

By email to: eplanning@highland.gov.uk

FAO Ms Lucy Prins, Case Officer

26 March 2021

Dear Ms Prins

Construction of Earth Embankment Dam, Associated Spillway, Pipework And Construction Access Track, Land At Allt Feith A Chatha NW Of Glenfinnan

Reference Number: 21/01016/FUL

1. Mountaineering Scotland is a membership organisation with over 14,000 members and is the only recognised representative organisation for hill walkers, climbers, mountaineers and ski-tourers who live in Scotland or who enjoy Scotland's mountains, and acts to represent, support and promote Scottish mountaineering. Mountaineering Scotland also acts on behalf of the 80,000 members of the British Mountaineering Council (BMC) on matters related to landscape and access in Scotland, and provides training and information to mountain users to promote safety, self-reliance and the enjoyment of our mountain environment.

Visual Impact of Construction Access Tracks

2. Mountaineering Scotland recognises that development activities will have impacts and accepts and encourages developments that work with the grain of nature and maintain the wild qualities of the landscape.

3. We accept many renewable energy developments in the Scottish hill country but do have concerns about the residual visual impacts of small hydro schemes throughout Scotland. This is generally from the alignment of penstock and construction access tracks and the detail and quality of post construction restoration. With impounded bodies of water, the effect of draw-down can be highly visible as a bare scar around the water body.

4. We are especially concerned where these proposals lie within areas of high landscape quality and where they are close to popular hillwalking and climbing areas.

5. The Utha Dam proposal is situated within The Highland Council's Moidart, Morar and Glen Shiel Special Landscape Area, and on the edge of the Kinlochhourn-Knoydart-Morar Wild Land Area. The route to the proposed damhead is used by hillwalkers accessing Sgurr an Utha, a nearby Corbett.

6. The EIA Report recognises the potential landscape and visual impact from the dam construction and proposes surfacing the dam embankment with turves recovered from the construction and inundation area. An Ecological Clerk of Works is essential to ensure the correct removal and storage of turves, followed by secure placement on the embankment facing. Regular reporting on progress to the planning authority is required to monitor the effectiveness of the work. It would be prudent for the applicant to specify a back-up plan for masking the embankment if the turf plan fails, as they sometimes do.

7. We note that it is proposed that the new construction access track be restored back to 2.5m width and covered lightly with soil to allow natural revegetation. We suggest in a sensitive landscape with regular recreational use that restoring the track to 2m width would be adequate for dam inspections, while more fitting to its location.

8. It would be helpful for the applicant to propose a timescale as to when the revegetating of this post-construction landscaping can be regarded as completed, and to provide a backup plan in the event of the process failing. Natural revegetating of soil works well in fertile soils in a moderate climate; however, the west of Scotland is a wet and cool environment, and natural revegetation may be slow to achieve a satisfactory outcome. We suggest sowing a central grass strip to aid vegetation colonisation.

9. We request The Highland Council look at seeking planning gain by assessing and restoring where required the existing track from the A830 to the current intake weir to similar specifications as the proposed scheme, with a central grassy strip, to reduce the legacy of landscape impact from this track.

10. We would expect the applicant to maintain public access to and from Sgurr an Utha at all times.

I hope you find these comments helpful in your consideration of this proposal.

Yours sincerely



D. Black

Davie Black
Access & Conservation Officer
Mountaineering Scotland

T: 07555 769325

E: access@mountaineering.scot

