



FORT AUGUSTUS VILLAGE CENTRE

Development Brief
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Director: John D. Rennison
Planning & Development Service

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Purpose

1.1 The Inverness Local Plan identifies land adjoining the village centre at Fort Augustus for housing, business, community uses and car/coach parking*. Early action is needed to assemble a proposal capable of delivering urgently needed parking and a viable development opportunity.

1.2 This Development Brief promotes co-operation between landowners and consultation with the community. In particular, it provides a framework for:

- ▶ assembly/excambion of land;
- ▶ engineering works and remodeling of the site;
- ▶ layout and servicing options.

Situation

1.3 The site is located to the north of the village centre (see Diag opposite). It extends to 2.4 ha., embracing the existing car/coach park; the raised embankment of a former railway; two significant rock outcrops, the southernmost comprising a viewpoint/picnic site; and adjoining rough ground. The site is bounded by the A82/bus lay-by to the east; the River Oich and adjoining track to the south; open lands beyond and below the properties Pinecroft and Rowanlea to the west; and the steeper, treed slopes, below the Brae Hotel to the north.

1.4 The topography is extremely variable and fragmented, with contours ranging from 17-24m AOD, the lower margins at risk to flooding and intermittent remnant birch and scrub vegetation extending throughout. Maximising the potential for development and the uses identified will be dependent on engineering works to remove the embankment, spread material and - with the exception of the two rock outcrops - "grade-out" the substantive part of the site.



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*Inverness Local Plan Public Local Inquiry 2004

*Inverness Local Plan (Chapter 24, Fort Augustus, para. 3)

1.5 Adjoining activities require to be integrated and taken into account in the layout and arrangement of the site. These comprise the:

- ▶ Tourist Information Centre, electricity sub-station, public toilets and picnic site to the south-west and any future redevelopment aspirations which might arise in this vicinity;
- ▶ Brae Hotel and low density housing, elevated and overlooking the site to the north together with possible future connections through to Bunoich;

▶ Rare Breeds Park to the west, which may benefit from improved access through the site; and

▶ existing car/coach park, through which access to development in the “backlands” of the site will be taken and which may be remodeled to give maximum benefit.



Policy

The Inverness Local Plan adopted March 2006 (following a Public Local Inquiry 2004) indicates (Ch. 24, paras. 2 & 3):

“0.3 ha of land at the Village Centre is allocated for the extension of the car and coach park. The Council proposes to provide additional parking capacity on land in its ownership and acquire further ground to create a total of some 156 car spaces and 10 coach bays as a matter of priority.

1.2 ha. of land adjoining the village centre could have potential for housing, business and community uses subject to removal of part of the embankment, site levelling/ upfilling, extension of services and any necessary river defence works. The bridge abutments and adjoining ground will be retained to enable public access, and vegetation around the edges of the site reinforced. A full feasibility study should be pursued to explore the cost/ engineering implications of development and the options for access, after which the Council will prepare a Development Brief.”

Land Ownership and Commitments

2.1 There are two principal landowners, the Highland Council and Lovat Estate. Part of the Estate land vested by agreement with the Community Council, comprises a picnic site/viewpoint amenities associated with the car park.

Topography and Land Engineering

2.2 The two outcrops, distinguishable by their dense gorse vegetation, amount to some 11,600 cu. m (north) and 5,400 cu. m. (south) of hard rock. Unless required for armouring/other site works, these could be difficult and costly to remove given the limited “additional” development land that might result. Rising respectively to approximately 5m and 3m above a finished ground level, these could be retained as landscape features; around which different uses, development and access could be configured.

2.3 The disused railway embankment dissects the site, north east-south west. This is significantly more imposing to the south west on the immediate approach to a former river crossing, rising at this point to a height of 9m with a base width of 30m; gradually reducing in volume to 4m with a 20m base width, at the north east corner of the site. An initial *feasibility study* commissioned by the Estate# indicates that this material could be spread to the 21.5m contour to create an overall site “footprint” extending to 2.1 ha. (in addition to the existing car park), up-filling to a depth of some 2-4m in the lower parts of the site. For comparative purposes, the mean level at the existing car park is 20.3m. AOD.

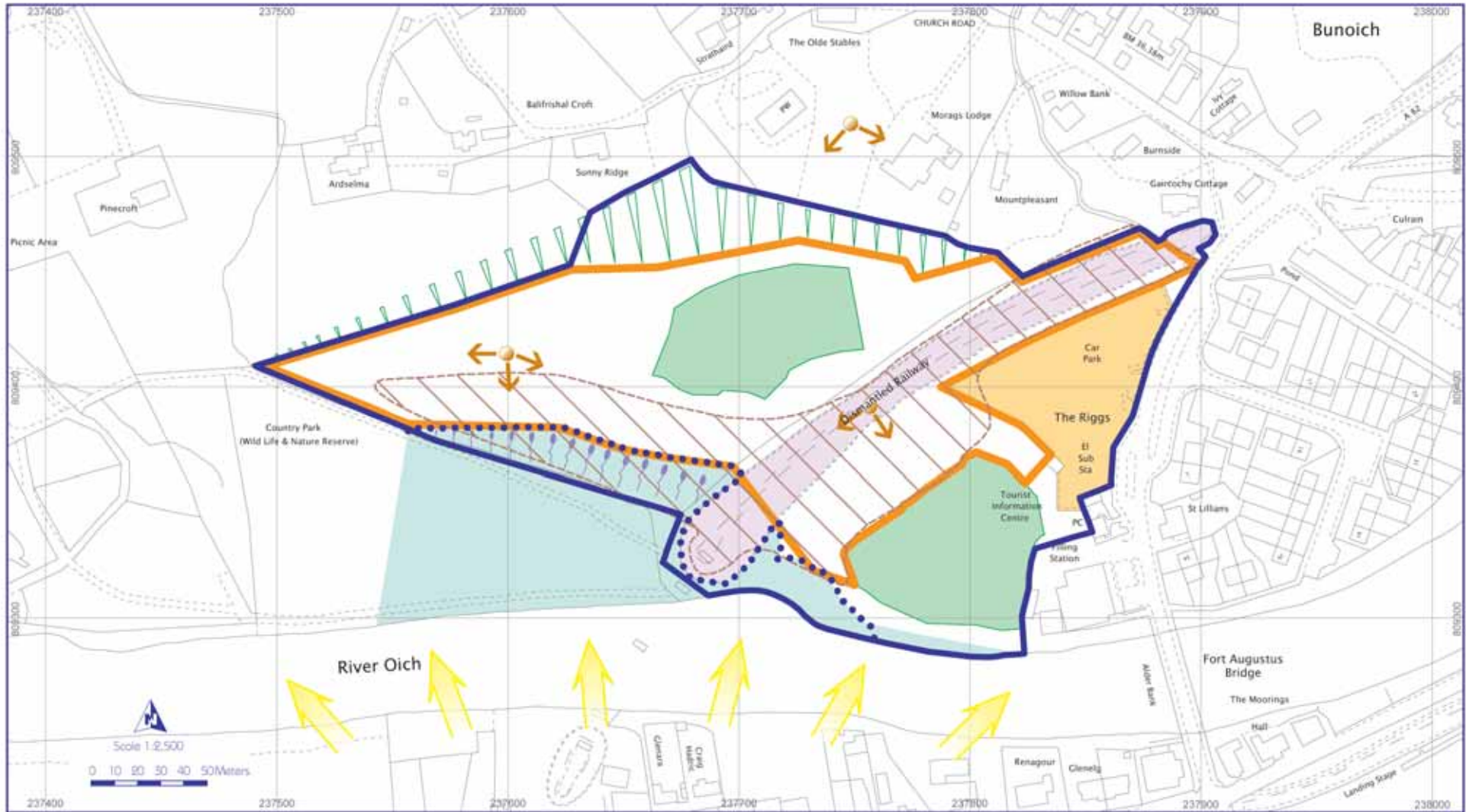
Flood Risk and Public Safety

2.4 Site works and development should be compatible with *SPP7 Planning and Flooding*. This prescribes that development should not occur on land considered to be at medium or high risk to flooding, nor within the functional flood plain. These factors are determined by the flood level likely to occur no more than once in 200 years (0.5% probability).

2.5 A *Risk Framework* (SPP7) sets the annual probability of flooding against possible land uses for planning purposes. For areas of medium to high risk, residential, commercial and industrial development is discouraged where flood defences are neither existing or planned. A preliminary Risk Assessment* indicates that any risk of flooding will arise from high water levels in the River Oich caused by high flows and/or water levels in Loch Ness backing-up; and that this could be exacerbated by obstructions to the flows. Further modeling within the vicinity indicates a predicted 200-year event water level in the River Oich at 18.8m OAD attributable in the main to the level of Loch Ness. It is conceivable that the combination of a high loch level and high river flows together with the width of the channel/flood plain at the former railway embankment/piers, could affect water levels adjacent to, and within the southern margins of the site. The preliminary Risk Assessment concludes it “very unlikely that the ...water level would exceed 19.5m AOD”.

*Nortec Feasibility Study: Lovat Estate 2001

ANALYSIS / CONSTRAINTS



LAND CONFIGURATION

- Former rail embankment
- Initial area of up fill
- Revised area for spread / up fill
- Side slope margin (variable) of fill
- Existing car / coach park

FLOOD RISK

- 19.0 metre contour
- Flood plain

GREEN FEATURES

- Rock knoll
- Steep slope

AMENITY

- Sunlight / exposure
- Views / outlook

Option B - Phanalysis Ltd

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2.6 Accordingly, a minimum site level of 21.5 m OAD is assumed sufficient against the 200-year return flood event. This is some 2.0m higher than the design water level, the baseline for effective flood prevention and management; and therefore gives a generous “free-board” for turbulence or obstructions. Notwithstanding, land-raising within the site could reduce flood storage and the conveyance or carrying capacity of the River Oich. Whilst downstream (of the former rail crossing) this is unlikely to affect flood risk or the flood plain and would not necessitate any compensatory flood storage; any such works upstream should not reduce the width of the river channel/flood plain. In addition, although it is unlikely that up-filling to the site boundary will result in any significant increase in flood levels, it would be prudent not to spread material from the former railway embankment into the river margins below the 19 m contour. To the west of the site this coincides with a dyke, and changes in the character of vegetation in this locality defines the extent of lower land towards the river.

2.7 The remaining sandstone bridge piers standing 9m high, were constructed around 1927 to enable the railway to extend over the Oich to the shores of Loch Ness. The railway has not been in use since 1935 and the bridge dismantled in later years. One pier lies within the site, encased within the railway embankment; another immediately adjoining is free-standing and exposed. The former should be retained within the embankment which should be reconfigured to create a viewpoint; or suitably cordoned-off to prevent public access. The latter, should be subject to assessment of any “risk” to future occupiers or users of the site, in the event that any instability in the structure might arise, together with appropriate remedial measures

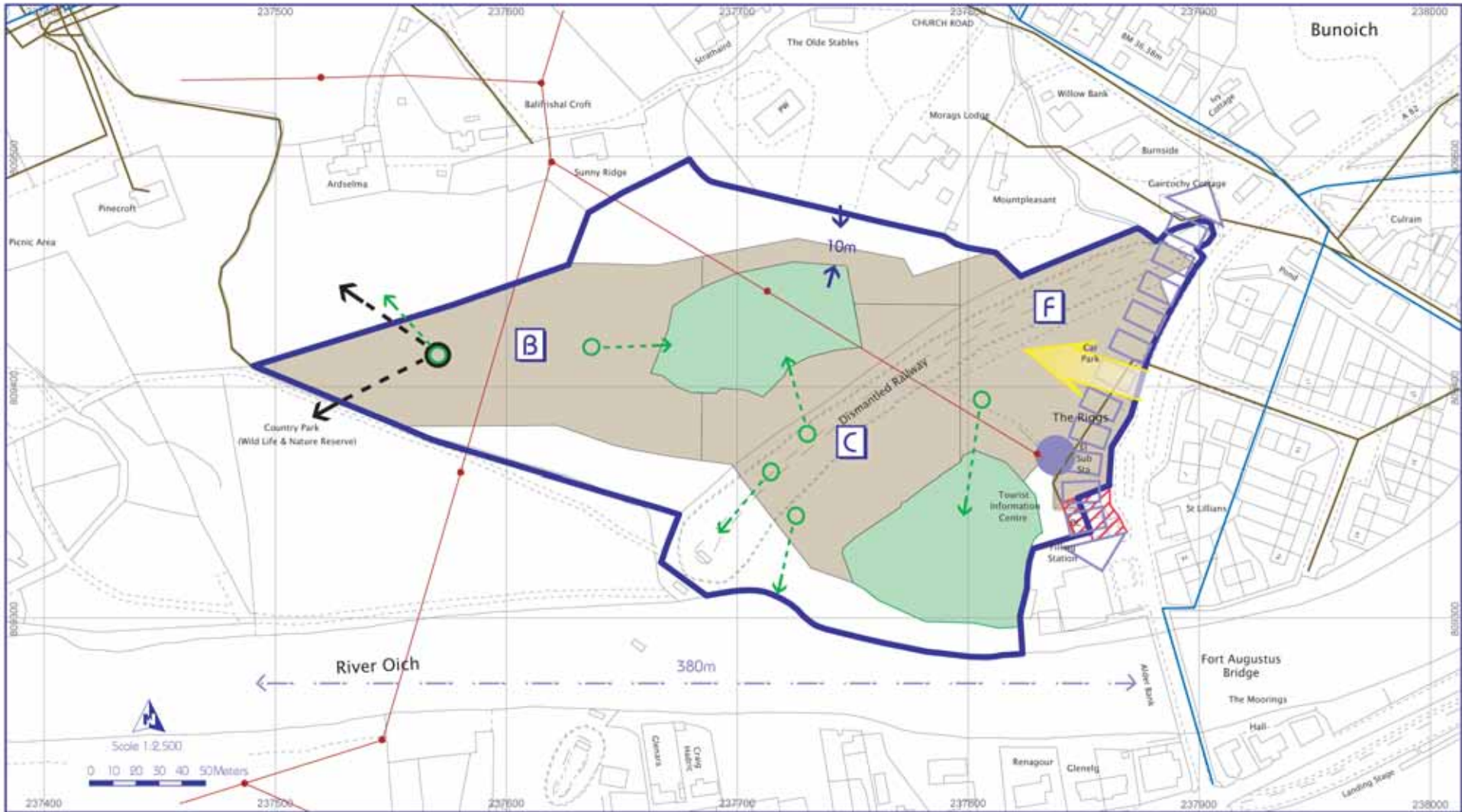
*Dr J F Riddell BSc PhD MICE MCIWEM Chartered Civil Engineer
(11th September 2006) with reference also to JBA Consulting for
Scottish Executive (September 2005)

Configuration and Capacity

2.8 The effect of fusing together these considerations will be that the actual “footprint” for development will be reduced and finished ground levels slightly higher than anticipated in the initial *feasibility study* (see *Framework diag over*). Such engineering details - which will substantially change the character of the site, its accessibility and potential for development - will require to be fully explained as part of any proposal and further adjusted, to incorporate:

- ▶ a gentle north-south crossfall enabling buildings to make the most of micro-climatic conditions, notably the south facing aspect and exposure to natural sunlight; and
- ▶ exposed side-slopes not exceeding 25% (1 in 4) to tie into the natural contours within or adjoining the site and avoid slippage or undesirable impacts on adjoining land, for which a margin some 7-8m wide should be retained free from development above the 19m contour.

2.9 Notwithstanding, for the purposes of this Brief, it is assumed that land reconfigured within these constraints and capable of development, could extend to approximately 2.3 ha., (19,200 sq m), of which the existing car/coach park car park comprises 0.3 ha. This gives a rather awkward, elongated shape extending east-west some 380 m and variously in width (north-south), between 60-90 m. Restrictions on up-filling and rising land create pinch-points towards the centre of the site, notably 25m in width to the south of the main rock outcrop and 10m in width to the north, the latter forming a tight corridor which may have potential as a conduit for access, separating different uses and freeing-up other land for development.



LAND CONFIGURATION

- Development "Footprint"
- Void
- "Pinch-Point"
- Distance

CONNECTIONS / LINKS

- Main access
- Possible road
- Possible Pedestrian link

SERVICES

- Water
- Waste water
- Electricity
- Access / Safeguard

AMENITY / DESIGN

- Townscape / Frontage
- Possible redevelopment
- Main Compartments
- Compartment name

Option 3 - Framework

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Access

3.1 Access to future development within the site will be taken from the A82 and a route reserved through the existing car park, which will require to be reconfigured/remodeled accordingly. The site should be connected to adjoining development, established routes and desire lines.

3.2 To the north, a raised beach escarpment some 10m in height towards Bunoich/Jenkins Park forms a slope at a gradient variously between 25-60%, moderating towards the west; whilst the open lands to the west, including the Rare Breeds Park, are flatter by comparison. Given that accessibility of these lands is via the existing, severely restricted A82/Bunoich junction, it would be appropriate to retain the option for improved access through the site ultimately. However, road construction standards* seek a maximum slope of 8%/1 in 12 for access and a link towards Bunoich/Jenkins Park could not be achieved without substantial cutting and acquisition of property outwith the site.

Water and Waste Water

3.3 The water supply and waste water *assets* at Fort Augustus have very limited capability to serve additional development without significant investment. Water is constrained by the capacity of the treatment works and the present Water Order governing extraction from Loch Tarff. However, off-peak demand is high and the scope for leakage reduction under investigation. The foul drainage treatment facilities are operating at close to capacity.

3.4 Scottish Water recognizes the potential for *growth* and having programmed improvements between 2006-2014 anticipates that water and waste water solutions will be completed as early as in 2007 and 2008 respectively. This will involve updated licensing for abstraction from Loch Tarff; and extension of the foul drainage treatment works. Notwithstanding, the capacity of the water and waste water *networks* will require scrutiny in respect of any improvement thresholds and related off-site costs which could fall against the development of this site. These might also serve other land identified for development in Fort Augustus, notably at Markethill (c.90 houses) and the Old Convent (c.45 houses) in addition to some 20-25 houses (and other development) at the village centre.

3.5 In the meantime limited spare capacity and operational efficiencies together with any off-site improvements to the networks will exert a particular bearing on the scale and timing of development; and possibly, the order in which housing proceeds at these locations. This may merit a 3-way, shared-costs arrangement, with contributions levied pro-rata against the potential of the land holdings involved; and consideration of their respective capability to deliver wider local benefits, including - in respect of the land at the village centre - essential car parking.

Utilities

3.6 Provision should be made to retain access to the electricity sub-station and for overhead lines to be under-grounded as part of any development proposal.

Principles

4.1 A viable development “package” will balance the cost of site engineering works and services with a mix of uses and activities which fit and function well with the village.

4.2 The following opportunities should be explored as part of the layout options for the site and where appropriate, provisions made as necessary:

- ▶ **housing:** a range of densities and types reflecting the grain and tenure of properties in the village. Higher intensity/tighter building forms should locate towards the east; lower/looser forms to the west. Affordable housing will be sought at the rate of 25%;
- ▶ **business:** a choice of opportunities including a high profile, clearly visible site which might suit a visitor-related enterprise or a more discrete, better concealed location, perhaps offering greater flexibility for local service uses;
- ▶ **community:** retention of the rock outcrops as landscape features, important trees and the picnic site/viewpoint. A *LAP* - local area for play - of 100 sq. m should be located centrally;

▶ **parking:** extension of the car and coach park equivalent to an additional 60/2 spaces. This will require in total - subject to detailed layout - a minimum “take” of 0.3 ha. of land plus further provision for any displaced spaces. Provision for short-stay users should associate with the Tourist Information Centre;

▶ **amenity:** direct pedestrian access to the footpaths in the Oich margins and to the village centre, and a reservation through to Bunoich. Land below the 19m contour should be reinstated and planted as habitat or contained and managed as part of the curtilage of residential properties;

▶ **access:** by the existing entry/egress point to the A82(T) and a 6m spinal road with 2m footpaths either side. This may be throttled down to 5.5m, serve car/coach parking on one side or both, incorporate shared/calmed surfaces in association with housing/business uses and be to unadoptive standards where serving no more than 4 houses. Whilst a residential cul-de-sac should not exceed 150m in length, “through” access to the Rare Breeds Park/Bunoich should be investigated.

1-bed	2-bed	3-bed	4-bed	5/6-bed
57 (47%)	31 (26%)	23 (19%)	6 (5%)	3.9m OD

Table: The Highland Council Housing Waiting List: Fort Augustus (October 2006)

Housing Needs Assessment

A Housing Needs Survey by the Highland Small Communities Housing Trust in 2003 identifies a need for some 55 homes. Of 40 considered priority, 40% were in the rented sector. With 10 affordable homes built or committed in the interim; this figure adjusts to 30. Further provision should be made to accommodate latent private sector needs not identified in this assessment which might arise with the community’s economic development. The Council’s Housing Waiting List (October 2006) (see Table below) reveals some 120 applicants. 73% (88) require small-sized homes; and 26% (31), medium-large homes. The Council and partners will monitor on-going housing requirements and give consideration to a further Needs Survey in due course. This will provide a basis for further agency action.

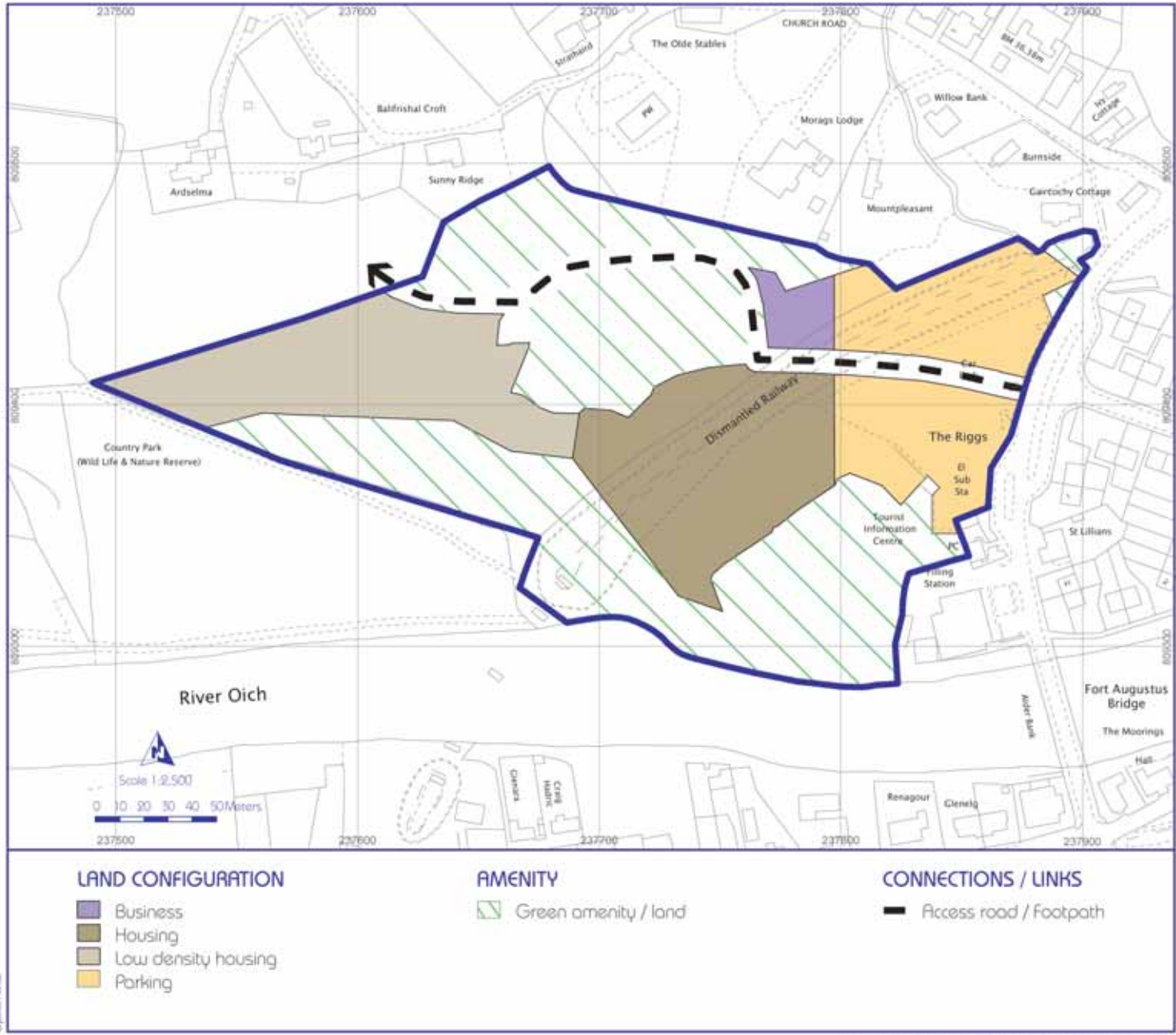
Option A



OPTION A:

- ▶ car/coach parking held to the south of an access "spine" associating with the tourist office/picnic site-viewpoint
- ▶ a higher value "frontage" development site with commercial/housing potential (8 units)
- ▶ townscape benefits from continuity of the traditional street "scene" and building line
- ▶ 4 semi-detached homes and 10 low density plots overlooking the river
- ▶ lower cost service connections

Option B



OPTION B:

- car/coach parking held to the site frontage, but segregated either side of a "spine" road
- retaining the void/views through from the A82
- discrete, concealed business site
- segregated access using corridor "behind" the rock bluff, limited infringement on plots by road reservation, but Longer utility connections
- 10 high density flats and 4 single plots in the centre (south)
8 lower/medium density to the west

Layout Options

4.3 The site breaks into three distinct parcels: the frontage (east); centre (south) and backland (west) from which two layout options appear to emerge; their component parts, tabulated below (see also the following diags. Option A and Option B). These options are intended to be flexible and offer scope for discussion. It is conceivable that a final outcome could involve a hybrid, drawing together for example, selected features of each.

OPTION A	use/density	area (ha.)	plot sizes (acres)/no.	character
EAST	commercial /business	0.20		frontage, high profile
	residential, high	0.25	n/a /8	flats
	parking	0.70		
CENTRE	residential, medium	0.20	0.15 @ 2	semi-detached
	open space	0.01		
WEST	residential, low	0.35	0.21 @ 4	single plots
	residential, medium	0.40	0.16 @ 6	single plots

OPTION B	use/density	area (ha.)	plot sizes (acres)/no.	character
EAST	business	0.80		discreet / concealed
	parking	0.70		
CENTRE	residential, high	0.35	n/a / 10	flats
	residential, medium	0.25	0.16 @ 4	single plots
	open space	0.01		
WEST		0.72	0.22 @ 8	single plots

Concept

5.1 A proposal should be based on the principle that the potential for enhanced land values from the housing, business and community uses is sufficient to underpin the costs of site engineering works and extension of the car/coach park, related surfacing and signage etc. This will require a detailed valuation assessment of the assets of the Council and the Estate; market/developer interest and a comprehensive site engineering contract.

5.2 Specifically, the Council's land requirements for car/coach parking are flexible and subject to detailed survey. The Council wishes to work with the adjoining landowner - and consult locally and with partners - to achieve the optimum layout.

5.3 Further consideration of any limitations in water and waste water will determine the rate and scale at which the site might develop and any related on-costs. In this regard, it is recommended that the Highland Housing Alliance undertake a feasibility/market assessment which should include the potential for the Alliance to acquire and bank land if necessary. In order to proceed along these lines, the draft Development Brief requires to be discussed locally and finalised in the first instance.

5.4 Further to the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes (Scotland) Regulations 2004 - and in the interests of promoting sustainable development - consultation will be required with SEPA, Scottish Natural Heritage and Historic Scotland to determine any requirement for Strategic Environmental Assessment of the proposals contained in this Brief.

Views

The Council wishes to consult locally and with interested parties prior to finalising this Brief. Comments invited by Friday 13th April 2007, should be sent to:

John D Rennilson
Director
Planning and Development
Service
The Highland Council
Glenurquhart Road
Inverness
IV3 5NX

Further information/e-mail:
colin.v.mackenzie@highland.gov.uk
Tel. 01463 702261