

# Fearnbeg



Chapter No:

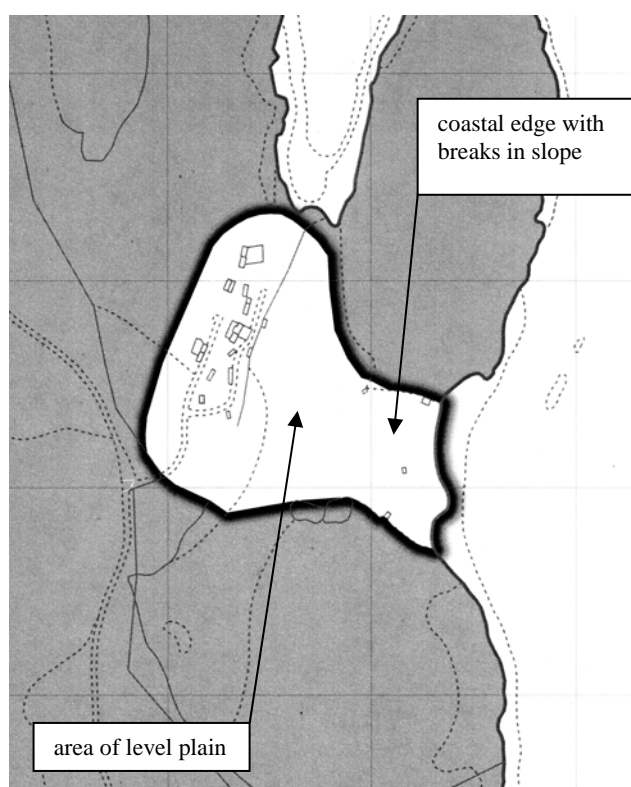
# 29

65 - Scottish Natural Heritage [Written Submissions]

## BACKGROUND

1. Fearnbeg lies at the north end of the Applecross Peninsula and comprises a small cluster of cottages grouped on the north-east side of the coastal road. The cottages look out over a small plain onto the south side of Loch Torridon.

2. The Proposals Map Inset for Fearnbeg shows the settlement to lie within an area of low sensitivity, with the Settlement Development Area extending over the level plain area to the shore line or coastal edge (see below)



Extract from Proposals Map Fearnbeg Inset showing the Settlement Development Area, as designated in the deposit draft plan

3. The **objector** pointed out that the Landscape Capacity Study had identified the area of evenly graded land between the village and the shore as inappropriate for development because of its lack of landscape features. The objector therefore recommended (a) that development be restricted to the fringe of this area, as specified in the study, where the hills behind would act as a backcloth to any development; and (b) that a note be included on the inset map to this effect.

4. The **council** confirmed that the additional area of the plain had been included at the request of the local crofting community who had wished to allow for opportunities for development in the township. The council did not consider that the landscape quality was strong enough to warrant a restriction on development and in any case, development plan policies would be applied to any application within the Settlement Development Area boundary.

5. On hearing the council's response, the objector decided not to pursue the objection.

## CONCLUSIONS

6. Paragraph 4 of Scottish Planning Policy 1: The Planning System sets out how the purpose of the planning system is to guide the future development and use of land in cities, towns and rural areas in the long term public interest. The aim is to ensure that development and changes in land use occur in suitable locations and are sustainable. The planning system must also provide protection from inappropriate development (see Appendix 3 to this report for the full text).

7. Accordingly, the situation in this settlement seems topsy-turvy to me. The Landscape Capacity Study advises against development

“on the evenly graded land where there are no landscape features for buildings to be associated with”.

in similar terms to the objector. The local population wishes to develop on the evenly graded land. The Settlement Development Area is therefore drawn to include the evenly graded land to enable them to do so. In my understanding of the situation, this is the antithesis of sound planning policy as expressed in Scottish Planning Policy 1. The question arises as to why the advice and the objection have both been ignored in favour of building on the prominent area of the plain.

8. Another unanswered question is why the objector withdrew in these circumstances. Either the objection was sound, or it was not; if the former, it should have been pursued, at the least in an attempt to ensure compliance; if the latter, then it should have been withdrawn. I have referred to this situation in my Introduction to the report (see paragraph 8 of chapter 1 of this report), so consider there to be no need to pursue it further at this stage.

9. The main road is the scenic coastal route around the peninsula and one of the attractive views it takes in is that over the top of this village, across the plain and out to Loch Torridon. In my opinion this view would be damaged by the insertion of new houses on the level area. Quite simply, they would stand out in the open and therefore be prominent in the attractive, natural view, drawing the eye away from the environmental features around them, especially the loch. It is therefore insufficient to suggest that planning policy will take care of the detail, when care over the basic location – which development plan policy would support – has been cast aside.

10. Of course there are mitigating circumstances in this area of the country as to why there is a need for additional houses for local people and it is an essential part of Rural Planning to identify such a need and to provide for it. However, this village has derelict properties, infill sites and scope for further building on the slope. Development does not have to spill out over the plain, which the present inset map would allow. It is not a case of ‘no housing here’ in order to protect the environment; it is a requirement to position it in and around the existing settlement where it will be less obtrusive. There is at least as great a need to protect the environment for the benefit of the majority – and indeed of the tourist trade for the region – from unnecessary and unsightly new development. Accordingly, the Settlement Development Area should be contained to the slope and development avoided over the plain between it and the coastal edge.

## RECOMMENDATION

11. I therefore recommend that,

- (i) the Settlement Development Area be confined to the sloping area of and around the present village;

- (ii) the evenly graded land and the coastal edge be removed from the Settlement Development Area, be designated as an Area of Avoidance in terms of the additional policy recommended in Chapter 21 of this report and be shown as such on the inset map; and
- (iii) a development factor be added to the inset map to state that the council will not support development on the area between the identified settlement boundary and the loch.