

**Cairngorms National Park
Local Development Plan 2020
Post Main Issues Report: New Sites Consultation**

Proposed Extension to T1 Allocation: Landmark Forest Adventure Park

Comments by Dr D.I. Gasking, [REDACTED]

Given the potential significance of the proposed change of ownership and designation of the Landmark site, I am rather surprised that more effort has not been made to bring the matter to the attention of the local community, particularly given the fairly short period of time allowed for this additional consultation. As with other planning proposals in the past, it would have seemed appropriate to have had some form of meeting/display in the village hall to lay out the details of the scheme and its likely future implications for the village. I myself only found out about the proposed changes by chance word of mouth.

On the basis of the very sketchy details provided in the two downloads from the National Park website, potential concerns for the local community would appear to include continued open public access and amenity, with retention of a meaningful forest buffer zone for circular walks and the through route between the back of Landmark and the railway line, plus ongoing guarantees for protection against additional enclosure or development on the site in future years.

The August 2018 addendum to the Strategic Environmental Assessment highlights the significance of the proposed Landmark T1 extension site for ancient woodland, wildlife diversity, and amenity to the setting of the village, each of which would appear to be very much in accord with the local priorities noted above.

I can imagine that many people in Carr-Bridge might be fairly relaxed about a modest and appropriate extension to the fenced area of Landmark, along with some expansion of its car parking capacity, as long as this can be achieved in a considerate and sensitive manner, without too much impact on the visual setting of the village as viewed from the road, or on the woodland access and amenity that is currently enjoyed.

I understand that Landmark may be looking to have some increase to the existing fenced area for immediate expansion to the park facilities for paying visitors, with the remainder of the forest, in the short term at least, being “looked after” (and improved?) for wildlife, habitat and amenity, but none of this is specified in the information supplied for the consultation. Likewise, on the question of their preferred location for the proposed new car parking area, which I imagine they may prefer to have close to the Aviemore road to the south of the existing park.

In the absence of such detail, I would suggest that development into the woodland areas, whether for car parking or fenced expansion of the park, should be restricted to a new boundary line close to the back edge of the present extension car park, running approximately parallel with the railway line. The remaining woodland corridor between the fence and the railway to be preserved, protected and enhanced for long-term open public access, amenity and wildlife/habitat protection.

The paths behind Landmark have a well-established history of open access, with daily public use throughout the year by locals and visitors alike: dog walking, guided tours, nature study, wildlife observation, cycling, cross-country skiing, and as an essential link in longer fitness trails. Even at 6.00am, or earlier, these days there are regular exercisers out on those routes, not just the super fit joggers, but also individuals undertaking a regime for personal health reasons - obesity/weight loss, recovery after illness or treatment, etc.

Many years back I highlighted the desirability of linking the then newly established Sustrans cycle route through Carr Wood with the railway route round the back of Landmark and I believe it was the tourist association who subsequently took up that suggestion and arranged for the creation of the path alongside the Carr-Bridge to Aviemore road, running from the cycle track exit onto the public road up to the forestry access track south of Landmark.

During various village plan consultations over the years I have also pointed out the potential for establishing a full circular boundary footpath route taking a wide sweep around the whole of Carr-Bridge, maximising the benefit of the woodland setting of the village. In principle, some three quarters or so of such a route already exists: Carr Wood, railway walk, Ellanwood and the forest above Bogroy. The main requirement would be to complete the final link south from the Grantown road across to Carr Road, with the construction of a second "Gurkha" footbridge to cross back over the river. Such a boundary route could represent a major asset for the village, potentially offering the chance for a further major day in the annual calendar, to add to the chainsaw and porridge events. The annual Carr-Bridge Boundary Race attracting major name competitors and amateurs of all descriptions? For comparison, many years back I remember taking part in the Cambridge boundary walk, which was a long-established and very well supported annual event following a 25 mile route on paths and lanes in a wide circle around the city.

Both on the grounds of preserving the existing amenity, and of retaining the potential for future footpath expansions for the benefit both of the local community and visitors, I would strongly argue that measures should be put in place to ensure that fenced expansion of Landmark is not at the expense of the loss of a meaningful forested public access corridor alongside the railway. This corridor should also be of sufficient width to permit not only walking through, but also to continue to accommodate the present options for circular walks of various lengths.

If there is to be any modification, realignment, or reduction of the signposted path network behind Landmark I would urge that there should be the opportunity for proper community involvement in the decision making process?

In the present, vaguely-defined situation, I wonder what protections can be put in place to head off the possibility of more aggressive threats to the redesignated site in the future, notably, for example, in the event of a change of ownership at Landmark, or of any attempt by later management of the business to sell on sections of the land for other, potentially more intrusive development?

I wonder also what, if any, implications there might be for impacts spilling over into the neighbouring forest areas controlled by Highland Council and the Woodland Trust?

During consultations on the housing plans for Carr Wood over the years I have often put forward the idea of progressively moving towards the creation of an arboretum area (a "Carr-boretum"), building once again on the image of Carr-Bridge as a forest village. I worked in Pitlochry for several years in the 1980s and my route to work each day then took me through Faskally Wood, which had previously served as a teaching area for Forestry Commission trainees, with planting of a wide range of specimen trees. By the time I was there, this had matured to provide a unique natural asset. If Landmark were subject to conditions requiring them to undertake positive long-term management of the forest outwith any extended, fenced commercial development land, this could give the opportunity for mixed planting and the slow creation of an area with enhanced natural and amenity value, which could draw in visitors for its own unique interest. Faskally Wood is one such example. The Hermitage at Dunkeld with its record tall trees would be another.

I have been told that there has been some movement of capercaillie into the southern end of the proposed extension site. The area around the Sustrans off-road cycle track on the other side of the road has long been recognised as a capercaillie area, and it would seem entirely reasonable that the

birds should now be taking the opportunity to migrate across into some of the quieter areas of the woods in the southern end of the extension site, which have been rendered more attractive, with more open habitat, following recent forestry thinning operations.

I myself have previously had a brief sighting of pine marten in the dense and rarely disturbed area of woodland immediately south of the field beside Crannich Park, directly across the road from the southerly end of the proposed extension site.

In the past few years I have had increasingly common early morning sightings of hedgehog in the woods behind Landmark, particularly around the path heading up towards the railway, between the overspill car park and the woodland trust land.

In August of this year, I observed a small (about 10cm), very quick, smooth, silvery-grey lizard (?) in the fire-damaged area between the overspill car park and the railway. I haven't been able to identify it – possibly a young specimen? – but I would be able to describe the creature and to point out the exact location.