

## WEST HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION

### HEARING 1 : The Alleged Over-Provision of Land Allocated for Housing Development in Fort William

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Statement by David Tough FRICS, MRTPI, Ryden LLP on behalf of Malcolm Cameron.

My name is David Tough. I am a Partner in Ryden LLP and a Chartered Town Planner and Chartered Surveyor. I act on behalf of Malcolm Cameron who has land interests at Lundavra, Fort William (MU8) identified in the Local Plan for mixed use development including housing.

#### Subject 1 : Established Housing Land Supply

The Council has indicated an established housing land supply of 622 units within the Housing Market Area focused around Fort William based on the housing land audit of 2007.

#### Subject 2 : Structure Plan Housing Land Requirement

It is agreed the Highland Structure Plan is now so out of date that its requirements are no longer relevant. The Finalised Draft West Highland Local Plan identifies a requirement for Lochaber for 767 houses for the period 2008 to 2018, primarily driven by changing household needs and in-migration rather than population growth. The Council estimates 50% of the Lochaber requirement should be met in Fort William which seems appropriate.

#### Subject 3 : Additional Housing Land Proposed by the Council

The Council lists the sites which it proposes for development in the Local Plan along with their potential capacity as 1187 units. These sites may be constrained as acknowledged by the Council.

#### Subject 4 : Torlundy and Fassfern sites

It will be for the site specific sessions to consider individual locations and their development potential.

#### Subject 5 : Does the Provision in the Local Plan equate to an over-supply of Housing Land or Not?

It is accepted that in quantitative terms Highland Council has over-allocated sites in terms of their notional capacity.

Subject 6 : If it does equate to an Over-Supply, would a reduction be justified and should any modifications be sought?

It is agreed that there are two issues i.e. firstly whether it is appropriate to consider a quantitative over-supply in Fort William and secondly, whether allocated sites can or will be delivered.

The Council's thesis is that an over-supply of housing land in Fort William is a valid approach. This is based on advice by Scottish Government, the nature of the market in Fort William and the prevailing overall conditions in the housing market.

The whole thrust of advice in SPP3: Planning for Homes is to raise the rate of new housebuilding. Whilst the target of 35,000 per annum throughout Scotland set out in the advice (para 5) was made in better economic conditions for housebuilding, the underlying factors driving demand are still latent. A key objective is to make an allocation of a generous supply land (Summary / Introduction) and to ensure that there is no constriction on supply which has had a detrimental effect on affordability. The new West Highlands and Islands Local Plan contains a strategic vision spanning into the 2020's (para 3.11). This is well beyond the current difficulties for the new housebuilding market and sites should be planned for accordingly.

SPP3 specifically advises planning authorities that in respect of housing land, development plans should allocate land on a range of sites to meet the housing land requirement for a period of up to 10 years and provide a broad indication of the scale and location of housing land up to 20 years (para 39). Whilst this is advice in respect of the new Local Development Plans introduced under the Planning Act 2006, these are now in preparation by Highland Council and therefore the advice is relevant to this local plan. An apparent over-supply of housing land looking only at a 5 year period does not take account of the need to look at the long term supply and where it should be located.

The housing market in Fort William includes limited activity by national housebuilders. The activity is principally by local housebuilders. Coupled with the downturn in the housing market, there is little appetite at present for potential developers to carry out the investigative and feasibility work required to take forward sites and potential allocations. This leads to uncertainties about constraints affecting sites and

their ability to deliver housing. In these circumstances providing a generous housing land supply is not an unreasonable strategy by Highland Council. The points the Council makes about this providing maximum choice and flexibility are well made and can be justified against the approach set out in SPP3.

In summary, this submission agrees with the approach taken by Highland Council to allocate housing land at the level proposed in the local plan.

DLT -- 15 December 2009