

## Speaking for Scotland's Buildings



*This comment was submitted by the AHSS Highlands & Islands Cases Panel via an online planning portal*

**Council:** Highlands

**Application reference:** 21/03487/FUL

**Address:** Beach and Shore Street, Ullapool

**Date AHSS comment submitted:** 20<sup>th</sup> August 2021

The AHSS Highlands & Islands Cases Panel objects to the proposed new promenade, sea "defences", and road widening, as it will significantly compromise the setting of Shore Street and the defining view of Ullapool, contrary to the placemaking priorities in the West Highlands LDP. It is also unnecessary.

Ullapool is possibly the best example of a planned town by Telford for the British Fisheries Society. As a harbour town, its seafront streets and beaches are its defining image, as seen from approaches to the town both on land and sea, and from the main pier.

Originally the east shore was like much of the west is today: a sloping natural beach with vegetation above. Some householders created gardens and built walls across Shore Street from their properties. In the 20th century, the present sea wall was built, but this matches the slope of the former natural bank, and echoes the colour of the beach shingle. From an aesthetic perspective, the present sea wall is simple and blends in, forming a narrow line between the natural beach and the architecture of Shore Street.

In contrast this proposed scheme would be much more visible, as it is much larger, uses materials dissimilar from the present solution, and destroys much of the beach, particularly the most visible higher portions. This partial beach loss, even worse in the marina proposal, significantly compromises the setting of Shore Street.

There appear to be two schemes with differing promenade widths, but both have areas of "rock armour" in excess of the present sea wall area. Rock armour consists of large boulders, which create a random pattern of light and shade, drawing attention to this distinctive contrast with the beach and houses. Over time they do not blend in but attract and trap detritus, which makes them more visible, and they act both practically and visually as a barrier between the shore and the street, compromising the links between the town and the sea which is responsible for its existence.

There is a remarkable lack of information on the proposed treatments of the street and promenade, but the principles of substantial new hard surfacing expanding Shore Street over the present sea wall and beach are apparent, and make clear that the present link between the houses of Shore Street and the sea will be largely removed, with access to the beach only possible at two points.

There are two main reasons given to support the scheme: traffic, and overtopping. In both cases this scheme is a sticking-plaster solution where effective addressing of the underlying causes would be far preferable, less damaging to Ullapool's setting, and more effective.

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It is a well-established principle that increasing road capacity increases traffic, rather than relieving congestion. Existing problematic traffic is largely related to the ferry terminal and harbour. Ullapool's grid layout allows a simple solution: re-route ferry traffic through existing and upgraded roads such as Quay Street to the A835, with one way traffic enforced on Shore Street and possibly elsewhere, and weight and other traffic restrictions preventing cut-throughs on unsuitable streets.

It is clear that the proposed rock armour would reduce overtopping by the positioning of energy-absorbing materials well in front of the existing sea wall line. What the supporting material here does not do is consider the causes of the existing overtopping, or consider any alternatives beyond the existing and proposed arrangements which might achieve this with less conservation impact.

Originally, when tide and wind conditions created the high waves that now overtop Shore Street's defences, the energy was able to dissipate to the west along the beach. The original pier at Ullapool included a bridge, which permitted this to continue to some extent. More recent piers present a barrier to longitudinal dissipation of tidal energy, and as a consequence the waves are constrained and funnelled within the east shore area, causing overtopping.

Alleviating this would require the restoration of lateral flow beneath the solid portions of the existing pier, and modelling would indicate the extent and effectiveness of different possibilities here. With the predicted rise in sea levels over future years, it is vital that clearly manmade problems such as this overtopping are properly solved, rather than compromising Ullapool's unique setting for what the application clearly acknowledges is not a permanent solution to overtopping.

In summary, Ullapool's entire existence is about the relationship between its people and the sea. This scheme would unnecessarily break that link, to the detriment of Ullapool's character and appearance. Shore Street should remain as-is, with alternative solutions to traffic and overtopping sought.