



Scottish  
Wildlife  
Trust



## NatureScot objects to plans for a luxury golf course at Coul Links

An application to build a luxury golf course on one of the last coastal dune habitats in Scotland has been dealt a huge blow with NatureScot objecting to the plans.

The unacceptable and damaging effects of the proposal, from developer C4C, to turn the nationally and internationally protected Coul Links into a golf course, is reflected in the statutory body's strong objection.

NatureScot has warned that

- The proposal will cause the direct loss of significantly more protected dune habitat within the Site of Special Scientific Interest than the 1.5ha stated by C4C
- There will be significant adverse effects on sand dune habitat of national importance and unavoidable adverse effects on other natural heritage interests of national importance
- It considers that C4C's Environmental Impact Assessment report underplays the adverse impacts of the development on sand dune habitats which are part of the Loch Fleet and Dornoch Firth SSSI and Ramsar site

This dune habitat on the East Sutherland coast is one of the last of its kind in Scotland and was previously under threat from a very similar golf course application in 2017. Those plans were ultimately turned down by Scottish Ministers in 2020 as they were deemed too damaging to nature to proceed.

The new plans have been strongly objected to by the seven members of the Conservation Coalition – Buglife, Butterfly Conservation, Marine Conservation Society, National Trust for Scotland, Plantlife, RSPB Scotland, and Scottish Wildlife Trust – who also opposed the previous application due to Coul Link's location within a globally important wildlife site which supports many rare plants and insects and is an important refuge for wintering birds. Over 700 objections from both members of the public and organisations have been submitted to Highland Council.

Aedán Smith, Head of Policy and Advocacy at RSPB Scotland said: “The objection from NatureScot – Scotland’s lead public body responsible for advising Scottish Ministers on nature matters – makes it clear that this development should not go ahead. Coul Links is so important for nature that it has multiple protection designations and is a completely inappropriate place for a luxury golf course. The impacts of the golf course would be hugely damaging and fly in the face of attempts to tackle the nature and climate emergency. We call on Highland Council to refuse this application and save Coul Links from irreparable damage.”

Ruchir Shah, Director of External Affairs at the Scottish Wildlife Trust said: “Given the application looks very similar to the previous application to develop the site it isn’t surprising that Nature Scot have once again objected to this proposal, it is welcomed though. Highland Council should listen to this valued opinion and refuse this application.”

Craig Macadam, Conservation Director at Buglife said: “NatureScot’s objection highlights the importance of Coul Links’ unique sand dune habitat and its value for breeding and wintering birds, endemic invertebrates, and rare lichens. Highland Council must take decisive action and kick out these plans or risk losing Coul Links and its special wildlife forever.”

NatureScot’s objection can be read in full here

[https://wam.highland.gov.uk/wam/files/0569E814432FC4B2D5ECB9CE7E0BA5D3/pdf/23\\_00580\\_FU\\_L-Nature\\_Scot-3020826.pdf](https://wam.highland.gov.uk/wam/files/0569E814432FC4B2D5ECB9CE7E0BA5D3/pdf/23_00580_FU_L-Nature_Scot-3020826.pdf) or accessed via the application’s documents tab on Highland Council website here

<https://wam.highland.gov.uk/wam/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=RPM8MCIHGB800>