

AGENDA ITEM 6

APPENDIX 5

2013/0119/DET

NATURAL HERITAGE
OFFICER COMMENTS
06/11/14

CNPA Application Ref. No. & name:
2013/0119/DET

Application description: Erection of 58 houses, associated roads and footways, land at School Road and Craigmore Road, Nethybridge.

INTERNAL SPECIALIST RESPONSE

Response date: 06/11/2014

Deadline: N/A

Internal Specialist (Name & Job Title): Hayley Wiswell (Natural Heritage Officer)

This ecology response is an addendum to the previous ecology responses submitted for this application.

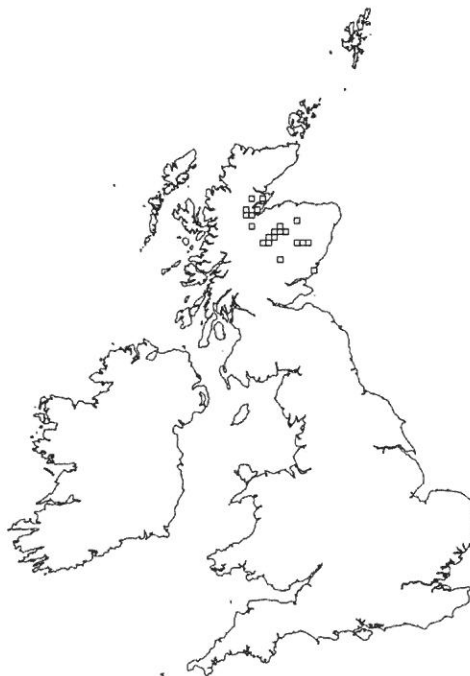
Green shield moss

A third party has brought to our attention the presence green shield moss (*Buxbaumia viridis*) within School wood. Green shield moss has been recorded within the red line boundary and immediately adjacent to the proposal areas.

Green shield moss has the following designations:

- Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 – illegal to intentionally pick, uproot or destroy the plant itself or its seeds or spores
- Cairngorms Nature Action Plan species – species of high conservation priority in the Cairngorms National Park
- Scottish Biodiversity List – species of high conservation priority at a national level
- UK Biodiversity Action Plan – species of high conservation priority at a UK level
- Habitats Directive Annex 2 – this species can be a qualifying feature of an SAC (i.e. Cairngorms SAC)
- Listed as “Endangered” in the British Bryophyte Red Data Book (2005), although a recent review has since downgraded the species to “Near Threatened” (Hodgetts 2011, Field Bryology, No 103 pg 40-48)

This moss is restricted to Scotland in the UK and the majority of records are within the Cairngorms National Park (see map to left showing UK distribution, from NBN Gateway).



This means that the park is the UK stronghold for this species. As such, it is present on the list of 26 key species on the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan that are of high conservation priority.

This species is likely to be significantly adversely impacted by the proposal by:

- Direct loss of the species where it falls within the red line
- Direct and indirect loss through thinning of woodland edge habitat around the proposal area (to aid in wind firming of the woodland around the site, as proposed in the arboricultural report). This would render the habitat unsuitable for this species by increasing light intensity and affecting humidity.

The moss requires a very specific habitat in order to flourish; fallen aged deadwood is the most commonly used as a growing medium, and a humid microclimate is required. Due to its specific needs, mitigating for this species in terms of translocation is not readily feasible.

As such, the proposal would have a significant adverse impact on the distribution of green shield moss in School wood. Only one location was found away from the proposal areas, along the Caochan Fhuarain burn. Unless significant colonies of the moss are found elsewhere in School wood away from the development, the proposal is likely to cause the extinction of the majority of known sites in School Wood.

As such, the proposal would result in the loss of green shield moss and would therefore fail to meet Policy 4 (protected species) and Policy 5 (non-protected biodiversity) of the Local Plan, as well as Principle 1 of Natural Heritage supplementary planning guidance (loss of biodiversity).

MBEC surveys

Records of green shield moss in the local area were found during a desk study conducted by MBEC in their original 2012 report and listed this in Table 2 of the Botanical Survey appendix.

As such MBEC were aware that green shield moss is present in the local area and its presence on the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan should have highlighted the need to be aware of the potential for this species during survey work. A series of surveys have been conducted by MBEC that had the opportunity to locate this species or identify suitable habitat:

- A Phase I Habitat Survey
- A “botanical survey” which included mosses
- An NVC survey
- Management Options Survey

Never the less, green shield moss was not recorded during survey work, despite being situated within the survey area that MBEC used. This is worrying, given the fact that a large number of locations of green shield moss have been found by a local ecologist.

A Management Options Survey was carried out in August 2014 which involved a walk over of School Wood and Balnagowan Wood to devise a management plan of the woodland to provide compensation for the loss of woodland through the proposal (discussed in MBEC’s latest response – “Additional Ecology and Nature Conservation Information, August 2014”). The management options proposed could adversely affect this green shield moss. Proposed compensation would involve removal of non-native Norway spruce from School wood to allow Scots pine regeneration, but this could remove habitat suitable for green shield moss, which is using Norway Spruce deadwood.

The survey work presented to date by MBEC states the ecological value of the non-native component of School Wood to be of negligible conservation interest. The finding of green shield moss indicates the contrary, and that the non-native Norway Spruce within School Wood is in fact of high conservation value, supporting a significant population of this rare plant species.

Members of the public have highlighted further flaws in the detail of the MBEC surveys, including:

- Notable plant species serrated wintergreen (*Orthilia secunda*) and common wintergreen (*Pyrola minor*) were missed within the location of Quadrat 1 for the NVC survey and during botanical study.
- Potential misidentification of lichen *Peltigera canina*
- Rare deadwood morel *Gyromitra infula* was overlooked during fungi survey
- Invertebrates such as the rare mason bee *Osmia uncinata* were missed due to late timing of survey

MBEC have stated, following their survey work, that botanically, the nature conservation value of the woodland component School Wood is considered to be Low, and of Low-Medium value at a Local level (MBEC 2012 Botanical Study, page 11). Information presented by members of the public (respected local ecologists) suggests the contrary. As such the biodiversity value of this woodland has likely to have been downplayed in the survey work and the reliability of the surveys is now uncertain.

According to Local Plan Policy 3, where Ancient Woodland is lost, compensation must be commensurate or greater to that lost. MBEC state in their 2012 report that if the proposal were to be approved, it would allow for conservation and enhancement of a wider area of woodland through a management plan for the remaining School Wood and Balnagowan Wood. However, the knowledge of the presence of green shield moss increases the biodiversity value of the woodland, in addition to other species records that have subsequently been brought to our attention.

As such, the compensation proposed no longer provides sufficient mitigation and compensation for the loss of woodland at a commensurate or greater level. In terms of green shield moss, if the proposal were to go ahead, significant impact would occur on this species which could not be compensated for by habitat creation in the short to medium term, due to the habitat needs of this species. As such, the proposal would no longer meet Local Plan Policy 3 due to the loss of ancient woodland which, with the methods of compensation provided in the latest MBEC report, contains features that cannot be compensated for.

Summary (place an 'X' in the boxes that apply):

	Further information is required
	The development raises no issues in relation to landscape/ecology
X	The development would have a major impact on a protected species, green shield moss, which cannot be addressed by mitigation
	In the event of planning permission being granted, conditions are required to address potential impacts on...
X	Due to the submission of new information, the development raises issues in relation to

	ecology, that are not capable of resolution.