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**From:** West Highlands and Islands Local Development Plan  
**Subject:** FW: West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan [#395]

**Section 1:** Rob Ware

**Your  
personal  
and contact  
details**

**1.1 Name \***

**1.2 Are you?** a member of the public  
\* a community or other organisation

**1.4 Name of  
Organisation  
(if  
applicable)** Sleat Community Council

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

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

Re Sleat

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide a viewpoint from Sleat Community Council (SCC) on the development of the area of Sleat, south Skye as a submission to the Highland Council's consultation for the new WHILP. This paper follows on from a presentation to the SCC on 10th March 2015 by Tim Stott, Principal Planner–Highland Council (HC) Development Plans team. This presentation enabled the SCC and residents to be briefed on the new process, with particular emphasis on Sleat and will be followed by a further public session at the SCC meeting on 5th May. The SCC recognise that HC consider the key area for assessment for Sleat is the area deemed, in the initial papers, as 'East Sleat', that is the area between the locations of Knock Bay (Toravaig) and Armadale. This paper will include comment on the other areas of the Sleat peninsula, notably the north shore townships of Achnacloich, Tarskavaig, Tokavaig and Ord together with the townships of Ardvasar, Aird, Po int of Sleat, Camuscross, Duisdale, Drumfearn and the Kinloch area.

## Background

It is widely accepted that the rural peninsula of Sleat is considered to be one of the most 'successful' areas of the Isle of Skye with a growing population, low unemployment, a wide variety of housing, a significant crofting and farming community and principally a highly vibrant tourist industry. In addition it is the home to Sabhal Mor Ostaig, Scotland's National Centre for Gaelic Language and Culture (the largest employer in Skye), two rural estates of over 20,000 acres each, these being Fearann Eilean Iarmain and Clan Donald Lands Trust (it being the largest private employer on the island) together with the opening in 2017 of the 'Torabhaig Distillery' and a Community Hub for the Camuscross and Duisdale Initiative (CDI) area. The ferry route from Mallaig to Armadale carries over 220,000 passengers each summer season alone with more than 50,000 cars and 3000 coaches. It is CalMac's third busiest route on the network.

At the last census in 2011 Sleat had a resident population of c. 880 which is increased significantly during the holiday season from April to October doubling and tripling that figure. Sabhal Mor Ostaig, in addition to its graduate courses runs highly successful courses at Easter and in the summer, with over 1000 students attending short courses, many bringing family with them. The area is also represented by the award-winning Sleat Community Trust (SCT), regarded as a role-model for community development groups across the whole of Scotland owning assets such as a Petrol Station, garage, shop and Post Office together with 1000 acres of the Tormore Community Forest and is active in many aspects of the community. The Trust has development aspirations for two sites in the area which will be detailed in a later item. The Community Council represents the conduit between a variety of public agencies and organisations and residents and local businesses. The Community Council works hard to keep residents informed of development in Sleat through its meetings, website, social media and has been involved in a range of community issues such as aquaculture development, the NHS single-site hospital for Skye, Lochalsh and south-west Ross, planning applications, the provision of public water supply and sewerage through Scottish Water, renewable energy projects and the re-design of health care services through NHS Highland.

The Sleat peninsula has a long history of community engagement and this was demonstrated in consultations and communications for the Tormore Forest project, development of the Sabhal Mor Ostaig Campus, the proposed new village of Kilbeg, the new distillery and the CDI community hub and a range of other issues across a wide spectrum of issues. This engagement has proved effective in ensuring the public are aware of the development of the area, and have their chance to hear locally of what is proposed for the community. The vibrant tourist industry in Sleat is a key economic driver with five hotels, over 15 B and B's, more than 90 self-catering businesses and a large number of 'second homes'. The Visit Sleat tourism group, managed under the auspices of the Sleat Community Trust has more than 55 business members, and promotes the area using its website, leaflet, social media and marketing alliances with CalMac, Destination Skye and Lochalsh Marketing and a number of others. The Community Council continues to emphasise the huge importance to Sleat of its tourism industry and future 'over-development' could put this success in jeopardy. As said the area attracts visitors from all over the world, including 'day-trippers' as well as students at the

college and those visiting for genealogical research, the area's outstanding scenery, wildlife, high-quality accommodation food and drink, entertainment much of which is promoted by SEALL, Sleat's highly successful rural arts promotion group, arts and crafts and water-sports. As tourism will, it is believed, continue to be the major economic driver for Sleat it is vital that development in the area is measured and realistic given the low number of areas available for any medium or major development.

Key points to be considered

The approval of the development of the Sabhal Mor Ostaig campus and adjacent Kilbeg village is widely accepted as being good for the community bringing additional jobs, potentially more than 100 houses of mixed use, increased numbers of students and academic/support staff, and development of much needed facilities such as sports facilities, a conference centre, a hotel, potentially a residential care home, and much more. The first phase of the development sees the opening this spring of the new Archive, Research and Knowledge Exchange Building, now known as 'Iain Noble Centre'. This frees up space for development of older, less energy efficient facilities.

The development of up to 100 homes in the Kilbeg site is considered to be the first new 'village' built in Skye in more than 100 years and will be the principal area for major development in Sleat, potentially satisfying the need for additional houses over a 20 year period. It is known that 56 new homes were built in Sleat between 2000 and 2006 and it is expected that in the period from 2007 to 2014 this number would be significantly higher. It is also seen from HC's statistics that 1,212 new homes were built in Skye from 2000 to December 2014. This shows the incremental growth for the island as a whole with Sleat expected to show an even greater level of growth.

Sleat Community Trust commissioned a housing needs survey in 2014 produced by Rural Housing Scotland and their detailed report can be found at this link

<http://s3.spanglefish.com/s/4109/documents/housing-survey/sleat-housing-report.pdf>

This report assesses the housing options for Sleat and is a key document in the SCC's submission to the WHILP.

The creation of additional mixed use housing inevitably requires the creation of new jobs. There is no light industry in Sleat, retail and services development is limited and whilst the college is expanding many of the jobs are in the academic and support field. We welcome the possibility of enhanced facilities such as the conference centre, hotel, potential assisted living housing and sports facilities all of which will create jobs in one form or another. The opening of the Distillery in 2017 will create a limited number of locally based opportunities although it is recognised some specialist roles will need to be filled from beyond Sleat. The CDI hub at Duisdale will create jobs in both construction and operation. Sleat has a successful locally based building contractor pool of resources and it is generally accepted that that sector remains buoyant.

Given the importance to Sleat of its tourism industry residents have a view that continuing development and possible reduction in farming and crofting areas could lead to a reduction in visitor numbers over the years. Visitors come to Sleat to because of its wild lands, magnificent scenery, a rural area with high-quality accommodation and geographically ideal as a base the west coast as well as wildlife, water-sports (particularly sailing and sea-kayaking) and entertainment. The road, rail and ferry infrastructure continues to support the growth in tourism but the Community Council, through the Sleat Transport Forum, continues to press for improvement particularly in the provision of a year-round vessel for the Mallaig-Armadale route so allowing the tourism season to be extended in to the winter and spring periods, as well as extended operations year round. Dark Sky tourism is very important to the area with no less than four sites in Sleat designated as dark-sky locations. Many consider any further major development of housing, for example, other than Kilbeg, could potentially jeopardise this form of tourism.

It is also recognised that the two principal rural estates of Sleat, Fearann Eilean Iarmain and Clan Donald Lands Trust are both commercial organisations and so the Community Council is not party to the developmental aspirations of these businesses. It is hoped, at the appropriate time, that both organisations will engage the community in those aspirations but given the commercial sensitivity of those plans we are unable to comment. Clearly both organisations have a wide range of opportunities for growth in the future, from renewal energy, housing, recreational and retail opportunities and development of tourist infrastructure to name but few.

The Council stresses the need for visitor and residential amenity space to be preserved as much as possible. The scenic amenity importance of many of the areas of the peninsula cannot be over-estimated particularly on the iconic views from around the coast. One example of that is the Community Council-led opposition to the current applications for two major aquaculture sites for fish farms in Loch Eishort and an extension of the Small Isles Marine Protected Area to include Lochs Scavaig, Slapin and Eishort. Upper Loch Eishort contains a very successful and long-established Mussel Farm which will be threatened by fish-farm development nearby, if approved, and is located in a Scottish Government-designated shell-fish protected waters. Furthermore the amenity value of the waters around Sleat is a huge asset to residents and visitors and major development of fish farm sites will have a significant detrimental effect on this and we continue the opposition to these proposals.

The Community Council recognises the huge importance of the biodiversity around the coast of the peninsula, particularly on the shores of Lochs Slapin and Eishort as well as under water, as discovered by visiting divers and during May 2014, a team from SNH. Recent sea-shore studies have revealed a significant range of unusual and rare marine species, some of which are only found in a few locations in the UK. These include Risso's, Montagu's, Hairy and Wrinkled Swimming crabs, the Purple Heart Urchin, the Rock Goby, Sea-grass lawns and most notably beds of Maerl, a rare coralline algal habitat that is highly sensitive to marine development, in particular elevated nutrient loads that emanate from net-cage fish farms. All of this emphasises the responsibility to protect these fragile and unique

environments as a bench-mark for future research. Many industrial development projects, including aquaculture and wind-farms, require the developer to complete an Environmental Impact Assessment, a comprehensive review of the implications to the environment of such development. The Community Council calls on the Highland Council to ensure that where EIAs are required to be completed for a development that these be of the highest possible standard. Recent submissions for fish-farm applications in Loch Slapin and Loch Eishort can only be described as derisory, haphazard, misleading and habitually inaccurate.

#### Limitations on growth

Sleat remains a rural area with large areas of farm and crofting land. It is this rural aspect that continues to draw people to come and live here as well as the large number of visitors that come each year. It is vital to preserve this aspect by limiting development to areas that would not put this historically and economically important part of the community at any risk.

The road infrastructure in the Sleat peninsula is considered as poor apart from the A851 spine road from the SCC boundary to Armadale completed in 2008. The single track roads to Aird and the Aird of Sleat, the Ostaig-Tarskavaig-Ord loop road, the township roads leading from the A851 and the roads around Camuscross are all viewed to be in need of great improvement but continuing demand on Council resources mean that developments in these areas are limited to single-site dwelling with tourism and croft opportunities. This applies also to demands on water-supply, public sewerage, road-servicing. We understand that the community septic tank at Ardvasar has reached maximum capacity.

Limited public services in the more remote areas of the peninsula will inevitably restrict growth and the on-going poor broadband in many areas, does hamper growth. However a new innovative project by SCT to bring higher speed broadband project through wireless technology will hopefully alleviate some of these issues. Development of wind-energy projects are still limited by connectivity to the Grid and the lack of road infrastructure in many areas of the peninsula. The SCC will be commenting separately on the recently announced Highland Council On-shore Wind Farm strategy consultation.

The increased ageing population and lack of resources to allow young people to return to Sleat is a crucial issue for the community. Care of the elderly, despite the proposed changes in health-care design will require significant resources in the years to come. It is accepted that many young people would like to return to the community after their studies but a lack of employment opportunities and affordable housing restrict this ability.

Public transport is limited within Sleat with few buses and infrequent service. In saying that there is limited demand even in the holiday season and schedules often do not reflect the times that locals need. This will be highlighted in the

work of the new Sleat Transport Forum. There is a community taxi service supported by the Highland Council which helps to a degree but there are clear opportunities for transport development particularly in the rural areas.

The continuing approval of holiday-let accommodation planning applications will, inevitably, lead to a dilution of revenue for the existing sector of self-catering. Whilst there are financial benefits to the community both in rental terms, the construction sector, and beneficial Council rebates there is a feeling that continuing development at recent rates could lead to 'the burst of the bubble'. Some areas could lead, particularly on the A851 corridor, to a vista of holiday lets on every corner. This is typified by a current development of two holiday lets at Ferrindonald one of which is immediately adjacent to the road and the other some 50 metres to the north all within the existing curtilage of an existing holiday cottage. The density of such development at such proximity to the others can seriously be questioned.

#### Opportunities for Growth

The expansion of Sabhal Mor Ostaig and the development of the Kilbeg village remains the principal opportunity for growth in the peninsula. It is believed that as of spring 2015, that the development of the housing element of Kilbeg may take chronological precedent above the facilities development of hotel, conference centre and other projects. It is expected though that SMO will be working closely with HC on these matters.

As earlier stated the two rural estates have aspirations for development on their land and the Community Council will wish to work with them both to maximise any opportunities for a variety of aspects.

Sleat Community Trust has aspirations for development at two sites, the first being the Trading and Office facilities at the Armadale Filling station location. Funding has recently been secured for a feasibility study. There are a number of enhanced opportunities at the Tormore Forest from increased forestry and related projects, a visitor centre, recreational, educational and social facilities. The SCT will continue to work on the feasibility of these two locations.

The 'Torabhaig Distillery' will require housing of some degree, and the café and visitor centre will create employment opportunities and jobs will be created at the CDI Hub assuming it is built.

The Council's policy of providing development for public well-being is to be welcomed. We encourage the development of Core Paths and new cycle routes across the peninsula and it has been recently suggested by a member of the community that a core cycle route from Armadale to Broadford to include the 'old road' north of Kinloch be considered. Preservation of shore access and projects such as the proposed Dalavil bothy on Sleat's north shore are a key area for tourism and residential amenity.

The introduction of the 'Road Equivalent Tariff' on the Mallaig Armadale route from October 2015 will see a dramatic

increase in passenger and vehicle movements, particularly from summer 2016.

There are clearly areas of land that can be used for both mixed use and affordable development for housing. This will be determined by the land-owners, with such example as the area owned by Fearann Eilean Iarmain on the site of the former 'Garden of Skye' allotments at Armadale being made available for housing. Local services and transport links are available within a close proximity as well as Sabhal Mor Ostaig.

There are other areas where low-density housing development could be considered such as the area at the intersection of the Drumfearn Road and A851 and at the Kinloch Forest, land adjacent to the Sleat Medical Centre (11 houses approved in principle, with an affordable element) and between Armadale and Ardvassar. Again all of these potential developments will be subject of land availability from a diverse range of land-owners. The Community Council supports such development where appropriate.

Population growth if continuing at current rate may require potential expansion of such facilities as the Sleat Medical Centre but it is believed that capacity at the Primary School will be sufficient for a number of years to come.

The Community Council would like to see improvements to the Armadale Pier area, a principal gateway to Skye, the west coast and Western Isles. The rapid growth of the popularity of sailing on Scotland's west coast provides an opportunity for the development of pontoon and related facilities at Armadale and nearby anchorages, with the resultant spin-off for local businesses and service providers. Similarly there are no formal camping and motor-home sites on Sleat and we would encourage developers to grasp this opportunity.

Whilst connectivity to the grid remains an obstacle for renewable energy projects there are still potential opportunities that would endeavour to provide substantial community benefits. But given the importance of tourism to the Sleat community any wind-farm development is likely to receive significant local opposition unless in the more remote areas of the community where road infrastructure is currently non-existent. Low-impact hydro schemes where appropriate should be supported.

## Conclusion

Sleat Community Council recognises the importance of the consultation process of the new West Highlands and Island Local Plan and will do what it can to support the Highland Council in its deliberations for development in Sleat as a whole and not just the designated 'East Sleat' zone. We believe that residents support appropriate development but at the same time value the peninsula as a rural and scenic area with its resultant economic benefits. Most people wish to see development that must be sustainable especially in housing sites that would be low-density but at the same time preserve the qualities of the area as a tourism destination and the importance of Gaelic language and culture, together

with the farming and crofting land that contributes so much to the quality of life for residents and visitors.

It is vital that key service providers such as Scottish Water, NHS Highland, Highland Council's range of services, BT, energy suppliers and transport operators are all involved in the development of the Plan. One such major example is Scottish Water's ability to deliver a sustainable water supply to the community in coming years, which has been the subject of significant dialogue via the SCC in recent years culminating in the consideration of alternative sources of water to meet expected demand over the next 20–30 years. Without the insistence of the SCC for that dialogue we are convinced that Scottish Water would not have revised its Infrastructure Plan for Sleat had the Council not raised this in 2010 which could have led to supplies to all locations being jeopardised.

In conclusion this paper seeks to answer the questions, in a general form, that have been presented in the 'Call for Sites and Ideas Response Form' on the WHILP web pages Sections 4.1 to 4.4. This document is not exhaustive and the Community Council will liaise with the Highland Council on the range of issues that will affect Sleat in the period of the consultation and deliberation exercise.

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