

Mr Brian Archibald
Directorate for Planning and Environmental Appeals
4 The Courtyard
Callendar Business Park
Callendar Road
Falkirk
FK1 1XR

21 December 2009
Our ref: Our ref: CNS/LP/HI/West Highland/WHILP

Dear Sir

**Town and Country Planning (Development Planning) (Scotland) Regulations 2008.
Examination of the West Highland & Islands Local Plan Deposit Draft
Allocation of MU16 Glen Nevis (National Scenic Area and Special Area of Conservation)**

Further to your letter dated 16 November 2009 addressed to Kristin Scott, please find attached a Written Statement from Scottish Natural Heritage relating to the allocation of MU16 and its impact on the Ben Nevis & Glencoe National Scenic Area and the Ben Nevis Special Area of Conservation.

As requested, I am copying this statement to all the parties taking part in the hearing.

Yours faithfully,

Martin Faulkner
Area Officer, East Lochaber
martin.faulkner@snh.gov.uk

cc T Jordan, Nevis Partnership
M Bruce, Fort William Community Council
A Polson, Brodies LLP, per Inverlochy Castle Ltd,
J Hillis, Bidwells, per Rio Tinto Alcan
T Stott, The Highland Council

Town and Country Planning (Development Planning) (Scotland) Regulations 2008.

Examination of the West Highland & Islands Local Plan Deposit Draft

Written Statement from Scottish Natural Heritage—Allocation of MU16 Glen Nevis (National Scenic Area and Special Area of Conservation)

Representation No.: 697

1. Background

1.1 Ben Nevis and Glencoe National Scenic Area (NSA) is designated for its great variety of landform and scenery. No other NSA has such a scale of relief, reinforced in Glen Nevis by the slope profile, and the remnants of woodland following stream-sides up the very steep slopes.

1.2 MU16 lies entirely within the NSA, albeit at the edge of the site. The boundary of the NSA in the vicinity of MU16 is the line of pylons running approximately NE-SW.

1.3 The Lochaber Landscape Character Assessment, (SNH, 1997) identifies two Landscape Character Types relevant to this area: Settled Lochs and Mountain Massif. Transitions between zones tend to be particularly sensitive to inappropriate development.

1.4 We objected to the inclusion of MU16 in the West Highland & Islands Local Plan Deposit Draft of December 2007 because the location and configuration of the 20ha allocation meant that there was no buffer between the town and the abruptly steepening ground within the National Scenic Area, resulting in a potentially unacceptable level of landscape and visual impact. The allocation extended to the break in slope which would have potentially increased its landscape or visual impact. SNH was also of the opinion that this configuration was not a natural extension of the town and affected the mountainous nature of the NSA because it removes the flatter area that forms a buffer between development and the hill. Although this allocation was sited at the edge of the NSA a very large number of sensitive receptors (ca 450,000 pa) would have been affected.

1.5 The Deposit Draft was revised in December 2008 and we were able to withdraw our objection to this allocation because of the significant changes to the scale and siting of MU16.

2. Impacts on Ben Nevis and Glencoe National Scenic Area

2.1 MU16 remains within the NSA and the allocation is therefore still in an area sensitive to landscape change. The development has the potential to have adverse impacts on the qualities of the NSA. However, its context at the edge of the NSA, and adjacent to existing housing and industrial development reduces the sensitivity of this part of the NSA to landscape change on the flatter section of the site.

2.2 The current size (7.9ha) and configuration of MU16 is considerably less than the allocation in the earlier draft Local Plan (Dec 07), and is removed from the transition between the Settled Loch and Mountain Massif landscape character types. It also no

longer straddles the road to Achintee and the precise location means that the visual impact on people travelling up and down the glen is significantly reduced.

2.3 The site lies on the edge of the Fort William Settlement within the lower moorland slopes which provides some of the setting for the key qualities of the mountain landscape beyond, but the location means that the main views of the allocation will be against the backdrop of existing housing and industrial development.

2.4 We have no objection to the principle of development at this location because we believe that this reduced allocation could be developed without compromising the qualities of either the Settled Lochs or Mountain Massif Landscape Character Types that form this part of the NSA, especially if very high standards of design in the layout, design of buildings and infrastructure, including open space, were an integral part of the development. We believe that the statement of developer requirements for this allocation make this clear.

2.5 MU6 is a new allocation but we consider that development in the Glen Nevis Business Park could be sited in a way as to not adversely impact on the qualities of the designation.

3. Ben Nevis Special Area of Conservation

3.1 We consider that development within this allocation is unlikely to lead to an adverse effect upon the integrity of the SAC either through direct or indirect effects. This has been the subject of an Appropriate Assessment undertaken by Highland Council for the Plan in its entirety, wherever possible significant effects upon the qualifying features of interest were suspected. This was the case for this allocation.