

2. VISION



The Council's vision for Caithness is of a growing population, a robust and expanding economy, improved communications and services coupled with strong safeguards for the environment. This can best be achieved by preparing an overall development strategy for the County. The principal components of this strategy are based on the following objectives.

Strategic Objectives

Overall

1. The Council will seek to meet the needs of the existing population and its projected growth for housing, employment, transport, social and recreational facilities whilst protecting and enhancing the environment as part of a balanced and sustainable strategy.
2. The Council will seek to direct the majority of

development to suitable sites within the main communities, particularly along the Wick - Thurso – Dounreay corridor. Infill development and small scale incremental growth will be allowed in smaller, rural communities.

3. The Council will promote the A9, A99 and A836 roads as tourist routes and identify key strategic sites for new facilities.

Economy

4. In an effort to promote economic development throughout the County, the Council will support the overall objectives and strategy of the Structure Plan and Caithness Partnership through:

- safeguarding and support for strategic industrial and business development sites and allocation of land for general business and industrial development, particularly along the Wick – Thurso – Dounreay corridor;
- promotion of Dounreay as a Centre of Excellence for decommissioning, energy studies and other high technology uses;
- identification of high quality locations for incoming businesses;
- identification of Murkle Bay and Forss as potential large scale industrial sites possibly for oil-related development;
- a major railfreight storage / distribution centre at Georgemas;
- promotion of sites for new visitor attractions, especially at Dunbeath / Lybster and, John O' Groats;
- identification of opportunities for interpretation, notably in relation to the Flow Country and archaeology;
- promotion of Wick and Thurso town centres

as sub regional shopping, business and service centres;

- support for sustainable agricultural diversification including crofter forestry, environmental programmes and re-using derelict farm buildings;
- support for local primary processing and value added production, including the flagstone industry and timber processing;
- promotion of the local, natural and cultural heritage as a tourism and educational asset; and
- encouragement of new tourist initiatives, particularly those related to the natural environment, including footpath / cycle networks.

Housing

5. In order to meet the housing needs of the local community, the Council will:

- identify sufficient land to meet the housing requirements identified in table 1;
- direct most housing development to settlements in line with existing infrastructure capacity and planned improvements;
- seek from landowners and developers contributions towards affordable housing where local need exists;
- encourage re-use of vacant houses and rehabilitation / redevelopment of derelict properties and will raise the inequalities with new build in respect of VAT with the Government and for crofter housing grants with the Crofters Commission;
- restrict development in the open countryside around Wick and Thurso where there are commuting pressures;

- expect development to have regard to infrastructure capacity, impact on sensitive environmental features and traditional settlement patterns.

Settlement Area	2000 - 2007	2008 - 2017	Total
Dunbeath / Lybster	40	50	90
Wick / Thrumster	195	255	475
Watten	15	25	40
Halkirk / Altnabreac	50	50	100
Reay	15	20	35
Thurso	205	255	460
Castletown / Dunnet	60	65	125
John O' Groats / Keiss	40	40	80
TOTAL	630	750	1380

* Figures based on Structure Plan and rolled forward one year. They will be subject to monitoring / review in respect of the latter period as well as local variations, in the event of increased activity at Dounreay.

Infrastructure

- The Council will seek to:
 - ensure that key roads are brought up to an acceptable standard and fit into the natural environment as far as is practical. Priority improvements are the A9 north of the Ord, the A99 and a Thurso by-pass.
 - support measures that will maintain and improve the Far North Rail Line, Scrabster and Wick harbours and Wick airport to encourage greater use by passengers and freight.
 - reduce the environmental impact of traffic in settlements and larger developments through

traffic calming measures and by giving priority to pedestrians and cyclists;

- encourage improvements to utilities, particularly the water supply south of Lybster; Wick mains sewerage system; Castletown, Watten and Thurso waste water systems;
- support the strategic and local role of the Seater landfill site and consider future proposals for the sorting, processing and transfer of waste in accordance with the Highland waste management network/strategy and Structure Plan;
- encourage the expansion of telecommunication development in accordance with the Structure Plan; and
- support the development of renewable energy opportunities in suitable locations that accord with the Structure Plan and National Planning Policy Guidance.

Community

- The Council will seek to safeguard and enhance communities and access to social and recreation facilities through:
 - protection of residential amenity;
 - promotion of quality living environments;
 - accommodating the needs of all sectors of the community;
 - securing developer contributions towards local community initiatives;
 - identification of land for a major new sports centre in Thurso and a smaller sports hall in Wick;
 - supporting the development of a community arts venue;
 - supporting the provision of multi-purpose community buildings in smaller towns and the rural areas;

- supporting a Countryside Around Towns initiative for Wick and Thurso;
- maintaining and enhancing the core path network, including promotion of a coastal footpath; and
- supporting structural planting along the Wick - Thurso corridor in conjunction with development initiatives.

Environment

- The Council will promote biodiversity, safeguard and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of Caithness by:
 - safeguarding statutorily designated natural heritage sites, species and habitats, including those covered by European Directives and international Conventions;
 - protecting the integrity of landscape designations or areas, including Regional Scenic Areas/Coasts and those on the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes;
 - protecting archaeological sites, landscapes, Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas and their settings and public Rights of Way;
 - promoting building designs that are in keeping with the landscape and cultural identity of the area;
 - protecting green corridors, important views, essential open spaces and the traditional crofting settlement form;
 - encouraging regeneration of native woodlands and new planting;
 - to encourage the re-use of recycled materials and energy efficiency; and
 - identifying new uses for redundant buildings, vacant and derelict land.

STRATEGY MAP

LEGEND

-  **Major Settlement**
Town Centre Regeneration
Housing Expansion
Business / Industrial Expansion
Tourist Centre & Expansion Potential
-  **Key Village**
Housing Expansion
Service Centre
-  **Other Villages / Local Service Centre**
-  **Major Growth & Transport Corridor**
-  **Other Main Road**
-  **Major Industrial / Business Site**
-  **Other Key Industrial / Business Site**
-  **Major Transport Terminal**
Expansion / Development
-  **Strategic Waste Disposal Facility**
-  **Hinterland / Countryside Around Towns Initiative**
-  **Main Tourist Route**
-  **Key Visitor Attractions**
-  **Potential for Major Upgrade or Visitor Centre**
-  **Gateway Centre**
-  **Heritage Area of National / International Significance**
-  **Heritage Coast**
-  **Regional Scenic Areas**
-  **Fragile Areas**

