

## 5. CASTLETOWN



### Background

Castletown (popn. 1030) is a planned village located on the north coast some 7km. to the east of Thurso. It is set on gently rising ground overlooking Dunnet Bay surrounded by good quality agricultural land. The settlement area extends to Castlehill to the north with its attractive harbour, policy woodlands and former quarry. This area was once the centre of a thriving flagstone industry. This led to the development of the village as a local service centre with a good range of community and commercial facilities along higher ground straddling the A836 road. The village did not recover from the demise of the flagstone industry until after the development of Dounreay in the 1950's. Substantial house building followed on land to the north of the village centre.

While a significant number of residents still work

in Thurso and at Dounreay, the successful development of the Norfrost freezer manufacturing plant has provided a major source of jobs in the village with room for expansion. This subsumed the small industrial allocation in the former New Mossy Quarry area, so additional land for other business and light industrial uses needs to be identified elsewhere. The worked out area of the Upper Castletown Quarry at the west end of the village as well as in the grounds of the former Castlehill House offer potential in this regard.

The A836 running through the village is a major tourist route linking North Sutherland with John O'Groats. Opportunities exist to take advantage of this and derive more local benefit in association with the Castlehill/Dunnet Bay area. The attractions of nearby Dunnet Bay, notably the superb beach and unique dune formation, are of significant nature conservation and recreational interest. The development of a heritage centre in the village, together with the restoration and appropriate reuse of the old Castlehill mill, harbour, steading and wooded policies, all offer potential to attract more visitors and permanent residents to the village. These could all be supported by additional interpretation of the flagstone industry, tourist facilities and quality accommodation. The service role of the village could be greatly enhanced if its tourist potential is developed in association with further housing. Existing facilities may at least be sustained and there is local support for the development of a bowling green.

House building in the village in recent years has been suppressed through a lack of serviced sites for individual development. This has transferred demand to the surrounding countryside,

particularly towards Thurso, and to Dunnet with resultant amenity, drainage and traffic problems. It is now necessary to release more land within the village and apply more restrictive policies in the countryside. Existing gap or infill sites in the village only allow for 15 to 20 houses. Permission has been granted for a further 16 houses through the restoration and conversion of the Castlehill steading. These provisions fall well short of the anticipated housing requirement over the next 10 to 15 years, which will be influenced by the upsurge in demand in the Thurso housing market area and restrictions on building in the open countryside. A more readily available supply of land and wider range of housing opportunities in all tenures in a choice of locations will help support the attraction of further jobs to the village.

For any area comprehensive servicing is required and development is restricted until improvements are carried out to the mains drainage system. Development close to Castlehill could assist the regeneration/ restoration of that area and enhance prospects for attracting more visitors and tourist related jobs. More significant development would help to sustain existing community facilities and services and secure additional leisure, recreation and social facilities, as well as public access to and management of woodlands. Opportunities are identified for 150 to 200 houses, to be developed in phases over the next 15 to 20 years.

A mains drainage scheme exists but there is no treatment of sewage. Improvements are required to treat sewage to comply with a European Directive for raising Dunnet Beach to bathing water standard. Early improvement is urged to enhance growth prospects.

Surrounding farmland is important to village setting and is intensively worked. Protecting this land from piecemeal development will assist the proper development of the village. Other areas, such as the Castlehill and Stangergill woodlands are also important to the landscape setting of the village and offer potential for informal recreation. Securing public access in association with development would help complete a loop of remote paths around the northern part of the settlement and reduce conflict with continued farming activities in other areas. The Community Council has been particularly active in pursuing the implementation of a path network. A Countryside Around Town Initiative would aid implementation and add to the successful community woodland scheme and sculpture garden on the restored tip at the former Castletown Quarry. Environmental enhancement of the former quarries on the south side of the village, together with more substantial planting on the south east side of the Norfrost factory would also improve the amenity of the village.

## Community Input

The main issues put forward by the community at the workshop in the Spring of 1998 were:

### Village Centre

Affordable/sheltered housing; upgrade play area/open spaces; traffic calming at Murrayfield and Traill Street; remove double yellow lines; car parking; retain toilets; recycling facilities.

### Traill Hall & Land to West

Play area; protect historic site; restore; preserve; demolish; tourist facility; sheltered housing; car park; recycling facilities.

### Old Church East Of Traill Hall

Fencing; protect open space; sports hall; building renovation; tidy up/environmental improvements; pub.

### North of Castlehill Avenue/Calder Square

Family sized/ large detached houses; affordable housing; care facilities for the elderly; plant trees.

### South, Around Norfrost Factory

Housing; plant trees; tidy up; protect farmland; protect open space.

### East of Battery Road

Affordable housing; family sized houses; sheltered housing; better new house designs; improve drainage.

### West Approach to Village

Traffic calming/speed limit; pavement; improve road; no street lighting.

### South East Approach To Village (Near School)

Traffic calming; bus shelter; recycling facilities.

### Flagstone Trail Area/ Castlehill Steading/ Land to the South

Family sized/ large detached houses; rented houses; affordable/shared ownership housing; hostel/bunkhouse; restaurant; craft industry; promote for tourism; chalets; swimming pool; hotel/guest house; promote scenic route; cycle route; more passing places; no street lighting; improve drainage; protect views; facilities for the disabled; toilets; tidy up.

### Castlehill Policies

Restore lodge; rebuild stone dykes; protect woodland; sewage treatment works; tidy up.

### Castlehill Harbour Area

Promote for tourism; improve pier; marina; picnic site; no street lighting; promote scenic route; cycle route; traffic calming; environmental improvements.

### Castlehill Mill

Hostel/bunkhouse; tourist facility; restaurant; public house; protect historic site; restore; demolish.



*Photo: Castlehill Steading*

## Development Factors

In line with government guidance preference is given to bringing vacant and semi-derelict property back into beneficial use. In addition to infill opportunities in the older part of the village, the restoration of property in the Castlehill area is promoted particularly as it has considerable potential to expand business and tourist activities. The cost of providing suitable drainage and undertaking restoration works requires additional

development to assist the overall feasibility. Development potential would be aided by minor realignment and passing places on the main access road from the village centre together with realignment of the A836 to the south of the Mill.

Development should avoid archaeological interests and spoiling the wider outlook from existing housing. This suggests limited development towards the Castlehill steading using the backdrop of the woodland to the north to minimise landscape impact and seeking high standards of design and landscaping. Similarly, the significant tree belts straddling the Stangergill Burn and Burn of Garth would help to contain development on the east side of the village. This area is relatively close to the primary school and includes land previously allocated east of Harland Road that can be developed with little additional infrastructure.

The open agricultural landscape combined with lack of drainage limit development around most of the rest of the village. The former quarry and refuse tip to the north east also presents potential hazard in relation to landfill gas. Appropriate consultation is necessary for proposals within close proximity. The worked out area of the Upper Quarry on the other hand offers potential to accommodate development with minimal landscaping. Continued expansion of the village along the main access roads is not sustainable in servicing terms.

## Objectives

The Plan seeks to:

- maintain, improve and diversify employment prospects through promotion of opportunities

for business, industrial, and tourism development;

- promote restoration and reuse of buildings, land and the harbour in the Castlehill area for tourism, business and residential purposes;
- identify a range and choice of sites to accommodate at least 150 houses over the next 15 years;
- maintain and expand community facilities;
- encourage early improvement of the mains drainage system;
- encourage extension of public access to surrounding areas for recreational purposes in association with development;
- safeguard important agricultural land, amenity woodlands and the coastal environment.

## Policies

In the built up area of the village, 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: Village Centre

**1. The Council will encourage consolidation of commercial development and community facilities along the Main Street frontage and in the area between Traill and MacKay Streets.**

**2. The Council will favour further infill housing development or redevelopment, particularly where vehicular access can be taken to Traill Street and Murrayfield. Land extending to 0.1 ha. at the south east end of Traill and**

***Main Streets is available and has potential for special needs, possibly for development by a housing association. Developers should be aware that the amenity of proposals on the Murrayfield frontage might be affected by nearby industrial activities. The Council will also resist further industrial development in the area between Murrayfield and Main Street.***



*Photos: Above - land at Mackay Street  
Below- land to rear of Traill Hall*



3. The Council considers that one of the open spaces between Main Street and Traill Street may be suitable for a bowling green. Two alternative locations are suggested:

- (a) the open area to the north east of MacKay Street if the land is not developed for housing (see 4b & 19); or
- (b) within the eastern expansion area (see 15a)..

H: Housing

4. The Council will encourage infill development in accordance with Supporting Policy SP1 on the following sites (Table 4):

| Table 4: Infill Sites                      |      |          |  |
|--|------|----------|--|
| Site                                       | Area | Capacity | Comment  |
| (a) west of the Traill Hall                | 0.2  | 4 – 6    | see 12   |
| (b) east of Castlehill Place,              | 0.3  | 6 – 10   |  |
| (c) west of the playing field              | 0.45 | 3        | subject to access from N.E. and measures for monitoring landfill gas |
| (d) north east end of Stangergill Crescent | 0.1  | 2        | minimal tree loss, turning area, footpath connection to the south    |

5. Planning permission was granted in 1999 for the restoration and rebuilding of the Castlehill Steading to provide 16 houses and 4 self-catering units on an area of 0.55 ha.

6. In the grounds of the former Castlehill House there may be scope for residential development, possibly as part of a master plan for a larger scheme for a mix of uses, subject to adequate servicing (see 9, 15 & 20c).

7. The Council will strongly presume against housing development on land immediately outwith the village boundary and on all areas safeguarded for open space or recreational purposes. Ribbon development along all public roads out of the village and between Castletown and Castlehill will not be permitted. Land between the village and the Ruthemyre area may have potential for housing development in the very long term, subject to adequate servicing.

B: Business

8. In part of the Castlehill steading there is potential to develop a visitor centre with display space and on the opposite (west) side of the road, to convert the former Pilot's House into a restaurant. These facilities would complement other features and places of interest in the Castlehill area.

9. In the grounds of the former Castlehill House the Council will favour a range of potential uses either as stand alone developments or as a mixed uses development, as follows:

- business/high technology industry/knowledge based uses, possibly a business headquarters;
- horticulture;
- tourist accommodation – large hotel, self catering units, caravan & camp site;

- residential (see 6) – large detached houses and/or courtyard groups of smaller houses. The location of development in the walled garden and former house areas is preferred, subject to drainage and access. Limited additional development may be allowed within the woodland, subject to minimal loss of trees and a woodland management agreement or Tree Preservation (see 20c). Developers will be expected to prepare a master plan to indicate the overall layout, the location of buildings, servicing arrangements, proposals for restoring the gate Lodge and public access. A high standard of building design will be required to complement existing and proposed in the adjoining Castlehill steading and Mill areas. (See 5, 15 & 20c).



Photo: Entrance to grounds of former Castlehill House

10. The Council will favour restoration of the former Castlehill Mill for a mix of business, tourism and retail uses, subject to adequate servicing, notably improved access. A feasibility

study is considering the potential for a heritage centre, craft/produce from Caithness outlets, hostel /bunkhouse accommodation, ranger base, exhibition, performance and community space. Development could be linked to the recreational use, management and interpretation of Dunnet Bay, as well as the flagstone industry. The location of the Mill on the A836 road could draw passing tourist trade but the suitable diversion of the main road to the south for access is a pre-requisite for development. This in turn would create potential for a new beach car park/focal point, taking pressure off the foreshore. Footpath links with the existing flagstone/harbour trail to the west and the proposed Stangergill Burn footpath to the north are desirable (see 15a & 20a).

11. The former Traill Hall is considered to have potential as a heritage and visitor orientation centre for the village. This may include the main interpretation display for the flagstone industry. Alternatively there may be potential to provide community care and/or residential accommodation, linked to the adjoining housing development to the west (see 4a).

**I: Industry**

12. The existing Norfrost factory and land with potential for its expansion are allocated for industrial use. The Council will seek improved screening around the periphery of the site in line with the conditions of the existing planning permission and in association with any further development.

13. The Council will consider the potential of the western section of the former Upper

Castletown Quarry for small business, light industrial and storage purposes with screen planting around the southern periphery.

**S: Special Uses**

14. The Council will encourage the North of Scotland Water Authority to progress early improvements to the existing drainage system in order to increase the capacity for additional development. A new screening plant is programmed during 2000/01 and the main improvements estimated at £380,000 are programmed for 2003/04. Primary Policy PP4 applies to the site of the existing macerator and a cordon sanitaire at least 45 metres around it.

**E: Expansion**

15. Land indicated in Table 15 below is allocated for longer term planned expansion of the village, linked to the restoration/

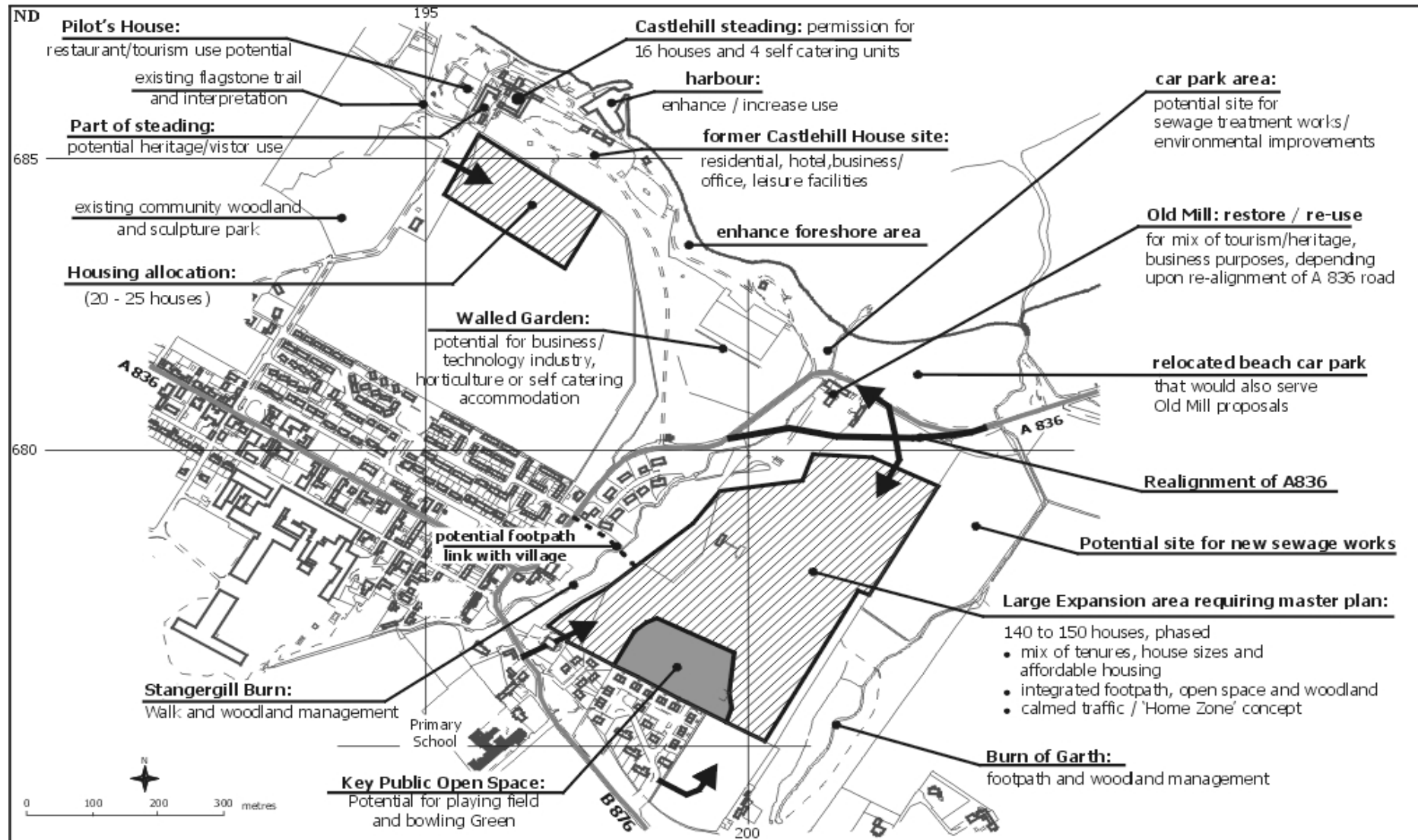
regeneration of the Castlehill area. Developers will be required to prepare a master plan or overall layout to guide development accounting for the principles indicated in the Framework Plan. It is important that the community is closely involved in this exercise, particularly in relation to provision for recreational and social facilities. Developers/landowners should also be prepared to enter into Agreements with the Council to:

- tie in with restoration proposals for the Castlehill area;
- undertake or contribute to necessary infrastructure improvements and servicing;
- provide landscaping/open space; and
- secure woodland management, footpaths and public access having regard to the Footpath Audit carried out in 2000.

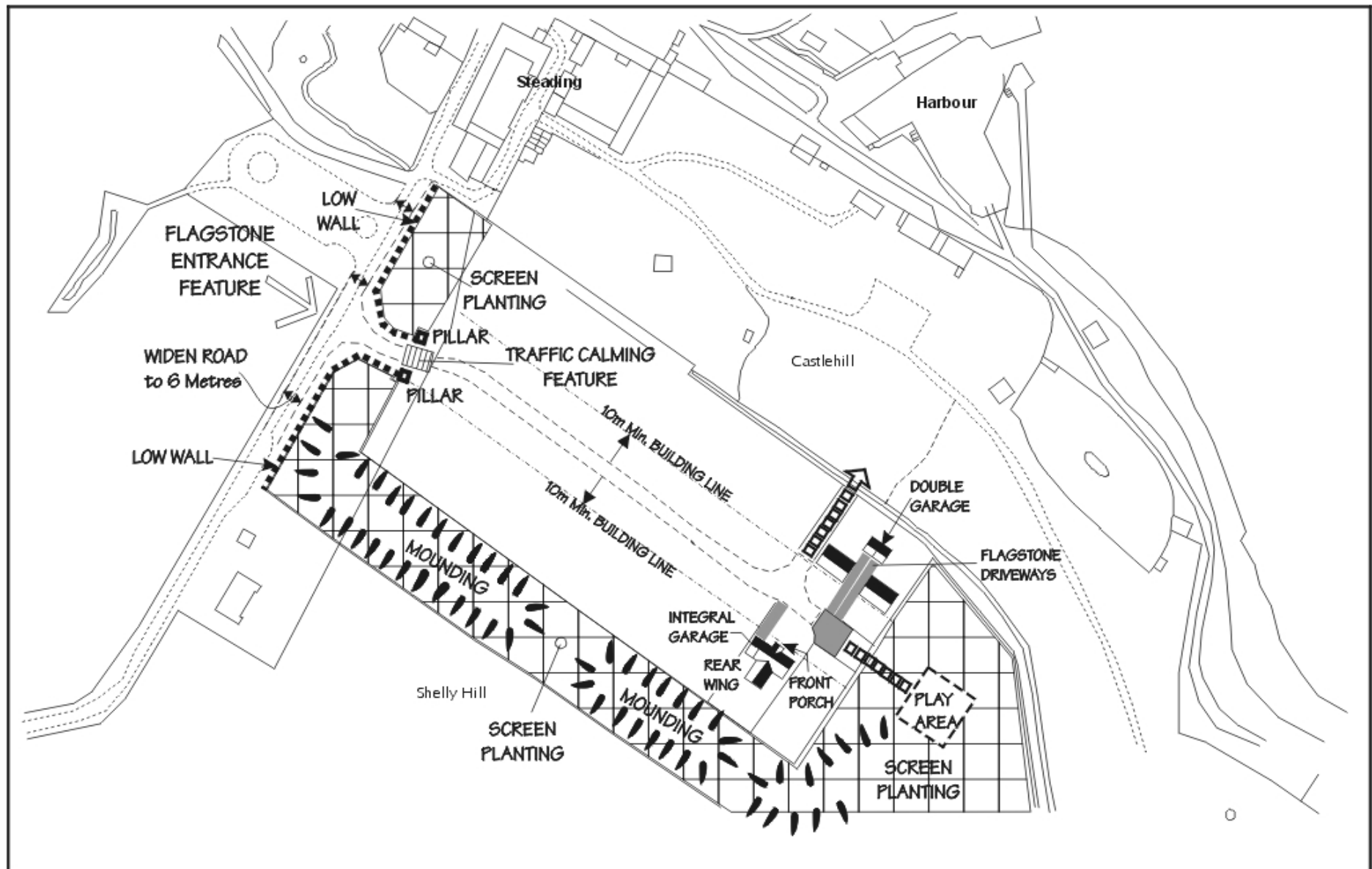
The layouts and building designs should contain a strong element of traditional or vernacular style features to complement the Castlehill buildings and include use of Caithness flagstone.

| Table 15: Village Expansion Areas |          |  |
|-----------------------------------|----------|--|
| Site                              | Capacity | Comments   |
| (a) East of Stangergill Burn      | 140      | Includes existing housing allocations. A mix of house sizes and tenures, including a proportion of affordable homes, is required, together with community/leisure facilities. Potential exists for up to three road accesses and creation of a traffic calmed (Home Zone) environment. Remote path links should be made to the village, Castlehill and Dunnet Bay via woodlands, burn sides and open spaces. Developers will be required to provide a range of open spaces/play areas in consultation with the local community and in accordance with the Council's standards. This includes a large playing field and a site for a bowling green set in parkland immediately to the north of the Harland Road area. |
| (b) South of Castlehill Steading  | 20 - 25  | Housing on 2.4 ha. A play area, mounding, screen tree planting (farm woodland scheme) over a further 2.5 to 3 ha. Contributions will be required to improving the road south towards the village. See Castlehill/Shelley Hill Layout and Design Features and Appendix III  |

## ▼ Castlehill/Castletown East Framework Plan



▼ Castlehill/Shelley Hill Layout and Design Features (see also Appendix III)



**A: Amenity**

16. On the area of the former tip in the old flagstone quarry a community woodland and sculpture park has been established. The Council will not permit the erection of buildings or other works that could potentially disturb underlying landfill gas. Primary Policy PP4 will apply in the interests of safety. Proposals for development within 250 metres of the former tip will also have to be referred to the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and the Council's Protective Services to consider the risk of infiltration of landfill gas and the need for precautionary measures in appropriate.

17. The Council will presume against development that would impinge upon or erode the character and setting of heritage features at Castlehill, notably the outdoor flagstone display area, harbour, ice house and Dunnet Beach. Consideration will be given to improve footpaths linking these areas and appropriate parking facilities.

18. In the Shelly Hill area the Council will apply a strong presumption against development in the interest of safeguarding archaeology, agriculture and amenity, and essentially to maintain the separation between Castlehill and Castletown.

19. The open area to the north east of MacKay Street may be suitable for a bowling green if the land is not developed for housing (see 4b & 15a).

20. Under Supporting Policies SP28 to 31 the Council will seek the management and protection of the following woodland areas:

- (a) the Stangergill Burn, in association with a woodland walk (see 15a);
- (b) along main road south of Harland Road; and
- (c) at Castlehill, in association with development (see 6 & 9).

21. Positive enhancement, improved access and education through interpretation of the surrounding countryside will be sought through a Countryside Around Towns partnership (see Map HAT 1, Landward Area 43 and Thurso 37).

**Environmental Action**

22. In the former Ruthermyre area north of the public road the Council will encourage further environmental enhancement, notably the planting of trees around the bus depot and the potential for nature conservation.



Photos: Above – Castlehill Harbour  
Below left – Ruthermyre area and Norfrost factory  
Below - Land to north east for village expansion towards the Mill and Stangergill woodland.

