

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

ROSS & CROMARTY EAST LOCAL PLAN INQUIRY

**STATEMENT OF OBSERVATIONS by the
DIRECTOR OF PLANNING and DEVELOPMENT**

ISSUE 21: Redcastle Estate as a Potential Country Park

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Highland Council (THC) has undertaken to hold a Public Local Inquiry to consider objections lodged by Mr Owen Smith [CD30/124] on the Deposit Draft of the above Local Plan, in respect of the deletion of the Redcastle Estate on the Black Isle from the proposal to explore the potential for a country park, as contained in Chapter 6: Landward – Environment at paragraph 68. The objector wishes to appear at the Inquiry.

- 1.2 THC will call Alan Ogilvie, Principal Planner as planning witness.

- 1.3 THC wishes to submit the productions listed below. References to productions are shown in the text as follows, [CD 1]. Quotes from productions are shown as follows, “extract”.

[CD1] The Highland Structure Plan: Approved Plan: The Highland Council: March 2001

[CD8] Ross & Cromarty East Local Plan: Consultative Draft: The Highland Council: May 2002

[CD9] Ross & Cromarty East Local Plan: Deposit Draft: The Highland Council: October 2003

[CD10] Ross & Cromarty East Local Plan: Statement of Publicity, Consultation and representations: The Highland Council: October 2003

[CD25] Ross & Cromarty Area Planning Committee Item: Representations on the Consultative Draft Local Plan: The Highland Council: 15 September 2003

[CD27] Ross & Cromarty Area Planning Committee Item: Objections and Representations on the Deposit Draft Local Plan: The Highland Council: 25 January 2005

[CD30] Letters of objection and representation to the Deposit Draft Local Plan

2. Background

Highland Structure Plan

- 2.1 The Highland Structure Plan [CD1] was approved in March 2001. Section 1.5 Strategic Themes - 6. Addressing the need for quality living environments states: *“People should live in settings which add pleasure to their lives not diminish their experience. They need good access to formal and informal recreational opportunities. In particular there is a*

need to make provision for informal recreation close to the major settlements through Countryside Around Towns initiatives. In an area so rich in natural beauty there is no excuse for not adopting policies which address these needs.”

Consultative Draft Plan

- 2.2 The Consultative Draft [CD8] of the Ross and Cromarty East Local Plan was published in May 2002. The following provisions are relevant: -

2.2.1 Chapter 4: Strategy – Spatial Elements: Hinterland: The ninth paragraph refers to the existing and potential uses of the Local Plan area for informal recreation, notably “*The attractions of the historic towns of Cromarty and Strathpeffer could be augmented by the creation of a country park style development.*”

2.2.2 Chapter 6: Landward – Environment, paragraph 63 states: “*The Council will explore the scope for the development of a Country Park on the Black Isle with land owners and SNH. Potential locations to be considered include the Mount Eagle forest and Redcastle Estate.*”

- 2.3 Representations were made in respect of Chapter 6: Landward – Environment, paragraph 63 as follows: -

SNH [CD10/59]: welcomed the interest shown in the development of a Country Park but did not believe the areas suggested were the most appropriate.

Scottish Landowners' Federation [CD10/75]: noted with interest the potential to provide a genuine countryside educational facility for the general public, but that any such development should not become simply a recreational 'theme park'.

The Black Isle Partnership [CD10/106]: would result in increased congestion on our currently poor road network.

Mr Owen P Smith [CD10/90]: welcomed the suggestion and considered the site between Redcastle and Arpafeelie Episcopal Church with access from the A9 would be ideal, especially if combined with a traffic restriction on the shore road from Charleston to Redcastle.

Knockbain Community Council [CD10/92]: welcomed this suggested that the area around Rosehaugh (between Munloch and Avoch) be considered.

- 2.4 THC's response and reasoning in respect of these comments [CD10 & 25] was as follows: -

“The reference here is only to explore the scope for and to suggest potential areas. Other locations outwith the Black Isle, such as the Balconie area south of Evanton or the restoration of the Logie Quarry by Kildary, may offer similar potential. These are both located close to the A9 and would serve the wider Local Plan and northern Inner Moray Firth area. It would be more appropriate at this stage to make the reference more general and suggest that locations near to the major road network, notably the A9 would

maximise access. The following modifications would be appropriate: -

- *In the first sentence DELETE ‘on the Black Isle’ and INSERT ‘in the Local Plan area’.*
- *In the second sentence DELETE ‘to be considered include the Mount Eagle forest and Redcastle Estate’ and INSERT ‘should be readily accessible from the major road network’.”* Support for other locations suggested was noted for future reference.

Deposit Draft Local Plan

- 2.5 The Deposit Draft [CD9] of the Local Plan was published in November 2003. This gave rise to an objection from Mr Owen Smith [CD30/124] in respect of Chapter 6: Landward, paragraph 68. No Modifications were offered in response to this.

3. The Council’s Observations

The Objections

- 3.1 Mr Owen Smith’s [CD30/124] objection to the Deposit Draft Local Plan is as follows: -

I welcome the suggestion to consider a Country Park. I fail to see why the Redcastle Estate has been omitted from the Local Plan since it meets the recommended insert "should be readily accessible from the major road network". The site between Redcastle and Arpafeelie Episcopal Church has direct access from the A9. It has the added bonus of being accessible by footpaths and cycle routes which are segregated from major roads.

The Council’s Response

- 3.2 THC as Planning Authority wishes to respond to the objections as set out in paras. 3.3 to 4.1 below. These are in the Annex to the Committee report of 25 January 2005 [CD27] and expanded as necessary.
- 3.3 In light of the concerns of SNH and the Black Isle Forum, no location is now specified. There is only a broad requirement that such a proposal should be easily accessible from the major (A) road network. In this respect such, the potential of the Redcastle Estate is not disputed and not ruled out. It will be considered with other potential locations accessible from the major road network at the appropriate time in consultation with land owners, local communities and other relevant interests. As THC is not presently in a position to progress a more detailed study and no other consultation has taken place, there would be no point in including any potential locations in the Local Plan. As such, THC questions why this issue has been sustained as an objection and referred to the Reporter.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 **Accordingly, The Council would ask that the Reporter support the provisions of the Deposit Draft Plan.**