
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: REPORT ON CALLED-IN PLANNING APPLICATION

Prepared by: NEIL STEWART
(PLANNER, DEVELOPMENT CONTROL)

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED: ERECTION OF DWELLINGHOUSE AND GARAGE, AT BUCHAAM FARM, STRATHDON (FULL PLANNING PERMISSION)

REFERENCE: 04/256/CP

APPLICANT: C & E OGG, BUCHAAM FARM, PER GORDON GAULD, BANKHEAD CROFT COTTAGE, MIDMAR, INVERURIE AB51 7QD

DATE CALLED-IN: 4 JUNE 2004



Fig. 1 - Location Plan

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL

1. The site to which this application relates, is located approximately 200m to the south west of the existing group of farm buildings at Buchaam Farm. It is triangular in shape and is positioned on elevated land above the Mossat to Strathdon A97 public road. The site, which is sloping, is set back from the public road, to the north of a cultivated field fronting the A97, and has maturing woodland to the west side and another open field to the north. Large boulders and stone outcrops are located around parts of the site, and a stone dyke exists along the southern frontage. Some small trees are located at the entrance to the site and on the southern frontage.
2. An overgrown access track exists from the complex of Buchaam Farm buildings. This complex consists of a large farmhouse and a range of steading buildings. To the north of the steadings and fairly close, are a couple of farm cottages presently operating as holiday lets. The present farm access passes these cottages, through the farm steading buildings, past the rear of the farmhouse, and continues on to the application site.
3. The site is located where it is stated that there was previously a small house (no longer visible). A new one and a half storey house (4 bedroomed) with an attached garage is proposed to be located just behind the smaller rectangular foundations of the old ruin. The new house is to have hipped dormers, and a hipped roofed porch on the front elevation.. The roof tiles proposed are concrete slate grey, and the walls will have a grey wet harl finish, apart from the porch on which it is proposed to use reclaimed granite. The windows will be mock sash and case with timber frames.
4. The house is to be for a full-time agricultural worker on Buchaam Farm unit, which extends to approximately 240.8Ha, of which 18.8Ha is forestry, and 56.7Ha is rough grazing. A report from an Agricultural Adviser at the Scottish Agricultural College advises that the principle enterprise on the farm is the production of store cattle (104 suckler cows, 4 bulls, and 70 store cattle under 12 months in age), although a proportion of the ground is cropped annually to produce barley of malting quality. On the basis of this, it is stated that the total man hours are 5,825 per annum (2,697 for cropping, 3,128 for stock). This equates to a labour requirement of 2.65 men. At present there is only one house (the farmhouse) on the farm unit, which is occupied by an agricultural worker.
5. Drainage is by a septic tank and soakaway, and a certificate attesting that the soakaway meets the BS standard has been submitted with the application.
6. Gordon District Council granted outline planning permission for a house on this site in November 1992, and this was renewed again in 1995 (expired in November 1998). At the time, the relevant policy was contained in the Gordon District Local Plan. This policy permitted the construction of single new houses in the West Gordon Countryside where the proposal was appropriately sited and designed.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONTEXT

7. **The Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Structure Plan (NEST) 2001-2016, Policy 12, House Building in the Countryside**, states that there will be a presumption against new houses except for a new house which is essential to the efficient operation of an enterprise which is itself appropriate to the countryside. **Policy 19 (Wildlife, Landscape and Land Resources)** states that developments which would have an adverse effect on regional/local designations, including Areas of Landscape Significance, will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that any damaging impact is considered acceptable overall or there is a public interest which outweighs the conservation interest.
8. **In the Finalised Aberdeenshire Local Plan** there are a number of relevant planning policies. **Policy HOU\4 New Housing in the Countryside** states that the erection of a single new house in the countryside will be approved, in principle, if a) it is for a full time worker in an enterprise which itself is appropriate to the countryside; b) the presence of that worker on-site is essential to the efficient operation of the enterprise; c) there is no suitable alternative to a new house e.g. through conversion of an existing building or properties for sale or rent in the area, which could fulfil the required function; d) the proposed house is within the immediate vicinity of the worker's place of employment; AND e) it conforms with Appendix 1 (The Design of New Development in Aberdeenshire).
9. The site lies within an **Area of Landscape Significance – Policy ENV\5. Development** within such an area will not be permitted where its scale, location or design will detract from the quality or character of the landscape, either in part or as a whole. Where acceptable in principle, development must conform to Appendix 1 and Appendix 5 (Landscape Design Guidance). In all cases the highest standards of design, in terms of location, scale, siting, aesthetics and landscaping, will be required.
10. Other policies include **INF\4 Drainage and Water Standards** which is to ensure the adequacy of drainage facilities, and water supply; **GEN\1 Sustainability Principles** which is to ensure all new development is as sustainable as possible and that developers give increasing consideration to sustainability aspirations in their proposals; **GEN\2 The Layout, Siting and Design of New Development**, which is to achieve high quality new development particularly of buildings, which respects the environment and provides a sense of place; and **Appendix 1, The Design of New Development in Aberdeenshire** which provides more detailed design guidance.

CONSULTATIONS

11. **Aberdeenshire Council's Transportation and Infrastructure Service** has advised that the existing farm access road to the A97 is well surfaced and the visibility at the junction is adequate for this classification at this location.

12. **Scottish Water** has indicated that a public water supply is available, but that pumping may be required. There are no public sewers in the area.
13. **The CNPA Natural Resources Group** has advised that the site is not situated within or adjacent to any designations. The site is located on grassland with a western boundary of conifer plantation. Being located in an elevated position with the ground in front falling away from the site, the proposed house may be very visible. They therefore suggest that the design and positioning of the house are important considerations in terms of landscape impact. However, they do not consider that the proposal has a significant impact on the natural resources of the Park.

REPRESENTATIONS

14. No representations have been received.

APPRAISAL

15. The application site is an elevated one, and the location is detached from the present grouping of farmhouse, steading buildings, and former farm cottages. There is no doubt that the farming operations qualify for more than just one residential unit. The Labour Requirement Assessment carried out by the SAC Farm Business Services indicates that the unit can support 2.65 labour units (on the current range of operations). With the production of store cattle as the main enterprise, an on-site presence (residence) is highly desirable for another farm worker.
16. The existing farm cottages (two) would be a possible location for a full-time worker to be housed. However these units have become an essential part of the farm's diversified operations since the early to mid 1970s. Over the last eight years Farm Diversification Grants have been awarded to assist this holiday enterprise. The Farmhouse has also provided some B&B accommodation since 1983. The applicants have indicated that the income from these non-agricultural businesses, are essential for the overall continuation of the farming enterprise in what is designated as a "Less Favoured Area". The applicants have also confirmed that no houses on the farm have been sold off since they took ownership of the farm in 1981 and that there are no redundant buildings on the unit.
17. Other sites for locating a new house on the farm unit have been explored, including trying to position a new house in closer proximity to the existing grouping of buildings in the landscape. All other sites (eg, to the north-west of the farm buildings, or to the south of the farmhouse) have serious disadvantages. These include the felling of mature trees which provide an important screening or landscaping function, the sites significantly "eating into" well-shaped agricultural fields, or them being too prominent in the landscape.

18. The principal disadvantage of the current application site is that the site is detached from the main grouping of farm buildings (steadings and residential units), however the site would not use any active agricultural land and there is a significant area of woodland (though in different ownership) to the west. The site is not visible over a long distance, along the A97. The woodlands restrict any long views to the west, and the landforms restrict any long views from the east. If the foundations of the new house are dug into the site, and if there is good planting carried out around the boundaries of the site, then the development will not be unduly prominent. In this respect, cross-sections through the site have been submitted. These show the house “cut into” the slope rather than “built out from” the slope.
19. The commercial woodland to the west will be harvested at some time in the future and some significant planting on the application site is needed for the medium to long-term establishment of shelter on this elevated site. The site plan indicates some new tree planting but it would be appropriate to seek additional planting proposals. The building up of the stone dyking along the southern boundary (a continuation of work started under the ESA and the Rural Stewardship Scheme) will also assist to reduce the impact of the new building.
20. As a house is required for a full-time agricultural worker, and not wishing to disrupt the sensitive economic operations on this diversified farm business, the application site would seem to be the best option to favour. The applicants have indicated that they are prepared to agree to a Section 75 Agreement to tie occupancy of the house to someone working full time in agriculture on the farm unit. This is required in terms of the justification stated for Policy Hou/4 in the Finalised Aberdeenshire Local Plan.
21. Any development of the site should have a number of conditions attached. Firstly the occupation of the house should be tied to the farm unit and limited to a full-time agricultural worker (or a dependant). Also, bearing mind the site’s location in an Area of Landscape Significance, there should be associated landscaping works carried out, including tree planting on the northern and western boundaries (to provide some shelter for when the adjacent woodlands are felled) and the southern frontage dyking should be upgraded prior to the occupation of the house. In addition, the roofing should be of slate rather than a concrete tile (the applicant’s agent has verbally agreed to this).
22. To conclude, the proposal complies with planning policy in respect of new single houses in the countryside and subject to the imposition of appropriate conditions and the S75 Agreement, it is deemed to be acceptable in terms of the aims of the National Park.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AIMS OF THE NATIONAL PARK

Conserve and Enhance the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Area

23. A new house on an uncultivated area of open ground will not necessarily conserve or enhance the local cultural and natural heritage. Nevertheless, the site which is not subject to any natural heritage designations has a landscape context and will not be seen as isolated or unrelated to any existing feature. Landscape impacts are mitigated by the manner in which the site is being developed and by the requirement for further tree planting. In the distant past there would appear to have been a building on the site – likely to have been a small house due to the existence of an access to it from the farm adjacent. It could therefore be argued that the residential use of the site is being restored.

Promote Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

24. The applicants are hoping to reuse some of the reclaimed granite from the remains of the ruin on the site (barely visible) on the walls of the porch on the frontage of the new house. Other local stone will be used for the improvements/upgrading of the dyke along the southern/south-eastern frontage of the site.

Promote Understanding and Enjoyment of the Area

25. Not applicable to this application.

Promote Sustainable Economic and Social Development of the Area

26. Another house on this farm unit for a full-time agricultural worker and his/her family will ensure the continuing operation of this agricultural business, which is also diversified into providing holiday/tourist accommodation, contributing to income and continuing employment for others in the locality.

RECOMMENDATION

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

Grant Full Planning Permission for a New Dwellinghouse and Garage at Buchaam Farm, Strathdon, subject to:-

- (a) the completion of a Section 75 Agreement, restricting the occupancy of the new house to a full time agricultural worker on the Buchaam Farm unit, and**
- (b) the following conditions,**
 - i. That the development to which this permission relates must be begun within 5 years from the date of this permission.

- ii. That the occupation of the dwelling shall be limited to a person solely or mainly employed, or last employed, on the agricultural unit (Buchaam Farm, Strathdon), as defined in Section 277 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, or a dependant of such a person residing with him or her, or a widow or widower of such a person.
- iii. Notwithstanding the details shown on the approved drawings, the roof shall be clad with natural slate, unless otherwise agreed in writing with the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Planning Authority.
- iv. No development shall commence until detailed drawings and specifications of the proposed windows have been submitted for the further written approval of the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Planning Authority. The windows shall be timber and shall closely resemble sash and case units, including a traditional stepped sash.
- v. Notwithstanding the details shown on the approved drawings, the proposed light brown stain for the window frames is not approved. Exact details of an alternative finish shall be submitted for the further written approval of the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Planning Authority.
- vi. That prior to the commencement of development, a landscaping plan which provides for significant tree and shrub planting along the west and north boundaries of the application site, shall be submitted for the consideration and further written approval of the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Planning Authority. Once approved the landscaping proposals shall be completed during the planting season next following the completion of the development and thereafter maintained in perpetuity to the satisfaction of the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Planning Authority.
- vii. That prior to the occupation of the dwelling the stone dyke along the south-eastern frontage of the site shall be enhanced/heightened as shown on the approved drawings.

Reasons for conditions:

- i. To comply with Section 58 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act, 1997.
- ii. The site lies in a rural location where the Cairngorms National Park Authority considers that new residential development is inappropriate unless related to the essential needs of agriculture.
- iii. In the interests of visual amenity; to ensure that the finishing materials are appropriate to this countryside location.
- iv. In the interests of the character of this building which is located in a countryside location.

- v. In the interests of the character of this building which is located in a countryside location.
- vi. To minimise landscape impacts and to ensure the formation of a sustainable landscape setting for the new building beyond the lifetime of the adjacent commercial woodland.
- vii. To help integrate the new building into the landscape and minimise the prominence of the new building.

Neil Stewart
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planning@cairngorms.co.uk