
From: West Highlands and Islands Local Development Plan
Subject: FW: West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan [#321]

Section 1: Bill Cornelius

**Your
personal and
contact
details**

1.1 Name *

1.2 Are you? a community or other organisation

*

1.4 Name of Organisation Morar Community Council
(if applicable)

Development Please see box 2.8 for full reply

Site 1

2.1 Address

/ Description

of Site

2.8 How will you or the developer of the site resolve any issues selected in question 2.7?

Section 2 – Suggested sites for development

As I have to remain true to the direction the Community Council discussion took, I'll enter ideas on development here.

Although specific sites are mentioned and there is a mention of one possible new site, the talk was really more on HOW we'd like to see development going in future, and on learning from past mistakes.

Housing

There is a lot of support for affordable housing that is done with a bit of imagination and vision. The preference is for small clusters like Camus Crescent and Donald's Row in Morar rather than larger housing-scheme like development like Canon Gillies Close in Arisaig. (I'll send photos of these later – as S2-1, S2-2, and S2-3) There is also the feeling that new development has of late been weighted towards larger individual houses and that this is changing the character of the area. It is also considered regrettable that so many of these become holiday homes.

The HSCHT principle of prioritising the allocation of houses to local people was felt to be preferable to the centralised points system of allocation which can often result in local people being denied housing, thus making it more difficult to stay. The Community Council stressed the importance of affordable housing to enable people who want to stay and

bring up a family here to do that. Many of the large new builds can add little to the community if they do not have permanent residents.

Linear development from Rhubana View towards the Hydro dam on the River Morar is favoured by most members of Community Council for affordable housing. There is concern about piecemeal development behind it (see comments on Glenancross Farm development below). Already one very large house has been built there which looks distinctly out of place (see photo to be sent later, as S2-4). The area along from Rhubana View belongs to the same owners as the land behind Rhubana View but, though they seem happy for it to be developed the problem is one of access because Loch Morar Estate owns the strip of land by the road. We don't know whether new land reform laws will affect this or not.

Linear development, or at any rate, well-planned and coherent development, would be preferred to piecemeal dotting of houses of diverse design over a piece of land as in Glenancross Farm in the Morar area (see photos to be sent later, as S2-5, S2-6 & S2-7). There is a lot of local feeling that this development took a piece of land both very scenic and very arable (it is in the vicinity of a lovely old steading – see photo to be sent later, as S2-8), and in near proximity to the iconic Camusdarrach beach of Local Hero film fame, and turned it in to a hotchpotch of large individual houses. Long term regular visitors to this area have been shocked – probably heartbroken would be a more accurate description in some cases – to come back and see what has happened here to an area which holds important memories for them. Some have even vowed never to return, preferring to remember it as it was.

This is not a criticism of individual houses so much as the conglomerate effect, as there is no attempt at coherence of style or positioning in relation to one another. Rarely in rural Scandanavia does one get the feeling that housing development jars in quite this way. Why have they not lost this sympathy for what harmonises with nature when we have? Perhaps the power over their Planning decisions is more localised? In this case farmland has been bought as an investment by someone who has no real personal connection to the area and has sold it off in building plots purely to maximise personal profit. In hindsight there is some feeling within the Community Council that this highly arable land could have been earmarked for allotments rather than development.

Such development is reminiscent of what happened to the Irish countryside during the Celtic Tiger years.

Protection Please see box 3.4 for full reply

Site 1

3.1 Address

/ Description

of Land

3.4 Why should the land be protected?

Section 3 – Areas to be protected from development

Again our talk did tend to stray away from the form layout.

Camusdarach – An area which should have been protected! This beach should surely be categorised as a site of

international interest, given the interest which has been aroused by Local Hero. This 30-year-old film still is still highly regarded across the globe. A house has been allowed to be built there recently which in itself is vernacular in style but its size and position has changed the beach, stealing some of its magic as an unspoilt natural public amenity. (photo to be sent later, as S3-1). When word got out that this was happening the planning department received letters of protest from far and wide. Sadly, as outline permission had already been granted some time ago (but had somehow escaped public notice) there was nothing to be done. There was originally one small traditional cottage here which blended in perfectly, (the church set was constructed around it in the film) but it has recently been “modernised” and other houses have been built overlooking the beach which can be particularly intrusive at night because of light pollution.

As a result the Community Council is agreed that housing should in future be kept clear of all the Morar beaches, that beach access should be clear and open to the public and the outlook should be kept as a public amenity for both locals and visitors. The feeling is that any more houses should be kept on the far side of the road from the beach.

4.1 How do you want the West Highland and Islands area to change over the next 10–20 years?

Section 4: The Big Picture

We discussed ideas for our future vision of this part of the highlands and it was agreed that we see tourism as playing a large part and so it is important to preserve the character of the area and protect those unspoilt features, in particular the spectacular beaches and their surrounding areas, which are such an asset when it comes to attracting visitors. Comments were also made on the work that needs to be done on improving access, infrastructure – in particular the condition of roads – and transport in order to raise the quality of visitors’ experience.

Fish farms are important to the economy here but there was concern about overreliance on them and also about their environmental impact on the waters of sea or loch. This could be reduced by developing a more sustainable approach, as they have in Norway, with tanks on land, and there was some enthusiasm for this.

Mussel farms were also mentioned.

It was considered that we need to think “out of the box” a bit, though, and an example was given of a visiting architecture student from Glasgow who was doing a project on the use of seaweed for manufacturing. One of his parents is Peruvian and he spoke of the various products, eg yarn, which are made from seaweed in Peru.

Sustainability was a key priority in his approach to the subject. Encourage development of diverse range of marine industries.

A more sustainable use of the sea was also hoped for in the future. There was mention of as a pioneering project which is underway to allow the seabed to regenerate in one area between the Isle of Arran and neighbouring Holy Isle and this is already proving quite a revelation. As well as the obvious environmental benefits more such projects could allow us to develop possibilities for sustainable use of the sea in economic terms.

It was felt that traditional industries would also work well here ie cloth. There used to be weaving sheds in Morar.

Renewables also played a big part in our vision of the future, and our history and tradition of developing hydro-electric power acts as a good pointer to this. Wind power has become controversial in some places, but is nevertheless an important part of the mix, provided it is done with the approval and blessing of the local community, and also done for the benefit of the local community. Complaints were made about landowners and foreign investors being subsidised and being allowed to profit from overlarge and insensitively sited developments, and also about profits being allowed to drain away to companies abroad. Wave power and tidal power – the latter particularly in the Pentland Firth area – need to be invested in for their potential future yield and we should be developing our potential for 100% renewable power.

5.1 Name of place that wishes to produce its own plan

See 5.2

5.2 Any additional details Section 5 – Our own Community Plan

We discussed this but decided that provided the ideas outlined here are heeded, it would not be necessary.

6.1 Name of Special Landscape Area See box 6.2

6.2 Tell us whether this special landscape area should stay the same or how it should be expanded / contracted. Section 6 – Special Landscape Areas

Here we are not sure of the criteria for different categories but some of the beach areas appear to us to be of more than local or regional interest. Loch Morar is already regarded as of national interest and many of the beaches should surely fall into that category at least, whereas Camusdarach is clearly of international interest as a result of the film Local Hero. (I'll send a map later indicating more clearly what is meant here, as S6-1).

Please provide reasons for your choice.

