

Mineral Extraction and the impact on landscape, recreation and biodiversity

GOLDMINE

There is a substantial history of mineral extraction in the National Park with building materials tending to reflect the nature of the local geology. There is also a history of planning consents for exploratory and extraction workings for gold at Cononish near Tyndrum.

Cononish Gold and Silver Mine is located within Cononish Glen, at the north western corner of the National Park. Initial prospecting work took place in the 1980s when Stirling Council was the Planning Authority for the area.

In 2010 a planning application for a commercial gold and silver mine was submitted to Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority. This was the most complex planning application the National Park has ever received. The application was refused for six reasons, including being contrary to the first (conservation) and third (recreation and enjoyment) aims of the National Park.

A revised proposal was submitted in 2011 and approved by the National Park Authority in 2012. A series of further planning applications were made between 2012 and 2014, mainly relating to variations to conditions and legal agreements. The site was then subject to proposals for processing of waste material on the site, left over from exploratory investigations, with planning permission being granted in 2016 for a "bulk processing trial" processing an existing stockpile of ore over a nine month period allowing time for the establishment and commissioning of the processing plant and for around six months of production. The time period for this trial was then extended by a further twelve months through another planning application which was approved in 2017.

In August 2017 a further revised planning application was submitted and on 27 February 2018 The National Park Board was minded to approve planning permission subject to conditions and a section 75 legal agreement. The planning permission was issued on 19 October 2018 following the conclusion of the s75 legal agreement. Works started on site on 3 January 2019.

The main differences between the proposal which was refused and the proposal which was granted planning permission were the size and shape of the Tailings Management Facility (TMF) which would be left on the hillside once the mine closed, and 'planning gain' in the form of the Greater Cononish Glen Management Plan.



This is a 30 year management strategy covering the Cononish Estate which includes:

- Planting native woodland in the lower Glen, riparian areas and around the mine site at Cononish.
- Management of grazing with new fencing to enhance the habitat, particularly upland heath, of Ben Lui.
- Restructuring the edges of Forestry and Land Scotland's plantation on the north side of the Glen through selective felling and new planting.
- Improvements to soften the landscape impact of the Glen track.
- Maintenance of access for walkers and climbers using the Glen.
- Signage situated at the public car park at Dalrigh to illustrate this, with further locational signage (way markers) on the Cononish Glen track.

Conflicting National Park aims:

As a National Park Authority we regularly have to make difficult decisions over what is the best way to proceed. At the heart of these decisions are, sometimes conflicting, National Park Aims.

- To promote sustainable economic and social development of the Park's communities.
- To conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the Park

Resolution and role of The National Park

The first application was refused due to the conflict between the first and fourth aims, and the overriding 'Sandford' principle whereby the greater weight must be given to the first conservation aim.

The application raised a number of complex issues. The short term impacts of the operation of the mine were weighed against longer term restoration/mitigation proposals and the compensatory measures proposed, including the Greater Cononish Glen Management Plan.

Subsequent applications had to demonstrate how the proposal would conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area. The scheme was re-designed to ensure a better restoration plan; and also proposed 'planning gain' in the form of the Greater Cononish Glen Management Plan (GCGMP) –bringing conservation and landscape improvements in the wider glen.

Assessment against National Park Aims

The 10 year operating impacts of the mine would be contrary to the aims of the National Park because of the impacts on landscape and scenic qualities, wild and remote character and the associated recreation experience of walking and climbing in the surrounding area. However, as these losses and impacts would not be permanent and the special qualities and recreation experience could be recovered and moderately improved within a 10 to 15 year period the proposals could be argued to support these aims.



As the impacts on natural heritage interests will be temporary and those interests will be ultimately conserved and enhanced in the long term the proposal will ultimately contribute positively to the conservation and enhancement of the natural heritage of the area. It was therefore concluded that, on balance, there is no conflict between aims.

Assessment against National Park Aims (continued)

Landscape and Special Qualities

Following mine restoration, if restoration techniques are rigorously enforced and the GCGMP successfully delivered, there will be an overall improvement in the landscape, special qualities and relative wildness of the area within 15 years of the development commencing.

Ecological Impacts and Habitat Restoration

The development will not affect protected habitats and species in the long term. Blanket Bog would be permanently lost, however woodland planting within the Greater Cononish Glen will compensate for this.

Economic Benefit

There will be considerable economic benefits to the rural economy and local community from the mine operating. There are wider economic benefits of Scottish gold presenting other opportunities for the local area including in the form of employability and media and tourism interests.

Impact on Recreational Experience and Access

The development will significantly diminish the recreational experience of the Cononish Glen due to the loss of wild and remote character and introduction of industrial activities during the operation of the mine. However with conditions imposed, the proposal would be consistent with recreation use such as the Rights of Way, core paths, wider access network and West Highland Way routes which will be protected from adverse impacts.

The recreation experience will be restored and improved within 15 years of the mine commencing.

Summary

On balance, the significant negative impacts on Cononish Glen Special Qualities (expected to last for at least 10 years) are acceptable because of the overall benefits expected following decommissioning and restoration and the full implementation of the Greater Cononish Glen Management Plan.

Whilst approval of the development was a departure from some policies, it is not considered that this represents a major departure from the Development Plan as a whole due to the temporary nature of the impacts, the environmental improvements that will be delivered, the economic benefits of the development, and the unique nature of the mineral to be extracted at this location.

Questions and pupil enquiry

- Considering the upland landscape around the mine, list the types of land use present in the area.
- What are the main areas of conflict that could result from the mining operations?
- What are the reasons for the conflicts?
- Was the local community in favour of the mine being opened? Give reasons for your answer.
- Why are the positive impacts for the Greater Cononish Glen Management Plan described over long periods of time?

FURTHER GUIDANCE

 Online

 [Planning application for Goldmine in 2017](#)

 Video clip

[BBC Tales from the National Parks](#)