

Safeguarding the Key Area of the Loch Morlich Beach and its Close surrounds

I raised this issue at a previous meeting and the minutes of that meeting are as below

Comments on early plan draft – Loch Morlich situation

The entry in the minutes on this item is as below.

1. *DW raised significant concerns about the expansion of the **Glenmore Settlement boundary** in the work associated with preparation for the draft Local Development Plan (LDP) and the hasty consultation associated with the plan.*

MF stated that the consultation was not hasty but followed exactly the requirements of government regulations and good practice guidance. PC said that the boundary change at Glenmore was a 'planning device' to allow a development brief to be prepared for the Local Development Plan that will help shape future tourism and community development in Glenmore. CNPA consider this planned approach is preferable to ad-hoc case by case planning decisions that would be made without a brief. Six members of STF are directly involved in the process which will be subject to statutory consultation as part of the Local Development Plan in spring 2013.

I raised this issue because it touches directly on the key issue in tourism is sustainable in the senses that it:-

1. Continues to deliver economic benefits to the local industry and community.
2. Does so by respecting and conserving the basic resources on which the industry in the Highlands at large is based – that is landscape, wildlife and, to a lesser but increasing extent, opportunities for outdoor recreation.

In particular, experience and research has shown the importance of protecting key sites. The Loch Morlich beach, as surveys have shown, is the most visited site by tourist in Badenoch and Strathspey and hence is a key area for tourism in that area. It is also a key part of the Glen More Forest Park and provides opportunities for a good range of recreations suitable to a wide range of ages. Murray's assertion that government requirements were followed is accepted but the situation is still a matter of concern. I discussed the issue with Mr Bob Reid, President of the Royal Town and Country Planning Institute, who knows the area and issues well as a planner and mountaineer. He stated,

*"I am in complete agreement with you that **if** there has to be a settlement boundary for Glenmore (jury out on whether it is needed at all) - it should **not** include the loch side. Being inside a settlement boundary is a nod from the planners saying okay to development there, albeit with certain provisos. Have looked for the new plan maps - are you sure they are doing one for Glenmore? It has hardly reached the threshold where such things are realistically needed. All the other settlement boundaries are for settlements significantly larger than Glenmore."*

The concern is that a settlement boundary should be placed in such a key area at all, even prior to consultation. Both reporters to the public inquiry into the Local Plan were clear on this question. Viz:-

See, for example, Page 117 para 25.8 of their report

"we also consider it is entirely proper for a local plan to define a boundary between land that may reasonably be considered as inside a settlement, where development may be appropriate, and land that is more properly outside and therefore in the countryside where a more restrictive approach should apply. For the National Park, this function is given greater emphasis by the significance of the first aim, i.e. the need to conserve and enhance the special qualities of the Park. These qualities include the natural environment and the aim is carried forward into the strategic objective objectives of the CNPP 2007. We interpret this as justifying policies that are designed to contain the existing built up areas and to protect the surrounding countryside from unrestricted and undesirable development.

25.9 Based on this context, we disagree with the objectors who argue that settlement boundaries should be more fluid, to accommodate development where proposals arise. On the contrary, we are satisfied that settlement boundaries should be clearly identifiable and preferably permanent features. In short they should be robust enough to last at least into the medium term, to give some certainty about what will, and will not, be allowed by way of development. If these characteristics can be achieved, at least for the lifetime of a local plan, then the resultant boundaries will be defensible against piecemeal development and will allow applications for contrary development to be resisted.

Glenmore isn't even regarded as a settlement in this local plan. On such a key site for the tourist industry, it is inappropriate to place even a proposed settlement boundary so close to the beach area that is already under heavy pressure and which is an important resource to the local tourism industry and the Forum should discuss this issue.