

18/00858/FUL: Retention and partial reduction of 6.3km section of existing estate track on land 3730M NW of 1 Garvamore, Laggan.

Mountaineering Scotland objects to this proposal in its current form. We are entirely sympathetic with the desire for peatland restoration to address carbon emissions, and to manage down deer impacts to allow the peatland vegetation to recover.

This proposal does reduce the impact of the current construction track, but not reducing it back to a proportionate specification fit for purpose. It will instead leave a broad, visible track going vertically up the hillside, where existing and long-established infrastructure is horizontal along the strath floor. The land uses proposed would lend themselves to a reduced width of track to the plantation to allow extraction of timber, with a reinstated argo track beyond that, as was already in existence, to allow transportation of materials to degraded areas of peatland.

The peatland restoration summary shows clearly that this estate is peripheral to the main SAC areas that require restoration action, and that this track doesn't go to them. The track proposal stops at the estate boundary and I can only assume that as it continues beyond into the next estate SSE will downgrade it to argo spec. There is therefore no requirement for the 4x4 section proposed as it all becomes argo track beyond a point where it crosses a large burn to access further into the hills.

Additionally there is not a plan in place for peatland restoration in the immediate future. There are no figures of what would be required, or how much it would cost, and if there would be funding available through Peatland Action to fund it. This level of detail would take a while to plan and cost. A reinstated argo track could be bedded in by the time that any restoration action is underway.

Regarding the recreational benefit for walkers to the Corbett Meall na-h-Airse, this is one of the lesser-visited hills in the area. Hillwalkers tend to use the promoted route that starts at Garva Brig and goes up the east side of the plantation. Even with the previous argo track up to it, there is little evidence of walkers taking that route. A wide, surfaced track would be of little benefit to walkers; hillwalkers do not like to see unnecessary, over-engineered tracks and can walk perfectly well on a green argo track if they so choose.

in conclusion Mountaineering Scotland welcomes the intention to restore peatland and manage deer impacts, but we are of the opinion that the current proposal is of too high a spec and causing visual intrusion as well as damaging the land. We therefore object to the current three-stage proposal. A two-stage proposal with a reduced track spec for the forestry, followed by the argo spec into the hills would be a more proportionate structure for the environment and future habitat management options.