

SANDILANDS, CROMARTY

Development /
Design Brief
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CONTENTS

Purpose	Page 1
Location	Page 1
1. PLANNING POLICY	Page 1, 2
2. DESCRIPTION	Page 2, 3
3. SERVICING	
Access, Traffic Management, Parking and Pedestrian Movement	Page 3
Water & Drainage	Page 4
4. RECENT STUDIES	
Housing Needs	Page 4
Townlands Barn Feasibility Study	Page 4
5. DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL	
Development Factors	Page 5
Development Areas and Preferred Uses	Page 5, 6
Layout Design	Page 6, 7
6. DESIGN GUIDANCE	
House Designs	Page 7, 8
Health Centre or other Non-Residential Buildings	Page 8
7. DESIGN STATEMENT	Page 9
8. CONTACTS	Page 9

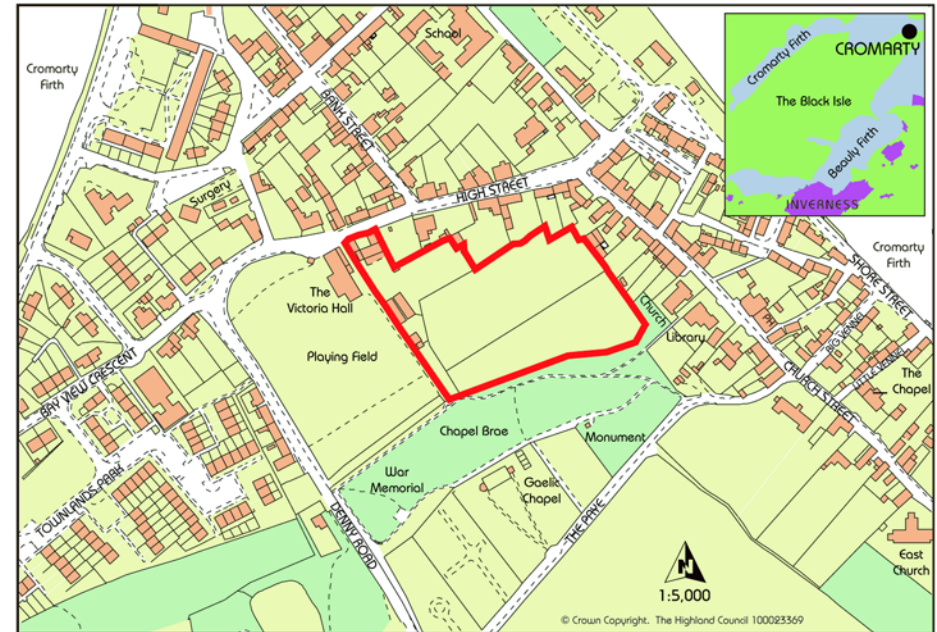
Purpose

This Brief provides detailed guidance and advice on the future development of vacant and derelict property comprising the Townlands Barn (formerly known as Sandilands House) and adjoining land south of Cromarty High Street. In line with the Draft Local Plan provisions for Ross and Cromarty East, the Brief emphasises that new development should be integrated sympathetically into the area in terms of scale, design and materials so that it respects and contributes to the character of the Outstanding Conservation Area. In particular, it:

- ▮ indicates potential uses for the properties;
- ▮ sets out a framework to achieve a comprehensive and cohesive approach to development, including layout design principles, servicing and environmental requirements;
- ▮ seeks to achieve high standards of design for buildings through guidance appropriate for the Outstanding Conservation Area location prior to preparation of a detailed design brief and/or master plan (which may be the subject of a design competition); and
- ▮ acts as a basis for consultation with the local community.



Location



1. PLANNING POLICY

1.1 The Black Isle Local Plan Alteration No. 2: Housing (adopted September 1996) identifies backland between Chapel Brae and the High Street for a mix of housing, public parking and open space. This is subject to improved access and a comprehensive Design Brief to ensure that development is sympathetic to the townscape and fully safeguards the wider public amenity in terms of footpaths, setback of buildings from existing open space at Chapel Brae, and planting. There is a requirement for development to be coordinated with restoration of the adjacent Townlands Barn on the High Street. Policy 7.8.1(g) allocates 1 hectare for 20 houses.

1.2 The Draft Ross and Cromarty East Local Plan establishes a more up to date planning framework. The Deposit Draft with Proposed Modifications, as presented to the recent Local Plan Inquiry in June 2005, contains the following relevant provisions in the Written Statement for Cromarty: -

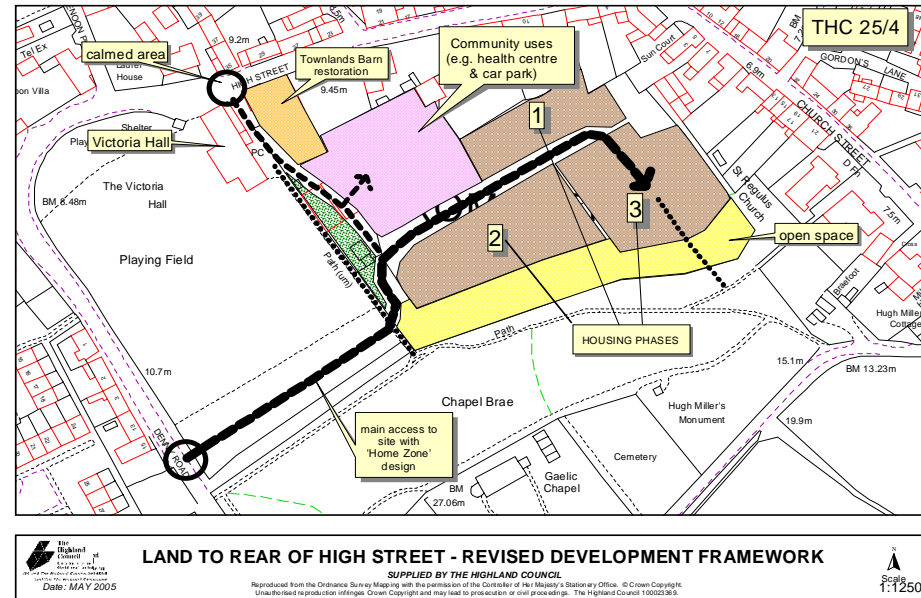
10. The Council encourages proposals for the restoration of the Townlands Barn. A feasibility study for this important Listed building will help determine appropriate uses and restoration details. The central location of the property within the town suggests a range of uses would be appropriate, including residential and small scale community, tourist business and/or orientation centre, business, office or arts and crafts workspace. Proposals should be co-ordinated with the restoration of the adjacent Victoria Hall (see 9 above) and the development of the land to the rear (see 13 below).

13. Land to the south and rear of High Street is allocated for a planned expansion of the town. The Council considers that the land is suitable for a mix of uses comprising housing, community/health, small business, office, arts and crafts workspace, public parking and open space. Proposals should comply with the draft Framework Plan below and development is subject to a commitment to restoration of the adjoining Townlands Barn in the same ownership (see 10 above). A design brief supported by an overall master or detailed layout plan should be agreed to guide comprehensive development and ensure a development sympathetic to the townscape character, scale, the tight-knit grid of street layout, materials and features of the historic core of Cromarty. Sketch elevations should be provided to illustrate proposals. Given the importance of Cromarty in conservation terms and the need for a high quality development, it would be desirable for the design brief/master plan to be the subject of an architectural design competition. Provision should be made to involve the community in the design process. Development proposals should:

- provide for 20 to 30 dwellings, including a proportion of affordable housing to meet local needs;
- indicate phasing and basic requirements for servicing, including adequate measures for disposal of surface water;
- account for full safeguarding of wider public amenity in terms of footpaths, setback of buildings from existing open space at Chapel Brae and planting;
- include new paths linking the development with visitor attractions in Church Street;
- be coordinated with restoration of the Townlands Barn and the Victoria Hall, particularly in relation to access and parking and including clarification of the need for a public car park;
- be the subject of a prior archaeological assessment.

15. Development within the Outstanding Conservation Area should have regard to the Design Guidance in Appendix II.

1.3 The density of housing development and proposed access to the area covered by policy 13 above attracted objections, which were considered at the Local Plan Inquiry in June 2005. The Report on the Inquiry was sent to the Council at the beginning of February 2006. The Reporter's recommendation supports the Council's view about how the land should be developed, as led in evidence at the Inquiry and now indicated in this Brief broad local support for the largest proportion of housing to be developed to meet local needs identified in a survey carried out in 2003 (see 4.1 & 4.2 below). The Council considers a very high quality development demanded by the location that meets the requirement for housing and improves community facilities will bring considerable benefits to the town.



2. DESCRIPTION

2.1 The area covered by this brief extends to 1.3 hectares in the centre of Cromarty and is located within the Outstanding Conservation Area. The largest proportion comprises an undeveloped and now vacant area of flat grassed agricultural land. This is bounded on the north and east by traditional properties on the south side of High Street and south west side of Church Street, on the south by the wooded Chapel Brae, part of the raised beach that defines the old burgh, and on the south west by the playing field and the Victoria Hall. The western area contains the former dairy farm buildings.

2.2 The Townlands Barn is a category A Listed building of two storeys and attic, set back from the current building line of High Street. Originally built in 1694/5 as laird's house known as Sandilands House, it is partly concealed behind two later, and less distinguished, single storey extensions. A series of crude, lean to corrugated iron sheds enclose the south and west elevations. Much of the original interior of the residence was lost when the building was converted to agricultural use some time after 1812.



2.3 Over time the ground levels have risen by almost a metre above the threshold of the front door which significantly changed the proportions of the principal elevation. This may relate to the working of the surrounding land for crops although an archaeological investigation is necessary to establish this. Many of the lean to sheds date from its last phase of occupation and are in a poor state of repair and suffering from rot. Use of the buildings ceased a number of years ago and have since lacked maintenance and been vandalised. As such, they have recently been the subject of complaints to Council Building Standards and Environmental Health officers.

3. SERVICING

Access, Traffic Management, Parking and Pedestrian Movement

3.1 The only existing vehicular access is a narrow passage from High Street between the Victoria Hall and the Townlands Barn. This has limited potential for use and the wider development of the area requires a new access across the southern edge of the adjoining Council owned playing field from Denny Road (A832). The existing access should be retained as a dedicated access to the Townlands Barn and as an emergency access/egress for the Victoria Hall and potential health centre. It requires a degree of calming at the entrance and pedestrian priority relative to the existing path link to the Chapel Brae.

3.2 In order to make a positive contribution to the overall quality of the environment, road/street layout design should be sensitively handled, relatively unobtrusive and not overly dominated by road engineering or parking standards. Developers should follow advice set out in Planning Advice Note 76 – New Residential Streets and specific advice set out in paragraphs 3.3 to 3.7.

3.3 The new access road would require measures to slow traffic on the approach and a calmed entrance. Over the first 35 metres from Denny Road its width should be a minimum of 5.5 metres. Thereafter a single carriageway to a minimum width of 3.7 metres and passing places should be used to maintain low traffic speeds. The employment of *Home Zone* design techniques including the construction use of shared surface culs-de-sac will also help give priority to pedestrians. Developers should construct roads and calming features in suitable materials that are in keeping with the Outstanding Conservation Area, i.e. minimal use of black top tarmac and concrete kerbing, but use of traditional materials such as stone setts and slabs is encouraged.

3.4 Consideration should also be given in the layout to facilitate vehicular access to the rear of existing residential properties. This would take the form of a narrow lane to allow property owners to form accesses and so help reduce traffic congestion on High Street and Church Street.

3.5 Provision for vehicle and cycle parking must be made in close proximity to future uses. Parking for individual houses should preferably be sited off street and to the side or rear of dwellings. Only visitor parking should be visible within the street scene and consideration given to utilising parts of the site that may be less attractive for development. Areas of common parking should be broken up by hard and soft landscaped treatment, including trees, to reduce their impact. In-curtilage parking should be designed so that any front gardens are not overly dominated by the parking space and are maintained mostly as permeable ground. Developers should also consider using porous parking surfaces.

3.6 Developers should contact the Principal Transport and Community Works Engineer for advice on specific parking standards. The car park for a community building should also be large enough to allow some general public parking for visitors to Cromarty and in connection with use of the Victoria Hall.



3.7 Developers should recognise the existing pedestrian route through the site between High Street and the remote paths on the Chapel Brae. A remote path link should be provided from the site with particular connections to High and Church Streets.

Top left: Townlands Barn
 Top right: Main access approach to site
 Left: Church Street remote approach path to the land

Water and Drainage

3.8 The site can be supplied with mains water. Connections are available nearby for this and foul drainage.

3.9 The local sewage treatment facilities were upgraded in recent years. Consultation with the Drainage Authority during preparation of the draft Local Plan indicated that there is sufficient spare capacity to accept foul drainage from future development, which should be connected to public sewer.

3.10 Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS) measures in accordance with technical guidance in CIRIA manual C521 shall be used for the disposal of surface water and designed for the site as a whole.

4. RECENT STUDIES

Housing Needs

4.1 In Spring 2003, Cromarty & District Community Council organised a Housing Needs questionnaire to gain a better understanding of the area's local housing needs and to establish if there was sufficient justification for the provision of new and affordable housing in and around Cromarty. Of 360 questionnaires issued 123 were returned (34.2% response rate). These were collated and analysed by the Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust. (*see footnote)

4.2 A total of **27** respondents indicated housing needs in the household. Of those respondents: 18 were seriously or possibly interested in renting a Housing Association house in Cromarty; 20 were seriously or possibly interested in 'low-cost home ownership' through the use of a Rural Home Ownership Grant (RHOG); and 8 would also consider shared-ownership as a low-cost housing option. A further **23** of the 123 respondents, with no particular housing needs, indicated that they would be interested in buying or building a new house without the use of a Grant.

* Cromarty Housing Needs Survey:
Cromarty & District Community Council and the Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust: Spring 2003

4.3 The projected requirement indicated in the Draft Local Plan for all types of houses over the next 15 years is for 30 to 40 new dwellings. The brief site has potential to accommodate up to 30 dwellings. On the basis of the needs survey, the following mix is supported by the Council and its affordable housing partners and is a key requirement for this site: -

- ▶ **1/3 rental housing** (Housing Association)
- ▶ **1/3 low cost home ownership** (RHOG supported or shared equity)
- ▶ **1/3 private** (open market sale).

Townlands Barn Feasibility Study

4.4 In 2004, the Highland Buildings Preservation Trust (HBPT) commissioned a feasibility study into the restoration of the Townlands Barn** to establish whether there is a viable new use for the property, whether it is repairable, and crucially, whether funding is available to cover the conservation deficit. The Design Team, under the lead consultant LDN Architects, reported back in April 2005. This revealed the strong momentum to see the Townlands Barn restored to residential use, both within the community and the statutory planning policy framework. The study confirmed residential use is the most viable option for the repair and re-use of the property and consultations with the principal funding agencies revealed support for the proposed scheme which would be eligible for grant assistance. Partnership funding will be required from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Historic Scotland, Ross and Cromarty Enterprise, Highland Council and smaller grant giving trusts to meet the conservation deficit.



Left: Townlands Barn from High Street
Right: Townlands Barn south elevation



** Townlands Barn Cromarty Feasibility Study Highland Buildings Preservation Trust: April 2005

5. DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

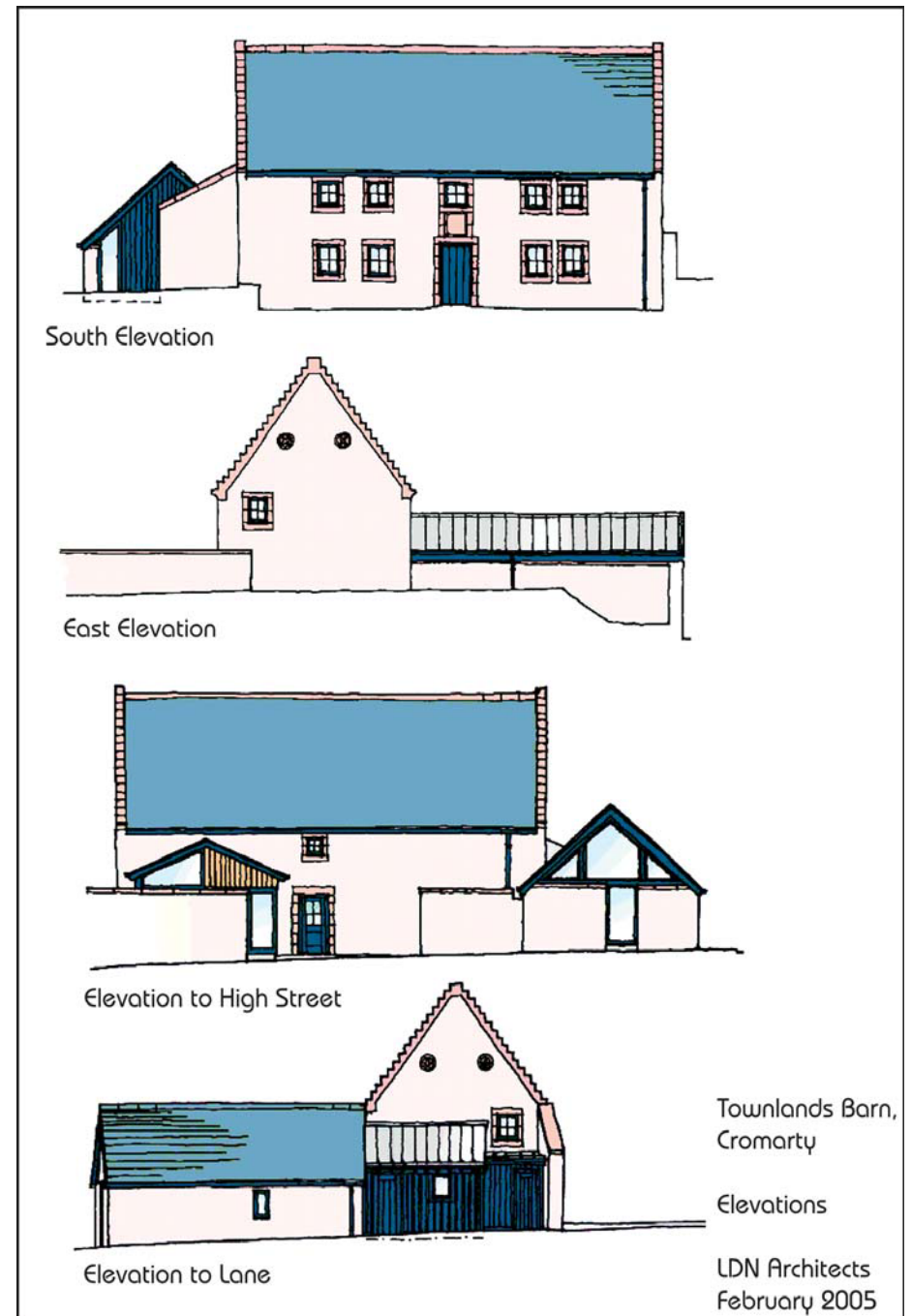
Development Factors

- 5.1 The following key considerations govern the development potential: -
- ▶ The location in the Outstanding Conservation Area and the need for appropriate high quality design.
 - ▶ The setting of the Townlands Barn.
 - ▶ Securing viable use(s) for the Listed building, through sympathetic conversion and restoration.
 - ▶ The need to make land available for low cost/locals needs housing and contribute to the overall effective land supply in Cromarty.
 - ▶ Its central location for a key community use - a health centre.
 - ▶ A new access from the A832/Denny Road.
 - ▶ The need to safeguard the adjoining woodland to the south and provide appropriate pedestrian links through the site between it and the High Street.
 - ▶ The need to safeguard and enhance the amenity of and allow for provision of rear access to surrounding property.
 - ▶ The need to integrate surrounding and proposed uses of the site while respecting the use made of the Victoria Hall and adjoining recreation space/play area.
 - ▶ Requirement to comply with standards laid down by Communities Scotland for affordable housing.

Development Areas and Preferred Uses

The Townlands Barn

5.2 As per the feasibility study, on the basis of securing the necessary funding, the property will be returned to its original use as **a house**, with the later west extension being used to provide a separate residential unit, possibly a starter home or granny flat (see drawings opposite/). Alternative use of this extension for a studio/workshop/office would also be appropriate. Access for vehicles shall be taken via the lane at the side and curtilage parking provided.



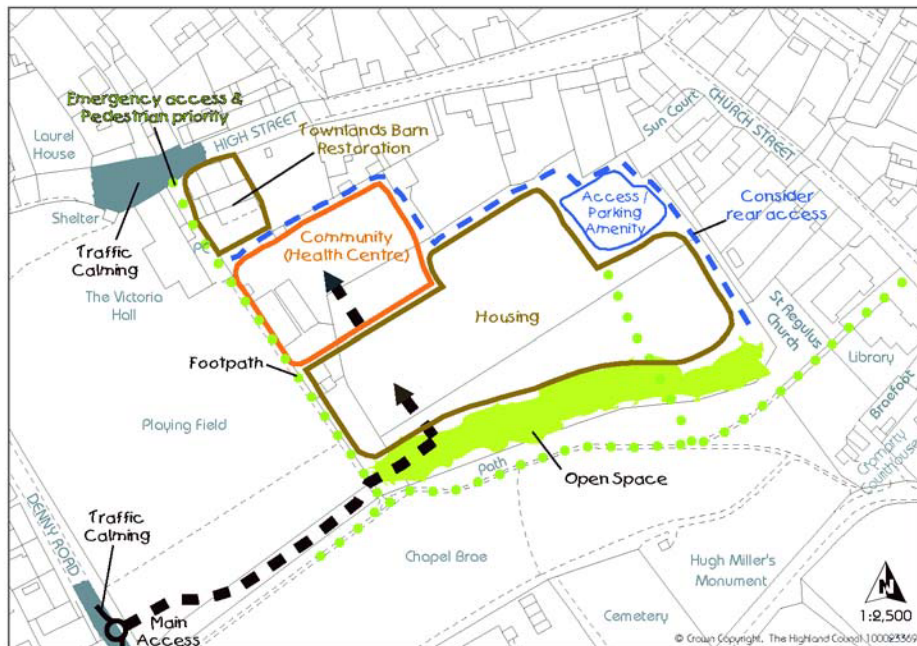
Land

5.3 Housing on up to 1 ha. for 20 to 30 dwellings of which two thirds should be for affordable/social needs and low cost home ownership.

5.4 Discussions have been held with local medical practitioners and NHS Highland about the possibility of accommodating **a new health centre** with a gross floorspace of approximately 250 square metres in the north western area of the land. The associated car parking area should provide more than the minimum spaces to supplement general provision for the town centre.

Layout Design

5.5 Uses should generally be located in accordance with the Framework Plan below. The layout design should follow the principles set out in Planning Advice Note 67 *Housing Quality* and developers should demonstrate by means of a Sustainable Design Statement that their proposals take account of sustainable design practice as indicated in the Council's guidelines, *Designing for Sustainability in the Highlands*.



5.6 In common with most historic Scottish towns the pattern of streets in the central area of Cromarty is quite varied. The main thoroughfares generally run either north west or south east from High Street. This affords most houses a south westerly aspect, important for solar gain and a factor relevant to the overshadowing effect the wooded slope of the Chapel Brae has on the southern edge of the development area.

5.7 A particular characteristic of the street patterns in this area is of built form located hard to pavement edges, irregular plot widths, staggered and stepped building lines, and a noticeable lack of regularity or formality in street planning. All of this contributes to the creation of a sequence of public spaces that are varied, interesting and human scaled, with a strong sense of enclosure. These characteristics should inform a development that contributes to a strong sense of place rather than an anonymous repetitive suburban residential development.

5.8 The Council also expects developers to account for the following when preparing proposals for the area: -

Housing Plot Ratio: The Council will normally expect a maximum plot ratio (total building floorspace divided by plot area) of 30%. However, this could vary according to the form of development proposed and the character of the surrounding properties.

Privacy, Amenity and Daylighting: The siting and orientation of buildings should minimise potential adverse impacts on the privacy and amenity of adjoining properties on High Street and Church Street. New development should not result in significant loss of daylight or overshadowing of any habitable or usable room within a neighbouring building.

Woodland Safeguarding and Tree Planting: No buildings shall encroach into the open space area adjacent to the Chapel Brae woodland or within 20 metres of the trunks of individual trees. Developers should consider the planting of trees in other areas of the development to help break up the urban form and communal parking areas and to complement the nearby Chapel Brae.

Landscaping/Open Space: Developers should lay out and develop all areas of open space, landscaping and footpaths indicated and phased as appropriate. Adequate space should be provided for SUDS measures. There is no requirement to provide an equipped play area but developers should instead contribute to upgrading the adjoining play park.

6. DESIGN GUIDANCE

Archaeology: There are no recorded archaeological sites within the undeveloped land. However, as there are recorded sites at the Townlands Barn and on property surrounding the open land, it is possible that there are yet unrecorded sites. Developers will therefore be required to:

- ▶ undertake archaeological evaluations prior to development to define the presence/absence, nature, depth, extent and importance of any remains;
- ▶ consult the Council's Archaeology Unit and Area Planning and Building Standards Manager prior to any planning application being lodged; and
- ▶ provide an assessment of the archaeological importance of the site by as part of any application.

Construction Waste: Contractors should be aware of SEPA guidance regarding the correct disposal of waste arising from a construction site and are required to contact that Agency for clarification on any matter prior to the commencement of work. In accordance with sustainability guidance, developers should also demonstrate arrangements for minimising waste and storage for recycling.

Lighting Design: For the design of street and other exterior lighting, developers should comply with the provisions of emerging national guidance and Section 5.3 of Designing for Sustainability in the Highlands (Revised November 2005).



Building design should reflect local distinctiveness and incorporate local design features evident in surrounding buildings. Many examples of local design features can be found in the listed buildings in this locality and buildings within the Outstanding Conservation Area. However, the guidance which follows need not inhibit a creative interpretation of local traditional building style through contemporary architecture. See PAN 67 and Designing for Sustainability in the Highlands.



House Designs

Affordable Housing: Developers should follow Communities Scotland standards for Housing for Varying Needs and Design Guidance.

Form and Scale: Buildings should generally have a rectangular plan and not exceed two and half storeys in height.

Roofs: Particular attention should be paid to reflecting traditional roof pitches, ridge lines and skews. Roofs should be simple and symmetrical, should be pitched, ideally at an angle of between 45 and 55 degrees and can be gabled or hipped. Roofing materials should be slate from a natural source, and in terms of texture, thickness and grading should be a close match to West Highland slate. Concrete tiles and artificial slates are not permitted.

Wires, aerials, satellite dishes and vent pipes should not be allowed to clutter the roofline.

Generally the eaves detail comprises a projecting stone immediately beneath the roof with a very shallow overhang rarely exceeding 75 mm. Fascias with boxed soffits will not be permitted.

Dormer Windows: Dormer windows can add interest and character in the roofscape but they should reflect the traditional styles and should not dominate the roof but be of a scale appropriate to the building and slated to match the rest of the roof. Collectively they should not occupy more than 50% of the roof elevation, should be set below the ridge of the roof, drawn well back from the eaves and should not extend right up to the gable end.

Rooflights: Small conservation style rooflights may be acceptable in inconspicuous locations. They will be discouraged on front and visually prominent roof slopes.

Solar Panels: The location of solar panel, if proposed, should be discussed with the Conservation Architect.

Flues and Chimneys: Flues and extract ventilator terminals will not be permitted on front walls or other walls fronting public areas. Vent stacks should be contained within chimneys.

Rainwater Goods: Rainwater goods should generally be in cast iron or in aluminium painted black. Gutters will generally be half round.

Walls: Facing/finishing materials should be chosen for their durability and weather resistant qualities. The use of natural stone and/or harling or render is encouraged, but innovative design incorporating glass and timber may also be acceptable. However, multi-coloured artificial stone and PVC facing materials should not be used. Natural through coloured harl or render is acceptable with type and colour to be approved. Where colour washing or painting of expansive areas is proposed, colours should match traditional local stone work or be white or off white. Mortar joints in random stonework should be flush pointed. Mortar should be lime based.

Windows: Window openings should be vertical in emphasis, with the ratio of solid to void being in favour of the solid. Windows should be timber and painted and should be vertical sliding sash and case or side hung casements.

Doors: Door openings should have a vertical emphasis and doors should be of traditional and simple design, panelled or vertical lined timber and painted. The addition of an enclosed front porch will be permitted if it is of a traditional design, construction and form.

Outbuildings and Ancillary Facilities: Garages and permanent storage buildings should complement the main building, and adopt a similar roof pitch, external wall finish and roof slates. Garden sheds, refuse bin storage, cycle storage, fuel bunkers and drying greens should be sited unobtrusively. Sheds may be timber framed and clad with weatherboarding. Greenhouses should be timber framed.

Boundary Enclosures: The use of traditional local materials is encouraged and generally confined to the side and rear boundaries of individual properties, co-ordinated across the whole development. The existing stone walling along the periphery of the development site should be retained and maintained in traditional materials.

Heath Centre or other Non-Residential Buildings

In order to maximise the flexibility of use and design there is no hard and fast requirement for a particular style of building. However, developers should consider designs that reflect traditional local building styles and materials. The following guidelines apply: -

- ▶ No building shall exceed the equivalent of two and a half storeys in height.
- ▶ The overall bulk of a large building should be broken down to avoid long horizontal frontages.
- ▶ Facing materials shall be chosen for their good weathering characteristics and include quality finishes in wet or dry dash, natural stone, timber, glass and slate, as required.
- ▶ Colour can be used to break up the visual bulk of a building although a wide variation in the range and use of garish colours should be avoided.



7. DESIGN STATEMENT

Any potential developer must prepare a detailed design statement in accordance with PAN 68: Design Statements, that sets out the design principles for the development, and explains how these have resulted from a detailed contextual analysis of the site and its wider context. Such an analysis should consider and demonstrate an awareness of urban design issues such as: views into and out of the development, circulation routes and desire lines through the site, traditional street patterns, front to front / back to back relationships, active frontages with main door accesses that front public areas, the appropriate mass and scale of the development, opportunities to 'celebrate' entry and corner features, and clear definition of public and private space. A landscaping strategy should be included to demonstrate how boundary treatments, planting, surface finishes, building materials, lighting, and incidental uses such as garages, bin stores, etc. would be integrated.



8. CONTACTS

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Developers should make contact with Scottish Southern Energy and British Telecom for other service connections.