

New green lairds ABRDN appear to flout the hill road planning system at Ralia

Description

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The “repairs” to the road to Far Ralia. Note how the footprint of the former military road has been widened. Photo credit parkswatch reader

Two parkswatch readers have sent in photos of current construction work along the line Old Military Road on the Ralia Estate near Newtonmore. I am most grateful.

Six weeks ago Highland Council planners decided that, apart from a new bridge and section of road on either side of this, all the other track “upgrades” being proposed on behalf of Ayr were only “repairs” and did not even require to be considered under the Prior Notification System ([see here](#)).

This followed an about turn by the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) who, early on 16th February, responded to Highland Council stating that “This is a significant track upgrade within an open landscape” [the main upgrade is 4460m long] and that intended to call it in. Later that day, however, they emailed Highland Council reversing that decision:

“Please disregard..... and replace with the following; Having discussed this in house, while we have concerns regarding the information submitted within the CMS [Construction Method Statement] which states that the final track width is to be 3.5m whereas on the ground using aerial imagery it’s appears that the current width is 2m and no wider than 2.5m. I am however reassured that officers at The Highland Council have discussed this with the agent, and you have expressed no concerns regarding the works across the track network”

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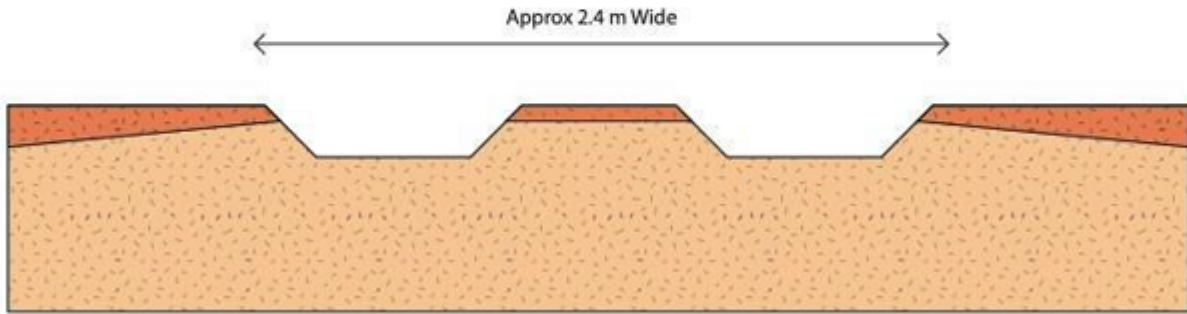


Looking back towards Nuidhe. On the original prior notification it was the road on the right, not on the left that was due to be upgraded and no proposal to “upgrade” the track on the left ever appears to have been submitted to Highland Council. Photo credit Parkswatch reader.

The footprint of the construction work does appear to be c3.5m wide as the CNPA feared and, along with the “side cast” (the heaps of spoil) partially resembles what was described in the Construction Method Statement (CMS) ([see here](#) for planning papers) produced by Taiga Upland and Kilrie Trees:

2.2 Soft materials and vegetation scraped from the centre and sides of the road, side cast and levelled – see figure 1.2

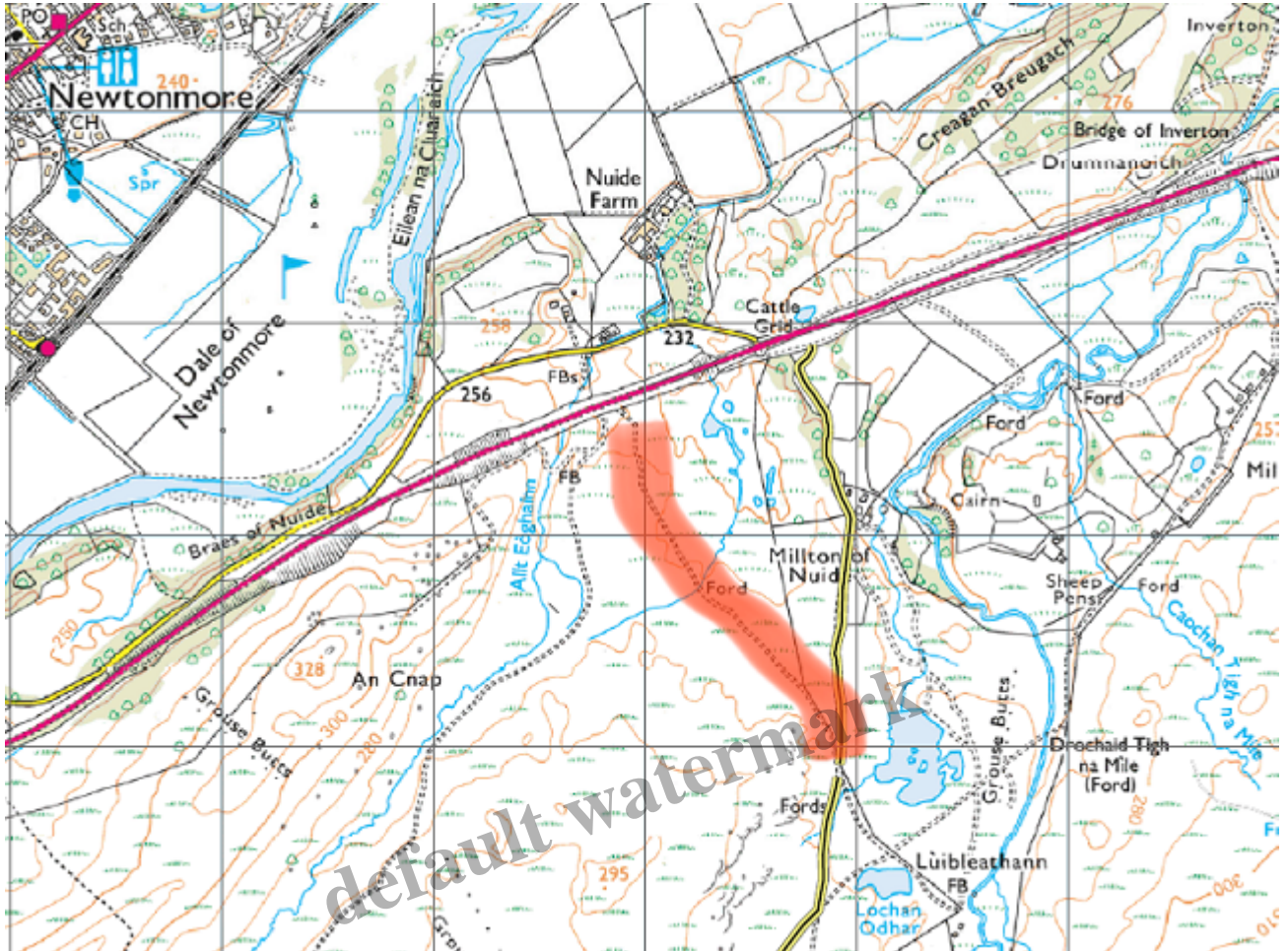
Figure 1.2 - Soft Materials Removed



The CMS, however, contains no mention of the construction “tray” as it appears in the photos above. Moreover, in their report of handling of the new bridge and short section of new road on either side of it Highland Council said this about the rest of the proposed road works:

“There are other works proposed within the estate which include repairs [my emphases] to the wearing course and re-cambering of smaller ATV tracks. The agent has supplied details of the works proposed to the existing tracks and no upgrading or increasing of width of the tracks are proposed, only the finish to the track surface. These works are not considered to be part of this Prior Notification and will be treated as repairs to existing tracks. The agent has been informed that any increase in width or additional engineering works will require a full planning application to be submitted in order that the works can be carried out.”

The photos clearly show that the road is being widened and doing significant damage to the landscape and the former military road (which underlies much of the route taken by the new road).



Yellow shows line of proposed road upgrade submitted with the original Prior Notification, the pink the track is actually being upgraded

Renwick Drysdale, from Kilrie Trees (whose name is on the CMS0, made a fairly lengthy comment on my last post on the track upgrade proposals ([see here](#)), which I was happy to publish. It included the following statement in response to the criticisms made in the post about the location of the new bridge and the gate across the old road:

“Our contractors put the gate too close to the bridges so we had it moved. We also agree that the engineers who flagged the bridge managed to find the only tree as far as the eye can see which is staggering! This has also been moved away from the beautiful Wades Bridge. We do listen and adapt our plans. We don’t always respond to every issue but on the whole, we try to”.

That was very welcome.



The new bridge appears to have been carefully constructed and relocated to avoid the only tree in the area. Photo credit Parkswatch reader.

But why then has Mr Drysdale NOT apparently listened to what Highland Council told Abridn's agents about the "repairs" to the rest of the road? Or did SAC consulting, who also act as agents for Abridn, fail to inform him?

There is certainly evidence to suggest that SAC consulting and Kilrie Trees do not know what each other are doing. For example, in the Application Form for the new road dated 7th March SAC there were no plans for peatland restoration whereas Mr Drysdale stated in his comment on my post that "The project is a native woodland restoration project with peatland restoration"!

That comment suggests the real purpose of this track upgrade with little to do with planting trees – which could be brought in by ATV – and is really about bringing in diggers to restore peatland. That might or might not be justified in its own right but it reinforces the fact that Highland Council should have never treated the proposed work, as they did in their Decision Notice, as a "Forestry Private Way".

The locations plans for the new bridge, which was granted "prior approval" by Highland Council, state that for the new sections of road on either side: "road width to mirror the existing road at 2.8m". This

photo suggests the road that has been constructed is significantly wider than that:



The new section of road to the bridge – note the width of the bridge with plenty of clearance room for large vehicles and machinery such as diggers. Photo credit Parkswatch reader.

This could of course be because the work is unfinished or it might be because the bridge has been designed to enable large diggers to be brought in for peatland restoration.

Whatever the explanation for these issues one hopes that Mr Drysdale will ensure the road by the bridge is narrowed to the correct specification, call a halt to the work on the main length of road immediately and submit a planning application to Highland Council which clearly documents what the road is for and how it will be constructed.

If Kilrie Trees and SAC consulting fail to do this, Highland Council and the CNPA should take enforcement action and issue a Stop Notice. Meantime Highland Council would be wise not to decide the application for the new bothy/potential shooting hut ([see here](#)) and Scottish Forestry to delay any decision on the planting proposal until Ayr has produced one consistent plan for Far Ralia and the access road. That needs to explain how all the proposed developments fit together and how they will promote conservation in the National Park.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. forestry
3. hill tracks
4. planning

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