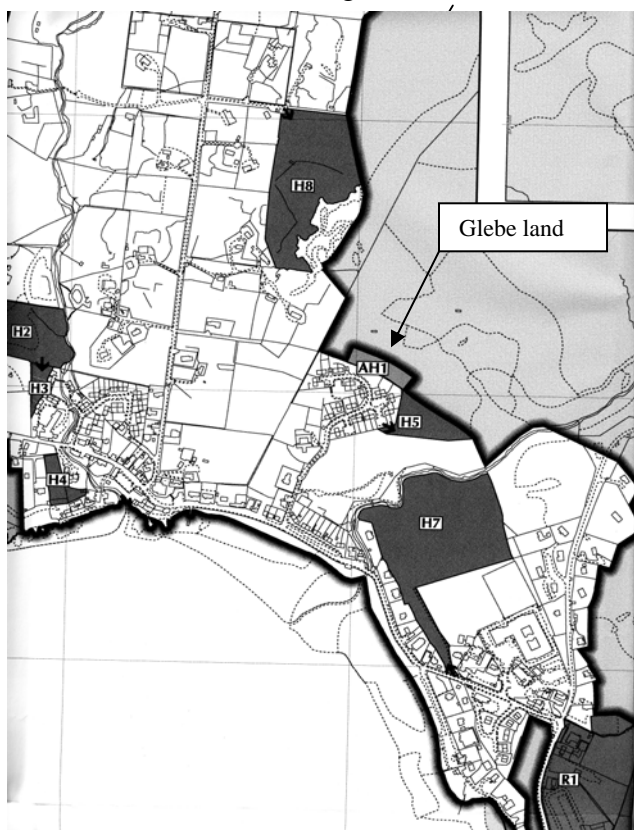




3. In the initial draft of the Wester Ross Local Plan, the identification of the Glebe land for longer term housing had been deleted, and in its place, an allocation for affordable housing had been made in the following terms:



“AH1 Top of Glebe Park Road  
 Indicative Capacity: 4  
 Access to be taken off a remote footpath.  
 Single row of houses as a continuation of existing terrace.”

The Proposals Map Inset indicated the proposed AH1 allocation as shown in the extract (left).

4. In the deposit draft version of the local plan (see extract below), all allocations in the area of the Glebe Land have been deleted, including the affordable housing allocation identified as AH1 in the initial version of the plan. However, the boundary of the Settlement Development Area has been extended to include not only the area previously identified for housing, but the remainder of the church land as well.

**SUMMARY OF THE OBJECTION**

5. The objector considered that the Glebe land would offer exceptionally high



Extract from deposit draft local plan showing lack of any specific allocation, although Glebe land included in the SDA

Extract from the initial draft Wester Ross Local Plan showing allocation of affordable housing on Glebe land

amenity sites for general needs housing on the higher elevations, which could be associated with affordable housing lower down the Glebe. There were no physical features which would impede development and the Church was ready and willing to support the early development of its land, provided it had an allocation for housing rather than being restricted as proposed. Similarly, there was no objection to the use of part of the land for affordable housing.

6. In relation to the access road, the Church considered that even affordable housing would require vehicular access, but the introduction of appropriate traffic management measures on the road and the provision of a dedicated parking area within the Glebe would address the current problems of congestion. The financing of such measures could be the subject of developers’ contributions. Although upgrading the access to the B8021 might prove difficult, solutions existed and some alternatives

were offered.

## **SUMMARY OF THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE**

7. The council accepted that the lack of identification of the Glebe land in the deposit draft local plan was an alteration to its position in the adopted local plan of 1996, but reviews did enable previous policies and allocations to be reconsidered. This was particularly important in Gairloch, where other development opportunities were now available. There had also been specific local community concerns expressed about possible increased vehicular traffic on Glebe Park at the time of the initial draft, when a small site in this location was presented as an option for development and the council had proposed that it be used for four affordable houses, served by a footpath from Glebe Park. However, the site was deleted following the public response, consideration of access difficulties, and the availability of other sites with fewer constraints.

8. Nevertheless, while no longer specifically allocated for housing, the objection site had been included within the Gairloch Settlement Development Area and that meant that any proposal which came forward would be assessed against Policy 1 (now Policy 1A) of the plan. On this basis, the objector withdrew the objection.

9. However, the council added that Scottish Natural Heritage had previously raised concerns on the development of the upper slopes of the Glebe on landscape grounds, although it had not objected to the small scale development of four affordable houses on the lower slopes. The Landscape Capacity Study had also stated that there should be no development on the containing ridges and convex slopes in order to ensure a strong relationship between settlement and land form. The council repeated that as designated within the Settlement Development Area, any development which came forward would be assessed against Policy 1 (now Policy 1A) of the plan and the landscape impact would be an important factor in this assessment, given the prominence of the upper slopes. With earlier negotiations having taken place with a housing trust, the sites would be developed by local people with a housing need in the short to medium term.

10. In regard to the access to Glebe Park, the council confirmed that access to any development above Glebe Park would be desirable, although advice from its roads department had been that achieving such an access would be difficult. More importantly however, the junction with the B8021 was single lane width and it appeared very difficult to be able to achieve any necessary improvements. In addition, there had been specific local community concerns expressed about possible increased vehicular traffic on Glebe Park at the time of the initial draft plan.

11. As to the problems of car parking on Glebe Park, the council considered that it would be up to the developer to demonstrate that such difficulties could be overcome. Other allocated sites in Gairloch already provided for a sufficient range of effective housing to meet the likely demand in Gairloch which did not have such access constraints and accordingly, it had not been considered appropriate to allocate the site specifically for housing. Nevertheless, the council considered it appropriate to continue to recognise the continuing longer term possibility of future development north of Glebe Park, subject to satisfactory road access.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

12. Following the history of this objection site, I can understand the objector's frustration at having a site which was once identified for new development; then it was identified for just four

affordable houses; and in the latest version of the plan even this has been reduced to a lack of any allocation, other than to be included within the Settlement Development Area boundary. However, the Settlement Development Area policy includes council support for any development which may come forward, subject of course to scrutiny under structure plan policies, in terms of landscape, design, etc. In my view, this site should not merit council support in any terms but should be excluded from the boundary of the Settlement Development Area as quite unsuitable for development.

13. First, there is an apparent lack of need, more suitable land for the housing allocations for Gairloch being found elsewhere in the village. I have no doubt that there would be demand for the houses if constructed, as they would enjoy extensive views over Loch Gairloch. Of course, such views mean that the houses would also be visible from the loch. In terms of housing numbers, the houses could be counted as windfalls, but would be likely to reduce the demand for other sites which have been identified as more appropriate for sound planning reasons.

14. Next, the Landscape Capacity Study evidently states that, in order to ensure a strong relationship between the settlement and the land form at this point, there should be no development on the containing ridges and convex slopes. In view of the topography of the Glebe land above the existing houses, it appears possible that a limited development of the type proposed in the initial draft version of the plan could be fitted within the containing ridges, although it seems unlikely that this could be achieved without their ridges breaking the skyline when viewed from the remainder of the Glebe Park development.



Photograph of the junction of Glebe Park with the B8021

15. There are a number of problems involved in taking access to the site, although it seems to me that there is no reason why it would not be possible to do so. Similarly, the junction with the B8021 appears to raise concern with the roads engineers, on the basis that it is “single lane width”. Perhaps this submission was prepared before the junction was widened, but without evidence from an engineer on this matter, I can draw no conclusion other than to illustrate the junction as I noted it on site (see photograph above left).

16. On the other hand, the access road is clearly of single width and sub-standard for much of its length. There are complaints about car parking and congestion, and certainly if cars were to stop on the sections of the carriageway designed for single file traffic only, as shown further up the slope in the photograph (above), this would be certain to lead to congestion. The upper reaches of the road also contain steep bends and cars parked on the roadside at these points surely constitute a hazard. In addition, all the traditional properties served by this road, as well as the houses more recently constructed further up the slope are served by this one, narrow, single carriageway, cul-de-sac road

and I consider that the implications for an emergency, should it become blocked, are already unacceptable and demand the council's urgent attention.

17. In these terms, I find that not only should the very limited areas of the Glebe land identified as 'contained' and therefore environmentally less intrusive, not be considered for a small-scale development, until those problems that can be resolved have been fully addressed; but also there should be no identification of additional land in the Glebe beyond these confines for any form of development. Accordingly, it seems to me to be misleading both for the council to confirm as it has done, both that it recognises that the sites at the Glebe remain available for development, or for it to include any of the Glebe land within the Settlement Development Area for Gairloch in the current plan.

18. Obviously, this will be disappointing to the objector, but if it wishes by the next local plan to achieve even the limited development of four single-storey houses, as was indicated on the initial draft of this plan, I consider it should be necessary for it to be able to demonstrate a satisfactory resolution to the extremely problematic barriers to development which currently exist in relation to this site.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

19. I therefore recommend that the Glebe land be removed from the Settlement Development Area as defined on the Proposals Map Gairloch Inset.