

INTERNAL SPECIALIST RESPONSE FORM

THC reference: 21/04253/FUL
CNPA reference: 2021/0328/DET

Erection of 6m high lattice radio mast and equipment cabinet, land 4825m NW of Keepers Cottage, Pitmain

Response date: 14 February 2022
Internal specialist: Caroline Stanton, Landscape Adviser

Interests affected by the proposal

- Landscape character, visual amenity and Special Landscape Qualities (SLQ) of Cairngorms National Park (CNP)
- Monadhliath Wild Land Area (WLA)

Notes: All landscapes within the CNP have a baseline sensitivity which is high, reflecting the National Park designation as an IUCN Category 5 Protected Landscape.

This advice is limited to predicted landscape and visual effects experienced from the CNP only (which does not include the actual development site).

Background and baseline conditions

The proposal is for a 6m high lattice mast (triangular in section) on a plinth approximately 2.8m x 1.5m, plus a cabinet (0.9m x 0.54m base x 1.3m high). It is not clear whether and by how much an aerial may extend from/ above the tower (illustrated on the 'example photograph' submitted). Additionally, the proposal seems to include photovoltaic panels (on posts 1.6m high). It is assumed that the mast will be accessed from the existing adjacent estate track.

The proposed development site lies at an elevation of approximately 878m AOD, on the top of Càrn an Fhreiceadain, in the Monadhliath Mountains.

Very little information has been provided to explain the need for the mast or the rationale for the proposed siting and design and the alternatives explored.

Within the CNP, the proposed mast would be seen and experienced mainly from the South Monadhliath **landscape character area** (further info available on the Landscape Toolkit via link here). Key characteristics sensitive to the proposal include the openness of the landscape, high elevation, simplicity of ground cover and rolling landform horizons.

Within the CNP, the proposed development would be clearly visible by **people travelling along some key recreation routes within the area**, including the 'Old Road to Coignafearn' Scottish Hill Track and 'Càrn an Fhreiceadain circular' route (shown on the Scottish Paths Map by Ramblers Scotland). A relatively high number of people would also view the proposal whilst accessing the **Corbett of Càrn an Fhreiceadain** ([link](#) to Walkhighlands map and description). It is highlighted that the Monadhliath are fairly popular for recreation during snow cover when the proposed mast and associated infrastructure are likely to be more obvious than existing access tracks.

The proposed development site lies within the **Monadhliath Wild Land Area (WLA)**. The baseline conditions of this area are described on the NatureScot website [here](#) and further information on wild land attributes is provided in the NS policy statement 'Wildness in Scotland's Countryside'. (Although existing hill tracks around the proposed development site are a 'detractor' to the wildness qualities, it is highlighted that the Monadhliath WLA was identified in 2014 when the

hill tracks were already present, and thus it can be assumed that the wildness attributes of the area were judged to be of sufficient value for the area to be a WLA despite the existing tracks.)

The **SLQs of the CNP** are described by NatureScot [here](#) and summarised in the CNP Landscape Toolkit [here](#). The SLQs likely to be most affected by the proposal include 'vastness of space, scale and height', a 'landscape of layers', 'dominance of natural landforms', 'layers of receding ridge lines', 'wildness' and 'wild land'.

Predicted landscape and visual effects:

The application is accompanied by a location plan (drawing 483928/PL01) and site plan (drawing 483928/PL02). 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, a landscape and visual appraisal, wild land assessment, nor assessment of effects on NP SLQs has been provided. In the absence of this information and based only on the material submitted, it is assessed that the proposal is likely to result in the following **landscape and visual effects on the CNP:**

- a The proposed mast would contrast to some of the key characteristics within the South Monadhliath **landscape character area**, particularly: the openness of the landscape; the typical location of built structures within the straths or upon lower slopes, not hill tops; the rolling landform horizons; the simple ground cover; and the ruralness of the area. Although the baseline conditions are already affected by existing estate tracks which result in adverse effects, it is assessed that the proposal is likely to result in significant effects in addition to these.
- b The proposed mast and associated infrastructure would be **prominent and have visual effects** within the surrounding area, particularly from some popular NMU routes and by a relatively high number of people visiting Càrn an Fhreiceadain due to this being a Corbett. For these people, the mast, cabin and PV panels would have a collective visual effect that would contrast to the open views, creating a prominent and distracting focal feature.
- c The proposed development would be located within the **Monadhliath WLA**. As mentioned above, a wild land assessment has not been provided. Nonetheless, based on the information submitted, it is predicted that the proposal would adversely affect the following wild land qualities highlighted by the WLA baseline description. '*A range of massive rounded hills and plateaux that are awe-inspiring in their simplicity, openness and immense scale, and offer panoramic views to distant mountain ranges*'; and *a hill range in which many types of recreation take place...*'
- d The predicted landscape and visual effects of the proposed development summarised above would affect the **National Park SLQs** including the: 'vastness of space, scale and height'; a 'landscape of layers'; 'dominance of natural landforms'; 'layers of receding ridge lines'; 'wildness'; and 'wild land'.

Further information required

To address the effects and issues highlighted above, if a new mast is required, it is advised that alternative locations and designs are considered. In this respect, we advise the applicants follow good practice guidance on the siting and design of telecom masts, such as produced by NS [here](#). Specifically, we advise that the following information is provided:

- a **Further details** of the proposal, including the proposed PV panels, and the materials, colours and textures of all structures. In addition, details of any antennae, dishes, exterior lighting, signs, drains, fences or cabling if proposed.
- b A description of the **siting and design objectives** for the proposed development to directly

respond to the specific landscape characteristics, visual amenity, wild land attributes and qualities, and SLQs within the CNP.

- c Leading from b above, **information on alternative sites and designs** considered and their relative benefits and disadvantages in terms of potential landscape and visual effects.
- d **A landscape and visual appraisal** of the proposal, identifying the predicted effects on landscape character, visual amenity, wild land attributes and qualities and NP SLQs. It is advised that this should be informed by some visualisations of the proposed development from key routes within the NP including:
- From the track next to the summit of Càrn an Fhreiceadain within the NP, around GR 273007 807385
 - From the track on the north eastern top of Càrn an Fhreiceadain within the NP, around GR 272572 807117
 - From Càrn a' Bhothain Mholaich where the proposal would be visible (on/ by 'Old Road to Coignafearn' Scottish Hill Track), eg around GR 270591 806678
 - From the glen of Allt Mòr to the south where the proposal would be visible (on the 'Old Road to Coignafearn' Scottish Hill Track), eg around GR 273537 804804
- e **A Construction Method Statement** which includes details of proposed construction works, including vehicular access, excavation works, and soil and vegetation restoration as these would affect landscape and visual effects from the CNP.