

# Sandsting and Aithsting Community Council Area Statement

See Area Proposals Map

## Background

1.1 Sandsting and Aithsting Community Council area covers approximately half of Shetland's 'Wastside', an undulating landscape peppered by freshwater lochs and punctured by deep voes. The settlements generally sit sheltered at the heads of the voes. The pattern of development reflects the area's roots in crofting and fishing.

## Planning Context

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

- To seek ways to diversify the local economy and enhance and maintain existing services.
- To conserve and enhance the natural and built environment.
- To strengthen the viability of local communities.

## Natural and Built Environment

3.1 This area has a stunning landscape of rolling moorland down to deep sheltered sea voes. There are fine bays and beaches and rugged cliff-bound coasts. There are also tree plantations at Sand.

3.2 Brindister Voe and The Vadills are a Marine Consultation Area and there are 7 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) designated for marshland, moorland, breeding birds, lagoons, plants and geology. The Vadills has also been designated as a candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC) for its coastal lagoons. Lagoons have been identified as a priority habitat within the UK. The south-east coast of Sandsting forms part of Shetland's National Scenic Area. The main settlements in the area are Aith, Bixter and Skeld; with smaller crofting

communities at Twatt, Tresta, Clousta, Sandsound, Reawick and Westerskeld.

## Built Heritage

3.3 There are 15 Listed Buildings in the area. 2 are category A, (Culswick Broch and Sand Haa) 7 category B and 6 category C(s). Currently, there are also 335 known archaeological sites in the area with 42 that are scheduled.



Sand Haa

## Local Protection Areas (LPAs)

3.4 LPAs have been identified by local residents on part of the area between Garden, Bixter and the sea, and from Culswick Broch to Silwick. Both of these sites have been selected in order to protect important landscapes and views from development. For details see policy LP NE11 and the Proposals Map.

## Coastal Management

4.1 Programmed coastal protection work was undertaken at Redayre, Reawick and emergency work was carried out in the winter of 1993, to protect three houses at Reawick following the collapse of the seawall. A number of small-scale works are being carried out in the area in conjunction with road improvements. The sea is eroding the landward end of the pier at Skeld; the construction of the proposed new breakwater should protect the pier from further erosion.

4.2 A management scheme is currently being developed for The Vadills cSAC (candidate Special Area of Conservation) with involvement of the local community conducted through the marine SACs Advisory Panel.

### Water and Drainage

**5.1** The water supply for the area is piped from Eela Water in the North Mainland. This multi-million pound scheme was completed in 1998. Most of the properties in the area have their own septic tanks. Aith has a new wastewater collection scheme with septic tank. New first time wastewater collection schemes for both **Skeld** and **Bixter/Twatt** are included in NoSWA's programme for after 2008. To comply with various wastewater regulations, Scottish Water will construct new septic tanks at **Tresta** and **Bixter** before 2006.

### Waste Management

**6.1** Rural skips are available on a rota basis at various locations throughout the area, giving residents convenient disposal points for bulky household refuse. There are collection points for used batteries at the Aith and Bixter shops. There is a glass recycling collection point at Bixter.

### Energy

**7.1** The area has considerable potential for the development of renewable energy projects. Aith Hall utilises a heat coil to provide heat and one or two dwellings in the area have domestic wind generators. Good siting and design of buildings can also achieve sustainable energy efficiencies and reduced energy consumption. The overhead power lines in the area were renewed in the mid-1990s.

### Minerals

**8.2** There is a borrow pit at Paets of Twatt which provides stone for the community's needs for the repair and maintenance of tracks and other small projects. This is a valuable local resource.

**8.3** Skeld Pier Trust proposes to construct a breakwater as part of the Skeld Waterfront redevelopment project. To help achieve this they intend to create a borrow pit at Hestinsetter. An additional benefit will be the removal of a dangerous blind bend in the road.

### Proposal 1

### Planning permission has been granted for a borrow pit at Hestinsetter

### Business and Industry

**9.1** Agriculture and crofting underpin the economy in this truly rural area. Diversification of industry needs to be encouraged, subject to environmental safeguards. Available figures show that in 1997, a total of 269 people were employed in the area in both full-time and part-time jobs.

- **Industrial Estates**

**9.2** There is a small industrial site at Skeld, where the Shetland Smokehouse is located, producing smoked fish products and speciality food dishes.

**9.3** A number of small fishing and lobster creel boats operate in the area, berthing mainly at the piers at Aith and Skeld.



Fish farming pier at Sand

- **Aquaculture**

**9.4** Aquaculture is of growing importance, as in many of Shetland's other rural areas. The main local centres are at Aith and Sand. At Sand there is a large salmon farming operation and fish packing station. A new fish farming building is being built at Aith Pier.

- **Other industry**

**9.5** There are a number of domestic outlets for knitwear. Sheepskin rugs are produced in Aith.

### Development Opportunity

The old school buildings at Aith are occupied by various small businesses. The buildings have suffered from lack of maintenance since the new school was built in the 1980s and the rent for the units is consequently low. Maintenance is required to ensure this valuable local asset, potentially providing affordable business starter units continues.



Former Knitwear Factory, Aith

### Recommendation 2

The former knitwear factory in Aith has been empty for some years and is currently used as a store for dinghies and small craft. The Aith Boating Club has submitted a request for funding for the construction of a boathouse store/shed. If this new facility is built, the site of the old factory will be available for an alternative development.

### Tourism

10.1 The natural beauty and tranquillity of the area make it a favoured destination for tourists. There is chalet accommodation at Sand and Twatt and self-catering accommodation at Aith, Bixter and Tresta. There is a shortage of B&B accommodation in the area.

### Recommendation 3

To help diversify the local economy, it is recommended that additional tourist facilities, for example B&B accommodation and trout fishing are developed.

10.2 As part of the Skeld waterfront project, the old shop at Skeld is to be refurbished by Shetland Amenity Trust for use as a camping böd.

### Proposal 4

The old shop at Skeld will be converted for use as a camping böd.

10.3 It is hoped the proposed Skeld Waterfront Development project will generate additional tourist activity (see Community Facilities section for further information).

### Commercial Development

11.1 Aith has a general store, post office, fuel pumps and garage.

11.2 At Bixter there is a general store with fuel, a vet's surgery, a post office, and a craft shop. The main Shetland Landrover and Volkswagen garage is also based in Bixter.

11.3 The shop at Skeld closed in 1994. It is anticipated that the building can be reused as part of the project to redevelop the Skeld waterfront. There are part-time post offices at Skeld and Reawick.

11.4 The local community at Aith has recently established a charity shop named the Auld Skule at the former Aith Social Club premises which sells/recycles second-hand goods. The refurbishment of the Aith Hall providing replacement social facilities released the premises for reuse.

### Transport

12.1 The area is linked to Lerwick by the two lane A971 from Walls. Most of the other roads in the area are single track with passing places. The "Sustrans" North Sea cycle route passes through the area via Bixter and Aith.

#### • Road Improvement Programme

12.2 The long awaited Bixter Brae improvement scheme on the B9071 to Aith was completed at the end of 2001. The Community Council would like to see the road improvement continued for a further half mile to Paets of Twatt, but wish the road through the village of Aith to remain as single track with passing places.

12.3 The Community Council has requested the provision of a parking area in Bixter at the B9071 junction to provide a

park and ride parking area, to encourage car sharing and travel by the bus. The works will cost an estimated £30K and, if the necessary land can be purchased, construction will be started in 2001/2.

**12.4** Improvements to the B9071 from **Park Hall to the Sand junction** have also been identified and are included in the capital programme in 2002/2004. There is also a scheme to provide street lighting and pavements in the centre of **Aith** in 2002/03. The Community Council has requested speed restrictions at Tresta and further traffic calming measures at Bixter.

- **Public Transport**

**12.5** There is a twice-daily bus service from Walls to Lerwick and a daily service from Aith to Lerwick, both of which pass through Bixter. There are feeder bus services from Skeld, Clousta, Aith and Sandsound to Bixter. There is a weekly shopper bus service from the Aith and Skeld areas to Bixter and Lerwick. A Dial-a-Ride shopper service is available from West Burrafirth to Bixter and there is also a late night Saturday service from Lerwick to Bixter and Aith.

### **Population and Housing**

**13.1** The number of new houses built in Sandsting and Aithsting has been steady, with an average of 5 house completions per annum since 1994. However the population is in slow decline, falling from 841 in 1981 to a projected figure of around 740 in 2011. There are two Council housing schemes at Aith and one in both Skeld and Bixter. As part of the Council's rolling programme, environmental improvement works are programmed for Grindibrek, Skeld in 2006/7. Tenants at Lingaro, Bixter have requested access improvements under the same programme; these are scheduled for 2008/10. Hjalmland Housing Association also has four houses at Bixter.

- **Housing Zones**

**13.2** Within the framework of the Local Plan housing policies, the main settlements at Aith, Bixter and Skeld are identified as housing Zone 1, where development is encouraged. All other settled areas andcrofting townships are identified as Zone 2 where new houses are favourably considered. New houses are strictly controlled in the remaining generally uninhabited areas and the open moorland, which is classed as Zone 4. Further details of the housing zone requirements are set out in policy **LP HOU4** and shown on the Proposals Map.

### **Community Services and Facilities**

- **Schools**

**14.1** The two-teacher primary school at Skeld was substantially extended and refurbished in 1997. The school roll for the year 2001 is 26 pupils, up 15 on the 1991 figure. The Junior High School at Aith, which has nursery, primary and secondary departments is also being extended, the school roll is 197 pupils in 2001, up 40 on the 1991 figure.

- **Halls**

**14.2** There is a community hall at Bixter. Skeld also has a hall, together with the Sail Loft, the clubhouse for the Reawick and District Boating Club. The hall at Aith has recently been refurbished, providing excellent facilities for the whole community. The Rankin Lounge in the hall is open in the evenings at the weekend. During the summer months there is a café in the hall, which also provides youth hostel accommodation.

- **Health**

**14.3** A new health centre at Bixter, providing a wide range of medical services opened in 2002. The doctor also holds weekly outreach surgeries at Skeld, Aith and Weisdale.

- **Leisure and Other Facilities**

**14.4** A new leisure centre with a swimming pool is currently under construction at Aith. The Centre is due to open in 2002, completing the network of leisure centres throughout Shetland.

**14.5** There are several churches in the area with the Church of Scotland, Congregational, Methodist and Baptists all represented.

**14.6** The volunteer fire service is based in Bixter. This service is to be upgraded with the building of a new fire station.

**14.7** In addition to the fuel pumps at the shops and garages at Bixter and Aith, fuel is also available at Reawick. There are public toilets at Bixter and Skeld, with planning permission being granted for toilets at Aith marina.

- **Water-based Facilities**

**14.8** Aith marina offers a safe haven for 36 craft.

**Proposal 5**

**The Aith Boating Club has submitted a request for funding for the construction of a boathouse store/shed. The preferred site for the proposed building is the east side of the marina.**

**14.9** The lifeboat station in Aith, the most northerly in Britain, is one of two lifeboat stations in Shetland, the other being in Lerwick. A new Severn class lifeboat came into service in 1998 and a new shore station providing improved facilities is planned.

**Proposal 6**

**There are proposals to build a new lifeboat shore station, with improved crew facilities and a small shop selling RNLI merchandise, on the same site as the existing building at the Aith pier.**

- **Skeld Waterfront Project**

**14.10** The Skeld Waterfront redevelopment project is an ambitious community led initiative to regenerate the area around the pier, providing a breakwater, marina and onshore tourist and other facilities. The Council has approved partial funding for the project, but additional funding from other sources is required. A project feasibility study is being undertaken. The results of this study will indicate the type and scale of the facilities to be provided.

**Proposal 7**

**The local community intends to promote a scheme to regenerate the area around Skeld Pier. The land required for the Skeld waterfront redevelopment project is identified on the Skeld Inset Map.**



Skeld Waterfront

