

**For the attention of Keith Gibson, Planning Officer
The Highland Council**

PLANNING APPLICATION 20/00338/FUL – Nairn Town Centre / 62 King Street

Introduction

I am writing as the Secretary of Nairn Improvement Community Enterprise (“NICE”) to formally object to the above application.

NICE is a Community Body as defined in the “Right to Buy” legislation and the Community Empowerment Act, and currently has 1016 members who are individuals resident in IV12 postcodes.

NICE has just conducted a survey with key questions relating to the future of Nairn Town Centre, with particular emphasis on the above application. The survey was conducted in online and hard copy format, and the responses to key questions are set out below and fully justify NICE making this objection.

Reasons for Objection

Our reasons have their foundation in the Nairn Town Centre Charrette process of 2014, which was the basis of The Highland Council’s report of 2015.

The report was the outcome of a substantial consultation exercise led by independent consultants, which over the course of three days involved many community representatives including elected councillors and many members of the general public.

The report produced a detailed and well considered plan for the area of the town centre between King Street and the High Street, and in particular identified spaces suitable for a “new town square” and a “new multifunction space”. Both of these will be key to giving the town centre a vibrant and welcoming atmosphere that will encourage visitors to stop in Nairn.

The planning application is to build a block of flats and office space on the footprint of the space identified potentially as a new town centre. The impact will be wider than just the building’s footprint because of elements such as car parking and bin storage.

The loss of this space will make the town centre plan as envisaged undeliverable, and in our opinion be a travesty of the consultation in 2014/15. To lose the opportunity to have a “new town square” in the centre of town would be devastating.

There will also be significant visual impairment to the area in question, because the sightlines from King Street to the three most appealing heritage buildings will be ruined. The heritage buildings in question are the Court House (just restored at great expense), the current Finance Building (listed Grade B), and the former Police Station (commonly referred to as the Old

Social Work Building – OSWB). These buildings are at the heart of Nairn’s architectural heritage, and the tourist experience will be greatly enhanced by enabling a clear sightline to them as a group from King Street and, from a higher vantage point, the Community & Arts Centre.

Wider Issues

For several years the community’s objective has been to leverage Nairn’s fantastic assets and location to make it a destination of choice for visitors and tourists. Thereby footfall will be increased and in consequence economic activity and job opportunities will increase.

The proposed building makes absolutely no contribution to these objectives, and indeed can only lessen the attractiveness of a regenerated town centre to visitors and reduce visitor numbers to less than would otherwise be expected.

This will reduce Nairn’s attractiveness as a visitor destination and put at risk regeneration, not only of the local economy but also the economies of Inverness and the Highlands generally because Nairn with its proximity to the airport and situation generally is a very attractive destination for visitors.

Planning Process Issue

We understand that as non-statutory planning guidance, and in line with Scottish Government legislation, the Town Centre Plan document needs to be taken into account in any planning application. The adopted Town Centre Plan is a relevant document and in particular is a key consideration for the determination of the planning application. Although it is not prescriptive it needs to be considered alongside all other aspects relevant to the application. It would be interesting to know The Highland Council’s corporate position in relation to Nairn Town Centre.

Summary & Survey Result

The proposal is simply the wrong building in the wrong place. There are ample opportunities in the town to build or convert 12 flats and provide office space, and the Nairn Connects BID in its objection has referred to its own research into perfectly viable alternatives.

As stated above, NICE has just conducted a survey of its members and the wider community. The questions asked were deliberately straightforward, in order to assess where public opinion sits. Survey responses continue to be received, and the interim findings of the first 287 responses “YES/NO” to three key questions are as follows, expressed as percentages:

Would you like to see the Town Centre Development Plan as published in 2015 to be delivered?

YES/NO: 60/40

Despite previous agreement for a designated area to become a new town square the latest proposal is to build a block of 12 flats and a new CAB office. Are you content to see the land used for this new purpose?

YES/NO: 48/52

Would you support attempts by the Council and local community organisations to identify alternative sites for 12 flats and CAB office?

YES/NO: 54/46

We will publish the full survey result with an analysis shortly.

Michael Barnett

*Secretary
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