

AGENDA ITEM 9

APPENDIX I

2015/0245/DET

REPRESENTATION
COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Boat of Garten & Vicinity Community Council
Representation agreed at a public meeting of the Council held on 7th September

Planning application: CNPA: 2015/0245/DET [HC: 15/02551/S42]
Mr Austen Durrant, Boat of Garten Holiday Park:
appln. under s.42 to vary condition 1 of planning ref. BS/1976/96
for siting of 9 static holiday caravans on area of site currently used for touring caravans and tents.

1: Summary

Comparison of the proposed and existing lay-out plans of the site (supplied as part of the planning application) shows that, consequent on the siting of the nine new statics, no space remains for touring caravans and tents.

In addition, the designated area for the laundry & toilets for touring caravans is no longer marked as such.

The application states that no change is expected in relation to water and sewerage services.

2: Relevant history

A series of previous similar applications relating to the Holiday Park have been called in by CNPA. The most recent was in July 2013, when an application for 5 statics was approved. The Boat of Garten & Vicinity Community Council had made no submission at that time. The report drawn up by the CNPA planning department explained the rationale of their recommendation to approve under the headings of 'Promote Understanding and Enjoyment of the Area' and 'Promote Sustainable Economic and Social Development of the Area'.

In 2013, highlights from the report of the responsible case officer for the CNPA included:

- * The case made that static caravans are growing in popularity is supported by the CNPA's Economic Development Manager.
- * The proposed development will help support the social and economic development of the area by providing holiday accommodation, encouraging longer stays in the area which supports local facilities in the village, and by generating income for the site owner which can be re invested in the site and also supports a local business. Furthermore the location for holiday makers within a village with ready access to transport and local facilities is inherently sustainable.
- * The application simply seeks to vary an existing planning condition to enable a change to the type of caravan in a small part of a large, well established and popular caravan site from touring pitches to provision of five static caravans. [This] is considered appropriate and in line with policy, providing enhanced facilities for those persons seeking static caravan sites in the National Park. It will also enable the site owner to continue to re invest in this site *which accords with the Local Plan designation safeguarding the site for continued caravan and camping use.* [emphasis added]

3: Comments approved by the Community Council

In response to CNPA: 2015/0245/DET [HC 15/02551/S42], we wish to supply relevant information and to make the following comments.

3.1: Economic growth

- 3.1.1 We accept that static caravans are likely to be occupied over a longer period of the year than the shorter season for tourers and campers: and that (as in 2013) *longer stays in the area ... support local facilities in the village, and by generating income for the site owner which can be re invested in the site and also supports a local business.*
- 3.1.2 We suppose that using this space for statics would be more profitable, because of their longer season and enhanced accommodation, and because separate laundry, toilet etc facilities would no longer be needed.
- 3.1.3 Such 'longer stays' could offer support not only to the Holiday Park but also to Boat of Garten's shops, cafes, etc.

3.2: Diversity of facilities

- 3.2.1 The cumulative impact of the removal of touring and camping facilities from our area is, however, of concern.
- 3.2.2 At one time both the sites at Loch Garten Lodges and in Boat of Garten itself provided facilities for campers: now, if this application is approved as it stands, NO such facilities will be available in our area: the central Park will no longer be *safeguarded ... for continued caravan and camping use.*

- 3.2.3 Yet Boat of Garten is on the Speyside Way and the National Cycle Network, and in recent years our community has invested in our network of paths. Walkers and cyclists are among the types of tourist we would hope to encourage. Nor would we wish our area to gain a reputation as unwelcoming.

3.3: Impact of unmet demand for touring / camping provision

- 3.3.1 What might be the environmental impact in our area of the removal of all facilities for 'transient' tourists - caravanners and campers? The following comments were received following enquiries by the Community Council.

- 3.3.2 Jeremy Roberts, Senior Site Manager at the RSPB's Abernethy Reserve - part of which is in our area - reports:

"We now see significant over-night parking of camper vans in the reserve car parks/lay-bys; as many as 7 per night. Not sure if this is because of lack of touring sites. Likely to be people avoiding cost of charged-for sites. They can also charge up their power-supply and empty loos at commercial sites every few nights, but do not then require paid-for sites on other nights.

We have recorded an increase in human waste in car parks, which may be associated with this overnight use, where people have vans without toilet facilities. We have had one incident of a chemical toilet being emptied on the edge of one of our car parks.

Wild camping around loch has increased. Again, this may not be attributable to lack of paid-for sites; it may just be people wanting a wild location to camp, and/or wishing to save money.

True, wild-camping is permissible under the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC), so there's no reason to expect people not to do it, if doing it responsibly. That said we have seen an increase in camping beside cars, at roadside, which is discouraged by SOAC. We have significant concerns about campfires associated with "wild" camping on the loch-shore. Again, this is about people not being responsible under SOAC, rather than because they haven't got a commercial site to use."

- 3.3.3 Alison Greggans, part-time local Ranger at Boat of Garten (and also with the RSPB) comments:

"On several occasions this season (at least 5 from memory) I have been approached by disgruntled campers who have targeted Boat of Garten for camping, (often after a long or strenuous walk) expecting to find camping facilities. As they find space very restricted or unavailable they have found themselves potentially stranded despite the fact that on OS map 36 the camping symbol is clearly marked on the camping and caravan site in Boat of Garten.

While offering suggestions, I have sought to direct them away from Deshar Woods at the most sensitive time of the breeding bird season. My concern is that word of mouth could exacerbate potential disturbance or anti social behaviour issues in these high value wildlife sites (breeding golden eye, common sandpipers and an active badger sett, and perhaps a new Capercaillie territory).

It's true that as the popularity for tourers increases, problems with ever larger RV's in Mallachie, The Osprey Centre and Garten Wood car parks are escalating. These are turning into overnight camping areas which augments all the usual issues of litter, dogs, campfires, damage to vegetation and of course gleaning of precious dead wood.

Loss of facilities at the Holiday Park would certainly exacerbate an existing deficit for casual camping in the area."

- 3.3.4 Staff at the Boat of Garten Post Office also report occasions during the summer when walkers have sought advice on the availability of local sites - at present they have been directed up the road to the Holiday Park.

- 3.3.5 We are aware of one occasion during this summer when a party of walkers, some with severe blisters and unable to go further, were accommodated in a local farmer's field as no accommodation remained at the Holiday Park.

3.4: Consideration of the Local Development Plan 2015

- 3.4.1 *Policy 2, Supporting Economic Growth, s2, Tourism and leisure development*

Proposals that *add to or extends the core tourist season* by enhancing existing accommodation (as this one does) nevertheless ought not to have *adverse environmental impacts on the site or neighbouring areas*.

s 4.12 ... There is a balance to be struck between new development and supporting and protecting predominant land uses. Development which facilitates diversification of existing land uses is likely to be particularly successful where the new and existing uses are complementary.

This application, however, reduces land use options rather than diversifying; and might indeed have *adverse environmental impacts* on our wider community, its surrounding woodland and wildlife.

3.4.2 Policy 8, Sport and Recreation, s3 Reduction of facilities

s.9.3 ... The Scottish Government includes 'increasing physical activity' as a national indicator. ... Suitable protection and promotion of sport and recreational opportunities through the land use planning system make a positive contribution to this objective.

Reduction of facilities

Developments which would result in a reduction of sport and recreation facilities or opportunity will only be supported where:

- a) the development is ancillary to the principal use of the site as sport and recreation facilities; and*
- b) the development would not affect the use of the site as a sport and recreation facility; and*
- c) in the reduction of public access rights, or loss of the existing path network including loss of access to inland water, an appropriate or improved alternative access solution can be secured; and*
- d) a compensatory site of at least equal size and quality is created which is convenient to users, or an existing facility is upgraded to maintain and improve the overall capacity in the area; or*
- e) an audit demonstrates the development will not result in the loss of provision of services used by the affected community, and that no alternative site is available.*

This Policy does not seem to have been written with camping sites primarily in mind; but the Speyside Way is promoted by the CNPA, and long-distance footpaths and cycle routes are promoted by the Scottish Government. Their success requires B&B and camping facilities to be available. The loss of camping facilities at Boat of Garten does appear to be a *Reduction of Facilities*; and the current LDP has a presumption against permitting such developments unless there are mitigating factors.

3.4.3 Chapter 13, Community Information, s13.12

Sites are identified where they provide important facilities to support the tourism sector. These existing facilities will be protected from adverse development and proposals which would result in a reduction in the provision of facilities on these sites will not be supported.

The complete loss of provision for tourers and campers, albeit with their limited season, though set against the longer season and better facilities offered by statics, appears to be a *reduction in the provision of facilities* in terms of this chapter.

3.4.4 Section 19, Boat of Garten

3.4.4.1 Objectives (include)

- To protect the role of Boat of Garten as an important provider of local services.*
- To facilitate appropriate economic growth which supports a thriving community.*

with General design guidance

19.4 All new development will, where appropriate:

- maximise use of existing local services and infrastructure;*
- enhance and diversify the local economy;*
- protect existing shops and businesses and their normal operations;*
- add to and improve community facilities, including improving pedestrian connectivity and achieving a more pedestrian and cycle friendly environment.*

These sections restate the essential issue: more statics are probably more productive and arguably could *enhance the local economy*, and *protect existing shops and businesses and their normal operations*; but removing the camping option altogether diminishes local facilities, it doesn't *diversify the local economy* and isn't *pedestrian or cycle friendly*.

3.4.4.2 Tourism

T1: The existing caravan and camping site provides continued support to the provision of tourism accommodation within Boat of Garten and will be protected from adverse development. Where appropriate, enhancement opportunities will be supported.

Again, while more statics could be *enhancement opportunities*, the complete removal of camping facilities seems to be *adverse development*.

3.5: Waste Water Services

3.5.1 There has been considerable distress in Boat of Garten from the too-regular overflowing of the main drains/sewers in the centre of the village; some concern has been expressed to us about any additional load on the system. While we understand that at present the Holiday Park uses its own septic tanks, we believe that the intention is that it should be connected to the main sewer network in due course. LDP 19.19 specifies - in relation to Boat of Garten - *Connection to the public sewer will be required of all new development. However, an interim solution may be acceptable* **Bearing in mind all the current difficulties with the sewer system and new treatment works the Community Council would want to see these difficulties resolved before any new connection from the Holiday Park was made, and especially if new statics are added to the site.**

3.6: Conclusion

3.6.1 **The Community Council considers that there are material considerations against accepting this application in its current form, as**

- a) It is contrary to those policies of the Local Development Plan that seek to diversify facilities for tourists; and especially in that it reduces facilities that support physical activity - distance walking on the Speyside Way, and cycle-touring in our area.
- b) The consequences of adding to an already increasing tendency to wild camp are contrary to the general objectives of the National Park: *adverse environmental impacts* can be anticipated.

3.6.2 **While not opposing an increase in the number of static caravans in the Holiday Park as such, the Community Council considers any new increase should be mitigated by a continued local offer of space for walking or cycling campers, even if only on a seasonal basis.**

3.6.3 In making this distinction between touring caravans and walking / cycling campers, we are aware of proposals, recently reported in the local press, for additional space for touring caravans at Grantown on Spey - as well as the fact that mobile caravans have opportunities to travel to available sites that those without powered transport simply do not have.

On behalf of Boat of Garten & Vicinity Community Council
Frank Bardgett, Secretary

Date: 7 September 2015