

# Camusteel and Camusterrach

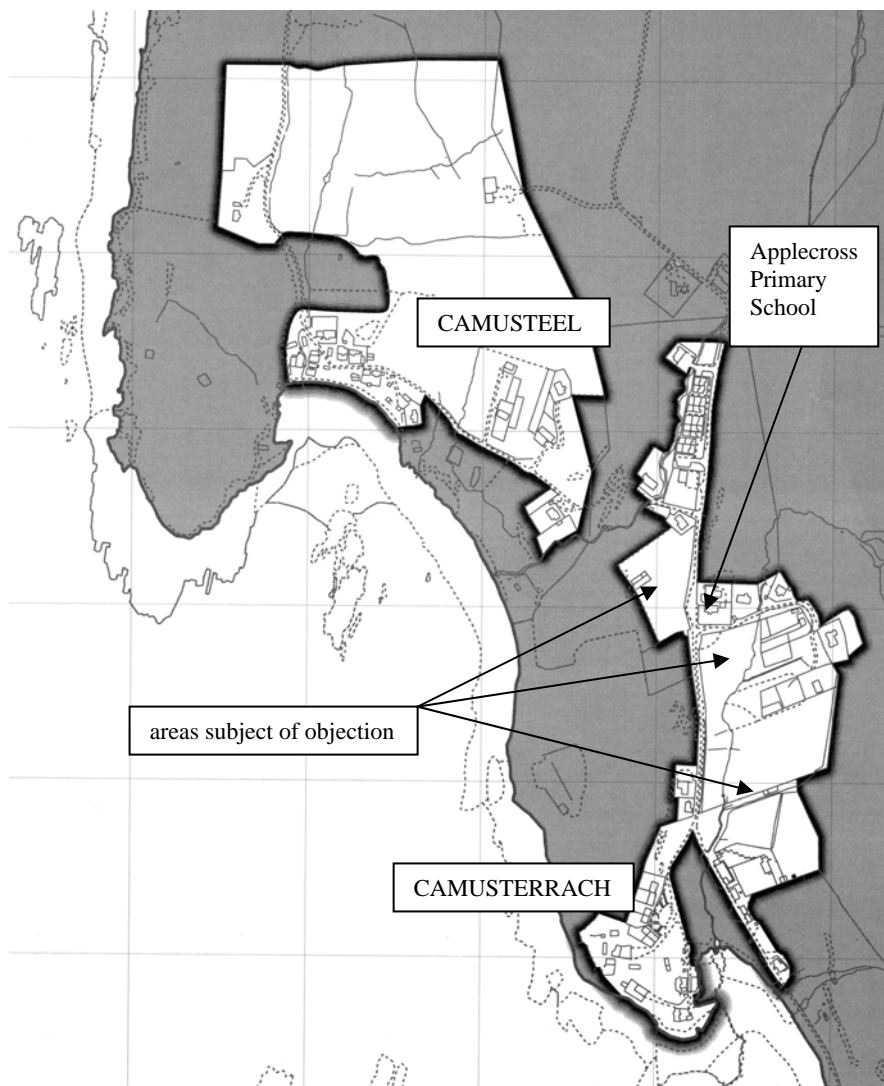


Chapter No:

# 27

- |    |   |   |
|----|---|---|
| 11 | - | Mr Allan Cross [Written Submissions]      |
| 34 | - | Mr and Mrs A MacRae [Written Submissions] |
| 55 | - | Applecross Community Council              |

## BACKGROUND



Extract from Proposals Map Inset showing Camusteel and Camusterrach

1. Camusteel and Camusterrach are two adjacent settlements on the west side of the Applecross peninsula, situated close to the shoreline. They are located within an area of low sensitivity and both Settlement Development Areas include considerable additional land around the traditional village boundaries, as shown (left).

2. Development Factors under Policy 4.8 (now Policy 1B8 – see Appendix 2 to this report) include the following:

“CAMUSTEEL:

- The crofting divisions should be the basis for new housing – one new house per croft should be permitted.”

CAMUSTERRACH:

- Retain separation to Applecross to the north and Culduie to the south.
- Views across the sea from the road should be protected.”

3. The Landscape Capacity Study shows a scatter of new housing in the hinterland to Camusteel and identifies this area as an opportunity to site detached houses in order to consolidate the housing pattern in this shallow glen; however, roof heights should not go above the containing ridges. In Camusterrach, amongst the constraints noted is one that states that the views to the coast and islands should be maintained over the field to the west of the primary school; another highlights the opportunity to site houses within the area of walled pastures, which is also the subject of objection (see plan at paragraph 1 above). Renovation of old croft houses would assist in reinforcing existing settlement patterns, which are well related to landscape features and have a strong identity.

## SUMMARY OF THE OBJECTIONS

4. More than one objection related to the proposal to limit each croft to a single additional dwelling house. It remained unclear from the wording of the policy whether the council was requiring a maximum or a minimum of one house per croft. If it were the former, it would mean that crofting families would be deprived of the opportunity to build on family crofts. In the past, local people had been able to use crofting land to build houses and this was one of the few opportunities available to them to secure building sites.

5. With house prices escalating, it was becoming increasingly difficult for local people to live and work in their area and they would have little alternative but to apply to a Housing Association waiting list or leave the area altogether. There was therefore no logic to such a strategy and it was proposed first, that the proposal to introduce the one-house-per-croft rule be deleted; and second, that Camusteel should be subject to standard planning procedure whereby any planning application would be determined on its own merits.

6. An amendment to the Settlement Development Area was also sought, whereby the land on the east side of the road, to the south of the school, identified on the plan at paragraph 1 above would be excluded. The field to the west of the road should also be deleted on the grounds that it was important agricultural land and of value to the steading; that to the east of the road should be deleted in order to maintain the views over open water. Nevertheless, there remained scope for further building along the break of the slope between the hills to the east and the comparatively level areas around Applecross Primary School.

7. Although the council viewed the land opposite the school at Camusterrach as relatively poor quality croft ground, it was well used for the production of hay, potatoes and the wintering of sheep. Recent experience had shown that crofts had become a highly desirable, tradable commodity, with local people finding it difficult to acquire them. If crofting land were to start being designated for development, this would increase their value and put them out of reach for most local people. By designating crofting land as development land therefore, the council was encouraging the speculative development of croft land.

8. In addition, the development of the land opposite the school would create a ribbon of development. With the relationship of the land to the school, and with the children requiring to cross the road to reach their playing field, there were also traffic implications for such a development. The present school was a building of character which enjoyed outstanding views of Skye and Raasay; any development which blocked this outlook for the children would be seen as highly detrimental. The community council queried whether there was not more to a local plan than simply identifying flat pieces of land which could be developed at minimum cost. The wishes of the community should be paramount and local opinion was that it would not be appropriate for this land to be developed.

## SUMMARY OF THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE

9. A number of references to national planning policy included paragraph 49 of Scottish Planning Policy 3: Planning for Housing which advised that, where possible, most housing requirements should be met within or adjacent to existing settlements to prevent sprawl and coalescence, to make efficient use of existing infrastructure and public services, and to assist in the conservation of the natural heritage and the rural amenity (for full text, see Appendix 3 to this report).

10. The council explained that the Settlement Development Areas set out in the deposit draft Wester Ross Local Plan had been identified as the preferred locations for most types of development, including housing. The identification of the Settlement Development Areas had involved discussion with the community, including community councils and the local common grazings committees. The overriding function of the boundaries of the Settlement Development Areas was to act as a guide to users of the plan as to which were the most acceptable areas for development in planning terms. The plan also recognised that there would be occasions where development interest would be present outwith the identified boundaries, and as a result, Policy 2 (now Policy 1) would cover the wider countryside areas.

11. The specific factors used in the identification of the Settlement Development Areas at Camusteel were the important landscape setting of the area, and the relationship with the assignation of new crofts in the area, which had led to applications for housing. The council was concerned that development in the area would have an impact on the important landscape setting of the area and considered that a control on the number of houses on individual crofts would allow a more planned and focused approach to their development. On the other hand, Camusteel was the only Settlement Development Area where this particular development factor would apply and, as the plan policy would require development proposals within the Settlement Development Areas to be judged against the existing pattern of development, it was considered that this factor was no longer necessary. Accordingly, it was proposed that the development factor restricting development to one house per croft be removed and that proposals for one or more houses be assessed against Policy 1 (now Policy 1A).

12. In Camusterrach, the council accepted that the land to the south of the school was locally important croft land and, with the opportunities available for further housing to take place at the edges of the area, associated with the existing housing at the break of the slope, the council proposed another modification whereby the area south of the school would be removed from the Settlement Development Area.

13. In relation to the objection site on the west side of the road from the school, adjacent to the playing field, the council considered it to be relatively poor quality croft land. It had been included in the Settlement Development Area on the basis of proximity to the school and the existing houses to the north of the township. Consultation with the Camusterrach Common Grazings Committee had noted that the land was not of as high quality as that to the east of the main road. The Landscape Capacity Study did not identify this land as particularly sensitive, although it recognised that there were views obtained over it towards Skye; nevertheless, the council considered these to be representative rather than unique. The area was also covered by the Coast Area of Landscape Value. However, as it was well related to the rest of the township, the council considered that there was merit in retaining it within the Settlement Development Area.

14. Questioned on this, the council conceded that there were issues that still needed to be considered; issues such as the fact that this land was directly opposite the entrance to the school and prominent to the entrance to the village. However, the site was not as detrimental as was being alleged by the objectors. If carefully designed and laid out, any development of the site could act as a gateway to the village. The council was aware that the community opposed its development but this required to be balanced against its conformity to structure plan policy and its potential for development. If it were removed from the plan, then the choice of development sites would be reduced.

## CONCLUSIONS

15. There are three separate objections in relation to the issues at these settlements. First, there is the policy principle relating to Camusteel that crofting divisions should be the basis for new housing and one new house should be permitted per croft; and second there are objections to including two separate areas of crofting land within the defined Settlement Development Area boundaries.

16. In relation to the first policy issue, the council has conceded that this would be the only application of such a policy remaining in the plan and has proposed a modification to delete it. With no limit defined as to the size of a croft, it seems to me that it would be open to abuse in any case and therefore merits deletion. Accordingly, I support the council's proposed modification in this regard.

17. In relation to the two areas of ground opposed by the community, the first (to the east of the road and south of the school) is identified by Scottish Natural Heritage and in the Landscape Capacity Study as an opportunity to site houses; while the second (to the west of the school on the opposite side of the road and adjacent to the playing field), is an area in which the Landscape Capacity Study states that views to the coast and the islands should be maintained. The council has proposed that a modification be introduced to delete the former, but resolutely opposes deletion of the latter.

18. In planning terms, little weight is given nowadays to the preservation of agricultural land, even of relatively high quality compared to the type of land in this area of the country. Nevertheless, with crofting one of the few remaining indigenous lifestyles, and with the quality of the land such as it is, having been worked up from a very meagre start, it does seem misguided to me to identify such land as the most suitable for development merely because it lies between the rocks and some measure of levelling has been achieved upon it.

19. The council has agreed to delete the area to the east of the road as being locally important croft land and for the above reasons, I accept that this is the correct decision. However, it seems to me that the reasons for the community's opposition to the development of the field opposite the school are better founded and should carry greater weight. However, I consider that the number of car journeys generated by such a small development would be as nothing in comparison to the number of cars that visit the area in the summer. The road is narrow and windy and traffic speeds should not be excessive in any case, but the speed of those cars entering and leaving the objection site are likely to be the slowest of all. Sight lines can be achieved in both directions and I therefore discount the traffic arguments in relation to this site.

20. The Landscape Capacity Study cannot be so easily dismissed in my opinion. There is already protection under the Coastal Area of Great Landscape Value designation and views over the

site have been identified as a constraint and although not unique, require consideration. The site is prominent from the road and if developed, would alter the character of the settlement to a considerable degree. Advice from the study is that the renovation of old croft houses would assist in reinforcing existing settlement patterns, and in my opinion much greater support should be given to this aspect of housing provision, not just in these settlements, but throughout the plan area, as it is these traditional properties which have created the character of the settlements in the first place.

21. The council has countered that new housing on the site west of the road would appear as a gateway development to the area, but I consider that this would also be out of character with the existing settlement pattern and would not be an asset to the visual characteristics of the villages. In any case, the centre of what is a very dispersed settlement does not seem to me to be the most appropriate location for a gateway development.

22. If this field were to be deleted from the Settlement Development Area of Camusterrach, it would encourage development in the form of infill and in renovation of derelict buildings. In addition, the local community confirms that there is scope for further building as infill along the break of the slope, which would conform to the Landscape Capacity Study. In any case, there is more than sufficient scope for additional new development in Camusteel which can accommodate any need for such a proposal. With new houses setting a precedent for further development of the valley and with scope for a considerable number of infill houses around the settlement as well, I see no need for the identification of the field opposite the school. Accordingly, I consider that the boundary of the Settlement Development Area should be redrawn to exclude it as well.

## RECOMMENDATION

23. I therefore recommend that,

- (i) the first development factor under Camusteel, stating that

“• The crofting divisions should be the basis for new housing – one new house per croft should be permitted.”

should be deleted from the Proposals Map Inset for Camusteel and Camusterrach;

- (ii) the boundary of the Settlement Development Area be amended to exclude two areas of croft land: the first to the west of the school and the main road, the second to the south of the school and to the east of the main road; and
- (iii) both areas be identified on the Inset Map as Areas of Avoidance in terms of the additional policy set out in Chapter 21 of this report.