



Scottish  
Environment

**LINK**

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Mr Stuart Black  
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The Highland Council  
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We are writing on behalf of the LINK Hilltracks Group which has been monitoring the construction of new tracks in Scotland over the past year. As you may know, LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with over 35 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with a common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society. [The members of the hilltracks group are listed at the bottom of this letter.](#)

We wish to raise our concerns regarding tracks related to some hydro schemes.

### **1) Tracks to hydro projects above Loch Quoich**

The papers for the current application for a small scale hydro development in wild land area 18 to the north of Loch Quoich (16/04506/FUL) suggests that the restoration work for the tracks to two similar schemes which have been constructed just to the west (Allt Mheil and Peitireach) has not been completed properly. Paragraph 36 of the LVIA Interim Summary for 16/04506/FUL states in respect of these two similar schemes:

*Currently the restoration of disturbed ground is slow to establish and the tracks, particularly higher on the hill, are wider than the consented scheme proposed. There are areas where restoration has not been carried out and the combined effect is to accentuate the impacts of these schemes.*

It is possible that some restoration work on these tracks was still ongoing at the time that the above observation was made. However, if it is claimed by the developer that the work has been completed, LINK is interested to know what action The Highland Council will take, and within what timescale, to ensure that these tracks are reduced to the widths consented and that all the restoration work is carried out to a satisfactory standard.

### **2) General concerns regarding tracks for small scale hydro**

This raises what is a growing concern amongst environmental groups about the tracks created to facilitate the construction and maintenance of small scale hydro. While detailed attention is



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given in planning applications to the construction of inlets, buildings for turbines and the laying of the pipes, information provided for the track(s) is often inadequate. Sometimes the information provided is generalised, rather than specific to the location, or it simply makes reference to SNH's guidance on tracks or similar. Information in the application regarding restoration work on the tracks after construction of the scheme has finished is often limited.

While new tracks are clearly necessary for many schemes, we do question whether tracks are always necessary at the construction phase and/or for maintenance access in the longer term or whether other methods of access could be used. We wonder if, from time to time, applicants make the case for tracks, particularly for maintenance purposes, when the presence of these will primarily serve other purposes. Does The Highland Council consider the potential secondary use of hydro tracks for recreational, agricultural or sporting use, and the environmental implications of this, at the application stage?

There are also examples of restoration work not being carried out properly. In respect of small scale hydro, it is often the tracks, rather than the other works, which are the most visually intrusive features left in remote landscapes in the longer term, so getting their planning and the restoration work right is critical.

Where permanent tracks are approved, LINK considers it essential that conditions are attached limiting the width of the track after restoration to the maximum needed for maintenance and that a central vegetation strip is created. Including such conditions will limit visual intrusiveness.

Finally, we are interested in knowing how The Highland Council ensures that conditions are being adhered to and what action takes place if this is not the case.

We look forward to your responses to these issues.

With thanks for your interest.

Yours sincerely

Helen Todd and Beryl Leatherland  
Co-conveners, LINK Hilltracks Group

*LINK members of the hill tracks group are:*

Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland  
Badenoch & Strathspey Conservation Group  
Cairngorms Campaign  
North East Mountain Trust  
Scottish Wild Land Group

Ramblers Scotland  
National Trust for Scotland  
RSPB Scotland  
Scottish Campaign for National Parks