

Guide to forming a response to planning applications (UK wide)

This guide has been created to help people who know of a planning proposal that might impact a wild place and want to respond. The following checklist doesn't cover every consideration for writing a response, but we hope it provides a good starting point.

Before you begin writing

1. Fully grasp the detail of what is being proposed.

- Read the Non-Technical Summary for a basic overview of what is being proposed.
- Read Chapters of the Environmental Impact Assessment Reports for detail on specific impacts e.g. hydrology, peatland, biodiversity, landscape.
- Check whether there is a Wild Land Impact Assessment. This is a requirement of any development in a Wild Land Area (relevant to Scotland only).
- Consider the scale of the development, the fragility of the landscape, what associated infrastructure might be needed (e.g. transmission lines for new energy development projects), what habitats might be lost, the way it has been designed (is there any attempt to design it sensitively, to avoid impacts to a wild place?).
- If there are any specific issues which you are concerned about or you think need further explanation, then reach out to the developer and ask them for more information, or to direct you to where you can find the information.

2. Work out your main concerns.

For example, are you concerned about the loss of biodiversity at a time of a biodiversity crisis (land use change is one of the main causes of biodiversity loss)? Are you concerned about the loss of local green space which people rely on for exercise, fresh air and looking after their health? Are you concerned about noise or pollution?

3. Apply critical thinking and question what you read in the planning documents.

- If you know the area and the proposed site or surrounding landscape, check whether the planning application misses anything out.
- Evaluate the impacts of the proposals against your own knowledge of the landscape, the species and habitats that are there. Challenge conclusions in the Environmental Impact Reports if you have evidence that suggests contrary to what is being said.
- Consider whether viewpoints included in the landscape assessment provide a fair assessment of potential impacts? Do you agree with evaluations in the Environmental Impact Assessment of whether a potential impact is significant or not?

When writing your response

4. **Turn your main concerns into relevant ‘material considerations’.**
 - Material considerations are matters that the Planning Authority must take into consideration. These are the things that relate to the specific development and use of the land. They are what count when it comes to influencing decision making. They include landscape impacts, noise disturbance, impacts to protected species, the design of the proposal and planning policies.
 - The more points that you can make that relate to material considerations the better.
 - You could group points into sub-headings if you have a lot to say.
5. **Acknowledge biodiversity enhancement plans or biodiversity net gain plans.**
 - Consider whether the plans will result in overall enhancement or net gain of biodiversity at the proposed site.
 - Consider whether irreplaceable habitats are likely to be lost. (It is not possible to compensate for the loss of these habitats through net gain or biodiversity enhancement.)
 - Consider enhancement or net gain plans in the overall scale of the development and ask whether the proposals have sought to avoid harm in the first instance (according to the mitigation hierarchy, developers should seek to first avoid harm, then to minimise it, then take on-site measures to restore biodiversity, before finally compensating for, what should be by this stage, unavoidable impacts).
 - Look for any evidence - or a plan/proposal - for how biodiversity improvements will be measured or understood over time.
6. **Acknowledge ways the developer intends to mitigate harm e.g. by careful design, or siting of infrastructure.**
 - Consider the mitigation hierarchy (as above).
 - Look at baseline survey data – are there gaps?
 - Point out if opportunities to mitigate harm have been overlooked.
7. **Consider what others are saying.**
 - Does your Community Council or Parish Council intend to respond?
 - Read submissions on the planning portal from statutory consultees if these are available (e.g. NatureScot and Natural England).
 - If the site is near you, ask your neighbours what they think.
 - Re-affirm what others have said if you agree with them. Add your own evidence too.
8. **Cite relevant Local Development Plan and relevant National Planning policies.**

What do they have to say about this development type or land use change? If there are conditions or caveats to a policy have these been met? Does the development contravene the objectives of any policies? Check for any available policy guidance to help interpret the meaning and application of policies if you are unsure.
9. **Consider whether, if the development was to proceed, what conditions you think should be attached to it and whether these conditions would be practical or feasible.**

For more information:

- Resources and support on responding to planning applications are available from Planning Democracy (a Scottish charity), Planning Aid Scotland, Planning Aid England and Planning Aid Wales.
- Check your Local Planning Authority planning portal for all documents related to a proposal and to find the main contact person for directing enquiries about the consultation process to (you might be able to submit a response through the planning portal if you have registered and have an account).

We welcome any feedback to help us improve this guide. email policy@johnmuirtrust.org

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