

Letter of support from Inverness West Community Council

I am writing in response to the CAT request lodged by HI Skills in respect of Torvean Quarry.

The directors of HI Skills attended a recent IWCC meeting and shared with Members and residents their vision for the Torvean Quarry site.

Their passion was evident and underpinned by their long collective experience in their respective fields. As local people, they value and respect the heritage within the site and articulate their desire to enhance and maintain it. Apart from the historic hill fort, we understand the site also encompasses a SSSI, which HI Skills seem determined to protect.

Torvean Quarry lends itself to the project, partly because of its size, and also because of its topography. As a brownfield site, it does not detract from the local area resource. Whilst there is currently unlawful use by the motorcycling community, HI Skills is cognisant that preventing such use could cause nuisance elsewhere. They are willing to work with that sector to provide a structured terrain for regulated use at specific times. This has the potential to appease the motorcyclists whilst also managing the noise about which some residents frequently complain.

In a wider context, HI Skills' proposal addresses a significant gap in the training market. There are currently at least six planning applications in the Highlands to construct temporary accommodation "villages" to house workers on renewable infrastructure projects. These are necessary because there are too few "home-grown" technicians. Training facilities to support the renewables industry are sadly lacking in Scotland; all too often young people with potential turn away from a vocational career in a burgeoning market because they do not want to relocate in order to acquire the skills they need.

IWCC believes that a skills centre at Torvean would directly benefit young people looking to move on from Charleston Academy and other Inverness schools. Delegates from the wider Highland and Islands area will also benefit from a far more accessible and affordable training location, rather than having to fund repeated trips to Norfolk and other parts of southern England. Finally, the HI Skills proposal also speaks to the retraining and career change sectors. Scotland is a leading nation in the switch from fossil fuels to renewables. It is fitting that upskilling workers seeking to transfer from one industry to another should be accomplished in Scotland. Similarly, HI Skills expressed openness to working with more vulnerable people, such as those recovering from addiction, ex-prisoners, and the migrant community, which may be particularly relevant given the recent announcement concerning Cameron Barracks.

Notwithstanding the training aspect, the project will necessarily require accommodation quarters for trainees and thus has the potential to offer ancillary employment locally, and to provide multifunctional facilities that could be available for community use, such as meeting rooms and offices.

IWCC recognises that Highland Council is tendering to develop a Battery Energy Storage System on the site. We channel residents' concerns about that possibility; many residents are opposed to the development and express concern, if not fear, about the prospect. They argue that the

Fairways proposal was rejected partly because it was too close to residential development, and ask why they should be treated differently. IWCC acknowledges those concerns. Indeed, residents of the Golf View Road and Millerton Avenue areas face a significant loss of green space and now find themselves sandwiched between the Robertson Homes development on the brae above them and an equally unwanted BESS from which they are down wind. An incendiary event there would be catastrophic.

IWCC therefore agreed unanimously to support the HI Skills proposal and trusts that Highland Council will look favourably upon this CAT request.

Kind regards

Mark Pole

Secretary & Vice Chair, IWCC