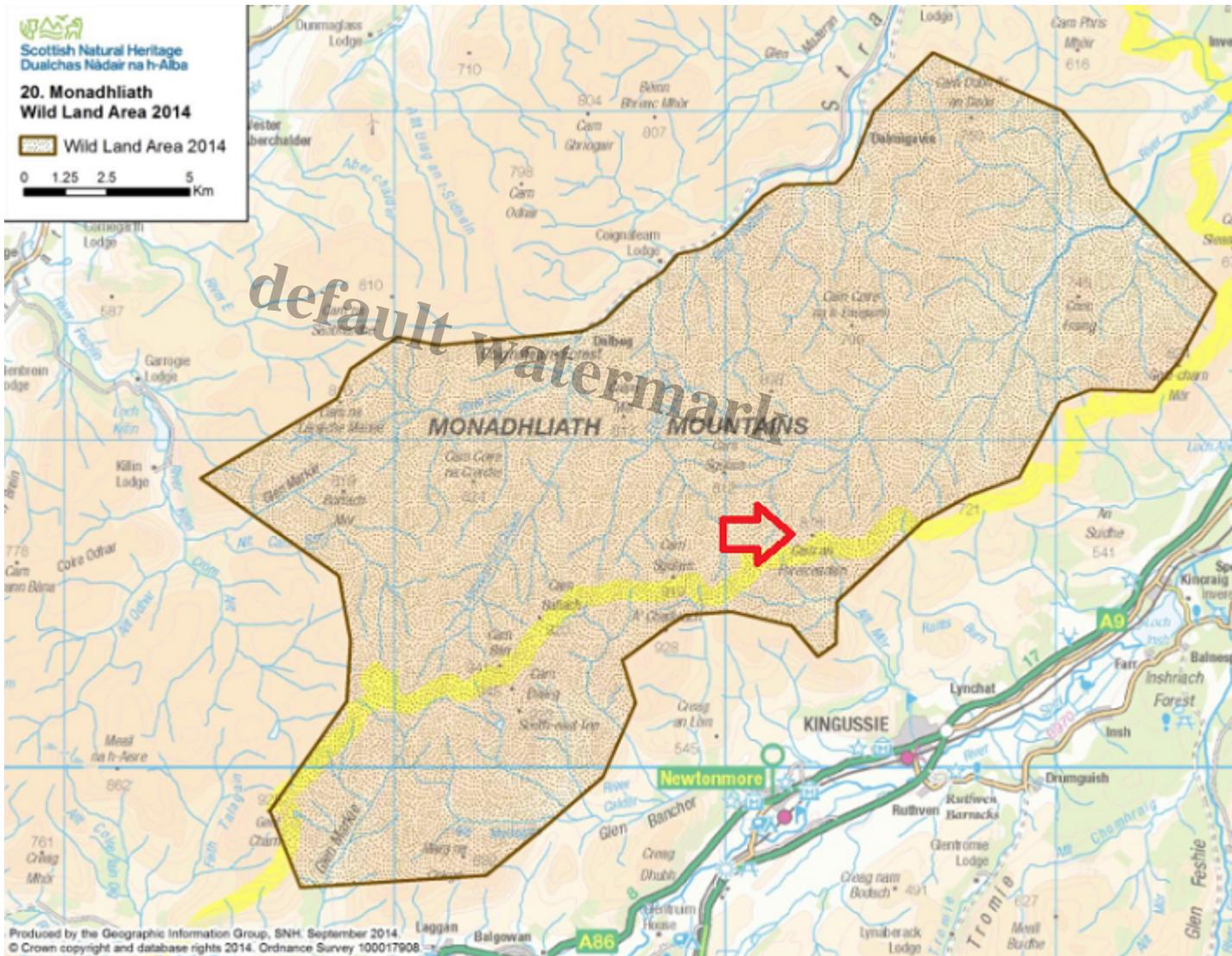


Intensive grouse moor management and the attrition of wild land on the Pitmain estate

Description

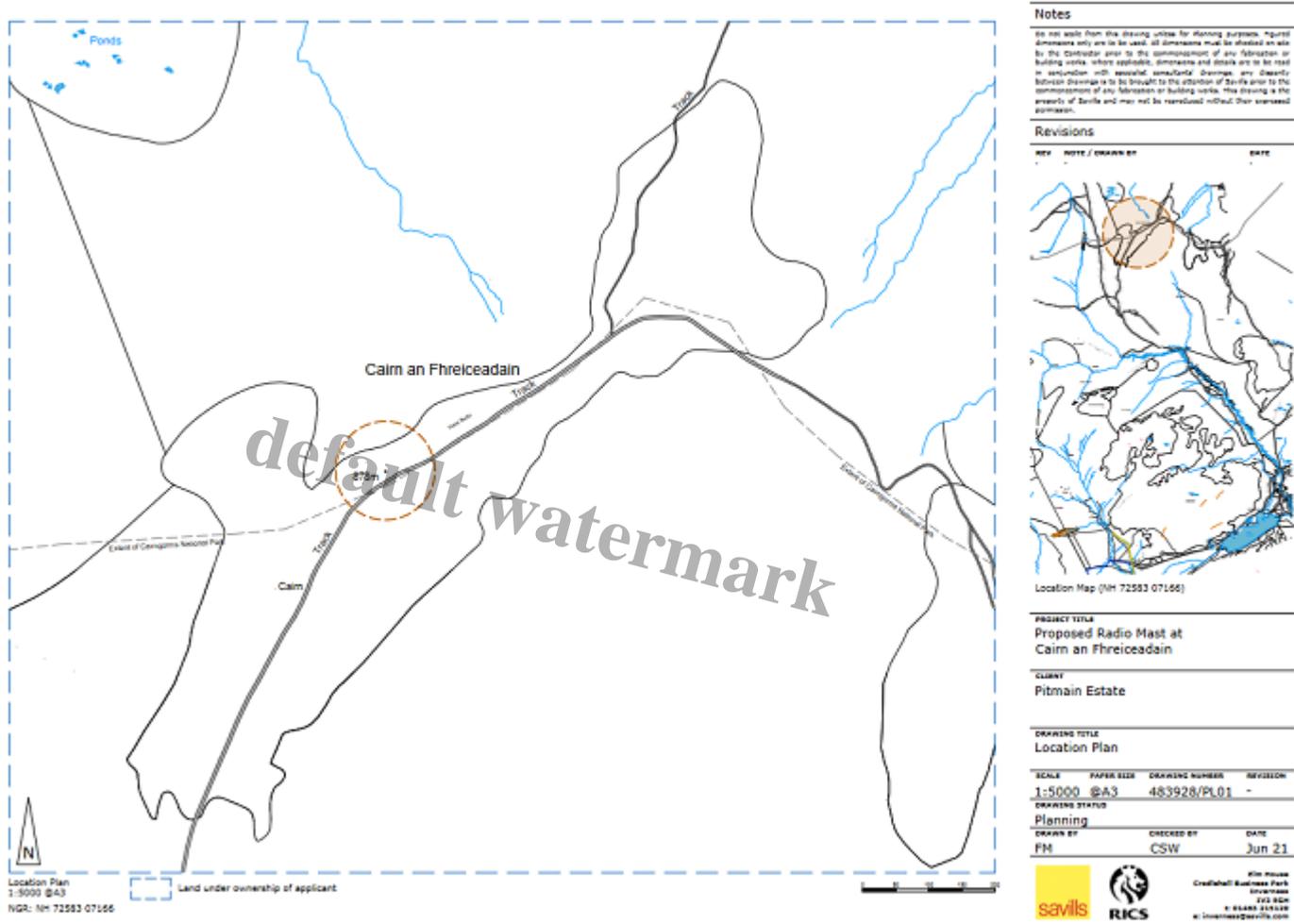


The Monadhliath Wild Land Area, with National Park Boundary in yellow and arrow marking summit of Carn an Fhreachadain

Development for sporting purposes on the Pitmain and Glenbanchor estates in the Cairngorms National Park, albeit interspersed with some tokenistic conservation projects funded by our public authorities ([see here](#)), is relentless.

On 8th October Highland Council validated a planning application ([see here](#)), submitted by Savills, to erect a 6m high lattice radio mast and equipment cabinet by the summit of Carn an Fhreachadain, a Corbett north of Kingussie.

The planning application consists of three brief documents: the standard application form, a site layout plan and a location plan. The location plan shows the proposed site of the mast lies a few feet outside the Cairngorms National Park Authority boundary:



Cairngorms National Park boundary demarcated by dotted line

The proposed location of the mast means that the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA), which has specific statutory duties to protect the landscape, is unable to call-in the planning application for a decision. They can, however, still comment on it and I hope they will object as strongly as they have done to proposals to build windfarms in the Monadhliath that would be visible from within the National Park.

Savills fails to mention in the planning application that the proposed mast lies within the Monadhliath Wild Land Area and makes no attempt to evaluate the likely impact. The description of the Wild Land Area, published in 2017, states that among its qualities are:

An extensive, simple interior with few human artefacts, contributing to a perceived emptiness and a strong sense of naturalness, remoteness and sanctuary

Cairn an Fhreicheadain, 'Hill of the Watch', has for some time been afflicted by hill tracks which extend to the very summit and continue to be improved.



Track on southern slopes of Carn na Fhreiceadain, with turning circle which allows estate staff a 360° view of the landscape without leaving their vehicle.

But past damage doesn't justify making the situation worse. That would happen if this 6m high new human artefact was added into the landscape. Even in conditions of extensive snow cover when the tracks were hidden you would be faced with a blot at the top.

The justification in the Planning Application for the mast is brief:

Description of Proposal

Please describe the proposal including any change of use: * (Max 500 characters)

It is proposed to erect a Radio Mast at Cairn an Fhreicheadain to provide a means of localised communication for the estate staff whilst working across Pitmain and Glenbanchor. These areas are outwith normal mobile phone reception. This is proposed on predominantly Health and Safety grounds following a member of staff recently becoming stranded for a number of hours with a broken down vehicle. Mast height to be 6 metres tall with a small cabinet to house electronic equipment

Is this a temporary permission? *

Yes No

No map is provided of the area that is outwith mobile phone reception at present and which would be covered by a radio transmitter located on the summit of Carn an Fhreicheadain. Highland planners need to question this.

But there appears no justification for the proposal on health and safety grounds. Provision of satellite phones and locator beacons to estate staff would allow them to communicate in an emergency or to be found in the case of an accident. The estate clearly needs to put in place some basic reporting systems so that if staff are out on the hill and don't return someone responds. None of this requires a radio mast. Pitmain's apparent owner, Majid Jafar Chief Executive of Crescent Petroleum, clearly does not lack the money to provide his estate staff with the necessary equipment.

It would seem, therefore, that there could be other reasons for the application, which is only predominantly on health and safety grounds. Highland Council should now insist that Savills makes public what those other grounds for the application are.

One possibility, that crossed my mind after reading about the estate on GunsOnPegs ([see here](#)) is that it is to enable grouse shooters to chat to each other while waiting on the hill:

Pitmain Estate is a diverse all round sporting estate of uncompromising quality. The hill provides first class driven grouse shooting over three beats, and walked-up grouse over a fourth. The land rises from 720 feet along the River Spey to 2,880 feet at the top of Carn an Fhreicheadain, with the undulating terrain and change in altitude giving spectacular driven birds. The ground is divided into four beats, with the Home, Middle and Dulnain beats providing driven shooting. The fourth beat, Ballochroan, is used for walked-up shooting although it does have some historic butt lines. Each beat is serviced by a well connected hill road network which has been substantially improved over the last few years. The estate can accommodate back to back driven days. A typical driven grouse day would comprise of 3 drives in the morning, a hot two course meal, served in well maintained heated bothies and a further 2 drives after lunch.

If you want to see the impact that the uncompromising quality of grouse shooting has had on Carn an Fhreicheadain take a look on google earth ([see here](#)). Tracks and muirburn have destroyed the landscape and natural habitats. The grouse shooting lobby is blind to this and the impact of their pleasure. The proposed radio mast may be outwith the Cairngorms National Park boundary but the sporting land management practices that lie behind the planning application take place within it.

If you want to help protect the Monadhliath Wild Land Area you can object to the Pitmain radio mast Planning Application [here](#).

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. grouse moors
3. landed estates
4. landscape
5. natural environment
6. planning
7. wild land

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