

Assynt Local Place Plan 2026-2030

Assynt Community Council

Coordinated by the Assynt Development Trust
on behalf of the local community.

March 2026



Photos: Struan Candlish & Discover Assynt

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Introduction

This Local Place was prepared by Assynt Community Council in coordination with the Assynt Development Trust on behalf of the local community. This Local Place Plan (LPP) offers a spatial profile of the main settlement and larger townships of Assynt, focusing on community aspirations and land use opportunities. Designed to guide development over the next 5 to 10 years, the Local Place Plan extends until approximately 2030.

Rooted in consultations with our local community, this plan reflects views gathered through community engagement in 2025 and early 2026. It addresses key issues highlighted by residents

Regard for NPF4

The Plan has regard for the [National Planning Framework 4](#) (NPF4) specifically resonating with the NPF4 overarching principles of Local Living and Rural Revitalisation. The Assynt Community Council is bounded to the south west by the Inverkirkaig River and the Cromalt Hills, to the west by Minch, the north by Eddrachillis Bay and Loch a' Chàirn Bhàin, and the north east by Loch Glencoul and Ben More Assynt. The west (Inverkirkaig, Badnaban, Strathan, Baddidarroch, Brackloch, Torbreck and Rhicarn, Achmelvich and Feadan, Stoer, Balchladich, Clashmore, Raffin) , north (Culkein Stoer, Achnacarnin, Clashnessie, Culkein Drumbeg, Nedd Kylesku, Unapool, Newton) and south (Elphin, Knockan) of the area is defined by crofting townships. Lochinver is the major conurbation and Inchnadamph and Altnacealgach are dominated by traditional hotels.

There is a distance of approximately 34km from Altnacealgach northwest to Point of Stoer, and a circumferential route from Inverkirkaig to Point of Stoer, on to Unapool and south to Knockan of approximately 45km. The residents of each township identified the “settlement development boundary” of their individual settlements to place them within the wider rural homes and development context and with regard to the principal of Local Living.



Photo: Chris Puddephatt

Regard for Local Development Plan

The Plan has regard for the current Local Development Plan for the Local Place Plan Area which comprises of two current adopted Local Development Plans, the [Highland-wide Local Development Plan](#) (HwLDP) (2012) and the [Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan](#) (CaSPlan) (2018). The previous Locality Plan [Assynt Community Plan](#) (2019) and the present consultation highlights the need for allocated areas for affordable housing, and to address the need for employment and support local economy opportunities allocate areas for commercial development and better internet connectivity. Proposals for inclusion in the subsequent iteration of the LPP are detailed on page 49.

Summary of Local Priorities

The consultation process has identified many opportunities for specific developments, which are detailed on the maps in this document, and also identified needs and challenges that local people want to see being addressed. An agenda of priority needs are set out at the end of the document and summarized here:

- Support affordable housing developments to meet local present and future demand.
- Investigate ways to limit the proportion of second homes.
- Fast track planning permission and building warrants for new homes for local people.
- Address the inadequacy of bus services.
- Improve roads, fix potholes, enhance maintenance, and develop roadside paths for pedestrians.
- Address gaps and weaknesses in broadband and mobile phone coverage.
- Support enhancements to community buildings.
- Explore opportunities for new rural childcare provision.
- Invest in skills development opportunities, such as apprenticeships and greater use of community facilities for learning.
- Develop facilities for young people, such as a youth hub and skate park.
- Address the desperate need for more care for elderly people.
- Address the drugs problem.
- Provide better support for emergency services.
- Support new renewable energy developments, connections and infrastructure.
- Support local food developments and establishment of new crofts
- Review commercial assets to identify resources with spare capacity that can be repurposed.
- Retain earnings from Lochinver harbour for local use, including for the development of harbour facilities and enterprises, such as a seaweed enterprise.

Community Engagement

The strategy for community engagement was to ensure participation not just from the main settlement of Lochinver, which had been the main focus of a previous Local Development Plan, but also from all the other townships that had not been included in spatial plans since 1987. To ensure a constructive process all responses were treated as confidential. The process involved a long initial stage of consultation and idea generation through an online survey, interviews, drop-in sessions and meetings with school children. More than 88 people were involved in interviews or drop-in sessions, 12 primary school children took part and a further 22 people filled in online surveys. After integrating all of these ideas there was then a feedback process, which involved further drop-in sessions and sharing of draft maps and proposals with interested individuals, landowners and grazing committees. This feedback was used to eliminate controversial ideas and identify those for which there is strong support. We cannot guarantee consensus for all ideas, nor the agreement of landowners who did not respond.

Outlying Townships Engagement

In the second half of 2025 more than 70 residents living outwith Lochinver were interviewed to help develop draft township maps to understand the spatial opportunities and challenges for each settlement. As some of these townships have low residence occupancy rates, key informants were identified through local networks. Between interviews the draft maps were updated with annotations and at the end all ideas were collated in a spreadsheet and on the maps.

Student Engagement

A session was held in December 2025 to engage the pupils of the Lochinver Primary School in the process and gather their ideas (see map on page 13). Feedback opportunities were given to Ullapool High School students at a workshop with the S3 class in February and with the youth worker in March 2026.

Drop-in Sessions

To engage the community more widely, three staffed drop-in sessions were held in Lochinver, Elphin and Drumbeg, with more than 40 participants. At these sessions maps were shared with community members, whose ideas were gathered and discussions were facilitated about potential developments. A subsequent meeting was held in Elphin to discuss further. Two further feedback drop-in sessions were held in March 2026 in Stoer and Lochinver, with 12 participants, to enable responses to the collated map annotations, to gauge support for suggestions and identify controversial ideas.



Photos: Romany Garnett

Online Survey

To enable participation by a broader range of the community, an online survey was created and advertised using social media. There were 22 responses.

Online Public Feedback

The Local Place Plan draft maps with community annotations were posted online by Assynt Development Trust for comment in late February and March 2026.

Feedback Summary

Strong support was given to the Glebe affordable house plan. Discussions with the harbour superintendent clarified possible harbour developments. Some proposals raised by community members as important, including a helipad for emergency medical helicopter use and a site for huts, were removed from specific maps because the sites suggested were not approved by the landowners. Some potential new house sites and proposed sites for wind and tidal/hydro power were added.

The Area

The Local Place Plan covers the whole of the Assynt Community Council Area. The Area-wide map shows the area covered by each of the detailed settlement Insert Maps.

Population and local context

Assynt has a total population of about 1020 people. It is part of the North West 2045 area, which consists of the seven rural parishes of Coigach, Assynt, Scourie, Kinlochbervie, Durness, Tongue/Melness/Skerry and Bettyhill/Strathnaver/Altnaharra, which together have an area of about 300km² and a population of just over 3000, making it one of the least densely populated areas in Europe. Most of that population inhabit coastal villages and hamlets.

Infrastructure

Assynt, described by the poet Norman MacCaig as ‘this most beautiful corner of the land’ is a large area of approximately 55,750 ha, with iconic mountains and moorland inland. Land access to the parish is by three roads, from the north, south and east. The harbour at Lochinver is a significant port for international and inshore fishing, aquaculture and recreational use. The parish is served by a single primary school in Lochinver and the nearest high school is in Ullapool. There is a health centre and a day care facility for elderly people in Lochinver. There is a small shop in Clachtoll and another in Drumbeg, but otherwise all shops are in Lochinver.

Community Land Ownership and Buildings: The community council area land ownership is characterised by large estates and a large part of the parish (23,612 ha, 42.2%) is in community ownership. This land consists mostly of croft, grazings or uplands. The key land holdings in community ownership are listed in Table 1. (Note that Assynt Foundation’s landholding totals 18,072 ha but some of that, Drumrunie, is in Loch Broom Community Council area)

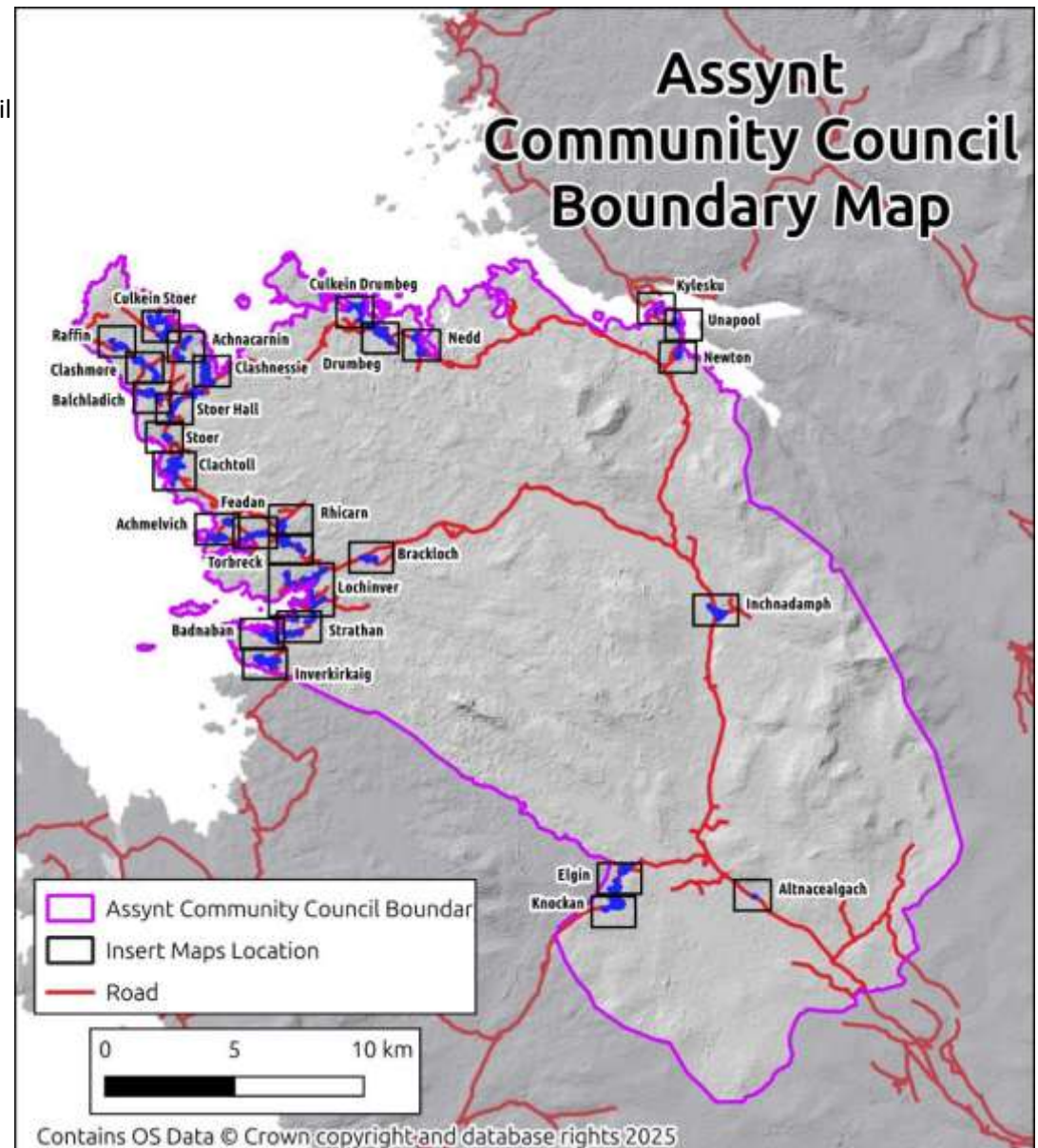


Table 1. List of Community Owned Larger Landholdings

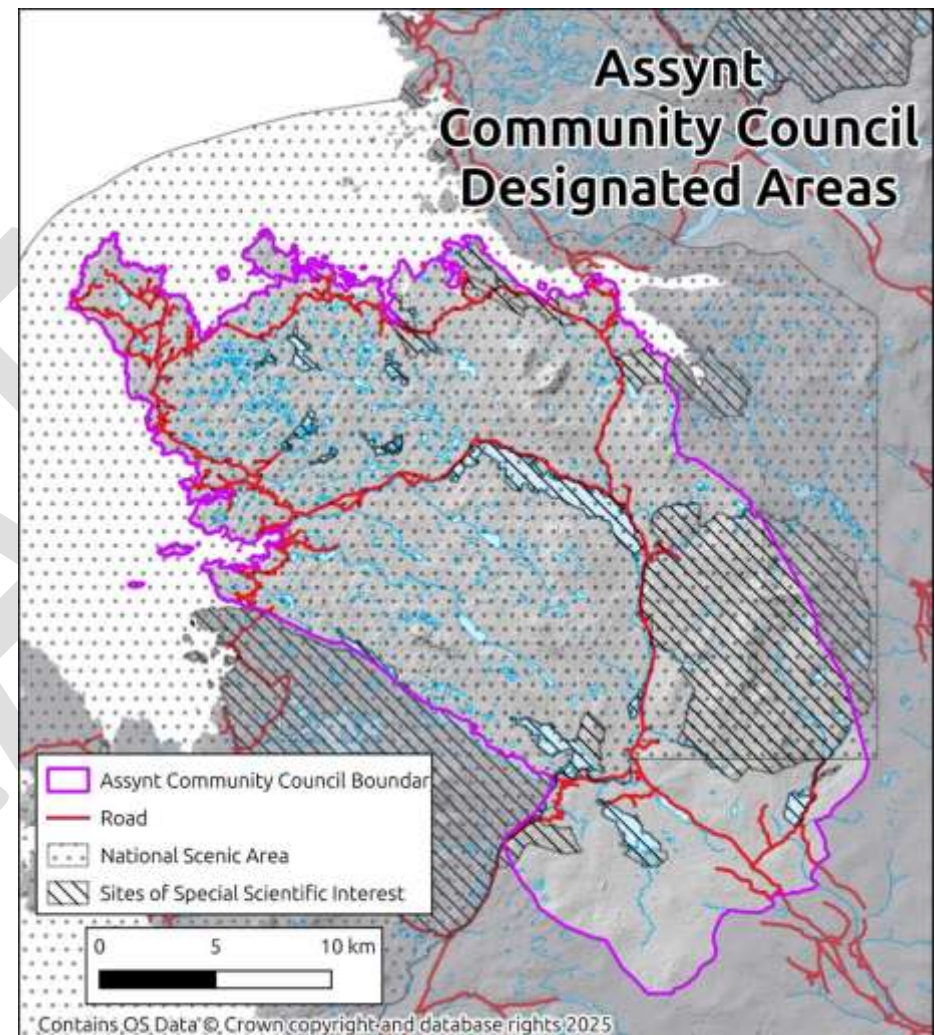
Location	Area (ha)
Assynt Crofters Trust: North Assynt	8,962
Assynt Foundation: Glencanisp	13,204
Culag Community Woodland Trust: Little Assynt	1,153
Kylesku Crofter Trust	268
Assynt Development Trust: Glencanisp Glebe	25

Designated Areas

Assynt Community Council has 47,120ha or 85.5% of its total area with one or more designations areas (*Table 2*). These designations are Sites of Scientific Interest (SSSI), and National Scenic Areas designated by NatureScot.

Table 2 List of Designated Sites within Assynt Community Council Area.

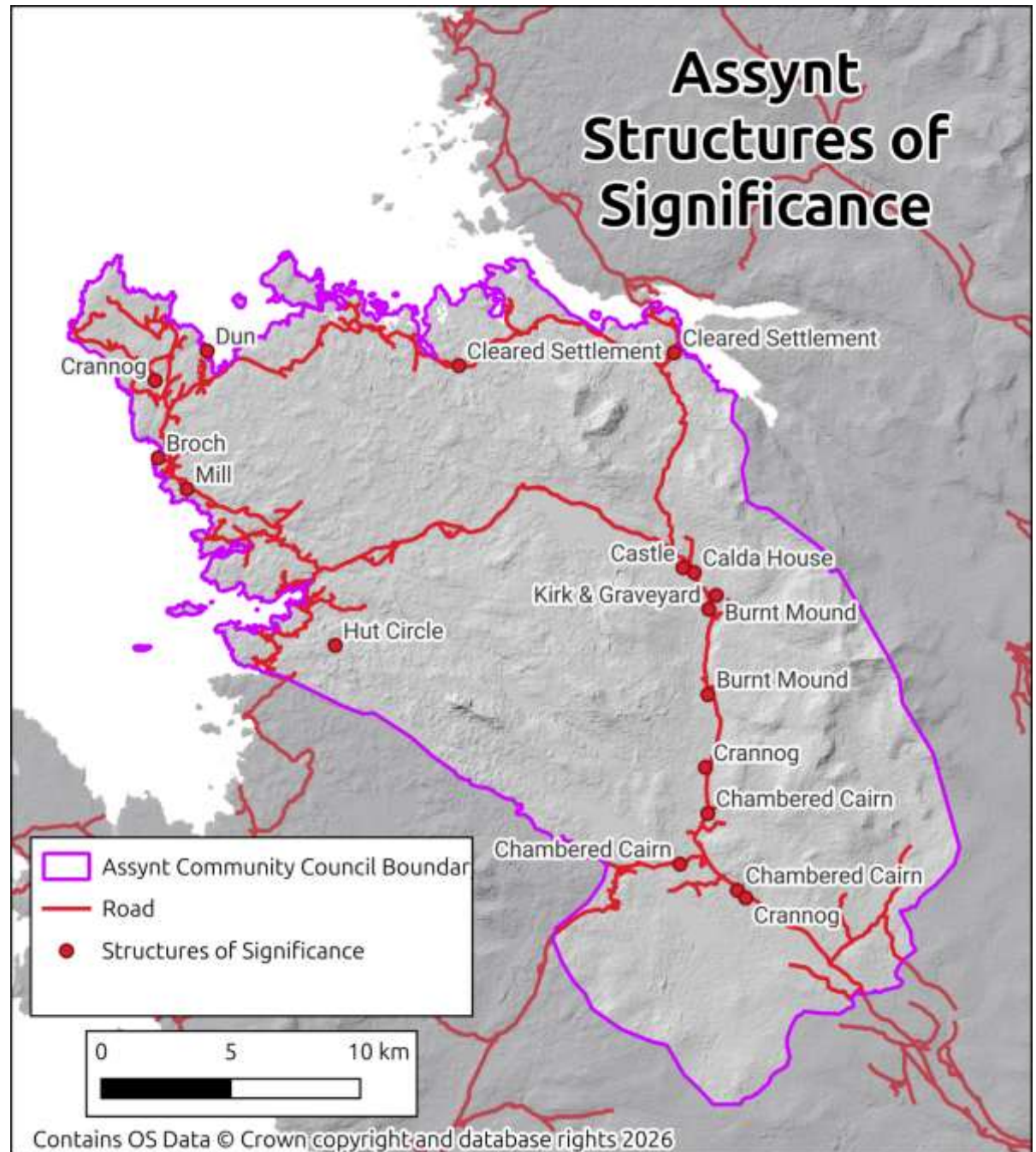
Designated Location	Type	Total Area (ha)	Area in Assynt CC (ha)
Coigach-Assynt	NSA	90,200	46,135
Ardvar Woodlands	SSSI	730	730
Ben More Assynt	SSSI	8,834	7,177
Cam Loch	SSSI	477	477
Inverpoly	SSSI	11,882	133
Loch Beannach Islands	SSSI	32	32
Loch Glencoul	SSSI	896	263
Loch Urigill	SSSI	321	321
Loch Awe and Loch Alish	SSSI	146	146
Assynt Lochs	SSSI	1,158	1,158



Structures of Significance

There are over 187 sites of interest, as surveyed by AOC Archaeology in the Hidden Lives project (see <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Source/SHG24882>). Some of the structures within the area that are of particular significance to the community, and have been excavated or conserved by Historic Assynt are the following.

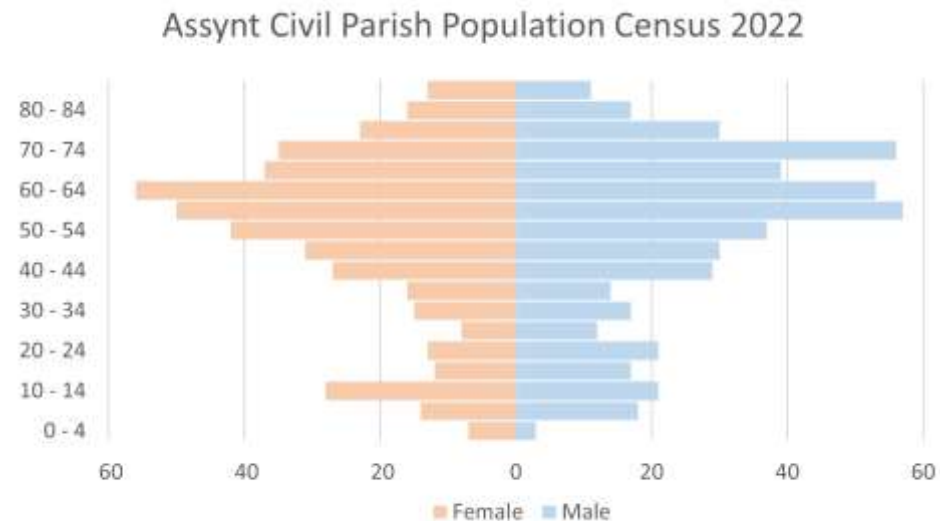
- Clachtoll Broch
- Ardvreck Castle & Calda House
- Inchnadamph Kirk and graveyard
- The Clashnessie Dun
- Neolithic chambered cairns at Ledbeg, Lyne and Loch Borralan.
- Bronze age hut circles at Cnocnaneach
- Crannogs in Loch Borralan and Loch Awe and at Clashmore
- Burnt mounds at Stronchrubie and Allt Drum nan Tor
- Cleared settlements at Glenleraig and Newton
- The old mill at Alltan na Bradhan



Assets, Opportunities, Needs and Challenges

Fragile Community

Highland Communities have been classified using the Highland Fragile Communities Tool, which evaluates 2011 Data Zones for “fragility” based on four key criteria: population, dependency ratio, employment, and housing. The Assynt Community Council area lies within the area covered by the *Sutherland North and West – 05 (SO1010814) [Scourie & Stoer]*, *Sutherland North and West – 06 (SO1010815) [Lochinver & Elphin]* and *Ross and Cromarty North West – 04 (SO1010693) [Inverkirkraig, Coigach and Ardmair]* Data Zones which meet the **Fragile Community Generous Criteria**. It is important to note that the first and third of these include communities outwith Assynt and the data cannot be disaggregated by using the census data boundary for the 1930 Civil Parish of Assynt. However demographic analysis from the 2022 census reveals with some outlying cohort age classes a **regressive or negative growth population pyramid**, indicating a high dependency ratio and declining working-age and child population – for example, there are more than 3 times as many men in the 55-59, 60-64 and 70-74 age brackets as in the 25-29, 30-34 and 35-40 age brackets and four times as many women in the 60-64 bracket as in any of the 25-29, 30-34 and 35-40 age brackets. Under fives, of both sexes, are the least numerous of any age bracket by far. This is reflected in falling school roles and the closure of three out of four of the primary schools in the parish over recent decades.



In light of these demographic challenges and the classification of the relevant Data Zones we request that with reference to the implementation of MPF4 for development that the Assynt Community Council be formally recognised as a **Fragile Community**.

Homes

We support the construction of new homes in appropriate locations, built to environmentally sustainable standards. The community faces significant challenges due to an ageing population and declining school enrolment, which threaten its long-term sustainability. As previously identified ([Assynt Community Plan 2019](#), [Assynt Housing Needs Report 2019](#), [Assynt Business Survey 2019](#)) there remains an urgent need for various types of housing to enable young people to remain and to attract new residents to Assynt to boost the local population. Many respondents sought limitations on the proportion of houses that are second homes and unoccupied through much of the year, with suggestions of an 'empty house tax' or other measures to release housing. There is a need for more houses that are earmarked for local residents and key workers and a suggestion of a programme of centralised house purchasing for renting to locals. The shortage of housing is linked to the sustainability of the wider local culture. As one respondent said, what is needed is "opportunities to buy modest, affordable homes and to bring up families locally...without a core of people born and raised here, the continuity of Highland culture and community identity will be lost".

Affordable Housing

Although the settlements of Assynt benefited from the completion of 116 homes between 2000 to 2023 only 12 of these homes were affordable homes. There is a need for more affordable housing, particularly rental housing for people with young families. Compared to the Highland Council average levels of 19% social rented housing and 11% private rented housing, a total of 30% of all housing, Assynt has only 22%: 16% social housing and 6% private rented housing. There is also a call for more sheltered housing for elderly people.

Since Assynt Development Trust bought the Glebe land close to Lochinver, there is now a project for the development of community-owned affordable housing, the first phase of which already has planning permission. Strong support was shown during the community engagement process for this project. It is now increasingly appreciated that our location makes establishing new housing significantly more expensive than in other parts of the country, due to a combination of difficult site conditions requiring expensive ground work, cost premiums for materials due to haulage, storage and other logistics, a shortage of skilled tradespeople and additional costs due to travel and accommodation for workers coming outwith the area to provide skilled construction services. It is vital that these additional costs are taken into account and supported.



Potential Housing plots in Assynt

To facilitate more affordable building, there is a clear need for cheap housing plots. A suggestion was made that there is croft land with poor agricultural value close to settlements that could be used for house plots. There is a call for a fast-track for planning applications from local people.

The Local Place Plan consultations identified 13 plots of land with a cumulative area of 64743m² within the settlements. Table 3 lists the areas and locations of each of these plots.

Table 3: List of Potential Housing Plots in Assynt

Site	Approx Area (m2)	Location Map	Comments
Achmelvich	700	Achmelvich	To be investigated
Lochinver fank	4900	Lochiver & Baddidarach	To be investigated
Glebe A2	1900	Lochinver	Phase 1
Elphin Common Grazings (Land Court Decision (RN) 589-1992)	7000	Elphin	Designated
Kylesku	3700		To be Investigated
Taigh na Fraoch	33000	Taigh na Fraoch, Stoer Hall & Rienachait	Designated
Glebe B2	2643	Lochinver	Phase 1
Glebe B1	1300	Lochinver	Phase 1
Glebe D	1900	Lochinver	Phase 2
Glebe E1	1200	Lochinver	Phase 2
Glebe E2	1900	Lochinver	Phase 2
Glebe E3	3400	Lochinver	Phase 2
Glebe F	1200	Lochinver	Phase 3
Total	64743		

Community Infrastructure

Common themes were identified by the communities of different townships. Many of these themes were also identified by the community the Assynt Community Plan 2019 and are detailed below.

Transportation: The lack of public transport connections, particularly with Inverness, is a major problem raised repeatedly in the consultation. On the survey question about infrastructure improvements needed, expansion of public transport services was the most popular item, wanted by 50% of responders. Lack of timetable information is identified as a problem, particularly about disruptions caused by bad weather. The poor transport links contribute to increased cost of living and increased car dependence. Specific examples illustrate some of the issues:

- It's no longer possible to travel to Inverness for an appointment and return the same day.
- There is no public transport to meet trains at Lairg.
- There is no public transport to Golspie, which is the nearest care home.
- There is no bus connection from the afternoon ferry from Stornoway to Assynt.
- There is no Sunday bus to Ullapool so it's impossible to go away by public transport for the weekend as you can't get back on Sunday.
- There is often a lack of clarity as to who to contact and how, and when booking is required, for pickup by buses between Stoer/Drumbeg/Achmelvich and Lochinver.
- Inadequate infrequent services prohibit employment opportunities and frustrate managing on limited budgets.

It is clear that the current bus service is not fit for purpose and far less than required to help to reduce car use.

Other transport issues include the need for a second community taxi, more transport for elderly people, greater availability of the community bus, a dedicated hospital car, a car hire option and restoration of the bike bus service. A helipad for medical helicopter use with easy road access is seen as a need but a site is not agreed. Concerns have been expressed about electric vehicle charging facilities being frequently out of order and more chargers are needed to cope with growing local and tourist demand, yet investment by the local authority in car parking (e.g. at Achmelvich) has not included any new EV chargers.

Roads: The poor quality of roads and problem of potholes, in particular on the coastal roads outwith Lochinver, requires urgent attention. Many people commented on the dire state of road surfaces and the need for more and bigger passing places to ease congestion. There is no doubt that the promotion of the North Coast 500 has caused a massive increase in traffic, with many tourist hotspots, such as the road to Achmelvich, suffering severe road degradation as a result. Winter road maintenance is a concern, with many people commenting on this including challenges faced by gritters, the lack of a gritter shed, the need for more local control over gritter routes and more frequent gritting and snow clearance.

Paths: Several suggestions about paths for walkers and cyclists were made, some of which are on the maps for specific townships. They include a cycle route from Little Assynt to Lochinver, via the bridge at Inveruplan, which requires upgrade.

Internet and Mobile Phone Connections: Particularly outwith Lochinver, there is a lack of high-capacity fibre broadband and many gaps in mobile phone coverage, which has a severe impact on local education, livelihoods, businesses and development potential, particularly for online working. High quality fibre optic broadband is needed throughout the whole area.

Community buildings and land assets: Assynt is exceptionally rich in community-owned land (see page 4 above). We also own the Assynt Leisure centre building, An Cala (the former Fishermen's Mission building), have a community-run facility for elderly people, the Assynt Centre run by Community Care Assynt, have a community transport company (Connect Assynt) and community halls in Lochinver, Stoer, Drumbeg and Elphin. Community buyouts are suggested for Quinag and for the Stoer hostel. There is a call for community halls and other community facilities, such as the Glencanisp studio and pole-barn, to be better signed, with contact details for bookings, and for resources and equipment to be shared among them. Some halls (e.g. Stoer) need better heating. A shared community office space, with high speed internet, is proposed.

Health and Wellbeing

Care for Elders: An issue of great concern is the difficulty of finding adequate care, including respite care, for our ageing population. This is described as a 'desperate need' because the lack of such care extends hospital stays and requires people to have to leave the area prematurely. With the closest care facility in Golspie, to which there is no public transport, this causes isolation from families.

Child Care: There is a shortage of child care and a working group from the seven community council areas of the North West 2045 area (NW2045) has been tackling the issue, seeking a mobile childcare solution. They are seeking new Scottish legislation to enable Rural Childcare Practitioners, with the nurturing nature of a childminder, but also the ability to deliver childcare in a non-domestic settings such as local village halls, which is not allowed in current legislation. A second model being explored is a Single Care Model (SCM) for care provision across the age spectrum within a rural community where there have been difficulties with recruitment of staff within adult care as well as childcare. A Highland Working Group has been formed to help support the identification of two pilot areas and how the model could potentially be delivered in Highland region; and a Regulatory Advisory Group at national level is establishing the regulatory parameters within which a Single Care Model could be delivered and to get a SCM Pathfinder underway. Another option is providing a subsidy to a rural childminder to bring their income up to the value of the Living Wage, in addition to ensuring a viable business which doesn't depend on the number of children in their care, making it viable in sparsely populated areas like Assynt. This work has highlighted the challenges of recruiting childminders in the Northwest Highlands but, with no legal barriers, it is hoped that this business model could be piloted in the near future, and adapted to local needs.

Drugs: There is a significant drugs problem in the area, a call for open acknowledgement that this is the case and structured support, including an addictions nurse or social worker. There are suggestions that community models from other places (e.g. Iceland) should be explored for tackling this issue.

Emergency Services: Emergency services are struggling. There is no fire service. There is no coastguard service, despite the Harbour Authority and RNLI volunteer lifeboat being based in Lochinver. The ambulance service needs a base.

Community Council and Community Organisations: The Community Council needs more funding to support local facilities, with a suggestion of a 'Village Officer' with responsibility for maintenance of public areas and/or an 'Engagement Officer' to co-ordinate among community groups and organise get-togethers. An annual public meeting is suggested of all Assynt community bodies and promotion of all the opportunities to get involved.

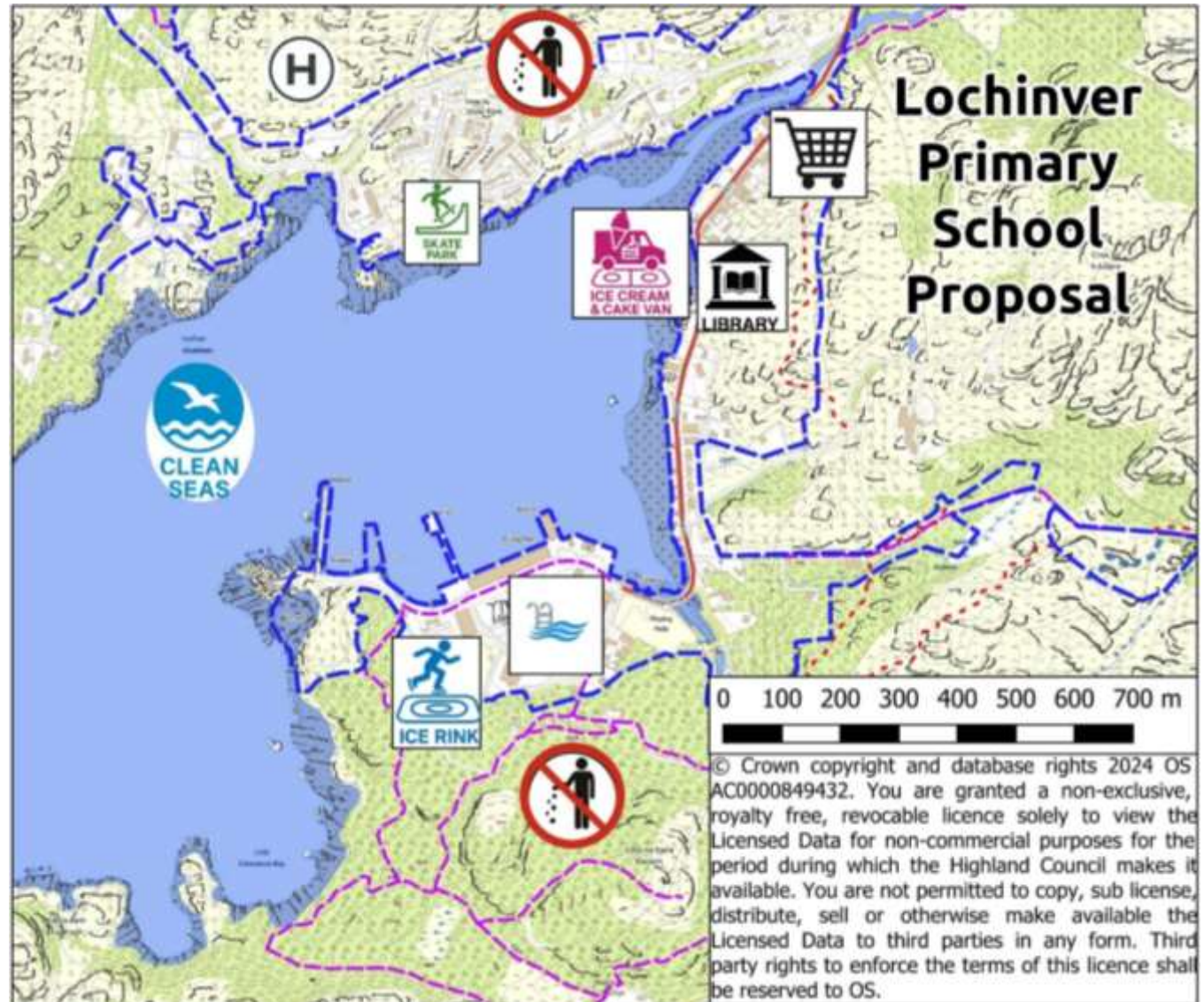
Education, Training and Opportunities for Young People

Lochinver Primary School Proposals

Pupils in the upper class at Lochinver Primary School were asked to identify the key priorities for the area and suggest developments that could improve their life in the community. They then voted on their ideas. This map highlights the improvements our local young people felt were most important in order of importance:

Top priorities

1. A helipad in Lochinver would give the Air Ambulance a safe place to land so they can reach people quickly when someone needs urgent help.
2. **Joint 2nd place:** an ice-cream and cake van, a bigger supermarket, working harder on clean seas and more small bins in the woods.
3. **Joint 3rd place:** a skate park near the pottery, a library at Inverpark, and more *no-litter* signs at Inverpark.
4. **Joint 4th Place:** More nature reserves, a bigger doctor's surgery, a vet, and opticians and a digital games store.
5. **Joint 5th Place:** A swimming pool at the leisure centre and an outdoor ice rink at the harbour.
6. **Joint 6th Place:** A bike shop, bike trails, helpful signs in the woods about where to go,



The lack of any Gaelic medium education at primary level in Assynt is a weakness and is out of step with national policy, given the cultural history of the area as part of the Gàidhealtachd.

As a result of smaller school rolls, there is a lack of specialist subjects available in local schools, for example, the lack of drama and the small range of languages is perceived as a limitation. The inability to study what they want to is cited as a reason for leaving the area.

Not all school leavers want to move away for further or higher education but the opportunities are very limited without moving to Inverness. There is a call for investment in skills development, particularly for school leavers, with vocational opportunities including work experience apprenticeships. Apprenticeships set up with local business would help to address the expense of hiring people from outside Assynt. Trades and skills identified where training is needed include: carpenters, joiners, builders, mechanics, plumbers, electricians, renewable energy services including off-shore wind, ecologists, geologists, kayakers and tourist guides.

The Leisure Centre in Lochinver has potential as a learning hub to provide more educational opportunities, both broadening beyond the school curriculum and also to encourage adult learners, in both formal courses (such as those at the University of the Highlands and Islands) and evening classes in subjects like art, pottery and creative writing. The field centre at Inchnadamph is also highlighted as having potential for local training.

People complain of a lack of youth activities. There is a suggestion that the Leisure Centre could provide more recreational activities for young people, building on the current Assynt Young Minds project. Mountain bike trails and a shelter for gathering at Little Assynt would help, as well as the various Lochinver-specific proposals such as a skate park.

There are links between other issues and problems for young people. For example, several people commented on how inappropriate or overcrowded housing impacts children but that housing alternatives are unaffordable. The plethora of seasonal work but lack of employment opportunities out of the tourist season, is a problem.

Environment and Renewable Energy

Assynt is the only community council area in the Highlands that gets no community benefit from renewable energy. Apart from private sources (e.g. domestic solar panels) and the Assynt Crofters Trust hydro scheme on the Oldany River, there are no renewable energy sources in the parish. This needs to be addressed.

Wind Power: Suggestions include:

- a small wind turbine at the harbour in Lochinver and/or on Soyea island;
- a small turbine at Clashmore;
- looking again into local wind turbines on Assynt Foundation land;
- making connections to wind farms at sea, including those planned north of Sutherland ('West of Orkney Windfarm' and others).

Hydro or Tidal Power: Some potential sites were suggested for hydro schemes, with due care taken for environmental and wildlife impacts:

- the Culag River;
- between Cam Loch and Loch Veyatie;
- Loch Roe;
- Assynt Foundation land, where an earlier feasibility study of hydro schemes should be revisited.

The extremely high costs of electricity connections and lack of 3-phase electricity is identified as a problem. Grant availability, such as the [Scottish Hydro Electric Community Trust](#), needs to be promoted. The harbour area at Lochinver has significant renewable energy potential, for servicing off-shore wind, for renewable electricity provision for boats and future developments of alternative renewable fuels such as hydrogen or ammonia.

Sea and Shore: In the marine environment there is some support for more marine protection and for seaweed cultivation. There is concern about flooding risks, particularly in Lochinver, where the risks of sea level rise are serious and limit development opportunities along the front.

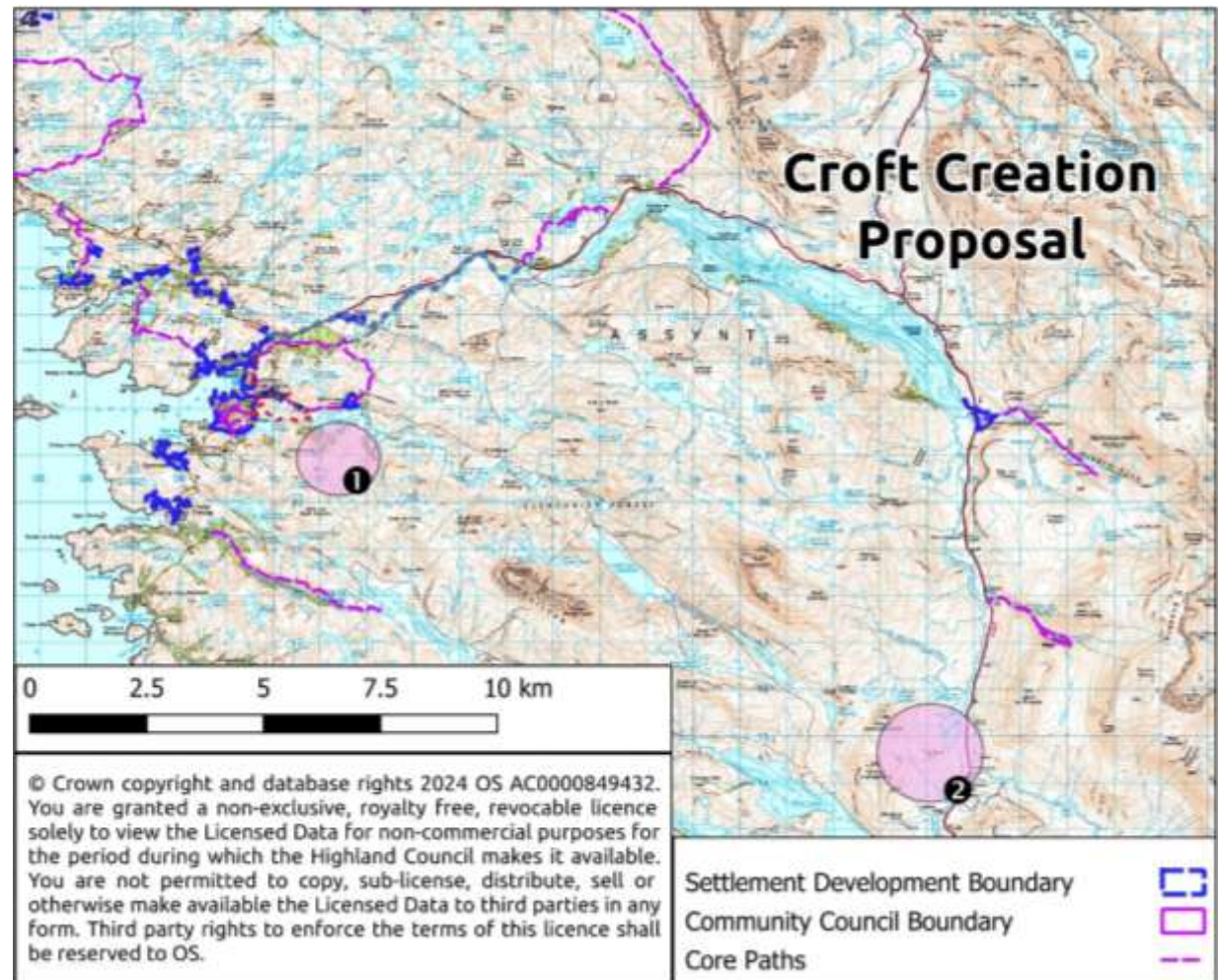
Peatland Restoration: Damaged peatland emits carbon and there are grants available for healing it. Peatland restoration work has already been carried out on Assynt Foundation land on Cul Mor and around Loch Awe. Feasibility studies have been carried out on some other areas. Considerable peatland remains unsurveyed, particularly in North Assynt, and this could be a good opportunity for crofters.

Land Management: Assynt has benefited from a lot of new native woodland establishment over recent decades and more is planned, especially by The Woodland Trust through their management agreement for Assynt Foundation land. Deer management is a major issue, as is management of grazing of livestock. All of these issues are being explored in the NW2045 Rural Land Use Partnership.

Food, Crofts and Huts: Other environmental issues that need to be planned for include local food production, with a desire for a community garden and increased availability of crofts. There is a plan for establishment of new crofts on Assynt Foundation land with two sites identified in Assynt (see map below). While there is interest in huts, there is no agreement on a specific site.

Potential croft creation proposal area map

- ① 4 potential new croft sites proposed.
- ② 5 potential new croft sites proposed.



Commercial Developments

There is a perception of a lack of investment in Assynt. Several respondents called for support for promotion of local businesses.

We encourage business and landowners to maximise commercial opportunities by reviewing their commercial assets throughout the community. Industries that may provide opportunities for Assynt in the future are both offshore e.g. offshore wind and seaweed farming or onshore e.g. food and drinks preparation.

The Local Place Plan process identified 11 sites that may have underutilized capacity, and some of which might be repurposed for new commercial opportunities. Table 4 lists these development opportunities.

Table 4. List of Potentially Underutilised Commercial Properties

	Approx Area (m2)	Location Map	Comments
Coffee Van	100	Achmelvich	To be investigated
Inchnadamph Mountain Rescue Hut	300	Inchnadamph	To be investigated
Loom Workshop	200	Inchnadamph	
Elphin village hall	700	Elphin	To be investigated
Elphin village hall car parking	1300	Elphin	To be investigated
Brackloch	9300	Brackloch	To be investigated by the owner
Glack Development Opp	5000	Lochinver	To be investigated
Ranger Hut	300	Achmelvich	To be investigated
Sheep Shed	100	Achmelvich	To be investigated
Craft Shed	248	Feadan	To be investigated
Snack Van, Stoer Lighthouse	100	Stoer Lighthouse	To be investigated
Jimmy's Shed, Retail opportunity	100	Lochinver	To be investigated
Total in metres	17748		

Harbours: Assynt has two harbours, at Lochinver and Kylesku.

There is concern about the need for ongoing maintenance of the slipway and breakwater at Kylesku.

Lochinver Harbour has considerable potential for development and many suggestions were made by consultees. Lochinver harbour brings in considerable income to Highland Council and there is a strong wish for more of this to be ringfenced for local developments of harbour facilities and for the benefit of the

local community. The harbour area is already a significant source of local employment and it should be developed to create more livelihood opportunities and local resources. In addition to the renewable energy-related points above, these include the following (plus see the map on page 30).

- Investment in the pontoons, including improved security.
- Facilities for visiting boats: showers and toilets for both sexes, laundry and wifi.
- Marina provision for tall ships, lugger ships, commercial and marine leisure boats, perhaps leading to a boat festival.
- Services and improved infrastructure for yachts, including better slip-way and bigger boat-lift, hosing, marine engineering, varnishing, every-day diesel sales.
- An additional pier.
- A boat shed for storage and servicing.
- Seaweed harvesting, drying and processing
- Enabling fish sales at the pier.
- Recycling marine plastics: Lochinver Harbour is signed up to the KIMO, Fishing for Litter scheme, whereby vessels are encouraged to bring marine litter ashore for disposal, but these plastics need to be sorted for recycling. This requires either a mobile processor (plastics lorry) to service multiple sites in the region, or a sorting facility with funding for staff.

Heritage: Assynt lacks any kind of heritage centre or museum other than the volunteer-run kirk at Inchnadamph, and there is enthusiasm for making a more permanent centre for heritage, including fishing history. This could involve co-ordination between multiple local organisations including Historic Assynt, linking with crofters and other land owners, tourism organisations and businesses. The ranger hut at Clachtoll requires ongoing maintenance. The much-loved Achmelvich ranger hut was destroyed during Highland Council's development of the new car park and needs to be replaced with a new, improved hut.

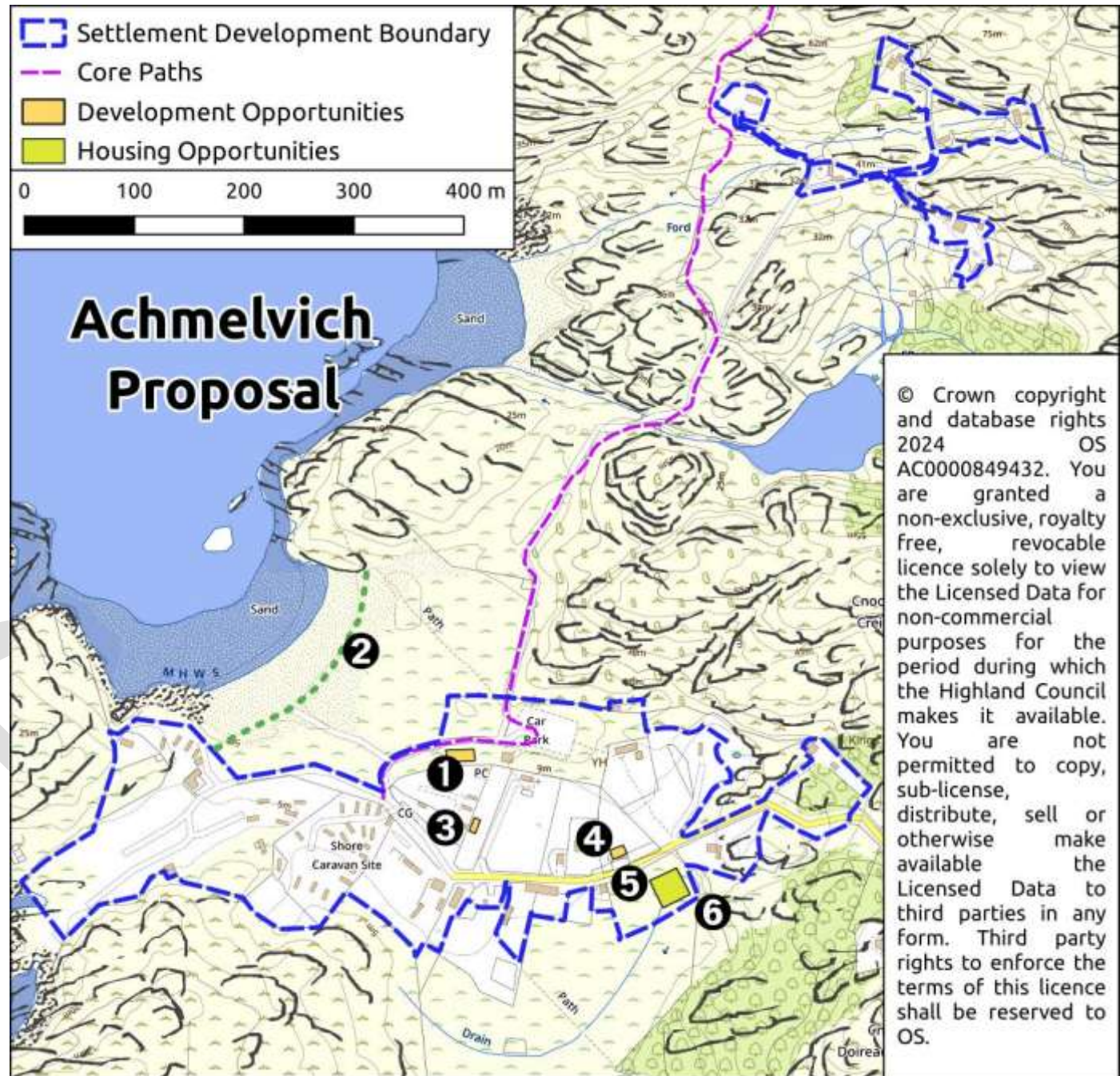
Proposals Achmelvich

Potential Development Opportunity

- ① Site for new ranger hut.
- ② Clearing of marram grass on beach.
- ③ Site for mobile coffee/daytime snack van.
- ④ Sheep shed proposal for shelter at lambing time.
- ⑤ Gate to allow access to footpath across field leading to the sea.

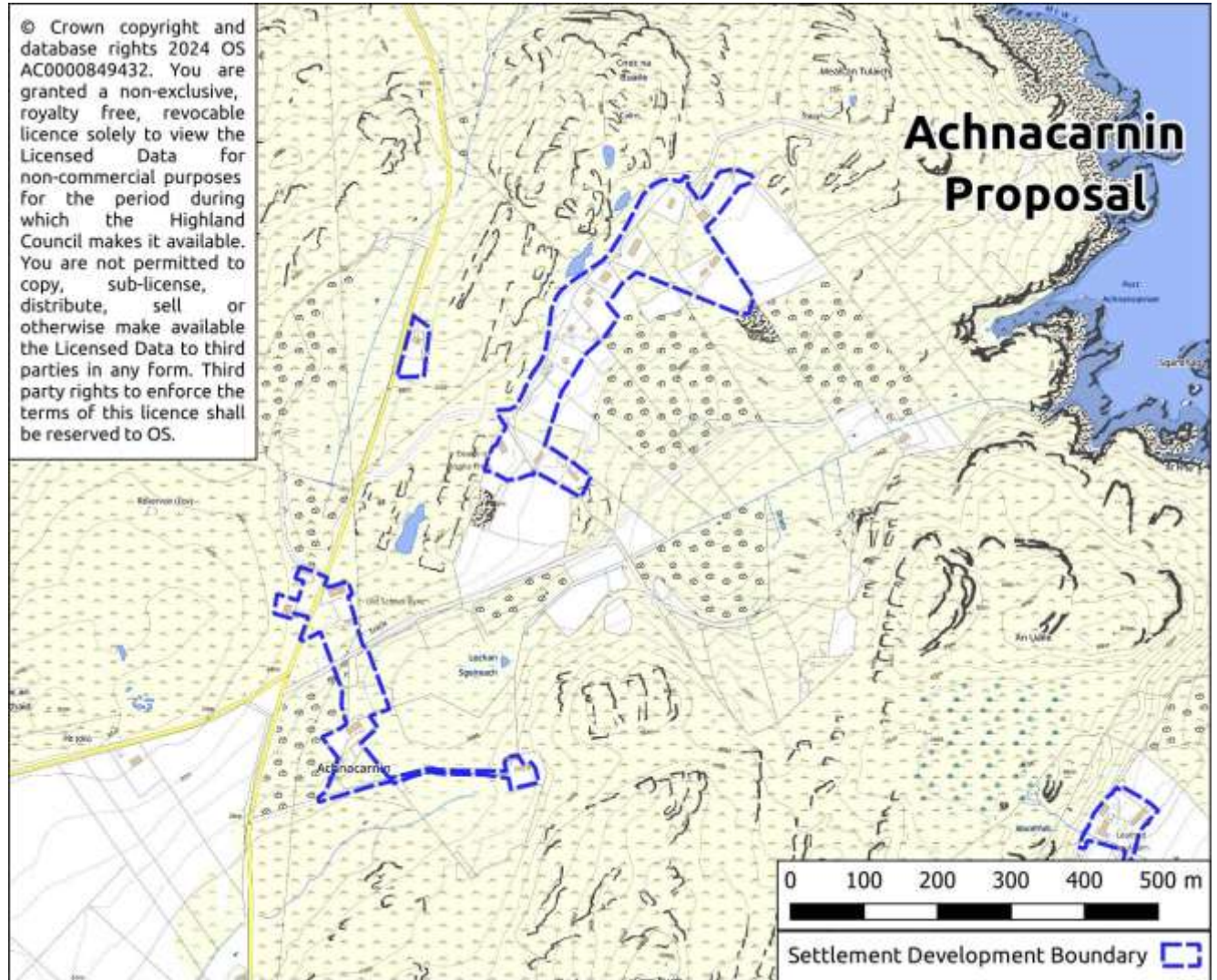
Housing Development Opportunity

- ⑥ Affordable housing. Requires site investigation



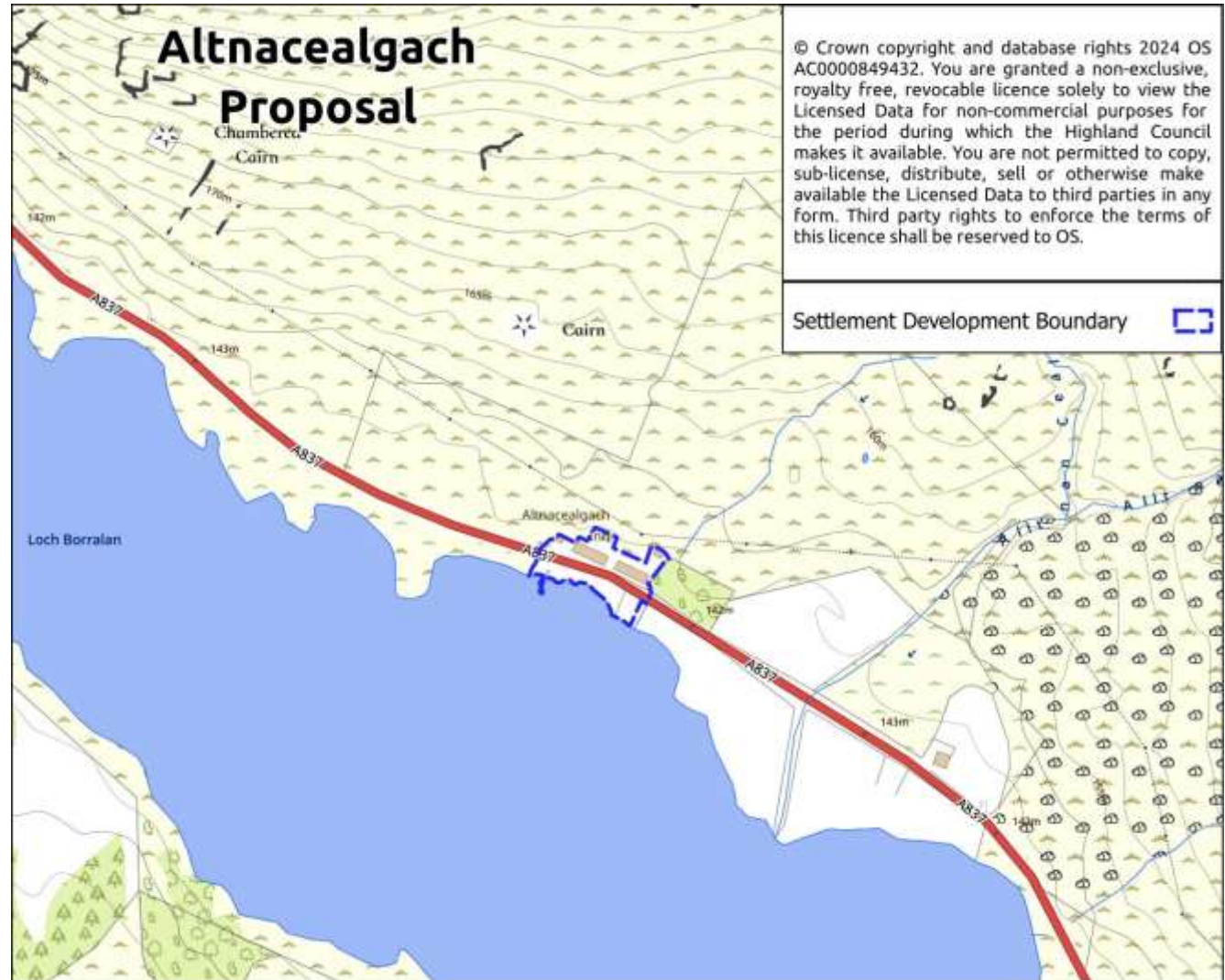
Achnacarnin

No new development proposals



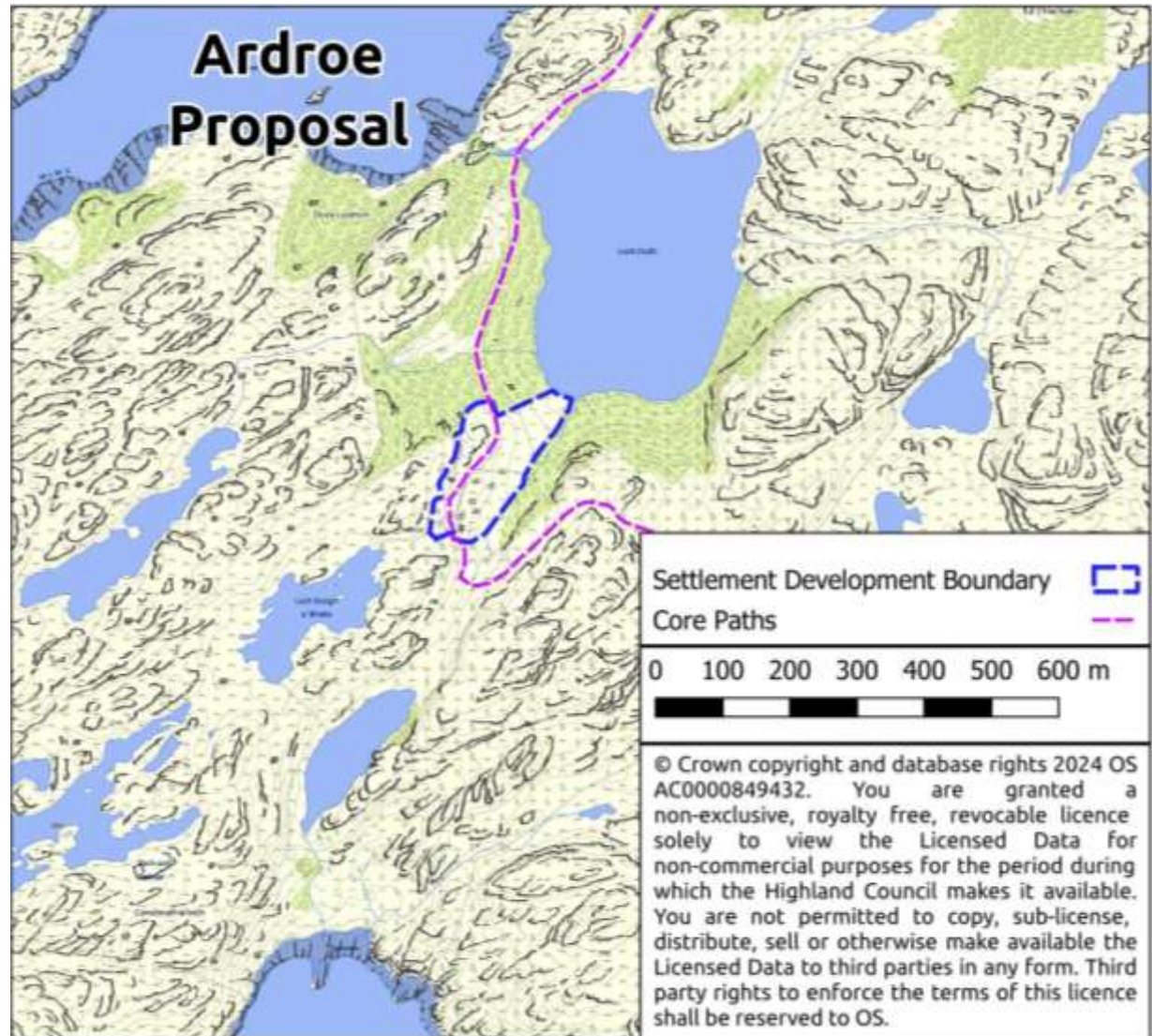
Altnacealgach

No new development proposals



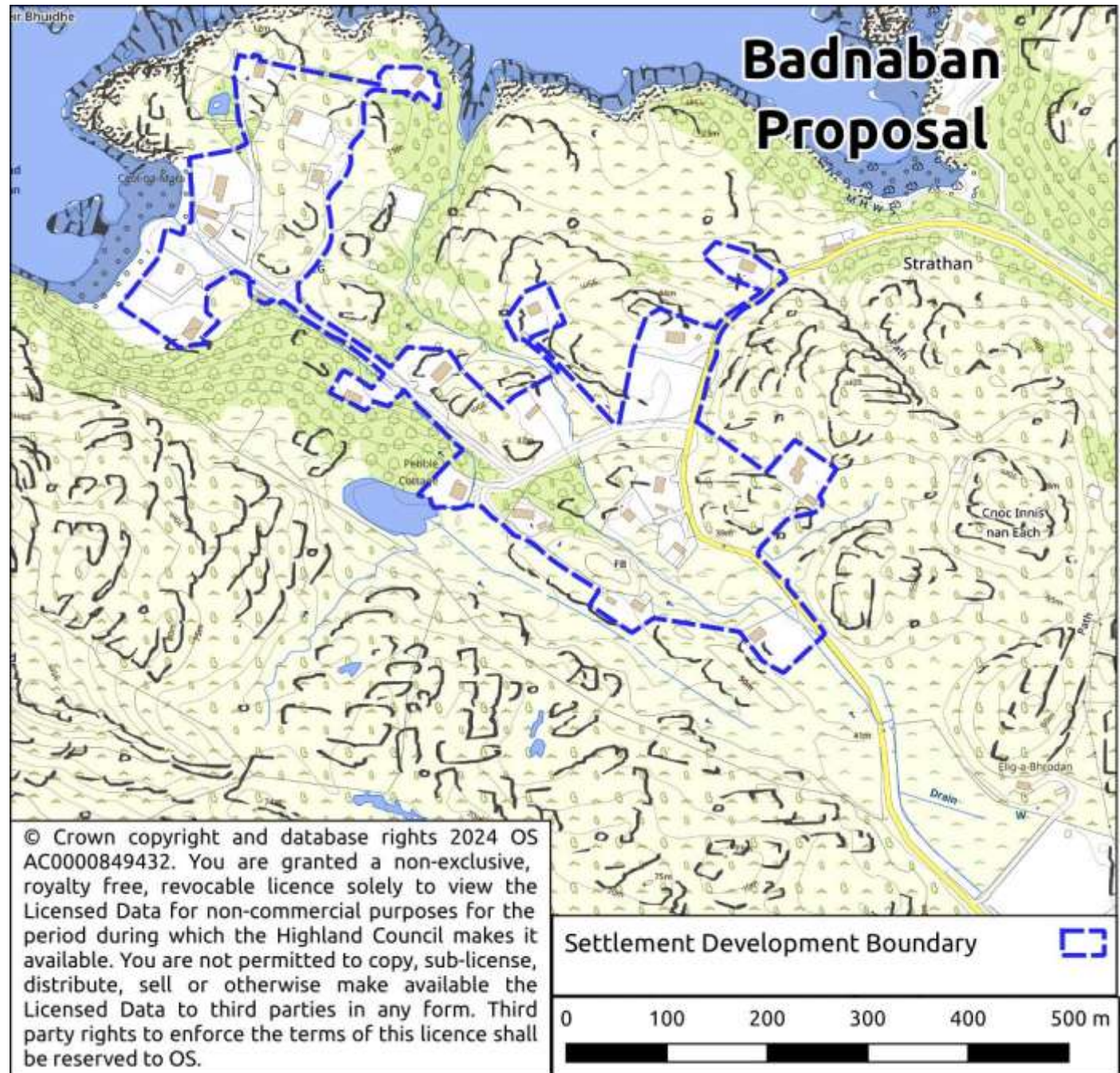
Ardroe

No new development proposals



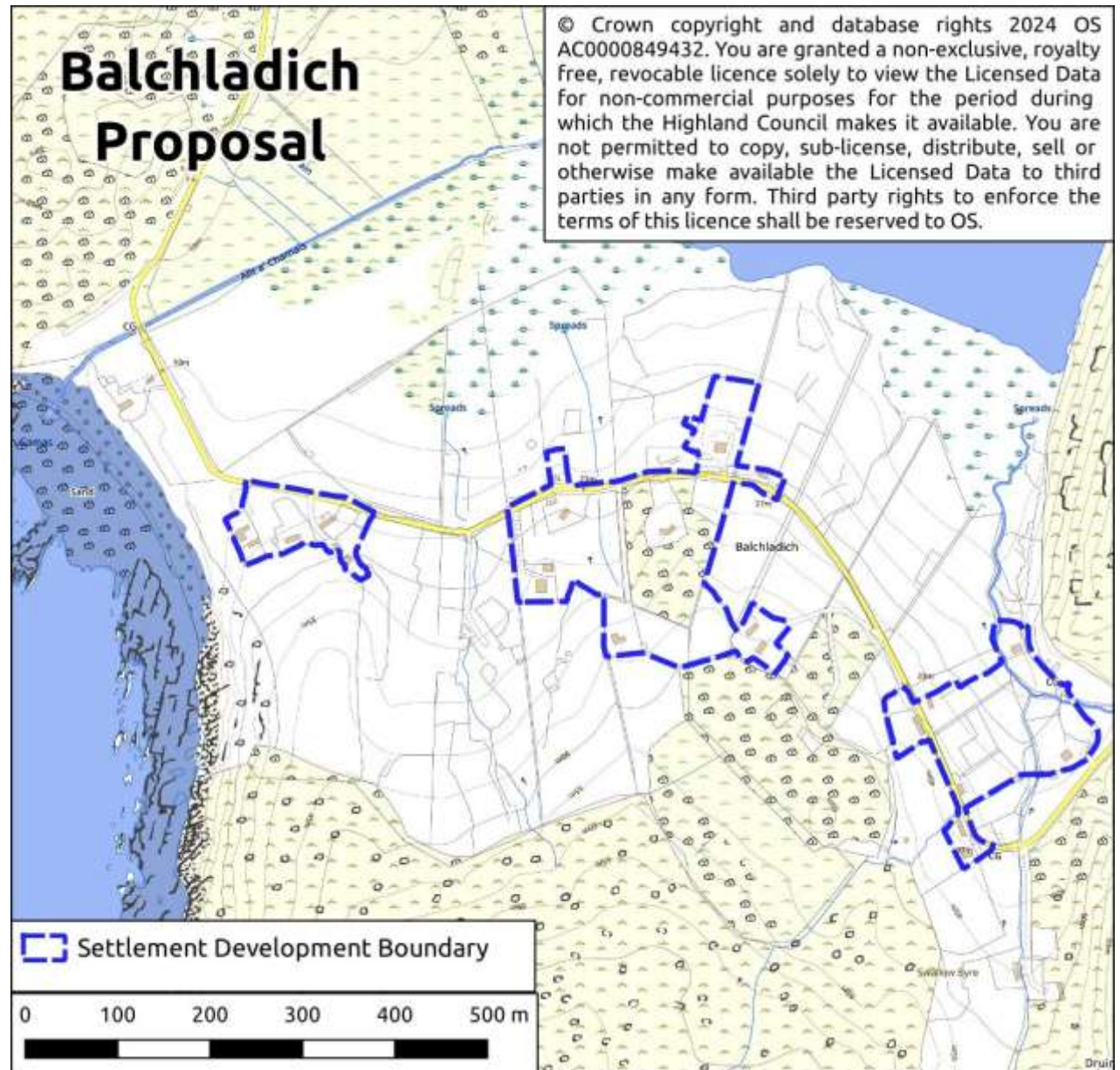
Badnaban

No new development proposals



Balchladich

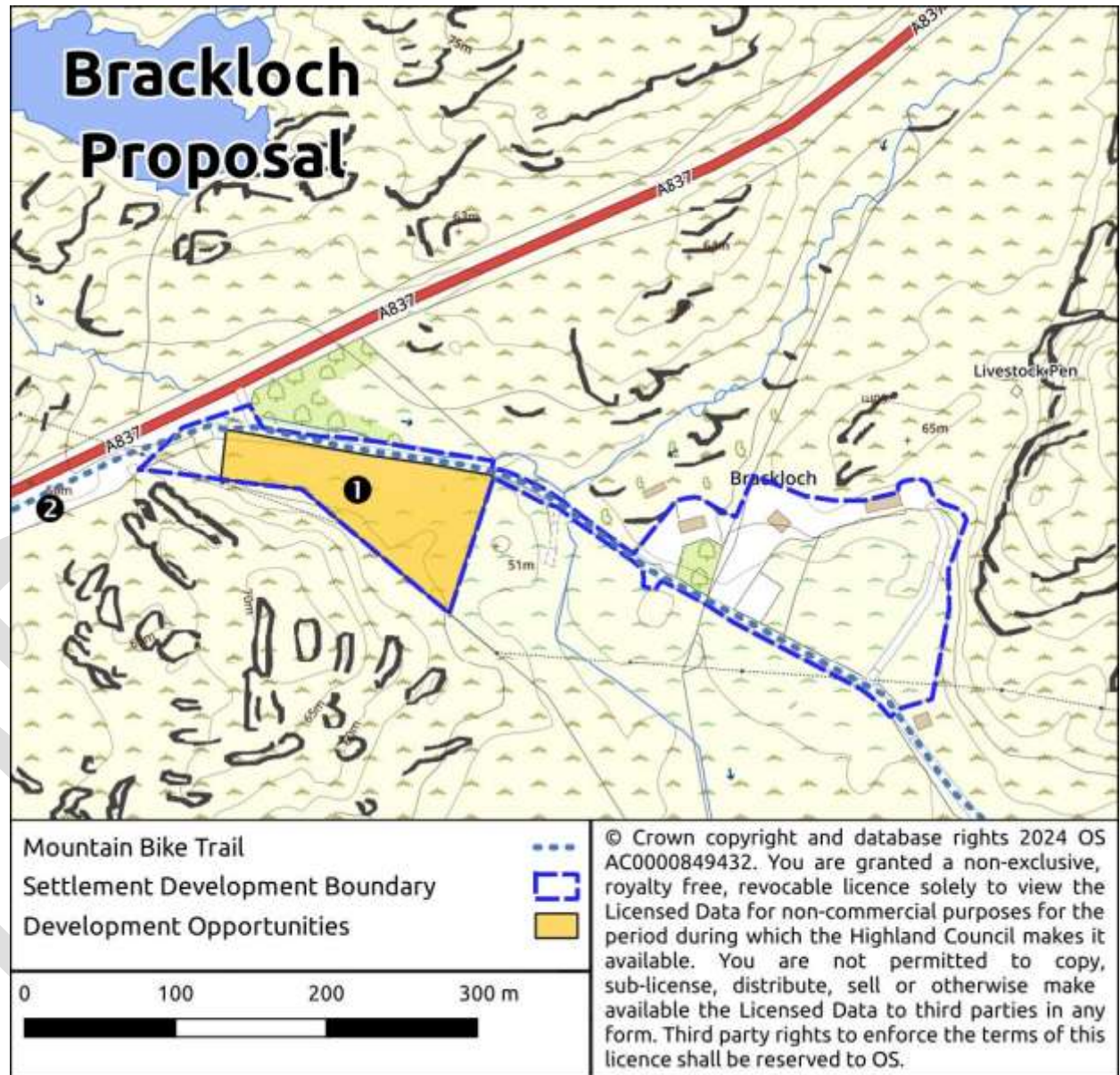
No new development proposals



Brackloch

Potential Development Opportunity

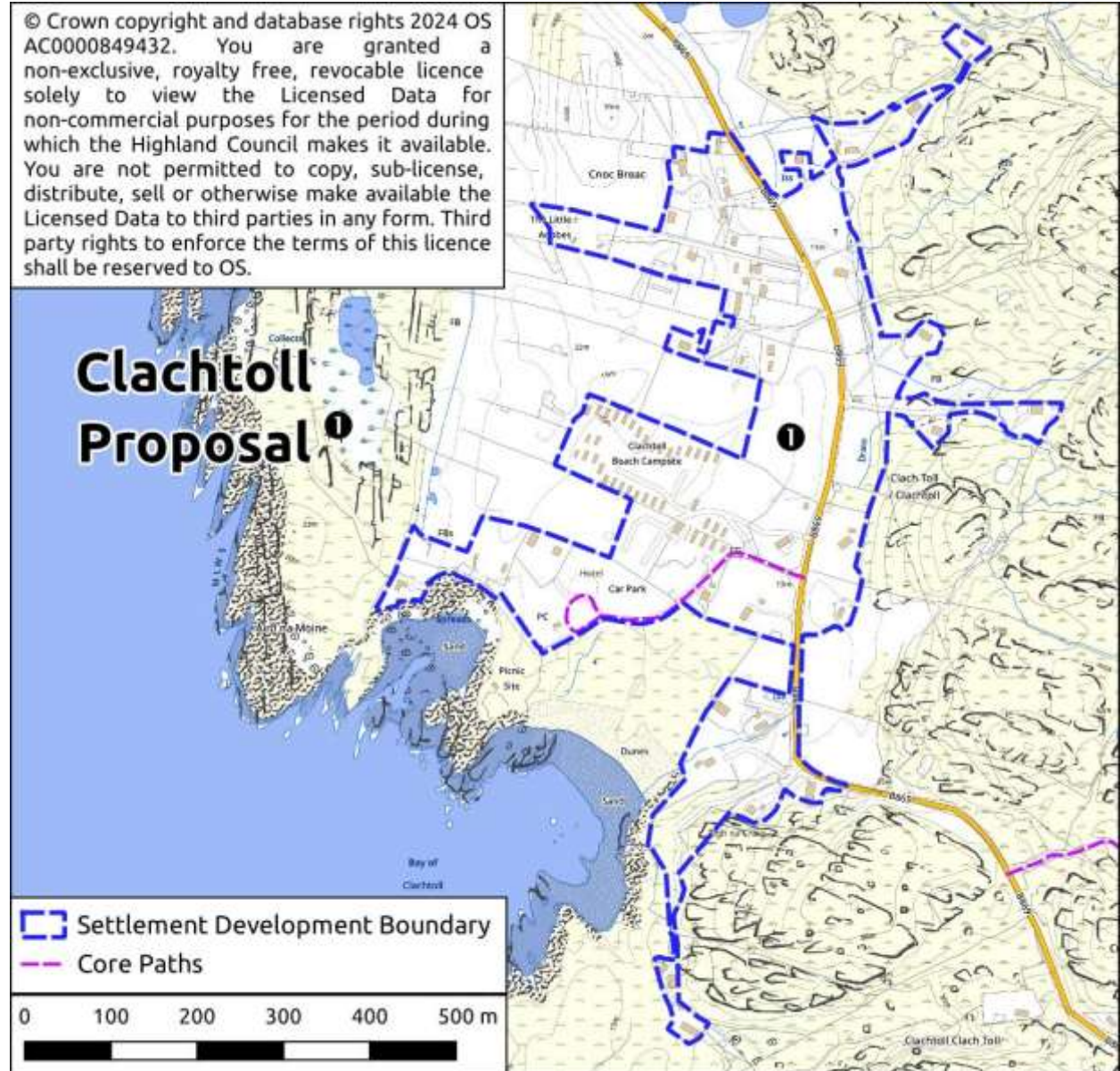
- ❶ Explore potential business opportunity developments.
- ❷ Mountain bike trail proposed from Lochinver following the old road route to Little Assynt.



Clachtoll

Potential Development Opportunity

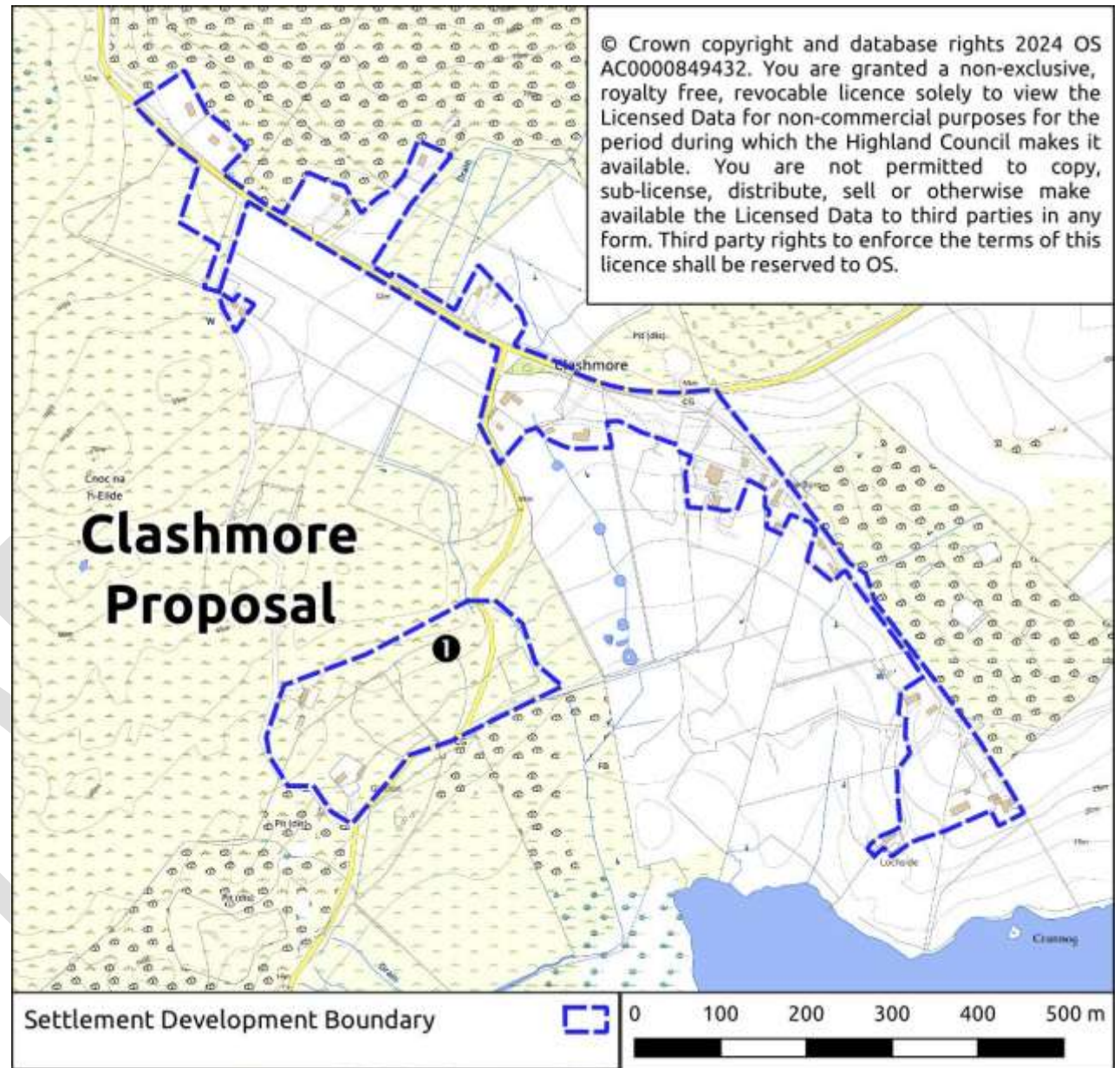
- ❶ Suggested areas for wildlife conservation grazing management collaboration.



Clashmore

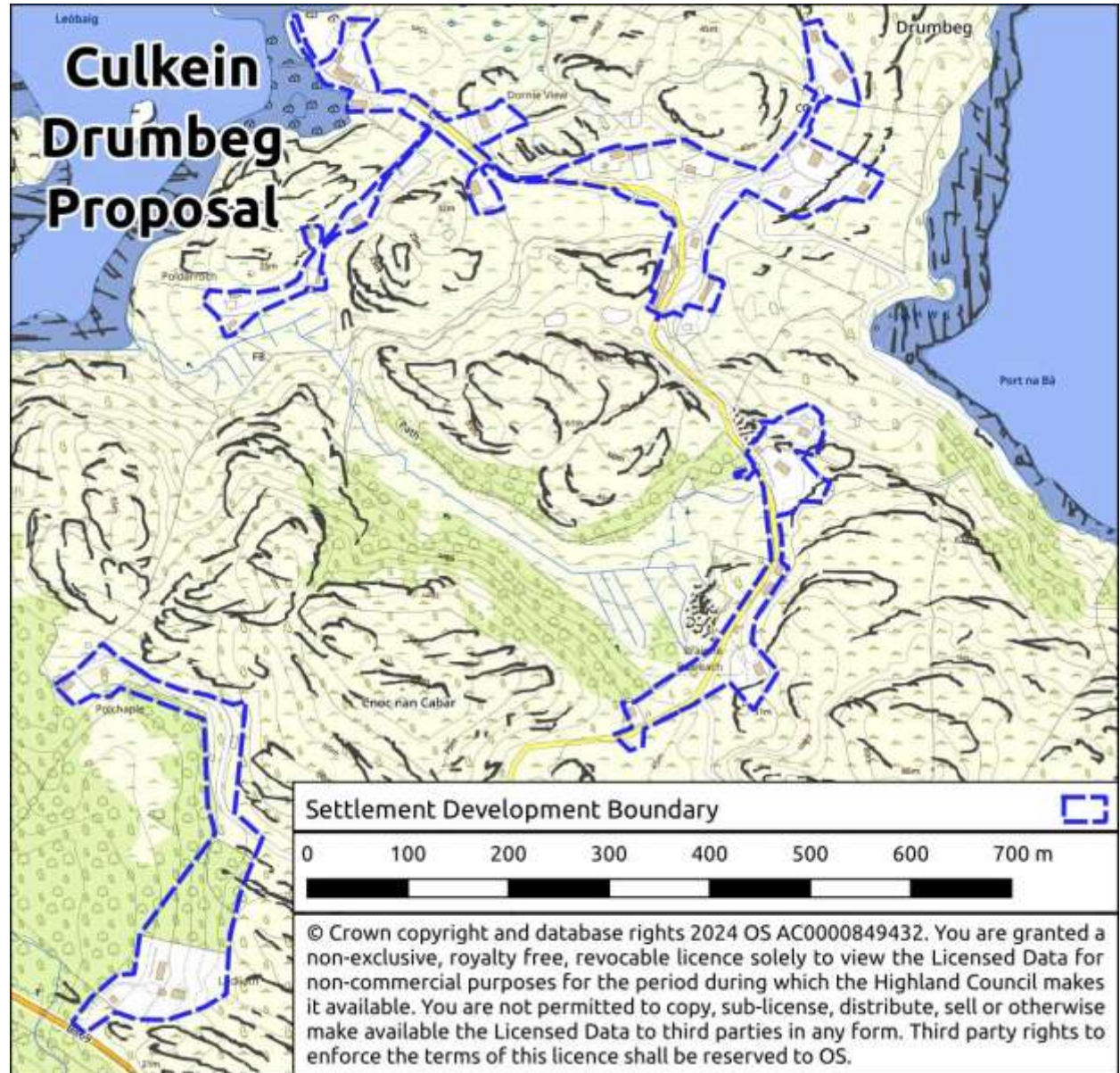
Potential Development Opportunity

- 1 Potential location for a small-scale wind turbine.



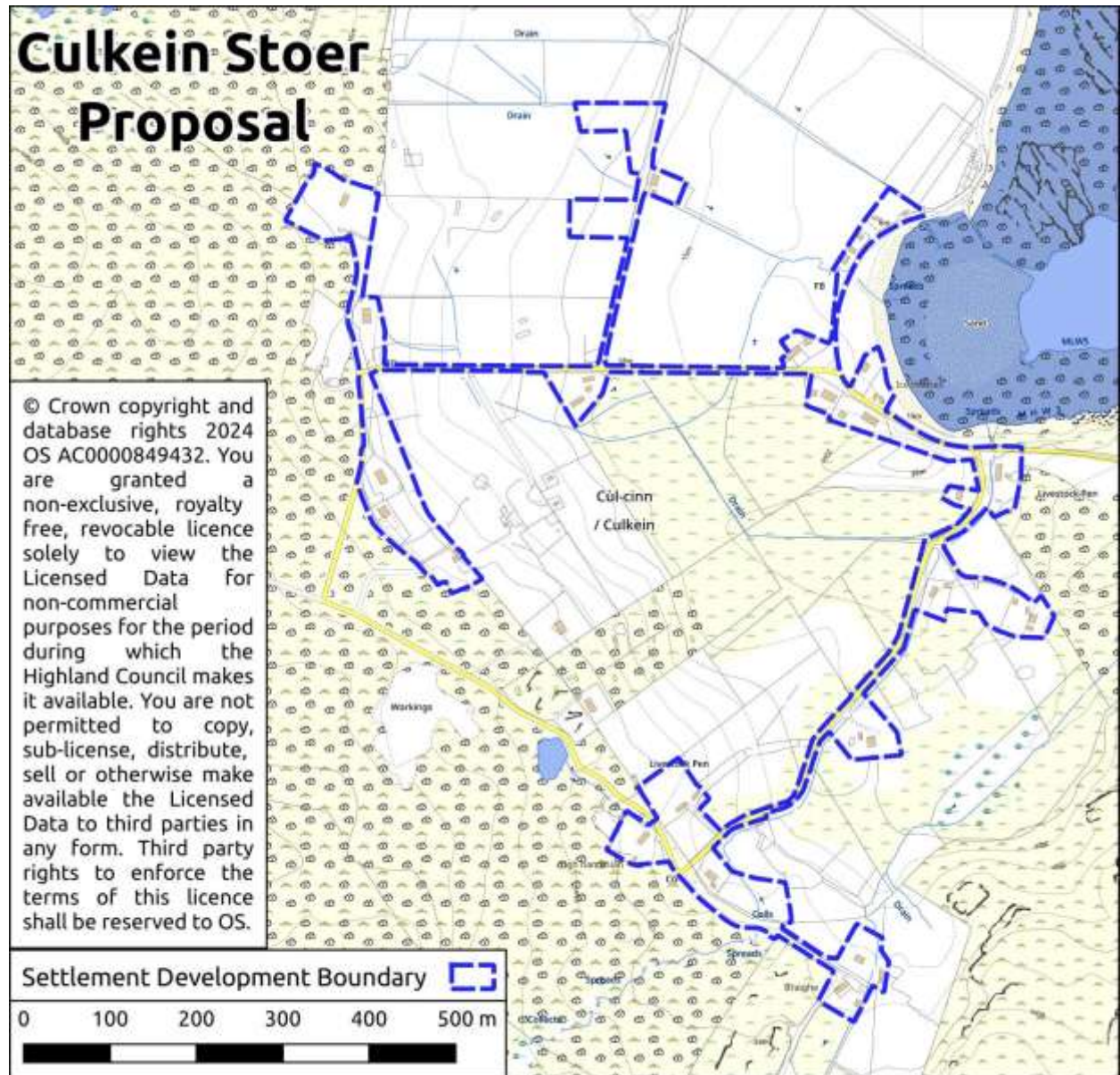
Culkein Drumbeg

No new development proposals



Culkein Stoer

No new development proposals

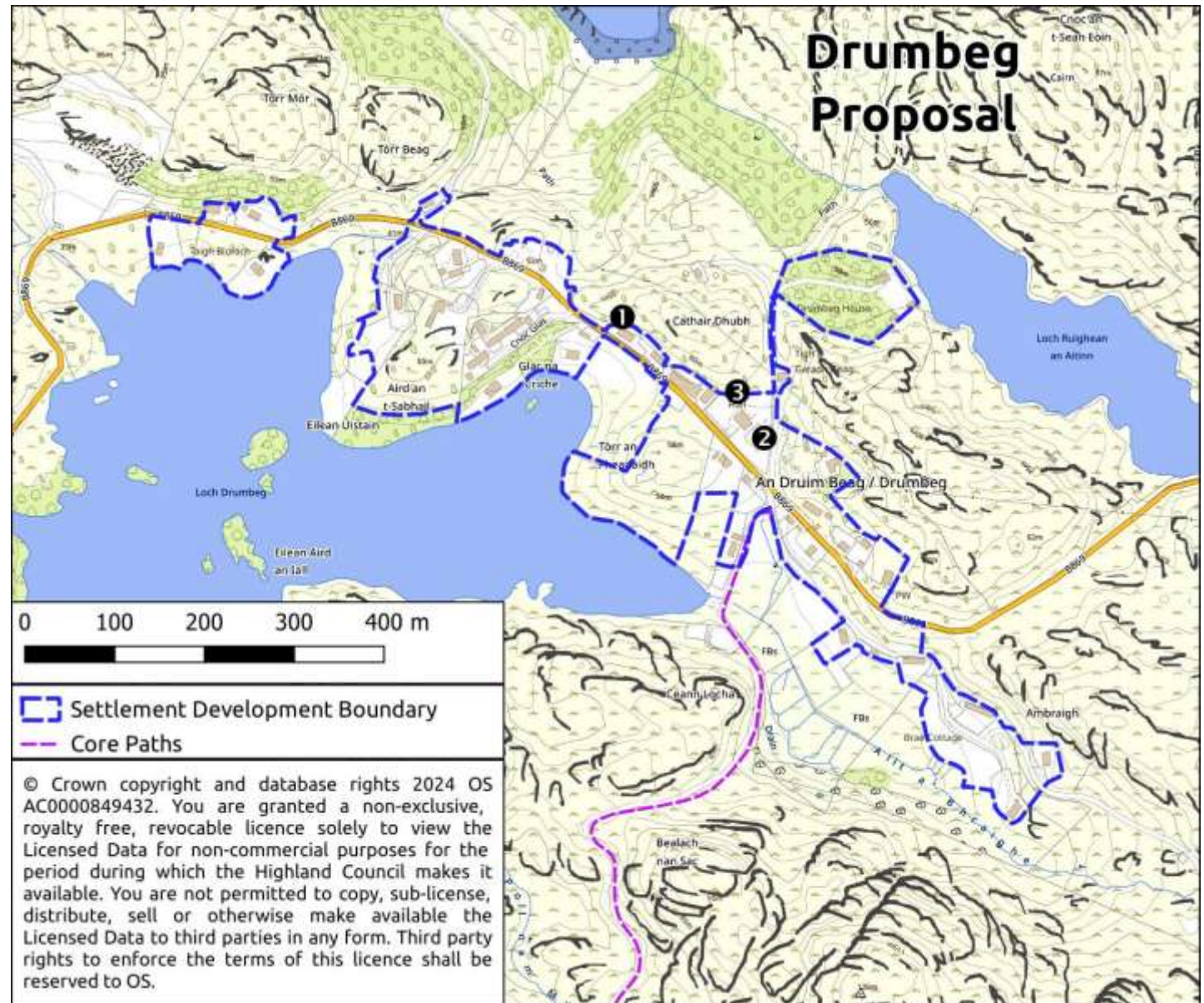


Drumbeg

Potential Development

Opportunities

- ❶ Street lights currently on all night. Change so that movement sensitive and they switch off when not needed.
- ❷ A mobile post office service based at the village hall required to ensure continued access to essential postal and banking functions for residents, particularly those without digital access and the means to travel.
- ❸ Community-led purchase of the Drumbeg Hotel, recognising it as an important local asset and requiring the formation of a dedicated group to progress the buyout.



Elphin

Housing Development Opportunities

1 Housing Development Opportunities
(Land Court decision (RN) 589 -1992 for resumption of part of common grazings.)

2 Housing Development Opportunities

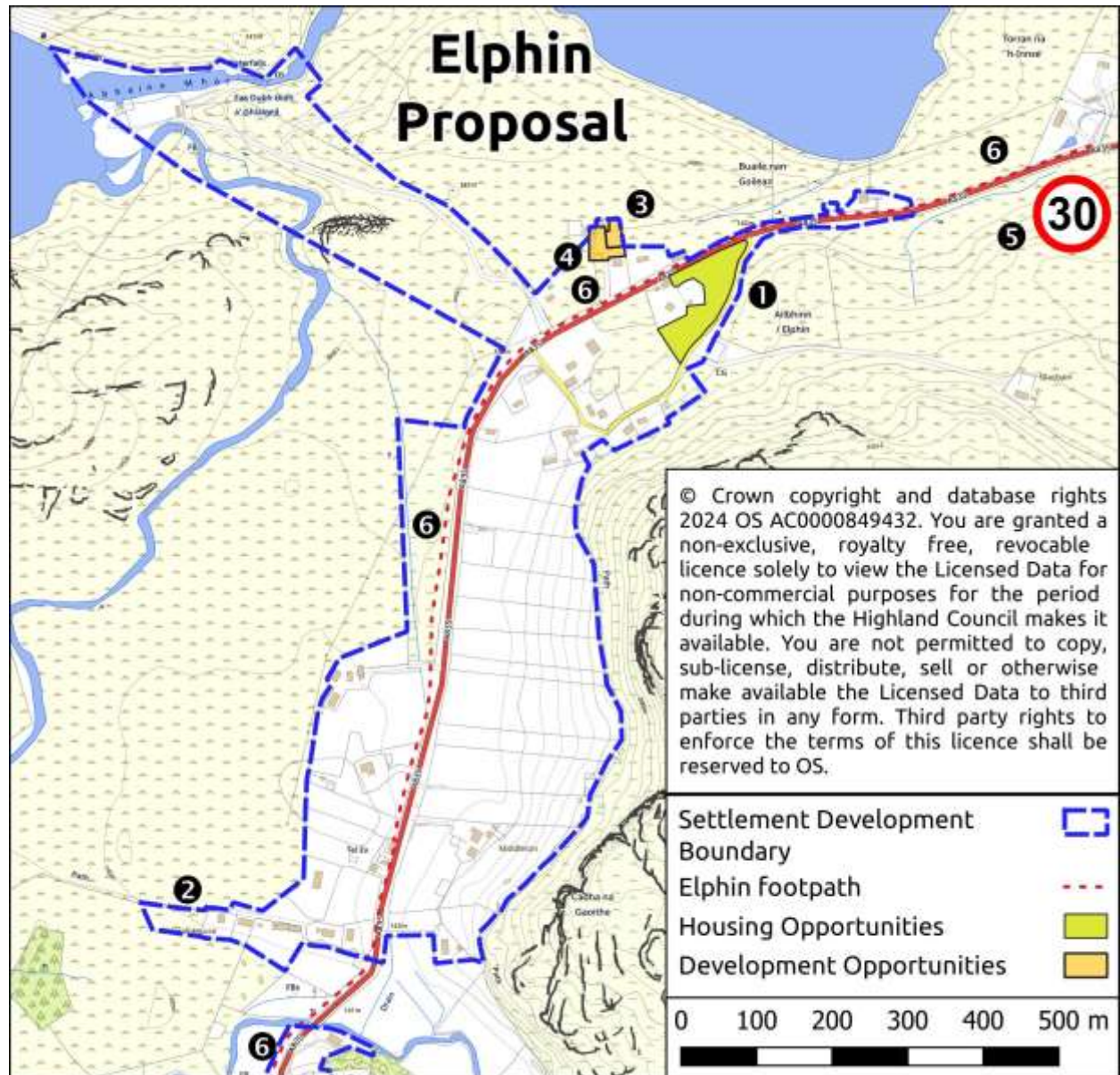
Development Opportunities

3 Elphin village hall extension.

4 Elphin village hall car park extension.

5 Extend 30 mph speed limit zone and place sign before the bend.

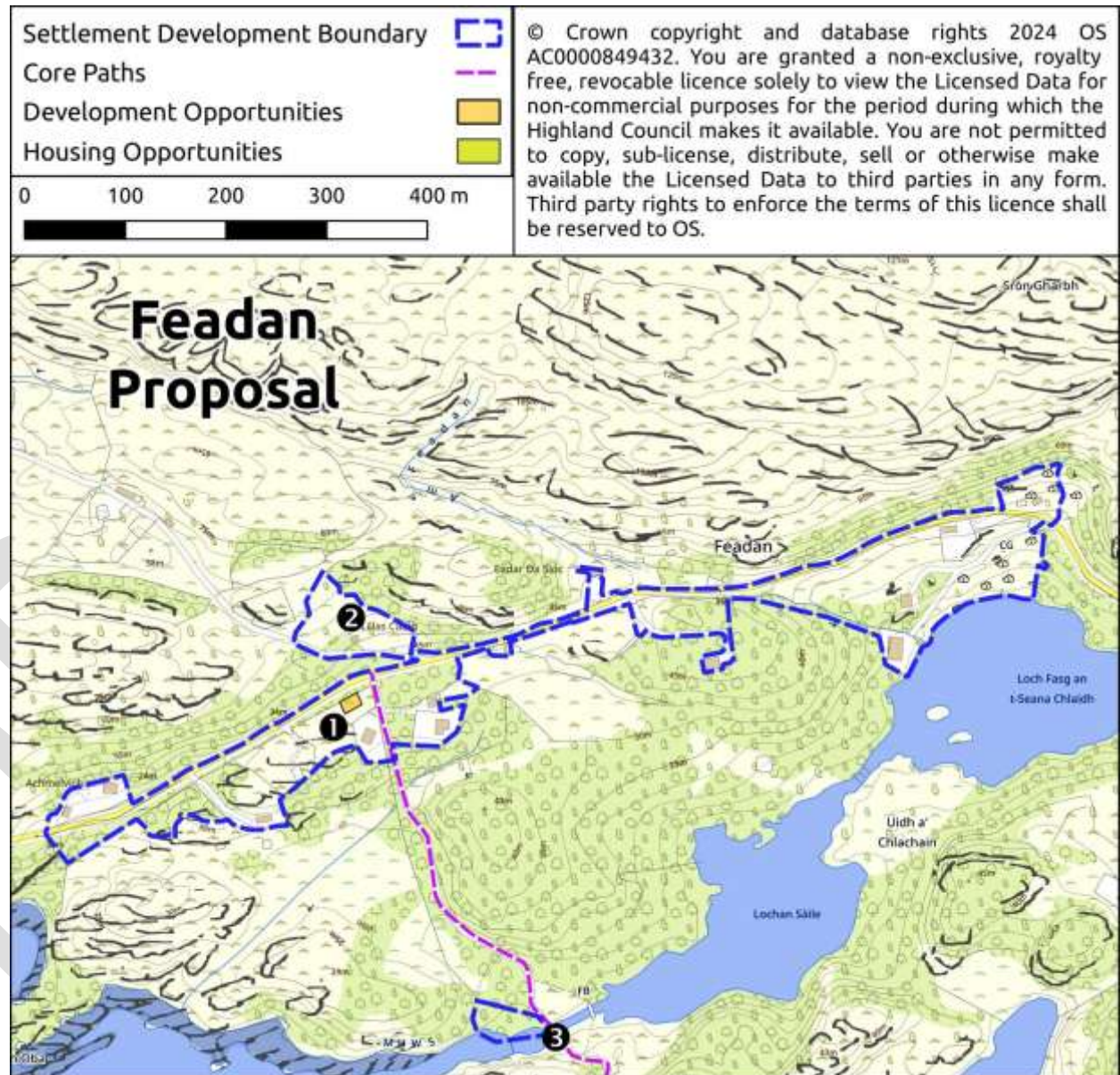
6 Create safe footpath along verge through entire village up to Knockan.



Feadan

Potential Development/Housing Opportunities

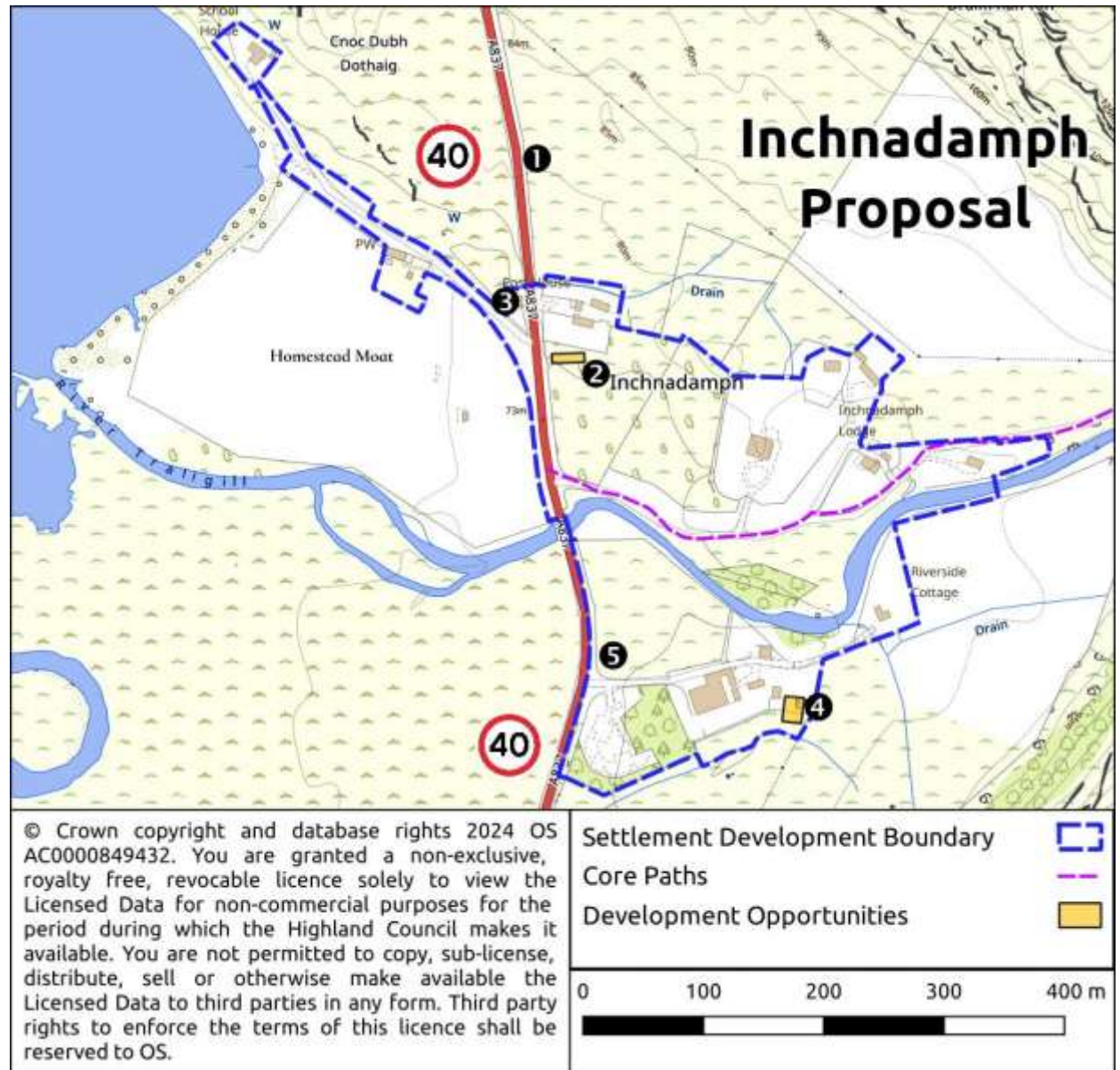
- ❶ Craft, Culture and Conservation hub for the community.
- ❷ Investigate opportunities for a potential house site.
- ❸ Investigate opportunities for hydro or tidal renewable energy generation to the west of Ardroe bridge area.



Inchnadamph

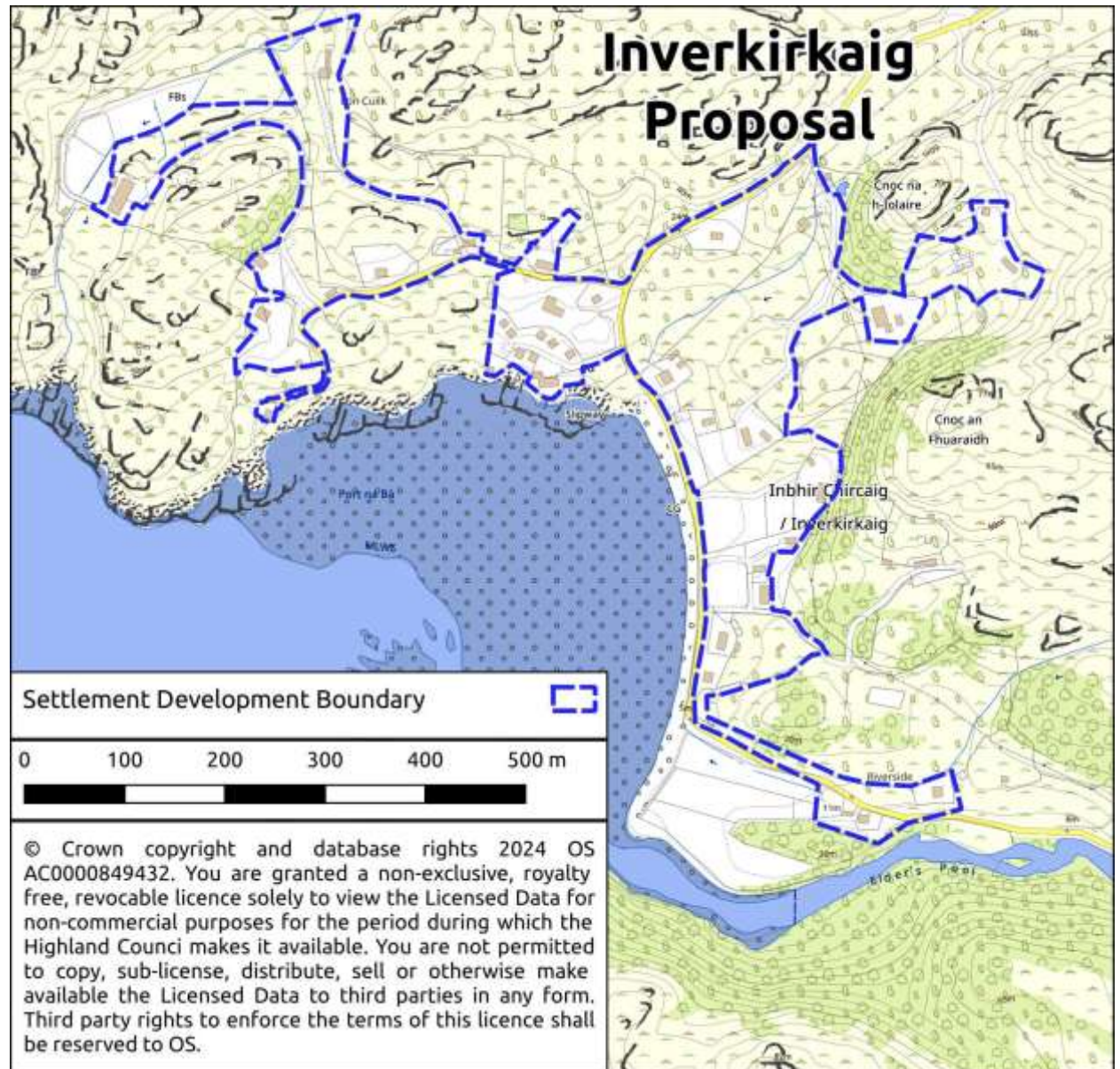
Potential Development Opportunity

- ❶ A 40-mph speed limit is proposed through the township to improve road safety and reduce traffic-related risks for residents and visitors.
- ❷ Proposed weaving shed/shop development.
- ❸ Defibrillator to be sited in the public phone box.
- ❹ Extension of mountain rescue hut proposed.
- ❺ Bus shelter proposed to be built from natural materials to ensure it blends sensitively with the surrounding environment.



Inverkirkaig

No new development proposals



Knockan

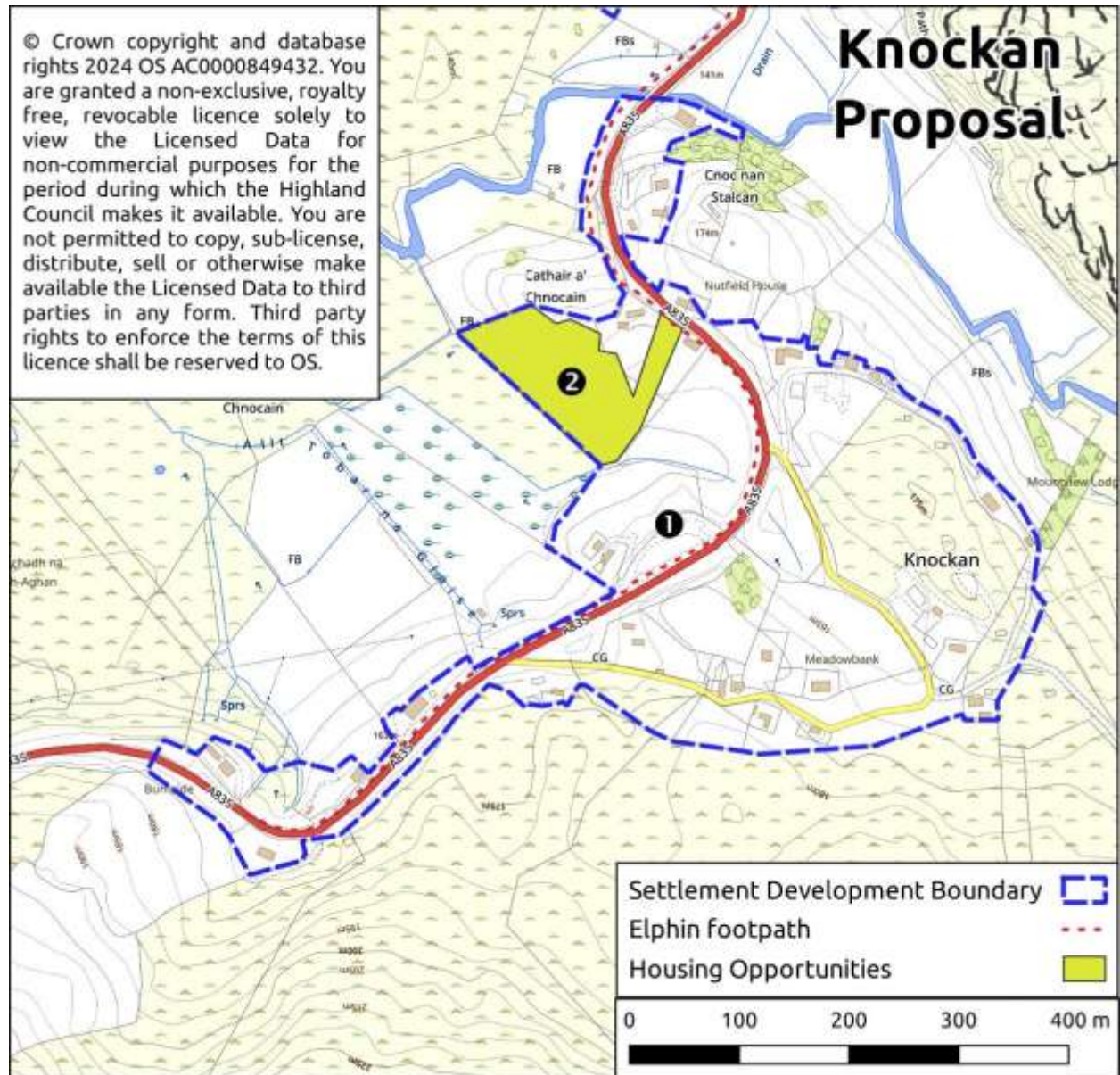
Development Opportunity

- ❶ Glass recycling provision. Site to be finalised.

Housing Opportunity

- ❷ Housing Opportunity. To be investigated.

Continuation of safe footpath along verge through Knockan and Elphin.



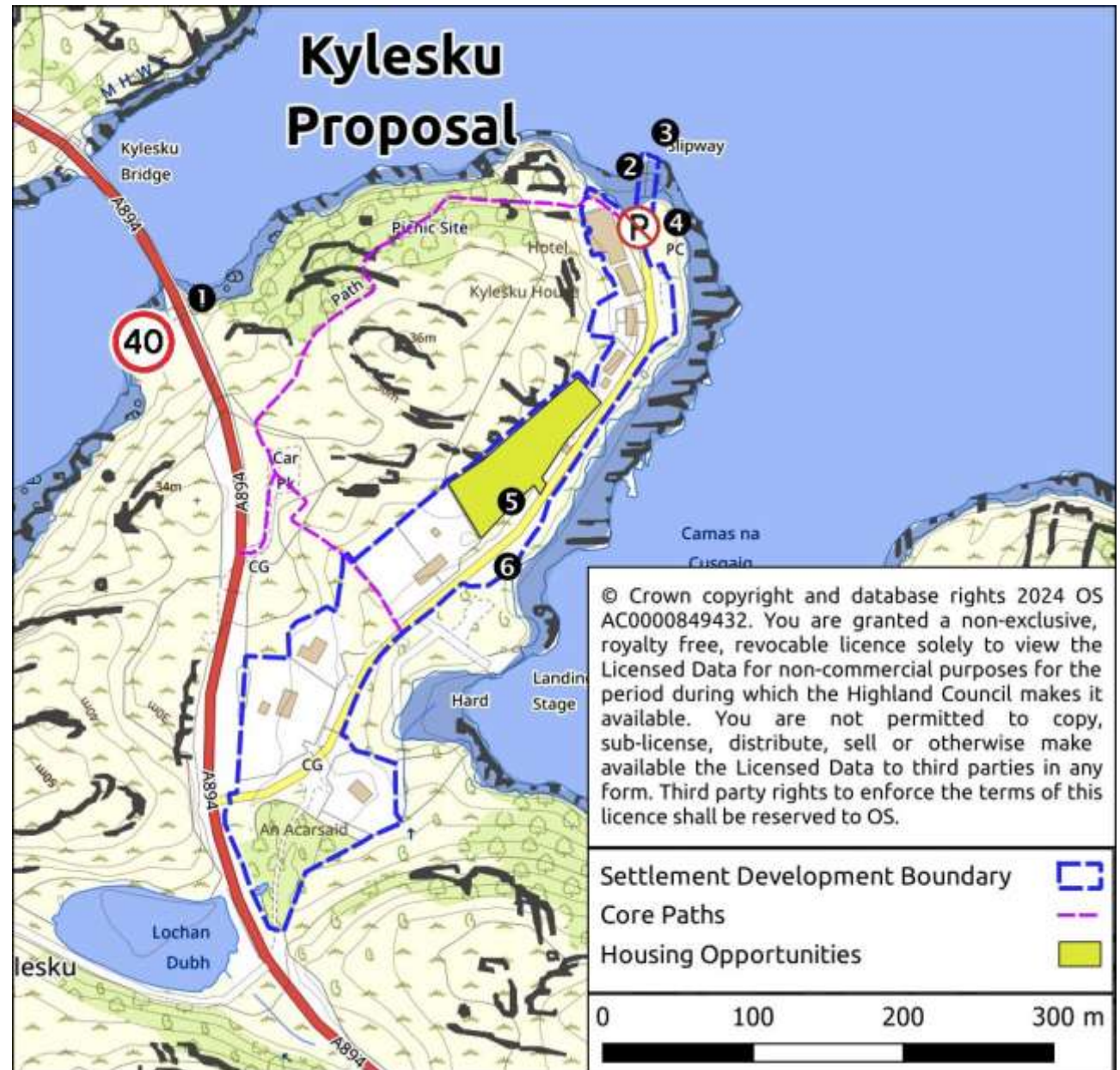
Kylesku

Potential Development Opportunities

- ① Introduce a 40-mph speed limit throughout both Kylesku and Newton townships to improve road safety for residents and visitors.
- ② Ongoing maintenance of the slipway for recreational boats, with Highland Council confirming they will take responsibility for its upkeep.
- ③ Upgrading and strengthening the breakwater walls to improve protection for the harbour and moored vessels.
- ④ No Parking sign at Kylesku Pier.
- ⑥ Extend the layby to create additional parking for the public as an alternative to the residential area.

Housing Development Opportunity

- ⑤ Affordable housing. Requires site investigation.



Lochinver North

Potential Housing Development

Opportunity

❶ Suggestion: Potential redevelopment of the fank site for affordable housing. Also suggested: Install deer fencing to establish a small community space incorporating woodland, wildlife habitat, and an orchard/growing area.

Potential Development Opportunities

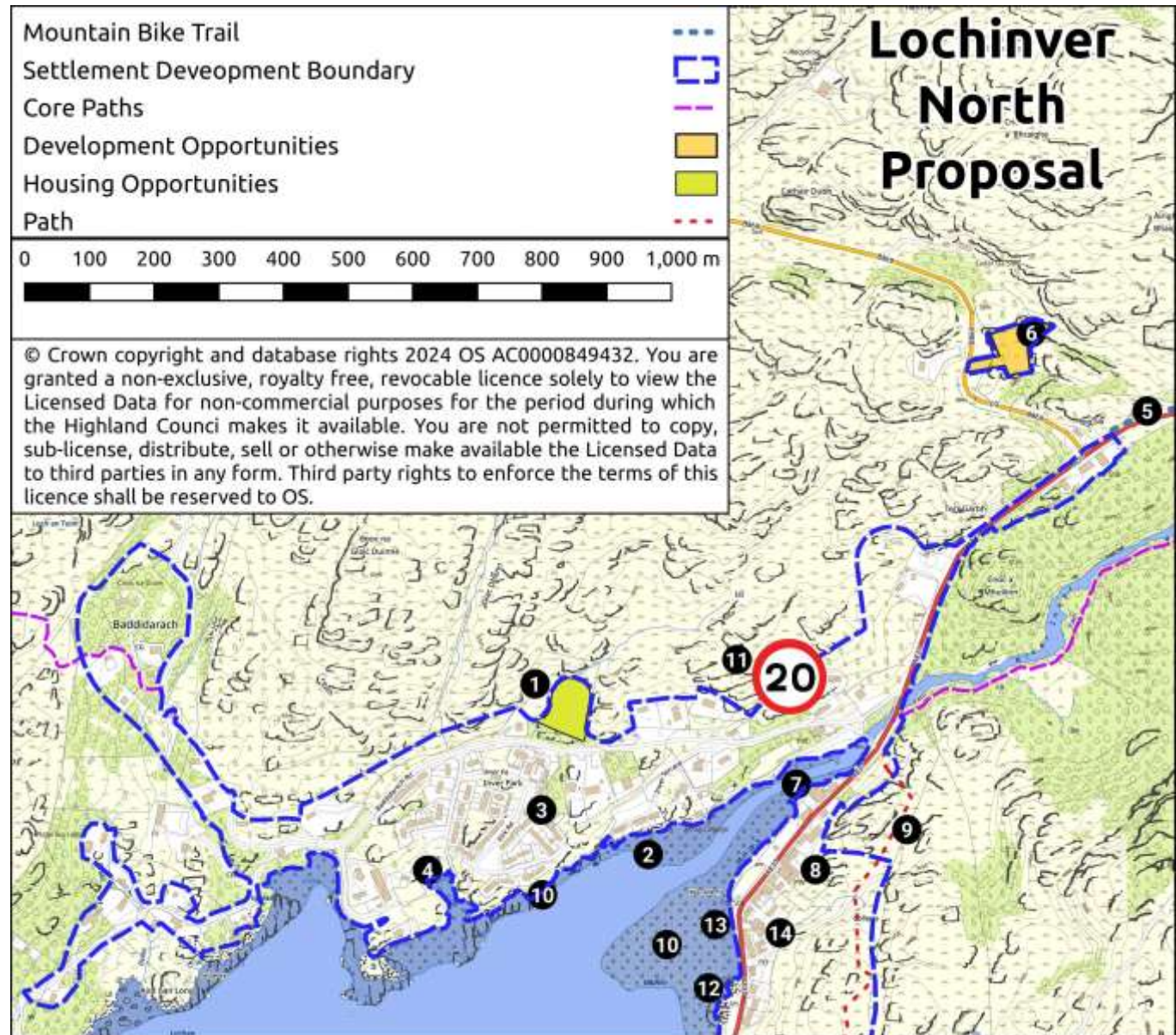
❷ Future proofing the area against rising sea levels.

❸ Enhance the Assynt Centre by increasing the building height to accommodate a respite care facility on the upper floor.

❹ Develop a skate park and scooter track for teenagers and older children in old tennis court.

❺ Develop a cycle path from Lochinver to Little Assynt along the old road, continuing from Little Assynt to the Suilag bothy and returning to Lochinver to form a complete loop.

❻ Glack potential development opportunity site. To be explored further.

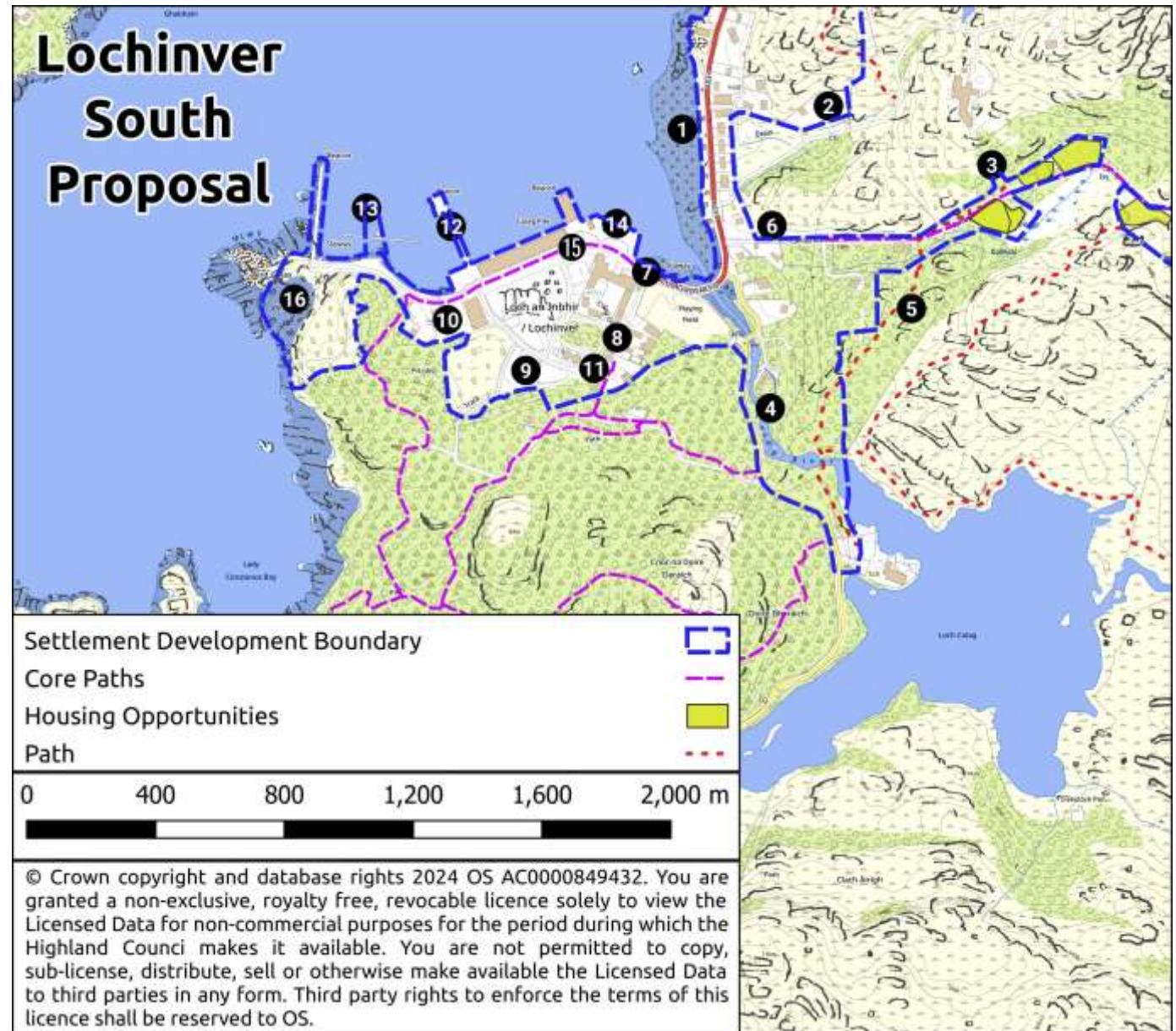


- 7 Improve signage in the carpark/spar area to give more information to tourists: highlight campervan disposal facilities, the ATM, campervan parking, bus stops and cafés.
- 8 Develop additional parking in the area behind the butcher's, accessed via the road between the Free Presbyterian Church and Driftwood.
- 9 Establish a footpath to the rear of the surgery, connecting through to Crumar.
- 10 Restore the historic fish trap as a cultural heritage asset, supported by signage describing its past function.
- 11 Consider traffic-calming options along the 30mph stretch from the bridge to Inver Park, including a possible reduction to 20mph.
- 12 Develop a sculpture trail in the village showcasing the work of Duncan Hutchinson, Highland Stoneware and local artists.
- 13 Develop units on sea front into whisky shop and community shed for fixing things. The old drop-in centre could be repurposed as a library and community space.
- 14 Repurpose the old garage/shed behind the former Post Office into a mechanics shed.

Lochinver South

Potential Development Opportunities

- ❶ Expand the seafront walkway to create a wider, more accessible promenade with seating areas and benches.
- ❷ Create a fenced, publicly accessible dog park on the land behind Crumar to provide a safe, dedicated space for exercise and responsible dog use.
- ❸ Develop a new play park beside the new housing area to provide a safe, accessible play space for children.
- ❹ Explore the potential for a small-scale hydro scheme on the River Culag to generate community-owned renewable energy, designed with integrated fish passes to protect and enhance local ecology.
- ❺ All abilities paths to the school from new housing developments.



- ⑥ Widen the access road serving new developments and provide a safe, dedicated path linking residents to the village.
- ⑦ Install clear signage at the junction leading to the Mission and the campervan facilities at the Leisure Centre, to reduce confusion and prevent visiting campervans from getting lost.
- ⑧ Encourage small retail development at Jimmy's shed to create a livelier destination for residents and visitors.
- ⑨ Invest in improved services for visiting small boats at the Leisure Centre, including 24-hour access option.
- ⑩ Establish a dedicated paramedic station at coastguard site to serve as a hub for staff supporting emergency response across the area.
- ⑪ Develop a dedicated public parking area to increase capacity and improve access for both residents and visitors and upgrade the road and approach to the leisure centre so it can function effectively as the main campervan-to-leisure-centre route.
- ⑫ Renovate the existing boat lift and replace it with a larger lift, alongside upgrades to the finger jetty and pier.
- ⑬ Invest and seek funding for improved pontoon infrastructure to enhance harbour capacity and usability.
- ⑭ Remove redundant ice plant and replace with seaweed processing facilities.
- ⑮ Develop a transition plan to support the shift towards hydrogen power and the electrification of vessels.
- ⑯ Enhance facilities for the yacht and marine leisure community by improving mooring options and better on-shore services. This could include secure boat storage with a large service she, weekend diesel availability. Additional services—such as hosing, marine engineers and varnishers—would strengthen the offer, alongside exploring land availability from Highland Council and develop quarry site. Seek funding to grow marine leisure. Introducing overnight mooring charges and developing events such as a Lochinver Boat Festival could further support long-term sustainability and attract wider interest.

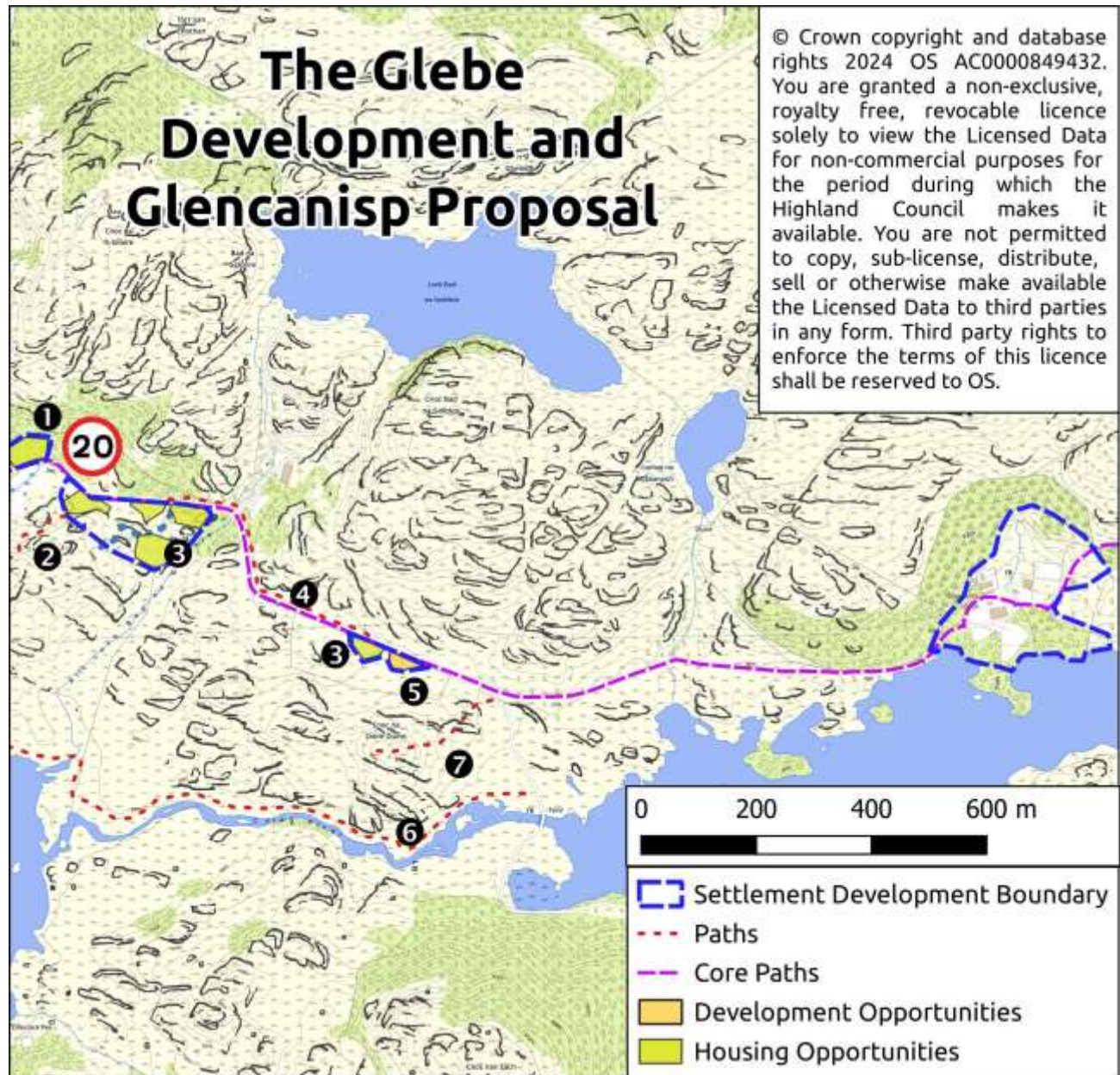
Lochinver Glebe and Glencanisp

Potential Development Opportunities

- ① 20mph speed limit to Glebe developments
- ② All abilities paths to the school from new housing developments.
- ④ Path safely connecting housing sites
- ⑤ Opportunity to develop modern small-scale business units to support start-ups, local enterprises, and future employment.
- ⑥ Path from Loch Culag creating a recreational loop by linking to the existing track.
- ⑦ Creation of a new path providing access to a scenic viewpoint.

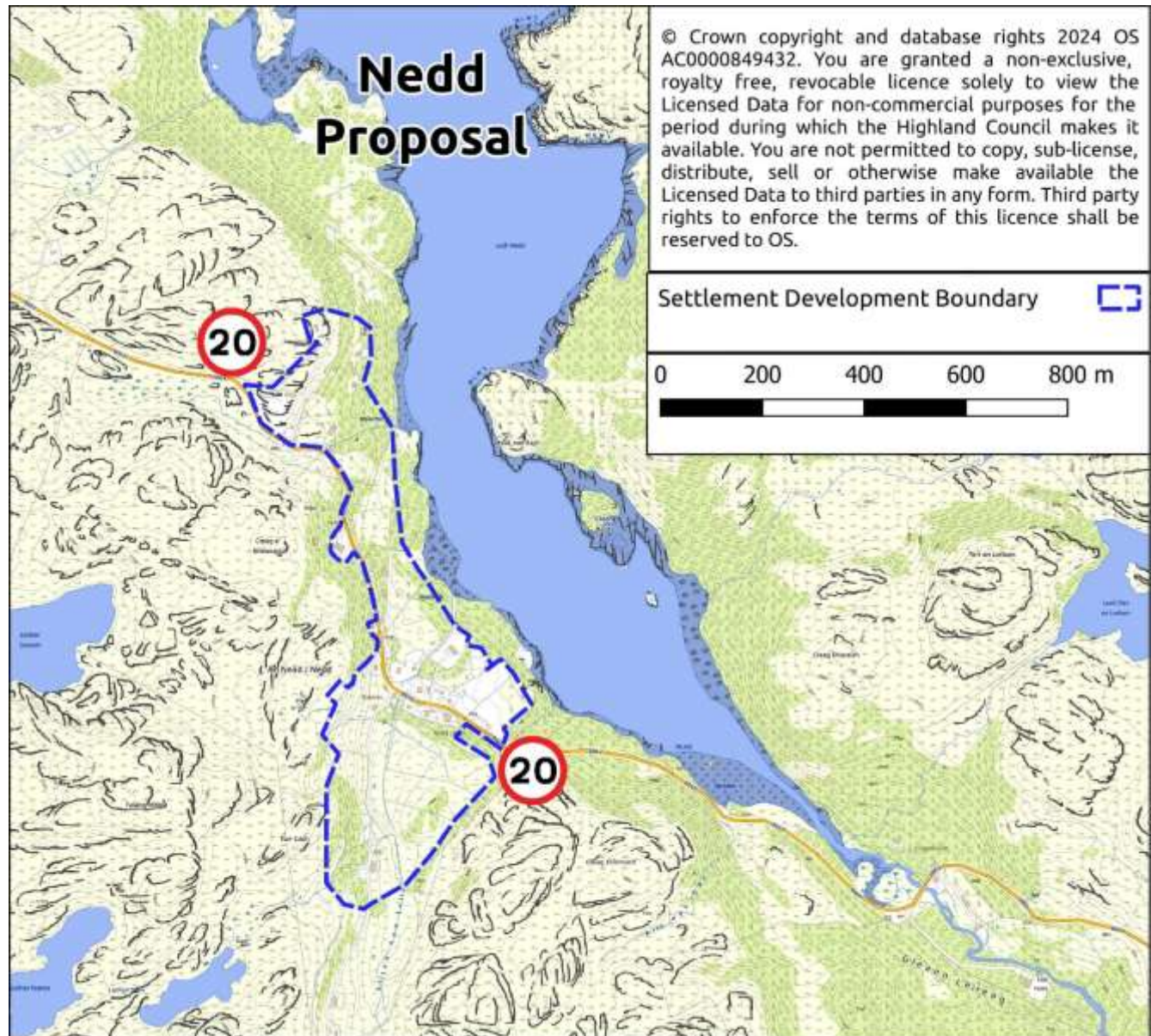
Housing Development Opportunity

- ③ Sites identified for affordable homes offering a mix of sizes to meet diverse local needs.



Nedd

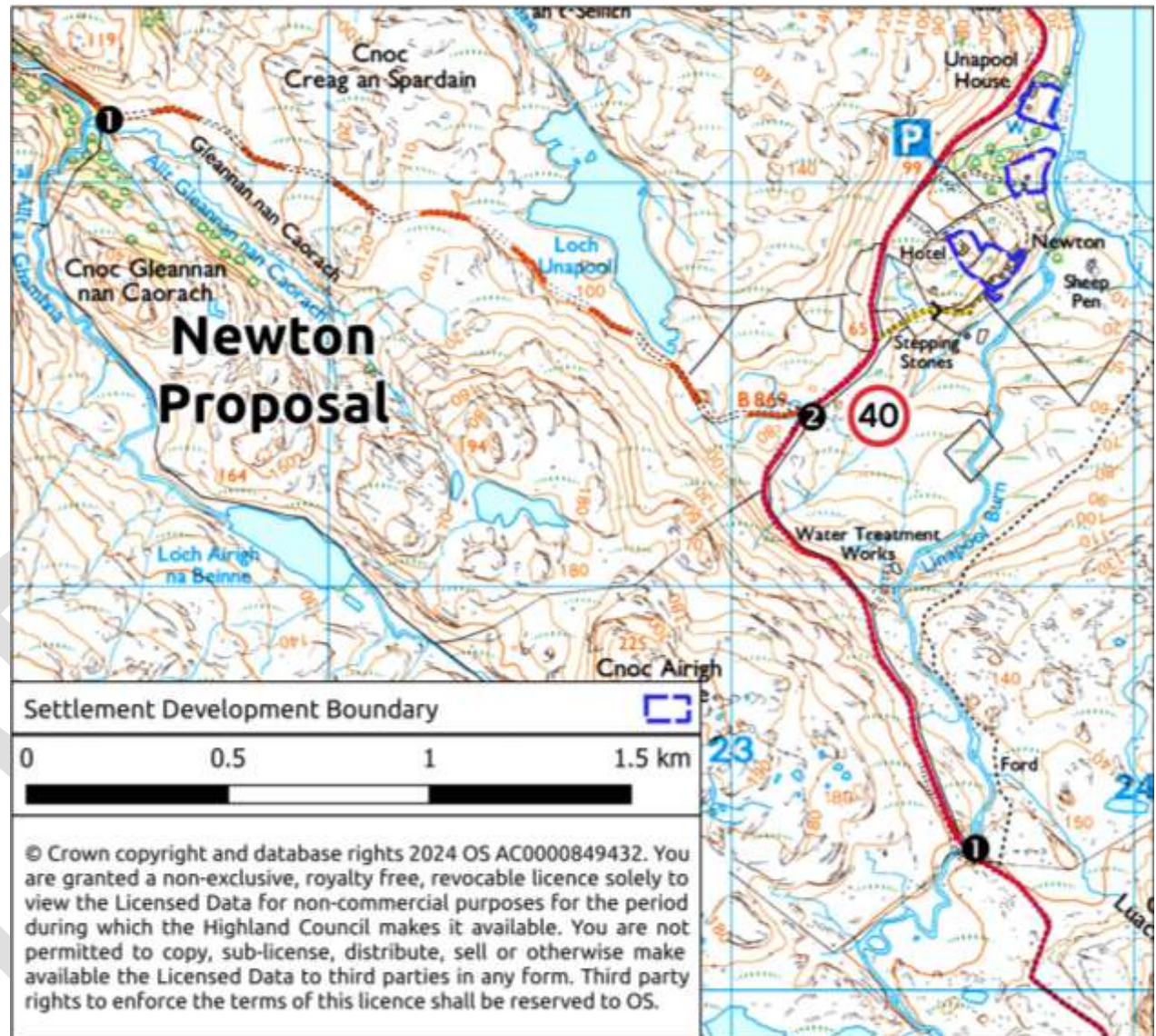
Introduce a 20mph speed restriction throughout village.



Newton

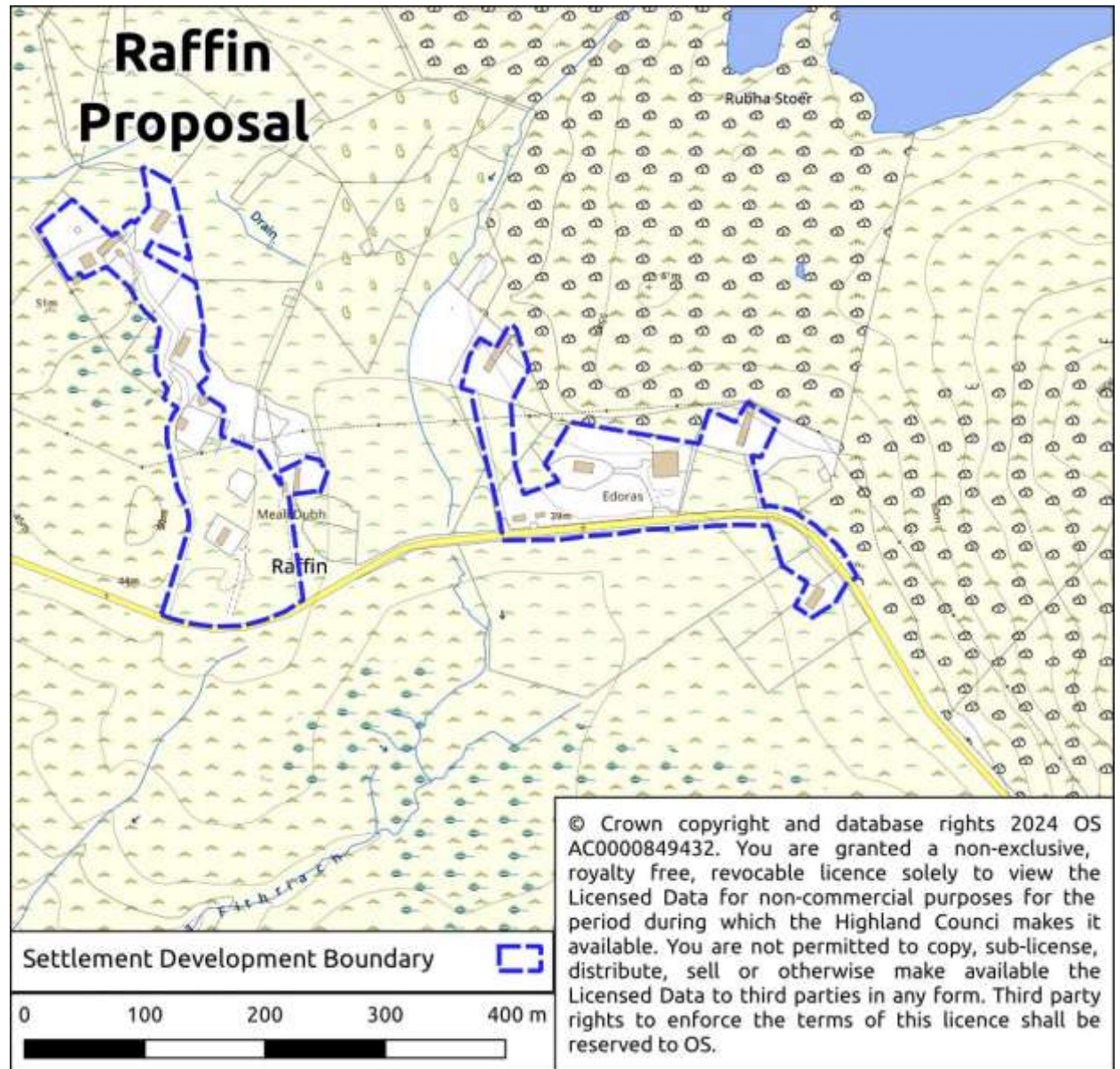
Potential Development Opportunities

- ❶ Cattlegrid after bridge on B869 and near old bridge of Unapool burn on A894. Exact site to be decided by crofters.
- ❷ Cattlegrid at Kylesku/Drumbeg junction. Introduce a consistent 40-mph speed limit through Kylesku and Newton townships, extending to the Drumbeg junction where the school bus stops, to enhance road safety for residents and visitors.



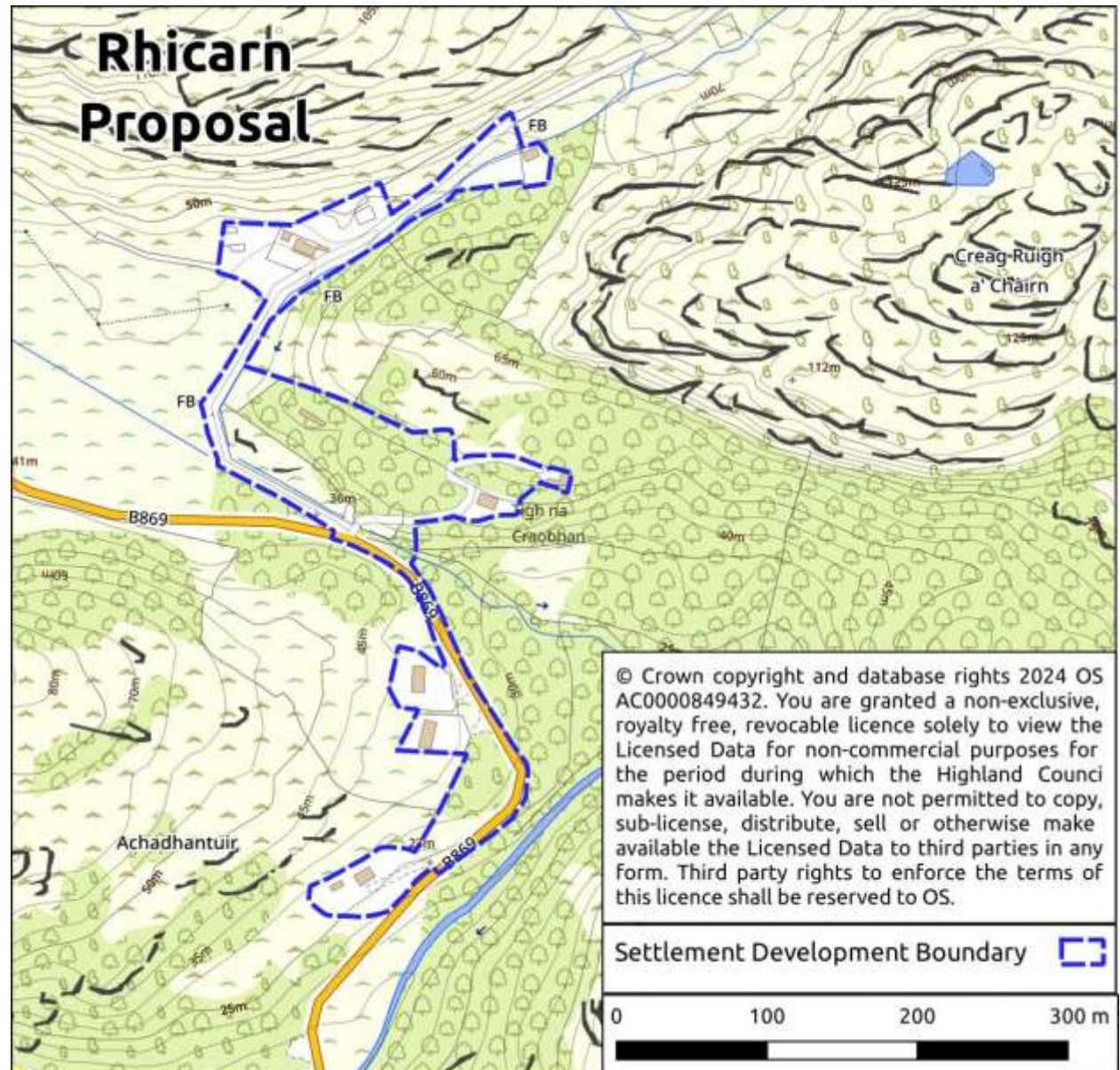
Raffin

No new development proposals



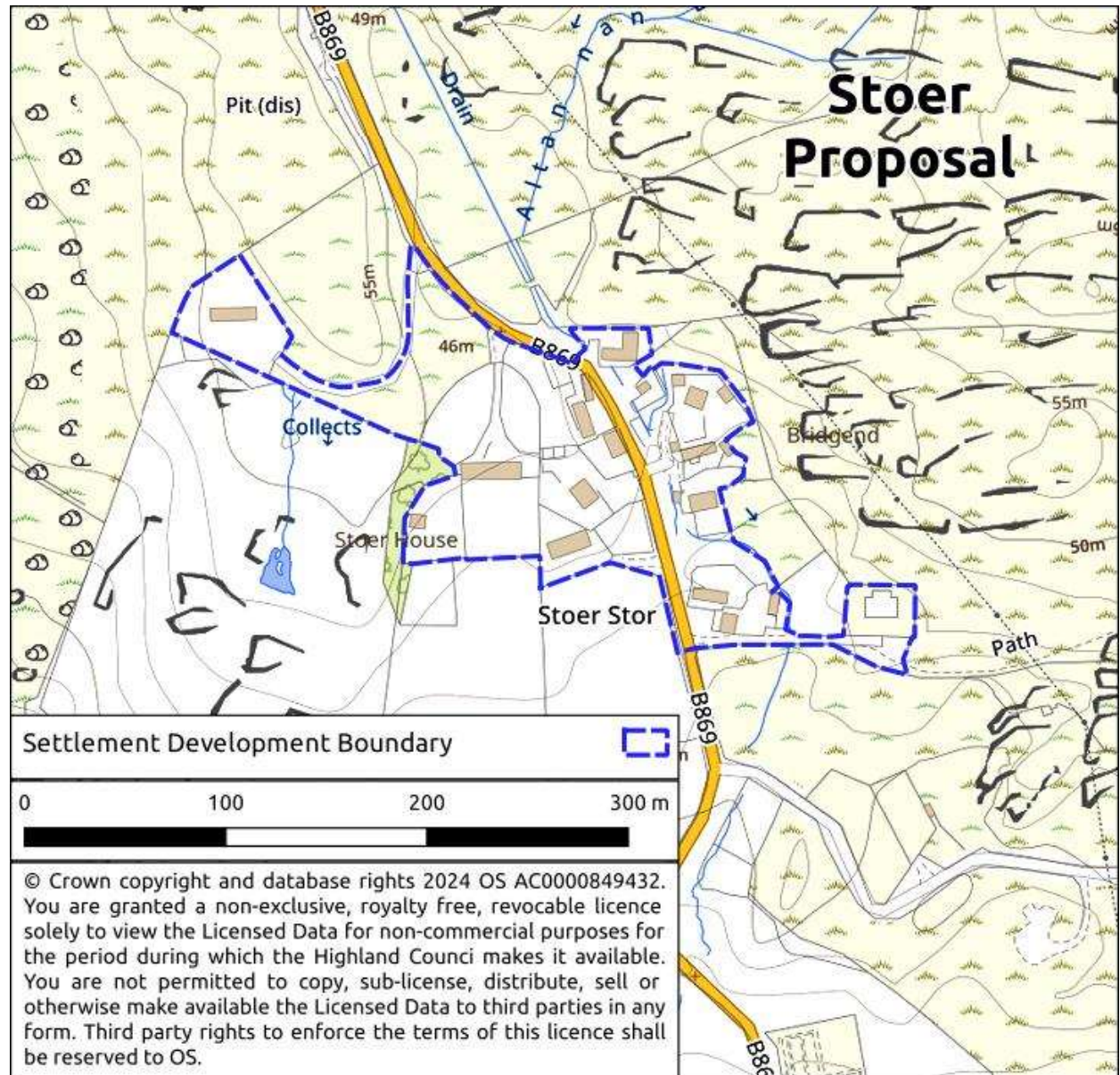
Rhicarn

No new development proposals



Stoer

No new development proposals



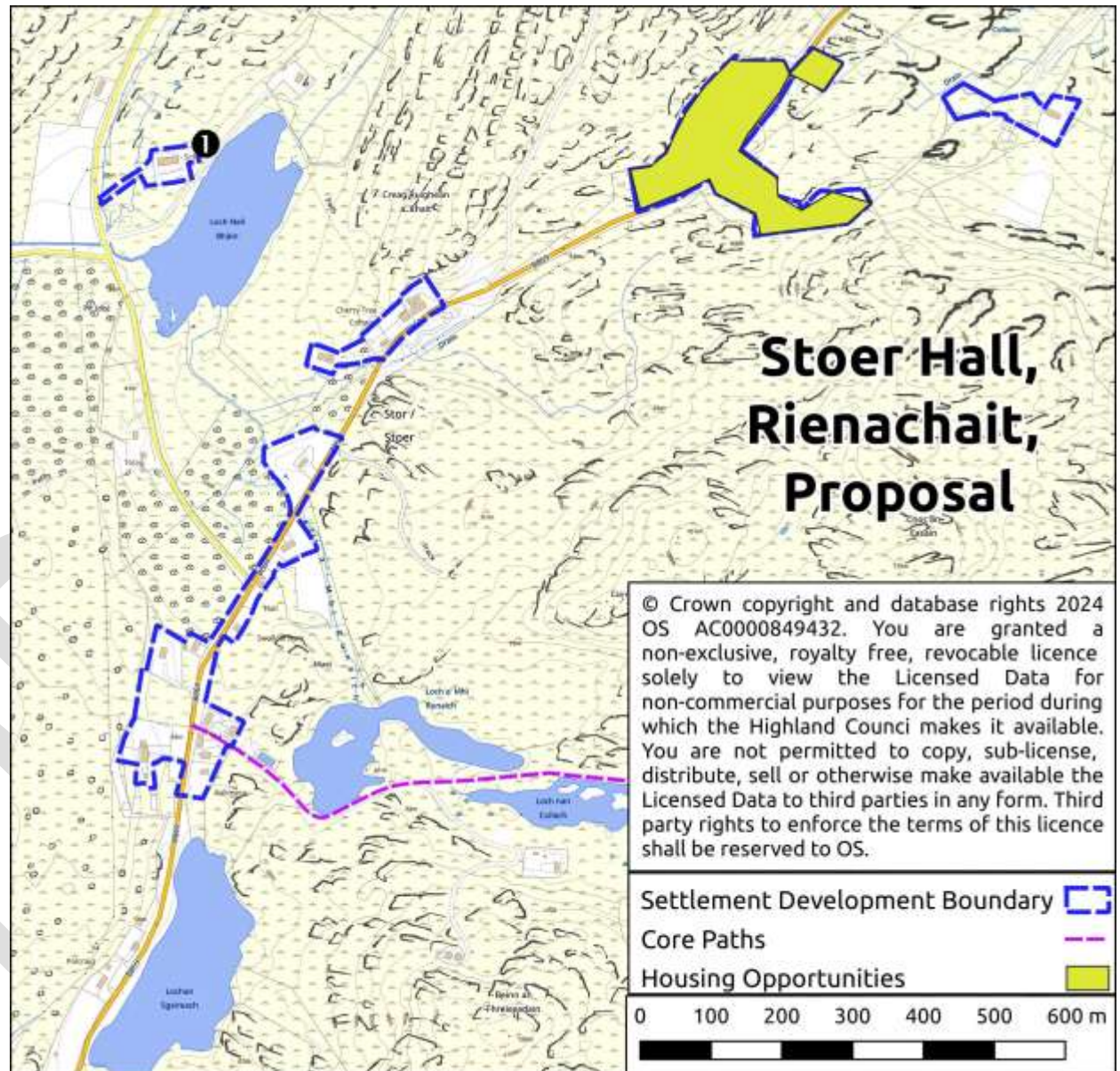
Stoer Hall/Lochend

Potential Development/Housing Opportunity

1 Future of Stoer School.

Suggestions received:

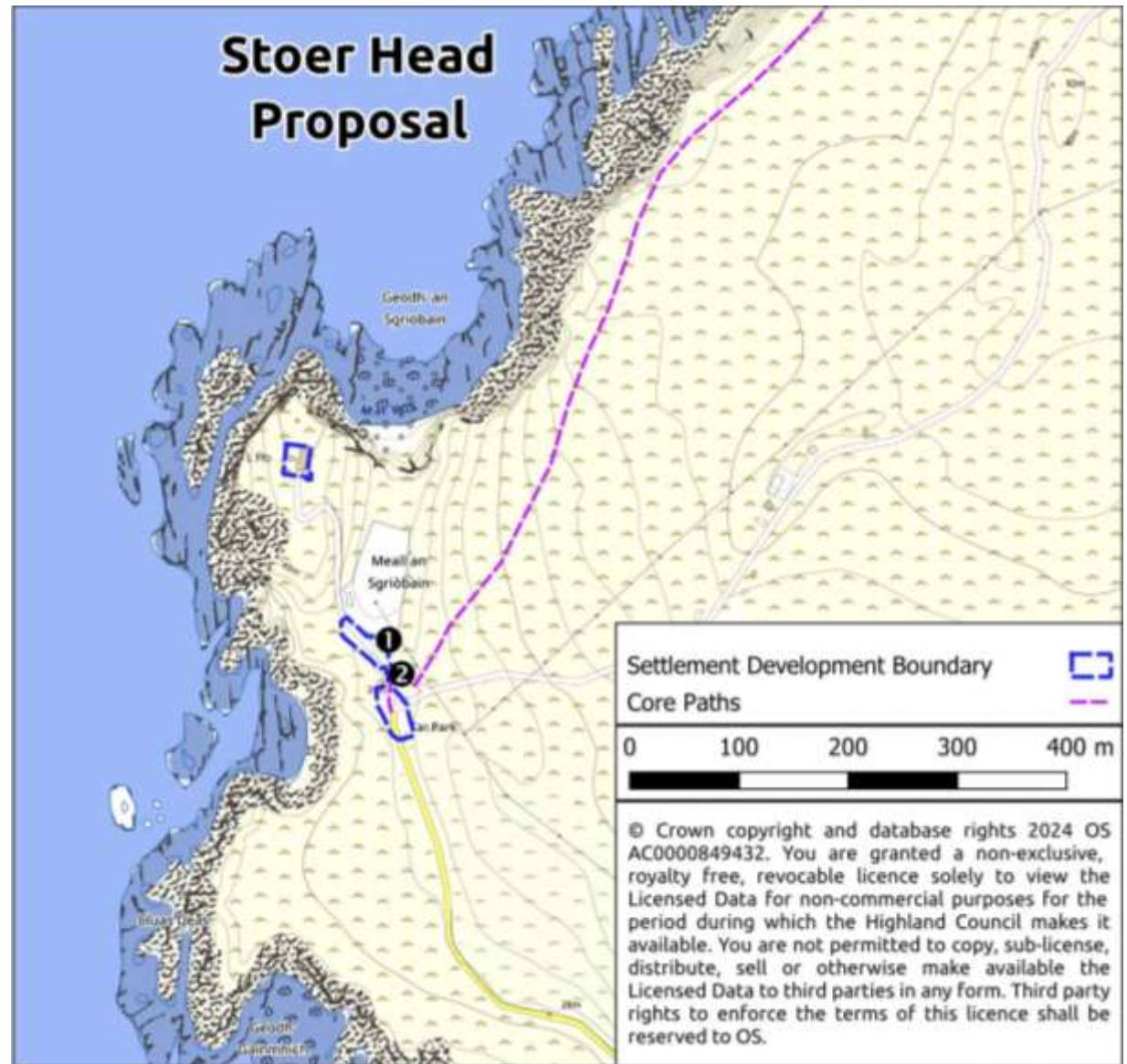
- a) Celebration of Local Heritage / Community Café at Stoer School. If new housing is not feasible on this site, explore opportunities to repurpose Stoer School as a community hub—potentially incorporating a small café, heritage displays, and flexible space for local groups and events.
- b) Explore the potential for a small, non-religious local cremation facility—reducing the need for residents to travel to Inverness for end-of-life services. A site such as Stoer School could be considered if appropriate and feasible.
- c) Progress the sale of Stoer School on the open market as soon as possible, as the building has remained unused and deteriorating for nearly a decade.
- d) Reinstate the plan to develop affordable housing.



Stoer Head

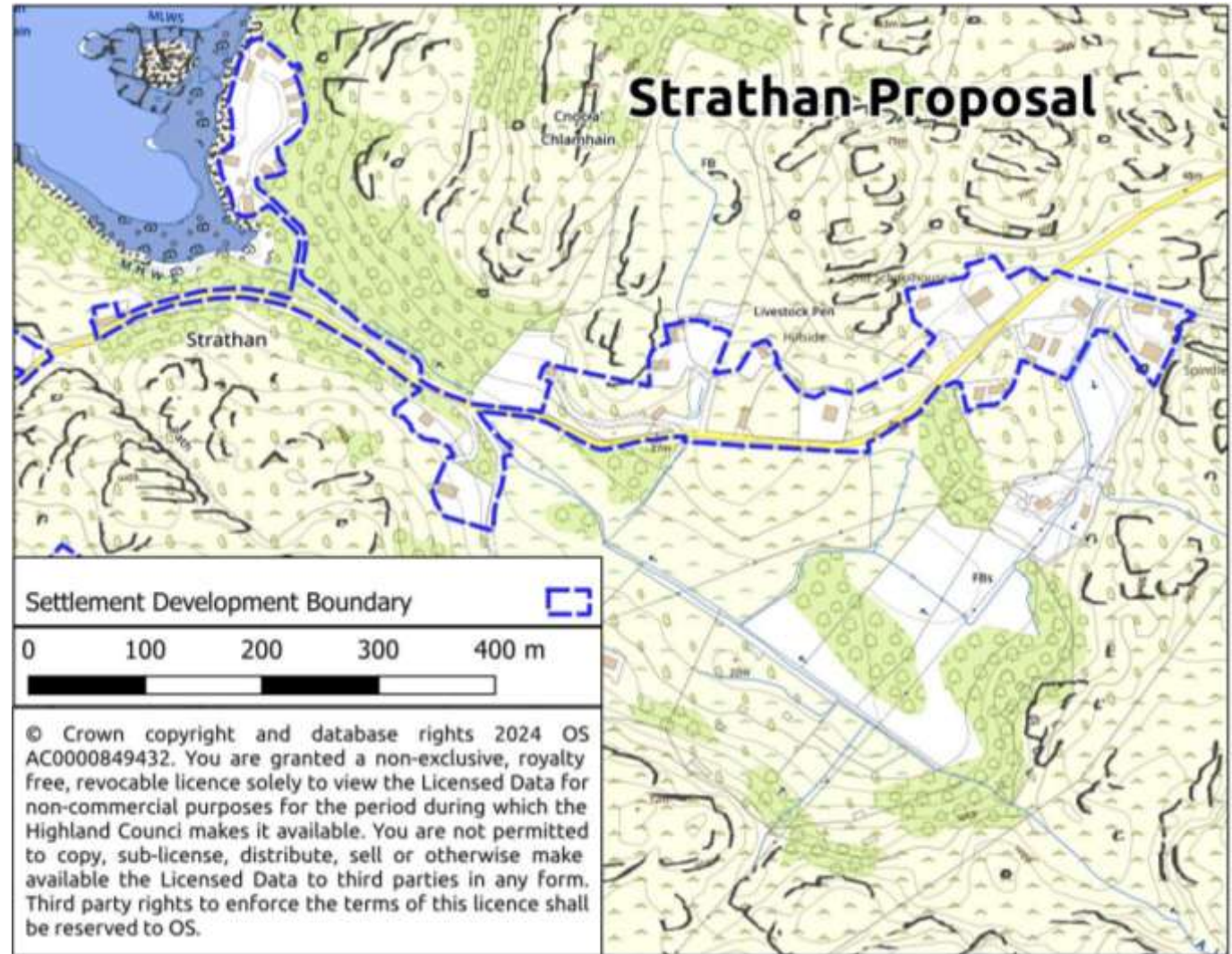
Potential Development Opportunities

- 1 Suggested as a suitable site for a new mobile catering van.
- 2 Restore the compost toilets to proper operational condition.



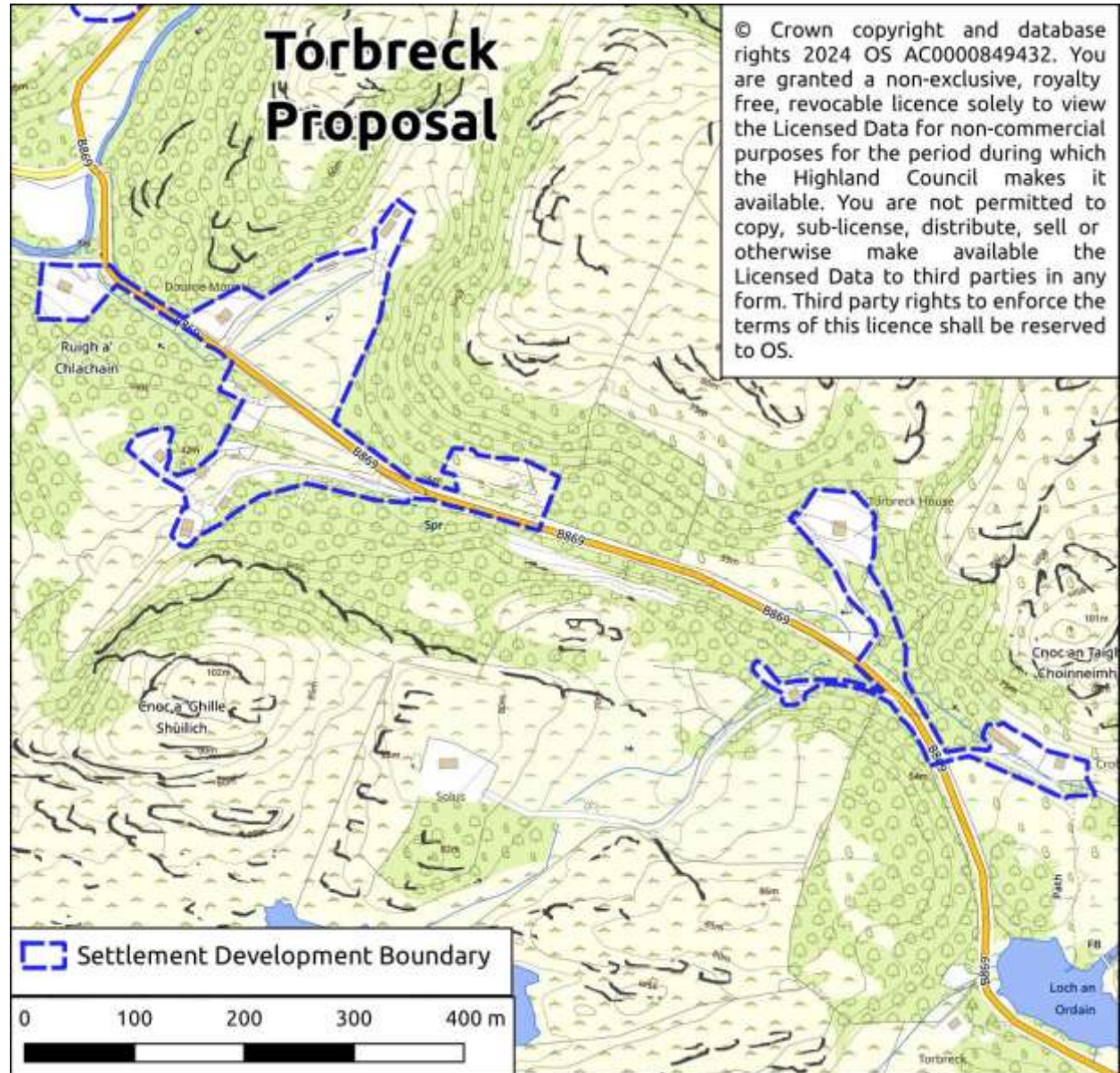
Strathan

No new development proposals



Torbreck

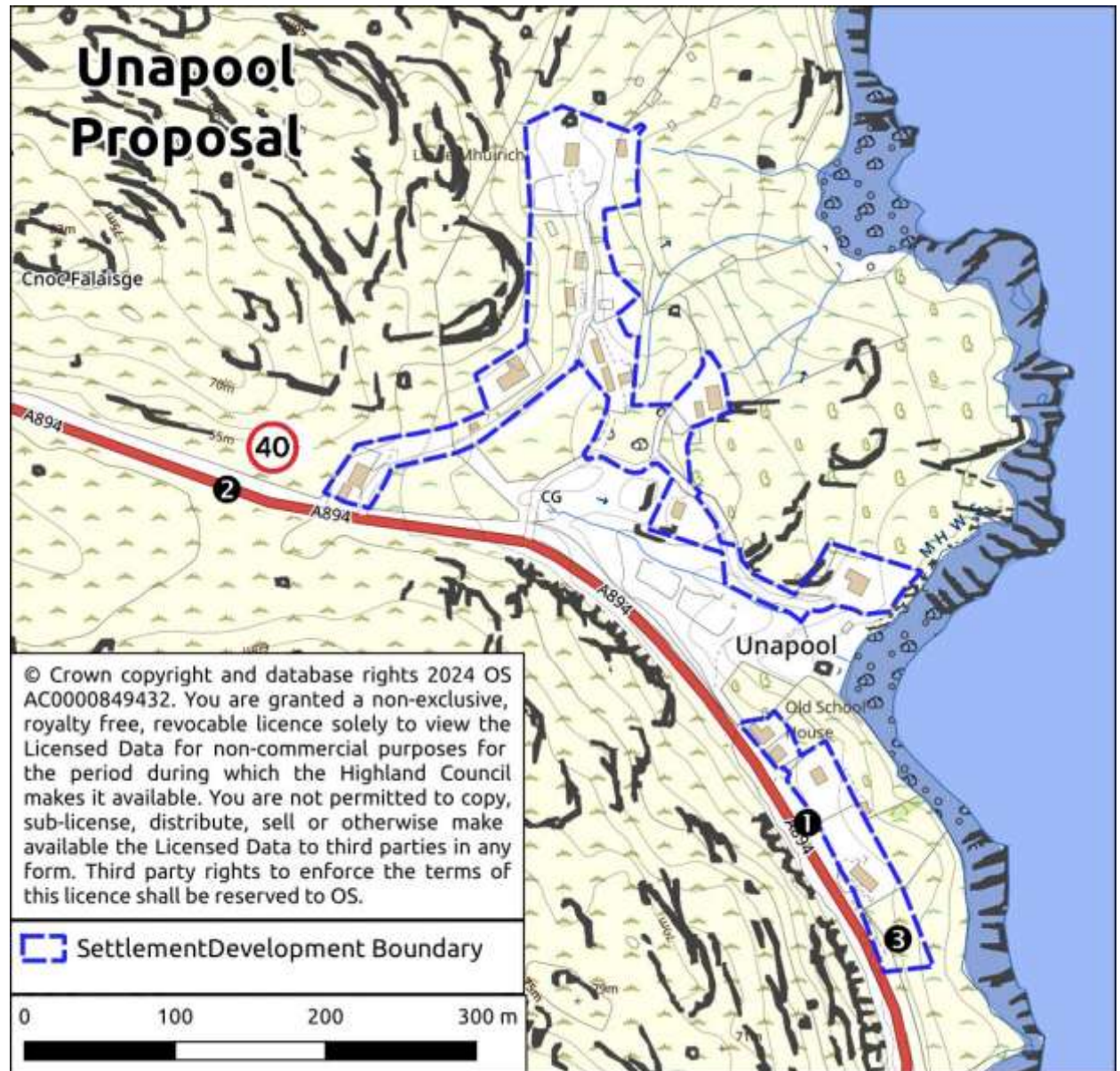
No new development proposals



Unapool

Potential Development Opportunities

- ❶ A mobile post office service is required to ensure continued access to essential postal and banking functions for residents, particularly those without digital access and the means to travel.
- ❷ A continuation of 40-mph speed restriction.
- ❸ Develop an improved car parking area to accommodate visitors to the Rockstop.



Future Planning Policy

The Local Place Plan offers several recommendations for the Highland Council to consider as it develops the upcoming Highland Local Development Plan. These recommendations reflect the aspirations and priorities of the local community and are intended to influence spatial planning decisions in alignment with national and regional policy frameworks.

Local Place Plans are a key mechanism for community engagement in the planning system, providing a bottom-up perspective that complements the strategic direction set out in Local Development Plans. Under the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, Local Place Plans are recognised as formal expressions of community intent, and their integration into the development planning process is encouraged to ensure that local voices shape future land use and development. By embedding the community's vision within the statutory planning framework, these recommendations aim to support a more inclusive, responsive, and place-based approach to development across Highland.

The Highland Local Development Plan must also align with the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), which sets out Scotland's spatial strategy and national planning policies. NPF4 places strong emphasis on sustainability, climate resilience, and the creation of 20-minute neighbourhoods—principles that are echoed in the recommendations of this Local Place Plan.

Key Policy Interpretation of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)

Definition of Terms

Within the 33 Policies, NPF4 affords certain exemptions for “Fragile Communities” but does not provide a definition of “Fragile Communities”. The section of “Fragile Communities” within this document provides evidence that the community of Assynt Community Council area is a “Fragile Community” and therefore should be afforded associated policy exemptions.

Policy 4: Natural Places

Most of Assynt Community Council Area is contained within the Coigach-Assynt Natural Scenic Area and the Assynt rural townships and their communities are described as integral to this landscape. We propose that development, such as housing, within townships areas that sustain communities are vital for the sustainability of these communities. We therefore request

Policy 4c)i Development proposals that will affect a ... National Scenic Area, ... will only be supported where: The objectives of designation and the overall integrity of the areas will not be compromised; Recognise as described in the NSA description of “*Settlements nestled within a wider landscape of mountain peaks, wild moorlands, and rocky seascapes*” that townships are an integral part of the NSA and be allowed to be able to expand within the community defined Settlement Development Boundaries.

Policy 5: Soils

According to NatureScot's 2016 Carbon and Peat Map, carbon-rich soils (Classes 1–3 and 5) cover some of the Assynt Community Council area. Most settlements, which make up around 1% of the area, are unclassified but likely contain high-carbon soils due to the region's climate. Applying Policy 5 as currently written would significantly restrict development in this area, undermining efforts to support

sustainable growth in this fragile community. Bearing in mind that peat restoration is ongoing over hundreds of hectares within the Assynt Community Council Area, we therefore request the following considerations:

Policy 5c) limiting development on carbon rich soils. Exempt Assynt from restrictions on development in carbon-rich soils, recognizing its status as “Fragile Community”.

Policy 5d) Requires detailed site-specific soil surveys for development on carbon-rich soils. Waive or simplify the requirement for detailed site-specific soil surveys, which pose a financial and logistical burden. Instead, limit peat-related restrictions to structural foundation requirements.

Policy 15 Local Living and 20 minutes neighbourhoods

NPF4 states *“In rural areas the approach to local living will be shaped by local context.”* As Assynt’s settlements are traditional crofting communities with extended lateral layouts within the geography of the landscape, the communities have defined their settlement development boundaries to provide local context to all the townships. Our communities need the support to adapt the policy for rural contexts by focusing on digital access and mobile services, support community hubs and transport links.

Policy 17 Rural Housing:

Our community recognises that long-term sustainability depends on the delivery of new, affordable homes. We therefore request the following considerations:

Policy 17a) Development Proposals for new homes supports the reinstatement of a former dwelling or reuse of an existing building. Currently, new homes are only supported if they reinstate former dwellings or reuse existing buildings, and only on sites identified in the Local Development Plan (LDP). This approach does not reflect the needs of Fragile Communities like Assynt, where flexibility is essential.

Policy 17c)i provides support for “new homes in remote rural areas” where the building of new homes “supports and sustains existing fragile communities”. This clause supports new homes in remote rural areas where development sustains “Fragile Communities”. Given the complex and undulating landscape of our area, we ask that this support explicitly include infill and windfall sites, not just those listed in the LDP, to enable appropriate housing growth.

Policy 29 Rural Development

We welcome the support for rural economic activity, including traditional crofting and other developments that create local employment. We also support efforts to encourage economic innovation and diversification, provided they respect the unique character of our rural communities.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our suggestions further and look forward to hearing how the Highland Council intends to incorporate them.

Local Priorities

The Local Place Plan offers several specific recommendations for the Highland Council to consider as it develops the upcoming Highland Local Development Plan. These suggestions, along with their justifications, are outlined below.

We hope the Highland Council will find our recommendations, along with those from other communities, useful in shaping the Highland Local Development Plan. This is a valuable opportunity to align planning policy across different levels to better address key issues affecting communities throughout the Highlands, such as providing affordable housing for working people and improving access to services, facilities, and opportunities. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our suggestions further and look forward to hearing how the Highland Council intends to incorporate them.

Housing

Suggestion	Rationale
Support affordable housing developments to meet local present and future demand.	To enable people to stay locally. To sustain our local communities.
Investigate ways to limit the proportion of second homes.	To maximise the number of houses lived in year round.
Fast track planning permission and building warrants for new homes for local people	To help address the urgent need for new housing.

Community Infrastructure

Suggestion	Rationale
Address the inadequacy of bus services	To enable reduced car use and increase accessibility for work and services.
Improve roads, fix potholes, enhance maintenance, and develop roadside paths for pedestrians	To support health and safety of road users, both in vehicles and on foot.
Address gaps and weaknesses in broadband and mobile phone coverage	To support local businesses, employment and education opportunities.
Support enhancements to community buildings	To protect community assets and support cohesion and social support.

Health, Welfare and Young People

Suggestion	Rationale
Explore opportunities for new rural childcare provision	To sustain local population, facilitate employment and encourage young people to stay in the area.
Invest in skills development opportunities, such as apprenticeships and greater use of community facilities for learning.	To sustain local communities. To provide opportunities for young people to stay in the area.
Develop facilities for young people, such as a youth hub and skate park.	To make the area more attractive for young people.
Address the desperate need for more care for elderly people. Address the drugs problem. Provide better support for emergency services.	To make life in the area safer and more viable for everyone.
Address the drugs problem.	To make life in the area safer and more viable for everyone.
Provide better support for emergency services.	To make life in the area safer and more viable for everyone.

Renewable Energy and Environment

Suggestion	Rationale
Support new renewable energy developments, connections and infrastructure.	To sustain local communities. To mitigate climate change through the promotion of new, low carbon industries relocating to the community.
Support local food developments and establishment of new crofts	To sustain local communities. To mitigate climate change through the promotion of new, low carbon industries.

Economic

Suggestion	Rationale
Review commercial assets to identify resources with spare capacity that can be repurposed.	To sustain local communities.
Retain earnings from Lochinver harbour for local use including for the development of harbour facilities and enterprises, such as a seaweed enterprise	To sustain local communities. To mitigate climate change through the promotion of new, low carbon industries.

References

NB: Highland Council has moved some of their documents, highlighted, to unknown locations so these URLs no longer work.

National Planning Framework 4

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-planning-framework-4/documents/>

Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan) (2018)

https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/178/development_plans/283/caithness_and_sutherland_local_development_plan

Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP) (2012)

https://www.highland.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/1505/highland-wide_local_development_plan.pdf

North West Sutherland Local Plan – Adopted Plan May 1987

https://www.highland.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/4879/north_west_sutherland_local_plan_written_statement.pdf

Assynt Community Plan 2019

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North West 2045 Call to Action and Socio-Economic Profile

<https://www.northwest2045.scot/publications>