
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: REPORT ON CALLED-IN PLANNING APPLICATION

Prepared by: NEIL STEWART, PLANNING OFFICER
(DEVELOPMENT CONTROL)

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED: FULL PLANNING PERMISSION FOR FORMATION OF CAR PARK, CARN DEARG MOUNTAINEERING CLUB HUT, GLEN CLOVA, KIRRIEMUIR (RETROSPECTIVE)

REFERENCE: 06/202/CP

APPLICANT: CARN DEARG MOUNTAINEERING CLUB, C/O R. LERSKI (SECRETARY), BROOMIEKNOWE, MOOR ROAD, CERES, FIFE

DATE CALLED-IN: 16 JUNE 2006

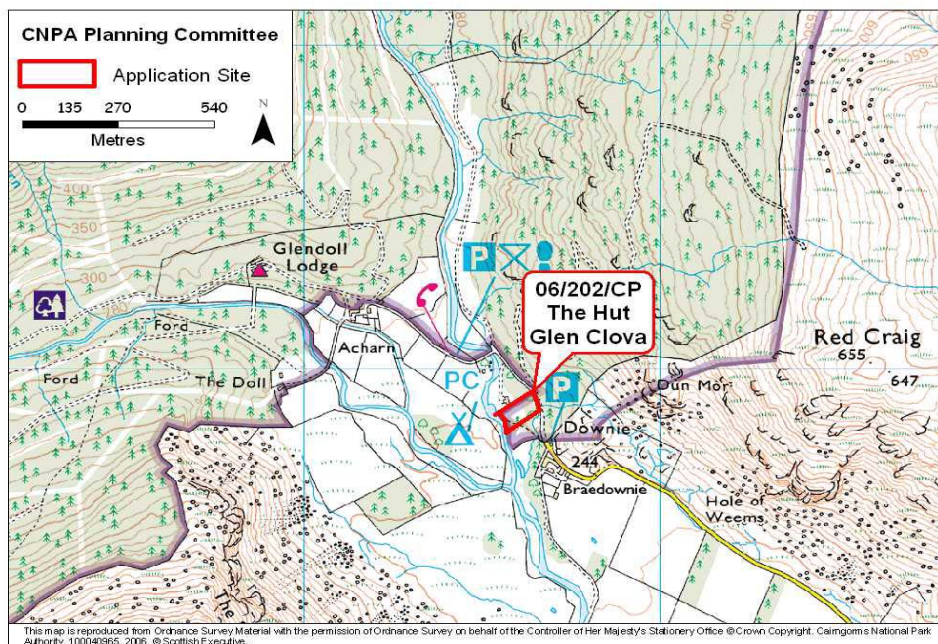


Fig. 1 - Location Plan

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL

1. Retrospective planning permission is being sought for the construction of a car park adjacent to the Carn Dearg Mountaineering Club Hut which is located at the head of Glen Clova between the road to the Glen Doll Car Park and the River South Esk. The site is located within an area of deciduous woodland dominated by birch. There is a stand of sycamore close to the road. The new car park is accessed off the existing road to Glen Doll. The access crosses a burn, adjacent to the road and then leads to the new car park which has been formed by clearing some trees. From the car park there is a footpath that leads to the Club Hut which is situated adjacent to the river.



Fig. 2. Access to Car Park

2. The car park is surfaced in hardcore aggregate, apart from the first few metres of the access which is tarmaced. It is located approximately 30m from the river. The edges to the car park are marked by a mixture of tree trunks, log rounds, stones and birch branch fencing. At the entrance, there are two timber posts with a chain spanning between them. The drawings, however, indicate a new 4m gate being installed. The applicants have confirmed that this is to be a timber gate. The access road also culverts a small burn adjacent to the road and some drystone dyking has been removed to form the access.



Fig. 3. Car Park and Access as Constructed

3. The applicants have submitted some additional background information. This advises that the Carn Dearg Mountaineering Club was founded in 1949 and has its roots in the Angus Glens. Membership is now largely based in Dundee but there are active participants from all over the UK. The total membership is 83 at present. In 1965, the Club gained permission from the Forestry Commission to erect a “climbing” hut in Glen Clova and the structure that was erected thereafter has remained in use ever since both by club members and other groups. The facilities in the hut are bothy style with sleeping accommodation on platforms for 18 people, a kitchen, toilet and wood burning stove. In 2004, the Club purchased the ground on which the hut stands and the surrounding space from the Forestry Commission, and there are on-going discussions about upgrading the hut to include shower facilities. Users of the hut include club members who can use it for free but other groups pay a small “bed-night” charge. It is stated that most weekends, someone is in residence, making use of the local Munros or climbing in the corries. Recently, the Fairbridge Charity, which offers outdoor activities to inner-city youth groups, have been a frequent user.



Fig. 3. Car Park and Footpath to Hut and River

4. In relation to the new car park, it is stated that car parking close to the hut has been problematic in the past. There was some space near the end of the public road but this has been removed and a turning circle has been put in where parking is not allowed. The Glen Doll main car park discourages overnight parking because of the possibility of concern being raised over a car whose occupants may not have been in the hills. It is for these reasons that the Club formed the car park in the ground near to the hut. It is stated that they took advice from the Forestry Commission regarding entrance and drainage specifications. It is also stated that they did not appreciate that planning permission was required and they apologise for the error.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONTEXT

5. The Dundee and Angus Structure Plan 2001-2016 (“Joining the Links”) is the relevant structure plan for the area. Environmental Resources Policy 1 (Natural Heritage Designations) states that development proposals within or affecting a proposed or designated area of natural heritage importance will be determined according to their effects on the particular interests that the designation is intended to protect. Where development proposals are likely to have a significant effect on a designated area of natural heritage importance, they must be accompanied by an appropriate ecological or similar assessment that sufficiently establishes the impacts on the conservation interests of the designation. Environmental Resources Policy 2 (The Wider Natural Heritage) advises that all developments must respect main features

and characteristics of the natural heritage and should contribute to landscape restoration or improvement, biodiversity conservation and enhancement, environmental quality, and where appropriate, promotion of public enjoyment and understanding.

6. The Local Plan for the area is the **Angus Local Plan (2000)**. **Policy ENV1 (Environmental Quality)** requires all developments to have regard to opportunities for maintaining and/or improving environmental quality. **Policy ENV7 (National Scenic Areas)** states that development affecting NSAs will only be permitted exceptionally where it can be adequately demonstrated that either the development will not compromise the underlying objectives and the overall integrity of the designated area; or there is an over-riding and proven public interest which outweighs the scenic quality interest. **Policy ENV9 (Landscaping of Development Sites)** requires development to have satisfactory provision for landscaping in order to assimilate the development into its local landscape context. **Policies ENV13 (Natura 2000 and Ramsar Sites) and ENV14 (National Nature Reserves and SSSIs)** both seek to protect the natural heritage interests of these sites. **Policy ENV54 (Angus Glens)** is specific to the Angus Glens and advises that development proposals will be considered in the context of other policies in the Plan but with a priority to projects that ensure the provision of local needs housing; or supports local employment and diversification compatible with the locality and environment; or conserve the historical and landscape character of the Glens. **Policy RT9 (Countryside Recreation)** states that development proposals for outdoor recreational/leisure activities in the countryside will be encouraged where they accord with other policies.
7. For information purposes only, the **Draft Cairngorms National Park Plan for the Future: Priorities of Action 2007-2012** sets out 7 priorities. These include (amongst others) conserving and enhancing the Park's biodiversity and landscapes, providing high quality opportunities for outdoor access, and developing awareness and understanding of the Park.
8. For information purposes only, the **Cairngorms National Park Consultative Draft Local Plan** places the site in a **General Policy 2 Area**. This permits development but only if it is demonstrated that the aims of the National Park or objectives of the designation will not be compromised. **Policy 1 (Natura 2000 and Ramsar Sites)** seeks to protect these natural heritage designations and requires an appropriate assessment in certain circumstances. **Policy 4 (Landscape)** advises that development that is likely to have an adverse impact on the special landscape qualities of the National Park will not be permitted.

CONSULTATIONS

9. **Angus Council Planners** have advised that, although retrospective, they consider this small car park to be fairly inoffensive and relatively well screened by existing vegetation from the public road. It also does not appear to be damaging to the natural environment. SNH will however advise on this point.
10. **SNH** have stated that they have no comments to make in relation to the application.
11. **SEPA** also offer no objection to the application and advise that they hold no data on flooding on this site and are therefore unable to comment on this aspect.
12. **Angus Council's Transport Department** have confirmed they have no objections and they do not suggest the imposition of any conditions.
13. **The CNPA Visitor Services and Recreation Group** have advised that the design of the car park and the quality of the design appear to be below the standard set by the Forestry Commission further along the road at Glen Doll. However, it appears not to be for general visitor use. Some improvements could be made to help integrate it better with its setting.
14. **The CNPA Natural Heritage Group** have stated that views to the car park are limited from outside the site by surrounding woodland. In winter, though it will be more visible. It is possible to see the car park from the river and from a limited, narrow area to the west of the site. When empty, the car park is not easily seen from any distance outside the site (particularly in summer). However, the vehicles themselves will be quite visible. They state that the car park has an undeniable impact. At the moment it is new and therefore quite "raw". The construction material has therefore not "weathered". There has been no incursion from edge vegetation to soften the edges and the culvert is still quite visible. The gate posts are very tall and stand at a point where the walls along the roadside are particularly low. Planting undertaken near the car park is mostly dead. However, they state that there are mitigating factors. The site is not highly visible due to the combination of tree cover and ground levels, and the adjacent site has an established car park around the building which is rather more visible from surrounding areas. The use of low key materials has minimised the impression of a highly engineered solution and further planting could in time reduce further visibility of the site. To summarise the **NHG** advise that the car park has had an impact upon the area but it has not significantly changed the character but improvements could be made to further reduce the impact. These include consideration of reducing the height of the gate posts, carrying out native tree planting, naturalising further the culvert and simplifying the edging materials to allow the natural incursion of vegetation. In addition, the **NHG** advise

that it is unlikely that the development has had any noticeable effect upon the spread of Japanese Knotweed. The Knotweed has spread naturally along the wall in soil that appears undisturbed. It is also common in the area well away from the car park.

REPRESENTATIONS

15. One representation has been received. The points raised include:
- *The development has been completed and is considered an eyesore which spoils the natural beauty of the area.*
 - *The site is in the Cairngorms National Park and close to the River South Esk SAC.*
 - *Drystone dyking and several native trees have been removed.*
 - *The area is not a "brushwood" as described by the applicant but a native woodland area.*
 - *The groundworks material brought in and moved about on the site is earth infested with Japanese Knotweed.*
16. **A copy is attached to the report. Both the applicant and the objector wish to address the Committee.**

APPRAISAL

17. The issues that require assessment in the determination of this retrospective planning application are the principle of the development in relation to the policy and the Park's aims, and the impact on natural heritage and the surrounding area.

Principle

18. Clearly, it is unfortunate that this development has been carried out without the benefit of planning permission. The applicants have acknowledged their error in this respect and apologised. The application is retrospective but this should not be allowed to influence the consideration of the proposal. It is necessary to assess the application on its merits and as if the car park and access had not already been formed.
19. The applicants have put forward their reasons for needing the car park. Alternative, but informal, parking arrangements nearby no longer exist and bearing in mind that the hut seems to be in use most weekends, for both groups and individuals, it seems a logical step to provide parking within the site of the existing long established Club Hut. It is noted that Angus Council's Transport Department has no objections and, in the interests of road safety and to avoid congestion on the single track road, in my mind it is of benefit to have off road parking.

The alternative could be informal and uncontrolled parking at locations nearby on other land or on the road itself.

20. The use of the Club Hut is not for the general public. Users are Club members or organised groups who would have a specific reason for visiting the site and have "booked" with the Carn Dearg Mountaineering Club. The activities of the users of the Hut are clearly linked to outdoor recreation and in some cases (such as the Fairbridge Charity) there are social and educational benefits. Generally, I view the use of the Hut as positive in terms of the Park's aims. Providing an appropriate level of off road car parking is seen as improving the facilities for these users and as such, I see it as being supported by planning policy.

Impact on Natural Heritage and the Surrounding Area

21. The site lies close to natural heritage designations. As pointed out by the representee, the South Esk River which is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is nearby. There is also the Red Craig SSSI which lies to the east across the road. However, the actual site of the new car park is outwith these designations. SNH have not raised any objections or comments in relation to these designations. The conclusion therefore is that the development has no impact on these areas.
22. The site does though lie within the Deeside and Lochnagar National Scenic Area. In view of this and the concerns of the representee, the visual and landscape impact of the development therefore needs to be examined. The CNPA's Natural Heritage Group have raised some localised issues about how the proposal could be improved in terms of its localised impact but their conclusion is that any impact caused is not significant. The treed context for the site certainly provides for natural screening and the materials used are low impact. The car park is also quite a naturally formed area rather than an engineered solution. The development is also of a small scale and while it has introduced a change to the character of the woodland area at this location, it is not isolated or overly prominent in the wider area. It will also "weather down" over time. I therefore take the view that the car park and its access point are not significantly detrimental to the local or wider NSA area in terms of visual and landscape impact. However, it is accepted that some improvements to the treatment of the car park edges, and the culvert could be made and that the provision of more native tree planting is required in order to provide a higher quality finish and appearance.

Conclusion

23. The concerns of the representee are acknowledged. However, I can find no planning policy or other reason to resist this development.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AIMS OF THE NATIONAL PARK

Conserve and Enhance the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Area

24. The development does not adversely affect any natural heritage designations or any feature of cultural heritage interest. Some trees have been felled and the car park will be visible from some of the surrounding area. It is not viewed as having a significant landscape or visual impact but the development can be improved by providing new tree planting and naturalising the overall appearance of the car park.

Promote Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

25. The development uses natural materials in its design.

Promote Understanding and Enjoyment of the Area

26. The development does not have a direct impact on promoting the understanding of the special qualities of the surrounding area. However, improving the facilities at the Carn Dearg Mountaineering Club Hut, is seen as beneficial to users whose activities relate to outdoor pursuits in the area.

Promote Sustainable Economic and Social Development of the Area

27. There are no significant implications for this aim. However, the improvement of the facilities, such as the car park at this site, may help increase usage by groups involved in promoting the social and educational well being of people, such as the Fairbridge Charity.

RECOMMENDATION

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

Grant Full Planning Permission for the Formation of Car Park at the Carn Dearg Mountaineering Club Hut, Glen Clova, Kirriemuir, (Retrospective), subject to the following conditions:

1. Native tree planting, of a species and variety, height and number (minimum no.15), shall be undertaken in the land surrounding the car park hereby approved, during the planting season next following the date of this permission. This tree planting shall be in accordance with a scheme which shall be submitted for the further written approval of the CNPA acting as Planning Authority within two months of the date of this permission. Thereafter any trees removed, or which in the opinion of the CNPA acting as Planning Authority, are dying, being severely damaged or becoming seriously diseased within three years of

planting, shall be replaced by trees of similar size and species to those originally planted.

2. That within 6 months of the date of this permission, the treatment to the edges of the car park hereby approved shall be revised. An alternative, more natural, method for defining the edges shall be specified and submitted for the further written approval of the CNPA acting as Planning Authority within two months of the date of this permission. For the avoidance of doubt, all loose boulders and birch branch fencing shall be removed.
3. That within 6 months of the date of this permission, the existing concrete slabs used to deflect the flow of water at the culvert shall be removed and replaced with natural stone, to the satisfaction of the CNPA acting as Planning Authority.

Neil Stewart

21 August 2006

planning@cairngorms.co.uk

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.