

# Caithness & Sutherland Local Development Plan

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## Strategic Environmental Assessment

### DRAFT Revised Environmental Report – COMMITTEE VERSION

This Revised Environmental Report is based on the Environmental Report that was published for consultation in October 2014. The appendices that accompany this revised Environmental Report have been updated to reflect comments received and to reflect the content of the draft Proposed Plan that is going to the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee on 4 November 2015. The Revised Environmental Report itself has not yet been updated to reflect the updated appendices. This work will be completed and the Revised Environmental Report and Appendices will be published for consultation alongside the Caithness and Sutherland Proposed Local Development Plan.

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## Non-technical summary

### Purpose and objectives of the Environmental Report

As part of the preparation of the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan) Highland Council is required to carry out a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). This provides a systematic method for considering the likely environmental effects of any new plans, programmes and strategies (PPS) and for achieving the following aims:

- integrate environmental factors into PPS preparation and decision-making
- improve PPS and enhance environmental protection
- increase public participation in decision making
- facilitate openness and transparency of decision-making

The Revised Environmental Report is an important stage in the SEA process. It outlines the contents of the Proposed Plan and highlights how the SEA process has influenced the proposals within the Plan.

### Purpose and objectives of the Plan

The purpose of a Local Development Plan is to guide where different types of development can happen, and to contribute towards delivering the Scottish Government's aim for sustainable economic growth. The Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan) aims to set a planning framework for the northern part of the Highland Council region. It is supported by the Highland wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP) which sets the strategic planning policy context for the whole of Highland (with the exception of the Cairngorms National Park area). CaSPlan sets out a vision which is based on four key outcomes which reflect the objectives of the Single Outcome Agreement 3 (SOA3), Local Transport Strategy and the Highland Council's Programme.

Following its adoption CaSPlan will replace the elements of the Caithness Local Plan (2002) and the Sutherland Local Plan (2010) which have been continued in force by The Town and Country Planning (Continuation in force of Local Plans) (Highland) (Scotland) Order 2012.

### State of the environment summary

The tables below show a summary of statistics relating to each of the key SEA topics:

#### Biodiversity, flora, fauna

Some of the country's most important natural environments which are protected under international designations: SSSI (150), SAC (29), SPA (15), NNR (4), RAMSAR (3). Also 1,338 Semi-natural woodland sites, 1,010 ancient woodland sites and 8 Tree Preservation Orders.

#### Climatic factors

- Areas which are at risk of coastal, fluvial and pluvial flooding have been taken into account with the use of SEPAs latest flood mapping data.
- Highland Council Energy Consumption is 22, 250GWH per annum.

#### Population and Human health

- Population of Plan area in 2011 was 38,556 (17% of the Highland population). This is expected to decline to 37,020 by 2031.
- Current population density is 5.1 people per km<sup>2</sup> (compared to Highland at 8.7 people per km<sup>2</sup> and 67.4 for Scotland).
- Sutherland is the most sparsely populated area of Scotland with only 2.2

#### Material assets

Within the Plan area there are:

- Two housing markets: Caithness and Sutherland
- In Sept 2013 there were 20,904 houses
- Around 1/3 of housing in Wick and Thurso are affordable but in rural areas it is below the Highland average.
- Private renting is lower than the Highland

people per km<sup>2</sup>.

average

- High rates of vacant housing Caithness and second homes Sutherland

### Soil

- Large areas of peatland including the Flow Country, which is the largest expanse of blanket bog in Europe, covering about 4,000 km<sup>2</sup>.
- Large numbers of brownfield sites with potential contamination within Caithness

### Cultural heritage

Within the Plan area there are:

- 4 conservation areas
- 967 Listed buildings (66 A Listed; 552 B Listed and 349 C Listed)
- 598 scheduled monuments

### Water

- High number of rivers/lochs in good ecological condition

### Landscape

Caithness and Sutherland includes 4 National Scenic Areas – Scotland's finest landscapes, 10 Wild Land Areas and 10 Special Landscape Areas

### Air

- No Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) in Caithness or Sutherland at present.

## Expected Environmental Implications without CaSPlan

It is considered that without CaSPlan there would be increasing adverse impacts on the environment from development. Without CaSPlan there would be reliance on existing development plans, which would increasingly become out of date with land allocations being fully built out.

The Highland-wide Local Development Plan contains a number of general policies in relation to the strategic protection and safeguarding of the environment. However it relies upon up-to-date area specific development plans to provide a framework to support these policies in the local context.

## Assessment approach and key findings

SEA objectives relating to the key topics were identified and are shown below:

SEA Topic	SEA Objectives
Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna	To conserve and where possible enhance biodiversity and accord to the protection of valued nature conservation habitats and species
Population and Human Health	To improve the living environment for all communities and promote improved health of the human population
Soil	Safeguard the soil quality, geodiversity and improve contaminated land
Water	Manage and reduce flood risk and protect the water environment
Climatic Factors	Reduce greenhouse gases and contribute to the adaptation of the area to climate change

Material Assets	Manage, maintain and promote sustainable use of material assets
Cultural Heritage	Protect and enhance, where appropriate, the area's rich historic environment
Landscape	Protect and enhance the character, diversity and unique qualities of the landscape

The vision and spatial strategy, policies and policy tools set out within the Proposed Plan have been assessed against these objectives (Appendix XX for those included in the plan and Appendix XX for the alternative approaches) as well as site allocations (Appendix XX for those included as allocations in the Proposed Plan and Appendix XX for the alternatives) Baseline information on each of the SEA topics, shown in Appendix X, has helped to inform the preparation of the Proposed Plan and the assessment process.

An assessment matrix was prepared for the assessment of the vision and spatial strategy, policies and policy tools. A different matrix was prepared for the assessment of sites. As part of the assessment of environmental impacts we also identified relevant mitigation measures. Our approach to mitigation is based on the hierarchy of avoid, reduce, remedy and compensate. Where appropriate we also look to enhance environmental features. The site assessments are shown in Appendix XX.

From the site assessments we have identified issues which may have a significantly positive and a significantly negative impact on the environment. This has then allowed us to provide specific mitigation measures which will help to minimise the negative impact and maximise the positive impact.

### **Monitoring the effectiveness of the Plan**

A framework for monitoring the environmental outcomes of the Plan is set out in the Monitoring section of this report. To ensure that it is effective the framework is based on the main SEA topics and sets out the objective sought, the monitoring indicator, the responsible organisation, timescales and remedial action required.

### **Next Steps**

This Revised Environmental Report will be available for public comments alongside the Caithness and Sutherland Proposed Local Development Plan, between XX and XX. All comments must be received by Midday on XX.

# Introduction

## Purpose of this Environmental Report and key facts

As part of the preparation of Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan, the Highland Council is carrying out a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). SEA is a systematic method for considering the likely environmental effects of certain PPS. SEA aims to:

- integrate environmental factors into PPS preparation and decision-making;
- improve PPS and enhance environmental protection;
- increase public participation in decision making; and
- facilitate openness and transparency of decision-making.

SEA is required by the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005. The key SEA stages are:

<b>Screening</b>	Determining whether the PPS is likely to have significant environmental effects and whether an SEA is required
<b>Scoping</b>	Deciding on the scope and level of detail of the Environmental Report, and the consultation period for the report – this is done in consultation with Scottish Natural Heritage, The Scottish Ministers (Historic Scotland) and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency
<b>Environmental Report</b>	Publishing an Environmental Report on the PPS and its environmental effects, and consulting on that report
<b>Adoption</b>	Providing information on: the adopted PPS; how consultation comments have been taken into account; and methods for monitoring the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the PPS
<b>Monitoring</b>	Monitoring significant environmental effects in such a manner so as to also enable the Responsible Authority to identify any unforeseen adverse effects at an early stage and undertake appropriate remedial action.

The purpose of this Revised Environmental Report is to:

- provide information on the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan
- identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant effects of the PPS and its reasonable alternatives;
- provide an early and effective opportunity for the Consultation Authorities and the public to offer views on any aspect of this Revised Environmental Report.



# Key facts about the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan

## Name of Responsible Authority

The Highland Council (THC)

## Title of Plan, Programme or Strategy

Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan

## Subject (e.g. transport)

Town and Country Planning

## Purpose and or objectives of the PPS

To plan for and help guide the future use of land of the Caithness and Sutherland areas of Highland. It will give confidence to communities and developers in the future of settlements by determining where development should and should not take place. It will contribute towards sustainable development and tackling climate change.

## What prompted the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (e.g. legislative, regulatory or administrative provision)

As a legal requirement of the Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006, the Highland Council is preparing a Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan as the new land use plan for development of a scale and nature that are of local significance. The plan will cover the period from 2016 to 2021 but with a vision and principles extending to 2035. It will replace the Sutherland Local Plan (2010) and the Caithness Local Plan (2002).

## Period covered by PPS

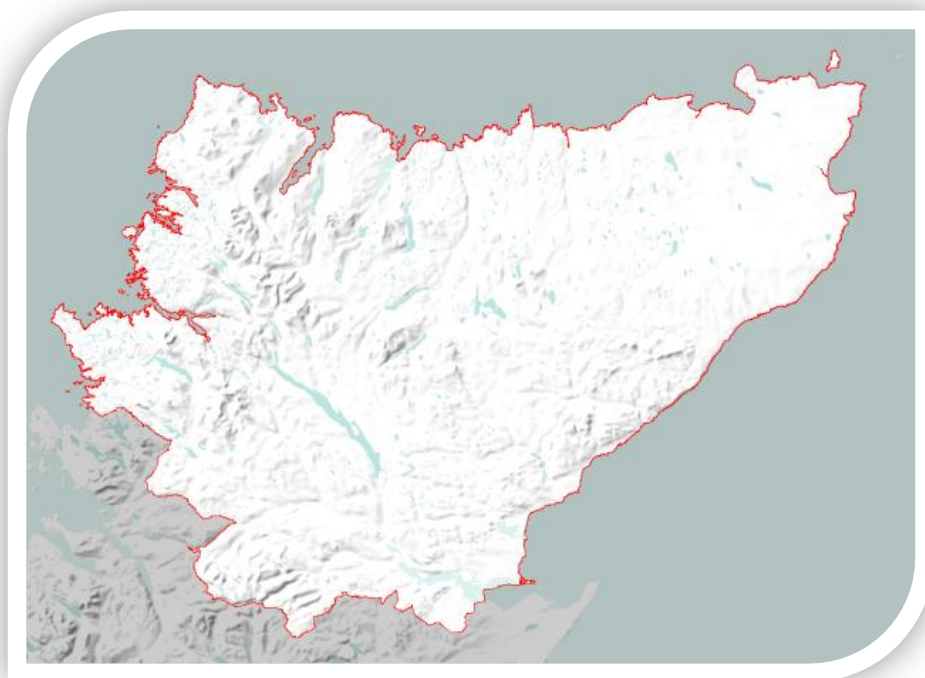
2016 - 2035

## Frequency of updates

Within a 5 year cycle

## Area covered by PPS

The Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan extends over an area of 812,997ha. See the map to the right.



## SEA activities to date

The table below summarises the SEA activities to date in relation to the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan

SEA Action/Activity	When carried out
Screening to determine whether the PPS is likely to have significant environmental effects	N/A – The PPS falls under the scope of Section 5(3) of the Act and requires an SEA under the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005. No Screening was undertaken and the plan moved straight to scoping
Scoping the consultation periods and the level of detail to be included in the Environmental Report	A Scoping Report was submitted in December 2012
Outline and objectives of the PPS	Outlined within the Scoping Report submitted in December 2012 (revised for Environmental Report Oct 2014)
Relationship with other PPS and environmental objectives	Outlined within the Scoping Report submitted in December 2012 (revised for Environmental Report Oct 2014)
Environmental baseline established	Outlined within the Scoping Report submitted in December 2012 (revised for Environmental Report Oct 2014)
Environmental problems identified	Outlined within the Scoping Report submitted in December 2012 (revised for Environmental Report Oct 2014)
Assessment of future of area without the PPS	Outlined within the Scoping Report submitted in December 2012 (revised for Environmental Report Oct 2014)
Alternatives considered	Alternatives considered within the Environmental Report Oct 2014
Environmental assessment methods established	Outlined within the Scoping Report submitted in December 2012 (revised for Environmental Report Oct 2014)
Selection of PPS alternatives to be included in the environmental assessment	Outlined within the Scoping Report submitted in December 2012 (revised for Environmental Report Oct 2014)
Identification of environmental problems that may persist after implementation and measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and offset any significant adverse effects	Outlined within the Scoping Report submitted in December 2012 (revised for Environmental Report Oct 2014)
Monitoring methods proposed	Alternatives considered within the Environmental Report Oct 2014
Consultation timescales <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timescale for Consultation Authorities</li> <li>• Timescale for public consultation</li> </ul>	Outlined within the Scoping Report submitted in December 2012 (revised for Environmental Report Oct 2014)
Notification/publicity action	October 2014 – January 2015
Preparation of Revised Environmental Report	
Publication of Revised Environmental Report	



### **Outline and objectives of the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan**

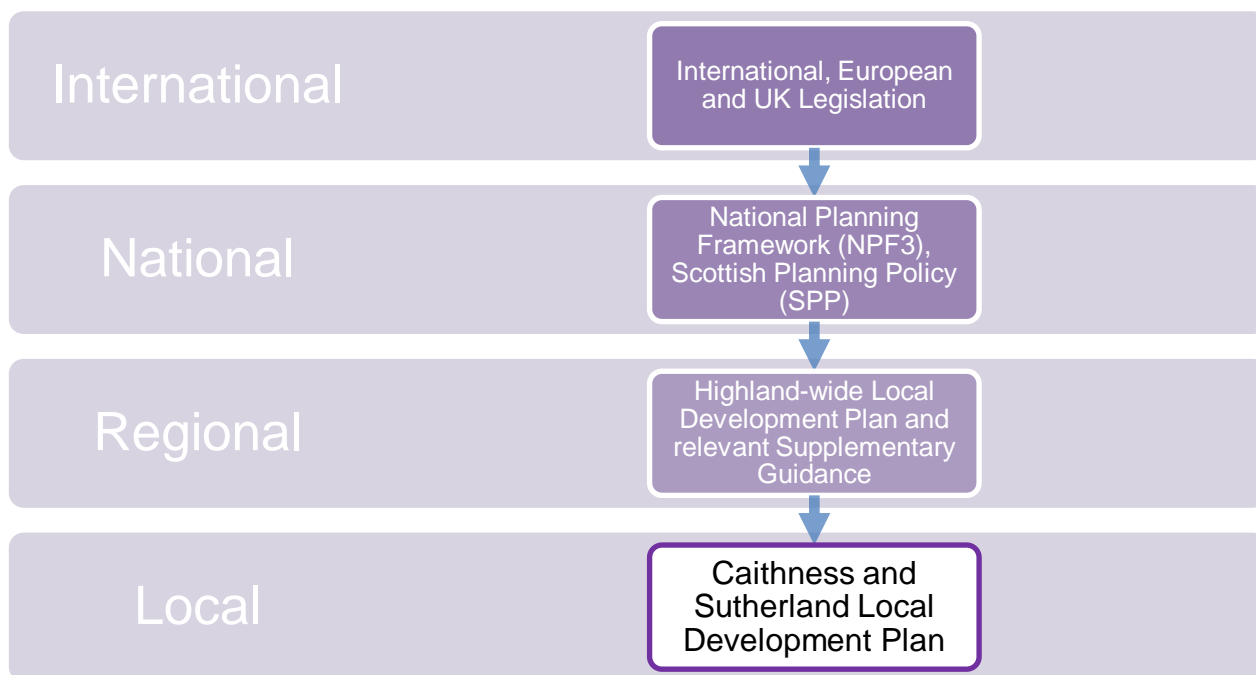
The Highland wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP) sets the strategic planning policy context for the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan). Based on the HwLDP strategy and the work which has occurred since its adoption CaSPlan sets a vision and spatial strategy for achieving the aims below:

- Establish a strong and diverse economy
- Create a network of successful, sustainable and socially inclusive communities
- Enhance transport, communication and utilities infrastructure
- Conserve the environment and promote the built and cultural heritage

The Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan will replace the elements of the Sutherland Local Plan (2010) and the Caithness Local Plan (2002) which have been continued in force by The Town and Country Planning (Continuation in force of Local Plans) (Highland) (Scotland) Order 2012. The provisions of the Highland-wide Local Development plan as they relate to land allocations will also be updated.

## Relationship with other PPS and environmental protection objectives

Schedule 3 of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 requires that the Environmental Report includes an outline of the PPS relationships with other relevant PPS, and how environmental protection objectives have been taken into account in the PPS preparation. This section covers these issues and describes the policy context within which the PPS operates, and the constraints and targets that this context imposes on the PPS.










The key **environmental objectives** to be considered in the assessment and preparation of the CaS LDP, as identified in Appendix 2, include:

- **Biodiversity, flora and fauna:** Highland Council has a duty to further the conservation of biodiversity under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004
- **Population and human health:** The Council must plan for changing demographics including forecasts of a declining and ageing population.
- **Climatic factors:** The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 sets out a framework for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and a transition to a low carbon economy. The Act introduces a new duty to all public sector bodies to exercise their functions in a way that is best calculated to contribute towards GHG targets of 80% reduction by 2050 with an interim target of 42% by 2020.
- **Material assets:** Delivering sufficient numbers of houses together with sustainable waste management and appropriate infrastructure.
- **Water:** The Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act provides a statutory framework for delivering a sustainable and risk-based approach to managing flooding. Highland Council has a responsibility under the Act to exercise its functions with a view to managing and reducing flood risk and promotion of sustainable flood risk management.
- **Soil:** Protecting and supporting the enhancement of carbon rich soils and good agricultural land such together with respecting designations such as North West Highland European Geopark.
- **Cultural heritage:** National and regional policy sets out the principles which must be followed in order to care for, protect and enhance our historic environment.

- **Landscape:** The landscape is a defining feature of the area and the Council has a duty to have regard to the desirability of conserving the natural heritage of Scotland under the Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967.

The relevant PPS and associated environmental objectives to be considered in the Environmental Report are shown below. PPS above the national level have typically not been outlined in detail primarily because the environmental protection framework provided by European legislation has been integrated into national and regional plans, policies and guidance.



Legislation, Plans, Programmes or Strategies	Summary of relevant Environmental Objectives to be reflected in CaSPlan
Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna	
<p>Ramsar Convention (Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p>EU Birds Directive &amp; EU Habitats Directive</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p>Habitat Regulations</p> <p>Moray Firth SAC Management Scheme, Revision 2 (2010)</p>	<p>The Habitats Regulations transpose the provisions of the EU Habitats and Birds Directives into Scottish Law and require that Local Development Plans are subject to HRA of their implications for Natura sites. Habitats Regulations also requires protection for European protected species.</p> <p>To establish and maintain a viable population of bottlenose dolphins, and to conserve the condition of subtidal sandbanks within the Firth.</p>
<p>Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)</p> <p>Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004</p> <p>Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011</p> <p>Protection of Badgers Act 1992</p> <p>Convention on Biological Diversity</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p>UK Biodiversity Action Plan/ Scottish Biodiversity Strategy (Scotland's Biodiversity – It's In Your Hands)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p>Highland Biodiversity Action Plan (2010-13)</p>	<p>CaSPlan will further conservation of biodiversity consistent with the proper exercise of its functions and protect and enhance precious natural features and wildlife.</p> <p>To prevent the release and spread of non-native animal and plant species into areas where they can cause damage to native species and habitats and to economic interests.</p> <p>CaSPlan will conserve species and habitats in Caithness and Sutherland that are considered vulnerable or threatened on a local or national basis. In turn the plan will contribute to the conservation of our global biodiversity; promote awareness of local natural resources; promote community engagement in, and ownership of, the practical conservation of natural resources; and promote the sustainable and wise use of resources.</p>
<p>North West Highland Geopark &amp; Flow Country</p> <p>Peatlands of Caithness and Sutherland Management Strategy 2005 – 2015</p> <p>Scotland's National Peatland Plan 2014</p> <p>Scottish Planning Policy</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p>Highland wide LDP</p>	<p>The North West Highland Geopark and the Flow Country (tentative World Heritage Site) are internationally important environments. These plans seek to protect and enhance the areas. CaSPlan will recognise the importance of these sites.</p> <p>CaSPlan will deliver green networks, consisting of green spaces and green corridors within and around settlements, linking out to the wider countryside.</p>

 Green Networks Supplementary Guidance Population & Human Health	
Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003  Highland Council Core Paths Plan (2011)	Establishes the statutory rights of access to land and inland water for outdoor recreation. Prepared under the Act, the Core Paths Plan provides a system of path in Highland which, as a whole, gives the public reasonable access throughout the plan area. CaSPlan will recognise these issues through the Site Assessment process, and where necessary will highlight their importance within specific land allocations in the plan.
Let's Make Scotland More Active' (2003)  THC Local Transport Strategy  Active Travel Masterplans	The LTS guides policy and investment on transport within Highland in partnership with other agencies. The LTS acknowledges the Moray Firth has high volumes of traffic along with delays and congestion during commuter periods. This needs to be addressed to remove barriers to development. To promote active travel THC in partnership with The Highlands and Islands Strategic Transport Partnership (HITRANS), a series of Active travel audits and masterplans have been prepared which will inform the CaSPlan.
Soil	
Scottish Soil Framework (2009)	To promote the sustainable management and protection of soils consistent with the economic, social and environmental needs of Scotland, achieved through targeted activities including reducing soil erosion; greenhouse gas emissions from soil; and contamination. CaSPlan will recognise the important soils in the plan area including the important blanket bog in the Flow Country and other carbon rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitat,
Water	
EU Water Framework Directive  Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Act 2003 (WEWS) Act  Scotland River Basin Management Plan (2009)	To prevent deterioration in the status of the water environment, including rivers, lochs, estuaries, coastal waters and groundwaters and protect, enhance and restore all surface water bodies to 'good' status. CaSPlan will safeguard the water environment through the Site Assessment process, and where necessary by safeguarding specific water environments associated with land allocations.
EU Floods Directive  Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009	To reduce and manage the risks that floods pose to human health, the environment, cultural heritage and economic activity through improved assessment and the sustainable and coordinated management of flood risk.  The Act imposes a new duty on local authorities to exercise their flood risk related functions with a

	view to reducing overall flood risk and establishes the requirement to prepare plans to manage flood risk which will provide a framework for coordinating actions across catchments to deal with all forms of flooding and its impacts. CaSPlan will consider flood risk through the Site Assessment process, and where necessary by requiring Flood Risk Assessments on specific land allocations.
<p>EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Marine (Scotland) Act 2010</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Pentland Firth and Orkney Waters Marine Spatial Plan</p>	Aims to achieve good environmental status of the EU's marine waters by 2020 and to protect the resource base upon which marine-related economic and social activities depend. The Marine (Scotland) Act transposes the Directive into Scots law and makes provision for a new statutory marine planning system to sustainably manage demands on the marine environment. CaSPlan's intertidal zone along the north coast is shared with the Pentland Firth and Orkney Waters Marine Spatial Plan, the plan will be cognisant of the Marine Spatial Plan.
<b>Air</b>	
<p style="text-align: center;">EU Air Quality Directive</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (2007)</p>	Air quality targets have been set at the European and UK levels. The Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland sets objectives for Particulate Matter (PM), oxides of nitrogen (NOx), sulphur dioxide (SO2) and ozone (O3) amongst others.
<b>Climatic Factors</b>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Land Use Strategy : Getting the best from our land</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Highland Climate Change Strategy</p>	<p>The Act introduces a new duty on the Council (and all public bodies) to exercise their functions in a way that is best calculated to contribute towards the greenhouse gas reduction targets of reducing emissions by at least 80 per cent by 2050.</p> <p>A national land-use strategy has been prepared under the Act. This identifies key principles for the sustainable use of land, including: encouraging land uses which deliver multiple benefits; land highly suitable for primary uses should be recognised in decision-making; and examining options for restoring derelict or vacant land should be a priority.</p> <p>The Council's own strategy sets out how it will mitigate against the causes of climate change and adapt to the likely impacts. CaSPlan will transpose these higher level legislation and strategies at the local level.</p>
<b>Material Assets</b>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Scottish Forestry Strategy (2006)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Control of Woodland Removal Policy</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>	Environmental objectives include reducing the impact of climate change; making access to and enjoyment of woodlands easier for all to improve health; protect the environmental quality of our natural resources; and help to maintain, restore

Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy	and enhance Scotland's biodiversity. CaSPlan will safeguard assets, and promote access and environmental quality through the Site Assessment and allocation process.
Zero Waste Plan ↓ Highland Council & Moray Waste Strategy	To achieve a zero waste Scotland, where we make the most efficient use of resources by minimising Scotland's demand on primary resources, and maximising the reuse, recycling and recovery of resources instead of treating them as waste.
<b>Cultural Heritage</b>	
Scottish Historic Environment Policy (SHEP)	The three key outcomes presented in the Policy are that the historic environment is cared for, protected and enhanced for the benefit of our own and future generations; greater economic benefits from the historic environment; and that the people of Scotland and visitors to our country value, understand and enjoy the historic environment.
<b>Landscape</b>	
Countryside (Scotland) Act 1967 European Landscape Convention 2004 Scotland's Scenic Heritage (1978) Special Qualities Reports for National Scenic Areas (2010) Caithness and Sutherland Landscape Character Assessment (1998) Citations for the Special Landscape Areas Wildness in Scotland's Countryside Policy Statement 02/03 ↓ Wildness Qualities Mapping Wild Land Areas (2014) Scottish Planning Policy ↓ Highland Coastal Development Strategy	To promote the protection, management and planning of all landscapes, including natural, managed, urban and peri-urban areas, and special, everyday and also degraded landscape.  To protect the elemental qualities of some of Scotland's most remote mountain and coastal areas which many people derive psychological and spiritual benefits.  Sets a vision for the sustainable use and development of the coast of Highland. Areas of isolated coast identified in the coastal classification within the Strategy has statutory development plans protection under the HwLDP policy.
<b>Other Relevant PPS</b>	
EU Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment.	Public plans and programmes covered by this Directive are subject to an environmental assessment during their preparation and before their adoption. SEA will be carried out on every CaSPlan and an Environmental Report produced.
National Planning Framework 3 (2014)	The National Planning Framework 3 aims to guide Scotland's development to 2030 and sets out strategic development priorities to support the Government's goal of sustainable economic growth. The Framework will play a key role in co-



	ordinating policies with a spatial dimension and will help move Scotland towards a low carbon economy.
Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) (including Circulars and PANs)	SPP sets out the Scottish Government's planning policy on nationally important land-use planning matters. This places planning within the wider context of the Scottish Government's overarching aim to increase sustainable economic growth.
Single Outcome Agreement 3 (SOA3)	Single Outcome Agreement 3 delivers a partnership approach to tackling issues which affect Highland. As part of this there are a number of National and Local Outcomes which have fed into the preparation of the four outcomes which make up the vision of CaSPlan.
Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP)  Supplementary Guidance	To continue to provide a strong platform for economic growth, together with adequate levels of housing and community facilities while also protecting and conserving the built and natural environment.
Programme for the Highland Council 2012 – 2017: Working Together for the Highlands	The Council sets out 128 bold and ambitious actions across seven main themes: the economy; children and young people; caring communities; better infrastructure; better housing; empowering communities; and strong and safe communities. Protecting and enhancing the environment, a more efficient transportation network and improving sustainability are important considerations.
National Renewables Infrastructure Plan (N-RIP)  Pilot Pentland Firth and Orkney Waters Marine Spatial Plan	To support the development of a globally competitive offshore renewables industry. The Council is one of three key partners developing a pilot Marine Spatial Plan for the Pentland Firth and Orkney Waters (PFOW). A key element of the emerging marine spatial planning policy arena is the integration of marine and terrestrial planning. The jurisdictions between both of these planning areas overlap at Mean High Water Springs and Mean Low Water Springs respectively.

By carrying out this analysis and the more general site analysis as part of the plan making process it has facilitated the development of a Local Development Plan which gives due consideration of the necessary plans, policies and strategies which may affect and those which may be affected by the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan.

## Relevant aspects of the current state of the environment

Schedule 3 of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 requires that the Environmental Report includes a description of “the relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan or programme”, and “the environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected”. This section aims to describe the environmental context within which the PPS operates and the constraints and targets that this context imposes on the PPS.

The purpose of this section is to provide enough environmental baseline data to:

- support the identification of environmental problems;

- support the process of assessing the environmental effects; and
- provide a baseline against which future monitoring data can be compared.

### General

The Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan covers an area of 7,876 sq km. This is 10% of Scotland.

This section of the Environmental Report is split by SEA Topic as defined by the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005. A table and maps showing baseline data can be found in Appendix 2.

### Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna

Natural heritage designations cover a range of habitats in the CaSPlan area. In designated sites there are:

Designation	Number of Sites	Area covered (Hectares)	Percentage of CaSPlan area
Site of Special Scientific Interest	150	254,193	31.3%
Special Area of Conservation	29	354,973	43.6%
Special Protection Area	15	239,356	29.4%
National Nature Reserve	4	12,516	1.6%
Ramsar	3	152,819	18.8%

There are also a number of forestry designations across Caithness and Sutherland:

Designation	Number of Sites	Area covered (Hectares)	Percentage of CaSPlan area
Semi-natural woodland	1338	12,898.7	1.59%
Ancient and Long Established Woodland	1010	5,059.4	0.62%
Tree Preservation Orders	8	29.6	0.0036%

The following habitats occur in Highland (many of which in the area covered by the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan) and are priority habitats in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK):

- Ancient and/or species rich hedgerows
- Blanket bog
- Blue mussel beds
- Calaminarian grasslands
- Carbonate mounds
- Cereal field margins
- Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh
- Coastal saltmarsh
- Coastal sand dunes
- Coastal vegetated shingle
- Maerl beds
- Maritime cliffs and slopes
- Mesotrophic lakes
- Mountain heaths and willow scrub
- Mud habitats in deep water
- Mudflats
- Native pinewood
- Oligotrophic and dystrophic lochs
- Open mosaic habitats on previously developed land (brownfield sites)
- Ponds

- Deep sea sponge communities
- Estuarine rocky habitats
- Eutrophic standing waters
- Fens
- File shell beds
- Fragile sponge & anthozoan communities of subtidal rocky habitats
- Inland rock outcrops and scree habitats
- Intertidal boulder communities
- Limestone pavements
- Lowland calcareous grassland
- Lowland dry acid grassland
- Lowland heathland
- Lowland meadows
- Lowland wood pasture and parkland
- Machair
- Purple moor grass and rush pasture
- Reedbeds
- Rivers
- Saline lagoons
- Seagrass beds
- Seamount communities
- Sheltered muddy gravels
- Tidal rapids
- Traditional orchards
- Upland calcareous grassland
- Upland flushes, fens and swamps
- Upland hay meadows
- Upland heathland
- Upland mixed ashwoods
- Upland oakwood
- Wet woodland

The protected species known to be found in Highland are listed in Appendix 2 of the [Statutorily Protected Species Supplementary Guidance](#). Many sections of the coastline are important for breeding seabirds and much of the north and east coastline and the associated offshore environment is designated as Special Protection Area. Much of the north and west coast has been classified as isolated coast.

Wild Deer are an important element of Scotland's biodiversity and ecology, an economic asset and valued as an iconic species. They are present across Caithness and Sutherland.

Green networks help to create a sense of place by providing spaces to meet friends and neighbours, take part in sport, recreation and play while also making a significant contribution to the biodiversity of the area. Green networks should be a facilitating feature which enables the delivery of high quality development which integrates with green networks and aids the protection and enhancement of the network. Detailed mapping and priorities have not been identified in Caithness and Sutherland however the HwLDP identifies Wick to Thurso and Dornoch to Helmsdale as areas where Green Networks will be identified.

### **Population and Human Health**

The current population of the plan area is 37,020 but this is expected to decline to 35,556 by 2031. The current population density is 5.1 people per square km compared to the Highland population density of 8.7 people per square km and 67.4 for Scotland. Sutherland is the most sparsely populated area of Scotland with only 2.2 people per sq km.

The census is one of the most effective methods we have of gathering information on the health of our population. In Highland the percentage of those with a long term limiting illness is 18.6% which is below the 19.6% average in Scotland as a whole.

### **Soil**

Given the scale of the Plan area and the diversity of its landscapes and uses there are a wide range of soil types. Appendix 2 shows a map produced by Scotland's Soils showing the different types of soils in Scotland. It can be seen from this map that there a number of different types of peat based soils and large areas of peatland. This information is supplemented by Map 6 of the Land use Strategy for Scotland showing the depth of peat in Highland. The plan area includes the Flow Country which is the largest expanse of blanket bog in Europe and many parts of Sutherland have peaty soils. Peat is important in terms of its carbon storage properties and the habitats (many of

which are water dependant) which it provides. The removal and disturbance of peat can mean the stored carbon is released and may contribute to climate change. Scottish Natural Heritage's Information note 318 provides a reproducible method for categorising the carbon richness of soil mapping units produced by the soil survey of Scotland. While this work has not been carried out, the carbon storage potential of soil is recognised.

The soil capability in the plan area varies considerably. While there is no class 1 prime agricultural land or Class 2, there are areas of Classes 3.1 and 3.2. The plan will take the approach to prime agricultural land as set out in Scottish Planning Policy as confirmed by the Highland-wide Local Development Plan.

### **Water**

The quality of the water environment is generally very good in Caithness and Sutherland. The freshwater environment is recognised internationally for its importance as a spawning ground for wild salmon and its use in the whisky making process. The many lochs and rivers that characterise the local area are important for local economies and provide the scenic backdrop that encourages visitors to the area. The Dornoch Firth and wider Moray Firth areas are also internationally renowned with a number of the coastal areas protected by international legislation. The River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) Area Management Plans provide valuable baseline information on the quality of water in Highland. The plan area is covered by the [North Highland](#) RBMP Area Management Plans.

As part of this SEA we have considered Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) for the area. Flood risk was considered during the site assessment work and where relevant has been factored into developer requirements for sites to provide mitigation. It is considered that, given the smaller-scale nature of sites allocated and of potential development, this is a suitable and proportionate approach to SFRA.

### **Climate Change**

In Highland one of the main contributors to climate change is transportation due to the emissions of carbon dioxide. High levels of CO<sub>2</sub> and other "greenhouse gases" in the atmosphere are thought to accelerate the Earth's natural warming. Warming is predicted to have a variety of environmental consequences including increased frequency and severity of storm events, as well as rises in sea level, which may have an affect on the coastal communities throughout the plan area. Changes in rainfall patterns could lead to increased erosion and pollution associated with surface run-off.

### **Material Assets**

For the purposes of this Environmental Report waste, access and transport are considered to be material assets. In terms of waste it is considered that the materials and management of waste as a result of development is a key consideration given the potential location and scale of development.

The Highland-wide Local Development Plan (under policy 70 – Waste Management Facilities) sets out our commitment to the Government's Zero Waste Plan, Scottish SPP and the Council's Municipal Waste Strategy. To meet the Zero Waste Plan targets additional operational waste Management Infrastructure Capacity required includes:

- 160,000 tonnes of total additional capacity is needed
- 80,000 tonnes of additional capacity is needed to manage source segregated recyclables
- 70,000 tonnes of additional capacity is needed to manage unsorted waste
- 2,000,000 tonnes required to meet the 10 year landfill capacity

In terms of access to the outdoors the Council's Local Transport Strategy 2010/11 – 2013/14 provides the key information on this valuable material asset including the level of access infrastructure as set out in the table below:

Access Resource	Distance (km)	%
Rights of Way	3,362	11.6
Promoted	3,959	13.6
Other Paths	8,331	28.7
Roads	13,401	46.1
Total	29,053	100

**Note:** This information is Highland-wide.

The Highland area has a diverse transportation network encompassing one of the longest road networks in Scotland. Generally the transport infrastructure across Highland comprises of:

- 6,730km/4,182 miles of locally adopted road;
- 1400 bridges (span greater than 3 metres) and 700 structural culverts (up to 3 metres);
- 951km of trunk road;
- 108 harbours, slipways and piers; and
- 2 airports

### Cultural Heritage

There are a number of cultural and built heritage features in the Plan area. These are set out in the table below:

Designation	Number of Sites	Area covered (Hectares)
Schedule Monuments	598	1,101
Listed Buildings	A – 66 B – 552 C - 349	N/A
Gardens & Designed Landscapes	7	5.8
Conservation Areas	4	60.6
Inventory of Historic Battlefields	1	-

The Highland Historic Environment Record includes 18,713 records of all known archaeological sites, historic buildings and historic landscapes that make up the archaeological and historical heritage of the Highland area.

### Landscape

This local development plan covers a large area and therefore it can be expected the landscape varies significantly across the area. The Caithness and Sutherland Landscape Character Assessment covers the plan area and describes the changes in landscape. The Munro's, Corbett's and other hills and mountains are key features in the landscape and attract visitors to the area year after year.

Wild land areas are key features of the landscape and this is recognised by its inclusion within Policy 57 of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan as a feature of Local Importance. The detailed mapping of Wild Land Areas has now been published and has been used as part of our site assessments. There are 10 Wild Land Areas within (or partly within) the CaSPlan area. Scottish Planning Policy (2014) has identified wild land areas as nationally important but it is not a statutory designation.

There are nationally important landscapes in the area and these are recognised by being designated as National Scenic Areas (NSAs). There are 4 NSAs within the plan boundary (Dornoch Firth, Kyle of Tongue, NW Sutherland and Assynt-Coigach).

There are 10 Special Landscape Areas within the plan, citations for these have been prepared and are available [online](#). Small amendments to the boundaries of these areas are up for consideration as part of the consultation on the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan.

The key facts and the baseline information collated for this environmental report has helped us to identify some environmental problems in the Highland area. Environmental problems that affect the area are identified in Table 3. Some of the negative trends highlighted in this table are likely to continue if Caithness and Sutherland LDP is not brought forward.

Designation	Number of Sites	Area covered (Ha)	Percentage of CaSPlan Area
Special Landscape Area	10	162,737	20
National Scenic Area	4	193,605	23.9
Wild Land Area	10	398,434	49

### Gaps/Unreliability of Baseline Data

Much data and information was available through the Consultation Authorities, the Scottish Government and there was a wealth of information on offer to the Highland Council to inform the baseline data for this Environmental Report. However, there are a number of factors which can limit the validity of this data:

- Some parts of the plan area have been studied more widely than others. Therefore, the quality and accuracy of information for some areas will be greater than for others;
- Collation of data has predominantly been gathered at a Highland wide basis, therefore it has proved difficult to disaggregate these to information that covers just the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan area; and
- The data relevant to this Report is held in different forms. If information is held in databases and Geographic Information Systems it can be more easily queried than information which is only in the printed form in reports, books or even on websites.

## Environmental problems

Schedule 3 paragraph 4 of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 requires that the Environmental Report includes a description of existing environmental problems, in particular those relating to any areas of particular environmental importance. The purpose of this section is to explain how existing environmental problems will affect or be affected by the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan and whether the PPS is likely to aggravate, reduce or otherwise affect existing environmental problems.

Environmental problems that affect the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan are similar to those which affect the Highlands as a whole. These environmental problems are identified in the table below. The environmental problems have been identified using the baseline data available in Appendix 2 and refined following consultation authorities responses.

The negative trends highlighted in this table are likely to continue if there are no planning policies to help guide development to appropriate locations subject to suitable planning conditions.



**Table 3: Environmental Problems Relevant to Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan**

SEA Issue	Potential Environmental Impact resulting from Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan	Implications for Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan
<b>Biodiversity, flora, fauna</b>	Stress on biodiversity and loss of habitat resulting from development. Conflicts between designated areas and economic development. Vulnerability of rare and endangered flora and fauna to changes in climate. Loss of native, ancient, long established and semi-natural woodland cover. Loss of habitats and roosts for protected species. Potential for cumulative impacts on protected species. Potential indirect effects on designated sites.	The local development plan needs to ensure a balance between the demand for development while protecting the quality and character of the environments.
<b>Population and human health</b>	Potential for development to put increased pressure on the natural environment in terms of water and waste water capacity, energy supply and transport links. Limited opportunity for active travel in more remote parts of Highland.	The local development plan will identify mitigation measures for each allocation and its alternative (where appropriate) to ensure key infrastructure provision as detailed does not impact on the natural environment to a negative extent.
	An ageing population is likely to result in housing needs of the population diversifying. It may also put different pressures on services in more rural areas.	The local development plan will look at accommodation where a higher level of assistance is sought to be located close to local services.
<b>Soil</b>	Erosion. Potential contamination from waste storage. Impact of loss of good quality soils (including those identified as prime agricultural and/or carbon rich) through development. Generation of waste soils.	The Local Development Plan will seek to deliver development in line with the policy approaches as set out in SPP and the Highland-wide Local Development Plan.
<b>Water</b>	Flooding, drainage and erosion resulting from infrastructure and changing climate. The need to sustain water supply and sewage treatment. Tidal, pluvial and fluvial flood risk to new and existing development. Reduced quality of watercourses and the coastal environment.	The local development plan will promote the development of sites which will lead to the sustainable use of use of resources, including water. It will seek not to allocate sites which substantial sections of the site are at a medium to high flood risk and where sites are allocated to put in place mitigation.
<b>Climatic factors</b>	Lack of sustainable design. Impact of sea level rising. Movement of species in the face of climate change.	The local development plan should seek to allocate sites which will aid the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions through development of mixed use sites, and better active travel connections, where appropriate, will be identified as a requirement of development on sites. Ensure allocations avoid sites at risk from sea level rising or which might prejudice coastline management

<b>Material assets</b>	Increase travel/energy needs. The challenge of managing access to the natural environment.	measures to respond to sea level rising. The local development plan will allocate sites which link well with active travel opportunities. Ensure protection of paths and safeguarding of access rights. The local development plan will identify sites for the provision of waste management facilities within existing business and industrial areas. Land allocations will, where appropriate, contain requirements for the provision of recycling facilities.
<b>Cultural heritage</b>	Stress on the historical environment resulting from development.	The Local Development Plan will protect the historic environment through the application of the policy framework in the Highland wide Local Development Plan and avoid development which may have an adverse impact on historic environment features.
<b>Landscape</b>	Wind farm developments affecting scenery and wildlife/ impact on landscape character and cumulative impacts. Development of new housing and infrastructure. Poor siting and design eroding the quality of both townscapes and landscapes. Negative impact of development on traditional crofting settlement character. Loss of local landscape character. Attrition of wild land and wildness qualities. Impact of development on isolated coast.	The local development plan should encourage responsible development of all landscapes (as per the European Landscape Convention). Development should be sited and designed to fit with the landscape character, whilst local distinctiveness and identify are retained and/or enhanced as detailed within the relevant Landscape Character Assessment. In crofting areas, developments should respect the character of the crofting settlements, particularly with regard to siting, scale and design.

## Expected Environmental Implications without CaSPlan

It is considered that without CaSPlan there would be increasing adverse impacts on the Caithness and Sutherland environment from development. This is primarily because the existing planning policy does not provide sufficient guidance to direct development to the best locations. The Highland-wide Local Development Plan contains a number of general policies in relation to the strategic protection and safeguarding of the environment. However it relies upon up-to-date area specific development plans to provide a framework to support these policies in the local context. The Caithness Local Plan is now over a decade old and many of the proposals within it do not fit within the current context of the area. The Caithness Local Plan was also not subject to any kind of Strategic Environmental Assessment or Habitats Regulations Appraisal. Although the policies and site allocations within the Sutherland Plan were subject to SEA the plan was adopted in 2010 and it too is due to be renewed.

The CaSPlan will provide a planning framework which will guide decisions on where development should and should not go for the next 10 years. The Plan will promote development in the most appropriate locations with due consideration to current statutory obligations. Therefore there is potential for positive development and environmental improvements to be delivered from the preparation of a new local development plan.

## Assessment of Environmental Effects

The baseline information from the previous sections is applied to consider whether the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan and its alternatives are likely to have significant environmental effects (positive and negative).

### Outline of reasons for selecting alternatives

As part of the production of a Local Development Plan, a Main Issues Report must be produced detailing the different areas which will be covered by the Local Development Plan and reasonable alternatives to this approach. This has been the main driver for selecting the reasonable alternatives.

For the purpose of the Strategic Environmental Assessment, the Council will not look at the alternative of not producing a Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan as this is not considered a reasonable alternative. However, this has already been covered to an extent in the previous section; 'Likely evolution of the environment without the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan'.

The alternatives identified below have emerged from a variety of research and analysis. The preparation of the Monitoring Report helped to indicate the current state of the environment and highlighted the performance of the current planning policy framework including key issues contained in the Highland-wide Local Development Plan (2012), existing Local Plans (Sutherland (2010) and Caithness (2002)) and national policy/guidance.

### Vision and Spatial Strategy

The Vision and Spatial Strategy for the CaSPlan has been developed following discussions with a wide range of partners and we think it supports both the Council's Programme and the Single Outcome Agreement 3. A reasonable alternative of carrying forward the existing Highland-wide Local Development Plan Vision for the Caithness and Sutherland area has been identified however it is less up to date and has not been prepared in the context of the Single Outcome Agreement 3.

### Policy Approaches

While the majority of General Policies are contained within the Highland-wide Local Development Plan the following policy approaches have been deemed necessary within the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan area. A preferred approach and reasonable alternatives have been suggested for the approaches:

#### Growing Settlements

This preferred policy approach would support the development of smaller settlements. Development proposals that are contained within, round off or consolidate the Growing Settlements will be assessed against the extent to which they:

- Take account of the issues and placemaking priorities and development factors;
- Are likely to help sustain facilities in that settlement;
- Are compatible in terms of use, spacing, character and density with development within that settlement;
- Can utilise spare, existing capacity in the infrastructure network (education, roads, other transport, water, sewerage etc.) within that settlements or new/improved infrastructure could be provided in a cost efficient manner;
- Avoid a net loss of amenity/recreational areas significant to the local community; and
- Would not result in an adverse impact on any other locally important heritage feature (which may include a war memorial, burial ground, important public viewpoint/vista or open space).

The alternative to this approach would be either more rigid i.e. all of the above criteria must be met or more flexible i.e. for development to be supported it only needs to meet some or certain criteria.

#### Promoting and Protecting Town Centres

The preferred policy approach applies to Brora, Dornoch, Golspie, Thurso and Wick and the Council will not support any proposal for development that is likely to have an adverse effect on the vitality and viability of those settlement centres. The alternatives to this approach would be either a more flexible approach whereby we do not have a settlement centre policy and do not define settlement centres, instead relying on Highland-wide general policies, or a more rigid approach where we identify centre boundaries for all settlements.

#### Special Landscape Areas

The policy framework for Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) is set out within the Highland-wide Local Development Plan. What is up for debate here is the boundaries of these Special Landscape Areas. The preferred approach is to retain most of the SLA boundaries as they are, whilst amending some of the boundaries to ensure that SLA boundaries fully enclose areas of similar landscape character and quality. An alternative option is to carry forward all the SLAs unchanged from the Highland wide Local Development Plan.

#### **Alternative Sites**

Over 145 sites were submitted to us when a CaSPlan “Call for Sites” was carried out in 2013. In addition we have considered all:

- existing adopted local plan sites to determine whether they should be brought forward into the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan
- locations identified for development as part of the Wick and Thurso charrettes
- relevant sites within the Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land Survey;
- sites submitted to the targeted call for sites as part of the North Highland Onshore Vision

This resulted in around 750 sites across the whole LDP area. The sites which are identified as preferred, non-preferred or alternative in the Main Issues Report have been assessed as part of the SEA process. We have had wide ranging and early input to these assessments from a variety of sources such as Access Officers, Contaminated Land Unit, Flood Team and from the Consultation Authorities.

#### **Analysis of Preferred Sites**

The table below shows a break down of the number and total areas of the preferred sites within the MIR.

Preferred site use	Number of sites	Across this number of settlements	Preferred sites total area by use (ha)
Housing	31	13	106
Business	12	7	228
Industry	13	8	100
Community	6	4	13
Mixed Use	43	12	280

In most cases the sites identified in the MIR as preferred sites are wholly or mainly unbuilt. There are some sites which already have planning permission on part or all of the site and in some cases some development has occurred. An example would be the Mountpleasant housing site at Thurso. It should be noted in particular that amongst the sites for which the preferred use is business or industrial, there are some sites which are already well-established business parks or industrial estates; the hectareage indicated in the table above is for the entire site as identified in the MIR and

therefore includes existing business and industrial activities. An example would be Wick Business Park. In such cases clearly the potential for new business and industrial development is through taking up vacant plots, intensification of use or redevelopment and hence would be of significantly lower hectareage than the total area of the MIR preferred site. The table below shows the total occurrence of component land uses within the preferred Mixed Use allocations. The component use 'Other' includes retail, tourism and openspace land uses.

Preferred Mixed Use sites component uses	Number of preferred Mixed Use sites
Housing	32
Business	34
Industry	6
Community	23
Other	15

### Assessment methodology

The reasonable alternatives described above have been assessed against the range of environmental issues set out in Schedule 3 of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005. Comments from the Consultation Authorities (SNH, SEPA and The Scottish Ministers (Historic Scotland) have been taken into account regarding the methods, scope and level of detail in this Environmental Report.

As described in the Scoping Report for the Caithness and Sutherland LDP we are using an assessment matrix for the assessment of the preferred options and alternatives for the strategy and vision and policy approaches. To assess the sites we used a specific detailed Site Assessment Matrix. The matrices also identify appropriate mitigation measures for each of the sites. Following the publication of the Scoping Report we were asked to trial a pilot site assessment matrix developed by the Consultation Authorities. Following discussions with the Consultation Authorities, some amendments were made to the pilot matrix and we agreed on an adapted matrix that would be used.

Detailed matrices can be found in Appendix 4 (Vision and Spatial Strategy and general policies) and Appendix 6 (Site Assessments). The site assessment matrix and checklist is shown in Appendix 7. Each site assessment contains a map showing the location of the site which has been assessed. In some instances the extent of land assessed is greater than the land shown on the map. This may be due for example to mitigation which removes some land from the site in order to minimise negative effects.

### SEA Objectives

A number of objectives were identified at scoping stage and have been refined following comment from the consultation authorities.

As air quality within Caithness and Sutherland is very good it has been scoped out following responses from the Consultations Authorities to the Scoping Report. There are no Air Quality Management Areas within or near the Plan area and no known candidate sites.

SEA Topic	SEA Objectives
Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna	To conserve and where possible enhance biodiversity and accord to the protection of valued nature conservation habitats and species
Population and Human Health	To improve the living environment for all communities and promote improved health of the human population

Soil	Safeguard the soil quality, geodiversity and improve contaminated land
Water	Manage and reduce flood risk and protect the water environment
Climatic Factors	Reduce greenhouse gases and contribute to the adaptation of the area to climate change
Material Assets	Manage, maintain and promote sustainable use of material assets
Cultural Heritage	Protect and enhance, where appropriate, the area's rich historic environment
Landscape	Protect and enhance the character, diversity and unique qualities of the landscape

The Vision and Spatial Strategy and policy approaches have been considered against a range of key considerations which are set out in Appendix 4.

In the site assessments (Appendix 6) a series of questions were answered. For clarity the table below sets out which question relates to which SEA objective:

SEA Objective	Site Assessment Consideration Question
1	3a, 3b, 3c, 3d, 3e, 3g
2	6a, 6b, 6c, 6d
3	3f, 7a, 7b, 7c, 7e, 7f
4	1a, 1b, 1c, 2b, 4g
5	2a, 2c, 4a, 4b, 4c, 4d, 4e, 4f
6	7d, 7g, 7h, 7i, 7j
7	9a, 9b, 9c, 9d, 9e, 9f, 9g
8	8a, 8b, 8c, 8d

### Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Appraisal

When undertaking this Strategic Environmental Assessment, The Council has been conscious of the overlap in work between the Strategic Environmental Assessment and the Habitats Regulations Appraisal work which is required to be undertaken. With this in mind SEA objective 1 and the site assessment work will be used to inform an initial screening to help identify which elements of the plan may have an effect on a European designated site either alone or in-combination.

A Habitats Regulations Appraisal Record will be produced through partnership working with Scottish Natural Heritage and other relevant agencies, and published with the Caithness and Sutherland Proposed Local Development Plan.

### Assessment of the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan

The approaches and alternatives contained within the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan have been assessed using the framework and methodology described earlier in this Environmental Report. A summary of the assessment findings are shown below, the full findings are shown in Appendix 4 for the Vision/Spatial Strategy and Policy Approaches and Appendix 6 for the individual sites. During the drafting of the vision and policy approach options, assessments were carried out against the SEA Objectives, to show where potential improvements could be made to the preferred approaches.



## Caithness and Sutherland Vision and Spatial Strategy – Option 1 – The Preferred Vision

SEA Objective	Timescale			Magnitude	
	Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term	Local	Regional
1	+	+	+	+	+
2	=	+	+	+	+
3	+/-	+/-	+/-	=	=
4	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
5	+	+	++	+	+
6	+/-	+/-	+/-	=	=
7	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
8	+	+	+	+	+

The vision is based on four outcomes linked to the Single Outcome Agreement 3. Economic development is a key element of the vision and whilst this is not a consideration of SEA, the vision sets out how economic growth in the area can be achieved with little impact on the environment. It is anticipated that the vision will have no/little negative impact on the environment but have significantly positive effects in terms of SEA Objective 5.

## Caithness and Sutherland Vision and Spatial Strategy – Option 2 – carry forward the existing HwLDP Vision for the Caithness and Sutherland area

SEA Objective	Timescale			Magnitude	
	Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term	Local	Regional
1	+	+	+	+	+
2	+/-	+	+	+	=
3	+/-	+/-	+/-	=	=
4	+/-	+/-	+/-	=	=
5	+	+	++	++	++
6	+/-	+/-	+/-	=	=
7	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
8	+	+	+	+	+

The vision sets out a comprehensive approach to ensuring the heritage of the area is safeguarded and, while not a consideration of SEA, demonstrates how economic growth of the area can be brought forward ensuring limited impact on the environment. It is anticipated that this vision would have little/no negative impacts on the environment but have significant positive effects in relation to SEA Objective 5.

## Growing Settlements Policy - Option 1 – The Preferred Growing Settlements Policy

SEA	Timescale	Magnitude
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	Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term	Local	Regional
1	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
2	+	++	++	++	=
3	=	=	=	=	=
4	+	+	+	+	+
5	+	++	++	++	+
6	=	=	=	=	=
7	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
8	+	+	+	+	+

This policy approach is likely to have significant positive environmental effects on SEA Objectives 2 and 5. It is not anticipated that there will be any negative environmental effects from this policy approach.

**Growing Settlements Policy – Option 2 - An Alternative approach – More rigid approach**

SEA Objective	Timescale			Magnitude	
	Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term	Local	Regional
1	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
2	+	++	++	++	=
3	=	=	=	=	=
4	+	+	+	+	+
5	+	++	++	++	+
6	=	=	=	=	=
7	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
8	+	+	+	+	+

This approach is not dissimilar to the preferred approach therefore the assessment results are the same. The exception is that because all criteria must be met then the likelihood of negative impacts is lessened. This policy approach is likely to have significant positive environmental effects on SEA Objectives 2 and 5. It is not anticipated that there will be any negative environmental effects from this policy approach.

**Growing Settlements Policy – Option 3 - An Alternative approach – More flexible approach**

SEA Objective	Timescale			Magnitude	
	Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term	Local	Regional
1	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
2	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
3	=	=	=	=	=

4	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
5	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
6	=	=	=	=	=
7	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
8	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-

It is not anticipated there will be any negative or significantly negative effects arising from this policy approach. However given that this alternative approach means only some of the criteria need to be met then it is not possible to determine whether there would be positive or negative effects from the policy.

### Promoting and Protecting Settlement Centres Policy - Option 1 - Preferred Policy Approach

SEA Objective	Timescale			Magnitude	
	Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term	Local	Regional
1	=	=	=	=	=
2	+	+	+	+	=
3	+	+	+	+	+
4	=	=	=	=	=
5	+	+	+	+	=
6	+	+	+	++	+
7	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
8	=	=	=	=	=

This policy is likely to have some positive environmental effects but have significant positive effects in relation to SEA Objective 6. Due to the nature of the policy there are many SEA Objectives where there will be little or no impacts. However the application of this policy in combination with the general policies of the Highland wide Local Development Plan, it is likely that the overall effect would be positive.

### Promoting and Protecting Settlement Centres Policy – Option 2 – More Flexible Approach

SEA Objective	Timescale			Magnitude	
	Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term	Local	Regional
1	=	=	=	=	=
2	+	+	+	+	=
3	+	+	+	+	+
4	=	=	=	=	=
5	+	+	+	+	=
6	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
7	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
8	=	=	=	=	=

This approach means there is no additional policy in CaSPlan, with a continuing reliance on using the general policies of the HwLDP, particularly Policy 40. It is anticipated that the approach will have a positive effect on SEA Objectives 2, 3 and 5. This is mainly due to the approach directing new retail development towards town/village centres.

### Promoting and Protecting Settlement Centres Policy – Option 3 More Rigid Approach

SEA Objective	Timescale			Magnitude	
	Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term	Local	Regional
1	=	=	=	=	=
2	+	+	+	+	-
3	+	+	+	+	+
4	=	=	=	=	=
5	+	+	+	+	=
6	+	+	+	++	+
7	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
8	=	=	=	=	=

This approach is similar to the preferred approach except that it would apply to all settlements in the plan area and not just the ones listed in the preferred approach. Therefore the assessment results are the same. This policy is likely to have some positive environmental effects but have significant positive effects in relation to SEA Objective 6. Due to the nature of the policy there are many SEA Objectives where there will be little or no impacts. However the application of this policy in combination with the general policies of the Highland wide Local Development Plan, it is likely that the overall effect would be positive.

### Special Landscape Areas - Option 1 – The Preferred approach – Examine all SLA boundaries and make amendments as appropriate

SEA Objective	Timescale			Magnitude	
	Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term	Local	Regional
1	=	=	=	=	=
2	=	=	=	=	=
3	=	=	=	=	=
4	=	=	=	=	=
5	=	=	=	=	=
6	=	=	=	=	=
7	=	=	=	=	=
8	+	+	+	+	+

It is unlikely that this approach will have an effect on any of the SEA Objectives other than the one related to landscape character and qualities where there may be a minimal positive effect at a local and regional scale as the protective policy approach from the Highland wide Local Development Plan will be applied to a wider area.

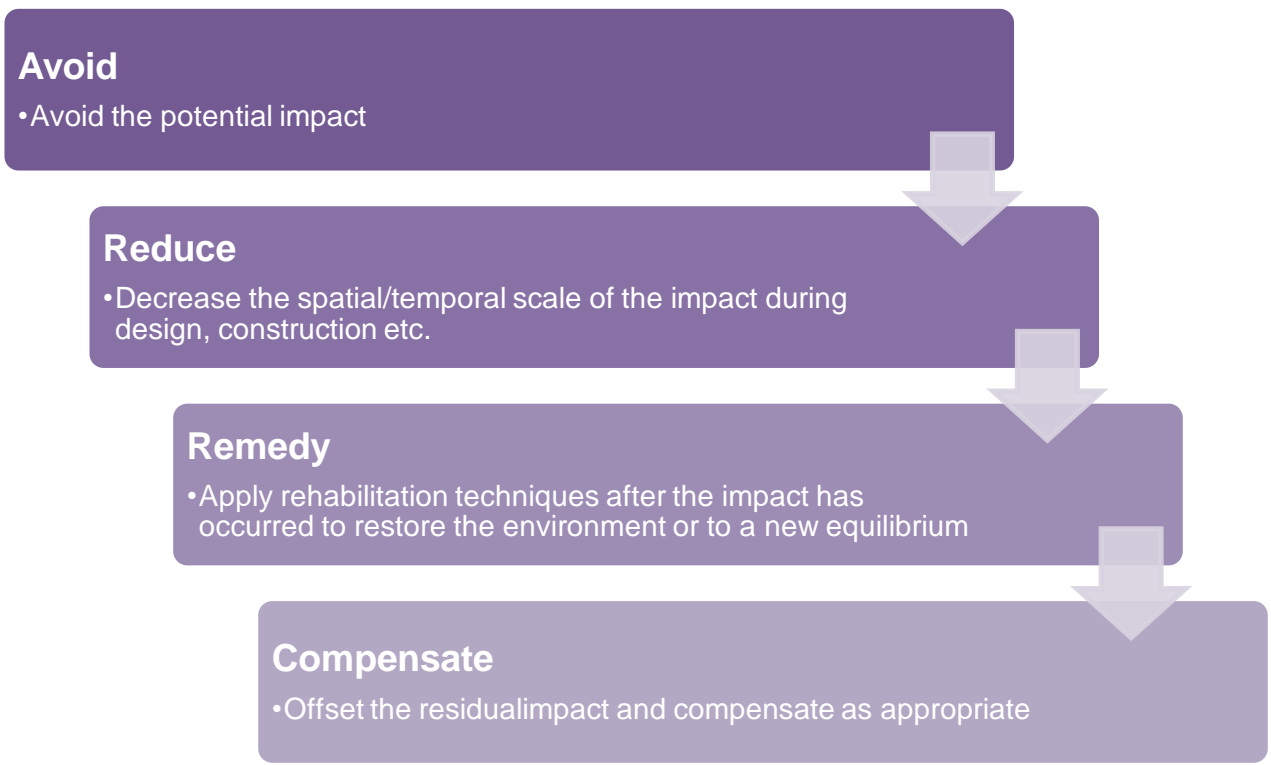
**Special Landscape Areas – Option 2 - An alternative - Carry forward all the SLAs unchanged from the HwLDP**

SEA Objective	Timescale			Magnitude	
	Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term	Local	Regional
1	=	=	=	=	=
2	=	=	=	=	=
3	=	=	=	=	=
4	=	=	=	=	=
5	=	=	=	=	=
6	=	=	=	=	=
7	=	=	=	=	=
8	=	=	=	=	=

It is unlikely that this approach will have an effect on any of the SEA Objectives as there will be no changes to any of the boundaries. The protective policy approach from the Highland wide Local Development Plan will be applied to the same area as present.

**Mitigation Measures**

An important feature of the Strategic Environmental Assessment is to assess any environmental impacts from development and identify relevant mitigation. Schedule 3 paragraph 7 of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 requires an explanation of “the measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme.” Our approach to mitigation is based on the following recognised hierarchy:



In the first instance the Plan seeks to **avoid** significant adverse effects on the environment. This represents the cheapest and most effective form of impact mitigation. It has mainly been achieved through either not preferring particular uses on a site or not preferring the site as a development opportunity. Where this is has not been achieved, the provision of the Plan seeks to **reduce** the severity of impact, identify ways to **remedy** or restore the environment, as the last resort, **compensate** for the adverse effect so there is no net loss. An additional approach has been to identify potential mitigation which will **enhance** the environment and achieve a net positive gain. By undertaking a detailed site assessment for each of the site options outlined in the Plan, we have been able to identify mitigation measures required for each specific site.

Some of the most common mitigation measures identified through this SEA are highlighted below. The Site Assessments have been beneficial in highlighting mitigation measures such as:

- Undertaking flood risk assessments and avoiding areas at risk of flooding
- Undertaking of protected species surveys for sites where protected species are known to be present
- Undertaking of archaeological survey work where sites are known to have archaeological interest
- Compensatory planting where a site involves loss of trees
- Maximising of active travel links to reduce reliance on car use
- Minimising waste, both during construction and operational phases
- Sensitive design and layout to avoid negative impact on the settings of Listed Buildings
- Appropriate buffers/setbacks to maintain the integrity of natural heritage designations
- Design to take advantage of passive solar gain
- Setting requirements for development setbacks from particular features or constraints.

The mitigation measures identified will be continued through the Plan process and within the Proposed Plan it is expected they will help to identify relevant developer requirements. In all cases standard mitigation which is set out in general policies of either the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan or the Highland-wide Local Development Plan will be secured to ensure that the negative environmental effects can be minimised and the positive environmental effects can be maximised.

The overall Plan impact, mitigation measures and how the mitigation will be actioned may be subject to change and could be further updated in the revised environmental report which will accompany the proposed plan.

## **Assessment of cumulative and synergistic effects**

In this section the Council have sought to assess the cumulative effect of the plan as a whole. This would take into consideration the realisation of the vision and spatial strategy in combination with a level of development commensurate with the preferred sites contained within the Main Issues Report.

Cumulative impacts may be seen where all or some of the local development plan sites are brought forward therefore we have carried out three cumulative assessments which consider different level of development being brought forward. These assessments will be undertaken using the same methodology as used for the assessment of the vision/spatial strategy and policy approaches.

The cumulative assessments will consider the vision/spatial strategy in combination with the application of the policies and policy approaches of the plan and a high (100% of all preferred development sites), medium (60% of all preferred development sites) and low (30% of all preferred development sites) level of development which may be brought forward.

The results of these assessments can be found in Appendix 5 – Cumulative Assessments and are summarised below:



### Cumulative Assessment 1 – 100% of all preferred development sites built out

SEA Objective	Timescale			Magnitude	
	Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term	Local	Regional
1	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
2	+/-	+	+	+	+
3	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
4	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
5	+	+	+	+	+
6	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
7	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
8	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-

It is anticipated that by considering the vision/spatial strategy along side the general policy approach and all of the preferred sites being built out, there will be some positive effects on the environment in terms of delivery of green infrastructure and reducing the need to travel. However there may also be negative effects in relation to landscape impact but this could be mitigated on a site by site basis.

### Cumulative Assessment 2 – 60% of all preferred development sites built out

SEA Objective	Timescale			Magnitude	
	Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term	Local	Regional
1	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
2	+/-	+	+	+	+
3	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
4	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
5	+	+	+	+	+
6	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
7	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
8	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-

It is anticipated that by considering the vision/spatial strategy along side the general policy approach and a medium level of development of the preferred sites, there will be some positive effects on the environment in terms of delivery of green infrastructure and reducing the need to travel. However there may also be negative effects in relation to landscape impact but this could be mitigated on a site by site basis. These positive and negative effects may not be as significant given the lower level of development which may come forward.

### Cumulative Assessment 3 – 30% of all preferred development sites built out

SEA Objective	Timescale	Magnitude
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	Short Term	Medium Term	Long Term	Local	Regional
<b>1</b>	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
<b>2</b>	+/-	+/-	+	+	+/-
<b>3</b>	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
<b>4</b>	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
<b>5</b>	+	+	+	+	+
<b>6</b>	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
<b>7</b>	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-
<b>8</b>	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-

It is anticipated that by considering the vision/spatial strategy along side the general policy approach and a low level of development of the preferred sites, there will be some positive effects on the environment in terms of delivery of green infrastructure and reducing the need to travel. However there may also be negative effects in relation to landscape impact but this could be mitigated on a site by site basis. These positive and negative effects may not be as significant given the lower level of development which may come forward.

## Summary of Site Assessment Findings

This section summarises the key findings from the assessment of site options in the Main Issues Report. The full assessments can be found in Appendix 6.

### Sites with Significant Effects

The table below sets out the sites which have been identified as having a significant effect (either positive or negative) on the environment. Also included is the relevant SEA question(s) which is significantly effected:

Settlement	MIR Site Reference	SEA Question(s)	Significant Positive Effect Pre-mitigation	Significant Negative Effect Pre-mitigation	Significant Positive Effect Post-mitigation	Significant Negative Effect Post-mitigation
Bonar Bridge	BB02	2b		X		
Brora	BR03	7a, 7d	X		X	
Brora	BR04	7a, 7d	X		X	
Brora	BR07	7c		X		X
Brora	BR08	4b			X	
Brora	BR10	4b			X	
Brora	BR11	2b, 4d		X		X
Castletown	CT01; CT02; CT03 CT04; CT10; CT12	7c		X		X
Castletown	CT04; CT10; CT12	6b	X		X	
Castletown	CT08	7a	X		X	
Castletown	CT09	7a, 7d	X		X	
Dornoch	DN01	4b			X	
Dornoch	DN01	4e, 6b	X		X	
Dornoch	DN01	7c, 7f		X		X
Dornoch	DN02	8d			X	
Dornoch	DN02	2b		X		
Dornoch	DN05; DN10	7c		X		X
Dornoch	DN09	7c		X		
Dornoch	DN09	8a, 8c		X		X
Edderton	ET03	7c		X		
Edderton	ET04	7c, 7f, 8a, 8c, 8d		X		
Golspie	GP01	7c		X		X
Golspie	GP01	4a			X	
Golspie	GP07	4c		X		X
Halkirk	HK03	7f		X		X
Halkirk	HK07	2b		X		X
Halkirk	HK07	3f			X	
Helmsdale	HD01	7a, 7d	X			X

Settlement	MIR Site Reference	SEA Question(s)	Significant Positive Effect Pre-mitigation	Significant Negative Effect Pre-mitigation	Significant Positive Effect Post-mitigation	Significant Negative Effect Post-mitigation
Helmsdale	HD03	4b			X	
Helmsdale	HD04	3f			X	
Helmsdale	HD02; HD03	7c		X		X
Helmsdale	HD06	2b		X		
Lairg	LA07; LA08	7c		X		X
Lairg	LA01	7a		X		X
Lochinver	LV01	4a	X		X	
Lochinver	LV02	7c		X		X
Lochinver	LV03	2a, 4g, 7c		X		
Lochinver	LV04	4a		X		
Lochinver	LV04; LV05; LV06	7a	X		X	
Lochinver	LV07	3a		X		
Lochinver	LV07	6c, 6e			X	
Lochinver	LV08	4f, 7c, 8a		X		X
Lybster	LY01	7c		X		
Lybster	LY06	3a, 3b, 3e		X		
Lybster	LY07	7c		X		X
Thurso	TS01; 03	2a, 4b		X		
Thurso	TS01; TS03; TS04; TS06; TS11; TS14; TS16; TS17; TS20	7c		X		X
Thurso	TS02	4e	X		X	
Thurso	TS04	6a, 6b, 6c, 6d, 6e	X		X	
Thurso	TS04; TS06;	7f		X		X
Thurso	TS07	3g, 6d, 6e8c, 8d, 9c, 9d, 9h			X	
Thurso	TS07; TS08; TS12; TS13	7a	X		X	
Thurso	TS07; TS08; TS09; TS10; TS11; TS12; TS13; TS16	4d	X		X	
Thurso	TS08	6c, 6d, 6e, 8c, 8d, 9c			X	
Thurso	TS12	4a		X		
Thurso	TS14; TS17	6b	X		X	
Thurso	TS14; TS17	6e			X	
Thurso	TS16	6b			X	
Thurso	TS18	6a, 6b			X	

Settlement	MIR Site Reference	SEA Question(s)	Significant Positive Effect Pre-mitigation	Significant Negative Effect Pre-mitigation	Significant Positive Effect Post-mitigation	Significant Negative Effect Post-mitigation
Thurso	TS18	6c	X		X	
Thurso	TS14; TS17	7e, 8c, 8d		X		
Thurso	TS18	8a, 8d		X		
Tongue	TG01; TG02; TG03; TG04	7c		X		X
Wick	WK02; WK07; WK13; WK32	7a	X		X	
Wick	WK02; WK13; WK32	7d	X		X	
Wick	WK06	6a, 6c, 6d, 6e		X		
Wick	WK07	2c		X		
Wick	WK07; WK11	4d	X		X	
Wick	WK10	6e, 7a, 7d, 8c, 8d			X	
Wick	WK13; WK14	8c, 8d	X		X	
Wick	WK 18; WK20; WK21; WK27; WK29WK30; WK33; WK34; WK36; WK37	7c		X		X
Wick	WK18; WK30	7e		X		
Wick	WK29	7f		X		X

### Minimising and/or Maximising the Significant Effects

We have been able to minimise and/or maximise significant effects by, where possible, identifying additional mitigation measures and through our site preference approach. Significantly negative impacts may result in listing mitigation measures which will avoid, reduce, remedy or compensate or if these cannot be secured then our non-preference for the site. Significantly positive effects may be maximised through additional enhancement mitigation such as siting and design requirements and identifying environmental features which can be made into positive features within the development.

### Influence of SEA on Each Settlement

The SEA process has played a central role in informing the site preferences and overall strategy for each settlement within the Main Issues Report. Below is a summary of the findings and how these have influenced the overall proposals for each main settlement.

#### Ardgay

The sites in Ardgay are existing local plan allocations which have previously been through SEA assessment. No other sites were suggested in the Call for Sites exercise. The sensitivity of the landscape in Ardgay was a key factor identified by SEA in considering sites. The settlement is located within the Dornoch Firth NSA so mitigation requirements that deal directly with landscape issues are necessary and the SEA helped identify these. AG02 and AG03 were both identified in the SEA as being at risk from flooding. SEA has however helped identify appropriate mitigation to ensure that the flood risk is taken into account in any proposed developments.

## **Bonar Bridge**

The sites in Bonar Bridge are existing local plan allocations which have previously been through SEA assessment. No other sites were suggested in the Call for Sites exercise. BB01 Cherry Grove has been partially developed since the existing local plan was adopted however the remainder of the site is available for development. The sensitivity of the landscape in Bonar Bridge was a key factor identified by SEA in considering sites. The settlement is located within the Dornoch Firth NSA so mitigation requirements that deal directly with landscape issues are necessary and the SEA helped identify these. BB02 South Bonar Industrial Estate was identified through the SEA process as being at risk of flooding however as it was already an established industrial estate it was decided that there was merit in taking it forward as a preferred site. SEA has however helped identify appropriate mitigation to ensure that the flood risk is taken into account in any proposed developments.

## **Brora**

All of the sites considered for Brora, except for BR11 Former River Fascally Recreation Area, are existing sites in the Sutherland Local Plan and have already been through SEA assessment. The potential impact on the landscape setting of Brora was identified by the SEA for most sites in Brora and SEA has identified appropriate mitigation. SEA identified a range of mitigation required for various sites in Brora such as: providing landscaping and planting on the boundary adjacent to existing housing at BR07 Adjoining Industrial Estate; potential need for a bat survey to be carried out and for development to connect to the public sewer to ensure no adverse impact on the Moray Firth SAC at BR04 Former Radio Station; and a likely requirement for a contamination study at BR05 Scotia House. BR04 Former Radio Station and BR05 Scotia House are at risk of flooding and SEA has identified mitigation of requiring a flood risk assessment and not allowing development in areas shown to be at risk of flooding in a flood risk assessment. BR02 Rosslyn Street and BR06 Former Mackay's Garage are adjacent to the River Brora (and Inverbrora SSSI) and SEA identified mitigation of keeping development back from the river edge to minimise any potential impact on the water environment and any intrusion on the SSSI. It also identified flood risk and mitigation of requiring no development on areas shown to be at risk from flooding. BR11 Former River Fascally Recreation Area is non-preferred on the basis of the SEA identifying majority of site at risk of flooding.

## **Castletown**

The sites originate from a variety of sources including existing local plan allocations, the Prince's Trust for the Built Environment Masterplan, North Highland Onshore Vision, survey work and CaSPlan Call for Sites. As none of these have been subject to SEA previously SEA the process has significantly helped shape the site preferences for Castletown. The woodland at Castlehill and Stangergill are important to the landscape setting of the village and has been protected from development. The surrounding farmland is also identified as being important to the setting of the village and the ability for piecemeal development has been avoided through keeping the SDA tight around existing or planned development. CT10 is also acknowledged as being relatively high quality agricultural land and is located on the edge of the village. It may therefore have more of a landscape and visual impact than other sites. Land around Stangergill Burn has been identified as being at risk of flooding which has resulted in CT12 and CT05 being non-preferred. Several brownfield and historic sites were assessed and the most suitable ones were preferred. The former quarry site at Dunnet Beach (CT11) has been non-preferred as it raised a number of ecological and landscape issues, including being wholly within the Dunnet Links SSSI.

## **Dornoch**

The sites assessed for Dornoch were a mixture of existing allocations in the Sutherland Local Plan, which have already been subject to SEA and sites put forward through the Call for Sites exercise. SEA has identified a range of mitigation factors such as: providing a buffer to a watercourse at DN02 Dornoch South Abattoir; need for a drainage impact assessment at DN07 Meadows Park; and ensuring pedestrian links are created between DN04 Bishopsfield and the centre of Dornoch. DN02 Dornoch South Abattoir site is identified as a preferred site for mixed use development. The SEA site assessment flags constraints for the site such as high flood risk at the southern end of the

site. However the SEA assessment has influenced the mitigation in that any development on the site will be subject to a Flood Risk Assessment, with any areas shown to be at risk from flooding, unlikely to be suitable for built development.

SEA has identified a number of mitigations provisions required for DN01 Dornoch North: retaining and integrating the watercourse as a natural feature within the development; widening of Embo Road and footpath created; ensure footpath links to town centre; and sensitive layout and design to take consideration of esker landform and adjacent conservation area.

The SEA site assessments have also influenced the decision to have DN09 West of Meadow's Park Road and DN10 West of Sutherland Road, as non-preferred sites due to the potential impact on landscape. Mitigation, where appropriate, is identified, however it is considered that there is sufficient capacity for housing on other sites in the settlement without requiring either of sites at present.

### **Edderton**

Edderton has a number of natural, built and cultural heritage features in and around it. The SEA has helped identify what these sensitivities are and where possible has identified mitigation to lessen any potential impact. Sites for Edderton were a mix of allocations from the adopted local plan and sites suggested through the Call for Sites exercise. ET04 Edderton Glebe was suggested through the Call for Sites exercise and it is a non-preferred site. This was greatly influenced by the SEA which identified it as being at risk of flooding, adjacent to the SAC, SPA and Ramsar site, partly within the Dornoch Firth NSA and a large greenfield site. Even with mitigation provided through the SEA, the impacts of developing this site were too great. ET03 West of Station Road and Balleigh Road and ET01 Land to the North East of Haven are influenced by SEA by providing mitigation to lessen the potential impact on adjacent scheduled monuments.

### **Golspie**

The majority of preferred sites in Golspie are existing allocations in the Sutherland Local Plan and have already been through SEA assessment. SEA identified a range of mitigation requirements at preferred sites such as: drainage impact assessment and providing a link to adjacent open space at GP04 Mackay House Hostel Site; a buffer between any development and adjacent watercourse at GP03 West of Existing Business Park; investigating the potential to retain some existing trees on site or providing replacement planting at GP06 Sibell Road; and ensuring design of site has no impact on the setting of a chambered cairn and listed building at GP07 Rhives. GP09 Ferry Road site is non-preferred due to the impact of any development on the landscape and surrounding area, which was identified through the SEA. GP10 South Argo Terrace is currently open space in the Sutherland Local Plan and it was suggested as a site for housing in the Call for Sites exercise. It is shown as non-preferred and the SEA influenced this by identifying that it would lead to a dis-connectivity of areas of open space and that road access was difficult with a one way road and limited footpath provision.

### **Halkirk**

None of the sites in Halkirk has been assessed through the SEA process before. The existing industrial allocation HK07 adjoining the railway line is found to be almost fully under risk of flooding from the adjoining burn and has therefore been non-preferred. HK01 has been preferred as it currently has a live planning permission and is being built out at a slow rate. Although the sites to the west of Bridge Street have not raised significant environmental issues, due to the structured nature of the settlement pattern it was considered that it could result in a more piecemeal structure which would have detrimental impacts on the setting of the village. The SEA site assessment of HK03 has flagged up several issues including the setting of the adjoining listed church building, flood risk and potential impact on River Thurso SAC and protected species. The site has been identified as a key opportunity for the future expansion of the adjoining cemetery. This use will have less impact on environmental and landscape features. Relevant mitigation has been identified including development setback and species survey. HK05 has been allocated for industrial uses,



with opportunities identified for improved access, in order to encourage employment opportunities within the village.

### **Helmsdale**

Most preferred sites in Helmsdale were identified through the SEA process as having minimal risk of flooding. An exception to this was site HD04: Shore Street that was flagged as being at risk of coastal and fluvial flooding. Therefore built development at HD04 is preferred only to the west side of the road (outwith the SEPA flood risk mapped area). A mix of residential, industrial and community uses are preferred in Helmsdale. The SEA identified the need to ensure this range of sites were able to safeguard the natural environment. For example, requirements included retention of mature trees and species survey work at site HD01: St. John's Church; requirements for sensitive siting, design and planting to safeguard landscape settings and green corridors, for example at site HD02: East of Industrial Estate, and requiring pedestrian access improvements, for example at site HD03: North of Rockview Place.

### **Lairg**

All of the sites considered for Lairg, except for LA11 North of Lairg Industrial Estate, are existing sites in the Sutherland Local Plan and have already been through SEA assessment. The potential impact on the River Oykel SAC was identified through SEA for all sites in Lairg and mitigation is provided that all development should connect to the public sewer. LA07 and LA08 South-west of Main Street is an existing allocation in the Sutherland Local Plan but the SEA assessment of the site has led to part of the site being preferred and part being an alternative. The land behind Main Street is preferred and the land that runs along the A836 is alternative. The land beside the A836 is identified through the SEA as having an undulating landform with development having the potential to be visually intrusive. Development on the land behind Main Street would be less visually intrusive. Preferred sites: LA02 South-west of Ord Place all development should have regard to the Scheduled Monument. LA03 North-west of Ferrycroft an otter survey should be carried out. LA03 North-west of Ferrycroft links should be provided to adjacent woodland. LA01 Former Hotel/Outbuildings any development should not affect TPOs. LA04 Former Laundry maintain core path on site.

SEA influenced decisions to non-prefer sites such as: LA12 Ord Place which SEA identified as being at risk of flooding with a Flood Risk Assessment required as mitigation and most of the site was blanket peat; and LA11 North of Lairg Industrial Estate which SEA identified as being steeply sloping with unclear access. Impacts identified via SEA were not the only reason for non-preferring some sites. The preferred strategy for Lairg is about consolidating development around central sites. Therefore the more central sites are preferred and some alternative are provided.

### **Lochinver**

Sites suggested for Lochinver ranged from existing Local Development Plan allocations to new sites within and outwith the current Settlement Development Area. The sensitivity of the landscape in Lochinver was a key factor identified by SEA in considering sites. The settlement is located within the Assynt-Coigach National Scenic Area (NSA). Several of the sites allocated have mitigation requirements that deal directly with landscape issues, and the SEA process was fundamental in identifying these. For example site LV02: Cnoc a Mhuillin is required to have a carefully designed and masterplanned development approach that takes account of the sensitive landscape setting and NSA designation. SEA also informed decisions for alternative sites. Site LV08: East of Main Street was identified as an alternative because although it is well connected to the settlement significant earthworks would be required to realise its development, raising concerns about potential impacts to the landscape setting. Sites were not preferred on the basis of SEA outcomes, like potential impacts on assets like blanket bog and developing housing in unsustainable locations, for example at site LV09: Assynt and Stoer Glebe.

### **Lybster**

Caithness Local Plan is over 12 years old (at 2014) and therefore a number of existing allocations had not been SEA'd before. The process was integral to identifying site issues and in shaping

preferences in Lybster. In the recent past there have been issues with fowl water flooding on certain sites. SEA highlighted this issue and in preferring site LY03: West of old police station the opportunity was taken to address this historic pressure by mitigation through developer requirements. Other preferred sites were identified as having sensitive water-related constraints, for example LY02: East of Main Street was preferred with mitigation requirements for designing water courses into development, and ensuring no new culverting could impact the water environment. Certain sites were not preferred on the basis of landscape character considerations, like site LY07: South Harbour Road, which threatens cultural and landscape harbour assets by skylining the ridge east above the harbour, on this basis Settlement Development Area boundaries were also revised. Other sites were not preferred because SEA identified important natural heritage designations, like site LY06: Land at Shalligoe, development of which may impact upon birds at East Caithness Cliffs Special Protection Area (SPA)/ Special Area of Conservation (SAC) or impact Dunbeath to South Gaps Geo Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

### **Tongue**

Similar to Lochinver, Tongue is in a sensitive landscape setting within the Kyle of Tongue NSA. Therefore all of the sites were carefully considered, in this landscape context, through the SEA process. Design statements were a requirement for several sites, including site TG02: West of Varrich Place, which was required to have regard to potential impacts to the amenity of adjacent housing. Natural heritage was an important factor for Tongue identified through the SEA process. Site TG01: South of Loyal Terrace was identified as having a mosaic of burn, woodland and scrub, mitigation of potential impacts to these assets was to require careful planning and retention of existing features to maintain and enhance wildlife connectivity, as well as ensuring necessary species survey work was undertaken. Large sites with potential to impact on the NSA designation, settlement character and other natural heritage assets were identified by SEA. A number were not preferred, like site TG05: Tongue Glebe, the SEA process identified a large part of this site would, among other features, impact the landscape setting. SEA also facilitated a dialogue with consultation authorities that led to site compromises. For example, site TG04: West of the fire station was originally part of site TG05: Tongue Glebe, but was suggested by Consultation Authorities to have potential, subject to careful design and siting, to punctuate the entrance to Tongue. SEA also flagged the sensitivity of Tongue's designed landscape and listed buildings. Site TG03: St. Andrew's Church was flagged as being adjacent to important listed buildings, in preferring this site mitigation included the requirement for a design statement and a design sensitive to the surrounding built heritage features.

### **Thurso/Scrabster**

The sites originate from a variety of sources including the existing local plan, Thurso Charrette, North Highland Onshore Vision, survey work and CaSPlan Call for Sites. None of the sites have therefore been assessed through the SEA process before. The long term expansion of the town to the North West was assessed via several individual SEA site assessments and this raised a number of issues. An area at risk of flooding was identified resulting from a burn at TS03 but a flood risk assessment and a development setback could mitigate any impacts. Better alternative sites are available and as a result it has been identified as a long term housing site. Wolf Burn which runs through Pennyland was noted as having potential for relatively high levels of ecological value and may be used as part of wider environmental corridors. Relevant mitigation was identified including both safeguarding and making positive features of green corridors through the site for wildlife and recreational uses. The landscape value of TS12 and TS14, with clear vistas out to Thurso Bay and Dunnet Head, is noted as important to the setting of west Thurso. However, with strong mitigation which limits the scale of development and ensures sufficient levels of openspace are retained and access enhanced, the area has been allocated for a new hotel. The openness of the fields west of Pennyland House (TS04) were also noted as providing a degree of landscape value for west Thurso but a suitable setback from the B835/A9 has been considered appropriate. Thurso Harbour TS13 is recognised as being at risk of coastal flooding but this was mitigated against by preferring it for water sports facilities only. Several issues emerged with sites along the riverfront including flood risk, potential land contamination and impacts on wildlife but relevant mitigation was identified. Potential recreational and open space enhancements were also identified for sites TS07 and TS08.

Flood risk, wildlife and significant impacts on the landscape value results in large scale expansion of the town to the east being not taken forward as allocations.

### **Wick**

The sites originate from a variety of sources including the existing local plan, Wick Charrette, North Highland Onshore Vision, survey work and CaSPlan Call for Sites. None of the sites have therefore been assessed through the SEA process before. Previous housing allocations to the south east of Wick were assessed and WK31, WK33 and WK34 have not been taken forward due mainly to landscape and visual impacts. The site south of Thurso Road was a new site submitted at the Call for Sites process. Much of the site has a number of issues including significant landscape, flooding and ecological impacts. However through the SEA process a much smaller section on the eastern side of the site (WK06) has been identified as potentially suitable for long term housing expansion. A major housing site on land west of Miller Avenue was not taken forward due to impacts on the landscape, being prime agricultural land and ecology, including on Lower River Wick SSSI. Several sites within the existing extent of Wick have been allocated for development because they are vacant or derelict brownfield with some having heritage value. Protected species surveys and contaminated land surveys have been noted where appropriate. Sites at Staxigoe and Papigoe have not been taken forward as they do not correspond with the aim to consolidate the. It was highlighted during SEA that the sites WK35, WK36 and WK37 had issues with access and sustainability.

## Monitoring

Section 19 of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 requires the Responsible Authority to monitor significant environmental effects of the implementation of the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan. This must be done in such a way as to also identify unforeseen adverse effects and to take appropriate remedial action.

It is considered good practice for monitoring:

- fit a pre-defined purpose, help to solve problems, and address key issues;
- is practical and is customised to the PPS;
- is transparent and readily accessible to the public;
- is seen as a learning process and a cyclical process relating closely to the collation of the environmental baseline.

For this monitoring to be effective it will need to be linked to both the SEA Objectives and the Plan Objectives. The baseline data set out earlier in this report sets the scene for any monitoring which is to take place. Below is a monitoring framework. As part of the Action Programme for the Highland wide Local Development Plan we will publish a fuller framework for monitoring of the plan. However, the table below only considers indicators relevant to the state of the environment.

SEA Environmental Report Monitoring					
Environmental Parameter	SEA Objective	Monitoring Indicator	Responsible for Data Collection	Publication of Monitoring	Remedial Action
1 - Biodiversity, Flora & Fauna	To conserve and where possible enhance biodiversity and accord to the protection of valued nature conservation habitats and species.	Monitor biodiversity actions. Monitor loss of woodland habitat through development and provision of compensatory planting to deliver habitat.	THC	Triennial Biodiversity Duty Report/ Ongoing	Review application of policy area.
2 - Population & Human Health	To improve the living environment for all communities and promote improved health of the human population.	Monitor housing completions in SDAs, Growing Settlements, hinterland areas, wider countryside and fragile areas to monitor application of the Development Hierarchy.	THC	Annual Briefing Note	Review application of policy area.
3 - Soil & Peat	Safeguard the soil quality, geo-diversity and improve contaminated land.	Number of planning applications granted on prime agricultural land.	THC	As Required	Review application of policy area
		Number of planning applications		Annual	

		granted on brownfield land in the last 12 months and remedial action required.			
4 - Water	Avoid, manage and reduce flood risk and protect the water environment.	Monitor reduction in level of permissions in areas of flood risk.	THC	As Required	Seek mitigation measures to reduce flood risk.
		Monitoring of quality of rivers and bathing waters.	SEPA	Annual	
5 - Climatic Factors	Reduce greenhouse gases and contribute to the adaptation of the area to climate change.	Monitor travel patterns and reductions in car usage.	THC	As Required	Review application of policy area.
6 - Material Assets	Manage, maintain and promote sustainable use of material assets.	Monitor % of residual waste going to landfill. Mineral Supply Audit.	THC	Ongoing	Review policies on waste strategy and minerals.
7 - Historic Environment & Cultural Heritage	Protect and where appropriate enhance the historic environment.	Number of historic buildings at risk.	Scottish Civic Trust	Ongoing	Review application of policy area.
8 - Landscape	Protect and enhance the character, diversity and unique qualities of the landscape.	Monitor development of unspoilt coast (including Marine Planning Zones for Aquaculture).	THC	As Required	Review application of policy area.

## Next Steps

### Timescales for the Local Development Plan and SEA Preparation

This Revised Environmental Report will be subject to a XX week consultation from XXX until XXX, where expressions of opinion on the report will be welcomed. The Revised Environmental Report will be available to view on the Council website and hard copies will be at Development and Infrastructure Service Reception, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness, IV3 5NX and at Planning & Building Standards offices in Golspie and Wick. Electronic copies will be sent to the SEA Gateway and to the Consultation Authorities.

Following this consultation the views will be collated and, where appropriate, alterations will be made. A timetable for the next steps is below:

Timescales	CaSPlan	SEA/Habitats Regulations Appraisal
<b>Complete</b> (From 2011)	Publication of the updated Development Plan Scheme	Prepare a Scoping Report and send to the Consultation Authorities
<b>Complete</b> (Autumn 2013)	Call for Sites	Gathering variety of information on sites and more strategic issues.
<b>Complete</b> (2013/2014)	Preparation of Topic Papers	Identifying key environmental issues and priority outcomes
<b>Complete</b> Autumn 2013 – Summer 2014	Pre Main Issues Report (MIR) Engagement	Regular meetings with key agencies
<b>Complete</b> Oct 2014	Publish Main Issues Report	Publish Environmental Report and submit to SEA Gateway
<b>Complete</b> 13 Weeks	CONSULTATION on MIR and SEA	
<b>Complete</b> Spring/summer 2015	Consider representations. Prepare Proposed Plan and Action Programme	Consider responses from key agencies. Appraise environmental implications of Proposed Plan and undertake HRA. Make appropriate amendments to Environmental Report
Winter 2015	Publish Proposed Plan and Proposed Action Programme	Publish revised Environmental Report and draft HRA and submit revised Environmental Report to SEA Gateway
8 Weeks	CONSULTATION on Proposed Plan  Consider representations. Prepare Summary of unresolved Issues and Report of Conformity with Participation Strategy.	Consider responses
Autumn 2016	Submit Proposed Plan, Action Programme	Submit HRA record to

	and Report of Conformity to Scottish Ministers. Advertise submission of Plan.	Ministers
2016/17	Examination of Proposed Plan.	
2017	Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan adopted by the Highland Council	Publish Post-Adoption SEA Statement and submit to SEA Gateway.
From adoption onwards	Put plan into place and monitor our progress	Publish Post-Adoption Statement and submit to SEA Gateway



**Appendix 1a and 1b – Responses to Scoping Report and THC Response**

**Appendix 2 – Baseline data information and maps**

**Appendix 3 – Outline of Vision/Spatial Strategy and general policy approaches**

**Appendix 4 – Assessment of Vision/Spatial Strategy and general policy approaches**

**Appendix 5 – Cumulative Assessment**

**Appendix 6 – Site Assessments**

**Appendix 7 – Sample Site Assessment Matrix**