

**THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL**

**SOUTH PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE**  
**23 June 2015**

Agenda Item	5.1
Report No	PLS/039/15

**15/01766/PAN : Gomde Trust**  
**Land 310M South of Hardmuir Steading, Hardmuir of Boath, Auldearn**

**Report by Area Planning Manager – South**

**Proposal of Application Notice**

**Description :** Establishment of a Meditation Activity Retreat Facility Centre between Nairn and Forres, within Wester Hardmuir Woodland, Auldearn.

**Ward :** 19 - Nairn

**1.0 BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 To inform the Planning Applications Committee of the submission of the attached Proposal of Application Notice (PAN).
- 1.2 The submission of the PAN accords with the provisions of the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006 and was lodged on 11 June 2015. Members are asked to note this may form the basis of a subsequent planning application.
- 1.3 The submitted information attached includes :
  - Proposal of Application Notice
  - Site and Location Plans
  - Supporting Documents - Outline Masterplan

**2.0 DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT**

Establishment of a Meditation Activity Retreat Facility Centre between Nairn and Forres, within Wester Hardmuir Woodland, Auldearn. The principal activities at the Centre will be:

- Individual meditation, private contemplation and retreat
- Group meditation and retreat
- Online study and meditation programmes
- Volunteer programmes to help maintain the woodlands, gardens and buildings

The expectation is that a maximum of 20 people would be on site at any one time. There will also be one annual teaching event catering for around 30 people.

### **3.0 SITE DESCRIPTION**

The site consists of a large rectangular area of woodland extending to some 20ha split into two areas. The eastern area comprises young, mixed native woodland with large open areas and extends to approximately 8.5ha. The western compartment is mature coniferous woodland. There are several structures on site at present, including a workshop and store, meditation hut for the use of visiting Lamas and a static caravan. The site takes access from the A96 (T) road but is set some 550 metres back. There is a small group of houses immediately to the north of the site with further woodland to the east.

### **4.0 DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

The following policies are likely to be relevant to the assessment of the proposal:

#### **4.1 Highland-wide Local Development Plan 2012**

28	Sustainable Design
29	Design Quality and Place-Making
35	Housing in the Countryside
51	Trees and Development
52	Principle of Development in Woodland
57	Natural Built and Cultural Heritage
58	Protected Species
64	Flood Risk
65	Waste Water Treatment
66	Surface Water Drainage
77	Public Access

#### **4.2 Inner Moray Firth Proposed Local Development Plan 2014**

N/A

#### **4.3 Nairnshire Local Plan**

N/A

#### **4.4 Highland Council Supplementary Guidance**

Developer's Contributions (March 2013)

Flood Risk and Drainage Impact Assessment (January 2013)

Green Networks (January 2013)

Highland's Statutorily Protected Species (Draft - June 2011)

Housing in the Countryside (August 2011)  
Managing Waste in New Developments (March 2011)  
Sustainable Design Guide (January 2013)  
Trees, Woodlands and Development (January 2013)

## **5.0 POTENTIAL MATERIAL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

- The site is in an area of woodland and there is a requirement to consider the potential impact on trees.
- The amenity of existing properties that are located to the north of the site e.g. potential noise issues.
- A small burn runs along the southern boundary of the site, which presents a flood risk. This will need to be assessed via both Flood Risk and Drainage Assessments.
- The access to the site is from the A96(T) road and the views of Transport Scotland will, therefore, be important in assessing the scheme.
- Public access is a consideration. The site has potential for the public to make use of woodland paths.
- There may be a need for developer contributions e.g. public transport improvements; public access.
- The need for a manager's house within the Hinterland area.
- The design of the meditation huts and other structures.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

6.1 The report presents the information submitted to date as part of the PAN. Summarised are the policy considerations against which any future planning application will be considered as well as the potential material planning considerations and key issues based on the information available to date. The list is not exhaustive and further matters may arise as and when a planning application is received and in the light of public representations and consultation responses.

## **7.0 RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended the Committee notes the submission of the PAN and advises of any material issues it wishes to be brought to the applicant's attention.

Signature: Allan J Todd  
Designation: Area Planning Manager - South  
Author: J. Harbison  
Background Papers: Documents referred to in report and in case file.  
Relevant Plans: Plan 1 – Location Plan

## PROPOSAL OF APPLICATION NOTICE

### MOLADH BRATH IARRTAIS

The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 as amended by the Planning Etc. (Scotland) Act 2006  
Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (Scotland) Regulations 2008

**The Council will respond within 21 days of receiving the Notice. It will advise whether the proposed Pre-application Consultation is satisfactory or if additional notification and consultation above the statutory minimum is required. Please note that a planning application for this proposed development cannot be submitted less than 12 weeks from the date the Proposal of Application Notice is received by the Council and without the statutory consultation requirements having been undertaken. The planning application must be accompanied by a Pre-application consultation report.**

Applicant .....	GOMDE TRUST	Agent .....	MAKAR
Address .....	24 ADAM DRIVE FORRES MORAY	Address .....	CLACHANDREGGY WEST TORBRECK INVERNESS
Phone No. ....	0131 208 2884	Phone .....	01463 709993
E-mail .....	info@gomdescotland.org	E-mail .....	neil@makar.co.uk

**Address or Location of Proposed Development** Please state the postal address of the prospective development site. If there is no postal address, please describe its location. Please outline the site in red on a base plan to a recognised metric scale and attach it to this completed Notice

WOODLAND HERMITAGE WESTER HARDMUIR WOODS  
HARDMUIR OF BATH NAIRN IV12 5QG

**Description of Development** Please include detail where appropriate – eg the number of residential units; the gross floorspace in m<sup>2</sup> of any buildings not for residential use; the capacity of any electricity generation or waste management facility; and the length of any infrastructure project. Please attach any additional supporting information.

ESTABLISHMENT OF MEDITATION/RETREAT CENTRE  
FOR PERSONS OF ANY FAITH – WITHIN EXISTING  
WOODLAND - IN ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE MANNER

**Pre-application Screening Notice**

Has a Screening Opinion been issued on the need for a Proposal of Application notice by the Highland Council in respect of the proposed development?

If yes please provide a copy of this Opinion.

YES..... NO...<sup>X</sup>.....

**Community Consultation** [See checklist of Statutory minimum consultation attached]

State which other parties have received a copy of this Proposal of Application Notice.

Community Council/s	Date Notice Served
EAST NAIRNSHIRE COMMUNITY COUNCIL	5 <sup>TH</sup> MAY 2015
AULDEARN COMMUNITY COUNCIL	5 <sup>TH</sup> MAY 2015

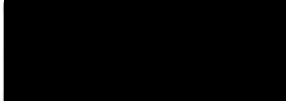
Names/details of any other parties	Date Notice Served
.....	.....
.....	.....

**Please give details of proposed consultation**

Proposed public event	Venue	Date and time
PUBLIC DISPLAY & MEETING	DUNBAR MEMORIAL HALL, AULDEARN	5 <sup>30</sup> -6 <sup>30</sup> pm. FRIDAY 15 <sup>TH</sup> MAY 2015
PUBLIC OPEN DAY	WESTER HARDMUIR WOODS	10-4pm. SATURDAY 16 <sup>TH</sup> MAY 2015

Newspaper Advert – name of newspaper	Advert date(when known)
INVERNESS COURIER	FRIDAY 8 <sup>TH</sup> MAY 2015

**Details of any other consultation methods (date, time and with whom)**  
INFORMAL MEETINGS WITH CLOSE NEIGHBOURS AT HARDMUIR OF BOATH TO PRESENT PROPOSALS 15<sup>TH</sup> APRIL → 6<sup>TH</sup> MAY. ALSO MEETINGS WITH LOCAL INTEREST GROUPS INCLUDING: TREES FOR LIFE, REFORESTING SCOTLAND, VARIOUS BUDDHIST AND MINDFULNESS SCOTLAND GROUPS, PLUS GLASGOW SCHOOL OF ART AND NHS STAFF 28<sup>TH</sup> APRIL → 16<sup>TH</sup> MAY

Signed .....  
SUZIE TISCH  
ARCHITECT (MAKAR)

Date 5<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2015.....

### **Introduction:**

The Gomde Trust is carefully developing a Masterplan for a project whose unfolding will span the next ten years.

The Trust's vision is to make their richly diverse, well managed and carefully designed woodland available to a small stream of visitors- persons of any faith- who wish to spend time on retreat.

The integration of 'sustainable tourism' with diverse woodland will be mutually beneficial:

- retreatants will benefit from the natural beauty of the forest, and
- the woodland will benefit from a stream of resources which will make the continuation of good management possible.

### **The Gomde Trust:**

Gomde Trust is a non profit making charity registered in Scotland since 2009 (Ranjung Yeshe Gomde Trust - SC040361), with the charitable aims of providing public benefit through four areas of activities:

1. the advancement of religion and philosophy
2. the advancement of environmental protection and improvement
3. the advancement of human health, and the
4. prevention or relief of poverty

The first three activities are based in Scotland while the fourth is based in the Himalayan regions of Nepal and Tibet. The Gomde Trust relies completely on donations made by people who appreciate the benefits of meditation and wish to support the public in accessing and utilizing retreat facilities.

## **The site:**

The land belonging to Gomde Scotland is located between Nairn and Forres on the outskirts of Auldearn, in Nairnshire, at a place locally called the “Wester Hardmuir Woodland”.

The land is ancient glacial moraine, now sparsely populated with scattered settlements, and interspersed with fields and woods. The total area belonging to Gomde Scotland amounts to approximately 48 acres and is a pleasing mix of woodland and meadows. There are two distinct areas:

The Easter Wood is of 15 year old mixed native broadleaf. These 21 acres were planted in 1999 under the Woodland Grant Scheme with a delightful mixture of species including Rowan, Elm, Chestnut, Larch, Aspen and Oak. The clusters of trees in this east wood were designed by a forester, located, and planted according to the climate, water availability and soil condition. Today, there are about 27,000 trees and over twenty species of native tree.

The contrasting light, texture and density of the species marries richly with the undulating topography- with its hills and hollows- and results in a landscape that has both open and expansive spaces, as well as more concealed private spaces. It is easy to imagine small timber huts fitting into this environment; and easy to imagine the peace and well-being one might feel sitting in a comfortable hut looking out to the trees and sky beyond.

The Wester woods are larger at 26 acres and of a similar topography. They differ in appearance however with areas of mature Birch, Spruce and Scots Pine and areas that were felled and are now either replanted under the Woodland Grant Scheme or self seeded with Birch.

## **Proposal:**

The Trust hopes to be able to fulfil its charitable aims through the establishment of a Meditation Retreat Centre designed to provide a place of peace and solitude suitable for meditation and retreat for persons of any faith.

The development will be environmentally sustainable and low impact, with the Centre encouraging visitors to make sustainable choices in matters such as transport, access to products (to support local markets) and the careful use of resources (such as wood fuel and electricity).

## Summary of Proposal:

Principal Activities of the Meditation Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Individual meditation, private contemplation and retreat</li><li>• Group meditation and retreat</li><li>• Online study and meditation programs</li><li>• Volunteer programs to help maintain the woodlands, gardens and buildings</li></ul>
Principal Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Creates a local amenity that encourages a higher level of health and wellbeing.</li><li>• Attracts international visitors increasing economic opportunities in the local area.</li><li>• Reaches a worldwide audience from the heart of Scotland</li><li>• Will be an example of low impact sustainable development</li></ul>

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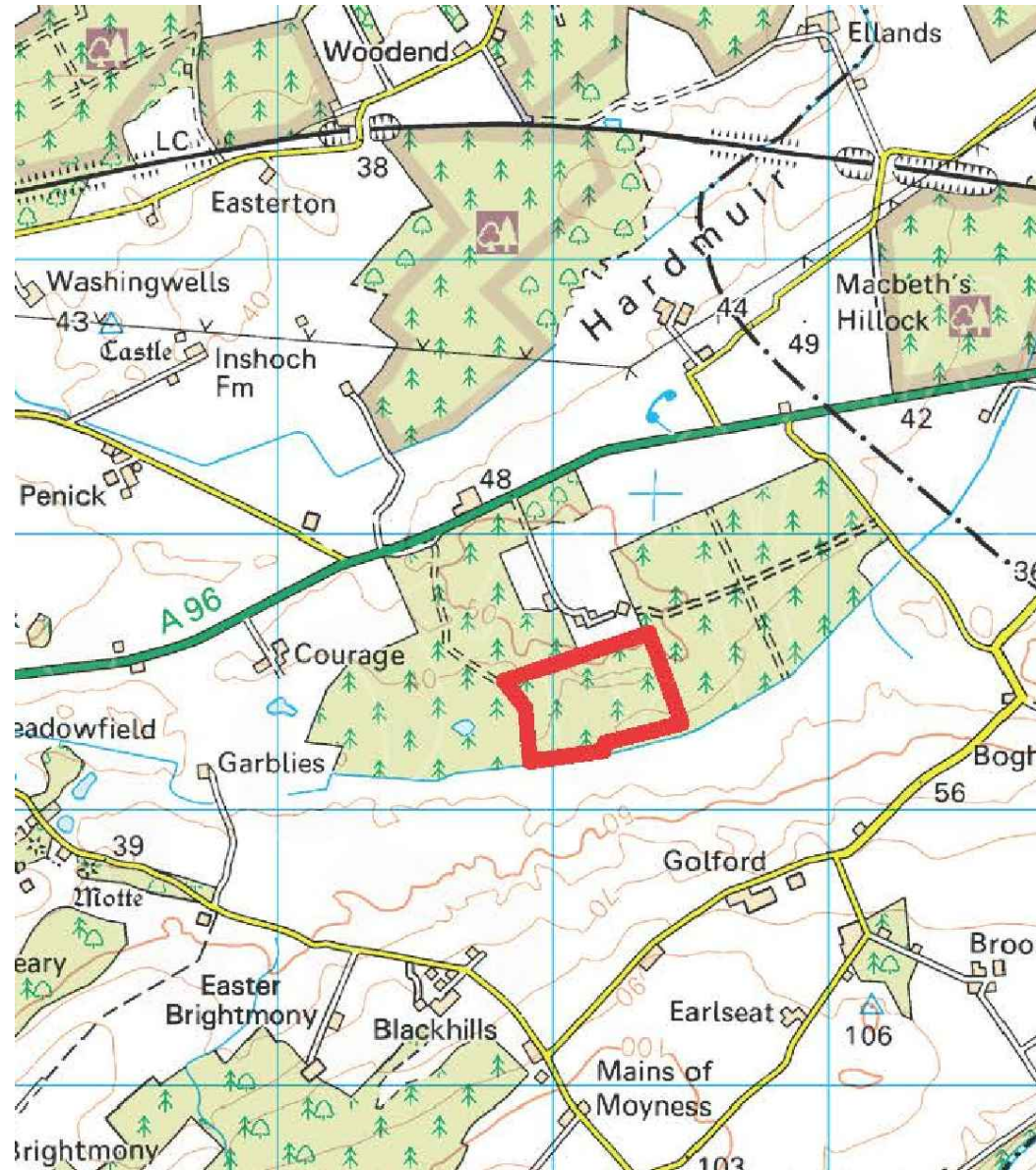
To find out more, please come to one of the proposed open events, where you can meet some of the MAKAR team, and some of the Gomde Trust trustees.

### Scheduled public events in May:

- Open evening with refreshments, presentation of proposals and Question and Answer session: **Friday 15<sup>th</sup> May 2015, 5.30pm - 6.30pm**, Dunbar Memorial Hall, Auldearn.
- Open Day, with refreshments, guided tours and display of proposals: **Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> May, 10am - 4pm** Wester Hardmuir Woods, Hardmuir of Boath (please enter via lay-by on A96).

There will be an opportunity for you to ask questions, share your thoughts with us & leave your comments at these events. You can also contact us by emailing [info@gomdescotland.org](mailto:info@gomdescotland.org)





location plan scale 1:20,000



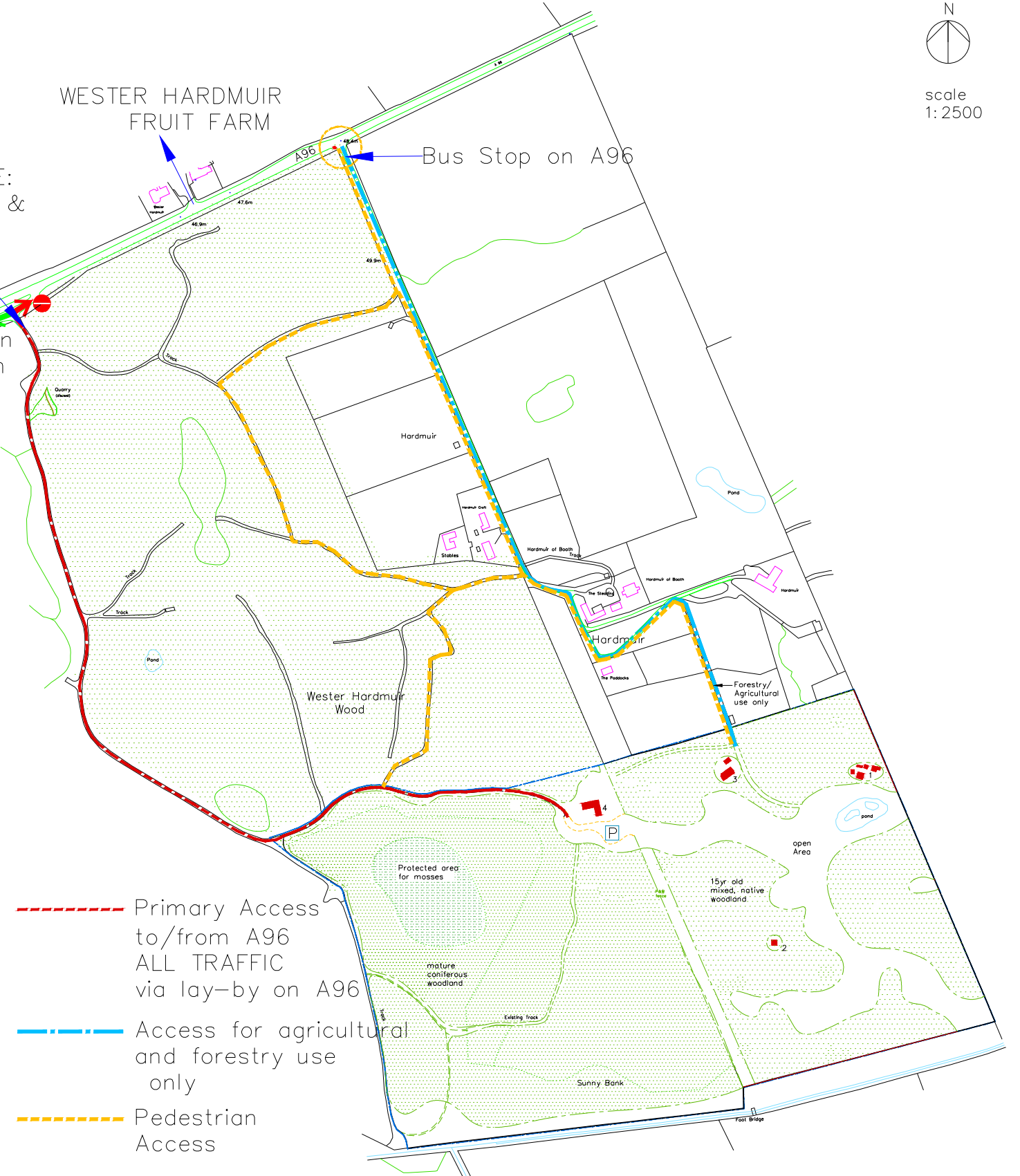
scale 1:2500

ACCESS VIA LAY-BY (THROUGH GATE: FOLLOW TRACK & PRAYER FLAGS)

WESTER HARDMUIR FRUIT FARM

Bus Stop on A96

No right turn on exit from lay-by



- Primary Access to/from A96 ALL TRAFFIC via lay-by on A96
- Access for agricultural and forestry use only
- Pedestrian Access

**MAKAR LTD**

Incorporating Neil Sutherland Architects

Clachandreggy, Torbreck, Dores Road  
Inverness, Scotland, IV2 6DJ  
T: 01463 709993 F: 01463 709515  
E: info@neilsutherlandarchitects.com

NOTES:  
CONTRACTOR TO VERIFY ALL DIMENSIONS AND CONDITIONS ON SITE AND REPORT ANY DISCREPANCIES TO ARCHITECT BEFORE COMMENCING WORK.

DO NOT SCALE DRAWING

REVISIONS:  
REV01: 02.02.15: notation/removal of proposals- existing Features only  
REV02: 06.03.15: note re: exit at layby  
REV-03: 10.03.15: bus stop & pedestrian route  
REV-04: 05.05.15: NOTES re: access

PROJECT:  
**HARDMUIR MEDITATION-CENTRE**

DRAWING:  
**ACCESS**

ARCHITECT: SUZIE-TISCH  
VERIFIED BY:  
DRAWN BY:  
SCALE: 1:5000  
DATE: 30.1.15

PROJECT NO | DRAWING NO  
| **HG-04-D**

DRAWING ISSUED FOR: ISSUE