

Correction and update â?? Glen Banchor and Pitmain hill road planning application is very much live

Description

Last week I had a bad week for various reasons. I not only misinterpreted some of the data about boating use on Loch Lomond ([see here](#)) but also a notification from the Cairngorms National Park Authority about the withdrawal of a track application close to Newtonmore. I mistakenly thought this applied to the revised track application submitted by the Glen Banchor and Pitmain Estate ([see here](#)) and wrote a short post about disappearing planning applications.

This application hasn't been withdrawn and the notification concerned another track to the south of Newtonmore on land at Ralia owned by the Standard Life Investment and Property Income Trust ([see here](#)). My apologies. I have removed the post.

I will leave it to readers to judge whether I am as guilty as making information disappear from the public realm as our Planning Authorities but will write further about the disappearing SLIPIT track proposal, which I had been investigating, in due course.

Meantime, I am very sorry if my post has resulted in people not submitting objections or comments on the Glen Banchor and Pitmain hill road application which is very much live ([see here](#)). So far there have been five objections including my own. That is significantly less than the number of people/organisations who objected to the previous application. Numbers are important because they help show Planning Committees the degree of public concern. The CNPA asked for comments from their Access Team and Highland Roads at the start of February, giving them 21 days to respond so, if they are being fair, they should still accept comments from the public.

In a very positive development the CNPA's Peatland Action Team have commented on the application and their response ([see here](#)), while scrupulously careful, helps confirm what I said in my post about the adverse impact the track would have on peatland:

From my reading of the proposal and the information provided it would appear that there will be displacement of a certain volume of peat along the forest road line as a result of construction. This peat will mainly consist of a depth of less than 50cm and is therefore at the shallower end of the potential peat layers found in this setting. Any removal of peat from its natural setting and relocation to a different setting is likely to generate some carbon emissions. If the new setting for the removed peat is one where the peat is then exposed to conditions that trigger it drying out then further carbon will be emitted. I would not be able to suggest the scale of impact of these carbon emissions for this forest road proposal. The only mention I found of how the removed peat would be managed is in the Design Statement: "Engineered design to reinstate peat soils, etc to bankings, culverts and where appropriate". This suggests that the removed peat will be kept on site and used in the landscaping of verges and culverts. This is likely to be a setting where this peat will dry out and produce carbon emissions as these settings do not normally allow for the peat to maintain a condition where it can continue to be a carbon store / sink. Again as to the scale of these emissions I would not be able to comment.

The other consideration in terms of impacts in relation to peat would be the disruption to overland flow down the slope on the hillside and to the blanket bog areas below the proposed forest road. By cutting a new road across the hillside the natural flow pathways will be cut off and disrupted, this may affect the habitats below the road. Blanket bogs are fed by rainfall and receive overland flows. I note in the drawings for the proposed road that there are points where this natural overland flow is intercepted and carried below the proposed road to the downslope side. I cannot comment on the effectiveness of this or the scale of impact from the disruption to the natural overland flow pathways. I also cannot comment on the scale of blanket bog that would be impacted by this disruption.

I wondered if carrying out a peat slide risk assessment would be advisable given it is cutting across the slope and there is peat present.

The concern about the impact of this track on peatland is extremely welcome: such an analysis should be applied to every development which affects peat, including tree planting.

In a response to a recent parliamentary question from Rhoda Grant, MSP, the Scottish Government revealed how much they had spent on peatbog restoration in the Monadhliath for the five financial years from April 2018 to March 2023 (the last year is incomplete with the spend being up until 6th January). The following information was provided for Glen Banchor and Pitmain:

Pitmain Estate	185,908.00	193,769.62	141,905.00	35,000.00	116,890.00
Glenbanchor Estate	990.00	47,864.00	-	-	-

That is £722,327 paid to the family of an oil magnate, which appears to have made their money extracting fossil fuels from beneath the earth's surface and whose primary use of the estate is for sporting purposes.

This sporting use has involved maintaining high numbers of red deer and the use of extensive muirburn to increase grouse numbers. The peatland restoration work is quite likely to fail due to the numbers of deer, as is already apparent in Glen Banchor ([see here](#)), and its impact will be further limited by the continuation of muirburn. That analysis appears to be supported by the advice of the Peatland Manager on the application which states:

“the landscape appears to include active muirburn within this habitat matrix and the expectation is that this management may have modified the habitats present to some degree”.

One of those modifications is that muirburn prevents peatland from forming and risks the destruction of peaty soils.

In terms of its conservation objectives, there is no justification for the CNPA to fork out such large sums of public money for peatland restoration in some areas on an estate and then allow damaging developments such as this road to go ahead on others. It also appears from the comments of CNPA staff about the lack of information accompanying the application that the people working for Pitmain and Glen Banchor have learned almost nothing about the value of peat despite the £722,327 which has been forked out by the public over the last five years.

When is the Minister responsible for National Parks, the Green MSP Lorna Slater, going to stop the peatland greenwashing and demand a joined up approach to peatland restoration in our National Parks?

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. hill tracks
3. peatland
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5. restoration

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