

Sutherland Local Plan – examination report highlights

People with an interest in The Highland Council's Sutherland Local Plan can now see a copy of the 'Report of Examination' from The Scottish Government's Directorate for Planning and Environmental Appeals on the Highland Council's website.

This note provides Highland Council planners' summary of highlights from the Report of Examination. It focuses mainly on those recommendations of the Reporter that are for the deletion of site allocations from the Local Plan.

The Report of Examination will be considered by the Council's Planning, Environment and Development Committee on 17 March 2010. The circumstances in which the Local Planning Authority can decline to follow the recommendations of the Reporter are set out in regulations. Generally, however, the recommendations are binding upon the Council and the Plan will be modified in accordance with them. Once modified, the Plan will progress through formal steps and is likely to become the adopted Local Plan in summer 2010. The report to Committee will outline these steps including arrangements for making the modified Plan available, keeping interested parties informed and ultimately publishing the adopted Plan.

Many of the recommendations in the Report, including recommendations for changes to the Plan, are wholly or largely in line with the Council's position at examination. Most of the sites that were proposed by the Council as development allocations in the Local Plan have in principle been confirmed, with some modifications where necessary to the detail of the plan proposals.

On some issues the Reporters' recommendations differ significantly from the Council's position at Examination. In particular, there are a number of allocated sites which the Reporters have recommended be deleted including:

- Embo H1 (North of Station Road) and Embo MU1 (West Embo);
- Golspie H3 (Adjacent to Macleod House);
- Ardgay H1 (North of Manse Road);
- Invershin H1 (Former Balblair workings);
- Lochinver H3 (Glencanisp);
- Tongue MU1 (West of the Manse); and
- various sites identified in the Plan as 'long term'.

More information on these is available below. We are examining carefully the detail of what the Reporters have said about the sites, including long term sites which are to be deleted from the plan and fully considering the implications of these changes. There may be some sites where the issues of concern cannot be overcome. However there may be other sites where some limited development may be possible during the plan period or some sites which could be considered for inclusion in a future replacement Plan.

Deletion of sites does not affect existing planning consents on sites, which can still be implemented, although depending upon what they are for they may be unlikely to be renewed.

The following site allocations are recommended by the Reporter for deletion from the Local Plan:

Embo H1 (North of Station Road) and Embo MU1 (West Embo) - The Reporter concludes that the character and setting of Embo would be best protected by the deletion of these sites and that, in any event, access to site H1 is far from guaranteed. Although this would leave Embo without development land for new housing the Reporter considers that, exceptionally, this course of action is justified. The Reporter does reference the holiday park as offering an additional dimension to the variety of accommodation available and refers to the possibility that the community forest crofting scheme will provide some additional residential accommodation in the general vicinity of Embo.

Golspie H3 (Adjacent to Macleod House) - The Reporter concludes that the loss of the development potential of the site would not undermine the credibility of the local plan but would preserve in its entirety an open space which has important recreational and visual amenity functions. The Reporter notes that it is a small site and that there is significant provision for housing elsewhere in Golspie. The Reporter recommends that the site be covered by an extended open space designation in the Plan.

Ardgay H1 (North of Manse Road) - The Reporter is concerned about lack of certainty at this stage over access arrangements and about how potential operational impacts on agriculture might be overcome. The Reporter is also concerned about the impact that the development, including likely access improvements, would have on the setting of Ardgay.

Invershin H1 (Former Balblair workings) - The Reporter has had regard to the form of the existing settlement of Invershin, comprising a scatter of buildings over a significant length and considers the proposed extension and allocation at the former Balblair workings to be artificial. The Reporter also considers that there is reasonable expectation that plots, including plots for affordable housing could come forward elsewhere on non-allocated land within the settlement development area to meet needs.

Lochinver H3 (Glencanisp) - The Reporter is concerned about landscape character, the established settlement pattern, uncertainties about feasibility at this stage and the potential scale of development that could ultimately be proposed to the Council. The Reporter does though indicate that some limited dispersed development may be appropriate and could be considered in the wider countryside. The Reporter also notes that feasibility work on the Glencanisp site is underway and indicates that with some amendment the Plan can continue to make reference to this and that it may enable further consideration of the aspirations of the Assynt Foundation in the context of future plan preparation.

Tongue MU1 (West of the Manse) - The Reporter feels that the field makes an important contribution to the setting of the listed buildings nearby and to the character and amenity

of the village. The land is however to be retained within the settlement development area.

The Reporter has also recommended the deletion of the sites identified in the Plan as 'Long Term', and some amendments to the extent of certain Settlement Development Areas e.g. at Tongue. The Long Term sites were identified in the Deposit Draft Local Plan at: Dornoch (Dornoch North Expansion), Helmsdale (North Helmsdale/ West of Primary School), Bonar Bridge (South of Cherry Grove), Lairg (North of Milnclarin), Lairg (North-west of Lochside) and Kinlochbervie (North of Innes Place). The Reporters make observations about each of the long term sites in terms of local planning considerations and also, in general, conclude that there is an adequacy of other sites identified and that the long term sites are therefore not required for inclusion in this Plan in terms of land supply. The Reporter also identified Housing Land Supply as an issue in its own right for examination and indicates that if the Plan is modified as recommended, the housing land supply remaining in the Plan is justified. It will be further assessed in the preparation of future Plans.

Under Examination Issue 20, the Reporter refers to deletion of Brora site H5 (Old Woollen Mill). The Council's planning officers consider that the Reporter has referred to a site at Brora which was referenced H5 as a proposed allocation in a previous draft of the Plan (South of Academy Street, subsequently deleted by the Council) and the officers therefore consider that the site now referenced H5 (Old Woollen Mill) is therefore to be retained as an allocation.