

## THE PLANNING BACKGROUND

Previous Local Plans for Fochabers have provided for the protection of the historic core, especially the Outstanding Conservation Area in the centre and for the further expansion of the town to the south. A northern by-pass line has been identified since the first Development Plan, over 40 years ago.

The 1978-83 Local Plan established the Conservation Area, designated extensive areas for housing developments to the south of the town, and made provision for a new High School. The 1985-90 Plan continued this approach but in acknowledgement of the very slow rate of house building, marginally reduced the amount of land. During this Plan period the Council completed the 38 housing development at Castlehill and a sheltered housing scheme was built by Hanover Housing Association on part of the field opposite the new High School.

The 1993-98 Local Plan acknowledged that house-building in Fochabers was limited by drainage capacity and this Local Plan proposes to continue with the existing level of provision.

In 1996, Consultants appointed by the Scottish Office recommended a northern route for a by-pass.

## CHARACTER OF THE TOWN

Fochaber's character is one of outstanding amenity being destroyed by the ever-increasing through traffic on the A96. Few towns in Moray are as well provided for in terms of open space, trees, and buildings of such high architectural merit. The River Spey, Gordon Castle and the winding walks beyond the Nursery, combine to give a high quality environment within easy walking distance.

The town is split largely between the new and the old along the line of the Burn of Fochabers with the historic landscape grounds of the Castle to the north. The quality of the central area is acknowledged by the designation of an 'Outstanding Conservation Area' but even outwith this area the townscape to the north of the Burn of Fochabers is distinctive with traditional housing styles in stone and slate.

Once across the Fochabers Burn and its impressive line of mature hardwood trees which visually dissect the town, the character changes to one of more contemporary suburbia. The Local Authority's housing at Murrayfield and Castlehill merge with the private bungalow developments of Ordiquish Road and Woodside Place. Milne's High School visually separates this area from the less developed west side which contains a number of substantial private houses, and the Oldmills area. Oldmills has a pleasant informal character with high levels of vegetation which the Council has sought to protect from further development in the past, partly because of restrictive drainage problems.

## OBJECTIVES

- (i) To secure, as early as possible, formal commitment from the trunk road authority to build a Fochabers by-pass to the north of the town and ensure maximum environmental benefit thereafter.
- (ii) To protect and enhance the character and vibrance of the central area.
- (iii) To provide an adequate supply of housing land to cater for a housing demand from the town and its surrounding area.
- (iv) To maintain and enhance the areas of natural environment, particularly those which run continuously along the north and south of the 'old' town.

## POLICIES AND PROPOSALS

In addition to the site specific requirements identified below and in development briefs, all developments must meet the terms of the Implementation policies (L/IMP1-8) in Chapter 8 (relating to siting, layout and design, character impact, landscaping, drainage, environmental and traffic impact). Subject to the scale of the development having a measurable impact on local community facilities, amenities or infrastructure, funding policies L/F1 Developer Contributions and L/F2 'Commutated Payments' in Chapter 7 may also apply.

## BUSINESS ACTIVITIES

The Local Plan policies for business development are contained in Chapter 1 'Economic Development'.

No sites are specifically designated for commercial or industrial development. Opportunities exist to accommodate expansion of the principal local businesses e.g. (Christies Nurseries) within land already under their respective control and there are a limited number of gap sites available within the town.

**Population 1560**

## TOURISM

Fochabers has a significant amount of tourism potential being located on the main Inverness to Aberdeen trunk road and boasting a high quality natural and built environment.

The governing policies for Tourism are L/ED16 and 17 in Chapter 1 of the Local Plan (Tourist Facilities and Accommodation and Roadside Signs). The Economic Development policies in Chapter 1 apply where relevant and policy L/CF4 in Chapter 5 safeguards established routes for walking, cycling, trails and cross-country skiing.

### T1 Caravan Site

The site takes access off the A96 and provides a range of visitor facilities including children's play equipment and swimming pool. The site is relatively sheltered by mature trees to the north, west and south. Pedestrian footpaths link the caravan site to Burnbank Road. (See ENV1) The caravan site will be retained as such and shall remain within its present boundaries although the need to expand will be monitored.

### T2 Speyside Way

The route of the Speyside Way passes through the village following the line of the River Spey to the Oldmills residential area, then following the Fochabers Burn to the east before travelling south to rejoin the River Spey. This route will be protected and enhanced where opportunities arise.

## ENVIRONMENT

The policies for the maintenance and enhancement of the environment are found in Chapter 2 (Environment).

The principal policies for the local environment are L/ENV10 'Settlement Boundaries' and L/ENV18 'Public Amenity and Open Spaces' in Chapter 2, and L/IMP1 'Development in Built Up Areas' in Chapter 8.

Under the terms of policy L/ENV18 (Public Amenity and Open Spaces) a number of spaces have been identified which contribute to the environment and amenity of the town. The purpose of policy L/ENV18 is to protect the integrity of these spaces from inappropriate development and to ensure that their contribution to the amenity of the built up area is not compromised.

### ENV1 Tree Belt along the Fochabers Burn

The trees, open space and cricket pitch to the west of the town link Fochabers with the banks of the River Spey. This area also forms part of the Speyside Way route. Within this area the value of mature landscape is recognised and the Council will presume against any development proposals which threaten to compromise the amenity or attractiveness of this area. The tree belt stretching from the Cricket Ground along the Burn of Fochabers as far as the caravan park adds to the character and amenity of Fochabers, and the Council will strictly control any proposals which involve the removal of trees. The area of woodland at Speybank presently buffers the east side of Oldmills, an area of low density houses with extensive open spaces and mature vegetation. It also provides footpath links between various sites and acts as a screen between areas.

### ENV2 Woodland Alongside River Spey

This area of woodland is used for informal access to the River Spey and has potential for low-intensity leisure-related development which respects the environmental merits of the site.

### ENV3 By-Pass Landscaping

An area of open space will be reserved between the existing built-up area on the northern boundary of the town and the proposed line of the by-pass.

### ENV4 School Playing Fields

The playing fields at Milnes Primary School and Milnes High School will be protected from development and retained for amenity purposes.

### ENV5 Village Square

The Square is the historic focal point for the village being located at the heart of the Outstanding Conservation Area. It has a mix of hard and soft landscaping and accommodates a significant proportion of the village's car parking provision. The Council will prepare a comprehensive plan for the environmental improvements of the Square which will address the issue of car parking, the location of public conveniences and the general upgrading of this area.

**ENV6 Cricket Park**

Fochabers Cricket Park will be protected from inappropriate development and will be retained for recreational use only.

**ENV7 Woodside Road**

The area of green open space on the southern boundary at Woodside Road will be protected from development and will be retained as an area of amenity ground.

**ENV8 Former Orchard Site**

The distinctive open character of this area to the south of the Fochabers Burn should be retained and backland plot sub-division will not be permitted to occur.

There are wider environmental designations relating to areas of local, national and international scientific importance and to areas of high scenic and landscape quality which in most cases may relate to areas just beyond the settlement boundary. Where sites of scientific importance are found within settlement boundaries, these are designated as ENV in the Proposals Map.

**SINS** To the immediate west of the town is the Lower Spey Site of Interest to Natural Science, designated for the protection of interesting riverside vegetation.

**HGDL** The grounds of Gordon Castle are contained in the National Inventory of Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes.

**Update:**

**The River Spey became a designated SSSI in August 1999**

*Detailed maps of all the above are held by The Moray Council.*

**Conservation Area**

The governing local plan policy for development within Conservation Areas is L/ENV15 in Chapter 2. (Listed Buildings are controlled under policy L/ENV14).

The boundary remains unchanged. (See detailed maps held in the Council Environmental Services Department offices).

**HOUSING**

Given that there has been relatively little activity in house building in Fochabers over the last 10 years, the Council does not consider the incorporation of additional land for development necessary.

The main governing local plan policy for new housing developments is L/H3 in Chapter 3 (Servicing and Layout of new Housing Developments). Policy L/H7 in Chapter 3 (Affordable Housing provision) may also apply pending on the size and location of the development.

**R1 Milne Croft**

Planning consent was granted in March 1994 for the development of 78 houses in two phases. Phase 1 at the end of the site was to be complete before work begins on Phase 2. A further condition of the planning consent was that a 15 metre planted strip be provided along the southern boundary of the site and a footpath link be retained at the north west corner providing access to the Old Mills area. Housing development has been relatively slow, with less than 20 houses constructed to date. The requirement of the existing consent shall apply to any further or alternative development proposals.

**R2 Castlehill**

An application for the development of 10 semi-detached Housing Association homes at the east end of the site was approved in August 1995. Planning consent required that a landscaped strip be provided on the southern boundary of the site with access being taken from Castlehill Road and Milne Road. This site, immediately east of Castlehill Road has been extended on its northern boundary to include a small parcel of land with a maximum capacity of an additional 2 houses. The requirement of the existing consent shall apply to any further or alternative development proposals.

## FOCHABERS BY-PASS

The by-pass for Fochabers is a principal objective for the Local Plan and the Council will continue to press for its inclusion in the trunk road programme for the A96 as a top priority. It is anticipated that current problems associated with traffic congestion and car parking will be alleviated following the construction of a by-pass.

### FOCHABERS BY-PASS

#### By-pass:

(i) A northern line is reserved for the new road on the basis that this is the most straightforward, cost effective and environmentally acceptable route.

(ii) Whilst the Council will favour the adoption of a northern route, it will seek the most sensitive design techniques to minimise the impact on the historic grounds of Gordon Castle. In particular the Council will require a safe and easily monitored pedestrian link from Castle Street to the lakeside walks and walled garden within the Castle grounds, and to preserve the wooded area to the north of Lennox Crescent.

(iii) In order to minimise the impact of traffic noise and fumes on the residents of Duncan Avenue and Castle Street, the Council will require appropriate landscaping design techniques. The retention of the tree belt to the north of Castle Street and significant additional planting north of Duncan Avenue should form a community woodland accessible from Duncan Avenue including Christies car park and linking with the tree belt at the castle's east lodge.

(iv) The Council does not anticipate the release of any land north of the existing settlement boundary nor to the east of the A96 for development. The existing settlement boundary to the north is considered to represent the extent to which the town will expand for the foreseeable future.

(v) Tree Belt - Episcopal Church. This established area stretches from the entrance to Gordon Castle along the northern boundary of the town as far as East Street. No additional development will be permitted within this area in order to preserve the entrance to Gordon Castle and perhaps more importantly to retain the tree belt to the north of Castle Street in anticipation of a by-pass route following the indicated line. The trees will act as both a visual and noise barrier to the new road. The Council propose to safeguard this area by the means of a Tree Preservation Order.

## WASTE WATER TREATMENT

Any development beyond the sites designated may have to be curtailed, unless improvements to the sewage treatment can be carried out to increase capacity.

