





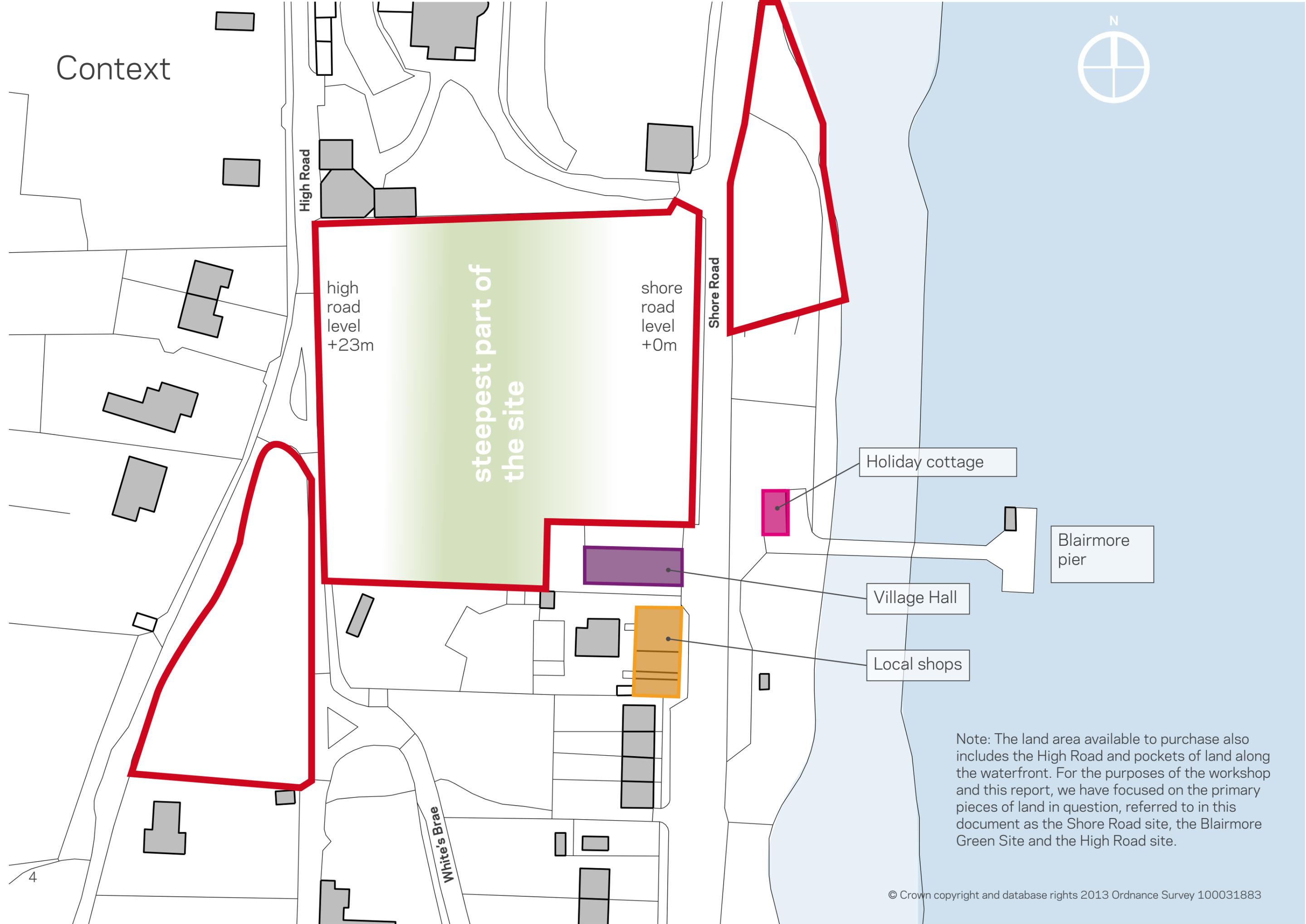
Executive summary

This document reports on a community workshop event held in Blairmore Village Hall on Saturday 26th October. The focus of this workshop was the future of the adjacent site, known as Blairmore Village Green within the context of the wider village.

Blairmore Village Green has been subject to much discussion over the years due to its critical location in the heart of the village. The community now has the opportunity to buy the site, on the condition that it can devise a long term sustainable use for it that will have a positive impact on the village as a whole.

The Blairmore Village Trust and the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority, working in collaboration to provide these community workshops, have brought in designers 7N Architects to help facilitate and move ideas forward. This creates a forum for the village to discuss this opportunity, evaluate the potential of this site for the community and begin to influence what the site might become. The outcome will be promoted as part of the emerging Local Development Plan, as well as provide the Trust with community consensus on what it wishes to do with this opportunity and the necessary information to take the next steps in the process of acquiring the site.

Context



High Road

high road level +23m

steepest part of the site

shore road level +0m

Shore Road

White's Brae

Holiday cottage

Blairmore pier

Village Hall

Local shops

Note: The land area available to purchase also includes the High Road and pockets of land along the waterfront. For the purposes of the workshop and this report, we have focused on the primary pieces of land in question, referred to in this document as the Shore Road site, the Blairmore Green Site and the High Road site.

Context

Blairmore village is located on the Cowal peninsula in the west of Scotland and in the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park. The village is situated on the western shore of Loch Long and backed by the hills and greenery of Benmore Forest. Blairmore pier has been restored so that it can once again receive boats and the Waverley stops here during the summer.

Adjacent to the village hall, is a green area known to the village as Blairmore Village Green. It is a steeply sloping site, that is largely unkempt. The Blairmore Village Trust has been informed by the owners, the Younger Estate, that they wish to sell this site and other small parcels of their remaining landholdings and will give the community first refusal. This and the ability of the Trust to seek grant funding through the Scottish Land Fund has given the community a unique opportunity to consider the possibility of taking the land into community ownership. This will not only ensure that the community have control over what happens to the heart of their village, but it also poses the chance to make use to the site for the greater good of the community.

In order to be successful in seeking grant funding, the Blairmore Village Trust must demonstrate, amongst other things, that there is community support for the purchase of the site and that uses can be found for it that will contribute to the social, physical and economic wellbeing of the village.

Blairmore faces many of the same challenges as other rural villages in picturesque parts of Scotland. Issues such as affordability of local housing, an aging population, diminishing school role and limited employment, combine with the changing habits of the visitor economy. Communities such as these are trying to figure out how to best harness their strengths and adapt and change to meet the challenges facing them, for long term economic and social stability. One way to do this is to make the most of opportunities such as this.



What does Blairmore need?

This question was open and people were encouraged to respond with anything. It was recognised that the site in question cannot be the answer to all of these issues, but that an understanding of the village's needs as a whole will help to influence what this site becomes.

visitor accommodation
to draw and keep
people here eg. youth
hostel or eco-friendly
huts

boat hire, bike hire,
there has to be
something to do here

whatever happens has
to be commercially
viable

the village has to have
a vision that is about a
growing community

need a recreational area
with seats, a play area,
shelter and toilets

somewhere to get a
coffee

affordable family housing,
units need to be smaller
to be affordable on open
market

there needs to be
somewhere to buy my
papers

district heating

there is a need for
housing suitable for
elderly people so that
they are not forced to
move away from their
home

there is anxiety about
the school roll

the village needs business
units and opportunity
for employment

Community Life and Visitor Income

A key discussion point centred around the need for income from visitors to the area, to support local businesses.

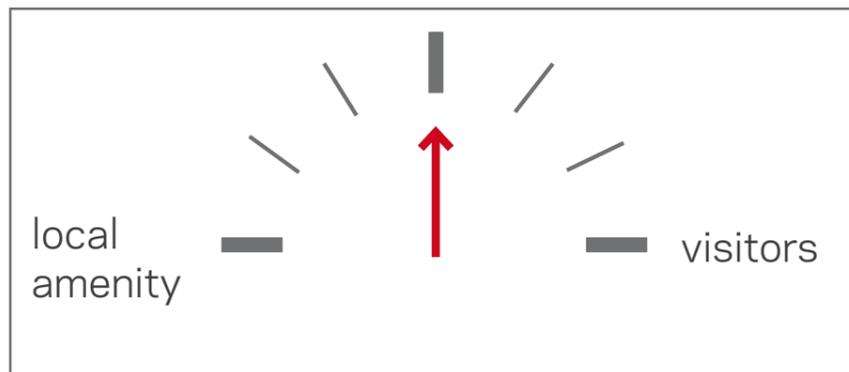
We asked the question, why would visitors come to Blairmore, though more accurately, it is, why would people spend time and money here?

Answers included:

- Accommodation
- Activities
- Complementary attractions



benmore gardens



small rural communities need to balance visitor needs with local needs to best benefit from visitor income (diagram drawn on board during workshop)



puck's glen walk



the cowal tourist map - visitcowal.co.uk

Feedback forms and Post-Its

During the workshop, feedback forms were distributed and collected, with specific questions for people to respond to. There were 23 forms collected and counted (of an overall workshop attendance estimated at 40 people). Below is a brief summary of the feedback received via this method:

1. The most popular suggestion was for a community hub. This is quite an interpretive term and not only did it receive several votes in its own right, but many of the other suggestions could be covered by this (toilets, cafe, soft play area, art/craft workshops etc).
2. A café/tea shop was second (with emphasis on evening accessibility).
3. There were several suggestions that might all be covered by the idea of a tourist venue: info boards, viewpoint, seating, bike hire, wooden tepees, viewpoint. Adding these all up put it in 3rd position.
4. Housing was the next most popular, with sheltered noted on more occasions than affordable.
5. There were equal votes for an active play area/outdoor gym and a park area with amenities
6. Art/craft workshops
7. Small business/Industrial units; a market garden; an accessible path linking the Shore & High Roads; shops (specifically a ferry shop) and a car park received the same number of votes.

Other suggestions:

- o Wildflower garden;
- o Dog walking area (fenced);
- o Keep the tree!
- o Combined shopping and transport;
- o A circuit created to bring more visitors and connect communities.

Interpretation:

The feedback received reflects discussion during the workshop. There is a desire for facilities that can benefit the community as well as visitors, such as play areas, toilets, a place to get food and drink and arts and crafts workshops. There is a need to provide parking, to facilitate ease of stopping and spending time in Blairmore, for residents and visitors alike. And there is also a desire to improve what Blairmore offers visitors, in terms of orientation, activities and accommodation.



Summary of Views

There was general agreement that the Blairmore Village Green site is important to the village, and the opportunity now available for the community to take control and be instrumental in what happens to it should be taken.

There was acknowledgement that a range of uses should be found that are self-sustaining - the green cannot rely on ongoing volunteer work.

In reality, the process of transforming the village green site will be step-by-step and be developed over time. It is important therefore to have a clear idea of where it is going, so that the steps in the process all lead in the right direction.

There is a desire to use this opportunity to implement ways to breathe life into the local economy and/or to address some local needs. This is not only as a requirement for receiving grant funding in the first place, but to properly make the most of what the site can do for the village. The means in which to do this will require further discussion.

Questions put to the room ...

1. Should the community buy the site?

Yes

- though this is dependent on finding a range of uses that is complementary to the village and what makes it a desirable place to live in.

2. Does the community support the provision of affordable housing?

Yes

- not necessarily on the village green site, but in the village.

3. Does the community support the development of employment opportunities?

Yes

4. Does the community want the high road to be brought up to adoptable standards?

Yes

(concern raised by those living on the road about personal cost implications)



Strategic Approach

Following on from the workshop discussions, it is clear that Blairmore Green offers the community the potential to significantly enhance the village as well help to contribute positively to some of the needs highlighted on page 6.

In terms of spatial approach to the site, Ewan of 7N Architects briefly sketched out a strategic framework during the workshop which is illustrated in more detail in the adjacent diagram. It is too early in this process to fix uses or built form, however it is important that a vision and framework is set out so that:

- o The community can discuss the approach and come to a broad consensus;
- o Ongoing discussions are based on a realistic appraisal of what is appropriate for the site, in terms of context, visual impact and what can potentially be supported by the planning authority;
- o Next steps in the process can be made in the right direction.

This page and the next outlines a strategic approach that may be taken to Blairmore Green and the associated areas of land under discussion.





1. Village Green

Keep a village green central to the plan. This should front onto the Shore Road and act as a multi-purpose space for community gatherings, visitor picnics and everything in between.

2. Zones for potential development

Outlined are areas that could support appropriate development. Potential options are outlined over the next few pages but in principle, the following should apply:

Pink: Should support visitor income and activities, for example visitor orientation, bike/kayak hire, food/drink. Could be a community enterprise or small independent business. Scope to include publicly accessible toilets to serve the green. Can be a first step in a phased process and work with functions in the village hall. Importantly, it should address people coming in from the pier.



Cafe at Jupiter Artland, Edinburgh

Purple: Scope for some development, with appropriate uses to be discussed. Frontage onto the green will be an important consideration.

Yellow: Scope for some development, with appropriate uses to be discussed. Must not block views from existing homes and take cognisance of the overall view of the village when approaching by boat. The High Road in its current condition is viewed as a constraint on potential uses.

Orange: Scope for development, with appropriate uses to be discussed. Can be utilised for identified community needs that are less public facing, such as housing or small business units. The site may act as enabling for the main village green site.



The Gale Centre, Gairloch

3. Wildflower garden

The middle, more steeply sloping part of the site can become a wildflower garden to promote habitat diversity and in particular, provide opportunity for bee habitat conservation. Paths and steps can enable people to walk up the site and enjoy the views, with some adventure play equipment dotted amongst the trees.

4. Visitor parking

Subject to a view on safety and traffic, visitor parking, including a coach layby to be provided to encourage people to stop and spend time in Blairmore.

Option 1

Option 1 consists of a minimal amount of built development on the site and may act as a first phase in a phased approach. It makes the most of the immediate strengths of the site; its green character, its proximity to the village hall and the pier, and the views that can be enjoyed from the top.

It suggests a small building adjacent to the village hall, which can be a community enterprise much like similar projects in Arrochar and Gairloch, or a private local business. Opportunities include sea kayak hire, food and drink, visitor and walking orientation. Educational and interpretation uses may be accommodated in tandem with the village hall. The site can be landscaped to provide a village green, hillside wildflower garden, children's playpark, parking, local interpretation and orientation and at the top, a viewing platform.

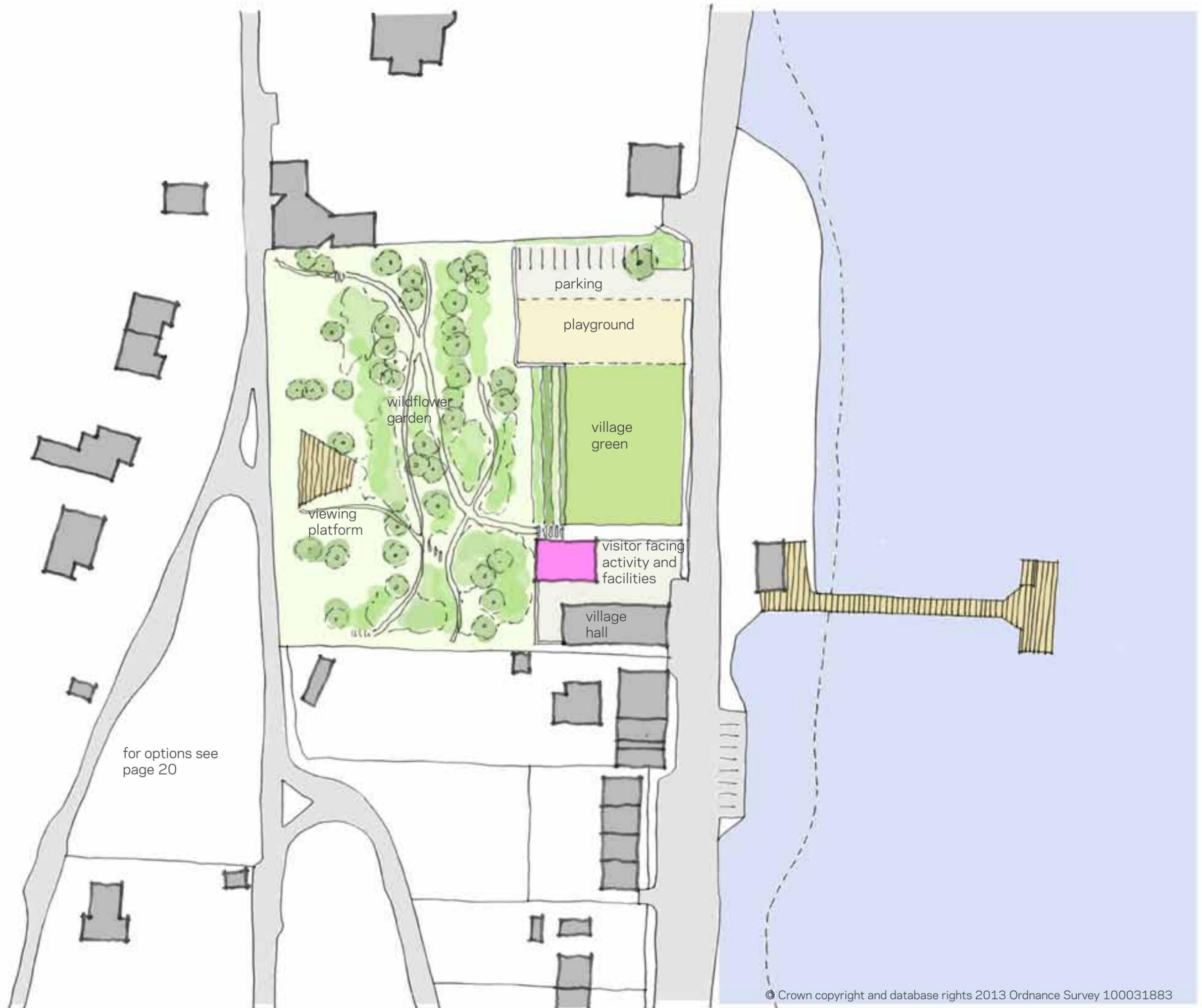


Peak shop, Nottingham



Site sketch section

Option 1



Site sketch plan

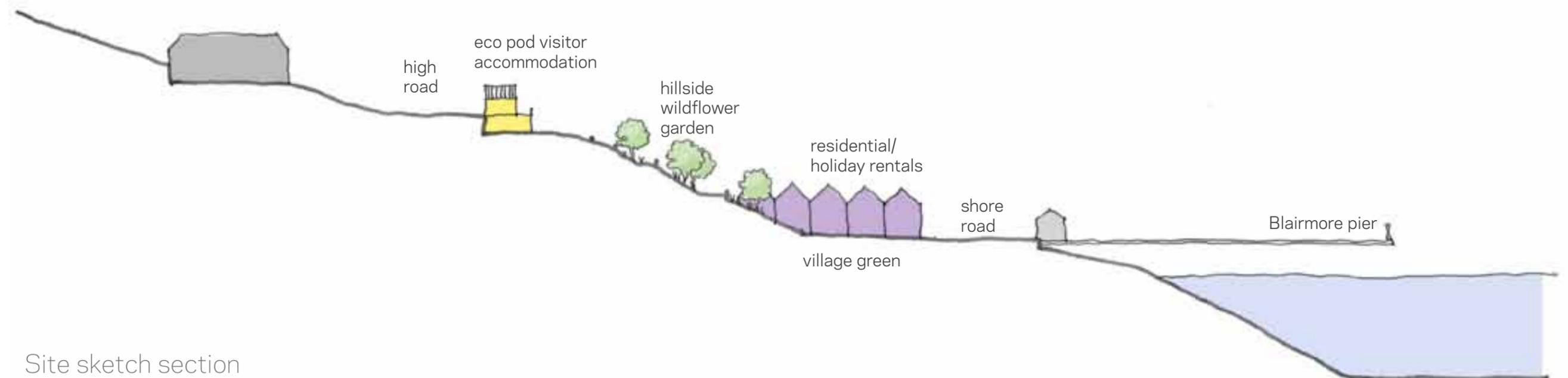
Option 2

Option 2 proposes more built development and may act as further phases in a phased approach. In addition to the community/visitor hub (shown in pink), a row of houses would provide frontage and enclosure to the other side of the green. These houses could be suitable for elderly people, young families and/or holiday rentals.

At the top of the slope, there is the opportunity to provide small 'eco-pod' style holiday houses. These may complement Blairmore promoting itself as a destination for outdoor activities, including walking, sea-kayaking and cycling. A relatively light touch approach to development in this location reduces the issues posed by the condition of the High Road.



Glencomeragh House Retreat Center, Ireland



Site sketch section

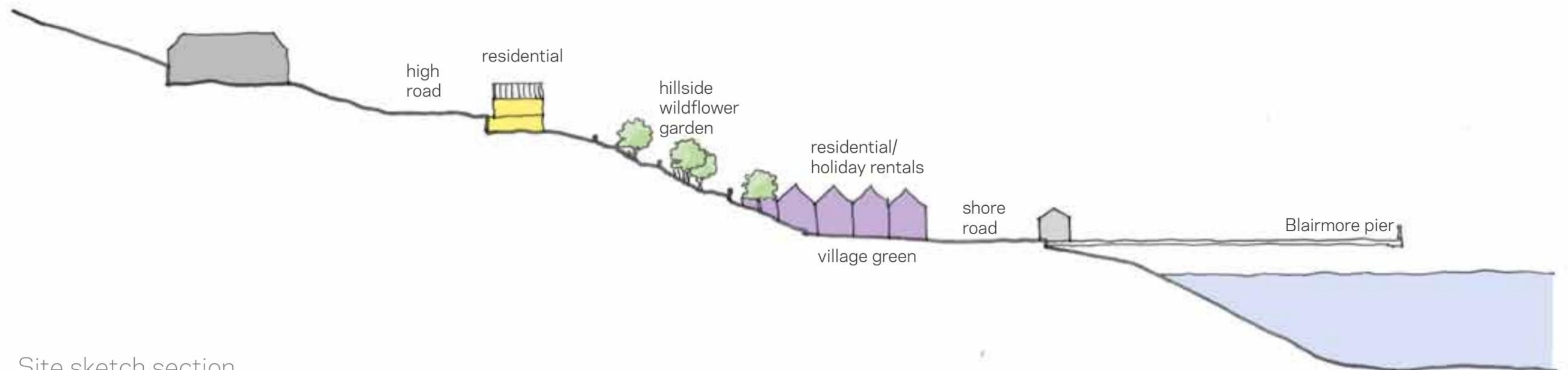
Option 2



Site sketch plan

Option 3

Option 3 focuses on the provision of residential accommodation on the site. During the workshop, the need for housing was identified, though it was undecided whether Blairmore Green was the best place to locate housing provision. This option suggests a potential approach, that the site can accommodate. There is the opportunity for flexibility in terms of unit sizes, and therefore target markets.



Site sketch section

Option 3

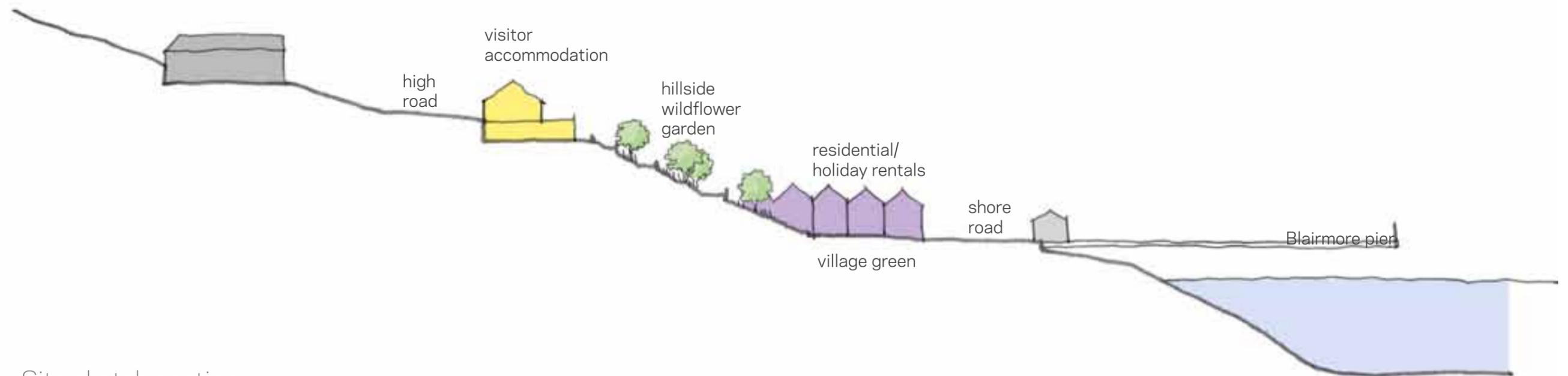


Site sketch plan

Option 4

Option 4 relates to option 2, however it suggests a different type of visitor accommodation at the top of the site, which could be a small hotel or bunkhouse.

Both Options 2 and 4 present the greater opportunities in terms of visitor stick, that is, staying overnight and spending money in the area. These would require support in terms of complementary development, such as visitor orientation, activities and opportunity for purchasing food and drink.



Site sketch section

Option 4



for options see page 20

Site sketch plan

High Road Site

As part of the early evaluation process, it is appropriate to also consider the High Road site that will form part of the purchase. The options illustrated below suggest utilising this site for identified community need, be that the ability to sell plots to the private market as an enabler for the Blairmore Green site, or the provision of affordable housing or small business units, which may also act as an enabling project in more limited capacity.



Two private housing plots



Small business units



Residential - in the affordable spectrum, ie. small units in private ownership, shared ownership, mid-rent....

Conclusion

The Blairmore community have an exciting opportunity to take the future of the heart of the village into their own hands. It is important however, that there is clear idea and consensus about what the intention is to do with the site, once it is in community ownership and how this will fit in with a wider strategy for the village as a whole.

Communities such as Arrochar and Gairloch have already followed this path and much can be learned from their experiences. Community enterprise is becoming increasingly important to small rural villages, to stabilise their economic wellbeing and provide local community facilities.

This is a step in the process and the aim of the proposals contained in this document is to provide food for thought. The next step will be to ask what the community as a whole feel is best for the village and the area. This will help to inform the grant application process and the Local Development Plan, which is currently being prepared by the National Park.



potential to use the slope of the site to create outdoor terraced seating facing the water, for events or just to enjoy the view



use local knowledge of gardens and plant species to create a beautiful hillside garden in Blairmore



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