

A. Comments for Reporter’s Specified Subjects (RSS)

To avoid re-iteration, please refer to my letters of 12th March 2008 and 7th June 2006 for further explanations.

RSS 3.

Yes, in the SEA Revised Environmental Report, December 2008 and Appropriate Assessment there are relevant findings for consideration in this determination, in particular :

This proposal for **H1 – Tomonie** seems to contradict parts of the Council’s General Policies : 4, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14. An outline of the reasoning for each of these contradictions is given in my letter of 12th March 2008. For example, **GP 11** there are references to the criteria which need to be met before advocating a development which is likely to have adverse effects on European species.

SEA in addition to my comments on the SEA, dated 12th March 2008, for SEA Q 19 it states :

- “ *Requirement for protected species’ surveys.*”
This could be part, but is not mitigation *per se*. Mitigation should refer to actions which would be taken to protect species found to be living in the proposed development area. (An analogy could be : a GP diagnosing a serious treatable disease and then giving the patient no treatment.)
- “*No net loss of wetland habitat.*” What is this based on ?

This housing proposal contradicts at least 3 of the objectives within the Lochaber Biodiversity Action Plan, and has the potential to damage a number of UK and local BAP ‘priority habitats and species’. For instance, it would affect habitats e.g. fen and rush pasture, and species such as otter and bats; which are listed as specially protected under EU and UK legislation.

RSS 6.

As well as ecological constraints, there would be environmental constraints in changes to drainage and the water table. How the displaced ground water would be dealt with would alter its availability for wild plants and animals either by loss, reduction, or increasing the levels in lower areas, depending on which SUDS methods were employed.

RSS 5. & 7.

If it is decided that this development should proceed then instead of destroying semi-natural habitat and subsequently creating SUDS capacity, the lower areas beside the canal could be used for this purpose and as retained open space. For a realistic wildlife corridor, a zone of at least 50m of the present habitats should be retained from the burn, or the northern embankment of the canal where the burn is indistinct, to keep habitats which both otters and several species of bats use including as resting places.

RSS 8.

Adverse effects to the wildlife in this area and to humans would come from :

- Loss of wetland habitats including BAP ‘priorities’ fen and rush pasture; and plants including BAP species such as Ragged Robin.
- Loss of habitats for feeding and breeding for : bats, otters, invertebrates such as dragonflies, and birds - including song thrush and birds of prey. Otters and bats are specially protected under the EU Habitats and Species Directive as well as within UK legislation; as are various birds which frequent this area.
- Detrimental effect on an EU protected species and potential loss of otters from the area if it is either unsuitable habitats or too disturbed (eg by domestic cats and dogs) for them to use.
- This burn is likely to be important freshwater source for cleaning for otters near the coast as well as for feeding. Most other burns in Corpach, Tomonie, Banavie and Caol, are in culverts and thus unsuitable for otters to use, thus the remaining open burns are that much more crucial for the local otter population.
- Loss of a burn with loss of aquatic ecosystem and all it supports. Fish in the burn include brown trout, a UK BAP species; and if these are migratory salmonids this is another EU protected species which is present.
- Loss of a semi-natural resource and open space for human recreation : both for walking or viewing nature. This is an important open, green, “breathing” space both for residents and users of the Caledonian Canal; and accessible at any time of year.

B. Remarks on THC’s submission

THC 4.2

My point on SEA Q 2 is that the loss of an open area of semi-natural habitats and replacement with a built-up area would reduce opportunities for walking as gardens do not offer the same wildlife habitats or experiences for humans, nor would they be available to the public. At present this provides a valued ‘green space for nature’ within a built-up area.

THC 4.3

In document ref **THC 3** section 4.5.3 (e) states “*Tomonie - ...otherwise development potential is restrained by crofting and service deficiencies;*” As the settled lochs landscape character type appears to include crofting, and as open spaces of semi-natural habitats form part of the crofts, placing houses in this area will affect the distinct character of our local landscape.

Also, the Canal is not viewed in isolation to its surroundings and its landscape corridor is recognised also as a valued wildlife corridor. In document **THC 3** section 4.5.59 states “*The Council will encourage conservation and management of the following landscape corridors as an integral part of the built up area : (a) the Caledonian Canal ... These will be safeguarded from development inconsistent with their use for public access and recreation, or as continuous wildlife and ecological habitats across the town.*”

C. My overall Conclusion

Maintaining the high quality of our environment, including space for the native Lochaber flora and fauna – some of which is of international importance, should limit the extent of development in some situations in order that the features people enjoy are not spoiled by loss or over-management. The rural setting of Corpach should not be lost by filling almost every adjacent piece of natural or semi-natural habitat with housing.