

15 March 2017

Lucy Prins
The Highland Council
Fulton House
Gordon Square
Fort William PH33 6XY
epc@highland.gov.uk

Dear Ms Prins

17/00045/FUL | A run of river hydro scheme on the Allt Nathrach and associated watercourses.

We are writing with regard to the above planning application and have a number of comments to make in response to the proposals.

This application is located within an area which is highly valued for its natural heritage and landscape quality, and as a world-class setting for outdoor recreation. These are aspects which are important to the wider economy of the area, as well as contributing to the overall integrity of the West Highland Way (WHW). This is Scotland's most popular long distance route, completed by approximately 40,000 people each year as well as many additional day visitors. The WHW route in this area has historical and cultural significance, being an old military road.

We therefore have particular concerns over the potential disruption to this important route given that the overall construction period is set to last 14 months. We would like assurances that uninterrupted access will be carefully and dynamically managed throughout this time. We welcome the plans within the environmental statement to facilitate access during the construction phase, but far more detail is required. It will be challenging to ensure safe passage for those using the WHW, and also the path down Beinn na Caillich and the route up Coire na h-Eirghe which converge at this point and are well used in all seasons. While the proposed signage will play a role in ensuring people are informed about the works as they approach, it should be borne in mind that many people walking the WHW are overseas visitors who may not understand the fairly wordy examples of signage which are given in the access management plan. We note and support the further comments from the council's access officer on how access should be managed.

In terms of impacts on the landscape, this development is within the Ben Nevis and Glencoe National Scenic Area and partly within Core Wild Land Area 14, Rannoch – Nevis – Mamores – Alder. It is vitally important that the construction and reinstatement/restoration of the area is tightly controlled and any potential for damage is mitigated as far as possible. Across Scotland, we are monitoring a growing number of works relating to hydro schemes which have not been carefully controlled by the planning authority and have led to long term or permanent damage to the geology, soils and vegetation, often leading to a permanent negative impacts on the landscape as a result. Given the steepness of the terrain in this area and the high levels of rainfall, it is clearly important that the construction is managed appropriately to minimise any environmental or visual impact.

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We note that the permanent track from the West Highland Way to the main intake will be reinstated to a width of 2.5m and allowed to “green over”. Firstly we question whether a track of this width is required given that it will be used by ATVs and quad bikes and SNH’s guidance on width specifies a track width of 2m for quad bike use. Secondly we suggest that the track is pro-actively restored by being sown with seed to enable the grass to take hold and reduce visual impact as quickly as possible.

Should this development be approved, and recognising the long-term potential disruption to public access in this area while the construction takes place, Ramblers Scotland would be happy to help publicise any health and safety information to walkers during this time.

We trust this information is helpful and would be happy to discuss further at your convenience.

Yours sincerely

Helen Todd
Campaigns & Policy Manager

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President: Ben Dolphin
Director: Brendan Paddy

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