

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

ROSS & CROMARTY EAST LOCAL PLAN INQUIRY

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

**ISSUE 22: Chapter 8 Alness – Expansion at Milnafua Farm, and Achnagarron
boundary**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Highland Council (THC) has undertaken to hold a Public Local Inquiry to consider objections lodged by Bowlts on behalf of H W Gill [CD30/187] in respect Chapter 8, policy 25 to increase the land allocation at the Expansion area at Milnafua Farm.
- 1.2 Mr J Bremner [CD31/403] has submitted objections to the proposed changes to the Deposit Draft [CD11] in respect of inclusion of housing Expansion land at Dalmore. Mr and Mrs Lennie [CD31/402] and Mr & Mrs Innes [CD31/401] have submitted objections to the proposed changes to the Deposit Draft [CD11] in respect of the housing group at Achnagarron.
- 1.3 It is understood that Bowlts on behalf of H W Gill [CD30/187] wish to appear at the Inquiry and Mr J Bremner [CD31/403] , Mr and Mrs Lennie [CD31/402] and Mr and Mrs Innes [CD31/401] have submitted written submissions.
- 1.4 Objections lodged by Alness Initiative[CD30/48] in respect of supporting inclusion of housing land at Dalmore and Alness Community Council[CD30/93] in respect of loss of amenity land in regard to Chapter 8 are either sustained on the basis of written submissions lodged in respect of the Deposit Draft Local Plan or not withdrawn. The Council's response in respect of these matters is contained in the report[CD27].
- 1.5 THC will call Brian MacKenzie as planning witness.
- 1.6 THC wishes to submit the following productions: -
[CD1] The Highland Structure Plan: Approved Plan: THC: March 2001
[CD4] Easter Ross Adopted Local Plan: THC: July 1992
[CD8] Ross & Cromarty East Local Plan: Consultative Draft: THC May 2002
[CD9] Ross & Cromarty East Local Plan: Deposit Draft: THC: October 2003
[CD10] Ross & Cromarty East Local Plan: Statement of Publicity, Consultation and representations: THC October 2003
[CD11] Ross & Cromarty East Local Plan: Proposed Modifications to the Deposit Draft (Prior to Public Local Inquiry): THC February 2005
[CD14] SPP3: Planning for Housing: Scottish Executive: February 2003
[CD17] SPP15: Rural Development: Scottish Executive: February 2005
[CD25] Ross & Cromarty Area Planning Committee Item: Representations on the Consultative Draft Local Plan: The Highland Council: 15 September 2003

[CD26] Planning Development Europe & Tourism Committee Item:
Representations on the Consultative Draft Local Plan: The Highland Council: 1
October 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
[CD31] Objections to the Proposed Changes to the Deposit Draft Local Plan
[THC22/1&2] Report to Ross & Cromarty Planning Cttee, 20/04/04, application
for 45 houses at Dalmore(1) and Minute of meeting(2)
[THC22/3] TRM meeting schedule: THC & The Scottish ExecutiveTRNMD:
29 July 2004
[THC22/4] Correspondence in relation to factual boundary error at Achnagarron

2. Background

National Planning Guidance/Advice

- 2.1 Scottish Planning Policy 3: Planning for Housing [CD15] sets out the Scottish Executive's planning policies on housing. The following paragraphs are relevant: -

49 states that *“where possible, most housing requirements should be met within or adjacent to existing settlements. This prevents the sprawl and coalescence of settlements, makes efficient use of existing infrastructure and helps to conserve natural heritage and rural amenity”*

60, 63 & 64 indicate that development plans should take an informed long-term view on the requirement for new housing and that the local plan should convert this into effective site-specific allocations for at least 5 years from the date of adoption. Medium to long-term planning is needed to allow all parties to consider carefully how to accommodate future demand for growth where infill and brownfield opportunities cannot provide all the land necessary for new housing. Local plans should also identify further sites to meet requirements in the medium term and to monitor their effectiveness and programming through the annual housing land audit, to maintain sufficient effective land for at least the following 5 years at all times.

64 states that if *“development plans do not keep pace with the need to maintain a supply of land, planning permission should be granted in advance of local plan adoption....”*

Highland Structure Plan

- 2.2 The Highland Structure Plan identified the need for housing allocations for the period to 2017. Part of the housing allocations sought the implementation of a strategy aimed at removing pressure from the Inverness area, Chapter 2.2, para. 2.2.5 [CD1], *“To deflect some of the development pressure away from Inverness and to assist in supporting the sub-regional functions of Nairn and the Evanton, Alness and Invergordon corridor, allocations have been increased above the anticipated needs in Nairn and Ross & Cromarty.”*

Adopted Local Plan

- 2.3 The Easter Ross Local Plan [CD4] was adopted in July 1992. The area of land at Milnafua was allocated as an agricultural safeguard area amongst many others on the periphery of the built extent of Alness, with allocations being situated in the main to the north of the settlement.

Consultative Draft Plan

- 2.4 The Consultative Draft [CD8] of the Ross and Cromarty East Local Plan, was published in May 2002. The most recent population and household projections of the time saw a requirement for some 445 houses for the first ten year period of the Plan with a requirement of a further 260 to 2017 in line with Structure Plan housing allocations.

The draft plan allocated the following large sites for the expansion of the town:-

“E: Expansion

The following sites are identified for the expansion of the town: -

Ref.	Area (ha.)	Location	Capacity	Requirements
23.	9	Whitehills	120 - 140	Master Plan
24.	15	Crosshills	200 - 225	Master Plan; landscaped buffer with Caplich Quarry;
25.	12.5	Milnafua farm	180 - 200	Master Plan; upgrading of the Moss-Side Road

Built form, circulation, green space and landscaping require to be integrated with each other as part of an overall concept. Where appropriate, developers will be responsible for completing the public road, water distribution and sewerage systems to the limits of their respective boundaries in the interests of the proper servicing of the area. Play space / open space should meet the standards set out in the Development Plan Policy Guideline. The Council will encourage substantial early structural tree planting to help integrate developments into the landscape.”

These sites were intended to meet the larger scale housing development needs of the town and also capacity towards the Structure Plan strategy of deflecting development from Inverness.

E25 Milnafua Farm was allocated on land on the north-east of Alness and formed a planned progression of development running from west to east. The early development of the site was constrained by a requirement to provide an adequate twin track access to link with Obsdale Road. Capacities for these were based on a high density figure of 15 dwellings per hectare.

Para 26, Amenity, sought protection of farmland to the east and south of Alness in order to preserve the setting of the town. In addition this provided continued separation from Achnagarron to prevent eventual coalescence with Alness.

The Consultative Draft Plan boundary extended east towards the small housing group at Achnagarron(Mossfield), although identified as an existing housing group the settlement boundary had, in error, not included Achnagarron.

- 2.5 The representations made and the changes made by THC in response are detailed in [CD10].
- 2.6 Representation was received from Bowlts on behalf of H W Gill [CD10/158] in respect of inclusion of additional land to allow for lower density housing than indicated within the Plan and provision of open space landscaping, whilst still achieving the indicated housing capacities.

In addition concern was raised in regard to the provision to upgrade the access as part of the development requirements, feeling that this was also required to benefit the community as a whole, and that this may make the development unviable. The allocation of further land would assist this viability.

- 2.7 The Councils response indicated that capacity figures were for guidance and that a mix of housing types could deliver the allocation as stated. In respect of the need to improve the access, planning permission had been granted for the development of the housing allocation at H9 Obsdale, which required road improvement as far as the partially developed site at H7 Whitehills. This would restrict the requirement for any improvements, in relation to development at E25 Milnafua Farm, to the short stretch of remaining single track road.

Deposit Draft Local Plan

- 2.8 The Deposit Draft [CD9] of the Local Plan was published in October 2003. Existing allocations for housing and expansion were reaffirmed including the land at Milnafua Farm.
- 2.9 Objections were received from Bowlts on behalf of H W Gill [CD30/187] in respect of Chapter Further to the previous representation the objection further asked for the redefinition of the area from Expansion to Housing in order to progress the development of site more rapidly.
- 2.10 Objections were received from in respect of Chapter 8 in relation to housing and expansion from :-
- Bowlts on behalf of H W Gill [CD30/187]
 - *sought inclusion of additional expansion land at Milnafua Farm*
 - Nigel Ross [CD30/311]
 - *object to omission of two house sites at Achnagarron*
 - KWA Consulting Engineers [CD30/215]
 - *sought inclusion of housing land at Coulhill Forest*
 - Alistair Munro [CD30/46]
 - *sought inclusion of two house sites at Achnagarron*
 - Director of Housing, THC [CD30/224]
 - *sought inclusion of land at Blackmuir Farm and Coulhill*
 - A Ross Contractors [CD30/8]
 - *sought inclusion of housing land on amenity land at Dalmore*
 - Alness Initiative [CD30/48]
 - *supported the inclusion of housing land on amenity land at Dalmore*

Alness CC [CD30/93] & John Bremner [CD30/221]

- *supported the retention of amenity land at Dalmore*

- 2.11 THC's response and reasoning is set out in [CD27].
- 2.12 The area of extension sought by Bowlts on behalf of H W Gill [CD30/187] lies to the east and south of E25 Milnafua and would expand the development area to meet Achnagarron (Mossfield) giving scope for lower density development.
- 2.13 The representation was made in the context of a history of landowners within Alness failing to release land for development and a resultant unmet housing demand for the area.
- 2.14 The extension eastwards of the allocated sites at Milnafua Farm would ultimately lead to the coalescence of Alness with the small group of houses at Achnagarron.
- 2.15 The proposal also indicated that access would be developed either through Achnagarron or an alternative route through the existing Amenity land to west of Achnagarron to provide a link to the existing A9 junction to the east of Alness. Improvement to the A9 access would allow early development of the site using this as the main site access. Advice from Trunk Roads Network Management Division is that this junction is not good and TRNMD are looking at it as part of the review of the network in order to address current issues.
- 2.16 Other objections were received in regard to the allocation of further land within Alness, citing a lack of progress on sites within the town.
- 2.17 The Council accepted that delivery of housing has been constrained by the failure of landowners to release allocations for development. In order to address this, consultation with the local Council members for Alness advised that they wished to allocate further land arising from the objections, within various ownerships, to achieve an effective supply for the settlement. In addition to this, further expansion land was incorporated at Dalmore in relation to the granting of planning permission for housing at Dalmore, detailed at paras 2.19 & 2.20 below.
- 2.18 Further allocations were made at sites at Dalmore West, in respect of approval of an application for 45 dwelling houses, Coulhill Forest, 30 dwellings, Blackmuir, 25 dwellings and Dalmore East for housing expansion for 70 dwellings. In addition smaller sites at East of Obsdale Park, 6 dwellings, previously included in the Adopted Easter Ross Plan, and Coulhill, 10 dwellings, were also introduced to the Deposit Draft Plan.
- 2.19 The inclusion of land at Dalmore, A Ross Contractors [CD30/8], reflected an approval of an application for 45 dwelling houses on 4ha of land, the application had been submitted after the consultation on the Deposit Draft Local Plan. This was approved in April 2004, contrary to recommendation, as contained in the report presented to Committee [THC22/1]. Reasons given within the minute of the meeting [THC22/2] for this departure were as follows:-
1. The land was not in fact used as amenity or agricultural land, only being used for grazing.

2. The type of development proposed for the site was badly needed in the town.
 3. The Local Plan process had proved insufficiently dynamic to meet existing housing needs in and around the town.
 4. The site itself was ideally situated for access to central amenities.
- 2.20 The permission at Dalmore was on an area of land previously allocated under the Amenity policy A26 of the Deposit Draft. The area approved formed an isolated island of development within the overall amenity area at Dalmore. In order to help integrate the development with the community the elected members sought allocation for further housing expansion land to provide a more cohesive form of development and further meet the needs of the community.
- 2.21 In this respect a further area of expansion was identified for inclusion within the proposed modifications to the Local Plan. The area allocated, E33 Dalmore East, 7 ha of housing expansion, in the intervening land between the approved site at Dalmore(A Ross) and the Invergordon Road as indicated in the Dalmore Development Framework contained within the Written Statement of the Proposed Modifications to Deposit Draft.
- 2.22 The inclusion of further allocations sought to provide an effective housing land supply for Alness and, also compensate the Structure Plan strategy element to some extent, with the proposed removal of a significant expansion area at Invergordon, E21.

Deposit Draft with Modifications (Proposed Changes)

- 2.23 The Proposed Changes to the Deposit Draft [CD11] were approved in January 2005. Additional housing allocations were made at sites at Dalmore West for 45 dwelling houses, Coulhill Forest, 30 dwellings, Blackmuir, 25 dwellings and Dalmore East for housing expansion for 70 dwellings.
- 2.24 In addition smaller sites at East of Obsdale Park, 6 dwellings, previously included in the Adopted Easter Ross Plan, and Coulhill, 10 dwellings.

Those made largely in response to objections and comments indicated below in respect of housing and housing expansion:-

Page 43, Housing

- ADD policy "***15., 4.2ha, Dalmore West, 45, existing planning permission, provision of access from mini-roundabout from Invergordon Road, screen planting.***"

Page 43, Housing

- ADD POLICY "***16. Coulhill Forest, 4.3 ha, 30, low density housing, significant tree planting, integration of recreational paths, provision of roundabout Coulhill Road.***"

Page 43, Housing

- ADD new policy "***17., Coulhill, 0.6 ha, 10, affordable housing***".
- ADD new policy "***18 ., Blackmuir, 3.2 ha, 25, consultation with local community, affordable housing, recreational space, access from old A9, screen planting to south of access road***".

Page 43, Housing

- ADD POLICY "***19., 0.7ha, East of Obsdale Park, 6, single access from Obsdale Road, planting to southern and western boundary***".

Page 44, Expansion

- ADD policy "***33., 7ha, Dalmore East, 70, access of mini-roundabout from Invergordon Road, landscaping and screen planting, integrated footpath network, provision of area for community use.***"

- 2.25 Further objections were received in respect of the inclusion of land for housing at Achmagarron from Mr and Mrs Lennie [CD31/402] and Mr & Mrs Innes [CD31/401]. These related to the inclusion of an area of land that had received planning permission for two dwelling houses and had been subject of an objection at the Deposit Draft stage of the Plan. The extension to the Achmagarron settlement envelope reflected the extent of land that was the subject of the objection at the stage of the Deposit Draft. The approved house sites, however, ultimately varied from the submitted objection site and it is the approved site boundary that should have been represented in the Deposit Draft with Modifications. It is on this basis that the objections have been made. The Council's view is that a modification to the Plan should be made to accord with the approved site.
- 2.26 In addition objection was received from J Bremner [CD31/403] in respect of the inclusion of housing expansion at Dalmore on land previously allocated for amenity.

3. The Council's Observations

The Objections

3.1 **Bowlts on behalf of H W Gill [CD30/187]**

1) We note that 12.5 hectares of Milnafua Farm have been designated within the "expansion" category of the Plan as being suited for the development of 180 to 200 houses subject to the "Master Plan" and upgrading of the Mossfield road. Whilst our client welcomes recognition of this area's suitability for residential development, they object to its designation within the expansion category. Our client submits that this area should be categorised in the "H" allocation (housing) as being suited for residential development.

2) Our client notes that there is a history in the area of landowners refusing and/or failing to release land which has been designated within the Local Plan for housing purposes to that use. Should this continue, it is clear that land designated within the Local Plan for housing purposes may not be developed within the period of Plan and, as a result, it would be impossible for land within the expansion category to be appropriately developed. Our client would also object to the boundary allocation for Area E: 25 and would ask that, in amending this to the housing allocation, the eastern boundaries of the current designated areas be moved further eastwards to meet the existing development at Mossfield. Such a development pattern would allow the two settlements to become integrated and would provide the opportunity to substantially improve the access to the entire area by linking this to the existing roadway running

through the Mossfield development to the main A9. Such access provision would have the benefit of removing the need for traffic taking access to the development requiring to pass through the main Alness settlement and allow a reduction in existing congestion.

Expansion of the zoned area for housing would provide further benefits through a reduction in the required density of housing within the land allocation allowing additional opportunities for the incorporation of green space, landscaping, play areas, etc. This, in turn, would also provide the opportunity to create a more attractive development. A copy of this firm's letter of 6th August 2002 which expands upon these points, together with plan submitted with that letter are enclosed for your consideration and we would ask that the points detailed therein are further considered in relation to the current draft consultative Plan.

In respect of Allocation A:26 (adjacent E:25, see above)

On behalf of our client HW Gill, we object to the allocation to the land lying adjacent to Achnagarron Farm and, in particular, lying to the north and east of this which has been designated within the Local Plan as "A: 26" (amenity land). Our client would submit that in keeping with the development pattern surrounding, this area should be designated as "H" (housing) as being suitable for residential development. Again, the area in question is shown outlined and hatched red and letter "A" on the plan enclosed with our letter of 6th August 2002.

Inclusion of this additional area for residential development will further allow a reduction in the necessary density of housing in the area and provide sufficient area to include flexibility in the development pattern, provide wider landscaping benefits, incorporation of green space, circulation areas, play areas and other development. Again, -by providing access to the development by connecting to the existing public roadway to the east of this area, access directly to the main A9 can be obtained, avoiding additional traffic flowing through the main Alness settlement. As will be noted, this additional area proposed by our client to be included within the housing allocation does not include the more southerly section of Achnagarron Farm which lies adjacent to the A9 trunk road. It is intended that this land adjacent to the A9 will be retained in agricultural and equestrian use in compliance with the requirements of the proposed draft Local Plan.

We trust you find the above comment and proposals in order and would be happy to provide any further clarification or detail which you may require in order to fully consider our client's submission. In the interim, should you have any queries or require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

3.2 J Bremner [CD30/221]

I understand that the new proposals for land development in the Alness area retains the land adjacent to Dalmore House and the School as a green protected area.

I wish to express my wholehearted support for this proposal. I believe that whilst it is important for us to allow further housing development of Alness it is also

important for us to protect the green arborial areas. The importance of this is shown by the huge numbers of people who avail themselves of the paths around Alness. During the summer more than 100 people each day were walking around the circular path past Dalmore and the school.

I also believe that my view is shared by the Alness Community Assoc. who have expressed their wish to preserve this green area and to avoid housing encroachment.

I believe that the timing of these recommendations is highly apposite given the pending application to build 45 houses within this protected area. Clearly the continued strength of reason for the retention of this land as a green belt to protect the environment of Alness will prevail over the exploitive nature of the planning application.

Objections to the Deposit Draft with Modifications (Proposed Changes)

3.3 J Bremner [CD31/403]

Over the past two years I have been consistent in my support for the local planning department's recommendations concerning the preservation of Green Belt status for the land adjacent to Dalmore House.

This area of land must be considered within the context of current community usage and the strategy of the Planning Committee as detailed within the draft paper. This clearly highlights the Committee's commitment to protecting green open spaces, agricultural landscape and the improvement of the footpath network.

This area of land represents the nearest open area to the town and offering a combination of tree landscape, unspoilt agricultural land and splendid views over the firth. Undoubtedly, and for these reasons, it enjoys the highest frequency of walkers in the town. I also believe that it is important to note that the main beneficiary of this landscaped area is the school.

The Draft plan makes reference in section 71 to avoidance of landscape impact upon eleven areas. Most of these are distant from the towns and are private properties seldom, if ever, visited by members of the public. Conversely, the landscape and gardens around Dalmore are proximate to the town and enjoyed by many people as they walk and equally important, they surround the school.

The regrettable but current planning permission provides for a small number of houses within an essentially unchanged landscape. However, this proposed modification of the plan will transform this area of unspoilt meadow land into a large housing estate.

I would ask the Inquiry to reject this modification to the Plan.

3.4 Mr and Mrs Lennie [CD31/402]

The area marked on the attached map of the proposed modifications indicates the wrong area to be changed. The correct area should be immediately below that indicated, on which a property has already been built. We would oppose the area shown on the proposed modification being changed from amenity to building land. This would set precedence for the adjacent fields.

3.5 Mr and Mrs Innes [CD31/401]

We wish to object to the proposed change of boundary to include the area adjacent to our house from amenity to development land. We have always been

assured that the area from our boundary to Milnafua will be safeguarded as green belt or amenity. However the new proposed plan shows an area marked in red as a change from amenity to development.

We feel that this would commence an erosion of amenity land and would send a message to other land owners that the area safeguarded as amenity would be considered for development if pressure was brought to bear on the local planning authority. The whole area should remain amenity.

The Council's Response

3.6 **Bowlts on behalf of H W Gill [CD30/187]**

1) The allocation in question is assigned as Expansion site on the basis that the development of large sites require the preparation of a comprehensive masterplan. Sites allocated under the Expansion allocation do not necessarily refer to longer term development, unless so stated, but to the need for the preparation of the aforementioned masterplan.

3.7 2) The Council is aware of the slow progress of development of allocated sites and has taken steps to address the need for effective land through the release of further sites in a number of ownerships. At this point in time development has commenced at Crosshills (E31), 11 houses, Obsdale East (H10), 67 houses and Willowbank Road (H4). Planning permission has also been granted at Braeface Park (H5) for 21 houses, Dalmore (H15) and Cadboll Wood (H11) for 26 houses. Also pending is an application at Coulhill for 13 affordable houses.

3.8 The commencement of development of the Obsdale East site has included the provision of an access road beyond Obsdale Primary. This will facilitate adequate access for the development of land at Whitehills(E23), Milnafua(H7) and substantially towards Milnafua Farm(E25) where a requirement for development is the improvement to the residual length of road.

3.9 Traffic flows can access the site most readily from the junction to the A9 to the east end of Alness at Obsdale and would not increase flows through the High Street.

3.10 In regard to the formation of an improved separate access to the A9 at Rosskeen, the Scottish Executive have programmed the provision of a north bound right turn lane to serve traffic accessing the turn to the Alness Parish Church but would wish to discourage the further increase of access to the A9, this would also apply to the provision of a secondary access to serve the site at Milnafua.

3.11 In regards to the extension of the site eastwards towards Achnagarron, the amenity buffer between the two is to be maintained to avoid coalescence of the settlements. To allow movement of the eastern boundary to reach Achnagarron would only serve to encourage further development proposals that would utilise the direct access to the A9. This would have the effect of creating a satellite development where the preferred road access would engender no relationship with the rest of the community and promote the use of the trunk road to access the central area of the town.

3.12 The housing capacity figure given for the site is indicative, and takes account of

a wide range of development types of varying densities. Developers have to take into account the provision of all requirements for a development of this size as outlined in the accompanying text to the policy allocation. Guidance on play space/open space provisions as well as other standards for residential layout including landscaping, residential mix and plot ratios is available within the Development Plan Policy Guidance.

- 3.13 The Council has taken the view that there is a requirement for a greater availability of land in different locations and ownerships to ensure that there is an adequate effective supply of housing land. To this end various new allocations have been brought forward to meet this requirement. The allocation at Milnafua Farm provides a significant element of the requirement for Alness, but the further extension of this allocation would lead to erosion of the amenity belt providing separation of Alness and Achnagarron and lead to eventual coalescence of the two communities.
- 3.14 **J Bremner [CD30/221]**
In reference to approval of application for development of 45 houses on land at Dalmore, The Council has taken the view that given this permission further land should be allocated to utilise the infrastructure provision associated with this development. The further allocation gave The Council the opportunity to influence its development through a framework layout plan incorporated within the Deposit Draft with modifications. Requirements for landscaping and planting will reduce the visual impact of the development. Further to this will be the incorporation of footpath linkages to the town centre and existing footpath network, as well as the allocation of land for a community use.
- 3.15 The site has been the subject of an approval of an outline planning application for 45 houses and is separated from the main access road by a significant area of land used for rough grazing. The access proposed was to utilise an existing single track access road serving existing housing, however, a second road is required to provide proper access to the site. The view has been taken that the access road should be utilised not only to serve the site itself but also to service the intervening land. The approved site has not yet finalised the route of the access road to serve it and opportunity existed for provision of a road to adequately serve all land along the length of its route.
- 3.16 Current housing allocations have capacity for between 500 and 850 houses, whilst the projected housing requirement ranges between 420 and 630 houses. Although there appears that the supply of housing land is adequate as identified within the Plan, there is a need to ensure that growing demand for housing in Alness can be readily met.
- 3.17 Development of the current allocations at lower density levels may result in a shortage of housing land in the medium to longer term. Combined with the significant delay in the delivery of housing on many of the allocations questions over the effectiveness of these sites are raised. As such there appears to be a need to allocate further land to ensure housing needs can be met through an available and effective supply.
- 3.18 The addition of land at Dalmore in association with the other new housing land allocations in Alness was reflected in the next draft of the Plan.

In respect of land granted planning permission at Dalmore, policy was added to the Housing section and mapping *"14., 4.2ha, Dalmore West, 45, existing planning permission, provision of access from mini-roundabout from Invergordon Road, screen planting."*

An additional allocation for housing expansion was also added *"27., 7ha, Dalmore East, 70, access of mini-roundabout from Invergordon Road, landscaping and screen planting, integrated footpath network, provision of area for community use."*

The Council's Response to objections to proposed changes

3.19 **J Bremner [CD31/403]**

The permission at Dalmore was in an area of land previously allocated under the Amenity policy A26 of the Deposit Draft. The policy seeks to protect the areas of farmland adjacent to the A9 from development. The Ross and Cromarty Area planning committee approved the application for the site having taken a view that the housing land supply for Alness was not effectively responding to housing demand. This was in keeping with national guidance Scottish Planning Policy 3: Planning for Housing [CD15] which states that where, *"development plans do not keep pace with the need to maintain a supply of land, planning permission should be granted in advance of local plan adoption...."*

3.20 The area granted planning permission formed an isolated island of development within the overall amenity area at Dalmore. To help integrate the development with the community the elected members sought allocation for further housing expansion land to further meet the needs of the community and provide a more cohesive form of development.

3.21 In order to best utilise the associated infrastructure that this development would deliver and to also help integrate the approved site to the rest of Alness a decision was taken to allocate further expansion land to the east of that approved. This would involve utilising the new access road to serve the approved site to provide the necessary access and service infrastructure for development of the whole area.

3.22 The approval of development at Dalmore also set a precedent for further applications for housing within the adjacent amenity area. This could best be addressed through planned expansion for the area. The inclusion of an expansion area at Dalmore would, in addition to housing, also provide some form of community benefit through the allocation of portion of the allocation within the prepared development framework for a community use. Development of a footpath network through the site would strengthen pedestrian links to the school, town centre and nearby retail uses.

3.23 The inclusion of the new expansion allocation at Dalmore still retains a significant area of amenity land immediately adjacent the school and impact of development will be minimised with the requirements for landscaping and screen planting. This Dalmore allocation differs from other areas offered protection under the amenity policy in that it is not visible directly from the A9

and in this respect impact will be less than on other agricultural land bordering the A9.

3.24 Mr and Mrs Innes [CD31/401] & Mr and Mrs Lennie [CD31/402]

The area of land submitted for inclusion within the Achnagarron housing group has varied from that of the finally approved sites. The site shown on the Deposit Draft relates to the original submitted objection in relation to the Local Plan and not that given approval. The basis for the objection is that the approved boundary is that which should be included within the Plan. The Council accept that this is the case and that a **modification** to the boundary should be made in line with the objection and reflect the approved boundary. Correspondence relating to the correction of the factual error is attached [THC22/4]. This includes acceptance in respect of the proposed modification by Mr and Mrs Innes & Mr and Mrs Lennie.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 The extension of the expansion area Milnafua Farm would lead to the eventual coalescence of Alness with Achnagarron(Mossfield) and would be contrary to guidance contained in SPP3: Planning for Housing (para 2.1)
- 4.2 The development and usage of the existing A9(T) access to the east of Alness (Rosskeen) would fragment the integrated nature of the settlement and encourage use of the A9(T) to access local services situated near the trunk road. The existing allocation supports the development of the internal road network of Alness and the integration of the site with the town.
- 4.3 There has been progress in relation to the release of housing land within Alness with planning permissions being approved for over 150 houses. Of these development is progressing at Willow bank Road, Crosshills and Obsdale East and planning permission being approved at Dalmore and Cadboll Wood.
- 4.4 The allocation of expansion land at Dalmore is intended to address the shortage of effective land in Alness. The introduction of the site follows the approval of land for 45 dwellings at Dalmore. The allocation intends to consolidate the existing permission and give the basis for future planned development at Dalmore.
- 4.5 **Accordingly, The Council would ask that the Reporter recommends no change to the content of the Deposit Draft with Modifications, in respect of these matters, excepting the amendments highlighted in paragraph 3.24 above).**