

# Development Plans Newsletter

## Cuairt-litir Phlanaichean Leasachaidh

January 2026



## Quick Read

This is the Highland Council's annual Development Plans Newsletter which gives an overview and update of the timetable for preparing land use planning documents for the Highland Council area. The newsletter lets you know how and when you can get involved in preparing these plans and is our Development Plan Scheme that we submit to Scottish Government.

The Highland Council is working towards a Highland Local Development Plan (HLDP) that will replace its current Local Development Plans. It will be used with National Planning Framework 4 to guide the use and development of land within the area. Together, these documents will help guide project and investment decisions and have an important role when considering whether planning applications can be supported or whether they should be refused. The plan process includes Evidence Gathering, then Plan Preparation, then Delivery (using the plan and making it happen). This Newsletter lets you know what stage we have reached, including what we have done so far and what related work we are doing. It also explains what comes next, particularly during 2026, including what opportunities there are to get involved. During 2025 we continued with Evidence Gathering, with associated public consultation and stakeholder engagement, and a call for suggestions of sites for development. This stage, including preparation of the Evidence Report, has taken longer than we envisaged in last year's Newsletter.

We have therefore revised our timeline for future stages, and now aim to:

- Publish the Evidence Report by the end of Q1 2026-27, for Gate Check
- Publish the Proposed Plan by the end of Q1 2027-28, for Public Consultation
- Submit the Proposed Plan by the end of Q4 2027-28, for Examination
- Adopt the Plan by the end of Q1 2029-30, for Delivery

During 2026 we expect to be:

- Completing the Evidence Report for approval by Council and then Gate Check
- Alongside Gate Check, holding a Call for Ideas for the HLDP (details to be announced)
- Beginning initial stages of plan preparation, and receiving the Gate Check outcome as to whether our evidence is sufficient to formally proceed to preparing the Proposed Plan

Also:

- Our draft Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA) is on consultation (deadline 27 February 2026), after which we will be finalising the PSA
- Further public events for the potential Masterplan Consent Areas will be held in February-March 2026
- Potential further Short Term Let Control Areas are being considered and, subject to Committee deciding so, public consultation will likely be held in February-March 2026
- We will be continuing to check Local Place Plans submitted by community bodies, providing feedback to them and registering those that are valid
- We will complete the HLDP Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Report, then formally consult the SEA Consultation Authorities on it alongside the Gate Check
- We will continue our programme of monitoring of development and land use change

In this rest of this Newsletter, you can read more detail about the HLDP process, the reasons for the revised timeline, component and related work, as well as our Participation Statement that sets out how we will keep people informed and how we will involve people.

# Contents

1	Introduction and Purpose .....	4
1.1	What is the Development Plan? .....	4
1.2	Revisions to the planning system .....	4
1.3	The Purpose of a Development Plan Scheme .....	6
2	The current status of the Development Plan in Highland .....	6
2.1	Our current and future local development plan.....	6
2.2	Delivery Programme and Monitoring.....	7
2.2.1	HLDP Evidence Consultation, Call for Sites and drafting Evidence Report .....	8
2.2.2	Short-Term Lets .....	8
2.2.3	Housing Challenge and Masterplan Consent Areas .....	9
2.2.4	Flow Country World Heritage Site (WHS) .....	10
2.2.5	Energy Projects Mapping .....	11
2.2.6	Play Sufficiency Assessment .....	11
3	Move to a single Highland Local Development Plan .....	11
3.1	Introduction .....	11
3.2	Progress Timescales .....	12
3.3	Overview of Chapters for the Evidence Report .....	14
3.4	Local Place Plans.....	15
3.5	Regional Spatial Strategy/ Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy.....	16
3.6	Supplementary Guidance.....	17
3.7	Strategic Environmental Assessment .....	18
4	Participation Statement.....	20
4.1	Introduction .....	20
4.2	Methods of engagement.....	21
4.3	How we will make people aware .....	22
4.4	Who will get involved?.....	23
5	National and Regional Marine Plan .....	24
5.1	National Marine Plan.....	24
5.2	Regional Marine Plan.....	24
6	Contacts .....	25
7	Appendix 1 – Additional work packages to support HLDP .....	26

# 1 Introduction and Purpose

## 1.1 What is the Development Plan?

Development Plans guide the use and development of land within the Highland Council area, via a set of policies, proposals and spatial strategies that cover many themes such as housing, town centres, transport and open spaces. Ultimately, development plans set out how places will change and adapt in the future, with a long-term vision of where developments should and shouldn't take place. Additionally, a development plan guides decisions on planning applications, whereby decisions must be made in accordance with the adopted [development plan](#) unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Planning legislation sets out how local authorities must prepare *local* development plans. The Highland Council is preparing a new local development plan (LDP), and we encourage early participation from the public and stakeholders (people, businesses and organisations with an interest or concern in the LDP) to make sure our plans gather and consider local opinion. This newsletter provides further information on the requirements for the new LDP's preparation and when people can get involved.

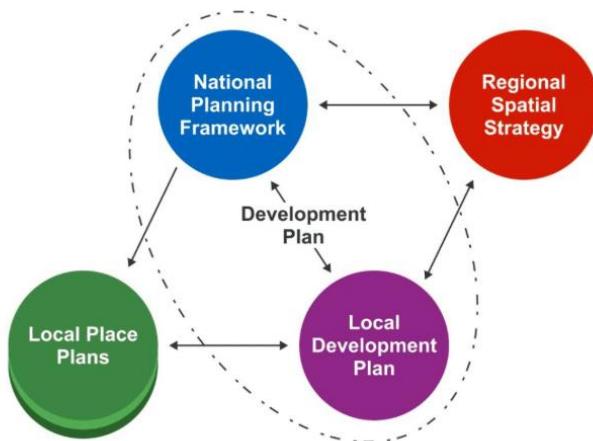
The best place to view and comment on Development Plans prepared by the Highland Council is the [Council's website](#) or the online Development Plans [Consultation Portal](#) – use the links provided to find out how you can contribute to the plan.

## 1.2 Revisions to the planning system

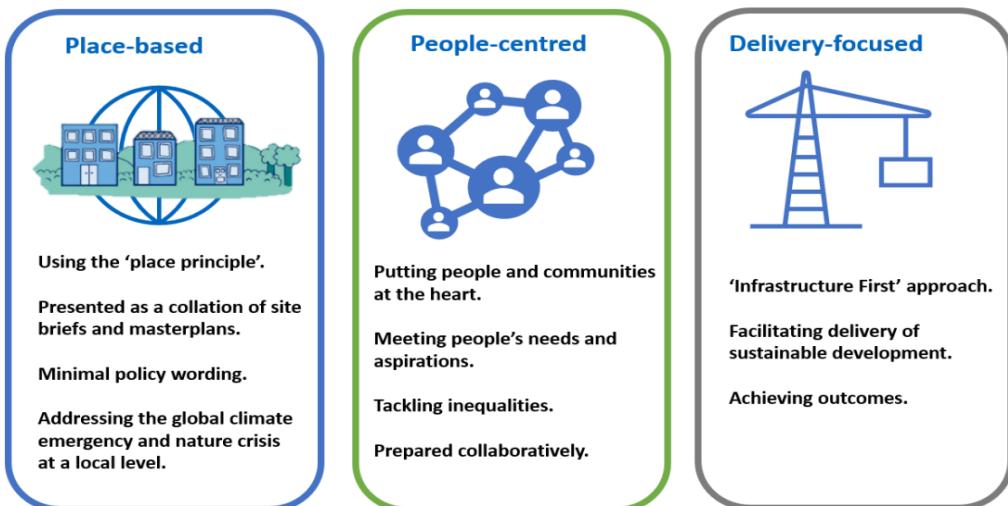
Scotland's [fourth National Planning Framework \(NPF4\)](#) was adopted and published by Scottish Ministers on the 13th of February 2023. It forms part of the “adopted development plan” for each council area in Scotland and is therefore a very important consideration in making most planning decisions. NPF4 also contains a national vision and spatial strategy which councils should not contradict in producing an LDP. For example, NPF4 lists national developments such as large-scale renewable energy developments, the principle of which cannot be disputed at the local level.

Planning legislation sets out that each planning authority, individually or in collaboration with one or more other planning authorities, will need to produce a Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) but this will not form part of the statutory “adopted development plan”. This legislative requirement to prepare an RSS has yet to come into effect (commence) and it is not yet known when it will do so. Until then, the Council cannot formally prepare an RSS.

Each planning authority must prepare one or more Local Development Plan(s) (LDP) for its area, that takes into account NPF4 as well as each registered Local Place Plan (LPP) for that area. Regard must also be had by the planning authority to any adopted RSS and



any local outcomes improvement plan (LOIP) relevant to the area. Scottish Government expects that “new style” local development plans will not duplicate the policies already set out within NPF4. Instead, they are expected only to contain policies and proposals specific to the circumstances of that local area. For example, they will fill in local detail not covered in NPF4 or add a local perspective on national issues if local evidence justifies a tailored approach. Local development plans are expected to be “place-based”, visual plans with a clear spatial strategy reflected primarily in a collection of maps, development briefs and masterplans. There are 3 overarching aims for an LDP, as instructed by the [Scottish Government](#) – for it to be: Place-based, People-centred, and Delivery focused.



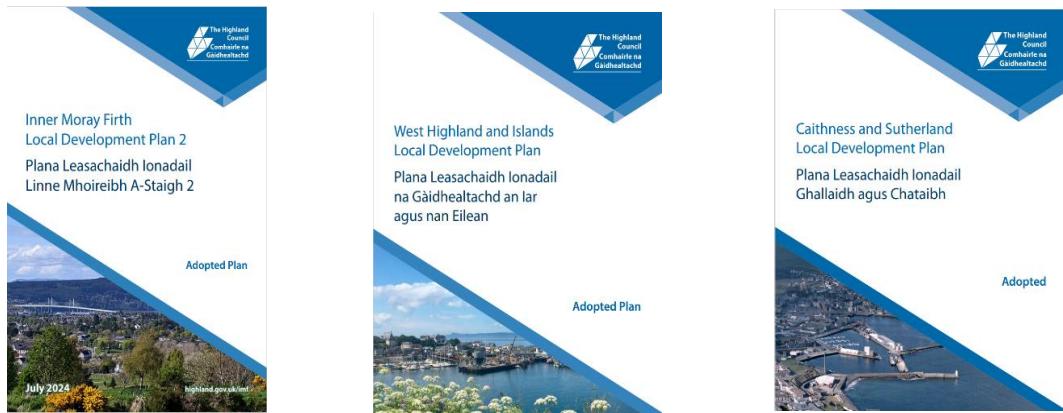
## 1.3 The Purpose of a Development Plan Scheme

Our annual newsletter serves as our Development Plan Scheme (DPS), which is a statutory document essential for communicating to key stakeholders, agencies and any other interested parties the progress with development plans in Highland. The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 as amended, and the Town and Country Planning (Development Planning) (Scotland) Regulations 2023, require a DPS to be prepared each year, as explained in Scottish Government's Local Development Planning Guidance (2023). The DPS includes intended timings for various stages of LDP preparation, updates on key projects and on-going engagement and consultation, as well as general background information that is regarded as significant and relevant. A "Participation Statement" must also be prepared as part of a DPS, that outlines when consultation is likely to take place, with whom and its likely form, including the steps that will be taken to involve the public and stakeholders.

## 2 The current status of the Development Plan in Highland

### 2.1 Our current and future local development plan

Four adopted local development plans prepared by the Highland Council cover the majority of its area, with the remainder of the Council's area being within the Cairngorms National Park and covered by a separate LDP prepared by the Cairngorms National Park Authority. The first of the four Highland Council LDPs provides a mixture of site-specific allocations and general policies that apply across all of Highland, hence this LDP is called the Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP). It dates back to April 2012 and much of its content has been overtaken (but not legally superseded or replaced) by more recent Highland area local development plans and by NPF4. There are three area local development plans which, along with the HwLDP, can be viewed at [www.highland.gov.uk/devplans](http://www.highland.gov.uk/devplans) : the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CasPlan) (August 2018); the West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan (WestPlan) (September 2019); the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 (IMFLDP2) (June 2024).



All of the four LDPs above will continue to form part of the “adopted development plan” for their respective parts of Highland until the new style LDP is adopted for Highland (scheduled for 2029). In addition, there are Supplementary Guidance documents connected to one or more of the existing Highland LDPs which provide more detailed policy and guidance on specific topics or geographic areas. These Supplementary Guidance documents are listed in section 3 and can be accessed at [www.highland.gov.uk/devplans](http://www.highland.gov.uk/devplans). They too continue to form part of the “adopted development plan” until the new style LDP is adopted.

In the last year, we have progressed our new style, single Highland Local Development Plan (HLDP) by gathering evidence from various data sources and stakeholders. Our November 2025 committee report [here](#) provides an overview of the work that has been undertaken within each chapter of our current suite of evidence. The information in that report on next steps and revised timeline for progression is reflected in this Newsletter. A further progress report will be taken to the February 2026 meeting of [committee](#).

## 2.2 Delivery Programme and Monitoring

Better evidence leads to better planning policies, better decisions and better outcomes. As well as the evidence gathering for the new Highland Local Development Plan described below, we continue to gather evidence relating to the delivery of current Highland LDPs.

Over the last year we have updated our [Delivery Programme](#) for the Development Plan, the latest version of which is available on our webpage. The Delivery Programme outlines the infrastructure and other investment that is required to support the implementation of the policies and proposals in the development plan. A delivery programme identifies, monitors and implements actions for delivering future growth in an area, whilst also identifying which infrastructure projects will be subject to developer contributions requirements. We analysed comments submitted on a consultation we held on the Delivery Programme and this shaped the latest version online. The Delivery

Programme informed the preparation of the Highland Deliverable Housing Land Pipeline published 31 March 2025. This provides a more detailed housing deliverability appraisal of the 2025 position in respect of sites with a capacity remaining of 25 or more housing units.

There has been a range of workstreams underway throughout 2025 that relate to the delivery of the current Development Plan and/or the preparation of the new HLDP, including the following:

### **2.2.1 HLDP Evidence Consultation, Call for Sites and drafting Evidence Report**

An online public consultation on our emerging evidence for the HLDP was held from 31 January to the extended deadline of 02 May 2025. There were over 230 written responses to this consultation, which we have summarised and responded to within the emerging Evidence Report. A Call for Sites exercise ran over the same period, 31 March to 02 May 2025. Suggested sites were subsequently mapped and can be observed [here](#). These provided useful evidence on land availability and development viability across Highland. As part of the promotion of these two consultations, we held an information webinar for community organisations on 13 March 2025 and another with the development industry on 20th March 2025.

We will consider all of the suggested sites for possible inclusion in the future plan, but the Council will not be deciding on which it proposes to include until early-mid 2027. Thereafter, those sites included by the Council in the Proposed Plan will be subject to a statutory public consultation and objection process.

After carrying out the emerging evidence consultation and the call for sites, the team have been progressing the preparation of individual chapters of the Evidence Report, liaising with several external and internal stakeholders and agencies to inform the content of the report, drawing off expertise and a plethora of online resources, published datasets and internally derived evidence.

See [www.highland.gov.uk/hldp](http://www.highland.gov.uk/hldp) for more information.

### **2.2.2 Short-Term Lets**

The Council established a Short-Term Lets Control Area for Ward 20 (Badenoch & Strathspey) on 04 March 2024, since which time any new Short-Term Lets within the Ward have required planning approval prior to being used as such. The regulatory process to designate a Short Term Let Control Area (STLCA) follows three steps: notification and consultation; submission to, and approval from, Scottish Ministers; followed by public notice of the designation. Reaching a decision on whether to progress with the implementation of a Short Term Let Control Area will require a number

of decision points to consider: the supporting evidence, the analysis of the outcome of consultation, and whether ultimately to designate an area. The Council agreed a new process for designating future Short Term Let Control Areas in September 2025, which sets out that Area Committees will first decide on whether to progress with the introduction of a Short Term Let Control Area covering all or part of their Area, before the formal statutory processes are agreed at Economy and Infrastructure Committee. Therefore, for the remainder of Highland (outwith Ward 20), each Area Committee considered a report on this matter within the period November 2025-January 2026, to identify those areas where this was sought and justified. Of those, the following Area Committees agreed to progress with the process of considering the introduction of Short Term Let Control Areas:

- [Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh](#)
- [Lochaber](#)
- [Sutherland](#)
- [Skye](#)
- [Inverness](#)

Officers will bring a report to [Economy and Infrastructure Committee](#) in February 2026 which will seek approval to formally commence the process with the evidence gathering and consultation. Should this be agreed, a formal public consultation would be undertaken most likely between February and March 2026.

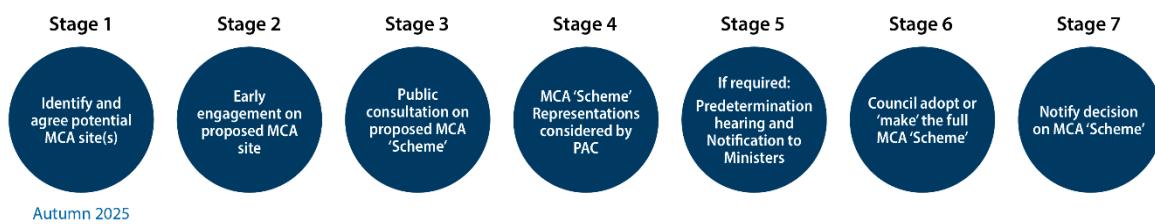
### **2.2.3 Housing Challenge and Masterplan Consent Areas**

In July 2024, The Highland Council declared a Housing Challenge that sought to address a range of issues to accelerate housing delivery in the area. This was partly a response to major economic development such as the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport project and the increase in workforce coming into the area to deliver improvements to the national electricity grid and other renewable energy projects across Highland. The Council has prepared an analysis of the potential housing need and demand arising from these developments. The study predicts 24,000 new homes will be required in the next 10 years.

The IMFLDP2 adopted in June 2024 earmarks sufficient housing and employment land to support the short-term housing requirements for the Green Freeport. However, the Highland Delivery Programme referenced above contains a more detailed assessment of effective housing land supply through a Deliverable Housing Land Pipeline document which sets out that there will be a medium/long-term deficiency in housing land supply terms relative to the 24,000 target.

The Council is looking at several mechanisms to address housing delivery and respond to housing needs. For example, the Highland Housing Challenge Partnership Action

Plan made a corporate commitment to establish three Masterplan Consent Areas (MCA) in Highland. An MCA is a legal, advanced consenting mechanism that can accelerate the delivery of development. The processes to prepare an MCA 'Scheme' has community input embedded at multiple stages and establishes both site allocation and planning permission for a development. The streamlined MCA process (see diagram) aims to enable housing delivery more quickly compared to conventional planning procedures for large development sites, which can typically take around 7 years. A report was taken to committee on 13 November 2025, which can be accessed [here](#), detailing the Council's progress on implementing this corporate commitment: namely, identifying a firm preference to progress three potential MCA sites.



For stage 2, the first set of public engagement events for each potential MCA site have been hosted in January 2026 and the second set of public engagement events is scheduled for February/March 2026.

## 2.2.4 Flow Country World Heritage Site (WHS)

In June 2025, an updated [Flow Country World Heritage Site Planning Position Statement and associated Heritage Impact Assessment Toolkit](#) was published, following the Flow Country's inscription as a World Heritage Site (WHS) on 26 July 2024. It sets out the Council's position on how World Heritage should be factored into the consideration of proposed developments for which effects on the inscribed site are likely to be a consideration. We may further update it from time to time. An Article 4 Direction is currently being prepared by the Council which, if brought into effect, will remove certain (not all) permitted development rights within the World Heritage Site, whereby a planning application would be required for such development proposals. The Council as part of the Flow Country Partnership is also inputting to the updating of the Management Plan for the WHS and to the preparation of guidance on the consideration of effects on the WHS's setting. The intention is that these will be used as material considerations in planning decisions. We intend to prepare and include planning policy and guidance for the WHS in the forthcoming Proposed HLDP, to be used alongside the policies of NPF4.

## 2.2.5 Energy Projects Mapping

In April 2025, the Council published a [Renewable Energy Mapping Tool](#), enabling those with an interest in understanding the location and type of renewable energy projects within Highland to discover not only what already exists on the ground but also the stage that any projects may be at within the planning process. A weekly extract is made to update this data.

## 2.2.6 Play Sufficiency Assessment

The Council have prepared a draft [Highland Play Sufficiency Assessment](#) report which is on public consultation from 16 January to 27 February, 2026. We identified and assessed formal and informal play spaces in Highland, within Settlement Development Areas, as defined in Local Development Plans, to understand what facilities and functions different play spaces offer and where they may have limitations. Additional evaluation of accessibility and inclusivity of play spaces has also been undertaken. An analysis of the quality, quantity, accessibility and inclusivity of play opportunities in Highland and in the settlements of Local Committee Areas is presented in the draft report and accompanying interactive map. The Play Sufficiency Assessment is part of the evidence base referred to in the emerging Evidence Report and will inform the preparation of the new Highland Local Development Plan.

# 3 Move to a single Highland Local Development Plan

## 3.1 Introduction

Since the previous Development Plans Newsletter was published in January 2025, significant work has been undertaken to collate evidence for the preparation of the upcoming Highland Local Development Plan (HLDP).

As already mentioned, a Call for Development Sites consultation took place alongside a public consultation on Evidence Papers (our emerging evidence), which helped to gauge a reaction to our evidence base at the time and its implications for the future HLDP.

The emerging Evidence Report, comprising 14 chapters, is now well advanced. 10 chapters were noted by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee at the meeting on 13 November 2025. The other topic chapters are well progressed and the Committee at its forthcoming meeting on 12 February 2026 will be asked to note them. Each relevant chapter has been, or otherwise is being, circulated to key agencies and other topic-specific internal and external stakeholders to confirm that the Council has adequately

incorporated their feedback. Section 3.3 of this Newsletter provides an overview of the general purpose and content of each of these evidence chapters.

Local Place Planning activity has continued, with many communities across Highland preparing Local Place Plans (LPPs) and some having reached the stage of submitting them to the Council for checking and for registration if valid. Registered LPPs are considered within the drafted Evidence Report chapters, summarising and providing an initial response to the issues raised by the local communities. We will continue to update each chapter with the content of any newly registered LPP to the point of approval for submission of the Evidence Report to Scottish Government.

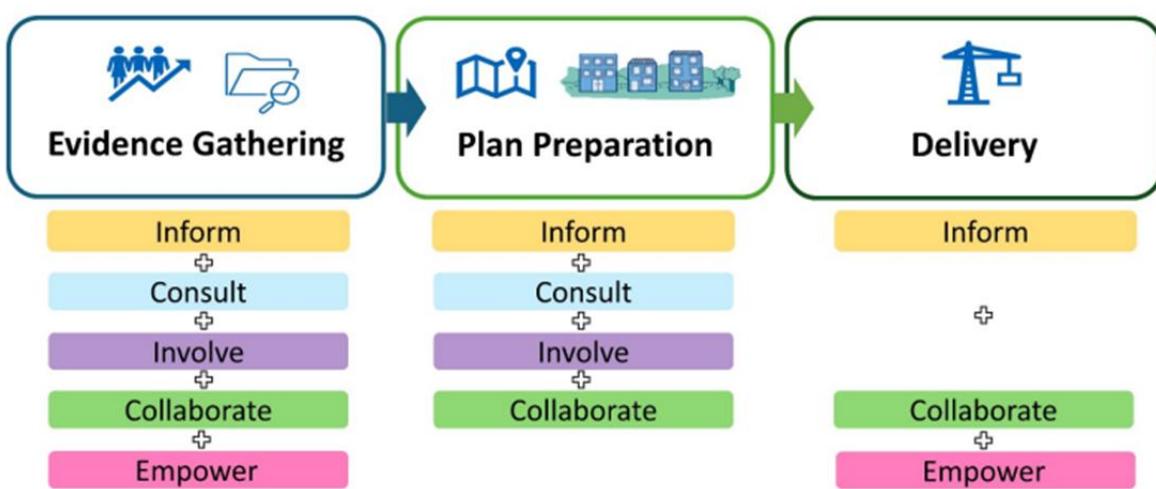
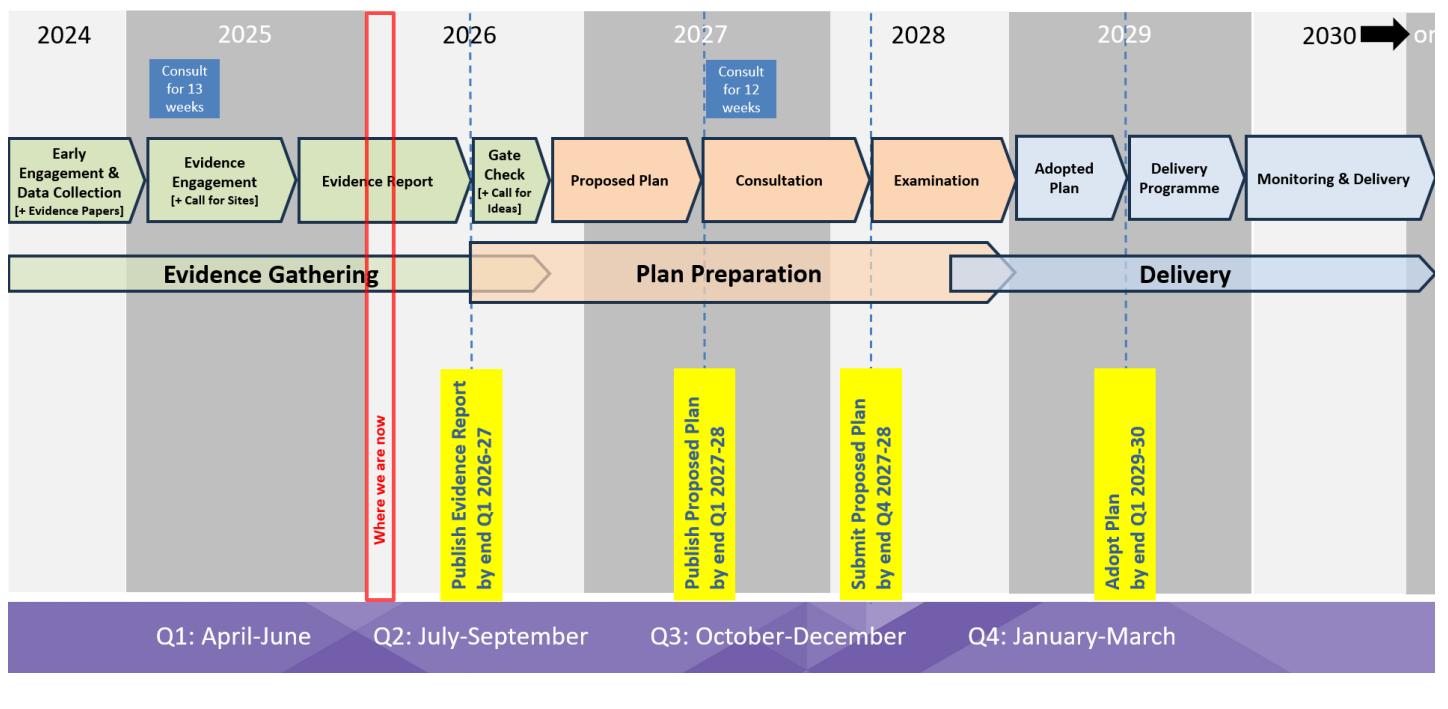
### 3.2 Progress Timescales

The target in last year's Newsletter was to complete the Evidence Report by the end of Q2 2025-26, ready for submission for Gate Check. However, it has taken more time than was envisaged to pull together the evidence for the plan. Alongside resource challenges, the emergence of a new system has created an element of uncertainty, whereby all planning authorities are on a learning curve in terms of what is required in order for an Evidence Report to successfully progress beyond the Gate Check stage. Additionally, there is crucial evidence yet to be released by other parties, hence amending the timeline will allow significant datasets to become part of our evidence base.

The revised timeline is that:

- The HLDP Evidence Report will be subject of further reporting to committee (a further report will be considered at the meeting of Economy and Infrastructure Committee on 12 February 2026) and it will subsequently be approved and published by Full Council by the end of Q1 2026-27, and thereafter it will be submitted to Scottish Ministers for Gate Check
- Preparation of the HLDP itself will commence after submission, with some initial work undertaken in parallel to the Gate Check – including holding a Call for Ideas (CFI) to inform plan preparation (further details of the CFI will be announced and details provided on our [webpage](#)) – and further advancement of plan preparation being subject to the Evidence Report passing the Gate Check
- The HLDP Proposed Plan is anticipated to be published by the end of Q1 2027-28, with its principal public consultation commencing at that stage and running over a 12 week period
- The HLDP Proposed Plan is anticipated to be submitted by the end of Q4 2027-28 for Examination
- The HLDP is expected to be adopted by the end of Q1 2029-30

## HLDP Timeline - January 2026



### 3.3 Overview of Chapters for the Evidence Report

This section provides an overview of the key evidence being progressed.

Evidence Report Chapter	Overview
<b>Introduction</b>	Provides an introduction to the rest of the report.
<b>Area Profiles and Key Areas of Change</b>	Provides an extensive overview of 9 Highland Council areas including population data and place standard survey results.
<b>Statement of Engagement</b>	Outlines the steps taken by the Council to consult and engage with communities throughout the production of the Evidence Report.
<b>Climate Change and Energy</b>	Provides coverage on climate change mitigation and adaptation, energy development and infrastructure, and heating and cooling.
<b>Nature and Environment</b>	Provides coverage on Highland context regarding biodiversity, natural designations, forestry and woodlands, and soils.
<b>Coastal Development</b>	Provides coverage on coastal profiles, climate change and the implications of sea level rise, developed and undeveloped coast, coastal biodiversity and environmental designations, local ports and harbours, coastal access and recreation and aquaculture.
<b>Flood Risk Management</b>	Provides coverage on flood risk management and sits alongside the Highland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment.
<b>Economy Business Tourism and Productive Places</b>	Provides coverage on the economy, business and industry, the cultural and creative sectors, the tourism industry and minerals.
<b>Housing</b>	Provides coverage on the implications of housing topic evidence, including that which relates to the Minimum All Tenure Housing Land Requirement (MATHLR), housing need and demand, specialist provision and the indicative Local Housing Land Requirement (iLHLR).
<b>Transport</b>	Provides coverage on policy context, travel patterns, active travel, public transport, road, rail, water, and aviation, as well as cross-boundary considerations and developer contributions.
<b>Infrastructure</b>	Provides coverage on education, community facilities, waste management, water and wastewater, digital infrastructure, and health.
<b>Historic Assets Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings</b>	Provides coverage on Highland's built heritage designations and details on the spread of brownfield land and empty buildings.
<b>Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking</b>	Provides coverage on placemaking, health and wellbeing, health harms, open space, recreation and blue-green infrastructure, local living, retail and town centres, and clustering of non-retail uses.
<b>Performance of the Plan</b>	Evaluates the performance of current LDPs against their outcomes and presents lessons learnt for the HLDP.

A number of more detailed studies and analysis have previously been identified for carrying out or for further consideration, to support the evidence for the new plan. Some have been substantially progressed since the last Newsletter was published. These are summarised in Appendix 1 alongside the timescales for preparing and completing them.

### 3.4 Local Place Plans

Local Place Plans (LPPs) are community-led plans that allow a Community Council or Community Controlled Body to reflect the ambitions of their place through a set of recommendations that inform local authorities in preparing LDPs. LPPs must be prepared in accordance with a set of statutory requirements and, once an LPP is submitted to The Highland Council for registration, it is firstly checked by a Highland Council officer for compliance with those requirements and feedback is provided to the community body who submitted it. Only those LPPs that are valid (meet the requirements) can be registered. A number of LPPs have been registered, others have been submitted, and more are under preparation. Guidance is available for communities [here](#). Based on the current HLDP preparation programme, we advise that Local Place Plan submissions that:

- Pass the validation checks and are registered no later than 30 April 2026 will be taken into account in the preparation of the HLDP Evidence Report
- Pass the validation checks and are registered between May and September 2026 are likely to be taken into account in the preparation of this HLDP from the outset
- Are validated and registered after September 2026 will be taken into account at the next available opportunity in the local development plan cycle which may include some consideration in the preparation of the HLDP Proposed Plan.

[Validated LPP's](#) on our Register:

Name of Local Place Plan	Date of Validation
<b>Ardgour Local Place Plan</b>	23.04.24
<b>Black Isle Local Place Plan</b>	04.10.24
<b>Broadford and Strath Local Place Plan</b>	08.10.24
<b>Caol Local Place Plan</b>	24.11.25
<b>Dores and Essich Community Local Place Plan</b>	13.02.25
<b>Duror and Kentallen Local Place Plan</b>	30.09.24
<b>Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Local Place Plan</b>	30.07.25
<b>Gairloch Local Place Plan</b>	14.04.25
<b>Garve and District Local Place Plan</b>	04.11.24
<b>Golspie 2034/44 Local Place Plan</b>	30.05.25
<b>Kinlochleven Local Place Plan</b>	05.03.25
<b>Lochalsh Local Place Plan</b>	11.10.24
<b>Nairnshire Local Place Plan</b>	20.08.25
<b>Sleat Local Place Plan</b>	05.12.25
<b>Stratherrick and Foyers Local Place Plan</b>	15.09.23
<b>Torridon and Kinlochewe Local Place Plan</b>	01.11.24

Once registered, a LPP must legally be taken into consideration by a local authority when preparing a Local Development Plan. Local Place Plans that are registered by us can also be a material consideration when planning applications are being considered by our Planning Authority. If you have any questions about Local Place Plans or submitting a Local Place Plan, please email us at [Lpp@highland.gov.uk](mailto:Lpp@highland.gov.uk). Note: Local Place Plans prepared by communities within the Cairngorms National Park would be submitted to and taken into account by the Cairngorms National Park Authority when preparing the Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan.

### 3.5 Regional Spatial Strategy/ Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy

A Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) is a long-term spatial strategy in respect of strategic development of an area. It must specify the region it belongs to and identify the need for strategic development, the proposed outcomes that strategic development will contribute towards, priorities for the delivery process, and proposed locations which must be shown in the form of a map or a diagram. RSSs will not be part of the statutory development plan but will have an important part to play in informing future versions of the NPF and LDPs. It is up to planning authorities to decide for themselves the most appropriate scale and extent of areas to be covered by Regional Spatial Strategies. NPF4 has set out within the National Spatial Strategy a number of Regional Spatial Priorities for five sub-areas of Scotland, providing a narrative on challenges and opportunities offered for each, with Annex C providing more information on the spatial planning priorities which is intended to guide the preparation of RSSs and LDPs to help deliver the national spatial strategy. These five areas are North, North and West Coast and Islands, Northeast, Central and South. The first three mentioned are all of some direct relevance to parts of Highland.

The Highland Council developed an Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy (IRSS) as part of a response to Scottish Government's preparation of NPF4. Read the [April 2021 IRSS](#) here or alternatively watch this [short video](#) to learn more. The Highland Council intend to formally transition the IRSS into a RSS for Highland by means of a method that aligns as much as is practicable with, but subject to not causing any significant delay to, the preparation of the new HLD. Completing the formal work on the RSS will be dependent upon the statutory requirement to prepare an RSS being commenced by Scottish Government. It is understood that they will first prepare statutory guidance for RSS preparation and the Council is not aware of any programme for that to be progressed. With regards to current context however, the IRSS can still be observed as a useful document, with some more up-to-date spatial strategy context for the Highlands than the content presented through NPF4, which does not include major economic

developments, such specific content on the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport, that will initiate major changes across the region in the coming years.

### 3.6 Supplementary Guidance

The development plan system is transitioning to one where supplementary guidance does not form part of the statutory development plan. No further statutory Supplementary Guidance can now be prepared by The Highland Council, nor any of the existing Supplementary Guidance be formally reviewed in a way that maintains its Supplementary Guidance status. It is expected however that key issues which may have been previously covered in supplementary guidance, such as issues around developer contributions will be proposed to be covered in the LDP itself so that they are consulted upon and scrutinised where appropriate and carry 'development plan' status. Nevertheless, non-statutory planning guidance may still be produced by local authorities for the purpose of providing guidance on specific planning issues. The Council will review the coverage and content of its current suite of Supplementary Guidance (and other planning guidance), to establish which aspects should be covered within the new Local Development Plan itself, which aspects should be covered within non-statutory planning guidance and any aspects no longer required.

Development Guidance	Period of Adoption	Currently part of the Development Plan? (Yes/No)
<b>Aquaculture</b>	Autumn 2016	No
<b>Biodiversity Enhancement</b>	May 2024	No
<b>Coastal Development</b>	May 2010	No
<b>Developer Contributions</b>	November 2018	Yes
<b>Flood Risk and Drainage</b>	January 2013	Yes
<b>Forest and Woodland Strategy</b>	November 2018	No
<b>Green Networks</b>	January 2013	Yes
<b>Historic Environment Strategy</b>	January 2013	Yes
<b>Houses In Multiple Occupation</b>	March 2013	Yes
<b>Managing Waste in New Developments</b>	March 2013	Yes
<b>Onshore Wind Energy (and Part 2b)</b>	November 2016 (and December 2017)	Yes

<b>Open Space in new Residential Developments</b>	January 2013	Yes
<b>Physical Constraints</b>	March 2013	Yes
<b>Protected Species</b>	March 2013	Yes
<b>Public Art</b>	March 2013	Yes
<b>Renewable Energy Strategy</b>	May 2006	No
<b>Rural Housing</b>	December 2021	Yes
<b>Sustainable Design</b>	January 2013	Yes
<b>Trees and Woodland</b>	January 2013	Yes

### 3.7 Strategic Environmental Assessment

			THC Integrated Impact Assessment		
Plan Stage	Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)	Habitat Regulations Appraisal (HRA)	Public Sector Equality Duty Assessment	Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment	Island Communities Impact Assessment
<b>Evidence Report</b>	Scoping report	-	Screening	Screening	Screening
<b>Plan Preparation including site assessment</b>	Undertake assessment	Undertake assessment	Undertake assessment	Undertake assessment	Undertake assessment
<b>Proposed LDP (draft plan)</b>	Environmental report	HRA Record	Assessment Report	Assessment Report	Assessment Report
<b>Adopted Plan</b>	Post adoption statement	Final HRA Record	-	-	-

A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a statutory requirement that aims to ensure the environment is a primary consideration when LDPs are being prepared. The key steps of the SEA process are:

1. Scoping
2. Scoping Report (consultation with SEA Consultation Authorities) alongside publication of the Evidence Report for the Plan
3. Assessment
4. Environmental Report (consultation with SEA Consultation Authorities and public) alongside consultation on the Proposed Plan

4. Further assessment
6. Finalised Environmental Report
7. Post-Adoption Statement of SEA

The Highland Council's practice is that the SEA for the LDP is undertaken by the Development Plans Team with input from colleagues across the Council, e.g. Environment Team, Flood Team, Contaminated Land Team, as well as close engagement with the statutory SEA Consultation Authorities (NatureScot, Scottish Environment Protection Agency, and Historic Environment Scotland). Our schedule of work on the SEA aims to ensure that SEA is early and effective, makes best use of evidence for the LDP, and that the SEA properly informs and influences decisions on the Plan content.

During 2025 we made progress working through the Scoping process and drafting the Scoping Report, informed directly by the drafting of the Evidence Report and by relevant feedback we received on that from stakeholders we engaged with.

In 2026 we will engage with the SEA Consultation Authorities, through a workshop that we aim to hold with them in March 2026. This will inform our completion of the Scoping Report, for publication alongside the Evidence Report for the HLD, which is anticipated to be in early/mid 2026, when formal consultation on the Scoping Report with the SEA Consultation Authorities will be undertaken.

Once the Evidence Report has cleared the Gate Check stage, we will begin the Assessment for SEA alongside, and to inform, preparation of the Proposed Plan. Again, this will include working with the SEA Consultation Authorities, using both a workshop format and online collaborative working.

## 4 Participation Statement

### 4.1 Introduction

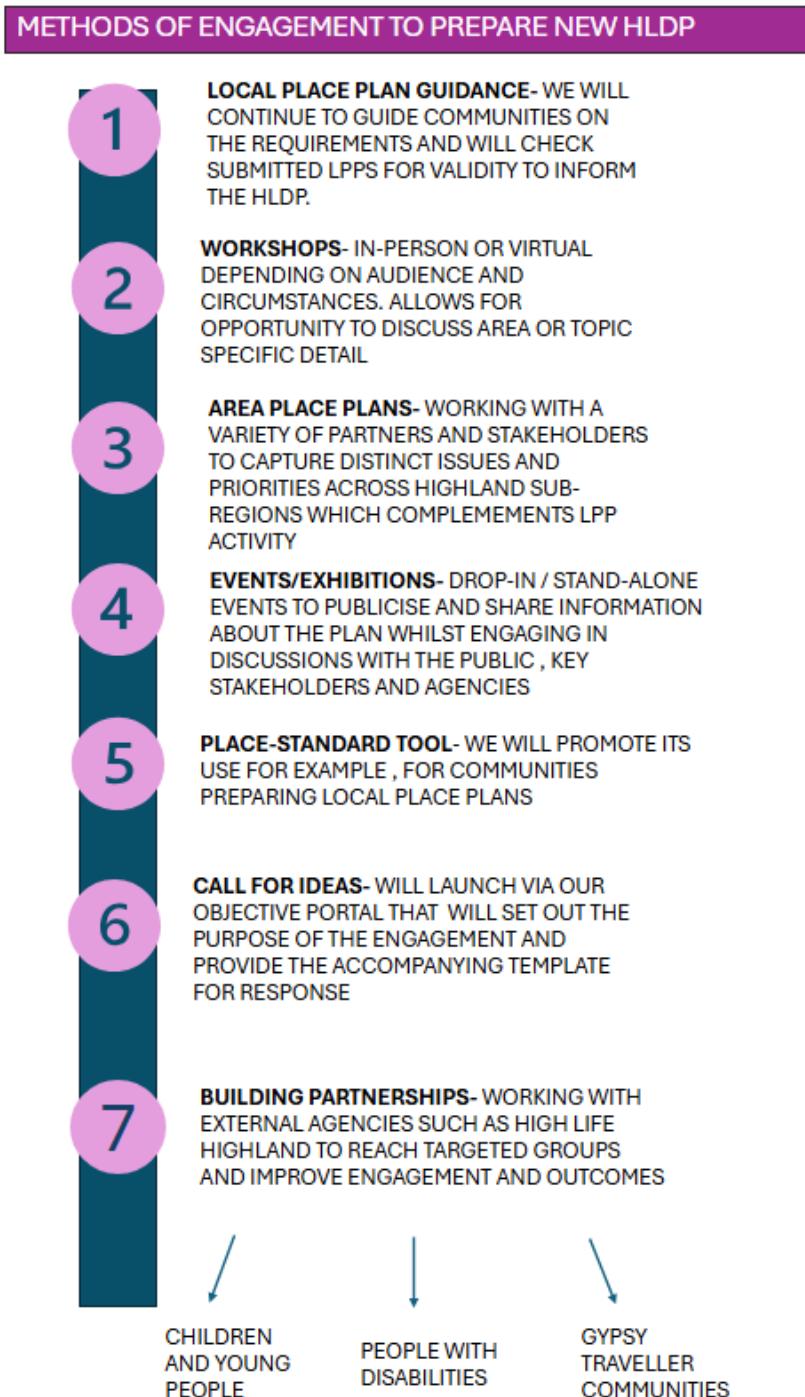
The success of a new HLDP is dependent on the Council's commitment to ensuring that stakeholders and key agencies are involved in every stage of the process. Individuals, businesses, organisations and homeowners are just some of the key stakeholders who have an interest in the future development of the Highlands and the impact that the plan will have on those who live and work here. Our Participation Statement sets out key agencies and stakeholders who we have worked with and will continue to work with alongside to inform the preparation of the plan. We tailor our engagement approach for different agencies and stakeholders to ensure that unique stakeholder challenges and opportunities are appropriately identified and subsequently given weight as part of our overall evidence base to inform the HLDP, and in moving to plan preparation stage.

Community engagement is a statutory requirement within development planning, enhanced in recent years by the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 which introduced Local Place Plans, as well as specific provisions to involve children and young people alongside other groups with protected characteristics such as gypsy/travellers and disabled people. Our Participation Statement provides a summary of how we intend to engage the public on the preparation and implementation of the HLDP, with a focus on the specific actions we will take and how we will communicate and promote engagement in the plan preparation stage, including using the evidence we have gathered. Comments on the suitability of the Participation Statement are always welcome and should be sent to [devplans@highland.gov.uk](mailto:devplans@highland.gov.uk) .

The sections that follow describe the criteria that can help to test the suitability of our approach to engagement on the local development plan. In addition, in exceptional circumstances mediation is seen as a potentially useful tool for exploring, resolving or reducing disagreement on land use plans. It can be used to aid the engagement process and to help build bridges between stakeholders. It is a voluntary process between two parties, facilitated by a third independent party. There is no legislative requirement for mediation in the Scottish planning system but there are potential scenarios where it might assist in resolving issues that arise through the preparation of different types of land use plan. However, our aim is to remove or reduce the need for mediation by gaining awareness of proposals/sites that may prove contentious through early engagement with stakeholders in the preparation of plans including any community-led Local Place Plans.

## 4.2 Methods of engagement

The diagram below illustrates some of the engagement opportunities that are being made available through the forthcoming consultation on the HLDP. It also mentions some of the other linked engagement opportunities that will feed into aspects of the evidence or the plan, including LPPs, Area Place Plans, etc. We will carefully consider how partners need to be engaged through each of these elements of plan-making.



### 4.3 How we will make people aware

We provide a range of different communication channels that let you know how you can contribute to the preparation of the HLDP, as well as how the plan is developing and taking shape.

#### HOW WE WILL PUBLICISE HLDP ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND PROGRESS

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8

##### DEVELOPMENT PLANS WEBSITE AND COUNCIL NEWS

**STORIES-** We regularly monitor and update our webpages to include up-to-date information regarding development planning in the Highlands and publish and issue news stories to inform the public of key events and publications.

**CONSULTATION PORTAL-** Our consultation portal is an effective site for us to provide updated information to the public, advertising new consultations and development plan information.

**DURING IN-PERSON EVENTS-** We will ensure that interested parties are kept up-to-date on HLDP engagement opportunities and information channels through face-to-face discussions.

**REPRESENTATIVE GROUPS/ORGANISATIONS-** Engagement with underrepresented groups can be facilitated by using representative organisations as an intermediary to engage effectively.

**SOCIAL MEDIA-** We have Facebook and X accounts that we will use to update the public on HLDP progress, and we will look to work alongside partners to further utilise social media for promoting information, helping to reach a wider audience.

**MAILING LIST-** We have a designated mailing list for updating individuals and organisations across the Highlands on our key engagement stages. To be added to it, please contact us with your request.

**LIBRARIES-** We provide electronic and/or paper copies of consultation documents in public libraries for viewing, and will explore alternative means of making documents available where there are no such facilities

**DEVELOPMENT PLANS NEWSLETTER-** This newsletter indicates engagement strategies proposed for the upcoming stages of HLDP preparation, additionally outlining how people can get involved in the process.

## 4.4 Who will get involved?

The following tables include some of the key agencies and stakeholder participants that we will consult as part of using our evidence to inform the preparation of HLDP. This is not an exhaustive list but illustrates how different techniques will be used for different types of participant. We will make efforts to engage each of these groups at each milestone stage of the plan.

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Main Publicity/Engagement Techniques</b>
Public	In-Person, Social Media, Mailing, Newsletters, Surveys
Community Councils	In-Person, Social Media, Mailing, Newsletters, LPP Assistance and Workshop, Surveys
Other Community Groups	In-Person, social media, Mailing, Newsletters, LPP Assistance and Workshop, Surveys
Children and Young People	Tailored Engagement, Meetings, Social Media, Website, Newsletter
Ageing Populations	Tailored Engagement, Meetings, Social Media, Website, Newsletter
Disabled People	Tailored Engagement, Meetings, Social Media, Website, Newsletter
Gypsy/Travellers	Tailored Engagement, Meetings, Social Media, Website, Newsletter
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Main Publicity/ Engagement Technique</b>
Business Organisations	In-person, Mailings, Social Media, Call for Sites, Meetings
Local Businesses	In-person, Mailings, Social Media, Call for Sites, Meetings
Developers	In-person, Mailings, Social Media, Call for Sites, Meetings
Landowners	In-person, Mailings, Social Media, Call for Sites, Meetings
<b>Participant</b>	<b>Main Publicity/ Engagement Techniques</b>
Scottish Government	Mailings, Meetings, Workshops
Transport Scotland	Mailings, Meetings, Workshops
NatureScot	Mailings, Meetings, Workshops
SEPA	Mailings, Meetings, Workshops
Scottish Water	Mailings, Meetings, Workshops
Highlands and Islands Enterprise	Mailings, Meetings, Workshops
Sustrans	Mailings, Meetings, Workshops
Hitrans	Mailings, Meetings, Workshops
NHS Highland	Mailings, Meetings, Workshops
Historic Environment Scotland	Mailings, Meetings, Workshops
Neighboring Local Authorities	Mailings, Meetings, Workshops

## 5 National and Regional Marine Plan

### 5.1 National Marine Plan

The emerging Evidence Report details how our Coastline will be an important part of the new HLDP. However, there is an opportunity to shape *national* policy in this area.

Scotland's National Marine Plan (NMP) was adopted and published by Scottish Government in 2015. The NMP covers inshore and offshore waters and serves to support development and activity in the seas around Scotland, while helping to protect our marine environment through the sustainable management of marine resources. Scottish Government is required to monitor and report on the NMP at least every 3 years. The last such report was published in 2021 and concluded that there have been significant changes that would warrant the development of an updated NMP. In Autumn 2022 it was confirmed that this suggested update would be taken forward. The decision to do so cited Scottish Government's commitment to becoming a net zero nation by 2045, the impacts of EU exit and increased understanding of climate change and human activity impacts on the marine environment.

The development of NMP2 is progressing steadily. The process began in 2022 with a scoping phase to identify emerging issues, challenges, and policy needs for Scotland's marine spaces. In November 2024, the Planning Position Statement was published, and a public consultation was held from November 2024 to February 2025. A report summarising the consultation was published in August 2025. Following a review of the consultation responses, the Scottish Government has decided to postpone the consultation on the draft NMP2, originally planned for winter 2025, to allow additional time to consider the feedback received and their planned approach. A revised timeline for the draft NMP2 consultation is currently being developed, and an update is awaited.

### 5.2 Regional Marine Plan

Under the Marine (Scotland) Act (2010) regional marine plans may be prepared at the local level by delegated bodies forming a regional marine planning partnership. The Scottish Marine Regions Order (2015) divided Scotland's Inshore area up into several regions. Three of these regions fall within the Highland Council's area: West Highlands, North Coast, and Moray Firth. To date, the national picture on regional marine plans shows that uptake has been slow with some progress made by the Clyde Marine Planning Partnership, in the Shetland Islands and in the Orkney Islands.

As of December 2025, the Orkney Islands Council's Regional Marine Plan (OIRMP) has undergone a final review by the Orkney Islands Council and the final modified plan and accompanying consultation report was submitted to the Scottish Government. The plan

is expected to be officially adopted early this year, guiding all future marine licensing and development decisions within Orkney's waters.

The Shetland Islands Regional Marine Plan (SIRMP) has officially been finalised, following its formal adoption and publication by the Scottish Government on 04 December 2025. This marks Shetland as the first region in Scotland to have a statutory regional marine plan under the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010.

The Clyde Marine Planning Partnership (CMPP) continues to develop the Clyde Regional Marine Plan (CRMP). A pre-consultation draft was released in March 2019, inviting feedback from stakeholders and the public. Since then, the CMPP has been actively engaging with stakeholders to address local issues and pressures on the coastal and marine environment, working towards the finalization of the plan.

Presently there have been no substantial forward steps taken in the Highland area to form a regional marine planning partnership. However, Highland Council will continue to listen to and work with coastal and marine stakeholders with a view to progressing regional marine planning as and when appropriate. In conjunction with this, Highland Council will engage with Marine Scotland to better understand the interactions with and dependencies on the update to the NMP.

## 6 Contacts

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**Website-** [www.highland.gov.uk/developmentplans](http://www.highland.gov.uk/developmentplans)

**X-** [@PlanHighland](https://twitter.com/PlanHighland)

**Facebook-** [Highland Development Plans](https://www.facebook.com/HighlandDevelopmentPlans)

We update our Development Plans Newsletter on at least an annual basis, please visit [www.highland.gov.uk/developmentplansnewsletter](http://www.highland.gov.uk/developmentplansnewsletter) for future updates.

## 7 Appendix 1 – Additional work packages to support HLDP

Work Package	Proposed Timing of Completion (Q/Yr)	Progress	Relevant Evidence Report Chapter(s)	If not complete - Reason for any slippage from DPS 2025 programme
<b>Local Transport Strategy</b>	LTS Delivery Programme – Q1 26/27	Local Transport Strategy – Complete; LTS Delivery Programme – In Progress (follow-on)	Chapter 10	n/a
<b>Transport Appraisal</b>	Q4 26/27	In Progress	Chapter 10	Optimising timing, identifying resources, procurement
<b>Identify Developed &amp; Undeveloped Coastline</b>	-	Complete	Chapter 6	n/a
<b>River Basin Management Plan: area-specific report derived from RBMP</b>	-	Area-specific report not required; RBMP considered within the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment – Complete Q3 25/26	Chapter 6 and Chapter 7	n/a
<b>Coastal Change Adaptation Planning</b>	Local CCAPs – ongoing (resource dependent)	Regional Coastal Change Adaptation Plan - Complete (agreed) Q1 25/26  Local CCAPs – In Progress for some of the 29 high-risk locations identified in the Regional CCAP	Chapter 6	Local CCAPs established as focussed list for undertaking as resources permit
<b>Housing Need &amp; Demand Assessment</b>	Q1 26/27	In Progress	Chapter 9	Identifying resources, procurement, delay to national data required
<b>Housing Land Audit (and Pipeline)</b>	Q4 24/25 Next HLA – Q4 25/26	Complete In Progress (annual)	Chapter 9	n/a
<b>Identify Fragile Areas and</b>	Further work to feed in to Plan Preparation stage	In Progress – Fragile Areas Mapping Prepared	Chapter 8, Chapter 9	n/a

<b>Depopulated Areas</b>				
<b>Vacant &amp; Derelict Land Survey</b>	-	Complete - Submitted to Scottish Government November 2025	Chapter 8	n/a
<b>Business and Industrial Land Audit</b>	To be determined with reference to requirements for Plan Preparation stage	In Progress	Chapter 8	Prioritising and identifying resources
<b>Desirability of allocating land for resettlement</b>	Further work to feed in to Plan Preparation stage	In Progress – Fragile Areas Mapping Prepared	Chapter 9	n/a
<b>Updated Forest and Woodland Strategy</b>	Q3 26/27	Not Started	Chapter 5	Prioritising and identifying resources
<b>10-Year Construction Aggregate Mineral Landbank</b>	Initial Findings – Q2 25/26	Complete	Chapter 8	n/a
<b>Review of SLA citations</b>	Q3 26/27	Not Started	Chapter 5	Prioritising and identifying resources
<b>Culturally and locally important soils</b>	Further work to feed in to Plan Preparation stage	In Progress	Chapter 5	Scope and timing of requirements
<b>Infrastructure Capacity, Condition, Need &amp; Deliverability</b>	Q4 25/26 for Evidence Report content, with further for Plan Preparation stage if required	In Progress	Chapter 11	Scoping requirements, extent of stakeholder engagement, extent and timing of information provision to Council
<b>Capacity of Education Services</b>	Q4 25/26 - Updated School Roll Forecast	In Progress – School Roll Forecasts last published March 25	Chapter 9	n/a
<b>Health Impact Assessment, Capacity &amp; Service Needs</b>	To be determined with reference to requirements for Plan Preparation stage	In Progress	Chapter 11	Optimising timing, prioritising and identifying resources
<b>Strategic Flood Risk Assessment</b>	Q3 25/26	Complete	Chapter 7	n/a
<b>Play Sufficiency Assessment</b>	Q2 26/27	In Progress	Chapter 13	Prioritising and identifying resources

<b>Open Space Strategy</b>	Q2 26/27	In Progress – Open Space Audit	Chapter 13	Prioritising and identifying resources
<b>Retail Studies- Provision, Sustainability, Identify Network of Centres</b>	To be determined with reference to requirements for Plan Preparation stage	Not Started – use Town Centre Health Checks as starting point for reviewing supply and demand of retail provision and boundaries for city and town centre approach within HLDP	Chapter 11	Evidence regarding retail capacity, demand and consumer expenditure could be strengthened to inform HLDP, but at present the Council is not in a position to commit to commissioning further consultancy work of this nature
<b>Town Centre Health Checks</b>	To be determined with reference to requirements for Plan Preparation stage	In Progress	Chapter 13	Prioritising and identifying resources

