
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: REPORT ON CALLED-IN PLANNING APPLICATION

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(DEVELOPMENT CONTROL)

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED: CONSTRUCTION OF NEW LINK SECTION OF ALL ABILITIES PATH NETWORK, CAIRNGORM SKI AREA, AVIEMORE (FULL PLANNING PERMISSION)

REFERENCE: 06/220/CP

APPLICANT: CAIRNGORM MOUNTAIN LIMITED

DATE CALLED-IN: 16 JUNE 2006

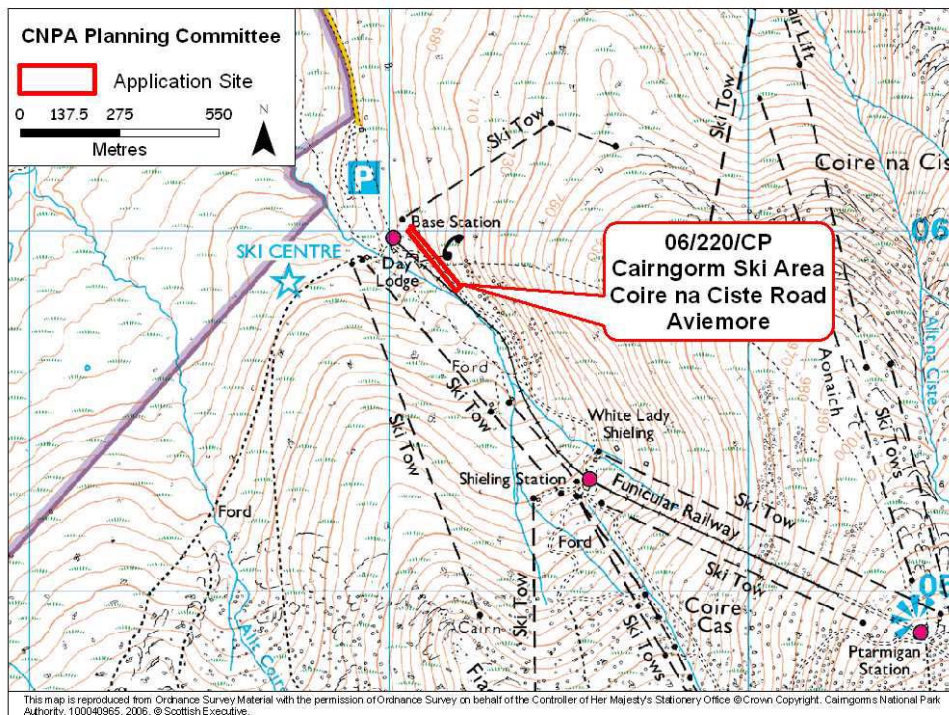


Fig. 1 - Location Plan

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL

1. The site for this application is the Cairngorm Mountain ski area, located in Coire Cas and within the Cairngorm Mountains National Scenic Area (NSA). The proposal is for the construction of an additional linking section of the all abilities path between the existing section of path directly above the car park and the mountain garden. The path is approximately 240 metres in length and 2 metres wide. The path is specifically designed for all abilities access.



Fig 1 existing path above car park, new path to fork off to left adjacent to funicular. Fig 2 View from mountain garden looking down line of proposed route.

2. In terms of construction the path will be finished in an aggregate material sourced from Alvie and will match the existing paths constructed at the site. The surface will be 25mm deep compacted, crushed stone, no individual stones on the surface would exceed 10mm and there would be an underlying sub-base to a depth of 200 mm. A cross-fall on the path ensures adequate drainage.
3. An amended planning application for landscape works in the car park area was called in at the last planning committee meeting. The planning committee also granted approval for a walking trail further up Coire Cas in October 2004 (CNPA case ref 04/358/CP).

DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONTEXT

Highland Structure Plan Policy

4. **Policy G2 Design for Sustainability of the Highland Structure Plan** considers that developments will be assessed on the extent to which they are compatible with a range of criteria including their impact on a range of resources such as: habitats, species, landscape, scenery and cultural heritage **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. **Policy T2 of the**

Structure Plan considers that the Council will support high quality tourism development proposals, particularly those which extend the tourism season, provide wet weather opportunities, spread economic benefits more widely, are accessible by means other than private vehicles and provide opportunities for the sustainable enjoyment and interpretation of the area's heritage.

Local Plan Policy

5. 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. **Policy 2.2.9 (Tourism and Recreation)** states that tourism and recreational activities continue to make a vital contribution to the economy. The priority is to ensure that broadening the range and quality of facilities is balanced with protecting the area's exceptional scenic and heritage resources. **Policy 2.5.10 (Landscape Conservation)** states that the conservation of areas of landscape importance will be sought, and development proposals will be considered carefully in respect of their impacts on conservation and the environment. Where significant, an environmental assessment will be required.

Cairngorms National Park Draft Policy

6. For information purposes the **Draft Cairngorms National Park Plan, Priorities for Action 2007-2012** includes seven priorities for action, one of which is providing high quality opportunities for outdoor access. This is a priority in terms of understanding and enjoying the park. Residents and visitors of all ages, abilities and interests need to be able to get outside and enjoy the countryside. Work within this area includes improving route provision and promotion and; supporting responsible outdoor access and management (**please note that this is not land use plan**)
7. **The Cairngorms National Park Local Plan: Consultation Draft October 2005** zones the area under general policy as a **General Policy 2 Area**. This policy considers that development will only be permitted where it is demonstrated that there is no alternative and; the aims of the National Park or objectives of designation and the overall integrity of areas, features or interests will not be compromised; or any significant adverse effects on the special qualities of the National Park or qualities for which the area, feature or interest has been designated or identified, or amenity or public health are clearly outweighed by social or economic benefits of national importance and are mitigated to provide features or interest of equal importance to those that are lost.

8. **Policy 4 Landscape** considers that development that is likely to have an adverse impact on the special landscape qualities of the National Park including: landscape character, scenic qualities; natural beauty; amenity; historic landscape elements; cultural components; or wild land character of parts of the National Park, will not be permitted. The planning authority will use conditions and agreements to ensure that all consented development in the National Park will be sited, laid out, designed and constructed of materials so as to make a positive contribution to the special landscape qualities of the National Park.

CONSULTATIONS

9. **Scottish Natural Heritage** has no objection to the development and has expressed support for the associated path and garden installations.
10. The proposed path extension links two important low ground routes near the day lodge and provides improved visitor facilities and enhanced opportunities for safe all abilities exploration. The proposed development site lies within the Cairngorm Mountains National Scenic Area and within the Cairngorms National Park. SNH advice in relation to landscape interests notes that the proposal is set within the existing developed area and is set close to various built installations relating to ski operations. SNH therefore advise that the proposed development will not have a significant negative impact on the landscape interests at this location.
11. **Cairngorms National Park Authority, Natural Heritage Group Landscape Officer** has no objection to the principle of the application and suggests that the lines of existing paths are used wherever possible. It is suggested that it would be useful to see an accurately plotted alignment and details of construction materials. (Further details have subsequently been provided).
12. **Cairngorms National Park Authority Visitor Services and Recreation Group** consider that the proposal is to be welcomed as it provides a good fit with the policies emerging in the Park's Outdoor Access Strategy. Namely, that routes should be developed that are barrier free wherever possible and there should be opportunities for people of all abilities to experience all the principal habitat types and landscapes that can be found within the Park. The extended path will enable a wider range of users to access the mountain garden and will extend the fully accessible path network at Coire Cas.
13. The proposed gradients and cross slopes are within the parameters that would allow full accessibility. There is however no mention of the path surface although the source of stone will match the existing path material. We would wish to see a hard, firm and well drained surface with loose material kept to a minimum and any remaining stones being less than 10mm in diameter.

REPRESENTATIONS

14. No representations have been received on the proposal; background information from the applicant's is attached at the back of this report.

APPRAISAL

15. The key issues in assessing this application relate to the principle of the path proposed and its detailed siting and design measured against any impacts upon the local environment.
16. The response from Scottish Natural Heritage notes that the site is located within the Cairngorms NSA. There are a range of nature conservation designations in the wider area to the west, on the other side of the ski area, but these are some distance away and would not be affected by the proposal. In terms of the NSA this is primarily a landscape designation. The protection of landscape and scenery is also governed by Policy G2 of the Highland Structure Plan. However, there are no policies or presumptions against the principle of an all abilities path in the area. In addition, it should be noted that the area for the works is close to an existing developed area.
17. In terms of the detailed siting and design of the path, the proposed line generally forms a link between the all abilities path from the southern side of the day lodge poma, along an area of ground that has been disturbed in the past. The path links into the upper part of the mountain garden close to a red telephone box. Much of the area where the path line runs was developed as garden terraces and used as a picnic site in the 1960's. In addition, as noted by Scottish Natural Heritage and our own landscape advice there are already a number of footpaths and structures in the area and the line for this path is generally near to other structures such as the funicular base station and railway as well as ski tows and fences. The landscape advice suggests that existing paths are used where possible to minimise the area of new construction required. Additional information, including typical cross sections has been supplied by the applicant's. The surface cover will be to a 25 mm depth with stone particles at a maximum of 10mm down to dust.
18. The proposal essentially links in with the all abilities path which runs along the top of the car park. This area is subject to a range of landscaping proposals to improve interest along this section of the path network and an amended application for the landscaping works was called-in at the previous planning committee meeting. While the landscaping works have connection with this scheme, they would in no way prevent the implementation of this path, or in any way prejudice any future decision on the landscaping scheme by the planning committee. Given this, there is no reason for delaying the determination of this application to wait for the landscaping plan to be brought forward.

19. The application provides an additional link to the all abilities route at the site on previously disturbed ground. Overall, the proposal is viewed as according with planning policy and making a positive contribution to the collective aims of the Park.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AIMS OF THE NATIONAL PARK

Conserve and Enhance the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Area

20. The proposal is for a relatively small section of all abilities path that will not have any negative effects on the natural and cultural heritage of the area, but will help to improve the visitor understanding and interpretation of the area (see below).

Promote Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

21. The proposal involves the use of local materials from Alvie in the same manner as previous paths constructed in the vicinity. The scheme has been designed locally and local labour would most likely be used in its implementation.

Promote Understanding and Enjoyment of the Area

22. The proposal makes a positive contribution to this aim in helping to open up an all abilities route from the car park, up to the mountain garden. This will provide an improved route leading to greater enjoyment of the area, but will also help in improving interpretation of the area's natural heritage because more people will be able to access the mountain garden.

Promote Sustainable Economic and Social Development of the Area

23. In a small way the proposal provides an improvement to recreation facilities at the site which would be likely, in turn, to encourage increased use of the commercial facilities at the site. In terms of social development the improved all abilities path will provide an enhanced facility for local people as well as visitors.

RECOMMENDATION

24. That Members of the Committee support a recommendation to:
GRANT Full Planning Permission for the construction of new link section of all abilities path network at Cairngorm Ski Area, Aviemore, subject to the following conditions:
 1. The development to which this permission relates must be begun within five years from the date of this permission.

2. The path shall be constructed to an all abilities standard in accordance with the details submitted.
3. Any ground disturbance to the immediate environs of the proposed path shall be suitably restored to a standard to be agreed in writing by the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as planning authority. The agreed standard shall then be implemented on site in the first planting season following the completion of the new path link.

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21 July 2006

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