
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: REPORT ON CALLED-IN PLANNING APPLICATION

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DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED: ALTERATION AND EXTENSION TO CAR PARK, AUCHALLATER, BRAEMAR

REFERENCE: 04/410/CP

APPLICANT: INVERCAULD ESTATE

DATE CALLED-IN: 12 MARCH 2004

RECOMMENDATION : APPROVAL

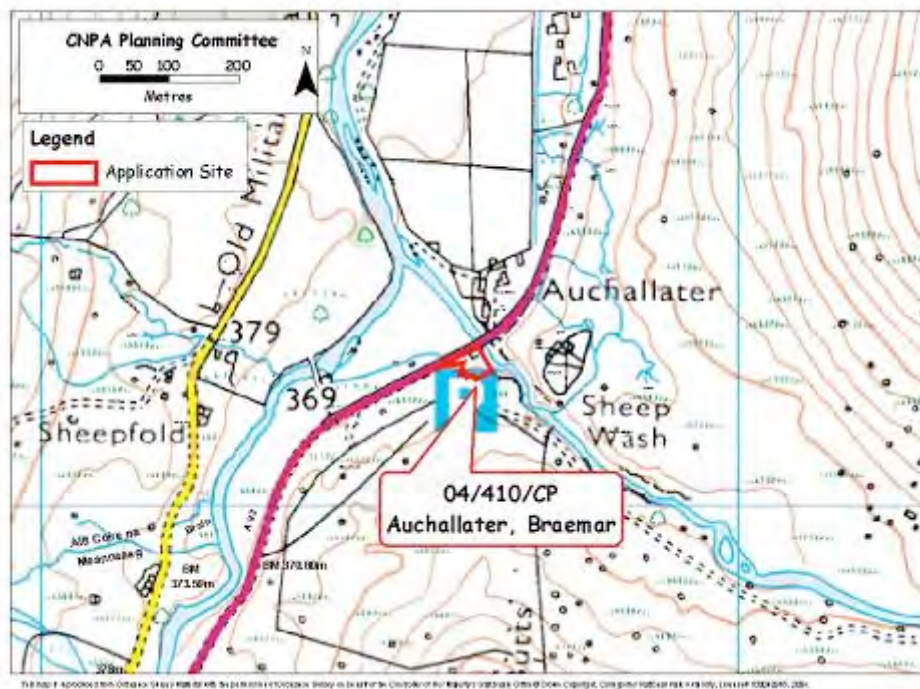


Fig. 1 - Location Plan

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL

1. The site of this application is an informal parking area on the east side of the A93, on the outside of a bend in the road. The site is immediately adjoining the road opposite Auchallater Farm. The site is bounded by the Callater burn running down from Loch Callater, the burn is part of the River Dee Special Area of Conservation (SAC), a vehicle hill track loops around the back of the parking area and heads up to Lochallater Lodge. The site is within the Deeside and Lochnagar National Scenic Area.



Fig 2 View of parking area from A93



Fig 3 View of site looking towards A93

2. The site is used to access a number of hill walks and effectively is the start of the Jocks Road Right of Way which runs across the Mounth to Glen Doll. The car park also provides access to a number of Munro's including Carn an Tuirc, Tolmount and Tom Bhuidhe.
3. The car park is informal in nature and utilises a flat area just off the road. Invercauld Estate would like to formalise and enlarge the car park as it is considered to be overcrowded on a regular basis. The original proposal included a toilet building.
4. This application has been with the Park some time and started life as a large rectangular car park in two sections with 34 car parking spaces and a toilet block (see fig 4). This would have resulted in a very large scale engineering operation to dig into steeply sloping ground to the rear of the existing parking area, the rectangular shape of the car park was also considered not to be sympathetic with the surrounding shapes and contours of the land. Another scheme involving a slightly more informal approach was suggested. However, this was still considered to result in an unacceptable level of landscape impact. The positioning of the toilet block on a promontory appearing to be particularly obtrusive.

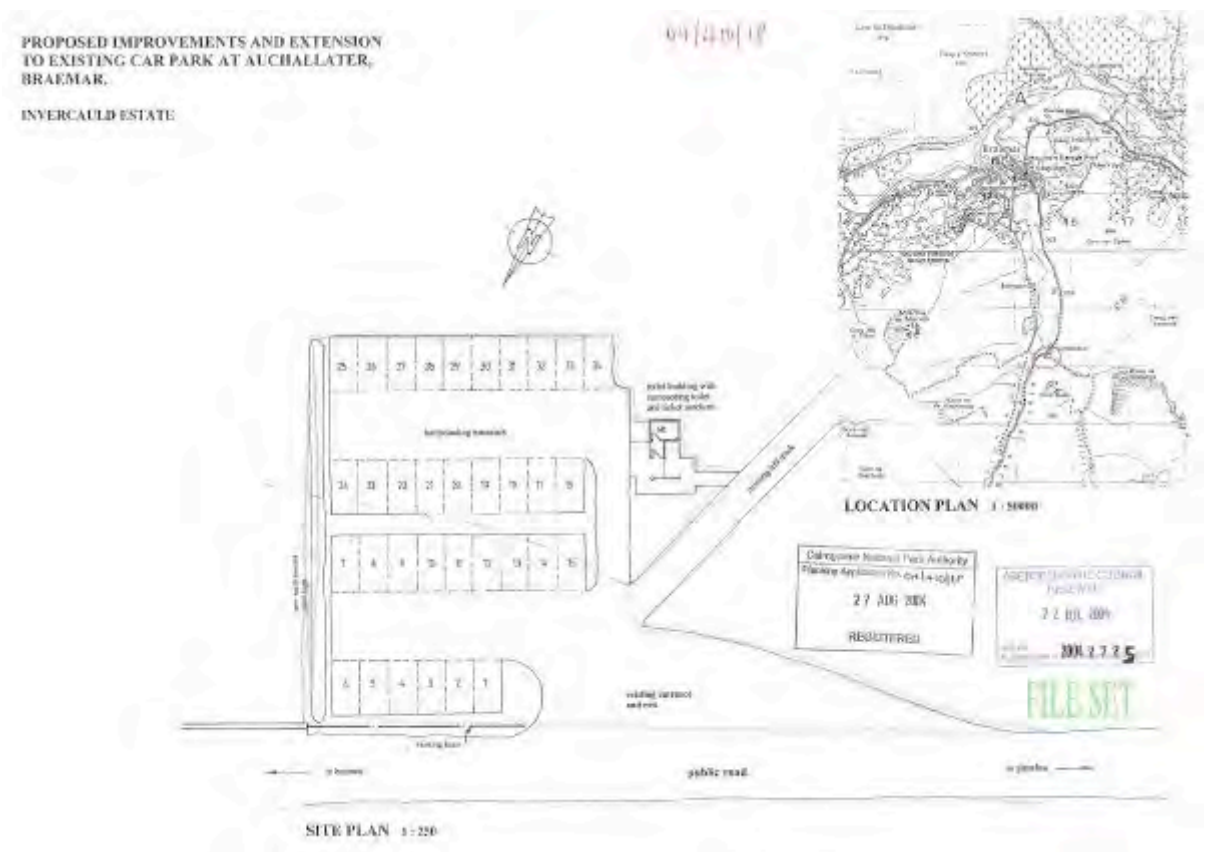


Fig 4 Original Proposed Layout

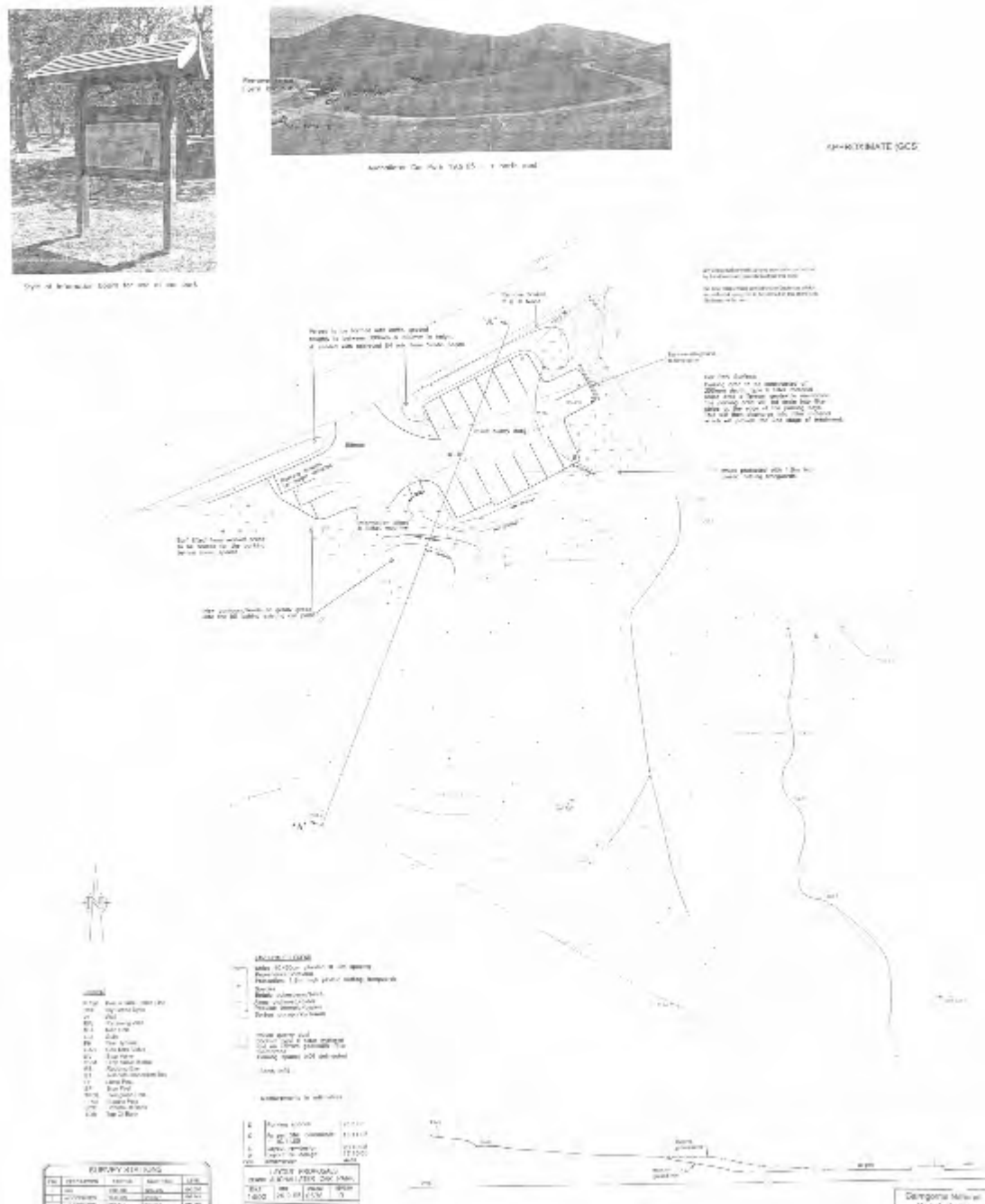


Figure 5 Current Proposed Layout

- As a result of detailed negotiation an amended scheme has been put forward which relies on the existing contours of the site to a much greater extent. The car park as now illustrated (see fig 5) will accommodate 18 cars including one larger vehicle. Some excavations will still be required, particularly for the spaces to the south of the existing car park. This material will be utilised at the front of the site where a concrete post and wire fence will be removed and replaced by earth mounding of up to 600mm in height. Any additional earth would be used on site to fill existing hollows behind the car park.

6. The construction will consist of a geo-textile membrane with two levels of surface water treatment and apart from the first 5.5 metres in tarmac the surface of the car park will consist of rolled quarry dust, the car parking spaces and edges will not be delineated on the ground. The proposal no longer includes a toilet block but does have a notice board which will also incorporate a small ticket machine. Some tree planting is proposed around the car park's southern edge.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONTEXT

7. The site lies adjacent to the Callater Burn which is a tributary of the River Dee **Special Area of Conservation (SAC)**, and within the Deeside and Lochnagar **National Scenic Area (NSA)**.
8. In the **Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Structure Plan 2001-2016 (North East Scotland Together, NEST)** Policy 19 states that development which would have an adverse effect on a Natura 2000 or Ramsar site (the SAC) will only be permitted where there is no alternative solution and there are imperative reasons of over-riding public interest, including those of a social, environmental or economic nature. Where a priority habitat or species (as defined in Annex I of the Habitats Directive) would be affected, prior consultation with the European Commission (through Scottish Natural Heritage) is required unless the development is necessary for overriding public health or safety reasons.
9. In the **Aberdeenshire Local Plan 2006** the main policy that covers this location is **Policy Env\1** (International Nature Conservation Sites) where development that would have a significant effect on a Special Area of Conservation, Special Protection Area or a Ramsar site will be subject to an appropriate assessment. It will then only be permitted where the assessment indicates that
 - (a) it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site; OR;
 - (b) there are no alternative solutions; AND
 - (c) there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest.Where development is allowed which could affect any of these designated sites, including beyond their boundaries, the developer must demonstrate that adequate measures will be taken to conserve and enhance the site's ecological, geological and geomorphological interest.

Policy Env\5 National Scenic Areas (NSA) provides protection to NSAs, only permitting a new development where its scale, location or design does not detract from the quality or character of the landscape, either in part or as a whole. In all cases the highest standards of design will be required.

CONSULTATIONS

10. **Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)** has been consulted on the proposal and have been involved in detailed negotiations to reduce the impact of the scheme on the River Dee SAC and the Deeside and Lochnagar National Scenic Area. SNH has objected to the proposal a number of times and various revisions and additional information on the schemes have been put forward.
11. However, a revised scheme was received together with a construction method statement and landscaping plan. After further changes and additional information SNH are prepared to remove their objection subject to planning conditions being attached to any consent that seek a method statement setting out detailed measures required to prevent the release of sediment into the Callater Burn. Provided adequate measures are identified to prevent siltation and that implementation of these works is a requirement of planning consent then SNH's advice is that the proposal is unlikely to have a significant effect on the River Dee SAC.
12. The site is located within the Deeside and Lochnagar National Scenic Area (NSA). Again SNH are content to remove their objection provided planning conditions are used to cover the following issues: location and type of filter strips to be approved by planning authority; final style, size and location of information board to be agreed by planning authority; landscape architect or other suitable qualified person be employed to supervise works.
13. **SEPA** have made specific comments with regard to the toilet block. However, this is no longer part of the proposal. Comment is made that a planning condition be attached to any consent requiring a site specific construction method statement. The statement should consider issues such as measures to prevent erosion/sedimentation or discolouration of controlled waters along with monitoring and contingency plans, timing of works should avoid periods of heavy rainfall and planting should be undertaken to minimise run-off.
14. **Aberdeenshire Roads** have no objection subject to the access to be formed being 5.5 metres wide with 3.5 metres bellmouth radii and the first 6 metres to be surfaced in bitmac. Measures should also be taken to discourage roadside parking in the area to the south of the access.
15. **CNPA Visitor Services and Recreation** comments that the site has been used as an area for informal parking. At busy times car parking can be problematic. However, there is no evidence from the developer that the proposal is need based. It is pointed out that the car park is used by hill walkers and mountaineers accessing Jock's Road and surrounding Munros. The Callater burn also offers challenging canoeing waters when in spate so the car park is at times also used by canoeists.
16. Concern is raised that the provision of a toilet building would risk increasing urbanisation in such a rural setting. There has been a long standing problem with camping along the Clunie Water and the addition of a toilet here may run the risk of attracting a different audience from the one intended. It is not clear from

the application whether it is intended to charge for car parking. While a number of sites in the Cairngorms have introduced charges, this is normally associated with a problem requiring management or a means of generating revenue for path or other related infrastructure. If charging is to take place it may prove unpopular to the hill-going public if there is not a clear public benefit arising from the revenue generated.

REPRESENTATIONS

17. No representations have been received.

APPRAISAL

18. There is already an existing and well used/popular parking area at the site. Therefore, the key issue relates to the development of a formal car park at the site and its impact upon the natural and cultural heritage. Highways issues are also important in this case.
19. As noted there is an existing informal parking area next to the bridge at Auchallater, where cars park in a rather haphazard manner. There is no documented evidence of a need for additional parking. However, in anecdotal terms there is evidence that the site is well used by hillwalkers accessing Jocks Road a range of Munros and other hills. There are also winter climbing routes in Corrie Kander which can be accessed from this car park. The car park is well known in hill walking circles and is mentioned in many guidebooks to the area. Given the general level of use and also the configuration of the car park (narrow and long) there would seem to be sufficient reasons for formalising this area both in terms of providing some more space for cars, but also to ensure more efficient use of the space and safer movement of vehicles within and in/out of the site.
20. The proposal started life as two large rectangular car parking areas (fig 4) with a toilet and notice board (total 34 car parking spaces). One section would be in the area of the existing car park, the other was intended above that area. This would have resulted in very large scale earthworks which would have been detrimental in terms of landscape, both in the immediate and wider setting. The upper car park would have been some 1.5 to 2.5 metres above the existing lowest ground level at the roadside. Several meetings and negotiations took place which resulted in a much less formal scheme, but still on two levels with 31 spaces. This scheme still raised concern in terms of landscape impact and suggestions were made that the toilet to be sited on a promontory would be highly visible. Investigations took place to see if this could be sited down slope. However, this took it nearer to the burn, which was not acceptable. SEPA stipulated that any toilet needed to be at least 10 metres from the burn.
21. Because of concerns outlined the scheme now submitted (fig 5) does not include a toilet block and the parking area is much better related to the existing footprint and levels. In addition, a landscape design statement has been submitted with the application. The scheme now includes a total of 18 spaces with a small notice

board and ticket machine. The new scheme involves some limited excavation but works with existing levels to a much greater extent. Some concrete post and wire fencing next to the roadside will be removed and a landscaping bund will be used to make a clear distinction between the public road and the car park. A condition will ensure that this is not constructed in a uniform manner. Extensive planting of birch, alder, aspen and rowan is proposed behind the car park and this will help to supplement the existing trees along the burn.

22. The scheme now up for determination has taken much time to negotiate but is considered a significant improvement upon what was originally submitted. The additional information requested, together with planning conditions will ensure that the integrity of the adjacent SAC (Callater Burn) is not prejudiced and that the scheme is constructed in an appropriate manner.
23. The intention is that a small notice board and car park charging machine will be introduced, details of the sign board will be sought by condition. It is likely that this would be similar to an existing one at Keiloch Car Park (Invercauld Bridge). The addition of car parking charges for hillwalkers in such areas has been an issue of concern for some recreation groups and the issue has been the subject of past debate in the outdoor press. However, it is important to note that the planning system does not make a distinction between free and charged car parks as this is not classed as development and therefore the issue essentially lies outside of the parameters of the town and country planning system.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AIMS OF THE NATIONAL PARK

Conserve and Enhance the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Area

24. There are clearly pressures in this area for visitors to park vehicles off-road in a haphazard manner. This proposal will manage the use of this open area of ground in a more orderly manner, with reduced damage to the area physically and visually, to the benefit of the local natural heritage. Additional tree planting will extend the remnant woodland area around the burn. The work would be of the same character as that at the Keiloch Car Park at Invercauld.

Promote Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

25. Some of the materials to be used will be sourced locally.

Promote Understanding and Enjoyment of the Area

26. The provision of this car parking facility will help to promote understanding and enjoyment of the area, as will the notice board providing local information.

Promote Sustainable Economic and Social Development of the Area

27. Providing such facilities for visitors and tourists in the area will promote the use and enjoyment of this locality for these people, and may encourage other future visits or longer stays in the area - to the benefit of the local economy.

RECOMMENDATION

28. That Members of the Committee support a recommendation to: **GRANT FULL PLANNING PERMISSION** for alterations and extension to car park at Auchallater, Braemar, subject to the following conditions.

1. The development to which this permission relates must be begun within 5 years from the date of this permission.
2. That the turfing or reseeded of the grassed areas surrounding the new parking area shall be carried out using a natural grass mix appropriate to this rural site, agreed with the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Planning Authority, and shall include some areas for a sowing of wild flower seeds found naturally in this area.
3. That not less than the first 5 metres of the access into the car park shall have a tarmac finish, to the satisfaction of the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Planning Authority.
4. Further detailed cross sections of the recontouring/bunding shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Planning Authority prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved, the scheme shall then be implemented in accordance with the agreed details.
5. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved a method of construction statement including a scheme of future maintenance shall be submitted to and agreed by the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as planning authority and the completed car park shall be maintained in accordance with the scheme thereafter. The method statement shall include details on measures to prevent run-off, erosion, sedimentation and discolourisation of controlled waters and details on movement and storage of soils. The statement should also identify any waste streams associated with the works and methods for storage of turfs to be stripped and re-used as part of the landscaping proposals.
6. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved full details (including dimensions) of the proposed information board shall be submitted to and approved by the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as planning authority.

7. The development shall be landscaped and maintained in accordance with the approved scheme as follows:-
- Completion of the scheme during the first planting season following the completion of the development, or such other date as may be approved in writing with the Planning Authority.
 - The maintenance of the landscaped areas in perpetuity in accordance with the detailed maintenance schedule/table. Any trees or shrubs removed, or which in the opinion of the Planning Authority, are dying, being severely damaged or becoming seriously diseased within five years of planting, shall be replaced by trees or shrubs of similar size and species to those originally required to be planted.
 - A landscape architect or other suitably qualified person shall be employed to supervise all landscaping works. The nominated person to be agreed with the CNPA prior to commencement of works.
8. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved a scheme for temporary car parking in the vicinity of the site for the duration of construction works shall be submitted to and approved by the CNPA acting as Planning Authority. The scheme shall also ensure that construction works do not result in any restriction of access to the Loch Callater track. The agreed scheme shall be implemented during any works resulting in parking restrictions at the site.

ADVICE NOTE

- 1. You are advised that works should be timed to avoid periods of high rainfall.**

DETERMINATION BACKGROUND

- This application has taken an inordinate length of time to bring before the Planning Committee. The planning application has been through several versions and a significant amount of additional information has been submitted. However, the main reason for the delay has been the time taken in submitting the information by the applicant.

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19 May 2009

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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.