

Date: 02 July 2013
Our Ref: A1311/Landscape Capacity Matters

Committee Services
Kilmory
Lochgilphead
PA31 8RT

Dear Sirs

**SITE FOR ERECTION OF A DWELLINGHOUSE AT LAND EAST OF BLARCREEN HOUSE,
BONAWE, ARGYLL AND BUTE
(PLANNING APPLICATION REFERENCE NUMBER: 13/00123/PPP)**

I refer to the above application for planning permission in principle, which was recently refused and is currently at a Local Review.

VLM Landscape Design Ltd has been appointed by Mrs E. Struthers to undertake an independent and objective appraisal of the Landscape Capacity Study for Argyll and Bute, produced by Gillespies, with specific regard to the area identified as 'Lorn – LN22 Inveresragan' (Lorn & The Inner Isles Landscape Capacity Study, February 2010). The application site and extended land holding within ownership of Mrs E. Struthers are wholly located within this area.

The following appraisal and commentary has been undertaken by Victoria Mack, a chartered Landscape Architect with over thirteen years of professional experience, on behalf of VLM Landscape Design Ltd.

The Inner Isles Landscape Capacity Study

Gillespies were commissioned by Argyll and Bute Council to produce a Landscape Capacity Study for the entire Argyll and Bute administrative area. The main aim and objective of the study was to identify the landscape capacity for development within Rural Opportunity Areas (ROAs) identified in the adopted Local Plan and which are located within National Scenic Areas (NSA) or Areas of Panoramic Quality (APQ).

The Lorn & The Inner Isles Landscape Capacity Study (L&TIILCS) forms one in a series of documents produced in 2009 and 2010 by Gillespies. As identified in the L&TIILCS, the application site and extended land holding is wholly located within site 22, 'Lorn - LN22 Inveresragan', and the assessment is located on pages 46 and 47 of the document. This site forms one of 81 sites identified within the Study Area for the Lorn and Inner Isles. (Refer to the Site Reference Map on page 6, L&TIILCS)

In accordance with the methodology of the study, the assessment of each site has been graphically illustrated followed by a brief written appraisal. The figure on Page 46 of the L&TIILCS identifies "Areas with potential to accommodate development, subject to criteria, without damaging the landscape character of the area" (coloured orange); "Areas where development is generally unacceptable and would have an adverse impact upon the landscape character of the area" (coloured red); and, "Key viewpoints" (coloured blue). The application site and extended land holding are assessed to be areas where development is generally unacceptable. The southern part of the extended land holding, in the vicinity of the ruins of Kennacraig, is also included within a key viewpoint.

On page 47, the findings of the landscape capacity for LN22 are detailed as follows:

“Areas with potential to absorb development (Orange Areas)

- *There is potential to accommodate 1 or 2 houses in the low lying land between the road and the river. This should be discreetly sited and associated with existing tree groups.*

Areas not recommended for development (Red Areas)

- *The open fields in the centre of the ROA and the low lying improved pastures around Blarcreen should not be developed, as there is insufficient tree cover to allow development to be suitably sited. Development here would be very visible in the wider landscape;*
- *The steep scrubland on the west of the ROA should not be developed, as extensive earthworks would have to be undertaken to create level platforms for developments, which would in turn adversely affect the landscape character of the hillside;*
- *The river setting should not be further compromised by development to maintain the attractive landscape qualities;*
- *Important views south to Loch Etive should not be compromised.”*

Landscape and Visual Appraisal

Following a detailed site assessment of the application site, its immediate and wider context, it is considered that the application site has been incorrectly labelled as an “*area not recommended for development*”.

The broadly triangular application site comprises an area of rough grassland with some scattered areas of vegetation including mature and regenerating trees and scrub. The northern and eastern boundaries are defined by the B845 and a dry stone dyke whilst the northern boundary is further delineated by areas of scrub vegetation and several mature trees. On the other side of the B845, broadleaved woodland and understorey planting extend along the road corridor and up the steeply rising slopes of Beinn Mheadhonach, creating a strong sense of enclosure. The Blarcreen Burn and associated riparian vegetation also traverse the landscape at this location and extends to the south of the road to define the western fringes of the application site and the extended land holding. Blarcreen, a large 2 storey detached dwelling, and associated outbuildings are located on the western side of the burn corridor with the main dwelling orientated NW-SE to take advantage of the loch views, with the wooded River Esragan corridor defining the setting further to the west. To the immediate south of the application site and Blarcreen, a low lying area of improved pasture gently slopes towards Loch Etive and the lack of vegetation cover creates a sense of openness on the edge of the loch. In turn, this allows inter-visibility with the loch and wider context for receptors travelling along the B845 to the immediate south-east of the application site.

In assessing the characteristics of the site against the criteria for permitted development as described in the L&TILCS, it is considered that development of the application site is favourable. The application site does not form part of the open, pastoral land on the shore of the loch but rather, comprises an area of rough grassland with areas of mature vegetation where development could be “*discreetly sited with existing tree groups*”. Whilst it is acknowledged that the southern boundary of the application site is open, advanced planting including native hedgerow and tree species could be implemented which, once established, will form part of the woodland framework surrounding the site to the north, east and west. In addition, it is considered that through careful site planning, a single dwelling could be integrated into the application site where it would have a strong relationship with the existing building group of Blarcreen. Working with existing levels would negate the requirement for “*extensive earthworks*”. In this regard, through the implementation of a sensitive site planning and site-wide native planting strategy, it is considered

that development of the application site could enhance the landscape setting and quality of the immediate context, creating a more defined sense of structure. The proposed single dwelling development would not compromise the landscape qualities of the river setting further to the west nor impact upon views towards Loch Etive due to the site's close relationship with Blarcreen and the road corridor and its partly semi-enclosed character.

In line with the conclusions for the capacity of LN22 to absorb development, it is acknowledged that *“the open fields in the centre of the ROA and the low lying improved pastures around Blarcreen should not be developed, as there is insufficient tree cover to allow development to be suitably sited. Development here would be very visible in the wider landscape.”* However, as described above, the application site does not form part of the open, pastoral land, but rather has characteristics similar to those found across the land further to the north which has been designated as an *“area with potential to absorb development”*. (Refer to the orange area on Page 46). In this regard, it is therefore strongly contended that the application site should also be designated as an *“area with potential to absorb development.”*

Summation

Overall, it is predicted that the potential effects on the landscape and visual resource will be Minor and no significant effects will arise from the proposed single dwelling on the panoramic views and special qualities of the designated area. Where local transitory views are available along the B845, they will be limited to filtered glimpses or framed views towards a new built form which will be seen within the context of an established building group. From the wider landscape on the southern side of Loch Etive, the proposed dwelling will be seen to respect the key characteristics of the landscape and be wholly consistent with the established rural settlement pattern, where small buildings group are scattered along the transitional landscape between the wooded steep slopes and the shoreline.

It is considered that the application site does have the capacity to absorb a small scale development where the proposals will be seen to effectively and logically round-off the existing Blarcreen building group. The proposed development is therefore **acceptable in terms of Policy P/DCZ4 and LP ENV 10.**

This appraisal reflects the findings of an assessment carried out by VLM Landscape Design Ltd. Should the reader wish to discuss or clarify any matter in relation to this appraisal, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned.

Yours faithfully



Victoria Mack
Director of VLM Landscape Design Ltd