

Annat



Chapter No:

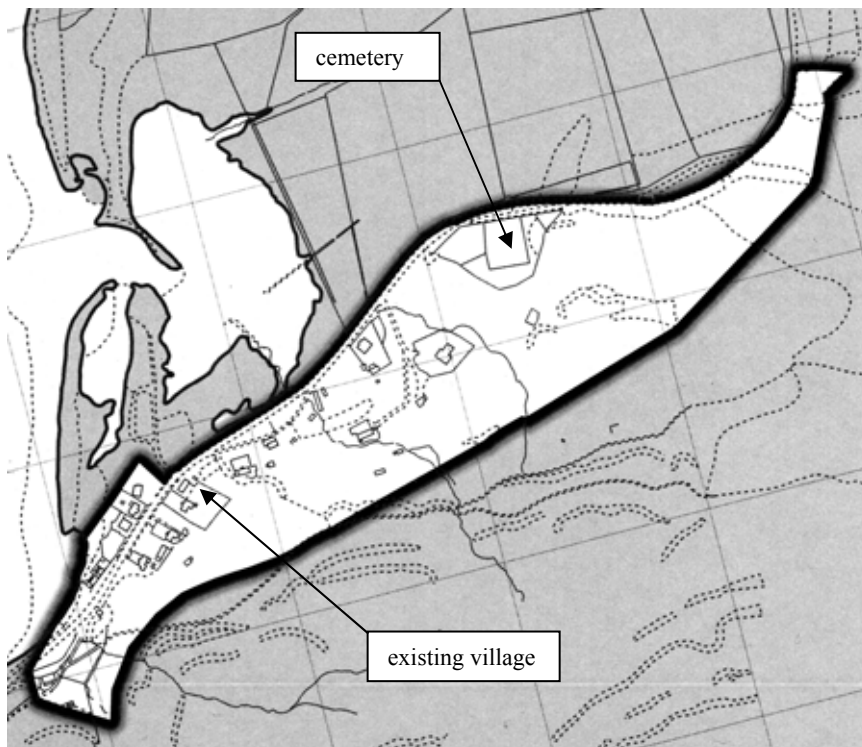
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- 65 - Scottish Natural Heritage [Written Submissions]
Modification Objector # 1 - Mr D J MacLean [Written Submissions]
Modification Objector # 2 - Mr A M Macdonald [Written Submissions]
Modification Objector # 3 - Mr T D Gray [Written Submissions]

BACKGROUND

1. Annat is a village situated at the south-eastern end of Loch Torridon with the A896 running through it. With a small nucleus of houses to the south-west, the village spreads out to the north-east, with some of its houses lying at the roadside, but others spread around the higher areas behind. Once separated from the remainder of the village by fields, the cemetery lies at the roadside to the north. The separating land now accommodates a recent dwelling house and there is reference in the submissions to another. The village of Torridon lies off the A896, some 500m to the north.

2. As can be seen from the Proposals Inset Map (below), the Settlement Development Area boundary has been drawn not only to include the cemetery to the north, but also extensive additional land to the east and north-east of it. Among the development factors noted on the Inset Map is the following:-



- “• Retain separation to Fasag (Torridon) to the north.”

SUMMARY OF THE OBJECTION

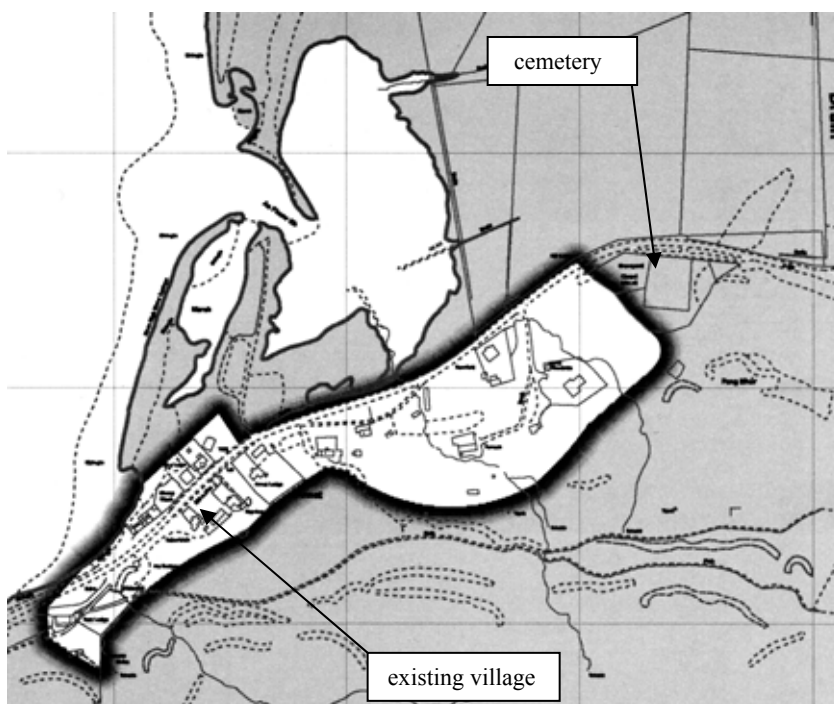
3. The objector pointed out that the Settlement Development Area had been drawn to include an area to the north-east of the original settlement, while part of the original settlement boundary to the south had been excluded.

← Extract from Proposals Map Annat Inset, as shown in the deposit draft Wester Ross Local Plan.

The additional area took the settlement boundary beyond the point identified in the Landscape Character Study as being the eastern settlement limit (ie near the cemetery). Apart from the ground where two houses were being built, this area comprised steep slopes, which already defined the limits of the settlement to the west.

4. The objector accepted that the reasons for extending the settlement boundary to the north-east were to include the new house sites but considered that there was no scope in landscape terms for development on the higher ground to the south of the road and east of the cemetery. Nevertheless, there might be limited scope for further house sites in the low lying area of the two new houses. The Settlement Landscape Capacity Study included a broad area to the south of the village which was said to offer “limited opportunities for new, small scale housing between rocky outcrops and on flatter areas higher up hill slopes.”

SUMMARY OF THE COUNCIL’S RESPONSE



5. The council accepted the objector’s submission that the Settlement Development Area included an area of land to the east of the cemetery where the nature of the ground was unsuitable for development. It was therefore proposed to amend the boundary to exclude all land to the east of the cemetery (and this proposed modification was shown on an additional plan (see left).

SUMMARY OF THE OBJECTIONS TO THE MODIFICATION

Plan produced by the council to show modification to the settlement boundary. 6. There were three objections to such a modification.

These objections considered the objections to the deposit draft plan were misleading, as the areas to the east of the cemetery were low-lying, and not visible from the main road to the south, nor from the public footpath nor even from the other side of the loch, being screened by trees on the north side of the main road, and it was therefore suitable for development. Historically, croft houses started at Brownhill, just south of the Torridon River. By contrast, land to the west of the cemetery provided little scope for further housing, most of the available sites on it already having been used up. There was a shortage of accommodation in the area as “thousands of people wished to come to Torridon; accordingly a need existed to attract new crofters and permanent residents, although 50% of the usable houses had been converted to holiday homes.

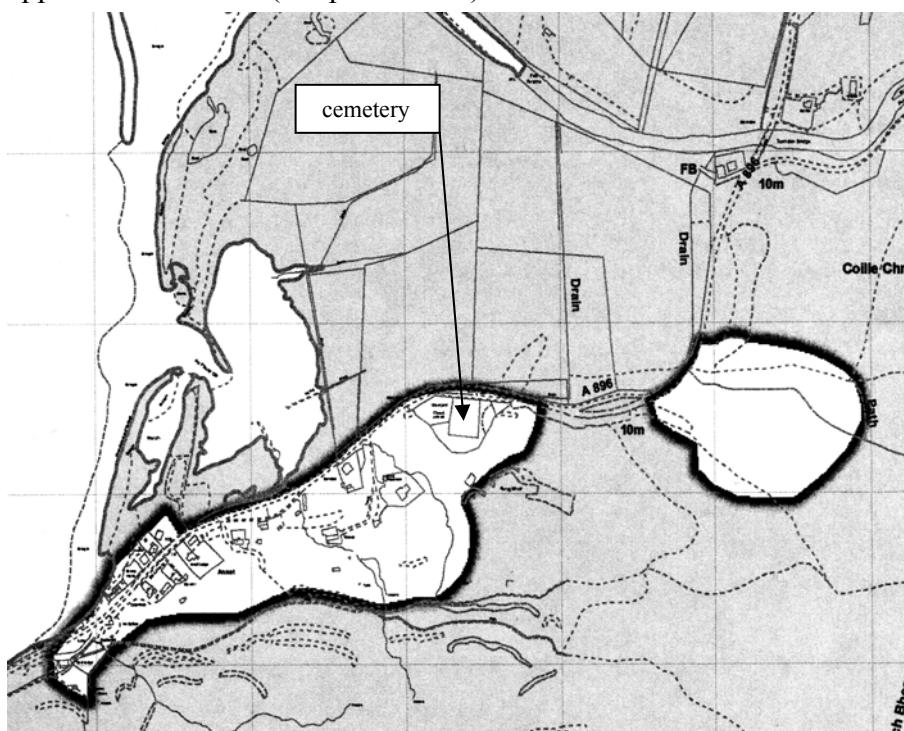
SUBSEQUENT NEGOTIATIONS

7. Accordingly, a meeting was held at the objection site between two of the three

objectors (the third being unable to attend), the original objector to the deposit draft local plan and a representative of The Highland Council. At the meeting, there was agreement that a change could be made to the Annat Settlement Development Area which would seek to focus any new development in the most appropriate areas that might be promoted during the plan period.

8. It was therefore proposed that the Settlement Development Area be split to identify two distinct areas, both of which reflected existing development. The **council** described the changes to the Proposals Map Annat Inset in the following terms: The boundary would be widened in the western part of the settlement to include land between rocky outcrops and on flatter areas higher up the hill slopes. This was a wider area than had been shown previously, although it generally accorded with the area identified in the Landscape Capacity Study (see paragraph 4 above).

9. The council also favoured including the area behind and to the east of the cemetery. It was set into a rocky outcrop, which would be taken as the line of the Settlement Development Area boundary. However, in addition, the council considered that a new area should be identified which would offer scope for several house sites in the general area surrounding two house plots at the east end of the village which currently had planning permission. This was in keeping with one of the original suggestions made by the initial objector in response to the deposit draft local plan. This was illustrated as a proposed amendment to the Inset Map in the deposit draft version of the plan and appeared as follows (see plan below):



Copy of second revision to Inset Map showing Annat divided into two separate Settlement Development Areas.

10. The area between the two Settlement Development Areas was more prominent and more difficult to develop. The monitoring system that would be put in place once the plan had been adopted would enable the early review of boundaries contained within the plan, should additional pressures arise.

11. It was evidently agreed between parties that these amendments to the plan included the main areas of land which were able to be accessed and developed over the life of the plan and offered a range of sites

which met the objections. On the basis of the agreement and the revisions to the Inset Map as shown above, the three objectors confirmed that their objections were to be withdrawn.

12. The original objector, who had been party to the meeting, accepted that the above plan provided a number of specific locations where new houses could be placed while still retaining the existing distinctive settlement pattern. The objector therefore endorsed the proposed revision to the Settlement Development Area, while welcoming the specific exclusion of the area between the two

areas, as development on this ridge would be uncharacteristic and have a high landscape and visual impact.

CONCLUSIONS

13. I agree with the original objector, who in the Landscape Capacity Study observed that the openness of pasture at the head of Loch Torridon should be retained,

“as important in providing a visual contrast between farmed land and the elemental qualities of mountains.”

In fact, I find this to be the most important constraint on development at this settlement. I consider the second most important constraint to be that viewed when approaching the settlement on the A896 from the north-east, namely, the group of pine trees set in front of the rocky ridge, with the cemetery immediately to the west of it, adjacent to the road. Thereafter, the bend in the road allows views of the village to open up as the settlement is entered. In these terms, the rocky outcrop, together with the group of pine trees and the cemetery identify the start of, and act to contain the village in this direction.

14. While views on uncontrolled sprawl are normally associated with more heavily developed areas, nevertheless, they are sound planning principles, and I fully support that set out in the deposit draft Wester Ross Local Plan on the Annat Proposals Inset Map, namely, that separation to Torridon to the north should be retained. Although reference to this principle disappeared as proposals increased to extend the village further east, I consider that it should not be forgotten. Indeed, it remains particularly valid, as there already exists such a solid visual stop in the form of the three features already referred to above: the cemetery, the rocky ridge and the pine trees. In these terms, I see no sense in expanding the village still further towards Torridon, round the corner into a separate visual area which extends as far as the river, leap-frogging the existing visual block and opening up the more level area, which has no such structural village limit until the river is reached.

15. Although advice from Scottish Natural Heritage in this regard is that,

“woodland planting in this area would enhance character and provide setting for future development associated with river”;

and, following the meeting between all parties, the objector has withdrawn the objection, satisfied that the existing distinctive settlement pattern at Annat can still be retained. Nevertheless I am equally satisfied that to continue development north-east of the cemetery would extend the village into a new and visually separate area. It is an area of Medium Sensitivity, and its development would be contrary to the existing village character. There remain development opportunities within the contained settlement to the south-west, albeit they have been described as “limited” in the Landscape Capacity Study. However, I am in no doubt that such opportunities should be exploited to the full before settlement extensions are considered and the most efficacious means of ensuring this, is not to extend the boundary without proper justification.

16. I have noted that the council has already granted approval to two houses within the area to the east of the cemetery, and has done so without the woodland planting having been undertaken. Nevertheless, these houses will still appear as isolated properties in the countryside and there is no need to grant any more at this stage. In the circumstances therefore, I consider that it is time for the council to be resolute and to decide whether it wishes to continue random extensions of Annat into the countryside around it; or whether it would prefer a programme of planned

development. If the latter, the Landscape Capacity Study has confirmed that limited opportunities for development remain within the settlement boundary as re-drawn (see paragraph 4 above), and these should be taken up during the plan period. These sites will satisfy the demand described by those objecting to the proposed modification. While consolidation of the existing settlement is taking place, future area(s) of growth for the settlement should be determined, a development brief prepared in association with the objector, and, if the extension of the settlement is to take place to the east of the cemetery, then a programme of woodland planting should be undertaken as soon as possible.

17. The Landscape Capacity Study does not identify the rocky outcrop, although it states that,

“The old burial ground with its mature pines marks [the] approach to Annat.”

Accordingly, and in view of my preceding conclusions about the future direction of village growth, and its importance as set out in paragraph 13 above, I consider that the area to the east of the burial ground and the rocky outcrop, as adjacent to the Settlement Development Area merit identification as an Area of Avoidance on the inset map.

RECOMMENDATION

18. Accordingly, I recommend that

- (i) the Proposals Map Inset for Annat be amended to that shown at paragraph 5;
- (ii) the Development Factor set out in paragraph 2 be restored to the plan; and
- (iii) in association with Scottish Natural Heritage, the extent of the area to the east of the rocky outcrop be identified and mapped as an Area of Avoidance.