

THE TREE INSPECTOR (SCOTLAND)

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Response to objections of Development and Woodland Restoration

The site is in Portincapple, Argyll and Bute, 2.5km northwest of Garelohead (Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: NS 23268 93622). The site is proposed for small scale development with 12 houses within a 1.5ha site. The site has impressive designations being on the 'Ancient Woodland Inventory' (AWI) and 'Ancient of Semi-Natural Origin' (ASNO). These designations can be accurately described as historical in value and do not correspond to the current condition of the woodland. Whilst fully acknowledging and supporting in principle the Woodland Trust policy of protecting high quality woodland whether of ancient origin or not, the principles underpinning the policies are undermined within the context of this site as it actually exists in its current state.

The survival of what remains of the woodland in the long term will be dependent on managing trees, replacing trees and keeping the site clear of invasive species. The shrub layer and field layer of the wood is largely absent, depleting the wood's value for biodiversity. A large area where rhododendron has been cleared shows the complete absence of 'A' (High quality) trees. Existing biodiversity is remnant, the Lower quality trees are threatened and the entire ancient woodland ecosystem is virtually lost. Critically, without intervention the woodland will revert to *rhododendron ponticum* which has the lowest biological value of any green space.

Existing oak trees with their native provenance hold the key to the future of the woodland which could regenerate if management is undertaken. The proposed Woodland Management Plan will set out a range of key measures to protect and enhance the biological value of the site and ensure the woodland's long term sustainability. In order to ensure the successful establishment of protective and restorative measures it is recommended the management plan should cover a 10 year rather than 5 year period. The woodland extends beyond the site boundary to the south. Restoration will have a benefit beyond the current ownership site as the woodland increasingly holds a greater store of biodiversity allowing for the migration of species beyond the site to neighbouring woodland.

In posing the direct question, 'will the woodland and associated wildlife benefit from this development or not'? The factually correct answer is yes. The woodland can only be restored by intervention with the allocation of resources and the implementation of key actions prescribed in a woodland management plan. In conclusion, the greater part of the woodland can be restored by the granting of Planning permission without which the continued loss of the woodland is assured.

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