

**West Highland & Islands Local Plan
Examination
Fort William Hearing Sessions**

Day 1 (pm) – Tuesday 19 January 2010

**The Alleged Under-Provision of Land Allocated for the
Development of Business and Industry in Fort William**

Statement by Fort William Waterfront Limited

Fort William Waterfront Limited (FWWL) will be represented at the hearing by:

- Charlie Barbour, Development Manager, (FWWL); and
- Brian Muir MRTPI FRSA, Partner, Muir Smith Evans.

There are no additional documents to which FWWL wishes to refer, other than those already notified to the Reporter by other parties.

Statement

- 1 FWWL notes the statement prepared by The Highland Council in response to the questions set out by the Reporter.
- 2 FWWL's principal objective, as the council's selected partner for the development of Fort William Waterfront, is the regeneration of Fort William as a whole to the economic and social benefit of the town and the surrounding area.
- 3 Within this context, the waterfront development itself is envisaged as a mixed-use area, extending the town centre and refreshing the viability and vitality of the area. The waterfront development also aims to incorporate modern, town-centre accommodation for businesses, providing a variety and choice which is not currently available in the area.
- 4 Specifically, the development framework and draft masterplans for Fort William Waterfront, on which FWWL's discussions with the council have been based, incorporates just over 5,000sq m (approximately 55,000sq ft) of modern office and business accommodation.
- 5 It is accepted that this provision of office accommodation for business use will not become available until the waterfront project proceeds. However, on the basis of the current aspirations and intentions of both the council and FWWL, the provision of this office accommodation should be achievable within a five year period starting from now.

- 6 Taking a wider view, FWWL notes the poor figures relating to the recoded take-up of industrial and business land within the local plan area in general, and the Fort William area in particular, in recent years. Although there will be many reasons for this, FWWL believes that an improvement of Fort William in terms of public profile and business perception, may be necessary in order to improve this situation, particularly in relation to new business start-ups and inward investment. For this reason, FWWL believes that the delivery of the Fort William Waterfront project is of crucial importance to the future economic and social health of Fort William and its surrounding hinterland. This may help to contribute to the improvement in the take-up of business and industrial land in the future.
- 7 Within this context, and in relation to Subject 5 as set out by the Reporter, FWWL notes that, in the council's commended change in relation to the Waterfront Expansion Site (MU10), a minimum of 2 hectares of employment land should be allocated within the MU10 policy area for "employment land and other community, retail, leisure and tourism uses". FWWL does not oppose, in principle, this commended change, provided the interpretation of employment land does indeed include retail, leisure, tourism, and other community uses as well as the more traditional classification of business and industry.

Conclusion

FWWL considers it to be very important that the proposed mixed-use regeneration scheme at Fort William Waterfront incorporates a contribution to modern accommodation for businesses in the area and this is provided through the office accommodation incorporated within the mixed-use proposals.

Accordingly, whatever the Reporter's conclusions in relation to this topic heading, and to the debate between the council and HIE, the proposed office accommodation within the waterfront project should be noted and affirmed, and the potential role of the waterfront project to contribute towards the overall business perception of the area should be noted.