

Polbain



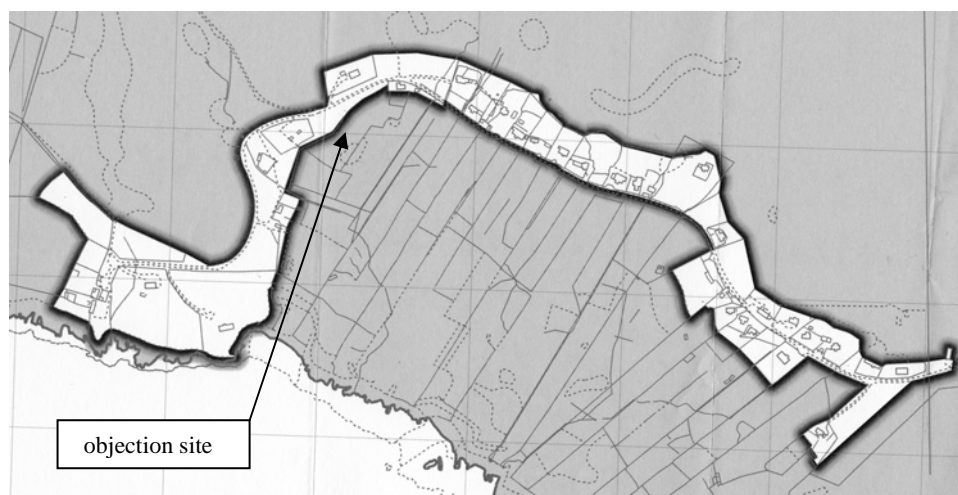
Chapter No:

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- 26 - Mr Reiner Luyken [Written Submissions]
Modification Objector # 9 - Mr W Drake [Written Submissions]
Modification Objector # 10 - Mr Ian C Thomson [Written Submissions]
Modification Objector # 11 - Mr A C Hamilton [Written Submissions]
Modification Objector # 12 - Mr William Maclean [Written Submissions]
Modification Objector # 13 - Mr James I Muir [Written Submissions]
Modification Objector # 14 - Ms Joyce Ingledew [Written Submissions]
Modification Objector # 15 - Mr Gordon G Smith [Written Submissions]
Modification Objector # 16 - Mr E Drake [Written Submissions]
Modification Objector # 17 - Mr Harold Hassall [Written Submissions]

BACKGROUND

1. Polbain is a linear settlement situated south of Altandhu, opposite the Summer Isles. It is identified in the Proposals Map inset as lying within an area of medium sensitivity, so that the settlement encloses land between the houses and the coast line (see extract from Polbain Inset Map below left). The inset map also includes two development factors which are relevant to the objections: first, that open views over the sea should be protected; and second, that locally important croft land to the south should be retained. The objection site is an area of relatively level ground at the foot of a steep slope, across which the unclassified road



Extract from Proposals Map Polbain Inset, showing location of objection site

through the village has been run.

2. The Landscape Capacity Study identifies the whole of the area shown as lying outwith the Settlement Development Area on the Proposals Map Inset (above) as “Areas where development

is inappropriate for landscape reasons". However, a secondary site to the south-west of the east end of the Settlement Development Area has been identified immediately adjacent to this area as suitable for up to four detached houses, and preferred sites for up to six detached houses have been shown within the boundary. In its General Guidance section, the Landscape Capacity Study states,

"Retain open pasture below road as component of views to Achiltibuie and Ben More Coigach, the sea and Summer Isles."; and

"Few opportunities for additional building within the western part of Polbain due to the tight linear layout of the existing settlement, although there is an opportunity to expand [the] settlement down at the coast."

3. The **objector** accepted that the important croft land to the south of the road should be retained, but objects to his area of rough, scrub land being excluded from the settlement boundary, on the basis that it was unsuitable for cultivation or grazing. It was considered to be suitable for diversification development or possibly for a family dwelling house. This would not affect the policy objective of maintaining uninterrupted views from the road to the south, as the area was largely obscured from above and, seen from the east, lay within a sweep of existing buildings (see photograph at head of chapter).

4. The **council** confirmed the basis of its policy to protect the open views over the sea from the road, as well as the locally important croft land to the south of the road. However, the land in question comprised rough land with some established planting. Although the area was shown in the Landscape Capacity Study as being inappropriate for development for landscape reasons, as there already was development on the seaward side of the road at this point, and as the linear pattern of the settlement became less well defined, it was considered that there was scope to accommodate some development there, without it having any impact on the open views. Tree planting already carried out would help screen any future development and provide a boundary feature. However, the council considered that future access arrangements would require to be carefully considered, and they would become an important factor in determining any planning application which came forward in the area.

5. Accordingly, the council supported the amendment of the settlement boundary and proposed a modification to include the area suggested by the objector in the final version of the plan. However, it was important to note that any development would be subject to Policies G2 of the structure plan and Policy 1 of this plan in terms of siting, design and other servicing and locational issues.

6. **Further submissions** were raised by local residents in objection to this proposed modification. They set out the history of the land involved and proposed that wherever possible, common grazing land should be used for development rather than established croft land, as it could become a valuable asset in the future. The objection site was a large area that had been worked in the past, despite its present appearance to the contrary and it could be reclaimed and restored to use. It was large enough to accommodate several dwelling houses. At this west margin of the settlement, building was sparse and provided a gradual build-up towards the centre which was already developed.

7. The area was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and was evident from two important viewpoints at Polbain, and the tree cover and established scrub supported a significant bird population and other wildlife. In any case, development on the seaward side of the road would be wrong, as it would involve the loss of the present distinctive boundary location and require the construction of a hazardous access road. Similarly, to include the objection site within the settlement boundary would establish a precedent for development below the line of the road, despite the desire

to preserve the open views, and this could affect tourism which contributed to the area. There was available building land within the existing Settlement Development Area at Polbain and there were other alternatives which should be considered first, should building land be used up. Building to date below the road had consisted merely of two original croft houses and a small house.

8. The **objector** responded to these submissions. There had been a misunderstanding over the identified use of the croft in question which was not arable land; accordingly, the policy that croft land should be preserved would not be affected. In regard to the suggested precedent, the objector pointed out that the Settlement Development Area already contained parts of two arable crofts on the seaward side of the road at the east end of the settlement. Although the view referred to would remain unaffected by development, the use of the viewpoint had been stopped by the council with the erection of a sign to prevent parking there. Finally, the objector compared the need for affordable housing for local families, which the proposed modification was intended to provide.

9. The **council** summarised its position following receipt of the more detailed submissions from the objectors to the proposed modification. It repeated that there already was development on the seaward side of the road at this point and that the broadly linear pattern in the main part of the settlement became less well defined. The Landscape Capacity Study was only one of the factors to be considered, and although it indicated that the objection site was inappropriate for landscape reasons, the council considered that there remained scope to accommodate some development below the slope without creating any impact on open views over the sea or locally important croft land. Scottish Natural Heritage had not objected to the proposed extension of the Settlement Development Area. The council agreed that access arrangements would require to be carefully considered and would be an important factor in determining any subsequent planning application for the area.

10. The plan was not proscriptive in terms of the number of houses to be accommodated on the objection site, and again, the planning application would be considered under Policy 1 (now Policy 1A) which stated that,

“We will also judge proposals in terms of how compatible they are with the existing pattern of development, how they conform with existing and approved adjacent land uses, and trees.”

This would involve ensuring that any proposal sat well within the existing settlement pattern. Finally, the Proposals Map Polbain Inset required that important croft land would be retained.

CONCLUSIONS

11. I consider that the advice set out in the Landscape Capacity Study is clear that the open pasture below the road should be retained as a component of the existing views to the south and west. The council considers this advice to be but one factor in determining the boundary of the Settlement Development Area; nevertheless, the reasons for identifying the line of the boundary where it is shown in the plan appear to me to be sound, and were followed by the council when it produced the deposit draft plan. Accordingly, it seems to me that not only should there be good reason for altering them at this stage, but also such alteration should continue to follow the advice upon which the plan was based.

12. The reasons for seeking the alteration are set out by the objector. First, the land in question is rough, scrub land which is unsuitable for cultivation or grazing. Whether or not this was always the case – and those opposing the modification would have it otherwise – it cannot follow

that this makes land suitable for development, or much of Wester Ross would become prime development land.

13. The objector is of course correct that a house on the objection site would not interrupt the view from the road, as there is plenty of scope for development at the foot of the hill which would still allow open and unbroken views of the coastline and the sea. However, this is not an accurate rendition of the advice set out in the Landscape Capacity Study, which actually refers to the land being retained as a component of the views, and I consider this to be almost as important. Development on the south side of the road, particularly on the level ground to the south and east of it, such as the location of the objection site, would not interrupt these views but would certainly be prominent, and therefore a prominent component within them.

14. I also accept the submissions of those objecting to the modification that development, once started in this , already development south of the road, in this part of the village at least, it consists of houses, mainly traditional houses, set on the slope or at the road side. Certainly they interrupt the views referred to, but in my opinion they play little part in them. By contrast, development on the objection site would be overlooked by the public road, both from above and from the east. Although formal parking of cars may have been prevented, I consider the issue to remain valid in all but this detail.

15. There can be little argument over the objector's views that additional affordable housing should be encouraged; indeed this is council policy and is set out in the plan. However, the Settlement Development Area boundary has been drawn widely around the village, allowing the potential not only for development within the identified area, but also for infill amongst the existing housing. Accordingly, I do not accept this as a relevant issue to the consideration of whether or not the boundary of the settlement should be extended at this point.

16. The area has been identified in the plan as being of medium sensitivity, and part of a National Scenic Area. In these terms, the issues become the more important, and the question of views, appearance, landscape form and structure also become more at issue. Accordingly, I do not agree with the council that the boundary should be altered to include the objection site and a planning application left to look after everything else, should it arise. The purpose of the plan is to direct development, and I consider that in this location, it should be directed away from the area already identified as being inappropriate for reasons of landscape. Indeed, as an area of medium sensitivity and lying within such an important scenic landscape, I consider that the area so identified should be shown in the Inset Map as an area where development should be avoided. This would include the objection site in this case.

RECOMMENDATION

17. Accordingly, I recommend that
- (i) the modification proposed by the council and described in paragraph 5 above be deleted; and
 - (ii) the area shown in the Landscape Capacity Study as inappropriate for development be identified as such on the Proposals Map Polbain Inset by making it an Area of Avoidance in terms of Policy 1D as set out in Chapter 21 of this report.