

APPENDIX B - AREA CAPACITY EVALUATION

Land near Tomdow, to the north-east of Ballibeg, Castleton, by Lochgilphead – ROA Mid Argyll 10

a) Purpose of the assessment

This assessment has been undertaken in accordance with the Interim Supplementary Planning Guidance approved by the Council on 19th February 2009.

In this instance, the Area Capacity Evaluation (ACE) is triggered in respect of undetermined application reference 12/00319/PP which seeks planning permission for 'the formation of a timber haulage contractor's yard including the erection of a medium scale maintenance bay/office building and ancillary matters', the site being within a 'Rural Opportunity Area' (ROA) which would normally limit any such building to 'small scale' unless sufficient operational/locational need exists to outweigh the normal policy presumption against such development.

The Council's adopted guidance requires that the findings should be made available to applicants and/or agents and to Members in advance of the determination of any related planning application(s) in order that, if necessary, there is an opportunity to prepare a response to the findings for consideration by Committee at the time the application(s) is/are determined and the ACE is given consideration as part of that determination process.

The area to be assessed should be identified as a wider 'area of common landscape character' within which the prospective development site(s) is/are located. ACE's will be considered by Members at the same time as the related development proposal(s) is/are being determined, and once endorsed will become a material consideration in respect of any future applications within that ACE compartment.

b) Area of Common Landscape Character

The application site (12/00319/PP) lies within a wider 'Rural Opportunity Area' (ROA) immediately to the north of Tomdow and south of Acres, being two uninhabited locations within a modestly elevated and generally afforested area above and to east of the settlements of Ballibeg and Castleton, near Lochgilphead. The precise location is some 390 metres north-east of the A83(T) within a concealed location not visible from the trunk road within a locally open section of generally afforested upland, between conifer plantations to the north-west and south-east. The application site already benefits from a change of use permission for the use of the site as a timber haulage yard, which was granted because of an operational need to service felling operations and associated timber haulage within Mid Argyll. The suitability of the land for the purpose was partly due to its accessibility by forest roads and partly due to its concealed location. The current application is for a building defined as 'medium scale' by the adopted local plan which needs to be assessed, because of its size, in relation to this area capacity evaluation.

The application site whilst in a modestly elevated location is a flat area of ground lying within a contained bowl, unseen from main transport routes and vantage points

frequented by the general public, due to it lying just beyond a lip in the rising topography within the generally afforested upland which lies to the north west of the mid reaches of Loch Fyne.

Having regard to the above, the ACE compartment comprises the upland bowl within which the application site is situated. Its south western boundary is formed by an internal forestry road which strikes off in a north westerly direction at the point where the generally open landscape (with a mix of some deciduous and conifer trees) rises to a lip, beyond which the concealed topographical bowl commences. Both the north western and south eastern boundaries of this bowl are formed by the coniferous afforested ridges on either side of it which merge to meet in the higher hill some 600 metres beyond the aforementioned lip. Within this bowl, the landscape is rough open hill which forms an area of open ground which has avoided afforestation. Beyond this upland ACE compartment, on the other side of the ridges to the north and west, the upland is afforested overall, with the exception of some temporary clearings formed by recent felling which will be subject to cyclical restocking. Beyond in an easterly direction on the other side of the nearest ridge lies the generally concealed and relatively small scale mineral quarry operated by Macleods which constitutes a contrasting feature in the landscape..

The application site is thus located within, and contained by, a unique area of common landscape character, defined primarily by open rough grassland/bracken within a concealed topographical bowl, surrounded by afforested ridges except to the south-east where the landscape also changes beyond the lip (topographical break) into the wider open slopes of the lower hill stretching down towards Loch Fyne.

The ACE compartment is within an area categorised by the Scottish Natural Heritage Landscape Assessment of Argyll and the Firth of Clyde 1996 as “Upland Forest- Moor Mosaic” which is generally characterised by:

- Upland plateau with rounded ridges, craggy outcrops and an irregular slope profile.
- Upland lochs.
- Winding narrow glens and wider river valleys.
- Extensive, large-scale mosaic of open moorland and forest plantations.
- No field boundaries.
- Very few buildings; occasional isolated dwellings on edges of moor.
- Little access; roads follow shorelines.

In general, the 1996 SNH report acknowledges that it is the narrow shoreline strip of this landscape character type that has the most sensitivity to change; recognising that there will be scope within the extensive plantations typical of this landscape to screen development and accommodate changes in the landscape, although it is noted that in so doing care would be needed in the assessment of potential development to ensure

structures do not become exposed as blocks of trees are felled. Within the landscape character type it recognises that the area is generally devoid of development other than often derelict properties, a scattering of traditional buildings built of local stone and the emerging windfarm development.

Returning to this particular ACE compartment within this landscape character type it is considered that it is essentially a single area of common landscape character as illustrated on the plans / photographs attached to this evaluation and detailed in the matrix below. It is important to note that in the case of this compartment, screening is afforded by the effect of topography and not just forestry planting.

c) Key Environmental Features

The ACE compartment itself actually contains only some of the key characteristics associated with the Upland Forest-Moor landscape type, given the absence of any lochs, narrow glens or wider river valleys.

The key feature of the landscape is however its open rough hill nature, surrounded by rounded afforested ridges, and with one isolated and ruinous stone croft/farm building/s within it.

The ACE compartment is compact and largely homogenous; contained by the surrounding afforested ridges and the lip (topographical break) which protects it from view both from the trunk road and neighbouring settlements e.g. Ballibeg. Whenever the surrounding forests are felled, and ahead of any replanting, the surrounding ridges would contain the ACE compartment, protecting from general view any development contained within it.

The foregoing comments however do need to be qualified by the fact that immediately beyond the ACE compartment (to the south-east of the 'lip') within the differing wider open landscape, the Dun Dubh (a site of local archaeological importance) is a key environmental feature within that neighbouring landscape. The Dun Dubh is not a Scheduled Ancient Monument and Historic Scotland have no comments to make. Never-the-less this feature is of importance and its relevance and impact upon it was carefully assessed in the earlier grant of planning permission for the change of use. A photograph is attached which shows the relationship of the site/and the ACE compartment to this Dun and the views available from it towards the ACE compartment. It is considered that the presence of any new building whether 'small scale' or 'medium scale' within the site within the ACE compartment can be mitigated by an increase in tree cover between the two, provided the position of any such building is set back in a north-easterly direction within the site. In this way development will not impinge upon the setting and historical landscape context of the dun.

The ACE compartment contains part of an archaeology consultation zone. Apart from the Dun and some ruinous buildings aforementioned, there are no other surface archaeological features. West of Scotland Archaeology Service did not object to the previous change of use and have no issues to raise with this latest application.

Access to the compartment is via two existing private forestry roads which merge and lead to/from the A83(T).

d) Capacity to Absorb Development Successfully

The proposed development (a 'medium scale' but still relatively modest building), is driven by a somewhat unique operational need to have an adequately sized operational maintenance building for the timber haulage business operating from the site in to service significant fleet of vehicles. At present servicing operations are carried out in the open which is not satisfactory from a health and safety standpoint.

The ACE compartment and its surrounding land is designated as 'Rural Opportunity Area' with no existing development other than small ruinous features within the compartment.

Structure Plan settlement strategy policy STRAT DC 4 and Local Plan policy LP BUS 2 would not normally permit new business structures in excess of 200 sq. metres within the identified compartment, unless there is a proven locational need to be on or in the vicinity of the proposed site. The application site is already in use for forestry vehicle maintenance and servicing in the open which, it is appropriate to undertake within the confines of forest where forest road access is available and public road trips can be minimised but there are obvious limitations as to what can be achieved on this basis.

Having due regard to the constraints relative to this location, it is considered that the ACE compartment holds capacity for a single modest 'medium scale' building underpinned by an operational need, given its contained and well screened location. The detailed siting of any such building within the compartment is dictated by the need to avoid compromising the setting of and elevated views achievable from the Dun Dubh. The application site is the most appropriate location within the ACE compartment where this is able to be achieved.

AREA CAPACITY EVALUATION MATRIX			
ACE Title		Land near Tomdow, to the north-east of Ballibeg, Castleton	
Date	19.07.12	Location	Land near Tomdow, to the north-east of Ballibeg, Castleton
Surrounding Strategic Planning Zones			
Town Village:		N/A	
Minor Settlement:		N/A	
Green Belt:		N/A	
Countryside Around Settlements :		N/A	
Rural Opportunity Area / Coast :		The site is situated within the Rural Opportunity Area designation.	
Sensitive Countryside / Coast :		N/A	
Very Sensitive Countryside / Coast:		N/A	
Landscape Character			
Landform		Unimproved grassland, comprising rough hill within a topographical bowl, surrounded by rounded ridges with strong conifer plantations on the fringes.	
Land Cover		The majority of the area comprises unimproved grassland / bracken with coniferous plantations on the fringes, containing the compartment.	
Development Pattern		There is no built development within the compartment with the exception of one very small ruinous croft/farm building and only occasional, similar ruinous development outwith it. The significant archaeological Dun Dubh lies outwith to the immediate south east.	

Notable Key Environmental Features		
Significant Historical Interest and Important Cultural Associations	Scheduled Monuments Unscheduled Monuments etc	Dun Dubh as an unscheduled archaeological feature overlooking the compartment
	Gardens & Designed Landscapes	None
	Locations associated with people, events, art, literature, music culture	None
Built Heritage Importance	Important individual buildings inc. Listed and other locally important buildings	None
	Important groups or areas of buildings including Conservation Areas	None
	Other important examples of built heritage including transport / industrial heritage	None
Nature Conservation Importance	Internationally important wildlife sites including SPAs and SPAs SACs Ramsar Sites	None
	Nationally important wildlife sites including NNRs, SSSI, Marine Consultation Zones	None
	Locally important habitats, -SINC, SNW	None
	Nationally and regionally important Geological / Geomorphological Sites	None
Access and Amenity Importance	Long distance routes trails, mountain routes and other designated paths and their immediate corridors	Forestry roads
	Important local paths / networks and their immediate corridors	None
	Important views and prospects	None – excepting the relevance of views to from the Dun Dubh
	Named and other waterfalls shown on OS	None
	Important car parks lay byes etc	None

	Valued landscapes including NSAs RSAs & LSAs	None
Health and Safety Constraints	Water catchment zones	None
	MoD Zones	N/A
	Air Safety - Airfield Safeguarding and CAA Consultation Zones	N/A
	Safety - Health and Safety Executive Consultation Zone	N/A
INFRASTRUCTURE		
Road Access	The area is accessed off a private forest track which connects to the A83(T) public highway.	
Water	Water is to be by connection to the public water main.	
Sewerage	Private drainage arrangements	
Electricity	No known constraints	
DEVELOPMENT		
Proposed Development	Site for the erection of a single shed of 446 sq. metre for timber haulage vehicle maintenance purposes/offices tied to the operational needs of the business, together with wash bay, oil tank within an authorised contractors yard.	
Other Issues/Notes	None	