

Rhue



Chapter No:

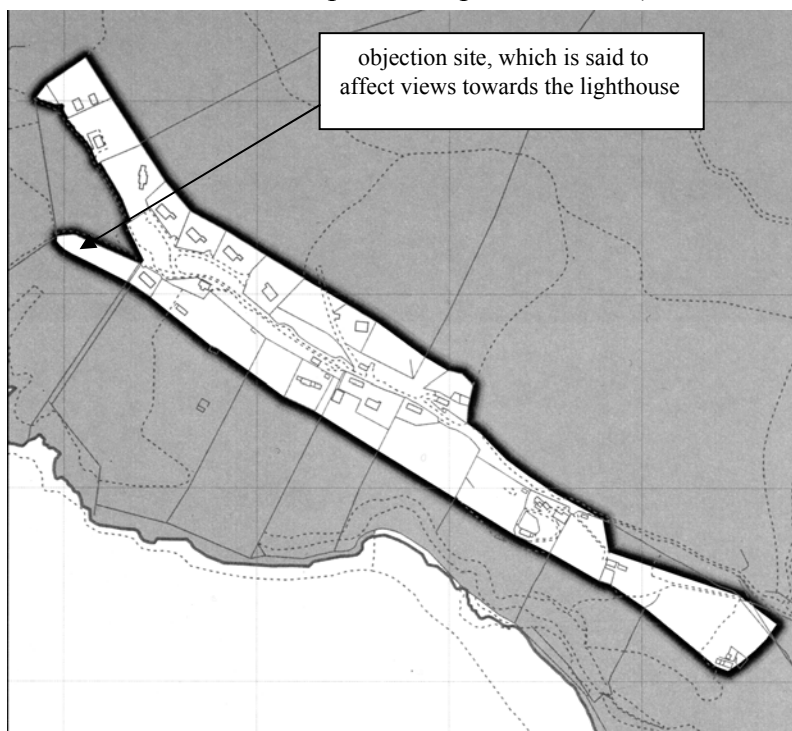
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- 4 - Ms Irene Brandt [Written Submissions]
- 9 - Mr Barry Chislett [Written Submissions]
- 43 - Mr and Mrs Iain Roy [Written Submissions]

BACKGROUND

1. Rhue is a linear settlement at the mouth of Loch Broom, to the north of Ullapool. It is located on both sides of an unclassified cul-de-sac access road leading from the A835 Ullapool to Ardmair road. It is set on a hillside, so that the houses to the north of the road, which are mostly recent additions to the settlement, lie above the road with the slope of the hillside increasing above them; those to the south of it lie at a lower level, with the slope levelling out closer to the water's edge. There are views across the loch to the hills on the Scoraig peninsula beyond, in particular Beinn Ghobhlach which sits opposite the settlement, and to the north towards the lighthouse on the adjacent point, Isle Martin, the coastline to the north of it and the Summer Isles.

2. In the Proposals Map Rhue Inset (see extract below), the settlement is shown to lie in an area of low sensitivity. Two Development Factors relating to these objections were included on the inset map:



Extract from Proposals Map Rhue Inset

Two Development Factors relating to these objections were included on the inset map:

“• Access and views to the lighthouse at the west end should be maintained.

• Any development at the western end below the road must be single storey only.”

3. The Landscape Capacity Study notes that some pastures are still grazed, although many are infested with rushes; and that a few derelict buildings are present within these pastures at the eastern end of the settlement. Its General Guidance section states,

“Open ground between the coast and the main road at the north-west end of the

settlement should be retained in order to conserve views to the lighthouse, open sea and islands.”

Its accompanying Proposals plan shows a number of areas where development would be inappropriate for landscape reasons. Some of these lie within the settlement envelope, both above and below the road.

SUMMARY OF THE OBJECTIONS

4. The objectors were concerned that the Settlement Development Area, as drawn in the plan, would allow for development south of the road which would spoil the amenity of the community and its character. Land to the south of the road should be protected against development because of its historical, cultural and agricultural value. Development to the south of the road would obstruct views to the sea currently enjoyed by existing properties and by visiting tourists. There was a potential in the Settlement Development Area plan for the loss of more than 28% of the agricultural land used presently for grazing. In addition, development on the south side of the road would restrict access to the fields and the sea beyond, for both crofters and walkers alike.

5. In particular, objections were raised against the potential for development to the south-west of the village, as this would obstruct views to the lighthouse; because this land projected out into an area of croft land; and because this would change the nature of the experience of visiting Rhue. The council’s suggested modification to reduce this area by half did not meet the objections. It was insufficient of the council to state that development on this land would be lower than the adjacent houses and would have no significantly detrimental effect on the views in this direction as even a single storey house on that site would have a detrimental effect on the views over the open water both for residents to the north of the road and for visitors approaching from the car park. Arguably, this was one of the finest viewpoints on the coast.

6. The open character of the settlement and the vista from the end of the road attracted many visitors both from the local area and tourists. Access to the lighthouse for maintenance had been accommodated in the past and would not be affected by improvement of the track, another reason cited for allowing development. Accordingly, there appeared to be no reason why the area to the south-west as shown within the Settlement Development Area, should not be removed from it entirely.

7. The objectors were not reassured by the council’s statement that houses would only be built if there were a demand or a need for them, as there was a growing demand for land and houses in the area from those able to pay high prices, enabling local landowners to take advantage of this opportunity to make more money from their land than they ever could by crofting. If the sites made available in the Settlement Development Area as shown were developed, together with those already with planning consent, it would allow the development of a further 15 houses, thereby doubling the size of the existing settlement.

8. Finally, one objector referred to a decision, which it was understood had been made in principle to locate an emergency helicopter pad on the common grazing land near the car park at the west end of the settlement. If this were the case, in the interest of safety, it was considered to be advisable not to allow further domestic development on a site in such close proximity.

SUMMARY OF THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE

9. The council referred to the linear pattern of development at Rhue, to its relationship to both sides of the road and to the break in slope. Land identified within the Settlement Development Areas on the south side of the road included the upper edges of the croft land and avoided the flatter platforms above the sea shore. As designated, the council considered that the land included within the Settlement Development Area would not involve a significant impact on the historical, cultural or agricultural value of the land. In any case, including such land did not mean that development would take place; it merely suggested that a location within the boundary might be appropriate should the need arise and subject to Policy 1 (now 1A) of the plan. There was no evidence to suggest that eight of the potential sites identified by the objectors were the subject of any active developer interest. A letter from the local grazings committee did not seek the exclusion of any of the land to the south of the road from the Settlement Development Area boundary, but instead set out a number of possibilities for development throughout the village.

10. The existing settlement pattern included a number of houses on the south side of the road and the boundary of the Settlement Development Area merely sought to maintain this pattern. The land on the south side of the road did fall away considerably to the more level ground below so that, if development proposals were to come forward on this side of the road, if sensitively sited and designed, it was likely that there would be no significantly detrimental impact on the views enjoyed by the houses on the north side, nor from the road itself. Scottish Natural Heritage had not objected to the boundary as it stood.

11. As to the area of ground on the west end of the village, concerns were raised at the initial draft stage of the plan, so that an additional development factor to restrict development to single-storey only had been added, as shown at paragraph 2 above. The council accepted that the Landscape Capacity Study for the settlement identified this area of land as an area where development would be inappropriate for landscape reasons. However, it pointed out that the constraint had been identified in order to maintain the setting of, and views to the lighthouse. The informal car park referred to by objectors faced directly west, while the additional area of land which was the subject of objections lay to the south-west. It was therefore considered that there remained some scope for limited small scale development at this end of the settlement.

12. In response to the concerns raised, it was proposed to modify the settlement boundary at this end of the settlement to reduce the area and to tie any development more closely to the existing last house, and to relate better to the linear pattern of the rest of the village. In addition, the amended area would not have any impact on the setting of or views to the lighthouse. The topography of the area meant that houses to the north end of the car park sat well above the area of land referred to so that any development would be considerably lower and would not have a significantly detrimental effect on any views obtained.

13. As access to the lighthouse took place along a rough track from the car park area, there should be no impact on this track, any development possibly improving the start of the track if it were upgraded to provide access. There was no intention to provide access for maintenance of the lighthouse, and a development factor on the inset map already maintained such access.

14. Finally, in relation to the potential for a helicopter pad near the car park, the council accepted that such a decision had been taken in principle but it was an issue which would require to be considered when and if a planning application were submitted for any housing at the western end of the village, once the detailed location and operating requirements of the landing pad were known.

CONCLUSIONS

15. There are two main issues for determination in relation to the objections to this Settlement Development Area boundary: the potential for the erection of development on the south side of the public road; and the extension of the Settlement Development Area to the north-west towards the lighthouse. However first, there is also the consideration of whether there is demand or need for housing in this settlement.

16. I consider that the objectors' assessment of the position in relation to need and demand is probably accurate. There appears to be no argument that local people are unable to afford current prices of property and that there is a resultant need for affordable housing in the plan area generally. However in my view, the potential demand for housing in this settlement, as set out by the objectors, is confirmed by the letter from the grazings committee as produced and referred to by the council (see paragraph 9 above). It states,

“Few crofters have adequate or indeed any pension provision and the current demand for housing sites has provided an opportunity for at least a lump sum payment as a nest egg or investment from unused land.”

In these terms, it seems to me to be quite likely that sites within the Settlement Development Area – and probably outwith the boundary as well – may be advanced as having the potential for development within the life of the plan. Certainly, this will assist in the retention of the population, but it also demonstrates the need not only to direct development to the right locations, but also to discourage it from other areas where it is considered important that they remain free of development.

17. In relation to Rhue, the objectors would include all areas to the south of the road in this category. I appreciate that the views across the loch are special but, although there are some areas where development would be more prominent and intrusive than others, and might affect such views, the Landscape Capacity Study has identified eight sites on the south side of the road where development would be preferred, and where views would extend over the tops of the houses.

18. Accordingly, if development were kept at a maximum of one-and-a-half storeys in height as recommended in the study document, I do not agree with the objectors that the houses necessarily would be detrimental to the views obtained from the public road. However, there are sites, also identified in the Landscape Capacity Study, where it is recommended that development would be inappropriate for landscape reasons, either because they would be likely to obstruct the views referred to, to the south and south-west, or because they would affect the setting of, and views towards the lighthouse.

19. The site in question however, which lies at the west end of the village, would clearly



lighthouse

end of public road

← photograph submitted by objector and annotated as follows:
“View from road, showing how a house sited to the south-west end of the paved road would block the view to the lighthouse.”

affect views towards the lighthouse from the end of the public road. Even if viewed from the public car park (which is off the above photograph to the right of the picture), a house in this location would be prominent in views from that location – the views are undoubtedly unique – and an additional visual block would be to their detriment. I therefore agree with the objectors that merely to reduce the potential area of development in this location, even by half, does not resolve the issue.

20. The settlement already clearly has the potential to accommodate a number of houses – it is unlikely to be as many as the 15 identified by the objector in my opinion as, for example, two of the houses were shown within the public car park area – and there therefore appears to be no need to identify even a single house site at this end of the village. Accordingly, I do not understand why the council was prepared to reduce the area but not to eliminate it altogether, when so evidently there was considerable objection to it from the local community, and, as can be seen from the objector’s photograph on the preceding page, it would reduce the view still further.

RECOMMENDATION

21. I therefore recommend that

- (i) the boundary of the Settlement Development Area at the west end of the settlement be amended further in order to eliminate the objection site, as identified on the Proposals Map Rhue Inset (shown at paragraph 2 above); and
- (ii) Areas of Avoidance under Policy 1D (see chapter 21 above) be identified on the inset map to accord with the Landscape Capacity Study, both at the west end of the settlement and to the south of the settlement, and the Settlement Development Area boundary be adjusted accordingly.