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# CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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**Title: REPORT ON CALLED-IN PLANNING APPLICATION**

**Prepared by: ANDREW TAIT, PLANNING OFFICER (DEVELOPMENT CONTROL)**

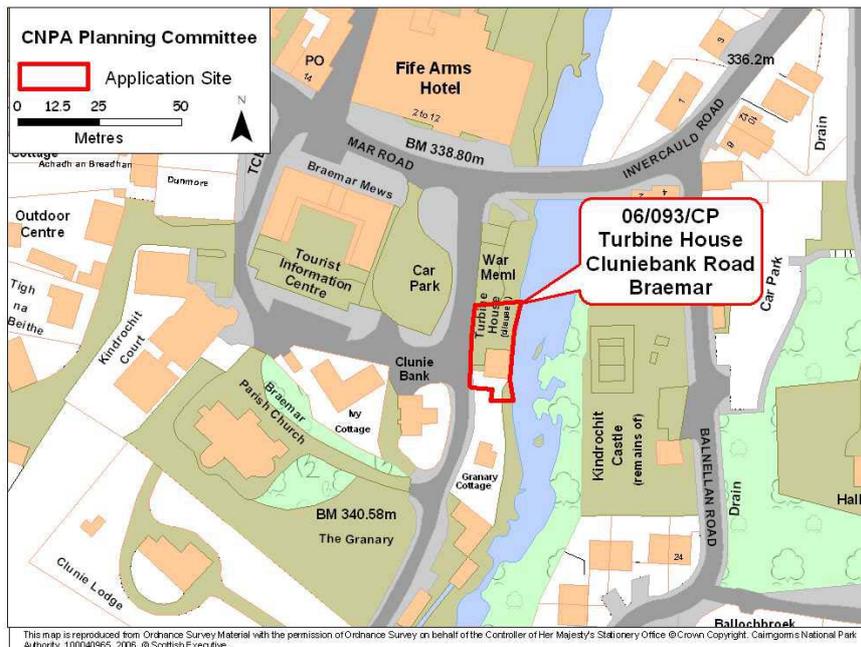
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**DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED: CHANGE OF USE AND CONVERSION/EXTENSION TO FORM RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY, TURBINE HOUSE, CLUNIEBANK ROAD, BRAEMAR (FULL PLANNING PERMISSION)**

**REFERENCE: 06/093/CP**

**APPLICANT: Mr John Duff**

**DATE CALLED-IN: 7 April 2006**



**Fig. 1 - Location Plan**

## SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL

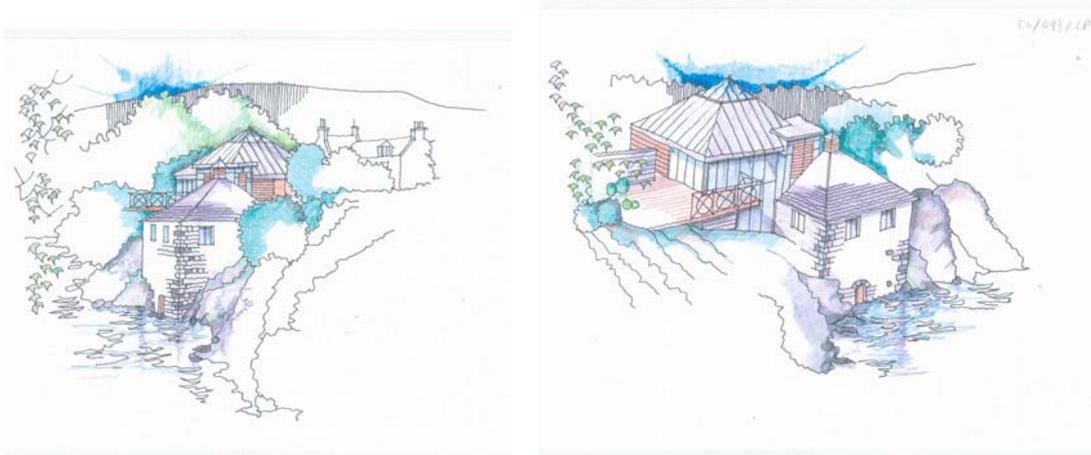
1. Turbine House lies just below Cluniebank Road on the west bank of the Clunie Water in Braemar. The building currently lies to the north of a converted granary and is prominent when seen from the popular tourist viewpoint of the bridge over the Clunie. The site is also visible from Kindrochit Castle.
2. Turbine House was built at the turn of the last century and while not listed is an important building in the Braemar Conservation Area. The house was constructed to generate electricity for the nearby Fife Arms Hotel. Water was fed by means of a lade and some 100 metres of iron pipework that entered Turbine House at its lowest floor level powering an electricity generator before being returned to the river. The river is now part of the Dee Special Area of Conservation (SAC)



**Fig 1 View of Turbine House from Bridge. Fig 2 View from Kindrochit Castle.**

3. After a number of years of deterioration the building was bought by the present owner and renovated to form a workshop. The building currently has 3 floor levels with roofspace storage that originally housed the maintenance engineer, the main workshop floor below and underneath that the basement room which housed the generator.
4. A background statement is attached at the back of the report which highlights problems with the building and it is pointed out that water is at times seeping through the wall of the structure from the rock bank below Cluniebank Road. This is causing damage to internal services and needs to be remedied immediately. In addition, a portion of the building's foundations at the lowest floor level have crumbled as a result of frost damage, it is considered that without urgent action this threatens to undermine the whole structure. The building has also recently been subject to vandalism.

5. The proposal is to convert the building to residential use and to link the building with the roadside by means of an extension. The proposed extension will link onto the existing structure at an overlapping corner using a small flat roofed element to incorporate the staircase. It should be noted that finished floor level of the extension will still be significantly below the roadside level.



**Figures 4 and 5 showing perspectives from bridge over Clunie and aerial view**

6. The floor plan at the upper (road level) consists of a dining, kitchen and a linked room formed into the current upper floor of Turbine House for a TV room. The main floor of Turbine House will incorporate two bedrooms and a study. The basement room will remain largely as is being the most vulnerable area for flooding from the river. While it is not formally part of this proposal investigations are ongoing to see if this turbine room could be used to generate domestic power for the conversion.
7. Apart from the linking extension Turbine House will remain largely as it is with existing openings being utilised. The roof planes with existing slates will be repaired and corrugated sheeting on the remainder of the roof will be removed and replaced with natural slate. The extension is designed in a range of modern materials including large glazed panels and ship lap boarding with a zinc standing seam roof, the possibility of a lead, or copper roof is also being investigated. Two car parking spaces will be formed at the bottom of the garden area, effectively behind the war memorial. The applicant's intention is to retain as many trees as possible. However, one larch and two smaller trees on the footprint of the extension would definitely need to be removed. However, it is important to note that permission has previously been granted for the removal of the larch which has several dead limbs and a hollow trunk. All other trees would be retained apart from any that are found to be undermining the structure. It is understood that two sycamore trees that spring from the bank of the Clunie may be having a detrimental effect on the building.

## DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONTEXT

### National Planning Guidance

8. **SPP 3 Planning for Housing** recognises that housing in rural areas should generally be directed towards towns and villages. However, the guidance also points out that landscape can make an essential contribution to environmental quality. The guidance notes that vacant buildings can make a contribution towards supply of new housing. The conversion of commercial, industrial or institutional premises offers opportunities to create new residential environments with a distinctive character while retaining buildings of architectural or historic interest.
9. **NPPG 18 Planning and the Historic Environment** para 46 considers that Planning Authorities must pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the designated conservation area when determining applications. Planning Authorities should give this a high priority.
10. NPPG 18 para 46 further notes that notwithstanding the acceptability of proposals in terms of other planning issues, if any proposed development would conflict with the objective of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a designated area there should be a presumption against granting permission. The guidance also draws attention to the impact of the proposals against the character of the whole area. It is also noted that if a proposal has negative and positive impacts then these will have to be weighed against each other. The guidance further notes that if a proposed development would have a neutral effect upon the character of the area then it should be treated as being one which preserves the areas character or appearance.
11. **SPP15 Planning for Rural Development** generally encourages the re-use of existing non-residential buildings for housing. The policy goes on to note that in many rural areas there are small sites (eg sawmills and brickworks) which cease to be required for their original purpose where conversion to residential use would bring about a net environmental benefit subject to a range of detailed criteria such as proximity to services, design, drainage, highways etc.

### North East Structure Plan Policy

12. **Policy 11 (General Housing Considerations) of the North East Structure Plan** directs housing towards sites within settlements. However, caveats are stated that housing should be located through sensitive siting with the use of appropriate densities. The preamble to this policy emphasises making sure that developments are well sited and properly designed to fit their surroundings.

**Aberdeenshire Local Plan Policy**

13. **Policy Gen\1 Sustainability Principles** considers that development will be assessed against sustainability indicators that relate to the local environment, community and economy demonstrated by whether the proposal accords with a range of criteria including d) protecting or enhancing any valuable natural resources including landscapes and wildlife habitats or species; e) does not damage built or cultural heritage resources; and f) does not impact negatively on the character, including landscape character, environment or amenity of the surrounding area. The policy concludes that where the assessment concludes that there is significant uncertainty as to whether the proposed development would cause substantial harm, the precautionary principle will be applied.
  
14. **Policy Gen\2 The Layout, and Siting and Design of New Development** relates to the layout siting and design of new development and considers that it will be approved if amongst other things it a) it can be laid out successfully into the site itself and respect the character and amenity of the surrounding area; b) its scale massing, height and density are appropriate; c) it respects existing natural and built features on or about the site which are worthy of retention.
  
15. **Policy Env 17 Conservation Areas** notes that all designated Conservation Areas shall be protected against any development, including change of use, that would have a detrimental effect on their special character or setting, by the refusal of planning permission or conservation area consent. New development wholly or partly within Conservation Areas must be of the highest quality and respect and enhance the architectural and visual qualities that give rise to their actual or proposed designation. All proposals must follow the Memorandum of Guidance on Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas and conform to appendix 4. The section of the appendix on Conservation Areas relates to external features such as layout and urban form, open spaces, external appearance of buildings; and individual or groups of trees. The appendix goes on to point out that the keynote is conservation, with the emphasis placed upon the character or appearance of the relevant area.
  
16. **Policy Env\8 Trees and Woodlands** considers that development that would cause the loss of, or serious damage to, trees or woodlands, which are either covered by an existing or proposed Tree Preservation Order OR of significant ecological, recreational, historical, shelter or landscape value, will be refused unless: its public benefits at the local level clearly outweigh the value of the habitat; the development will be sited and designed to minimise adverse impacts on the biodiversity of the site, including its environmental quality, ecological status and viability; there will be no further fragmentation or isolation of habitats as a result of development; AND the development incorporates

satisfactory measures to replace and/or enhance existing trees and woodlands.

**Cairngorms National Park Local Plan Draft for Consultation (For Information Purposes)**

17. **Policy 40: Conversions of Existing non-Residential Buildings** considers that conversions/extensions/alterations/replacements of existing rural buildings will be permitted if the following criteria are met:  
a) The building is redundant for its existing use, and it can be demonstrated that it is unlikely to have a commercial or economic future (where possible the development could incorporate space for an office/workshop to allow for some continued commercial use/economic diversification). No more than 3 residential units may be created from such a conversion, unless they are for affordable housing; tenure to be secured in perpetuity by planning agreements. The proposal is designed to maintain the style and character of the original building in terms of form, scale, materials and detailing; the building footprint should not increase by more than 50%
18. **Policy 7 Conservation Areas** considers that all conservation areas in the National Park will be protected through the refusal of planning permission, conservation area consent or listed building consent, against works that would have a detrimental effect on their special character.
19. **Policy 8: Locally Distinctive and Vernacular Architecture** considers that development that would result in the unnecessary demolition or insensitive alteration of vernacular buildings or other locally distinctive architecture that contribute to the character and amenity of the surrounding area will not be permitted.

**CONSULTATIONS**

20. **Historic Scotland** has been involved in pre-application discussions and examined the application from both the archaeological and built heritage perspective and has no comments.
21. **Scottish Natural Heritage** has no objection to the proposed development. SNH considers that it is unlikely that the proposal will have a significant effect on any of the qualifying interests of the River Dee Special Area of Conservation (SAC) either directly or indirectly and in SNH's view an appropriate assessment is therefore not required.
22. **SEPA** note that it is proposed to connect the foul drainage from this development to the public sewer and has no objection to this. In terms of surface water drainage SEPA has no objection to SUDS measures such as discharge of surface water run-off to soakaways.

23. **Scottish Water** point out the need to gain consent for a connection to their services.
24. **Aberdeenshire Council Archaeologist** has no objection in principle but recommends that a range of photographs of the building are taken and submitted prior to any works being carried out.
25. **Aberdeenshire Council Flood Prevention Unit** has commented that there could be a technical requirement for a flood risk assessment. However, it is not thought that the building would be subject to flood beyond the generator floor. Providing the applicant provides a letter stating that the building would be occupied subject to the applicant's own risk then there is no objection. The applicant has provided a letter to this effect.
26. **Aberdeenshire Council Transport and Infrastructure** have raised concern about the current position of the parking area and request that the parking area is re-sited 2 metres further away from the memorial and that the height of walls for 2 metres either side of the access should not exceed 1 metre. The drawing has been altered accordingly.
27. **Aberdeenshire Council's Planning Gain Co-ordinator** has commented that should the application be successful a contribution should be sought towards infrastructure and affordable housing. A figure has been agreed between the parties and this will be provided prior to the release of the planning decision notice to avoid the need for a Section 75 Agreement.
28. **Aberdeenshire Council Natural Heritage** notes that the proposal will involve the loss of a few trees on the south side of the site and some scrub, bird cherry and lilac on the north side. Only, one of the trees, a mature larch is of any real significance. However, this tree is showing signs of die back and its removal had already been agreed. In the northern part of the site the lilac and bird cherry form a screen approximately 3 metres high. If some of this planting could be retained between the proposed car parking spaces and the existing access and the bird cherry replaced within the garden area this would be of benefit for the visual amenity and character of the conservation area.
29. **Aberdeenshire Council Built and Cultural Heritage** considers the proposal to be acceptable.

## REPRESENTATIONS

30. **Braemar Community Council** has no objection. It was agreed by everyone that it was a good idea to make the building residential as it would make good use of the building and it would be properly maintained into future years.

## APPRAISAL

31. There are a range of issues to be considered in the determination of this application, including principle, design and the effect of the scheme on the conservation area, flooding and highways.

### Principle

32. The starting point for this proposal is whether the application is acceptable in principle. With regard to this it is important to note that the site is located **within the settlement envelope of Braemar** and involves the re-use of an existing traditional building. The starting point in terms of national guidance in **SPP3 Planning for Housing** is an expectation that housing in rural areas should generally be directed towards towns and villages. This guidance also recognises the contribution that the conversion of industrial or commercial premises to create new residential environments can make. The guidance goes on to note that this approach can also help to conserve buildings of historic and architectural interest. This general stance is supported at both structure and local plan level with **Policy 11 (General Housing Considerations) of the North East Structure Plan** directing housing towards settlements.
33. When looking at a conversion it is often important to consider the loss of the existing use of the building and the value that that use may be contributing to the area. The original use of the building for electricity generation for the Fife Arms is clearly not required today. The building has been used as a domestic ancillary workshop by the owner of the site who lives in a neighbouring building. Given this, it is clear that the loss of the existing use at the building cannot be considered significant in terms of its economic contribution to the locality. Also, given the location and design of the building it would perhaps not be suitable for many forms of free standing commercial/workshop activity in any case.

### The Design of the Proposal in the Conservation Area

34. While the proposal may be considered appropriate in principle this principle is filtered through a range of remaining policy areas. Given that this is a traditional building within the Braemar Conservation Area high regard must be had for the design of the resulting conversion and its effects upon the character and appearance of the area.
35. This is a reasonably difficult building to convert given the main level of the building being set down well below Cluniebank Road. The existing Turbine House is basically a structure with a square footprint set on rock, just above the banks of the Clunie. The existing building will be converted largely as is with no additional openings on the main walls of the building facing Kindrochit Castle and the bridge over the Clunie. This is viewed as very positive in terms of conserving a building that

could be viewed as being under threat if repairs are not carried out in the short to medium term.

36. The change in levels and the space available in Turbine House means that an extension is required to provide a reasonable scale of accommodation, particularly given that the lowest floor of the building has to be left vacant because of potential for flooding. The extension is set below the Cluniebank Road level where a kitchen and dining room will be situated, then linked to a TV room, effectively being housed in the roofspace of Turbine House, this link would be formed by a small flat roofed element housing the staircase giving access to the main floor of the house. This would contain 2 bedrooms, a bathroom and study, as mentioned the floor level below this would be left as is due to limited potential for flooding of this section.
37. While the form and scale of the extension mirrors the scale and form of the existing structure, in exterior terms the extension contrasts boldly the traditional materials of Turbine House by using large panels of glazing in aluminium frames and horizontal ship lap boarding. The roof of the extension would take entirely the same form as the roof of the existing building but be formed with raised seam aluminium sheeting with a glazed section at the pinnacle of the roof. This change would create a distinct, positive identity between the traditional stone building and the new accommodation. A wrap around balcony element in timber decking with steel balustrade is also proposed to the south of the main structure but will only be physically connected to the extension.
38. The most relevant detailed policy with regard to the design of the conversion/extension in the conservation area is **Policy Env 17 Conservation Areas** of the Aberdeenshire Local Plan. This policy considers that “new development wholly or partly within Conservation Areas must be of the highest quality and respect and enhance the architectural and visual qualities that give rise to their actual or proposed designation”. The policy also points to appendix 4 of the plan where a list of detailed criteria provide guidance to developers on layout/urban form, street layout and furniture, open spaces, external appearance of buildings and individual or groups of trees. The policy notes that infill is encouraged on appropriate sites. At its heart, the policy has twofold criteria. The first test is whether the scheme conserves the character of the area and the second being whether the development positively enhances it. In terms of the existing building the main public elevations from Kindrochit Castle and the bridge will remain relatively unchanged with existing openings being used to provide light. The new extension would also be viewed, set back and above Turbine House from both of these popular viewpoints. While the approach conserves the main part of the fabric of the existing building the second part of the question is whether the extension detracts from, or enhances the character of the conservation area and cultural heritage of this part of the Park.

39. As noted the extension is set back from Turbine House so helps to conserve the historic integrity of that building; this is particularly the case in the classic view illustrated by fig 4 from the bridge over the Clunie. However, it must also be noted that this view, even in winter, is broken up by several trees located between the site and the bridge. The new build proposed has a very similar footprint and built form to Turbine House but the modern materials help to emphasise the historic identity of the original building while the new build provides a modern interpretation of its basic form. Historic Scotland has no objections to the proposal on archaeological, historic building or conservation area grounds, and neither has Aberdeenshire Council's Built Heritage Team. I am of the view that the new build extension accords with **Policy ENV 17** by both conserving Turbine House but also by enhancing the conservation area, providing a free standing, individually designed solution to ensure the continued existence and use of Turbine House while positively adding a contemporary element to the stock of good quality, individual buildings, within the village.

### Natural Heritage

40. In terms of natural heritage the key concern relates to the adjacent river which is part of the River Dee Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designated for its internationally important populations of Atlantic salmon, freshwater pearl mussel, and otter. Scottish Natural Heritage has no objection to the development as it is considered unlikely that it would have a significant effect on any of the qualifying interests of the River Dee SAC either directly or indirectly. In SNH's view an appropriate assessment is therefore not required.
41. The site is generally surrounded by trees and over time some have been allowed to grow very near to the building. To accommodate the extension on the Cluniebank Road two small aspen would need to be removed as would a larch. As mentioned two of the trees are small and the loss of the larch had already been agreed some time ago by Aberdeenshire Council Officer's because the tree has many dead limbs and is thought to be hollow.
42. With regard to the backdrop of the building significant larger trees immediately to the south of Turbine House would remain. In addition, there are trees between the view from the bridge and the site. These are important as they form an essential part of the classic view of the building from the bridge. Two other trees immediately to the south of the building that spring from the banks of the Clunie may also need to be removed, but only if they are undermining the structure of Turbine House. These trees make some positive contribution to the character of the conservation area. However, there is a lot of significant vegetation on the banks and, as noted, the site has significant treed areas either side. While it may be preferable to retain these two trees their loss is not considered significant when set against the overall benefits of the scheme and the fact that the loss of these trees would

not detrimentally effect the wider character of the area given the amount of vegetation that lines the banks of the river both north and south of the site. Some lower level shrubs would require to be removed to accommodate the parking spaces at the rear of the war memorial. In line with the comments of Aberdeenshire Council Natural Heritage replacements including a bird cherry can be sought through the landscaping condition suggested at the end of the report. The applicant's agent has provided a letter that it is his intention to retain as much of the natural vegetation around the site as possible.

### **Drainage/ Potential Flooding**

43. SEPA have been consulted on drainage and are happy with the measures proposed, there will be little difference in terms of surface water drainage. Prior to the application SEPA had commented that flooding was unlikely to occur from the watercourse at this location. Aberdeenshire Council's Flood Prevention Officer was also consulted on the application. In technical terms the application could be subject to a flood risk assessment. However, the Flood Prevention Officer does not think that the site will flood and it is important to note that anecdotal evidence from the owner of the site that in the last 25 years including the severe flooding events of November/December 2002 that the lowest chamber of the building which is not to be developed flooded to a level of 200mm on just 2 occasions, this floor is more than 2 metres below the lowest level which this development proposes to occupy as useable residential accommodation. The applicant's agent has confirmed that the occupier of the building will occupy it at their own risk in respect of flooding.

### **Parking/Roads**

44. The proposal provides two parking spaces behind the war memorial. The number of spaces proposed is accepted by Aberdeenshire Transport Section. However, they have requested that for pedestrian safety the parking spaces are moved 2 metres further away from the back of the war memorial. Revised plans have been supplied that confirm this.

### **Conclusion**

45. This application offers a key opportunity to ensure the continued fabric and use of an important building that is under some threat from undermining. The building has recently subject to vandalism and requires a significant investment. The extension proposed is of itself a good quality individually designed element that will enhance the character of the conservation area and the cultural heritage of this part of the Cairngorms National Park. In addition, the scheme is supported by the Community Council. The proposal is considered to make a significant contribution in delivering the collective aims of the Park.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AIMS OF THE NATIONAL PARK

### Conserve and Enhance the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Area

46. The proposal enables Turbine House to be retained into the future and as such helps conserve the cultural heritage of the area. The modern addition is in turn, considered to enhance the cultural heritage of this part of the Braemar Conservation Area by providing a contemporary, distinctive, and individually designed building. In terms of natural heritage the assessment by SNH indicates that there are unlikely to be effects and the proposal involves only limited loss of trees in the area. Given the tight nature of the site and the proximity of the river a construction method statement will be sought by condition to ensure the protection of the river during any construction.

### Promote Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

47. The proposal is intrinsically sustainable as it involves in part the re-use of an existing building within a village that hosts a range of local services. The scheme is designed so that working from home can be accommodated and this is the intention. The applicant and agent are also investigating the possibility of reinstating the turbine to generate electricity for the house.

### Promote Understanding and Enjoyment of the Area

48. Ensuring the future retention of the building will add positively to the popular tourist views of the site from the bridge over the Clunie. The building is a key part of the cultural heritage of the area and of itself adds to the understanding of the history of the area. Its retention will ensure that this remains the case for future generations.

### Promote Sustainable Economic and Social Development of the Area

49. The proposal makes a small contribution to this aim by conserving an important building in an area where the economy relies on tourism, and by providing an additional unit of accommodation in the village. This will hopefully contribute in a small way towards the use of village facilities.

## RECOMMENDATION

50. That Members of the Committee support a recommendation to:  
**GRANT** Full Planning Permission for Change of Use and Conversion/Extension to Residential Property, Turbine House, Cluniebank Road, Braemar, subject to the following conditions:
1. The development to which this permission relates must be begun within 5 years of the date of this permission.

2. No trees shall be felled, lopped, or topped on the site without the prior written consent of the Cairngorms National Park Authority.
3. The development shall be landscaped and maintained in accordance with a scheme which shall be submitted to and approved by the Planning Authority before development commences. The scheme shall include indications of all existing trees and landscaped areas on the land, and details of any to be retained, together with measures for their protection in the course of the development and shall indicate the siting, numbers, species and heights (at the time of planting) of all trees, shrubs, walls and hedges to be constructed/ planted and to the extent of any areas of earthmounding, and shall ensure:-
  - (a) Completion of the scheme during the planting season next following the completion of the development, or such other date as may be agreed in writing with the Planning Authority.
  - (b) The maintenance of the landscaped areas in perpetuity in accordance with the detailed maintenance schedule/table. Any trees or shrubs removed, or which in the opinion of the Planning Authority, are dying, being severely damaged or becoming seriously diseased within three years of planting, shall be replaced by trees or shrubs of similar size and species to those originally required to be planted.
4. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved a construction method statement shall be submitted to and approved by the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as planning authority. The statement shall include details of any excavations, measures to prevent materials from entering the river, construction material and spoil storage areas and destination of any material to be removed from the site. Construction shall be carried out in accordance with the approved statement.
5. Exact details and specifications of all proposed external finishing materials for conversion and new build (including roofing and balcony/balustrade materials) shall be submitted for the further approval of the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as planning authority before any work commences on site.
6. The parking indicated on the approved plan shall be made available and ready for use prior to the occupation of the development hereby approved.
7. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby approved a full photographic internal and external survey of the building shall be carried out in a form to be agreed by the Cairngorms National Park Authority in consultation with Aberdeenshire Council Archaeologist.

8. That notwithstanding the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992, no house extension shall be formed, and no greenhouse, shed or garage erected without the prior written permission of the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as planning authority.

**Andrew Tait**

**planning@cairngorms.co.uk**

**26 June 2006**

The map on the first page of this report has been produced to aid in the statutory process of dealing with planning applications. The map is to help identify the site and its surroundings and to aid Planning Officers, Committee Members and the Public in the determination of the proposal. Maps shown in the Planning Committee Report can only be used for the purposes of the Planning Committee. Any other use risks infringing Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Maps produced within this Planning Committee Report can only be reproduced with the express permission of the Cairngorms National Park Authority and other Copyright holders. This permission must be granted in advance.