

**THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL**  
**PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT**  
**COMMITTEE – 12<sup>th</sup> August 2009**

Agenda Item	
Report No	

**Highland Wide Local Development Plan**  
**Main Issues Report**

**Report by Director of Planning and Development**

**SUMMARY**

The Main Issues Report represents a major first step in the preparation of the Highland wide Local Development Plan, which is a key part of the Council's Programme. It is being brought forward as part of a pilot project with Scottish Government.

The attached Main Issues Report highlights the major development issues facing the Highlands and sets out a number of options for how these will be dealt with in the Local Development Plan when it is prepared. In doing so it sets out where the Council is genuinely seeking help from members of the public, the development industry, key agencies and other interests to work out what the best way forward is. Members are asked to approve this document for public consultation.

The preparation of the Local Development Plan meets the commitment set out in the Council's Programme to prepare a new Highland Development Plan which will enhance the conditions for balanced and sustainable economic growth for Highland communities.

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Members will recall the series of reports which have been brought to this committee regarding the Highland wide Local Development Plan. Following a Members' workshop held on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2009 the Main Issues Report has been finalised and is circulated as Booklet A.
- 1.2 The purpose of a Main Issues Report is to highlight the choices that can be taken in planning for the development of the Highland area over the next twenty years. **It is not a draft plan.** It is seeking the views of the community, the development industry and other interested parties as to the options for how development can be delivered in a way which fits with an overall vision and strategy. In doing so, the main issues report seeks to address the issues where the Council is genuinely seeking help in finding the best way forward.

- 1.3 This Main Issues Report is the first to be produced by Highland Council under the new planning legislation and is only the second Main Issues Report produced in Scotland. The work carried out to date has been progressed as part of a Scottish Government pilot scheme to demonstrate the benefits of partnership working in producing a new style local development plan.
- 1.4 Once approved the Highland wide Local Development Plan will replace the Highland Structure Plan (2001) and all of the general policies contained within our existing Local Plans. This will ensure a consistent approach to dealing with planning issues at a Highland wide level. It will also update the provisions of the Inverness Local Plan and Nairnshire Local Plans in relation to development in the A96 Corridor and parts of the Caithness Local Plan as it relates to regeneration priorities.

## **2. Content of the Main Issues Report**

- 2.1 The Main Issues Report covers a number of issues that need to be addressed by planning policy over the next twenty years. These issues have been linked to the Single Outcome Agreement 2 and the Council's Programme "Strengthening the Highlands".
- 2.2 The Main Issues Report invites comment on a spatial strategy for Highland which highlights some of the priorities set out in National Planning Framework 2 and the Scottish Transport Projects Review. Of particular significance, it highlights the key issues there are with the implementation of the Council's A96 Corridor Development Framework and suggests the preferred options in moving this forward. As Members are aware, there are a number of large planning applications already submitted to the Council which will benefit from updated guidance before they can be determined.
- 2.3 There are also other important parts of the spatial strategy. For example the Caithness area offers the opportunity for regeneration and it is important that the new Local Development Plans are pro-active in ensuring this area can build on the opportunities which may come from marine renewables and other inward investment. The role of the other towns and villages in Highland is emphasised, as is the need to ensure a consistent approach to building in the Highland countryside. This will standardise the wide range of different approaches that are contained within existing Local Plans.
- 2.4 To help us to work toward this vision and strategy we have set out objectives for the Highland wide Local Development Plan. These have been linked to the objectives and themes set out in the Single Outcome Agreement:
  - Sustainable Highland Communities;
  - Safeguarding our Environment;

- A competitive, sustainable and adaptable Highland economy;
- a Healthier Highlands;
- Better opportunities for all/A fairer Highland

2.5 For each of these objectives we have a range of different policy approaches which will contribute to the overall vision and strategy for Highland.

2.6 When published, the Main Issues Report will be accompanied by a Monitoring Report. This forms one part of the evidence base for the plan and is required to inform plan-making, justify the plan's content and provide a baseline for later monitoring.

### **3.0 Public Consultation**

3.1 This Main Issues Report is one of a number of documents which the Council are consulting on in parallel. These are the draft Coastal Development Strategy, the draft Local Transport Strategy and the initial stage of the Local Housing Strategy.

3.2 The Development Plans Team have been meeting members of the public and Community Councils over the past months to give updates on the new development planning system and discuss how this will effect Highland especially in terms of preparation of a new plan. This has been supplemented by information being posted on the Highland wide Local Development Plan blog and the Highland Council website.

The official start to the public consultation on the Main Issues Report will be 31 August 2009 and it will run for 10 weeks. This consultation period is longer than originally planned to allow more time for the community to respond on what is a significant document for Highland. The Main Issues Report will be available to view at all Highland Council Libraries, Service Points, planning offices and online.

3.3 Information days will be held in a number of locations throughout Highland and the team will also be giving presentations and inviting comments at a number of ward forums.

### **4.0 Strategic Environmental Assessment**

4.1 Following a partner workshop with SEPA, SNH and Historic Scotland in May 2009, a Strategic Environmental Assessment Environmental Report has been produced and will be submitted to the Consultation Authorities and the Scottish Government for their consideration and comment on the 31st August 2009.

## **5.0 Equalities Impact Assessment**

5.1 An equalities impact assessment has been prepared and will be published week commencing 31 August 2009. This has been produced in partnership with the Council's Equalities Officer.

## **6.0 Community Engagement**

6.1 A short report setting out how the consultation on the Main Issues Report has met the National Standards for Community Engagement (and where appropriate the standards set out in Scottish Planning = Effective Engagement and Delivery) will be available online in due course.

## **7.0 Financial Implications**

7.1 This report has no direct financial implications. By working in partnership with other services it has been possible to minimise the cost of the public consultation to the Council.

## **8.0 Conclusion**

8.1 The Main Issues Report is the first opportunity for members of the wider community to have their say on how they would like to see Highland develop over the next twenty years. The report has been produced in a way which is hoped will be engaging and will enable the debate on the future development of Highland.

## **9.0 RECOMMENDATION**

9.1 Members are asked to:

- (i) Agree the Main Issues Report is made available for public consultation on 31 August 2009; and
- (ii) Agree a report is brought to this committee setting out the findings of the public consultation and bringing forward the Proposed Highland wide Local Development Plan.

Signature:

Designation: Director of Planning and Development

Date: 4 August 2009

Authors: Malcolm Macleod/Simon Hindson