

Gulberwick, Quarff and Cunningsburgh Community Council Area Statement

See Area Proposals Map

Background

1.1 The Gulberwick, Quarff and Cunningsburgh Community Council area covers the northern half of the South Mainland peninsula, lying between Sandwick and Lerwick. The Clift Hills run down the western side, dominating the landscape, whilst the eastern side is the coastal plain, where all the main settlements are located, except for the small crofting township of Wester Quarff that lies on the sheltered west coast. This area has been subject to substantial housing development in recent years due to the availability of land and the close proximity of Lerwick.

Planning Context

2.1 The previous Local Plan that covered the Community Council area was the West, South and Central Interim Local Plan, approved in October 1992. Local planning aims for the Community Council area are:

- To seek ways to diversify the local economy.
- To conserve and enhance the natural and built environment.

Natural and Built Environment

3.1 The steep Clift Hills to the west and the undulating coastal strip to the east dominate the natural environment. The West Coast is included in the Shetland National Scenic Area.

3.2 On the eastern side of the area, agricultural land alternates with higher moorland edged by sea-cliffs. The settlement is almost entirely confined to the areas of lower-lying agricultural land at Gulberwick, Quarff and Cunningsburgh, though there are a few scattered houses elsewhere.

3.3 **Gulberwick** is situated approximately 2 miles (3.2km) south of Lerwick and comprises some 120 buildings, built

mostly in clusters and often on the steeply sloping valley. Originally a scattered crofting community, the area has been extensively developed for housing since the 1970s. The rate of development has put severe strains on the provision of infrastructure, including roads, sewerage, water and electricity supplies. See *Water and Drainage section*.



Gulberwick

3.4 The main planning issue in Gulberwick is local residents' concern regarding the over-development of the area for new housing development. This concern has been reflected by the designation of the area of land lying between the loop road and the shore as a Local Plan **Local Protection Area (LPA)**. The residents have extended the southern end of the LPA up to the A970, between the loop road and the golf driving range. Further details are set out in policy **LP NE11** and shown on the area Proposals Map.

3.5 **Easter Quarff**, 2 miles (3.2km) south of Gulberwick, has expanded from 12 crofts and 28 houses to over 70 dwellings in the last 25 years. The scattered pattern of development has again been repeated. Local residents have identified the area from the main road east to the shore as a **LPA** (see policy **LP NE11** and the Proposals Map).

3.6 **Wester Quarff**, on the west coast 1½ miles (2.4km.) west from Easter Quarff has not been developed to the same extent and consists of 13 mainly traditional dwellings distributed in small clusters. Local residents have identified the valley basin as a **LPA** (see policy **LP NE11** and the area Proposals Map).

3.7 **Cunningsburgh** is a large settlement 10 miles (16km) south of Lerwick on the

main A970 road to Sumburgh airport. It is centred on two areas of local authority housing, with a small industrial estate and community hall at the northern end. Between and surrounding these areas are a number of traditional crofting townships and a number of scattered modern bungalows, stretching along the A970. There are approximately 150 houses in the Stanefield/Gord/Mail area. North of Cunningsburgh lies the old crofting township of Fladdabister, a small settlement of 22 traditional croft houses interspersed with modern bungalows.

3.8 Local residents have identified seven sites around Cunningsburgh as **LPAs** (see policy **LP NE11** and the proposals map for details). The sites protect important views, local flora and fauna, farmland, Aiths Voe pier and public amenity ground. The LPA at Scoo has been reduced slightly. The Mail and Laxadale Burns have been identified by the community as requiring special protection as a habitat for breeding sea trout. The need for coastal walkways, footpaths and styles has also been noted.

- **Land Designations**

3.9 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) have been designated at Aith Meadows for the size and richness of its 'damp hay meadow' and at the Burn of Aith for post glacial sediment and peat deposits that contain a fossil record of vegetation over the last 10,000 years.

- **Built Heritage**

3.10 There are 4 listed buildings in the area, 3 category B, and 1 category C(s). Currently, there are 73 known archaeological sites in the area with 4 that are scheduled.

3.11 The area of **Fladdabister** was suggested as a potential Conservation Area in the previous Shetland Structure Plan and West, South and Central Local Plan. The area is notable for the traditional form and appearance of the lower part of the settlement, where there are many abandoned houses and croft buildings, testifying to the changing fortunes of rural communities. It is an evocative place in which many local artists have found inspiration. If formal designation as a Conservation Area was to be considered, one aim would be to

retain the special character of the place. Proposals for enhancement would have to encourage, over the long term, the restoration of traditional features and building styles. The possibility of this should be considered in consultation with the local community.

Proposal 1

The Council proposes the possible designation of Fladdabister as a Conservation Area, if agreed in full consultation with the community.

Water and Drainage

4.1 In recent years Scottish Water has undertaken improvements to the water quality throughout the area.

- **Water Supply**

4.2 Both Easter and Wester Quarff are now provided with water from the Sandy Loch reservoir at Lerwick. The system is currently working at 78% of capacity. Gulberwick is also supplied with water from the Sandy Loch and although some properties suffered from low water pressure levels in the past, this problem has since been rectified. Cunningsburgh is also being connected to the water supply from the Sandy Loch.

- **Drainage**

4.3 Work to link the existing Gulberwick wastewater system into the new Lerwick Wastewater Treatment Works is currently being undertaken by a private contractor and is scheduled for completion in 2002.

4.4 This proposal is a committed project and is contained in the Local Plan for information purposes only. This work will therefore lift current development restrictions imposed due to the present system operating over capacity.

Proposal 2

The Gulberwick wastewater (i.e. drainage) system will be connected to the Lerwick Wastewater Treatment works by 2002.

4.5 There is no mains drainage in Quarff and parts of East Cunningsburgh, with all houses having private septic tanks.

Easter Quarff is included in NoSWA's Investment Plan for the provision of a first time wastewater collection scheme, sometime after 2009. The existing wastewater system in Cunningsburgh has spare capacity and a scheme for the rest of East Cunningsburgh could be achieved by extending the existing system. Scottish Water will be requested to include it on their list of extensions to existing rural wastewater collection schemes.

Energy

5.1 The overhead power lines in this area were renewed and refurbished in the mid-1990s.

5.2 There is considerable potential for the development of renewable energy projects, whether wave power with the exposure to North Sea swells or aerogenerators on the Clift Hills, for which a scheme was proposed some years ago. Any such development would of course, have to address environmental and amenity considerations. In addition to such developments, sustainable energy savings and reduced energy consumption can be achieved through the good design and siting of buildings.

Minerals

6.1 One of the main private sector employer in the area is the Brindister aggregate quarry operated by Hanson Quarries. The quarry employs 15 to 20 people directly, but there is additional spin-off employment in the haulage and service sectors.

6.2 The quarry is located to the south of Gulberwick and contains significant reserves of Devonian old red sandstone, of a type that is much in demand for road surfaces on the UK mainland. The aggregate is transported by trucks and exported from Greenhead in Lerwick and Blackness Pier in Scalloway.



Brindister Quarry

6.3 There is also a concrete block making operation at the quarry, which supplies part of the Shetland market.

6.4 Planning permission was granted to extend the life of the quarry for a further 20 years. Permission was granted for this extension early in 2002 on the understanding that a section 75 agreement will be signed guaranteeing a full programme of restoration and after-care.

Business and Industry

7.1 The only significant private sector employers in the Community Council area are Brindister Quarry (see *Minerals section above*), and building contractors Adamson Bros and J&D S Halcrow are. Many residents have no alternative but to commute into Lerwick or further afield for work.

7.2 Agriculture and crofting continue to underpin many of the area's settlements. Several home based knitwear enterprises provide employment in the area. There is also a company based in Cunningsburgh that manufactures a range of garden stoneware.

• Industrial Sites

7.3 There is a small industrial estate at Cunningsburgh. The glass recycling company Decocrete has recently moved here. Adamson's builders and joinery specialists also have their workshops in Cunningsburgh. There are four vacant sites that are available for development, amounting to approximately half a hectare (1.25 acres) in total.

- **Aquaculture**

7.4 The future expansion of aquaculture is limited in this area given the severe exposure to the North Sea and the lack of sheltered voes. Although aquaculture is an important and growing industry for Shetland, any proposals must be balanced against the wishes of the local residents and the impact on the surrounding environment.

Tourism

8.1 A large percentage of tourists to Shetland pass through this area as it is situated on the main road between Lerwick and Sumburgh Airport. However, there are few visitor attractions in the area to tempt tourists off the main road. One notable exception to this is the golf driving range at Gulberwick.



Golf Range, Gulberwick

8.2 The old kilns and wild flowers at Fladdabister are of interest, but there are few dedicated tourist facilities or activities.

8.3 There is self-catering and B&B accommodation in both Gulberwick and Cunningsburgh.

Transport

9.1 Apart from the main A970 spine road, the other major route in the area is B9073 known locally as the Black Gaet. Linking two sections of the A970 at Gulberwick and the Burn o' Fitch, it was upgraded in early 1990s and acts as a by pass for Lerwick. Both these roads form part of the Council's spinal network and are of a high standard.

- **Road Improvements**

9.2 Road safety improvements have recently been implemented at Quarff due to a number of accidents. Local residents are requesting additional improvements with the provision of a third lane.

9.3 Additional junction improvements are programmed for Cunningsburgh, but no date for the work has been confirmed. There is a 50mph speed limit zone through Cunningsburgh.

9.4 Side roads in the area are generally good and subject to an ongoing programme of resurfacing and improvement. Additional passing places will be provided on the Aithsetter township spur road during 2003/4 and design work is in progress to replace the Mid Voxter Brig, Cunningsburgh.

9.5 Residents of Gulberwick consider the road to be in serious need of improvement, including improved verges (for pedestrian safety, more passing places and better road drainage. Local residents have also requested the provision of additional passing places on the Gord road.

9.6 The 'Sustrans' North Sea cycle route runs along the A970 and passes through Fladdabister and Aithsetter.

- **Public Transport**

9.6 The area enjoys the good bus service connecting Sumburgh Airport to Lerwick, which passes through this area at least 5 times per day (3 on Sunday). There are local feeder bus services from Bigton, Scousburgh, Quendale and Exnaboe to the Channerwick Junction. Shopper buses are also provided from Hoswick and Sandwick to Lerwick and Dunrossness. Additional local-dial-a-ride shopper services operate from Sandwick and Cunningsburgh. There is no bus service through Gulberwick.

Population and Housing

10.1 The area's close proximity to Lerwick, Shetland's principal employment centre, makes it a popular place to live. The population is consequently increasing, from 1,009 in 1991, to a projected figure of over 1,200 by the year 2011.

10.2 There has also been a strong demand for new house building over the past decade, with an average of 11 house completions per annum since 1994. Currently there are more than 450 dwellings in the area, including over 50 affordable housing units provided by the Council.



Easter Quarff

10.3 The Council proposes to carry out environmental improvements at the **School Flats, Laxdale Road and Pundsta Place, Cunningsburgh** during 2001/2 as part of the environmental improvement rolling programme.

- **Affordable Housing**

10.4 Hjaltland Housing Association (HHA) built five barrier free houses in South Cunningsburgh in the mid-1990s. HHA are currently negotiating the purchase of land at North Cunningsburgh, 5 or 6 additional affordable social rented housing units will be constructed as the first phase.

Proposal 3

Land at Pundsta Place, Cunningsburgh will be developed by Hjaltland Housing Association for the provision of affordable, barrier free housing for rent

- **Housing Zones**

10.5 Within the framework of the Local Plan housing policies, the central area of Cunningsburgh is identified as Zone 1, where new houses are actively

encouraged. Easter Quarff and the settled land from Fladdabister south to Mail is identified as Zone 2, where new houses will be favourably considered where they reflect the existing settlement pattern. Additionally, the Ocrquooy and Fladdabister areas are covered by a Village Design Statement (VDS) prepared by a steering group of residents, providing supplementary planning guidance to the Local Plan. Gulberwick and Wester Quarff are designated as housing Zone 3, which means new houses should strengthen and reinforce existing building groups. The remaining generally uninhabited areas are classed as Zone 4, where new houses are strictly controlled. Further details of the housing zone requirements are set out in policy **LP HOU 4** and shown on the Proposals Map.

Community Services and Facilities

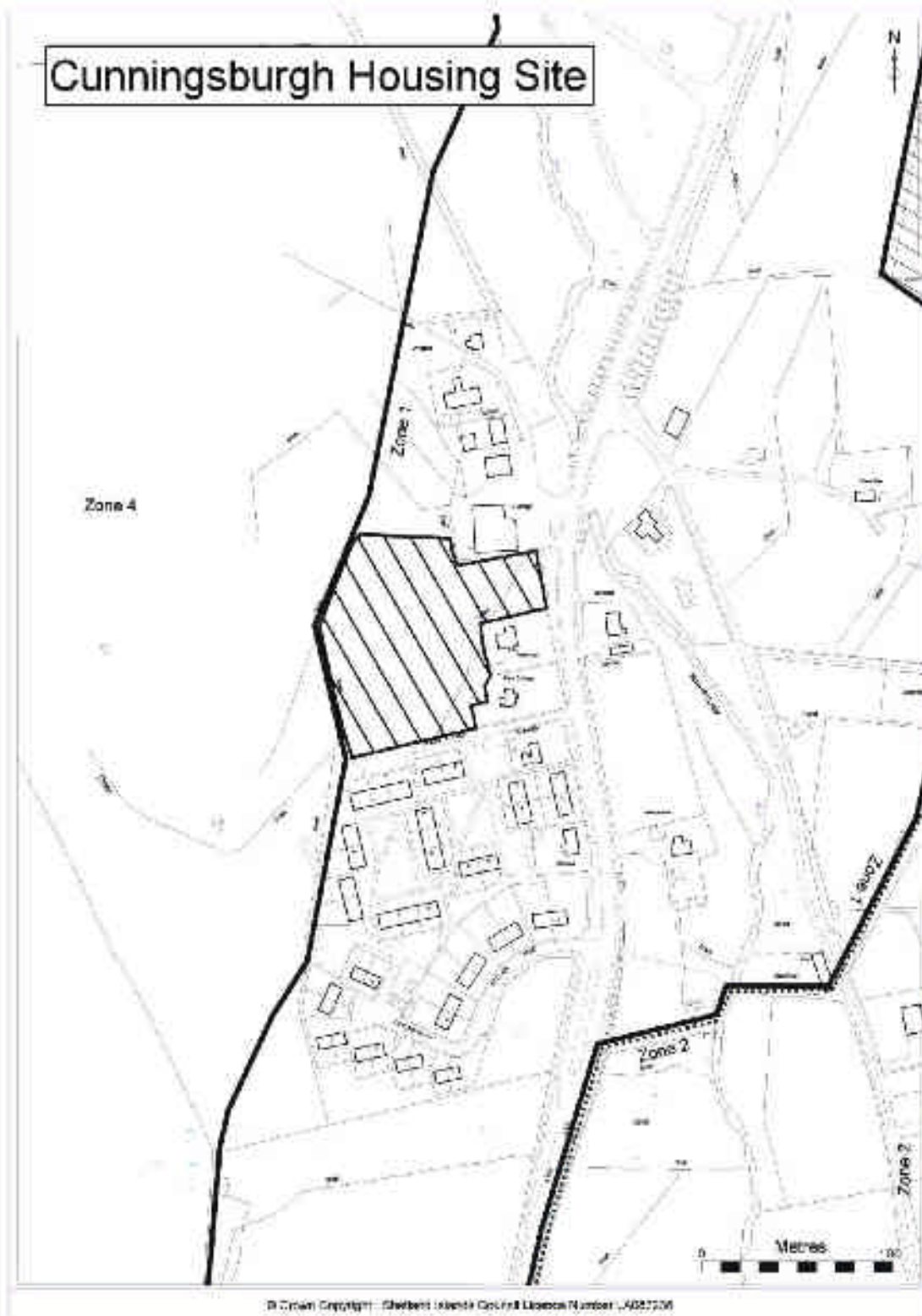
- **Primary Schools**

11.1 Quarff and Cunningsburgh both have modern primary schools. The school roll at Cunningsburgh has remained fairly stable at around 60 pupils for the past 15 years. The school roll at Quarff on the other hand has been falling from a peak of 25 pupils in 1987 to 12 in 2001. The low numbers at Quarff are a cause for concern. The principal reason for this decline is thought to be due to local children being taken to schools in Lerwick, as this is more convenient for parents who also work in the town.

- **Facilities in Cunningsburgh**

11.2 As well as the community hall and primary school, Cunningsburgh has a general store with fuel pumps, two churches, a children's play area and multicourt at the school. There is a grass sports pitch, a football club and the village club, which runs youth activities and entertainment. The annual agricultural show for the south mainland is held here every August. The residents of Cunningsburgh have suggested several possible environmental improvements:

- The creation of a community garden adjacent to the school.
- An extension of the planting at Pundsta Place.



- **Facilities in Quarff and Gulberwick**

11.3 There is a church and a community hall in both Gulberwick and Quarff. The area's close proximity to Lerwick limits the potential for additional community facilities.

11.4 The Moor Park golf driving range at the south end of Gulberwick opened in 1996. This private enterprise extends the range of sports facilities available to Shetland residents and tourists and is a good example of diversification in a rural area.

The residents of Quarff and Gulberwick have suggested several possible environmental improvements:

- In Quarff: the renovation of the pathways at Blackwalls, Streets and Böd Cart Road.
- In Gulberwick: the planting of trees up the Burn of Wick and the development of a coastal walkway.

- **Marina Development**

11.5 The sheltered Aith Voe to the east of Cunningsburgh is the centre for pleasure boating in the area and for many years the local community have wished to see a marina built here.

Proposal 4

It is proposed that a local marina be developed at Aiths Voe. The Council has committed around £2 00,000 to the project from the Capital Programme in 2002/3.

