



Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal

Cùmhnant Baile-Roinne Inbhir Nis agus na Gàidhealtachd

Annual Report 2020/21

Aithisg Bhliadhnail 2020/21



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Follow this link to read the City-Region Deal Agreement:
www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/18274/city-region_deal_signatory_document

1 An introduction from the Leader of the Council Ro-ràdh bho Cheannard na Comhairle

It is my great pleasure to introduce the Annual Report for the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal. The report illustrates the excellent work that the Deal enabled between April 2020 and March 2021.

The start of this period was marked by truly exceptional and challenging events, which affected everyone globally and our own Highland region did not escape the impact.

The pandemic and latterly Brexit have been seismic events, which have affected both our lives and the Deal. Whilst projects are recovering, they are also re-evaluating how they will deliver the benefits that we committed to, by adapting and changing their activity in response to the new environment and landscape. This now includes even more urgent attention to the Net Zero Carbon priorities.

For example, the Science Skills Academy, during a year of restrictions, developed new modules, which were delivered in the outdoor school environment, and sent comprehensive Maths and experiment packs which could be delivered by teachers within their bubble. The Northern Innovation Hub has delivered training, support and collaboration opportunities for over 600 new and small business via digital and conferencing technologies. And despite severe restrictions in the construction industry new affordable homes were delivered and the West Link has been completed.

So significant progress has been made across the Programme despite the challenges, and I would like to thank Felix as Programme Manager and all in The Highland Council and Partners for their commitment to continuing their efforts to deliver the very best from this investment to our communities.



Councillor Margaret Davidson
Leader of the Council

2 City-Region Deal Overview

Àrd-shealladh dhen Chùmhnant Bhaile-Roinne

We are now in year five of the ten-year City-Region Deal. The projects have shown tremendous resilience in a challenging year of the deal. Deliverables and project spend have, in some cases been slowed, but the focus remains on delivery of benefits, and to capitalise on its substantial opportunities and investments, including £135m invested from the Scottish Government and £53.1m from the UK Government.

The core overarching aims remain to:

- help to rebalance the population through the aim of attracting and/or retaining an additional 1,500 young people in the 18-29 age group;
- create 1,125 direct jobs with a further 2,200 jobs in construction;
- help to upskill the labour market to move to a high wage high skill economy adding an extra £100m pa to the regional economy;
- deliver 6,000 homes over a 20-year period, of which 1,600 will be affordable; and
- deliver private sector investment of £800m over a 20-year period in the region.

The Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal, maintains a key focus on inclusive growth alongside the main themes of the deal.

The Delivery Partnership

The Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal is built up of 6 partners who co-ordinate and drive the component projects. These organisations are The Highland Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the University of the Highlands and Islands, Transport Scotland, Albyn Housing Association Limited and HI-TRANS. The mission statements of the partners and how their work relates to the City-Region Deal are summarised below:

The Highland Council

Ambitious Sustainable Connected

The Council's work aligns with the City-Region Deal, through:

- driving economic growth and ensuring our infrastructure meets the needs of expanding businesses and population.
- supporting children to learn and thrive by delivering a whole system approach to education and integrated children's services.
- Promoting fairness and welcoming diversity.
- Making the Highlands a stronger and more resilient region.
- protecting and enhancing the Highland's influence and reputation nationally and internationally.



High Life Highland

The transformation of Inverness Castle is a Highland Council project, managed by High Life Highland (HLH) on behalf of the Council. HLH is a charity registered in Scotland, formed on the 1st October 2011 to develop and promote opportunities in culture, learning, sport, leisure, health and wellbeing across nine services throughout the whole of the Highlands, for both residents and visitors.



Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE)

The aspirations of HIE are for the Highlands and Islands to be a highly successful, inclusive and prosperous region in which increasing numbers of people choose to live, work, study and invest.



University of the Highlands and Islands

The University of the Highlands and Islands is an integrated university, encompassing both further and higher education. Its reputation is built on an innovative approach to learning and distinctive research and curriculum, all enriched by the people, natural environment, economy, culture and heritage of the Highlands and Islands and its communities.



Transport Scotland

Transport Scotland is an Agency of the Scottish Government and accountable to Ministers. The Purpose of the Scottish Government is to focus on creating a more successful country with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish through increased wellbeing, and sustainable and inclusive economic growth. The vision set out in the National Transport Strategy supports this in that we will have a sustainable, inclusive, safe and accessible transport system, helping deliver a healthier, fairer and more prosperous Scotland for communities, business and visitors.



Albyn Housing Society Limited

Exists to enable everyone in the Highlands to be well housed within sustainable communities. To this end Albyn Housing Society Limited will build, manage and maintain a quality housing stock in the Highlands, and to support communities to thrive. Through innovation meet the needs of the community and challenges of the future.



HI-TRANS

Working hard with Councils, the Scottish Government, Transport Scotland, HIE, transport operators and other stakeholders to improve transport services and infrastructure in the north of Scotland and on routes to the Highlands and Islands.



In addition to the project leading partners, there are a number of significant contributing partners and organisations who support the Deal via the provision of expertise and access to networks, providing the role of the critical friend and selling the benefits of the Deal and the region. These include but are not limited to:

- Scottish Council for Development and Industry (SCDI)
- National Health Service Highland
- The Highland Economic Forum
- The Community Planning Partnership.

Investment Breakdown

It is likely that the investment and funding will increase as other public and private funding sources are attracted. The table below contains information on the funding of the projects. The table has been updated to reflect the agreed virement with the UK Government of £1.362m transferred to assist with the funding of developing Inverness Castle.

Some projects have more spend than funding – these further contributions should be identified in partner funding table below.

Project	Total £	UKGov £'000	ScotGov £'000	THC £'000	UHI £'000	HIE £'000	Albyn £'000
Deal Development Funding	100,000	100	0	0	0	0	0
Life Sciences Innovation Centre	9,000,000	9,000	0	0	0	0	0
Northern Innovation Hub**	16,000,000	11,000	0	0	0	5,000	0
Joint Digital Programme	30,000,000	20,000	0	10,000	0	0	0
Longman Land Remediation	10,000,000	10,000	0	0	0	0	0
City Centre Wi-Fi, & Tower*	1,998,000	1,638	0	300	0	60	0
Science Skills Academy	3,060,000	0	3,000	20	20	20	0
Innovative Assisted Living	5,224,000	0	3,000	0	0	0	2,224
Inverness Castle */**	31,362,000	1,362	15,000	15,000	0	0	0
Affordable Housing	5,000,000	0	5,000	0	0	0	0
A9A96 Inshes to Smithton & A9/A82 Longman Junction	109,000,000	0	109,000	0	0	0	0
West Link and Inshes	64,356,000	0	0	64,356	0	0	0
Prudential Borrowing (Hsg)	30,000,000	0	0	30,000	0	0	0
Total	£315,100,000	£53,100	£135,000	£119,676	£20	£5,080	£2,224

*HC Includes Common Good Funding

**Includes European Funding

Themes and Projects

Inclusive Economic Growth

The Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal is about trying to achieve inclusive economic growth. In addition to the component projects, there are themes around which the outputs of projects can coalesce:

Connected

Being on the western periphery of Europe, with a massive geographic area, creates connectivity challenges in terms of physical and also digital connectivity. Overcoming these challenges will go a long way to enabling the growth of the Highlands both in terms of economy and, equally important, as a place.

Young People

There is a need to rebalance the population of the Highlands to attract and retain more young people to live, work and study in the region. To do this we need to ensure that young people see the Highlands as a connected place, a place where they can make a living and thrive, and a place that is desirable to others.

Innovation

Whilst unemployment is low in the Highlands, wages are also low. Innovation, in its many forms, is key to creating different opportunities in the Highlands. At the heart of innovation are the Life Science projects, the Innovative Assisted Living (FIT homes) project and the Northern Innovation Hub. Devising services, procedures and products that deal with our particular geographic challenges could place us front and centre.

Skills

From developing the entrepreneurial skills needed to grow the economy, to supporting people into higher skilled posts that will be created; from enthusing future STEM practitioners, to supporting them to higher attainment levels, skills development is of central importance to the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal.

Digital Capability

Given the region's geography, digital connectivity and capability can act to enhance the region's growth capacity. It can enable collaboration beyond the region, and make the region more attractive to businesses and young people by being more connected.

Physical Renewal

In addition to innovation and human capital, there is a need to review the physical infrastructure, both for transport purposes but also to act as places to do business, such as Inverness Castle, The Centre for Health Innovation on Inverness Campus and the land reclamation project at the Longman.

Tourism

Not surprisingly for a region of such outstanding natural beauty, and one so rich in heritage (natural and otherwise), tourism is included as a theme on its own. Any economy must build on its assets and creating more wealth and high value jobs is a key challenge for the tourism sector.

Life Sciences

There has always been a strong element of life science projects within the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal, the Northern Innovation Hub, the FIT Home and the University of the Highlands and Islands Centre for Health Innovation. What is particularly pleasing is the level of collaboration between these projects.

Place Making

A Growing theme within the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal is the importance of place. The City-Region Deal, enables physical renewal, makes the Highlands a more connected place, attracts the right kind of human capital and fosters innovation. New affordable homes are being created throughout the Highlands.

Themes supported by the City-Region Deal Projects

Science Skills Academy

Outcome:
More young people taking STEM subjects and higher levels of attainment.

Themes:

- Skills
- Young People
- Innovation
- Digital
- Life Science
- Place Making

Longman Land Remediation

Outcome:
To create land that can be used to support the economy.

Themes:

- Physical Renewal
- Innovation
- Place Making

Inverness Castle

Outcome:
Creating a world class visitor experience and attracting more visitors to stay longer and explore the Highlands.

Themes:

- Tourism
- Digital
- Skills
- Physical Renewal
- Place Making

Northern Innovation Hub

Outcome:
To support and grow businesses to be more productive, modernise and ultimately provide more high value jobs in the Highlands.

Themes:

- Innovation
- Skills
- Digital Capability
- Young People
- Tourism
- Life Sciences

Affordable Housing

Outcome:
Enabling people and especially young people to live and work in the right places for them and the economy.

Themes:

- Young People
- Physical Renewal
- Inclusive Growth
- Place Making

Digital

Outcome:
To provide the connectivity and capacity required to enable the digitisation of the Highlands.

Themes:

- Innovation
- Skills
- Digital Capability
- Young People
- Life Sciences

Innovative Assisted Living (Fit Home)

Outcome:
Enabling vulnerable people to live in the community longer and safer and learning lessons of national importance from their experience.

Themes:

- Physical Renewal
- Innovation
- Digital Capability
- Life Sciences

**A9/A82 Longman Junction Improvement
A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton, West Link and Inshes**

Outcome:
To reduce journey times, connect the Highlands and deliver development land.

Themes:

- Physical Renewal
- Tourism
- Connected

Life Sciences Innovation Centre

Outcome:
New ways to support patients and in particular those in remote communities. Creating services, products and companies to grow the economy.

Themes:

- Innovation
- Digital Capability
- Skills
- Life Sciences

Skills and Employability

Outcome:
To ensure those who are currently furthest away from employment are not left further behind and indeed are encouraged into works and given the skills to succeed.

Themes:

- Skills
- Young People
- Innovation

Air Access

Outcome:
To ensure the Highlands is as connected as possible in terms of air travel.

Themes:

- Tourism
- Connected

3 Geographical Overview

Àrd-shealladh Cruinn-eòlasach

The Highland Council serves a third of the land area of Scotland, including the most remote and sparsely populated parts of the UK mainland, and has the 7th highest population of the 32 authorities in Scotland. The total land area, including all islands, at low water, is 26,484 square kilometers. It is 10 times larger than Luxembourg, 20% larger than Wales, and nearly the size of Belgium.

The length of coastline, including islands, at low water is 4,905 kilometers, 21% of the Scottish total and, excluding islands, is 1,900 kilometers (49 per cent of the Scottish Mainland Scotland).

The Highlands have seen significant population growth over the last 30 years. They have benefitted from the creation of the University of the Highlands and Islands, together with major investments in digital infrastructure and transport. However, the Highlands also faces challenges, particularly the out-migration of young people

due to a lack of higher education and employment opportunities, low productivity and a low wage economy.

Results from the 2011 census show that the population of the Highlands on census day was 232,132, increasing to 235,180 in mid-2017. Since 1996, the population of the Highlands has increased by 12.5%. This is the 7th highest percentage change out of the 32 council areas in Scotland. Over the same period, Scotland's population rose by 6.1%.

Given the nature of the geography of The Highland Council area, ensuring the dispersal of projects throughout the Highlands has been an important factor. While there are a higher number of projects within the Inverness area, this is as should be expected given the role of Inverness as the economic engine and service hub for the Highlands. However the map overleaf, shows a wide dispersion of the projects throughout The Highland Council area.

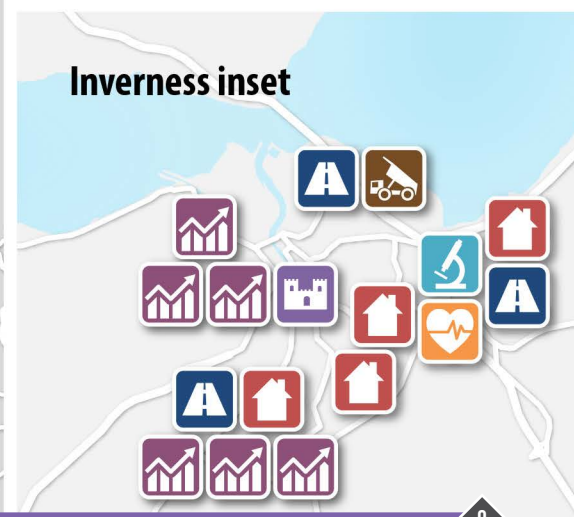
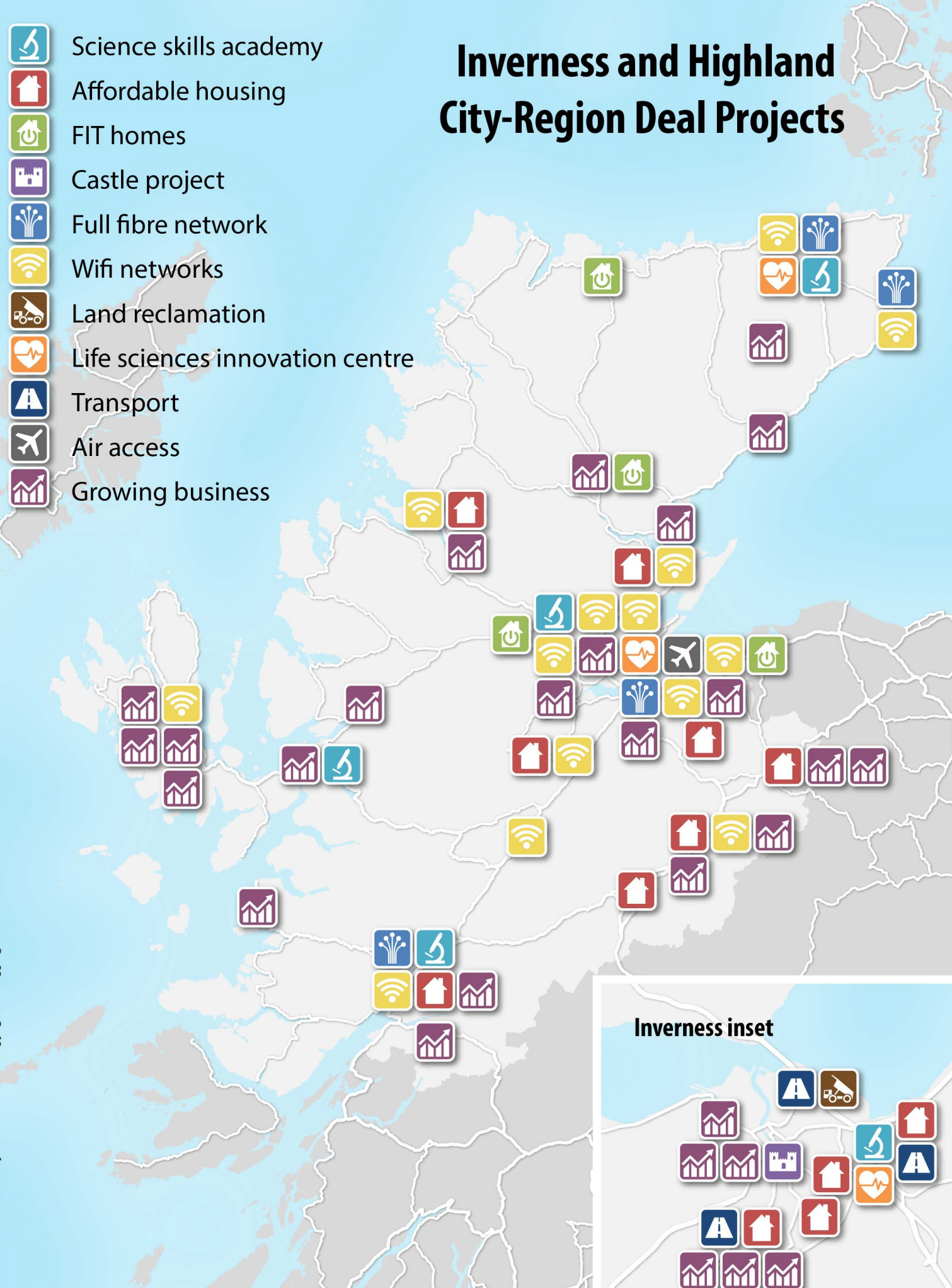


Photo: Science Skills Academy © Alison White HIE

Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal Projects

-  Science skills academy
-  Affordable housing
-  FIT homes
-  Castle project
-  Full fibre network
-  Wifi networks
-  Land reclamation
-  Life sciences innovation centre
-  Transport
-  Air access
-  Growing business

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4 Financial Statement

Aithris Ionmhasail

The table below provides a view of the spend for 2020/21 and Column B shows the cumulative position since the start of the City-Region Deal. Note the £1,362,000 from the UK Government for Bridge Street and the Museum and Gallery has been included in the Castle Project grant.

In terms of spend against the original profile (September 2016), spend is behind what was suggested. A revised profile for the Deal based on a greater maturity of project development was provided, this was predominantly for two reasons: this was an early date to set a profile and was agreed prior to all business cases being signed off; in addition to this the original profile included significant figures for the Digital Project where, to date, no spend

has been possible. COVID-19 has impacted on the majority of projects, and consequently there will now be further delays in achieving spend.

Programme Management Office works with SG & UK Government colleagues to manage the governance of money to the projects and ensure financial planning is aided by effective and transparent information. Project Managers are responsible for managing and reporting on project budget, spend forecasting and quarterly reporting to Scottish and UK Governments. The Programme Management Office and Senior Responsibility Officer will review with The Highland Council's Finance Officer, to track and resolve any significant deviation from plan.

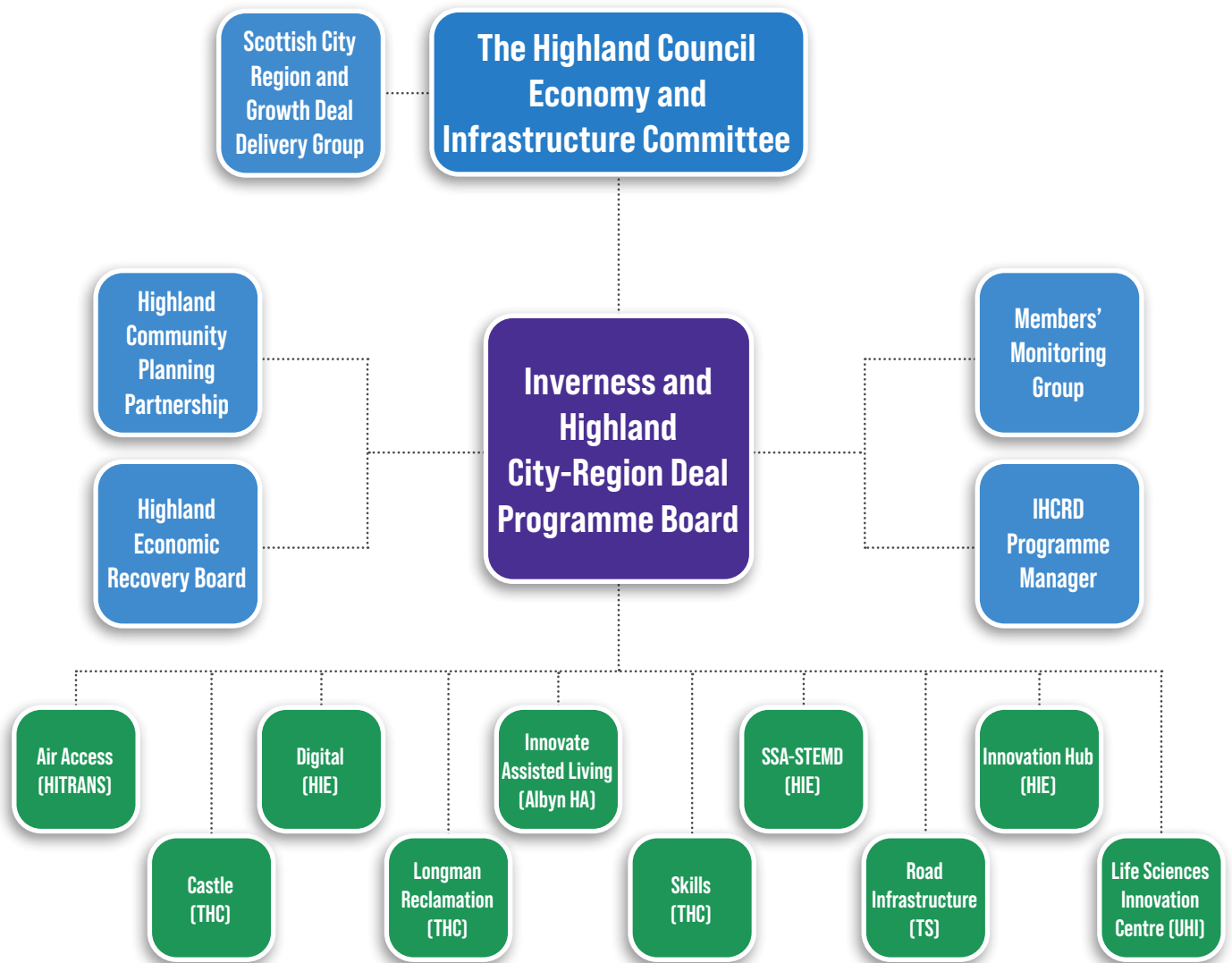
Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal 2020/21 Financial Summary

Project	A	B	C
	Spend in 2020/21	Spend to end of FY 2020/21	Total Government Funding
	£	£	£
Deal Development Funding	0	174,762	100,000
Life Sciences Innovation Centre	558,948	2,129,732	9,000,000
Northern Innovation Hub	1,108,807	2,851,736	11,000,000
Joint Digital Programme	0	0	20,000,000
Land Remediation	0	221,996	10,000,000
Wifi and Tower	0	**1,942,006	1,538,000
Science Skills Academy	674,808	1,626,600	3,000,000
Innovative Assisted Living (Fit Homes)	378,390	1,108,287	3,000,000
Inverness Castle	232,128	4,735,923	16,362,000
Affordable Housing	306,000	1,542,160	5,000,000
A9A96 Inshes to Smithton & A9/A82 Longman Junction	3,089,608	11,419,727	109,000,000
Total	6,348,689	25,810,923	188,100,000

** total includes match funding

5 Governance and Accountability

Riaghlachas agus Cunntachalachd



The Highland Council is the accountable body for the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal; providing effective management arrangements for the Deal, and assurance to both Governments that there is openness and transparency in governance, decision making and project delivery. A diagram of governance arrangements is above.

Central to the governance arrangements is a Programme Board, to which the lead officer / organisation for each specific project reports. The Board is attended by the lead officers for each project, a representative from The Highland Council's Corporate Finance Service, a representative from the business community and representatives from the Scottish and UK Governments. The Board is chaired by The Highland Council's Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

Each project has a governing body / project board which the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal Programme Manager has access to or sits on. The

role of these boards is to scrutinise progress, assist in the management of risks, issues and budget, and to encourage spend against profile. The Programme Manager provides a project assurance role for these boards. Each project within the City-Region Deal is required to have a project plan, a risk register and a benefits register, and to track spend against profile.

The Programme Manager and Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment present to the quarterly Members' Monitoring Group. This allows members to scrutinise progress and proposed changes to projects within the Programme.

Quarterly progress updates are provided to The Highland Council's Economy and Infrastructure Committee, as reported to the Scottish and UK Governments. The Annual Report for the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal is presented to the The Highland Council, Scottish and UK Governments for approval.

6 Overview of Project Progress

Àrd-shealladh de Phròiseactan agus Adhartas

The following sections, 7 to 18, give an overview of the component projects, highlighting key milestones and illustrations. To provide an overview of the programme the table below gives a view of progress for each of the component projects where UK or Scottish Government funding is provided.

For the purpose of this overview the projects are “RAG’d” dependent on the need of remedial action or a change of approach. This report is produced for 2020/21 and the concerns and developments as at the end of period determine the RAG status.

- R** **Red** - There are significant issues with project delivery.
- A** **Amber** - A problem has a negative effect on project delivery.
- G** **Green** - The project is performing to plan.
- C** **Blue** - Completed.

Inverness Castle

This project remains on programme and on budget. There has been minimal impact from the COVID-19 restrictions.

Last RAG **G** RAG **G**

Castle Viewpoint

This project is now concluded.

Last RAG **C** RAG **C**

Northern Innovation Hub

There have been delays in some projects, notably the Food and Drink Technology Centre. Following the impacts of COVID-19 this project has been redesigned to be better aligned to the needs of the Industry. The capital project is due to complete Summer 2023. Following an interim review of the NIH, a number of smaller changes to projects, budgets and timelines are being proposed.

Last RAG **G** RAG **A**

Life Sciences Innovation Centre

Delays in contract award of building contractor due to slower completion of the design with COVID-19 restrictions and value engineering.

Last RAG **A** RAG **A**

Digital

Delivery of this project has been delayed owing to the connection to the Reaching 100% Programme which has suffered contractual delays owing to legal challenge.

Last RAG **R** RAG **R**

Wi-Fi

This project is now concluded.

Last RAG **C** RAG **C**

Science Skills Academy STEM

Risks/issues that have caused the RAG status to change to amber are as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and restrictions that have been placed upon schools. If restrictions placed upon schools are eased, ‘normal’ delivery should resume and target numbers increase.

Last RAG **G** RAG **A**

Innovative Assisted Living (Fit Home)

Ongoing challenges with site identification, planning and delivery delays as a result of supply chain issues have prevented the installation of monitoring equipment until build programmes have completed. An expanded retrofit programme has been developed to help mitigate this impact.

Last RAG **A** RAG **A**

Affordable Housing

Project is progressing well with over 282 new homes approved, however land availability (particularly around Inverness) continues to be an issue and recently building material price increases and shortages are resulting in high tender price inflation.

Last RAG **A** RAG **A**

Longman Land Reclamation

The recent cyber attack at SEPA has caused delays in seeking approval for partial surrender of a licensed waste site however the application is now due to be considered.

Last RAG

A

RAG

A

Employability and Skills

Team resources were re-targeted to support businesses and individuals, through the management of COVID-19 grants and support.

Last RAG

A

RAG

A

A9/A82 Longman Junction Improvement and A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton (Transport Scotland)

The preferred option for the A9/A82 Longman Junction Improvement scheme was announced in June 2019. Work continues on the detailed development and assessment of the scheme with a view to publishing draft Orders for formal comment.

Draft Orders were published for the A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton scheme in September 2019. Progress on the delivery of the scheme will depend on whether a Public Local Inquiry will be required to consider objections made and not withdrawn. Transport Scotland is currently considering all objections received and is working to resolve these where possible.

For both schemes, Transport Scotland continues to work closely with The Highland Council through regular working groups and officer engagement on a range of issues, with regular bi-monthly Working Group meetings being held between Transport Scotland and The Highland Council during the period.

Last RAG

G

RAG

G

Air Access

This project has largely been overtaken by events but maintains a watching brief. The opportunity has been taken however to use the formed group to look at development opportunities within air access.

Last RAG

G

RAG

G

West Link (The Highland Council)

This project is nearing completion with commissioning scheduled for May 2021, Following this, the maintenance period is 2 years for roads infrastructure and 5 years for landscaping works.

Last RAG

G

RAG

G

Transport Infrastructure Inshes Junction (The Highland Council)

Consultation on the options is now live, with very active engagement of the local community. The desire and request for face to face consultations is there but the pandemic continues to frustrate this aspiration. It is programmed to determine the preferred option at committee late 2021 – such that the project can move to developing the necessary construction consents and detailing. Ongoing discussion with Transport Scotland over the interface with the A9/A96 Smithton to Inshes continues.

Last RAG

G

RAG

G

7 Inverness Castle and Tower Viewpoint

Caisteal Inbhir Nis agus Àite-seallaidh an Tùir

Lead Organisation
High Life Highland

Funding
Scot Gov £15,000,000
UK Gov £2,400,000

Design and Construction

At each step of the Castle's journey from sheriff court to international visitor attraction we have found additional layers of potential that reassure us that this project can meet and exceed the considerable expectation of it. This recent period is no exception, with the various reveals from the enabling works helping us not only to meet the outcomes of Design Development Stage (RIBA Stage 4), but to find and add more value during the process. Architectural features long-hidden from view have been uncovered that will enrich the interpretation possibilities and add to the visitor experience of a truly impressive built environment.

This enabling work, undertaken despite COVID-19 restrictions, did not identify any significant issues and has ensured the project remains on programme and on budget. It also allowed specification for the main construction contract to be published in spring 2021, with a potential contract start date before the end of the year.

Our specialist input from external teams continues to enhance the possibilities of the spaces we are finding. Most significantly, our architect team have designed a terrific new attraction - a roof terrace on the South Tower, looking west over the river towards Loch Ness that will be fully accessible. We believe this will become one of the 'wow' moments for visitors, and the cleverly designed internal access to the terrace will maximise the impact of the 'visitor reveal'.

Equally important from both a resident's and visitor's point of view, is the work undertaken by our landscape architect team to establish the castle grounds as a new destination green space in the city centre that is genuinely worthy of the visit and destined to become a popular location for informal and formal gatherings.

Considerable imagination has allowed the creation of a new visitor walkway that maximises access to the riverside views, an accessible route from the road to the main entrance, a planting regime that emphasises indigenous species, as well as significant sculptural interventions at key sites to the west, south and east.

External lighting design specialists have proposed a scheme that is guaranteed to maximise the many unique architectural features and scale of the building. It draws attention to detail around the high towers in subtle but very effective ways, and can be modified to adapt colour, timing, and strength. Similarly, the lighting within



the landscaping allows 24/7 access for visitors and is cleverly and unobtrusively located within features such as handrails, seats, and bike stands that focus on the areas to be lit rather than the source of the light.

The internal and landscaping designs were developed in consultation with Historic Environment Scotland and The Highland Council Planning and Environment Service, with input from the Chief Architect of the Scottish Government, and applications for full planning permission and listed building consent were approved in spring 2021.



Creative content

A key external partner secured for the project this year was the design team Mather and Co who will be responsible for coordinating the internal design of all aspects of the building – from exhibition to retail, café and performance spaces.

The development of the interpretive spaces within and around the Castle to present the Spirit of the Highlands theme to visitors will now step up a gear, translating into reality ideas that have already excited the project team and partners, and bringing specialist knowledge that will help develop and refine the plans for the retail and café offers in the building.

‘Story’ and its importance and centrality in the life of the Highlands, past and present, remains the core of our approach and the interpretation of the ‘100 Stories’ theme will allow an incredibly broad range of interpretative methods within the castle, potentially including everything from immersive experience to VR and AR, digital intervention to first-person interpretation with live story tellers. We have begun gathering stories from many sources, including collating stories from the public via a Highland-wide invitation that was launched in September 2020, backed by a marketing campaign on radio, TV and social media. There is also a rich vein of stories from many other sources that we will use, including a number of story-gathering projects/organisations in the area with whom we have convened an informal association.

**Spirit
Spiorad**
of the Highlands
na Gàidhealtachd



Stakeholder engagement

Involving the public in the progress of the project, and communicating with partners, remains central to our operation. Although the pandemic has made this more challenging, we have continued to engage stakeholders to test the market for potential private sector interest, develop partnerships with national organisations such as the National Museums of Scotland and National Galleries of Scotland, and work more closely with our City-Region colleagues and partners. The project is a good-news story for the region and the country, and its potential economic and cultural impact is clear to our various partners who remain positive in their contribution to the developing plans.

Closer to home, partners such as the University of the Highlands and Islands and Museum Heritage Highland remain important partners for the project and we continue to find ways we can collaborate now and in the future at both individual and institutional levels. We have also created small network groups to ensure we engage and involve a range of partners in area of mutual interest – these include organisations involved in trails in Inverness and across the wider Highlands, linking with tourism and other specific business sectors.

When lockdown guidance allows, we have plans to restart face to face engagement and to initiate a schools’ engagement programme early next year. A video created to advertise the call for stories used lockdown self-generated camera-phone footage of people of all ages and from all parts of the Highlands - an effective way of communicating the social and geographic reach the project will have.

A programme of media relations continues, with regular releases being issued to keep stakeholders up to date with project developments. We work closely and regularly with VisitScotland to make sure we connect with key markets and tour operators at the appropriate stage in the project.

With a clear visualisation of the plans for the Castle and grounds, exploratory conversations with potential private sector interest and investment continue.

Highlights and Outcomes

- Approval of the applications for full planning permission and listed building consent in spring 2021.
- The application included the landscaping plans, designed to enhance the accessibility of the whole Castle hill site and to maximise on the contribution and impact made to the overall visitor experience.
- The impending appointment of exhibition content designers to deliver the content for the new visitor attraction.



Additionality

Funding is being sourced from a number of sources including:

- A revised application (Spirit:Journeys) submitted to the Natural and Cultural Heritage Fund was approved in spring 2021. Spirit:Journeys was co-developed with VisitScotland to utilise the stories as a means of enabling visitors to navigate around the Highlands.
- Match funding for the NCHF project from HIE and VisitScotland
- Discussions are ongoing with potential sponsors and investors in the private sector.
- Early approaches have been made to Historic Environment Scotland to seek support for the capital works.
- Developing partnerships with national organisations to benefit the content of the new visitor attraction.



Inverness Castle artists impressions by LDN Architects

8 Northern Innovation Hub

Co-ionad Nuadhais a' Chinn a Tuath

Lead Organisation
Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Funding
UK Gov £11,000,000
ERDF £1,700,000
HIE £2,000,000



Progress

The Northern Innovation Hub (NIH) was launched in early 2018 and is now completed its 3rd full year of delivery. It is a programme which builds on and accelerates current business support services in the region, enabling a focus on sectoral opportunities, technology and young people, which will create global competitive advantage.

An interim review was completed in March 2021. This found that the programme is broadly fit for purpose but made a number of recommendations to expand reach and enhance performance, which have been developed into a series of actions.



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- The majority of projects have now been launched and are delivering outputs.
- Some projects are now entering into phase 2 procurement.
- The Food and Drink TechHub and Next Generation Programme, and a Digital Tourism Conference, are under development.
- The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent impacts on SMEs in the region brought several challenges.

Programmes quickly moved to full digital delivery and a change of focus from growth to resilience made them more attractive and fit-for-purpose. We are adopting an agile approach to continuous improvement and adapting projects to suit the changing needs of businesses.

- A number of minor changes have been made to individual projects whilst maintaining the original goals and ambitions of the programme.
- To date the NIH has had over 1,600 business transactions, and of these, over 900 have been significant or intensive levels of support.

Area Participants in NIH Projects

NIH Project	Caithness and Sutherland	Inner Moray Firth	Lochaber, Skye and Wester Ross	Total
Technology Placements	2	4	0	6
Life Sciences	0	0	4	4
Impact 30	2	18	0	20
Creative Industries	19	190	65	274
Food & Drink	8	21	14	43
Adventure Tourism	0	11	16	27
Digital Tourism	12	37	31	80
Coding Academy	0	5	0	5
Total	43	286	130	462

Highlights and Outcomes

XpoNorth Digital has supported 400 unique creative businesses to date, to enhance customer engagement and develop new products and services using digital technologies. A total of **53** digital workshops have been delivered to **566** participants as well as a fully digital International Conference. **75** businesses were provided with considerable or intensive support during financial year 2020/21.



The **Highland Food and Drink Innovation Network (HFDIN)** has now engaged with over **200** businesses and delivered **10** online events and workshops to **65** individual participants. Digital Routes to Market webinars were launched at the early stages of the pandemic as business activity moved online. It has also been a platform for a triple helix collaborative proof-of-concept project around logistics which identified opportunities for significant efficiencies economically, environmentally and amongst communities and involved **24** individual business contributions.

Due to COVID-19 and Brexit, a revised Food and Drink TechHUB project is being developed. A large number of businesses participated in a market consultation exercise and stakeholder engagement is ongoing to better align to the needs of the industry. This will involve delivery in phases with the service initiating the project through digital / virtual service followed by a physical space in phase 2.



NEXUS coworking space is now well established in its new base, with **9** businesses taking leases/occupancy agreements and a further **6** with 6-month soft-landing agreements to date. A series of **15** business webinars were broadcast throughout 2020/21 on a range of topics, receiving **338** attendees.

Pathfinder Accelerator Business Support Programme ran 2 cohorts in 2020/21 with a total **15** businesses taking part. A new contractor for delivery of phase 2 was procured. To date **42** businesses have benefitted from Pathfinder.

Following the **NHS Market Ready** pilot, a new Business2Healthcare (B2Hc) service was established to provide support to businesses looking to sell products and services to the NHS and Health sector.

Digital Tourism - Our Global Markets and Business Insights programme Tune into Tourism developed a new initiative to support the heavily-impacted tourism industry during these challenging times. The Road to Recovery series included **20** podcasts and **4** webinars open to all businesses, as well as **4** webinars hosted specifically for DMO members within the Highland Council area. Each broadcast was hosted by our usual presenters alongside a panel of relevant and expert guests. **220** businesses from the HC area have now registered for the Road to Recovery series. The Digital Tourism Think Tank community continues to deliver value to 10 destination management organisations (DMOs), and the service has now been opened up to tourism businesses within the Highland Council area. A new collaboration with Scottish Cycling will support 24 businesses operating in the mountain biking sector to adopt digital improvements.

Adventure Tourism – the Let's Grow Adventure Tourism programme was launched with **17** businesses from Lochaber and Skye, and **12** from the Cairngorms, benefiting from a programme of digitally delivered one to one workshops alongside one to one consultancy.

Impact30 Young Entrepreneurs Programme continued to attract a good diversity of young business leaders from across Highland. 2 cohorts ran in this FY, with 51 young entrepreneurs from 49 businesses taking part. To date 76 businesses have benefitted from the programme, including 9 from outside Highland Council area with additional funding from HIE.

A total of 10 graduates and 1 student took part in the **Technology Placements** programme during 2020/21, supporting 10 businesses to bring new skills to the organisation and to innovate using technology.

Phase One of the **Coding Academy** project came to an end in February, having supported 15 individuals to develop digital skills.



Inclusive Growth

In spite of the challenges faced by small businesses in the Highlands, the COVID-19 pandemic in fact had a number of positive impacts including notable advances in innovation (see our case study on Kirsty Elizabeth Studios as one example), and the ability to improve programme reach and accessibility through digital delivery. Projects continue to reach right across the Highland Council area, with businesses from all corners taking part. Impact30 Young Entrepreneurs Programme works exclusively with young business leaders, with a 50-50 female to male split taking part so far, from a diverse range of sectors. The Technology Placement Programme has supported businesses from the construction and food and drink industries, and social enterprises, as well as engineering and technology companies.

Technology Placement Programme

This programme aims to place students and graduates in a relevant discipline, into SMEs to work on a technology related project that will develop new systems, processes or products for the business. The scheme contributes up to 50% of the salary for up to a year.

Pat Munro Ltd took part in the programme and employed Michael Graves, a graduate in Computing Science, as a Graduate Systems Analyst on a 12-month contract. Michael was assigned a number of tasks including to introduce a digitized system for aggregate sales, implementing a paperless HR system, and streamlining / automating existing accounting processes.



Photo: Michael Graves graduate by Pat Munro

Michael's work streamlining accounting administration led to a 10% reduction in processing speeds, while his creation of customer portals increased the online provision of information to customers, sub-contractors and other partners. Furthermore, digital dashboards introduced by Michael during his placement enhanced information flow to management, helping increase the company's focus on its KPIs.

"Having Michael on board allowed us to complete a number of the primary objectives, providing efficiencies in how we undertake a variety of activities," says Mark Bramley, Pat Munro's commercial director. "The Technology Placement allowed us an element of 'try before you buy' in terms of IT improvements, which, had it not been for the grant, we may not have been able to trial."

Extended as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Michael has now been given a permanent contract. To find out more visit:

www.hie.co.uk/our-region/casestudies/pat-munro

Additionality

During 2020/21 additional funding was provided by SG to enable the rollout of the Pathfinder Accelerator beyond the Highland Council area, allowing 5 additional businesses to benefit from the programme.

HIE also approved additional funding to enable the expansion of Impact30 Young Entrepreneurs Programme to the wider Highlands and Islands. The 5th cohort included 18 HC businesses and a further 9 from Orkney, Shetland, Argyll and Innes Gall.

Cross-project collaborations included a NEXUS webinar on Food and Health, delivered in partnership with the Highland Food and Drink Innovation Network, also linking up businesses to XPONorth Advent Calendar, Tune into Tourism podcasts and working with Impact30 Young Entrepreneurs Programme, F&D businesses.

A data-driven food and drink logistics project in collaboration with RGU and The Data Lab has created a model for identifying solutions to logistics in rural places.

A Graduate taken on by Pat Munro Ltd through the Technology Placement Programme gained a permanent contract with the company.



Photo: Pat Munro

Case Study

IMPACT30 is a 12-month programme targeted at young entrepreneurs and leaders and is designed to provide advice, support and mentoring to new start-up businesses which are led by people aged 35 and under. The support offered is tailored to the needs of the business, focusing on the tools, skills and knowledge required for each business to reach its full potential.



Photo: Kirsty MacLennan by Scottish Viewpoint

One of the businesses benefiting in 2020/21 was Fort William based Kirsty Elizabeth Studios. Kirsty MacLennan took part in the programme with a view to growing her bespoke bridal wear business. When COVID-19 hit she was supported to develop new product lines to maintain valuable income streams.

After graduating in Fashion Design from Heriot Watt in 2013, Kirsty MacLennan spent seven years gaining experience working in the Scottish fashion, textiles and interior design scene. In 2018, she also began to teach Fashion at the University of the Highlands and Islands.

Incredibly, in that busy period, the Fort William native has found time to develop her real passion - a bespoke bridal occasion and evening wear brand. After years of planning and preparation, MacLennan finally took the plunge and launched Kirsty Elizabeth Studio in 2020, focusing full-time on the business for the first time.

Hearing about the IMPACT30 programme through a friend, MacLennan wasn't sure if she would be accepted onto the programme initially because she was only in the very early stages of establishing her brand. But as soon as she spoke to the IMPACT30 team she was persuaded.

MacLennan's initial idea was to produce bespoke bridesmaids' wear, even though she ultimately wanted to make bridal wear. A discussion with her IMPACT30 mentor changed everything.

"I immediately started to question why, if I was going to be giving it my full focus, wasn't I doing what I really dreamed of? So my business objectives and vision changed from day one. I focused on what I wanted to achieve and a whole new version of myself emerged in the months that followed.

"My mentor says that the difference in me from October 2019 to today is huge. I know what I am doing now. I know what the business is. I think it took someone to challenge me regularly to know that. Especially as I come from a creative rather than a commercial background."

For more information visit: www.hie.co.uk/our-region/casestudies/kirsty-elizabeth-studios



Photos: Kirsty Elizabeth Studios



9 Life Sciences Innovation Centre Ionad Ùr-Ghnàthachaidh Saidheansan Beatha

Lead Organisation
University of the Highlands and Islands

Funding
UK Gov
£9,000,000

Progress

Despite challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, achievement of innovation outputs as part of the revenue project has progressed to time and budget.

The procurement for the new facility on Inverness Campus has concerns on tender costs and a value engineering exercise is under way. The estimated date for completion of building works is autumn 2022.

The objective is to foster collaboration and partnership between the university and public, private, and/or third-sector organisations in health and life sciences.

The design of the new research and innovation facility was completed in the spring of 2021, allowing the project to proceed with the procurement of a building contractor. Construction will start in summer 2021.

Highlights and Outcomes

The medical nanotechnology team welcomed the addition of research assistant Dr Susanna Challenger in December 2020. Not only does this represent additional resource for this new research theme in the region, it also enables the university to apply for research and innovation funding. In March 2021, an application was submitted to CENSIS (Scotland's Innovation Centre for sensing, imaging and Internet of Things technologies) to investigate the development of photonic pathogen sensors for hospitals and public places.

A health and life sciences innovation fund has been established to support applied clinical and life sciences research, development, and evaluation studies that address clinical, academic, and commercial needs.

Inclusive Growth – Health Impacts

The project team and other university researchers contributed to workshops and data analysis of the Inclusion Scotland's COVID Highland Summit in February 2021. The online event was organised in partnership with NHS Highland, The Highland Council, the COVID Highland Disability Forum and the university. It attracted over a hundred participants who were given the opportunity to share their experiences of the pandemic and has led to further collaborative funding applications to the Ideas Fund coordinated by the British Science Foundation.



Photo: Life Sciences Innovation Centre by Austin-Smith:Lord

Additionality

University researchers have successfully adapted to changes in research methodology and funding necessitated by the pandemic. Prof. Sarah-Anne Muñoz along with colleagues from the Department of Nursing and Midwifery have been awarded funding by the Scottish Funding Council and the Chief Scientist Office for projects focusing on the physical and mental health impacts of COVID-19. Likewise, the Biomedical Sciences team have a collaborative project with the University of Edinburgh to identify new biomarkers of COVID-19 disease severity.

Thanks to Scottish Funding Council support, the medical nanotechnology team was able to purchase a Raman spectrometer which will allow them to pursue projects in water quality and antimicrobial surfaces.

Case Study

The City-Region Deal project supported a collaborative study with NHS Highland and Daiichi Sankyo investigating the role of technology to detect atrial fibrillation (AF) in patients who had experienced a stroke. AF is a heart rhythm disturbance which affects about 1% of the adult population. The project was completed in October 2020 and findings showcased at the 2021 British Cardiology Society and 2020 Royal College of Physicians Conferences.

Stroke is the leading cause of adult disability in the developed world and the third leading cause of death. In patients who have had a stroke, AF greatly increases the chance of a further stroke and is associated with poor prognosis and increased stroke severity. Oral anticoagulants reduce the risk of recurrent stroke in patients with AF and it is therefore critically important to identify and treat these patients appropriately.

The project evaluated whether prolonged, technology enabled monitoring could improve patient outcomes by increasing AF detection. The study demonstrated that establishing a prolonged AF monitoring service is feasible within existing NHS resources and likely to deliver clinical and economic benefits including improved patient quality of life, reduced secondary stroke risk, fewer inpatient bed days, and net savings of approximately £4,000 for every secondary stroke prevented. These results have led directly to an improvement in NHS Highland stroke services, with patients now offered prolonged AF monitoring as part of routine care.

This was a joint working project with Daiichi Sankyo and received funding for the purchase of 7 R-TEST monitors used in this study. Daiichi Sankyo had no other input to the project, its design, or the reporting of any results.

10 Digital and Wi-Fi Didseatach agus Wi-Fi

Lead Organisation
Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Funding
UK Gov £20,000,000

Progress

Digital Connectivity continues to be the most challenging of the Inverness and City-Region projects owing to its reliance on the Scottish Government's Reaching 100% (R100) North Lot contract. Although the contract has been signed with BT following a period of delay owing to a legal challenge, the final coverage has had to be revised and will only be finalised in summer of 2021. It has therefore not been possible to develop the scope of the IHCRD project and draft a realistic expenditure profile. Furthermore it is now looking increasingly likely that R100 will not provide a suitable framework for delivering the project for commercial and state aid reasons and HIE, Highland Council and both Scottish and UK Government's are investigating use of the UK Project Gigabit framework as the best means of delivering the project.

IHCRD partners have investigated other potential uses of the capital funding but public interventions on digital connectivity have significant state aid and procurement regulations to follow which has precluded any quick and effective use of the funds elsewhere.

Highlights and Outcomes

Any coverage using the Project Gigabit framework will deliver gigabit broadband solutions rather than the superfast broadband envisaged at the outset. These solutions will provide a greater degree of future-proofing and a longer lasting legacy.

Inclusive Growth

By its nature the project aims to reach homes and businesses with poor digital connectivity. The reliance placed on connectivity during COVID-19 has underlined the vital nature of accessible and affordable internet connections for everyone.

Additionality

In their report, the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery advocates collaboration between the UK and Scottish Governments to scale up and accelerate investment in our fixed and mobile networks. It remains the aim of this project to deliver gigabit broadband services within the Highland area in support of this recommendation.

Completion of the Wi-Fi Project

The Wi-Fi project was the second of the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal's to conclude. It has provided free Wi-Fi to Inverness and another 17 settlements in

The Highland Council area. It is predominantly used by tourists supporting the Tourism theme within the Deal.



Highlights and Outcomes

Cumulative Users: 2020/2021		
Location	Individual Visitors	Login Sessions
Achnasheen	548	772
Alness	5,812	7,318
Aviemore	6,228	7,468
Dingwall	2,915	3,842
Dornoch	945	1,188
Drumnadrochit	1,162	1,564
Fort Augustus	1,356	1,555
Fort William	2,995	4,820
Invergordon	3,147	4,193
Inverness	38,500	51,650
Lochcarron	318	331
Nairn	7,128	9,498
Portree	2,846	3,398
Tain	5,648	7,407
Thurso	296	321
Ullapool	2,230	2,562
Wick	1,229	1,583
Total Users	76,175	99,972

Additionality

The project seeks to provide an added value element to it, as it provides a flexible and scalable backbone infrastructure, which may allow current and future projects to make use of and reduce capital costs.

Increased partnership working between the bodies such Highland Transport Partnership (HITRANS), The Highland Council, HIE, Visit Scotland and Inverness Business Improvement District (BID) as examples.

11 Science Skills Academy (STEM) Acadamaidh Sgilean Saidheans (STEM)

Lead Organisation
Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Funding
Scot Gov

£3,000,000

Mission

The Science Skills Academy (SSA) was established to inspire children and young people across Highland to become engaged with the core STEM subjects – SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING and MATHEMATICS. We want to encourage more young people to study STEM subjects in school and beyond and raise awareness of STEM-related careers, particularly those in the region. This innovative project will ensure an equity of provision, overcoming barriers of geography and scale, to reach all school children in Highland.

Progress

Newton Room Network

Refurbishment works on the Dingwall Newton Room were completed in September 2020 and the room was handed over to the SSA. The facility hosted its first pupils in December 2020, with ALL the S2 pupils from Dingwall Academy participating in the Renewable Energy Newton Module. Feedback from pupils and teachers was positive and it was a very encouraging introduction to the new Newton Room.

The Thurso and Fort William Newton Rooms have had some light refurbishment works recently, and both rooms are ready to welcome back pupils when restrictions permit.

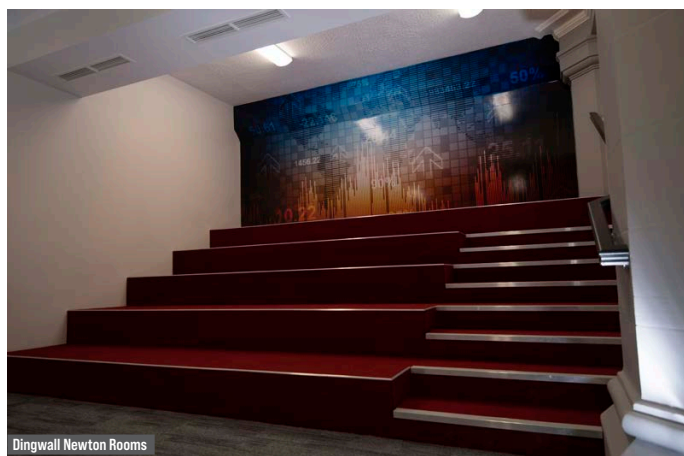
The SSA is still pursuing options for the Inverness Newton Room, with the preference being for the facility to be hosted at Inverness Campus. In the interim the SSA will be delivering Newton activity from the An Lòchran building, also located on Inverness Campus.

The SSA is ready to launch the Pop-Up Newton Room: term 1 of the next academic year will bring Newton activity to schools from Skye and Lochalsh,

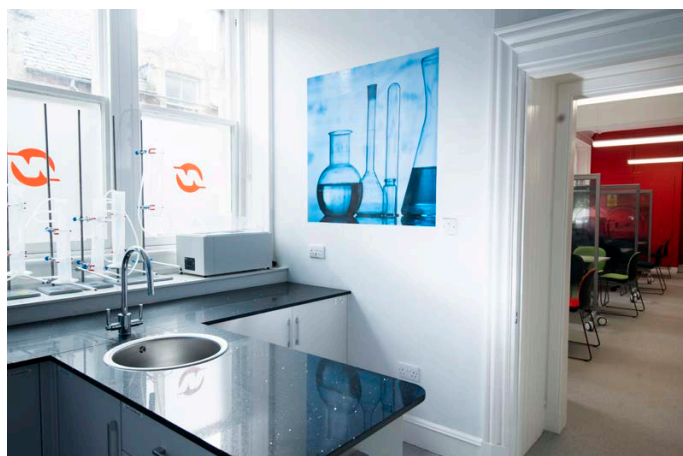
SCIENCE SKILLS ACADEMY

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with subsequent Pop-Up locations in Badenoch and Strathspey and also Inverness. This approach will replicate the experience of visiting a Newton Room, with portable furniture and equipment and a dedicated member of staff to deliver Newton Modules. This is a very exciting opportunity to give more remote and rural areas an opportunity to be involved with school, family and public events, and allows Newton to become embedded into communities.



Dingwall Newton Rooms



Newton Module Delivery

As previously reported, the Newton Rooms in Thurso and Fort William were opened in March and April 2019 respectively, and the STEM Engagement Officers (SEOs) for these rooms started in August and September 2019. SEOs initially ran Taster Sessions on Robotics and Mathematics (P6/P7) and Renewable Energy (S1/S2), and when both Newton Rooms were fully operational between August 2019 and March 2020 full-day Newton Modules were offered. In October 2020, with temporary access to facilities at Inverness Campus being granted, the SSA began to offer full-day Newton Modules to Inverness schools too.

The final members of the SSA Delivery Team joined in January 2020 and by March the team were fully trained with school bookings across every area confirmed through to the summer holidays. The SSA began to run in-school Taster Sessions for schools within the Dingwall catchment area, ahead of the completion of the Dingwall Newton Room refurbishment works.

Table 1 summarises all delivery until 16th March 2020, when the coronavirus pandemic caused schools to close.

Activity Type	Number of Participants	Number of Events
SSA Newton Module	1,679	94
SSA Extracurricular Event	805	55
SSA Taster Session	1,226	44
SSA Public Event	11	1
SSA Meeting	326	15
SSA CLPL	19	2
External Deliverer	414	36
Business Event	29	6
Total	4,509	253

Table 1. Summary of SSA activity until March 2020

COVID-19-Response and STEM Delivery During Coronavirus Pandemic

All in-person delivery had to cease as the country went into lockdown, with pupils learning from home, which had a significant effect on the SSA's ability to deliver its in-house face to face programme of activity. Despite restrictions, which changed regularly and at times with short notice, the SSA constantly reviewed options to ensure that the project could continue to deliver a high-quality intervention to young people in Highland.

Digital Teaching Resources: In April 2020, teachers suddenly found themselves working from home delivering home-learning via Google Classroom across Highland. The SSA responded to the needs expressed by primary schools by providing curriculum-linked STEM activities that could be carried out at home including:

- **STEM Grids** for first and second-level linked to topics on the Curriculum for Excellence. Each grid featured contained 8 activities that included topics such as Properties of Materials, Deserts, and Plant Biology, amongst others
- **STEM at Home Videos** that featured our SEOs leading hands-on activities, alongside resources including teacher support notes and curriculum-linked worksheets. Ten activities were recorded that included Make Your Own Microscope, Ocean Plastics, and Garden Bird Watch.

Newton Module Development: In January 2021 we returned to lockdown, and the SSA Delivery Team used this time to develop three new Newton Modules that complemented and highlighted key STEM growth sectors in Highland:

- Health Science (P6/7)
- Aquaculture & Fisheries (P6/7)
- Life Science – Biofuels (S1/2)

The SSA Delivery team attended training with FIRST Scandinavia to understand the ethos and core principles behind the Newton Room educational approach, and these have been built into the new Newton Module design.

The SSA has worked tirelessly over the last 12 months, and has had to maintain creativity, flexibility, and resilience to adapt what is a face to face and hands-on project into a programme of activity that could still be delivered during the coronavirus pandemic. Despite the restrictions placed on schools and workplaces, the SSA has continued to develop and deliver new activities for Highland school pupils and teachers.

Table 1 summarises all delivery from the start of the SSA project.

Activity Type	2017/18		2018/19		2019/20		2020/21	
	Number Participants	Number Events	Number Participants	Number Events	Number Participants	Number Events	Number Participants	Number Events
SSA Newton Module	0	0	0	0	1,679	94	160	10
SSA Mini Newton Module	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SSA Taster Session	0	0	35	2	770	53	0	0
SSA Extracurricular Event	44	3	271	4	911	37	1,493	76
SSA Teacher CLPL	0	0	0	0	11	1	578	15
SSA Public Event	0	0	80	4	246	11	0	0
SSA Meeting	0	0	19	2			0	0
External Deliverer Event	169	8	18	3	227	25	0	0
Business Event	0	0	8	1	21	5	0	0
	213	11	431	16	3,865	226	2,231	101

Table 2 provides a breakdown of SSA delivery to school pupils and teachers in the 2020/21 academic year, from September 2020 when restrictions eased and delivery re-commenced.

Activity Name	Activity Type	Delivery Method	Interactions
Renewable Energy Newton Module	Newton Module	Newton Room	160
Peatlands and Climate Change	Mini Newton Module	In-school (outdoors)	1,472
Outdoor Maths Activities	Extracurricular	In-school (outdoors)	1,069
Destination Space (Inverness & Caithness Science Festivals)	Extracurricular	Digital	595
Total Pupil Interactions			3,296

Activity Name	Activity Type	Delivery Method	Interactions
Outdoor Maths	Teacher CLPL	Digital	481
Destination Space STEM Box	Teacher CLPL	Digital	31
Build Back Better	Teacher CLPL	Digital	88
Total Teacher Interactions			600

Highlights and Outcomes

Destination Space STEM Kits: Destination Space is a partnership between the UK Association for Science and Discovery Centres, the UK Space Agency, and the Government's Spaceflight Programme - LaunchUK. As a result of the coronavirus pandemic restrictions, the SSA was unable to deliver in-person sessions as originally planned and instead created a STEM Kit Box linked to Space Activities, and offered this to every Primary School in the Highland area – in total 171 kits were sent. Each box contained seven activities for second-level along with associated equipment, and included activities such as Thermochromic Calibration, Materials Testing, and Building a Satellite. The SSA also delivered digital CLPL session for teachers, to support the delivery of the activities.

Build Back Better:

The Highland Council is delivering a package of support for schools to help them 'Build Back Better'. This programme will support schools in assessing and putting in place a wholistic strategy for supporting health and wellbeing needs arising as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. To support the programme, the SSA developed seven activities that can be carried out by pupils in school to help understand and explain the hygiene measures used to reduce transmission of the Coronavirus. The education package focuses on the importance of social distancing, handwashing and wearing face coverings, and goes into detail about why these things are so important during the pandemic. All of the Build Back Better resources have been made available in both Gaelic and English.

**Inclusive Growth**

As well as complementing the Curriculum for Excellence, SSA activity reflects STEM sectors relevant to the Highlands and Islands and to do this the SSA engages directly with employers in a range of ways:

- Working with local STEM employers to shape Newton Module activities so as they incorporate skills or real-life applications from STEM sectors.
- In collaboration with Skills Development Scotland, a project partner, the SSA is developing marketing materials that go into detail on the wide variety of career options and pathways that are linked to our Newton Modules.
- To complement the Newton Modules, a series of films have been created that highlight STEM sectors that are key to the region.



The SSA wants to raise awareness of the wide variety of STEM careers, and the range of pathways into them, both in general and in particular those available in the Highlands and Islands. The films described above will be shown to school pupils when they visit a Newton Room, as well as to schoolteachers, careers advisors and parents. Footage is recorded on-site at local STEM employer locations and young, enthusiastic members of staff provide interview footage. To date six STEM sector films have been created (Robotics, Renewables, Fisheries and Aquaculture, Land Science, Life Science and Health Science), as well as an additional 18 films focusing on STEM career pathways, which can be viewed here:

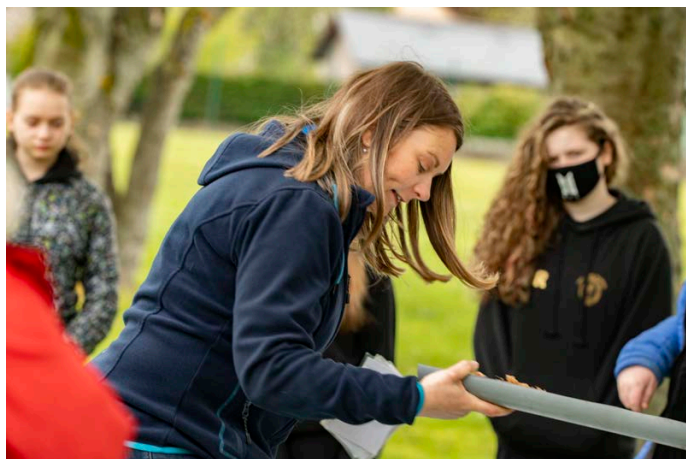
www.scienceskillsacademy.co.uk/stem-career-opportunities

The films feature a wide range of STEM employers local to the Highlands and Islands including BSW Timber (Fort William), the European Marine Energy Centre [EMEC] (Orkney), the Environmental Research Institute (Thurso), Christie Elite (Moray), Scottish Association for Marine Science (Oban), LifeScan (Inverness) MOWI and SSE (both pan-Highland).

The films have been designed to give just a few examples of the wide range of STEM careers that are available to young people and some of the pathways into these jobs including modern apprentices, further and higher education as well as voluntary work and placements. The intention is to help pupils, parents and teachers become aware that there are a wider range of career opportunities in STEM sectors than they may realise: the Health Science film, for example, does focus on medicine in the NHS but also features the importance of computer sciences and data engineers for analysing and interpreting test results. The Aquaculture films features both freshwater fisheries and the fish farming industry including animal husbandry, but also goes into detail on diagnostics and environmental monitoring laboratories that support the industry. There is a focus on gender balance, for example focusing on young female engineers at LifeScan, a female operations technician at EMEC, and a female PhD student working on 'swarm robotics'. In addition to video footage, some of the films contain animations to help describe scientific processes such as how tidal versus wave devices differ when harnessing energy, or how hydroelectric dams produce electricity.

**Additionality**

November 2021 sees the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) being hosted in Glasgow. In response to the Scottish Governments desire to make it an inclusive COP, that sees participation and engagement across Scotland, the SSA will be involved in delivering and facilitating a range of activities relating to COP26.



Photos by Gillian Frampton/HIE



S1 pupils from Tain Royal Academy take part in the Peatlands and Climate Change Mini Newton Model, being delivered by the SSA's Dingwall STEM Engagement Officer.

Peatlands and Climate Change Mini Newton Module:

The SSA worked with a Master's student from the Scottish Alliance for Geoscience, Environment and Society (SAGES) programme to develop a new Mini Newton Module focusing on land-based sciences, in particular peatland and linking it to the climate emergency and COP26. This 100-minute activity has been designed for S1/2 pupils and can be delivered in an outdoor

environment at school. The Mini Newton Module aims to highlight the global significance of peatlands as a carbon store and raise awareness of COP26.

Working in small groups, pupils carry out a variety of practical activities such as identifying and classifying plants, including mosses and lichen, that thrive in local Highland peatlands therefore learning about how special the local environment is. The Mini Newton Module is designed to help secondary school pupils learn about the significance of peatlands, both locally and globally, and will find out about the important role peatlands play in tackling the climate crisis – peatland restoration is a key part of the Scottish Government's goal of achieving a net-zero Scotland by 2045.

In the spring-summer term of 2021, the SSA delivery team ran 92 Peatlands and Climate Change sessions at 20 different secondary schools across The Highland Council region. The activity was delivered to 1472 pupils – the majority of these were S1 pupils.

Climate Change and the Climate Emergency

Animation: The SSA have produced an animated film that focuses on climate change and the climate emergency; provides an explanation of what COP26 is and what will happen at it; and describes how Scotland, and in particular the Highlands and Islands, is helping to tackle climate change. This video is being promoted through the Peatlands and Climate Change Mini Newton Module, and more widely to pupils in Highland schools as well as the general public. The animation about climate change and COP26 can be viewed by clicking here:

www.vimeo.com/showcase/8209886/video/493847050

Case Studies

Children in Scotland returned to school full-time in August 2020 after a prolonged period of disruption from the school closures. Guidance to teachers during the Recovery Phase was to focus on learning across literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing solely. Scottish Government guidance for schools had encouraged the increased use of outdoor spaces at school as outdoors can provide extra space for distancing between consistent groups of learners, help to decrease the risk of transmission and improve the physical and mental health and wellbeing of young people. In response to this guidance, the SSA developed two sets of activities that could be delivered in an outdoor setting: Peatlands and Climate Change Mini Newton Module (described earlier in report) and Outdoor Maths.

Outdoor Maths Kits: The SSA identified that there were few resources for outdoor numeracy at second-level (aged 9-12) and embarked on a project in partnership with Maths Week Scotland to support schools. The SSA developed an Outdoor Maths Kit that included 17 activity cards, along with associated maths equipment, which was delivered to every primary school in Highland (172 kit boxes in total), and also ran a series of digital teacher CLPL sessions that had 416 teacher

interactions. Respondents to a teacher survey gave the total estimate of 4,125 young people that would use the Outdoor Maths Kit activities in the 2020/21 academic year. In-person Outdoor Maths sessions were also delivered by the SSA to selected school that were identified based on Scottish Attainment Challenge and SIMD. A total of 1069 pupils, from 27 Highland primary schools, took part in these face to face sessions.

The SSA provided Outdoor Maths kits, containing activity cards and maths equipment, to every primary school in Highland, many of which were hand-delivered by the SSA's STEM Engagement Officers.



Photos by Gillian Frampton/HIE



12 Innovative Assisted Living (Fit Home) Bith-beò le Taic Innleachdach (Taigh Fiot)

Lead Organisation
Albyn Housing Society Ltd

Funding
Scot Gov
£5,000,000

Progress

The Fit Homes digital solution is continuing to be developed. COVID-19 has interrupted the development to the extent that we were unable to enter properties purely for research purposes for much of the year, however we did manage to develop some of the research further. We have been working with Glasgow University on the sensing package and RGU have been developing further work on data capture and prediction. The build side of the project has been affected exponentially due to lack of materials and workforce which has resulted in us developing a new plan to retrofit buildings with technology to enable further development to take place, despite the lack of new build. We are also continuing developing relationships with NHS outside Highland and with Edinburgh University. The construction side is progressing. Two sites are actively underway and a third is preparing to go to tender.

The resulting lockdown periods from the COVID-19 pandemic introduced site delays on the start of our Dingwall Castlepark development and as we emerge from the pandemic, delays resulting from changes to safe working practices in response to the pandemic and scarcity of material availability are pushing completion dates further into the future.

At this stage, we do not have evidence of tender price impact of the post pandemic period but we expect to understand this better when the tender outcome for the Nairn scheme is known later this year.

Technology Data Capture

Discussions with the University of Edinburgh continue specifically with their Artificial Intelligence Department. The data capture we have developed is aligned to their vision of the future and collaborations are being explored. We are also working with Digital Health and Care Innovation Centre on a pilot to enable our data to be part of the NHS data exchange platform being taken forward by the Scottish Government. This will be the first housing data within that exchange framework. Glasgow University have been working with us to strengthen our data capture technology. We are in the pre trial stage at the moment. The algorithm we have developed continues to be strengthened within Robert Gordon University and new data gathering techniques are being explored within that framework.

Retrofit Plan

A retrofit plan has been developed to enable us to move on with the technology development without the need for new homes to test it in. We are currently working with a GP surgery in Thurso and the Integrated Care Team in NHS Highland to develop a test bed around supporting people both prior to and on leaving hospital. This more detailed work with NHS Highland necessitates a new data agreement between NHS Highland and Albyn Housing which will be one of the first such data sharing agreements of its kind. We also have a smaller test bed being developed to establish the usefulness of the technology for supporting people coming out of institutional care. Part of the plan will include the development of a new interface for the data to make it more intuitive for the end user.

Highlights and Outcomes

Build Programme

The build programme is now underway and consist of the following:

Scheme	Units	Status	Completion
Dingwall, Castlepark	11	On-site	Feb 2022
Nairn, Cawdor Road	10	Tender Preparation (Planning appeal successful)	Mid 2022
Inverness, Stratton Farm	8	On-site – Highland Council (Purchase on Completion)	Jan 2022
Lairg	4	Feasibility (Costs in excess of benchmark)	End 2022 (tbc)
Tongue	4	Feasibility stage	End 2022 (tbc)

Social Enterprise

The development of a structure to put the new technology onto a long-term footing to derive benefits after the IHCRD programme had ended is on-going. We are in discussion with other NHS areas and a number of research and government bodies looking at what this could look like and how it could be funded. Interested from other social landlords remains strong.

Inclusive Growth

The goal of enabling people to remain in their own homes as long as possible is still our primary driver for this project. Engaging with support services to enable this to happen will result in new services being established to meet the needs of the residents. The potential for this to grow into a new social business, particularly around the data management and storage, is currently being explored.

Additionality

The development of the technology and the associated data capture has enabled us to go on and develop the retrofit programme which will be working directly with GP's and NHS clinicians. It has also enabled the development of relationships with a number of universities resulting in the project being used for trials in data management at a national scale. The work currently being developed to enable the sharing of data with NHS is an example of this. The IHCRD support for this project at such an early stage in data capture, has resulted in us being seen as a leader in this area which has enabled discussions with research and public sector to happen which would otherwise not be possible.

Case Study

Remote Health Monitoring Under 5G New Thinking Project Funded by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS)

One of the first repairs we had to undertake when the coronavirus restrictions allowed us, was to re-set the sensor systems within the FitHomes at Dalmore. One of the on-going maintenance issues we have with the sensors, is that they are battery operated and therefore need to be monitored and changed periodically. The City-Region Deal Board have set as a priority, establishing an alternative to the battery operated system and on the back of that request, we are now working with the James Watt School of Engineering of the University of Glasgow. The Communication Sensing and Imaging research group Team (Ahmad Taha, William Taylor, Ahmed Zoha, Qammer H. Abbasi and Prof Muhammad Ali Imran) have installed a wireless and non-invasive activity monitoring system at the same time we were replacing the battery's with the full agreement of one of our Dalmore residents. That system will be gathering data at the same time as our current system, enabling a direct comparison to be made and the efficacy of the tested. This is very much a first stage in a longer trial that will look into the utilisation of 5G technology to develop in-home activity monitoring systems. Glasgow University have been great to work with and we hope we can do more with them in the future.



Photo: FIT Homes - Glasgow University at Dalmore

13 Affordable Housing Taigheadas Neo-chosgail

Lead Organisation
The Highland Council

Funding
Scot Gov £5,000,000

The project purpose is to offer young people attractive, affordable housing in the Highlands to enable them to stay in the region, retaining a young, vibrant workforce for the Highlands. The vision for the project is to deliver high quality housing for young people in the Highlands.

Progress

A total of 282 units have been approved to date in locations across the Highlands which have been identified as having a housing need which can be met through the initiative.

The first projects have been completed, delivering a total of 91 new Mid-Market Rent (MMR) opportunities within Alness, Ardgay, Dornoch, Drumnadrochit, Fort William, Inverness, Carrbridge, Munloch and Ullapool.

The project in **Avoch** is delivering 34 homes for social rent by Cairn Housing Association and 12 mid-market rent homes for Highland Housing Alliance. It neighbors the local primary school and will provide a new pedestrian crossing creating a safe route to the village amenities. The mix includes bungalows and housing with a ground floor bedroom/bathroom arrangement to meet varying needs within the community. The homes are scheduled to complete with occupation due in early 2021/22.

Fort William, former Achintore Primary School, is currently on-site where 27 homes are being developed by The Highland Council for social rent and 10 by Highland Housing Alliance for mid-market rent. Rejuvenating this vacant site will provide differing housing types, from family homes to 2 bed cottage flats popular with younger tenants as well as homes for the elderly who are more likely to require level access ground floor properties. The homes are due to complete in August 2021.

Strathpeffer, Kinellan Drive, is an example of collaborative and partnership working to deliver mixed tenures. The development is a partnership between The Highland Council, Highland Housing Alliance and a private developer. The Highland Council are developing 21 homes for social rent and 6 for low-cost home ownership; Highland Housing Alliance with 10 homes for mid-market rent; and Compass Building & Construction Services Ltd with 4 homes for open market sale. The development is due to complete in September 2021.

Inverness, Culloden West, is a large development by a national housebuilder which include a range of affordable opportunities including social rent, low-cost home ownership and mid-market rent. A phase of 15 MMR units, which are being delivered by Highland Housing Alliance, are due to complete in September 2021.

The tables below show the sites developed and to be developed since 17/18:

2017/18

Project	Units
Inverness, Glendoe Terrace	10*
Inverness, Raining's Stairs	10*
Drumnadrochit	5*
Inverness, Balvonie	9*
Ullapool	6*
Lochyside	6*
Inverness, Balloan Road	6*
Munloch, Cameron Crescent	6*
Total	58

2018/19

Project	Units
Alness, Dalmore (Ph4)	8
Alness, Dalmore (Ph5)	4
Alness, Newfields	2*
Ardersier	4
Ardgay	2
Dornoch, Deans Park	2
Dornoch, Kennedy Road	2
Inverness, Academy Street (WH)	14*
Inverness, Stratton	2
Inverness, Viewhill	4
Strathpeffer, Kinellen	10
Total	54

2019/20

Project	Units
Avoch, Memorial Field	12
Carrbridge	5*
Fort William, Achintore School	10
Grantown on Spey	8
Inverness, Slackbuie	15
Aviemore, Burnside	4*
Inverness, Ness-side	12
Fort William, Blar Mhor	10
Inverness, Ness Castle	4
Inverness, Lomand Gardens	8
Kingussie	5
Total	93

2020/21

Project	Units
Drumnadrochit	8*
Dornoch, Elizabeth Crescent	8
Inverness Stratton	10
Inverness Academy Street	14
Inverness, Castle Street	8
Fort William, Lochaber House	6
Inverness, Culloden West	15
Aviemore, Spey House	4
Kincraig	4
Total	77

*Highlighted sites are completed

Inclusive Growth

This project is, by definition, an inclusive growth project. It aims to bridge the gap in affordability of good quality housing for those people, many of them young, who are needed to develop the earning potential and careers so that they can further contribute to the Highland Economy.

Highlights

Information about the developments below demonstrate the many facets of these developments. The restrictions arising from the COVID-19 outbreak have limited progress on a number of projects. However, it is anticipated that a further 57 units will be completed by 31st March 2022, with additional projects either on-site or currently being worked up as identified within the adopted Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP).

Inverness, Academy Street is a development of 14 MMR flats at Wyvern House was completed and occupied in February 2021, forming part of a wider development which included 23 homes for affordable rent by The Highland Council. The project contributes to the redevelopment of the City Centre.

Photo: Wyvern House by Ewen Weatherspoon



Carrbridge, Main Road, is a mixed tenure development within the Cairngorm National Park which includes homes for social rent, mid-market rent and private sale. The 5 MMR homes were completed and occupied in October 2020.

Drumnadrochit, Highland Housing Alliance purchased 8 homes from a private developer which have been let as mid-market homes as a phase 2 of their former development.



Photo: Carrbridge by Ewen Weatherspoon

Additionality

Projects like those highlighted above have been successfully achieved with funding from the City-Region Deal which has fully supported difficult projects, overcoming physical challenges to ensure we are always provide high quality homes and meet demand clearly identified in rural and urban areas.

14 Longman Land Remediation

Ath-leasachadh Talmhainn an Longman

Lead Organisation
The Highland Council

Funding
UK Gov

£10,000,000

Progress

The project objective is to carry out remediation and site servicing works to release a strategic site to the market to create up to 18 hectares of development-ready land for light industry / commercial use.

This will address lack of availability of appropriate land to meet the needs of both small and medium size businesses and the needs of larger inward investment companies. Encouraging employment uses to ensure the continued economic growth and success of Inverness.

In order to achieve the above we need to provide SEPA with a detailed remediation plan which will enable them to consider a partial release of the landfill licence categorisation. A business case for site investigation work was approved and The Highland Council carried out site investigation works to consider and report on landfill stability / settlement, landfill leachate and landfill gas; this required one year of gas monitoring, the monitoring of ground water tidal effect, an ecology study and standard penetration tests.

These studies have enabled the Council to prepare a strategy document for a landfill surrender application and provide detailed estimated of the remediation work

required to deliver significant business and industrial land supply for the next 10 years in Inverness.

The intrusive site investigation works to fully assess the levels of contamination and remediation works required, have been carried out. These have been shared and discussed with SEPA. Further site investigation works have been completed and are being submitted to SEPA. Detailed discussions are ongoing with SEPA and the formal application for the partial surrender of the licence has been submitted and it is anticipated that agreement will be reached later in 2021.

The timescales for the project are intrinsically tied into the proposed new junction at the Longman roundabout as the site cannot be developed and let until the new junction is built. The amount of development land which be delivered through this project is dependent upon the land take for the new junction including associated services. The Highland Council is working closely with Transport Scotland to co-ordinate activities and share information in relation to the Longman junction proposals and ensure both projects can be delivered to the maximum benefit to the Highlands.



Site at the Longman, Inverness by The Highland Council

15 Transport Infrastructure (Transport Scotland) Bun-structair Còmhdhalach (Còmhdhail Alba)

A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton

As part of the Scottish Government's commitment within the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal, Transport Scotland is taking forward plans for a single carriageway road connecting Inshes and Smithton.

The project is being delivered by Transport Scotland and is subject to Transport Scotland's governance requirements. Funding of the project is a matter for Scottish Ministers directly.

Progress to Date

Transport Scotland carries out a rigorous assessment process for all trunk road projects. The assessment process, based on standards and best practice set by the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB), covers environment, engineering, traffic and economics. Throughout this process Transport Scotland consults with a large number of people.

- The DMRB Stage 2 route options assessment work was completed in October 2017;
- The Preferred Option (Option 3, with two variants) was presented at Public Exhibitions held between 31st October and 1st November 2017;
- Further public events were held on 16th and 17th May 2018 to present updated proposals for comment, including provision for cyclists and pedestrians and the preferred route option (Variant B);
- Preliminary Ground Investigation work, completed in May 2018, has helped to inform the on-going design and assessment work for the new link road; and
- The DMRB Stage 3 assessment is now complete. Draft Orders and an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) were published in September 2019.

Public events were held on 25th and 26th September 2019 to inform members of the public of the current status of the scheme and to enable them to ask any questions they had regarding the published draft Orders and EIAR. Transport Scotland also presented a virtual reality model showing an artist's impression of how the scheme may look 15 years after opening.

The proposed scheme includes new junctions at Eastfield Way and Cradlehall, a new link to the Inverness Retail and Business Park and a bridge over the Highland Main Line railway. Additional capacity will also be added across the A9 at Culloden Road through the addition of a parallel structure, providing two lanes of traffic in either direction. An additional lane (auxiliary lane) will also be provided on the A9 southbound between Raigmore Interchange and Inshes Junction to assist merging and diverging traffic. The proposed scheme will also provide enhanced facilities for cyclists and pedestrians through the provision of a 3 metre shared surface on both sides of the carriageway between Inshes and Smithton, and a dedicated cycleway and separate footway linking to Inverness Retail and Business Park. The cycling and pedestrian facilities will also connect into the existing core path, local path and national cycle networks.

Further information is available on the Transport Scotland website: www.transport.gov.scot/projects/a9a96-inshes-to-smithton/project-details

Next Steps

Progress on the delivery of the scheme will depend on whether a Public Local Inquiry will be required to consider objections made and not withdrawn. Transport Scotland is currently considering all objections received and is working to resolve these where possible. Construction of the scheme itself can only commence if the scheme is approved under the relevant statutory procedures and thereafter a timetable for its progress can be set.

The A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton scheme is located to the East of Inverness and will support The Highland Council's Inverness East Development Brief. The proposed scheme is interdependent with both the A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) and the Inshes Junction Improvements – Phase 2 road schemes which are being progressed by Transport Scotland and The Highland Council respectively. Transport Scotland has been working closely and collaboratively with The Highland Council throughout the development of the scheme and will continue to do so.



Inshes, Smithton by Transport Scotland

A9/A82 Longman Junction Improvement

As part of the Scottish Government's commitment within the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal, Transport Scotland is taking forward plans for the grade separation of the A9/A82 Longman Roundabout.

Progress to Date

Transport Scotland carries out a rigorous assessment process to establish the preferred option for a trunk road project, like the improvements to Longman. The assessment process, based on standards and best practice set by the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB), covers environment, engineering, traffic and economics. Throughout this process Transport Scotland consults with a large number of people which has included close working with The Highland Council with regards to the proposals for the Longman land remediation project.

Building on the work being progressed on the A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton Link Road, design development work on the grade separation of the A9/A82 Longman Roundabout is progressing well.

Progress to date includes:

Transport Scotland appointed a consultant in August 2017 to take forward the design and assessment of the scheme;

- Public exhibitions held in May 2018 to let the local community and road users view and comment on the junction options under consideration;
- Preliminary Ground Investigation works completed in October 2018;
- Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) Stage 2 route options assessment completed in June 2019;
- Preferred Option (Option 1 – comprising of a grade separated junction with the A9 passing over the A82) presented at Public Exhibitions on 25th and 26th June 2019;
- Detailed Ground Investigation works undertaken in 2019; and
- Development of DMRB Stage 3 design and Environmental Impact Assessment.

For the preferred option, the junction slip roads will form a diamond layout ending at an enlarged roundabout with connections to the A82 and Stadium Road. Non-Motorised User (NMU) route improvements are also incorporated into the design and will be subject to further refinement throughout the detailed development and assessment of the preferred option (DMRB Stage 3 assessment).

Further information and material presented at the exhibitions can be found at the following link:

www.transport.gov.scot/publication/exhibition-materials-june-2019-a9a82-longman-junction-improvement-scheme

Next Steps

Building on the engagement undertaken at the Public Exhibitions in June 2019 and throughout the scheme development so far, Transport Scotland and their design consultants will continue to engage with key stakeholders, including The Highland Council, throughout this process. The preferred option is now being developed and assessed in detail, leading to publication of draft Orders for formal comment.



Progress thereafter on the delivery of the scheme will depend on the level and nature of formal representation received in response to the published draft Orders and whether a Public Local Inquiry will be required to consider objections made and not withdrawn. Construction of the scheme itself can only commence if the scheme is approved under the relevant statutory procedures and thereafter a programme for its delivery can be set.



As we have been doing on the A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton Link Road, Transport Scotland will continue to work in collaboration with The Highland Council during the development and assessment of the scheme. Transport Scotland will also continue discussions and maintain regular engagement with The Highland Council regarding potential development around the Longman area which may come forward in advance of major junction improvements.

16 Transport Infrastructure (The Highland Council)

Bun-structair Còmhhdhalach (Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd)

Lead Organisation
The Highland Council

Funding
THC £64,300,000

West Link

The last 12 months has seen a major milestone for the West Link. Major road construction and housing access roads were completed with the second bridge brought to site for installation. COVID-19 had a significant impact on the construction phase with a full 3 month cessation of construction activity and continued to be an issue as when construction works recommenced, many controls and measures had to be put into place which affected productivity and the programme.

The structural elements of the new bridge were delivered to and fabrication was completed on-site. Commissioning is now schedule to start in May 2021. This will be followed by the opening and closing bridge trials.

Landscaping works commenced in December 2020 and the streetlighting completed on A82. Three Toucan pedestrian crossings were fully installed and operational around the bridges allowing greater and safer non vehicular access to the area.

The amenity areas Works in Torvean Park are also nearing completion with the artwork installation due in April 2021.

The Highland Council will continue to maintain the road and bridge for the next two years and the maintenance of the landscaping for the next 5 years.



Inclusive Growth

The road infrastructure itself has enabled the realisation of the Council's long-held vision for major city expansion to the south east, helping to deliver much-needed affordable and open-market homes. For example, the development of 767 homes and greenspace has commenced at Ness-side with the first phase of homes currently under construction.

Additionality

The West Link project will deliver major transformation for the city and region. The route has provided a new, more direct crossing of the River Ness for existing city neighbourhoods, as well as supporting the transport needs of Ness Castle, a major expansion area. Across the project area active travel connectivity has been expanded and enhanced, with a network of shared paths, road crossings and new destination routes all contributing to support people to choose walking, wheeling or cycling to get around. Stage 2 of the project has also served as a catalyst for a broad range of community and commercial opportunity

Land immediately adjacent to the canal is recognised as a key destination and asset for the city and, as such, an updated development brief has identified this land for commercial development to establish a new, attractive destination in the city. This will add to the range of destination offers in the city and will provide capital receipts from land transactions. To the north, the former golf course land has also been unlocked for redevelopment potential as additional greenspace, with scope to deliver residential development and a school, should the school estate strategy identify the need.



Photos: Construction of new Swing Bridge by The Highland Council

Inshes Junction Improvements – Phase 2

Progress

This scheme will address existing and future traffic congestion issues and is being designed in close consultation with Transport Scotland's work as it is linked on the A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton scheme as part of The City-Region Deal. The A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton scheme is dependent on the delivery of Inshes Junction Improvements – Phase 2, and it is important that these works are complete in advance of the Transport Scotland Scheme.

Following the publication of the National Transport Strategy in February 2020, this document clearly advocates a new hierarchy of travel – with the aspiration of more sustainable travel modes such as walking, wheeling and cycling, with cars being the least favoured transport mode, layouts have been developed during the year. A range of solutions have been developed for Inshes Junction that have been considered at committee and also allowed the consultation exercise to commence – to determine public views on the proposals. Despite the need for the consultation to be virtual and via a Highland Council consultation portal, over 1000 representations have been made to date. There is a strong desire for face to face consultation – and the project is committed to do this at Committee if restrictions were relaxed. Consideration is being given to extend the consultation period beyond the end of July to facilitate face to face consultations.

The new Beechwood access forms part of the overall vision for the Improvements planned on the Inshes Corridor. The access allows the stopping up of an existing junction which used to exit onto Old Perth Road. Removing a direct access onto Old Perth Road and the associated traffic conflicts is seen as a vital part of the overall solution to help simplify the east / west traffic movements through the corridor.

Highlights & Outcomes

Commencing the consultation to influence the decision on the preferred option is a milestone – this should, if not delayed, allow selection of the preferred option in 2021 – which will allow the promotion of the necessary consents required to facilitate construction.

Inclusive Growth

Inshes Junction forms a key infrastructure element of the Local development Plan. It is recognised that to realise additional development—both residential and commercial, will require this necessary infrastructure investment and the works will act as a catalyst for development and growth in the area.

The investment will allow opportunities for additional much needed affordable homes and mix of family homes. Commercial opportunities and jobs will be created as the development allows greater access and ease of movement in the area.



Photos: Beechwood, Inshes by The Highland Council

17 Employment and Skills

Cosnadh agus Sgilean

Lead Organisation
The Highland Council

Funding
N/A

The Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal, when prepared and entered into, recognised the challenges in delivering skills and training across the region and acknowledged that the current approach adopted did not always serve businesses and individuals to best effect. To this end, the Deal committed the Council, together with the UK and Scottish Governments, to bring forward pilot innovative and new approaches to the delivery of skills and training.

On 5th December 2018 the Scottish Government and Scottish Local Government agreed a Partnership Working Framework and Framework and Phase 1 of the 'No One Left Behind' programme commenced in April 2019.

This review identified 6 actions:

- A new local employability delivery model will be managed collaboratively between Scottish Government and local government from April 2019.
- One Funding Stream: Following the development of comprehensive delivery/funding arrangements and governance/accountability structures, other programmes will be integrated into this model such as the Employability Fund; Community Jobs Scotland; 14-19 Fund and Discovering Your Potential.
- A national outcomes and measurement framework will be put in place, which will allow local front-line services providers to align activity and deliver more flexible services.
- A national all-age employment support offer will be explored to incorporate improved alignment with health and other services.
- A programme of innovation and integration will be progressed to continue to join up between employment services and other services, including criminal justice, housing and mental health.
- Invest in improvement, innovation and user led employability sector collaborations.

While there is no defined approach set out by the Scottish Government on how they wish this model to be developed, it can be anticipated that the development of a new local Highland employability delivery model will require an inter-agency Project to be initiated, designed and resourced. It is envisaged that a local employability delivery model in Highland will require both a strategic and local response(s).

It is also recognised that in designing and delivering a new approach to employability services, this also crosses over to skills provision and thus links also with the new approach to skills provision as per the work of the Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board.

Progress

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted this projects progress. Council resources for this project were re-targeted to support business's and individuals, through the management of COVID-19 grants and support. The team rapidly designed and delivered a grant application approval and award process to help business's in the region survive the economic impact of COVID-19.

Work will resume at national and local levels, with Council working with the Scottish Government and meeting regularly with local Job Centre Plus and Skills Development Scotland colleagues to undertake complementary local actions.

It is envisaged that the local Highland employability delivery model offers the means by which services can be aligned, co-ordinated and delivered to maximise the national investment available and help those Highland citizens overcome the multiple barriers that stop them from securing work. If this opportunity is realised it effectively will deliver on an Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal commitment to align and co-ordinate employability services.

It is recognised that delivering on employability services and the development of an all age service, also will deliver elements of skills alignment and co-ordination of activity. Both aspects are currently being incorporated into the Highland Economic Recovery Partnership efforts going forward.

18 Air Access

Inntrigeadh Adhair

Lead Organisation
HITRANS

Funding
N/A

The Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal has established the Highland Air Access Group to work on and promote:

- Connectivity of the region should recognise not just direct destination links with the region but is also a capacity, frequency and onward connections at destination airports;
- Reduction of entry barriers for new routes;
- Partnerships with airlines and airports on route development;
- Stimulation of demand through effective brand development;
- Understanding of State Aid rules are fully understood;
- Fitness for purpose of aviation facilities;
- Conscious partnering with air linked economies;
- Work to ensure that any connectivity benefit is spread more widely across the region; and
- Work to ensure that the direct, indirect, induced and catalytic benefits of aviation are optimised.

As is well documented the COVID-19 pandemic has had a severe impact on the airline industry and has halted development in this sector. As the industry recovers this project will refocus efforts on the objectives stated and include:

- Making the case for continuing to have appropriate arrangements in place for all airports within the Highlands and Islands in respect to Air Passenger Duty and any potential successor arrangements;
- The development of best value options for the re-introduction of air services to Ashaig Aerodrome on the Isle of Skye; and
- Developing opportunities for the development of the Highlands and Islands towards the ambition of becoming Europe's first zero carbon aviation region.

19 Contacts

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Kirtomy, Sutherland by Emma Gunn



City-Region Deal
Cùmhnant Baile-Roinne



HM Government



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
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