
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: REPORT ON CALLED-IN PLANNING APPLICATION

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(DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT)**

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED: FULL PLANNING PERMISSION FOR CONVERSION OF, AND ALTERATIONS AND EXTENSION TO, HOTEL TO FORM 5 DWELLINGHOUSES, STRUAN HOUSE HOTEL, CARRBRIDGE

REFERENCE: 08/117/CP

APPLICANT: SCOIN INVESTMENT PARTNERS LTD. C/O GRAMPIAN DESIGN ASSOCIATES, LEADSIDE HOUSE, 62 LEADSIDE ROAD, ABERDEEN

DATE CALLED-IN: 4 APRIL 2008

RECOMMENDATION: APPROVAL, SUBJECT TO CONDITIONS

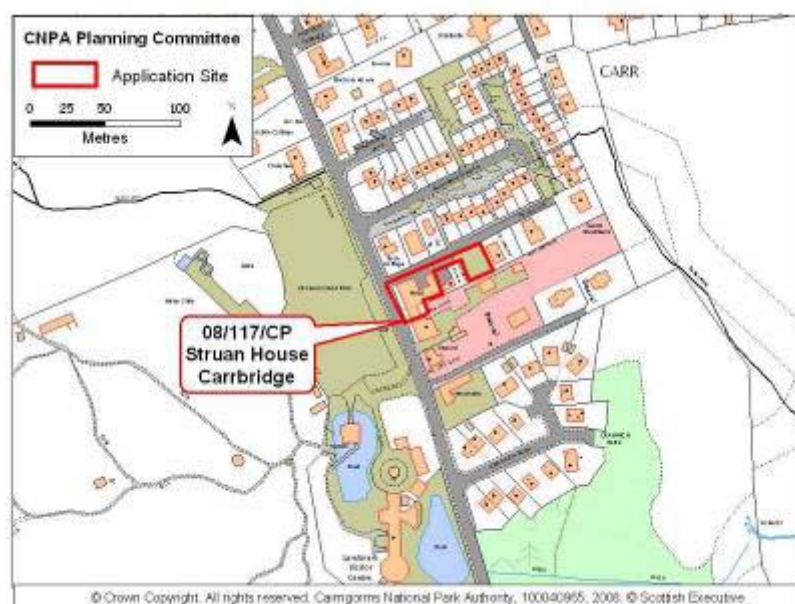


Fig. 1 - Location Plan

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL

1. The “Struan House Hotel”, which has been vacant from its use as a hotel for approximately 2 years, is located on Main Street in Carrbridge opposite “Landmark”. The building consists of a traditional, 2 storey frontage, facing west to the public road, with modern extensions to the rear (east). The building is finished with slate to the roof, white washed wet harling to the walls, with traditional sash and case timber framed windows to the older part and modern casement window types to the rear extensions. A low wall forms the roadside boundary.



Fig. 2. Struan Hotel frontage

2. Adjoining the rear extensions, to the east, is a house (“Aspen House”), which is in separate ownership. This property has a separate garden to its east side and a separate access courtyard and parking area situated immediately adjacent to the hotel extensions. Beyond the garden area of “Aspen House” is a rectangular area of ground which formed an informal parking area for the hotel. There are some fences and trees enclosing this area. Further to the east, beyond but immediately adjacent to this parking area, is a detached bungalow (“Carrwood”). There is also a bungalow immediately adjacent to this parking area on the south side, but within the rear grounds of the “Crannich Guest House”. The “Crannich Guest House” is a traditional, 2 storey, stone and slate property, which adjoins the front elevation of the “Struan House Hotel” on the south side.

Vehicular access to the property is by an unadopted road, off Main Street, on the north side. This road also provides vehicular access to "Aspen House", "Carrwood" and two other properties beyond.



Fig. 3. Rear extensions to the hotel – part of the current conversion proposal



Fig. 4. Existing access with houses to the rear beyond

- The proposal is to convert the former hotel into 5 residential units consisting of 4 no. 3 bedroom and 1 no. 2 bedroom units. The properties will be for the market. There will be 3 units formed in the original building and two units formed in the extensions. Externally, there will only be a few alterations, including the removal of some adjoining outbuildings and an external staircase, and the formation of some new porches, and doorway and window openings. The only change to the front elevation is the erection of a new porch and doorway to provide an entrance to one of the new residential units. The original proposal included the provision of 10 parking spaces aligned along the mutual access road and the erection of 5 double garages in an "L"- shaped building on the former parking area to the rear. Following discussions with the applicant's agent, this has been formally amended to remove the garaging, use the former parking area for a landscaped amenity area, thus retaining trees, rearrange the 10 parking spaces, create some footpath provision adjacent to the mutual access road and provide an additional landscaped entrance courtyard area to the 2 residential units in the extensions to the rear. Vehicular access to the parking courtyard of "Aspen House" is retained.



Fig.5. Amended Layout Plan



Fig. 6. Proposed Elevations

DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONTEXT

Cairngorms National Park Plan 2007

4. Strategic objectives for Landscape, Built and Historic Environment include; ensuring that development complements and enhances the landscape character of the Park; and new developments within settlements and surrounding areas complementing and enhancing the character, pattern and local identity of the built and historic environment. Strategic objectives for Sustainable Communities include making proactive provision to focus settlement growth in the main settlements. Strategic objectives for Housing include increasing the accessibility of rented and owned housing to meet the needs of communities throughout the Park; and ensuring that there is effective land and investment for market and affordable housing to meet the economic and social needs of communities throughout the Park. Strategic objectives for Sustainable Tourism include strengthening and maintaining the viability of the tourism industry in the Park and the contribution it makes to the local and regional economy.

National Planning Policy

5. At the National level **SPP3 (Planning for Housing)** encourages the re-use of existing buildings for residential development. Para 32

under the efficient use of land and buildings, tends to relate to larger settlements but notes that the conversion of commercial premises offers opportunities to create new residential environments with a distinctive character while retaining buildings of architectural or historical interest. Para 49 of SPP3 notes that, traditionally, planning policy has sought to restrict new housing in the countryside to maintain rural character and amenity and safeguard agricultural production. Where possible therefore, new housing requirements should be met by developments within or adjacent to settlements. **Scottish Planning Policy 2 (Economic Development)** includes a range of advice promoting new economic development but says little about protection of existing facilities. **Scottish Planning Policy 15 (Planning for Rural Development)** again emphasises promotion of rural economic development in the right places and seeks thriving and sustainable communities but says little about the role of existing facilities.

Highland Structure Plan 2001

6. **Policy G2 (Design for Sustainability)** considers that proposed developments will be assessed on the extent to which they are compatible with service provision, are accessible by public transport, cycling and walking, maximise energy efficiency, make use of brownfield sites, existing buildings and recycled materials, impact on individual and community residential amenity, impacts on landscape, habitats, species, cultural heritage, promote varied, lively and well used environments and contribute to the economic and social development of the community. The Highland Structure Plan includes a whole section on **tourism** and the first line of this section notes that tourism is a vital element of the Highland economy. Under paragraph 2.7.8. general tourist accommodation is not considered to be, on the whole, in short supply, although a growth trend in recent years has been evident in the self catering sector. Again there is little in the way of guidance as regards the protection of existing facilities. In relation to **housing** the structure plan's strategic objectives aim to steer housing development to appropriate locations within existing settlements. **Policy H8 (Access arrangements for new and existing development)** requires development proposals which involve new or improved access to serve more than 4 houses, to be served by a road constructed to adoptive standards.

Badenoch and Strathspey Local Plan 1997

7. Within Carrbridge the site lies in an area covered by **Policy 5.1.4. (Infill)**. In the interest of safeguarding the character of established residential areas, this policy provides a presumption against the sub-division of existing plots where development does not meet certain criteria relating to scale, design orientation, inadequate plot size and spacing, established building lines, tree retention, loss of privacy and substandard access. **Policy 2.2.9. (Tourism and Recreation)** advises that these activities will continue to make a vital contribution to the economy. The priority is to ensure that broadening the range and quality of facilities and accommodation is balanced with protecting the areas exceptional scenic and heritage resources.

Highland Council Development Plan Guidelines 2003

8. This document sets out general standards for design and sustainable construction. Included in this is the provision of open space in housing developments. A standard proposed for developments of 5 terraced houses is for the provision of minimum 70sqm of private amenity space per dwellinghouse.

CONSULTATIONS

9. **Scottish Water** state that both the Blackpark Water Treatment Works and the Carrbridge Waste Water Treatment Works may have sufficient capacity to service the proposed development but there may be issues in the networks. They do not object but state that any planning approval given does not guarantee a connection to their infrastructure.
10. **SEPA** have no comments to make.
11. **The CNPA's Sustainable Tourism Officer** advises that according to the Carrbridge Tourist Association website, the village currently has 4 hotels, 2 guest houses, 9 B & Bs, 1 hostel and 14 self-catering units. She is generally reluctant to see the loss of hotel accommodation, but the Struan House Hotel has not been operational for some time, and the village remains well served by tourist accommodation. She does not feel that there will be a wider economic impact and therefore has no objections.
12. No response has been received from the **Carrbridge Community Council**.
13. **Highland Council's Area Roads Manager** was unable to recommend approval of the original proposal. It was stated that the private access road serving the site already appears to serve 4 existing houses. In accordance with Council policy, before any further development can be served by the road, it will require to be upgraded to an adoptable standard satisfying the requirements of the Council's Guidelines. The submitted proposal at that time did not satisfy this requirement. On receipt of the amended proposals, the **Area Roads Manager** has now advised that he still has some concerns that the road layout proposed does not satisfy adoptable requirements and that the development therefore offends Council policy with regard to the number of dwellinghouses that will be served by a non-adopted road. However, it is accepted that the proposed layout will now represent a considerable improvement on the present access

arrangements at the site. Therefore should the application be approved, he suggests conditions relating to a suitable private management and maintenance scheme, public footway reconstruction, and the provision of visibility splays and street lighting.

REPRESENTATIONS

14. Three letters of representation were received to the original proposal. Matters raised at that time include;
 - *Concerns about the increase in the use of the private access, its need for adoptable status, and difficulties for access for emergency vehicles;*
 - *Concerns about the layout of parking; and in particular the impact of the proposed garaging;*
 - *The impact of the proposed garaging on the privacy, amenity and daylight provision of neighbouring properties;*
 - *Need to re-establish the fence along the north-west boundary of the site;*
 - *Need for bin storage;*
 - *Concerns about the impact of construction traffic potentially blocking the access road.*
15. At our request, the applicant's agent has re-notified neighbours, on the amended proposals. At the time of writing, no further representations have been received.
16. In addition, the applicant's agent has submitted three letters which are considered to be in support of the proposal. They provide information on the justification for the loss of the hotel, the deteriorating quality of the building, the prohibitive costs of upgrading and keeping the hotel use, and justifications in relation to the amenity space provision, and roads and parking layout, as proposed.
17. Copies of all representations received are copied for the Committee's consideration.

APPRAISAL

18. The issues that this development raise, include the principle of the loss of the hotel and its conversion to residential market housing, and the detailed aspects of layout, design, access, parking, and open space provision, and impacts on neighbouring properties.

Principle

19. The loss of hotel accommodation within the National Park is not an uncommon one. We have been faced with other similar proposals recently. Nevertheless, it is important to examine these

on a case by case basis. It is known that the Struan House Hotel was a popular and well-used business in the past. It contained a self-contained public bar, lounge bar and dining/function room, owner's accommodation and 11 no. letting bedrooms. However, the hotel function ceased some two years ago and the applicant's agent has stated that the previous owners were not able to run the hotel as a successful business and ran into financial difficulties. The management of the hotel had also changed on a number of occasions prior to this. During this time, little or no improvements were made to the fabric of the building or the quality of the facilities offered. It is estimated that to bring the hotel up to current standards and to meet current legislation and expectations in the market place, costs would be in the region of £1.6m. It is not considered that the potential return from the number of existing letting rooms and the facilities provided, could justify such an investment. The ability of the hotel to expand and provide more accommodation to help offset these improvement costs, has been compromised by the sale, in the past, of parts of the original feu, including the property now known as "Aspen House" which was converted from part of the hotel extensions to the rear. Externally and internally, the building is beginning to deteriorate and there is evidence of water ingress in some parts. The property was put on the market with offers over £225,000 invited and no other hotel operators were forthcoming in bids.

20. Often the importance of a hotel can be gauged by the level of community concern about it's loss. In this instance, there has been no response from the Community Council, and the letters of representation received from neighbouring properties, raise no objection to the loss of the hotel use for residential purposes, but concern themselves with the more detailed, localised matters of layout and design. No other letters of objection have been received from the wider community. In addition, the CNPA's Sustainable Tourism Officer recognises that the Struan House Hotel has not been operational for some time, and that Carrbridge remains well served by tourist accommodation. It is not felt therefore that the loss of the hotel use here would have a wider or significant economic impact.
21. While the strategic objectives of the Cairngorms National Park Plan seek to strengthen and maintain the viability of the tourism industry, there are no specific planning policies contained within the Structure or Local Plans for the area, which prevent the loss of such tourist accommodation facilities. The site lies within an area in the Badenoch and Strathspey Local Plan where there is a presumption against "infill" development unless certain siting and

design criteria can be met. I do not consider that the conversion of an existing building constitutes infill development in this sense, and therefore the proposal does not compromise the terms or spirit of this protective policy.

22. To conclude, while it is unfortunate to see the loss of tourist and local accommodation and facilities, I cannot see any justification, in this instance, for resisting the change of use of this hotel to residential uses. In this respect, weight must also be given to the fact that this traditional building occupies a prominent location in Carrbridge. Being boarded up at present, it provides a negative visual feature which, if left untouched, could deteriorate more. Redeveloping the building provides an opportunity to improve the appearance of the building and retain its cultural heritage value to the village. Please also note that the applicant's agent was asked if some consideration could be given to using the proposed residential units for affordable housing or for retaining their use for the tourist accommodation market. However, the applicant proposes to offer the units on the open market. Highland Council policy does not require any percentage of affordable housing to be provided on developments of less than 10 houses. As stated above, there are also no policies to require that the loss of tourist accommodation is off-set by providing alternative tourist accommodation, particularly when it is considered that there is no significant economic impact on Carrbridge or the wider area.

Layout, Design, Access, Parking, Open Amenity Space and Impact on Neighbours

23. From the outset, I was concerned about the layout of the development. In this respect, I was concerned about the lack of open space being provided, and I agreed with some of the concerns raised by the representees in relation to the arrangement of parking, and the impact of the proposed garaging on adjacent properties. The Roads Authority was also raising concerns about the access and parking arrangements. At that time, an argument could have been raised that what was being proposed could be construed as overdevelopment and as such was unacceptable.
24. The garaging had been placed immediately adjacent to the boundary of the house known as "Carrwood". The house itself is positioned close to this boundary and some of its windows would have been blocked from daylight. This garaging also occupied an area of land, which I felt could have been used to improve the lack of provision of open amenity space for the occupiers of

the proposed properties. Following discussions with the applicant's agent and several alternative plans, the final scheme; removes all proposals for garaging; shows amenity space being formed in the open area to the rear, and within a small courtyard at the entrance area to Units 4 and 5; indicates 10 parking spaces and the provision of a footpath near to the access road junction; and retains an appropriate amount of space for access to be maintained to "Aspen House". Bin stances are also shown.

25. My view is that this is a much improved layout, which provides an adequate amount of amenity space and an acceptable number of parking spaces in a safe and workable arrangement. The removal of the garaging now removes any adverse impacts on the neighbouring properties to the rear and existing trees on the boundary of "Aspen House" can be retained. It is the case that the full requirements of Highland Council policy for providing an adopted road cannot be met here. The applicant's agent has demonstrated the most that can be achieved on the site in terms of the access requirements, and while the Area Roads Manager still has concerns, he concedes that improvements are being made to the current situation. It should also be noted that the access was used to serve not only the existing houses to the rear but also the hotel when it was in operation. It would have been possible to reinstate the hotel use, without the need to upgrade the access arrangements here at all, and it could be argued that the level of use of the access could have been greater. It should also be remembered that to resist the development on the grounds of the access situation alone would mean the possibility of having an empty, boarded up, traditional building located in a prominent location, for the foreseeable future.
26. The design of the refurbishment of the existing building is considered to be appropriate. External changes, particularly to the traditional frontage, will be minimal, with retention, repair and maintenance of existing features and finishing materials. The character of the building is therefore retained. However, a condition requiring more detail through the submission of working drawings is suggested.
27. One final point is that of bats. As a conversion of an existing building which has lain empty for a few years, it was felt necessary to seek a bat survey. At the time of writing, the bat survey has not been completed. If the Committee agrees that approval should be given for the development, I would recommend that, the decision notice is not issued until such time

as the required bat survey has been completed, submitted and found to raise no implications for the development as proposed.

Conclusion

28. The loss of the hotel is unfortunate. However, it is a business which ceased to operate several years ago. No objections have been raised to its loss to residential uses and there are no planning policies which seek to protect such uses. With the amendments to the layout, I am now satisfied the proposal represents an acceptable development which will bring a traditional building, located in a prominent location on the main road through Carrbridge, back into use.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AIMS OF THE NATIONAL PARK

Conserve and Enhance the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Area

29. Provided no issues arise in relation to the bat survey, the development has no implications for natural heritage. However, the retention and sympathetic conversion of the traditional part of the existing building, which is being allowed to fall into disrepair, is considered to be positive in terms of conserving the cultural heritage of the area.

Promote Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

30. Other than the re-use of an existing building for residential purposes within a settlement, there are no implications for this aim.

Promote Understanding and Enjoyment

31. Again, the development has no implications for this aim.

Promote Sustainable Economic and Social Development

32. The loss of the hotel is considered to be negative for this aim. However, this hotel has been vacant for some time and is in a poor state of repair. Carrbridge is furnished with an adequate supply of visitor accommodation and while the loss of its bar and restaurant functions is unfortunate, its re-use for housing purposes will help sustain the Carrbridge community.

RECOMMENDATION

- 33. That Members of the Committee agree, (following receipt of a bat survey, which has no adverse implications for the development proposed) to a recommendation to;**

Grant Full Planning Permission for the Conversion of, and Alterations and Extension to Hotel, to Form 5 No. Dwellinghouses, the Struan House Hotel, Main Street, Carrbridge, subject to the following conditions;

1. The development to which this permission relates must be begun within five years from the date of this permission.
2. That prior to the commencement of any development on site in association with the conversion of the existing building, full and detailed working drawings, as submitted for Building Warrant approval, shall be submitted for the further written approval of the CNPA acting as Planning Authority. For the avoidance of doubt, the required drawings shall detail all internal and external works.
3. That unless otherwise agreed in writing with the CNPA acting as Planning Authority, all existing windows shall be retained, repaired and upgraded as necessary. Any proposal to replace the existing windows, shall be first agreed in writing with the CNPA acting as Planning Authority, prior to installation, and following the submission of detailed information/specifications for the proposed replacement windows (samples may be required).
4. That during the construction of the development hereby approved, unrestricted access for all vehicles, including service vehicles, through the site, to the existing houses to the rear, shall be retained at all times.
5. That unless otherwise agreed in writing with the CNPA acting as Planning Authority, the provision and layout of car parking

spaces, amenity space, bin stores, and footpaths shall be as shown on the approved site plan (Job reference 07/2012, Drawing No. 07, July 2008). The car parking, amenity space, bin stores, and footpaths shall all be completed and available for use, prior to the occupation of the residential units hereby approved.

6. In addition to Condition No. 5 above, the internal road shall be constructed in accordance with the approved site plan (Job reference 07/2012. Drawing No. 07, July 2008). Construction, shall, as far as reasonably possible, comply with the requirements for a minor access as detailed in Highland Council's Road Guidelines for New Developments.
7. That prior to the occupation of the residential units hereby approved, a detailed scheme for the private management and maintenance of the communal amenity space areas within the development, shall be formulated and submitted for the further written approval of the CNPA acting as Planning Authority. Thereafter, the agreed management and maintenance scheme shall be implemented in perpetuity, to the satisfaction of the CNPA acting as Planning Authority.
8. That prior to the occupation of the residential units hereby approved, a detailed private management and maintenance agreement to ensure the appropriate long term management and maintenance of the internal access road and parking areas, shall be formulated and submitted for the further written approval of the CNPA acting as Planning Authority, following consultation with Highland Council's Area Roads Manager. Thereafter, the agreed management and maintenance scheme shall be implemented, in perpetuity, to the satisfaction of the CNPA acting as Planning Authority and Highland Council's Area Roads Manager. Such a scheme shall also include details of surface water drainage, which shall accord with the SUDS principles contained within the SUDS Design Manual for Scotland and Northern Ireland, CIRIA C521 2000.
9. That the public footway fronting the site along Main Street, shall be reconstructed, as required, in consultation with, and to the satisfaction of, Highland Council's Area Roads Manager.
10. That visibility splays of not less than 2.5 metres by 70 metres shall be provided in both directions at the junction of the existing access and the public road, prior to the occupation of the development hereby approved and thereafter maintained free

from any obstructions exceeding a height of 1 metre above the adjacent road channel level.

11. That street lighting within the development hereby approved, shall be provided, as required, in consultation with, and to the satisfaction of, Highland Council's Area Lighting Engineer.

ADVICE NOTES

- 1. The applicant is advised of the need to comply with the legal requirements of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) during construction. This is in relation, in particular, to the protection of bats and breeding birds.*
- 2. In addition, in the interests of biodiversity and to enhance the natural heritage of the area, the applicant is encouraged to incorporate within the design details of the building, opportunities for wildlife and ecological enhancement, such as bat roosts and bird nests.*
- 3. The applicant is advised that prior to any work of excavation or surfacing starting within 2 metres of the public road edge a road opening permit is required from Highland Council as Roads Authority.*

Neil Stewart

6 August 2008

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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.