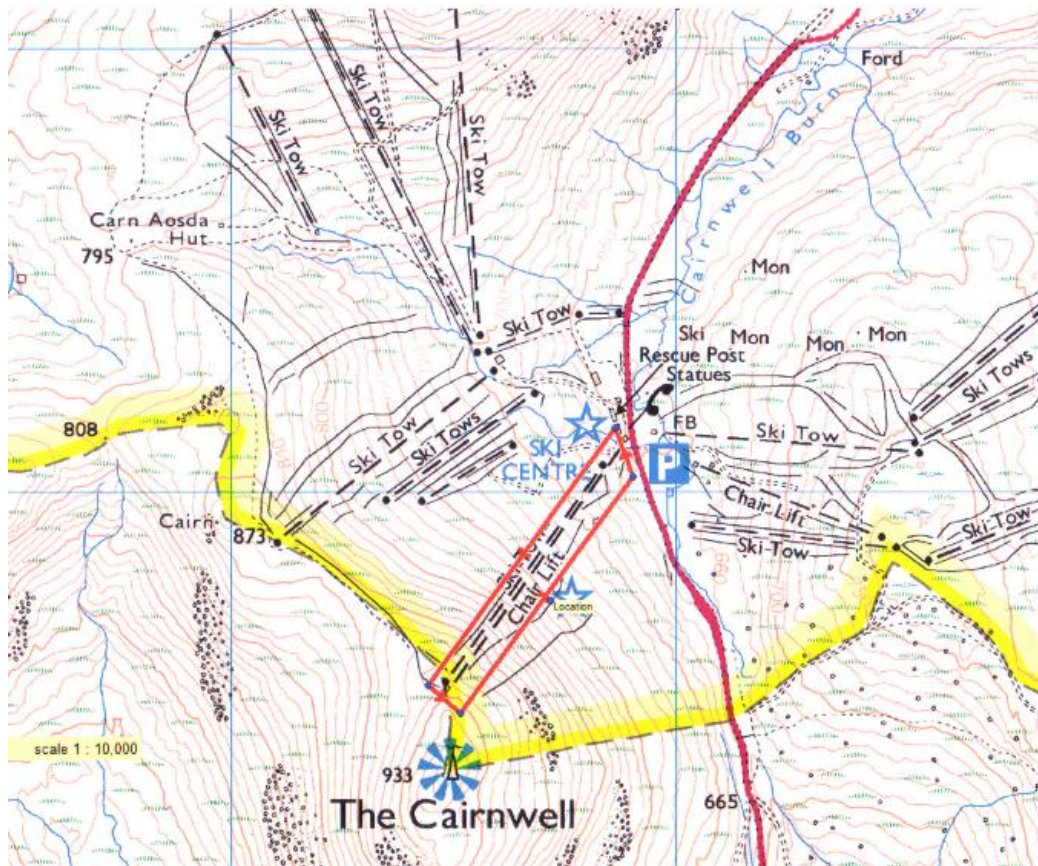


Figure 2 – Site Plan - For illustrative purposes only (extract from applicants' location plan)

5. The current proposal is to replace the existing one person chairlift (which is understood to be the oldest chairlift in Britain) with a modern three person chairlift which will enable families to use the facility – at present young children are not allowed to use the lift unaccompanied. No changes to servicing are proposed and a construction management statement has been submitted to explain how the works will be undertaken with minimal environmental disruption. For example, existing vehicular access will be used to reach the drive and return stations, with the removal and construction of the intermediate pylons/towers using helicopters.
6. The new chairlift comprises a number of elements. Firstly, the existing drive-station, which is housed in a wooden building, will be replaced by modern drive-station infrastructure located slightly to the south west of the current position. This is illustrated in **Figures 3(a) and (b)** below. It is understood that the applicants may also seek to remove some of the existing buildings in due course.



Figure 3 (a) Photograph of existing drive-station and chairlift



Figure 3 (b) Indicative visualisation of new drive-station and chairlift

7. The new chairlift will run along the line of the existing facility and will comprise a series of nine new pylons/support towers. The construction method statement explains that existing pylons will be removed and their foundations cut down to below ground level, covered over and reinstated. New foundations about 2 metres deep will be required (dependent on ground conditions) for the new pylons. These are of varying heights above ground level reflecting the ground contours, ranging from 7 to 11 metres.
8. The third element of the proposals is the return station near the summit of the Cairnwell. The existing structures will again be replaced by modern infrastructure. This is illustrated in **Figures 4(a) and (b)** below.



Figure 4 (a) Photograph of existing drive-station



Figure 4 (b) Indicative visualisation of new drive station and lift

9. In terms of planning history there have been several planning applications over the years for infrastructure at the Glenshee ski centre. Most relevant to this case is an application for a new chairlift to the north which was approved by Aberdeenshire Council in 2010 (Reference APP/2010/0972) running from the car-park to the Cairnwell Cafe.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONTEXT

National policy

10. **Scottish Planning Policy** (SPP, revised 2014) sets out national planning policies that reflect Scottish Ministers' priorities for the operation of the

planning system and for the development and use of land. Under planning law, planning applications must be determined according to the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The content of SPP is a material consideration in planning decisions that carries significant weight. The SPP promotes consistency in the application of policy across Scotland while allowing sufficient flexibility to reflect local circumstances.

11. The SPP sits alongside four other Scottish Government planning policy documents:
 - The **National Planning Framework (NPF)** which provides the statutory framework for Scotland's long term spatial development. The NPF sets out the Scottish Government's spatial development policies for the next 20 to 30 years;
 - **Creating Places**, the policy statement on architecture and place, containing the Scottish Government's policies and guidance on the importance of architecture and design;
 - **Designing Streets**, a policy statement putting street design at the centre of place-making. It contains policies and guidance on the design of new or existing streets and their construction, adoption and maintenance; and
 - **Circulars**, which contain policy on the implementation of legislation or procedures.
12. Scottish Planning Policy seeks to support business and employment and to facilitate sustainable economic growth

Strategic Policies

Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan (2012-2017)

13. The Cairngorms National Park Plan sets out the vision and overarching strategy for managing the Park and provides focus and priorities at a time of limited financial resources. The Plan also provides a strategic context for the Local Development Plan and shows how the four aims of the National Park can be achieved together. It sets out the strategic direction and priorities for the Park.
14. Three long-term outcomes for the Park are set out as follows:
 - a) A sustainable economy supporting thriving businesses and communities;
 - b) A special place for people and nature with natural and cultural heritage enhanced; and
 - c) People enjoying the park through outstanding visitor and learning experiences.

These outcomes address the interaction of the three main characteristics of the National Park, these being that the Park is an internationally important area for nature conservation; a fragile rural economy, and an internationally known tourism destination. Recognising the relationship of these outcomes is

at the heart of the National Park. A series of work programmes to help deliver the outcomes is set out in the Plan.

15. Specific policies of the Plan seek to promote and enhance the special qualities of the Park including policy 2.3 which seeks to conserve and enhance the special landscape qualities and to enhance opportunities to enjoy and experience the landscapes of the Park. Policy 1.1 seeks to grow the economy of the Park by strengthening existing business sectors.

Local Plan Policy

Cairngorms National Park Local Plan (2010)

16. The Cairngorms National Park Local Plan was formally adopted on 29 October 2010. The full text can be found at:
<http://www.cairngorms.co.uk/parkauthority/publications/results.php?publicationID=265>
17. The Local Plan contains a range of policies dealing with particular interests or types of development. These provide detailed guidance on the best places for development and the best ways to develop. The policies follow the three key themes of the Park Plan to provide a detailed policy framework for planning decisions:
 - Chapter 3 - Conserving and Enhancing the Park;
 - Chapter 4 - Living and Working in the Park;
 - Chapter 5 - Enjoying and Understanding the Park.
18. Policies are not cross-referenced and applicants are expected to ensure that proposals comply with all policies that are relevant. The site-specific proposals of the Local Plan are provided on a settlement by settlement basis in Chapter 6. These proposals, when combined with other policies, are intended to meet the sustainable development needs of the Park for the Local Plan's lifetime. The following paragraphs list a range of policies that are appropriate to consider in the assessment of the current development proposal.

19. Policy 33: Tourism-Related Development – supports development which has a beneficial impact on the local economy through enhancement of the range and quality of tourism attractions and related infrastructure, including accommodation, provided it will not have an adverse impact on the landscape, biodiversity or the culture and traditions of the National Park which outweigh that beneficial impact.
20. Policy 35: Sport and Recreation Facilities – supports the diversification of, or extensions to, existing sport and recreation related business activities or the enhancement of existing facilities where they demonstrate best practise in terms of sustainable design and future maintenance and where there are no adverse environmental impacts.
21. Policy 1: Natura 2000 Sites – sets out that any development likely to have an effect on a Natura 2000 site (which includes Special Protection Areas) will be subject to an appropriate assessment and where this is unable to ascertain that the development will not adversely affect the integrity of the site, the development will only be permitted where there are no alternative solutions or there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest including those of a social or economic reason.
22. Policy 2: National Natural Heritage Designations – this policy seeks to ensure that new development does not have an adverse effect upon these designations, which include National Park designation.
23. Policy 5: Biodiversity which presumes against any development which would have an adverse effect on habitat or species identified in the Cairngorms Local Biodiversity Plan or upon European Protected Species. These policies are supported by natural heritage supplementary guidance.
24. Policy 6: Landscape – sets out that there will be a presumption against any development that does not complement and enhance the landscape character of the Park. Exceptions will only be made where any significant adverse effects on the landscape are clearly outweighed by social or economic benefits of national importance and all adverse effects have been mitigated.
25. Policy 13: Mineral and Soil Resources – seeks to ensure that new development avoids any unnecessary disturbance of soils, peat and any associated vegetation and explains that where disturbance is necessary best practise must be adopted in movement, management, storage and reinstatement.
26. Policy 16: Design Standards for development – sets out the design standards to be met with new development and is supported by supplementary planning guidance in the form of a sustainable design guide.

Supplementary Planning Guidance

27. In addition to the adoption of the Cairngorms National Park Local Plan (2010) a number of Supplementary Planning Guidance documents were also adopted. In this case the key documents are guidance on Natural Heritage which sets out how the natural heritage of the National Park will be taken into account when considering development proposals. The Sustainable Design Guide also sets out how to achieve sustainable development in the Park

Proposed Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan

28. The Department of Planning and Environmental Appeals (DPEA) carried out an Examination of the proposed Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan (LDP) over Spring and Summer 2014. The CNPA received the Report of the Examination on 8 September 2014. The CNPA Planning Committee approved post-examination modifications to the Proposed Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan (Proposed LDP) on 21 November 2014. The CNPA has published notice of its intention to adopt the Plan and expects to adopt it in February 2015. The Proposed LDP (as modified) is a material consideration and carries significant weight in planning decisions though it does not replace the adopted Local Plan until it is formally adopted.
29. There are no significant differences between the policies contained in the Proposed LDP (as modified) relating to the current application as compared to the 2010 Local Plan policies as noted above.

CONSULTATIONS

30. **CNPA Landscape Advisor** notes that the site lies within the Cairnwell High Pass landscape character area where there is a strong sense of enclosure. The ski centre infrastructure is a prominent feature in the landscape, with the Cairnwell chairlift sitting in the midst of the other infrastructure here.
31. The proposed bottom drive-station will be larger than the existing set up and its colour will contrast with the existing dark green buildings although it may be possible to paint parts of the superstructure to reduce this effect. The top return station will be smaller than the existing set up which is partially derelict. Overall, the proposal, aside from the larger drive station arrangement, will have little impact on the wider landscape.
32. There may be local impacts arising from the works to install the new pylon foundations given the high altitude, sensitive soils and steep gradients. This can be mitigated by careful attention to detail of soil management and restoration in order to comply with Local Plan policy 6 on landscape.

33. A revised construction method statement to address these points has been submitted and the Officer considers this to be generally satisfactory, subject to construction management in adverse weather conditions being addressed.
34. **CNPA Ecology Advisor** advises that the proposals will not have an adverse impact upon designated sites in the area. There are species of interest within 100 metres of the site including mountain hare, birds, fungi and potentially invertebrates in the Cairnwell burn. Impacts upon these species can be avoided by careful construction at the appropriate time of year. It is also recommended that measures be taken to compensate for any loss of habitat arising out of the construction, for example in relation to peat disruption with consideration given to restoring damaged and exposed areas of peat elsewhere on the slopes. Appropriate planning conditions and informatives may be attached to address these matters.
35. **CNPA Economic Development Manager** notes that the Cairnwell chairlift has a strategic role for the Ski Centre as it provides the easiest access to the higher slopes, and during the summer also enables access by cyclists and walkers. The value of the snowsports sector to Scotland's rural economy is highlighted together with their role in helping to support regional equity given the location specific nature of the business which keeps investment within the rural community. The officer notes that Glenshee accounts for around 30% of all Scottish skiers attracting visitors from central Scotland and Aberdeenshire. The fragility of the sector is also noted, which is due to a number of factors including inconsistent snow conditions and old equipment.
36. In these circumstances the Officer concludes that the proposed upgrade would be a welcome addition to the product available at Glenshee highlighting that the current chairlift is not in keeping with modern expectations with its limited capacity creating bottlenecks during times of "good snow" preventing skiers reaching the higher slopes. The new development will increase capacity at peak times providing access to higher slopes when snow at lower levels is poor. This is considered to be essential at Scottish resorts require to improve access to higher snow fields and will have a positive economic impact for the Glenshee economy.
37. **Braemar Community Council** was consulted and has not commented to date.
38. **Scottish Natural Heritage** notes that the site lies immediately adjacent to the Cairngorms Massif Special Protection Area (SPA) which is designated for golden eagle. Accordingly the effects upon the SPA require to be considered under the term of the Habitats Regulations. In this case as the proposal involves replacing existing infrastructure, it is considered that the development is unlikely to have a significant effect, either directly or indirectly, on the interests of the SPA.

REPRESENTATIONS

39. The application was advertised in the local press and 30 letters of representation have been received which are attached as **Appendix I**. All of these letters offer support for the application and the key points of support are summarised as follows
- Much-needed improvement to popular tourism and sports attraction
 - Supports upgrading and promotion of Scottish snow-sport industry
 - No visual impacts
 - Modern facility will enhance visitor experience
 - Improves capacity on hill and reduce queues
 - Replaces a poorly functioning lift - which is beneficial in economic and visual terms
 - Improved environmental impacts resulting from energy savings associated with running a newer, more efficient chairlift
 - Improved safety
 - Economic benefits to the area and Scotland

APPRAISAL

40. This proposal will enhance the visitor experience at one of the National Park's key attractions and, as noted by the CNPA Economic Development Manager, is considered to be of economic benefit. Consequently the principle of replacing an outdated chairlift with a modern one of increased capacity is considered to be satisfactory and in line with Local Plan policies (policies 33 and 35) to support tourism and recreation development and the enhancement of existing facilities.
41. There are no particular servicing issues raised by this proposal which is essentially replacement infrastructure. The key planning issues to consider are therefore the impact on the environment and landscape of the National Park.
42. In terms of natural environment the development will not have an adverse impact on any designated sites whilst species of interest can be readily protected by appropriate planning conditions and construction techniques.
43. The site is located in an already disturbed area. New pylons/support towers will be required there will be some disturbance of soils and potentially peatland in the lower parts of the line of the chairlift. This may represent an opportunity to secure some enhancement through potential restoration of some areas of exposed peatland in the vicinity of the chairlift. Overall it is considered that the proposal complies with planning policies 6 and 13 on biodiversity and soil resources.
44. In terms of landscape impacts, as noted by the CNPA Landscape Advisor, impacts of the new chairlift are limited given that this is a replacement facility. Careful attention to restoration and construction should also help ensure minimal disturbance over time in terms of groundwork.

45. With regard to the main pieces of new infrastructure, it is considered that the return station will represent a visual improvement upon the existing structure near the Cairnwell summit. Although the new drive station will inevitably be more obvious than the current situation where it is housed within a building, it will relate well to the existing built infrastructure at Glenshee beside the main road. It is accepted that the new infrastructure will inevitably be of brighter hues and these should be agreed with the CNPA to secure the best landscape fit
46. In these circumstances it is considered that the proposed development will not give rise to any detrimental visual impact and in addition more modern infrastructure has the potential to secure some improvement overall. Accordingly it is considered that the proposed development complies with Local Plan policy 6 on landscape.

CONCLUSION

47. In conclusion this proposal to enhance the facilities at the Glenshee ski centre is to be welcomed. There is considerable public support for the proposal as evidenced in the supporting letters received from users of the centre. Landscape and environmental impacts are considered to be acceptable with opportunities for enhancement. The application is therefore considered to comply with Local Plan policies and approval subject to appropriate planning conditions is recommended.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AIMS OF THE NATIONAL PARK

Conserve and Enhance the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Area

48. Subject to appropriate construction techniques and exploring the potential to secure the restoration of exposed peat areas and vegetation the development supports this aim.

Promote Sustainable Use of Natural Resource

49. The new specialist infrastructure is not made locally so there is not a particular opportunity to support this aim. However, it is understood that all site works will be carried out by ski centre staff or locally sourced workers so this should help sustainable resource use by minimising travel.

Promote Understanding and Enjoyment of the Area

50. The proposed development provides an opportunity to attract more visitors and users to the ski centre through the provisions of improved facilities as well as improving the experience for existing users. As such, it fully supports this aim.

Promote Sustainable Economic and Social Development of the Area

51. The proposed development fully supports this aim by enhancing the facilities of an important local attraction and employer which is of considerable benefit to the local economy. This may also help to promote the economic development of other linked sectors such as ski hire, accommodation, food and retail in the area through attracting more visitors and trade.

RECOMMENDATION

That Members of the Committee support a recommendation to GRANT FULL PLANNING PERMISSION for the Installation of Replacement Chairlift at Glenshee Chairlift Braemar subject to the following planning conditions:

1. No development shall commence until details of the colours and finishes of the proposed new chairlift infrastructure have been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Planning Authority. The work shall thereafter proceed in accordance with the approved details.

Reason – to ensure the landscape is complemented and enhanced in accordance with Local Plan policies.

2. No development shall commence until a site specific Construction Method Statement has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Planning Authority. This statement shall cover the following points
- Details of construction and subsequent restoration of new chairlift (including micro-siting of pylons) which should also ensure that any damage to vegetation and peat is avoided
 - Details of inclusion and protection of existing drainage
 - Details of removal of existing infrastructure
 - Preparation of land for seeding and management
 - Recovery and re use of turf and topsoil
 - Details of storage of material
 - Management of construction during adverse weather conditions
 - Pollution prevention during construction
 - Details of ground conditions including any impacts upon peat
 - Measures for the restoration and enhancement of exposed peat in the area (vicinity of existing chairlift) to compensate for any peat disturbance on site including a timetable for these works

The construction works shall thereafter proceed in accordance with the approved Plan and timetable.

Reason – in order to ensure there are no adverse landscape or environmental impacts in accordance with Local Plan policies 1, 2, 5 and 6

INFORMATIVES

1. In accordance with section 58(1) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended), this permission lapses on the expiration of a period of three years beginning with the date on which this permission is granted unless the development to which this permission relates is begun before that expiration.
2. If any construction works are undertaken during the bird and mountain hare breeding season (March to July in any year) then a walkover check should be undertaken for breeding bird and mountain hare nest sites.

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Date: 08 October 2014

The map on the first page of this report has been produced to aid in the statutory process of dealing with planning applications. The map is to help identify the site and its surroundings and to aid Planning Officers, Committee Members and the Public in the determination of the proposal. Maps shown in the Planning Committee Report can only be used for the purposes of the Planning Committee. Any other use risks infringing Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Maps produced within this Planning Committee Report can only be reproduced with the express permission of the Cairngorms National Park Authority and other Copyright holders. This permission must be granted in advance.