

Cairngorms National Park - Proposed LDP 2020

Objections

Policy/Proposal: Carrbridge - Coach and Car Park

Site: Land 40M NW of The Spinney, Inverness Road

Objector: Mac Infrastructure Ltd

Summary of Objection: Object to the lack of an allocation within the plan for a coach and car park, on land off Inverness Road, for use by The Carrbridge Hotel (see location and proposed layout plans attached as Appendix 1).

Objection:

1. The Carrbridge Hotel is a well-established and reputable tourism business offering high quality hotel, conference and event accommodation. The distinctive building it occupies is an important part of the cultural heritage of the 18th century village of Carrbridge that also boasts the Old Packhorse Bridge, a Scheduled Ancient Monument dating back to 1717 that is located directly opposite the hotel, and The Landmark Forest Adventure Park, one of the most visited tourist attractions in the National Park and voted one of the UK's top-ten parks by TripAdvisor.

2. Providing 45,000 resident bed nights per year, the Carrbridge Hotel compliments and contributes significantly to the wider tourism offer of the national park with substantial economic multiplier benefits to many other local suppliers and businesses. National projections estimate a 4% decrease in population within the National Park over the next 21 years, including a 21% decline in children age 0-15, and a reduction in working age population of 10%. The pensionable age-group will increase by 23% and those aged over 75 will increase by 97% (National Records of Scotland, Population Projections for Scottish Areas, October 2016).

3. Given the demographic profile of those employed, the Carrbridge Hotel offers the potential to contribute significantly to both the tourism and demographic needs of the LDP. The success of the Carrbridge Hotel, and its efforts to extend the tourist season, therefore offers local cultural heritage benefit but also more diffuse economic benefit.

4. Tourism in the Cairngorms National Park accounts for 30% of the economy (GVA) and 43% of employment (CNPA, 2019). CNPA say it is "vital" to the economy of the Park. However, the Carrbridge Hotel owners report a decline in demand for year-round hotel room provision. In responding to this they see an opportunity to meet a seasonal requirement for conferences and events. This will offer the potential for continued year-round hotel operation, with the retention of 40 full-time jobs (38 jobs currently) and an estimated 200 external supplier and other local jobs in businesses reliant on hotel trade.

5. The hotel is attempting to respond to this market change by broadening their customer proposition, whilst also increasing bed night capacity during the main tourist season. The hotel has planning consent for, and plan to build, an on-site extension with some parking, but desperately need additional parking facilities to meet parking needs arising from their attempt to diversify into the vitally important off-season conference and events market that runs from October to April.

6. The nature of this market dictates a requirement for high capacity at peak times, especially during event start, breaks and end, with a remote offsite location requiring up to 4 x 48 seat coaches for delegates transport, who would normally all arrive and depart in a private transport cluster.

7. The hotel has found no appropriate existing parking opportunity within Carrbridge itself, either on-street or within other operator or public car parks, suitable for this type and level of demand. Such demand would compete and block out the parking needs of local businesses including the nearby Landmark Centre that recently extended its car park, but which will itself be in high demand during competing periods such as the October school mid-term and Easter holiday periods.

8. The parking area for The Landmark Centre is also too remote and via an unsuitable route for clients of the Carrbridge Hotel, in particular during inclement weather, necessitating the use of group transport, making the events tender process un-competitive which would damage the Carrbridge Hotel main low season job retention strategy.

9. In consultation with executive officers of CNPA and with the Carrbridge Community Council the hotel undertook a detailed site search for a suitable parking site. A range of brownfield and greenfield opportunities were considered. The proposed parking site, with the backing of the Community Council, was eventually identified as the only site within a reasonable distance offering suitable scale, with safe pedestrian and vehicular access and with development potential. It also provides the opportunity for the hotel to further improve Health and Safety provision for a customer refuge in the event of a sustained evacuation. Coaches parked overnight in the proposed new parking area would provide further enhanced safe refuge in the event of an emergency at the hotel.

10. The size of the required parking facility has been accurately assessed based on experience of past conferences held at the hotel. It is anticipated that guests will first disembark at the hotel before coaches and cars are then directed by hotel staff to the proposed parking area that offers flexible accommodation for coaches and/or cars. A suitably-sized area at the front of the proposed parking site offers safe refuge for guests and drivers leaving their vehicles in the parking area and walking via existing lit public footpath the relatively short distance back to the hotel.

11. The proposed parking site of 0.4ha is broadly of rectangular-shape, located to the north of the A938 Inverness Road, within the Intermediate Settlement of Carrbridge. It sits some 250m north-west of the Carrbridge Hotel that is itself positioned prominently in the village centre.

12. The land is recently cleared rough heath ground that is shown on OS maps dated 2010 as being within a larger un-managed area of mostly open bracken, heath and marsh land populated at a relatively low-density with a mix of coniferous and non-coniferous trees. This area is different in character and separate to the more densely wooded Baddengorm Woods, a large area of well-established coniferous forest the southern-most tip of which is some 250m north-west of the proposed parking site, but which extends across the much higher ground running north of, and several km away from Carrbridge.

13. The Club House for the Carrbridge Golf Club is located some 100m to the east, with residential properties running either side of the appeal site to the east and west along the A938. A rough track leads from the appeal site to the back of the golf course. A public footpath runs along the south side of the A938, providing safe pedestrian access to the village centre. The site is otherwise contained by surrounding rough terrain, bracken, boggy heath and woodland.

14. The settlement of Carrbridge has historically developed in a linear fashion, extending out and along the A938 and B9153 roads, with the Carrbridge Hotel located at the intersection of these two roads. Residential and commercial properties are located on either side of the A938, an arterial road leading north-west out of Carrbridge towards the A9 trunk road, with access thereafter towards the regional centre of Inverness. The 30mph speed limit sign, indicating the edge of the Carrbridge settlement, is located approximately 500m north-west of the appeal site along the A938.

15. A report undertaken by Atmos, independent environmental consultants, in December 2018 concluded that there are no significant constraints in relation to protected species which may be potentially prohibitive to the development proposals. Mitigation can be provided in accordance with recommendations in the report, and a pollution prevention plan is outlined. No field evidence of capercaillie (a species in the local biodiversity action plan) was identified, and no protected species licensing requirements were stipulated following the survey.

16. There will be no access from the parking site to either Baddengorm Woods or Kinveachy Forest SPA. The boggy and rough wooded ground surrounding the proposed parking site provides a natural barrier dissuading public access from the site to Baddengorm Woods, but

users of the car park will be directed via the existing paved and lit public footpath to the Carrbridge Hotel. It is proposed that the car park will be barrier-controlled with access to hotel patrons by code only available from staff at the Carrbridge Hotel

17. The road and pedestrian access requirements, including visibility splays and swept path analysis for maneuvering coaches, all meet the requirements and standards of The Highland Council Transport Planning department. There are no objections from Highland Council Transport or Environmental Health in relation to pollutants, waste, noise or disturbance either during construction or operation as a coach and car park. The plans at Appendix 1 illustrate sensitive and sustainable construction methods and design (for example discreet low-energy reactive bollard lighting with diffusers, and the parking area finished with porous compacted type 1 rather than more conventional tarmac) utilising materials that will complement the setting of the development and make sustainable use of resources in future maintenance arrangements.

18. The site does not flood, there will be no increase in flood risk elsewhere, and all proposed drainage will be in accordance with The Highland Council standards. The dam feature currently existing outwith and to the north-east of the appeal site, and which is holding back water and slowing down flow and dispersal through the watercourse channel, will be retained. It will continue to play a key role in the development and maintenance of wetland habitats in the surrounding area.

19. In terms of landscape fit, the site sits within the 30mph boundary of Carrbridge along the already developed arterial A938 Inverness Road, surrounded and screened by proposed new planting and areas of existing built development and woodland, protecting wider views into and out of the site. The proposed parking area surface material will be landscape neutral, porous, with sympathetic demarcation and lighting.

20. Boundary treatments will seek to blend the site within the existing landscape. Any adverse landscape effects could be minimised and mitigated by replacement planting, by tree protection measures and additional landscaping proposals, and by the sensitive use of construction materials. The existing overall site topography will remain largely the same during construction so there will be no adverse impact upon any of the retained trees due to changes in ground level.

21. The Carrbridge Golf Club, Cairngorms Business Partnership, the Carrbridge Business and Tourism Association and Carrbridge Community Council are all supportive of the proposals, the latter recognising the benefits of job creation and enhancement at the Carrbridge Hotel, and the reduced need for on-street parking (a problem that will now become more acute following the recent introduction by The Highland Council of double yellow lines in the vicinity of the Carrbridge Hotel and along roads in close vicinity). The economic benefits to local businesses, village shops and services are substantial.

22. For all the above reasons, this proposed car park allocation is considered consistent with national and local policy guidance and should be allocated within the LDP 2020 as per the proposed layout plan attached.

23. It will not be necessary to reference, within the LDP, the need for the applicant for planning permission on this parking site to produce protected species, flood, landscape or other reports, as they have already been undertaken by the site promoters. The effectiveness of the site will therefore be inherent within the adopted plan allocation, giving confidence to the hotel and local community.

Proposed Changes:

(i) The Carrbridge Settlement Plan on page 145 should be altered so as to include an allocation (ED4) on the land 40M NW of The Spinney, as per the Leslie Hutt Architect plan at Appendix 1;

(ii) A further bullet-point should be added to the Settlement Objectives for Carrbridge on page 146 to say, "Support proposals for the expansion and diversification of the Carrbridge Hotel, including additional car and coach parking provision".

(iii) A new "Proposal ED4: Inverness Road - Allocated for Car and Coach Parking - Indicative Capacity 39 car spaces plus 4 coach spaces (0.4ha)" should be added on page 149 after "Proposal ED3 - Former Saw Mill - Allocated for Economic Development (3.7ha)". The associated development plan should be as shown on the Leslie Hutt Architect plan Ref: 1737-103 Rev A March 2019 and lodged here as Appendix 1.

(iv) There should be no text or annotations relating to the need for environmental, protected species, flood risk, landscape impact assessment or any other report. The coach and car-park allocation is proven to be effective and a presumption in favour of un-fettered sustainable development should be positively endorsed within the adopted LDP.

- Appendix 1: Proposed Site and Layout Plan, Leslie Hutt Architect, Ref: 1737-103 Rev A March 2019.

