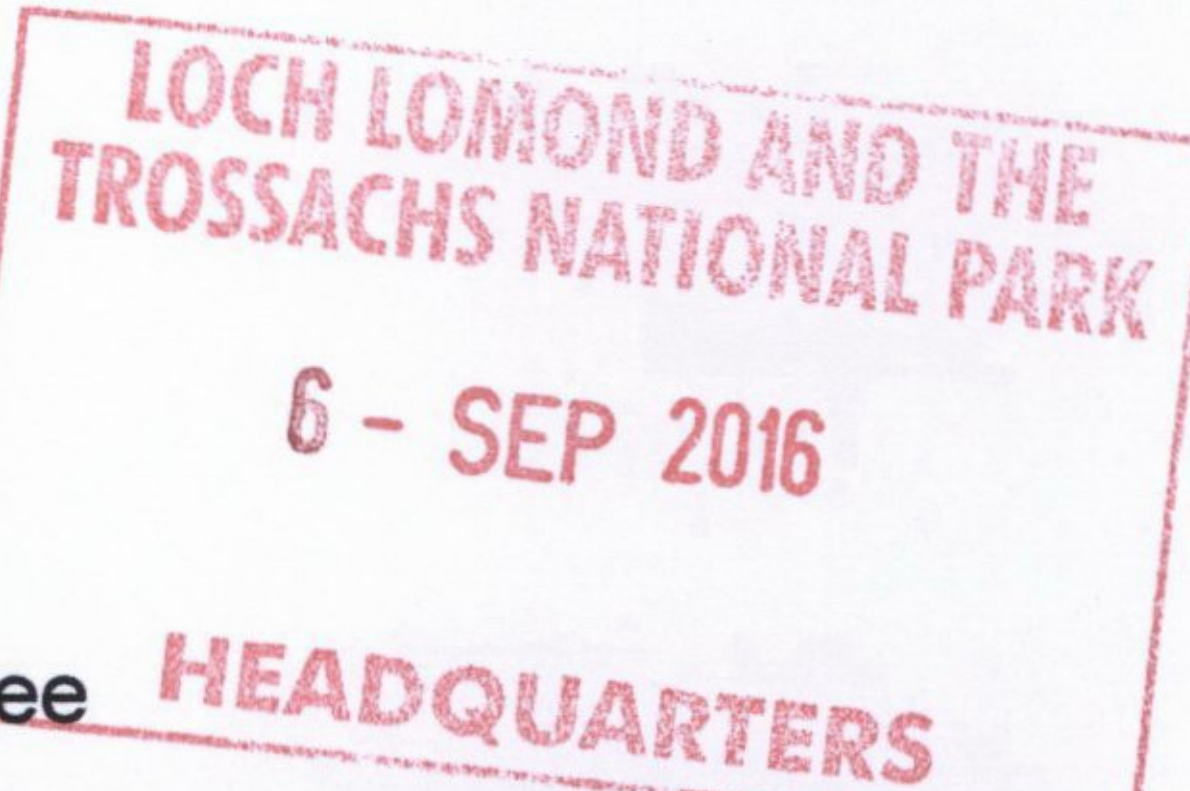




18th August 2016

To Members of the National Park's Planning and Access Committee



Planning Application Number: 2016/0096/DET - Erection of Retiral Dwelling House at Oakwoods Farm, Croftamie.

We are writing to express our disappointment that planning permission has been refused under delegated powers for the erection of a retiral house for Mr and Mrs Martin and wish to confirm our strong support for this decision to be overturned by the Planning and Access Committee under the National Park's planning appeal procedures.

We consider there are strong grounds for granting planning permission and we are also of the view that the assessment by the Planning Officer of the justification for this retiral house has a number of materially significant shortcomings. This may partly be explained by a lack of sufficiently detailed background information initially being supplied by the Martins on how Loch Lomond Luxury Lodges operate and their family's long association with Oakwoods Farm. They have sought to rectify this in their supplementary submission associated with this appeal and we trust sufficient information has now been supplied to grant planning permission.

The Martins have operated high quality tourism businesses at Oakwoods farm for over 20 years as part of their very successful farm diversification efforts. It was clear that Jamie, who has lived on the farm all his life (47 years), needed to diversify the farm business to secure a long term livelihood for his family and to enable them to continue to live there. Initially, alongside the farm operation, they ran a successful bed and breakfast business and then, on a phased basis, they gradually built up a very successful self-catering holiday business with the provision of 4 luxury lodges that consistently achieve VisitScotland/Scottish Tourist Board 5 star quality assurance gradings which is the highest level of grading that can be achieved.

They have now reached the stage where they are very sensibly looking to the medium term future with succession planning for the core holiday business which will pass to their daughter over a five year period as they gradually step back into semi-retirement and re-building a small scale farm operation at Oakwoods. They understandably are keen to continue living on the farm and to retain the holiday business in the family.

There are several grounds why we believe there is a strong case for granting the Martins planning permission for a retiral dwelling house at Oakwoods Farm and they are as follows:

1. The proposal complies with policy HOUS5 'Housing in the Countryside' of the Adopted Local Plan.

It is clear from this policy that there is provision for support to be given 'to a new house where this would meet the housing needs of a household that is retiring from working in an established rural business and where there is a long established link between that household and the wider rural area.'

We believe the Martins proposed retiral home comfortably complies with this policy. Mr Martin has lived at Oakwoods Farm all his life as have his son and daughter. Since their marriage in 1992 his wife Ingeborg has also lived on the farm and jointly they have built up and successfully operated tourism businesses over a 20 year plus period. This proves beyond all reasonable doubt they have a long established link with Oakwoods Farm.

Importantly, given the Martins long association with Oakwoods Farm they have no desire to move away from the farm into one of the neighbouring villages as this would be total contrary to the way of life they have been used to. They also want to remain fairly close to what is a very 'hands on' tourism enterprise operating at the luxury end of the market to provide support to their daughter as she gradually takes over the running of the business. Jamie also wants to return to his farming roots by operating a small scale farm and this can be best achieved by remaining resident on the farm as opposed to doing this remotely.

We consider there is sufficient justification to grant planning permission for this retiral dwelling house for the Martins to allow a smooth transition of the business to their daughter as part of succession planning and to enable them to be close at hand to continue to help out on a scaled down basis while they run a small farm enterprise as they move towards retirement.

We also believe the Martins plans are entirely within the spirit of what was intended when we successfully lobbied the National Park Authority a number of years ago for a relaxation in the new housing in the countryside policy to enable people with a long association with an established rural business to retire and not to be 'forced' to move away into towns and villages. Granting consent for a retiral house would ensure all three generations of the Martins will have been able to stay at Oakwoods Farm.

2. The nature of the existing luxury lodge operation necessitates a full time presence on site which means it is not practical for the Martins to retire in the existing house beside the lodges. This needs to be freed up for their full-time Manager.

In section 7 of the Planning Officer's report the Planning Officer comes to the seriously flawed conclusion that the luxury lodges can be operated remotely as *'the chalet offering is small scale'* and it is not considered that a full-time presence on site is required. She concludes that the Martins *'could continue to occupy and retire in the existing house at the site.'*

Clearly, the Planning Officer fails to understand the 'hands on' nature of running a self-catering operation at the luxury end of the market and the importance of being on site 24/7 to provide support to clients and to deal with day to day issues including the maintenance and monitoring of amenities such as hot tubs. Also given the very high percentage of short breaks with quick turn arounds it is important there is a full-time operational and management staff on site presence.

The Martins explain more fully the justification for retaining a full-time management presence beside the luxury lodges in their submission and we trust this will be fully understood and accepted by the Planning and Access Committee members. If there is a site visit we believe there would be merit in seeing the self-catering operation and hearing more about the nature of the operation.

We consider it is unreasonable to suggest the Martins could retire in the existing house on site as it is very close to the Luxury Lodges and acts as a reception/an arrival/departure point. It also accommodates the laundry and back up workshop to support the business and isn't ideally suited to retirement living. They would be constantly on demand and accessible to visitors which is not what they had planned to be doing in retirement. This house is more suited to be occupied by the lodge Manager who requires to be readily accessible on site for guests at all reasonable times.

We also cannot agree with the Planning Officer's assessment that *'the chalet offering is small scale'* given at any one time there can be as many as 30 guests on site. Due to the high percentage of short breaks this means there can be 60-90 guests on site in any one week and this requires a staff presence on a 7 days a week basis to provide support services and ensure the quality of customer care provided is commensurate with their 5 star grading.

Since the luxury lodges are operating at the high end of the market there are some similarities with running a hotel and this can be very labour intensive ensuring high quality support services are provided to guests.

3. The proposed retiral house is modest in scale and due to the location of the proposed site and the extensive tree and shrub cover it is well secluded and cannot be seen from the busy A811. It therefore has no adverse impact on the scenic qualities of the National Park.

Having visited the site recently we are impressed with how well sited the proposed house is. It is well away from the main road and enjoys extensive screening from mature tree and shrub cover. It will also benefit from the landscaping works which have taken place previously to screen a very large agricultural shed which is adjacent to the house site.

We were surprised to read the Planning Officer's comments that the retiral home was more like a family home in size and nature when in fact what is proposed is a modest u-shaped 2 bedroom bungalow with a reasonable amount of living space. We consider the scale and nature of the building is entirely appropriate for a retiral home and no reduction in size or form is required given the site is so well secluded.

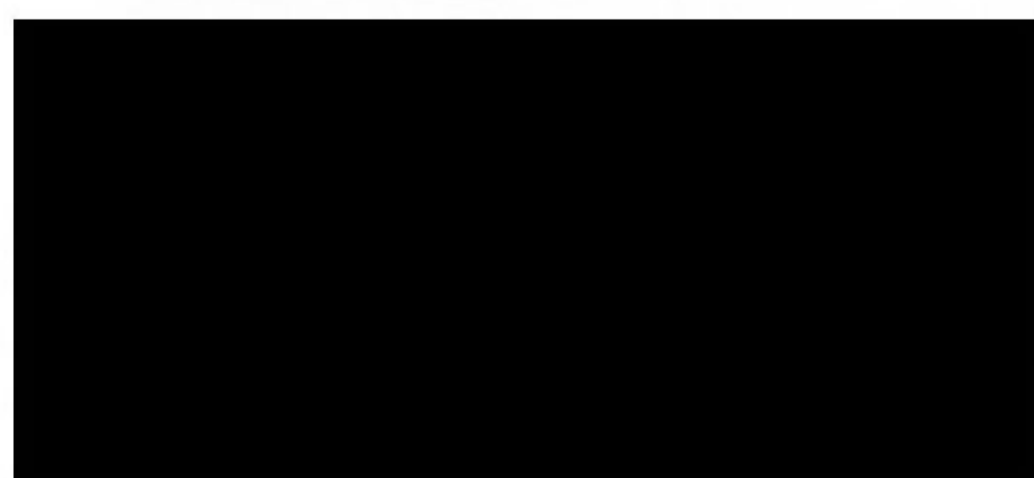
Concluding Remarks

The Martins have established and operated a high quality self-catering business in the National Park for a period of more than 20 years as part of a farm diversification scheme and they are providing a range of high quality services which meet and exceed visitors' expectations. They are a great credit to the National Park and what they have been doing is 'a good fit' with the objectives of the National Park and the National Park Partnership Plan. They want to ensure the business continues to be a success making a positive contribution to providing high quality experiences to National Park visitors and are sensibly taking steps to ensure effective succession planning with their daughter gradually taking over the running of the business with them moving to semi-retirement.

In our view this is best achieved by their daughter remaining in residence at the on-site house which is closely linked to the operation of the business and the Martins moving to a new semi-retirement house nearby on the farm where they can continue to provide help and support while re-establishing a small farm operation. This would enable the Martins long association with Oakwoods Farm (3 generations) to continue into the future and help secure the sustainability of the farm and the related self-catering holiday business.

We earnestly hope that Planning and Access Planning Committee members are sympathetic to this case and that they grant planning permission for the proposed dwelling so that the Martins can continue to live at Oakwoods Farm and enjoy countryside living as they move into retirement.

Yours faithfully,

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James Fraser
Chairman