
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: REPORT ON CALLED-IN PLANNING APPLICATION

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(PLANNING OFFICER,
DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT)**

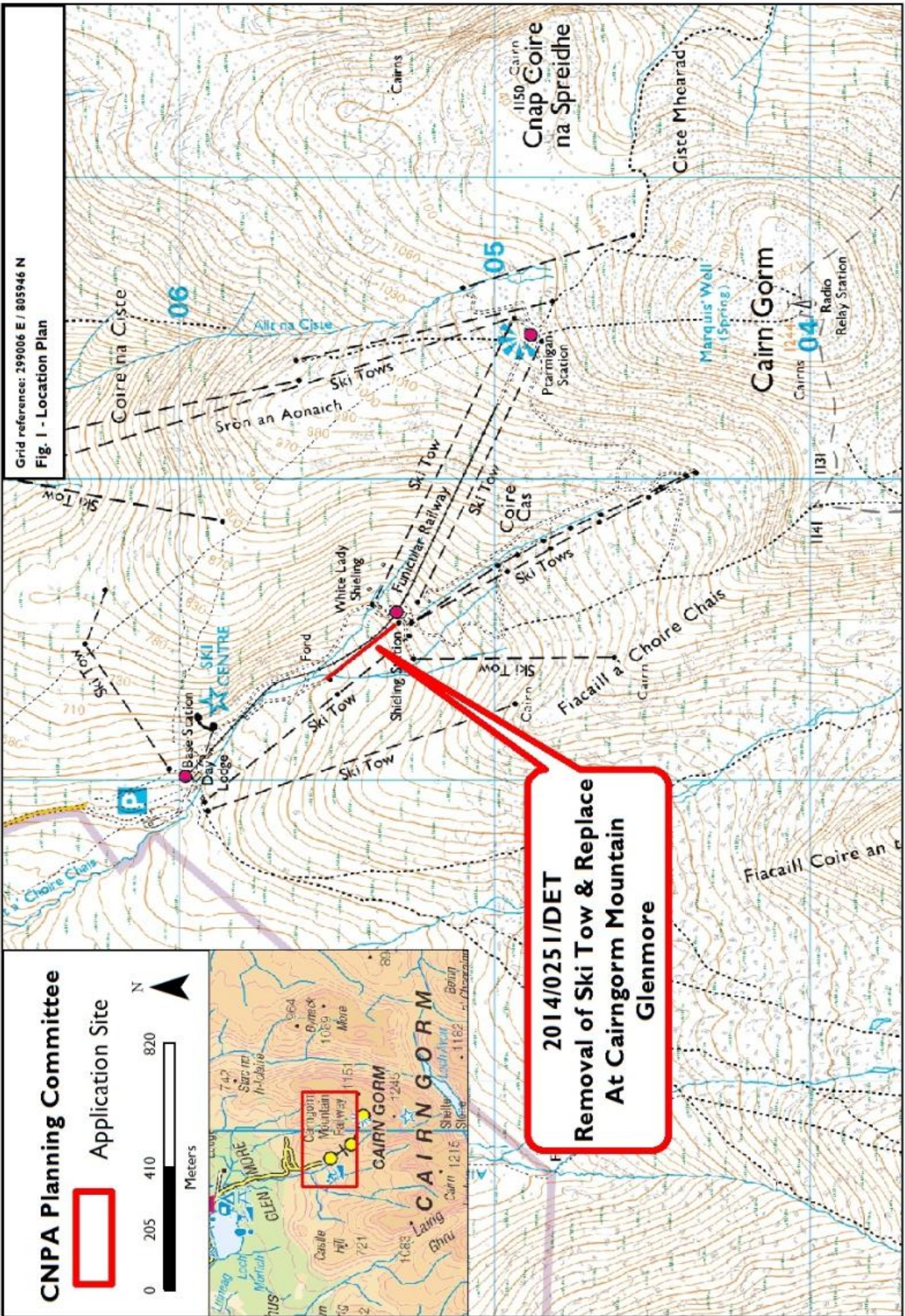
DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED: Removal of Shieling Ski Tow and replace with a modern rope-tow of similar length and profile

REFERENCE: 2014/0251/DET

APPLICANT: CairnGorm Mountain Ltd

DATE CALLED-IN: 25 August 2014

RECOMMENDATION: APPROVAL SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS



Grid reference: 299006 E / 805946 N

Fig. 1 - Location Plan

CNPA Planning Committee



Application Site



2014/0251/DET
Removal of Ski Tow & Replace
At Cairngorm Mountain
Glenmore

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 and are available on the Cairngorms National Park website at:

<http://www.eplanningcnpa.co.uk/online-applications/#searchApplications>

Title	Drawing Number	Date on Plan	Date Received
Topographical Survey at Mid Station	CTCH-752-01	23/05/14	25/08/14
1:50,000 location plan – sheiling poma button lift ground profile		undated	25/08/14
Sheiling poma button lift ground profile with photographs		undated	25/08/14
Sun Kid lifts brochure		undated	25/08/14
Cairngorm Mountain Method Statement	LM003	undated	25/08/14

2. Supporting information in terms of visualisations and photographs of the existing tow were also considered along with manufacturer’s specifications.
3. This application seeks full planning permission to replace an existing ski tow at the Cairngorm Mountain ski centre with a new rope tow over the same distance/location. The existing tow is some sixty years old and comprises around 484 metres of tow running through three arched “pylon” type structures from the drive station as the bottom up to the return wheel at the Sheiling mid station. It is accessed by the Sheiling mid station of the funicular railway which leads up to the Ptarmigan restaurant at the top of Cairngorm. No changes to servicing are proposed. **Figure 2** shows the layout.

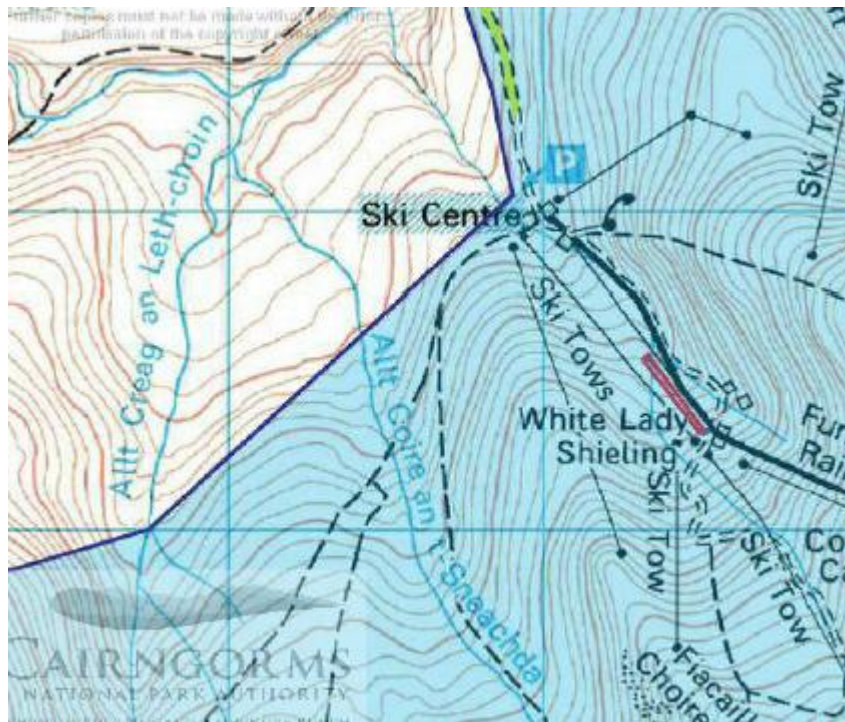


Figure 2: Site Plan - for illustrative purposes only (extract from 1:50,000 location plan)

4. It is understood that whilst the existing ski tow has served the ski centre well, key components require to be replaced, and the opportunity is being taken to provide a complete replacement with a modern rope tow which is considered to be better suited to today's needs and in particular for small children, beginners and snowboarders. It is understood that the existing infrastructure may be re-used in another ski centre.
5. The new ski tow will comprise a rope tow running from a new drive station at the foot of the slope (where the attendant will sit - the existing attendants' small timber hut will be upgraded or replaced) up to the new return wheel at the Sheiling mid station which is designed to allow it to be raised when snow cover is higher for operational reasons and also for ease of use. The rope tow will be a single tow running from drive station to mid station with no intermediate structures. **Figure 3** represents a visualisation of the proposal.



Figure 3: Visualisation - for illustrative purposes only (Extract from applicants' supporting statement)

6. At present the tow runs over disturbed ground including a bulldozed track dating from earlier construction. It is proposed to reinstate this track and also to provide safe crossings over existing water courses (Allt Choire Chas) and replace run down timber bridges with culverts. A construction method statement has been provided which sets out how these works will be undertaken with minimal disturbance and taking the opportunity to reinstate vegetation. Minor ground works including removal of rocks will be carried out and it is intended that this will improve the ski run, and provide an important facility when the runs on the top of the mountain are not available in poor weather conditions.
7. The site itself forms part of the wider ski centre at Cairngorm Mountain being part of a network of ski runs, tows, fencing, funicular railway and buildings.

Site History and Constraints

8. The site lies within a National Scenic Area, but is not covered by any other specific environmental designations.
9. In terms of planning history there is no specific history on the site itself. There have been various applications over the years for infrastructure at the ski centre including the installation of two poma tows at the top of Cairngorm near to the restaurant in the area known as the Ptarmigan bowl. This application was approved by the CNPA Planning Committee in 2004 (Ref 2004/252/CP)

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:
 - a) 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;
 - b) **Creating Places**, the policy statement on architecture and place, containing the Scottish Government's policies and guidance on the importance of architecture and design;
 - c) **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
 - d) **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 29th 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:
 - a. Chapter 3 - Conserving and Enhancing the Park;
 - b. Chapter 4 - Living and Working in the Park;
 - c. 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 2 (National Natural Heritage Designations): Seeks to ensure that new development does not have an adverse effect upon these designations, which include National Scenic Areas.
22. Policy 5 (Biodiversity): 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.
23. 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.
24. 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

25. 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 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 and the Sustainable Design Guide which also sets out how to achieve sustainable development in the Park.

Proposed Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan (LDP)

26. The Department of Planning and Environmental Appeals (DPEA) carried out an Examination of the Proposed Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan (Proposed LDP) over Spring and Summer 2014. The CNPA received the Report of the Examination on 8 September 2014. The Proposed LDP and the Reporters' recommendations are now a material consideration in planning decisions. The emerging policies in the LDP have been checked and these raise no new issues that are not already considered in this report.

CONSULTATIONS

27. **CNPA Landscape Advisor** notes that the site lies within the Glenmore landscape character area where there is a strong sense of being surrounded by the bulk of the Cairngorm Mountains. The existing infrastructure, roads etc. are a prominent feature in the landscape with the Sheiling tow sitting in the midst of other ski infrastructure. Consequently replacing the existing tow with a rope tow will have little impact on the wider landscape. However there may be local landscape and visual impacts depending on the extent of earthworks necessary and whether brightly coloured or reflective components are used in the drive station and return mechanism. These impacts can be minimised by careful attention to the detail of the earthworks and appropriately coloured infrastructure to reduce the prominence when the area is snow covered. The Advisor has now considered the construction method statement submitted by the applicants and considers this to satisfactorily address the earthworks issue subject to use of appropriate seeding.
28. **CNPA Ecology Advisor** advises that the proposals will have a minor impact on ecology which has been addressed by the mitigation measures and considers that overall the proposals will enhance habitats. The officer advises that if works are undertaken during the bird breeding season then a pre-construction check should be made for ground nesting birds.
29. **CNPA Sustainable Tourism Officer** highlights the importance of the snow sport industry to the tourism economy of the National Park, attracting visitors at an otherwise quiet time of the year, greatly reducing the seasonality that affects many other rural areas. The proposals should provide a better experience, particularly for children and snowboarder, as currently the main beginner areas are at the top of the mountain, particularly vulnerable to high winds so the provision of an alternative beginners tow on the lower slopes should increase the number of days the centre can offer snow sports to this demographic. This may also increase the likelihood of repeat custom. It is therefore considered that the development will have a positive economic impact for the Cairngorm Mountain centre and possibly a smaller impact on the other linked sectors such as ski hire, accommodation, food and retail.
30. **Aviemore and Vicinity Community Council** has no objections to the proposals.
31. **Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)** has no comments, noting that the site lies outwith any designated sites and is unlikely to either directly or indirectly affect any interests for which SNH lead on.

REPRESENTATIONS

32. None

APPRAISAL

33. This proposal is intended to enhance the visitor experience at one of the National Park's key attractions, and, as noted by the CNPA Sustainable Tourism Officer, is considered to be of economic benefit. Consequently the principle of replacing an older style ski tow with a modern one is considered to be satisfactory and in line with Local Plan Policies 33 and 35 to support tourism and recreation development and the enhancement of existing facilities.
34. As there are no particular servicing issues raised by this proposal, the key planning issues to consider are the impact on the environment and landscape of the National Park.
35. The site is located in an already disturbed area represents an opportunity to secure some improvement by removing an old bulldozed track and carrying out reinstatement and re-vegetation. Consequently it is considered that the overall environmental impact will be positive whereby the development will readily comply with Local Plan Policies 2 (National Natural Heritage Designations) and 5 (Protected Species).
36. As noted earlier, the development will relate to existing ski infrastructure across this wider site and will replace the existing arrangement which included three pylon type structures with a more visually streamlined arrangement of tow, drive station and return mechanism in line with Local Plan Policy 16 (Design Standards for Development). The development is not therefore considered to have any particular visual impacts on the wider landscape as compared to the existing situation, indeed the removal of some of the structures may be considered to be beneficial in design and landscape terms.
37. Due to the ground configuration here the tow is located almost within a bowl type area. It will however be visible within the existing older ski infrastructure. The existing infrastructure to be replaced is green with the tow and pylons subdued brown tones. However 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 and compliance with Local Plan Policy 6 (Landscape).

CONCLUSION

38. In conclusion this proposal to enhance the facilities at the Cairngorm Mountain ski centre is generally welcomed. Landscape and environmental impacts are considered to be acceptable with opportunities for enhancement. The application is therefore considered to comply with Development 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

39. The proposed development will secure the reinstatement of a bulldozed track and provide opportunities to restore vegetation. As such it is considered to support this aim.

Promote Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

40. The new specialist infrastructure is not made locally so there is not a particular opportunity to support this aim. However the proposal to re-use the existing infrastructure is welcomed as a sustainable move.

Promote Understanding and Enjoyment of the Area

41. The proposed development provides an opportunity to attract more visitors and users to the ski centre through the provisions of improved facilities. As such it fully supports this aim.

Promote Sustainable Economic and Social Development of the Area

42. 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 subject to the following planning conditions:

1. No development shall commence on site until details of the colours and finishes of the proposed new rope tow 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: In order to ensure the landscape is complemented and enhanced in accordance with Local Plan policies.

2. No development shall commence on the attendant's hut until details of design and finishes 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: In order to ensure the landscape is complemented and enhanced in accordance with Local Plan policies.

3. All construction work shall proceed in accordance with the approved construction method statement, with any seeding to be appropriate to the site. (*Note: advice on seed mixes may be obtained from Scottish Natural Heritage*)

Reason: In order to ensure there is no adverse landscape or environmental impacts in accordance with Local Plan policies.

4. If any construction works are proposed during the bird breeding season (April to July in any year) then a pre-construction survey of the area shall be undertaken to check for signs of ground nesting birds. No development shall commence on site until the results of this survey and any proposed mitigation have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interests of protecting biodiversity in accordance with Local Plan policies.

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 3 years beginning with the date on which this permission is granted unless the development to which this permission relates is begun before that expiration.

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Date: 31 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.