

An Camus Mor and the new local development plan

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Readers' letters

Village's green lung must be protected

CONGRATULATIONS to the Old Bridge Inn in Aviemore for hosting the world premiere of Patagonia's film 'Right to Roam'.

This event last Thursday initiated a European tour to highlight the adventures of two snowboarders, American Alex Yoder and Canadian Marie-France Roy as they explored the Highlands last winter in a surprisingly successful quest for snowy climbs and descents.

Underlying their adventure was unstinting praise for Scotland's world class right to roam legislation, expertly described in the film by local enthusiast Lauren MacCallum.

What a piece of luck for our tourist industry - two of North America's star snowboarders promoting Scottish snow, access rights and our cultural heritage to the wider world, all paid for by an outdoor clothing firm.

The film should be compulsory viewing for VisitScotland staff and all our politicians.

Perhaps we should not be surprised - Patagonia has its origins in Scotland.

Its American founder, the climber, skier and surfer, Yvon Chouinard, visited Scotland in 1970 and purchased a brightly coloured rugby shirt.

Back home he realised the tough material and high collar were ideal for rugged outdoor pursuits, with colours likely to appeal to the rapidly expanding generations of outdoor enthusiasts.

From this single shirt developed one of the world's most successful outdoor clothing manufacturers - today Patagonia employs over 2,000 people worldwide in eight offices with annual revenues in excess of \$600 million.

It is also a leading force in protecting the world's land, rivers and oceans - every year one per cent of its sales, or ten per cent of its annual profit, whichever is the larger, is allocated to an environmental fund whose primary purpose is to support local activists.

Under Chouinard's leadership Patagonia has laid down the ethical benchmark that the rest of business should follow.

But the supreme irony is that while the Patagonia team were singing the praises of Scotland's access legislation just across the River Spey was the greatest threat to that legislation.

The proposed An Camas Mor housing development on Rothiemurchus estate is the supreme example of what Patagonia has been fighting against for most of its existence.

Where else would a private landowner be allowed to carry out a massive housing development in the heart of a national park and destroy extensive tracts of naturally regenerating native pine and birchwood - trashing one of the best areas in the Cairngorms National Park



AN CAMAS MOR: has been earmarked for up to 1500 homes in the next 25 to 30 years. The site is pictured beyond Aviemore upper central section of the photograph.

for demonstrating rewilding and the restoration of native habitats?

Where else would a development of 1500 new houses also require the regulation of public access over large areas of forest and woodland, way beyond the actual development site, with byelaws the only certain way of achieving that regulation?

Surely the time has come for a community buy-out of most of Rothiemurchus estate so that an alternative plan for An Camas Mor can be promoted?

Aviemore needs a green lung - a new bridge across the Spey for walkers and cyclists, with the extensive development of trails, sports and refreshment facilities, with sensitive regard for natural habitats, and no housing.

The top priority for housing should be social housing development elsewhere in Aviemore and other communities in the strath, coupled with a decent bus service to connect everyone together.

Maybe Patagonia can be persuaded to return to Aviemore and make a film about the other side of the river and how to stop a crazy housing project.

Dave Morris
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Kinnesswood
Kinross.

Excessive and brutal response by state

ONE cannot fail to have been moved by the scenes of violence in Catalonia, as Spanish forces attacked unarmed voters.

Whatever the view on Catalonia's right to hold such a vote or not, the response by the Spanish national government was brutal and excessive, leading to 844 people being injured.

The sight of people being dragged from polling stations by baton wielding

police and the disabled being attacked in wheelchairs has no place in a modern western democracy.

One cannot praise highly enough the calmness, humanity and bravery of the Catalan people when faced with such acts of violence.

What is deeply disappointing is the muted response from the international community, which bar a few exceptions such as Angela Merkel, the Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel and Nicola Sturgeon, has been largely silent.

While the European Union may argue that this is a domestic situation, in the past it has been willing to act in such matters.

In 2000, for example, it imposed diplomatic sanctions on Austria when Joerg Haider's extreme right wing Austrian Freedom Party entered the government.

The Tory Government is so morally bankrupt that little more was to be expected than the pathetic response from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office when it referred to Spain as a "close ally and a good friend, whose strength and unity matters to us".

There was no condemnation of the violence, but the UK Government is so weakened due to Brexit that it requires every scrap of support it can gather, even if it means turning a blind eye to such obvious brutality.

One suspects that if there was any doubt previously over Catalonia's desire for independence, the actions of the Spanish state have pushed it well and truly down this road.

Alex Orr
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Shooting is vital for our rural economy

OCTOBER heralds the start of the

The current debate on An Camas Mor is likely to carry into the consultation on the new Local Development Plan. (Letter 5th October - Dave Morris is fellow campaigner and friend of mine).

Arguably the most important item on the agenda of the Cairngorms National Park Authority Board Meeting on Friday ([link to papers](#)) was the Local Development Plan. The current five year plan was approved two and a half years ago but the consultation for the next one is due to start at the end of the year. The Board was being asked to consider the draft “Main Issues Report” for consultation. It contains many important issues (which I will come back to) and a significant discussion about An Camas Mor.

When the CNPA Board renewed the planning permission for An Camas Mor for a paltry £203 under Section 42 of the Planning Act in the summer, part of their argument was they had no choice but to do so. This was because the land at An Camas Mor was set aside for housing in the existing Local Development Plan. There is a danger here of a circular argument, planning permission is granted because a new town at ACM is in the Local Development Plan and then the Local Development Plan allocates the site for a new town because.....its been granted planning permission. This could go on for years!

In what I see as a significant development the Main Issues report identifies a way out of this circular argument based on the Scottish Government’s targets for new build housing in the National Park:

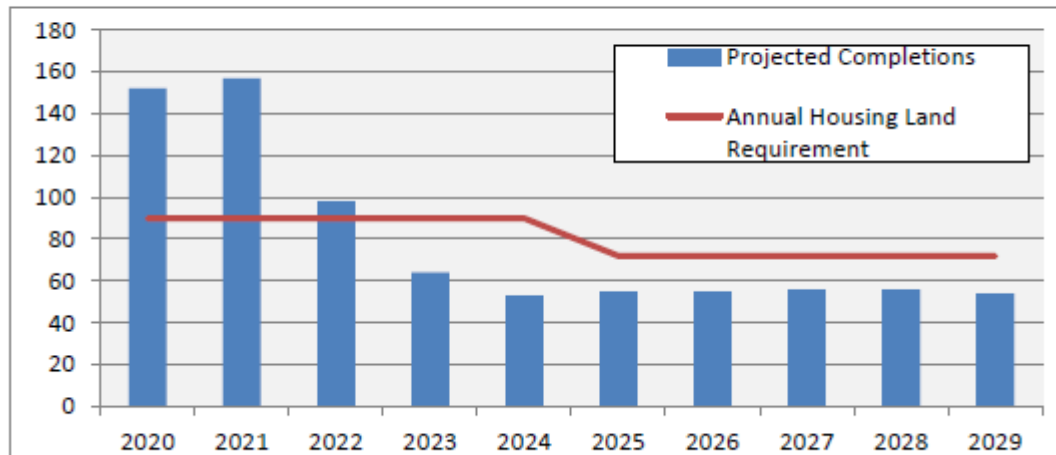
We will continue to work with the site owners and their design team to deliver An Camas Mòr. However, it is also possible that An Camas Mòr will not be delivered. The next Local Development Plan needs to be able to adapt to those circumstances if they happen and have alternative ways of meeting the National Park’s housing land requirements in the event that the site is unable to be developed.

The argument is that if ACM is not built, the CNPA’s proposed housing target would be missed so the CNPA is suggesting setting aside alternative land for housing. Its suggestion is land at the northern edge of Aviemore which, it says:

“is close to the existing road network, mains water supplies, sewage infrastructure and electricity supplies and would link to existing services and facilities in Aviemore.”

In other words, the infrastructure costs associated with development would be significantly less and so make the development more likely to go ahead. If that is the case, however, why not just choose the site now and ditch ACM?

Figure 3 Anticipated housing delivery rates excluding the An Camas Mòr new settlement



Extract from Main Issues report

There is lots of other interesting information in the report (the CNPA is in a different league to the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority when it comes to providing evidence about its plans – the draft LLTNPA National Partnership contains no proper evidence). This evidence I believe will further assist with opening up a debate about whether ACM is a sensible solution to the Park’s housing problems. Take the chart above (which excludes ACM which is projected to provide 50 accommodation units a year till it reaches 1500). This shows that in 2020 and 2021 new housing completions will exceed the Park’s target and by my reckoning this surplus offsets the shortfall between 2023 and 2026. From then on the projected shortfall is only 20 houses a year, far less than the 50 a year ACM claims it will provide. So, why is ACM needed on the Park’s projected “Annual Housing Land Requirement”?

If the Park’s projections of either demand or supply are wrong and fewer new houses are needed – for example if the number of vacant houses in the National Park could be reduced – there would be no justification for ACM at all.

The Local Development Plan is also proposing to increase the proportion of affordable housing in new housing developments from the Scottish benchmark of 25% to 45% in Aviemore and Blair Atholl because of the shocking levels of low pay in the National Park (average pay is well below the Scottish average). Now, I think this is a commendable move in the right direction, even if its not clear if this applies to ACM as well as Aviemore. It should do though and, if it did, it would be very interesting to know if ACM would still go ahead (because of the high cost of new infrastructure).

Although the CNPA is saying in the Main Issues Report that it will do all it can to facilitate ACM, the

logic of the Plan and the evidence seems to me to point to a different conclusion: that is it would be much better use of public money to plan for social housing elsewhere NOW and not wait for ACM to fail. This would also avoid an access stushi and, most important of all, the destruction of one of the finest areas of regenerating native woodland ([see here](#)) in the National Park. The consultation on the Local Development Plan offers an opportunity to stop the new town madness that is An Camas Mor and for the CNPA to meet its objectives both for conservation and sustainable development.

Category

- 1. Cairngorms
- 2. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

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