

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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

Prepared by: **ANDREW TAIT, PLANNING OFFICER
(DEVELOPMENT CONTROL)**

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED: **LANDSCAPE PROPOSALS FOR
CAIRNGORM MOUNTAIN CAR PARK.
INCORPORATING DRY STONE DYKING,
REMODELLED SLOPES, REVISED
DRAINAGE ARRANGEMENTS AND
ARTWORKS (FULL APPLICATION)**

REFERENCE: **04/119/CP**

APPLICANT: **CAIRNGORM SKI AREA**

DATE CALLED-IN: **12 MARCH 2004**



Fig. 1 - Location Plan

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL

1. The site to which this application relates is located at the Cairngorm Mountain Ski Area and consists of the car park for the ski area and its immediate surroundings, particularly the engineered embankments that surround the site.
2. The application is presented in the form of an artist's concept proposal and is part of the Cairngorms Art Initiative. In summary the proposals involve the amelioration of the straight contours within the car park, the regular slopes of the upper and lower car parks being reshaped to less uniform angles by exaggerating the existing curves in the car park. The addition of scree and boulders, and the introduction of heather, juniper and blue berries are proposed to replace the current semi-improved grassland on the banks, which are untypical of the surrounding mountain environment. Works would also include the opening up and naturalizing of the drainage works that are not under tarmac to create cascading burn features.
3. The proposal also involves the redesign of the all abilities path with an access to be positioned to better advantage for wheelchair users. The number of rest promontories on the path would also be diminished and would be rebuilt as drystone wall enclosures to replace existing fencing but with built in benches and landscape history tables. Each table would be a cylinder of stone masonry topped by a cast bronze three-dimensional topography of the Cairngorms landscape. A wind singing dry stone hut 3.8 metres in height and 4.3 to 4.8 metres in diameter is also proposed in the shape of an erratic boulder with a window to the northwest. This would be sited on the promontory closest to the car park entrance. Bronze bottles and tube flutes would be embedded in the structure at varying heights to create music from the wind. Stones required for the site would be sourced from the Alvie Quarry.
4. In relation to this application it is important to point out that some of the works such as planting upgrading of parts of the footpaths and limited alterations to slopes do not of themselves require planning permission. However, the cumulative nature of what is proposed means that the proposal constitutes development requiring planning permission.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONTEXT

5. **Policy L4 (Landscape Character) of the Highland Structure Plan** considers that the Council will have regard to the desirability of maintaining and enhancing present landscape character in the determination of development proposals, including off shore developments.
6. The **Badenoch and Strathspey Local Plan** regards Cairngorm as a sensitive area where there should be a presumption against non-essential development for winter sports. The Local Plan supports consolidation and upgrading within the existing lease area.

CONSULTATIONS

7. **Highland Council** have provided a detailed response to this application and consider that the proposal would add much to the area. However, a number of detailed concerns are expressed as follows including in relation to the lack of precise detail on many issues including the proximity of high voltage cables, providing power to the ski centre, concerns relating to retaining walls and how rocks would be prevented from rolling off the slope and the reduction in picnic benches. A request is also made for engineering drawings to show how the retaining walls would be designed to function in engineering terms. The applicants have subsequently provided details of retaining walls.
8. The **Highland Council** response goes on to consider that the applicant's attention should be drawn to the Construction, Design and Management Regulations as administered by the Health and Safety Executive.
9. **Scottish Natural Heritage** considers that the proposed development will have a significant positive effect on the landscape of this prominent location within the NSA.
10. In relation to European interests **SNH** consider that it is unlikely that any qualifying feature will be affected directly or indirectly and in **SNH's** view an appropriate assessment is therefore not required.
11. **Highland Council Area Roads and Community Works Manager** has no comment upon the application providing that parking capacity will not be reduced.
12. **Scottish and Southern** raise concern regarding the impact of the proposal upon high voltage cables and recommends a site meeting.
13. **SEPA** generally support the proposal but requests that a condition be attached to any grant of planning permission to obtain a detailed method statement for the development, liaising with SEPA prior to the commencement of any works on site in order to prevent water pollution.
14. The **CNPA Visitor Services Group** are confident that the work has been well planned and will make a positive contribution to the amenity of the area.
15. The **CNPA Natural Resource Group** consider that the proposal will result in a positive landscape impact. The proposal will help the car park to blend in with the surrounding area by removing the current straight-line engineered approach of the car park.
16. **NRG** also state that there are no particular natural heritage impacts from the proposal and while the surrounding area is heavily designated in conservation terms the site itself is outside of the Cairngorms Special Area of Conservation and the Cairngorms Special Protection Area.

REPRESENTATIONS

17. No representations have been received regarding this proposal.

APPRAISAL

18. The proposal essentially involves a range of landscape works to better assimilate the car parking area at Cairngorm into the wider landscape. In principle it is clear that the proposal provides positive benefits in this key location in the National Park, which receives a large number of visitors in summer and winter. There appear few drawbacks and all consultation responses are positive providing the works are properly carried out on the ground. The documentation supplied with the application confirms that car-parking capacity will not be reduced.
19. The key elements include the basic re-shaping of the car park to create a series of curved spaces to reflect the contours of the mountain this will involve the removal of the current straight engineered lines of the car park which are clearly at odds with their surrounding environment. Reintroducing native plant species and adding occasional sections of boulder and scree additions to the slopes and the opening up and naturalizing drainage courses to form burns would achieve this. Cross section drawings of typical retaining wall arrangements have been supplied which will use gabion baskets to ensure that slopes are retained. However, these will not be visible, as they will be screened behind dry stone dyking. A cross section of the footpath upgrade indicates 6 mm down crushed rock from Alvie Quarry for the top surface with 100-150 mm broken down rock. The footpath would be approximately 1.8 metres wide.
20. The application involves the redesigning of the all abilities path and the removal of fencing in favour of dry stone dyking. A range of features including landscaped history tables and a wind singing hut are also proposed to help widen the interpretation of the environment to the less able by using forms and sounds.
21. On a more detailed scale it is the long-term aim to ensure that new the new hard landscape features are colonised in the native biodiversity in line with the Cairngorm Biodiversity Plan. This would compliment more formal landscape planting proposals around the site including the introduction of dwarf birch, woolly willow and creeping juniper in the hollow adjacent to the bus circle in the lower car park. The dry stone walls would be treated with a nutrient rich solution to accelerate the growth of lichen and moss.
22. In terms of a planning assessment the proposals are viewed as entirely positive as they would provide an example of a development, which strongly contributes towards the aims of the park and accords with **Policy L4 (Landscape) of the Highland Structure Plan**. A range of conditions are proposed to ensure that the works are carried out in a satisfactory manner.

23. A concern has been raised by Highland Council and Scottish and Southern regarding high voltage cables that serve the ski centre. As a result of this the applicant has had a meeting with Scottish and Southern on the site, which included the marking out of all the buried cables in the vicinity to ensure that there is no conflict between the proposal and electricity supply.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AIMS OF THE PARK

Conserve and Enhance the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Area

24. The proposal can clearly be seen to enhance the natural heritage of the area, particularly in relation to conserving and enhancing what could be described as a degraded landscape formed by the engineered lines of the car park itself. The proposal also includes the intention to soften the surface of the car park in the long term and introduces plant species that are typical to the area. The proposal would also provide benefits in terms of cultural heritage by the removal of post and rail fencing which is generally alien to the area and its replacement with dry stone dyking.

Promote Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

25. The proposal would appear to be based upon the principles of sustainability. The planting proposals involve using species typical of the area and encourage bio diversity in line with the Cairngorms Biodiversity Action Plan. The booklet accompanying the application expresses a longer-term wish to reduce the use of cars to access the ski resort (although this is not actually part of the current proposal).

Promote Understanding and Enjoyment of the Area

26. One of the objectives of the proposal is to interpret the natural and historic landscape of the Cairngorms by means of interpretative features such as the aforementioned landscape tables. In addition the opening up of the burns around the site, together with the construction of the wind singing hut and improvements to the all abilities path will help to bring the landscape of the Cairngorms into the car park itself for the less able.

Promote Sustainable and Economic Development of the Area's Communities

27. The landscaping work itself would be likely to provide employment for local people and the materials to be used are to be sourced locally, so helping to retain the spend on the project within the Park. In terms of social development the interpretation facilities and the improvements to the car park will also help in terms of being a facility for local people to use, so will effectively also aid in the social development of the area.

RECOMMENDATION

That Members of the Committee support a recommendation to: **GRANT PLANNING PERMISSION**, subject to the following conditions-

- (i) The development to which this permission relates must be begun within five years from the date of this permission.
- (ii) A full report detailing the methods of construction and timing of construction and methods/location and storage of materials for all landscaped areas shown on the approved site plan shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Cairngorms National Park Authority, acting as Local Planning Authority in consultation with SEPA prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved. This report shall also identify all waste streams associated with the work and practices should be identified to minimise the use of raw materials and maximise the use of secondary aggregates and recyclable/renewable materials. This statement shall also include methods to prevent erosion, sedimentation and discolouration of controlled waters, along with contingency proposals. Measures should be incorporated to ensure that ant fuels/chemicals from machinery does not result in pollution.
- (iii) Full detailed cross sections through the car park at points to be agreed with the Cairngorms National Park Authority shall be submitted to and approved by the Cairngorms National Park Authority, acting as Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved. The development shall be implemented in accordance with that approved detail.
- (iv) Prior to the commencement of the development on site a detailed scheme showing the connections between the existing footpaths including gradients on the all abilities footpath and the car park shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details.
- (v) Detailed scale drawings of the landscape tables/seating areas and wind singing hut shall be submitted to and approved by the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Local Planning Authority prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved. The development shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details.
- (vi) Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved a sample section of dry stone dyking shall be erected on site for the approval of the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Local Planning Authority.

ADVICES

- (i) You are advised that the timing of the works should avoid periods of high rainfall
- (ii) Your attention is brought to the Construction, Design and Management Regulations as administered by the Health and Safety Executive as the works relating to slope moderation may be notifiable to the Health and Safety Executive.
- (iii) Your attention is drawn to the proximity of high voltage cables around the site. Scottish and Southern (contact name Jim Anderson) can be contacted on 01349 869232.

Andrew Tait
Date 17 September 2004

planning@cairngorms.co.uk