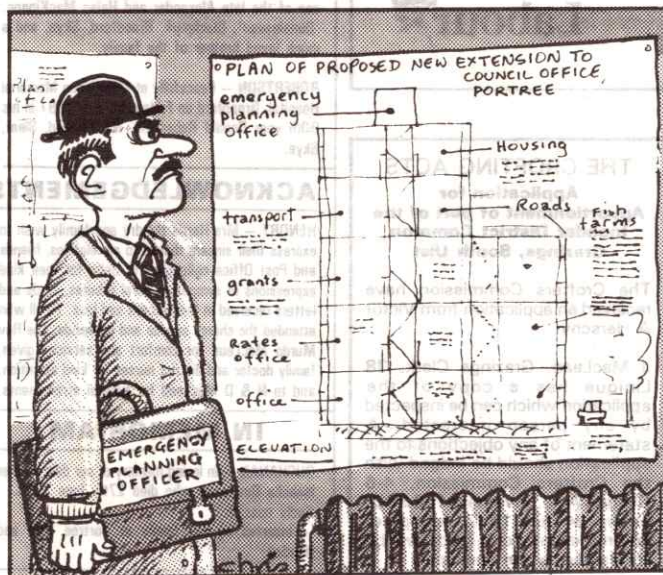




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## Council's bombshell scheme for Civil Defence centre

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Skye and Lochalsh District Council have come up with a cunning plan to fund the construction of their new office extension on the site of the former drill hall in Portree.

By designating part of the new extension as their Emergency Operations Centre for civil defence purposes the council hope the building will become eligible for a 75 per cent specific grant available from the Scottish Home and Health Department for constructing Civil Defence control centres.

At their meeting last Friday the council had to consider — as part of their Civil Defence obligations — the siting of an emergency operations centre in their area from which the local authority can supposedly control and co-ordinate action "in the event of hostile attack or a threat of hostile attack".

A report from the regional emergency planning officer in Inverness suggested that a small basement room in Portree police station would be an eminently suitable location for an emergency operations centre and urged the council to carry out a costing study for its conversion. Grants of 75 per cent are available from the Government to carry out the conversion, the emergency planning officer pointed out in his report.

Portree rubbish dump would be a more suitable location, suggested councillor Donald Cameron. He explained: "If they (the Government) are stupid enough to spend money on this then they will be stupid enough to spend it on the rubbish dump."

Mr Cameron felt the council should only get involved in building an EOC if the Government paid for 100 per cent of the cost. "If not we should not accept this Civil Defence nonsense," he said.

Mr Cameron's attitude was far too frivolous, thought councillor Murdo

James MacLeod. "Whether we like it or not we have a legal duty to provide this," he said. He had a point: after all, Portree rubbish dump is not bomb-proof.

But Mr MacLeod was visibly shell-shocked when it was explained that the Government's own frivolous treatment of Civil Defence meant that no provision is made to render emergency operations centres blast-proof.

After a discussion on the merits of Civil Defence — such as the increased capacity the programme could give the council in dealing with floods, and the convenience of being able to use typewriters bought out of the Civil Defence budget for other purposes — Mr Cameron amended his original suggestion.

Picking up on the point that Civil Defence equipment could be used for other purposes if it were near at hand, rather than in a dingy police station basement, he suggested that the EOC be located in the council's new extension. "If we designate the new extension as our emergency operations centre we could then ask to recover 75 per cent of the cost of building it," he ventured.

But the idea did not impress some councillors. Peter Fulton backed by Murdo James MacLeod tried to spoil the fun by moving that the council accept the recommendations of the emergency planning officer's report.

Mr Cameron put the direct negative, which won by a single vote, and then formally presented his motion that the council should make provision for an EOC in its new extension and then apply for a 75 per cent grant from the Government to build it.

The motion was carried, so it remains to be seen whether Skye and Lochalsh will have the first emergency operations centre in the UK with full district council facilities and a hall/gallery space for community use. Except, of course, in the event of . . .