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MAST PLAN MUDDLE HARMING SCOTLAND'S MOST BEAUTIFUL VIEWS

Conservation charity the National Trust for Scotland says the nationwide 4G expansion project is having a severely detrimental impact on the landscape in some of Scotland's most beautiful and remote locations and is calling for a joined-up approach to protect Scotland's landscapes.

A nationwide effort to extend 4G coverage to 95 per cent of Scotland is leading to multiple planning applications being made to place masts and telecommunications infrastructure in some of Scotland's most scenic locations, including Torridon in the North West and the Mar Lodge Estate National Nature Reserve

The charity says these developments are often planned for places completely unsuited to development and, if approved, would have a detrimental impact on their ecology, stunning landscape character and quality, views and the tranquillity and unspoilt nature of these special places. The diesel driven generators that provide power to the masts will provide a constant background noise in these tranquil places and access tracks will scar the landscape. In many cases there is little consideration other than covering the countryside with 4G connectivity – this includes remote, inaccessible and seldom-visited areas where there is no community need or wider public benefit.

An application has been made to place a mast in the Coire Mhic Nobuil, Torridon in the heart of the Torridon National Scenic Area. In an objection made to Highland Council's Planning Department, the National Trust for Scotland says that it would significantly impact on the character of the landscape and undermine people's experience and enjoyment of it. Any structure would be highly visible not only to those walking throughout most of Coire Mhic Nobuil but also from the ridges and peaks of the most iconic hills in the area including Ben Alligin, the Horns of Alligin, Liathach, West Beinn Eighe range, Sail Mhor and Conneach Mhor.

The plan would also require obtrusive changes to the footpath through the Coire Mhic Nobuil, undoing decades of sensitive work to restore the 14 km path, carried out by a 130-strong team of National Trust for Scotland staff, contractors and volunteers since 1999. Particular care has been taken to keep the path and landscaping as natural as possible, to ensure that the site retains its wild sense. This will be destroyed if the plans proceed.

In October, a developer withdrew an application for a mast to be sited in a sensitive location within the National Trust for Scotland's Mar Lodge Estate National Nature Reserve. After a drawn-out legal dispute the charity did reach an agreement with a

telecoms operator over a mast in Torridon where the equipment to enable communication has been considerably scaled back to minimise the impact on the countryside yet continue to provide support for the emergency services network.

Stuart Brooks, the National Trust for Scotland's Director of Conservation & Policy said:

"The National Trust for Scotland understands that connectivity is vital to support thriving rural communities and we're more than happy to work with providers to find appropriate places for their facilities.

"We are deeply concerned by the approach being taken at the moment which seems to take no account of the nature, beauty and heritage of many locations.

"We are calling for urgent discussions to take place between government, stakeholders, communities of interest and the Shared Rural Network project teams to ensure that national targets and overall approach is reviewed and proposals within Scotland's highly sensitive and internationally valued landscapes are stopped.

"We can help providers find sites for masts and associated infrastructure in places where they can bring benefits to communities, while protecting the ecology, stunning landscape and views for everyone enjoying the tranquillity and unspoilt nature of these places.

"Scotland's beautiful places and views are amongst its most valuable assets, and we all have a responsibility to ensure that they are protected for everyone."

Bob Brown is the National Trust for Scotland's Upland Path Manager. Since 1999, Bob Brown has been working as part of a 130-strong team to restore a 14km path that stretches across the majestic mountain paradise of Torridon.

The footpath through Coire Mhic Nobuil was the first one Bob worked on when he started as a trainee with the National Trust for Scotland over two decades ago, and since then Bob has gone on to train many colleagues and volunteers on the same path.

Commenting on the plans for a mobile mast in Coire Mhic Nobuil, Bob said: "This landscape, loved by many, will be blighted by such a structure. It will be visible during the entire traverse of the Coire Mhic Nobuil path, and at many other points. In the Footpath Team we have worked to ensure the path and landscaping are as sensitively designed as possible, to ensure that the site retains its wild sense. The attention to detail and care in creating such work will be pointless if this goes ahead."

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Notes to editors

Images - <https://www.flickr.com/gp/133918740@N04/69Zi642Ce2>

About the National Trust for Scotland

Established in 1931, the National Trust for Scotland is Scotland's largest conservation charity and cares for, shares and speaks up for Scotland's magnificent heritage.

Over the last 90 years the Trust has pioneered public access to and shared ownership of some of the most magnificent buildings, collections and landscapes in Scotland. It cares for more than 100 sites, from ancient houses to battlefields, castles, mills, gardens, coastlines, islands, mountain ranges and the plants and animals which depend upon them.

In March 2022 the National Trust for Scotland launched *Nature, Beauty & Heritage for Everyone*, its ten-year strategy which sets out the ambitions of the charity over the coming decade. From speaking up for Scotland's heritage which doesn't have a voice, to improving the lives and wellbeing of people across the country, and responding to the climate and biodiversity crisis, the Trust will build on its work in recent years to grow its impact and conserve and restore more of Scotland's heritage, as it moves towards its centenary in 2031.

Scotland's largest membership organisation, the National Trust for Scotland relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work.

For more information on the National Trust for Scotland visit www.nts.org.uk.

The National Trust for Scotland is a charity registered in Scotland, Charity Number SC 007410.