

---

## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

---

**Title:** **REPORT ON CALLED-IN PLANNING APPLICATION**

**Prepared by:** **Katherine Donnachie  
(SENIOR PLANNING OFFICER,  
DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT)**

---

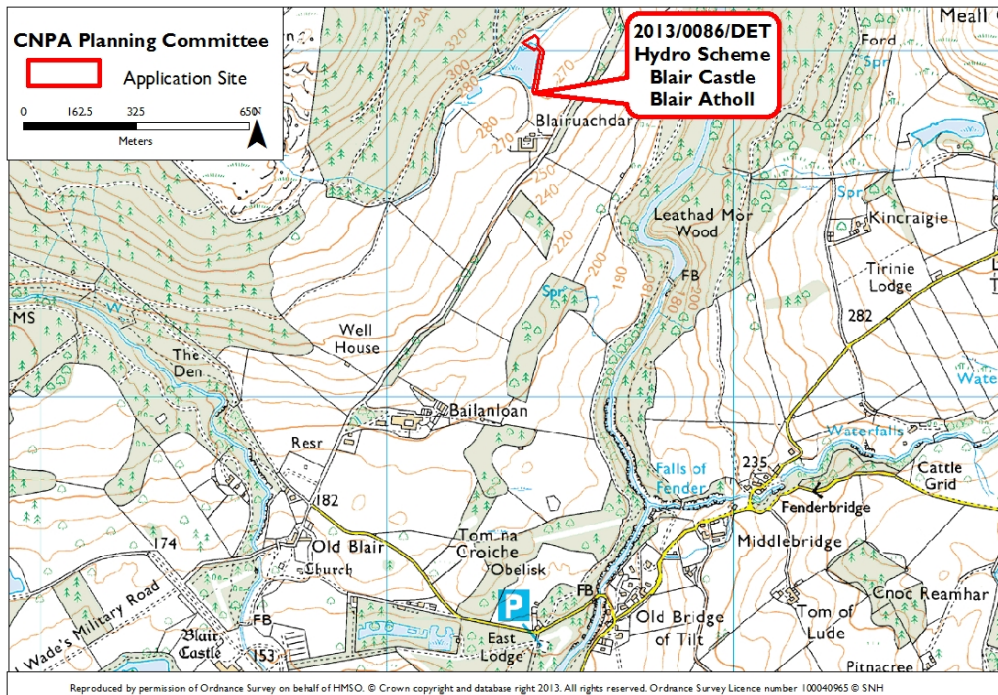
**DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED:** **ALTERATION AND FORMATION OF INTAKE STRUCTURE FOR HYDRO SCHEME AT BLAIR CASTLE, BLAIR ATHOLL**

**REFERENCE:** **2013/0086/DET**

**APPLICANT:** **BLAIR CHARITABLE TRUST**

**DATE CALLED-IN:** **18 March 2013**

**RECOMMENDATION:** **Approval Subject to Conditions**



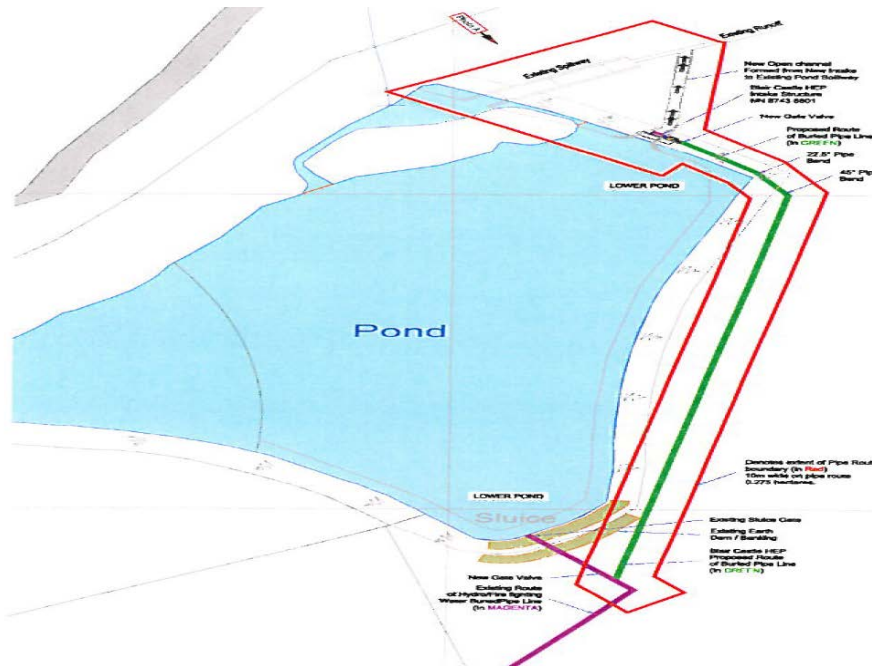
**Grid reference: (E) 287421 (N) 768025**

**Fig. 1 - Location Plan**

**SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL**

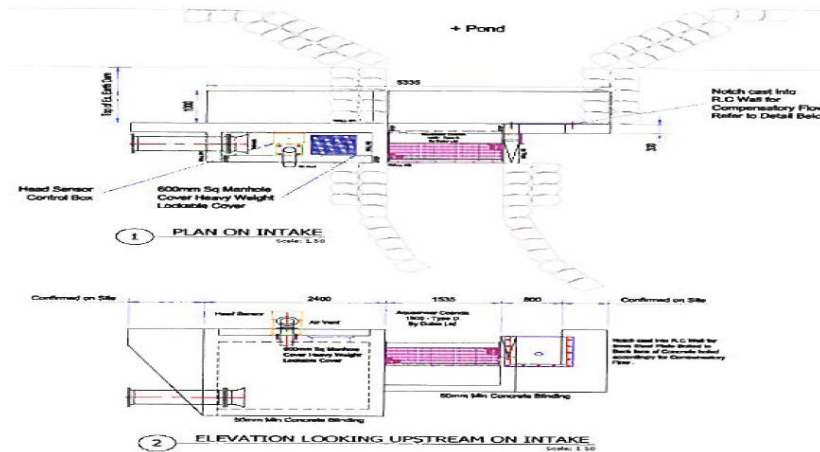
1. This application seeks full planning permission for alterations in order to reinstate a historic hydro scheme, dating from the early 1900s, serving Blair Castle, near Blair Atholl. The reinstated hydro scheme will provide around 75-80 kw of energy to provide electricity for Blair Castle, which is an important tourist attraction and historic building. This proposal basically involves reinstating the original hydro scheme for the estate which was also used for fire hydrant purposes, and is still used for this purpose today.
2. By way of background, the original scheme was constructed by Atholl Estates starting in the late 1800s when they built an aqueduct/drain to carry water from the Allt Slanaidh Burn to a holding dam with sluice outlet uphill from Blairuachdar to supply a water powered sawmill. A second dam further uphill in the woods was built later. Following this a hydro electric turbine was installed to the south east of the Castle beside the Banvie Burn supplied by these water systems channelled through new pipework from the lower pond/dam.
3. It is now proposed to now bring this scheme back into use by reinstating an intake structure at the lower pond at Blairuachdar which is the subject of this current application. (The next item on the agenda -2013/0062/DET -relates to the second part which is the reinstatement of the Croft Crombie Burn diversion further upstream)
4. It is proposed to re use the existing generator house, which is a block and corrugated sheeting building located within the Castle grounds. There will be no external changes, and the new turbine generator will be installed in this existing building. The existing pipework from the lower pond will be utilised so the only new pipeline will be a short section of pipework to be installed around the edge of the pond, within an agricultural field as shown on **Figure 2** below. These excavations will be reinstated.
- 5.

**FIG 2 SITE PLAN**



- The new intake is discretely located within banking at the east end of the pond and will be of simple concrete and stone design. The intake will be concrete and the spill from it will be formed by rock armour as shown in Figure 3 below. The existing sluice gate will be maintained.

**FIGURE 3- INTAKE DETAILS**



- The site is located at Blairuachdar pond which lies to the north east of Blair Castle. This site lies within the boundaries of the designed landscape of the Castle which is also a category A listed building of architectural and historic importance. This is a relatively remote upland location accessed by farm tracks past the category B listed Blairuachdor Farm. Areas of ancient woodland lie to the north west of the site.

8. No new access tracks will be required. The nearest residential property is at Blairuachdar some 135 metres to the south.
9. Supporting information has been submitted in the form of a short environmental statement which concludes that there will be no adverse impacts arising from the development. A construction method statement has also been submitted outlining how the works will be carried out to minimise any environmental impacts.
10. In terms of planning history in the area a planning application for a hydro scheme at Banvie Burn to the far south nearer the Castle was approved by Perth and Kinross Council in 2010 (reference 10/00665/FLL) It is understood from the applicants that this scheme is not now proceeding.

## DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONTEXT

### National policy

11. **Scottish Planning Policy (SPP)** is the statement of the Scottish Government's policy on nationally important land use planning matters. It sets out that planning authorities are encouraged to take a positive approach to development, recognising and responding to economic and financial conditions in considering proposals that would contribute to economic growth and has the basic aim "to achieve the right development in the right place."
12. The key topic in this case is renewable energy which restates the Scottish Government's commitment to renewable energy and notes that hydro and wind are currently the main sources of such energy. Further advice on hydro is contained in the Scottish Government on line information note setting out issues to be considered and the key role of SEPA.

### 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.  
Three long term outcomes for the Park are set out as follows:
  - A sustainable economy supporting thriving businesses and communities;
  - A special place for people and nature with natural and cultural heritage enhanced; and
  - People enjoying the park through outstanding visitor and learning experiences.

14. 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.

### **Local Plan Policy**

15. The Cairngorms Local Plan 2010 does not presently apply to the part of Perth and Kinross located within the Park boundaries as it was prepared prior to this part of the Park being included. Accordingly the Perth and Kinross Local Plan policies apply. These are contained within the **Perth and Kinross Highland Area Local Plan 2010**. Key policies are as follows.
16. Policy 11 –Renewable Energy which seeks to support renewable energy proposals subject to no adverse environmental or landscape impacts or upon residential amenity
17. Policy 19: Designated Landscapes seeks to ensure that designed landscapes are protected and enhanced whilst Policy 28:Listed Buildings seeks to protect the setting of listed buildings.
18. Policy 1: Sustainable Development which seeks to ensure that development is carried out in a manner in keeping with the goals of sustainable development.
19. Policies 2: Development Criteria, Policies 3 & 4: Landscape, and Policy 5: Design all seek to ensure high standards of design and landscaping.
20. Policy 13 to 17: Nature Conservation all seek to ensure that nature conservation and environmental interests are protected.

### **CONSULTATIONS**

21. **The CNPA Landscape Officer** advises that the site is within the designed landscape but is not visible from popular walking routes along the glen of the Tilt, further noting that the aspects of a hydro scheme which generally cause the greatest landscape impact are already in place, such as pipeline, access and turbine house. It is advised that in order to ensure the lightest possible touch in terms of further landscape impacts that details of the specification for the construction of the channels using site won stone are provided to ensure a natural fit in the landscape.
22. **The CNPA Ecology Officer** has no adverse comments
23. **Scottish Water** have no objections
24. **Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)** has no objections, noting that an application for Controlled Activities License (CAR) has been submitted to the Agency for this scheme and the one covered by the next

item on the agenda. They advise the scheme is potentially consentable under their legislation.

25. **Scottish Natural Heritage's** have no comments.
26. **Tay Fisheries Board's** comments are outstanding at the time of writing.
27. **Historic Scotland** have no comments
28. **Blair Atholl and Struan Community Council** have been consulted and support the application noting that it will reinstate an old hydro scheme, will not have a significant impact upon the environment or its attractiveness for visitors.

## REPRESENTATIONS

29. The application was advertised and no representations have been received.

## APPRAISAL

### Principle

30. National and local planning policies support the principle of renewable energy proposals such as this, providing they are suitably sited and designed. In this case the proposal involves the reinstatement of a historic hydro scheme to provide electricity for an important tourist attraction and historic building. As such the principle of the development complies with policies for sustainable development and for cultural heritage, helping to ensure the continued viability of Blair Castle. It is therefore the detail of the proposal which requires to be considered in terms of environmental impacts.

### Technical Issues

31. There are no particular technical issues with the proposal which largely uses existing infrastructure and does not involve construction of new tracks.

### Residential Amenity

32. The site is located a reasonable distance from the nearest house with no new infrastructure that is likely to give rise to disturbance proposed. Any impacts arising out of construction activities will be short term.

### Ecology

33. The proposed development has minimal impacts as, with the exception of a short section of new pipeline, it utilizes existing infrastructure with minor modifications. The new pipeline is proposed over agricultural land and there is not considered to be any particular ecological impacts. The applicant's

construction method statement also outlines how they propose to carry out the works with minimal disturbance.

### **Cultural Heritage Impacts**

34. The discrete location of this site is such that there will be no impact upon the setting of any listed buildings with Historic Scotland satisfied that there will be no impacts upon the designed landscape in this case.

### **Landscape and Visual Effects**

35. Again the landscape impacts of this proposal are minor, given the relationship to existing infrastructure and the small scale of the proposals. Providing the spillway from the dam is suitably constructed using natural stone channelling as proposed by the applicant, and subject to more detail being provided to ensure this is the case (as suggested by our Landscape Advisor) the proposal is considered to be visually satisfactory.

### **Conclusion**

36. In these overall circumstances it is considered that the proposed development complies fully with planning policies and with the aims of the National Park.. Reusing an existing scheme minimises environmental impact and overall the reuse of this historic hydro scheme is welcomed as are the benefits for Blair Castle and the local economy. Approval is recommended subject to suitable planning conditions.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AIMS OF THE NATIONAL PARK**

### **Conserve and Enhance the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Area**

37. The proposal is not considered to have an adverse effect on Blair Castle , or other important historic buildings in the area due to its location and nature. Indeed the purpose of the scheme to provide sustainably sourced electricity for the Castle should help to ensure the Castle's long term viability and continued maintenance, and hence will help to conserve and enhance the cultural heritage. Similarly the scheme is not considered to have any adverse effect on the designed landscape here.

### **Promote Sustainable Use of Natural Resources**

38. The proposed development supports this aim by providing locally sourced renewable energy which will be used to power the Castle. The scheme uses existing hydro scheme infrastructure which (together with the fact that the long term benefits of renewable energy are the sustainable use of natural resources) helps ensure this aim is met.

### **Promote Understanding and Enjoyment of the Area**

39. The proposal may help support this aim by offering the opportunity to provide interpretive facilities for the many visitors to the Castle to explain how the energy for the Castle is generated. It is understood that the applicants intend to take this opportunity by providing interpretive material and considering showing visitors the schemes in the future. In addition the location of the site, and the scale of the development will ensure that it does not should detract from the enjoyment of the visual qualities of the Park but rather may add to it.

### **Promote Sustainable Economic and Social Development of the Area**

40. The proposed development will help support the social and economic development of the area by providing electricity to an important tourist facility and local employer. There is also potential for construction materials and work to be locally sourced thus supporting economic development.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**That Members of the Committee support a recommendation to GRANT full planning permission for the Alterations and formation of intake structure for hydro scheme at Blair Castle Blair Atholl**

**Subject to :**

#### **(a) the following planning conditions**

1. The development to which this permission relates must be begun within three years from the date of this permission.

**Reason:** To comply with Section 58 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act, 1997.

2 No work shall commence on the construction of the spill channel until details of the specification of the structure has been submitted to and approved by the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Planning Authority. These details to include the use of site won stone and the size of this material, concrete formation, finish etc.

**Reason** – to ensure the development fits well into the landscape in accordance with planning policies.

- 3 All construction works shall be carried out in accordance with the approved construction method statement document no 3511-12 Issue A dated 22/01/13 with all excavation works reinstated within 3 months of



completion of the development unless otherwise agreed with the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Planning Authority.

**Reason** – to ensure that there is no adverse environmental impact in accordance with planning policies

4 No new access tracks shall be created in connection with the approved development.

**Reason** – to ensure that there is no adverse environmental impact in accordance with planning policies

### **Information Notes**

I – It is recommended that the opportunity be taken to provide interpretive material at Blair Castle to explain how the hydro scheme works and its role in providing locally sourced electricity for the Castle. The Cairngorms National Park Authority would be happy to assist with any comments on potential wording if this would be helpful.

**Katherine Donnachie**

[planning@cairngorms.co.uk](mailto:planning@cairngorms.co.uk)

**10 May 2013**

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.