

Mr Andrew McCracken,  
Senior Planner,  
Highland Council Area Planning and Building Control Office,  
100 High Street,  
Kingussie, PH21 1HY

Dear Mr McCracken,

Thursday 2 November 05

***Objection to 02/230/OUTBS Housing with additional sites for lorry-parking and commercial use etc., development south of Deshar Road, Boat of Garten.***

Despite the lateness of this communication, the Cairngorms Campaign wishes to register this objection to the above development with Highland Council.

The Campaign feels that this development has to be seen both in its broader context and in its more local specific context.

***1.0 Broader Context***

There are two aspects to the broader context – the situation regarding the significance of woodlands, particularly ancient and semi-ancient woodlands, within the National Park, and the significance of developments of this kind for communities and the environment in the light of global research on the impacts tourism development.

***1.1 Ancient and Semi-Ancient Woodland***

Woodlands in the context of Badenoch and Strathspey, and of the National Park in general perform a range of important functions. They shelter a wide range of species including priority species like the capercaillie and the red squirrel. They provide an important diversity, structure and texture to the landscape, and the Autumn colours this season on Speyside and elsewhere bear elegant testimony to that. They provide important areas for outdoor recreation for residents and visitors alike in surroundings that provide a relaxed acquaintance with the natural world, and often permit an enjoyable experience on days when wind and other climatic influences create an unpleasant environment outwith their shelter. These assets are particularly valuable where woodlands occur close to settlements where visitors and residents can access them readily on foot as at Boat of Garten.

Semi-ancient woodlands, such as the one threatened with housing development in this case, have been reduced over centuries to small, scattered fragments occupying only a few percent of their former extent in the UK. The protection of these surviving fragments is a nationally important priority which must gain further standing within a National Park. The woodland at Boat of Garten also harbours important priority species which are increasingly iconic of what the Highlands and the Cairngorms National Park offers visitors.

It follows from the above that the Highland woodland resource, of which the one at Boat of Garten is an excellent example, are a key component of those assets of landscape and wildlife that are both the foundations of Highland tourism and the features that the Cairngorms National Park encompasses. Such woodlands cannot be realistically re-created once destroyed and even normal mature woodlands of birch or other native species take a generation or more to recreate.

*It is therefore vital to the sustainable future of the area that your Council safeguards this resource!* Semi-ancient woodlands were brought to their present state, not largely by widespread rapid destruction, but by frequent lesser losses causing gradual degradation and fragmentation, of which this housing proposal would be a good example.

#### *1.1 The Implications of Research Into Intensive Tourism Development*

We have learned much from global research about the problems of balancing the social, economic, and environmental benefits and disbenefits of large scale tourist development. It is important that these lessons are taken account of in the National Park in general and in Badenoch and Strathspey in particular where the tourism development pressures are greatest and often take the form of housing developments.

We are aware that one of the most fundamental impacts of such tourism development is the rapid rise in property prices, often leading to the situation where local residents, whom the development is claimed to benefit, can no longer afford to live in their own communities. Aviemore has long been pointed to internationally as a classic example of this problem and indeed of other negative impacts of over-intensive tourism development, but the problem affects other parts of the District to a significant extent.

Provision of affordable housing is part of the claimed benefits of this development. The above trend, and other factors, often lead to conflicts such as this being presented as “*Capercaillie versus homes.*” It is a false dichotomy, but leads to strong pressure on planning authorities to relent, which provides a signal to other developers to offer similar proposals, resulting in piecemeal degradation of woodland and other valued habitats.

We therefore believe it is important that your Council takes a firm stand on such proposals and refuses planning permission for it.

## **2.0 Specific Objections**

Evidence supplied by Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group and SNH clearly establishes the importance of this woodland for the priority species capercaillie and red squirrel and cast considerable doubt on the reliability of data supplied by consultants to the developers. We therefore support their objections to this development.

We also support the grounds of objection succinctly stated in the letter from the Scottish Council for National Parks.

Yours sincerely,

R Drennan Watson (Convenor)  
Brig o Lead,  
Forbes,  
Alford, AB33 8PD