

Appendix 1

Charlotte Milburn

From: Katherine Donnachie
Sent: 10 May 2013 14:30
To: Planning
Subject: public info for website -2013/0092/DET Braemar mountain sports supporting statement

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 06 May 2013 10:52
To: Katherine Donnachie
Cc: Don McKee
Subject: Site meeting

Katherine

Thank you for the opportunity to meet on site earlier today and discuss your areas of concern.

As I agreed prior to us meeting our team have carefully considered the points you have raised.

As suggested by yourself we have increased the vertical element of glazing on the elevation facing the street. We have introduced a screen on the Eastern end of the raised decking and would be willing to consider a short return along the front. The upper triangular part of the Eastern gable can be offset outwards by 50mm above a horizontal drip strip, clad and stained to match the upper gables on the existing building.

We have considered in depth the possibility of retaining more of the existing timber mill building and joining it to the shop by some glazed link. Whilst this could be visually attractive I do not believe the completed building would be as effective at achieving the objectives we are aiming for.

When the retention of the mill (which in essence is a dilapidated timber shed) was discussed with the main contractor, architect and surveyor all questioned whether the structure was fit for its intended use. The engineering loadings need consideration. The western side is far from plum. The building would be longer and narrower. Escape distances would be longer requiring additional exit etc.

The application we have with you has our sales floor and coffee shop floor at the same levels. The design encourages a free flow of customers between the two parts. If we were to make use of the existing mill building the levels are different by 820mm. Four, if not five steps would be required and neither I, the shop staff or our professional advisers believe this would work as effectively. Identical floor levels have been a key requirement since the design process began.

The current basement of the existing shop is too small to allow us to increase our hire stock and enable the diversification into attracting the modern adventure tourist to Braemar that we are intending. We need the extra ground floor space as is on our application. Whilst there is around 30m² on the ground floor level of the existing mill headroom is restricted. This area cannot be joined at ground level to the main shop as access is required to the staff accommodation behind.

Additional storage in the proposed new "attic" is important to us. As part of our policy of reducing unnecessary travel we are trying to dispense with our warehouse which lies 30 miles distant from Braemar. No staff are employed there. No staff live nearby. Staff will travel 60 unnecessary miles when stock is required or large deliveries expected. We do not want to lose the anticipated space.

No mention yet has been made of the instructors briefing room. This is of fundamental importance if our objective of attracting more people for residential courses is to be fulfilled.

As you will be aware there is an absolutely critical lack of accommodation for staff who wish to work in Braemar. Initial feasibility sketches on retaining the mill as opposed to current proposal show a reduction of staff bedrooms.

As previously intimated our mountain shop has been open every day of the year (except Christmas Days) since it was built 20 years ago. It is our intention to open the coffee shop throughout the year too. Obviously there will be very quiet times when it is imperative that staff costs are controlled. Our submitted design has taken this into consideration. Retaining more of the mill building would increase staff requirement due to its more spread out and rambling nature. This could potentially threaten our objective of offering year a round service to visitors.

Professional advice from our Chartered Surveyor initially questioned our investment in this project at all. Having surveyed and valued the existing premises he has studied our projected build costs. Basically we will be investing substantially more capital than the increase in site value will be. It was at this stage he questioned my sanity. What he had not taken into account was why we were making the investment in Braemar.

We started the business in 1986 whilst still at university. It grew. We initially sold the bunkhouse which is still in operation in Braemar today. In 2001 we sold three outlets including the mail order operation to another outdoor firm. Three years later this firm went into administration with staff redundancies. Turnover and service standards had plummeted. It was no longer financially viable. Braemar Mountain Sports Ltd was incorporated, five of the six shareholder/directors having worked in the business prior to the 2001 sale. The new Company bought what was left of the business back from the court appointed administrators. Many jobs were salvaged. The business is back on an even keel. It now has 35 staff within the National Park at its operations in Aviemore, Ballater and Braemar.

That said the management team keep careful watch of where we are. For some time the Directors have been aware of a weakness within the Braemar operation. We are now looking to take steps to address it. For four of the last five years turnover between April and October has not increased. When inflation (which ran at between 4 & 5% for a couple of years) is factored in the result is even more concerning. Quality of stock or service has not fallen but footfall has. Less people are coming into the Braemar shop. Less people are coming to Braemar. People are understandably spending less money.

The options are quite simple. We either reduce our costs by employing less staff or we attract more customers. New visitors to Braemar. The Company business model of combining coffee shop and outdoor equipment retail is proven. It works in Aviemore. (We sub let the area above our shop to a tenant who operates The Mountain Cafe). It works in Ballater where we have The Outdoor Store and The Bothy. Adding a coffee shop to our Braemar premises will drive more people through the outdoor shop. More footfall will increase turnover. Existing jobs will be secured. More employment opportunities will be created. That is the bottom line.

I am aware of the supportive report submitted by your Economic Development Officer. Thanks to him for this. I have considered his desire for more information. I am aware that it would be treated confidentially. I apologise however that I do not feel comfortable giving anyone

access to our business plan and financials. I have only ever shared this type of information previously with our bankers. I hope you can appreciate this.

I fully understand and respect your views that it would be nice to retain more of the timber mill. I agree it would look nice. However I believe that our proposed building too will look nice. I don't believe it will look like 'an extension'. We won a Design Award for the shop when it was built in 1993 and I think when our completed building has weathered it will look as it was designed and built at one go.

Whatever we build must fulfil the requirements of the business. I have given this considerable thought. If we were unable to gain permission for a building that was fit for our intended purpose we would not proceed with the investment. There is no point in building anything that won't be effective. The planned building expansion is for the benefit of the trading Company. It must be as effective as possible. The investment is primarily coming from the landlord. The landlord would probably be financially better rewarded in an alternative project elsewhere.

As I said at our meeting today we will continue to explore other designs with our professional advisers. These discussions will include the retention of the mill and developing alternative parts of the site. At this stage though I would like to confirm that subject to any non material variations we can reach agreement on we would like our existing application to proceed and be considered by your Committee later this month. I would be grateful if you could advise your Convener that should they feel it beneficial I would be happy to attend the meeting to answer any questions that might arise.

In conclusion I feel our proposal meets all the criteria in your design guide for The Park. I believe this is covered in our previously submitted Design Statement. I believe the streetscape you requested (which our architect prepared) clearly shows the building sits well on the site. From an early stage encouragement has come from within your organisation that that our proposal is exactly the type of project they would like to see within The Park. Similar expressions of support have come from within Aberdeenshire Council. Having studied the aims and objectives of The Park I firmly believe our proposal is contributing to both improving the visitor experience and will help make the economy of The Park more sustainable in the long term.

I sincerely hope you will consider all relevant factors prior to making any recommendation.

Please do not hesitate to contact me again if you have any further queries. I'll copy this to Don McKee as he has been involved since the early stages of our plans and in the pre application discussions we had with your authority.

Regards and thanks,

Colin Bruce