

# ***Gairloch: Smithtown***



**Chapter No:**

# **33**

48 - Mr John Smith [Written Submissions]

## **BACKGROUND**

1. Some 500m to the west of the Glebe land described in the previous chapter is a large open, marshy area which has had a road formed into it, giving access to a Portakabin. On the Proposals Map Gairloch Inset, it is identified as site H2, with a further area which adjoins it to the south identified as H3. In the Land Allocations box on the inset map, H2 and H3 are set out as follows:

<b>“Ref</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Indicative Capacity</b>	<b>Requirements</b>
H2	North of old people’s home, Smithtown Site 1	10*	Includes existing consent for 4 houses. Widening of access road. Drainage arrangements to satisfaction of the planning authority and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. Development must allow access into Site H3.
H3	North of old people’s home, Smithtown Site 2	2*	Subject to access being available through site H2. Potential site for housing for varying needs.”

(\* - In the initial draft plan, these figures had been 15 and 6 respectively.)

2. The relevant extract from the Gairloch Proposals Map is shown on the following page. Under Development Requirements and Factors at the head of the inset, Development Factors included,

- “• Crofting settlement pattern of Lonemore and Mihol areas should be retained.”

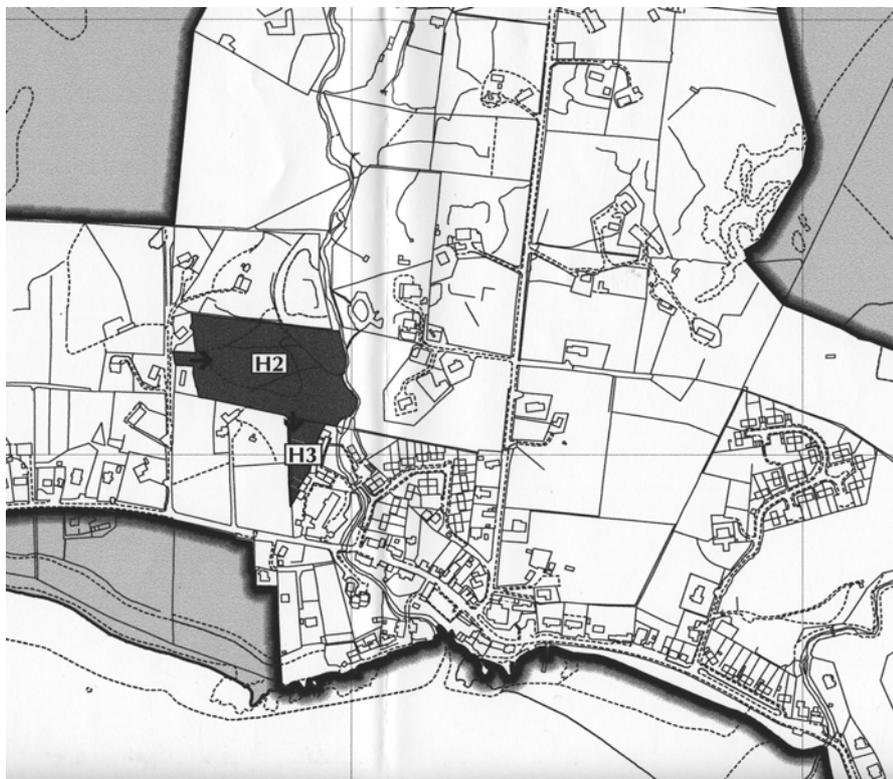
3. The Landscape Capacity Study identifies the site as an additional opportunity for development.

## **SUMMARY OF THE OBJECTION**

4. The objection related to the H2 site, and the objector considered that development on



the scale proposed would be in direct contravention of the guidelines set out in the plan itself, given the existing crofting settlement pattern of the site, which had to be retained. A reduction of the indicative capacity from 15 to 10 houses did not alter this, as such a development would result in a small housing estate.



Extract from Gairloch Inset Map showing area of the H2 and H3 designations

5. The objector referred to Chapter 6.1 of the deposit draft local plan which stated that, in order to protect and promote the identity of Wester Ross, the existing pattern of building within settlements would be preserved. It was also policy, as set out in Policy 1 (amended to Policy 1A), that proposals would be judged in terms of how compatible they were with the existing pattern of development (see Appendix 1 for full text of these references; and Appendix 2 for text following recommended amendments). The objector also referred to the development factor relating to settlement pattern (see paragraph 2 above).

6. Accepting that there would be a change in the landscape, as the council was doing, ignored these guidelines, and the change referred to would be a major change, obliterating the existing crofting settlement pattern. The fact that the site was close to the village core did not alter these facts and the contradiction between the proposal to develop the site and the guidelines set out in the plan was a reflection on the concept of public participation.

## SUMMARY OF THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE

7. The council did not accept the objector's submission. The strategy of the plan was to recognise that most of the future growth of Wester Ross would be in the three villages of Ullapool, Gairloch and Lochcarron. These were the communities which had experienced the greatest development pressures, where the main services were, and where the best transport links were focused. It was important that a significant proportion of new development took place on allocated sites, as this ensured planned and co-ordinated development, the most efficient use of infrastructure and the maximum benefit from development (for example in securing a contribution towards affordable housing, improved infrastructure, or environmental improvements).

8. In the same chapter of the plan as referred to by the objector, the strategy was also confirmed as one of focusing development within existing settlements and of making sure that there was enough land for housing. Although site H2 did begin to move development away from the

village core, it was well related in locational terms to ensuring that the crofting pattern elsewhere in the village could be protected as individual proposals came forward.

9. As pointed out by the objector, the indicative capacity of the site had been reduced in response to public concern, but the site currently had planning permission for four houses and it was considered that the additional six could be accommodated within the site without compromising the settlement pattern over the wider area. The site sat well within the landscape, and any development would be unobtrusive over the wider area. Development of the site would require to be assessed against local plan policy, particularly in terms of siting and design.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

10. The strategy of the plan has been referred to in support of both sides. The village core is located not far to the south-east of the objection site and, contrary to the objector's assertions, I consider this to be relevant to the development of the site. For example, the density of the recent development in the Strath area of the village, immediately adjacent to the south-east of the objection site, is considerable higher than that to the north and east of it and it seems to me that it has been increased to reflect its proximity to the commercial centre. While generally traditional settlement patterns reflect crofting densities, they also reflect a higher density around the village core. I consider that there is a logic to this, inasmuch as walking distances to shops, schools and community functions are correspondingly reduced. This is already illustrated to a lesser extent at the east end of the village, where there is a secondary centre.

11. Accordingly, I do not accept the objector's submissions that the density of the proposed housing on the objection site should be reduced still further; if any further change is to be made, it seems to me that it should be to replace the five houses lost between the initial and deposit drafts of this plan. Although these houses may no longer be required to ensure the housing land allocations are met, nevertheless, with such a centrally located site, the reduced level may result in a waste of the land resource in such a prime location of the village. The second site, H3, is not before me, as there has been no objection in relation to it, but it may be that additional affordable housing could also be justified on that site as a result of a further increase in the development potential of site H2.

12. Although the figures shown are indicative only, it seems to me that these permutations should be explored before the final development proceeds, so that such opportunities are not allowed to slip away. In these terms, I consider there would be advantage in the preparation of a development brief to encompass the planning permission already granted on site H2, and to include development on site H3 as well, so as to ensure both sites' proper potential in relation to the area surrounding them; their commercial proximity to the village core, the topography and physical features which prevent them from being as prominent as they might have been, the relevant recommendations of the Landscape Capacity Study, and the access to both sites which appears to be essential to the smaller of them.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

13. Accordingly, I recommend that

- (i) a development brief be prepared in relation to sites H2 and H3 to include the constraints identified in the previous paragraph (paragraph 12 above); and
- (ii) a note be added to the Land Allocations box on the inset map to this effect.