

Mains of Applecross



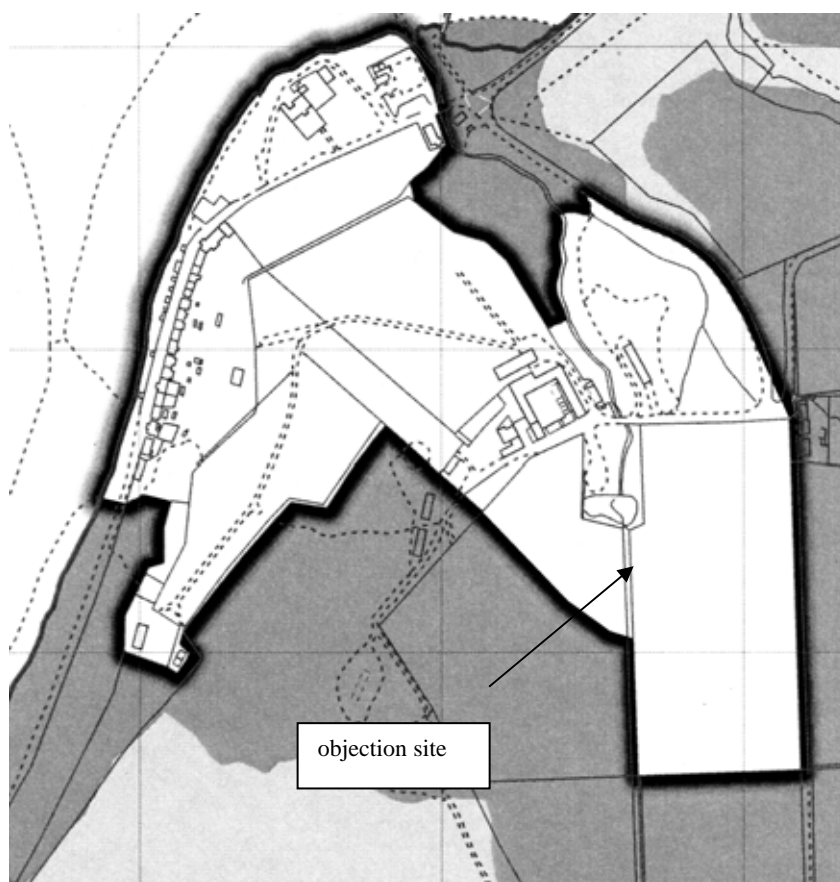
Chapter No:

37

- 17 - Mr Murdo Finlayson
55 - Applecross Community Council

BACKGROUND

1. The unclassified trans-peninsula road from Lochcarron to Toscaig, which crosses the Applecross Peninsula, rises to around 1900m before returning to sea level at Applecross. The area of Applecross involved in this objection is that around Applecross Home Farm, which lies on the trans-peninsula road at a higher level than the coastal village, but which has been included within the Settlement Development Area (see extract from the Proposals Map Applecross and Milton Inset below).



Extract from Proposals Map Mains of Applecross and Milton Inset, showing the location of the objection site

2. The vernacular farm buildings are listed Category 'B' in Historic Scotland's List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest. The farm workers' cottages were built along the waterfront overlooking Applecross Bay and, together with the Inn, now comprise the main section of the village. The buildings date from the early 1800s, but the objectors estimate the farm land to be considerably older. The land acts as a gateway to the village and to the policies of Applecross House, the main tourist attractions in the area.

3. The Settlement Landscape Capacity Study for Applecross states that,

"There is no scope to expand these two villages [Applecross and Milton] due to land form constraints which also provide a very clear definition for the settlement and emphasise the sense of integrity

between the land form and the settlement pattern. Additional house sites will need to be identified elsewhere.”

Under Opportunities and Constraints, the field which is the subject of the objections was described as an

“Additional opportunity for woodland to be established on more gentle slopes, to provide setting for future development.”,

while opportunities are identified along the waterfront and on an elevated but sheltered field above the existing village.

4. Under Development Factors, the inset map requires that,

“Any development to the south-east of Mains of Applecross should include tree planting to enhance setting.”

5. A line of steadings has been converted and expanded very recently by a housing association to form a small residential development (see photograph at head of chapter). The objections contend that the Stackyard Field, which lies to the south of this development across the farm access road, should be omitted from the Settlement Development Area for Applecross.

SUMMARY OF THE OBJECTIONS

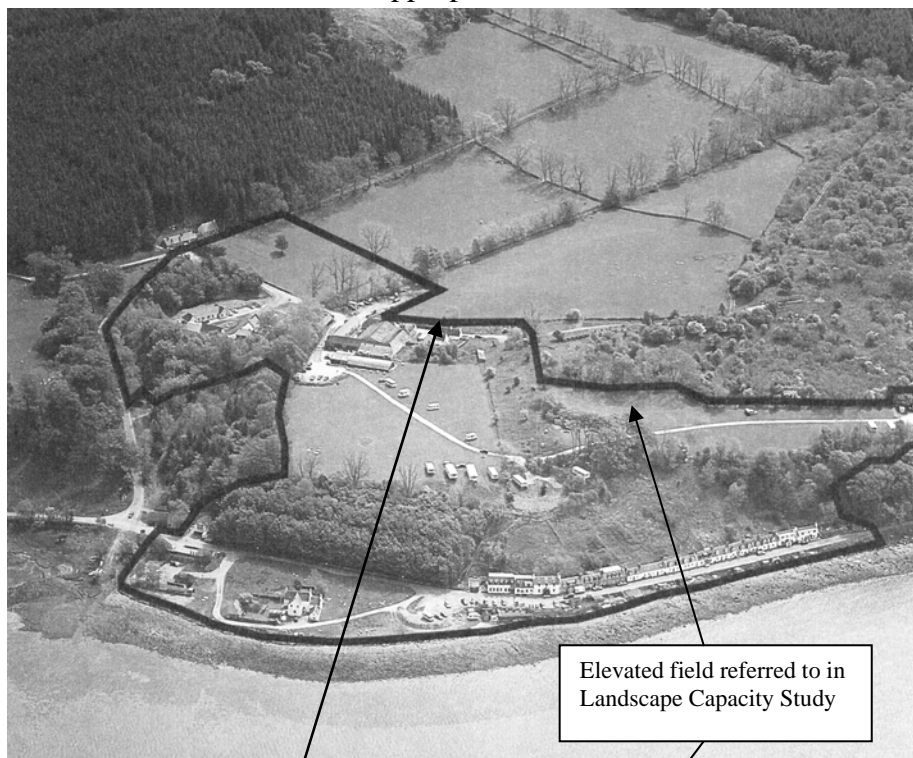
6. The Applecross Estate comprised around 26,300ha, most of which was of poor quality, acidic moor land. By contrast, the home farm and its surrounding fields followed a limestone seam and the fields were of good quality, alkaline soil and had been cultivated over the centuries. They comprised the best quality agricultural land on the peninsula and were used for the grazing of livestock. Its use for housing was unacceptable as it represented a community resource which should be protected, unless it could be shown that there were no alternatives; however, a number of viable alternatives did exist.

7. It was irrelevant for the council to suggest that this land should offer further expansion of the village on the back of the housing association development, as the village was completely separate from this development, which, if expanded, would constitute a completely new settlement, larger than the existing historic village itself. Although generally level and therefore less expensive to develop than many other areas, if the field started to be developed, the remainder would surely follow.

8. The Applecross Trust had not been contacted by the council about the proposal to designate the land as part of the Settlement Development Area. The community council confirmed that the trust was a conservation charity whose mandate was to preserve and protect the peninsula on behalf of the community and visitors. Accordingly, if the community council were against the use of the land as proposed, the question arose as to whose interests the council was protecting in its drive to develop. The field in question was prominent in the views from the public road and therefore to tourists arriving from the east side of the peninsula. The replacement of the present view of grazing livestock by a housing development would be detrimental to the area, involving the loss of amenity to residents.

9. It appeared that the council had failed materially to take account of the views of the community, or to explore possible alternatives to their proposals. A number of these were proposed, as was the alternative of incorporating one or two houses in various different settlements (either new build or re-build) rather than creating complexes of new housing which were both out of character

and also socially divisive. The Applecross Trust was currently engaged in a feasibility study for the removal of 350ha of conifers and their replacement with native, broadleaved forests. Accordingly, such an operation could present the opportunity for some suitably screened housing which would not detract from the outstanding amenity of the area and which would produce more benefit to the community. There was 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 considered and in this case, this was that it would not be appropriate for the identified land to be developed.



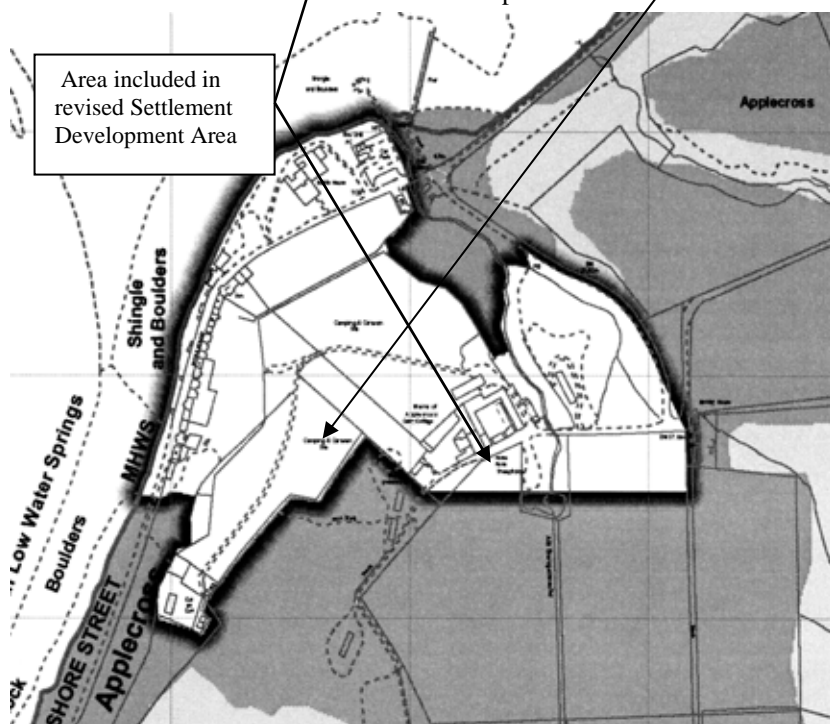
Aerial photograph produced by the council showing modified Settlement Development Area

SUMMARY OF THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE

10. The Settlement Development Areas had been identified as the preferred locations for most types of development, including housing within existing and planned new settlements. The council was seeking to meet its housing requirements within Settlement Development Areas. In identifying these areas, the council had taken into account the quality of neighbouring croft or

agricultural land; the type of land; the ability of the landscape to allow for development; the pattern of existing settlements; and the availability of infrastructure. The plan identified the boundaries of the Settlement Development Areas relatively widely around the existing built-up areas in order to allow enough room for development while recognising the physical limits due to the landscape and ground conditions.

11. The field to which the objection refers was included to offer potential scope for the expansion of the village, and particularly any future development of affordable housing on the back of the existing successful development on the site of the old steading. The flat area proposed would be less



Plan produced by council to show proposed modification

expensive to develop than many of the other areas on the peninsula. Any development on the site would be on the basis of agreement by the land owner that they would wish to see the site removed from agricultural use.

12. Following the initial receipt of the objections to the initial draft of the plan, the council had recognised that the whole area identified would not be required, given the expected levels of demand in the Applecross area. A smaller area of land adjacent to the road was therefore retained within the Settlement Development Area boundary and this would continue to allow scope for small scale development in this location – see proposed modification plan (on previous page).

13. The council referred to the Landscape Capacity Study and pointed out that Scottish Natural Heritage had not objected to the field being included within the plan, nor to the modified boundary. Advice from the roads engineers was that a small scale development would not raise any significant issues when compared to the capacity of the road and the junction. It was possible that road improvements might be necessary, but this would be assessed at the time of any planning application. As the rest of the area around Applecross was constrained by a number of factors, including slope, crofting use and landscape impact, the general area would offer scope for development while still being well located in relation to existing services. The council considered that its aerial photograph (see previous page) illustrated this point.

14. Finally, the Applecross Peninsula lay within an area identified as fragile and the plan stated that in fragile areas development proposals would be supported outwith the Settlement Development Areas which showed that they would sustain communities which were experiencing difficulties in maintaining population and services.

CONCLUSIONS

15. The council claims to have used the Landscape Capacity Study to help inform the identification of Settlement Development Areas throughout the plan, but it has not done so in this case; indeed, it has identified land contrary to the recommendations in the study. I have referred to the study in paragraph 3, where it can be seen that Scottish Natural Heritage actually says that there is no scope to expand the village, although it then goes on to suggest a number of alternatives. The field identified in the draft plan is not included in these, and, other than to remark that an opportunity to establish woodland there would provide a setting for future development (ie structural planting first and then, once the trees are effective, they would provide a setting for future development), there is no encouragement for development there. In my reading of the document, an opportunity for tree planting is not the same as an opportunity for development.

16. Instead, as the Landscape Capacity Study has been used in the drafting of the Settlement Development Areas, I consider it necessary to return to that document to determine which areas are suggested as alternatives. I find these to be along the waterfront and on the elevated but sheltered field (identified on the council's aerial photograph). However, both sites are already included within the boundary of the Settlement Development Area. As only 20 houses require to be found over the whole of the Applecross area, including Ard Dhubh, Camusteel, Camusterrach, Culduie, Toscaig, etc, each of which has had designated for it an extended Settlement Development Area, it seems to me that the boundary at Applecross can be amended exactly as sought by the community council without any loss of housing opportunity and little effect on choice.

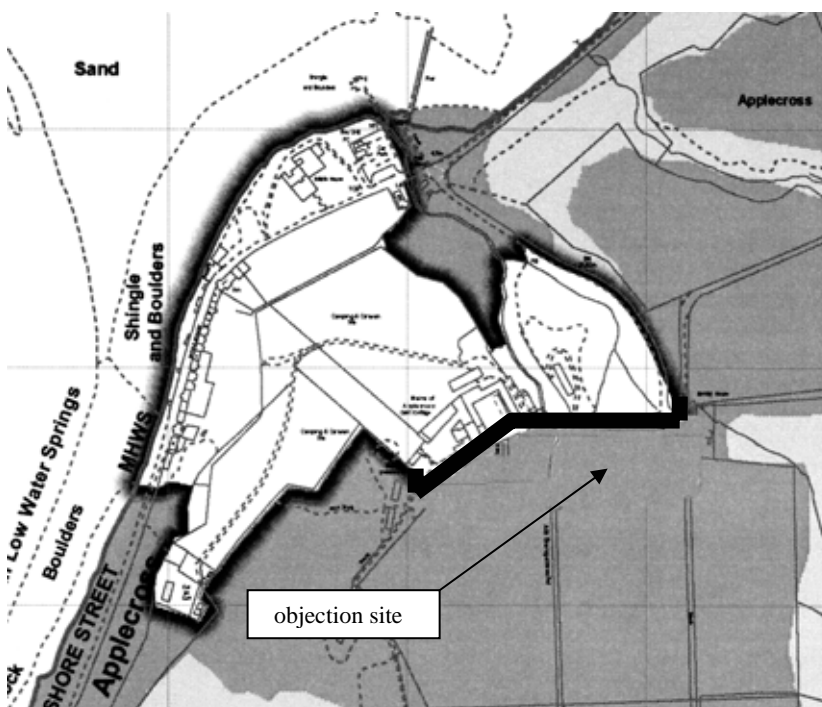
17. Of the community council's suggested alternatives, and bearing in mind the success of the refurbished steading development recently completed at Applecross, I favour further

development based on the renovation of other derelict barns at the farm – but such a development would also fall to be considered within the Settlement Development Area. Although I do not favour it, nevertheless I even prefer its suggestion of locating houses at the corner of the woodland which lies to the east of, but outwith the Settlement Development Area, as I consider the impact of the development around the existing houses there would be less than on the field proposed in the plan. In short, I see nothing which would favour the reduced length of field shown in the modified plan, still less the whole field identified in the deposit draft.

18. As the community council pointed out, merely because the field is level, and because it would cost less to develop than some other areas, should not merit its being singled out as suitable for development; especially when it is also prominent, agricultural land which is important to the open, rural appearance of the area from the tourist route which passes close to it.

RECOMMENDATION

19. Accordingly, I consider that neither the inset map from the deposit draft local plan, nor the modified inset, shown adjacent to paragraph 11 above, should be incorporated into the plan for adoption. Instead, the field which is the subject of objection should be omitted from the Settlement Development Area in the adopted version of the plan, as proposed (below).



Plan to show recommended adjustment to Settlement Development Area