



Scottish Natural Heritage Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba

All of nature for all of Scotland
Nàdar air fad airson Alba air fad

BY EMAIL

Katie Crerar
Cairngorms National Park Authority

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Our reference: CPP151905

19 September 2018

Dear Ms Crerar

Post-Main Issues Report new sites consultation

Thank you for consulting us on the additional sites that have emerged following the consultation on the Main Issues Report earlier this year.

Our comments and advice on allocations/settlements would normally reflect only the natural heritage matters that we lead on under the protocol between the Park Authority and SNH. This means that we would restrict our advice on allocations to areas protected for nature conservation, as the Park Authority are responsible for identifying and dealing with issues related to placemaking, local landscapes, wildness, protected species and biodiversity. However, we note that no Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) or Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA) accompany the post-MIR report. Where we feel it would be useful, we have therefore included advice in relation to SEA topics to help the Park Authority add the proposed allocations to the SEA done for the MIR. Our advice on protected areas should also inform a future HRA. (We also refer you to our advice in relation to capercaillie Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and river Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) provided in our advice on the MIR dated 26 February 2018.)

1. Advice

We have the following advice on the proposed new sites:

- **Aviemore, extension to EDI Dalfaber Industrial Estate.** The Aviemore Orbital path runs between the proposed allocation and the watercourse, with the rail line bounding the western edge. The extension is approximately 20 metres from a watercourse that flows into the River Spey Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and SAC, important for Atlantic salmon, freshwater pearl mussel, otter and sea lamprey. Our advice is that because of the topography, path and vegetation between the proposed allocation and the watercourse, earthworks to enable construction are unlikely to cause pollution of the watercourse or surrounding habitat, or increase the existing level of disturbance to otter. Therefore although there is potential for connectivity due to proximity, our advice is that there should not be a likely significant effect on the qualifying interests of the SAC (or adverse impact on the SSSI).

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In relation to SEA, the extension is also in close proximity to the boundary of the Cairngorm Mountains National Scenic Area (NSA). However, because the immediate surrounding area is already a developed active industrial estate, we do not consider that the proposed small extension would have an adverse effect on the special qualities of the NSA. In relation to other SEA topics, although we consider that overall the effect of the proposed allocation will be neutral, we recommend that a developer requirement is included in the proposed Local Development Plan (LDP). The requirement should be for sympathetic boundary planting that complements the natural surroundings between the allocation and the popular Aviemore Orbital path. For example, a hedge or tree planting using native species would visually soften the boundary by creating some screening when compared to traditional metal security fencing on its own. As well as reducing adverse visual impacts for users of the popular Orbital path (SEA topic Landscape & Cultural Heritage), such planting would also have biodiversity benefits (SEA Topic Biodiversity, Fauna & Flora).

- **Aviemore, community use at Spaven Drive.** We have no comments to make on this proposed allocation in relation to protected areas.

In relation to SEA, we would not normally encourage building on land safeguarded as open space for recreation due to adverse effects on the SEA topics of Climatic Factors and Population & Human Health. However the proposed development use would retain outdoor recreational facilities as well as providing a new built facility for community use. This should attract more use of the area, which due to its location should encourage users to get there by active travel (walking or cycling), reducing reliance on the private car and so reducing emissions that contribute to climate change. This should be of benefit to all the SEA topics that are at risk due to climate change (as well as Population & Human Health).

- **Aviemore, additional economic development area adjoining North Aviemore.** We reiterate our advice given in response to the MIR in relation to North Aviemore, as the same issues apply. We agree that this location has potential for economic development, subject to a developer requirement that development proposals must demonstrate that there would not be an adverse effect on the integrity of Badenoch and Strathspey capercaillie SPAs (eg through increased recreation disturbance to capercaillie due to the increase in human population). Particular consideration would be required as to how the A9 dualling will affect access opportunities into Kinveachy forest in particular. As this allocation would extend development outwith the existing settlement pattern and is in a prominent location alongside the main route into Aviemore from the north, it would also be beneficial to have a Development Brief that provides clear guidance on protected areas as well as other issues (such as landscape, placemaking and relationship to other developments in the vicinity - where relevant, connectivity, biodiversity, etc).

For the SEA, the potential for adverse impacts on the following protected species also require consideration under Biodiversity, Fauna & Flora. There are badger in the fields to nearby - badgers and their setts are legally protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 (as amended). The proposed allocation is within the Northern Strathspey wildcat priority area and wildcat have been reported in this location. Wildcat are an European Protected Species (EPS), and are sensitive to disturbance from human activity.

- **Calvine, community use at former Struan school.** We have no comments to make on this proposed allocation in relation to protected areas.

With regard to SEA, redeveloping land that is already built on should have a neutral environmental effect.

- **Carrbridge, Landmark extension.** The proposed allocation has potential connections with capercaillie SPAs and supporting habitat via the existing path network. However, we consider that the pattern of recreational use of the woodlands immediately surrounding Landmark is unlikely to change should the proposed allocation be developed as an extension in the style of the existing Landmark facility. Because the nature of a future extension is unknown, our advice is that a HRA would be required of any future planning application to reach a more informed decision. We therefore recommend that a developer requirement is included in the proposed LDP 2020 requiring that the developer provides sufficient information to enable the competent authority to undertake a HRA for the Strathspey and Badenoch capercaillie SPAs, should the allocation be taken forward.

For the SEA, to avoid adverse effects it will be important for the existing and well used path network to be safeguarded as an important recreation resource for village residents and visitors alike (SEA topic Population & Human Health). We are aware that there is also a community desire for an off-road cycle route between the village and the Speyside Way, which would increase the opportunity for active travel. At present, we understand the preferred route would make use of the paths within the proposed allocation, linking up to proposed new sections down to the Speyside Way. Increased active travel opportunities would reduce reliance on the private car, reducing emissions that contribute to climate change. This should be of benefit to all the SEA topics that are at risk due to climate change (as well as Population & Human Health). In addition, the current forest that acts as a buffer between the rail line and A9 and the village. The forest is identified in the Ancient Woodland Inventory and the Scottish Semi-Natural Woodland Inventory. Our advice is that there would be adverse effects from noise, pollution and loss of habitat that would affect Population & Human Health as well as Biodiversity, Fauna & Flora interests if the forest were significantly reduced or removed to enable development.

- **Grantown on Spey, caravan park extension.** The proposed allocation has potential connections with capercaillie SPAs and supporting habitat, particularly at Anagach Woods. However, we consider that the pattern of recreational use of the woodlands is unlikely to change should the proposed allocation be developed as an extension in the style of the existing caravan park.

For the SEA, it would be beneficial for the existing trees to be retained, to benefit Biodiversity, Fauna and Flora (as well as provide an attractive setting for people).

- **Tomintoul, extension to existing tourism allocation.** We have no comments to make on this proposed allocation in relation to protected areas.

With regard to SEA, the woodlands are identified on the Scottish Semi-Natural Woodland Inventory. It would be beneficial for as many of the existing trees to be retained where feasible, to benefit Biodiversity, Fauna and Flora (as well as provide an attractive setting for people).

2. Concluding remarks

Should you have any queries about our advice, please contact **Nina Turner**, Planning Advisor (north).

Yours sincerely

Debbie Greene
Operations Manager, South Highland