

6. DUNBEATH



Background

The small village of Dunbeath (popn. 250), lying 30km to the south of Wick, occupies a key position on the A9 (T) road. The steep terrain along the banks of the Dunbeath Water has resulted in a fragmented community. The original parts of the village lie to the west of Knockglass Farm, where the local hotel and shop are found, and at Balnabruich around the war memorial. More modern development, mainly of public housing, has been built along the banks of the river and adjoining the Primary School. Opportunities for infill development remain but consideration must be given to identifying further housing land. Potential expansion areas are restricted by the steep slopes. The previous Local Plan identified a substantial area of ground off Neil Gunn Road. This still remains suitable, but the site is visible from the A9 and any development would need substantial landscaping / planting. Land off Campbell Avenue may also offer an opportunity.

Services and community facilities are of a reasonable standard. The main servicing constraint is the water supply which is poor south of Lybster and there are drainage difficulties, although a new sewage treatment works is planned. Local jobs are limited mainly to the service sector, although several fishing boats still use the harbour. Tourism remains a key sector, with the local Heritage Centre playing a central role. Dunbeath's strategic location on the A9 (T) provides an opportunity to exploit this position further for both the local, and the wider Caithness, economy. In particular, a Visitor Orientation Centre providing tourist information for the whole of Caithness is a key requirement.

Protecting the local heritage and environment is also important. The river and historic harbour are significant attractions as are the various archaeological sites in the wider locality. These need to be protected together with croft land, open spaces, trees and footpaths.

Community Input

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

- provide family houses and affordable housing;
- protect open space, particularly on the margins of the village;
- promote further interpretation;
- upgrade and improve the facilities at the harbour;
- provision of tree planting / community woodland;

- provide for tele-working / distance learning; and
- maintain / establish footpaths.

Development Factors

The future development of Dunbeath will be shaped by several factors. The main constraint is the steep ground alongside the Dunbeath Water. The need to protect better farmland and restrict access to the A9 (T) road are further constraints.

Objectives

The Plan seeks to:

- identify further land for housing;
- identify land for a possible Visitor Orientation Centre;
- promote improvements to the harbour area; and
- protect important community, heritage and amenity features.

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.

H: Housing

1. *The Council will encourage further infill housing development, subject to Settlement Policy H.*

2. Land between Achorn Road and Neil Gunn Road was previously a Caithness District Council new build site. This was never progressed and the site would be suitable for housing development.

S: Special Uses

3. The Council supports the provision a Visitor Orientation Centre for Caithness at Dunbeath. Possible sites are to the east of Neil Gunn Road or adjacent to the Heritage Centre.

4. The Old Mill is empty at present but has potential for a variety of uses particularly tourist related and / or interpretation of the archaeology further up the Strath. It would also have potential for small business unit or community distance learning facility.

5. Further works to the pier area could enhance its attraction, including:

- repairs to the pier walls;
- upgrading of facilities;
- improved interpretation;
- small boat jetty; and
- craft / tourist uses

Proposals should not adversely affect the Listed Buildings.

E: Village Expansion

6. 4ha are allocated for housing development to the east of Neil Gunn Road. Developers will be expected to prepare a Master Plan for the site showing a detailed layout, phasing, landscaping and open space. Proposals should be low density (4/5 per ha.) and must

incorporate significant tree planting. The existing path should be safeguarded and improved.

7. 2 ha. to the south west of Campbell Avenue. Significant boundary tree planting will be expected. Developers will be expected to prepare a Master Plan for the site showing a detailed layout, phasing, landscaping and open space.

A: Amenity

8. The Council will protect important open spaces and amenity areas, particularly:
(a) play area / playing field at the hall;
(b) the riverside; and
(c) existing trees.

Environmental Action

9. The Council will safeguard the footpaths which link the parts of the village and encourage their improvement. Modest landscaping along the riverside would be of benefit together with basic interpretation and seating.



Photos: Above - Dunbeath Harbour
Below - the Old Mill

