

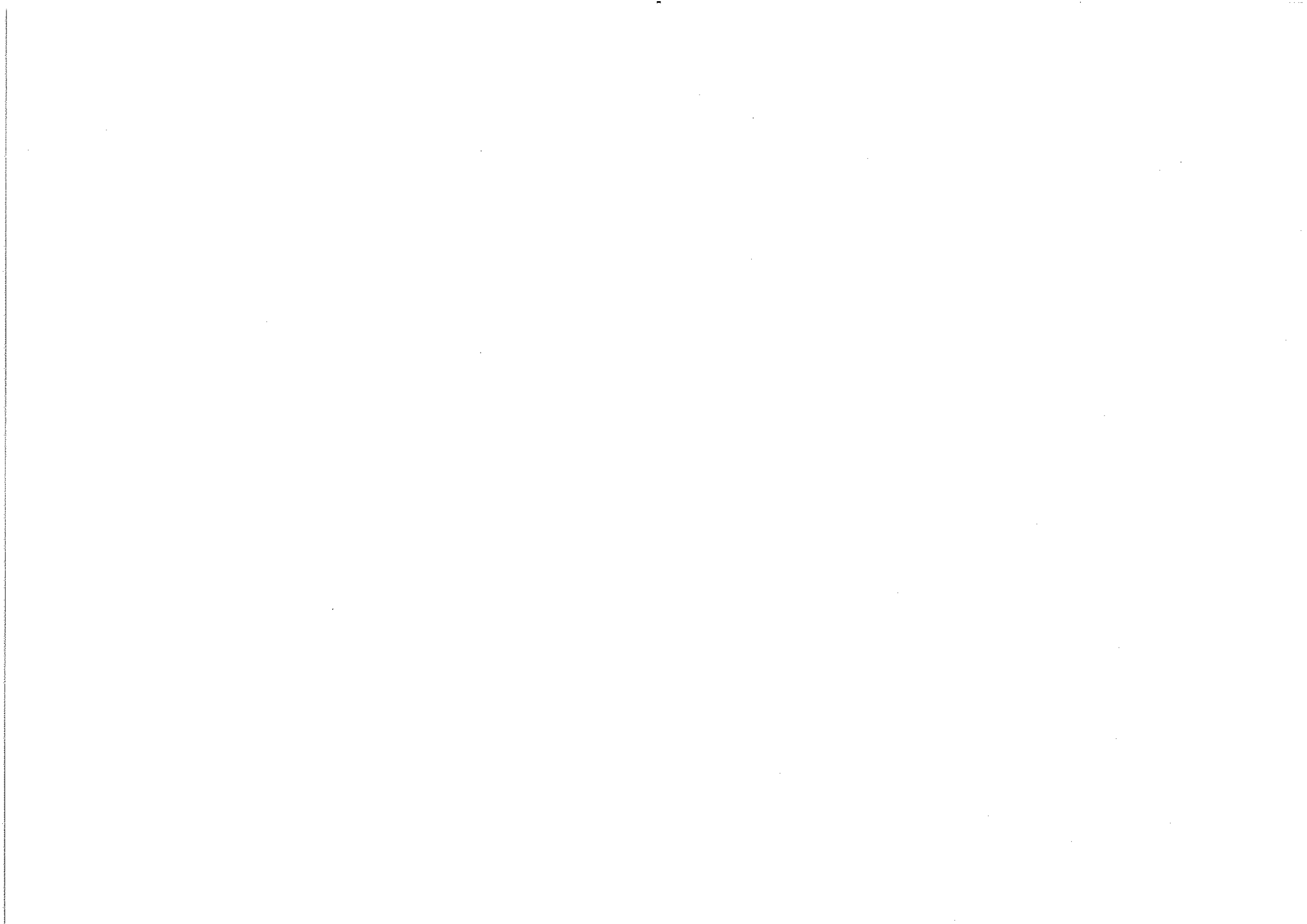


SOUTH & EAST SUTHERLAND LOCAL PLAN

WRITTEN STATEMENT

Adopted Plan May 2000

**Planning & Development Service
The Highland Council**



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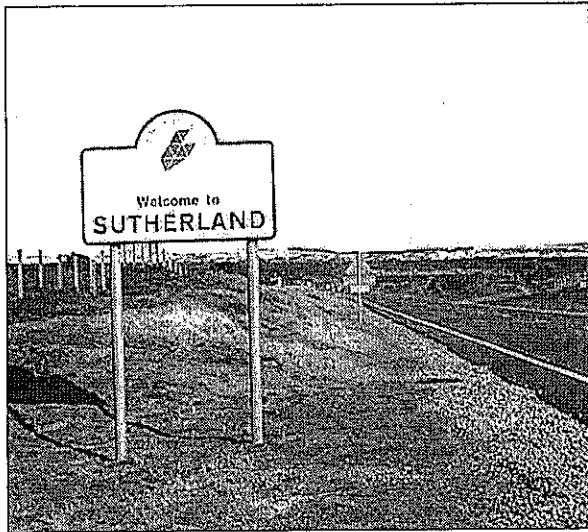
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INTRODUCTION



In February 1997 the Council announced its Intention to Prepare a new Local Plan covering South and East Sutherland. This will eventually replace the existing Local Plans and Alterations covering the following areas:-

- **Brora and Helmsdale** (Adopted in May 1983), including Alteration No.1 for the Doll (October 1994);
- **Golspie and Lairg** (Adopted in July 1983), for the Golspie area only, including Alteration No.1, Golspie Housing (October 1989) and Alteration No.2, the Doll (October 1994); and
- **Dornoch, Creich and Kincardine** (Adopted in January 1984), including Alteration No.1, Dornoch Housing (May 1991) and Alteration No.2, Embo Village (September 1996).

Purpose of the Plan

Legislation imposes a statutory duty upon Local Planning Authorities to prepare Development Plans for their area, looking ahead for at least 10 years. These are the basis for planning decisions in the Council's area and consist of a Structure Plan and Local Plans.

The Highland Structure Plan sets out broad locational and strategic policy guidance, which Local Plans must comply with. The Local Plan:

- sets out detailed policies and specific proposals for the development and use of land that will help guide most day to day planning application decisions;
- brings local and detailed planning issues before the public;
- highlights development opportunities; and
- provides a basis for people and organisations in the public and private sector to make investment decisions.

Planning legislation and National Planning Policy Guidelines have strengthened the role of Development Plans in recent years. Decisions on planning applications should be made in accordance with the provisions of the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This is to give greater certainty to residents, community groups, developers, business investors and infrastructure providers.

Global and National Obligations

In addition to the Highland Structure Plan, approved by the Secretary of State in November 1990, the Local Plan takes account of:

- emerging Local Agenda 21 considerations that underpin the application of sustainable development principles;
- European Commission Directives; and
- National Planning Policy Guidelines.

Format of the Plan

A Local Plan consists of a Written Statement and a Proposals Map, with relevant Insets. It is required to cover a wide range of topics including population; housing; industry and employment; transport; shopping, commerce and tourism; community and recreation facilities; utilities; heritage; and environmental matters. Also forming part of all Local Plans in Highland are two separate booklets containing Council policies of a more general or Highland wide nature.

The Written Statement contains policies, which guide or control development, and proposals, which promote development. It also contains site allocations, environmental safeguards, the phasing of proposals and the means of implementation. The Proposals Map and Insets show where the policies and proposals apply.

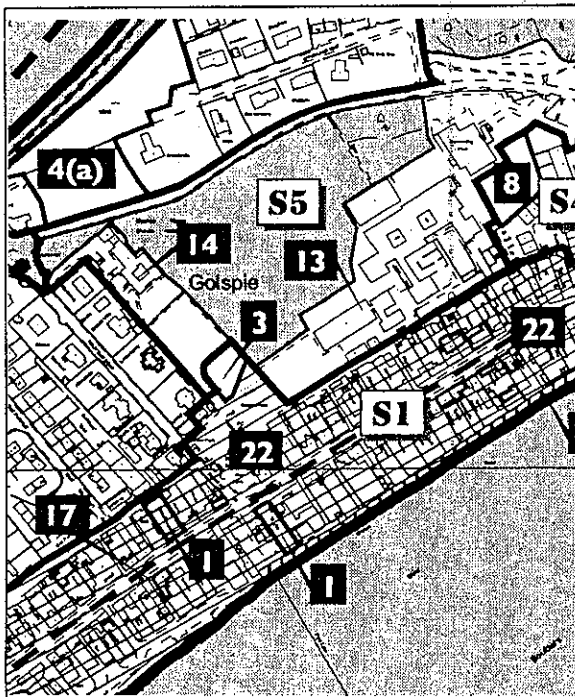
In addition to indicating the Council's own spending priorities, a Local Plan may include proposals identified by other Agencies and bodies expected to happen within the period of the Plan. However, any dates and costs shown against proposals are liable to

change as programmes and the availability of resources are reviewed annually.

How to Use the Plan

In the Written Statement **Chapter 1** outlines the broader concerns of the Local Plan. It contains the background information, including the general description of the Plan area as a whole, key population forecasts, development prospects and requirements, together with overall servicing and environmental issues. This chapter indicates the Council's strategic objectives for South and East Sutherland over the next 10 years and beyond.

The detailed provisions of the Plan are contained in **Chapters 2 and 3**, where the paragraph numbers of the Written Statement link the text to the separate set of Proposals and Inset Maps (sample below). There are two main approaches to using the Plan.



1. **Using the Written Statement first you can refer to the Index or Contents Pages to look up the village or area you are interested in.** For example, for Ardgay you would be directed to page 29 in Chapter 3 of the Written Statement where that village is number 1. That also means that the village is covered by Main Village Inset Map 1 of the accompanying Maps. Using both the Written Statement and the Map at the same time you can find out what the Plan says about that village.

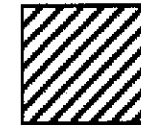
2. **Using the Proposals Maps you can, for example, find out about what the Plan is saying about the area in which your house is located.** In the map index within the separate maps booklet reference is made to the main Proposals Maps A or B. On each of these maps there are several Insets with appropriate reference numbers. If you live in one of the eight Main Villages turn to the appropriate Inset Map, which should be at a reasonable scale on which to trace your property. Areas outwith these villages are covered by the main Proposals Maps (A or B) and rural settlement Insets. These maps tend to be of a smaller scale so individual properties are more difficult to trace. However, the policies applying tend to cover much larger geographical areas.

On the maps, a set of General Policies are applied across the Local Plan area where indicated. These are referred to as **Environment / ENV 1 to 4 and Settlement / S 1 to 6**.

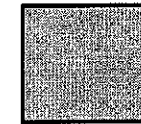
Environment (ENV) Policies 1 to 4 apply mostly to land in the countryside or Landward Area and occasionally extend into settlements. The areas these policies cover are shaded and the wording is as follows:-



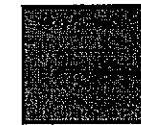
ENV 1: the Council will encourage development subject to detailed site factors.



ENV 2: the Council will favour development, unless this would significantly affect important local features.



ENV 3: the Council will presume against development, particularly where there is significant damage to heritage, amenity or public health.



ENV 4: the Council will not approve development, unless there is a strong and over-riding social, economic, public health or safety reason.

Within a town or village boundary **Settlement Policies S1 to 6** cover different land use policy areas, which are indicated as follows:-



Land Use Policy Areas



Settlement Boundary

More specifically the policies are:

S1 Town/Village Centre:

The Council will give favourable consideration to town centre uses.

S2 Housing:

The Council will seek to maintain and enhance the established character of residential areas.

S3 Business:

The Council will give favourable consideration to business uses.

S4 Industry:

The Council will give favourable consideration to industrial uses.

S5 Special Uses:

The Council will expect existing uses to be maintained, unless otherwise indicated by specific proposals or land allocations.

S6 Town Expansion:

The Council will promote the planned expansion of the community.

S7 Village Expansion

The Council will encourage development consistent with the scale and character of rural settlements.

An explanation of the above policies, including detailed definitions and background, is contained in the separate Local Plans General Policies Annex.

More specific sites, proposals and policies have their own reference numbers -

- 4** black numbers circled on the Landward Area
- 1** white numbers in a black box on the Main Village Inset Maps .

These correspond with paragraph numbers in the Written Statement.

In the Written Statement policies, proposals and development opportunities are shown **in bold italic type**. Cross references to other policies in this Plan or its Appendices and General Policies Annex are bracketed () and the Structure Plan bracketed [].

Appendices unique to South and East Sutherland (A to C) are contained at the back of this Written Statement.

The General Policies Annex is a separate booklet. This includes a list of the 1990 approved Structure Plan Policies.

The Structure Plan General Development Control Policies Appendix (No. 1) is also a separate booklet.

As an example, in the Landward Area Chapter there are cross references to the Council's Housing in the Countryside Policies (**RS1, RS1.3.3, RS 1.4.1 etc.**). The details of these are contained in the **Housing** section of the Structure Plan General Development Control Policies booklet (Appendix 1).

Preparation and Consultation

COMMENCEMENT

7 February 1997 – Notice of Intention to Prepare.

CONSULTATIVE DRAFT

23 March 1998 – Sutherland County Committee agreed to publish Consultative Draft Plan.

24 April to 19 June 1998 – Consultative Draft consultation period.

12 Oct 1998 – Representations reported to Sutherland County Committee.

18 Nov 1998 – Highland Planning Committee agreed changes and publication of Deposit Draft Plan.

DEPOSIT DRAFT

18 Dec 1998 to 12 Feb 1999 – Deposit period.

29 March 1999 – Objections and Representations reported to Sutherland County Committee.

14 April 1999 – Highland Planning Committee agreed Modifications and Public Local Inquiry.

DEPOSIT DRAFT WITH MODIFICATIONS /PLI

7 May to 18 June 1999 – Mods. (1) deposit period.

4 & 5 Aug 1999 – PLI held.

1 Nov 1999 – PLI Report to Sutherland Committee.

17 Nov 1999 – PLI Report to the Highland Planning Committee, which agreed further Modifications.

DEPOSIT DRAFT WITH MODIFICATIONS (2)

26 Nov 1999 to 20 Jan 2000 – Modifications (2) deposit period.

2 Feb 2000 – Objections to Deposit Draft with Modifications (2) reported to Highland Planning Committee, which agreed Intention to Adopt.

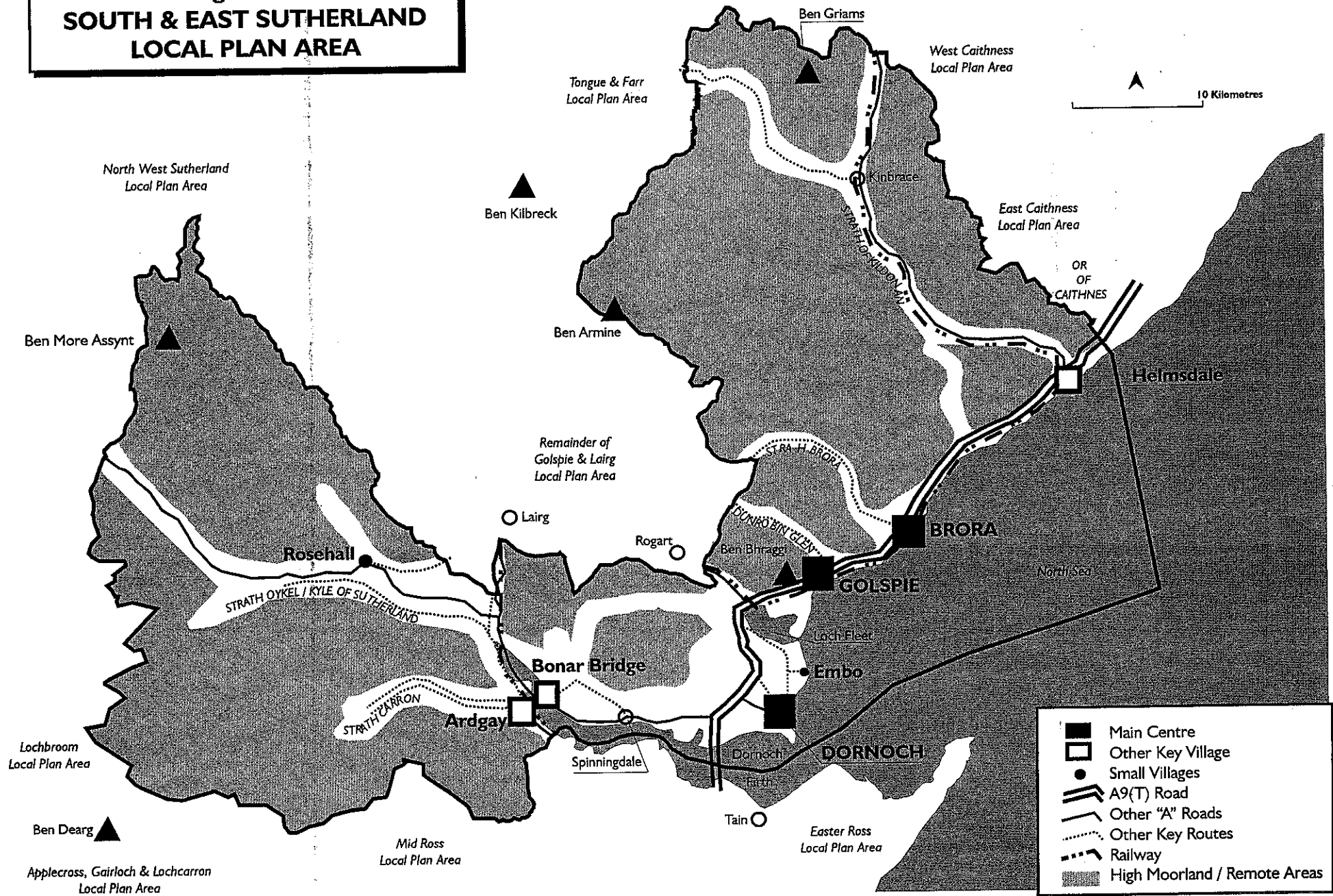
INTENTION TO ADOPT

17 Mar. 2000 – Plan on deposit.

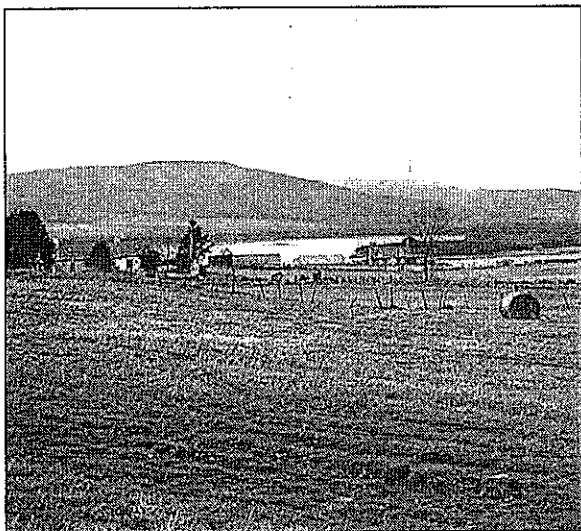
24 Mar to 21 Apr 2000 – Plan with Scottish Executive.

PLAN ADOPTED BY THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL ON 11 MAY 2000

**Figure 1 :
SOUTH & EAST SUTHERLAND
LOCAL PLAN AREA**



CHAPTER I: STRATEGY



View from Skelbo to Loch Fleet, Golspie and coastal hills

BACKGROUND

THE PLAN AREA

1.1 South and East Sutherland is an area of just over 2200 square kilometres extending from the Dornoch Firth north east to the Ord of Caithness and Kinbrace; west towards Beinn Dearg; and north west through the Kyle of Sutherland towards the summit of Ben More Assynt. The landscape is characterised mainly by high moorland slopes and hills, interspersed by the Straths of Kildonan, Brora, Dunrobin Glen, Oykel and Carron. The high ground provides relatively sheltered climatic conditions for the more fertile east coast and Dornoch Firth margins that support the larger communities and farm units. The tidal estuaries, long beaches, dunes and links of the coastal area support important wildlife habitats and recreational uses generating visitor interest. Pictish

heritage, the Highland Clearances, crofting, estate, sporting and forestry activities have all had an influence on the wider landscape character.

1.2 The majority of the 8,250 residents live in or near the A9 Trunk Road/Far North Rail Line east coast corridor linking Sutherland to the north and south. This is where the principal settlements of Brora, Dornoch and Golspie are located. Their close proximity to each other generates a relatively significant movement of people on a regular daily basis and local housing pressures in the surrounding countryside. The spread of public service, community and administrative functions between them, together with various complementary commercial and industrial activities almost classifies them as a single economic service unit. Other significant concentrations of population occur in the smaller local service centres of Ardgay, Bonar Bridge and Helmsdale, as well as in Embo.

1.3 An estimated 3100 jobs are based in South and East Sutherland, with a further 80 to 100 residents working outwith the area, mostly in Easter Ross. While traditional industries of agriculture/crofting, forestry and estate work, together with miscellaneous manufacturing, continue to underpin the economy, tourism is the main activity. The attractiveness of the natural environment and local history are major assets, complemented in recent years by improvements in the range and quality of tourist related facilities such as the Timespan Heritage Centre in Helmsdale, large hotels in Brora and development of the Carnegie Club at Skibo. The high quality environment also provides a source of leisure and recreational activity for residents, a factor essential to retain population and attract more people to come and live in the area.

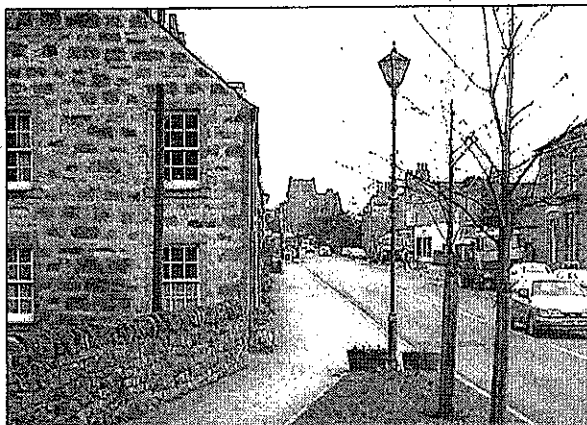
NEIGHBOURING PLAN AREAS

1.4 The following Local Plan areas, all in Highland, share boundaries with South and East Sutherland :

- the remaining area of Golspie and Lairg (principally the communities of Lairg and Rogart and associated landward area) *
- North West Sutherland *
- Tongue and Farr *
- West Caithness
- East Caithness
- Easter Ross
- Mid Ross
- Lochbroom

1.5 The communities of Rogart and Lairg, just outside the Plan area to the north west, have strong links in terms of major facilities and key services. Easter Ross to the south and Inverness also have an influence upon the area, particularly in respect of attracting a significant amount of shopping expenditure from Sutherland residents.

* These Plans will be reviewed and combined into a new North & West Sutherland Local Plan after 1999.



Dornoch Castle Street environmental improvements

STRUCTURE PLAN

1.6 The Highland Structure Plan, approved by the Secretary of State for Scotland in November 1990, sets out the strategic planning policy framework for the Highlands. The Plan is currently under review and different stages of the Local Plan preparation will have to take account of emerging guidance. Meanwhile, the Local Plan will apply the existing Structure Plan policies [e.g. P2] and key objectives. A full list of Structure Plan policies is contained in the Technical Annex to this Local Plan. The following Structure Plan Sub Regional objectives for South and East Sutherland are relevant: -

- Maintaining population levels.
- Diversifying employment opportunities and encouraging business and industrial development [Policy P2].
- Protecting agricultural land [P20].
- Implementing a Forestry Strategy [P22 & 23].
- Promoting tourism, particularly through local initiatives [P44].

- Maintaining and, where possible, improving the level of service provision and road links [P75].
- Carrying out environmental improvements in Brora, Golspie, Helmsdale, Dornoch and the Kyle of Sutherland [P78].
- Increasing awareness of natural, scenic, historic and archaeological heritage [P102-104, 108, 109 and 112-114].

POPULATION TRENDS AND FORECASTS

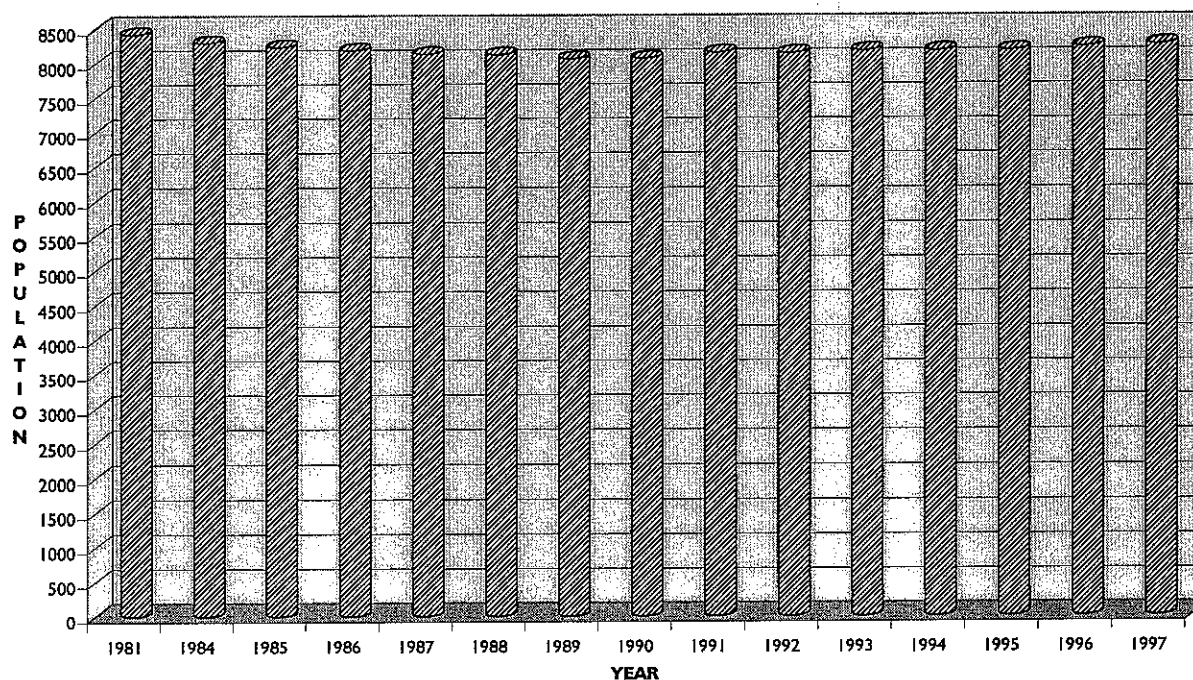
1.7 From 1981 to 1997 the Local Plan area population showed an overall decrease of just under 2% or 160 persons (see Figure 2 below), which contrasts greatly with the overall growth of 4% in

Highland. However, there was a modest increase of 100 persons in South and East Sutherland from 1991 to 1997, through net in-migration, particularly into the Dornoch area. This also coincided with the opening of the Dornoch Firth Bridge and substantial housing development in and around the Royal Burgh. This growth appears to have coincided with increase of retirement aged people moving to the area and second generation growth amongst the younger adult population which moved to the area a few years ago.

1.8 Some parts of South and East Sutherland experienced the greatest proportion of population loss in Highland between 1981 and 1991 (see Figure 3, below right), despite a higher rate of births than deaths. Widespread loss of employment opportunities, particularly in the Brora area and from Bonar Bridge west, together with a lack of a college

Figure 2: Population Change in S & E Sutherland - 1981 to 1997

(Source: 1981 & 1991 Census and H.C. estimates)



or university for further education studies, were mainly responsible for the greatest proportion of population loss, that of young adults in the 20 to 39 age range. Continuation of such losses could result in greater shortages of skilled labour in certain sectors of the economy in the longer term with the knock on effect of reducing demand for family housing and local services. Conversely there are now more people aged 60 or over, who will require more specialist accommodation and medical care in the future.

1.9 Government projections continue to suggest an overall decline in population for the whole of Sutherland between 1998 and 2008. However, if real growth in employment can be achieved, population growth close to the 1991-97 rate might occur. The Local Plan assists this positive approach whereby an increase of at least 200 persons by 2008 is planned for. Growth prospects will also depend upon more land being made available for housing development, the maintenance and improvement of community facilities and the minimising the impact upon the high quality environment.

KEY ASSUMPTION 1:
Population Growth of 200 by 2008

1.10 School rolls across Scotland are expected to fall over the next 10 to 15 years. The anticipated reduction in the Golspie High School roll will be quite significant. This is due to the availability of the new school at Kinlochbervie, expanded Farr Secondary at Bettyhill, the growth of Dornoch Academy towards six year secondary status and the transfer of some pupils to Tain from the Dornoch area. This will result in a surplus of education property in Golspie, for which new uses need to be explored.

EMPLOYMENT

1.11 The local economy has suffered many job losses in fishing, food processing, construction, retailing and estate work in recent years. This is due in part to increased access to the south via improvements to the A9 (T) road. This now bypasses communities west of the Dornoch Bridge and enables easier distribution of goods and movement to and from Inverness with its wider range of shops, services and job opportunities. Conversely the Bridge has allowed more people to travel between East Sutherland and Easter Ross for work and makes the Dornoch area particularly attractive to commuters. Indeed the Bridge has probably brought about the greatest economic change in the area in recent years.

1.12 A heavy dependence upon public expenditure in the past has meant that the effects of rationalisation of public sector jobs, the lack of money for Council construction projects and falling school rolls have been very significant. On the positive side,

tourism has improved and in the more immediate future is likely to attract investment in service provision, with further potential for growth.

1.13 The local unemployment rate continues to exceed the equivalent for Scotland and Highland. Around 330 persons (8.7%) were out of work in July 1997, although seasonal tourism work means that typical winter unemployment rates are a third greater (440 or 11.6% in January 1998). Particular local black spots are Ardgay, Bonar Bridge and Brora. The area is also economically disadvantaged through having the highest proportion of part-time jobs in Highland (38% in the 1993 Census of Employment returns), particularly for females, and relatively low wage rates prevailing in many job sectors. Gross Domestic Product and the economic activity rate are well below the Highland average with Sutherland County being the lowest in Scotland. The sluggish economic growth and high unemployment, combined with sparse population levels, led to the setting up of the Sutherland Partnership economic development initiative for the whole of the County in 1997.

Figure 3: Map of S & E Sutherland Population Change by Settlement Zone, 1981-1991
(Source: Population Census & Highland Trends 1998)

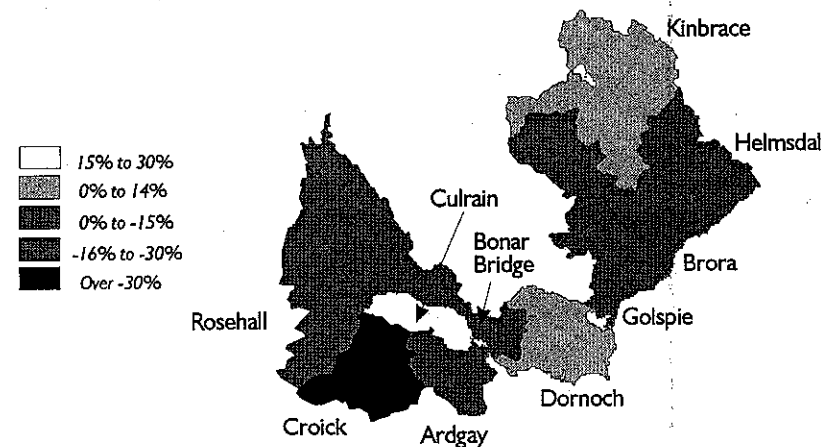
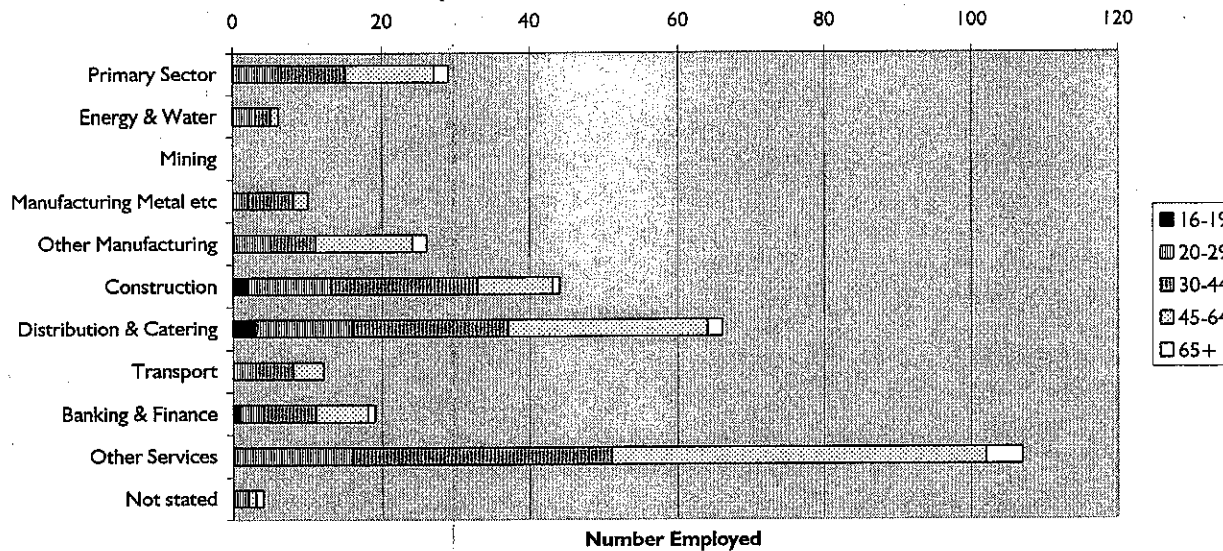
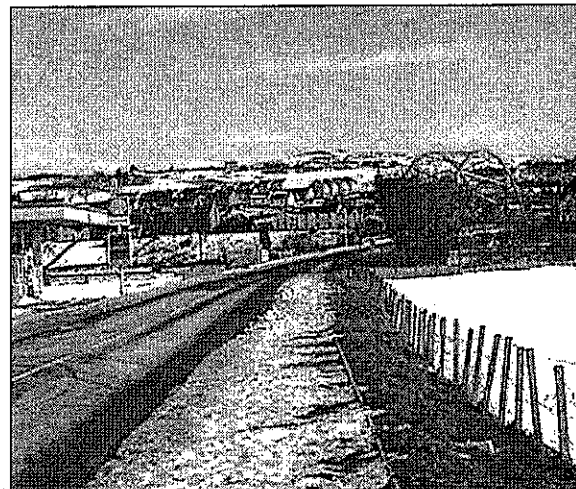


Figure 4: South and East Sutherland Employment Structure by Age
(Source: 1991 Census - 10% Sample)



1.14 The number of existing South and East Sutherland residents eligible for work is expected to decrease slightly (-2%) by the year 2008, and including the unemployed, will represent a potential "jobs gap" of around 400. The creation of that number of jobs during the next ten years would secure full employment. More realistically, even if initiatives to improve local economic prospects and tackle long term unemployment aim to bring the jobless total down to the current Highland average of 7%, this assumes that at least a further 150 full time equivalent jobs would need to be created. The prospects for population growth may depend upon at least 250 more jobs being created in the next 10 years. **The main priority for the area is to enhance economic prospects and create jobs.** Paragraphs 1.15 to 1.28 indicate the prospects for creating jobs in the Local Plan area.



Bonar Bridge, bypassed by A9 (T) road and suffered significant job losses in recent years

LOCAL ECONOMIC GROWTH PROSPECTS

1.15 The national economic outlook is for further significant employment growth in the Service Sector, notably in distribution, catering, finance, health and administration which, largely due to tourism, represent 60% of total employment in South and East Sutherland (see Fig. 4, left). Further structural changes in the economy are anticipated, particularly in light of continuing growth in personal and 'producer' services, customer call centres and high technology related manufacturing. Some of these may not require a location in the south of England or Central Belt of Scotland, or seek traditional village centre or industrial estates. These go hand in hand with improved telecommunications networks to allow computerised remote working, which will provide opportunities for new forms of development, reduce transport demands and create more flexible working.

1.16 Improved telecommunications represents a critical component of the future economic development throughout the Highland area. The ability of the South and East Sutherland area to attract such jobs will depend upon further improvements in access, the bringing forward of serviceable land, the availability of a skilled work force and opportunities for training and further education, coupled with maintenance of the quality of the environment. Indeed the maintenance and interpretation of the high environmental quality will be a key factor in improving local job prospects. The wealth of unspoilt natural landscapes and a wide range of wildlife and habitats of national and international importance are major assets to the tourist industry and sporting interests, and underpin many other activities. National growth is predicted in jobs in forestry and ranger service wardens, rural craft skills, agriculture and wildlife consultants, visitor centres and environmental education, mainly due to the increasing interest in 'green' tourism and enjoyment of the natural environment.

KEY ASSUMPTION 2:

Jobs growth target - 150 to 250 by 2008

1.17 Employment opportunities in other activities could be enhanced by the potential knock-on effect of the return of more substantial oil fabrication jobs to Nigg in Easter Ross, the ability to attract part of the University of the Highlands and Islands, greater freight use of the rail network, the growth and importance of golf, taking up European funding and yet unfulfilled potential in tourism.

1.18 Maintenance and diversification of traditional rural land uses and resource-based industries will be vital to sustaining the current settlement pattern of the area. Agriculture, crofting, forestry and sporting activities continue to be the predominant land uses. The Council has no direct power over rural land use change but can use its influence to encourage the best use of resources, and to protect land capable of important production. The processing of local resource based materials does not take place to any great extent, but through the Sutherland Partnership, the Council and other agencies support initiatives which encourage diversification and add value to products.

1.19 **Crofting** is a critical component of agricultural and social development in the area. Income continues to be supplemented by other employment and diversification initiatives to allow crofting to survive. The Croft Entrants Scheme, promoted by Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise (CASE) and the Crofters' Commission to encourage young people into crofting, together with Crofter Forestry, are important in this regard. The Council also supports land transfer to tenants on terms which recognise ongoing financial burdens as well as potential development opportunities.

1.20 **Forestry** is expected to be one of the main growth industries in the Highlands for the foreseeable future. At the present time, however, despite its extensive land coverage and landscape impact, forestry provides a relatively minor source of local employment in South and East Sutherland. This is due mainly to transport and access problems and the lack

of resources to upgrade the road network. Priority improvements are required between Bonar Bridge and Rosehall and further west, as well as between Helmsdale and Melvich. Rail movement is the best hope, otherwise harvesting operations and full economic potential will be severely hampered. This is also crucial as the post harvesting period will in turn offer the opportunity for forest enhancement in amenity, conservation and recreation terms, providing leisure potential for local residents and visitors and general tourism benefits

1.21 The Council's Indicative Forestry Strategy (IFS) identifies a large proportion of the area as a "preferred" or key area where a wide range of forestry types would be acceptable and where there are only minor localised constraints. More specifically, encouragement is given to further planting on the moorland slopes in the central part of the area and smaller scale farm woodlands and crofter forestry in the coastal margins to improve job prospects and promote widespread landscape change in the next 20 to 30 years. Effective forest management and development can significantly contribute to the sustainable development of rural communities both directly and indirectly

1.22 **Sea fishing** is concentrated in the port of Helmsdale. Job prospects will continue to be affected by external factors such as the Common Fisheries Policy, market prices and the general health of the industry. The Council supports the European Commission's PESCO Initiative, aimed at increasing income from fishing by improving facilities, skills, products and efficiency, or diversification. Specific proposals have been agreed for minor improvements to harbours and piers at Helmsdale, Brora, Golspie and Embo to support more tourist-related activities.

1.23 Freshwater salmon and trout fishing are critically important to the area, generating the main income for sporting estates in the area and employing around 100 people. This also gives rise to related jobs

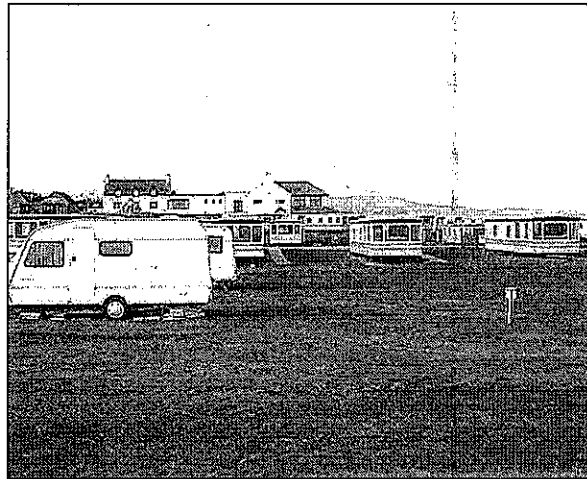
in tourism in the Kyle of Sutherland and Helmsdale areas. Unfortunately catches have fallen dramatically due to a range of problems which the Council's Land and Environment Committee is to address.

1.24 Fish farming activities are limited, mainly due to tidal conditions around the coast and natural heritage interests in the firths and lochs. A fish farm has been established at Loch Migdale where the impact upon the area gives local cause for concern.

1.25 **Mineral resources and quarrying** are acknowledged for local economic benefit in terms of the availability of locally used products and the provision of jobs. There are very extensive deposits of sand and gravel as well as rock suitable for armouring, aggregate and roadstone purposes in the area. However, a combination of the sensitive environment, market forces, wide variations in quality and accessibility and high transportation costs currently limit active quarrying to sand and gravel at Balblair (Invershin) and Uppat (Brora) as well as hard rock at Ardchronie (Ardgay). The Helmsdale/Kildonan area has traditionally contained high value minerals, notably gold, but is affected by market and environmental conditions. In examining proposals for restoration or re-use of former mineral workings, the potential for recreational use could also be considered to help improve the attractiveness of the area to tourists.

1.26 **Tourism** is a vital part of the area's economy, valued at some £50m and employing upwards of 1000 people. The natural environment is the area's greatest tourist asset, notably a fine coastline with long sandy beaches, contrasting with high moorland slopes, mountains, flat peat bogs and ancient woodlands. These all contain a wealth of wildlife and archaeological features, complemented by major visitor attractions, such as Dunrobin Castle and fine golf courses, notably the championship links at Dornoch. The promotion and increasing importance of **golf** in the Highlands offers the greatest potential to

attract more visitors, particularly with seven existing courses and two more proposed. Diversifying the range of facilities, including provision of municipal, pay-as-you-play, par 3 and nine hole courses, as well as driving ranges and practice area can make golf more accessible to tourists and residents.



Grannies Heilan' Hame Holiday Park at Embo

1.27 Major developments since 1985 have included a heritage centre in Helmsdale and an up-market holiday /leisure club on the Skibo Castle Estate. Indoor leisure facilities have also been added to the Royal Marine and Links hotels in Brora and at Grannies Heilan Hame caravan park (Embo). There is considerable potential for continued improvement in the quality and range of facilities and services, together with more effective marketing to generate further growth in tourism. There is also a wide range and geographical spread of supporting accommodation, but gaps in provision still exist. Specific proposals and opportunities are indicated in the Landward and Settlement Chapters (2 & 3).

1.28 The continued provision of **business and industrial estates**, coupled with an increasing range and choice of sites, location, size and quality of **premises** in the main villages will play a key role in

stimulating and supporting economic growth. This in turn could help to foster the development of small businesses, and meet the needs of both local and inward investment companies. The Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise (CASE) have an important co-ordinating role in this regard, as well as in the promotion of environmental improvement and renewal of spoiled land to encourage development and job creation.

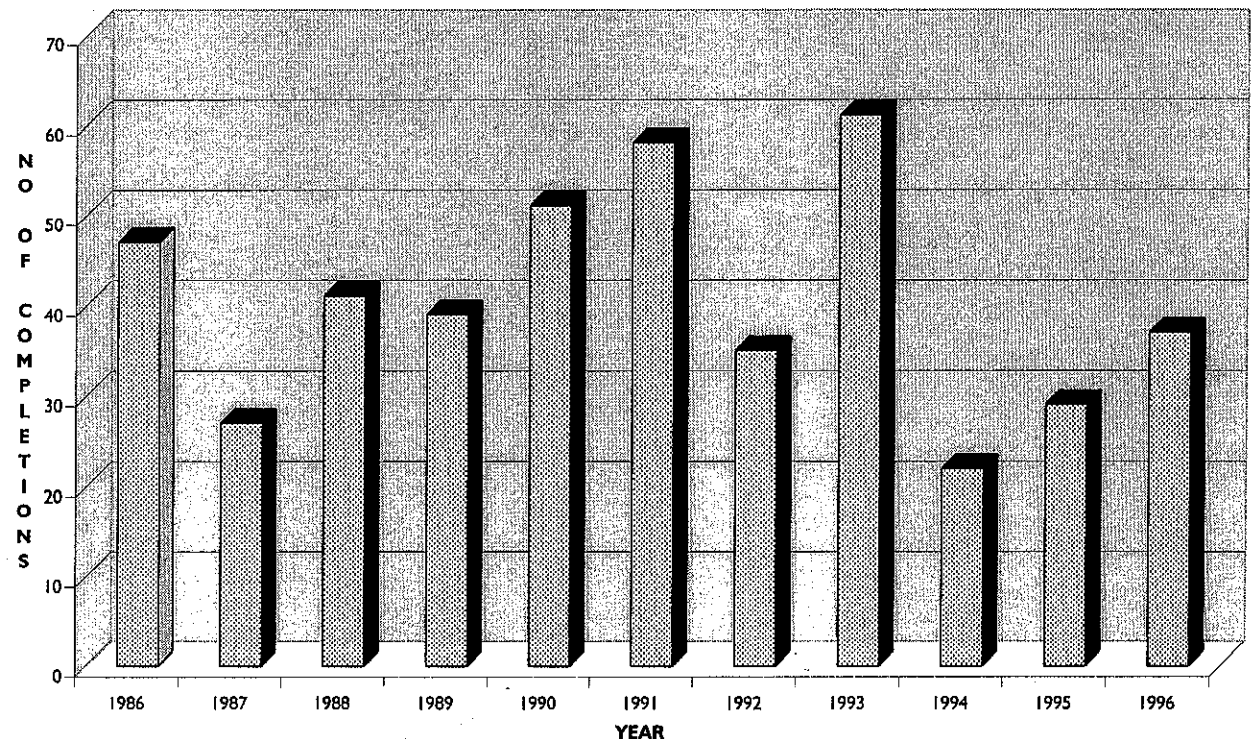
HOUSING REQUIREMENTS

1.29 From 1986 to 1996 more than 400 new houses were built in South and East Sutherland (Fig. 5, below) increasing the stock to around 4340. A little over 75% of these were built in the Brora, Golspie

and Dornoch settlement areas, including a number of larger public sector developments from 1986 to 1991. Private demand has been met largely by single house developments with private speculative schemes rare.

1.30 Despite the average sale price during 1994-96 of £49,300 being 8% below the Highland average, this is still well above affordability for those on lower incomes. Owner-occupation is outwith the reach of most of those on the 250 strong waiting list. Housing agencies recognise that current levels of subsidy cannot bridge the gap between lower local incomes and the private housing sector. The proportion of rented housing has declined due to both the reduction in the number of new houses completed and the consequences of "Right to Buy" legislation. This has resulted in the transfer of more than a third of the

Figure 5: South and East Sutherland Housing Completions - 1986 to 1996



Local Authority stock since 1979. The situation is compounded by the fact that one in six houses are either vacant or used as second or holiday homes.

1.31 Most of the existing houses are family-sized dwellings, whereas demographic trends suggest the largest proportion of future demand will be for smaller houses for single people, specialist groups and sheltered accommodation in most of the larger communities. Nevertheless waiting lists still show a need for family housing in Brora and Golspie. In terms of sheltered housing provision the area falls below the Government's recommended level of 46 places per 1000 elderly population (age 65+) and similarly below the amenity housing provision of 80 places per 1000.

1.32 The assessment of future housing needs accounts for population projections and age composition, as well as trends in marital status, household headship rates and the predicted reduction in average household size. Other key variables include the number of properties liable to be vacant or in holiday use in the future, together with a demand based on past new house building rates. Finally, an additional 30% allowance is made for flexibility and choice of locations.

1.33 Overall, the Plan assumes a requirement for approximately 500 new homes up to 2008 (or 50 per annum). A further 250 houses will be required by 2013. The distribution of these across the area is indicated in Table 2 on page 16 and in the detailed land allocations within the main settlements in Chapter 3.

KEY ASSUMPTION 3:

Housing requirement of 500 additional dwellings by 2008

Sustainable Development

1.34 Development Plans are required to embrace economic, social and environmental sustainability principles. In South and East Sutherland the need to safeguard the natural environment is widely acknowledged, particularly if the area is to remain attractive to visitors and potential residents. The need to maintain the livelihoods of local people, the quality of local services and the vitality of their communities must equally be recognised. Having reasonable access to a range of job opportunities, housing, social and community facilities is fundamental to providing a quality living environment and sustainable communities, as well as improving local self sufficiency.

1.35 Development must also be sustainable by:

- becoming more energy efficient and reducing the need to travel;
- reducing the impact of activities on cultural and natural heritage and the wider environment;
- re-using derelict and vacant property;
- reducing pollution and improving water quality;

and

- supporting the use of sustainable energy sources, including wind and hydro power.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

1.36 While reducing journey times and car dependence is a key objective of national transport policy, this will be difficult to implement in rural areas, particularly as facilities continue to be centralised and the minimum populations needed to support them increase. The current spread of services between Brora, Golspie and Dornoch implies that further significant development should be concentrated within these main communities and the smaller local service centres to support existing levels of provision. This approach is further supported by the relatively poor public transport provision, particularly away from the A9 and Kyle of Sutherland corridors.

1.37 While improvements to public and other forms of transport deserve support, having the use of a car is a precondition of rural employment, access to social activities and ultimately the well being of the population. Rural petrol stations are an important service in this regard but the prospect of higher prices and further closures, even in larger settlements such as Golspie, is a major threat to sustaining rural communities.

Table 1: SUMMARY OF SETTLEMENTS HIERARCHY IN SOUTH AND EAST SUTHERLAND

SETTLEMENT TYPE	SERVICE POPULATION	SETTLEMENT
Main Centre	1,000 - 10,000	Brora, Dornoch, Golspie
Key Village	400 - 1,000	Ardgay, Bonar Bridge, Helmsdale
Small village (with at least one facility)	50 - 400	Camore, Clashmore, Culrain, Embo, Invershin, Kinbrace, Portgower, Rosehall, Spinningdale
Township	30 - 150	Numerous e.g. Altass, Backies, Birichen, East Clyne, West Helmsdale
Housing Group	0 - 30	Numerous e.g. Clynelish Distillery Cottages, Dunrobin Farm Cottages, Kildonan Estate houses

1.38 An essential part in the process of preparing any Local Plan is the identification of a hierarchy of settlements based on accessibility, catchment population and local identity. Within these settlements minimum levels of service are identified as the basis for seeking additional facilities or resisting closure in order to sustain population. This includes access to a local shop, post office, village hall and primary school. Where there is a deficiency, the Local Plan will seek to reserve sites in appropriate locations. Table 1 over page provides a summary. Appendix A has the full range of settlement types and minimum service levels, together with the full assessment for the settlements of South and East Sutherland.

1.39 The assessment indicates that there is an increasing need to maintain and improve present levels of land, premises, service provision and supporting community facilities in various locations throughout South and East Sutherland. Even where basic services and facilities exist improved standards can be an incentive for people and business to remain in an area, or attract newcomers. Key deficiencies that the Plan seeks to address are: -

- **Further education facilities.**
- **More food shopping floorspace and improved quality.**
- **A purpose built indoor sports hall.**
- **Sufficient serviceable and available housing land in Brora, Golspie and Dornoch.**

1.40 Detailed deficiencies and improvements for individual communities are identified and addressed in Chapter 3. The most significant desire locally is for a purpose built indoor sports facility. The lead in this regard has been taken by the communities of Brora and Dornoch, but the ultimate location will be determined by a further feasibility study and funding organisations. The Sutherland Sports Development Strategy of 1995 indicated the need for 3 major

facilities, including one at Brora. A lower level or 'sports barn' facility was indicated for Dornoch.

FRAGILE AREAS

1.41 Some parts of the Plan area are very fragile in social and economic terms by virtue of the combined effects of high unemployment, significant population losses, distance from main centres, loss of key community facilities or low school rolls. In particular, the Kinbrace and Rosehall areas continue to show signs of decline. Services have been lost and those which remain are vital to their survival although no longer viable. Special action is justified essentially under the Sutherland Partnership initiative. This includes employment initiatives, services support and affordable housing. The General Policies Annex (page 35) outlines the specific criteria for defining Fragile Areas.

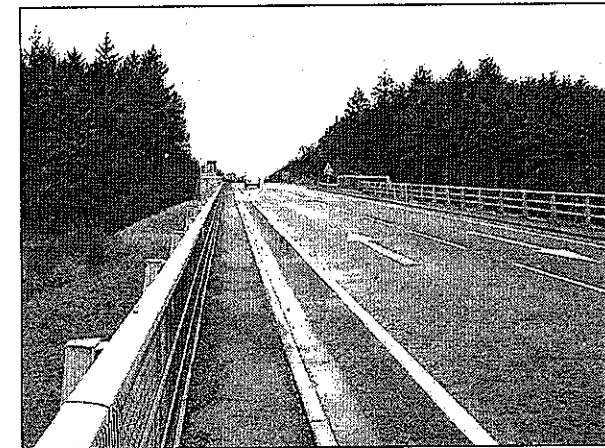
Key Servicing Factors

1.42 The largest proportion of the land area of South and East Sutherland is unsuitable for most forms of development due to a combination of high ground, climatic exposure, difficult terrain and remoteness from public service networks. In areas where these constraints prevail development unrelated to managing the land or use of natural resources, such as forestry or generating energy, is not encouraged. Elsewhere there are a number of key servicing factors which influence development potential. These are outlined in paragraphs 1.43 to 1.55.

ROADS, TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORT

1.43 Economic activity in South and East Sutherland relies heavily on the quality of road access to and from the south. The need to reduce the environmental impact of road traffic, move towards more energy efficient patterns of development and

reduce the need to travel are key components of a sustainable development strategy. The maintenance of and further investment in both road and rail links are necessary to ensure the future competitiveness of the area, particularly for the efficient movement of goods and raw materials



A9 (T) road improvement at the Mound

Trunk and Key Local Roads

1.44 Investment in upgrading the A9(T) road to the south of the area, including the Dornoch Firth Bridge, has led to considerable improvements in travel time to and from Inverness. However, the greatest proportion of the route through East Sutherland falls well short of this standard. The Ord of Caithness to Helmsdale section, a priority for improvement, and the Mound to Trentham section, are of particular concern. Long established routes for by-passing Brora and Golspie are likely to remain outwith the Scottish Office programme for the foreseeable future, but further measures to calm traffic through these villages and Helmsdale are to be considered in the interim.

1.45 The mainly single track A897 road connects North Sutherland to Helmsdale, via the Strath of Kildonan. While improvement would help the timber

and tourist trades no works are currently programmed. The A836 and A837 routes connect to the north west via Lairg and Rosehall, respectively. Significant improvements have been carried out towards Lairg in recent years, replacing single track sections. Only the sections nearest Lairg and Bonar Bridge remain to be improved. West of Invershin the A837 is predominantly single track and, despite the need to improve capacity for timber and tourist related development, no improvements are currently programmed.

Other Roads

1.46 Much of the remaining road network is single track and has poor alignment. The expansion of fishing activities on the west coast, forestry extraction and housing development around some of the main communities have substantially increased pressure on these roads. Development capacity is limited, particularly on minor roads meeting the A9(T) close to Helmsdale, Brora, Golspie and Dornoch. Only significant public funding could improve these routes therefore development restrictions may be necessary in the face of financial difficulties.

Traffic Calming and Management

1.47 The balance of investment in urban areas is gradually shifting from building new roads to slowing down traffic on existing roads. Various measures can be used, including humps, tables, chicanes and local narrowing. The Back Road in Golspie was one of the first in the Highlands to have Council funded road humps. Additional traffic management and pedestrian safety measures are now being considered by the Scottish Office for Main Street in the village. Pressure may increase for similar treatment through Helmsdale and Brora. The Council also encourages developers of larger housing sites to include appropriate measures to reduce the dominance of traffic.

Cycling

1.48 The Council is developing a Cycling Strategy for the Highland area, in partnership with the Scottish Office, other agencies and the voluntary sector. There will be a Local Action Plan for South and East Sutherland that will provide details of specific measures and policies. A major concern is safety on the A9 to assist potential for commuting and cycle touring, particularly between Golspie and Dornoch. Part of the North Sea Cycle Circuit, designated from Inverness to Thurso, passes through the area from Tain via Bonar Bridge to Lairg.

Bus Services

1.49 On the A9(T) regular daily express coaches run between Wick/Thurso and Inverness and further south to Edinburgh and Glasgow. At a more local level bus services are sparse but are vital links for remote and dispersed communities, particularly in the Kyle of Sutherland. Given the distance between centres and any reductions in personal mobility, a co-ordinated or integrated transport system which ensures good access to facilities is essential. As such community transport schemes may have to supplement existing services in the future.

Rail Network

1.50 The Inverness-Wick/Thurso or Far North railway line is important for the economic and social development of the area. Passenger trains bring backpacking tourists in the summer months and freight use is increasing. The development of a Dornoch Rail Link could shorten passenger train journey times between Inverness and Caithness, and so potentially increase use of services. However, the potential loss of the Lairg Loop, with related implications for the affected communities, as well as the environmental impact upon internationally important nature conservation interests and oceanic qualities in both Firths are important considerations. Current

Government funding arrangements mean that the implementation of the project is not anticipated within the plan period. If funding arrangements become available it will be necessary to demonstrate that there will be an overall economic and social benefit to the communities served by the Far North Line without an unacceptable level of environmental impact. In the meantime other less costly incentives are to be pursued to improve journey times and greater use of the line by passengers and freight.

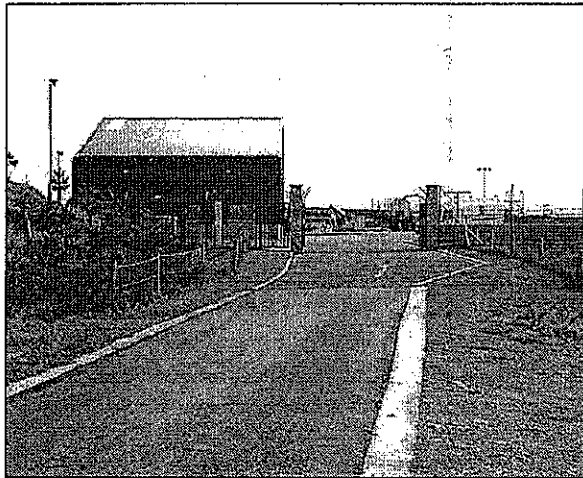
1.51 Scope exists to use vacant station buildings for tourist related purposes and to transport more timber and mineral products from the area to distant markets. The safeguarding of redundant or underused sidings/station yards at Ardgay, Brora, Golspie, Helmsdale and Kinbrace will be important with regard to the latter. The Council is encouraging Railtrack to invest in its existing infrastructure for freight purposes, including the provision of loading banks to assist timber extraction. The forestry industry is also being encouraged to use narrow gauge lines to allow the removal of timber to the main line from more distant forests.

UTILITIES

Drainage

1.52 European legislation, increasing environmental awareness and the economic benefits of good clean beaches, water based recreation and wildlife tourism have all increased pressures for improvement of public drainage systems. Substantial improvements were carried out at Dornoch, Bonar Bridge and Brora in the last 10 years and the provision of new treatment plants at Golspie and Helmsdale are required within the Plan period. In certain dispersed settlements around Dornoch and Brora and in the Kyle of Sutherland, poor subsoil conditions for septic tank and soakaway systems require development restrictions to be applied until the necessary improvements can be carried out. Clashmore,

Spinningdale and Mosshill require priority investment in this regard.



Dornoch Sewage Works

Water Supply

1.53 Substantial upgrading of water supplies has been carried out in the area in recent years to augment pressure, replace ageing local distribution mains and improve quality. During the tourist season demand can often exceed three times normal local levels, particularly in the Dornoch/Embo area, where improvements are programmed. Major works to improve the water quality and make provision for additional treatment capacity, are presently under construction at Backies Water Treatment Works, which supplies Golspie and Brora. Major problems will also be tackled in the Bonar Bridge area and further to the west.

Alternative Energy

1.54 There are opportunities for alternative energy, particularly wind and hydro power which can help meet local needs. The Council produced Highland wide indicative guidance on the location of

wind farms in 1995 and hydro power in 1997^{#1}. Areas north of Gordonbush (near Brora) and north of Bonar Bridge are considered to have potential in terms of their impact on the landscape, access to the national electricity grid and wind velocity, subject to satisfying basic criteria. Elsewhere, proposals for three wind farms on the more sensitive coastal hills between Brora and Helmsdale were rejected by the Scottish Ministers in July 1999 following the Public Inquiry held in October and November 1997.

Waste Disposal

1.55 The Council's overriding objective is to develop a Waste Strategy for its area. This is currently the subject of Council Working Parties. The main existing landfill tip at Ardachew, west of Brora is nearing capacity and a further facility will be required in East Sutherland for the disposal of inert material only. This will be the subject of separate investigation and formal proposals.

Environment

1.56 A key element of any strategy for sustainability is the conservation and enhancement of the environment. This means ensuring an acceptable balance between economic growth and safeguards for the environment. It requires the protection of habitats and species important to biodiversity, safeguarding of sensitive landscapes and significant geological and geomorphological features and

^{#1} The Wind Energy Regional Policy Guidelines were approved in March 1995 and the Small Scale Hydro Energy Guidelines were approved in January 1997. These are non-statutory supplementary planning guidelines produced to assist with determination of relevant proposals, but are not part of the Local Plan. The Local Plan and the Proposals Map identify the 'Primary Search Areas' from the Wind Energy Guidelines as they apply to South and East Sutherland. It is intended that these guidelines are superseded in due course by the new Structure Plan, once approved.

important cultural features, such as Listed Buildings and archaeological sites. Equally, the countryside in general requires care and attention.

1.57 The outstanding natural heritage of South and East Sutherland is a vital resource, crucial to the area's future and an asset that must be carefully managed. The area contains a rich variety of habitats, ranging from open water and seabed communities in Loch Fleet and the Dornoch Firth to the Flow Country peatlands, semi-natural woodlands and deep river gorges. The need to maintain this diversity is now widely recognised as fundamental to present and future generations. Policies promoting biodiversity and safeguarding cultural heritage features are based upon the following principles:-

(a) International obligations: as applied through EC Directives to rare, endangered and vulnerable habitats and species; the conservation of wild birds, coastal waters and the wider environment (see below). These embrace existing or candidate Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPA - already SSSIs) and Ramsar Convention sites where development or damaging operations which affect the conservation interest are not permitted except where there is an imperative and overriding public, economic, social, health or safety interest. In South and East Sutherland there are currently three proposed /classified SPA's, including the Dornoch Firth and Loch Fleet, six candidate SAC's, including Amat Woods, Beinn Dearg and the Mound Alderwoods and two Ramsar sites [Dornoch Firth & Loch Fleet and the Peatlands] (see **General Policy ENV 4**).

(b) National designations: including all notified NNR's and SSSI's, Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Grade A Listed Buildings, such as Dunrobin Castle. Development or land use change that will have a significant detrimental effect will be resisted, although promotion and interpretation are encouraged where

features are sufficiently robust and accessible (see **General Policies ENV 2& 3**).



Dornoch Firth SSSI and National Scenic Area

(c) Local statutory designations: this includes the Dornoch Conservation Area, lesser Listed Buildings, the Loch Brora Area of Great Landscape Value, archaeological sites, ancient and semi-natural woodland and Rights of Way to which development proposals must have regard (see **General Policies - ENV 2& 3**).

(d) Local non-statutory designations: where priority is given to avoiding damage to, or fragmentation of, the most sensitive features, including other amenity woodland, local wildlife reserves and other nominated areas of conservation value which contribute to biodiversity, the built heritage and local footpaths (see **General Policy ENV 2**).

1.58 Whereas the emphasis in **(a)** and **(b)** above leans heavily towards protection, resources and management in the remaining countryside should be directed towards habitat improvement; restoration of spoiled land; diversifying the traditional land use structure including multiple use of forests and estates; and improving public access and interpretation, including use of LIFE Project funding. General Policies

Environment 1 to 4 are applied in detail in Chapters 2 and 3. The General Policies Annex indicates the different levels of safeguarding or development potential for sensitive features and areas associated with these policies.

1.59 Enhancement of built up areas is also important to improve their attractiveness to residents and visitors. Environmental improvements often stimulate investment in business and residential property to assist economic growth. While continuing improvement of urban environments is encouraged throughout the area, more specific measures are indicated in Chapters 2 and 3 for Brora, Camore, Dornoch, Embo, Golspie and Helmsdale.

Landscape Impact and Character

1.60 Greater attention must also be given to local character and identity. The form and scale of village development, the design of new houses in the countryside, the promotion and planning of open space and new tree planting must also be carefully considered in relation to their impact on the landscape. The greatest challenge is to embrace change and development whilst directly relating this to the distinct character of the landscape, protecting and enhancing its unique qualities.

1.61 A detailed appraisal of landscape character and change in Caithness and Sutherland was completed in 1997. This is part of a national programme carried out with the benefit of a steering group comprising officials from the Highland Council Planning Service, CASE, the Forestry Authority and S.N.H. The aim is to promote a general understanding of the Caithness and Sutherland landscape, particularly the range and type of landscape character, the forces for and ability to absorb change.

1.62 The study has identified fifteen different landscape character types and six subtypes. These are described, the key forces for change are analysed and guidance given in each case (see Appendix C).

The detailed scope of guidance is set out in the full report (184 pp.) available from Scottish Natural Heritage.

FIGURE 6 : SOUTH & EAST SUTHERLAND CULTURAL HERITAGE

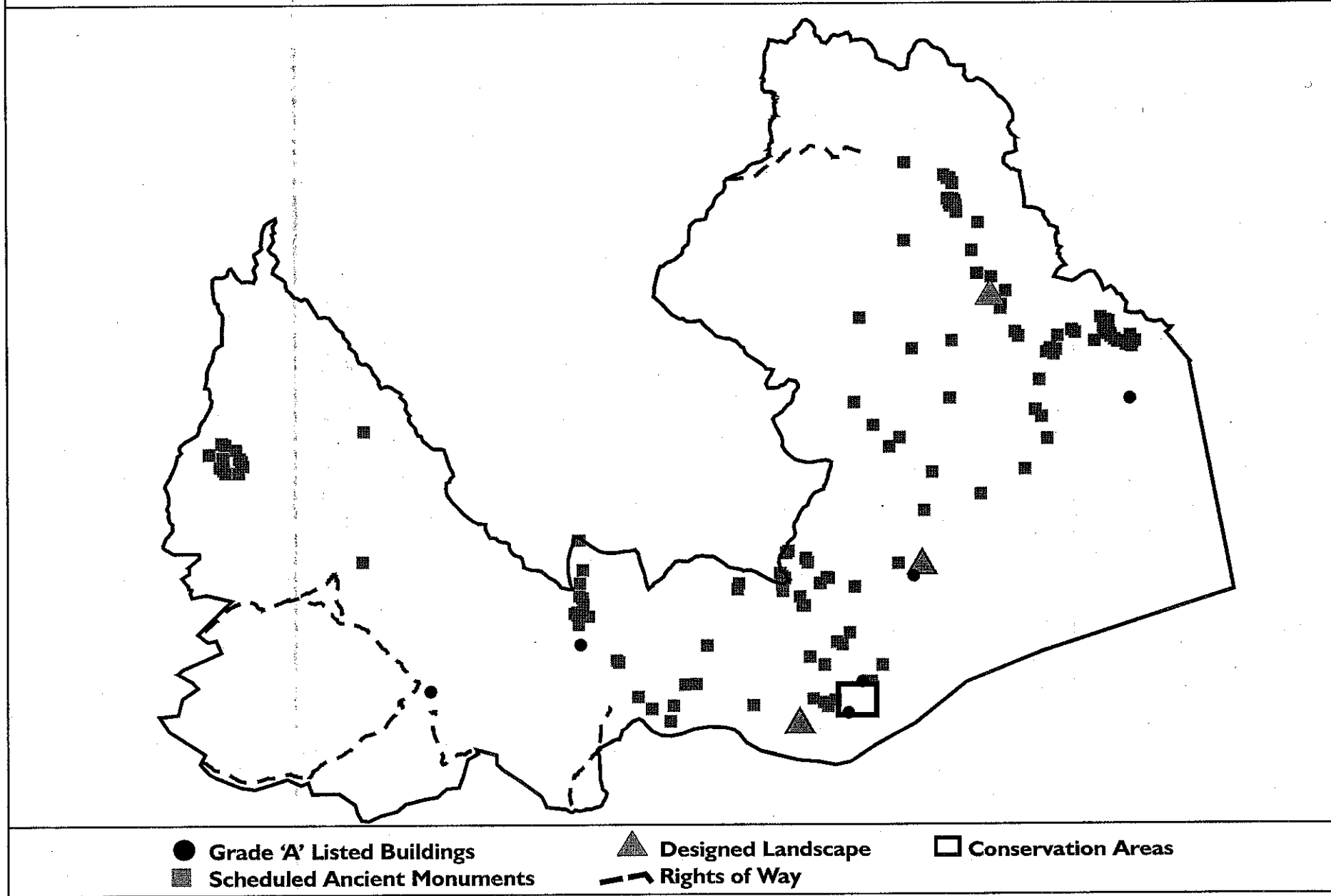
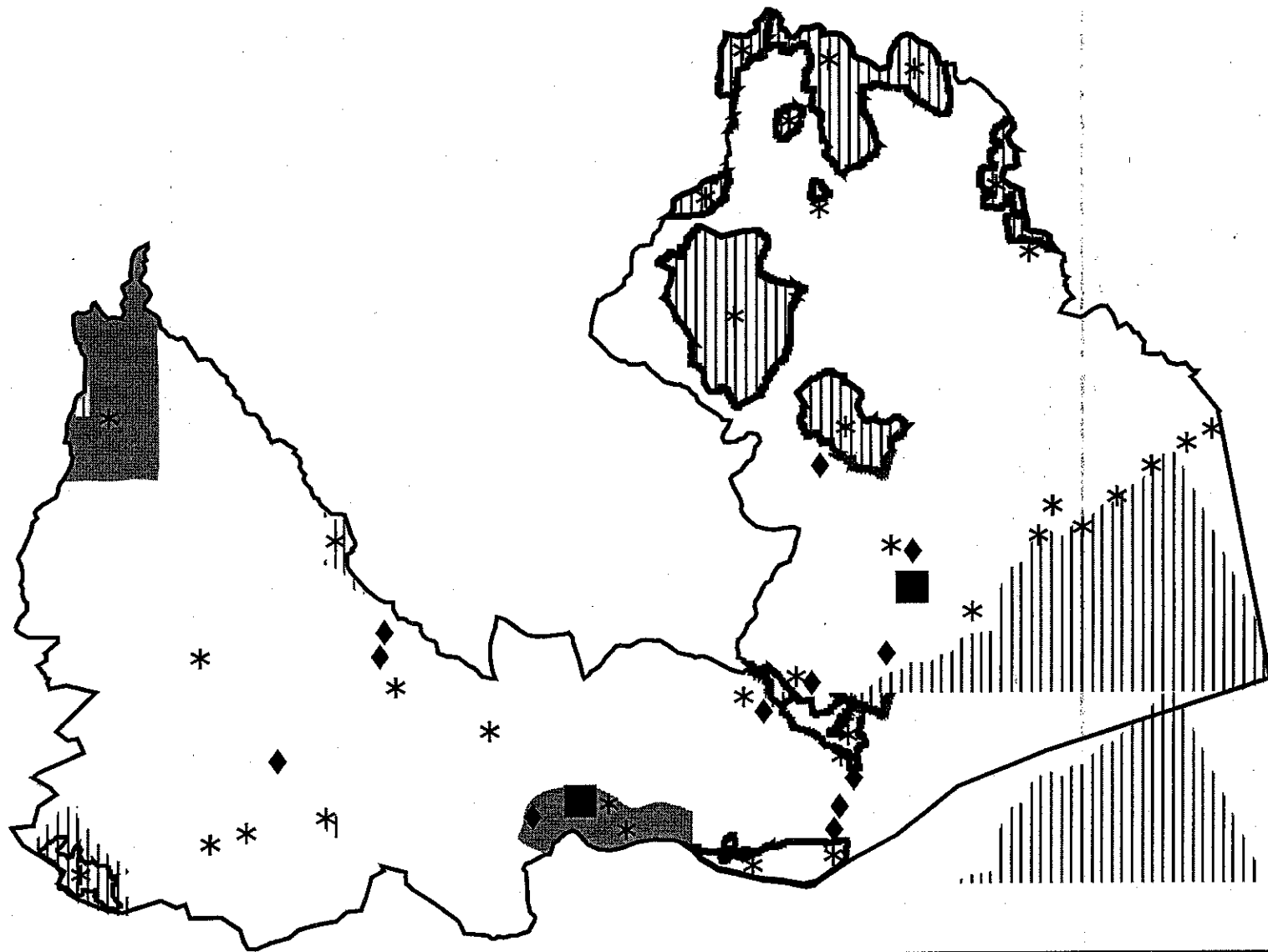


FIGURE 7 : SOUTH & EAST SUTHERLAND NATURAL HERITAGE



Special Area of Conservation
Special Protection Area

Natural Scenic Area
Area of Great Landscape Value

SSSI
Local Natural Heritage Area

Strategic Policies



Serviced land at Dornoch Business Park, a key part of the Council's strategy for enhancing economic prospects

With reference to the foregoing background considerations the Council's strategy for South and East Sutherland is based upon the following policies: -

OVERALL

1 The Council will seek to meet the needs of the existing population and its projected growth for housing, employment, transport, social and recreational facilities, whilst protecting and enhancing the environment and managing resources as part of a balanced and sustainable strategy.

For the period 1998 to 2008 the overall provisions of the Plan are based on the following forecasts or assumptions: -

- Population growth: 200 persons
- Additional jobs target: 150 to 250
- Housing requirement: 500 dwellings

SETTLEMENT AREAS	Housing land allocation allowing +30% flexibility for non-effective stock and choice of locations		Locate in settlements 1998 - 2013 (or 15 years supply)	
	PLAN PERIOD (1998-2008)	LONGER TERM SUPPLY (2008 - 2013)	%	NUMBER
Ardgay	28	16	75	33
Bonar Bridge	40	20	75	45
Brora	90	45	80	110
Dornoch	180	90	80	216
Embo	27	14	75	30
Golspie	100	50	80	120
Helmsdale	30	15	80	35
Rosehall	8	4	0-100	0-12
TOTALS	502	254		589-601

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

2 The Council supports the principle objectives of the SUTHERLAND PARTNERSHIP initiative to enhance economic prospects.

3 More specifically the Council will:

- allocate land for business and industrial purposes within or nearby Ardgay/Bonar Bridge, Brora, Dornoch, Embo, Golspie, Helmsdale and Rosehall [P2 -P4];
- establish joint programmes of business and industrial unit provision in association with Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise, including the building of larger premises, to allow manufacturing businesses to expand beyond small start up workshops;
- identify and promote opportunities for high or new technology business uses;
- encourage the development of further education facilities within the concept of the UHI, including reuse of redundant Council property at Golspie and Dornoch; and

- encourage opportunities to upgrade and improve all aspects of the tourist business offered to visitors, including the development of new facilities and visitor attractions, particularly at Bonar Bridge, Brora, Dornoch, Golspie, Helmsdale, Rosehall, Skibo and Spinningdale, which are sympathetic to local community interests, amenity, heritage or safety concerns (see Chapters 2 & 3).

4 The Council will promote action in the Rosehall and Kinbrace areas that will attempt to reduce social and economic fragility. Special initiatives will include:

- application of the Fragile Areas Housing in the Countryside policy and encouraging the provision of affordable housing;
- consideration of workshop premises provision and promotion of small business development;
- extra resources for tourist promotion and development;
- upgrading of infrastructure, notably road access and water supply at Rosehall; and
- rate relief for rural shops.

- 5 **The Council will seek to address key deficiencies or concerns about the quality of community facilities and services across the area and, where appropriate, allocate or safeguard land.**

HOUSING

- 6 **The Council will direct the largest proportion of housing development to the main communities in line with the existing capacity of infrastructure and planned improvements to that capacity.**
- 7 The forecasts of housing requirements have been scaled to produce estimates for each of the main villages and their landward areas, as shown in Table 2 left. The Plan identifies sufficient land within the main villages to accommodate up to 80% of requirements over the next 15 years. Specific land or site allocations are indicated in Chapter 3. This approach is justified where some parts of the South and East Sutherland countryside, particularly around Brora, Dornoch and Golspie, are unable to absorb more single houses.
- 8 **The Council will seek from landowners and developers of larger sites in the main communities, a proportion of affordable housing where local need exists.**
- 9 **The Council will restrict development, particularly where:**
- local water, road and sewerage networks are inadequate and no improvements are possible or likely;
 - development would have a significant impact upon a sensitive environmental feature;

- ribbon development is occurring;
- commuting pressures adjoining a major work centre are high;
- the traditionalcrofting settlement pattern is disrupted; and
- ad-hoc clusters of modern houses outwith existing settlements are beginning to form.

The smaller rural settlements and the wider countryside with capacity for additional development are identified in Chapter 2.

INFRASTRUCTURE

- 10 **The Council will seek to ensure that key roads are brought up to an acceptable standard for all users, capable of serving the economic and social needs of the area, and fit into the natural environment as far as is practicable. Priority improvements are:**
- the A9(T) between Helmsdale and the Ord of Caithness;
 - the A836 on the west approach to Bonar Bridge; and
 - the A837 between Invershin and Rosehall.
- 11 **The Council will seek to reduce the environmental impact of through traffic in villages and in larger new developments by traffic calming measures and by giving priority to pedestrians and cyclists, particularly in the absence of bypasses or major realignment of the A9(T) in Golspie, Helmsdale and Brora.**
- 12 **The Council supports measures that will maintain and improve the Far North Rail Line and will in turn encourage its greater use in terms of both passenger numbers and freight traffic.**

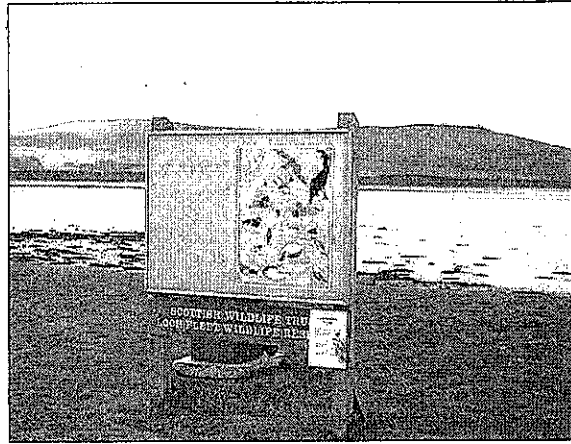
- 13 **The Council will seek improvements to public drainage systems at Golspie and Helmsdale.**
- 14 **The Council will seek continuing improvements to the water supply, particularly West of Bonar Bridge and in the Dornoch area.**
- 15 **The Council will encourage the expansion of telecommunication development in accordance with the approved Structure Plan.**
- 16 **The Council will support renewable energy developments in accordance with the approved Structure Plan and national planning guidance.**

ENVIRONMENT

- 17 **The Council will promote biodiversity, safeguard and enhance the natural and cultural environment throughout South and East Sutherland by:**
- safeguarding statutorily designated natural heritage sites, species and habitats, including those covered by European Directives and international Conventions (e.g. Ramsar Sites);
 - protecting the integrity of national and local landscape designations or areas, including National Scenic Areas and those on the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes;
 - protecting significant archaeological sites, landscapes, Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas and their settings and public Rights of Way;
 - promoting Conservation Area designations for Embo, Golspie and Helmsdale and the

upgrading of Dornoch to Outstanding status, all with supporting design guidance;

- **safeguarding the traditional crofting settlement form;**
- **promoting housing designs that are in keeping with the landscape and cultural identity of the area;**
- **presuming against development which obstructs important views;**
- **protecting green corridors, including woodlands, which are important landscape, wildlife and amenity features;**
- **encouraging regeneration of native woodlands;**
- **safeguarding essential open spaces;**
- **ensuring that the effects of any development upon the natural heritage are fully taken into account, consulting with Scottish Natural Heritage whenever necessary;**
- **promoting an area interpretative framework;**
- **identifying new uses for redundant buildings, vacant and derelict land;**
- **improving areas of degraded land; and**
- **promoting improvements to key footpaths.**



CHAPTER 2: GENERAL POLICIES & LANDWARD AREA

GENERAL POLICIES

The following General Policies apply throughout the Local Plan area as shown on the Proposals Maps.

Landward

Environment 1 (ENV 1)

The Council will encourage development subject to detailed site factors.

Environment 2 (ENV 2)

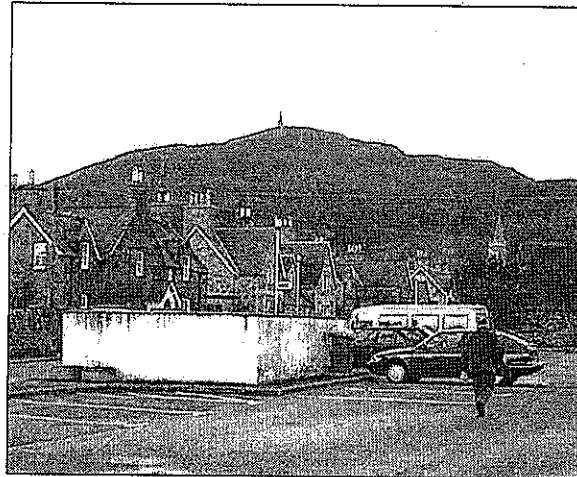
The Council will favour development, unless this would significantly affect important local features.

Environment 3 (ENV 3)

The Council will presume against development, particularly where there is significant damage to heritage, amenity or public health.

Environment 4 (ENV 4)

The Council will not approve development, unless there is a strong and over-riding social, economic, public health or safety reason.



Ben Bhraggie (ENV 3 area) from Fountain Road (SI area) Golspie

The criteria for designating these policies are defined in the separate General Policies Annex, together with details of sub-policies.

Settlements

Settlement 1: Town Centre.

The Council will give favourable consideration to town centre uses.

Settlement 2: Housing

The Council will seek to maintain and enhance the established character of residential areas.

Settlement 3: Business

The Council will give favourable consideration to business uses.

Settlement 4: Industry

The Council will give favourable consideration to industrial uses.

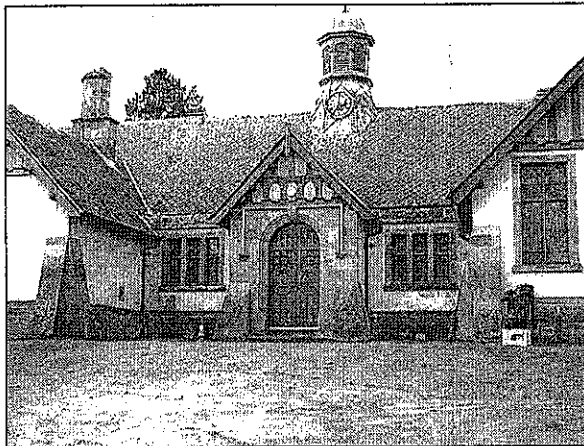
Settlement 5: Special Uses

The Council will expect existing uses to be maintained, unless otherwise indicated by specific proposals or land allocations.

Settlement 6: Town Expansion

The Council will promote the planned expansion of the community.

LANDWARD



Clashmore Hall

General Policies ENVI to 4 apply throughout the Landward area as shown on the Proposals Map. Site and area specific policies, proposals and development opportunities are shown below, together with the appropriate General Policy.

The following areas are identified under Policy ENV 1

Housing

- 1 General Countryside (RS1.1).
- 2 Fragile Countryside (RS1.2) applies to the Rosehall and Kinbrace Settlement Zones.
- 3 The Dispersed Townships policy (RS1.4.1) applies to: -

LOCATION	SPACING (metres)
(a) Achnahannat	200
(b) Amat	100
(c) Strathcarron	150-200

- 4 The Rural Townships and Villages policy (RS2) applies to:-
 - (a) Culrain;
 - (b) Dalchalm;
 - (c) Embo Street; and
 - (d) Kinbrace.

Employment

- 5 There is potential to accommodate storage of rail freight on land adjoining the halts at Kildonan and Kinbrace, possibly including harvested timber.
- 6 At Grannies Heilan' Hame the Council will encourage further development of tourist accommodation and visitor facilities only within the existing boundaries of the holiday park. Appropriate screen tree planting on the west and south side of the park would improve its integration into the landscape.

Infrastructure

- 7 The Council intends to undertake improvements to Embo Pier in a joint initiative with CASE to help enhance potential for leisure activities such as sea angling and related activities.
- 8 The Council proposes to upgrade the Bonar Bridge to Meiklewood section of the A836 road in 1999/2000 at a cost of £1,250,000.
- 9 The Council will consider the scope to develop cycle routes in the Plan area. Particular requests have been made to

designate a safer route between the Dornoch Bridge and Brora, which might involve the use of existing minor roads, the former Dornoch branch railway line, coastal paths and the provision of a combined cycle/pedestrian bridge across the Fleet, all with appropriate sign posting.

- 10 The North of Scotland Water Authority intend to carry out the following improvements over the next three years:
 - (a) Bonar Bridge water treatment works - £1.5m.;
 - (b) Culrain/Invershin/Tulloch/Balblair water quality improvements - £230,000;
 - (c) Henman's Bridge/Linsidecroy water quality improvements - £300,000;
 - (d) Linsidecroy/Durcha water quality improvements - £270,000;
 - (e) Backies water treatment works - £1.455 m.;
 - (f) Dornoch Water Treatment Works (under construction - £ 1.331 m.; and
 - (g) Rogart Loch Horn Mains - £ 295,000.

Environmental Action

- 11 The Council will consider the scope for undertaking environmental improvements at Camore, including street landscaping, screen planting and potential traffic calming.

The following areas are identified under Policy ENV 2

Housing

12 The Dispersed Townships policy (RS1.4.1) applies to:-

	LOCATION	SPACING (metres)	CONSTRAINTS
(a)	Achuan / Clashburdh	250	drainage
(b)	Achue	75	drainage
(c)	Altass	75-100	2 per croft unit, roads, sub-soil
(d)	Ardachew	70	2 per croft unit, landfill tip
(e)	Astle	50	sub-soil
(f)	Badnellan/ Crofthaugh/ North Brora Muir/Kilbrora	100	2 per croft, landfill tip consultation area, amenity woodland, poor sub-soil drainage
(g)	Badminish/ Achavandra Muir	200-250	2 per croft unit, roads, sub-soil
(h)	The Doll	100	2 per croft, various sensitive areas, ground pollution by septic tank discharges
(i)	Part of East Clyne	70	2 per croft, with preference to redevelopment/renovation of vacant houses
(j)	Lednabirichen/ Fleuchary	200-250	2 per croft unit, sub-soil

(k)	Linside	75-100	2 per croft unit, roads, sub-soil
(l)	Linsidemore	75-100	2 per croft unit, roads, sub-soil
(m)	Marrel South and East	100	2 per croft, priority to renovate/redevelop vacant/derelict houses
(n)	Migdale	150-200	drainage
(o)	Rearquhar	50	sub-soil
(p)	Skelbo Muir	75-100	2 per croft unit, roads, sub-soil
(q)	West Clyne	70	sub-soil
(r)	West Clynelish	70	tip consultation area
(s)	West Helmsdale/ Gartymore A	70	2 per croft, subject to satisfactory drainage
(t)	West Helmsdale/ Gartymore B	50	2 per croft, subject to satisfactory drainage
(u)	West Helmsdale/ Gartymore C	70	2 per croft, redevelop ruinous house sites, subject to satisfactory drainage
(v)	West of Camore	100-150	drainage

13 The Rural Townships and Villages policy (RS2) applies to: -

(a) Spinningdale, where there are drainage limitations and regard should be had for the National Scenic Area location;

(b) West Helmsdale/Gartymore areas E, F, G, H, I & J, with preference to renovating or redeveloping existing buildings subject to satisfactory drainage;

(c) Ladiesloch, where road access is limited; and

(d) Invershin South, lying within the consultation distance of the nearby quarry and subject to satisfactory drainage.

Employment

- 14** At Clynelish Distillery the Council will favour maintenance and expansion of industrial and business uses, subject to adequate servicing and consideration of the effects of the nearby waste tip.
- 15** At Fascally Park, by Brora, the Council has erected a building, which is proposed to house an Earth Sciences Interpretation Centre.
- 16** The Council recognises the importance of Uppat Quarry as a mineral resource and will support its continued use. In the longer term, the Council will support proposals to restore the quarry for low-key leisure and recreation purposes.
- 17** Potential exists for the provision of a camp site at Loch Migdale. A specific site will be identified with landowners, the local community and other interested parties, having due regard for the National Scenic Area location, the more sensitive areas around the loch and the availability of services.
- 18** Land is allocated at Achue Road for a chalet development of up to 25 units.

- 19 The Old Mill Inn at Spinningdale provides an opportunity for an Archaeological Interpretation Centre or similar attraction.
- 20 The Council will encourage the provision of proper parking and picnic facilities for visitors to Cassley Falls and Loch Craggie.
- 21 The Council supports the provision of a new golf course to the west of the present Royal Dornoch courses where this does not conflict with habitats and species of national and international importance.
- 22 The indicative Primary Search Areas north of Gordonbush and north east of Bonar Bridge are identified for the search process for potential wind farm development. Proposals here and elsewhere in the plan area will be assessed against the provisions of Strategic Policies 16 and 17.

The following areas are identified under Policy ENV 3.

Housing

- 23 Sensitive Areas (RS1.3.2)- see General Policy definition for ENV 3.
- 24 The Council will presume against development in the following Service Deficiency Areas (RS 1.3.3) until necessary improvements are carried out.

DEFICIENCY	LOCATION
Drainage	(a) Achrimsdale-East Clyne
	(b) Backies
	(c) Camore

Roads	
(d)	Glashmore
(e)	Dunrobin Mains
(f)	Embo Muir
(g)	Lonemore/Davochin
(h)	Achrimsdale-East Clyne
(i)	Backies
(j)	Crakaig Crofts-Lothmore
(k)	Culgower-West Garty Lodge
(l)	Dunrobin Mains
(m)	East Helmsdale-Navidale
(n)	Greenhill
(o)	Lonemore
(p)	Marrel (west of railway)
(q)	Portgower
(r)	West Helmsdale/Gartymore areas K & L

- 25 The Housing Groups Policy (RS1.4.2) to:- Achavandra Muir; Achinduich (nr. Lairg); Ardgay Hill; Badanloch Lodge; Balnacoil; Ben Armine Lodge; Blar Mhor-Auchintoul; Borrobol; Brae; Clynelish Cottages; Clynelish Distillery; Coul Farm; Crakaig; Culmaily; Drumlich; Dunrobin Castle; Easter Kincardine Hill; Embo House; Fourpenny; Golspie Tower; Gordonbush; Innish; Inveran; Invershin Power Station; Kildonan Lodge; Kilearnan; Kilphedir; Kirkton; Littleferry; Lothbeg; Matheson Road; Morvich Lodge; Mosshill; The Mound; Pitgrudy; east of Portgower; Rearquhar; Scriberscross; Swordale; Torboll Farm; Torrish; Tulloch North; Tulloch South; West of Drummuie; West Garty and West Helmsdale/Gartymore area D; West Helmsdale/Gartymore area M; West of Lonemore; Whiteface

Employment

- 26 The Council will support accommodation and facilities which consolidate the existing facilities at the Carnegie Club,

Skibo Castle where this does not conflict with natural heritage designations.

- 27 Dunrobin Castle is a major tourist attraction. It is expected that improvements to increase the visitor attractiveness of the Castle will respect the wooded policies and setting of the Listed Building and designed landscape.
- 28 There could be a possibility of re-using the redundant lock-keepers house at the Mound as an interpretation centre.
- 29 The Council will favour re-use and/or redevelopment of the Culgower Farm steading complex for housing and business use, subject to construction of a suitable access to the A9 and the availability of other services.
- 30 On the Crakaig Estate potential may exist to develop a farm diversification scheme, improve the existing caravan site, develop further tourist related facilities and a limited number of permanent dwellings. A prerequisite to development is the construction of a suitable access to the A9 and the availability of other services. Maintenance of the countryside character, notably the open views to the sea and the impact upon the Helmsdale Coast SSSI are also major considerations. A Master Plan will be required to cover proposed uses and their location, and include provision for landscaping and servicing.

Environment

- 31 The provision of a footway on the Oykel railway viaduct across the Kyle of Sutherland at Invershin is proposed and

efforts are continuing to secure the necessary funding.

- 32** *At Loch Brora (within the AGLV) the council will consider providing basic interpretation, picnic and car parking facilities.*
- 33** *The Council recognises the importance of Shin Falls and Cassley Falls and will safeguard them as Areas of Great Landscape Value.*
- 34** *The Council will encourage the upgrading of the Golspie/Brora coastal footpath.*

The following areas are identified under Policy ENV 4.

Infrastructure

- 35** *A new landfill tipping site is required for inert material. This will be the subject of separate investigation and formal proposals.*

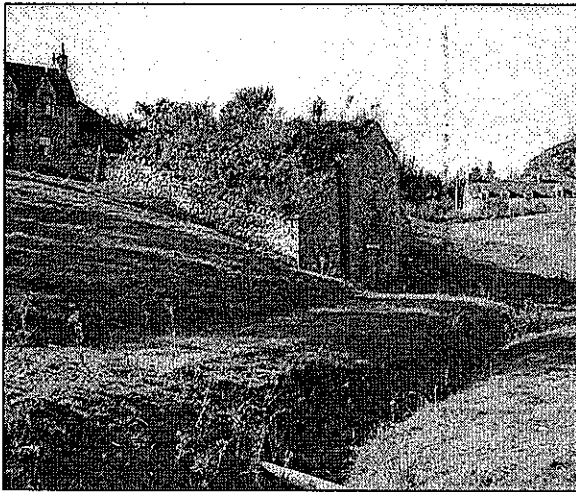
Environment

- 36** *The Council will encourage reinstatement of the former quarry at Kilmote.*
- 37** *Potential for improvement of car parking facilities needs to be investigated near Balblair Wood, south of Golspie.*

CHAPTER 3: MAIN VILLAGES

1. **ARDGAY**
2. **BONAR BRIDGE**
3. **BRORA**
4. **DORNOCH**
5. **EMBO**
6. **GOLSPIE**
7. **HELMSDALE**
8. **ROSEHALL**

ARDGAY



Located within the Dornoch Firth National Scenic Area, Ardgay (pop. 320) enjoys a superb setting at the head of the Firth. The village developed on the back of the railway, although this function has declined over the last 30 years. Original development is grouped around the station area, but more modern houses have been built on rising ground on the western margins of the village. The small crofting community of Lower Gledfield, further to the west, has close links with Ardgay, containing the school and local churches.

Most jobs in the village are in the service sector, particularly tourism, with many residents commuting elsewhere to work. There are limited opportunities to provide jobs. Land at the railway sidings provide the best possibility. Much of the allocated housing land has been used up and further sites must now be identified. A number of features contribute to the setting of Ardgay: the trees and woodlands on both approaches; the ice house and surrounding land; the farm land on the edge of the village and the coastal zone. These are features that should be protected.

Objectives

The Plan seeks to:-

- identify land for up to 30 houses;
- safeguard the setting of the village, particularly farmland, woodlands and the ice house and surrounding land;
- promote the station yard for industrial development, including a freight depot; and
- enhance potential for tourism, particularly through the safeguarding or development of links to attractions in the wider countryside.

Development Factors

Expansion of the village is constrained by the natural barrier of the Firth, steep ground, access problems and overhead lines, which create difficulties to the west. Good agricultural land and the need to keep the separate identities of Gledfield and Ardgay are important factors to the north. Gearrchoille woodland is the key factor to the south, although land is currently allocated to the south of Oakwood Place. Potential also remains at Lower Gledfield for infill development.

Policies, Proposals & Opportunities

In the built up area of the village, General Policies Settlement (S) 1, 2 and 4 and Environment (ENV) 1 to 4 apply as shown on the Inset Map. Site and area specific policies, proposals and development opportunities are as follows.

S1 Village Centre

- 1 *Planning permission has been granted for the conversion of the steading at the Lady Ross to a Bunkhouse.*

S2 Housing

- 2 *Housing Policy RS4 applies to 3ha of land to the south of Oakwood Place for up to 20 houses subject to:-*

- *access from Oakwood Place;*
- *set back from the main road;*
- *maintaining public access to Gearrchoille woodland; and*
- *integration of tree cover into the development where suitable.*

- 3 *Housing Policy RS2 applies to Lower Gledfield where infill housing is encouraged.*

- 4 *Larger housing opportunities at Lower Gledfield are identified under Policy RS4 as follows:-*

- (a) *1ha. adjacent to the Primary School.*
- (b) *1ha. on the south eastern margins of the village.*

- 5 *Ardgay lacks a kickabout pitch. There are difficulties in identifying a suitable site. The flat, agricultural land to the north of Manse Place would be suitable subject to landowner support.*

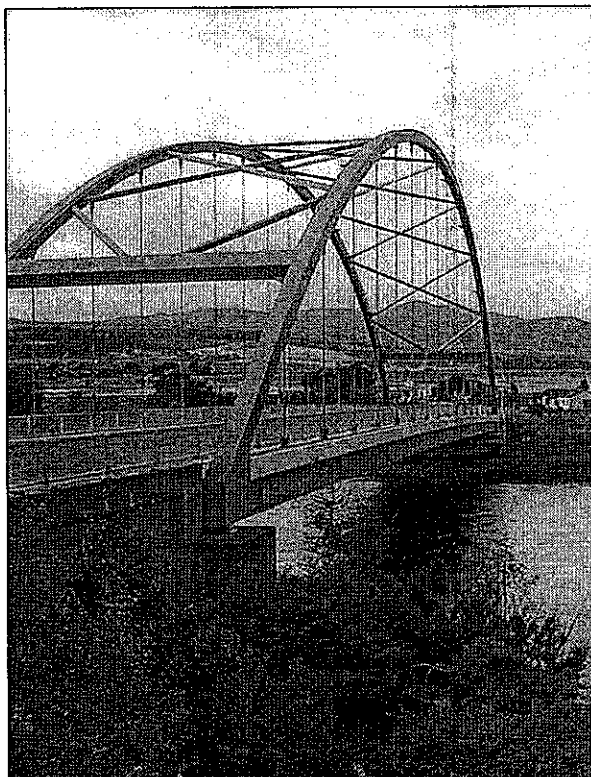
S4 Industry

- 6** *Land at Ardgay Railway station yard is allocated for a mix of uses, including rail freight and small business development. Potential exists to utilise the sidings as an aggregate depot connected with the transport of material from Ardchronie Quarry. A new access will be required on to the A836.*

S5 Special Uses

- 7** *The Council will examine the scope to develop remote foot and/or cycle paths from the village into the countryside, including a link to Kincardine Old Church and use of existing forest tracks*
- 8** *Works to connect Lower Gledfield into the Ardgay sewerage public system were completed in May 1998 at a capital cost of £ 213,000. This increases potential for further development at Lower Gledfield (see 3 & 4 above).*

BONAR BRIDGE



Bonar Bridge (pop. 550) lies at the junction of the Dornoch Firth and the Kyle of Sutherland. The village grew up as a route centre after the opening of the original bridge in 1813. It was a key location for cattle sales and acted as a small port for the surrounding rural area. Its role as a transport centre and gateway to Sutherland has been reduced over the years, the construction of the Dornoch Firth Bridge being the latest major change. The legacy of this role remains in a good range of shops and other commercial activities, as well as the local hospital, a key employer. The small industrial estate at South Bonar remains important but would benefit from upgrading.

The village has a strong north-south axis, although this has been eroded over the years. The older buildings of traditional cottage, terraces and villas front onto the main roads with extensive views across the Kyle. More modern housing, particularly public sector, has been developed to the rear.

Services and community facilities are of a reasonable standard, particularly with the completion of the Health Centre. Permission has also been granted for a Day Care Centre at Cherry Grove. Protecting the local heritage and environment is a critical issue. Although the townscape is not as significant as others in the Plan area, the older buildings form an interesting mix of traditional village buildings. The garden ground and open space between the road and the Kyle of Sutherland are of particular importance in maintaining the village character.

Objectives

The Plan seeks to:-

- identify land for at least 45 houses in the next 10 years;
- safeguard the setting of the village, particularly to prevent ribbon development;
- safeguard agricultural land;
- maintain the viability of the commercial centre;
- promote opportunities for commerce/business; and
- safeguard riverside land.

Development Factors

Expansion of the village is constrained by the natural barrier of the Kyle; good agricultural land and rising ground to the east and the need to restrict further ribbon development on the approaches. However, a substantial area of housing land remains at Cherry Grove which will be sufficient to accommodate demand over the Plan period.

Policies, Proposals & Opportunities

In the built up area of the village, General Policies Settlement (S) 1, 2 and 5 and Environment (ENV) 1 to 4 apply as shown on the Inset Map. Site and area specific policies, proposals and development opportunities are as follows.

S2

Housing

I

Small scale development opportunities are identified as follows:-

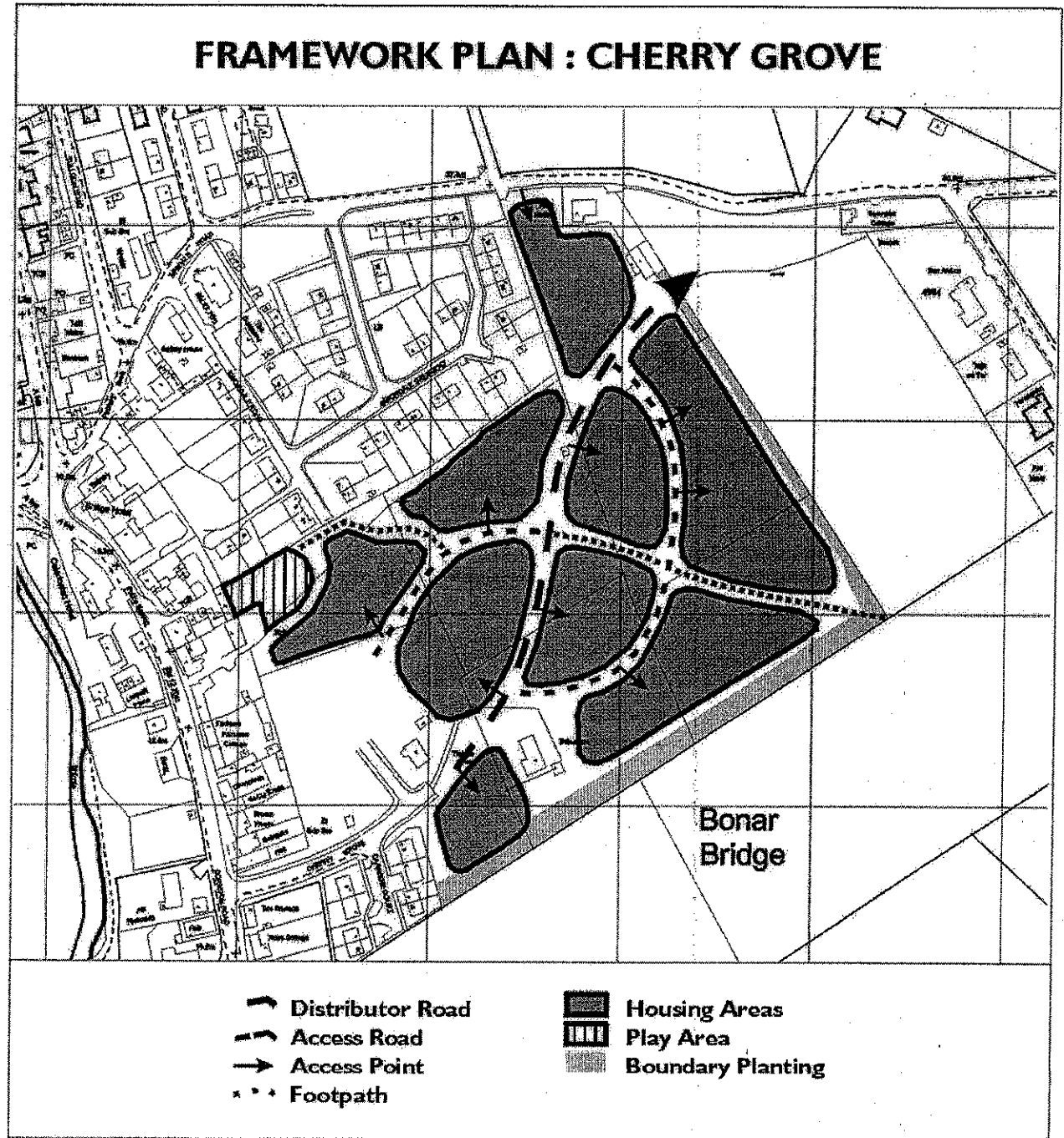
(a) at the former industrial estate off Migdale Road where 0.2ha would be suitable for affordable housing, particularly for single persons. Access should be taken from Swordale Crescent.

(b) Land is allocated at Swordale for up to four houses as part of a mixed housing and holiday accommodation development. Planning permission has been granted for part of the development.

(c) 1.5ha is allocated at Am Mhuilin with access from Migdale Road for up to six houses.

2 Housing Policy RS4 will apply to 4ha at Cherry Grove for up to 90 houses. Proposals for development will require to be in accordance with the Framework Plan and subject to:-

- Development from south to north.
- The road layout according with the Council's "Road Guidelines for New Development". A 6m wide distributor road will be required as shown on the Framework Plan and no direct access will be allowed onto it. Shared surface and other non conventional layouts may be acceptable.
- Footpath links should be safeguarded, and provided to likely destinations as site development progresses.
- Provision of appropriate open space, including a kickabout pitch, preferably in the north western corner.
- Density should not exceed 15 dpha and plot ratios should be restricted to a maximum of 30%.
- Houses should not exceed 1.5 storeys in height, except on the western side where the ground is lower, and avoid skylining.
- Good quality house designs, in keeping with the location of the site within the Dornoch Firth National Scenic Area, will be encouraged.
- Each phase of development must include a plan showing arrangements for tree planting and landscaping.



3 *The Council will seek to maintain continuity of the existing frontage of Lairg Road. Applications should conform with the scale, building line and detailing of existing buildings. Development on the riverside will be resisted.*

4 *There will be a presumption against further development taking access onto Migdale Road.*

S4 Industry

5 *The Council and CASE will consider a scheme for the improvement of the South Bonar area as a location for business and light industry. This should include scope for environmental enhancement and /or redevelopment of existing premises, the provision of workshops/craft units, improved drainage, appropriate flood prevention measures, landscaping on the fringes and future expansion, bounded by substantial tree planting. An archaeological evaluation will also be required.*

S5 Special Uses

6 *Sha. of land is allocated for a chalet / caravan site at Swordale. Planning permission has been granted for part of the development. The Council supports further expansion subject to suitable siting, design, landscaping, access and servicing.*



Lairg Road Frontages

BRORA



The village of Brora (popn. 1270) commands an attractive setting on the east coast. It straddles the River Brora, which is channelled through a narrow gorge and raised beach to the sea. The compact village centre is situated at the confluence of the A9 Trunk road, the North railway line and the river.

A history of major industrial activities led to substantial development, particularly after the Second World War when local authority house building spread towards the edge of the coastal links, both north east and south west of the centre. A further 600 people live in a series of mixed farming and crofting settlements, which sprawl out to the north and west of the village contained by moorland hills, forested slopes and coastal links.

Despite its setting Brora is often perceived as having a relatively poor physical appearance, probably due to significant decline in industrial activities and related manufacturing jobs in the last 20 to 30 years. This image has perhaps inhibited proper recognition of

Brora's quality and potential as a location for business, residential and tourist development. Only Clynelish Distillery and the woollen mill, shortly to relocate to the south west fringe of the village, now provide significant manufacturing activities. The village has assumed a greater service, administration and tourist centre role, reinforced in recent years by improved facilities at the Links and Royal Marine Hotels, caravan/camping sites and the golf course.

Despite a decreasing population the requirement to build houses has remained high with more than 70 dwellings completed in the last 10 years in the wider Brora area. A large proportion have been privately built on cheaper land in the outlying crofting areas, where the inadequate drainage and road network and decreasing standards of rural privacy and amenity necessitate more restrictive policies. The existing Local Plan land supply in the village is insufficient to meet anticipated housing requirements over the next 10 to 15 years. Consolidation of development close in to the village will be a major factor in the improvement of Brora's physical appearance.

Objectives

The Plan seeks to: -

- **improve employment prospects through promotion of opportunities for business, light industrial, tourism and retail development, notably at the existing woollen mill, harbour and former Radio Station;**
- **identify a range and choice of sites to accommodate 110 houses over the next 15 years, including opportunities for low cost/affordable and special needs housing;**

- **restrict sporadic house building in the surrounding countryside, particularly west of the safeguarded A9 bypass line;**
- **maintain and expand community facilities, including the safeguarding of a site for provision of an indoor sports complex;**
- **improve the physical appearance of the village, particularly its centre and harbour; and**
- **safeguard important agricultural/croft land, major open spaces and the riverside environment.**

Development Factors

The line of the long proposed A9 Trunk Road bypass should provide the western-most limit to development. The railway line, better croft land and open space limit development to the south and east. The importance of croft land to the north west and the presence of the industrial estate are also major considerations. As such four areas are highlighted for substantial development with comprehensive servicing:

- remaining industrial estate land and adjoining woollen mill site, north west of the village centre;
- land between Academy Street and Braambury Road to the north;
- remaining housing land at East Brora; and
- part of the South Links, focusing on the former Radio Station.

Policies, Proposals & Opportunities

General Policies Settlement (S) 1 to 5 and Environment (ENV) 1 to 4 apply as indicated on the Inset Map. Site and area specific policies, proposals and development opportunities are indicated as follows: -

S1 Village Centre

Relocation of Hunter's woollen mill offers a significant development opportunity with scope for a mix of uses in order to help generate more interest in existing businesses, vacant premises and environmental improvement elsewhere in the village centre. The site also provides the optimum location for a visitor centre.

1 The Council will encourage re-use of the existing woollen mill site, where business, light industrial, retail, community, tourist and residential development will be favoured, carefully located to avoid conflicts with existing adjoining uses. Road access to the A9(T) will only be permitted via Stafford Terrace.

2 The Council will encourage re-use of vacant and under-used premises, particularly as part of wider environmental improvement of the village centre. Specific opportunities include:

- the former surgery in Gower Street;
- the railway station building (Listed), for potential craft shop, hostel/bunkhouse, museum/heritage, restaurant/youth cafe use, subject to additional parking;
- the former goods shed (also Listed) for storage, crafts or rail-freight use, or relocation of the shed to allow more parking in the Station Square area.

S2 Housing

3 Land allocated for new development is indicated in Table 1 below.

4 Land allocated for medium to longer term development is indicated in Table 2 below.

5 The Council will restrict infill development at Golf Road/Bheinn Mheallaich, Academy Street and Victoria Road (north of 'Otago').

6 The Council will encourage rehabilitation/modernisation of remaining sub-standard properties at Lower Brora and generally throughout the village.

TABLE 1

Site Ref.	LOCATION	AREA (Ha.)	DENSITY (dwellings per ha.) / CAPACITY	COMMENTS
3(a)	at East Brora	2.4	15-25 d.p.ha	Public/private sector joint venture, including housing for rent and single plots
3(b)	The former Tordale School	0.25	2	Planning consent granted in 1999
3(c)	West of Masonic Hall	0.7	15-25 d.p.ha	widen service road/improve access
3(d)	at Rosslyn Street	0.9	7	subject to satisfactory access and drainage, together with screen planting, esp. along east side.

TABLE 2

Site Ref.	LOCATION	AREA (Ha.)	DENSITY (dwellings per ha.) / CAPACITY	COMMENTS
4(a)	West and south-west of Tordale School site.	2.4	20d.p.ha	Widen service road, improve access, re-grade land
4(b)	North west of Braambury Road	0.4	6	Widen service road

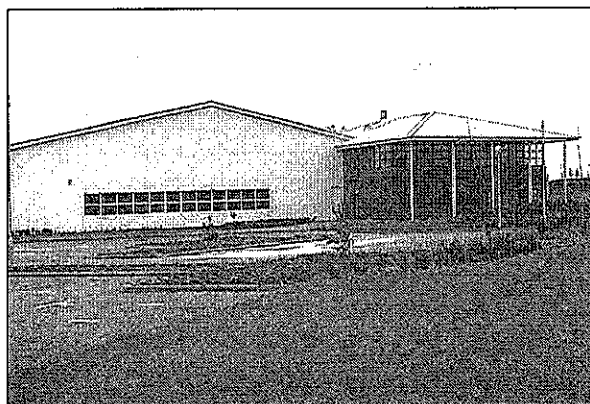
S3 Business

7 At the Old School and Knox's yard the Council will favour rehabilitation and conversion of the building into small business/office and/or tourist-related use, as well as screening of the yard to the north. Access should be taken via the C25 Distillery Road.

S4 Industry

8 At the industrial estate serviced land and premises offer significant business development opportunities. The Council is considering a Simplified Planning Zone designation. Tree planting should be carried out along the perimeter, particularly on the south side adjacent to existing houses.

9 The relocation of the woollen mill to new purpose built premises with related visitor facilities on the south west approach to the village is intended to improve efficiency and diversification, as well as capture more tourists.



New Woollen Mill

S5 Special Uses

10 The Council will consider preparation of a scheme for improvement of the Harbour area for implementation with possible assistance from CASE. The former Roads and Transport premises on the south side of the road may offer potential for housing and a tourist focal point to help make the area more attractive to visitors.

11 At the former Radio Station there is potential to develop a visitor/study/research and/or outdoor activities centre with supporting accommodation and possibly craft workshops, subject to improved access and coast protection measures. Part or full development of the site for permanent dwellings may also be appropriate.

12 The Council will continue to examine the feasibility of developing an indoor sports facility, serving the whole of South and East Sutherland on land adjacent to Brora Rangers Football Club.

13 The Council recently completed a new centre for people with learning disabilities at East Brora to replace existing facilities at Rhives House, Golspie.

14 The Council will continue to safeguard a line for the A9 (T) bypass west of the village until directed otherwise by the Scottish Office National Roads Directorate. Development within 30 metres of the line on the village side will not be permitted and the Council will presume against any further piecemeal development in open countryside, not essential to the working of land, at least 150m. to the west, or as indicated on the Inset map (ENV 3).

15 Along the existing A9 Trunk Road within the village limits, further direct frontage access points shall be restricted.

16 The existing railway siding is safeguarded for potential rail-freight use.

17 The North of Scotland Water Authority has recently completed a sewage treatment works at the South Links. There is a strict presumption against any development within 90 metres of the works.

Environmental Action

18 The Council will consider potential environmental improvement schemes:

(a) at Fountain Square, Rosslyn Street, Gower Street car park and Gower Lane, including streetscape improvements, traffic calming/ management, building cleaning and painting, and better utilisation of under-used properties (see 1);

(b) at the South Links, including dune stabilisation, coast protection, tree planting and the Brora to Golspie coastal footpath improvement, in association with development (see 4b & 8);

(c) along the northern riverbank from Fascal Park to the harbour, including improvement or provision of footpaths and woodland management; and

(d) west of the railway siding, including removal of scrap vehicles.

DORNOCH



The Royal Burgh of Dornoch (pop. 1300) is an ancient community dating to the sixth century. Its origins lie in a church settlement which provided educational, as well as religious training. Dornoch enjoys a superb setting on the edge of the Firth with good aspect and outstanding views to the south. It is divided by a heavily wooded ridge. The lower ground contains the main built up area and golf course with the higher part falling away to open farm land to the north and west.

An administrative and service centre for many years, Dornoch relies heavily on this role for jobs. It is also a major tourist destination, drawing upon the renowned Royal Dornoch golf course, historic associations and outstanding environment. Opportunities to build on these remain, especially in relation to golf; improving prospects for deriving more economic benefits from tourism. The opening of the Dornoch Firth Bridge in 1991 has improved access to jobs and services to the south with scope for increasing Dornoch's role as a commuter settlement.

Centred on the historic 13th Century Cathedral, the Royal Burgh is one of the gems of the Highlands. The Cathedral is flanked by several other fine buildings, notably the County Buildings and Court House, creating the superb setting of Cathedral Square. In contrast, groups of small cottages and narrow lanes feature on the fringes of the old burgh. This historic core is now a Conservation Area. The bulk of new housing development has taken place to the north and east, with limited development to the west where servicing problems are now becoming apparent.

Trees and woodlands are essential to Dornoch's character but most are now mature and there is a need to control regeneration or replanting. The links area to the south and east are very important to Dornoch's setting, as well as having significant tourism and recreational importance. The links also comprise most of the Common Good land for which an overall management strategy is required in addition to safeguarding policies to help sustain the area for future generations. Dornoch will also be eligible for funding for wider promotion and enhancement under the Inner Moray Firth Towns Strategy.

Objectives

The Plan seeks to:-

- **identify land for up to 250 houses over 15 years on the northern margins of the town;**
- **identify opportunities for business / commercial development, including potential designation of a Simplified Planning Zone at the Business Park;**

- **promote expansion of golfing facilities, including provision of a new course and a Golf Training School;**
- **consider measures for enhancing the village centre and make it more pedestrian friendly;**
- **promote a scheme to manage the town's trees and woodlands;**
- **create new wet weather facilities; and**
- **protect the Common Good Land, open space, golf courses and views across the Firth.**

Development Factors

A comprehensive assessment of the burgh shows the main constraints to be :-

- the golf course, beach and caravan site to the east;
- a high water table, drainage difficulties, Common Good Land and conservation designations to the south;
- surface water problems, high quality approach with views across the Firth to the west; and
- good farmland to the north.

Overall, land to the north appears to be the best option with good road access, drainage and fine views to the open countryside.



Dornoch Business Park

Policies, Proposals & Opportunities

In the built up area of the village, General Policies Settlement (S) 1 to 6 and Environment (ENV) 1 to 4 apply as shown on the Inset Map. Site and area specific policies, proposals and development opportunities are as follows:

S2 Housing

In view of the archaeological importance of Dornoch, any development or redevelopment within the S2 areas may have to be preceded by an archaeological evaluation to establish the presence/absence, nature, depth and extent of any archaeological remains present on the site.

- 1 Housing Policy RS4 applies to the sites listed in table 1 for short to medium term development.

SITE REF.	LOCATION	AREA (Ha.)	DENSITY (dwellings per ha.) / CAPACITY	COMMENTS
1 (a)	Bishopfield	3.3	30	
1 (b)	Earl's Cross	1.5	15	Planning permission granted. Access through Bishopfield
1 (c)	Meadows Park Road	3.5	45	Development will be subject to the provision of a suitable surface water drainage system. Access should be taken from Sutherland Road. Any upfilling should be graded to ground level at the boundaries of the site.
1 (d)	Sutherland Road	1.75	30	Subject to provision of a suitable surface water drainage system. Access should be taken from Sutherland Road and a planting scheme for the western boundary. The site would be suitable for sheltered or amenity housing.

- 2 With the exception of the land allocated for housing, there will be a presumption against further development off Sutherland Road and Meadows Park Road until they are brought up to an appropriate standard, agreed with the Council.

- 3 Land is allocated at Stafford Road for a small local shop.

S3 Business

- 4 The Council is considering designating the Business Park and the former Grants factory as a Simplified Planning Zone. Demolition of the factory would offer the opportunity to create more of a high quality parkland environment with suitable landscaping and planting. The SPZ would offer an attractive location for new business, including tourist and golf related.

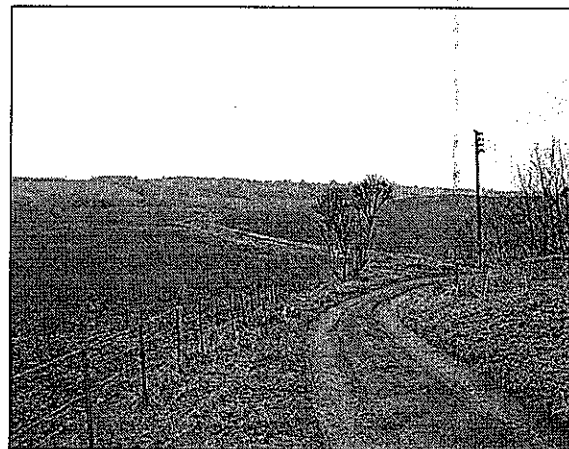
S5 Special Uses

- 5 Planning permission has previously been granted for a Country Club and Golf Driving Range and 9 hole golf course at Meadows Park. This would still be a suitable development subject to details of surface water drainage, high quality design and submission of an overall landscape master plan.

- 6 The Council supports the provision of a "sports barn" in Dornoch, subject to the completion of a feasibility study, identification of a suitable site and financial resources. There may be an opportunity adjoining the school.

7 The Council supports the development of a Golf training Centre at the former Ross House Hostel, as part of the University of the Highlands and Islands.

S6 Town Expansion



Town Expansion Area

8 Land for longer term housing development is shown in Table 2. Proposals should comply with the Framework Plan. Housing Policy RS3 will apply. A Development Brief will be prepared for this area to include phasing and basic requirements. A major requirement is the construction of a distributor road through the area in association with development phases. This will link the Poles and Embo Roads. Extension to the Evelix road in the long term could allow traffic between the A9 and Embo to bypass the centre of Dornoch. The Council will encourage substantial early structural tree planting around the fringes of this area and between phases to help integrate the development into the landscape. A hydrological assessment will be required to determine the adequacy of any surface water drainage system. The Council

SITE REF.	LOCATION	AREA (Ha.)	DENSITY (dwellings per ha.) / CAPACITY	COMMENTS
8(a)	Northfield	6.7	70	Comply with the Framework Plan. Developers will be responsible for completing the public road, water distribution and sewerage systems to the limits of their respective boundaries in the interest of the proper servicing of the area.
8(b)	Poles Road	5.5	29	Comply with the Framework Plan, unless a suitable alternative access can be achieved to the satisfaction of the Planning Authority. Developers will be responsible for completing the public road, water distribution and sewerage systems to the limits of their respective boundaries in the interest of the proper servicing of the area.
8(c)	North of Poles Road	7	70	Development should be in accordance with the overall Framework Plan for the area. Developers / landowners will be expected to provide land for community and recreational purposes. They will also be responsible for completing the public road system, water distribution and sewerage systems to the limits of their
8(d)	West of the Embo Road	10	100	respective boundaries in the interests of the proper planning of the area. The Council will apply its Affordable Housing Policy to this land. It may also seek to enter into formal agreements in the above regard.

will also expect that developments achieve an overall design that takes account of the characteristics and constraints of the site and its surroundings. In particular, built forms circulation, green space and landscaping require to be integrated with each other as part of an overall concept. The detailed

design and specification of individual buildings should also form part of a coherent overall design concept. The design of built form and selection of materials must take account of the traditional architecture of the burgh. Development must be preceded by an archaeological evaluation.

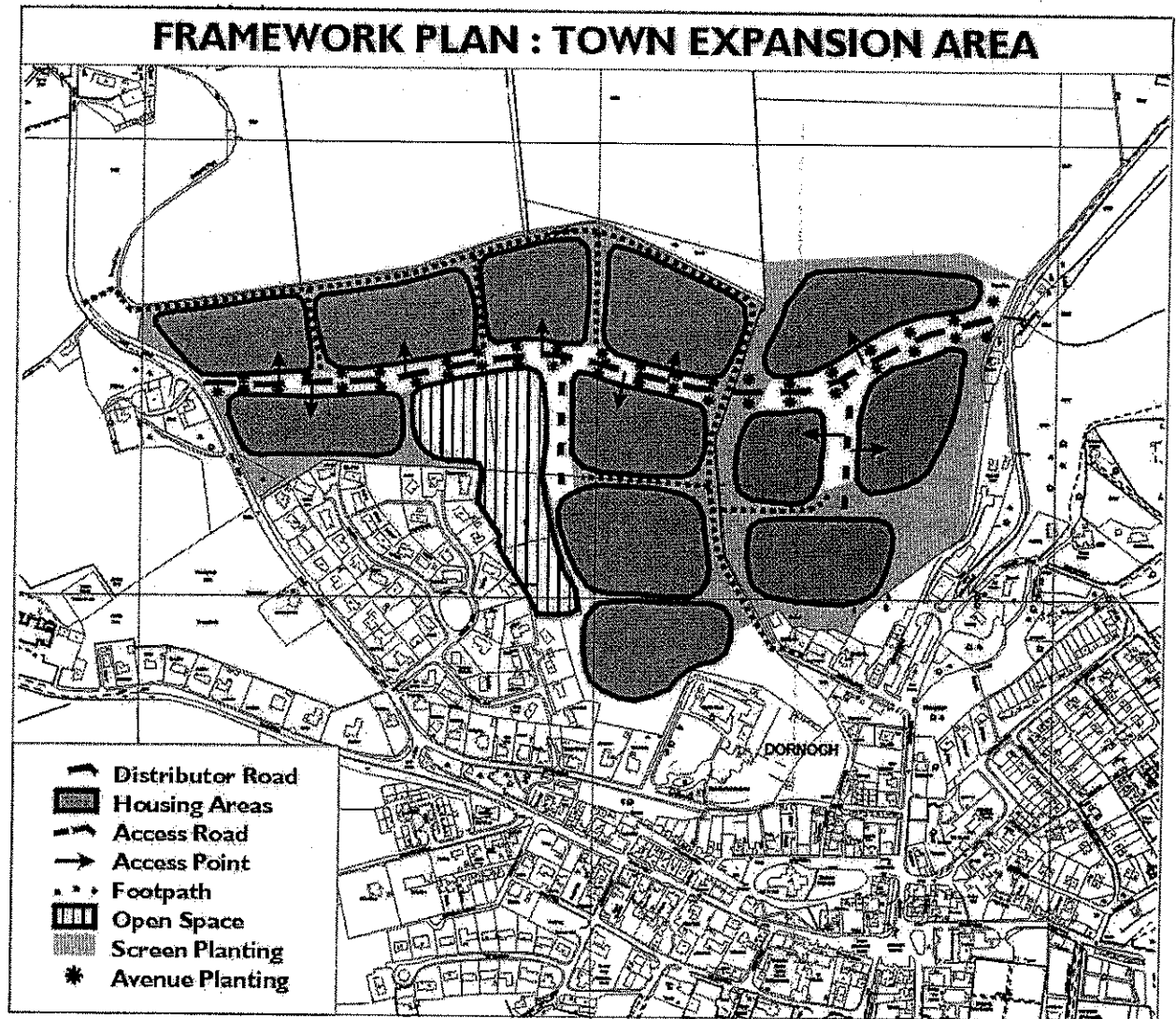
Environmental Action

9 The Council has allocated £10,000 in 2002/03 for environmental improvements in the Burgh. This is intended as “seed” money to encourage partnerships with other public agencies / private interests. The Council considers that a key priority is the preparation of a Management Plan for all of the trees within the town. This would examine their health, identify any surgery required and suggest areas for further planting

10 The Council is seeking the views of the public on an enhancement scheme for the town centre. Such a scheme might include the following:-

- making the area around the Cathedral more pedestrian friendly;
- resurfacing with high quality, more durable materials, including upgrading Burghfield steps and pavement at Cnoc an Loibht;
- further soft landscaping, for example, at the junction of High St./Station Road and management works on the trees in front of the Cathedral;
- improved signage, particularly for advertising tourist related businesses.

11 The Council propose to extend the Conservation Area to cover the buildings at Cnoc an Loibht and place an Article 4 Direction over the whole Area. The Council also recommends that Historic Scotland consider designating the Conservation Area as “Outstanding” and thereafter introduce a “Town Scheme” to promote enhancement



with grant assistance. Design guidance will be prepared to avoid development which is not in character with the Conservation Area or Listed Buildings.

12 An area of archaeological interest covers a large part of the Royal Burgh. Development or redevelopment proposals and environmental improvements within this area should allow for archaeological assessment, excavation and/or recording of remains, as appropriate [P112 – 114].

- 13** *The Council is seeking a funding package of £44,000 for Phase 2 of the Common Good improvements to the shore car park. The Council also favours measures to improve the beach and dune area, particularly screening / landscaping of the caravan park, subject to funding.*
- 14** *The Community Council in conjunction with the Council and other public agencies intends to prepare and implement a Management Plan for Earl's Cross Community Woodland*

EMBO



Embo developed on a narrow strip of land overlooking one of the finest beach and dune systems in Sutherland. It was laid out as a planned village with a coherent structure which guided development up to the early part of this century. The population had fallen from 700 at the turn of the century to 263 by 1971, due mainly to the severe decline of the local fishing industry. In the last 20 years the decline has been reversed with almost 330 people living in the village in 1991. Projections suggest that land for up to thirty houses must be allocated.

The five original streets of "Fishertown" remain. This core of the village is worthy of protection although this must be reconciled with modern traffic requirements. Several other features contribute to the amenity of the village. These include the beaches and dune systems, surrounding agricultural land and the main open green spaces and recreation areas.

Objectives

The Plan seeks to:-

- identify land for up to 30 houses to the west of the village;
- protect the older core of the village from inappropriate development;
- promote a programme of environmental improvements; and
- identify a site for a small workshop and interpretative centre.

Development Factors

The future development of Embo will be shaped by several factors, including natural barriers and the local environment. The most significant constraints on further expansion are:-

- the need to protect the better farmland, particularly on the western margins;
- the beach, dune systems and caravan park to the east;
- the playing field and open land to the north; and
- restrictions on access to the by-pass.

Policies, Proposals & Opportunities

In the built up area of the village, General Policies Settlement (S)2 and 4 and Environment 1 to 4 apply as shown on the Inset Map. Site and area specific policies, proposals and opportunities are as follows.

S2 Housing

1 *Housing policy RS4 will apply to 2.5ha. of land to the north west of Embo for up to 30 houses. This should be guided by a Master Plan, similar to the Framework Plan overleaf, and based on:-*

- *access from the U443 with a new village street running due east to west;*
- *a grid form based on a detailed feu layout;*
- *design of houses to conform with the principles set out in Appendix B;*
- *strong frontage building line and an area of open grassed verge to the front of each house of at least 5m depth;*
- *house designs must incorporate potential for extension to the rear; parking and garages must be to the rear of properties or incorporated within buildings; and*
- *safeguarding of the old railway line as a footpath.*

Development in this area on land allocated under paragraphs 2 and 4 should be preceded by an archaeological evaluation.

There is the possibility of a rail route passing to the west of the development, should it be required at some time in the future, beyond the time period of this plan.

2 Housing policy RS4 will apply to 0.25ha. of land to the north of Station House for sheltered housing. (See Framework Plan). Proposals must take account of the layout and design criteria listed under policy 1. The Council will require substantial tree/shrub planting on the eastern boundary to help integrate new development within the existing village.

3 The former school and adjoining land are allocated for a community centre and bowling green.

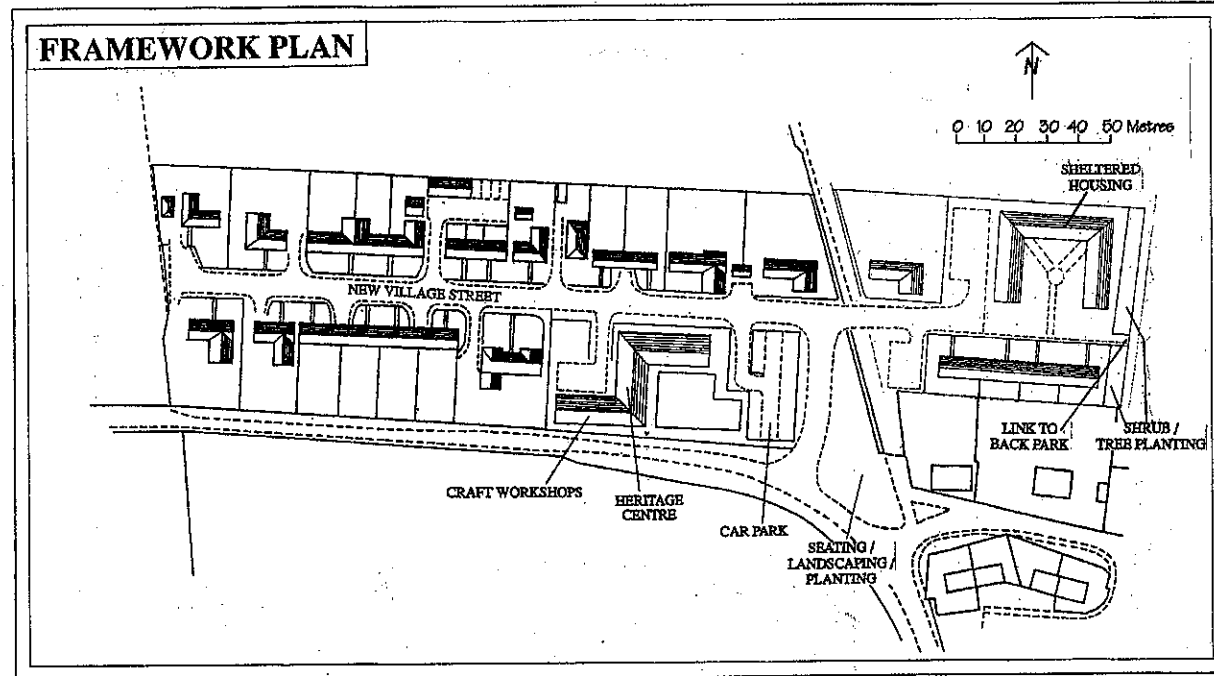
S5 Special Uses

4 0.35ha. of land is allocated for a heritage/interpretative centre incorporating craft/light industrial workshops (See Framework Plan). The latter will be restricted to Classes 4 and 6 of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Scotland) Order 1997. Proposals should follow the layout and design criteria of the adjacent housing site.

Environmental Action

5 The Council will seek to work with other public agencies, property-owners and voluntary groups to secure a village improvement scheme. This might incorporate:-

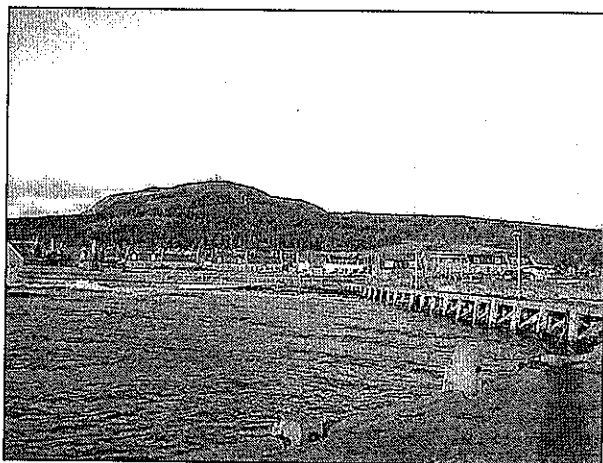
- provision of turning heads using existing lanes where possible;



- the potential for traffic management measures;
- opportunities for traffic calming;
- undergrounding of service cables;
- improvement of the various green open spaces, including new tree planting and seating, where appropriate;
- landscaping of the turning area off King Street;
- provision of a new car park at the pier, together with suitable interpretation;
- improving the various unadopted lanes;
- provision of appropriate street furniture, lighting, name plates, litter bins and bus shelter;
- promotion of a footpath to Dornoch using the old railway line; and
- provision for the long term management of the chambered cairn.

6 The Council intends to designate the core of old Embo as a Conservation Area. This would be subject to a separate statutory procedure and advertisement. Developers will be expected to conform with the principles set out in the Design Guide in Appendix B.

GOLSPIE



The village of Golspie (population 1400) has an attractive setting on the narrow east coastal strip, surrounded by farming, commercial forestry plantations and recreational interests. Most of the settlement lies between the foreshore and the railway line. Higher ground to the north west is given over to extensive crofting and estate uses. A further 250 people live principally in the smaller settlements of Littleferry, Golspie Tower, Dunrobin and Backies where further development opportunities are limited by servicing constraints.

The village population level has remained fairly static over the last 20 years, despite an average housing completion rate of 6 per annum. Limited additional growth is expected for the period of the Local Plan but there is still a need to identify opportunities for at least the same rate of house building as that of the last 10 to 15 years. In common with other parts of South and East Sutherland, there is a growing elderly population, which will increase the demand for specialised housing, medical, and social services. The loss of young people from the area corresponding with limited job opportunities for those who remain is a major local

concern. The provision of industrial land and the attraction of a further education establishment could improve this situation.

Golspie serves a large part of Sutherland as an administrative and service centre. As well as Highland Council and Scottish Natural Heritage offices for the area, it has two of the largest employers in Sutherland - the County Hospital (Lawson Memorial) and the High School. The role of the High School as the County Secondary School has diminished somewhat with the enhanced status of Kinlochbervie, Farr and Dornoch. Promoting appropriate re-use of potential surplus education property is a key issue.

Dunrobin Castle draws many tourists to the area but the lack of supporting facilities - caravan / camping site, large quality hotel, visitor centre - mean there is little passing trade for the village. Promoting the re-use of vacant shops, measures to reduce the dominance of the A9 in the village and the designation of a Conservation Area could all assist enhancement of the centre. Extension of environmental improvements along the foreshore, including the pier to encourage a greater tourist use, together with sewage treatment are key community objectives.

Objectives

The Plan seeks to:

- **identify a range and choice of sites to accommodate 120 houses over the next 15 years;**
- **allocate land and encourage its development for business and industrial uses;**
- **maintain and enhance existing community facilities;**

- **consider suitable new uses for education property should it become surplus to High School requirements;**
- **identify and promote opportunities for tourist related development, notably the re-establishment of a caravan / camping site;**
- **promote the Drill Hall primarily for re-use and redevelopment as a community facility;**
- **promote traffic management on Main Street;**
- **encourage the provision of sewage treatment facilities;**
- **consider the scope for improvements to the pier and associated facilities;**
- **promote the designation of a Conservation Area for the older part of the village; and**
- **safeguard the surrounding countryside, notably the good farm land, woodland and golf course from unplanned development.**

Development Factors

The village is contained by four major constraints:

- the railway line to the north with access limited by low bridges, together with agricultural land and forested slopes;
- the foreshore / sea to the south east;
- Golspie Burn and Dunrobin Castle policy woodlands to the east; and
- the better agricultural land and golf course to the west / south west.

Policies, Proposals & Opportunities

In the built up area of the village General Policies Settlement (S) 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 and Environment 1 to 4 apply as indicated on the Inset Map. Site and area specific policies, proposals and development opportunities are as follows:-

S1 Village Centre

- 1** Re-use of vacant premises along the Main Street will be encouraged, particularly the former Northern Times print works and bakery.
- 2** Land adjacent to the Shore Street car park may be suitable for a new purpose built doctor's surgery. The Council will consider this and alternative sites further with the NHS Trust and other interested parties.
- 3** The Council will consider the need for additional village centre parking on vacant land between the coach parks off Fountain Road. Alternatively this site may be suitable for a new health centre.

S2 Housing

- 4** Land is allocated for new development as indicated in the table above right.
- 5** There will be a presumption against unplanned housing development in the open countryside on the settlement edges indicated on the Inset Map. More substantial and/or longer term needs could be met at Drummie Farm (see 21)

SITE REF.	LOCATION	AREA (Ha.)	DENSITY (dwellings per ha.) / CAPACITY	COMMENTS
4(a)	Woodland Way	0.5	8	
4(b)	Sibell Road	3.8	50	Subject to access restrictions for more than 15 houses being resolved
4(c)	Ben Bhraggie Drive	1.25	15	
4(d)	Heavitree Farm	0.2	3	No direct access to the A9
4(e)	Macleod House, garden and land to the north west	1.1	16	As for 4(b) above and also see 11
4(f)	South end of Station Yard / rear of Ferry Road	0.4	Up to 4 houses	Access via Station Yard

S4 Industry

- 6** The north end of the station yard and the former Golspie Motors garage premises are safeguarded for small business, light industrial and storage uses.
- 7** Potential exists to develop a rail freight siding on scrub land to the west of the existing station, with a vehicular access safeguarded in the development of adjoining land at Drummie Farm (see 21)
- 8** Most of the vacant 0.18 hectare site next to the swimming pool could be developed as an extension to the industrial estate. A small portion nearest to the High School is likely to be required for an extension to staff and visitor car parking.

S5 Special Uses

- 9** The Council will support efforts to re-establish a caravan and camping site. Reinstatement of the old site is constrained

by problems of ownership, drainage, potential flood risk and the distance from the village. Alternative sites such as west of the buildings at Rhives Farm and west of the Golf Clubhouse require further investigation.

- 10** The Council will encourage the appropriate re-use and redevelopment of redundant buildings at Rhives Farm, subject to satisfactory access. The buildings and



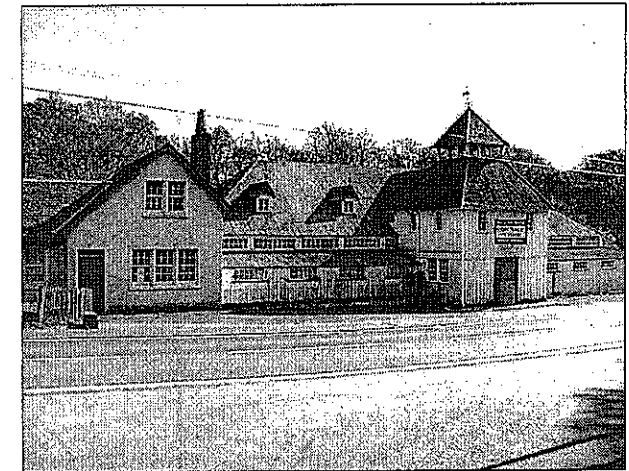
Potential caravan site east of Rhives Farm buildings

associated land may have potential for a range of uses including residential, further education, other institutional, tourism (linked to a caravan/camp site - see 9) and business purposes. Some environmental improvements would also be required. Proposals should include visitor parking and interpretation for the Ben Bhraggie walk.

- 11** Scope exists to convert the Listed station building / house to bunkhouse, hostel, restaurant, craft retail or office use.
- 12** There is also potential to convert the Macleod House Hostel to a youth hostel or business office use, subject to satisfactory servicing (see 4(e)).
- 13** The Council is considering the provision of technical teaching accommodation within the main High School complex in association with the disposal of the Technical Annexe at Drummuie (see 21).
- 14** Subject to the Mackay House Hostel no longer being required for accommodation of school pupils, the Council considers that it has potential to be used as a residential training centre, possibly as part of the University of the Highlands and Islands.
- 15** A feasibility study is to be carried out into the restoration and re-use of the former Drill Hall (Listed Category B). Potential uses being examined include village hall, a visitor orientation centre, museum, family history research facilities and interpretation of the Big Burn woodland walk network.
- 16** The Council, in partnership with Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise, has provided £11,000 through the Small Works

Programme for improvements to the blaise pitch north of the primary school. On completion of this the Council will appraise the level of playing field provision and future maintenance thereof.

- 17** The Scottish Office has commenced improvement works on the A9(T) through the village that are due for completion before summer 1999.
- 18** The Council will continue to safeguard a line for A9(T) bypass of the village until directed otherwise by the Scottish Office National Roads Directorate. The Council will presume against unplanned development north of the bypass line between the Rhives Farm road and Dunrobin.
- 19** The North of Scotland Water Authority has permission for the siting of a sewage treatment works to serve the village adjacent to the Kart Track at Littleferry. Provision is made in the NOSWA Capital Programme for this project in 2002 at a cost of £1m. Development should be restricted within 90 metres around the works.
- 20** The Council, in conjunction with other interested parties, will consider potential improvements to the pier to encourage greater use of the area. The attraction of European (PESCA Initiative) funding is aimed at encouraging tourist related uses.



The former Drill Hall

S6 Town Expansion

- 21** At Drummuie the Council has begun the consultation process to declare the High School Technical Annexe, some additional buildings and the farm surplus to educational requirements. If alternative technical facilities can be provided at the main High School complex (see 13) and the farm has a limited future as a single agricultural unit there is potential to re-use buildings and develop land to help boost the long term economic future of the village. More specifically the Council considers that there is potential for the following: -
 - Development of part of the farm to the south of the A9 for potential business and light industrial use, including conventional and high technology workshops as well as a call centre. Buildings should be of a high quality design set in well-landscaped grounds on this prominent site at the

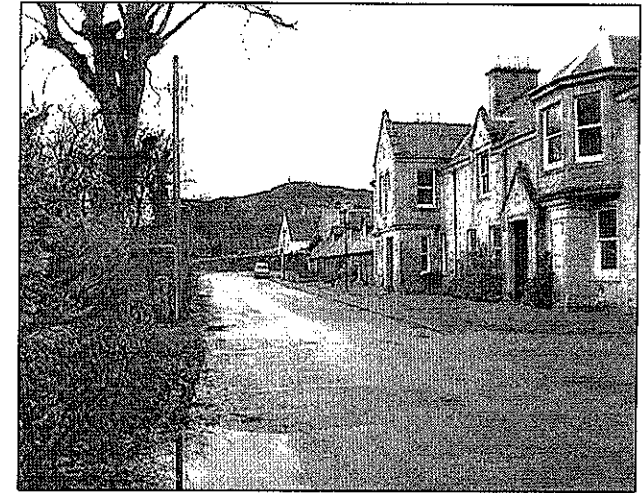
main western approach to the village. Proposals should emphasise the 'gateway' to the village and have regard to ground conditions as well as services passing through the site. The layout should also include the safeguarding of a vehicular access through the site from the A9 to a potential rail freight siding beyond the south east boundary (see 7).

- The re-use of the Technical Annexe (Listed) and associated buildings for either further education, business/office (headquarters type) or large hotel.
- An additional allocation of land north of the Technical Annexe for further business and light industrial use.
- The reservation of approximately 6 hectares of land north and east of the buildings for medium to long term housing requirements.. Full development of this area would require upgrading of public sewers and the water supply

Overall development will be guided by a brief, which will include requirements to improve access from the A9, provide appropriate buffering from the Trunk Road, safeguard the wooded setting and retain most of the land south of the A9 in agriculture.

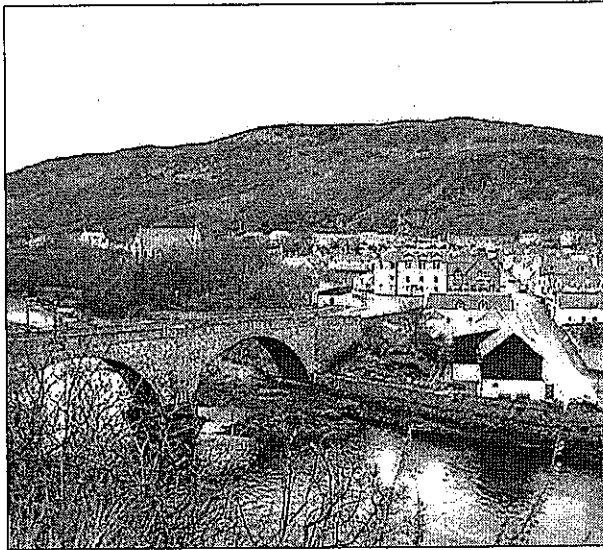
Environmental Action

- 22** Views are invited on a proposal to designate Church Street, Main Street, Old Bank Road and Duke Street as a Conservation Area. Separate statutory advertisement and consultation will be required. The Council intends to prepare a Design Guide for the proposed Conservation Area.
- 23** The Council will consider the scope for further environmental improvements along the foreshore from the rear of the former dairy, north east towards the Golspie Burn.



Listed Buildings of Duke Street and Golspie Kirk within the proposed Conservation Area

HELMSDALE



Helmsdale (pop. 730) lies on the east coast at the mouth of the Strath of Kildonan where it meets the A9 (T) road and North railway line near the Sutherland-Caithness boundary. The waterfront and hill foot setting, excellent southerly aspect, close-knit layout and good quality historic building fabric are major environmental assets.

The formal grid pattern of the 1811-25 planned village is still very much in evidence and may merit formal Conservation Area status. Developed during the Highland Clearances, it gave rise to crofting on surrounding land and coincided with significant growth in fishing activities. Subsequently the village population level peaked in the 1870s as a result of the coming of the railway and the Kildonan gold rush. A steady decrease in the range and quality of job opportunities since the mid-1970s has resulted in gradual population loss and a low rate of housing building in recent years.

Nowadays Helmsdale functions mainly as a local service centre and tourist base. Its role as a fishing port is still important but now much reduced because of major national changes in the industry. The uncertain future gives cause for local concern. Diversification could help to increase recreational fishing from the harbour to add to the visitors attracted by river fishing.

The development of the Timespan Heritage Centre in the mid-1980s greatly enhanced the tourist appeal of the village. Expansion and development of interpretation facilities over adjacent land is desirable to attract more visitors, but will depend upon relocation of the commercial garage. The siting of a Highland Clearances memorial on nearby Creag Bun-Uillidh, the establishment of a new caravan and camping site and further environmental enhancement, would complement proposals.

The encouragement of uses generating full time all year round employment is still a major priority, but with due regard for the amenity of existing residential areas. Various opportunities exist and need to be promoted to attract and improve business.

Objectives

The Plan seeks to:-

- **identify a range and choice of housing sites to accommodate at least 35 houses over the next 15 years and beyond;**
- **safeguard land and promote opportunities for business and industrial development, including relocation of Rapson's Garage;**
- **encourage expansion of tourist related uses and visitor attractions, including further heritage centre development and associated**

environmental improvements at Shore Street;

- **consider designating the historic core of the village as a Conservation Area;**
- **consider the scope for further improvements to the A9 (T) road that will increase pedestrian and traffic safety;**
- **identify and safeguard a site for a sewage treatment facility; and**
- **safeguard the setting of the village from encroachment by sporadic development and to improve footpath access to the surrounding countryside.**

Development Factors

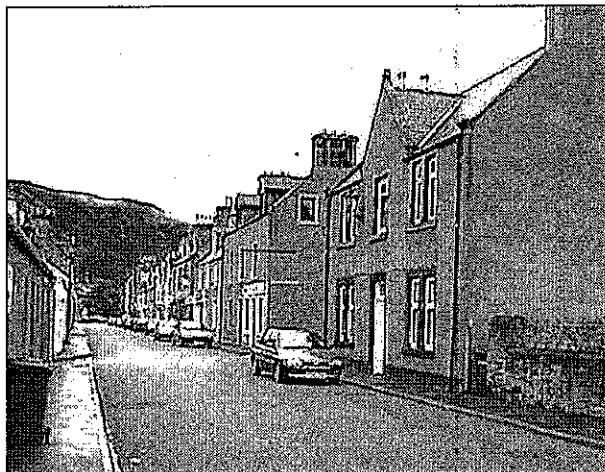
The village is contained by:

- the slopes of Creag Bun-Uillidh to the north;
- the River Helmsdale to the south;
- crofting and coastal conservation designations to the east; and
- the golf course, agricultural land and hydro-line to the west.

Encroachment into these areas is unnecessary, particularly as considerable potential still exists through a mix of conversion of existing premises, infill opportunities and remaining land allocated within the 1983 Local Plan. More substantial and/or longer-term requirements could be met at Old Helmsdale, to the north west, or south of Simpson Crescent on the east side of the village, particularly after the provision of a sewage treatment facility.

Policies, Proposals & Opportunities

General Policies Settlement (S) 1, 2, 4 and 5 and Environment (ENV) 1 to 4 apply as indicated on the Inset Map. Site and area specific policies, proposals and development opportunities are indicated below.



Dunrobin Street

SI Village Centre

1 The Council supports the need for additional car parking to serve the village centre and help reduce congestion in Dunrobin Street. Provision should be made as part of redevelopment proposals at Shore Street (see 9). Consideration will also be given to potential for associated traffic calming or management measures.

S2 Housing

2 Land allocated for new development is indicated in Table 1 opposite.

3 "Land at Simpson Crescent has potential for longer term housing development following completion of the Sewage Treatment Works (see 16). An area of 0.6 hectares is allocated with a density of 15 to 20 dwellings per hectare. Following substantial development of allocated land, the Council will consider the potential of land to the north east of Old Helmsdale for further housing development

4 Proposals for infill development within the historic core area should respect existing building lines and the traditional form, scale and materials of adjoining properties.

5 The Council will resist further development at East Helmsdale/South Navidale requiring new access to the A9 or which intensifies the use of any existing access until the realignment scheme for the trunk road is completed (RS 1.3.3 - see 15).

6 There is a presumption against further housing development in open countryside around the edges of the settlement, especially on the better croft land (RS1.3.2).

SITE REF.	LOCATION	AREA (Ha.)	DENSITY (dwellings per ha.) / CAPACITY	COMMENTS
2(a)	west of Rockview Place / north of Glebe Terrace	0.2	4	realignment of A9(T) road to the north; no direct A9 access
2(b)	north of Rockview Place	0.7	15-25	boundary planting
2(c)	at the east end of Dunrobin Street	0.13	4	traditional design
2(d)	on the former caravan site, Golf Road	0.84	12	includes 2 houses under construction; no more development
2(e)	west of the primary school	0.6	9	
2(f)	vacant St. John's church and land	0.14	4-7	includes church conversion; access from Old Caithness Road

S4 Industry

7 North of the existing industrial estate and Police Station, 0.8 ha. of land is allocated for business and light industrial development. Access should be taken via the existing spur road from Rockview Place. Screen planting is required around the periphery, accounting for proposed realignment of the A9 to the north, related road visibility requirements and water mains passing through the land. This area offers the best prospect for relocating the commercial garage from Shore Street, maximising its access to the A9 and providing space for future expansion (see 9).

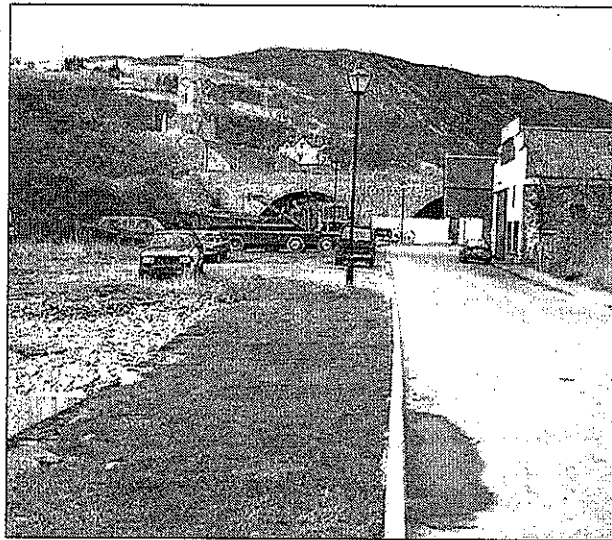
8 Other opportunities for development exist at:

- (a) the station yard, particularly for rail freight transfer and storage;
- (b) the depot to the north of the primary school for low key internal storage use;
- (c) the former fish processing factory east of the harbour, ideally for similar re-use; and
- (d) the former lobster ponds for a range of business, tourism and light industrial uses..

S5 Special Uses

9 Land at Shore Street is identified for expansion of the Timespan Heritage Centre. Potential additional features include an outdoor fishing exhibition area, a replica 'Broch', interpretative facilities and craft or retail units, supported by additional parking, traffic management, landscaping and possibly

flatted residential and/or self-catering accommodation. Difficulties over land assembly, re-location of Rapsons garage, the change in ground levels and the visual prominence of the area from the south all require to be considered as part of an overall master plan for redevelopment (see 10 & 12).



Shore Street for improvement and redevelopment

10 The Highland Clearances Memorial Trust proposes to erect a large-scale memorial on Creag Bun-Uillidh. This is expected to become a major tourist attraction to be linked with the Heritage Centre expansion (see 9) where car parking will be located and associated interpretation and research facilities could be provided. A route to the memorial site is safeguarded for pedestrian and special light vehicle access only.

11 At West Helmsdale 0.8ha. of land is identified for a caravan and camping site.

12 Scope exists to convert the vacant (Listed) railway station building to hostel, bunkhouse, restaurant, craft/retail or office use.

13 The Council proposes to upgrade the play area north of Rockview Place, including replacement of equipment.

14 At Cooper Park expansion of storage accommodation for the Highland Games is proposed. Potential exists to add to the complex of indoor sports/community facilities in the long term.

15 A route for the re-alignment of the A9 Trunk Road between Helmsdale and Navidale shall continue to be safeguarded.

16 By the end of the year 2005 appropriate treatment of waste water from the village will have to be provided by the Drainage Authority in order to meet a European Community Directive. Land near the existing sea outfall is identified for a sewage treatment works and associated 90 metres safeguarding area. Longer-term housing development will be limited until treatment is provided (see 3).

Environmental Action

17 The Council proposes to designate the historic core of Helmsdale as a Conservation Area. This would essentially include all properties within the original 'grid iron' street pattern and adjoining areas of older properties in Golf and Old Caithness Roads, as well as the harbour area and north bank of the river. Separate statutory advertisement and consultation will be required.

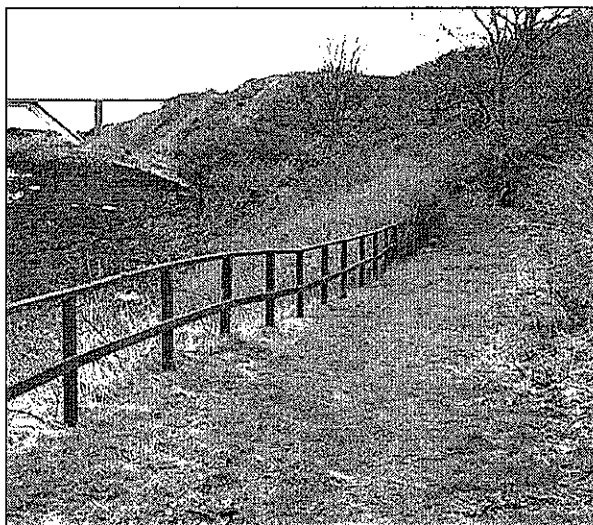
18 Additional measures are required to continue improvements along the riverside and coastal edge, between Golf Road and the former lobster ponds. Key schemes requiring priority attention are: -

(a) between the A9 and Timespan in association with redevelopment proposals for which £95,000 is included in the Council Planning Service Capital Plan for 2000-2002, and additional funding may be available from CASE;

(b) restoration of St. John the Baptist's well at the cemetery;

(c) paths on south west side of the river from the Ice House to the A9; and

(d) east of the harbour, including removal of unlicensed waste and coastal protection measures having due regard to the national geological importance of Helmsdale Coast SSSI.



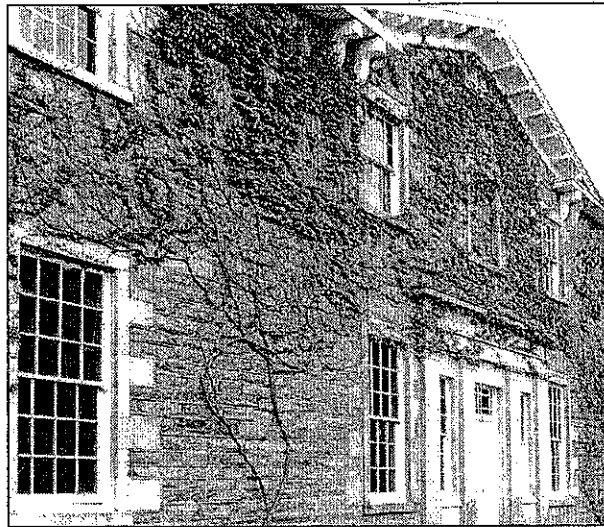
Helmsdale River Footpath

19 Elsewhere, the Council will consider:

(a) environmental improvement of the existing industrial estate, including tree planting, to reduce impact upon nearby houses; and

(b) landscaping between Glebe Terrace and Dunrobin Street, together with redevelopment or re-use of the former coastguard station.

ROSEHALL



Rosehall (popn 130) lies where Glen Cassley meets Glen Oykel, on the A837 road, some 12 miles to the north west of Bonar Bridge. The settlement comprises a series of houses grouped around community facilities which are somewhat spread out along the north side of Strath Oykel in a heavily wooded setting. The largest concentration of development is at Invercassley where the village shop and post office building is located.

Local employment is based upon agriculture, crofting, estate work, forestry and river fisheries. The latter activity is the main attraction of visitors to the area and supports the local hotel, bed and breakfast and self catering accommodation. Nearby attractions of Cassley Falls, Shin Falls and Loch Craggie are also important. Continued improvements to visitor facilities will help to generate more activity.

The vacant Rosehall House (above) has local support conversion and re-use to help generate more business and tourist activity. The creation of significant associated jobs could help sustain local population and

service levels, as well as boost the demand for housing. A proportion of any new housing should be affordable to local people.

Improvements to the largely single track A837 road would increase potential for timber extraction as well as use by caravans. There is also a large standing requirement to upgrade the public water supply in the area.

Objectives

The plan seeks to:

- promote small business and tourist related development to improve the role of the village as a local service and tourist centre; and
- improve local services and infrastructure, including the A837 road, the public water supply and footpaths giving access to the countryside.

Policies, Proposals & Opportunities

In the built up area of the village General Policies Settlement (S) 2 and 5 and Environment (ENV) 1 to 4 apply as indicated on the Inset Map. Site and area specific policies, proposals and development opportunities are as follows:-

S2

Housing

- 1** *Comprehensive expansion of Cassley Drive including affordable housing and provision of a play area of an appropriate size.*
- 2** *The Council will encourage infill development in the areas identified along the A837.*

S5

Special Uses

- 3** *The Council will seek to encourage the appropriate re-use of Rosehall House and adjacent land. The feasibility of shared ownership housing, care facilities for the elderly, educational facilities for the University of the Highlands and Islands and craft industry require investigation.*
- 4** *The Council will encourage the development of well designed, small-scale chalets in the Rosehall-Altass area, providing access and site servicing arrangements can be met, and siting conforms with the pattern of existing development.*
- 5** *The Council will undertake improvements to the A837 when finances permit.*

APPENDICES

Appendix A:

**SOUTH AND EAST SUTHERLAND
SETTLEMENT HIERARCHY AND
FACILITIES ASSESSMENT**

Appendix B:

DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR EMBO

Appendix C:

**CAITHNESS AND SUTHERLAND
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER
ASSESSMENT**

APPENDIX A: SOUTH AND EAST SUTHERLAND SETTLEMENT HIERACHY AND FACILITIES ASSESSMENT

FACILITIES / SETTLEMENT	HOUSING GROUPS INCLUDING RURAL ESTATE BUILDINGS		TOWNSHIPS		SMALL VILLAGES (with at least one facility)		KEY VILLAGES		MAIN LOCAL CENTRES		AREA OR SUB-REGIONAL CENTRE	REGIONAL CENTRE		
	Numerous, e.g. Kildonan, Clynelish Distillery, Skibo & Ardchronie		Numerous, e.g. West Helmsdale, Dunrobin, East Clyne, Backies, Birchen & Altass		Several, e.g. Embo, Rosehall, Portgower, Kinbrace, Culrain & Spinningdale		Ardgay, Bonar Bridge & Helmsdale		Brora, Golspie & Dornoch		Fort William, Wick/Thurso	INVERNESS		
Service Population	< 50		50 - 150		50 - 400		400 - 1,000		1,000 - 10,000		10,000 - 30,000	500,000 - 250,000		
Service Area	unspecified sq. km.		1 - 5 sq. km.		1 - 25 sq. km.		50 - 100 sq. km.		500 - 1,000 sq. km.		1,000 - 5,000 sq. km.	?		
Centre Distance	1 - 5 minutes		1 - 5 minutes		up to 10 minutes		up to 20 minutes		up to 30 minutes		up to 60 minutes	Up to 2 hours?		
Job Opportunities	Agriculture/estate work/processing, sports/recreation/tourism		Agriculture/crofting		Agriculture/crofting, estate work, tourism plus small scale light industrial activity		Small industrial estate (<2 ha.)		Industrial estate (2 - 5ha.) Area/locality administrative offices.		Industrial estate (>5ha.) Business park Main public administration offices (e.g. Health Board, Council, SNH) Service/distribution jobs, major hotel	Major industrial/ trading estate (50 ha.), with distribution/ transit warehousing Various business park/ light industrial opportunities around periphery		
Housing	Limited additions to group		Range of sites within boundary		Mixed including rented accommodation		Land allocated (RS4)		Land allocated (RS4) Sheltered or amenity accommodation for elderly.		Choice of sites/allocated land (all tenures) Sheltered accommodation, Residential Home(s).	Town expansion areas Volume building		
Commercial Services					Shop Community post office Small hotel/public house		General store Limited range of specialist shops/services (<5 outlets) Sub-post office Filling station Tourism/crafts outlet Restaurant		Small supermarket (up to 500 sq.m. g.f.a.) Range of specialist shops/services (5 to 10 outlets) Restaurants More than one public house/small hotel Bank (at least part time) Filling station/vehicle repairs/M.O.T.		Supermarket (500 - 2,000 sq.m. g.f.a.) Range of specialist shops/services (30 outlets +) Range of financial and professional services Range of public houses/hotels/restaurants Auction market/ slaughterhouse Large tourist information centre Full service garage/car sales		Several supermarkets (>2,000 sq.m. g.f.a.) Large range of specialist shops and services (>100 outlets) Department stores, shopping mall Retail Park Major insurance/banking institutions Public administration & company headquarters (including construction firms) Major conference and exhibition centre Many vehicle franchise dealerships	
Community/Recreation Facilities	Post box		Public telephone kiosk		Church Hall Kick-pitch/play area		Surgery (part time) Primary School Police station (part time) Community/Church hall Small park/equipped play area Cemetery		Health centre, dental service (at least part time) Secondary school Nursery school Library (part time) Churches (most denominations) Veterinary service (part time) Emergency services (part time) Cemetery Golf course, tennis courts/boxing green Community/sports hall Swimming pool Local park/playing field 2 or more equipped play areas		General Hospital, health clinic, dental practice Further education college 2 or more primary schools Branch library Veterinary service Full time emergency service bases Purpose built indoor sports/ leisure/ community centre Curling/shooting facility Museum/art gallery/cinema Major park/playing fields/athletics track		General Hospital, health clinic, dental practice Further education college 2 or more secondary schools Main library/ archive centre Major leisure centre/ indoor sports venue Outdoor sports stadium Large regional park Multi-screen cinema complex Theatre/concert hall/major arts centre	
Infrastructure	Access to Unclassified road		Access to 'C' class road		Access to 'B' class road		Access to at least 'B' class road, possibly 'A' class Daily bus service		Access to strategic road network (trunk/'A' class road) Bus service (at least to largest centre) Sewage treatment works (primary treatment)		At or close to hub of strategic road network (trunk/'A' class) Bus station/ terminus, village/ town service bus Railway station, airport/airtip (any terminal/harbour) Refuge tiphe-cycling centre. Sewage treatment works (secondary treatment)		Access to motorway network Regional airport Major public transport interchange Large harbour Cycle path network Park and ride facilities	

X DEFICIENCY

7 IMPROVEMENT REQUIRED

APPENDIX B: DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR EMBO

Proposed Conservation Area

The Council will apply the following guidelines to infill housing development and the improvement of vacant or derelict property

Infill Housing

It is important that the scale, details and materials of new houses in gap sites harmonise with existing properties.

New houses should:-

- maintain the original street frontage line;
- be restricted to 1 1/2 storeys maximum;
- have a minimum roof pitch of 45°;
- maintain the traditional streetscape relationship of house/street/garden;
- roof finishes should preferably be of natural slate, otherwise artificial slate will be considered in preference to concrete tiles;
- window openings should have a vertical emphasis;
- plot ratios should generally not exceed 30%.

Extensions

Extensions should:-

- have a pitched roof of a minimum 45°;
- be no higher than the ridge of the original building;
- use materials which harmonise with the original. Traditional materials are preferred — natural stone, wet harl, and natural slates;
- storm dormers are preferred. Where box dormers are considered necessary, they should be adequately set back from the eaves, gable and wall heads.
- window openings should have a vertical emphasis

Walls and Fences

The Council will encourage soft boundary edges, preferably an open fence with hedging.

Garages

Garages will normally be permitted within garden ground. They should be set back from the road with a pitched roof the ridge of which is at 90o to the road.

Outwith Conservation Area

Outwith the Conservation Area, infill sites should preferably be of traditional design, form, finishes and densities, consistent with the Conservation Area. Quality modern designs will also be considered. Development will normally be restricted to 1 1/2 storeys with dark roof finishes and a minimum pitch of 35°; window openings should have a vertical emphasis.

Housing Expansion Area

In order to achieve the layout and design embodied in the Framework Plan, the Council will apply the following principles to its development.

Form

- Buildings should have a rectangular, narrow Plan.
- Underbuilding should be kept to a minimum.
- Single and 1 1/2 storeys should predominate with 2 storey maximum.
- A southerly orientation should be sought.
- Storm porches/extensions should have similar proportions/finishes to the houses.

Roof

- A strong 45° pitch is preferred, with all properties achieving 40 - 55°.
- Slate is preferred but artificial slate or small tiles of smooth blue/grey/black finish are acceptable.
- Large overhanging eaves are unacceptable.
- Ridge vents should be used.
- Box dormers are not acceptable.
- Chimney stacks should be located on gable walls central to the roof ridge line.

Walls

- Natural stone and/or wet dash harling are preferred.
- Feature panels of artificial stone or other ornamental materials are not acceptable.
- Windows and door openings should have a vertical emphasis.
- Windows should be small and set back from the face of the wall. Picture and other large windows will only be acceptable to the rear of properties.
- Colour should be in the range of white/grey/buff.

Boundaries

- Front garden areas should be grassed and not enclosed.
- Screen and link walls should be of stone or harled with a stone coping.
- Post and wire fencing or hedging is acceptable on minor boundaries.
- Modern ranch panelling and chain link fences should be avoided.

The Council will impose appropriate planning conditions and, if required, enter into a Section 75 Agreement, to ensure that these standards are adhered to.

APPENDIX C: CAITHNESS AND SUTHERLAND LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

Background

The Planning Acts require Development Plans to indicate measures for the conservation of the natural beauty and amenity of each area. This may be achieved by:

- positively guiding development to preferred locations where landscape capacity, services and other planning considerations are most favourable;
- policy protection of or regard for acknowledged features ranging from National Scenic Areas such as the Dornoch Firth, to maintenance of open seaward views from important visitor routes, and safeguarding of prized local assets such as amenity woodland;
- promoting good quality design, including incorporation of suitable guidelines to assist developers;
- restoration of derelict or otherwise spoiled landscapes through appropriate environmental programmes or land management mechanisms; and
- enhancement and interpretation of landscape features.

The Council's strategic landscape conservation policies are set out in the Highland Structure Plan approved by the Secretary of State in November 1990. In particular, policies P97-101 refer. As Local Plans must conform with the provisions of the Structure Plan it is important to assess and understand the character of the landscape, its quality and relationship with land use activities.

Caithness & Sutherland Study

A detailed appraisal of landscape character and change in Caithness and Sutherland was completed a Scottish Natural Heritage consultant in September 1997. It is the latest in national programme carried out with the benefit of a steering group comprising officials from the Highland Council Planning Service, Caithness & Sutherland Enterprise, the Forestry Authority and S.N.H.

The aim is to promote a general understanding of the Caithness and Sutherland landscape, particularly the range and type of landscape character and the forces for change acting upon these. As a broad based study, it highlights the key landscape issues in relation to pressures for development and other land use change. It does not state where, or in what form, landscape development and change should take place. It is intended as a guide to the preparation of landscape policies and consideration of future proposals.

Landscape Character Types

The study has identified fifteen different landscape character types and six subtypes. These are described, the key forces for change are analysed and guidance given in each case. Their distribution across Caithness and Sutherland is shown on a map in the full report (184 pp.), together with the detailed scope of guidance is set out in - copies available from Scottish Natural Heritage, North West Region.

Potential Uses

The study has already been used by SNH to support their case as objectors at last year's wind farms inquiry in Helmsdale. However, it could be used to help the Area Planning and Building Control Manager to advise potential applicants how to integrate a proposed new house in the countryside into its surroundings. In preparing the South and East Sutherland Local Plan an attempt has been made to use the study to define areas in terms of their sensitivity to and appropriateness for development.

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