



Scottish Council for
Development and Industry

POLICY SUBMISSION

Tornagrain Outline Planning Application

May 2009

SCDI is an independent and inclusive economic development network which seeks to influence and inspire government and key stakeholders with our ambitious vision to create shared sustainable economic prosperity for Scotland.

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The Inverness Area Planning and Building Standards Office
The Highland Council
1-3 Church Street
Inverness
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Dear Sir/ Madam

Tornagrain Outline Planning Application

I am writing to offer comments from the Scottish Council for Development and Industry (SCDI) on the Tornagrain Outline Planning Application which was submitted to The Highland Council by the Moray Estates Development Company Ltd earlier this year.

SCDI's Highlands and Islands Committee has supported the sustainable development of A96 corridor between Inverness and Nairn, including a new town at Tornagrain. It believes that this development will help to deliver national and local policy outcomes.

The Scottish Government has identified in the Government Economic Strategy that the purpose of Government and Scotland's public sector is to increase sustainable economic growth. The first National Outcome in which it describes what the Scottish Government wants to achieve over the next ten years is: "We live in a Scotland which is the most attractive place to do business in Scotland." In response, the Single Outcome Agreement agreed by the public sector in the Highland area identifies "more people living, working and studying in the Highlands as essential to enable sustainable economic growth".

Inverness is the only city-region in the Highlands and in recent years it has been one of the fastest growing in Europe. Accommodating this growth over the next thirty to fifty will be essential if the city-region is to be an attractive location to live and work and, therefore, an attractive location for investment in key 21st century business sectors. The Highland Council has already identified the A96 corridor, including Nairn, in planning policy documents as the area best suited to accommodate the future growth of Inverness.

With SCDI's strong support, the strategic importance of the corridor to Scotland's long-term spatial development was recognised in the Scottish Government's National Planning Framework 2 (NPF2). This specifically identified the A96 corridor, including the creation of a new settlement at Tornagrain, as the main focus of growth in the inner Moray Firth. In its response to the discussion draft on NPF2, SCDI highlighted the even greater strategic benefits of linking proposed development and transport projects in the corridor. The Scottish Government's Strategic Transport Projects Review, which will guide transport infrastructure investment in the next 20 years, subsequently identified the need to accommodate growth by dualling the A96 between Inverness and Nairn and providing a new rail station, airport interchange and new park-and-ride facilities at Dalcross.

SCDI considers that new stand-alone settlements should only be approved if they are properly planned and co-ordinated. Tornagrain is a development that SCDI regards as showing best practice in terms of community involvement through "Charrettes", design, sustainability and ensuring that the development is sympathetic to its surroundings. The Outline Planning Application illustrates the high priority which is given to pedestrians and sustainable transport, mixed housing and development, and local services and employment opportunities. SCDI believes that Tornagrain can be a leading model of environmentally friendly development for the whole of Scotland if innovative local solutions for renewable energy and utility supply are supported in the planning system.

The current economic downturn should have no significant impact on the development of such a very long-term plan. Construction is not scheduled to begin until 2012 and will take 35 years to complete. Population growth in the A96 will continue and is essential to enable economic growth over this period.

Furthermore, as the economy recovers, the employment and supply chain benefits of the project and signal of long-term confidence in the development of the region should be a particularly important consideration.

Tornagrain is a development significant not just for the A96 corridor, but for the whole of the Highland region; and not just for current residents, but for prospective new members of our communities and for future generations. Indeed, as has been established in Scottish Government economic, planning and transport plans, it is of strategic importance for Scotland's sustainable economic development. As The Highland Council consults on the new development plan for the area, SCDI would urge approval for this application.

Yours sincerely

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