

Foreword

Foreword to the Report

BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

1. “The Highland Structure Plan Written Statement” (referred to throughout this report as ‘the structure plan’) was published in March 2000. It was approved by Scottish Ministers and became operative in March 2001.
2. In February 2003, The Highland Council (referred to as ‘the council’) approved the commencement of the preparation of a local plan for Wester Ross. The plan was carried out as part of a Scottish Executive pilot project to modernise development planning. A key aim of this was to speed up the planning process. Once adopted, the plan would replace the four previously adopted local plans, namely The Applecross, Gairloch and Lochcarron Local Plan, adopted in 1985; The Ullapool Village Plan, adopted in 1995; the Gairloch Village Plan, adopted in 1996; and The Lochbroom Landward Local Plan, adopted in 1999. A formal Notice of Intention to Prepare the plan was issued in March 2003.
3. The “Pre-Deposit Draft Wester Ross Local Plan” (referred to as ‘the initial draft’) was published in February 2004 and approved by the council in May 2004. Following a period of public consultation, the “Deposit Draft Wester Ross Local Plan” (‘the deposit draft’) was published in June 2004, the council considering all objections lodged against it in September 2004. As a result, a number of modifications were made to the plan and, following advertisement, objections to the changes were submitted by 19 November 2004.
4. On 9 July 2004, I was appointed by the council to conduct a public local inquiry into objections properly received but not withdrawn in relation to the deposit draft plan. I held a procedure meeting on 4 November 2004 in the Inverewe Village Hall, when procedural arrangements for the inquiry were discussed. The inquiry opened in the Poolewe Village Hall on 17 January 2005 and continued in the Alistair Murray Club Room, Lochcarron on 18 and 19 January 2005. Where appropriate, I made accompanied as well as unaccompanied site visits. These visits were made before, during and after the inquiry, some of the sites being visited on a number of occasions.

CONTENT OF THE REPORT

5. During the course of my consideration of the plan, the Scottish Executive has issued SPP 15: Planning for Rural Development, together with Planning Advice Notes 72 - Housing in the

Countryside, 73 - Rural Diversification and 74 - Affordable Housing. After consultation with the council, I have left these documents aside on the basis that they have been published at too late a stage of the proceedings to enable them to be taken into account.

6. The report follows the sequence of the deposit draft local plan, that is, it comprises this introduction, followed by an index which is combined with a summary of my recommendations in relation to each topic. There follows a section each on the objections relating to policy issues followed by those directed at the individual settlements, as shown on the inset maps. Within these headings however, I have taken the objections in the order set out by the council. Although I remain uncertain as to how the order of these objections has been set down (it appears to be alphabetical with a chronological addendum), I have followed the numbering and order of the objections as set out.

7. In an attempt to make my report more intelligible at the first reading to all its potential readers, I have ensured that it contains no planning acronyms or jargon. Although photographs provide a ready illustration of the parts of the plan area under discussion, apart from the chapter headings, I have kept these to a minimum and have ensured that they depict simple subjects only, so that hopefully, a much-copied version of the report would retain some semblance of the original subject.

8. Most of the plans contained in the report are extracted copies of the plan's inset maps. They are Ordnance Survey based and are reproduced under the council's licence no 100023369. All plans have north to the top of the page unless otherwise stated. The system of reproduction precluded the retention of accuracy in regard to scale so, unless otherwise stated, the plans as reproduced in the report are not to a recognised scale.

9. Finally, I would wish to record my appreciation of the arrangements which the council put in place for the inquiry and my recognition of the hard work which must have been involved by the council's officials. It enabled the inquiry to proceed as efficiently as it did, and to take into account the interests of all parties concerned. I would also thank Elaine Watt, the Programme Officer, for her efficient management of the administrative side of the inquiry and of the procedures involved; her assistance and support was invaluable to me throughout.

G M M THOMSON

Inquiry Reporter