



Friends of Blairs Loch (SC048921) Secure storage & covered workspace project

Proposal

The community-based charity, Friends of Blairs Loch (FoBL), are proposing to create a secure storage space and covered workspace on a site adjacent to the Boathouse, Stable & Bothy facilities previously developed at Loch of Blairs.

The proposed workshop will serve three key functions:

1. The developments carried out around the loch during the last 5 years have included construction of structures (such as bird hides, picnic benches etc) using volunteer's skills so that financial support has only been required for materials. These project elements have had to be prioritised depending on weather conditions and there is a need for a covered workspace for future construction and maintenance tasks. The need for a dedicated workspace is becoming more important as the previous practice of using the car park area, when weather permitted, is now inappropriate given the use of the Bothy & Stable rooms by visiting groups.
2. The workshop will include a secure storage space for the maintenance equipment (around £9K in value) that has been purchased for work on and around the loch. This equipment is currently stored in a converted wooden boathouse and the lack of security of this store is an insurance issue. The intention is to position a steel shipping container, clad with wood for cosmetic reasons, to provide a fully secure space which is in a place that can be monitored by the existing CCTV security system.

(Note: it is intended that the existing store will be returned to use as a second boathouse where, subject to future grant funding, a second boat will be stored for use by anglers on the loch. This second boat will be specially adapted to allow use by disabled anglers. The purpose-built store will have to be completed before the second boat can be provided).

3. Since the educational buildings have been available for hire we have seen a dramatic increase in the different types of recreational groups using our facilities such as organisations supporting individuals in recovery from mental health issues, improving people's physical health, supporting people's physical & mental disabilities, supporting young people not engaging with school and supporting people suffering from social isolation.

The workshop area will also provide an additional space for activities for visiting groups. As well as an outdoor area for general activities, it is also the intention of FoBL to equip the workshop with tools for Green Wood Carpentry (Pole lathes, shave horses etc). The traditional craft of green wood carpentry will add to the recreational opportunities available to the community at Loch of Blairs.

Impact of vehicle numbers and car parking

The proposed development will have no impact on either vehicle numbers or car parking arrangements at the facility.

The secure storage space, and the workshop for much of the time, will be used exclusively by the volunteers. There will therefore be no increase in vehicle numbers associated with the work party activities of the volunteers.

When the workshop area is being used by visiting groups it will be as an alternative space to the Bothy or Stable classrooms, rather than as an additional space. The toilet and ancillary facilities at Loch of Blairs can only accommodate 2 groups at any given time, and this will not be increased by the proposed development.

It should also be noted that since opening as an educational & recreational facility it has become clear that the vast majority of groups using the space travel to the Centre by minibus. There is car parking for 6 vehicles immediately adjacent to the buildings (including disabled parking) and another 8-10 in the area at the top of the access track. At no time has there ever been a shortage of parking space for visiting groups.

Visual impact of the development

The loch side, woodland, setting of the educational/recreation facility at Loch of Blairs is critical to its success. With this in mind the proposed store & workspace have been designed to carefully fit into the setting. Altyre Estate have kindly given permission for the felling of a few Douglas Fir trees to provide the columns to support the roof, and the roof sheeting used will be matched to that of the existing buildings. The main workspace will be open sided, and the secure store clad with wood.

This "rustic" construction method, whilst not requiring a building warrant (confirmed by Moray Council Building Standards) has been checked over by a structural engineer to confirm that it meets all required standards.

The loch, and its surrounding environs, has become a very popular place with the local community and the facilities at the Boathouse buildings are now a regular base for activities by groups of all ages. This proposed development is an important next step in the work carried out by the small group of volunteers that form Friends of Blairs Loch.

Friends of Blairs Loch.

October 2023