

14. WICK



Background

The town of Wick (popn. 8500) has a long history. Declared a Royal Burgh in 1589, the basic medieval plan of the town still survives with its High Street and rear lanes. The growth of the burgh was stimulated by the construction in 1810 of a harbour and the subsequent development of Pulteneytown by the British Fisheries Society. By the mid 19th century Wick dominated the European herring trade, becoming the largest herring port in Europe. The fishing declined in the 20th century and the burgh lost a key element of its prosperity.

The town now faces several problems. Population has seen a slow decline over the last 30 years, long term and youth unemployment remain high; fishing is in decline with the exception of shellfish; oil related activity fluctuates markedly, the town centre faces difficulties and many larger businesses rely on external markets. Equally, the town has a number of strengths - a wide economic base, air links to the rest of the UK and on to Europe, plentiful industrial land, a nationally known business in Caithness Glass, well known distillery and a good labour force. Potential exists to promote business and technology expansion, the tourism sector, food processing using quality Caithness products and harbour and airport related activity. The town is also being actively promoted as a location for public sector employment. A new high quality business park is also necessary to help the town attract new jobs and remain competitive.

A sub regional service and shopping centre, providing the main administrative and medical functions for the County, Wick has all the main community facilities, including a general hospital, swimming pool and reasonable shopping facilities. Together with Thurso, the town acts as a counter to the draw of Inverness. The town centre has suffered in recent years and there is now a vital need to promote a vibrant, safe and high quality shopping experience. The Wick Project has made substantial strides in this direction since it was formed in 1993. Nevertheless further efforts are needed. A key issue is the need to guide major development to the central area to reinforce commercial activity and attract new investment. However, infill sites are small and limited. Larger scale development will only be possible through demolition and redevelopment. The main opportunity is the

Council offices at Market Place. These are in poor condition and offer potential for a variety of uses. In the meantime efforts should be concentrated on offering a greater range, quality and convenience of services, improving accessibility and upgrading the environment, including streetscape and buildings. One opportunity in this regard is the provision of a town centre manager. Such posts have been successful elsewhere in Scotland and a joint post with Thurso would help promote both centres. Once resources permit, it is intended to undertake a health check of the performance of Wick town centre and thereafter, in conjunction with the Wick Project, prepare a town centre strategy.

Major infrastructure works have been completed over the last decade, notably the town centre pedestrianisation and the new road system and swimming pool in Pulteneytown. Funds are also now in place to carry out remedial works to the harbour, with plans in hand to upgrade the sewage treatment works. Proposals for new community facilities for the County are generally being identified in Thurso, notably the new indoor sports centre and the possible community arts centre. Such facilities will serve the wider NW Sutherland area as well as Caithness. Wick itself would benefit from a new indoor sports facility on a smaller scale than the Thurso proposal since the proposal some years ago to convert the hangar fell through. Further open space / sports facilities to the north of the river would also be of benefit. Suggestions have also been made for a weir on the Wick River which would improve its appearance and allow for further recreational use. Recent investigations indicate that, in the short term, this is unlikely to be feasible. However, the potential benefits

suggest that the idea should be borne in mind for the longer term.

Lower Pulteneytown is a key part of the burgh's heritage. Conceived by Thomas Telford for the British Fisheries Society in the early 19th century, the layout is still clearly in evidence today as are many original buildings. The area is almost entirely without precedent as an early industrial estate and is of national importance. It contains a wide mix of uses from houses and shops to offices and small industrial premises. Since its boom period in the 19th century, the area has suffered considerably from neglect and the effects of economic change. Many buildings are empty. Others are derelict and a regeneration scheme is a priority. The area does offer opportunities for conversion and redevelopment to provide sites for new houses and businesses. However, a strategy is urgently needed to safeguard this unique heritage, as well as fully realising its social and economic potential.

Housing development has been slow but steady with an average of around 20 houses built each year. Most recent new houses have been developed at Broadhaven. This is nearing capacity and further land is needed. Projections suggest a need for around 450 house sites in and around Wick by 2017, including an element for choice and flexibility. A portion will be developed in the countryside, particularly within the smaller settlements and through the use of vacant and derelict property. There are options for infill development, particularly for flats, at Lower Pulteneytown and, on a more limited basis, the town centre. Recycling existing brownfield sites and rehabilitating existing houses can contribute significantly to sustainability and help promote a lively town centre. Projections

suggest that there will be a demand for such smaller homes throughout the Highlands over the next 20 years as household size continues to fall. Such development can accommodate part of the overall demand, but many people will still be looking for a larger plot on the margins of the town. Land remains at Broadhaven and Hillhead. Nevertheless, further greenfield land will be needed. There are no major servicing constraints on land on the margins of the town. Analysis of the main constraints suggest that the best opportunities lie to the south of the town at Oldwick.

The Wick river is a key element in the townscape, bringing a green wedge almost to the heart of the town. It needs to be protected and enhanced, particularly as it opens up into the bay along the North and South Heads. Both headlands offer low key walking opportunities, but the latter in particular suffers from dereliction. An environmental improvement scheme would be welcome. The river could also be improved through the construction of a weir. Only the area around Argyle Square is covered by a Conservation Area. However, Lower Pulteneytown is a major part of the town's heritage. Extending the Conservation Area in this direction would help ensure recognition of the historic layout, the mix of uses and the quality of the buildings. The town centre also contains many fine buildings, including various banks and churches and the Old Parish Church. This is also the site of the original medieval settlement and has a high archaeological potential. A Conservation Area would help safeguard this heritage. The surrounding countryside is also important to the town, providing the landscape setting. The new Structure Plan supports the introduction of a Countryside Around Towns

partnership initiative. In this area farming and other existing land uses are expected to continue for the foreseeable future. However, measures towards diversification and future management for recreation will be encouraged including



Photos: Key elements of Wick Conservation Area

Above - Argyle Square

Below - Lower Pulteneytown



extensive structural tree planting, formation or improvement of paths, and the conversion of redundant buildings.

Community Input

The main concerns of the community put forward at community workshops in the Spring of 1998 were:

- environmental improvements, particularly along the riverside and in Lower Pulteneytown;
- protection of farmland on the margins of the town;
- traffic calming, particularly along Louisburgh Street and Willowbank;
- new housing in Lower Pulteneytown and on the southern margins of the burgh, particularly affordable housing;
- small businesses and car parking in Lower Pulteneytown;
- improved sports facilities, especially indoor facilities;
- key issues in the countryside were provision of cycle routes, environmental improvements, protection of croftland and improved tourist facilities.

Development Factors

A comprehensive assessment of the burgh shows the main constraints and opportunities as follows:

North west: Large area of prime agricultural land to the south of the existing industrial estate; very open but with good views across the river; relatively close to town centre but distant from local school; direct access to the A99 and close to



Photos: Development Factors

Left Prime agricultural land at Westerseat Farm

Middle Southern entrance to the town: good agricultural land, culvert upgrade needed

Right South Head

the airport; drainage requires upgrading; southern boundary adjoins Lower Wick River SSSI.

North east: extensive area of good farmland between the industrial estate and the Staxigoe Road; access and servicing feasible but close to the industrial estate and Wick airport flight path; main views to the north; outwith the natural enclosure of the town; distant from the secondary school, leisure facilities and the town centre.

South west: Area of open agricultural ground stretching from the A99 to the Wick river and rising generally north to south; substantial area is prime land; access and drainage are both viable with the exception of the ground to the south of the hospital where a major culvert upgrade is needed; views across the town higher up but very restricted closer to the built up area; close to both primary and secondary schools

South east: Area of open agricultural land stretching from the A99 to the South Head; access

and drainage feasible with the exception of a small area adjoining the cemetery where a new culvert is required; close to local primary school but distant from town centre; some views to the south; development east of the coastguard houses outwith natural enclosure of the town; grid iron development pattern which should be preserved.

Objectives

The Plan seeks to:

- identify land for a new high quality business park convenient to the airport and road network;
- allocate other industrial land;
- support expansion and upgrading of the harbour;
- support air related developments at the airport and nearby industrial estates;
- identify land for up to 450 houses;
- promote a regeneration strategy for Lower Pulteneytown;

- promote a healthy and vibrant town centre and identify potential retail sites;
- protect and enhance recreational areas, particularly along the riverside and at North and South Head;
- promote Conservation Areas for the town centre and Lower Pulteneytown;
- promote the upgrading of the waste water treatment works; and
- protect the margins of the town from ad hoc development; and promote a Countryside Around Town project including improved management and access to the countryside fringe for recreational purposes, including a network of footpaths/cycle ways.

Policies

In the built up area of the town, Primary Policies and Settlement Policies apply as shown on the Inset Map. Site and area specific policies, proposals and development opportunities are as follows.

C: Town Centre

1. The Council intends to work with the Wick Project to prepare a Town Centre Strategy that will aim to:

- ***maintain and strengthen the town's role as a sub-regional shopping and business centre;***
- ***maintain and improve the physical environment;***
- ***provide a high level of accessibility for all users by a range of transport modes.***
- ***protect established residential areas and encourage additional housing;***
- ***identify and promote development***

opportunities; and

- ***undertake effective management and promotion.***



*Photos: Town centre uses
Above - Council offices, pedestrian priority
Below - Car parking / rehabilitation*



2. Within the defined commercial core area (see Inset), the Council will:

- ***give the highest priority to improving the viability of the shopping centre;***
- ***encourage the addition, renovation, modernisation or replacement of floorspace needed to accommodate changing shopping patterns;***
- ***encourage office development , particularly through the re-use of vacant upper floors;***
- ***presume against further ground floor office and other non-retail uses in the main shopping areas of Bridge Street and High Streets, where they would interrupt continuous retail frontages; and***
- ***promote supplementary design guidance # for shop front design and signage with priority implementation to be encouraged in High Street, the pedestrian precinct, Town Hall Square and all other Listed commercial buildings.***

3. An opportunity exists to redevelop the site of the Highland Council offices at Market Place. Although the buildings are not listed, Market Place is a key part of the townscape. It is a high profile site and any development must be compatible with the scale and massing of the surrounding buildings, some of which are listed. The Council will therefore expect a high quality development, which must take account of the following:

- ***a mix of uses including retail, office and housing;***
- ***3 storey building;***

The *Caithness Frontage Guidelines for Commercial and Retail Properties* are separate from the Plan and available from the local Service Points.

- *natural stone / slate finishes;*
- *maintenance of the existing street pattern – developers should give careful consideration to retaining the existing curved façade;*
- *take advantage of the riverside prospect; and*
- *parking to the rear in a courtyard or underground.*

4. *The Post Office building is currently empty. The premises are listed and the Council will strongly resist proposals for demolition. The building has potential for conversion to a variety of uses subject to maintaining the character and integrity of the building. Possible uses include flats, offices, community or commercial uses.*

5. *Safeway intend to extend their existing store subject to agreement with the Council on parking facilities.*

6. *Land is allocated at Scalesburn for the development of a hotel complex for which planning permission has been granted.*

7. *The bulk of the environmental and road improvements to the town centre have been completed. Opportunities for further work remain, although no funds have been allocated. These include:*

- *widening of Shore Lane;*
- *upgrading the lanes which lead onto High Street;*
- *improvements to the landscaped areas at Market Street and MacLeay Lane; and*
- *examining ways of improving rear elevations, particularly those facing the river.*



*Photos: Infill housing opportunities in Lower Pulteneytown
Above: former North Eastern Farmers depot.
Below: former NOSWA depot*



8. *An area of archaeological interest covers an extensive area around the town centre. Development or redevelopment proposals must allow for archaeological assessment, preservation or excavation of remains, as appropriate.*

9. *The Council has prepared design guidance for shop front design and signage throughout the County. Developers will be expected to take account of these when considering their proposals.*

10. *In the residential areas of the town centre the Council will:*

- *protect and enhance their settled character and amenity;*
- *favour refurbishment, extension or redevelopment of properties for residential purposes;*
- *presume against the introduction of further non-residential uses, notably office development, and have regard to the impact of any such uses proposed for adjoining land; and*
- *consider environmental enhancement, including traffic calming and further restrictions on non-residents parking.*

H: Housing

11. *There are a number of “brownfield” sites within the town with potential for conversion / redevelopment for housing particularly flats. These are listed in Table 11. Capacity is for guidance only and may be altered depending on the individual proposal. There are also opportunities for rehabilitation / modernisation of houses, especially in Lower Pulteneytown.*

12. *Greenfield land allocated for new housing is shown on Table 12.*

Site	Capacity	Comments
(a) Former NE Farmers	9 - 12	<i>Pilot Project for the Empty Homes Initiative. Proposals should accord with the design guidance in Annex VII.</i>
(b) Former NOSWA yard and offices	30	<i>Mix of flats and community uses, including play area. Element of retail / offices would be acceptable. See Framework Plan.</i>
(c) Burn Street / Harbour Quay	30	<i>Planning permission for 24 flats. Potential to extend into Fountain Forestry depot and offices, subject to relocation. Proposals should accord with the design guidance in Annex VII.</i>
(d) Bank Row	8	<i>Proposals should accord with the design guidance in Annex VII.</i>
(e) Bank Row – Celtic Waters	25	<i>Depends on relocation to more suitable site. Also has potential for other uses including extension of Heritage Centre. Proposals should accord with the design guidance in Annex VII.</i>
(f) Former Laundry	10 - 12	<i>Part of original site now as High School car park. Could combine with redevelopment of radio station site (m).</i>
(g) Auction Mart	15	
(h) W.A. Geddes yard, buildings & telephone exchange		<i>Depends upon relocation of existing uses. Potential for flats in conjunction with other business / small scale retail/ commercial / tourist developments. Potential may exist for a call centre in the telephone exchange, subject to redesign in keeping with its location within the Conservation Area. Proposals should accord with the design guidance in Annex VII.</i>
(i) Rear of the Abattoir	3 - 4	
(j) Abattoir	3 - 4	<i>Depends upon relocation.</i>
(k) Former Caithness Glass site	10	
(l) D.M. Steven's depot	25	<i>Depends upon relocation of existing uses. Potential for flats in conjunction with other business / commercial / tourist uses. Opportunities for business/retail use also exist. Proposals should accord with the design guidance in Annex VII.</i>
(m) Radio Station buildings	15 – 20	<i>Assumes smaller houses on 0.6 ha.. Could also combine with remainder of former laundry site (f). Alternative potential for business /office or sports barn (see 28). Foul sewage from existing and new properties to the Wick main system and separate surface water arrangements. If family housing, proposals must incorporate a play area.</i>

Site	Area (ha.)	Capacity	Comments
(a) Broadhaven	1.25	10	
(b) Broadhaven East	4	40	<i>Proposals must incorporate an area 0.5ha for a kickabout pitch/play space which could be sited within the adjacent waste water treatment plant safeguarding area (see 25)</i>
(c) Hillhead	5	50	<i>Proposals must accord with the Development Brief prepared in 1991</i>
(d) South Road	1.2	12 - 15	<i>No development will be allowed until such times as the culvert in the A99 is improved.</i>
(e) south west of Mowat Pl., Papigoe	0.75	7 – 8	<i>Connect to Wick drainage system and widen Mowat Place for access.</i>

13. In accordance with policy H3 of the Structure Plan, the Council will not permit new housing and conversions of non-traditional buildings in the hinterland around Wick. This area, defined on Map HAT 2, extends at least 5 km. from the Settlement Boundary. The Council will favour rehabilitation or redevelopment of redundant traditional buildings, subject to satisfactory servicing together with innovative management of the land under a Countryside Around Towns partnership.

B: Business

14. 14ha. is allocated at Lochshell for a high quality Business Park. In August 2000 planning permission was granted for the first phase layout and servicing. Proposals must:

- take access from the A99;
- provide a high quality landscape setting with a strong element of tree planting;
- emphasise the site's "gateway" setting at the entrance to the burgh;
- provide for a green wedge to mark the entrance to the site; and
- ensure buildings are of a quality design.

15. The former bus depot is safeguarded for business uses compatible with adjoining dairy business. Alternatively it may offer a redevelopment opportunity for flats.

16. The site at South Road also has potential for use for a small hotel subject to surface water drainage improvements.

17. Land to the north of Wellington Avenue would be suitable for a high quality single user office development incorporating extensive open

space and landscaping.

I: Industry

18. The remaining land at Wick Industrial Estate is allocated for industrial uses including 14ha. to the east of the airport access road. This would be suitable for a Food Park concentrating on quality products from Caithness.

19. The Council will support the expansion of development directly related to the provision of passenger and freight services from Wick airport and to the movement and maintenance of aircraft where these do not significantly affect the amenity of adjoining residents. The retention and improvement of existing facilities is important in this regard.

20. The Council will promote development and facilities related to the business use of the airport, including air related business uses, where these do not significantly affect the amenity of adjoining residents.

21. Land adjoining the railway will be safeguarded for freight operations and other rail related developments.

S: Special Uses

22. The Council is undertaking harbour stabilisation/protection work in conjunction with the Harbour Trust at a cost of £3m.

23. The previous Local Plan supported significant extension to the harbour, including improvement of the fish market, provision of new breakwaters and additional back up land through reclamation. Although such works are

not likely to be carried out within the timescale of the Plan, the Council will encourage and support the expansion of the harbour. Shorter term opportunities include:

- provision of pontoons;
- upgrading of slipway; and
- improvements to the Camps slipway.

In the longer term there may be scope for the provision of further back up land encompassing the harbours fishing, oil supply, fabrication, boat repairs and general transport functions.



Photo: Wick Harbour

24. The Council intends to carry out remedial works to Wick Harbour Bridge at a cost of £275,000 in 2002/2003.

25. The North of Scotland Water Authority intends to upgrade the Sewage treatment works at North Head at a cost of £2.6 million in 2001 to 2003. Development will be restricted within 90 metres of the works.

26. *Suggestions have been made in the past to create a more direct link to the harbour via the road to the west of the cemetery. Although there are no funds available at present, the Council will investigate the potential as resources permit.*

27. *The Council intend to create an all weather pitch in Wick. No decision has been taken on whether this will be upgrading of an existing pitch or provision of a new facility.*

28. *The council supports the provision of a "sports barn" facility in Wick subject to completion of a feasibility study, identification of a suitable site and the necessary financial resources. Potential sites are on the industrial land to the east of the airport road and adjoining Wick High School.*

E: Town Expansion

29. *The following sites are allocated for the expansion of the Burgh. Proposals should generally seek to maintain the existing grid layout pattern. The Council will encourage substantial early structural tree planting to help integrate the sites into the landscape. Built forms, circulation, green space and landscaping require to be integrated with each other as part of an overall concept. The design of built form and selection of materials should take account of the traditional architecture of the Burgh. Where appropriate, developers will be responsible for completing the public road, water distribution and sewerage systems to the limits of their respective boundaries in the interest of the proper servicing of the area. Play space / open space should meet the standards set out in the Policy Annex.*

Site	Area (Ha.)	Capacity	Comments
(a) South Head	8.7	100	<i>Consider scope for relocating or retaining the BMX track prior to the site being required for development.</i>
(b) Roxburgh Road	4	15 – 20	<i>Proposals should protect and incorporate the burn into the development as a feature; the archaeological site on the western boundary will require further investigation.</i>
(c) Oldwick	8.8	80	
(d) Roxburgh Road East	8	80	<i>Long term allocation. Development will not be allowed until the above sites have been substantially completed or if insurmountable difficulties arise with development of the brownfield sites at Lower Pulteneytown.</i>
(e) Oldwick East	8	80	<i>Longer term development following sites (a) to (d). Some pumping of foul drainage may be required.</i>

30. *The Council will restrict further expansion of the town outwith its natural setting in the following areas:*
 (a) *to the east of the coastguard houses; and*
 (b) *north and east of Hillhead Farm.*

Environmental Action

31. *In May 2000 the Council extended Wick Conservation Area to cover Pulteneytown and the harbour. An Article 4 Direction is proposed over the whole area. The Council also recommends that Historic Scotland consider designating the Conservation Area as "Outstanding" and thereafter introduce a "Town Scheme" to promote enhancement with grant assistance. Development should have regard to the Design Guidance set out in Annex VIII.*

32. *The Council proposes to designate a Conservation Area in Wick Town Centre and place an Article 4 Direction over the whole area.*

33. *The Council supports the strategy prepared by the Wick Project for Lower Pulteneytown which provides guidance on land use and design principles for new development, together with potential conversion / redevelopment sites. Development opportunities are identified in the Lower Pulteneytown Heritage Strategy * Framework Plan. Some are dependent on the relocation of existing uses. Within Lower Pulteneytown, the Council will:*

- *retain the existing street pattern and hard frontage;*
- *encourage the restoration of existing buildings in preference to demolition or redevelopment;*
- *support proposals which contribute to the regeneration of Lower Pulteneytown;*

** Copies available from the Wick Project Office, 34A High Street, Wick*

- *encourage proposals for tourist related / commercial developments along Harbour Quay;*
- *encourage the repair and upgrading of older housing stock;*
- *support the conversion of existing buildings to residential use where appropriate;*
- *support the provision of new housing under the Empty Homes Initiative;*
- *discourage large scale commercial developments which are not compatible with the grid iron layout;*
- *encourage the relocation of non-conforming uses to more suitable premises on designated industrial estates; and*
- *encourage a scheme of environmental improvements*



*Above: Wick Heritage Centre, Lower Pulteneytown
Below: Wick River*

34. *The Council will encourage the preparation of a Management / Action Plan for the Wick River corridor, including North and South Head to improve public access, recreation and amenity. This should link through Lower Pulteneytown and the harbour and examine the potential for environmental improvements and upgrading of existing facilities, including the footpaths, provision of a boating pond and removal of dereliction. In the longer term, if funds become available, provision of a carefully located and designed weir, accounting for the potential environmental impact on the river, would be of benefit to the town.*

