Many thanks for the opportunity to address the committee today.

I am speaking to Nick Kempe’s objection, supplemented by the information I gained from two site visits made earlier this month.

Landscape, amenity and public enjoyment are key issues in assessing this planning application. Planning approval for the proposed hill road should be refused for three main reasons: firstly, it would be constructed through remote and sensitive terrain, mostly at an altitude of 600 metres or more - it would have too great a landscape impact; secondly, a new road would create far more damage along its total length than is already evident on the ground today - construction impacts would outweigh existing ATV damage and thirdly, there is already excessive hill road development in this area.

Planning approval would be in breach of the landscape policies contained within policy 5 of the CNPA 2015 Local Development Plan and policy 61the Highland Wide 2012 LDP. Furthermore, development of this hill road would conflict with Scottish Government guidance on the protection of the Wild Land Areas.

Existing damage from the use of ATVs is severe, but this damage is intermittent. It is mainly found on peaty soils near the southern end of the route and along sections of montane soil and vegetation on the summit ridge to Carn Dulnain. Where the route turns west and descends to the River Dulnain the damage is much less, even to the extent that the ATV route is difficult to detect in places. The vegetation and soils should recover along the route as a whole, within a few years, if repeated ATV use is reduced.

This road would be a massive intrusion into a wild and remote area. It would be an artificial structure between natural vegetation and landforms, visible as a continuous ribbon going into the far distance. Such intrusion would be many times more prominent than the impact of the tracks on the existing route. It would be visible from most of the hill tops and ridges of the Dulnain watershed, as well as from the river itself.

The applicants claim that the convex slope above the river would screen the road from riverside views. This is misleading – it depends which side of the river you are on – most people will be on the north side from which the proposed road would be fully visible.

The applicant’s suggestion that the road can be absorbed into the landscape by juniper regeneration and expansion are over optimistic. Existing juniper bushes are severely overgrazed, just surviving as low humps close to the ground. The proposed intensification of sheep management plus current overgrazing by deer along with the impracticality of deer fencing means this juniper restoration project is pie in the sky.

Policy 61 of the Highland Council LDP requires account to be taken of cumulative effects. It is difficult for the committee to do this in the absence of adequate map information. New hill roads have been constructed on the adjacent Dunachton estate in recent years and are very close to the proposed new road on Balavil. These new roads are not shown in the mapped information provided by the applicant. More hill roads are evident on Pitmain estate.

These Dunachton and possibly Pitmain roads provide a logical way for Balavil to access the River Dulnain using 4x4 vehicles and to deploy ATVs over the adjacent ground. They would meet Balavil estate management requirements without the need to construct a new high mountain road for 4x4 vehicular use.

The formal planning process cannot, by itself, resolve the problems of ATV use and 4x4 vehicular access on Balavil. I urge the Committee to use that process today to reject this planning application but I also ask you to consider your wider responsibilities as a Park Board. The Balavil situation urgently requires dialogue and cooperation between various interests at estate and community level, both local and national. The Board could facilitate the necessary dialogue and cooperation and, if that fails, support efforts under Community Right to Buy legislation to secure a resolution of current difficulties.

Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to your meeting today.

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