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Katherine Donnachie
Cairngorms National Park Authority
14 The Square
Grantown-on-Spey
PH26 3HG

Dear Ms Donnachie

Applications Number: 2016/0228/LBC and 2016/0227/DET
Development Proposed: Change of Use of Existing Derelict Shooting Lodge to Form Tourist Hostel
Accommodation (including staff accommodation) Location: Derry Lodge, Braemar, Aberdeenshire

Ramblers Scotland is writing in support of the above applications from the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) to develop a tourist hostel at Derry Lodge on the Mar Lodge estate. We fully endorse the intentions of the NTS to conserve and re-develop this historic building in an environmentally-sensitive manner and believe the development could also positively impact upon the wild camping activities in this area. We would like to make the following comments.

We recognise that this part of the Cairngorms National Park is rich in natural and cultural heritage, in particular reflected by the number of nature conservation and landscape designations which cover this area. Therefore it is important that any development is carried out in a sensitive way. Given that this is an existing building and that other buildings are also located nearby, we believe the current proposals are appropriate and will not further detract from the wild land qualities in this location.

It is possible that the development of a hostel will increase the numbers of people visiting the area who are attracted because there will be serviced accommodation at the site (we note the estimated 3-4% increase on 130,000 annual visitors). In general, we believe any potential impacts of greater numbers will be balanced by the improvements in managing the existing wild camping activities which are part of this proposal, for example by providing toilets which are open to all and which will reduce problems relating to human waste in the environment. The regular presence of a warden/ranger who can advise campers on use of fires and their responsibilities under the Scottish Outdoor Access Code while reducing the likelihood of any anti-social behaviour will be beneficial. If the application is approved, we advise the NTS to continue to monitor the use of the camping area in case the greater awareness of the Derry Lodge accommodation and the toilet facilities for campers leads to the growth of a *de facto* campsite nearby, with the resulting greater cumulative impacts on the environment. We would not condone any ban on camping in this case, but it may require further management measures to be considered and we would be pleased to advise on this.

We support the retention of the 'long walk in' by restricting access to those on foot, by bicycle or on horseback with the exception of disabled visitors who may require transport which should be arranged in advance of arrival.

Convener: Alison Mitchell
Vice-Convener: Andy Malby
Director: Jess Dolan

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87-90 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TW

If the application is approved, we agree with the suggestion made by the Mountaineering Council of Scotland that this restriction on motorised access by visitors should be secured through a planning condition.

We are particularly pleased that the design incorporates facilities for visitors of all abilities as it is often very difficult for such visitors to enjoy the experience of an overnight stay away from any settlement. We are also pleased to see the flexibility in the design of the accommodation so that it can be booked by both a group and individuals at any one time, and can be made use of by school and other youth groups.

The conditions of use, in terms of how visitors will book the accommodation, are crucial to the success of this project. In principle we support the position that all bookings should be made in advance of arriving at the hostel and that all marketing of the hostel should be on that basis. We believe it is important that visitors coming from the Linn of Dee are advised by signage at the car park about the pre-booking system so that they do not turn up expecting a bed without already having booked. However, for visitors arriving from other directions there needs to be a clear policy with regard to providing emergency shelter but also with regard to health and safety. For example, it is not difficult to imagine ill-prepared people arriving at the hostel late without a booking but expecting to stay, having walked through the Lairig Ghru or Glen Tilt without any camping equipment and who will find it very demanding to continue on to Braemar. If the warden is present and there are empty beds it seems unfortunate that people would be turned away in such circumstances even if the situation is not likely to turn into an emergency. If the warden is not present, then we assume there will be an entry key system for those who have pre-booked accommodation. We advise that the conditions of use remain under review following the establishment of the hostel and are re-assessed after a period of use. We would be happy to be involved in any discussions regarding the developing of the booking policy.

In conclusion we are very pleased to see this proposal come forward. We believe it can contribute to our own aspirations for diversifying the types of accommodation available for walkers in Scotland, especially in this case which caters for all abilities and can be used to bring people from a wide range of backgrounds into this special area.

We trust you find these comments useful and would be happy to discuss further at any time.

Yours sincerely

Helen Todd
Campaigns & Policy Manager.

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