

Altandhu



Chapter No:

22

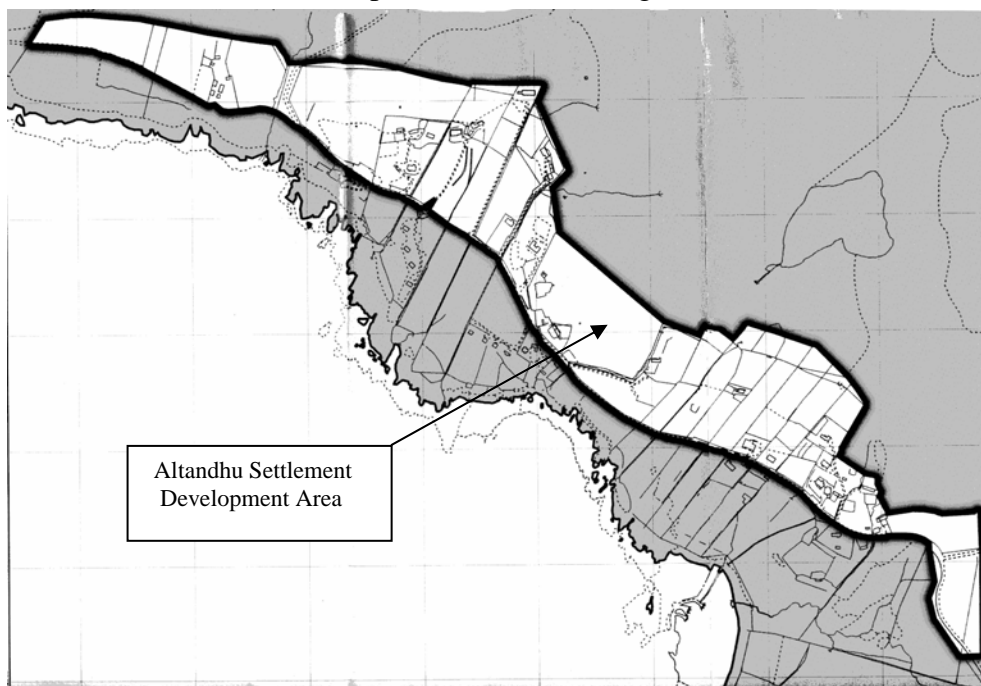
35 - Mr and Mrs D Mason [Written Submissions]

BACKGROUND

1. Altandhu is an elongated, scattered settlement, generally sloping down towards the sea, which lies to its south-west. Although shown on the Proposals Map Inset as a continuous area, it is divided into two sections by an outcrop of rock which visually obscures one end of the village from the other. Situated at the north end of the plan area, it is defined on the Proposals Inset Map as being situated in an area of Medium Sensitivity. Its Settlement Development Area is largely bounded on its south-west side by the public road. Development Factors for the settlement, as listed on the Proposals Map Inset are that,

- To the south of the road, open views and important croft land should be protected.
- A number of sensitivities, as listed in Box 1, may occur within the Settlement Development Area boundary (see Background Maps)."

2. The Inset Map shows the following information (see below):



Extract from the Proposals Map Altandhu Inset, showing the Settlement Development Area.

SUMMARY OF THE OBJECTION

3. The objector pointed out that the proposed Settlement Development Area identified at Altandhu extended to the north-west, well beyond the historical settlement. Until thirty years ago, the north end had been defined by a traditional dwelling-house, but a new house had since been permitted, followed more recently by a

second. Both were erected above the road, but both on land that had previously been common grazing, and outwith the settlement area. To draw the boundary of the Settlement Development Area to reflect these planning permissions was poor justification, and in any case was misleading since the area in question was outwith the village.

4. The land sloped steeply, both at the north end of the village, and in the centre, and any development required considerable excavation. The objector associated this with the fact that both areas were convex and this meant that any development was likely to break the skyline from any angle and therefore have a greater impact on visual amenity than similar development on a concave land surface. Accordingly, the objector sought (a) a reduction in the Settlement Development Area at the north end of the village, and (b) that it be split into West and East Altandhu, with the existing gap between the two maintained.

SUMMARY OF THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE

5. The council confirmed that the Settlement Development Area at Altandhu had not been drawn to reflect the historical boundary of the township. Instead, following the strategy set out in paragraph 7.2 of the plan, it identified the preferred areas for most types of development, including housing. This was consistent with the Highland Structure Plan Policy H3, which stated,

“Policy H3: Housing in the Countryside

Housing development will generally be within existing and planned new settlements. In the hinterland of towns... 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.”

6. The physical constraints of the Altandhu area had meant that finding appropriate and available sites for new housing had seen the move towards development taking place to the north-west of the settlement, and the Settlement Development Area boundary had been drawn to reflect the new developments. Further development outwith the boundary shown in the deposit draft version of the plan would be difficult in terms of the slope to the north-west, and undesirable in terms of extending the settlement. Within the Settlement Development Area, Policy 1 applied to any proposal for development, and the need for sensitive siting and design would be an integral part of this.

7. Consultation had not received any objection from the bodies concerned, but nevertheless, the council recognised that the steep slopes associated with the gap between the two parts of Altandhu would be a constraint on development. In addition, there were the remains of an eighteenth century pre-crofting settlement, now a Sites and Monuments Record site in the area. Accordingly, the council conceded that the boundary should be amended to reflect the existing crofting area better.

CONCLUSIONS

8. To the objectors' complaint that both new houses at the north end of this settlement are built on land that has previously been common grazing and outwith the settlement area, the council has responded that the Settlement Development Area has not been drawn to reflect the historical boundary of the township; instead, it has followed the strategy set out in paragraph 7.2 of the local plan as drafted, which was consistent with structure plan Policy H3 (extract shown in paragraph 5 above).

9. However, closer investigation shows that in fact this is not the case; indeed, the strategies militate towards a reverse situation. Paragraph 7.2 sets out how the Settlement Development Areas are the council's preferred areas for development; by drawing the Settlement Development Area boundary much wider than the historical boundary, as has been done in the majority of the Inset Maps, this extends – to a very considerable extent – the preferred area for development. However, structure plan policy does not endorse this, as the council suggests. It states that development will generally be within existing settlements (this is not a planned new settlement), and that in crofting townships new housing will need to respect the existing pattern of development.

10. It is relevant to emphasise at this point that Altandhu is not a compact township or village but, as described at the start of this chapter, it is a scatter of houses over an extended area of countryside. The opportunity for infill is infinite. There is no need for any extension to the traditional boundary of the settlement, whether to allow for development to retain population or for any other strategy. Indeed, there is considerable momentum from the structure plan towards retaining and respecting the existing pattern of development.

11. The objection relates to land at the north end, and to land in the centre of the settlement and it is to these areas that I therefore address my recommendations. In terms of the above I am in no doubt at all that the objector is correct and that, as the Settlement Development Area should be drawn tight around the already dispersed settlement, the land referred to in both areas of the objection should be excluded.

12. The council's concession, as noted above, is that the boundary of the Settlement Development Area should be amended to reflect the existing crofting area better. I welcome this statement, regret that it is intended to refer merely to the central area of the village, and urge the council to re-examine and redefine the whole Settlement Development Area boundary to ensure that it meets structure plan policy, with which it presently conflicts in my opinion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

13. I therefore recommend that the Settlement Development Area boundary be redrawn:
- (i) to separate Altandhu into East and West Altandhu by excluding the steep slopes at the centre of the village, as agreed by the council in paragraph 7; and
 - (ii) to remove the additional ground included beyond the two recent houses at the north-west end of the village.
14. I would also urge the council to re-examine the remainder of the Settlement Development Area boundary with a view to redefining it, so as to respect the existing footprint of the village.