

Halcrow Group Limited
Wick Active Travel Audit
Summary Report

February 2011



HITRANS



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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Halcrow Group Ltd was commissioned by HITRANS, the Highlands and Islands Regional Transportation Partnership to:

- Develop a methodology to audit existing active travel infrastructure;
- Provide baseline information on existing infrastructure provision for active travel; and
- Recommend priority areas for future investment.

1.1.2 The overall aim is to assess where best to apply available funding in order to increase the potential for active travel and ideally to see an increase in the number of people choosing to walk or cycle.

1.1.3 In particular, the key purpose of the audits is to identify:

“A practical network of high quality routes suitable for cycling within each settlement that provides convenient and safe access to all major destinations”

and

“A network of routes for pedestrians focused upon railway stations, bus stations, ferry terminals, major employment areas, local shopping areas, leisure/recreation centres, hospitals and main trip generators.”

1.1.4 This document summarises the main findings of the methodology as applied to Wick.

2 Active Travel Methodology

2.1 What is the methodology?

2.1.1 Halcrow has developed a methodology to assess existing and proposed active travel infrastructure. This methodology is based on the following key parameters:

- A desktop study including demographics, travel to work patterns, public transport information and traffic accident data;
- Analysis of main trip generators/attractors;
- Consultation with the Local Authority and other interested parties;
- On site audits; and
- Application of a 'prioritisation filter'.

2.1.2 The prioritisation filter is an analysis tool to identify those corridors where there is the greatest potential for modal shift. The filter encompasses information from the desktop study such as demographic data, trip generators and attractors, planning proposals and the results of stakeholder consultation. The filter also assesses the 'implementability' of a route compared to its potential usage.

2.1.3 On site audits for walking are carried out utilising the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) Pedestrian Environment Review System (PERS). For cycling, an Institution of Highways and Transportation (IHT) cycle audit is undertaken. Both systems audit the condition of existing facilities for pedestrians and cyclists to identify where proposed measures can be effectively targeted.

2.1.4 The outputs from the application of the methodology are:

- An Active Travel Prioritised Action Plan
- An Active Travel Master Plan

2.1.5 The prioritised action plan identifies areas and potential interventions where there is the greatest potential to achieve modal shift or where there is the greatest need for infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists. The master plan is a core network for pedestrians and cyclists that provide direct, convenient, safe, attractive and coherent links between journey origins and journey attractors. The proposals contained within the prioritised action plan and master plan will require further investigation and feasibility work.

2.1.6 Consultation also plays an integral role in the identification of routes for walking and cycling and also helps to pinpoint, at a very local level, the barriers to active travel. In Wick the following individuals and organisations were consulted:

- The Highland Council: TEC Services, Planning, Road Safety, Access Officer;
- Sustrans;
- Local bike shop;
- Community Council; and
- Caithness General Hospital

3 Walking and Cycling in Wick

3.1 Overview of current conditions for active travel

3.1.1 The total population of Wick is 7,333 consisting of 21% under the age of sixteen, 59% between 16 and pensionable age and the remaining 20% of the population are of pensionable age or over. The age structure of Wick is comparable to the rest of the Highlands, a marginally higher percentage of under-sixteen year olds and slightly lower percentage of population pensionable age or over being the only changes.

3.1.2 Table 3-1 below show comparisons of how people travel to work in Wick compared to the region and the whole of Scotland.

Table 3-1: Comparison of mode of transport for journeys to work and study – regional and national comparison

Mode of transport	Wick	Highlands	Scotland
% taking bus	12	13	16.5
% car and passenger	42	56	53
% cycle	2	3	1.3
% walk	41	24	23

(Data supplied by SCROL)

3.1.3 The data from the 2001 Census shows that:

- There are particularly high levels of walking in Wick – over two fifths of all journeys;
- There is a lower percentage of journeys by car compared to the Highlands and Scotland;
- Levels of cycling are slightly higher than the national average but below that of the Highlands; and
- Bus use in Wick is lower than the rest of Scotland.

3.1.4 Census data has also been used to provide a snapshot of the distances travelled to work and study in Wick and these are shown below in Figure 3-1.

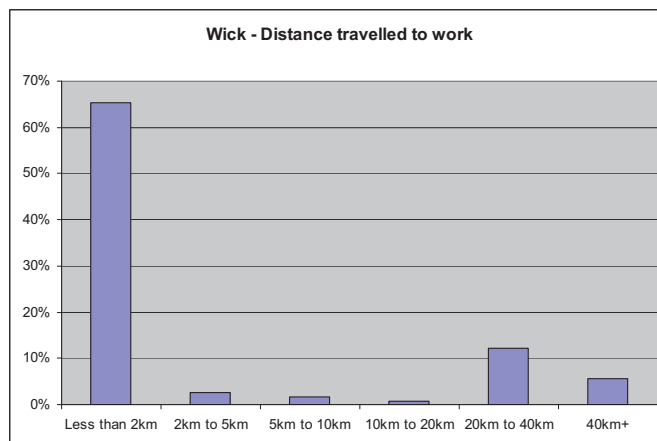


Figure 3-1: Distance travelled to work and study

3.1.5 The vast majority of journeys (65%) are less than 2km which equates to a 30 minute walk or 10 minutes cycling at an easy pace. An extra 3% of journeys are less than 5km – presenting 68% of journeys well within the comfort zones for walking and cycling.

3.1.6 Whilst Census data is now ten years old, it does serve to provide comparable data with other areas and it remains the best data available, prior to the forthcoming Census in 2011.

3.2 Study Area

3.2.1 Wick is located in the far north east of the Scottish Highlands within the Caithness administrative area. Wick’s relative close proximity to Thurso, around 20 miles north-west on the A882, somewhat mitigates its isolation from other population centres. Inverness lies some 100 miles south of Wick connected via rail services and the A9 and A99. Wick is an estuary town and much of it can be classed as a harbour town. The name Wick has been derived from the Norse word “vik” which is literally interpreted as bay – an indication of the important role that location and geographical features have played in the development of the town.

History

3.2.2 There are several defining eras in the history of Wick, which have in turn shaped the existing contrast in character between the northern and southern districts. Early Viking settlement was conclusively ended by the Treaty of Perth in 1266 which ended conflict between Norway and Scotland and an era of growth led to establishment of Wick as a Royal Burgh. James VI granted Royal Burgh status upon Wick in 1589, effectively creating a monopoly for foreign trade from Caithness. At this time the town was fragmented and small in comparison to modern Wick, comprising of merchants and other trades on the north side of Wick River, based around Market Place, probably the oldest surviving part of the town.

3.2.3 The evolution of Wick from 1589 onwards was slow, 100 years after being established as a Royal Burgh, Wick still only had a population of around 500. Records of three local merchants - John Sutherland of Wester, John Anderson of Wick and Alexander Miller of Staxigoe – exist describing their great success fishing for herring in 1767.



Figure 3-2: View from South Head Path looking back towards harbour



Figure 3-3: Typical stepped short cut through town centre passageway

3.2.4 This was to revolutionise Wick and firmly establish itself as one of the most productive herring ports in Europe. By 1790 there were 32 local boats fishing for herring and salmon and by 1795, this number had risen to 200. By this time, Wick consisted of three main districts, Wick to the north of Wick Water along with Louisburgh and Pulteneytown on the opposite side of the water. It was this boom in fishing that was about to create the biggest expansion in the town's history. The British Fisheries Society purchased 390 acres of land to develop the harbour and housing for the workers.

3.2.5 Acclaimed engineer Thomas Telford produced a revised plan for the town in 1803 which led to work beginning in 1805 to develop mainly Pulteneytown but also included the stone bridge over Wick River. The compact grid set up of Pulteneytown was divided into two sections, the lower and upper halves, linked by the Black Stairs, later made famous by L.S. Lowry's 1937 painting. In 1806 work began on the harbour, and completed 7 years later in 1813. This rapid expansion culminated in over 12,000 people being employed in seasonal fishing work with some 1000 boats. A distillery was established in 1826 in Pulteneytown. Still relatively inaccessible by land, barley was brought in by sea and the whisky was shipped back out¹.



Figure 3-4: River Street with high quality paving and traditional street lights and Bridge of Wick in the background

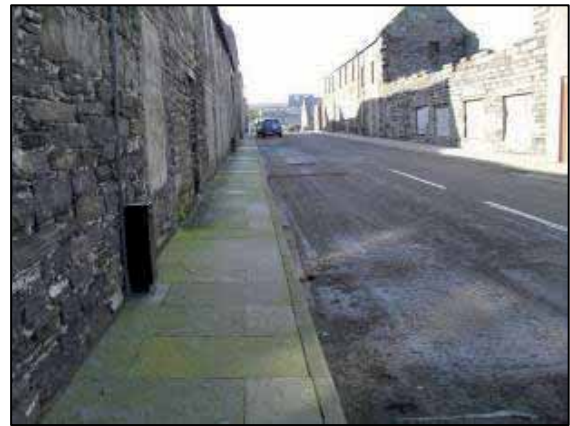


Figure 3-5: Typical Lower Pulteneytown street which has plans for gentrification and affordable housing

3.2.6 Fishing continued steadily through the 19th Century, however, prosperity and employment have significantly declined since then. The fishing industry steadily retracted throughout the 20th Century and Wick lost the industry that had historically brought wealth and employment.

Wick today

3.2.7 Modern Wick remains a compact settlement, characterised by a grid-like street patterns over relatively flat land. Key trip generators such as Caithness General Hospital, Wick Rail Station, Wick High School and the pedestrian shopping streets are centrally located. Newer large retail developments such as Tesco to the north and the retail park on South Road attract large numbers of trips. Adequate car parking is provided at each of these sites but with little or inappropriate consideration for active travel. Desire lines have not been adequately accounted for in the development of these sites, presenting physical barriers to walking and cycling.

3.2.8 High Street has been pedestrianised between Bridge Street and Shore Lane providing a pleasant traffic free environment for residents and visitors to shop, to dine and socialise in

¹ Historical research sourced from Wick Heritage Centre (<http://www.wickheritage.org/>), Caithness Community Website (<http://www.caithness.org/atoz/wick/historyofwick/evolutionofwick.htm>), Wick Harbour (<http://www.wickharbour.co.uk>) and The Gazetteer for Scotland (<http://www.scottish-places.info/>)

improved public space. Local Caithness flagstone has been used and period lighting features have replaced nondescript 1960s steel streetlights. Planting and benches complement the new pedestrianised area, providing space to relax, spend time and socialise in the town centre.

3.2.9 As illustrated in the 2001 census journey to work data, walking in Wick is already a popular form of transport. With 41% of journeys carried out on foot, it comes second only to car and passengers by 1%. This suggests that walking in Wick is acceptable and the existing infrastructure is supportive of these journeys. Generally speaking, the provision for pedestrians is good although may benefit from minor improvements.



Figure 3-6: Pedestrianised High Street with improved areas for public interaction



Figure 3-7: Pedestrian crossing in town centre at junction of High Street and Bridge Street

3.2.10 Wick River and Wick Bay create a divided town with two crossing points in the centre of town dominated by traffic. A single footbridge to the west links with Wick Riverside recreational paths in the area. Traffic passing through Wick is funnelled through one of the two routes across the river creating an unattractive environment for active travel. The junctions to the south of both bridges are not conducive to active travel with poor crossing opportunities and cyclists having to enter roundabouts with limited sightlines.

3.2.11 The characteristics of the settlement are, however, generally supportive of pedestrians. Good points of pedestrian infrastructure include the large maps displayed in the town centre area with local information, points of interest and key trip generators; vennels and passageways in the town centre which give competitive advantage to pedestrians over other forms of transport by providing convenient short cuts; the pedestrianised high street area with associated public realm improvements; and generally good lighting, maintenance and quality of environment. Pavement width scored well in the audit process with very few major links failing to return favourable numbers. However, Bank Row, Union Street and links around the Industrial Estate to the north of Wick returned low values, also scoring poorly for user conflict.

3.2.12 Whilst the overall pedestrian audit scores for Wick show clusters of poor pedestrian facilities, a generally good picture emerges. Pulteneytown emerges as an area where provision for pedestrians could be improved, returning low scores in several categories including tactile information, dropped kerbs and legibility. Throughout Wick, dropped kerbs and tactile information are sparsely provided with very few links scoring well for provision of either.

Public Transport provision

3.2.13 Through consultation with The Highland Council Public Transport Officer, no major difficulties are perceived to face the Wick public transport network. One service which is already operating in North Sutherland, currently serving Thurso, is the dial-a-bus subsidised taxi. This currently offers pre-booking for journeys in the following areas:

- A836 between Bettyhill and Melvich and all public roads branching off it; and
- Extensions to Thurso, Forsinard and Kinbrace are required for through journeys to/from Bettyhill and Melvich

School Travel Plans

3.2.14 Interrogation of the travel plans for Wick High School, North Primary School and South Primary school all indicate a desire to increase levels of cycling for both staff and pupils' journeys to school. Wick High School's objectives were:

- to encourage sustainable travel;
- provide safe crossing opportunities for pupils on busy roads;
- provide informative signs around the school area; and
- provide secure cycle storage in the school grounds.

3.2.15 Recently, the newly installed traffic calming at the west end of West Banks Avenue has been questioned by some of the parents of Wick High School pupils. It has been suggested that the raised table design may encourage pupils to cross the road without due care and attention – incorrectly assuming it to be a new crossing point. The complaints have been published in local press although the number of parents in objection remains relatively low. The Head Teacher of Wick High School has informed the concerned parents that he has observed pupil behaviour around the junction of West Banks Avenue and has no immediate cause for concern. One possible method of allaying the fears of concerned parents, especially when further work is progressed around the area, would be to follow up new physical infrastructure with promotional activities, making pupils aware of the new road layouts.

3.2.16 North Primary School raised several concerns within their travel plan that they felt required attention. These included traffic speeds outside the school, vehicle congestion (the school is in a residential area and parents drop off children on both sides of the road), crossing difficulties as the entire school finishes at the same time of day, insufficient cycle storage facilities for older children and poor road markings and signage around the school.

3.2.17 South Primary has included pupils in actively participating during the formation of the school travel plan. This involvement will encourage pupils taking ownership of the document and demanding to see results. Pupils have been involved with questionnaire work and site visits including early stage surveying of links which do not currently provide for active travel.

3.2.18 The school travel plans would benefit from being updated, reviewing the targets and outcomes set in previous versions and setting new visions in line with new national targets and works suggested within the Wick Active Travel Audit.



Figure 3-8: One of several large maps with local information displayed in town centre



Figure 3-9: Poor crossing points at roundabout south of Bridge Street

3.3 Existing provision for cycling

3.3.1 As previously noted, Wick is a compact town with a large majority of travel being of short distances to place of work or study. This suggests that cycling in Wick should be popular although the low levels returned from the 2001 census suggest otherwise. This may be reflective of the relatively short distances travelled to work and the lack of perceived major barriers to walking in Wick.

3.3.2 There are relatively few existing cycle facilities in the town of Wick, low levels of cycling appears to have attracted a proportionately low level of investment. The isolated nature of the settlement excludes Wick from any major cycle tourism. No recognised Sustrans route serves the town and in turn North Sea Cycle Route and LEJOG cyclists often travel John O’Groats – Thurso. However, not all cyclists use this route and there will be some through flow of cyclists who choose the A99/A9 route

There are several signing strategies in Wick, the most prevalent one being traditional style black iron signs with white lettering. These are found predominantly through the town centre on both sides of the river directing people towards points of interest such as the town centre, swimming pool, medical centre and railway station. These way markers are useful for setting people in the general direction although are not the most legible for those who choose to make the journey by bike. Distances are omitted from the black iron signs, something that when used effectively can encourage modal shift to more sustainable forms of travel, creating an awareness of journey distances. Other signs in Wick include the wooden designs for the North and South Head paths and Wick Riverside Path. These signs are predominantly for walkers although the Wick Riverside Path can be used as a recreational route for cyclists. Information boards explaining the flora and fauna of Wick River can be found along the north bank although clearer route information may be of value. During the audit process the river had flooded the path just beyond the wildlife viewing platform rendering it impassable.

3.3.3 The majority of a cycling network in Wick could utilise the extensive wide residential streets with low levels of traffic. These roads are generally well maintained with the only barriers to use being residential parking and the need to cross many junctions if avoiding the busier A99 South Road/ Francis Street/ Cliff Road/ Bridge Street/ High Street/ George Street and North Road corridor. Other barriers to cycling in Wick include transitional areas, for example, when travelling from one side of the river to the other, from the river to Upper Pulteneytown or from the town centre to Hillhead, Broadhaven, Papigoe and Staxigoe. These transitional areas comprise steep hills, stepped access only in some

areas, cycle unfriendly road designs such as the roundabouts on the south sides of each bridge and traffic dominated roads as the only accessible route

Very little evidence of cycling was observed in Wick during the audit process. Utility journeys were observed as people travelled to and from the new Tesco superstore using the shared path along North Road. Bicycles casually parked at the front door of Caithness General Hospital suggest short stay journeys although cycle parking provided in all other instances was empty and few other cyclists were observed throughout the town.



Figure 3-10: Shared use path along A99 North Road



Figure 3-11: Desire Lines not considered correctly during planning process



Figure 3-12: A typically wide residential street in Upper Pulteneytown



Figure 3-13: Path along Wick River flooded and impassable

3.4 Existing cycle parking

- 3.4.1 There is limited availability of appropriate cycle parking in Wick with several trip generators providing low quality or badly located cycle parking. For example, sites such as Wick Swimming Pool and Wick Business Park provide Butterfly Racks. These grip only the front wheel and are not suitable for public areas because they provide no means of locking the frame to the stand. They also provide little stability, meaning the bike can be knocked over. The audit process found no evidence of these sites being used.
- 3.4.2 High quality cycle parking can be found at both Wick Rail Station and Caithness General Hospital. At Wick Rail Station, five Sheffield Stands are located within the station building providing secure, covered cycle parking for up to ten bikes. The station building is locked from 17:00 weekdays and all day Sunday meaning overnight parking is secure. Station staff commented that the cycle parking was well used by rail patrons although no evidence of this was apparent during the audit. Caithness General hospital provides four cycle lockers, however, these are located a considerable distance from the main entrance. Reception staff suggested that these lockers were used by hospital staff although during the audit process, evidence of casual cycle parking was observed at the main entrance, which is a more convenient location for visitors who do not intend on staying for long periods.
- 3.4.3 Cycle parking at North Primary School was observed to be near capacity during the audit process with few spare racks available in the covered sheds. Wick High School set out in their travel plan to provide secure facilities for cycles on their grounds to encourage healthy living schools.
- 3.4.4 There is limited cycle parking provided in the town centre or other retail sites although this employment sector is integral to the modern-day economy of Wick. Two Sheffield Racks are located outside the Wetherspoon Public House on Market Place although during the audit process, these racks were not seen to be used. Many instances of casual cycle parking were observed throughout Wick, for example at Wick Industrial Estate, Wick Air Traffic Control Centre and local shops. This suggests that those that cycle feel that Wick is safe enough to leave cycles unlocked without the fear of theft.



Figure 3-14: Cycle parking at Wick Swimming Pool of a poor design



Figure 3-15: Cycle parking serving Wick Rail Station



Figure 3-16: Bicycle left unlocked at entrance to Caithness General Hospital



Figure 3-17: Cycle parking at newly developed Wick Business Park well located although poor design

3.5 Traffic flow and accident data

3.5.1 High levels of pedestrian activity in Wick may have raised driver awareness throughout the town as the accident levels for the last five years are relatively low. There is a cluster of accidents on the A99 Bridge Street which occurred prior to the installation of the pedestrian crossing at the junction with High Street. This measure may reduce the desire for casual crossing of Bridge Street although shops and other businesses still create the necessity to cross. Only by traffic reduction or traffic calming could informal crossing be made safer although the option to install the pedestrian crossing at High Street suggests these options may be obsolete. Another area which shows a cluster of accidents is around the south east of the town with two serious accidents on the A99 at Thurso Street and West Park. There have been pedestrian crossings installed at the A99 Thurso Street/Dempster Street junction which should have improved safety for pedestrians crossing in this area. Two minor accidents were recorded on West Banks Avenue, the main route to Wick High School. This suggests that improvements could be made to raise safety levels around Wick High School, something which may become more significant if the plans to redevelop Wick High School are given the go ahead with the associated site vehicles increasing traffic movements in this area. Pedestrian and cyclist accidents in Wick (2005-2010) are presented in Figure A-1 of Appendix A.

3.5.2 There are no permanent traffic counters in Wick, the most recent traffic counts date back 15 years and as such are not included.

3.6 Local Transport Strategy

3.6.1 Core Policy Statement No.4 from the Local Transport Strategy (LTS) sets out The Highland Council's aims for the pedestrian and cycle network. Among the outcomes detailed in the LTS are:

- The Council will seek to ensure that opportunities for encouraging walking and cycling through the development management process are maximised;
- The Council will expect developers to take into account the recommendations and priorities identified in the Active Travel Masterplans within their Transport Assessments;
- The Council will continue to work in partnership with Transport Scotland and Sustrans to develop the National Cycle Network within Highland;

- The Council will adopt a collaborative approach to encouraging walking and cycling with different Highland Council services and other public agencies;
- The Council will continue to support schools in delivering School Travel Plans and improving infrastructure within the Safer Routes to School framework; and
- The Council will seek to extend and upgrade the cycle network and improve cycle parking facilities where possible at its own premises and through the planning process.

3.6.2 The Council identify that these improvements will be carried out through several different strands of work that include working together with organisations whose roles include walking and cycling promotion, establishing core networks in the Active Travel Audit towns, ensuring new developments provide suitable infrastructure by enforcing design requirements/standards for new sites and continued work on Safer Routes to School and the Core Paths Network Access Strategy. It is clear that the overriding objective is removing barriers to active travel in the Highlands.

3.7 Local Plan

3.7.1 The Local Plan for Caithness is over eight years old, having been adopted in September 2002. Public consultation was carried out in 1998 and the following concerns were received:

- Environmental improvements, particularly along the riverside and in Lower Pulteneytown;
- Protection of farmland on the margins of the town;
- Traffic calming, particularly along Louisburgh Street and Willowbank;
- New housing in Lower Pulteneytown and on the southern margins of the burgh, particularly affordable housing;
- Small businesses and car parking in Lower Pulteneytown;
- Improved sports facilities, especially indoor facilities; and
- Key issues in the countryside were provision of cycle routes, environmental improvements, protection of croft land and improved tourist facilities.

3.7.2 Of particular relevance to this study, during consultation, the public commented on desired traffic calming around Louisburgh Street and Willowbank, both are highly populated residential areas with the latter also encompassing Hillhead Primary School. Provision of cycle routes was also noted in the consultation, the surrounding countryside is picturesque although very limited facilities for cyclists are to be found.

3.7.3 Policies put forward in the adopted Local Plan that may impact upon active travel are as follows:

- The town centre of Wick will be maintained and strengthened as a sub-regional shopping and business centre along with physical environment improvements and accessibility for all modes of transport;
- Proposals should generally seek to maintain the existing grid layout pattern;
- Housing expansion will be directed to South Head initially with scope for up to 100 houses followed by Roxburgh Road, Oldwick, Roxburgh Road East (Long term allocation. Development will not be allowed until the previous sites have been substantially completed or if insurmountable difficulties arise with development of the brownfield

sites at Lower Pulteneytown) and finally Oldwick East. Small scale development in this area has begun although brownfield sites at Lower Pulteneytown still remain the priority; and

- The Council will encourage the preparation of a Management / Action Plan for the Wick River corridor, including North and South Head to improve public access, recreation and amenity.

3.7.4 Investment in Lower Pulteneytown through the Wick Project has already improved pedestrian facilities with high quality materials used for new paving, improved lighting and other public realm enhancements.

3.7.5 A high profile campaign to upgrade or provide a new Wick High School has been underway for several years. Through MPs and MSPs, the issue has been raised not only locally but nationally. Following years of groundwork, the go ahead has been given to the project with two possible outcomes. The first option is to site a new school building in Bignold Park with the loss of an historic recreational area. The second option is to redevelop and rebuild on the current Wick High School site on the west of the town.

3.7.6 The process has not yet reached the planning stages within The Highland Council although the public consultation phase is now drawing to a close. The Bignold Park option has raised controversy in the local press, although official feedback is yet to be published.

3.8 Other plans/strategies

3.8.1 The Highland Wide Local Development Plan is currently at the Proposed Plan stage after passing through the consultation stage from September to December 2010. The Highland Wide Local Development Plan will update and replace parts of the Highland Structure Plan as well as parts of existing Local Plans, it will set out:

- The spatial strategy and vision for the area;
- Clear policy guidance for development of all types (including reference to Supplementary Guidance where appropriate); and
- The development principles of key action areas (including the A96 Corridor).

3.8.2 Caithness and Sutherland is facing many challenges moving forward although the Highland Wide Local Development Plan sets out what will need to be achieved to meet the challenges and regenerate the area. By 2030, it is hoped that Caithness and Sutherland will have undergone regeneration with a network of strong communities. The Plan notes that this should be achieved by promoting and improving town centres with the main centres having enhanced positions as service centres along with improved economic prospects of ports and harbours in the area. It also notes that Wick must be a connected and accessible place, locally, regionally and nationally. Within the HWLDP, Wick is highlighted as a town “which will have a high quality tourist industry”. The aim is to attract tourism using the “outstanding natural heritage, outdoor activities and high quality facilities”.

3.9 Core Paths Planning

- 3.9.1 The production of Core Paths plans are a mandatory requirement for every Local Authority. The paths radiating out from Wick are most typically roadside footways with the exception of the paths tight to the coastline and the path following the Wick River. Other constituent paths included in the Wick Candidate Core Paths are used as short cuts across greenspaces, for example, the paths across Argyll Square, Bignold Park and George V Park. Although the majority of Core Paths in Wick are relatively short in length, they total over 24km of routes serving the local community. Through consultation with Access Officers, it is clear that the Core Paths are mainly used firstly for local amenity followed by active travel for utility purposes.
- 3.9.2 Links that should be explored for the benefit of the wider community would include links to Haster and Reiss. These settlements rely on Wick for amenities and facilities and continuation of paths 215.023 and 215.036, illustrated in figure A-2 in Appendix A, would be of benefit.
- 3.9.3 Routes that were frequently discussed in consultation included the Wick Riverside, South Head, North Head, Newtonhill Community Woodland and Castle of Old Wick. These are purely recreational routes although comments suggests better maintenance and signing was required to bring these paths to a reasonable standard.

3.10 Current Issues

- 3.10.1 To summarise, the audit process identified a number of key issues that act as a disincentive for active travel:

1) No existing cycling culture

- Wick has high levels of walking, reflective of the compact nature of the settlement and short distances travelled for journeys to work; and
- A large percentage of journeys to work prefer to walk rather than cycle.

2) Physical barrier created by Wick River

- Wick River creates a divided town with concentrations of population on either side and disjointed location of services; and
- Traffic dominated crossing points at Wick Harbour Bridge and Bridge of Wick are a disincentive to active travel.

3) Town Centre Car Parking

- High levels of car parking available in the town centre presenting no barrier to bringing the car into the shopping areas.

4) Development Control

- An example of poor planning for active travel is present at the new Tesco store. Desire lines of pedestrians not considered in planning process with store at rear of site and subsequent convoluted route for pedestrians and cyclists to enter site.
- Low standard cycle parking at new developments such as Wick Swimming Pool and Wick Business Park suggests acceptance of poor active travel design.

5) Maintenance of passageways and steps in town centre

- The narrow passageways and steps in the town centre provide a competitive advantage over motorised forms of transport for

pedestrians although poor maintenance and upkeep can render them unattractive and unused.

6) Pedestrianised area of High Street not enforced

- The pedestrianised area of High Street provides what should be a high quality retail and leisure environment although traffic illegally uses it as a short cut from Shore Lane.

3.11 SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) Analysis of Active Travel in Wick

Strengths	Weaknesses
<p>Compact layout of settlement</p> <p>Existing high levels of walking</p> <p>Central location of important trip generators such as Caithness General Hospital and Wick Rail Station</p> <p>Pedestrian shopping streets in town centre</p> <p>Layout of town centre includes many stepped closes providing convenient short cuts for pedestrians</p> <p>Active Paths Groups in Wick which have previously been successful in campaigns</p>	<p>New retail developments on outskirts of town create longer journey times</p> <p>No cycling culture</p> <p>Poor quality cycle parking</p> <p>Poor signage and maintenance along Wick Riverside, South Head, North Head</p> <p>Widely accessible car parking in Wick Town Centre</p> <p>Limited crossing points of Wick River which are heavily dominated by traffic</p>
Opportunities	Threats
<p>Redevelopment of Wick High School presents an opportunity to build active travel into the school culture</p> <p>Regeneration of Lower Pulteneytown will provide housing in an accessible central location</p> <p>The desire to link Kennedy Terrace with the retail development on South Road identified in Core Paths Plan</p> <p>Around 70% of journeys to work from 2001 census suggest distances travelled less than 5km which could be transferred to more sustainable travel modes</p>	<p>Lack of provision for pedestrians and cyclists in new developments</p> <p>Planning acceptance for retail areas on town edge set dangerous precedent</p> <p>Lack of funding to improve/ build active travel infrastructure</p> <p>Declining population</p> <p>High public sector employment, 52% compared to 31% in the Highlands and 30% nationally</p>

4 Potential Wick Active Travel Network

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The active travel audit identified potential walking and cycling routes that could link residential areas to the main trip generators and attractors to form a strategic network for the area. The main trip generators are:

- Town Centre – High Street, Bridge Street;
- Wick Harbour;
- North Wick Industrial Estate;
- Wick Business Park;
- Wick Airport;
- Caithness General Hospital;
- Wick Rail Station;
- Schools – Wick High, North Primary, Hillhead Primary, Pulteneytown Academy and South School Primary;
- Supermarkets – Co-op, Haldanes, Lidl and Tesco;
- South Road Retail Park; and
- Wick Swimming Pool.

4.1.2 **The study has developed a set of long term objectives for encouraging walking and cycling as follows:**

Objective 1: Recognise existing walking culture in Wick and support and encourage more people to walk more often

Objective 2: Consider proposals for a ‘Twenty in Town’ 20mph zone in Wick on all streets other than the spine A99 route

Objective 3: Develop initiatives to begin the development of a culture of cycling in Wick

Objective 4: Ensure key barriers to active travel are addressed

4.1.3 It was apparent both through desktop research and the audit process that walking in Wick is already a highly accepted mode of transport. Therefore, the objectives focus on increasing walking in Wick through physical improvements in infrastructure and softer measures such as promotion. There are currently low levels of cycling in Wick, a result of the relatively short distances travelled and the demonstrated willingness to walk.

4.1.4 However, there are few physical barriers to cycling in Wick and prior to further expansion of the town, now is the time to establish an embryonic cycling culture. Early developments on the edge of town such as Tesco and the South Road Retail Park have already increased journey distances from residential areas and are reducing the likelihood that journeys will be carried out by walking. However, sites allocated in the local plan and the new retail developments remain within comfortable cycling distances.

4.2 Active Travel Network

4.2.1 The following corridors have been identified as having the potential to provide the most direct and coherent network of routes to the destinations listed in 4.1.1. The routes are:

- A99 South Road to North Road;
- Airport and Industrial Estate to Town Centre;
- Staxigoe and Papigoe to Town Centre;
- Old Wick to South Road;
- Upper Pulteneytown to Wick; and
- Wick High School/West Wick Links.

4.2.2 A full description of the routes with potential improvements subject to consultation, feasibility and design are included in Appendix 1 of this report. The action plan in the following sections suggests the key priorities in the development of the aforementioned routes along with the 'softer' initiatives to encourage active travel in the area. Figure A-3 of Appendix A shows the extent of the potential Active Travel Network in relation to the Local Plan for Wick.

5 Prioritised Action Plan

5.1 The Priorities

5.1.1 This prioritised Active Travel Plan sets out the key potential measures needed to encourage walking and cycling in Wick. As well as incorporating parts of the strategic walking and cycling network, it also includes promotion and 'soft' measures which form part of a package of works which have been used successfully in those towns and cities where there has been an increase in sustainable modes.

5.1.2 The following measures are the key priorities for encouraging active travel in Wick:

- Priority 1: Walking and Cycling Promotion
- Priority 2: Twenty Miles per Hour Town
- Priority 3: A99 Active Travel Improvements
- Priority 4: Airport & Industrial Estate to Town Centre
- Priority 5: Staxigoe & Papigoe to Town Centre
- Priority 6: Old Wick Spurs
- Priority 7: Upper Pulteneytown to Town Centre
- Priority 8: West Wick Links
- Priority 9: Town Centre Improvements

5.1.3 Each of these individual priorities are summarised below and form part of the wider Wick Active Travel Network outlined in chapter 4.

5.2 Priority 1 Recommendation: Walking and Cycling Promotion

5.2.1 The Department for Transport "Smarter Choices: Changing the way that we travel" paper from 2004 indicated that for every £1 spent on well designed soft measures there will be a benefit of £10 in reduced congestion plus wider gains in air quality, CO2 and health. Projects throughout Europe which have combined both hard and soft measures include the German Cycle Friendly Towns (1980s), English Sustainable Transport Towns (2004-09) English Cycle Friendly Towns/City (2005-11) and the Welsh Demonstration Project in Cardiff. Following these, the Scottish Government assisted with funding for the Smarter Choices Smarter Places project. This initiative set out to address not only transport but health and climate change and seven projects were awarded funding.

5.2.2 Each project proposal had a different emphasis and different methodologies although of particular relevance "Dundee Travel Active" set out a strategy with the aim to "Encourage active travel to promote healthy lifestyles for residents of and visitors to Dundee". Six pathways were established which could be replicated in Wick to achieve demonstrable results. In Dundee, behavioural change was to be targeted at NHS patients, children and their parents, city centre workers, university students and staff, local residents and city centre visitors. One project which Dundee Travel Active pursued was their "Personalised Travel Planning" project which was a door to door service, assisting residents with journey planning, attempting where possible to move journeys to active travel modes.

5.2.3 Other promotional activities that were progressed were as follows:

- Branding, or creating an identity for active travel in the city;
- Creating, publishing and making active travel information available;
- Active prescriptions from NHS professionals;
- Active kids – Active Parents, and;
- Various public transport incentives.

5.2.4 This sort of programme replicated on a smaller scale within Wick could potentially attain greater results as an extensive outreach would be achieved in a more compact town.



Figure 5-1: Examples of existing maps and signage in Wick that could be enhanced and used as a promotional tool for active travel

5.2.5 The recommendations are summarised below in Table 5-1:

Table 5-1: Priority 1 Recommendations Summary Table – Walking and cycling promotion	
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A targeted promotional campaign to maximise modal shift to walking and cycling
Issues for consideration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wick already demonstrates exceptionally high levels of walking • No apparent cycling culture in Wick
Recommended Intervention (subject to feasibility and design)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To build on the excellent levels of walking already demonstrated in Wick, some form of personalised travel planning should be considered. This would involve door to door consultations with residents of Wick to encourage them to consider more active forms of travel. As 40% of journeys to work (2001 census) are carried out on foot, walking is an already widely accepted form of transport in Wick – something that will assist with the personalised travel planning process. Indicative costs for PTP projects have been informed through the DfT Smarter Choices paper² and suggests that it may cost between £18 and £22 per person contacted based on the Sustainable Travel Demonstration Towns of Darlington, Peterborough and Worcester. • Active Travel literature and promotional information need to be produced to support those who participate in personalised travel planning. For example, in London where cycling has increased by 83%, the free London Cycle Map has proved a significant benefit. • Active Travel needs to be adopted not only by transport services within The Highland Council but also planning departments, health services and education services. Buy in from these sectors

² <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/sustainable/smarterchoices/programmes/pdf/chap6.pdf>

Table 5-1: Priority 1 Recommendations Summary Table – Walking and cycling promotion

may assist with funding and wider promotion. Initiatives such as the Active Kids – Active Parents or health prescriptions require the co-operation of education services and NHS Highland.

- An annual initiative to consider would be holding a car free day – this should be launched and promoted in association with any personalised travel planning exercise. The benefits of this would be felt on the day and may encourage a more permanent modal shift.
- A presence on the High Street would raise visitor and resident’s awareness of the desire to increase the active travel modal share. There are empty properties in the pedestrianised area of High Street that could be adopted on a short term basis to allow people to drop in while visiting town, an opportunity to learn what is being done and pick up literature or take part in a personalised travel planning exercise.
- A review and update of school travel plans in Wick which are out of date would present an opportunity to increase pupil participation in the process of modal shift to active travel. The redevelopment or relocation of Wick High School also presents the opportunity for pupils to take ownership of their school travel plan and make it an integral part of a new community facility.
- Wick has a history which still resonates with the community in the present day. An ideal way to create a brand or identity for active travel promotion would be to brand the routes within any potential active travel network. This branding should be extended to a new, consolidated signing strategy within the town, one which could display journey times to key destinations rather than distances may help create a realisation that, as a result of the compact settlement, journey times are relatively low. This is an approach carried out in Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire, the first place in the UK to display journey times for cyclists on directional signs. As a follow up from the production of active travel literature, any mapping should be displayed in prominent locations throughout the town, not just in the centre, making locals aware of their travel options.

5.3 Priority 2 Recommendation: 20mph Town

- 5.3.1 Portsmouth has become the first city in Britain to have a 20mph safety limit on almost all residential roads. The new speed limit, designed to protect pedestrians and cyclists in residential roads, became citywide by the end of March 2008. Its plan, funded by the government, has attracted national attention and stimulated interest from other local authorities.
- 5.3.2 In Portsmouth, the 20mph limit has been applied to roads where “the average speed was already 24mph or less”. The Council have installed prominent 20mph signs where drivers enter the new speed restrictions, as well as 'repeater' signs as reminders. Road humps are not part of the scheme, although if speeds do not drop on particular roads, then the Council notes that residents will be consulted again to see if they want additional measures. Initial results suggest that since the implementation of the 20mph safety limit, casualties have fallen by 15% and total accidents by 13%³.
- 5.3.3 A TRL review of 20 mph zones with traffic calming found that speeds were reduced by about 9 mph and traffic flows reduced by 27%. This led to a 60% reduction in overall accident frequency. Reductions in pedestrian and cyclist accidents of 63% and 29% respectively have been measured where 20 mph zones were introduced in the UK. Child pedestrian and child cyclist accidents were reduced by 70% and 48% respectively after the introduction of 20 mph zones. Since 1999, it has been permissible under certain conditions to apply 20 mph speed limits without any accompanying traffic calming.
- 5.3.4 The street layout of Wick tends to suggest that it would lend itself to a successful 20mph safety limit on all residential roads. Other than the A99 North Road to South Road

³ <http://www.20splentyforum.org.uk/portsmouth.htm>

through route, every other road could be considered a residential street. With concerns regarding traffic calming on Louisburgh Street and Willowbank raised in the Local Transport Strategy, it is apparent that residents have perceived issues with safety and vehicle speeds. The publicity a 20mph town-wide strategy would receive would be effectively self promotion. The City of Edinburgh Council recently approved proposals for a trial 20mph area covering over 20km of city streets in the Blackford area of the city. This was covered in both local and national media as well as industry press, was widely well-received and gathered ongoing community support.



Figure 5-2: Temporary 20mph zone outside North Primary School although the opportunity to extend the 20mph safety limit to all residential streets should be grasped



Figure 5-3: Typically quiet residential street in the Upper Pulteneytown area of Wick that offers a pleasant walking and cycling environment

5.3.5 The recommendations are summarised below in Table 5-2:

Table 5-2: Priority 2 Recommendations Summary Table – Make Wick a 20mph Town	
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider making Wick Scotland’s first 20mph town, a bold statement that signals a desire to make the entire town more appealing to walk and cycle in
Issues for consideration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidance on the type of 20mph limit to be installed should be viewed within the undernoted document⁴ Enforcing or extending existing localised 20mph zones, while effective, may not be as effective as a radical town wide scheme
Recommended Intervention (subject to feasibility and design)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liaise and learn from knowledge gained in Portsmouth and Edinburgh and apply any necessary changes to adapt the strategy to Wick Promote Traffic Regulation Orders for every street in Wick to apply a 20mph safety limit “Lock in” the benefits associated with speed reduction by encouraging walking and cycling throughout the community network with signage and other promotional work. Ensure that the strategy is visible as soon as one enters Wick – raising awareness that motor vehicles do not take priority over active travel in the town Engage with local councillors, school groups, parent councils, retailers and other relevant stakeholders to discuss idea and if the concept is supported, undertake initial consultation on the concept with local community Promote the intervention and ensure residents are aware of the impacts, especially the benefits gained by active travel. The entire road network of Wick can be classed as a community network for active travel following the introduction of a 20mph speed limit considering the associated safety benefits Develop PR strategy to, as far as possible, encourage positive coverage from local press and road safety industry media

5.4 Priority 3 Recommendation: A99 Active Travel Improvements

5.4.1 The A99 is undoubtedly the busiest road in Wick for vehicular traffic. The route forms a spine through Wick, running north/south and passing through the heart of the town and many of the key trip generators. At the moment, the A99 provides very little assistance for those who choose active forms of travel, barriers include limited safe crossing locations, wide roads, narrow footways, junction design with no consideration for non motorised road users and limited cycling facilities. The following paragraphs outline the key features of the corridor heading in a north – south direction.

5.4.2 Beginning in the north of the town, the recently developed Wick Business Park provides dental services and units for other employers to locate. This is one of the most isolated trip generators in Wick with only the A99 linking the Business Park to the town. There is currently a shared use path on the east side of the road which provides an off road cycle route, the only such facility in Wick. Moving south towards the town, the next large trip generator on the A99 is the recently opened Tesco Superstore. During the audit process, the car park was continually full illustrating the popularity of this new retail site on the

⁴ <http://www.highland.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/DAA2C72B-1F87-44D9-BAAA-76BF68FD2CCA/0/Item9TECS5709.pdf>

edge of town. While many of the customers will come from rural areas, there will be a significant number of local trips generated which could be undertaken on foot or by bike.

- 5.4.3 Wick Industrial Estate is an area with a high concentration of employment opportunities. This is located directly on the periphery of residential areas, creating short journeys to work for those who live in Wick. Greater provision of walking and cycling facilities linking the Industrial Estate to the town will increase accessibility to this key employment site.
- 5.4.4 The next section of the A99 corridor heading towards the town is dominated by residential land use on the east side with the continuation of prime agricultural land to the west. As the A99 approaches the town centre along High Street and Bridge Street, the land use diversifies to include retail, dining and services essential to the livelihood of Wick.
- 5.4.5 This is the key section of the A99 and ensuring this area is well served in any potential active travel network is essential to serve town centre retail trips and to assist in maintaining a bustling economic hub for the local and wider community. This is the area of greatest pedestrian activity and has an increased incidence of accidents involving a pedestrian from The Highland Council accident data.
- 5.4.6 Bridge Street represents a transitional area linking north and south Wick across the river and as crossing points are limited, it is inevitable that traffic passing through Wick will funnel through this corridor. It is important to recognise the needs of pedestrians and cyclists on this corridor and greater consideration must be given as to how pedestrians and cyclists safely negotiate this busy area.
- 5.4.7 To the immediate south of the river, Caithness General Hospital is located on the west side of the A99. A major employer, linking the hospital to the network is essential as it has great potential to contribute to the development of a more active Wick.
- 5.4.8 The corridor continues south serving residential areas and culminating on the southern edge of the town at a new retail park on South Road. The A99 provides a direct link to and through town from the south for a large percentage of the population. Whilst an essential link, the road also acts as a physical barrier to active travel, creating difficulty in crossing for pedestrians and cyclists and at times, an unpleasant environment to walk or cycle. These issues need to be addressed as a priority in creating an active travel network.
- 5.4.9 An example of an effective intervention on an arterial route can be located in Edinburgh. The City of Edinburgh Council have applied raised tables at each side street junction along Bruntsfield Place, a key arterial route into the city centre which also has high pedestrian flows. Drivers slow down as they approach the junction making pedestrian crossings safer.



Figure 5-4: The northern section of the A99 currently provides a shared use path from Tesco toward Wick as far as Wick Industrial Estate. Wide roads and large junctions in northern section are not designed with active travel in mind



Figure 5-5: The A99 runs through the heart of Wick including traversing the Bridge of Wick which, although scenic, presents a dangerous junction for pedestrians and cyclists. As the A99 moves south out of the heart of town, the gradient increases with limited footway widths and limited crossing points to Caithness General Hospital, a major employer which generates significant trips



Figure 5-6: The southern section of the A99 again presents wide roads and narrow footways in places. Although signals have been installed at the junction with Thurso Street, there still remains relatively unattractive crossing points and no provision for cyclists. There is sporadic residential parking which would need to be given consideration when providing for pedestrians and cyclists

5.4.10 The recommendations are summarised below in Table 5-3:

Table 5-3: Priority 3 Recommendations Summary Table – A99 Active Travel Improvements

Description
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek to reduce barriers to active travel along the A99 and provide a more appealing environment to walk and cycle
Issues for consideration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The A99 is the most heavily trafficked route in Wick Barriers to active travel are both in terms of crossing points and journeys along the A99
Recommended Intervention (subject to feasibility and design)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek to install higher standards of cycle parking at Wick Business Park where currently the only provision is of an unsuitable nature. The most appropriate form of cycle parking would be Sheffield Stands. These are cheap to install and allow both wheels and frames to be locked to the support. More innovative forms of cycle parking are available at higher cost, the key points to consider when installing cycle parking would be to site them appropriately and give them competitive advantage over car parking Improved maintenance of shared use path at northern end of A99. If the town is to expand north of Wick Business Park, it will be important to provide a high quality shared use path linking to the town centre There is no provision for cyclists on the carriageway. By promoting advisory cycle lanes the length of the A99, cyclists will feel more comfortable cycling on the road. On street parking needs to be considered where promoting cycle lanes and design standards in Cycling by Design should be followed Tesco generates a significant number of trips, many of which will be of a local origin. Current provisions for pedestrians and cyclists are very aesthetically pleasing although do not consider relevant desire lines. Currently, the desire line leaves the A99 shared use path at the southern edge of the site and progresses through broken down fencing across grass and in to the car park. During the audit process, the number of people using this informal route in to the store far outnumbered those using the provided ramp further north. Improved access should be considered utilising these desire lines along with appropriate cycle parking available at the store entrance Improved links in to Wick Industrial Estate could encourage more people to walk or cycle to work. The audit process noted several bikes parked casually around the site although levels of car parking were far higher. Assisting the employers on the Industrial Estate to consider a co-operative approach to green travel planning would help promote a modal shift where feasible and encourage more walking and cycling. For example, Cambridge Science Park has recently purchased two electrically assisted pool bicycles which are free to use for any employee on the site. The bikes can be used for business trips around the park, visiting local clients or simply popping in to the shops during lunch Support the retail function of the central area of the A99 around High Street and Bridge Street with footway widening and consideration of further formal crossing points During the audit process, it was noted that the southern end of the Bridge of Wick is a popular crossing point for pedestrians, many of whom encountered difficulty and delay. The demand is created by the close proximity of Caithness General Hospital and Wick Rail Station, sites which generate a significant number of trips. The junction with River Street is wide with limited visibility due to the bridge parapets and high side walls on Station Road. Consideration should be given to traffic management options which could remove the roundabout and signalise the junction. The dominant movements at this junction are the north/south movement along the A99 which should be given priority, but the provision for pedestrian crossings should be greatly increased. Safety for cyclists would be increased if this junction were to be signalised. Roundabouts are the safest form of at-grade junction for general traffic; however some 10% of all reported accidents involving cyclists occur at roundabouts. Of these, 11% are likely to be either serious or fatal and more than

50% involve a motorist entering a roundabout and colliding with a cyclist using the circulatory carriageway (TAL 9/97). Cyclist accident rates at roundabouts are four times that for motor vehicle drivers. Advanced stop lines for cyclists should be included in any signalisation works, a simple way of highlighting cyclist safety at junctions.

- Consider widening the footway on A99 as gradient increases southbound from Station Road/Bridge Street junction
- Improve crossing opportunities around Caithness General Hospital
- Continuation of existing advisory cycle lanes on both sides of A99
- Along the A99 in proximity to Wick High School consider providing further formal crossing points. During the audit process school pupils were observed casually crossing with little acknowledgment of traffic using the A99. This situation has the potential for serious accidents with narrow footways and large groups of pupils tending to “spill” on to the road rather than remain on the pavement. Greater priority should be given to pedestrians with wide footways in this area and possible traffic calming measures such as horizontal deflections or build outs which would reduce traffic speeds
- An area in which Wick scored poorly in during the pedestrian audit was dropped kerbs and tactile paving. The audit process observed wheelchair users and parents with prams struggling in several locations throughout this route. Ensuring every junction and crossing point has flush dropped kerbs and appropriate DDA compliant tactile paving would assist pedestrians on this route
- The coloured raised table at the west end of West Banks Avenue is an intervention which could be replicated widely throughout the A99 route. As the A99 forms the spine road through Wick, there are many side roads leading on to it. Where appropriate, consideration should be given to installing a raised table which works two-fold: it operates as a traffic calming feature, slowing vehicles around junctions although it also has the added benefit of drivers becoming more aware of pedestrians and using the raised tables as informal crossings

5.5 **Priority 4 Recommendation: Airport & Industrial Estate to Town Centre**

- 5.5.1 Providing active travel routes to link Wick Airport and the Industrial Estate to the town centre is essential, ensuring that those who use the airport have a direct, safe, attractive and easy to follow walking/cycling route in to town. Both locations are important employers for the local area and connecting them to the town will maximise journeys to work being undertaken by active travel modes. This may be the first sight of Wick that visitors have as they arrive at the airport and provides a great opportunity to create a statement signalling to them that Wick is a town which thoroughly embraces active travel.
- 5.5.2 The other key trip generator on this route is the North Primary School which has published an excellent school travel plan. A desire to increase walking and cycling levels has been well established and should be supported through appropriate interventions in the surrounding area.
- 5.5.3 The route is a direct link from the north of Wick to the town centre of just over 1km, a distance which can be comfortably walked in ten minutes or cycled in around five at a leisurely pace.



Figure 5-7: The Airport to Town Centre link passes North Primary which would benefit from further active travel support. Wick Industrial Estate joins the route, a site that generates a significant number of local trips which could be switched to active travel modes. There are two options for the route to join the town centre which give competitive advantage over motor vehicles. These passages or vennels provide an off road link from Louisburgh Street to High Street.

5.5.4 The recommendations are summarised below in Table 5-4:

Table 5-4: Priority 4 Recommendations Summary Table – Airport and Industrial Estate to Town Centre
Description
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is a short link but one which has the potential to provide for a large number of active travel trips including those to and from Wick Airport, Wick Industrial Estate and North Primary School
Issues for consideration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential objection from local taxi firms who may be worried about a drop in business from those using Wick Airport Providing for active travel without detriment to goods vehicle access to Wick Industrial Estate
Recommended Intervention (subject to feasibility and design)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As soon as people arrive at Wick Airport, they need to be informed of the options for travelling to Wick town centre. The link is approximately 1km in length which is well within comfortable walking and cycling distances. An active travel network map on display in the terminal would be beneficial along with hard copies to be taken away would encourage active travel trips for the duration of visitors stay in Wick. Improve the pedestrian crossing outside North Primary School by enforcing greater parking restrictions in close proximity to the school. The audit process observed cars and vans parked in close proximity to the crossing, greatly reducing visibility and safety for pupils using the crossing. By removing parking, the safety of school pupils should be greatly improved Consider options to improve the traffic free links to High Street from Louisburgh Road and provide for cyclists, wheelchair users and parents with prams Ensure that all junctions have DDA compliant flush dropped kerbs with appropriate tactile information

5.6 Priority 5 Recommendation: Staxigoe & Papigoe to Town Centre

5.6.1 This link would ensure that Staxigoe and Papigoe are integrated into the town, ensuring that where trips to Wick need to be made, there is provision for them to be carried out on foot or by bike. The area around Willowbank was highlighted in the Local Plan as an area that residents feel could benefit from traffic calming measures. In addition to the main link, consideration should be given to connections with North Head path which is well used for leisure purposes.



Figure 5-8: The link to Staxigoe is necessary to incorporate the settlement within Wick as it relies on the town for goods and services. The link also serves Hillhead Primary.

5.6.2 The recommendations are summarised below in Table 5-5:

Table 5-5: Priority 5 Recommendations Summary Table – Staxigoe and Papigoe to Town Centre

Description
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The remote settlements of Staxigoe and Papigoe should not be isolated from a potential active travel network, ensuring they are well served will assist with modal shift towards active travel modes
Issues for consideration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Journeys may be significantly longer than other routes developed in the active travel network Area highlighted as a concern by residents in the Local Plan
Recommended Intervention (subject to feasibility and design)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider options for traffic calming along Willowbank which could reduce traffic speeds and increase pedestrian and cyclist safety. Horizontal deflections and priority rules could potentially be very effective on what is essentially, a long straight road. Ensure that any traffic calming measure is not to the detriment of cyclists and provide appropriate run through areas Capitalise on benefits of reduced traffic speed by promoting walking and cycling in Hillhead Primary, making pupils and parents aware of any safety benefits associated with the physical interventions Ensure the entire route has DDA compliant flush dropped kerbs with appropriate tactile information Ensure signage represents journey times to key locations within Wick raising awareness that a compact settlement results in relatively low journey times

5.7 Priority 6 Recommendation: Old Wick Spurs

- 5.7.1 The need to link Old Wick to South Road was outlined during the Core Paths Consultation, with a desire to connect to South Road including the newly established retail park. The road pattern of the area, as for the majority of south Wick, is of a grid like pattern. Associated with this is the need for even short journeys to cross many junctions. Without flush dropped kerbs and appropriate tactile information, these crossings can be a real barrier to active travel uptake amongst disabled users and parents with prams.
- 5.7.2 There are many core paths in the area which could be improved and used to form links from Old Wick to South Road. Key locations in this area are Argyle Square, Bignold Park and the trip generators associated are South Road Retail Park and South Primary School. Improving walking and cycling facilities to serve this area should be supported by a personalised travel planning exercise and a review of South Primary School’s Travel Plan referred to in paragraph 3.2.17 of this report.
- 5.7.3 Examples of public realm enhancement are plentiful throughout Scotland and could be replicated in Old Wick. Ness Walk in Inverness which has feature lighting through the trees could be considered here to improve the aesthetics of the path. Although on a larger scale, Buchanan Street in Glasgow has installed a highly attractive “lightscape” with uplighting under benches and trees and other feature lighting. This will not only make the Old Wick area more pleasant but could improve perceptions of safety at night.



Figure 5-9: Connecting Old Wick and Upper Pulteneytown to South Road and in particular to the new retail park on South Road was mentioned during the Core Paths Consultation. Argyle Square is an historic area of town with a pleasant core path passing through the middle that could be enhanced through improved lighting.

5.7.4 The recommendations are summarised below in Table 5-6:

Table 5-6: Priority 6 Recommendations Summary Table – Old Wick Spurs	
Description	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve links from Old Wick and Upper Pulteneytown to South Road 	
Issues for consideration	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Necessity for links raised as an issue within Core Paths Plan • Within the Local Plan, Old Wick is highlighted as an area for town expansion when Lower Pulteneytown is regenerated 	
Recommended Intervention (subject to feasibility and design)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two spurs linking Old Wick and Upper Pulteneytown should be considered serving the current population but also ensuring any expansion in the south will be served • Ensure maintenance of Dempster Street paving which is currently mono-blocked. The audit process noted that in several locations, blocks were loosening and becoming uneven creating trip hazards and barriers to wheelchair users or parents with prams in particular. The carriageway is wide resulting in narrow pavements. Consideration should be given to widening the footway and replacing the surfacing with a more uniform high quality tarmac pavement • Provide DDA compliant flush dropped kerbs with appropriate tactile paving at the junctions with Malcolm Street and Beaufoy Street • Enhancements to Argyle Square could encourage more people to walk and cycle in the area. • Remove parking from the square side of the street on Argyle Square, while retaining parking outside properties. This will enhance the view of the square for those who walk and cycle through it • Carry out a programme of providing flush dropped kerbs with DDA compliant tactile paving along Grant Street and Huddart Street • Along Huddart Street, consider the application of colour graphics to the pavement around junctions with road safety themes to encourage pupils to walk to South Primary. This has been applied in Inverness and may benefit children in Wick as the grid like pattern of the streets creates the need for several crossings on even a short journey • Improve the path through Bignold Park, widening it and installing lighting which will increase users perception of safety whilst dark • There is a section of Oldwick Road round the corner from South Primary School which has no footway on the east side. This section has been raised as an issue by school pupils and parents which is highlighted in the South Primary School Travel Plan. Consideration should be given to creating a link of footway on this section of road • Improve provision for pedestrians on section of Harrow Road linking to South Road. Currently there is no footway, creating conflict between vehicles and pedestrians, an issue highlighted in the Core Paths Plan. By providing a footway on the north side of the road, user conflict will be negated. This will then link Old Wick to the new retail park on South Road, an objective of the Core Paths Plan 	

5.8 Priority 7 Recommendation: Upper Pulteneytown to Wick

5.8.1 The historic Pulteneytown area of Wick has gone through a period of great decline in the past century. The transition from the most prosperous herring port in Europe to a derelict post industrial landscape has been rapid. Through local government policy, there has been a concerted effort in recent years to regenerate Pulteneytown, renovating properties to provide affordable housing close to the centre of town and key employment areas. This work has been supported in part through European funding for the Heritage Edge programme which has included footway improvements along River Street and the refurbishment of the Black Stairs – the critical link between Upper and Lower Pulteneytown.

5.8.2 The aim should be to support the redevelopment of Lower Pulteneytown by reinstating the importance of the Black Stairs and to create a link with Upper Pulteneytown. This link has the potential to reconnect north and south Wick for a large concentration of the population – stimulating the levels of footfall once seen and captured by Lowry.



Figure 5-10: The Black Stairs of Wick are steeped in history and should be protected as a key network linkage. Travelling from the town centre to Upper Pulteneytown, as the name suggests, requires a climb up from sea level. The road is steep and may not be favourable for cyclists although the stepped links assist greatly with pedestrians. It is this reason that the A99 link should be enhanced for cyclists as far as is possible.

5.8.3 The recommendations are summarised below in Table 5-7:

Table 5-7: Priority 7 Recommendations Summary Table – Upper Pulteneytown Links
Description
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the links between Upper Pulteneytown and Wick town centre through continued public realm enhancements, maximising the opportunities for walking
Issues for consideration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The key link of this route is the historic Black Stairs which have recently been refurbished with the assistance of European funding. This link does not support cycling so it is important to consider alternatives along the A99 and Harbour Terrace • Building upon the historic identity of the route will assist with promotion
Recommended Intervention (subject to feasibility and design)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resurfacing of Upper and Lower Dunbar Street with high quality local materials replicating those used in River Street regeneration would identify this as a key corridor for pedestrians in Upper Pulteneytown. Branding this route as the Herring Trail or Black Stairs Route could promote the identity of the area – an incentive for residents to take ownership of the streets • As stated in Priority 6, work to enhance the environment of Argyle Square has the potential to increase the use of the area for active travel • Raise the profile of the Black Stairs to encourage more walking trips along this link. The European funding has assisted with a high quality refurbishing programme but historic links such as The Black Stairs need to be celebrated. The Black Stairs painting by Lowry echoes his famous Salford scenes with non-descript charcoal figures in late 1930s industrial Britain. Contemporary installations such as Antony Gormley’s Another Place of his Water of Leith statues in Edinburgh encourage people to visit points of interest. For example, an installation along these lines, paying homage to Lowry’s visit and recognition of the Black Stairs could raise the profile of Wick not only locally but nationally. A resurgence in local interest could encourage more residents to use The Black Stairs as part of an active travel route for commuting or leisure purposes • As Lower Pulteneytown is redeveloped, it is essential that provision for walking and cycling are taken in to account. Consider surfacing works and footway widening in Lower Pulteneytown which would provide for active travel • Examine feasibility of removing the roundabout at Martha Terrace and Williamson Street if harbour traffic permits. Tightening the junction would still allow large loads such as turbine towers and blades being docked in Wick to make a comfortable straight ahead movement but also improve crossing safety for pedestrians and the associated safety benefits of roundabout removal for cyclists • Provide flush dropped kerbs at all crossing points on link with appropriate tactile paving

5.9 Priority 8 Recommendation: West Wick Links

5.9.1 With three of the most significant trip generators in Wick located in the western edge – Wick High School, Wick Rail Station and Caithness General Hospital - ensuring good active travel provision is vital to create a useable and sustainable network. Improving signage in the area and ensuring there are no barriers to active travel are key initial interventions. The links around Wick High School require more provision for cyclists and pedestrians to create a network of safer routes to school to be supported by an updated school travel plan. If Wick High School is to be redeveloped on the site on which it currently stands, the travel plan may then be refreshed to account for additional cycle facilities on campus.



Figure 5-11: The links around the western edge of south Wick are critical within any active travel network, serving Wick High School, Wick Rail Station and Caithness General Hospital

5.9.2 The recommendations are summarised below in Table 5-8:

Table 5-8: Priority 8 Recommendations Summary Table – West Wick Links	
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serves three of the key trip generators in Wick with a coherent and safe active travel network
Issues for consideration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The A99 currently serves as a physical barrier to active travel in this area, severing the key locations from the majority of the town’s population Encouraging more pupils to walk and cycle to school, an outcome of Wick High School travel plan will require follow up promotional work to lock in the benefits of an improved active travel network
Recommended Intervention (subject to feasibility and design)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As outlined in the A99 recommendations, changing the Bridge Street/Station Road junction to signals rather than a roundabout will provide safer crossing opportunities for pedestrians and improve cyclist safety Provide greater information at Wick Rail Station for those arriving by train. Current cycle parking is of a high standard which should be promoted further along with additional provision of covered cycle racks outside the station. As the station doors are locked at 1700h, access to the bike racks is restricted. By providing covered racks outside the station, any inconvenience caused by the station closing would be negated Provide more appropriate cycle parking at Caithness General Hospital for short stay visitors. The current cycle lockers are out of view for the majority of people arriving in the hospital grounds, by simply providing covered, well designed Sheffield Stand racks at key entrances to the building, the awareness of staff and visitors will be raised, improving the chances of them cycling in the

future

- Tighten junction radiuses along West Bank Avenue and install raised tables at the east end and at the junction with Seaforth Avenue
- Improve traffic free links to A99 from west links at Seaforth Avenue and Newton Avenue including resurfacing work, widening and improved maintenance of vegetation.

5.10 Priority 9 Recommendation: Town Centre Improvements

- 5.10.1 The high quality of Wick town centre improvements to date may be at risk of being undermined by small details, that if addressed would help in creating a thriving a hub that people want to visit, spend time in, walk and cycle to and support the local economy. There has been significant works undertaken in recent years, perhaps most noticeably the pedestrianisation of a section of High Street between Bridge Street and Shore Lane. High quality materials have been backed up with attractive planting and the new pedestrian crossing at the corner of High Street/Bridge Street.
- 5.10.2 The centre of Wick is steeped in history with original features such as the vennels and passageways preserved even during modern day development. For example, these unique features could be promoted and capitalised upon, providing an opportunity to inspire the local community through initiatives such as community designed murals depicting historical scenes, giving a sense of ownership and identity to improve the environment for active travel.



Figure 5-12: The town centre of Wick has been enhanced greatly through the pedestrianised section of High Street although without proper enforcement, vehicles were still observed using the street as a short cut through to Bridge Street

5.10.3 The recommendations are summarised below in Table 5-9:

Table 5-9: Priority 9 Recommendations Summary Table – Town Centre Enhancements	
Description	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance the town centre environment further, a follow up exercise to the existing on street improvements 	
Issues for consideration	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure these interventions will benefit the retail function of High Street and Bridge Street Give walking and cycling a greater competitive advantage over motor vehicles 	
Recommended Intervention (subject to feasibility and design)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where space permits, consider providing ramped access in the closes and vennels leading to High Street and Bridge Street to provide for wheelchair users, cyclists and parents with prams. This will also provide the opportunity to enhance the closes with improved lighting and the opportunity to create an identity for each. The history of Wick has shaped the characteristics of the town, from the early Viking settlers through Medieval times right through to the herring trade boom. For example, in towns such as Prestonpans in East Lothian, the history of the town is embraced and displayed as murals on walls, depicting the mining and salt trades and historical links with the sea. Creating an identity for each vennel would create a sense of ownership amongst locals and could increase the use of the traffic free routes Rationalise the barriers around High Street to make cycling easier. The close highlighted in figure 5-12 illustrates the over-engineered solution of restricting motor vehicles. A single bollard will be as effective while removing any barrier posed to cyclists, wheelchair users or parents with prams Enforce the pedestrianised area of High Street by installing a rising Bollard at either end. During the audit process, many vehicles were observed using High Street as a short cut travelling east to west. This vehicle activity can ruin the integrity of a pedestrianised area. Retail outlets may have access for loading during certain times although this should be enforced, enhancing the quality of the pedestrianised area Relocate cycle parking on High Street to a more prominent position and provide additional racks at either end of the pedestrianised zone Investigate potential to provide short term cycle hire hub 	

6 Conclusions

- 6.1.1 Wick exhibits excellent levels of walking as demonstrated in 2001 Census data, a figure that should remain relatively unchanged as Wick has not significantly expanded since the collection of this data. This high level illustrates an acceptance that walking is a viable mode of transport in Wick and with the correct infrastructure and a supporting package of softer measures active travel could realistically become significantly enhanced in the area. The high levels of walking are tempered however by a virtually non-existent cycling culture. There appear to be reasonable numbers of children cycling to school although through a lack of provision and short travel distances in the town, cycling in Wick does not appear to be a mode favoured by many.
- 6.1.2 There is a need to plant the seeds of a cycling culture in Wick, through the provision of cycling facilities on those routes that are more dominated by vehicular traffic but by promoting quieter routes through residential areas, removing the chance of conflict with motor vehicles. Softer measures such as providing active travel network maps and route signing displaying journey times will assist towards encouraging a modal shift and help to increase the number of people cycling.
- 6.1.3 The physical infrastructure required to make Wick more active travel friendly is far from excessive. With fiscal restraint to be a continuing theme for the foreseeable future, this should not be to the detriment of active travel in the town. The cost of softer measures could be shared between local authority departments with a responsibility falling on transport, health and education.
- 6.1.4 The measures outlined in the priority tables above should assist with encouraging a modal shift towards walking and cycling and should be considered further.