

A New Future For The Isla Cooperage in Keith

Dear Cllr Gatt

In advance of the meeting next week of the **Planning and Regulatory Services Committee** (Tuesday 24th), I would like to take the opportunity to write to you regarding the proposed new Isla Cooperage in Keith.

The planning application for the new cooperage will be heard at this meeting, with the purpose of this note to provide you with information regarding both the application and Isla Cooperage, allowing you to make an informed decision on this important new development for the town.

Isla Cooperage

Isla Cooperage has been operating out of Keith at our existing site on Isla Road since 1989. Whilst this premises has served us very well over the years, despite various modernisations and improvements, it is simply no longer fit for purpose, and crucially, it is not possible for us to expand or redevelop. It is currently the situation that owing to its modest size and the fact we are operating at full capacity, we are now having to turn new contracts away. This had led us to explore moving to a new, purpose-built facility within the town and this is the culmination of the planning application that will be before you next week.



Isla Cooperage, Keith

As we seek to grow and expand, it is vitally important for us that we stay within Keith, maintaining the long-held tradition of cooperage within the town, whilst supporting the local economy, and the existing supply chains that have been so crucial to our success and the wider Keith economy.

The Proposals

The proposed new cooperage is a modern, industrial building situated on vacant land adjacent to Kynoch Park. Despite a strong desire to stay in Keith, it was challenging for us to find a suitable site owing to limitations with the floodplain and ensuring any future site was a suitable distance from neighbouring residential properties.



Proposed new Cooperage

The site chosen is the only viable site in the town for a development of this type and scale. It is extremely sustainable and well-connected to Keith town centre with good walking and transport links and meets our requirements for a modern, state-of-the-art facility.

It will also increase our workforce from **14** to **40** and continue to support **120** indirect jobs within Moray. We are also proud to offer **30** apprenticeship places throughout Scotland and this investment and new facility will only enable us to grow, provide new, well-paying jobs – especially for young people – and continue to play an important role in the local area's economy.

Responding to the Officers Report

We do, however, note the recommendation for refusal that Moray Council's planning department have put forward to you and would naturally like to take the opportunity to address this.

The objection relates to the application's deviation from highly specific and impractical technical requirements of the 2020 Moray LDP, where it requires a link road through the site and access to neighbouring industrial land

allocations to be safeguarded. The space required by roads would drastically reduce the developable area of the site and such roadworks would be prohibitively expensive if only looking to deliver the allocated sites of **I2** and **I4**.

The LDP has aspirations for the site to be developed as a speculative business park with a number of small offices or sheds set off a central road, with options to provide a new road eastward. In order for the cost of such road works to be justified, the development of more land than just I2 and I4 would be required. We are advised by the property consultants, Ryden, that a speculative development of that nature is extremely unlikely given local market conditions where there is little demand for such large quantities of office and industrial space. It is also extremely unlikely that a developer will come along and commit to the level of risk that would be associated with such a development.

In short, the roads related LDP requirements sterilise the development potential of the site. It is also difficult to understand the requirement to safeguard access to neighbouring industrial land allocations, when it is clear that those allocations will be used to deliver energy developments which have little to no traffic impact.

A full Transport Statement has been prepared and was submitted as part of the planning application. In summary, whilst it is acknowledged that the proposed development deviates from certain aspects of policy, it is a justifiable departure based on examining the application as a whole, concluding that:

- **We do not believe that the proposal would remove the opportunity to form a link road between Bridge Street and Westerton Road as it is our opinion that alternative routes and options are available. Likewise, the proposal would not prevent access to the neighbouring allocated sites.**
- **A connection between Westerton Road and Edindiach Road (which leads to Bridge Street) would be feasible from the alternative route and the proposal would not prevent the delivery of other allocated sites.**
- **The proposal would not contribute to the use of Balloch Road by industrial traffic, as the main point of access is from the south via Bridge Street.**

The report also suggests that the proposal is contrary to Policies 1 and 2 in NPF4, which broadly concern the climate crisis and our response to it. This position has been reached by reviewing Moray Council's guidance on the policies, despite the planning department's advice that it would not apply, as the application pre-dates the adoption of the guidance. All cooperages have an inherently sustainable and low-waste business model. The proposal is for an employment use on allocated land near the town centre, accessible by various modes of transport. The proposed landscaping scheme would deliver biodiversity enhancement along with sustainable building materials/practices that have been proposed wherever possible. It is our opinion that the application cannot reasonably be deemed contrary to Policies 1 and 2 in NPF4.

In summary, our proposed site has been allocated for four Local Plan periods with no viable option brought forward. As a key local employer in Keith, we believe that our proposed development will significantly contribute to the local economy through further investment and job opportunities. It will assist Moray Council achieve much of the longstanding industrial use ambitions it has for this area, whilst crucially allowing us to expand and remain in the town. On balance, we suggest that the merits of the proposal do out way the objection put forward by the Council's planning department.

Should you have any questions or require further information regarding Isla Cooperage or the proposals, please do not hesitate to get in contact with Steven Livingston on 07791 668153 / steven.livingston@cavendishconsulting.com.

Best Wishes

Willie Taylor

Isla Cooperage