

The Highland Council

Planning Performance Framework 2019-20

Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

Frèam Dèanadas Dealbhaidh 2019-20

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Contents

Welcome to Highland1
Introduction2
Performance Markers3
1. Decision Making3
2. Processing Agreements3
3. Early Collaboration3
4. Legal Agreements9
5. Enforcement Charter.9
6. Continuous Improvement	10
7. Local Development Plan.	17
8. Development Plan Scheme	17
9. Early Engagement of Elected Members.	18
10. Early Engagement of Cross-sector Stakeholders.	18
11. Regular and Proportionate Policy Advice	19
12. Corporate Working Across Services	19
13. Sharing Good Practice, Skills and Knowledge	23
14. Stalled or Legacy Sites	24
15. Developer Contributions.	24

Case Studies

A: Justice Centre, Inverness5
B: 96 Academy Street, Inverness6
C: More Ways to Communicate8
D: Inverness West Link - Stage 2	20
E: Inverness Campus Travel and Transport Plan.	21
F: Streamlining Flood Risk Consultations	22

Welcome to Highland

Highland covers 10,104.73 square miles (26,171.13 square kilometres), making it the largest region by area in Scotland. In 2019, the population was estimated as 235,830; the 7th largest Scottish local authority by population. There are about 4.5 dwellings for every square kilometre, reflecting the sparsely populated rural areas of the region. The largest settlement in the region is Inverness with a population (2017) of 63,949, next is Fort William with 10,201 people followed by Nairn with 10,148.



Introduction

As Chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee of The Highland Council I am pleased to submit the Planning Performance Framework for 2019 - 2020.

The Planning Performance Framework outlines our continued commitment to improving performance, meeting customer needs and helping deliver high quality development across the Highlands. This report reflects the good work of the Service over the course of the last year highlighting key improvements made during the course of the year.

The 2019/20 year has been a challenging one, particularly the final quarter due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet, as we consider what Scotland could be like in 2050 through the National Planning Framework review, Highland understands the significant contribution it makes to national outcomes. Over the last year we have started to engage our partners on the emerging indicative Regional Spatial Strategy and this work will continue and will establish the role of planning in the corporate structure of the Council. Meanwhile, we are also evolving our approach to engaging communities in shaping their future, and how a place based approach can benefit how we work together in investing in Highland communities.

The most significant improvements implemented during this period have allowed the Service to continue to operate effectively during this period. Investment in new system processes and appropriate ICT has enabled all office-based staff to work from home as if working from in office environment. This resilience has resulted in all planning tasks continuing to be fulfilled.

While it appears that key performance indicators for planning applications have taken a slight dip, I'm encouraged to see our planning performance figures have largely been maintained, particularly at a time of continued financial challenge for the Council. Importantly, we continue to see a number of quality developments on the ground. The most significant of these is the Inverness Justice Centre; the first of 16 new hub courts in Scotland, designed to provide a more integrated and efficient justice system.

The submission this year is in an amended and shortened form, focused on addressing each of the 15 performance markers. Nonetheless, it demonstrates how well the Service works collaboratively and efficiently with our partners and our communities to deliver a high quality service for the Highlands.



Trish Robertson

Chair of Economy and Infrastructure Committee
The Highland Council

Performance Markers

1. Decision making

We dealt with 2500 applications in the 2019/20 period, which is the most determined by any Planning Authority in Scotland with only 8 fewer than the previous year.

We determined 19 major scale planning applications in total during 2019/20, of which 11 had processing agreements with 91% of these determined within the agreed timescale. The average time taken to determine those remaining 8 applications without processing agreements rose from 18.7 weeks to 33.3 weeks in comparison with the preceding year.

The number of non-householder applications determined in 2 months fell from 62.7% for 2018/19 to 58.1% for 2019/20. The average time taken to determine these applications dropped from 11.5 to 12.3 weeks for the same period. Where stop the clock is accounted for this rises to 62%.

The number of householder applications approved within 2 months fell from 91.5% for 2018/19 to 85.5% for 19/20. The average time taken to determine these applications rose from 6.8 weeks to 7.5 weeks over the same period. Again, where stop the clock is accounted for this rises to 88%.

2. Processing Agreements

We offer processing agreements to all applicants for major applications and those that are locally significant. In doing so we clearly set out the expectations for all parties to facilitate certainty in the timescales for determination and decision. Within the last year we agreed processing agreements for 38 applications, 11 of which were major scale developments.

For the Planning Performance Framework submission for 2018-19 this marker was scored amber on the basis that it was not clear if information on processing agreements was available on our [website](#)¹. A link is provided in all major application pre-application advice packs. All completed processing agreements are available on the electronic case files and are publicly available.

3. Early collaboration

We firmly believe that early collaboration on individual projects are the key to successful outcomes and good quality decision making. We continue to do this effectively through provision of formal pre-application advice as well as the support we offer to the Inverness design Review Panel.

¹ https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/download/222/planning_applications_-_delivering_major_developments

Pre-application Advice

The provision of [Pre-application Advice](#)¹ remains a key component of our service delivery. We are now offering a more tailored service that includes three categories of pre-application advice according to development type – [Local Small Scale](#)², [Local Medium Scale](#)³ and [Major](#)⁴. The major development pre-application process ensures that the advice contributions of all key consultees, both internal and external to the Authority (including SNH, SEPA Transport Scotland etc), is provided on prospective development proposals. These meetings are held monthly and this partnership working with key consultees and developers allows for a smoother process to identify key issues and concerns at an early stage. Discussions can also clarify the information needed for subsequent applications, help improve the quality of proposals and save time and money on working up proposals. We also introduced Pre-application Advice applications for [Listed Buildings](#)⁵.

In total we issued 32 major development pre-application advice packs in 2019/20, down slightly on the previous year (8%). In addition, the planning service dealt with 430 Local Pre-application Advice applications and 589 Permitted Development Enquiries.

As a further development of the pre-application advice service offered, we have undertaken several Street Engineering Reviews on housing developments. The aim of this is to ensure compatibility between detailed street design and development layout thereby reducing uncertainty at Road Construction Consent approval. This is offered for all developments that has come through the pre-application process.

Design Review Panel

The Inverness Design Review Panel met three times during the 2019-20 period. The most significant project reviewed was for a redesigned hotel development at Glebe Street, Inverness. In view of reduced demand for major projects coming to the Design Panel this year, the Panel has agreed to look at ways in which to expand the remit, geographic spread and membership of the Panel as well as the scale of development that this body will provide advice on. These matters, along with revised publicity arrangements, will ensure that the relevance and value of the Panel is preserved in the coming years.

1 https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/205/planning_-_policies_advice_and_service_levels/785/pre-application_advice

2 https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/205/planning_-_policies_advice_and_service_levels/785/pre-application_advice/2

3 https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/205/planning_-_policies_advice_and_service_levels/785/pre-application_advice/3

4 https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/205/planning_-_policies_advice_and_service_levels/785/pre-application_advice/4

5 https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/192/planning_-_listed_buildings_and_conservation_areas/174/listed_buildings

A. Justice Centre, Inverness

The Inverness Justice Centre opened in March 2020 and has allowed the relocation of the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service from Inverness Castle. This in turn will support the delivery of a new tourist hub for the City centred around the old courthouse at Inverness Castle.



Working collaboratively with the applicant and though building positive working relationships we have secured a high-quality design of building and streetscape for Scotland's first Justice Centre based at Longman Road, Inverness.

The complex needs of a range of users required to be balanced with the city centre location, accessibility of the proposal and the uncertainty of development delivery on the adjacent site. Utilising the positive working relationship with the design team we have been involved in the detailing and quality envisaged in the initial design concept of a "building with gravitas" has been delivered on site.



On 31 August 2016 the applicant met with the Council, and other stakeholders, at the major application pre-application advice service meeting with formal comments provided by the Service four weeks later. Following this, in June 2017 the design was discussed at the Inverness Design Review Panel. Many of the Panel's suggested design improvements were taken forward within the finalised application submission. The application was determined in September 2017, just three months following submission. To achieve the desired contractual outcomes, we worked with the design team further to refine the design. This refined designed was granted permission in March 2019.

B. 96 Academy Street, Inverness

Cairngorm Taverns Ltd. sought permission for 'Alterations and change-of-use for public bar at ground-floor with first-floor restaurant and second-floor residential unit with both planning permission and listed building consent granted in May 2017. Subsequent applications were made for the installation of signage and external lighting and granted in September 2019.

The building was originally constructed for the Rose Street Foundry and Engineering Company (re-named Resistance Welders in 1945 and re-named again - to Al Welders in the 1960s). The frontage building formed the company's offices, with the foundry and engineering workshops to the rear. No.96 is B-listed and sits within the Inverness Riverside Conservation Area. The company vacated the building in 1988, whereupon



**Before renovation
Makar Ltd 2016**

it became a sports bar and pool-club, before being bought in a semi-derelict state by Cairngorm Taverns, a part of the Cairngorm Brewery, Aviemore.

This development represents the complete refurbishment and renovation of one of the most important buildings on Academy Street; while this involves extensive alterations internally, these do not incur any significant adverse impacts on historic fabric or layout. Overall there will be a considerable enhancement to the fabric, character and appearance of the listed building, as well as its conservation area context.

The planning process was informed by early site-visits between the case-officer and the agent, to identify (planning and heritage) issues and identify fabric/detailing which was of particular value. In consultation with Historic Environment Scotland, the following issues were raised as requiring further information (via condition): salvaging the existing roofing slate where possible; the proposed external colour scheme; an inventory of the existing windows; details of the restored shopfront; restoration of the mosaic panels.

The agent had also procured grant-funding from the Townscape Heritage Initiative at an early stage, particularly with regards to conserving the murals, which are now successfully reinstated.

All in all, this has proved to be a very successful project, from early planning through to completion, with no significant problems or issues of contention.



C. More ways to communicate

Delivering our services across such a large geographical area we are always looking at more flexible, accessible and sustainable ways to engage with our customers. In October 2019 we set up a new email address, planenvevents@highland.gov.uk, specifically for communication with our customers; providing news on future service updates and/or events. This has allowed us to communicate directly on changes to discretionary services and opportunities for participation in customer engagement.

This has also given our customers a platform to tell us what topics they would wish to hear about, whether it be holding on-line webinars, posting slides, information held on our web pages and what is on social media.

During the Covid-19 pandemic we have continued to provide updates to our customers using this email address and our webpages.

We continue to provide the opportunity for customers to give feedback using our on-line surveys:

- Planning and Environment Customer Satisfaction Survey
- Building Standards Customer Satisfaction Survey

4. Legal agreements

We have adapted our process to:

- set out clearly in the Report of Handling the developer contributions that are required;
- to provide a streamlined instruction form to Legal Services;
- to create updated style agreements;

all of which are designed to improve turnaround times and require fewer resources.

In addition, the governance around completion of legal agreements has been amended. We set out in our Report of Handling and correspondence between parties that we expect legal agreements to be concluded within 4 months or we may proceed to refuse the application under the Scheme of Delegation.

Having said that, applications subject to legal agreements have been taking longer to complete as a result of difficulties in recruiting a replacement member of staff.

Since establishing new processes and utilising the Uniform Case Management System for recording developer contributions, we have seen an improvement on the ability to monitor incoming contributions, the ability to report on developer contributions information in order to inform spending services and increase the rate of drawdowns, and a focus on accountability and governance on how decisions are made on spending of contributions.

Quarterly meetings with representatives from all spending services are held and are used to discuss upcoming projects, spend, anticipated planning applications and their contributions, and information on approaching clawback dates and anticipated income. Members of this Developer Contribution Action Group are briefed beforehand with information relating to all contribution pots held by the Council, allowing them to be fully prepared for discussion at these meetings.

Having Developer Contribution information recorded in Uniform and linked to in-house Access Reports has allowed us to provide real-time information on any projects we are collecting contributions for, which facilitates quick and informed decision making, and provides a solid audit trail from the moment developer contributions are requested until the moment they are spent.

All of the above has allowed us to provide more detailed and earlier information regarding developer contributions to potential planning applicants.

5. Enforcement charter

Our [Enforcement Charter](#)¹ has been reviewed within the last two years; the most up to date version approved and published in August 2019.

1 https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/1302/our_planning_enforcement_charter

6. Continuous improvement

Service Improvements delivered 2019/20

Create a single integrated planning service

ONGOING

There are a number of examples of work where planning staff have worked more collaboratively including development management, development plans and specialist advisers working together on the evidence to draw up the early strategy options for the review of the Inner Moray Firth LDP. Planning staff held a mini-workshop to discuss the national developments and national policy issues presented through the National Planning Framework 4 Call for Views.

The FW2040 place planning exercise continued through 2019-20 culminating in a new style workshop led by project leads and attended by over 150 people. We have provided feedback on our experience at corporate level management meetings to discuss how place planning might be developed at the corporate level.

Improve a suite of service processes such as:

Development of the pre-application advice service

COMPLETE

In our 2018-19 submission we committed to improving our pre-application advice service. In September 2019 we introduced improvements to streamline our pre-application advice service and bring it more into line with other planning processes. In order to offer a more tailored service, we now offer three categories of service for Pre-application Advice according to the development type. Our [Pre-application Advice webpages](#)¹ were updated to provide background on the benefits of using this discretionary service and each category identifies for the applicant what is mandatory and desirable for submission. It also provides information as to how we handle their request and what they can expect to receive as part of their response as well as providing them with our [fee information](#)².

[Local Small-Scale pre-application advice](#)³ - for 1-3 houses and other types of local development;

[Local Medium-Scale pre-application advice](#)⁴ - medium-scale developments e.g. housing developments between 4 to 49 units, commercial development and other types of development;

[Major Pre-application Advice](#)⁵ – see our Definition of a major development for the full list. e.g. 50 or more houses, the total area of the site is 2 hectares or more.

¹ https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/205/planning_-_policies_advice_and_service_levels/785/

² https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/20630/other_planning_and_environment_fees_and_charges_-_applicable_as_of_1_april_2019

³ https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/205/planning_-_policies_advice_and_service_levels/785/pre-application_advice/2

⁴ https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/205/planning_-_policies_advice_and_service_levels/785/pre-application_advice/3

⁵ https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/205/planning_-_policies_advice_and_service_levels/785/pre-application_advice/4

This piece of work involved creating on-line forms with our Digital Services staff and we now accept [on-line](#)¹ applications for both Local and Medium Scale applications. Major Pre-applications are submitted via a [short paper form](#)² available from our website, with applicants receiving an acknowledgement containing a reference number allowing them to upload their documents via the PSAD Form using the eDevelopment.scot platform. As part of the work we updated templates to maintain a consistent level of response and created new system workflow tasks for the process.

We also introduced Pre-application Advice applications for [Listed Buildings](#)³.

A further development will be to update the existing [on-line](#)⁴ form for Major Pre-applications submissions. During COVID-19 we continue to offer our pre-application advice service and are holding virtual Major Pre-application meetings as part of our advice service. Applicants are requested to submit a presentation prior to the meeting.

Satisfaction of Conditions

COMPLETE

In June 2019 we introduced a Premium 6-week service for the [satisfaction and discharge of conditions](#)⁵ on a planning application. This new discretionary paid-for service makes sure we respond to information submitted to satisfy conditions within 6 weeks from receipt and validation and recognises the critical importance of timing to a development proposal.

Customers can also use this service after the development is completed if they need a letter stating that the development has been delivered in accordance with the provisions of the conditions attached to their permission.

A downloadable application form is available on our [Satisfaction and discharge of conditions page](#)⁶ along with more information on our [fees to provide this service](#)⁷. Once the application form has been received a letter is sent to the applicant/agent containing a reference number allowing them to upload their documents via the PSAD Form using the [eDevelopment.scot](#)⁸ platform.

We continue to operate our standard service with a statutory timescale of 12 weeks.

1 https://self.highland.gov.uk/service/Pre_application_advice_for_local_developments

2 https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/1395/pre-application_meeting_request_form

3 https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/192/planning_-_listed_buildings_and_conservation_areas/174/listed_buildings

4 https://self.highland.gov.uk/service/Pre_application_advice_for_local_developments

5 https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/180/planning_-_applications_warrants_and_certificates/579/major_developments/3

6 https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/180/planning_-_applications_warrants_and_certificates/579/major_developments/3

7 https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/20630/other_planning_and_environment_fees_and_charges_-_applicable_as_of_1_april_2019

8 <https://www.edevelopment.scot/eDevelopmentClient/>

Listing of plans on decision notices

COMPLETE

In June 2019 we introduced a change in the way we record plans in Uniform saving case officer and Shared Business Support Team time. At receipt of an application drawings are no longer categorised within the Plan Screen in Uniform but are still indexed in the DMS Module. When a case officer is ready to issue the decision notice they select the drawings they wish to approve from DMS and mark these 'Pending Decision'. It is then only these drawings that our virtual SBS Team input into Uniform for the issue of the Decision Notice. This has led to a time saving and reduced the possibility of incorrect plans being issued.

Review of enforcement process

ONGOING

In our last submission we committed to undertaking a review of our enforcement process. This is an ongoing project. To date we have implemented the following:

- Update to our webpage to better inform [what the Council will and will not investigate](#)¹;
- Update to our [Planning Enforcement Charter](#)²;
- Update to our [on-line Report a Breach](#)³ form and improvements to our automatic acknowledgement to better inform customers of our process and timescales;
- Identified routine tasks to move from our Enforcement Officers to our central Epc (Electronic Processing Centre) freeing up officer time;
- Further improvements identified are:
- Review of charges for Fixed Penalty Notices if an Enforcement Notice is not complied with;
- Identify other planning processes which could be used by Enforcement to save officer time including:
 - Use the system to inform enforcement officers when a decision is reached on a retrospective planning application (Section 33A Notice);
 - Use the system to warn retrospective applications are not returned.
 - Continue to identify routine admin tasks which can be removed from Enforcement Officers;
- Creation of access report containing the expiry date of an advertisement consent so enforcement officers are proactive rather than reactive.

Roll-out of Consultee Access for easier access to detailed case information

COMPLETE

In our last submission we committed to the roll-out of Consultee Access. This piece of work involved engaging with internal and external statutory consultees and discussing with them how they can provide planning responses to us through the use of consultee software. As a result, Consultee Access was introduced as the new method

1 https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/180/planning_-_applications_warrants_and_certificates/170/planning_enforcement/2

2 https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/180/planning_-_applications_warrants_and_certificates/170/planning_enforcement/6

3 https://self.highland.gov.uk/service/Breach_of_planning_control?noLoginPrompt=1

of responding to planning consultations. This has been rolled out to all internal and external consultees (such as SNH, SEPA Transport Scotland etc.) Receiving responses via Consultee Access means we receive responses in a consistent way and helps us manage responses received more efficiently.

For consultees responding to the Council, this means when they are consulted on a planning application, including Local and Major Pre-applications, they are able to view all documents including those that would not normally be published to the general public on [our ePlanning Public Access site](#)¹. When making their response they can free type text into a pop-up box or upload a letter/document and submit their response online via their Consultee Access account. Their consultation response is automatically uploaded into our Document Management System, processed and made public.

This new process has been implemented with both internal and external consultees and has proved to be a huge benefit for both the Council and our Statutory Consultees, allowing consultation responses to be processed in a more consistent and timely fashion.

A follow-up is underway involving Community Councils and we are encouraging them to become involved in this new method of responding to planning consultations.

Promote the corporate role of planning including the preparation of a Place Planning Protocol and a “Full Cycle Planning” approach to the management of Council and partner assets affected by development **ONGOING**

There has been some good progress in promoting the role of the planning service in supporting wider corporate aims across the Council and its partners. Our experience with the Fort William 2040 events and working with PAS on the Applecross Community Plan this year have helped us to prepare a Place Planning Guide which is yet to be approved but spells out how communities will be supported in preparing their own plan, and how the Council and partners will support them. This has also fed into our joint work with the Director and Managers of the Community Services Directorate of the Council with whom we hosted a place planning workshop with all Directors across the Council to establish the Council’s corporate approach to place planning. The place planning protocol which emerged was due to be considered at a Council meeting in early 2021 but was cancelled due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, planning managers have been providing advice to senior elected members on how they might engage their respective communities in a way that reflects the emerging place planning protocol.

We are continuing to use the Delivery Programme as a more effective tool for managing the assets that are implicated by development. Alongside frequent meetings with our Care & Learning Service to help manage any issues for schools, the wider Developer Contributions Action Group provides a forum for infrastructure and service partners to interact with the planning service. Looking ahead, we have been stressing the vital role that the National Planning Framework plays in setting the ambitions for Highland communities and the opportunity it creates to align land use planning and investment in infrastructure and communities. Our Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan is being prepared as a means of taking forward many aspects of the NPF4 vision and in taking a more coordinated approach to development. We will be seeking alignment between the Council’s NPF4 vision, its approach to place planning and the emerging IMFLDP.

¹ <https://wam.highland.gov.uk/wam/>

Prepare a pilot interactive LDP evidence report for the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan **COMPLETE**

This service improvement was identified as part of our ongoing recognition of the integral role that mapping plays in preparing and delivering the Development Plan. The process for preparing the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan has been delayed largely due to the implications and response to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, good progress is being made on this innovative approach, and it is envisaged that the evidence report for the emerging Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan will be integrated as much as possible within a new interactive Main Issues Report hosted online.

The Main Issues Report is due to be published in the 2020/21 reporting year and therefore this service improvement will be carried forward to next year’s performance submission.

Continue to develop virtual teams to enable more efficient flexible delivery of service **COMPLETE**

As a service we had to ensure that we were suitably geared-up for flexible working and this is heavily reliant on technology and process. The electronic workflow processes are already well established, whereby work can be, and is, allocated and processed virtually.

We have continued our development of existing virtual teams with further new Enterprise tasks being introduced for our Shared Business Support and Professional Support Officer Teams. New tasks have been implemented for processes used for Local and Major Pre-applications. Teams are able to action tasks from their area office or home locations ensuring a better use of resource and providing a more efficient and flexible delivery of the Service. The use of email; phone calls; Skype and more recently Microsoft Teams has been paramount to this success allowing for peer support as and when required.

Continue to develop functional teams to make best use of available resource **ONGOING**

During 2019-20 we evolved our existing Housing Delivery Team to create the Strategic Projects Team to broaden the range of applications covered by a multi-disciplinary team and bolstering resources within it.

Develop Service ICT to enable mobile and flexible working **COMPLETE**

The Council wide ICT refresh project provided opportunity to obtain sim enabled laptops all officers and, where suitable, to support staff. This was issued along with sim loaded tablets. This allows for a streamlined, one action, file transfer from the database to the tablet allowing the case officer to take the whole case file out on site in a handheld device. Tablet email connectivity has empowered staff with all the tools needed to carry out site inspections and add value to the case file assessment (with the ability to record photographic evidence of sites for referral.) By investing in the appropriate technology and services we have robust supporting technology, communication, teamwork connectivity and clear aims and outputs. Tablet to laptop connectivity means that the case file can be updated on site without the need to come back to base to update the database. Effective case management with real time implications.

This work has ensured that during the initial uncertainty of responding to Covid19 pandemic all of our office-based staff were able to carry on as if working from an office environment where we found that there were no tasks within the planning processes which we could not fulfil.

Service Improvements 2020/21

A significant change has taken place in the Council with the amalgamation of some Council Services, including planning, to form the Environment & Infrastructure Service. This has brought together planning, climate change, energy, engineering and transport teams under one service.

This provides even more opportunity to improve the way in which the Service, and Council, operates. The following are most pertinent, particularly to assist with economic recovery following the Covid-19 pandemic:

Addressing Climate Change and the Green Recovery

Following the Council's declaration of a climate and ecological emergency in May 2019 and the restatement of our ambition for the region to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2025, it has been recognised that there is a key role for the Council to lead from the front in terms of climate mitigation and adaptation at a regional and national level. To this end, the Council will publish a greenhouse gas baseline inventory report for Highland in 2020/21, setting out the net emissions arising in the region for reporting year 2018, will better align its programme plan, corporate plan and individual service plans with the ambition of the Scottish Government in respect of the climate change agenda, and will establish a place-based, partnership approach to climate adaptation under the Highland Adapts initiative. In addition, there will be a pressing requirement on all Council services to work with partners throughout 2021/21 and into the future to secure a green economic recovery post-COVID-19, and to ensure that the principles of a "just transition" are embedded across all sectors of the economy.

The merging of the Climate Change and Energy teams creates opportunities to identify areas for new policy development that support the low carbon development agenda and promote matters such as EV charging and energy efficiency.

Local engagement to inform our approach to economic recovery and our contribution to national outcomes

Within 2019-20 we began developing the Council's position for inputting to Scottish Government's preparation of National Planning Framework 4, including for responding to the Call for Ideas and formulating an Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy for Highland (IRSS). We see it as vitally important to express Highland's interests in this process, particularly given the enhanced role and status that NPF4 will have compared to NPF3 and SPP 2014. This work has continued into 2020-21 with our submissions made to the Call for Ideas and a series of workshops arranged with colleagues, partners and stakeholders, for further working up of the IRSS ahead of its submission later this year.

We are still developing our placed based approach at the corporate level which will refine how we engage communities on how developments and investments at the local level feed through to outcomes at the local level.

However, our ongoing work on the Fort William 2040 masterplan and delivery programme is helping to shape our wider approach to place planning. During the latter half of 2019 we undertook what is now annual stakeholder engagement on FW2040 which is a shared, investment and placemaking portfolio for Fort William and sets out actions and responsibilities for delivering a Vision, Masterplan and Project Programme. Uniquely, the 2019 engagement was led by a collective of stakeholders (chiefly the physical project leads) in a “trade-fair” style format with only subtle prompting and coordination by The Highland Council, Scottish Government and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

The general public responded well to this innovative format because it allowed them to pick and choose topics and projects of most interest to them and talk directly to those with most knowledge of that topic or project. Project leads also became more aware of possible synergies with other investors simply by meeting and talking with them, which wouldn't have happened without FW2040. In this way, all stakeholders are working together to maximise the complementarity of investment across Fort William and wider Lochaber. Further details of FW2040 are available on [the Council's website](#)¹.

Continued effort to align Planning and Corporate Services and Priorities

We will continue to use the Development Plan at the national and local level, particularly the establishment of Highland's Regional Spatial Strategy through the National Planning Framework process, and our LDPs, to promote a coordinated, cross-cutting approach to growing and investing in our communities and infrastructure. We will look to align the Development Plan with the emerging economic recovery plan, and the Council's capital programme, to provide greater certainty on how we might achieve our vision for sustainable economic recovery and growth.

We will continue to input to the Council's approach to Place Planning, to firm up the corporate approach to engaging communities in the short, medium and longer term actions for delivering our vision for the future.

Securing positive effects for biodiversity

As well as continuing to ensure negative impacts on biodiversity are appropriately mitigated, the Council recognise that we need to do more to secure positive effects for biodiversity, one of the six key outcomes of NPF4. To deliver on this requirement, we are developing a Green Contribution. This will be applied to all development where habitat will be permanently lost, and the developer is unable to secure positive benefits themselves. Placing a monetary value on biodiversity is incredibly complex and it is therefore envisaged that, to ensure the contribution is simple to understand, apply and administer, that a flat rate (c. £2500 per ha) would be both fair and transparent. Monies accrued will be made available to conservation organisations and charities to fund/match-fund conservation projects across Highland, including habitat creation/restoration and management of invasive non-native species, as well as for Council initiatives to improve biodiversity on our own estate.

¹ https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/178/local_and_statutory_development_plans/582/west_highland_and_islands_local_development_plan/5

Other service improvements to be considered for the coming year include:

Preparation of an interactive LDP evidence report

This will provide a more intuitive link between the plan and monitoring report and elevate its status as an essential component of the plan for all users, particularly for the MIR stage where the implications of different policy and strategy options can be better understood. It is also considered to be a useful feed in to the LDP Gateway Check process.

Review of the planning processes

Revisit existing planning process to see where savings (both financial and time-saving) can be achieved. This shall include consideration of the 'new normal' resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure quicker processes and allow for continued use of virtual Committee Meetings and collaboration.

Enforcement review

Further consideration of opportunities to increase the equivalent staff hours dedicated to enforcement activity, including potential charging for enforcement officer time.

Continue to develop virtual teams and support for home/flexible/remote working

This will be further refined and improved.

7. Local development plan

Average age of our adopted Local Development Plans at March 2020 is 3 years 7 months, as follows:

- HwLDP (April 2012) – 7 years 11 months
- IMFLDP (July 2015) – 4 years 3 months
- CaSPlan (August 2018) – 1 year 7 months
- WestPlan (September 2019) – 6 months

14 years 3 months / 4 = **3 years 7 months**

8. Development plan scheme

No Highland Local Development Plans were submitted to Scottish Ministers during the year 2019-20, in line with the 2019 Development Plan Scheme. WestPlan was adopted during this year, and the review of the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan was commenced with a Call for Sites. The review of the Highland-wide LDP remained on hold. There was some slippage in the WestPlan and Inner Moray Firth LDP timescales based on previous Development Plan schemes but revised timescales were agreed with Committee through consideration of the Development Plan Scheme. The 2019 Development Plan Scheme was approved at our [January 2019 Environment, Development & Infrastructure Committee](#)¹.

¹ https://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/74815/item_8_-_development_plans_newsletter

9. Early engagement of elected members

In 2019-20 we took the opportunity provided by the early stages of Scottish Government's preparation of NPF4, to involve our Members in that process. NPF4 will be part of the development plan and include policies that planning authorities will use in local decision-making. Therefore, Member involvement in the preparation of those policies is important as it is expected that many of those policies will, in time, replace equivalent ones in our LDPs. In March we held a Member workshop which informed our initial response to Scottish Government and engagement with Members on this continues into 2020-21, including a further Member workshop planned for summer 2020.

In June 2019 we held a workshop to hear our elected Members views on Housing in the Countryside to inform a review of the relevant Supplementary Guidance and the hierarchy for development to be set out in the emerging Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan. The feedback received has been fully considered and will be reported to Committee before being opened up to public consultation.



10. Early engagement of cross sector stakeholders

North of Scotland Development Forum

We continue to participate in and coordinate the North of Scotland Development Plans Forum, which meets quarterly and comprises development planning representation from planning authorities in the wider Highlands and Islands region and from Scottish Government.

Highland Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy

In 2020-21, as part of work on the Highland Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy (IRSS), we have been pleased to take the opportunity to work with the Scottish Government's consultants to produce a video showcasing the ongoing Highland IRSS work and also to present at a workshop our Highland experiences in mapping and representation; both being part of knowledge sharing between regional groupings preparing IRSSs.

Regional Transport Partnership

In preparing the emerging Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan, we have worked closely with the Regional Transport Partnership, HiTrans, in agreeing the methodology for the transport appraisal and in gathering evidence to support the plan. This is supporting our work to take a more radical approach to how development support and enable more sustainable patterns of travel.

Core Path Plans engagement

The Highland Core Paths Plan in the West Highlands & Islands Area was reviewed from December 2017 in co-operation with the relevant Local Access Fora. A draft amended core paths plan was issued for public consultation on 05 August 2019 for a statutory 12 week period. All relevant identifiable landowners were notified along with press notices and specific bodies including SNH. Responses were requested to be placed on the Council's consultation portal. These were collated and reported to the Local Access Fora and Area Committees.

Any proposed changes will necessitate a further consultation of the Modified Amended Core Paths Plan before final approval by the Council and sending to Scottish Ministers for consideration of adopting the plan. This final stage has been delayed by the Covid 19 lockdown but would hope to complete before the end of 2020.

In addition to the above the first stage of review of the Inner Moray Firth area of The Highland Core Paths Plan was commenced in 2019 with a 'call for core path changes'. Letters were sent to all community councils and relevant organisations such as SNH, Forestry & Land Scotland, access user groups and landowning bodies. Public press notices were also issued for responses to the Councils consultation portal.

11. Regular and proportionate policy advice

In addition to the regular pre-application advice service, examples of proportionate policy advice can be found in the following specific aspects of the Service's work:

Grantown-on-Spey Conservation Area Appraisal

Grantown-on-Spey, located in the heart of the Cairngorm National Park, is a legacy of the Scottish Enlightenment and one of best-preserved Georgian planned villages in Scotland. It was designated as a conservation area in 1975. In 2018-19 The Grantown Society initiated and led a project to reassess the conservation area. It was supported by a steering group made up of representatives from the Council, CNPA, Community Council and a range of local community groups. The result was an in-depth appraisal detailing the town's history and development, identifying opportunities, threats and challenges. The appraisal highlighted the inadequacy of the 1975 boundary which excluded areas of both historical and architectural importance. In May 2019 the Council adopted the appraisal as supplementary guidance to inform and guide new development within the conservation area and agreed to enlarge the boundary to fully encompass what makes the town significant.

Applecross Community Land Use Plan (ACLUP)

At the end of 2019, the Highland Council endorsed a locally inspired and led community land use plan for the Applecross peninsula, which is a remote, rural part of Wester Ross. We worked with local community interests, Planning Aid Scotland, statutory agencies and other stakeholders to guide the formation of the ACLUP, consultation on it and on its endorsement as a Highland Council material planning consideration for development management purposes. The ACLUP is an exemplar of how a planning authority can work with local community interests to enable them to produce their own planning policy within a time frame that couldn't be achieved within the statutory local development plan framework. By agreeing its use as a relevant factor in development management decisions this detailed, tailored and locally agreed policy document is given proportionate weight in planning application decisions. In early 2020, the ACLUP has been applied in assessing and responding to pre-application enquiries within Applecross. Local Place Plans will need to be proportionate in terms of cost, time of production and legal significance if they are to be successful and we believe that the ACLUP content and process demonstrates good practice in this area.

Further details of the ACLUP are available on the [Council's website](#)¹ and the [Applecross Community Company website](#)².



1 https://www.highland.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/4188/ross_and_cromarty_committee

2 <https://www.applecrosscommunitycompany.org/company-projects/plan-it-applecross/>

D. Inverness West Link – Stage 2

Delivering development at all scales can be challenging, however with significant public scrutiny, development by the Council can be particularly difficult.

Working collaboratively between services across the Council and its partners a conscious effort was made to ensure that the positive impacts of the development of the Inverness West Link were maximised and any negative impacts minimised.

In doing so the Council has delivered the first stage, with the second stage now in construction, of a new river and canal crossing, an enhanced 18-hole golf course, a new rugby club house with international rugby board standard pitch, enhanced walking and cycling routes as well as opening-up land for development on both the east and west sides of the River Ness.



The collaborative working has continued from the inception of the project and throughout the construction process. This has included the use of development management staff as a planning monitoring officer, use of the Council's Forestry Officer as an Arboricultural Clerk of Works and the use of the Council's Ecology Officer as the Ecological Clerk of Works. Ensuring the delivery of the mitigation has been key and the development management case officer was also involved in production of contracts. The result of the cross service, collaborative working has been the delivery on the ground of high-quality facilities and infrastructure which will be of benefit to the City of Inverness for years to come.

E. Inverness Campus Travel and Transport Plan

Inverness Campus is a state-of-the-art location for businesses, research organisations, students and local residents. It's a place of work and for recreation, enjoyed by locals, visitors and patients. This innovative, collaborative space provides a stimulating educational environment, attracts knowledge-based businesses and is enjoyed by the local community. The Campus offers significant opportunities to both the City of Inverness and the wider region.

It is estimated that it could be a workplace for 1300 people within the next 5 years and create further employment across the region. To date over £105m has been invested in Campus developments. A Travel and Transport Plan has been and remains a vital part of ensuring that the Campus fulfils its aims, providing an accessible location which encourages sustainable travel forms, particularly walking, cycling and public transport.



Discussions were held to address travel-related opportunities, barriers, funding and implementation for the Campus. All stakeholders were keen to work towards developing travel measures designed to increase the use of sustainable travel and limit the use of private cars. The group agreed that the next steps would include forming a Travel and Transport Plan working group, which would set out an achievable action plan and timescales, and then resourcing a means of implementing the Plan.

The Campus Travel and Transport Plan was then developed and written by the five partners (HIE, The Highland Council, NHS (Highland), HiTRANS and the University of the Highlands and Islands) who also committed to funding a Campus Travel Officer post to implement the Plan. The Plan focuses on three key areas:

- Encouraging active travel – Promote schemes such as Walking Works and Walk to Work Week. Explore provision of pool and e-bikes. Development of Bike User Groups to promote cycling within the Campus.
- Improving public transport – Potential of more frequent bus services. Ensuring accurate, real-time information is displayed at bus stops and within buildings. Explore opportunities for provision of park and ride / rail halt facilities.
- Moving away from single occupancy car use – Introduction of a car park permit regime. Promote lift-sharing. Potential to introduce Campus pool cars / car clubs.

The Plan was adopted and launched in October 2019.

F. Streamlining Flood Risk Consultations

The Planning Authority, SEPA and the Council's Flood Risk Management Team worked together to develop a two-step working procedure and standing advice for streamlining consultations where flood risk is an issue to ensure that all those involved – developers, consultants and planning authorities and SEPA – focus attention and work where it will be most beneficial.



Previously SEPA and the Council's Flood Team were routinely consulted on planning applications where there is potential flood risk, which were not supported by any information to enable them to consider the flood issues. This resulted in automatic objections from both until such times as the information was provided by the applicant. Now rather than issue a consultation at validation if there is no flood information provided with the application, a letter is issued to the applicant requesting this information. A consultation is then issued to SEPA and/or the Flood Team once this information has been received, avoiding unnecessary consultation.

It was also found that SEPA and the Council's Flood Team often provided duplicate advice on the same issues in their consultation responses. In order to overcome this clear guidance was produced on what types of applications to consult SEPA and/or the Flood Team on.

12. Corporate working across services

How we work across services and with other key stakeholders is illustrated by three case studies.

13. Sharing good practice, skills and knowledge

We are an active participant in our benchmarking group with other rural authorities: Dumfries and Galloway, Argyll and Bute, Aberdeenshire, Border, Orkney, Moray, Shetland and Cairngorms National Park Authority. We also regularly attend and participate in the Heads of Planning Scotland committee and sub-committee meetings. We recognise and value the knowledge and experience gained by sharing best practice with different authorities and encourage and promote these opportunities with our staff.

Regular Team Leader meetings are held by senior staff every 6 weeks to review and discuss ongoing and emerging planning issues and develop and promote practice and procedures accordingly [during the Covid-19 pandemic these have been weekly]. Each Team Leader has regular meetings with their respective teams to discuss and disseminate information. All of these meetings are a two-way process to encourage staff feedback and engagement.

We aim to ensure staff training needs are met. We had planned to hold our annual training day event for technical and professional staff in May but this had to be cancelled.

We have sought to promote and develop good practice both internally and externally with other organisations. We have bi-annual meetings with SNH/SEPA to review existing practices and procedures, predominantly in connection with large scale developments and major applications. This collaborative approach allows us to have a better understanding of our respective roles and specific concerns in our consideration and assessment of development proposals.

Highland Archaeology Festival

The Council has run the Highland Archaeology Festival for 26 years and it continues to go from strength to strength. It provides a platform for the public and private sectors, academics and the public to share good practice, skills and knowledge and celebrate the rich archaeology and built environment of the highlands.

The festival's flagship event, a 2-day conference hosted by the Council, provides a forum to share the results of archaeological work – much of which is secured through planning conditions and funded by developers – with a wide and varied audience.

This regularly includes delegates from HES, local authorities, the commercial sector, academics and students, heritage groups and field clubs as well as members of the public. The festival not only highlights the importance of developer-funded archaeological research to the advancement of knowledge and understanding but also demonstrates that when heritage is utilised to its full potential, it can be a powerful device to facilitate and build a sense of community, identity and place.

Developer Contributions Processes

Since setting up our monitoring system we have shared best practices and knowledge with other Local Authorities through the national developer contributions group meetings. Our Developer Contribution Officer has offered to demonstrate how our system is set up at the next physical meeting and to advise how to administer this for similarly furnished LA's. Actively in discussions with North Lanarkshire Council about hosting an electronic demonstration to show how it works in real time.

Fort William 2040 – Improvement Service Webinar

In May 2019 the Council was asked to deliver a webinar presentation on the Fort William 2040 project as part of the Improvement Service's Planning Skills series of training events. The event outlined the FW2040 project as an example of how the Scottish Government's Place Principle. The session was attended by almost 60 attendees and feedback from participants was very positive, including the following:

Just to say well done and thanks – 13 folk here ... from dev management, dev plans, economic development and community planning. Our Director popped in later on while we were chatting about the presentations. He was interested in content, and the opportunity it created for different services to get together, and learn and share experience and knowledge.

Thank you very much for the webinar this morning, colleagues have been very positive about both the content and delivery of it.

14. Stalled and Legacy cases

The number of legacy cases determined in 2019/20 rose from 53 to 58 compared with the preceding year. The number of legacy cases that remained undetermined during 2019/20 rose from 35 to 53. However this is a consequence of our desire to address and resolve planning issues where possible to enable appropriate development to occur through constructive dialogue.

Sites	2019/20	2018/19
Number cleared during reporting period	58	53
Number remaining	53	35

15. Developer contributions

Our [Developer Contribution webpage](#)¹ has been developed to provide information on the Supplementary Guidance behind any Developer Contribution request, links to the Local Area Plans that may be relevant to the contributions projects we are funding, and Affordable Housing information.

All our pre-application advice contains information on likely developer contributions.

1 https://www.highland.gov.uk/directory_record/712087/developer_contributions

