

James and Veronica Blair

Achanadriane

Local Review - Ref: 10/0009/LRB

Mark Steele Consultants

Landscape & Visual Impact Report

July 2010

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Appointment and Scope

1.1.1 MSC was appointed by James and Veronica Blair in July 2010 to comment on the landscape and visual impact arising from the proposed construction of two houses (on two separate plots) at Achanadriane, Tayinloan, Kintyre. This was carried out by means of a visit to the site and surrounding viewpoints, a review of relevant guidance, a review of the Argyle and Bute Landscape Capacity Study, recognition of the terms of the Local Plan, and the preparation of additional graphic material (see Appendix Document).

2.0 Argyle and Bute – Landscape Capacity Study

2.1 Purpose

2.1.1 The LCS states that *'The principal objective of this study is to provide a robust set of documents that will clearly identify the opportunities and constraints, in landscape terms, for development within the Rural Opportunities Areas (ROAs) identified in the Local Plan.'*

The proposed development is located within an ROA and this study will test whether the constraints on development can be mitigated.

2.2 Guidance

2.2.1 The LCS states that it *'has been prepared with reference to the following documents:*

- *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA)* published by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Assessment, 2nd Edition 2002;

- *SNH Landscape Character Assessment (Guidance for England and Scotland), 2002;*
- *PAN 44: Fitting New Housing Development into the Landscape'*

2.2.2 The LCS also states that *'The GLVIA relies on an appreciation of the existing landscape, its sensitivity to change, a thorough understanding of the development proposals and the magnitude of change that would result from development.'*

Whilst the LCS assesses scenic quality, landscape sensitivity and capacity, self evidently it is unable to assess the magnitude of change or the consequential significance of effects arising from specific development proposals. This is the principal aim of this report.

GLVIA paragraphs 5.1 to 5.13 provide guidance on the types of mitigation measures (avoidance, reduction, remediation and compensation) as well as enhancement (paragraphs 5.14 to 5.16). GLVIA Box 5.1 lists common mitigation measures which include *'Appropriate form. Materials and design of built structures'* and *'Planting'*, both of which form part of the proposed development.

2.2.3 The LCS also states that *'PAN 44 offers suggestions to help planners, developers and local communities achieve residential developments which are in harmony with the landscape setting.'*

PAN 44 states that *'Landscape capacity is a measure of the degree of acceptable modification that the landscape can absorb. It embraces:*

- *the capacity or sensitivity of the landscape; and*
- *the potential of new elements to strengthen positive attributes...'*

Whilst the LCS assesses capacity and sensitivity, self evidently it is unable to assess the contribution of new elements associated with specific development proposals.

PAN 44 states that *'Where appropriate, new tree planting can be used to create a matrix or framework into which development sites can be located.'* The proposed woodland planting will seek to create a framework for the development as well as harmonise the development with its landscape setting.

2.3 Methodology - Scenic Quality

2.3.1 The LCS states that *'Scenic quality relates to the intrinsic aesthetic appeal demonstrated by a character area, zone, feature or component within the landscape, including the importance of any views experienced from and looking back at the ROA.'*

The views from and looking back at the site and ROA are illustrated in the Appendix Document.

The Landscape Capacity Study assesses scenic quality as high, medium or low against a set of criteria and identifies the Ballochroy to Craigrugh part of Kintyre as of medium scenic quality.

2.4 Methodology - Sensitivity

2.4.1 The LCS states that *'Sensitivity to change considers the extent to which the landscape can accommodate change and tolerate the type of proposed change. Although all the ROA's are either within an area of*

Panoramic Quality or National Scenic Area, there are still differing qualities within these areas and different capacities to tolerate change.'

The Landscape Capacity Study assesses sensitivity as high, medium or low against a set of criteria and identifies the Ballochroy to Craighuagh part of Kintyre as of medium sensitivity.

2.5 Methodology - Capacity

2.5.1 The LCS states that *'Having considered and assessed the scenic quality and sensitivity to change of the landscape, the ability of each ROA to accommodate development has been determined...'*

The Landscape Capacity Study assesses the Ballochroy to Craighuagh part of Kintyre as having a good capacity to accommodate development.

However, the more detailed Landscape Capacity Study assessment has determined that the site falls within an area that has *'limited or no capacity'* to accommodate development.

It should be noted that whilst the Landscape Capacity Study necessarily has to make assumptions about the nature of development, this report will assesses a specific proposal and associated mitigation measures.

2.6 Landscape Character

2.6.1 The LCS states that *'Part 3 of the Argyll and Firth of Clyde Landscape Character Assessment document divides the area into 25 Landscape Character Types (LCT).'*

The proposed development site is located within the Rocky Mosaic LCT.

2.6.2 With regard to the Rocky Mosaic LCT the LCS states that *'The main issues that need to be considered with regard to the proposed type of development, within this landscape type are:*

- *New built development should generally be small in scale so that it can be integrated within the surrounding, diverse landscape;*
- *Built development should always be associated with planting and/or landform to shelter and screen buildings;*
- *Conserve the characteristics of the diverse, small-scale landscape pattern; and*
- *Conserve the landscape setting of important archaeological sites.'*

The proposed development *is* small in scale and will be integrated into the landscape by existing and proposed planting. The existing/proposed planting will also screen the development in longer views and landform/existing planting will screen the development from users on the A83. The characteristics of the landscape will be conserved and no archaeological site or setting will be affected.

Therefore the proposed development addresses all the issues raised in the Argyll and Firth of Clyde Landscape Character Assessment.

2.6 Landscape Capacity Study Findings

2.6.1 The LCS states that *'The assessment results will report on the ability, or otherwise, of each ROA to accommodate development.*

Each ROA has been assessed in detail and areas with potential to accommodate development have been identified in orange and areas with limited or no potential have been identified in red.'

The proposed housing plots lie within a red area. However, it should be noted that red areas have *'limited or no potential'* for development. Therefore this report will assess whether the site has the capacity for *'limited'* development without causing significant adverse effects.

2.7 South Kintyre 1 - Ballochroy to Craiguagh

2.7.1 The proposed development lies within the area described as South Kintyre 1. The LCS assesses this area as having medium scenic quality, medium sensitivity and a good capacity to accommodate development.

2.7.2 With regard to the areas not recommended for development (red areas) the LCS states that:

- *'Avoid building on open land which has long views to it and where there is no existing woodland or topography to achieve a sense of place or shelter. In particular development on the higher open pastures to the east should be avoided where new buildings are likely to be highly visible and were localised planting would be inappropriate;*
- *The open fields to the east of the road should remain free from development where long views of the coast are obtained notably between the farmsteadings of Low Dunashry and Dalmore;*
- *Building along the road edge should be avoided.'*

Whilst the plots are located on open land the sites do not have the visual prominence of the more elevated and steeper improved pasture to the east (Appendix Document Figure 2).

Both plots are also in the vicinity of established woodland/trees that achieve a sense of place. The existing woodland/trees will be augmented by appropriate (in the context of existing woodland) native planting that will screen the development in long views.

There is a typographical error in the second bullet point as this should read 'west of the road' rather than 'east of the road' (as both Low Dunashry and Dalmore are to the west of the road). The proposed development is neither to the west of the road nor adjacent to it.

It is therefore perhaps debateable whether this site should be within the red area. However, as it has been placed within the red area it may nevertheless be allowed as part of the 'limited' potential for development. This would be determined by an assessment of the relative significance of effects arising from the proposed development.

3.0 *MSC Assessment*

3.1 *Proposed Development*

3.1.1 The proposed development comprises two house plots and associated access track situated in a field to the south of Achanadriane Farmhouse. The field is bounded to the north by the Achanadriane Farmhouse and steading, to the east by higher ground, to the south by the Leth Uillt Burn (and associated woodland) as well as Tighnadrochit and to the west by the Achanadriane Farmhouse access track and associated hedge and trees.

3.2 Proposed Mitigation and Enhancement Measures

3.2.1 A range of mitigation measures are proposed:

- siting of the plots;
- limited building height;
- muted colour building materials; and
- extensive native woodland planting.

The contribution of these mitigation and enhancement measures are assessed against the mitigation strategies set out in GLVIA paragraphs 5.9 to 5.16.

Avoidance

3.2.2 The plots were originally sited at the lowest elevation within the field immediately adjacent to existing trees to maximise avoidance of landscape effects. However, the plots were moved (in consultation with the planning officer) so as to minimise visual impacts upon adjacent properties. This necessitated the repositioning of the plots to a higher (and more prominent) elevation. Nevertheless the plots have been positioned so as to relate to the existing woodland associated with the Leth Uillt Burn.

Reduction

3.2.3 Landscape and visual effects (particularly from longer views of the site) will be reduced by limiting the building height (either by setting the development into the ground – as suggested by the GLVIA - or by limiting the buildings to a single storey) as well as the use of muted colour building materials (to reduce visual prominence as well as relate to the existing colour of the Achanadriane Farmhouse). The existing Achanadriane buildings are discreet when viewed from the foreshore and are barely

discernible when viewed from Rhunahaorine Point. The proposed buildings are set at a similar elevation and will have a similar low or subdued degree of prominence.

Remediation & Enhancement

3.2.4 The proposed plots will be surrounded by extensive native woodland planting that will both screen as well as provide a backdrop to the proposed buildings and associated infrastructure. This will extend the existing woodland situated to the south of the site (to the right of the site in Viewpoint 3 and the left of Viewpoints 1 and 2) as well as existing trees and scrub to the west (in the foreground of the site in Viewpoint 3 and to the right of Viewpoints 1 and 2).

The proposed woodland will remediate the impact of the development as well as enhance the wider landscape setting of the proposed as well as existing houses.

The proposed woodland planting will have the additional benefit of screening the proposed development from adjacent properties (without adversely affecting their views).

3.3 Assessment of Magnitude of Effects & Significance

3.3.1 GLVIA paragraph 7.39 states that *'The two principal criteria determining significance are the scale or magnitude of effect and the environmental sensitivity of the location or receptor.'*

The LCS has determined that the scenic quality and sensitivity of the landscape is medium. The magnitude of effect is typically assessed against the criteria set out in GLVIA *'Determination of magnitude'* (Option

2, page 145) which range from negligible, through low and medium to high.

3.3.2 The initial magnitude of effect (prior to the establishment of the woodland planting) can be judged based upon the effect of the existing Achanadriane Farmhouse (which is at a similar elevation and is of a similar scale and colour to the proposed development).

There will be no magnitude of effect when viewed from the A83 as the development is screened by existing trees and topography.

The magnitude of effect when viewed from the Kintyre Way, where the Leth Uillt Burn meets the foreshore will be medium/low, due to the partial screening and backdrop provided by existing trees and woodland. It should also be noted that that the site is only visible from this point as elsewhere along the foreshore inland views are screened by dunes (see Viewpoints 1 & 2).

The magnitude of effect when viewed from the Kintyre Way at Rhunahaorine Point will be negligible due the development being barely discernable at this distance.

The magnitude of effect when viewed from Gigha will be negligible/none due to the diminishing of effects over distance (only whitewashed buildings are discernable on Gigha when viewed from the site and then with only negligible effect).

3.3.3 The proposed woodland planting will take 10 to 15 years to have a screening effect on the proposed buildings but will have a more immediate screening effect on lower level infrastructure such as the access track.

Once the woodland is established the magnitude of effect from all views will be negligible/none.

3.3.4 The level of effect is typically assessed using criteria which range from no change, through slight and moderate to substantial (GLVIA Example 3 page 140). An assessment is also made as to the nature of effect (positive, neutral or negative).

In this instance the level of effects would range from no change to moderate/slight prior to the establishment of the woodland and no change to slight when established. The nature of effect would also change from neutral/negative prior to woodland establishment to neutral/positive post establishment.

3.3.5 The threshold for the significance is typically set at a moderate level of effect (or higher). In this instance this threshold of significance is not reached, therefore it is concluded that the effects arising from the proposed development are not significant.

4.0 Conclusion

4.1 Conclusion

4.1.1 This report concludes that:

- the Landscape Capacity Study assessment has determined that the site falls within an area that has *'limited or no capacity'* to

accommodate development. This implies that at least parts of the area have a limited capacity for development:

- mitigation measures are proposed (in accordance with PAN 44 and the GLVIA) that minimise effects and enhance the landscape setting of the development; and
- An assessment has been undertaken (in accordance with GLVIA guidance) that demonstrates that the proposed development will not have significant effects on the landscape.

It is therefore concluded that the site does indeed have capacity for development and that the proposed development would not exceed that capacity.