

FAEBUIE CROMDALE: SUPPLEMENTARY POLICY NOTE

Purpose

1. This note provides supplementary advice to the policy contained in para. 2.2.8-11 of the Highland Structure Plan and the policy contained in para. 2.2.1 of Badenoch and Strathspey Local Plan (1997), both of which deal with Housing in the Countryside. It relates to land at Faebuie, Cromdale.
2. This advice arises in response to the Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee's request following recent proposals for 9 houses and the likely availability of further land for development. In accordance with policy, it seeks to balance development opportunities with safeguards for existing land uses and amenity, physical limitations, and spare capacity in infrastructure.

Location

3. The area lies to the south of Cromdale. It embraces the Distillery village of Balmenach and a surrounding "envelope" of some 30 ha. of land which extends west to Faebuie. The land is substantially in one ownership. Cromdale lies towards the northern extremities of Badenoch and Strathspey. The economy and population show signs of fragility. Stimulating development would help to maintain facilities.

Policy

4. Policy H3 of the Structure Plan (approved by Scottish Ministers in 2001) states: *Housing development will generally be within existing and planned new settlements. ...Elsewhere, housing in the countryside of an appropriate location, scale, design and materials may be acceptable where it supports communities experiencing difficulty in maintaining population and services. In crofting townships, new housing will need to respect the existing pattern of development.* Proposed developments will also be assessed against the terms of Structure Plan policy G2.
5. These policies take precedence over, but should be read conjointly with, those contained in para. 2.2.1 of the Adopted Local Plan. Although the northern edge of the area is identified as *Restricted Countryside Area*, the land is predominantly within a *General Countryside Area* wherein single houses will normally be acceptable provided good siting and design are met. This advice therefore seeks to apply such principles and avoid proliferation and ad-hoc clusters of houses.
6. The Local Plan (para. 2.2.6) also encourages reinstatement of the Distillery operations or other beneficial after use. Para. 3.10.2 recognises the potential to form a path using the disused railway line from Cromdale.

ANALYSIS

Physical/Heritage

7. Much of the area is flat, open and exposed agricultural land of poor quality with pockets of heath and moor. Poorly drained, boggy pockets render ground conditions across parts of the area unsuitable for building. An established system of field drains fragments the area. Mature amenity woodland and rising ground to the south and west together with a prominent belt of mixed trees offer some shelter. The Cromdale burn, a prominent feature towards the east, could be the focus for a “green” corridor associating with the proposed walking route at (6) above.

Services/Infrastructure

8. A “loop” of narrow, single track roads with limited passing opportunities links the Distillery with the A95 at Cromdale and Faebuie. Three further passing places and some curve widening will be required for the seven house sites shown in the diagram provisionally costed at £24,000 to be met by the landowner/developer. This is also subject to the Trunk Road Authority’s satisfaction that no further upgrading of the southern most junction with the A95 is required. Private tracks lead from this road network. The disused railway line is promoted in the Local Plan as a path in association with visitor opportunities at the Distillery.
9. A branch mains water supply connects the Distillery. Outlying houses are believed to be served by private spring-fed supplies. A water storage tank should be protected. A small drainage plant serves the Distillery and associated buildings. Development elsewhere is dependent upon suitable septic tank and soakaway conditions or direct discharge to water courses subject to SEPA approval.
10. A major 132 kv electricity supply marches through the area south of the Distillery. This causes significant intrusion.

Settlement Pattern

11. The Distillery and its ancillary buildings dominate the main settlement. These create a tightly knit cluster, prominent - though not unappealing - in a generally open setting. Related housing - distinctive in style - forms a well defined “street” of cottages. The Distillery has recently re-started following several years “moth-balling”. Any consolidation of this settlement should include small scale woodland on its edges.
12. A loose collection of houses and related holdings to the west together with a more isolated farm unit to the south represent a scatter of remaining buildings associated with traditional uses, though in some cases these are no longer functioning. This pattern reflects the historic arrangement of land uses, services and prevailing development constraints.

Recent History

13. During the past 3 years planning permission has been granted for one “infill” dwelling at Balmenach. In outlying locations, two single houses have been granted permission. Two further proposed houses have been refused planning permission on the grounds of conflict with policy, loss of trees and visual prominence in the open landscape.
14. These decisions are consistent with policy and the one case “tested”, has been upheld on Appeal. They reflect the characteristic spacing of plots and capacity of the landscape to absorb additional dwellings and have a bearing on the potential for further building. Four additional planning applications are awaiting determination.

PRINCIPLES

15. This area is located 1-1.5 km from Cromdale where the Local Plan allocates some 10 ha. of land with capacity for approximately 70 houses. Much of Faebuie is exposed, boggy and lacking in ground cover; and the public water supply network is limited.
16. Accordingly, in areas away from Balmenach, a limited number of further houses may be acceptable provided that sites meet required standards in access, water supply and waste water disposal; and that sub soil conditions enable satisfactory building foundations. These matters will be resolved by technical assessment of individual proposals. Notwithstanding, the following locational factors are regarded as important in considering the scope and extent of further house-building:
- association with rising land or vegetation so that sites obtain some shelter and relate visually to the locality;
 - reasonable spacing between existing and proposed houses so that privacy and outlook is maintained with dwellings preferably not less than 150m apart;
 - reasonable proximity to the road network to minimise development costs.
17. The following locations (see Diag.) are therefore considered to be suitable for single houses (*where planning permission has been given) or merit further investigation as to their technical suitability for development:

Ref.	Location	Requirements	
(i)	Birchwood, Faebuie	(00/280/FUL/BS)*	
(ii)	Burnside	(00/272/FUL/BS)*	
(iii)	South of Faebuie	Set against rising land/woodland	Road improvements as 8 above
(iv)	east of Tomliath	Set by shelter belt, 20m from trees	
(v)	east of Rowanlea	As (iv) above, north of shelter belt	
(vi)	North of Rowanlea	Shared access, subject to availability	
(vii)	west of Faebuie	On former house site	

18. It is anticipated that the road improvements would be carried out, in a phased manner as houses are completed with priority given to curve widening and any requirement by the Trunk Road's Authority. A response from the Scottish Executive with regard to possible junction improvements at the A95 is awaited.
19. Additional houses should be designed to incorporate traditional features and durable materials. "Clump" tree planting should associate with each new building. Otherwise, the expanse of open ground (see Diag.) either side of Balmenach and running north to Cromdale, is not suitable for further building and should be safeguarded for its open character, views and habitat.
20. Subject to servicing, compatible layout and design, Balmenach could be reinforced/extended by further building on a modest scale. However, this potential should be assessed in relation to the use/expansion or conversion/redevelopment of the Distillery and associated buildings. Given that these buildings represent an important economic opportunity; that there is a reasonable choice of building land locally (including opportunities at (17) above) it would be prudent to consider the future of the settlement as a whole and in consultation with the community and the Distillery operator. In this regard any further infrastructure improvements may include consideration of a cycleway/footway from the Distillery to Cromdale using the disused railway. All this could be fulfilled most appropriately when the Local Plan is next reviewed.

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