

## 7. HALKIRK



### Background

Halkirk (popn. 970) is one of Scotland's earliest planned villages, established on its present grid-iron pattern of streets during the early and middle part of the last century by the agricultural improver, Sir John Sinclair of Ulbster. The bulk of the village lies between the bridge crossing of the River Thurso and the railway line to the south surrounded by a vast flat agricultural hinterland. With a good range of community facilities and local businesses Halkirk plays an important role as a local service centre. It is also a desirable commuter settlement, given its location less than 10 kilometres (6 miles) south of Thurso.

The original development concept was based on 1 acre smallholdings with small cottages located close to the access roads. Few holdings now remain undeveloped with most of the pressure for housing in the last 30 years being met through infill as the agricultural use of the land ceased.

The nature of this development in the recent years has given the impression that it has not been well planned, despite the existence of Council guidelines. Local concern has been expressed about the high density of development, overlooking of property, lack of building lines and inconsistent provision of roads, footpaths, lay-bys and boundary enclosures. Existing guidelines and shortage of public funding have also failed to provide common open space/recreation areas, particularly in close proximity to new houses at the southern end of the village. Problems intensified with the recent upsurge in housing pressure due to a shortage of land in Thurso and the haphazard pattern of development. There is now a need for greater co-ordination of future development, notably through detailed siting and design guidance and to agree a mechanism for securing recreation areas in association with such development.

Within the village remaining undeveloped infill sites can accommodate up to 120 houses. This should be more than adequate for the anticipated requirement in the next 10 to 15 years. Outwith the current village limits additional land at Comliff Terrace is capable of development, but this should be for longer-term development. The rate of development will continue to be influenced by the level of demand displaced from Thurso. Although it is hoped that the village will become more self-sustaining and not just be seen as a commuter settlement for Thurso and Dounreay. In this respect, maintaining existing businesses is important, as is the creation of new employment opportunities within or nearby the village. Halkirk is well placed to benefit from more significant development at Georgemas Junction, where consideration is being given to

expanding railfreight handling initially and more substantial development in the longer term.

The provision of additional community facilities and amenity areas is also important, particularly with an increasing population. In addition to the area for a new football ground development, the community's priorities are for another equipped playground at the south end of the village, and a bowling green and millennium garden close to the centre.

The grid iron pattern of the main part of the village provides a high level of access. However, the increased level of traffic associated with development has led to calls for traffic calming and limitations on use by heavy vehicles. The need for further improvements and calming measures in association with development has to be balanced with the maintenance of the character of the lanes.

The riverside area is an important amenity for the village, although public access is somewhat limited, mainly for ownership, safety and angling reasons. If a series of paths could be developed along the riverside linking the old Milton Mill, the bridge, the Abbey Church, churchyard and Braal Castle, this could become a significant asset for the village and attract more tourists. Continued protection of the riverside area from intrusive development is also important in this regard, as is the restoration of the Mill and the Church.

## Community Input

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

### Village

HOUSING - affordable/sheltered; sites at Comlifoot Terrace.

EMPLOYMENT/COMMUNITY - convert/re-use/demolish former Poor House (Fair View) for care facilities for elderly or as a craft industry centre; reuse empty wing of primary school for cottage industry.

RECREATION - village park on vacant site south west of Sinclair Street; bowling green; upgrade and extend existing play area at playing field.

COMLIFOOT ROAD - improve/do not improve road; pavement; street lighting/no street lighting; protect historic site; protect woodland.

### Countryside

Protect historic sites/promote for tourism

Tourist facility & picnic site at Loch Calder

In addition representatives of the Community Council participated in site visits around the village with the local Member, Roads and Planning officials to highlight concerns about the effects of past development and to identify solutions and priorities for the future. The outcome of this consultation is reflected in the Plan.

## Development Factors

Expansion of the sewage works will be required for development in excess of 80 houses and until such time will limit opportunities to the infill areas. Larger agricultural holdings beyond the settlement boundary, and the riverside amenity



*Photo: Riverside area and primary school*

area with associated woodland are important to the setting of the village. These merit stronger safeguarding policies to avoid encroachment by development and encourage improved amenities within the village. There are also servicing restrictions along the Comlifoot and Gerston Farm roads. Future long-term expansion for housing should not be too remote from the commercial centre of the village. This suggests development between Comlifoot Terrace and the river but not until existing infill opportunities are substantially taken up. Uses generating more in the way of traffic or needing to be sited away from housing (e.g. industry) require a location near to main access roads. The potential of land at the south end of the village towards the railway will be examined in this regard.

## Objectives

The Plan seeks to:

- identify further opportunities for housing development over the next 15 years and beyond;
- establish a revised framework for co-ordinating new housing development, including specific guidance on siting, design and access;
- set out a protocol for securing financial contributions to improve the amenity of the village in association with future development;
- encourage reuse of vacant property;
- encourage more business and light industrial development in suitable locations; and
- preserve the setting of the village from encroachment by unplanned development.

## 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 the central area through a mix of uses by infill or redevelopment. Scope exists for further commercial activities, parking, housing to a higher density and improvement of open space provision (see 2).***



*Photo: Housing development, Church Street*

2. On vacant ground at the west end of Sinclair Street the Council will encourage the development of a community garden, a small car park and housing (see 17b).

H: Housing

3. The Council has prepared a Framework Plan to guide future housing development. This indicates remaining development opportunities with individual site capacities and road access points. Any further proposals for new housing the areas indicated on the Inset Map and Table 3 below will be expected to conform to the Framework Plan, and development guidelines in Appendix IV. These guidelines indicate standards for access and footpaths, building lines, boundary treatment and design criteria. Developers will be expected to provide a financial contribution in lieu of the development of new or enhanced public open space, recreation facilities (see 17) and minor road

Table 3: Housing Sites as indicated on Halkirk Framework Plan									
Site ref.	Capacity	Site ref.	Capacity	Site ref.	Capacity	Site ref.	Capacity	Site ref.	Capacity
1	4	9	1	17	1	25	3	33	2
2	1	10	3	18	8	26	3	34	1
3	2	11	3	19	2	27	2	35	9
4	2	12	4	20	3	28	1	36	2
5	1	13	1	21	3	29	1	37	2
6	2	14	9	22	7	30	1	38	2
7	4	15	1	23	1	31	1	3	1
8	5	16	2	24	5	32	3	9	1
Sub Total	21	Sub Total	24	Sub Total	30	Sub Total	15	40	20
<b>TOTAL 110</b>									

SEE FRAMEWORK PLAN

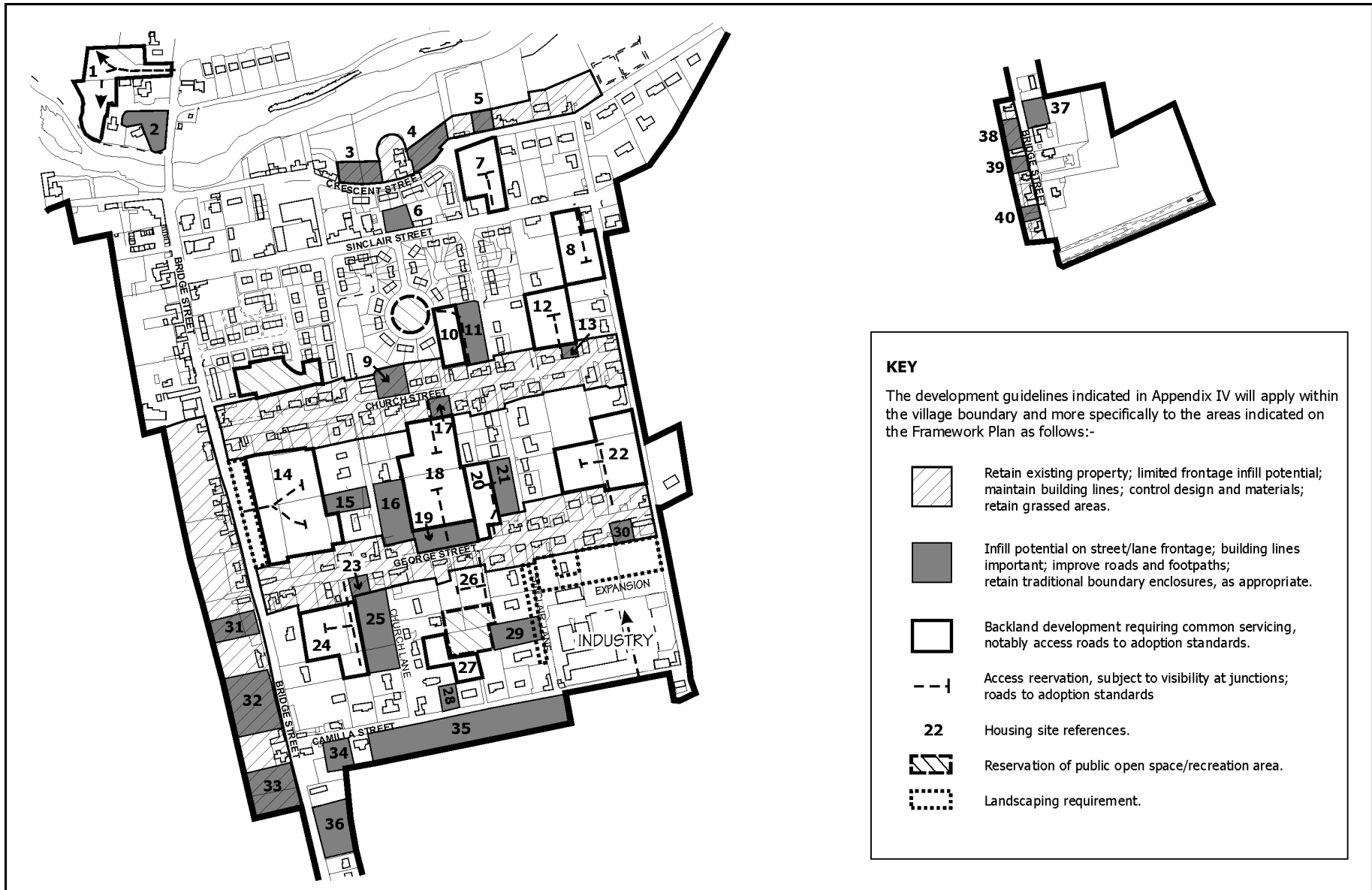
safety improvements (see 15). This will be a one off capital payment to a central fund for use in Halkirk. This is payable in advance of granting planning consent either through a Section 75 legal Agreement or other proper arrangement with the Council. The amount will vary in relation to the number of apartments in the proposed house with the scale of contributions indicated in Appendix IV.

4. At Henrietta Street approximately 0.8 ha. of Council land remains undeveloped. Its requirement for public sector housing within the Plan period is unlikely. There is community support for developing a bowling green over this area, which would be an appropriate alternative development of local benefit (see 17d). Any development for housing should not exceed 10 dwellings and accord with the Framework Plan and Development Guidelines (see 3). This includes financial contributions to the provision of open space.

5. At Fairview, the former Poor House at the north end of the village, the Council will favour conversion to dwellings, along with additional development within close proximity to the building, including extension. All additional buildings should complement the existing, particularly through use of finishing materials. Alternatively the use for business, tourism, office or light industrial purposes possibly mixed with residential, or 'stand alone', would be appropriate provided there is no detrimental impact on the amenity of existing or future residents (see 9).

6. The Council will favour conversion of the former Milton Mill to residential use, either as a permanent dwelling or for holiday letting, perhaps mixed with small business use. Potential for other uses would be subject to access, notably the upgrading of the substandard road on the north side of the Ulbster Arms, and other services being available.

# ▼ Halkirk Framework Plan



7. *The potential of land to the south of Comlifoot Terrace and west of Bridge Street will be considered for longer term development with landowners. Approximately 3.4 ha. with potential for 30 to 40 houses is identified. In the meantime the land will be safeguarded from premature development in order to avoid prejudicing the servicing of allocated land elsewhere in the village. More specifically, the Council will not approve development in advance of the sewage works being upgraded and as long as allocated land elsewhere in the village with capacity for more than 20 dwellings remains undeveloped. Limited access may be feasible from the south east corner, but most development should be served from Comlifoot Terrace. Developers will be expected to prepare a master plan for development of the site to indicate a detailed layout, phasing, landscaping, open space and remote footpath access.*

8. *The Council will maintain a strong presumption against new housing development on land immediately outwith the village boundary (see 21), in the vicinity of the riverside, along the Comlifoot Road towards Braal Castle and on all areas safeguarded for open space or recreational purposes.*

B: Business

9. *At Fairview there is potential for business, tourism, office or light industrial purposes, possibly mixed with residential or 'stand alone' would be appropriate provided there is no detrimental impact on the amenity of existing or future residents (see 5). This could be a particularly attractive rural location for high technology or knowledge-based business activities.*



*Photo: Former Poorhouse at Fairview*

I: Industry

10. *Adjacent to the premises of DM Geddes land is allocated for limited expansion of industrial activities. In view of traffic problems in the area the Council will seek an alternative access arrangement in association with further development. Ideally this should involve moving the main access for larger vehicles to the Camilla Street frontage and modest widening of the junction with Bridge Street (see also 13). Consideration will also be given to placing restrictions on related traffic approaching the site from the north. The Council will presume against further development in the defined buffer area where additional screen planting would improve the amenity for surrounding residents.*

11. *The Council will consider the potential for the location of more significant industrial development at the south end of the village*

*adjacent to the railway line. Development will be subject to adequate drainage and substantial screen planting around the land. Potential may exist for railfreight related activities.*

S: Special Uses

12. *The current capacity of the sewage treatment works will limit the level of housing development in the longer term. A maximum of 80 additional house completions from mid 1999 will be permitted in advance of upgrading of the works in longer term.*

13. *The Council will consider scope for additional widening of the carriageway and footpath provision on the south side of Camilla Street (see 10).*

14. *The Council will consider the scope for providing a new footpath on the south side of Crescent Street between the Ross Institute and the Garage.*

15. *The Council will introduce a 20 m.p.h. speed limit to the narrow streets and lanes and a number of traffic calming measures using contributions from developers (see 3).*

16. *The former Halkirk halt on the railway line will be safeguarded from development which would prejudice its potential to be re-opened as commuter station in longer term.*

A: Amenity

17. *The Council will require contributions towards the following public open space/recreation facilities in the village in association with applications for new houses on*

sites covered by the Framework Plan (see 3 above and Appendix IV):

- a) upgrading of the existing play equipment in the Recreation Park north of Braal Terrace and at Church Lane;
- b) the development of land at Sinclair Street for a millennium garden and car park (see 2);
- c) the development of a further recreation area south of George Street between Church and Sinclair Lanes; and
- d) the development of a bowling green on vacant land to the south of Henrietta Street, if not required for housing (see 4).

18. Land to the north of the existing recreation ground is considered suitable for a new football ground, as per the 1994 proposal.

19. Along the riverside area consideration will be given to the possibility of enhancing and extending the network of paths and provision of basic interpretation and seating. Completion of a loop would depend upon the co-operation of landowners and the restoration of the footbridge at Braal Castle.

20. The Council will encourage reconstruction of the Abbey Church with appropriate interpretation of it and the churchyard to attract more visitors.

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 36).



Photos: Above – Church Lane play area  
Right – Milton Mill and riverside path  
Below – Abbey Church and church yard

