
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: REPORT ON CALLED-IN PLANNING APPLICATION

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

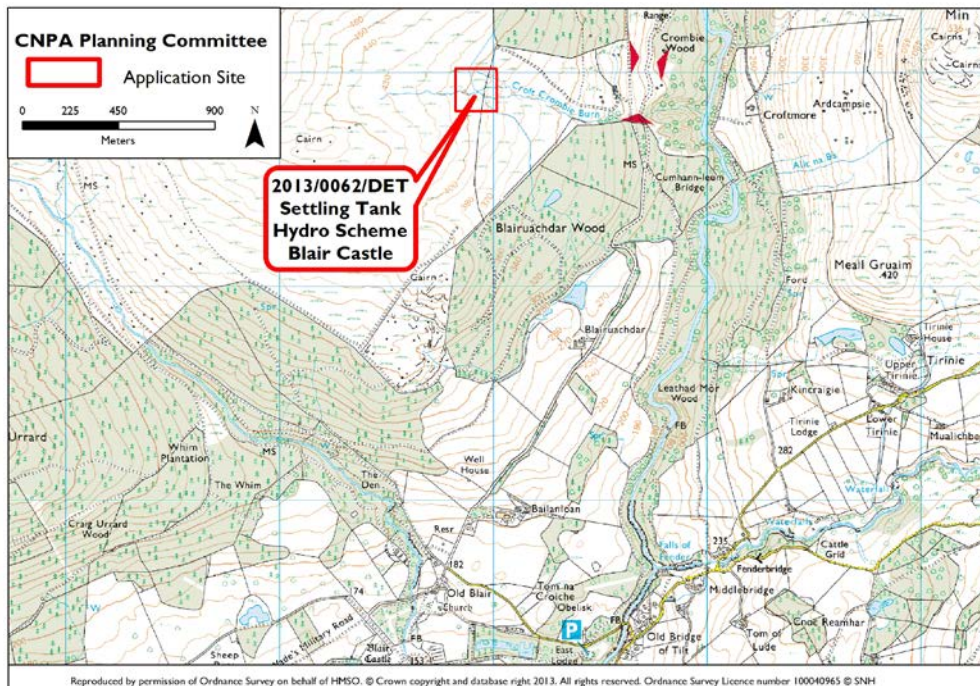
DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED: INSTALLATION OF SETTLING TANK AS PART OF HYDRO SCHEME AT BLAIR CASTLE, BLAIR ATHOLL

REFERENCE: 2013/0062/DET

APPLICANT: BLAIR CHARITABLE TRUST

DATE CALLED-IN: 11 March 2013

RECOMMENDATION: Approval Subject to Conditions



Grid reference: (E) 287275 (N) 769408

Fig. 1 - Location Plan

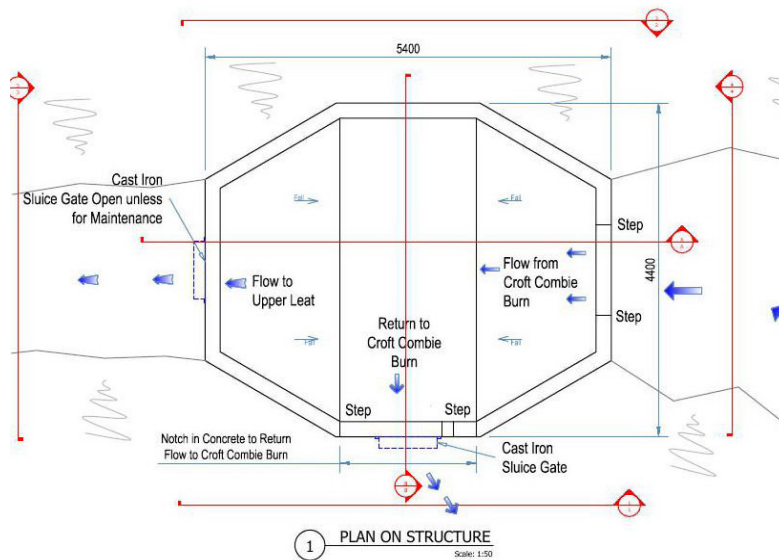
SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL

1. This application seeks full planning permission for works required 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. The overall scheme also included an abstraction system at the Croft Crombie Burn below the original drain and above the woods. 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 the previous item on the agenda -2013/0086/DET) and by reinstating the Croft Crombie Burn diversion and installing a settling tank which is the subject of this current application
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.
5. The current application proposes to reinstate the Crombie Burn diversion to enable water to flow down to Blairuachdar and the reinstated hydro scheme below. As part of these works a settling tank will be installed to settle out sediment. The area covered by the tank works is 5.4 metres by 4 metres.
6. The works involved are relatively minor, and will entail setting the tank into the existing channel and reinstating the abstraction to enable water to flow south eastwards towards the Blairuachdar system. The layout plan is shown in **Figure 2** below with **Figure 3** showing the plan of the settling tank.

Figure 2 Layout Plan



Fig 3 Settling Tank



7. The site is located at Croft Crombie burn which lies to the far north of Blair Castle in a relatively remote upland area. It lies outwith the boundaries of the designed landscape of Blair Castle which is itself a category A listed building of architectural and historic importance. Areas of ancient woodland lie to the far south of the site above Blairuachdar.
8. The site is accessed by continuing north past Blairuachdar, on the track leading to the estate rifle range then westwards. The site is accessed by minor

tracks across fields and then moorland which peter out closer to the site. No new access tracks will be required given the minor scale of the works.

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 not within the designed landscape and 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 a site specific method construction statement for restoration and reinstatement be agreed for this particular aspect of the development.
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** have no objection.
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. 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 at a considerable distance from residential properties and would not give rise to disturbance.

Ecology

33. The proposed development is considered to have minimal impacts involving minor localised works.

Cultural Heritage Impacts

34. The remote location of this site is such that there will be no impact upon the setting of any listed buildings or upon the designed landscape.

Landscape and Visual Effects

35. The landscape impacts of this proposal are considered to be minor, given the small scale of the proposals. It is however important, as noted by our Landscape Advisor to ensure satisfactory reinstatement is achieved and subject to a condition being imposed to achieve this, 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, and is located outwith this landscape in any event.

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 installation of settling tank as part of 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 development hereby approved until a site specific construction method statement has been submitted to and approved by the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Planning Authority. The details of this statement shall cover the reinstatement and restoration of all earthworks associated with the development, soil storage and order of replacement together with proposals to reinstate vegetation cover around the new structure.

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 and with the site specific method statement approved under the terms of condition 2, 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

10 May 2013

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