

Pitmain – the planning games being played on behalf of the very rich

Description

The planning application for the Carn an Fhreiceadain radio mast

Following my post in October on the proposal by the Pitmain Estate to erect a 6m high radio mast on the summit of Carn an Fhreiceadain, just outside the Cairngorms National Park boundary ([see here](#)), a number of people and organisations (including North East Mountain Trust, Scottish Wild Land Group and Mountaineering Scotland) objected to Highland Council. The application then went quiet until 31st January when Savill's, on behalf of the owner and oil magnate Majid Jafar, submitted two very similar visualisations of the mast location ([see here](#)). Viewed from below and 5km away they unsurprisingly showed nothing

Two weeks later the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA)'s landscape adviser submitted a detailed response which exposed Savill's attempt to show the radio mast would have no landscape impact:

“There was also a later submission (January 2022) of a visualisation from the south (drawing 483928/PL03), although no precise details were provided for this, including the location, elevation, field of view etc. Information has not been provided to explain the specific siting and design of the proposed mast. In addition, no landscape and visual appraisal, wild land assessment, nor assessment of effects on NP SLQs [Special Landscape Qualities] has been provided.”

A week later, on 23rd February, the planning application was withdrawn.

A small victory one might think? But this is the second time Pitmain has retreated. Originally, the application for a 6m mast and cabinet was submitted on 10th June but was then withdrawn, along with all supporting paperwork, on 24th August ([see here](#)). It is impossible to tell therefore whether Savill's or the Pitmain Estate intend to come back for a third time.

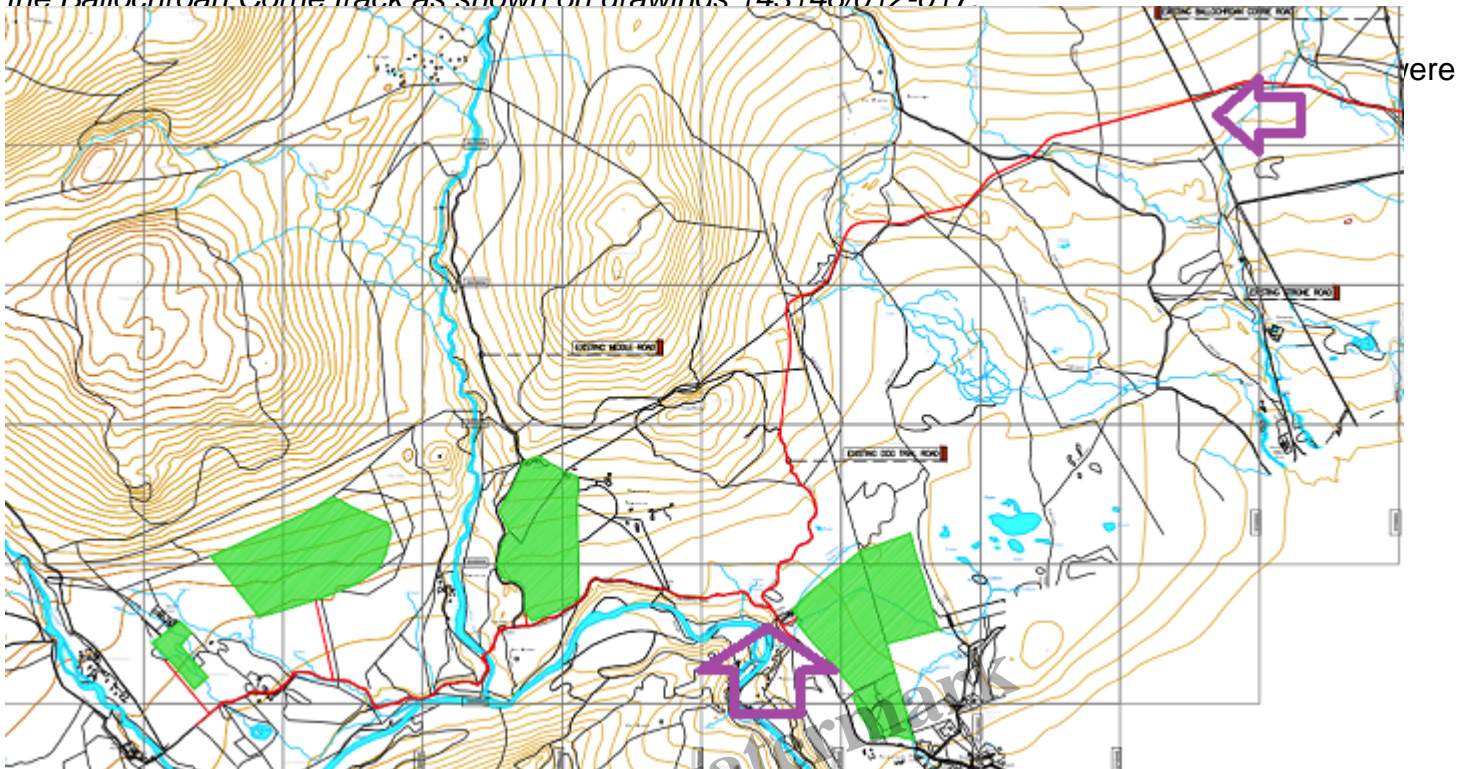
More on the Pitmain – Glen Banchor hill road

There have now been 20 objections to the proposal to create a connecting road between Pitmain and Glen Banchor which I considered at the end of January ([see here](#)), including from the North East Mountain Trust and Ramblers Scotland.

On 16th February the CNPA's Landscape Adviser responded ([see here](#)) to the application which had been submitted not by Savill's but by Caledonian Building Surveyors:

“As discussed last week, it's not possible to assess the full effects of this proposal at this stage on the National Park landscape due to insufficient information submitted. I have thus highlighted below some of the key sensitivities of the site and further information required. It is unclear from the material submitted what elements of the proposed forest access route is included within this application and thus, for the avoidance of doubt, I will highlight that my assessment

covers only the eastern access track between the Glen Banchor Road by Cnoc an Earraich and the Ballochroan Corrie track as shown on drawings 143146/012-017 ”



More specifically, the application only covers the 4.83km section between the two purple arrows above. This leaves out any “improvements” the Pitmain Estate would need to make to the public road in Glen Banchor to extract timber and details of how the connecting roads to the plantations (in green) will be constructed. Those omissions become more understandable if the Pitmain Estate’s real interest in this road is not to use it to extract timber but to create a connection between Pitmain and Glen Banchor for other purposes.

That that is the case is suggested by another development, which I overlooked in my first post. In March 2021 the Pitmain Estate submitted a planning application to Highland Council ([see here](#)) for a “Day Lodge” just above where the Ballachroan Road meets the A86 between Kingussie and Aviemore. Previous applications in 2016 and 2018 for a “lunch bothy” on the same site had been withdrawn before an application for a “day lodge” was approved in 2019. This was an amended application:

“The rectangular, T-shaped footprint, 1 and ½ storey unit will be used by the Estate to provide facilities for shooting parties including toilet, shower, drying room, kitchen, servery and large dining room.”

One of the conditions attached to the planning consent was that:

“Prior to the first occupation of the development hereby approved, 12 car parking spaces shall be provided within the application site. Thereafter, all car parking spaces shall be maintained for this use in perpetuity”.

That is a lot of vehicles and a lot of shooters who want to get onto the hill as easily as possible and return for lunch. That would explain why Pitmain’s proposals for a “forestry road” to extract timber from Glen Banchor did not stop at the Strone Rd, which also connected to the A86, but went on to the Ballachroan Rd. Imagine the inconvenience if shooting parties which started the day at Ballachroan then had to return to the public road to get to the Strone Rd or Glen Banchor?

Planning consent has also recently been given to a new under-keeper’s house at Ballachroan. The development of a dense road network across Pitmain and Glen Banchor will make it easier for the gamekeeper to perform their duties away from the public eye but more difficult for the CNPA to meet its conservation objectives.

It is being more and more obvious that the proposal by the Pitmain Estate to create a private road round Newtonmore has nothing to do with forestry and everything to do with the development of traditional field sports on the estate. That is not in the public interest and the CNPA should reject this road as being incompatible with its policy presumption against new roads in the uplands.

The CNPA Board should also reflect on the decision by their staff not to call-in the planning application for the Day Lodge. Every development that is for traditional sporting purposes raises serious issues for the statutory conservation objectives of the National Park and many, as in this case, appear to be part of a wider agenda to develop “sporting infrastructure” by gaming the planning system. Moreover, there are serious questions why a Day Lodge for shooting was ever needed? The Newtonmore Village Hall is just down the road and hiring that would have brought some welcome income to the local community. What about the carbon imprint? The truth is these developments are all about fostering a sense of sporting exclusivity: that once shooters have arrived on an estate they will be able to drive everywhere on private roads and eat in buildings specially constructed for that purpose.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. hill tracks
3. landed estates
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