

Lomond Luxury Lodges



SELF CATERING ACCOMMODATION

Planning Appeal Supporting Statement-Jamie and Ingeborg Martin,

Owners Oakwoods Farm and Loch Lomond Luxury Lodges

LOCH LOMOND AND THE
TROSSACHS NATIONAL PARK

6 - SEP 2016

HEADQUARTERS

Firstly, we would like to thank you for taking the time to review our planning application for a retirement home on our farm which has been in our family for three generations now. It is our earnest hope that current and future generations of our family will be able to continue to live on the farm enjoying country life while being custodians of a very special place and helping to sustain rural enterprises that contribute positively to the National Park.

We are appealing the decision to refuse planning permission for our retirement home as we want to continue living on the farm while gradually passing over the day to day running of the self-catering business to our daughter as we move to semi-retirement and ultimately retirement. Free from the day to day demands of running the self-catering business we would also like to get back to directly running the stock and grazing side of what is a small farm which has been leased out for a number of years to a neighbouring farmer who has successfully managed a quality herd of Highland cows on our land.

Considerable thought went into the design of the house and although we believed we had presented a sound application covering the many planning criteria, on reflection we feel that perhaps we did not explain ourselves well enough due to our inexperience in dealing with such matters. We also consider the Planning Officer, perhaps understandably, was unaware of what is involved in the operation of a cluster of quality Five Star self-catering lodges operating at the luxury end of the tourism market which requires an onsite day to day management presence.

At no time during the processing of the planning application were we asked for any additional information or justification and therefore assumed the submitted information was sufficient. We hope that the additional information we are now providing, coupled with the various supporting letters, help make the justification for our proposed retirement home clearer and stronger and that members of the Planning and Access Committee will be minded to approve our application. We don't want to over complicate this statement and will keep things as simple as possible.

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Once having retired from the lodges business, I do not want to be idle and will seek to build up a small farming/crofting business again. In the past I was brought up on the farm and it's in my blood. I have been planning and looking forward to this moment for a long time now. The thought of one of my pedigree cows calving and not being there and something happening – I don't know how I could cope with that.

Our dream is to have a retirement home beside our existing farm shed in the top field and to further develop the farming/crofting business. This is an ideal location especially at lambing time and when the cows are calving. I was born and bred on the farm and we have not been able to do this as much as I have wanted to because we have not had the time to devote to livestock. We want to retire from the lodges business, but keep it in the family as our daughter who has helped in the running over the years is very keen to take it on. We have lived here all our lives and want to continue to live here. Instead of renting the farm out, we will have our own livestock. I plan to have 15-20 Highland cows, calving once a year with the offspring being sold for future breeding or quality organic beef, as we are very proud the land has been kept free from pesticides and manmade fertilizers. I also plan to breed about 20 pedigree Texel sheep. I will continue to take hay/silage about 50 tonnes annually from one of the fields. We have been planning for this for years now and at last have the finances and time required.

We really do feel that our business is fairly unique and that in today's market we genuinely need a presence on site for the business to excel. We offer quality accommodation at the luxury end of the tourism market, however, this is becoming the norm, rather than the exception now in what is a very competitive environment. There is now a healthy competitive market for high quality self-catering accommodation in our part of the National Park and we need to 'stay on top of our game' providing high quality customer service.

Our location is not ideal, as we are on a busy main road. Therefore, our USP is the highest possible delivery of customer service. Our family business has gone from strength to strength because of the quality customer service we are able to provide to our guests. What was once a modest family business has grown to become a well-established business sleeping 38 guests running at 80%-90% year round occupancy rates with regular repeat guests from all over the world. It is due to this that the back bone of our business, repeat custom, exists. In our opinion, we can only exceed our visitors' expectations by living onsite and do not see how our successors (our daughter and her family) can continue to offer the level of 24/7 welcome, assistance or advice from a remote location as is suggested by the Planning Officer. Another hugely important factor for us is the high volume of short breaks we now cater for and the intensive hands on nature of the business that this requires. 2015/16 saw 83% of our guests staying for short breaks with an average stay of 2-3 nights which means in any one week we can have as many as 114 guests with 15 changeovers and all this entails.

On a more practical note, all of the lodges have private spas, which must be checked on a daily basis. We also offer courtesy lifts to the local village eg. if guests are going out for dinner, to and from the train station. The lodges are on a busy road which plays to our advantage as we have potential customers calling in at the house for information about the lodges and this is a large part of our business. We have a high turnover of guests staying, as we offer short breaks all year round and are constantly having change over days. We also do all of our own

gardening and buildings maintenance. As a family business this is necessary to keep our costs down. Another hugely important issue for us is security, especially as we are visible from the main road.

From the feedback we get, we know that our guests benefit from us being on site, for information or to help when problems arise, from simple things like the wifi not working to emergencies like power cuts, getting guests to hospital or dealing with a fire – these are some of the things we've have had to deal with recently.

We do have one property off site in Croftamie – Dalnair Castle Lodge. It is another 5 Star lodge with spa and we are constantly having to drive back and forth dealing with all of the above chores. From experience it would be impossible to offer this level of service X 4. Like any other good business, we have to strive to meet ever changing customer demands and are constantly upgrading the lodge facilities. Looking to the future, we are thinking of the luxury glamping market. We are in the process of trialling a pod and subject to demand and booking enquiries, this could be a potential new addition to the business subject to planning.

While we are not experts in planning matters, we strongly believe we do comply with the Park Authority's housing in the countryside policy as we clearly have long family links with the farm and the farming and tourism enterprises that we have developed over a considerable period of time. We want the farm and the associated businesses to stay in family ownership and management. As part of our family succession planning and our strong desire to continue living on the farm, we are seeking 'peace of mind' that we can build our retirement home and, as a result of this, allow our daughter (and her own young family eventually) to remain in the current family house running the adjacent luxury holiday lodge business successfully. We also believe this in line with the National Park Authority's main objectives and helping to stem rural depopulation and sustaining viable rural businesses.

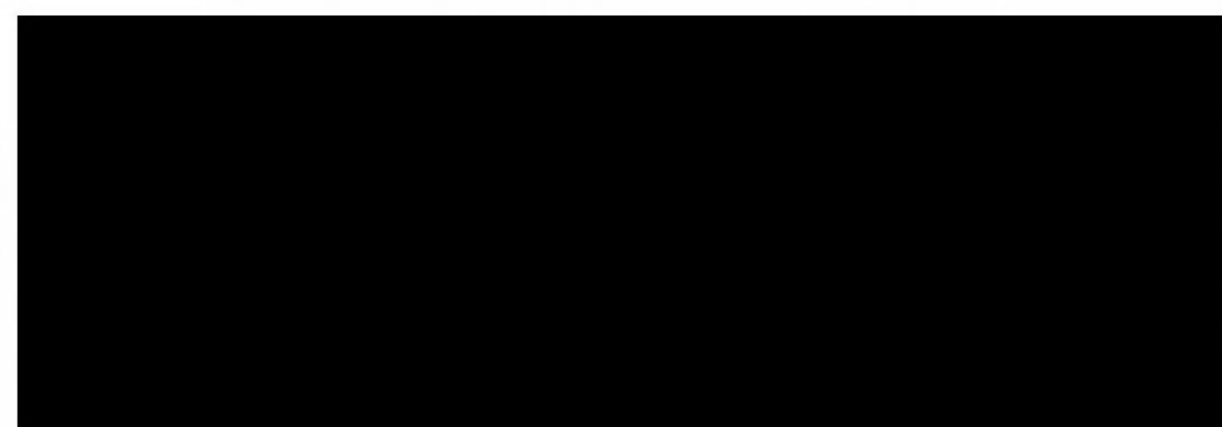
We have been in touch with The Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs, Industry Manager from VisitScotland, our local MSP Bruce Crawford, our local destination organisation - Love Loch Lomond and the Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers all of whom have kindly written letters of support which we have attached.

Finally, we believe precedents have been set at other properties in and around Loch Lomond where the parents have retired from the business passing its management onto their children and been allowed to build a new house for their retirement. We found it difficult to put the full extent of our proposal down on paper in our initial submission, along with all the other planning policies that had to be covered. We have therefore done our best to convey everything clearly and truthfully in this appeal statement. We hope that after reading all of this supplementary information you will agree that the proposed home does justify planning permission being granted.

We are more than happy to host a site visit from the Planning and Access Committee and to answer any questions to clarify our proposals further. The site visit would enable members to have an opportunity to see and understand our existing holiday accommodation operation and also to see where we propose to build our retirement home.

We hope our appeal will be sympathetically considered so that we can continue to live in what we consider is a very special place in retirement while our daughter can remain in the current family home running our successful self-catering holiday business.

Thank you for taking the time to read this statement and the supporting letters gratefully received from important local bodies.



Jamie and Ingeborg Martin

August 2016