

Balloch Community Council Response to the Inner Moray Firth Plan.

History

Balloch has been a village in its present form for well over a hundred years and the residents both old and new are protective of this status that we have in this village. There has probably been a settlement of sorts going back to the dawn of Christianity as witness by the **Fuaran a'chleirich** or the Priest Spring a well located at Wellside after which the estate was named and bronze age standing stones adjacent to the A96 show historical significance in this area .

Balloch was named (Balleowdoch) in the 1509 Charter confirmation of William Ogilvy of Strathdearn and Alison Rule granted by King James III, worth annually £3 6s 8d, with a quarter mart and a quarter mutton; with Original cottages on Cherry Park thought to be 350 years old. Certainly by 1846 Balloch had 20 dwellings and 104 inhabitants.

So it can be seen that this village has a history of some importance compared to the recent settlements of Smithton/Culloden which are relatively recent with Culloden being largely created in the 1970's. Balloch has managed to maintain a village feel even as the village has expanded from the village centre up the hill and with the developments to the east at Wellside.

Balloch has been fortunate to have a surrounding area of both green wedge of mainly farming land and forestry plantations, which have stopped further encroachment towards the village. We in Balloch believe that this land area will come under pressure for development in the future and wish to present our suggestions and concerns for the village and immediate area. That is not to say that we do not see the possibility of some potentially advantageous opportunities to provide some of the amenities that the village lacks through some minor changes of some of the green wedge and Background Policy land providing a buffer between Culloden to the west and the A96 corridor to the east.

Response of future plans for Balloch

We have utilised the Inverness city Plan map adopted in 2006 as our review reference, as we are unable to use the reference points on that plan we will comment by direction, if further clarification is required we are happy to meet with you.

North

The area shown as to the North of the village towards the A96 (North of Culloden Road), and consisting mainly large fields and associated smaller ones running west to east from Culloden Academy School to the A96. We suggest this whole area being

classified as potential area for community use and designated as Park Land. The two large fields running north are used currently as part of Balloch Farm and as such are owned by trustees of the late Mr Goodbody's estate. It is currently under farmed mostly as cereal crops. We can envisage that this land may eventually be unfarmed and as such we would like to see it designated Park Land. The current "Hedges/old Balloch Road" provides recreational benefits enjoyed by a wide range of users and would be the ideal opportunity to expand. This would provide the village with one of the deficiencies that the village suffers (noted on table on paragraph 2.25 (2006 LAP) from, which is a lack of a park(s)). It may also allow for Culloden Academy to potentially site games areas (on the west side field or and on an area of land to the North of this field) i.e. Football pitches, hockey etc; this would allow the school to expand onto the existing area currently used for this in the future. This area we would suggest (which should be owned by the community) would have to be available for all of the community, not just for the school and would not be owned by the school (council) thereby curtailing the option in the future to sell this land for future development if the Council wished to raise finance. This has happened in the past at a large number of schools throughout the country and by utilising this ownership clause would prevent this in the future. Land on the east of the "Hedges" (old Balloch Road) would be designated as Recreational Park Land i.e. non games land and hopefully would be planted with broad leafed trees and possibly other needed facilities, which could be enjoyed by the developments of Smithton, Culloden, West Hill and Cradelhall as well as the city at large. We envisage a large park encompassing items likes pre school children's playground, an adventure playground, a continuous path which being relatively flat would be ideal for disability access along with the potential for a 9 hole golf course at some time; this may provide an opportunity to relocate the current Torvean golf club and course to the east side of the city. We acknowledge that Castle Stuart does provide a world class golf course a short distance away but the proposal would be more in line with municipal courses throughout Scotland. We would envisage the park being a low cost development akin to a city centre park along the lines of Princess Street gardens in Edinburgh (excluding the Golf course) with limited parking to encourage walking, with circuit paths for walking, possibly a small lake and other recreational uses which are sympathetic. The cost to provide this would be minimal and maintenance should be limited to grass cutting and minor maintenance, ownership would be by the village trust or some body decided at the time.

The other area which we would ask to be safeguarded is the small area directly north of, and the area to the west of Balloch Primary School, being part of Balloch Farm. This is part of a parcel of land that the Balloch Village Trust have in place a Land Registration, valid for the fields around the school and the fields between Balloch and Culloden south of Barn Church Road (Chapelton Farm). Balloch Community Council supports this interest from the Balloch Village Trust and would be encompassed in the proposals above this would give the primary school at Balloch growing room (akin to the Academy) and additional games areas currently meet only by the school football pitch.

East

To the east of the village which incorporates the farm of Upper Cullernie and the land running to the A96 and to Balmachree in an eastern direction; we would wish this

area again currently farmland to remain as such with no further development towards the A96. The development of Tornagrain should be seen as the next unique development area to the east of Inverness, and we currently see no need to develop here now that Tornagrain is identified as development to the east of the village. The land to the south of this area is owned by Moray Estates and again should be maintained as forestry (BP) land as at present as it provides excellent recreational facilities in the area (see also additional areas below).

West

The current green wedge to the west creating a natural break between the eastern most part of Culloden and Balloch including the land of Chapleton Farm (BP land) again should be maintained, as shown in the 2006 adopted plan. This break provides for the identity of the village, whilst travelling from west to east along Barn Church Road, the break of development from Culloden Academy/Culloden identifies Balloch as a different village/area and any change to this would not be welcomed and would be opposed by both the BCC and the village in general.

South

To the south of the village, Viewhill and Feabuie are the two areas which mark out the ending of the village and the opening of farmland/BP land. Development pressure has been building for a number of years on this area between the village and the B9006 which with Culloden Battlefield as an area of not only Scottish Historical interest is also a world renowned heritage site which must continue to be protected for future generations as well as the tens of thousands who visit each year.

Feabuie

Feabuie Road marks the end of Balloch Community Council area and the position of the CC over the last 10-15 years is that this area should again not be developed due to infrastructure limitations, Feabuie may well in the future be a candidate for isolated development it has a natural break between Balloch and the B9006, and some development may be supported here. However major infrastructure developments need to be put in place before there can be any consideration and BCC would until or unless this takes place object to any change in the current status of this entire area and the adjacent CC area to the south, up to the B9006 road.

Planning applications continue to be presented for various areas of Feabuie which the Balloch Community Council will oppose due to infrastructure limitations (see conclusion) and because no farming need can be identified. We are also concerned at what appears to be continual development along the road adjacent (south) of Feabuie which appears to be a commercial enterprise, and a possible backdoor development potential.

Viewhill

To the immediate south of the village is Viewhill Farm and the land of which is currently still farmed although to a more limited extent than in the past. There are presently houses along the farm road and to the east of the farm road and we would be

concerned if any further infill took place here this again like Feabuie is due to the limitation of the infrastructure. In the past various dubious planning permissions i.e. for farm workers housing were granted which have caused concern. We have not been allowed on to the farm, as the agent for the owner has concerns for such a visit under Health and Safety legislation which we understand relates to the condition of the main barn/indoor riding school which was damaged during the 2010/11 winter snow. We understand there are plans by the current owner to develop the area of the existing farm buildings, for a courtyard development, which is again not an area currently zoned for housing and is not welcomed due to our previous comments. Additional arguments against this change of use are that the local infrastructure is not in a position to accommodate additional housing development. (See last paragraph). We on the BCC would like to see the farm to continue as operated or the land continue as BP land or again be designated community land.

Forestry College.

Inverness College operates a School of Forestry adjacent to Viewhill it is within the BP land of the Forestry Commission; we note that there were plans to place a railway halt (light railway) in this area as the main rail line runs north of this. With the new college operation moving we do not know what may happen to the forestry school we were not able to get any response over the Easter period. It might be possible, if the School was relocated to the main College at Inverness to utilise the buildings for a crafts related to the woodland environment.

Additional areas

At the south fringe of the village is a large area known as Cullernie woods, currently Forestry Commission land and again under BP 3 designation. This again is an area of land that we would like to protect this area as community use, currently the BCC has an area of community woodland bordering this area and if this additional land became available to Highland Council, (we understand there is a possibility of this) we would like to see it used for the community of Balloch. This area is also popular with dog walkers, ramblers, cyclists and others and as it borders Moray estates provides for many miles of recreational pathways. It is also the habitat of deer, red squirrels, pine martin, badgers and other wild life. We would like to protect

Conclusion

We believe that to maintain the identity of the village that further housing development in and around the village would not be welcome the future of any development should take place at the Tornagrain area identified by the Highland Council. The village lacks a number of infrastructure amenities and services as already identified in the adopted 2006 Local Plan and we hope that the sites we have identified to correct this will be given full consideration. Although it recognises that there are some deficiencies in the mix of housing, something which was allowed to take place over the last three decades of poor planning control. Any potential development in the future should be only to correct these identified deficiencies, which is low cost or shelter type housing, further large housing units of four

bedrooms or a large ground area, in or around the village should be actively discouraged, as should any further “back lot” development which seems to be a back way of increasing housing density in the area. The Community Council would be open to allowing “granny type” properties to be developed in any future back lot development but this must be tightly controlled by ground area and not be allowed to be abused as in recent applications where large units are allowed once outline planning applications are granted.

Areas of concern to the Community Council are the lack of recreational playing land, the only space currently is the school football field which technically is not available to the community. The Balloch Community Hall has come under financial pressure in the last couple of years but new management is pursuing further funding sources. The Hall is a vital asset for the Village and the BCC would hope it remains as such. The (New) village primary School (which was almost too small the day it was built) has had pressure to provide places to children not located in the village and we understand the reasons for this, however further development would exacerbate this problem. Although currently just within its limit of approx three hundred pupils any additional development would again mean composite classes and a question over the schools ability to provide quality education in the formative years. The road from the southern fringe of the village requires traffic to use a single lane Victorian railway bridge which is a bottle neck. The exit from Viewhill and Inverness College Forestry School is onto two particularly difficult sections of the road and this along with the railway bridge and the narrow road which proceeds south to the Keppoch B9006 junction has dangerous sections where unfortunately fatalities have happened in the past along with no lighting and limited safe walking sections. We are prepared at any time to meet with council officials to discuss this response thorough the Chairman Ian Williams.

Elsbeth Fraser

Angus E MacKiggan

John MacKellaich