

GS/404/IK

Local Plan Examination – Hearings Statements – HIE – Fort William Business and Industry Land

HEARING No 4 – Wednesday 1400 to 1700 – Expansion Sites MU5 (Blar Mor) and MU7 (Coal/Lochyside)

Representation

For this topic HIE will be represented by Ian Kelly, Head of Planning, Graham and Sibbald and by Scott Dingwall, Head of Transformational Projects, HIE Fort William Area Office. Ian Kelly will lead on this topic.

HIE Overall Objectives on This Topic

The overall HIE objective is to ensure that there is a sufficiency of available business and industrial land, allocated/reserved for that purpose, that is serviced or capable of being serviced at reasonable costs, to provide a choice of sites likely to meet the likely range of user requirements during the Plan period. It would appear that, broadly, the Council supports this overall objective.

Background

There are two key drivers setting the HIE view. Firstly, there is the view that the final Draft Local Plan position with land for industry and business is illusory. Basically, virtually none of the allocated land is available. Secondly, between the draft and the finalised draft Local Plans the Council moved from having allocated and reserved business and industry sites to having mixed use areas within which it was hoped that some such uses would be provided. The reasoning for this change has never been fully explained and, in HIE's view, this leads to unacceptable uncertainties.

In relation to the Blar Mor site (currently within the MU7 area) the HIE objection seeks the re-allocation of this site, which extends to approximately 10.0ha, for use classes 4, 5 and 6. HIE does not consider that the proposed mixed use allocation, even with the Council's proposed modification wording, will secure the availability of this key land.

Furthermore, HIE is concerned that if the Coal Link Road, as currently proposed, uses the current industrial estate access junction then the land to the west would be sterilised given the likely width and height of the embankment required to carry the link road over the railway line. That would preclude the western expansion of this successful industrial estate unless an expensive full height underpass could be achieved as part of the road works. The resolution of this concern will require a more flexible approach from Transport Scotland.

Observations on the Council Statement

As a general point it should be noted that this site did previously have detailed planning permission for industrial and business uses but the development did not proceed because of

difficulties with land values. This previous experience has influenced the HIE view that the employment land must be specifically allocated for those uses and protected as such.

In response to the Council Statement HIE would offer the following comments, using the Council document paragraph numbers:

- 1.1 – the Council notes that the Adopted Local Plan allocates 58.2 ha for a variety of uses including business and industrial development. The general principle of this is not disputed but the western extension of the current employment land area needs to be allocated and safeguarded
- 2.1 – the existing employment land estate is at its capacity and needs to be extended, especially to provide for food processing uses
- 4.1 – it is noted that the Council's commended change would provide for a minimum of 8.7 ha of employment land. In this location there might be some opportunity for HIE to become involved in a mixed use scheme, but the priority is to have the land to the west of the existing Blar Mor estate allocated for industrial and business use as per the previous version of the new Local Plan. This part of the overall area is bounded by the trunk road and the railway line and, thus, relatively self contained. This expansion would provide space for food processing uses in particular, a use that is not often compatible with residential uses nearby
- 5.2 – it is noted that, in this paragraph, the Council begins to describe a rational distribution of land uses within the MU5 area. In the view of HIE this slightly undermines the argument that the whole area must have the same MU allocation.
- 5.3 – the HIE objection is seeking the expansion of the existing estate and this is considered to be a sound planning approach. This is much preferable to attempts to create another entirely new employment area within the MU5 allocation. However, there are concerns about the effects of the proposed link road. As currently proposed, this uses the current industrial estate access junction then the land to the west would be sterilised given the likely width and height of the embankment required to carry the link road over the railway line. That would preclude the western expansion of this successful industrial estate unless an expensive full height underpass was provided as part of the road works. The resolution of this concern will require a more flexible approach from Transport Scotland.

Response to the Reporter's Questions

The Reporter's questions are considered below using the numbering in the letter of 16th November 2009:

- 1 – this is as discussed above. HIE is aware of the minded to grant planning permission for the residential development at Caol

- 2 – the Approved Structure Plan seeks the protection of employment sites and this is the approach preferred by HIE
- 3 – HIE is not aware of any particular contamination issues in respect of the estate extension being proposed by them set out above
- 4 – the HIE view on the development potential for employment uses is set out above
- 5 – HIE has no particular view on this providing those different uses did not prejudice the allocation and development of the employment site
- 6 – HIE is aware of some of the constraints and notes that the Highland Council are of the view that the Plan's proposals mitigate some of the relevant environmental effects. The other constraints are not seen as insurmountable for the employment uses particularly if the proposed western extension of the estate can be secured without the need for expensive road works
- 7 – this is precisely what HIE is seeking in relation to the employment land by way of extending the existing successful estate
- 8 – HIE is not aware of any such adverse effects

Conclusions

Again, it is considered that there is not an overwhelming disagreement between HIE and the Council on this matter. The proposed allocation of this site for development and the principle of a range of land uses are not disputed by HIE. What is in dispute is the means of securing the employment land allocation.

For the reasons set out to date, in relation to the Blar Mor site (currently within the MU7 area) the HIE objection seeks the re-allocation of this site, which extends to approximately 10.0ha and which would form a western extension to the existing estate, for use classes 4, 5 and 6. HIE does not consider that the proposed mixed use allocation, even with the Council's proposed modification wording, will secure the availability of this key land.

Furthermore, HIE is concerned that if the Coal Link Road, as currently proposed, uses the current industrial estate access junction then the land to the west would be sterilised given the likely width and height of the embankment required to carry the link road over the railway line. That would preclude the western expansion of this successful industrial estate unless an expensive full height underpass could be achieved as part of the road works. The resolution of this concern will require a more flexible approach from Transport Scotland.

This approach is in accord with HIE's considered view that the best way to achieve the delivery of employment land is to have that land specifically identified for business and industry uses and to have it protected for those specific uses.

Ian Kelly MRTPI,

Head of Planning, Graham and Sibbald

21st December 2009