
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: REPORT ON CALLED-IN PLANNING APPLICATION

Prepared by: NEIL STEWART (PLANNER, DEVELOPMENT CONTROL)

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED: SITING OF ADDITIONAL STAFF CARAVAN, AT LAGGAN COUNTRY HOUSE HOTEL, LAGGAN (FULL PLANNING PERMISSION)

REFERENCE: 04/379/CP

APPLICANT: LAGGAN COUNTRY HOUSE HOTEL, LAGGAN, By NEWTONMORE, C/o LESLIE HUTT ARCHITECT, 3 VIEW PLACE, INVERNESS

DATE CALLED-IN: 30 July 2004



Fig. 1 - Location Plan

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL

1. This application is for the siting of a caravan to accommodate staff, within the grounds of the Laggan Country House Hotel which lies on the east side of Laggan. It is proposed that the caravan be sited there for a temporary period of 3 years. The Hotel is adjacent to the public road (A86), on rising ground, and the proposed caravan is already on site adjacent to 2 existing mobile home type units, used for staff and manager accommodation. Some trees exist around the area of the temporary accommodation, providing some screening from the main public viewing points towards the hotel site. The staff accommodation is within a fenced off area, approximately 50metres away (on the east side) from the main hotel building. The new caravan unit is smaller than the existing units, and is approximately 5 metres in length. Drainage is to the same septic tank and soakaway system currently used for the existing staff accommodation.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONTEXT

2. **Highland Structure Plan 2001, Policy G2 (Design for Sustainability)** sets out certain criteria against which proposed developments will be assessed. These include the extent to which they; demonstrate sensitive siting and high quality design in keeping with the local character and historic and natural environment and; maximise energy efficiency in terms of location, layout and design, including the utilisation of renewable sources of energy. **Policy H3 (Housing in the Countryside)** allows for the development of housing in the countryside to support the viability of rural communities experiencing difficulties maintaining population and services.
3. In the **Badenoch and Strathspey Local Plan 1997**, the site lies within the Restricted Countryside Area, outside the settlement of Laggan. Nature conservation policy areas and amenity woodland areas lie close to the application site. **Policy 2.1.2.3 (Restricted Countryside Areas)** states that there will be a strong presumption maintained against new houses in the Restricted Countryside, except where a house is essential for the management of land, related family and occupational reasons. **Policy 2.2.9 (Tourism and Recreation)** states that these activities will make a vital contribution to the economy, and the priority is to ensure that broadening the range and quality of facilities and accommodation is balanced with protecting the area's exceptional scenic and heritage resources. **Policy 2.2.10 (Tourism)**, encourages the development of tourist accommodation and facilities at suitable sites within or immediately adjoining communities. Priority is to be given to expansion of existing facilities, and development is to be compatible with adjoining land uses and should associate well with the prevailing pattern of building, or be well-absorbed visually by landform or trees.

CONSULTATIONS

4. SEPA have advised that since this is a temporary development they have no objections to the use of the existing septic tank and soakaway system for foul drainage, provided the caravan remains under the same ownership as the hotel, and that the terms of the Building Standards (Scotland) Regulations 1990 are met.

REPRESENTATIONS

5. No representations have been received.

APPRAISAL

6. The proposed caravan accommodation is to meet a temporary need at the hotel, where there is to be new investment in the operation and facilities at the premises. The applicant has indicated that there is a proposal to build permanent staff and management accommodation as part of this new investment in the hotel, and these plans are presently being developed, with a submission for planning permission in the near future. Three years is required for the temporary accommodation during the period of the development of the permanent accommodation. Draft plans of a new staff accommodation block have been prepared by an architect and are currently the subject of discussion between the client and architect. Planning policies seek to encourage the improvement in the level and quality of tourist and recreational facilities in the area. The draft proposals indicate that the applicants are providing a level of commitment to the development of the business and are looking to invest in its future. This is, in principle, positive in terms of these planning policies and the aims of the National Park.
7. Large caravans/mobile home units are not usually considered to be suitable for locating in open countryside. The design, materials and colour of such units are not generally seen as being sensitive to such areas. However, the siting of this caravan, is visually separated from the main hotel premises, and there is tree cover to the east and south sides which limits the overall visibility of the caravan, and the other mobile home units, from the surrounding countryside.
8. In terms of design quality, the proposal does not meet the general thrust of planning policy. In addition, in terms of the overall sustainability objectives of the Highland Structure Plan, the use of a caravan for habitation is not seen as maximising the quality of housing, the standards of health, the use of renewable resources or the efficient use of energy. In relation to the aims of the National Park such accommodation seems even less appropriate, other than for exceptional circumstances. However, I am satisfied that, in this instance, there are exceptional circumstances. The need for the accommodation is a temporary need. The temporary siting and use of the caravan will allow the hotel business itself to continue to operate efficiently, but only for the period while new permanent accommodation is being developed. The initial plans

for the manager and staff accommodation, demonstrate a potentially significant investment in the business and an improvement on the present grouping of mobile/caravan style structures. Providing permanent accommodation will help sustain the viability of this tourist related business but the provision of temporary accommodation will help sustain the business in the meantime. Subject therefore to a specific limited time period, and subject to ensuring that the usage and ownership of the caravan is related to the operation of the hotel business only, the proposal for the continued siting and use of the caravan can be supported.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AIMS OF THE NATIONAL PARK

Conserve and Enhance the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Area

9. A caravan of this type is not normally appropriate for a rural location on the grounds that it could detract from the character and amenity of the countryside. However, the caravan is for a temporary period only and there is a proven need for staff accommodation at this hotel on a temporary basis. The location of the site is such that it is well screened and its landscape impact is therefore minimal.

Promote Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

10. The proposal will result in hotel staff being able to be accommodated on site, thus reducing the need to travel to their workplace. However, the use of a caravan for habitation is not viewed as being sustainable in the long term, due to its failure to maximise the use of energy and renewable resources.

Promote Understanding and Enjoyment of the Area

11. The caravan is to provide a short term solution to the provision of staff accommodation at an existing hotel. This hotel business relies on visitors to the Park.

Promote Sustainable Economic and Social Development of the Area

12. Providing staff accommodation for an existing hotel business is highly desirable, especially in a rural area where local and seasonal accommodation is not readily available for the employees of such a business. Whilst the design, financing and construction of more permanent accommodation for the management and staff of the hotel is being put together and implemented, temporary accommodation would seem essential for the continued operation of the business. In the longer term the provision of quality permanent accommodation may ensure a more sustainable hotel enterprise for visitors and tourists which may benefit the economic development of the community as well as the hotel owners and their staff.

RECOMMENDATION

13. That Members of the Committee support a recommendation to:

Grant Full Planning Permission for the Temporary Siting of a Caravan at the Laggan Country House Hotel, Laggan, subject to the following conditions:-

- i. That the planning permission hereby granted is for a limited period of 3 years from the date of this consent, and at the end of this period the caravan shall be removed from the site and, unless otherwise agreed in writing, the land restored to its former condition to the satisfaction of the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Planning Authority.
- ii. That the planning permission hereby granted is personal to the owners of the Laggan Country House Hotel only and the caravan shall not be disposed of separately from the existing hotel business.
- iii. That the occupation of the caravan shall be for staff employed in the adjacent hotel business only, and shall not be let or sub-let to any other individuals, for any other purpose, at any time.

Reasons for the conditions:

- i. The caravan is a temporary structure and is only acceptable in this location as an exceptional temporary expedient.
- ii. In order to retain special control of the development; the site lies in a countryside area where it may be inappropriate to have a caravan independent of the hotel business.
- iii. In order to define the permission; the site lies in a countryside area where it may be inappropriate to have a caravan for any purpose other than temporary staff accommodation

Neil Stewart
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planning@cairngorms.co.uk