

## 4. LANDWARD AREA



The Landward Area covers the largest proportion of the Local Plan area with the exception of the ten main settlements of Castletown, Dunbeath, Halkirk, Keiss, Lybster, Reay, Scrabster, Thurso, Watten and Wick, which are covered in Sections 5 to 14.

The Council will apply General Policies PP1 to 4 throughout the Landward Area as shown on the Proposals Map. Under Policies PP2, 3 and 4 a degree of restriction is applied depending upon the nature and severity of the development constraint, be it for servicing, amenity, nature conservation or public safety reasons. A high quality of design for new and extended buildings, in keeping with the character of traditional rural buildings, is expected. More specific guidance for the siting and design of new houses is indicated in the General Policies Annex. Site and area specific policies, proposals and development

opportunities are shown below under the appropriate general policy.

### Housing

1. *The Council will favour rehabilitation and re-use for residential purposes of the many vacant dwellings and other traditional buildings throughout the Caithness countryside, particularly where services are readily available. Assistance towards rehabilitation and repair may be available from the Council, Scottish Homes and the Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Department through the Empty Homes Initiative, the Highland Small Communities Housing Trust or the Agricultural Business Improvement Scheme.*

#### Under Primary Policy PP1 the Council will favour new housing development:

2. *In General Countryside Areas.*

3. *In the Fragile Countryside Areas of the Altnabreac and Dunbeath / Latheron Settlement Zones.*

4. *In the Dispersed Townships indicated in the table below, subject to the specified spacing between dwellings:*

LOCATION	SPACING (Metres)
(a) Auckengill	100 - 150
(b) Duncansby	100 - 150
(c) East Clyth	100
(d) East Mey	150
(e) Freswick	100 - 150
(f) Freswick South	150

(g) Gills	150
(h) Huna	150
(i) Raggra	100 - 150
(j) Thrumster	100 - 150
(k) Westend, John O'Groats	100 - 150

*Minimum spacing distances may be varied in the event of a demonstrable need for social or amenity housing that is unable to be met in nearby clustered settlements [H3].*

5. *In the following settlements with capacity for infill development or expansion:*

- (a) Ackergillshore
  - (b) Canisbay
  - (c) Dunnet, where significant development has taken place to the west in recent years. This has led to traffic problems on the road to Dwarwick pier and altered the settlement pattern. To meet possible demand further land is needed in the village and potential sites are shown on the proposals Map. This includes a 1.4 ha. site for comprehensive development not exceeding 15 houses at the east end of the Dwarwick Pier road with its appropriate widening. Development is restricted to the west of this site along the pier road (see 11d).
  - (d) Glengolly (limit of 5 houses)
  - (e) John O'Groats
  - (f) Reiss
  - (g) Sarclet
  - (h) Staxigoe
  - (i) Thrumster
  - (j) Westfield
- General Housing Policy H also applies to these settlements.*

**Under Primary Policy PP2 the Council will favour new housing development:**

6. In the Dispersed Townships indicated in the table below, subject to overcoming the servicing constraints and meeting the specified spacing between dwellings:

LOCATION	SPACING (Metres)	CONSTRAINT
(a) Achavar	150	Water supply
(b) Achavrole	150	Water supply
(c) Achow	150 – 200	Water supply
(d) Balnabruich	100	Water supply
(e) Barrock	100 – 150	Poor sub-soil drainage
(f) Brough	150	Poor sub-soil drainage
(g) Borgue – Ramsbraigs	100	Water supply
(h) Green Hill	150	Water supply
(i) Houstry	125	Water supply
(j) Keiss	150	Poor sub soil drainage
(k) Mid Clyth	150	Poor sub soil drainage
(l) Mybster	100	Poor sub soil drainage
(m) Occumster	100	Water supply
(n) Smerral	125 – 150	Water supply
(o) Ulbster	100	Poor sub-soil drainage
(p) Upper Lybster	125	Water supply
(q) West Dunnet	100	Road



*Photo: Vacant house at Mybster*

*Minimum spacing distances may be varied in the event of a demonstrable need for social or amenity housing that is unable to be met in nearby clustered settlements [H3].*

7. In the following settlements with limited capacity for infill housing:

- (a) Achvarasdal - sub-soil limitations.
- (b) Barrock – drainage/sub-soil limitations.
- (c) Bower – drainage.
- (d) Brough – drainage/sub-soil limitations.
- (e) Burrigill/Forse – water supply.
- (f) Latheron – water supply.
- (g) Latheronwheel – water supply. (The suitability of land to the south west for longer term development requires to be considered in discussion with land owners and the wider community).
- (h) Newport – water supply.
- (i) Shebster – water supply.
- (j) Spittal – water supply.
- (k) Westerdale – sub-soil limitations.

General Housing Policy H also applies to these settlements.

8. At Mill and Mains of Forss the Council will favour conversion and/or reuse of redundant buildings for permanent residential and/or holiday letting accommodation. Protection of the setting of listed buildings and woodland, and avoiding conflict with the continued operation of the farm, are also important considerations.

**Under Primary Policy PP3 the Council will presume against housing development:**

9. In the hinterland around the towns of Wick and Thurso, as indicated on the Proposals Map and Maps HAT 1 and 2. Exceptions will only be made where:

- a house is essential for the management of land and associated family purposes (see General Policies Annex);
- social housing is required to meet demonstrated local affordable needs that cannot be met within settlements; or
- development involves a conversion of a traditional building or redevelopment of a ruinous dwelling.

All proposals will be subject to adequate services being available and siting and design considerations.

10. Sensitive Areas as defined under General Policy PP3 in the General Policies Annex. Exceptions will only be made where a house is essential for the management of land and associated family purposes.

11. In the Dispersed Townships indicated in the table below, until the necessary

*improvements are carried out. Thereafter any development should be adequately sited in accordance with the spacing indicated.*

LOCATION	SPACING (Metres)	CONSTRAINT
(a) Hill of Forss	100	Drainage
(b) Rattar/ Scarfskerry	100 –150	Drainage
(c) Swinney Hill	150	Water supply, drainage
(d) Dunnet - Dwarwick Pier Road	100	Road
(e) West of Lybster	75 – 100	Water supply, drainage

*Minimum spacing distances may be varied in the event of a demonstrable need for social or amenity housing that is unable to be met in nearby clustered settlements [H3].*

*12. That creates new ad hoc clusters of housing or adds to the Housing Groups in Appendix IX. In exceptional cases there may be limited opportunities to add to these groups, and only then if their appearance is enhanced or infrastructure problems are remedied.*

*13. Within the following settlements until service deficiencies are eased or removed:*

LOCATION	CONSTRAINT
Dixonfield/ Duncanshill	Road widening and footpath provision towards Thurso.
Gerston Farm Road, by Halkirk	Access
Gillock	Drainage

Mey	Drainage - following a new system programmed for 2003/4, potential will exist for the comprehensive servicing and development of 2.3 ha. of land north of the Castle Inn for 20 - 25 houses.
Newtonhill	Drainage; Roads – development allowed only after connection to Wick system and road improvements
Scarfskerry	Drainage

*14. In all cases a strong presumption will also be maintained against development on land immediately outwith the defined settlement boundaries.*

### **Business / Industry**

*15. The Council generally supports small business development or additions to existing indigenous industries in the Landward Area in accordance with Structure Plan Policy B7, provided there is no adverse impact upon adjacent uses and the development can be adequately serviced.*

*Under Primary Policy PP1 the Council favours the following:*

*16. The development of an Archaeological Visitor Centre at Thrumster.*

*17. Subject to suitable servicing and landscaping, land to the north of the garage at the former station yard in Thrumster has potential for business, commercial and light industrial development.*

*18. The preparation of a programme of improvements to the various small harbours around the coast. There is a need to prioritise improvements based on safety issues, heritage and tourism potential.*

*19. The renovation of existing buildings for self catering tourist accommodation:*

- (a) at Crosskirk Bay, where limited additional development might be possible subject to avoiding impact upon the setting of nearby historical/archaeological features;*
- (b) at the former lighthouse keepers' houses at Dunnet Head and Holburn Head;*
- (c) on the foreshore at Berriedale; and*
- (d) the derelict properties to the north of Lybster, which may also be suitable for permanent housing.*

*20. At Dunnet 0.2ha is identified for tourist related commercial uses. Land should be reserved to the north to ensure a safe visibility splay for access.*



*Photo: Lighthouse and former keepers' houses at Dunnet Head*

21. *At John O'Groats interest has been shown in the past in the development of a Visitor Centre. Planning permission has been granted for two Centres, although development has not commenced. The Council considers that the provision of a Visitor Centre at John O'Groats is essential for the development of tourism in Caithness. Both sites are identified for a Visitor Centre (see Framework Plan).*

22. *On land to the east of the existing industrial units at John O'Groats 0.1ha is allocated for business uses.*

**The following areas are identified under Primary Policy PP2:**

**23. *Dounreay***

The large scale industrial site of the UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) nuclear plant at Dounreay lies some 12 km. to the west of Thurso on the north coast. The complex, together with the adjacent defence establishment at HMS Vulcan have been major sources of direct and indirect employment in the Caithness economy for the last 40 years. Energy generation at the UKAEA plant ceased in 1994 and reprocessing of spent fuels has not been carried out there since 1996. In mid-1998, the Government announced that the main aspects of work for the future will be decommissioning and environmental remediation of the site. This work will be undertaken over the next 40 to 60 years, involving around £4,500 million of expenditure, including some £1,300 million in the first 10 years. In this early period the workforce is expected to rise to around 2,300 in the process of establishing an international Centre of Excellence



for decommissioning. Detailed proposals for development associated with the positive management of radioactive wastes from the site are expected to come forward for the consideration of the planning and other regulatory authorities. There is also scope to gradually add to the tourist/visitor interest, interpretation and access to the site as decommissioning progresses.

The Council is concerned that positive steps are taken to redress the longer term loss of employment from present activities. In principle, it supports diversification proposals being brought forward for Dounreay and the surrounding area, provided that these will not foreclose future options for the very long-term nature of the site. The Council through the Caithness Partnership also supports the view that Dounreay should continue for the foreseeable future as a location for large scale business and industrial activities, particularly in view of the major site infrastructure which exists. The prospects for creating a major science and technology centre, for example, will

be assisted by the availability of the highly skilled workforce in the area. The Council and Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise wish to explore the scope for developing a business and industrial park including use of the former airfield once the need for facilities associated with decommissioning becomes more apparent. In the meantime significant early tree planting around the perimeter of the airfield may be appropriate in order to create an attractive landscape setting for longer term development.

Decommissioning activities, including recruitment of staff, and prospects for diversification would be enhanced by:

- more private housing to rent and purchase in the West Caithness area;
- improved community facilities, such as a major indoor sports centre in Thurso;
- road improvements, notably to the A9 between Latheron and Clashmore, realignment of the A836 at Bridge of Forss and completion of a Thurso bypass;
- improved air links from Wick;
- maintenance and improvement of the rail network, particularly for freight;
- improved bus services; and
- upgrading of the Shebster water supply.

***Policies***

**Safeguarding Zone**

***(a) A 5 km Nuclear Safeguarding Zone is delineated around Dounreay within which any planning applications shall be the subject of consultation with the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate and the Health and Safety Executive.***

## Decommissioning and Remediation

***(b) The Council will work closely with the UKAEA to translate the decommissioning and restoration programmes described in the Dounreay Site Restoration Plan, as approved by the HSE and SEPA, into a land use planning framework for the timely, safe and environmentally acceptable decommissioning, restoration and after use of the Dounreay site (\*see below).***

## Diversification

***(c) The Council will consult with the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate and Health and Safety Executive on planning applications for diversification proposals on land within or contiguous to the Dounreay site. The Council will support such proposals provided that it is satisfied that they will not adversely impact on the future mainstream activities of the Dounreay site.***

***(d) The Council will work closely with the operators and Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise, as well as the local community, to identify opportunities for diversification in the Dounreay area, including a business/ industrial park and science and technology business centre.***

## Supporting Infrastructure and Facilities

***(e) The Council, through the Caithness Economic Partnership, will seek to progress improvements to strategic transport links and other infrastructure networks and to increase housing supply and community facilities to help maximise economic benefit from future activities associated with Dounreay. NOSWA proposes to***

***upgrade the water supply in 2003/04 at a cost of £2.5 million.***

## Tourism/Visitor Facilities

***(f) The Council supports in principle the provision of additional visitor facilities and access as decommissioning progresses in order to potentially attract more tourists to the Dounreay site.***



*Photo: Dounreay Visitor Centre*

## \* The Council's position on waste management

The statement below represents the Council's position on waste management related to decommissioning and remediation of Dounreay. This does not reflect national policy and is not part of the Highland Structure Plan as approved by Scottish Ministers [see Highland Structure Plan 2001: Foreword, paragraphs 2.17.20, 2.17.21 & 2.17.22 and policies W8 & W10].

*The Council supports the decommissioning and environmental remediation of the Dounreay site. Pending arrangements for disposal at an appropriate time and in an appropriate way, proposals for retrieval, treatment, conditioning, packaging and storage of waste arisings will be considered sympathetically, provided they are in accordance with an appropriate waste management strategy and incorporate retrievability and monitorability.*

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## 24. Oil and Gas

The new Structure Plan indicates that there may be a need to identify the opportunity for a major oil/gas related landfall site on the north Caithness coast. However, if this involves processing of gas from the Aurora gas gathering project, for example, an area at least the size of the current complex and airfield at Dounreay would be required. Development of such a facility at Dounreay would raise serious concerns about the timing and scale of such a development being compatible with or prejudicing on-going decommissioning activities. The nature of both activities in close proximity also raises safety issues and there may be major infrastructure requirements well in excess of the current provision at Dounreay. This would include off site improvements to the road network, including a Thurso Bypass, appropriate access to the sea via an extended Scrabster Harbour and/or perhaps extension of the railway. In view of these requirements a site between Dounreay and Thurso, possibly in the vicinity of the former Forss Naval Base seems more likely. The situation with the World oil economy and on-going difficulties with activities in the Atlantic Frontier suggest a

major oil and gas processing facility in a much longer term timescale. Furthermore the extensive requirements associated with assessing the environmental impact and feasibility of such a major project and associated infrastructure precludes this Local Plan from identifying a more specific site. Nevertheless the potential jobs associated with the construction and operation of such a complex would be a major boost to the local economy and result in an upsurge in demand for housing and support services throughout the County. The long term safeguarded site at Murkle Bay and the former base at Forss are considered to have some potential as related or back up opportunities.

#### **Policy**

***The Council will keep under review the need to accommodate a major oil and gas processing facility on the north coast. Potential sites should be considered in consultation with the oil industry and the community.***

25. Since the mid 1970's successive development plans have acknowledged the potential of land south of Murkle Bay as a site for major industry requiring access to the sea. This was aimed in particular at possible oil-related development because of deep water close to the shore, the shelter afforded from the north west and the minimum road infrastructure required. The new Structure Plan identifies this area for major strategic business and industrial purposes and the site is expected to offer long term development potential.

#### **Policy**

***Land south of Murkle Bay is safeguarded as a large scale strategic business and industrial development site. The Council will presume against any proposals which would prejudice its***

***longer term potential. Development proposals will require to be the subject of a full Environmental Impact Assessment accounting for:***

- ***the importance of the surrounding countryside as an agricultural, recreational, tourism and conservation resource;***
- ***the scenic views afforded over the site from the A836 road to Dunnet Bay, Dunnet Head and Orkney;***
- ***the importance of the natural heritage, notably the wildlife interest of Dunnet and Murkle Bays;***
- ***residential amenity;***
- ***the special qualities of the adjacent Dunnet Bay and beach; and***
- ***large scale water demand with the potential adverse effect on supplies to Duncanshill and Sibster.***

26. ***The former US Navy communications base at Forss on the coast between Thurso and Dounreay is a large scale complex available for development. The major extent of the site and buildings, together with the existing infrastructure suggest potential for uses with a significant workforce and/or resident population. Consideration has been given to a range of uses including a research centre, a wind turbine site, long term secure storage, tourist facilities, residential and industrial storage associated with the oil industry.***

27. ***The Council supports the revival of the flagstone industry and will safeguard the potential of existing workings and appropriate dormant quarries from prejudicial development. Appropriate restoration measures will also be encouraged.***

28. ***In the Strathmore area the Council will seek to regularise working of the remaining sand and gravel resource at Dirlot and Knockdoo through the provisions of the Review of Old Mineral Permissions (Section 74 of the Town and Country Planning Scotland Act 1997).***

#### **Under Primary Policies PP3 & 4:**

29. ***The Council will encourage appropriate tourism and educational initiatives that derive local economic and community benefit from the many archaeological and historic features throughout Caithness. More specifically, Hill of Warehouse/Yarrows, Camster Strath and Dunbeath Strath have potential in this regard for interpretation facilities which are sympathetic to the protection of cultural and historic interests. Measures to derive economic benefit, including interpretation facilities, should respect that the integrity and sympathetic protection of the archaeological resource is of paramount importance.***

#### **Special Uses**

#### **Under Primary Policy PP1:**

30. ***The Council recommends to the Scottish Executive that priority is given to the upgrading of the A9 and A99 from Wick to Clashmore in Sutherland. Full realignment is imperative, particularly on the Ord to Helmsdale section, and should be associated wherever possible by funding improvements to the complementary rail route [TC5].***

31. *The North of Scotland Water Authority intend to carry out the following improvements over the next three years:*

Water Supply - mains renewals, commencing 2000/01 at a cost of £1.1 million

- (a) *Bruan to Thrumster*
- (b) *Thrumster to Sarclet*
- (c) *Bowermadden to Reaster*
- (d) *Brabstermire*
- (e) *Nybster to North Keiss*
- (f) *Weydale to Haimer*

Water Supply - new mains

- (g) *Dunn to Haster, 2000 - 2002, £1,260,000*
- (h) *Haster to Reiss, 2001/02, £160,000*
- (i) *Stemster to Dunn, 2001/02, £450,000*
- (j) *Wick to Thrumster, 2001/02, £280,000*

Drainage - waste water treatment

- (k) *Mey, 2003/04, £150,000*
- (l) *Newtonhill (as part of the Wick agglomeration), 2001/03*
- (m) *Scarfskerry, 2004/05, £380,000*

32. *Planning permission has been granted for a new ferry terminal at Gills Bay where land is allocated for harbour related uses including marshalling areas. A further 1.2 ha. of land to the south of the pier is identified for business / tourist uses subject to the proposed ferry service commencing. Development will require new access arrangements.*

33. *The Highland Rail Partnership has developed a railfreight terminal at Georgemas. This is expected to include land for additional sidings, well screened external storage areas and transit storage warehousing. There may be scope for additional development in the future,*



*Photos: Above - Georgemas Junction with developing railfreight terminal. Below - traffic held up by adverse winter weather on the A9 Trunk Road at Berriedale Braes.*



*particularly of activities that would benefit from a location close to a major rail terminal. A framework or master plan will be required to guide development including an indication of*

*servicing, screen planting and landscaping proposals. Potential additional uses to be considered include an auction mart, agricultural centre, slaughterhouse, meat processing and other industrial uses adding value to primary products (e.g. timber processing), and possibly storage related to the oil industry. Such additional development potential will depend upon the availability of a satisfactory drainage system and a major power supply. If this full range of activities is developed there may be scope to provide commuter rail links to the complex from Wick and Thurso in the longer term.*

34. *The Council will work with the Thrumster community to identify suitable sites for a new hall and playing field. Implementation will be subject to securing appropriate funding.*

Under Primary Policy PP4:

35. *The Council operates a strategic landfill waste disposal site at Seater that covers the northern Highland area. The future of this facility is being examined as part of the developing waste strategy for the Highlands. More immediately, additional works are proposed for leachate treatment at the site.*

36. *The sites of all existing sewage treatment works and safeguarding areas.*

37. *The site of proposed sewage treatment works at Watten, programmed for 2000/02, Lybster, Mey and Scarfskerry, with the appropriate safeguarding areas.*

## Environment

### Under Primary Policy PP1:

38. The Council will encourage the restoration, reuse or redevelopment of derelict land and buildings, subject to services being available and, in appropriate cases, investigation of archaeological interests. Proposals for croft houses and other buildings in close proximity to the A9 and A99 roads should not prejudice future road upgrading.

39. The former Mill at Westerdale offers scope for restoration, interpretation and basic visitor facilities.

40. Castles Girnigoe and Sinclair have potential for improved footpath approaches and interpretation. The dangerous condition of the buildings prevents entry to them by the public.

41. There is an opportunity for further promotion and interpretation at Whaligoe, including the lime kiln, mill, steps and harbour. The steps would benefit from maintenance works. However, they can be dangerous and any works will have to be carefully considered.

42. The Council will support the expansion and improvement of tourist facilities at John O'Groats and has prepared a Framework Plan to highlight these opportunities. This is a long term vision which requires substantial investment and the co-operation of all public and private sector interests and the formulation of a co-ordinated programme of investment. The Council has allocated £30,000 in 2000/01 for environmental improvements as a first phase. A further

£50,000 is programmed for 2004/05. In the longer term the Council intends to work with other public agencies and the private sector to prepare an Action Plan to include:

- upgrading / expansion of the hotel;
- provision of a Visitor Centre;
- soft / hard landscaping improvements;
- rationalise signposting;
- improve car parking;
- provision of a coastal walk; and
- creation of a gateway feature.



Photo: John O' Groats

### Under Primary Policy PP2:

43. The Council will encourage access to and enjoyment of the countryside and coastal area, subject to avoiding conflict with traditional land use activities. There is considerable potential for the development of tourist trails, themed or otherwise, notably the extension of archaeology trails. The development of a long distance coastal walk linking a whole range of

heritage features and areas would have potential to attract more visitors to Caithness, supporting more back up facilities. This would also be a significant resource for residents. Thurso Community Council are seeking to have the Thurso to West Murkle Lady Janet's walk restored with grant aid from the Crown Estates Commission. The Council will also promote a Countryside Around Towns Initiative for the hinterland immediately around Thurso and Wick.

44. The opportunity to provide modest interpretation and appropriate access to the following Sites of Local Nature Conservation Interest. will be considered with SNH, landowners and tenants:

- (a) Forss Water;
- (b) Loch Olginney;
- (c) St. Johns Loch;
- (d) Dunnet Head;
- (e) Noss Head;
- (f) Loch Watenan;
- (g) Keiss and Ackergill Links;
- (h) Flows of Leanas;
- (i) Burn of Houstry; and
- (j) Hill of Forss.

Additional sites may be identified in the future from Local Biodiversity Action Plans. The Council will also consider with SNH and local interests the potential for designation of Local Nature Reserves.

### Under Primary Policy PP3:

45. The following areas, identified as Regional Scenic Coasts, would benefit from improved interpretation and small scale visitor facilities:

- (a) Dunnet Head; and
- (b) Duncansby Head

46. The Council will seek to identify and safeguard scenic views from unsympathetic development. Views from public roads to open water are particularly important for amenity and tourism. To aid appreciation of scenic views the Council will favour improved lay-by parking, visitor interpretation and view point features, notably on the A9, A99 and A836.

47. The Council will safeguard the following locally important areas or features from unsympathetic development and will encourage appropriate management measures in association with landowners, tenants, community groups and other interested parties:

- (a) Holburn Head
- (b) Dirlot Gorge – limited access and angling interests
- (c) Sandside Bay – where sand extraction will continue to be resisted
- (d) Dunnet Bay - Dunnet Beach is a key recreational resource used for a wide variety of activities and backed up by the local ranger. The Council will:
  - restrict development to passive pursuits and conservation measures;
  - encourage the provision of suitable changing facilities;
  - encourage the upgrading of the pavilion
  - support measures for further dune stabilisation;
  - secure public access from the footbridge at Castletown; and
  - consider improved car parking in association with development at the Old Castletown Mill (see Castletown statement).
- (e) Whaligoe Steps.



Photos: Above - Sandside Bay, Reay  
Below - abandoned crofting settlement at Broubster



The following areas are identified under Primary Policy PP4:

48. At Loch Calder, a proposed SSSI and SPA, the Council will consider the scope for basic visitor facilities, notably a small car park and picnic site at the south end, in association with landowners, angling interests, community organisations, the North of Scotland Water Authority and SNH.

49. At Loch More there is scope for basic visitor facilities adjacent to the dam, including interpretation with links to the Blar nam Faoileag National Nature Reserve.

50. At the Broubster Crofts abandoned settlement the Council will favour more in the way of interpretation of these Scheduled Ancient Monuments, together with appropriate parking for potential visitors. The scope to combine such facilities with interpretation of the nearby Broubster leans, an internationally important area for birds, should be considered.

## ▼ John O'Groats Framework Plan

