

In February 2018, I submitted a detailed response to the Main Issues Report in which I set out my principal concerns about the content/strategy of the document insofar as it related to the village of Kincaig. Whilst in support of the proposed housing site (ref H1) and the protection of the open space at the Knoll, I was concerned about the potential allocation of the economic development site to the west of the village.

My concerns were summarised as follows:

- It would be contrary to the overarching strategy of directing most development to strategic settlements, maintaining the sense of wildness and protecting the area's landscapes
- It would destroy the buffer which the site (s) provides between the village and the A9. This buffer strengthens and enhances the village setting consequently protecting the views from within the village and beyond and from the A9 traffic corridor and protects the amenity of the village
- It would impact on the residential amenity of the adjacent housing and the proposed housing
- There is no justification for the release of any part of this site for economic development on the basis of the current supply and demand of land for economic development in the Highland area set out in the Main Issues Document (MID)
- The A9 dualling should not lead automatically to a presumption in favour of development of sites which lie adjacent to the transport corridor.

Subsequently, there was further correspondence to and from David Berry (Planning Manager (Forward Planning & Service Improvement) when the officer report to the June 2018 Planning Committee was published. The Planning Committee approved the recommendations contained within that report as they related to the Kincaig site ie the site, now identified in the Draft Development Plan (DDP) as ED2, to be allocated for economic development.

Having now examined the DDP, which is currently out to consultation, and visited the exhibition in Kingussie in February 2019, my concerns have not been allayed in any way and my comments made in 2018 are still very much relevant.

## **1. VISION**

- 1.1 The existing Development Plan (2015) states that the lack of development and the sense of wildness outwith the main settlements are key characteristics of the National Park which need to be maintained. It also states that its landscapes are one of its most important assets.
- 1.2 The 2020 DDP would appear to reinforce that in its introduction and Vision. Its states that one of the 4 statutory aims of the Cairngorms National Park (CNP) is *'to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area'* (p 6). This aim has greater weight over the other three when considering/assessing proposals. The document goes on to say that *'this is a sustainable development approach in which conservation of the natural and cultural heritage underpins the economic and recreational value of the National Park'* (p 6).
- 1.3 This aim contributes to delivering the long term vision for the Cairngorms National Park that is set out in the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan: *'An outstanding National Park, enjoyed and valued by everyone, where nature and people thrive together'* and is further backed up by ensuring that *'the special qualities of the Park are enhanced by new*

*development where possible and protected from development that would significantly erode or harm them' (2.3).*

## **2. SPATIAL STRATEGY**

- 2.1 In terms of its Spatial Strategy, the Plan's overall development strategy focuses on directing most development to the main (strategic) settlements of Aviemore, Ballater, Grantown-on-Spey, Kingussie and Newtonmore (3.8).

## **3. POLICIES**

- 3.1 Section 4 of the Plan sets out the policies against which development proposals will be assessed. Conformity with these policies will contribute to achieving the Plan's vision and aims. Policies 2, 4 and 5 are the most relevant in assessing this site's suitability for development. I deal with them in what I consider to be the order of importance.

### **POLICY 5: LANDSCAPE**

*There will be a presumption against any development that does not conserve and enhance the landscape character and special qualities of the Cairngorms National Park including wildness, and in particular, the setting of the proposed development.*

*Proposed development that does not complement and enhance the landscape character of the Park and the setting of the proposed development will be permitted only where:*

- a) any significant adverse effects on the special landscape qualities of the National Park are clearly outweighed by social or economic benefits of national importance; and*
- b) all the adverse effects on the setting of the proposed development have been minimised and mitigated through appropriate siting, layout, scale, design and construction to the satisfaction of the planning authority.*

- 3.2 The supporting text for Policy 5 reinforces the CNPA's objectives in respect of protecting and enhancing the landscapes:

- It recognises that the landscapes of the Cairngorms are one of the National Park's most valuable assets, underpinning its character, designation and the appeal of the area as a place to visit, live and invest. The experience of large scale wildness in the National Park is particularly distinctive in UK terms (4.70)
- The way the landscapes are used and managed and its many components will influence its quality and character. The Park Authority seeks ensure that new development conserves and enhances the distinctive characteristics which are valued. making changes where opportunities for enhancement exist, and avoiding change that would erode the characteristics that make the Park a special place (4.71/4.72)

- 3.3 The policy will seek to conserve and enhance the diverse and spectacular landscapes of the National Park by ensuring that only development which conserves and enhances the special landscape qualities of the Park will be supported. It supports development that contributes to landscape enhancement and protects against development that would erode the landscape qualities we value.

- 3.4 With regards to Kincaig, an intermediate settlement (with a population of no more than 300 and where any development is required to meet local needs), the Plan is proposing to

amend the settlement boundary to include a 1.6 ha site on the western side of the village for economic development (ED2). This site lies between the B9152 and the A9 (newly dualled). The B9152 currently forms part of the existing and effective settlement boundary. The proposed development site, which is part of an active farming unit, acts as an important buffer from the A9 corridor and effectively provides, strengthens and protects the setting of the village. This buffer is critical in protecting the views from a short/medium and long term perspective both from the A9 corridor and from within the village.

- 3.5 The Plan recognises this in the supporting Site Assessment, ie that the site provides a buffer between the village and the A9, allowing the setting of the village to be clear and discrete and enhancing and strengthening the setting of the village. The Site Assessment also accepts that the site is highly visible from the roads, railway and hills beyond the village partly because it is elevated.
- 3.6 Specifically under the Landscape section, whilst accepting that it addresses a slightly larger site, the Assessment concludes that there is little potential for mitigation and no potential to complement or enhance. It is given a 'red' marking. It is unclear how the Plan subsequently can conclude that a large part of this original site is appropriate for development, there being no reasoned justification. Further, the Site Assessment states that the principle of development has been established on the northern part of the site because it has been used as a compound for the A9 dualling. I consider, with respect, that this is flawed. The compound use was established through the appropriate permitted development rights under the relevant legislation. The use was temporary – for the length of the A9 dualling contract – and the site requires to be reinstated to its original form and use. This includes the removal of all the hardstandings and services and requires the landform to be reinstated. I acknowledge that since the MID was published a temporary consent has been granted for its use as a compound but its reinstatement is still required.
- 3.7 I remain of the view that the proposal also does not conform with the Plan's principal landscape policy - Landscape Policy 5.1.

### 3.8 POLICY 2: SUPPORTING ECONOMIC GROWTH

#### *2.4 'Other economic development*

*Proposals which support or extend the economy, or which enhance the range and quality of economic opportunities or facilities, will be considered favourably where they:*

- a) are compatible/complementary with existing business activity in the area; and*
- b) support the vitality and viability of the local economy.*

*Developments that contribute to the provision of an identified local economic need, such as the provision of small business units, or contribute to the delivery of the Cairngorms National Park Economic Action Plan, will be particularly encouraged'.*

- 3.9 A study was undertaken to establish the need and demand for commercial development land within the National Park by Ryden in 2011. The Park Authority considers that whilst this was undertaken some time ago, its findings are still relevant some 8 years on. The study recommended that economic development could be best supported through the allocation of some larger sites in more strategic settlements which, given the transport links and

supporting services, is one to be supported. It also suggested that opportunities for new allocations should be located in close proximity to the A9 or centres of population.

- 3.10 The justification for economic development land allocation in the Draft Plan continues to be based on a study carried out in 2011. There is still no empirical evidence to support the economic development land allocation in the Plan and an acceptance of any projection of supply is purely anecdotal. Given the importance which the Plan places on ensuring that there is a supply of economic development land in order to meet economic objectives, I would have considered that a more recent survey would have been undertaken to gauge demand. This survey would have usefully informed the content of the Plan in this respect. Instead, the review of demand and supply for business land and units within the Park is a future task in the Draft Action Plan.
- 3.11 I fully agree with the need to allocate land for economic development. It is a requirement of any Local Development Plan and it would be negligent of the CNPA not to do so. Any new allocations however require to be justified and conform with policy. It is interesting to note that the An Camas Mor proposal in Aviemore which has a potential capacity of 1500 houses makes no mention of employment uses within its boundaries.
- 3.12 In terms of the relationship with the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan, 'Supporting Economic Growth' policies work towards the objectives of increasing provision for business land **where there is an identified need and demand** (Partnership Plan Priority 9 and Policy 3.1). The policy will be used to support appropriate economic development which encourages sustainable economic growth whilst protecting communities from inappropriate development and helping to keep them vibrant and sustainable. All proposals must be appropriate and compatible with their surroundings. The policy should be used in conjunction with other policies in the Plan to ensure development is well designed and does not have any adverse impact on the features of natural or cultural heritage important to the National Park. The policy context therefore sets out strong guidelines as to what would be supported to achieve the common objectives of all the partners of supporting economic development.
- 3.13 Setting aside landscape reasons for not supporting Proposal ED2 (see above), the site is within an intermediate settlement, is adjacent to existing and proposed housing and will impact considerably on the character and amenity of the village.
- 3.14 I consider that it does not conform with the policy framework in respect of economic development.
- 3.15 POLICY 3 DESIGN AND PLACEMAKING
- 3.16 The Plan states that we must 'make the most of every opportunity to conserve and enhance the distinctive characteristics that make the National Park and its communities special, and make a positive contribution to a more sustainable way of living which considers not only the cost of the development, but the lifetime impacts of using the new buildings' (4.50).
- 3.17 In addition to the six qualities of successful places, all development proposals must be designed to '*protect the amenity enjoyed by neighbours including minimisation of disturbance caused by access to the development site*'.
- 3.18 Within the Partnership Plan, Priority 9 and Policy 3.1 (e), supports the retention and enhancement of local character.

#### **4. A9**

- 4.1 The Plan identifies the A9 dualling project as an opportunity for development potential. I fully support the dualling of the A9. It is a major infrastructure project which will benefit the national economy and those local economies along its corridor. Its construction (and completion) however cannot automatically lead to a presumption in favour development of sites within its corridor.
- 4.2 One of the objectives of the dualling programme is to ensure that the landscapes and communities are protected. Ad hoc allocation of sites adjacent to the A9 corridor does not meet this objective.
- 4.3 On the assumption that any access to the potential development site is taken off the existing B9152, and not from the A9, the A9 cannot be used to justify its development. Any vehicle movements generated by any new development would require to use the B9152 which has poor geometry both to the north and south of the site and consequently has traffic safety issues. This is well evidenced on a regular basis but particularly so during the construction of the dualling.
- 4.3 Perhaps more critically, is the safety of the community and the impact this increase in traffic would have on the village. Throughout the construction of the dualling, the number of and speeding of vehicles through the village was dangerous as was the number of HGVs which used the route. The Safe Routes to School for pupils going to Alvie Primary School runs through Macbean Road and comes out on to the public footway at the junction with the access to the underpass (and possibly to site ED2). Most of the pupils walk or cycle to school which is the key objective of the Safe Routes to School initiative. The potential threat to their safety is of concern.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 In conclusion, I would not support the allocation of this site (ED2) for economic development on the grounds set out above. I formally object to its designation in the 2020 Development Plan and respectfully would request that this designation be removed.
- 5.2 If, however, the independent Reporter is minded to approve it, I would ask that consideration be given to:
- Further clarification being set out in the Plan as to what category of economic development would be appropriate in order to give clear guidance to the landowner, potential developer and any other interested party. I consider that economic development use should be restricted to small business units which do not impact on the amenity of the village and the existing and proposed housing; and
  - Inclusion within the policy guidance, given the elevated levels of the site, that appropriate landscaping and screening be incorporated into any plans for its development in order that the impact of the development on the setting of the village and the landscape of the wider area is minimised.

#### **6. H1 Housing Site Allocation**

- 6.1 Under 'Anticipated Infrastructure & Affordable Housing Requirements', there is a requirement for a contribution to be directed, amongst others, to Kingussie High School. I

would request that further consultation be undertaken with The Highland Council in terms of seeking contribution to improvements within the village school – Alvie Primary.