

From:
Subject:

West Highlands and Islands Local Development Plan
FW: West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan [#381]

Section 1: Kevin P. Donnelly

**Your
personal
and
contact
details**

1.1 Name *

**1.2 Are
you? *** a member of the public

**Select a
topic to
comment
on** Tell us your vision for the area

Protection All land between Armadale and Teangue, Sleat, Skye

Site 1

3.1

Address /

Description

of Land

3.4 Why should the land be protected?

This is an almost entirely rural area without even a village in it. So it seems very strange and of some concern that it was included at all in the areas for detailed consideration in the Local Plan revision.

I believe that there should be no concentrated development at all in the area, other than the gradual development which has already been agreed at Kilbeg adjacent to the Gaelic college. Reasons include (1) the college and its fragile Gaelic-speaking environment; (2) the fact that this is a rural, farmed area of scenic importance for tourism; and (3) the dark skies area which are important both to the environment and the tourist economy.

The Gaelic college, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, is by far the main employer in the area, is regarded both nationally and internationally as a success, and attracts funding support for the Gaelic language. But this success is very fragile. The college depends for its existence on being able to provide a Gaelic-speaking environment. Without that, there would

be no reason for students to come there. Maintaining a Gaelic-speaking environment is a constant struggle when surrounded by the most powerful language in the world and the environment could collapse quickly due to feedback effects. Many dedicated college staff work there mainly because of the Gaelic-speaking environment even though they could earn more elsewhere. If the environment starts to collapse and they leave, it will lead to further deterioration. To see that survival of a community language is a flip-flop situation, compare the different fates of the three Irish-speaking Gaeltachts set up in County Meath in the 1930s.

The college is taking a huge gamble in the Kilbeg development in hoping that it will be able to progress without destroying the fragile Gaelic-speaking environment of the college. Gaelic has up until now survived best in Scotland and Ireland in dense but dispersed rural communities and has disappeared first in concentrated settlements. (Sleat was about 47% Gaelic-speaking in the 2001 census.) If the Kilbeg development is taken gradually and nursed and nurtured in careful stages which are given time to consolidate, it could become a thriving hub and beacon of hope to the Gaelic language and other threatened languages worldwide. But dropping housing schemes into the area within a mile or two of the college could put the project in jeopardy.

The stretch from Armadale to Teangue is in clear view of Knoydart, famed for its remoteness and wild land, and is in clear view of the summits of three Munros including the land owned by the John Muir Trust on Ladhar Bheinn. The ruin of Knock Castle in Teangue is celebrated in a painting by the famous 19th Century painter Horatio McCulloch. It is frequented by tourists, and likely to be even more so in the future with the opening of the tourist distillery at Toravaig. This is mainly because of the viewpoint it offers, an important part of which is the beautiful sweep of farmland and dense but dispersed community in Teangue and Saasaig.

The townships of Teangue and Saasaig are beautiful, largely unspoiled settlements with cows and sheep lambs and in the fields, worked by local people who derive their livelihood from farming and have done for generations. This is rare enough in modern Skye, but it is what tourists coming on holiday to Skye expect and want to see, and what makes it a so good to live here.

Dark skies are a major asset to the area, especially now that there are hardly any areas except the Highlands left in Western Europe which have properly dark night skies. They make it a pleasure to live here and are increasingly important for tourism. A particularly dark clear starry night with the Milky Way and constellations and planets visible is always a topic of conversation in the area. The Northern Lights have been a delight to generations of Highlanders. The moonlight glistening on the water of Sound of Sleat with the mountains of Knoydart silhouetted in the background is a major feature of east Sleat. From Teangue, the moonlight round Knock Castle on its promontory is particularly striking.

Dark sky tourism is becoming increasingly important in the tourism agenda, helping to extend tourism beyond the

summer season. There are two officially designated Dark Sky sites in east Sleat on the Clan Donald Estate and another at Kinloch. Last October the Clan Donald hosted a major Dark Skye Star Party popular education event featuring the Astronomer Royal, speakers from as far as Sark (an official Dark Sky Island, as is Coll) and with many members of the public coming from afar to attend. Tourism is an important part of the local economy, with many people doing B&B or letting a holiday chalet and several local hotels. Although of course you cannot guarantee starry skies or moonlight on the Sound of Sleat, these are a very important part of the tourist experience.

It is important to note that the very same new efficient reduced downward emission street-lighting which would be a justifiable cause for celebration in Inverness, would be a disaster if dropped into Sleat. It might be a factor of 2 improvement in Inverness but would be a factor of 100 deterioration in Sleat and would kill the dark skies.

4.2 What do you think are the best, existing assets and characteristics of the area? Think of your favourite landscapes, settlements, journeys, events and meeting places.

(I am concentrating my comments on Sleat, in particular the stretch of east Sleat from Armadale to Teangue, and in particular Teangue where I have lived myself for 22 years, but many of these comments apply more widely to the WHI area.)

Gaelic language; the Gaelic college, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig; Rural environment with cows and sheep and lambs in the fields; Unspoiled countryside; Dark skies with stars in the thousands, constellations, the Milky Way, shooting stars, comets and the movement of the planets; Moonlight on the Sound of Sleat; Moonlight glistening round the promontory of Knock Castle; Views to the wild land of Knoydart; “Reflected” sunsets with the hills in Knoydart glowing bright reds and oranges after dusk has already reached Sleat; Local community; Local people working the land.

4.4 How can these assets and characteristics best be safeguarded, improved or used to provide economic or community growth?

No concentrated development anywhere other than what has already agreed for Kilbeg, and even that has to be taken gradually and carefully to avoid killing the college.

People are generally okay with individual houses if they have limited local impact, but there should be a strong bias against over-large speculative houses which are clearly not designed for local need.

Absolutely no street-lighting or any schemes involving street type lighting. Declare the area a dark sky zone and try to clear up some of the pointless, dangerous, badly designed or excessive lighting in the particular half mile stretch from the school past the health-centre to the college, something which would be easy to do.

Better designed reduced lighting in Mallaig, Broadford and Fort William would have benefits even as far as Sleat. On a particularly dark moonless night with the constellations and Milky Way visible, a glow can be seen from Fort William

over 50 miles distant.

The sections of the old road between Teangue and Broadford should be connected to form a cycle path. It was a mistake not to do this when the road was built.
