

11. SCRABSTER



Background

Scrabster (popn. 290) is situated in the north west corner of Thurso Bay, approximately 1 km. from Thurso town. Scrabster harbour is an important fishing port and ferry terminal for the main Orkney crossing. It also has traditional trade links with other northern isles and northern Europe. As such, the harbour has a major influence on the Caithness economy and is a key employment area. This includes a major area of reclaimed land that accommodates fuel storage, fish market, storage and road haulage depot.

Only a small number of dwellings remain below the cliff line, mixed with commercial and harbour related uses. The largest proportion of residents live in newer housing above the Braes of Holburn Head to the north and south east of the imposing Scrabster House and its wooded policies.

Pressure to expand Thurso has also seen housing development spread towards Scrabster from the south east. Community facilities are limited to a small hall and playing field possibly due to the close proximity to Thurso. The potential for further housing expansion requires detailed consultation with landowners. The Hall Association is also has plans for expansion of the hall.

The Scrabster Harbour Trust operates the harbour with powers under Harbour Orders approved by Act of Parliament. While this means that planning permission is not required proposals for major development still require detailed environmental impact assessment. Previous land reclamation provided valuable back up land for the fishing industry and development opportunities still remain. Harbour Orders were extended in anticipation of being able to develop a forward supply base for the Atlantic Frontier oil fields although the associated berthing and deepening improvements have yet to be implemented. Nevertheless imminent improvements are needed to accommodate a larger Orkney ferry vessel and the larger new type of fishing vessels. Growth in fish landings and related fish processing therefore offer greater prospects than oil in the short to medium term. Prospects could be further enhanced through identification of suitable land close to the harbour for related transit storage and haulage activities as well as the construction of a Thurso bypass road.

Community Input

The main issues put forward by the community at workshops in the Spring of 1998 were: -

- improve the harbour;

- affordable housing;
- sports hall/play area.

Development Factors

Ongoing drainage works will aid development. Any expansion of harbour related activities must have regard to the landscape and nature conservation features of Thurso Bay, together with the setting of Scrabster House and the agricultural viability of Scrabster Mains Farm.

Objectives

The Plan seeks to:

- identify land for modest housing expansion and community facilities;
- support expansion of the harbour including identification of back up land;
- minimise the impact of development upon Scrabster House, the Braes, nature conservation interests and the broader landscape setting of Thurso Bay.

Policies

In the built up area, Primary Policies and Settlement Policies apply as shown on the Inset Map. Site and area specific policies, proposals and development opportunities are as follows.

H: Housing

1. The Council will consult with landowners about the scope for allocating 0.6 ha. Of land north east of St.Clair Avenue for 6 to 10 houses. There will be a need to underground or re-route overhead power lines.

I: Industry

2. At Scrabster Harbour land is available for related industrial uses, notably fish processing. The Council recognises the need to provide additional back up land associated with potential expansion, particularly for transit storage warehousing and possible short term external storage for the oil industry. Reclamation of more land from the sea to the south of the existing harbour requires careful consideration in relation to the nearby SSSI, traffic generation and visual impact. Alternatively, land to the south and west of the Scrabster Mains steading complex may have potential, subject to not conflicting with the farm operations, the availability of services and substantial screen planting/landscaping around the perimeter.

S: Special Uses

3. The Council supports upgrading of Scrabster Harbour to sustain and increase its use, including accommodation of a larger Orkney ferry, modern deep sea fishing boats and oil supply vessels. Longer term expansion, possibly for the development of an oil service base to serve the Atlantic Frontier area, will require careful consideration under Environmental Assessment procedures.

4. The Hall Committee proposes to extend the existing hall, essentially to provide indoor bowling facilities.

5. A provisional route for a western bypass or distributor road for Thurso will be identified as the basis for discussion with land

owners and other interested parties. Preliminary investigations suggest that part of the route will extend north from the A836 road to Scrabster west of the West Gill housing development (see Thurso 29).



*Photos: Above - Scrabster Harbour and House
Right - Scrabster Mains and Housing*

