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EILEAN DONAN CASTLE

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Trade monopoly fears at top Ross tourist attraction

FEARS of a trade monopoly have arisen over proposals to upgrade amenities at one of the Highlands' top tourist attractions.

Eilean Donan Castle near Kyle of Lochalsh, which has 77,000 visitors a year, is poised to get new facilities that will gear it for 21st century tourism.

The castle's owners, Conachra Charitable Trust, have submitted proposals for a 110-vehicle car park, fifty-seat tearoom and shop which will go before Skye and Lochalsh planning committee next week. The application also includes footpath provision between the castle and Dornie village.

The project will entail some land reclamation along the shore for the additional car parking space, which will increase by more than one third. This would utilise rock left over from the Skye Bridge construction and Scottish Natural Heritage has called for sensitivity in view of the castle's prime site.

Concern has also been expressed about the impact the development could have on existing village trade. Some local people are unhappy with the amount of information that has been forthcoming and a public meeting has been arranged

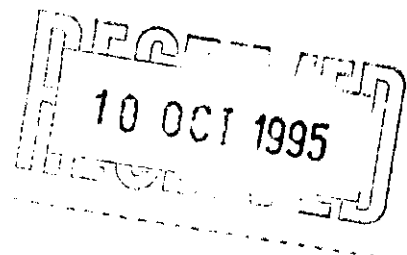
for Monday evening.

Lochalsh and Loch Long community council has asked planners for information on certain aspects of the plans — without success. Council secretary Colin Deans said they needed key issues clarified before giving their approval.

Community councillor Mary Robb has made representation as a resident of Dornie. "There are questions that need to be answered," she said. "I am concerned this would make the castle a one-stop shop — although it won't necessarily do that. It might even be an opportunity for the village. We just need the everybody to be a bit more open about it." A spokesman for the developers disputed claims that the castle would have a monopoly on passing trade. He added: "It's a project that will see the trustees into the next century. A big increase in numbers is expected after the Skye Bridge opens later this year and it will certainly improve road safety."

Council planning officer Pat Myhill considers the development "highly desirable." He pointed out that the proposed shop was merely a relocation of the existing shop within the castle. Although the tearoom was a new venture, it would not sell alcohol.

He added: "Effectively it is a facility which most tourists would expect to find at a site such as Eilean Donan Castle."



Eilean Donan upgrade furore

by **Peter MacAulay**

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Clarified

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