

THE WEST HIGHLAND AND ISLANDS LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY MILLER DEVELOPMENTS  
ON BEHALF OF LOCHEIL ESTATES AND OATRIDGE LTD  
(REPRESENTTEE NO. 947)

STATEMENT OF FURTHER INFORMATION

**HEARING 4 – EXPANSION SITES MU5 BLAR MHOR & MU7  
CAOL/LOCHYSIDE**

Miller Developments Ltd acts on behalf of Locheil Estates and Oatridge Ltd (Representtee no. 947) in respect of their representations to the draft West Highlands & Islands Local Plan. Although we do not wish to appear in person at the hearing listed above, the following statement should be read as confirmation of our views on the above issue.

This statement has been prepared by Colin Graham MA(Hons) DipSurv MRTPI, Development Manager at Miller Developments, 2 Lochside View, Edinburgh EH12 9DH. Reference is made in the Statement to a number of The Highland Council's core documents, namely:-

- THC 2: West Highlands and Islands Local Plan: Deposit Draft: THC: December 2008  
THC 3: Lochaber Local Plan: Adopted Plan: THC: February 1999  
THC 6: West Highlands and Islands Local Plan – Environmental Report: THC: December 2008

**Hearing 4 – Expansion Sites MU5 Blar Mhor & MU7 Caol/Lochyside**

This statement deals with MU5 Blar Mhor only.

The draft Highlands and Islands Local Plan [THC 2] allocates the Blar Mhor site for a variety of uses including housing, business, community, leisure and urban district scale retail. The adopted Lochaber Local Plan [THC 3] already allocates the majority of this land for business, industrial and campus development so the principle of development in this area is well-established.

We note that the Council's Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Site Assessment Matrices [THC 6] highlights a number of potential adverse environmental effects relating to MU5, including: loss of blanket bog habitat and related species; pluvial flood risk; altered landform from the stripping and bunding of peat; lack of shelter from the prevailing wind; light pollution; and minor contamination from previous agricultural uses.

These issues will be covered in detail during the ongoing master-planning process and where a specific issue is identified, an appropriate solution will be prepared for agreement with the relevant authority(s). Other issues, including the strategy for the removal of peat, dealing with surface water drainage issues and connections with the existing transportation network, will also be dealt with through the master-planning process.

We are aware that some objectors to MU5 have raised the site's status as a blanket bog habitat, which is defined as a European priority habitat under the Habitat's directive. The UK has a responsibility for protection of this priority habitat type, which has resulted in 50 sites across the UK being designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). These sites have been selected to ensure full coverage of geographic range and ecological variation. The largest sites with the most extensive areas of active blanket bogs have been favoured, such as the Lewis Peatlands and Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands. The large number of sites selected covers a total area of over 350,000 ha, much of which is within the Highlands and Islands area. Blar Mor represents a relatively small area, and has not been selected for SAC designation, or as a SSSI under UK legislation. This would indicate the ecological significance of Blar Mhor blanket bog is relatively low.

### **Conclusion**

We welcome and support the Council's decision to allocate MU5 Blar Mhor for a variety of uses. As anticipated in THC 2, we have now commenced on a master-planning process to inform the eventual layout & design of the site. It is anticipated that the supporting investigative work and public consultation will be complete by Summer 2010. It is not possible at this stage to put forward solutions to all the potential constraints highlighted in THC 2 but the proposed wording of the Local Plan makes it clear what issues need to be addressed as the site is progressed.