

12. THURSO



Background

Thurso (popn. 9000) is the principal market, service and social centre for West and Central Caithness and a wider hinterland reaching deep into North Sutherland. It lies at the mouth of the River Thurso overlooking a deep sheltered bay. Abundant local fisheries, fertile land, a fordable river crossing and readily available building materials, allowed development from early Norse beginnings into an important judicial, religious and fishing community trading with Scandinavia and continental Europe. The street plan of the medieval "Fisherbiggins" west of the river mouth remains largely intact. At the end of the eighteenth century changing social and economic circumstances led the visionary Sir John Sinclair to found the gridiron "New Town" over adjacent land to the south. As this developed, roads to the south of Caithness improved, followed by the

railhead established in 1874, whilst Thurso and adjoining harbours, including Scrabster, became vital to the burgeoning flagstone trade.

The town lost ground after World War I with the decline of traditional industries and consequent depopulation. This decline was not arrested until after the nuclear industry development at Dounreay in 1954, when the population more than doubled from 4000 to 10000 in the following twenty years. This period saw a succession of major housing and community projects when Thurso strengthened and consolidated its service functions. The population slowly declined during the 1980s because of the faltering economic prospects for second and third generation families. This decline was exacerbated from the end of that decade by a large number of job losses at Dounreay and Vulcan, and through the closure of the US Base at Forss. Special measures to help counter the effects of these losses have included attracting new technology enterprises to the Thurso Business Park and promoting Scrabster Harbour for fish landings, downstream processing and as a forward supply base for Atlantic Frontier oil-related activity. Creation of new service sector jobs at the BT call centre and the lithium ion battery factory were recent major investments. There are strong prospects for further hi-tech enterprise and new opportunities for the College as part of a future University of the Highlands and Islands. A build up of jobs at Dounreay are expected underpin more immediate growth prospects as activities switch towards decommissioning and site remediation in the next 10 years. The effects of longer term run down will also be strenuously addressed, particularly through encouraging more diversification into new areas of work using new technology, skills

learned in the nuclear industry and the availability of training. Thurso has a major role to play as a location for associated development. There is also a need to promote opportunities for more conventional small and medium sized businesses.

The Council is involved in partnership initiatives to regenerate the town centre and the peripheral housing estate of High Ormlie. The main emphasis of the town centre project so far has been to progress a revamp of the pedestrian precinct, encourage better shop front designs, improve security and promote reuse of vacant or derelict properties. A detailed strategy document is emerging as the basis for co-ordinating future action. While in Ormlie measures are largely being taken under the government's Social Inclusion Partnership, with a major effort from within the community itself to tackle social and environmental concerns about the estate, and to increase opportunities for local employment. Physical regeneration of other parts of the town, such as river frontage properties north of the bridge and possibly around the railway station, also requires more detailed consideration.

The ready availability of housing and a good range of community facilities will continue to play an important role in maximising economic prospects, by attracting incoming workers or maintaining existing residents. In 1995 Thurso's housing requirements came under close scrutiny with the preparation of an Alteration to the adopted Local Plan. This indicated a requirement to accommodate a further 400 to 500 houses in the period 1996 to 2011, largely on greenfield sites around the edge of the town. Despite the allocation of additional land its availability remained limited up until early 1999 but

development is now under way at West Gill and Heathfield.

A revised Highland Structure Plan assessment of housing requirements, based on the aspirations of the Caithness Partnership anticipates house building rates will average almost 20 per year in the next 5 to 10 years. The need to identify opportunities for 250 new houses in that period includes an allowance for flexibility and choice of locations. Projecting forward a further 5 years in line with government guidance suggests a need for almost 400 houses by 2014. A large proportion of houses could be accommodated on sites already allocated. However, factors such as alternative development or amenity considerations have necessitated changes to the capacity of the land supply.

Additional opportunities are essential to avoid limiting flexibility to cater for the possibility of a sudden upsurge in demand in the medium to long term if the efforts and aspirations of the Caithness Economic Partnership are realised. This assumes that over the next 10 years decommissioning work and diversification at Dounreay will be turned to full advantage, supported by new resource and knowledge-based activities and service industries. In the longer term there is also the prospect of oil related jobs if a major landfall and oil and gas processing site can be established on the north coast. This, together with the possibility of Dounreay becoming a major science and technology business centre, would significantly increase local job opportunities and the demand for services and housing across Caithness, notably in Thurso. As such, it would be prudent to take a longer term view of potential house building requirements in setting out the future development framework for the town.



Photo: AGM Battery factory at business park

Looking 25 years ahead will allow capacity to be built in to major infrastructure improvements, the introduction of initiatives for managing the surrounding countryside and establishment of an early landscape framework for development. In this respect an assumption is made that opportunities for a further 500 houses in the period 2011 to 2024 should be indicated in and around Thurso. This produces a combined requirement of 750 over 25 years.

Thurso has a relatively good range of community facilities and services associated with a town of its size and catchment but additional provision is required to sustain population, reduce trips south out of the County and attract new residents. The College continues to expand and attract more students, a new cinema is proposed and the need for youth facilities is well known. Thurso has also been identified under national guidelines as a preferred location for a major indoor sports

centre. The town is also being considered as one of the options for locating a Caithness community/arts centre. Further consolidation of retailing within the town centre, together with development of visitor attractions and facilities would strengthen Thurso's role as a sub-regional shopping and service centre. Additional playing field and neighbourhood facilities will be required in association with longer term development.

Traffic congestion in the central area is of great concern and is compounded by the fact that there is only one road crossing of the river. Construction of a by-pass or relief road west of the town is the favoured solution but under current government policy this is not eligible for inclusion in the national Trunk Roads programme. Nevertheless its construction would aid the creation of jobs at Scrabster, the business park and at Dounreay in the longer term, as well as the proper development of the town. Progression of early phases may be feasible as a *western distributor* in association with housing and business expansion. Improvements to the treatment of the town's sewage will be required to comply with European legislation by 2005. These may also allow extension of the drainage network to Sir Archibald Road and possibly Murkle in the longer term. Water supply continues to be deficient to the south west of the town.

Planning policies must balance the needs for continuing expansion of housing, business and leisure uses, with those of containment required to protect surrounding agricultural land, natural and cultural heritage features, amenity areas and attractive countryside setting. More restrictive policies for new development in the open

countryside surrounding the town are necessary to avoid further problems associated with commuter housing pressure. The introduction of a complementary Countryside Around Towns partnership initiative could encourage farm diversification and future management of land for recreation. Within the town the attractive open spaces adjoining the river and coastal edge are major 'green wedges' meriting policies for protection and enhancement. Similarly, playing fields and local open spaces are important to the amenity of their surrounding areas.

In addition to the setting of Thurso the town's built environment is a major asset. The Outstanding Conservation Area, containing a number of important Listed buildings covers most of the town centre. This attracts more attention because of its historic background and the Council's statutory duty to protect and enhance. Additional measures are required and promoted through the Plan. Less is said of the suburban housing estates developed since the Second World War using innovative town planning and architectural methods to provide attractive residential layouts. Most of these areas, notably Mount Vernon and Pennyland, were developed by the nuclear industry in the wake of the establishment of Dounreay. At Mount Vernon, for example, the layout was organised along the lines of the 'Radburn' principles, whereby main pedestrian and vehicle movements are quite distinctly separated. Such examples are worthy of a modest protection policy to require future development to have regard to their integrity. In some cases enhancement may also be required. Improvements are also required in the industrial areas to face-lift, relocate or re-use eyesore properties.



Photo: Ormlie Moors

Community Input

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

Town Centre

SHOPPING - improve shopping in precinct.

HOUSING - sheltered and affordable.

LEISURE/VISITOR FACILITIES - facilities for the disabled, elderly and youth; restore and re-use the old Brewery; cinema; tourist facilities; better located public toilets.

TRAFFIC calming.

Rest of Town

HOUSING - more housing for rent or affordable to buy in various locations in and around the town; large detached and family houses at West Gill and west of hospital; better new house designs.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC - regenerate High Ormlie; small business units at Ormlie and Mount Pleasant.

COMMUNITY/SERVICES - leisure centre/sports hall; recreational use of the Moors area; improved public transport around the periphery; traffic calming in the Pennyland and Ormlie estates, and on Scrabster Road; better treatment of sewage/new works at river mouth.

ENVIRONMENT - managing land around the countryside fringe for wildlife; protect farmland, "open space" and views at Pennyland Farm, especially on north side; establish or improve footpaths at various locations around the periphery; upgrade industrial area north of Sir Archibald Road.

Countryside

HOUSING - affordable housing; more large detached houses.

INDUSTRY - landscape and promote Janetstown industrial estate for development.

COMMUNITY/SERVICES - replace golf clubhouse; traffic calming/speed limit at Glengolly.

ENVIRONMENT - protect farmland; establish coastal footpath.

Development Factors

The government is placing an increasing emphasis on recycling urban land through redevelopment, property conversions and infill schemes. Such opportunities are limited in the short term due to the need to relocate existing non-residential uses but will be important for accommodating amenity and single person housing, with higher density redevelopment closer into the town centre. The largest

proportion of house building is planned to take place on peripheral greenfield land, with priority to early development of existing land allocations.

In identifying additional land, factors indicated during the 1995 housing study are still relevant and cover all forms of development. In addition to environmental and servicing factors, land availability remains a key issue in determining the location of future development. The prospect of Pennyland Farm on the north west side of the town becoming available offers an opportunity to accommodate medium to longer term development. Parts of the farm are readily serviceable and well located in terms of proximity to major places of employment. Use of good principles in the design, layout and organisation of buildings to suit the topography and climate are important. There is still a need to safeguard the openness of land on the north side of the farm and water supply is not available to the western-most fields. Farming interests, amenity and service deficiency factors limit development at East Mains, Mount Pleasant, Oldfield, Bleachfield, Heathfield and Scrabster Mains.

Objectives

The Plan seeks to:

- improve the vitality and viability of the town centre through a joint strategy;
- identify a range and choice of sites to accommodate 750 houses over the next 25 years;
- assist the re-generation of Ormlie
- allocate additional land for business use;
- enhance the development potential of industrial estates at Ormlie and Janetstown;

- consider the scope for improvements to riverside land, including relocation of industrial uses;
- maintain and enhance existing community facilities and identify a site for a new sports centre;
- identify and promote opportunities for tourist related development, notably the establishment of a significant visitor facility in the town centre;
- identify a provisional route for a western by-pass or distributor road as the basis for discussion with land owners and other interested parties;
- safeguard the Outstanding Conservation Area and promote measures for its enhancement;
- safeguard the surrounding countryside, notably the better farm, recreational and amenity land from unplanned development;
- maintain the layout and urban design attributes of Spring Park, Pennyland and Mount Vernon and to promote good design principles in new residential areas;
- promote 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 indicated in paragraphs 1 to 12.



Photo: Rotterdam/High Streets pedestrian precinct

C: Town Centre

The town centre area is defined on the Central Area Inset 12A. It includes the main shopping streets of Traill Street, Rotterdam Street, High Street and Meadow Lane plus a range of commercial premises in surrounding streets. To the south west the area extends along Princes and Janet Streets stopping just short of the Miller Academy. It also includes a significant number of residential properties, particularly in the old (fisher) town surrounding Old St. Peter's Kirk, and a scattering of semi-commercial, light industrial, leisure, community uses and open space. A significant proportion of the area is covered by the Outstanding Conservation Area designation.

A draft Strategy has been prepared with the following objectives:

- To strengthen Thurso's role as a sub-regional shopping and business centre.

- To improve the physical environment so that it becomes a more attractive and safer place to visit and live in, while protecting traditional and historic attractions.
- To provide an equally high level of accessibility for all users by a range of transport modes.
- To protect the character and amenity of established residential areas and encourage additional housing to maintain a mix of activities.
- To identify and promote development opportunities and to guide and assist their implementation.
- To undertake effective management and promotion.

The full document is separate from the Local Plan. The main policies, proposals and recommendations are indicated as follows:

1. The Council will encourage further commercial development together with improved visitor facilities and residential development within the town centre, having due regard to the availability of parking, the amenity of residential property and the Outstanding Conservation Area. In accordance with national planning guidance and the Highland Structure Plan, potential developers will be required to justify large scale retail development and should give first preference to the town centre as a location for such development. The Thurso Project Group will seek to work with such developers to identify areas with potential for larger scale redevelopment through imaginative urban design and will investigate the feasibility of land assembly, including suitable relocation of



Photo: Town centre redevelopment

existing uses. Smaller scale development opportunities include:

- (a) the former Presto store, Rotterdam Street for retail;**
- (b) the former Job Centre, Rotterdam Street for a retail unit, Internet/Cyber cafe or restaurant;**
- (c) the former St Andrews Church, Orlig Street for retail, restaurant, visitor/cultural centre, arts/exhibition venue or Internet/Cyber cafe;**
- (d) properties between 30 and 34 Princes Street (vacant Mackenzie store, existing newsagent and charity shop), potentially for redevelopment to provide a larger scale retail unit, incorporating the newsagent, with housing on upper floors;**
- (e) the property north west of the old brewery in Manson's/Meadow Lane for public toilets, tourist information centre, retail and extension of public car park;**

- (f) at the Elland Bridge car park as an option for a tourist information centre and public toilets, along with better pedestrian (priority) link to central core, better signing for visitors and expanded car park south west of footbridge approach;**
- (g) the former shop/house/stores, 8 Wilson's Lane etc. for restaurant, office or residential use;**
- (h) the former Marine Inn for a pub/restaurant/small hotel, self-catering flats or permanent dwellings;**
- (i) to the rear of the Royal Hotel, to redevelop/upgrade as hotel accommodation, including coach parking and access at rear; and**
- (j) the gap above the More Store in the Town Hall Square for office and/or residential use.**

2. It is proposed to convert the former brewery at Manson's Lane (pictured below) into a significant visitor attraction/orientation centre, including an archive with genealogy research facilities.



3. *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 Traill, Rotterdam and High Streets, where they would interrupt continuous retail frontages;*
 - *promote supplementary design guidance # for shop front design and signage with priority implementation to be encouraged in Traill Street, the pedestrian precinct, Town Hall Square and all other Listed commercial buildings.*

4. *The highest priority will be given to progressing an environmental improvement scheme for the Rotterdam Street/High Street/Town Hall Square pedestrian precinct. The Council has allocated £190,000 towards this in 2001 - 03, with additional funding being sought from CASE and the European Programme.*

5. *Elsewhere consideration will be given to the following:*
- (a) *Riverside improvements along the riverside, south of the harbour to Bridgend, including the Elland footbridge, building up the river*

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

wall from the TIC to the bridge to lessen flood risk, landscaping from harbour to Bridgend.

- (b) *Improving the TIC car park.*
- (c) *The informal parking area opposite Tollemache House at High Street.*
- (d) *Improving the car park and service area to the rear Tollemache House and the BB Hall.*

6. *Encouragement will be given to the incorporation of public art features within improvement and redevelopment schemes. For commercial development of £100,000 or more in value, a contribution will be sought from developers towards the provision of public art in the town centre. The level of contribution will not exceed 1% of the total cost of development.*

7. *It is proposed to develop the tourist potential of Old St. Peter's Kirk (pictured below) and harbour through better signing and interpretation, as well as part of a Heritage Trail.*



8. *The Council will also seek further improvements to the pedestrian environment and priority, accounting for the need for the flow of traffic on the main roads, shop deliveries and other essential users. Close examination will also be given to ways of providing safer access for cyclists, including priority routes from the edge of town and secure and convenient parking facilities in the town centre. The Council may consider these measures as part of an overall scheme for traffic management.*

9. *The Council will consult with the Trunk Roads Authority on the possibility of encouraging better access to and from long stay car parks, notably through improvements to the junction of Sir George's Street, Janet Street and Riverside Road.*

10. *At Swanson Street the Pentland Housing Association is to provide 8 flats through conversion of vacant houses and demolition and redevelopment of the former bakery.*

11. *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.*

12. Where re-development is approved within the area of archaeological potential (Map 12C) permission will be conditioned to ensure the satisfactory excavation and recording of remains.

H: Housing



Photo: New housing at West Gill

13. The sites in tables 13.1 & 13.2 are allocated for housing. While it is possible for development to commence on all sites within the Plan period, it is anticipated that the market will dictate the later completion of some of them. Servicing requirements dictate comprehensive implementation by contractors and housing associations, possibly including serviced fees for self-build purposes with GRO grant or similar assistance.

14. The housing sites listed in Table 14 are capable of development within the Plan period.

Site	Area (ha.)	Capacity	Comments
(a) Upper Burnside (West Gill)	7.8	90	under construction
(b) Pennyland South	3.0	40-45	private plots/HA development; access via extension of Provost Cormack Drive; link to Henderson Street; upgrade Moors/Wolf Burn footpath; interpret archaeology; provide equipped play area
(c) Heathfield (upper)	5.0	41	under construction
(d) Heathfield (lower)	1.3	12	access from Heathfield (upper)
(e) Lower Ormlie	1.8	18-20	
(f) Juniper Bank (south)	1.6	16	access from south, after development of Lower Ormlie
(g) Mount Pleasant (south)	1.0	15-20	
(h) Mount Pleasant (north)	2.2	30-50	equipped play area

Site	Area (ha.)	Capacity	Comments
(i) Ormlie Allotment Gardens	1.5 (1.0)	30 (20)	excluding community centre (community centre on 0.5ha.)
(j) Pennyland Terrace /Scapa House	0.77	20-25	higher density flatted development may be appropriate
(k) Juniper Bank (north)	0.6	4-5	Existing caravan site, access from north

Site	Capacity	Comments
(a) Naver House	12	Completed at end of 2001
(b) Ormlie Farm	15-20	Guideline figure - under construction
(c) Barrock Street	20-25	Guideline figure
(d) Millbank Works	15-20	Listed building also with non-residential potential (see 33)

A higher density of development will be possible.

15. At Pennyland Farm and north west of the Dunbar Hospital land is safeguarded for longer term development of approximately 240 to 260 houses. Development should not commence until after substantial take up of land in Tables 13.1 and 13.2 or in advance of water supply improvements (see also para. 37).

16. The potential for redevelopment to provide residential accommodation at Bridgend, Auction Mart and north of Sir Archibald Road will be explored with relevant land owners and occupiers in the period of the Plan.

17. At Ormlie the Council will lead in partnership with the local Community Association and other organisations to progress social, economic and physical regeneration of the area. The area is eligible for funding under the Government's Social Inclusion Partnership initiative. In addition to social measures, a major objective that the Council supports in principle is to physically redesign High Ormlie to:

- improve access to and from the area via the surrounding road and footpath networks;*
- reduce traffic speeds and give priority to pedestrians through calming measures (pilot Home Zone);*
- redefine front and back entrances to houses;*
- increase garden ground; and*
- enhance provision of play areas.*

The Council will also seek to promote;

- development of the allotment gardens area for housing and possibly a community centre (see 13i);*
- improved pedestrian access to and environmental enhancement of the Ormlie industrial estate (see 25); and*
- improved paths across the Moors area, including north towards the business park and north east to Pennyland Primary School (see 35c and Framework Plan).*

18. Proposals for development in the Spring Park, Pennyland and Mount Vernon areas should have regard to the original residential layout and urban design principles.

19. In accordance with policy H3 of the new Structure Plan, the Council will not permit new housing and conversions of non-traditional buildings in the hinterland around Thurso. This area, defined on Map HAT 1, extends approximately 5 km. from the Settlement Boundary, where 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 (see 36).

B: Business

20. At the existing business park land is available for business and light industrial uses. The Council will favour the servicing of additional land to the south east for: further business development; and a business/conference/training centre, possibly with supporting residential accommodation, as part of the proposed town expansion area.

Development should be accessed by early phases of the western distributor/bypass road which developers will be required to provide, together with a high standard of landscaping and relevant sections of a major remote footpath/cycle way adjacent to the Wolf Burn (see 15, 35c & 37).



Photo: Pennyland and the business park from the moors – informal recreation, by-pass route and housing land potential.

21. At Pennyland Farm 1.2 ha. of land is allocated for a hotel. Detailed proposals should retain, respect and incorporate the Listed farm house and steading in the design and layout, as well as interpretation of the historic interest, possibly in a small museum to Sir William Smith and the Boys Brigade. An opportunity exists to create a well designed quality development in this key location adjacent to the A9 Trunk road. Vehicular access is preferred from Castlegreen Road and provision should be made for associated improvements, including upgrading of the junction with the A9. Associated outdoor

recreation uses could be provided over adjoining land to the west to retain its open character (see 35b).

22. At the railway station it is proposed to convert the former shops into youth enterprise workshops.

23. In the event of the auction mart relocating from its present site (see Landward Area, 34), the Council will prepare a development brief with the owners to explore a range of alternative uses. In planning terms re-development for business/light industrial workshops, further education facilities, a community/arts centre and residential uses would be appropriate. Non-food retail warehousing would only be considered as part of a mixed development which incorporates the other appropriate uses and benefits the wider community.



Photo: Auction Mart

24. At Naver House permission has been

granted for conversion to a business centre to offer small office type units, common support facilities and residential accommodation (See also 14a).

I: Industry

25. At Ormlie industrial estate most of the remaining undeveloped land served by Henderson Street is available for light industrial purposes. The Council will also consider undertaking landscaping and general environmental improvement, as well as providing formal footpath connections to adjacent housing areas.

26. In the area to the east of the auction mart the Council will seek to promote environmental enhancement, better use and/or redevelopment where appropriate. Land adjoining the railway will be safeguarded for freight operations and other rail related developments

27. At the Janetstown industrial estate land is available for industrial uses. The Council will consider potential for expansion into the former quarries for external storage purposes, possibly stock piling connected with the oil industry, together with substantial landscaping/screen planting around the fringes.

S: Special Uses

28. Developers are required to construct consecutive phases of the Provost Cormack Drive to A836 link road in association with development of housing and business uses over land to the west of Pennyland (see 15, 20 & 37). This should accord with a detailed framework or

master plan and developers are required to construct the road up to the boundary of each phase of development. No buildings shall be sited within 10 metres of this road. The Council will consider the scope for traffic calming measures on the existing and future sections of Provost Cormack Drive as part of a 'Safer Routes to School' initiative.

29. A route for a western distributor road has been identified linking the A836 in the north and the B874 in the south. The distributor road will serve the western expansion area as shown in the Framework Plan. However, the road will be designed to be capable of extension, and upgrading if necessary, in order to allow for the provision of a Thurso by-pass. Preliminary investigations suggest a by-pass route starting from the southern approach of the A9 and heading west across the river from opposite the entrance to Stainland Farm towards the south side of the Dunbar Hospital. Here it would meet the western distributor road and pass over the Moors on the town side of the golf course to the east side of the business park. Finally the by-pass will extend northwards from the A836 road to Scrabster. An attempt should be made to retain traditional field enclosures and undertake appropriate earth mounding and planting to help integrate the distributor road, ultimately to become the by-pass, into the landscape. The Council will require developers to construct early phases of the distributor road from the A836 south as service access for business and housing over Pennyland.

30. Within 90 metres of the existing Waste Water Treatment Works, General Policy PP4 applies a presumption against further development not associated with drainage

improvements. NOSWA are considering a site for a new head works close to the mouth of the river. Expenditure of £10 million is currently programmed for 2002 to 2005.

31. The Council supports in principle the continuing expansion of the North Highland College, particularly as part of the University of the Highlands and Islands. However, the existing Thurso campus is becoming quite intensively developed. Further detailed proposals should avoid encroachment on to open space/recreation areas and will require additional parking in accordance with the Council's standards.

32. A feasibility study being carried out for Sports Scotland for the location of a Regional Sports Centre has identified two main options with considerable potential:
(a) the existing Dounreay facilities at Viewfirth; and
(b) open land adjacent to the swimming pool at Millbank.

33. An investigation of optional locations for a Caithness Community and Arts Centre is under way. The town of Thurso is one general location with the possibility. Potential may exist at Millbank through renovation and sympathetic extension of the old works adjacent to the existing small theatre (see 14d). The auction mart site at Ormlie Road is another possibility in the longer term (see 22).

34. The Council will consider the following locations as longer term options for the development of playing fields:-
(a) Pennyland (north of A9 Trunk road, see 35b)
(b) golf driving range

(c) Mountvernon (east of cemetery)
This should be part of a wider assessment of the supply of and demand for playing fields throughout the town, taking into account their quality, accessibility and size.

A: Amenity

35. The Council will protect and enhance major open spaces and amenity land in and around the town and, where appropriate, will encourage people to use and enjoy them. More specifically the Council will explore the availability of funding, including contributions from developers/owners of associated land, to:

- (a) improve the riverside park in the vicinity of the boating pond, as well as tree management;
- (b) develop open land to the north and south of the A836 at Pennyland Farm as a public park in the longer term, incorporating playing fields and a pitch and putt course (see 34a) where possible, the siting of all ancillary buildings will be rigorously controlled to ensure that the panoramic view across this area is maintained in its entirety;
- (c) extend a remote footpath network around the west side of the town, including the provision of sections in association with development and linkages across areas such as the Moors adjacent to Ormlie; and
- (d) restore the Lady Janet's Walk east long the coast towards Castletown, including tackling erosion and allowing public access past and beyond Thurso Castle.

36. Positive enhancement, improved access and education through interpretation of the surrounding countryside will be sought through a Countryside Around Towns partnership.

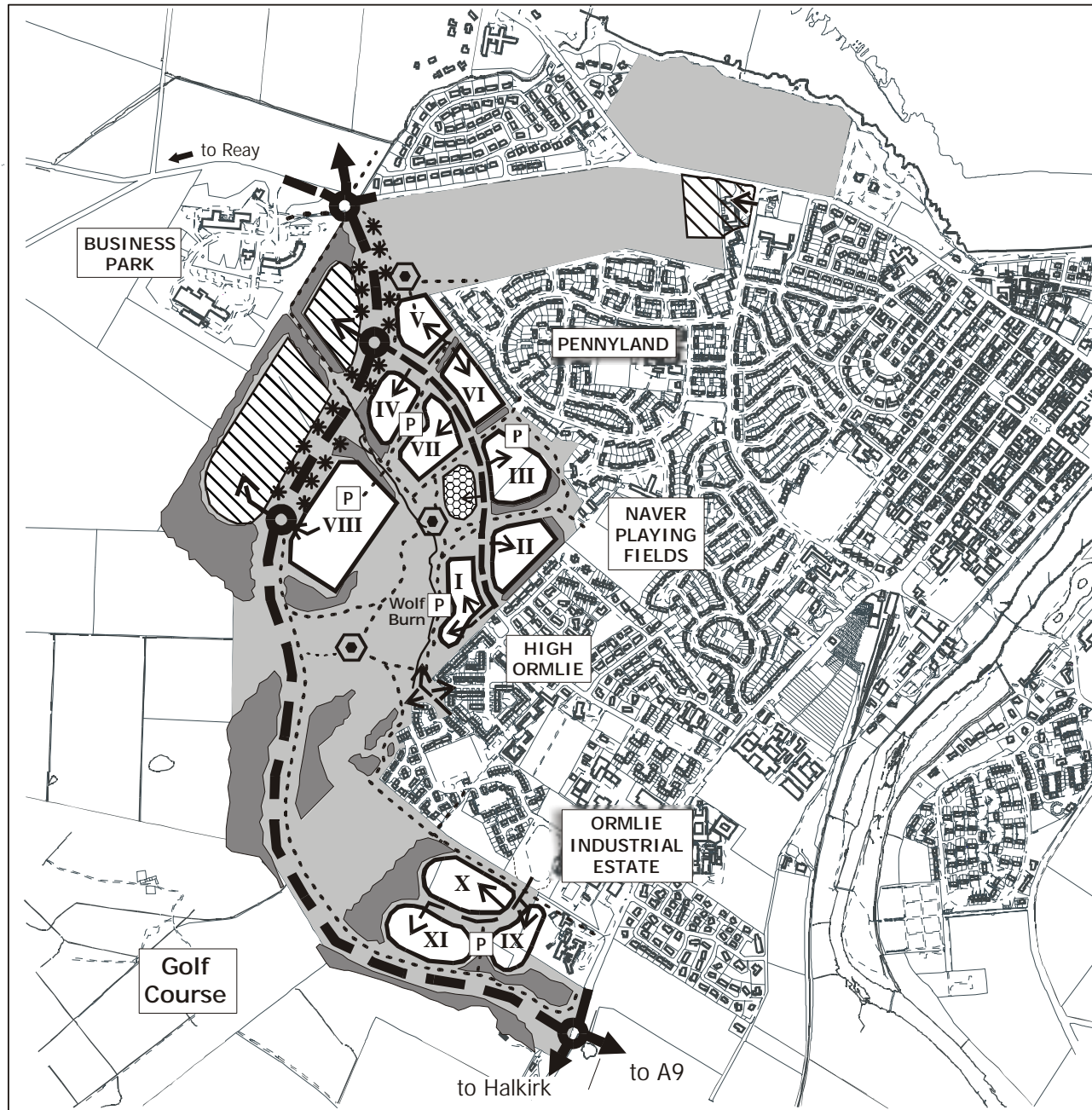


Photo: The Moors looking towards Ormlie – potential route of Western Distributor road and open space.













E: Town Expansion

37. Land is reserved for longer term housing and business development on the west side of the town. More specific reference is made under paragraphs 15 and 20. Proposals should comply with the Framework Plan. A Development Brief or Master Plan will be prepared for this area to include phasing and basic requirements. A major requirement is the construction of a link road from the A836 south through the area to Provost Cormack Drive in association with development phases. The Council will encourage substantial early structural tree planting around the fringes and between phases to help integrate the development into the landscape. A hydrological assessment will be required to determine the adequacy of any surface water drainage system.

Thurso Western Expansion Framework Plan



KEY

-  Western Distributor / By-Pass Road
-  A836 - Provost Cormack Link Road
-  Access
-  Remote Paths
-  Housing Phases
-  Business / Tourism
-  Community Facilities / Special Needs Housing
-  Open Space / Amenity / Farm Land
-  Play Area
-  Structural Tree Planting
-  Avenue / Occasional Trees
-  Viewpoint / Focal Point Interpretive Feature



0 100 200 300 400 500 metres

Developers/landowners will be expected to enter into legal Agreements to secure necessary access roads, footpaths, open space/recreation facilities and restrict development over land that should otherwise remain open. The Council will also expect that developments achieve an overall design that respects and complements the topography, characteristics and constraints of the site and its surroundings. In particular, built forms, circulation (notably via remote paths), green space and landscaping require to be integrated with each other as part of an overall concept. The detailed design and specification of individual buildings should also form part of a coherent overall design concept, including the clustering buildings. Development must be preceded by an archaeological evaluation.

Environmental Action

38. The Council's general policy for Conservation Areas will apply to the designated Area in central Thurso, which has 'Outstanding' status. It is also proposed to extend the existing Area to cover properties on the north side of Odrig Street towards the Police Station. A map of the Area (and proposed extension), the background to its designation, statutory powers and design guidance are contained in Appendix VI. Development should have regard to this and the Caithness shop front design guidance, as appropriate, and be carried out in accordance with the established character of the area. Proposals for stone cleaning, colour washing and floodlighting of buildings require prior discussion with the planning authority. The Council will seek to bring under Special Control, certain classes of development which would otherwise be 'permitted' without formal planning consent through an Article 4 Direction.

This would give scope for more specific action through a 'Town Scheme', which the Council will consider in consultation with Historic Scotland. Such a scheme could also assist efforts to encourage improvement or redevelopment, as appropriate, of buildings considered to be of poor design or otherwise inconsistent with the character of the area

39. Redevelopment and enhancement of parts of the east bank of the river would considerably improve the appearance of this area, but it is accepted that due to industrial relocation this may take some years to achieve. In the meantime the Council will encourage the removal of river frontage dereliction and modest landscaping, as appropriate.



*Photos: Above - Thurso Bay
Below - Riverside*

