

The Highland Investment Plan: A Place Based Approach to Delivery

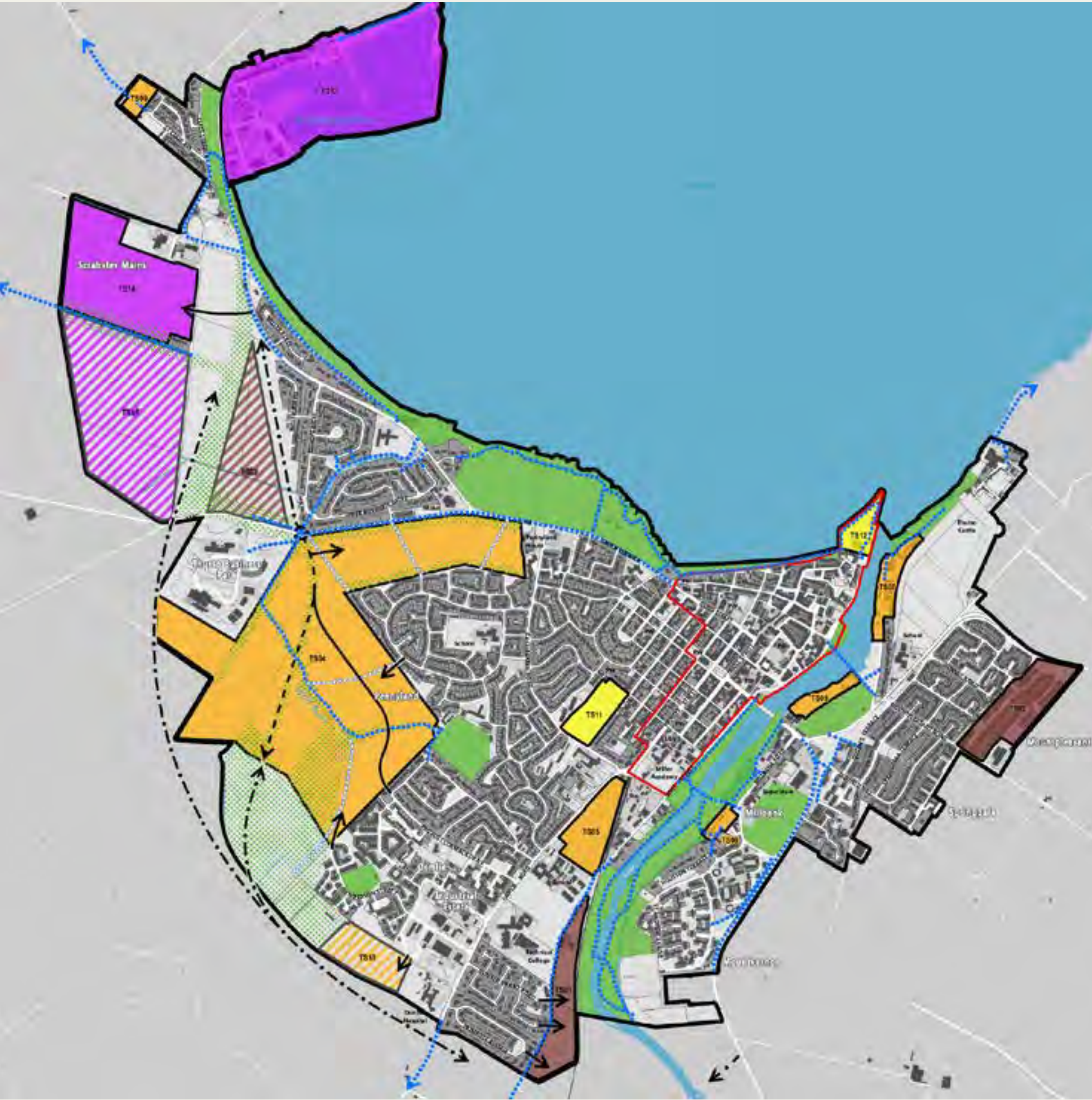
Thurso: Points of Delivery

What is the project?

In partnership with local communities, public agencies, private and third sector, Highland Council is leading the development of a place-based approach to planning for the future of each sub-regional area. Area-based plans are being produced as a clear statement of shared priorities for development and investment, service delivery and community action.

A key element of this approach is the creation of Community Points of Delivery (PoDs), which are designed to integrate various services and improve accessibility for residents.

Map from Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan 2



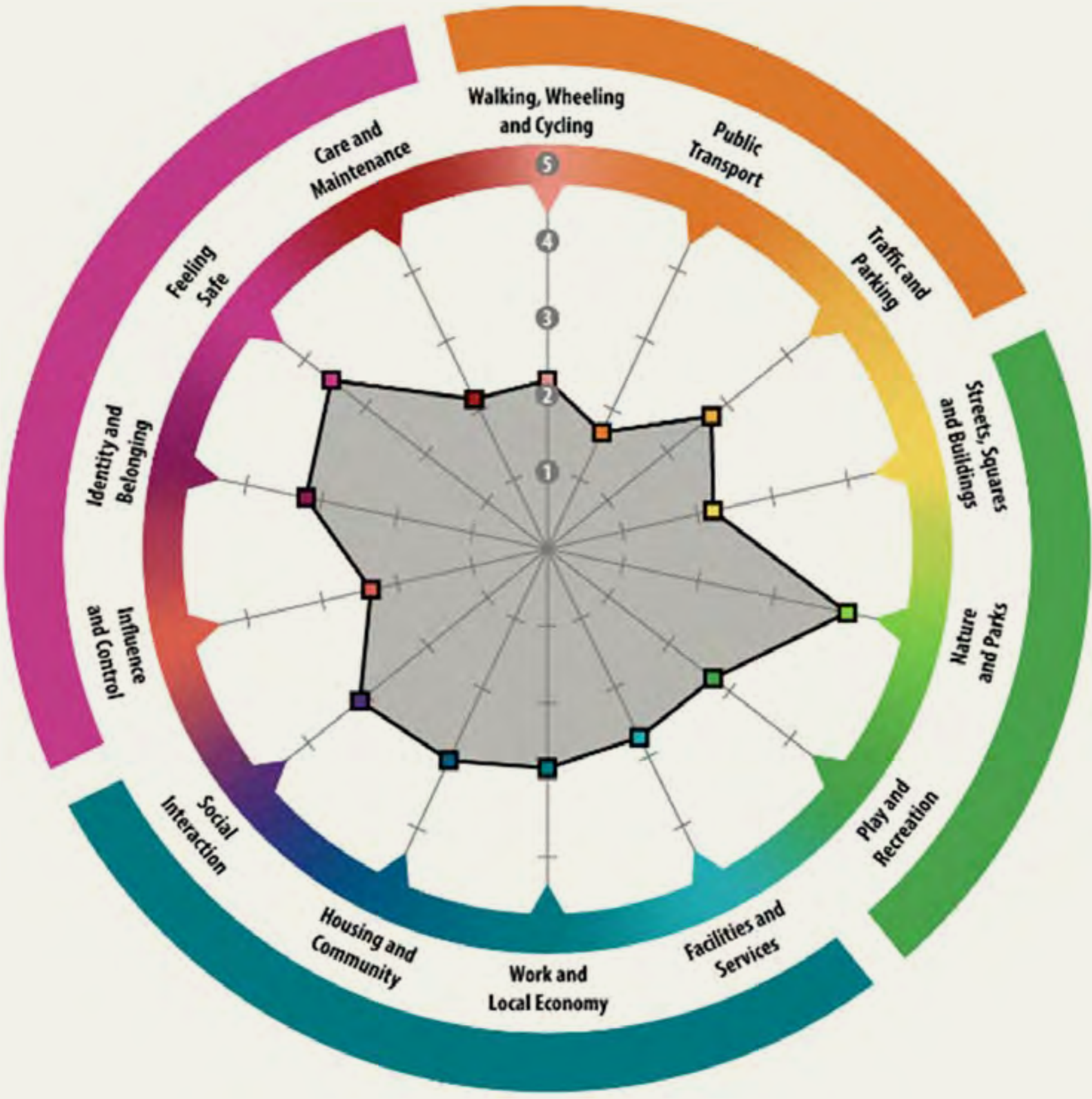
- Key:**
- Housing Opportunity
 - Mixed Use Opportunity
 - Community Opportunity
 - Industry Opportunity
 - Long-Term Housing Site
 - Long-Term Mixed Use Site
 - Long-Term Industrial Site

What is a 'place-based' approach?

The 'Place Principle' is a Scottish Government and CoSLA initiative to encourage better collaboration and community involvement. It's about understanding the issues, opportunities and relationships in a place, so we can work effectively together to improve the quality of life for our communities.

Knowing how a community is structured and how it works helps us make good decisions on investment and how to coordinate change.

Thurso Place Standard Tool

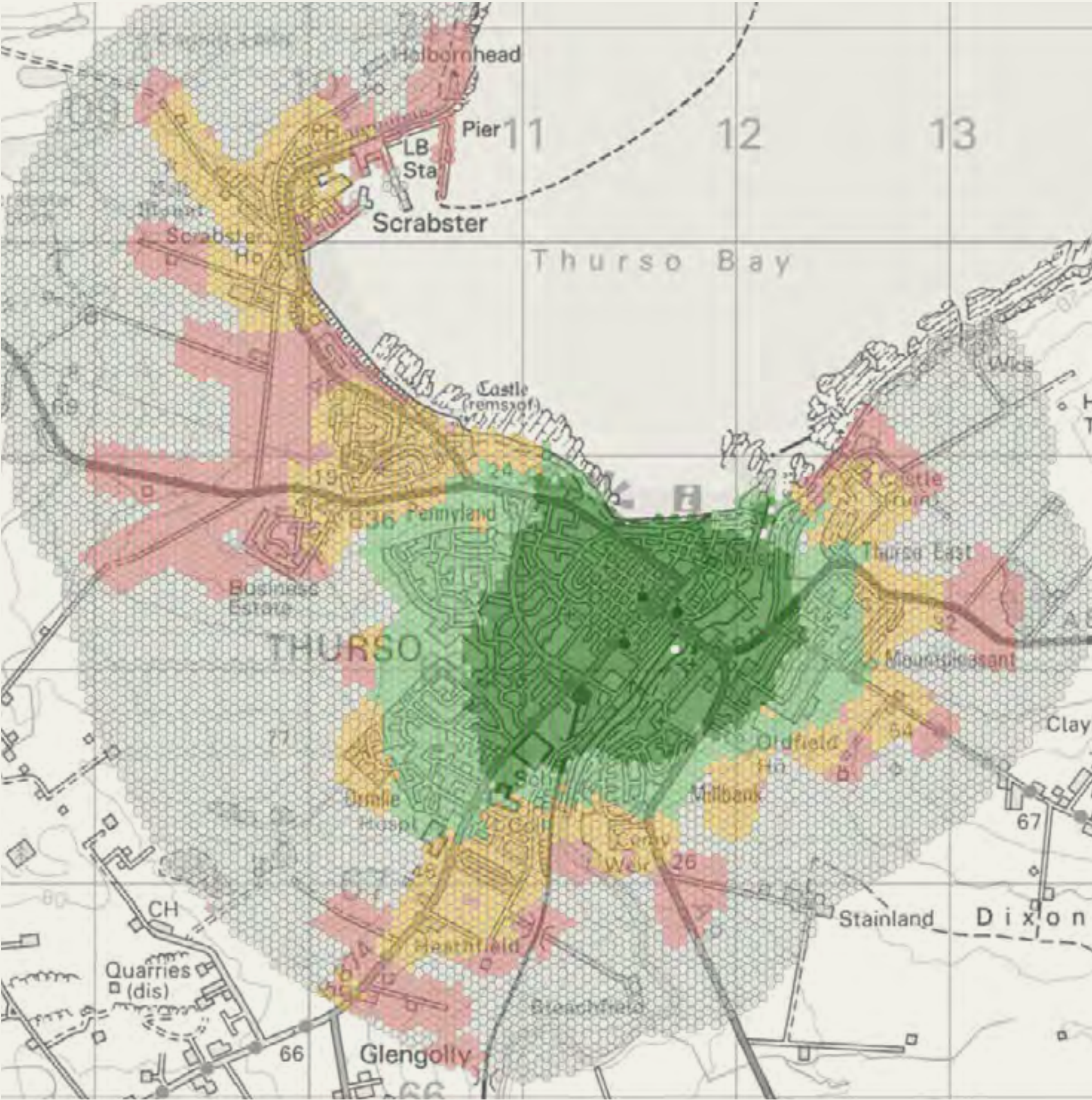


How we are taking a place-based approach?

Following recent changes to the national planning system, communities have been invited to consider preparation of their own Local Place Plans - a community's proposals for the development or use of land and buildings in their local area.

Across Highland, several groups are engaging their local community to reflect on how to make their place better, agree priorities for the future and how to act on them (often working with others). While Local Place Plans have a particular role in the planning system, they may also highlight other priorities for service delivery and community action.

Thurso Walkable Access to Services Map



- Key (50m Hexagon Grid):**
- Very high level of walkable services (12.0 - 15.8)
 - High level of walkable services (8.0 - 11.9)
 - Some walkable services (4.0 - 7.9)
 - Few walkable services (1.1 - 3.9)
 - Very few walkable services (0 - 1.0)

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Place Narrative: Guiding Principles



The 4 Guiding principles



The Council approved a report in May 2024 setting out a **Highland Investment Plan (HIP)** worth £2 billion over the next twenty years. The plan will see wide ranging investment across communities in the Highlands, with over **£1 billion of investment in schools and roads over the next 10 years.**

A new annual "2% of Council Tax Funded" investment model has been adapted, which will help deliver **£338 million for the Built Estate over the next five years, and £59 million for Roads Improvements Projects.**

The Highland Investment Plan

Thurso: Points of Delivery

Project Methodology

Step 1: Analysis

A number of buildings and sites across Thurso were identified through discussions with Partners, stakeholders and THC. From this, 44 of the most impactful sites / buildings were selected. These could accommodate Community, Office or Depot PoDs. Some of the sites could accommodate several PoD uses and some have potential for residential development.

Step 2: Workshops

A series of workshops were held, both remotely and in person in Thurso throughout Q4 2025 and 2025, with Partners, stakeholders and THC to review the identified sites/buildings and agree which to explore as 'What If?' Opportunity Studies.

Step 3: What If? Opportunity Studies

A series of high level 'What if?' feasibility studies were then undertaken identifying potential for accommodating different POD scenarios and complementary uses.

Step 4: Conclusion of Study & Publication

All studies were organised by location/type and compiled into a report together with context, analysis and recommendations for next steps.



Key Aspects of the Highland Investment Plan's Place-based Approach

Community Involvement

The plan emphasises engaging with local communities to understand their needs and priorities for development and investment.

Asset Reconfiguration

The plan involves a review and potential reconfiguration of the Council's assets, including buildings and land, to ensure they are fit for purpose and support community needs.

Community Points of Delivery (PoDs)

These hubs will co-locate various Council and partner services, creating more integrated and accessible service delivery points for residents.

Modernised Operating Model

The PoDs are linked to plans to modernise the Council's operating model, promoting more integrated and efficient service delivery across the ten Council areas.

Partnership Working

The plan encourages collaboration and partnership working between the Council, other public bodies, the private sector, and community organisations.

Focus on Sustainability





The plan aims to create sustainable communities by addressing housing needs, updating infrastructure, and reducing carbon emission through various initiatives.

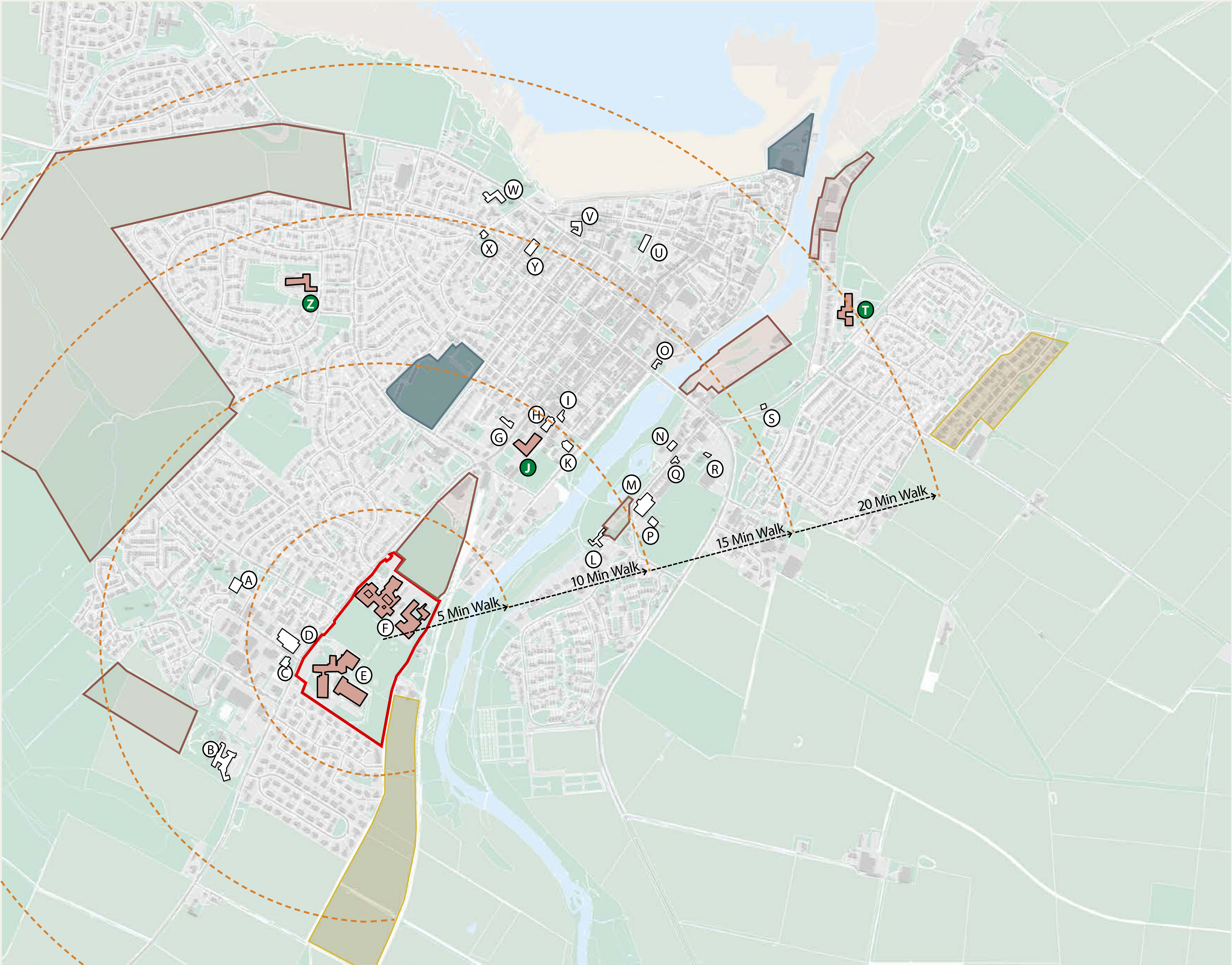
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Map of Opportunities

The masterplan will follow the place-based and asset mapping approaches with options developed and tested to determine the best long-term solutions for the area.

Key:

- A Thurso Community Garden
 - B Dunbar Hospital
 - C Thurso Ambulance Station
 - D Merlin Cinema Thurso
 - E UHI North, West and Hebrides
 - F Thurso High School
 - G Princes Street Surgery
 - H Thurso Art Gallery & Library
 - I Thurso Health Centre
 - J Miller Academy Primary School
 - K Three Harbours Surgery Thurso
 - L Thurso Youth Club; Mill Theatre
 - M Thurso Leisure Centre
 - N Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Thurso
 - O Bridgend Health Care Centre
 - P Caithness Rugby Club
 - Q Highlife Highland Thurso
 - R Thurso Bowling Club
 - S Thurso Football Club
 - T Mount Pleasant Primary School
 - U Thurso Community Greenhouse
 - V Police Scotland Thurso
 - W Bayview House Assisted Living Residence
 - X Scottish Environmental Protection Agency Thurso
 - Y UHI Environmental Research Institute
 - Z Pennyland Primary School
-  New Community POD Location
-  Key Location
-  Existing School
-  Residential Opportunity
-  Mixed Use Opportunity
-  Community Opportunity
-  Est. Walking Time



Thurso: Points of Delivery

Providing Points of Delivery (PoDs)

What is a PoD?

The Point of Delivery (PoD) initiative is a Highland Council led program designed to consolidate public service provision, bringing together all public service providers to establish integrated community, office, and depot facilities.

This initiative aims to identify opportunities for sharing facilities and resources, thereby increasing efficiency. It also offers the Highland Council an opportunity to review and rationalise its existing estates, creating various opportunities across both public and private sectors, including residential development.

Thurso has been selected as one of the priority locations for a Community PoD.

“

The local community in Caithness are being given a unique opportunity to feed into proposals that will see £100 million of investment in Thurso, starting with a new high school community Point of Delivery (POD).

We are talking about significant investment in the town by Highland Council, which will in turn encourage other partners to engage and contribute.

I am delighted that plans are progressing, particularly during a time of economic challenge. This is a really positive project not just for Thurso but for the whole of Caithness.

Our Points of Delivery are a new way of co-locating and delivering services so that they are easier for people to access, designing spaces where partner agencies can work better together, encouraging organisations, where possible to share facilities where they have similar needs.

This is a key driver for our future operating model, and part of our wider strategy to devolve and decentralise council operations over time. This is essential to help sustain communities and populations throughout the Highlands. I would encourage people to engage in the public consultation process during December where Council Officers will be on hand to listen to your views and provide feedback on the next steps in this exciting project.

Councillor Raymond Bremner, Council Leader and Caithness Councillor ”

Tain Intergenerational Community Campus



Community PoD Provision

All new or refurbished school buildings and sites will have the capacity to include community facilities, Council services or other partners as required.

A local plan for community, sport and leisure facilities or the Thurso High Associated School Group will be developed with High Life Highland.

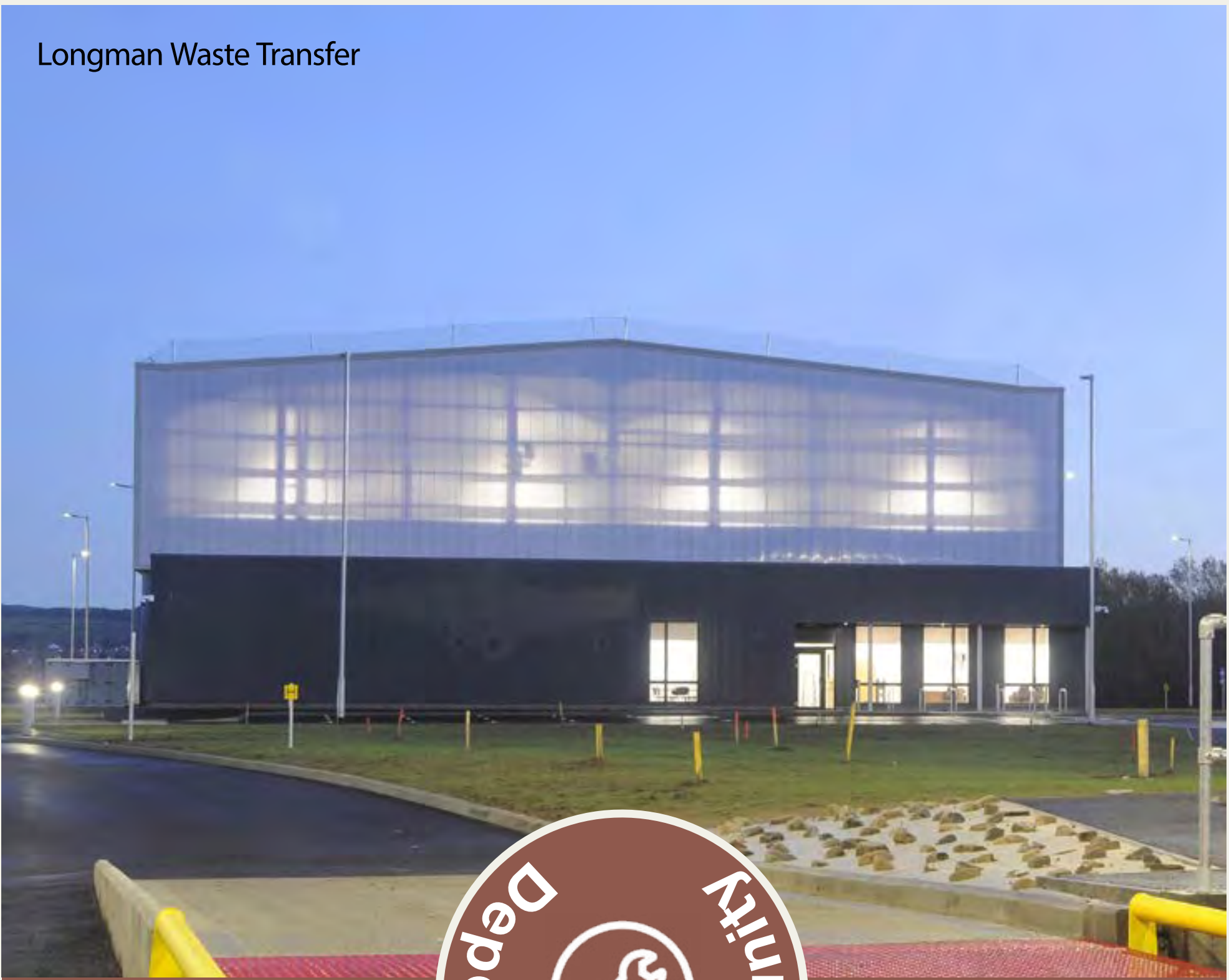
New THC Offices, Wick



Office PoD Provision

A review of existing assets and services that could be located at a Community PoD will be undertaken, and opportunities for co-location will be explored with potential partners..

Longman Waste Transfer



Depot PoD Provision

A review of existing assets that have opportunities for co-location, to allow for centralisation of delivery is to be explored with potential partners.

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Key Aspects of Community PoDs

| Engagement | Purpose | Location | Flexibility | Funding | Example |
|--|--|--|--|--|---|
| Community engagement is a key part of the process, ensuring that PoDs meet the needs of local residents. | To improve access to services and facilitate better collaboration between public bodies and community organisations. | PoDs are being planned for various locations across the Highlands, including those listed below. | PODs can take various forms based on the specific needs and opportunities of each community. | The Highland Investment Plan involves significant capital investment, including £100 million for Thurso. | PoDs might include spaces for education, health, leisure, childcare, and other public support services. |

Community PoD Opportunities

The following opportunities have all been identified through the Place Planning & Area Review Process, and could have **significant positive outcomes for local communities, partners, job opportunities, investment, and housing.**

£100m - New Thurso High School and Primary Schools

- £80m - New Charleston Academy
- £50m - New Dingwall Primary and St Clements School
- £24m - Partial refurbishment of Fortrose Academy
- £24m - Partial refurbishment of Inverness High School
- £20m - New Beaulay Primary School
- £20m - new Broadford Primary School
- £20m - New Tornagrain Primary School
- £18m - New Dunvegan Primary School



The Highland Council School Estate Management:
Thurso Community POD



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Delivering Improved Outcomes for Thurso

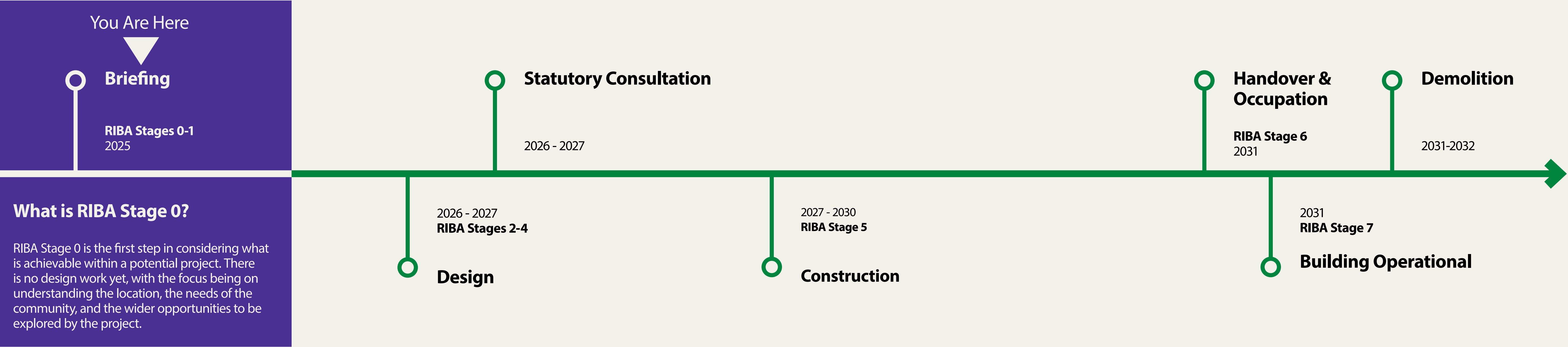


East Caithness Community Facility



Thurso: Points of Delivery

Anticipated Dates



Thurso Transformation Delivery Group (TTDG)

The new **TTDG** is comprised of various bodies who are focused on delivering improvements to Thurso.

Current Membership includes:

- The Highland Council
- Local Councillors
- Dounreay
- Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE)
- University Highlands & Islands (UHI)
- Chamber of Commerce
- NHS Highland
- High Life Highland
- Focus North
- Hub North
- Thurso Community Council

The involved members have come together with a joint focus on delivering the following outcomes for Thurso:

- **A Learning Campus linked to UHI and new primary schools**
- **Key worker housing utilising existing sites & buildings**
- **New Caithness Depot PoD**
- **A review of existing office accommodation**
- **A review of leisure facilities**
- **Opportunities for partners to share premises**

The Highland Council's Future Operating Model (FOM)

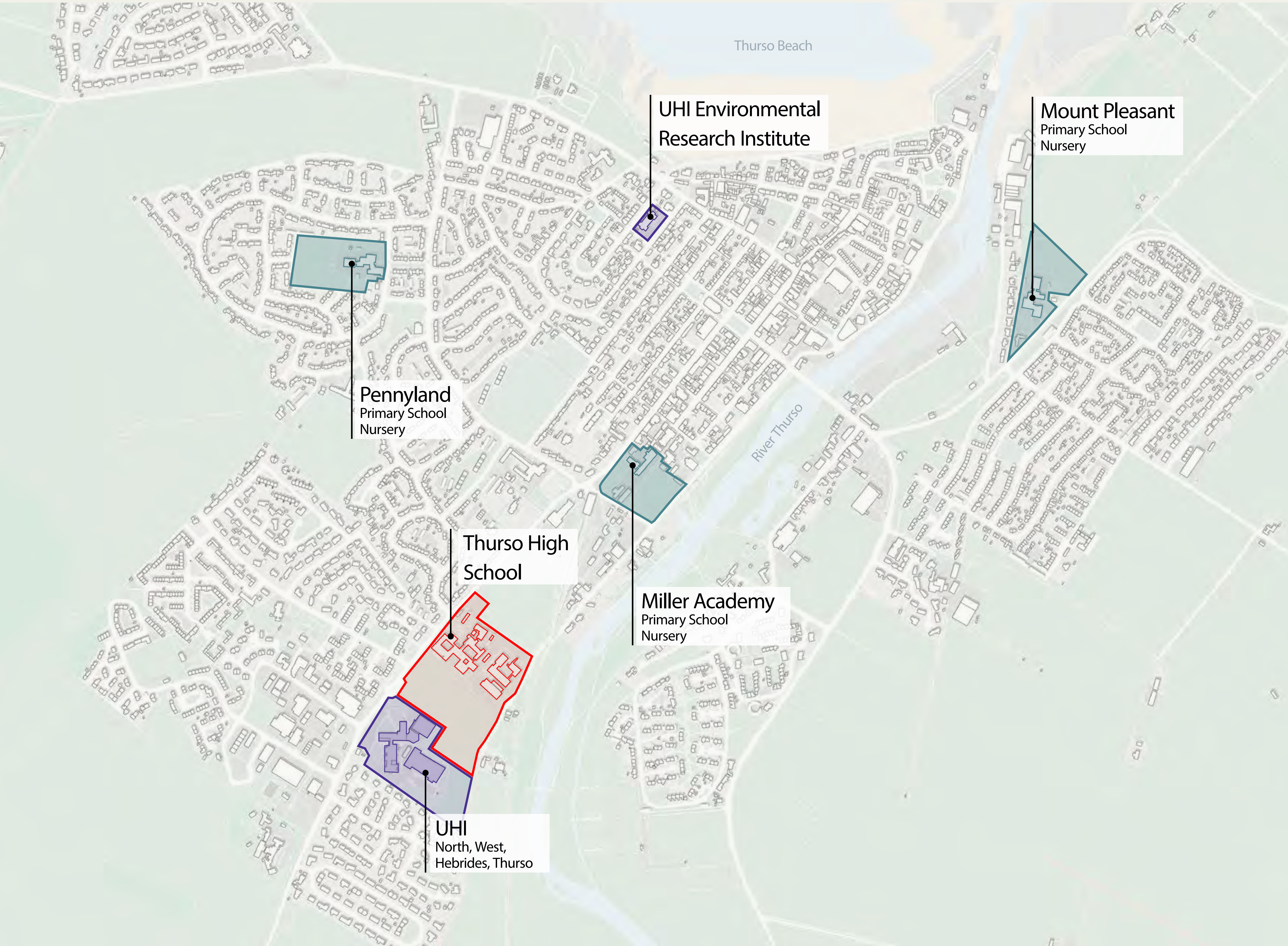
THC is currently evaluating how it wants to operate going forward to support and deliver the model of PoDs to fully utilise its assets.

Some of these future priorities that are being explored are:

- **Improving asset management by reducing the amount of buildings operated by THC**
- **More jobs across less buildings**
- **Securing the school estate while making it more flexible**
- **Creating shared and flexible Office and Depot PoDs**
- **Exploring opportunities to share spaces with partners**

Thurso: Points of Delivery

The Future of Thurso's Education Provision



Current School Information

Thurso High School

| | |
|--------------------|----------|
| Capacity | 1,079 |
| Current Roll | 736 |
| Enhanced Provision | |
| Condition | C (Poor) |
| Suitability | C (Poor) |

Miller Academy Primary

| | |
|--------------------|------------------|
| Capacity | 330 |
| Current Roll | 292 |
| Enhanced Provision | |
| Condition | B (Satisfactory) |
| Suitability | B (Satisfactory) |

Mount Pleasant Primary

| | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| Capacity | 243 |
| Current Roll | 164 |
| Enhanced Provision | |
| Condition | B (Satisfactory) |
| Suitability | Bv (Satisfactory) |

Pennyland Primary

| | |
|--------------|------------------|
| Capacity | 278 |
| Current Roll | 159 |
| Condition | C (Poor) |
| Suitability | B (Satisfactory) |

| Condition |
|------------------|
| A - Good |
| B - Satisfactory |
| C - Poor |
| D - Bad |
| Suitability |
| A - Good |
| B - Satisfactory |
| C - Poor |
| D - bad |

School Considerations

The following key points will be continually considered throughout the process:

- Additional Support Needs (ASN)
- Early Learning and Childcare (ELC)
- Primary Schools
- Gaelic Medium
- School Locations
- School Management Structures
- Asset Retention

Educational Perspective

Pupil, staff, parents and the wider community will be consulted early in the process, with pupil representatives involved where appropriate. We will be drawing lessons from other new education settings to maximise this development's potential. The priority is to deliver a well-planned provision that meets current needs while anticipating future demands and making full use of the opportunities created by the proposed changes.

Thurso: Points of Delivery

Community PoD options

Although educational provision is just one element of the Community PoD approach, the future configuration of schools is a key factor in identifying suitable sites in terms of capacity, location, and suitability. The following initial list of options were identified for consideration:



Option 1: Status Quo

Three primary schools (With ELC) on separate sites from the High School, each with ASN bases as required.

Replacing all 4 schools would be unaffordable, and 3 out of the 4 schools are under occupied with school rolls projected to continue falling.

Option 2: Education Campus (One Primary School)

Thurso High, a combined LARGE primary school, Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) provision and Additional Support Needs (ASN) bases all located on one campus.

Location confirmed as the current High School site with playing fields.

| | |
|--------------------------|-----|
| Education Campus: | |
| Secondary capacity | 750 |
| Primary capacity | 641 |
| ELC capacity | 144 |
| Enhanced Provision Base | |

Option 3: Education Campus (Two Primary Schools)

As Option One but with primary school provision split between the Education Campus and **one other primary school** located elsewhere and with revised catchment areas.

| | |
|--------------------------|---------|
| Education Campus: | |
| Secondary capacity | 750 |
| Primary capacity | 333-469 |
| ELC capacity | 72-120 |
| Enhanced Provision Base | |

Separate Primary:
Retain one the of current primary schools from the campus.

Option 4: Separate High School (One Primary School)

As Option Two but one **combined LARGE primary school on a separate site** from the high school.

| | |
|--------------------------|---------|
| Education Campus: | |
| Secondary capacity | 750 |
| Primary capacity | 333-469 |
| ELC capacity | 72-120 |
| Enhanced Provision Base | |

Separate Primary:
Retain one the of current primary schools from the campus.

Option 5: Separate High School (Two Primary Schools)

As Option Four but with **two separate primary schools** with revised catchment areas.

| | |
|--------------------------|---------|
| Education Campus: | |
| Secondary capacity | 750 |
| Primary capacity | 333-469 |
| ELC capacity | 72-120 |
| Enhanced Provision Base | |

Separate Primary:
Retain one the of current primary schools from the campus.

Thurso: Points of Delivery

Thurso Community Pod: The Opportunity

At a meeting of The Highland Council on Thursday 26 June, elected members approved the work to date in progressing the Highland Investment Plan's work, including the masterplan for Thurso, and agreed to nominate the current Thurso High School site as the preferred location for the new Thurso Community Point of Delivery (PoD). **These plans represent £100 million of investment in the town.**

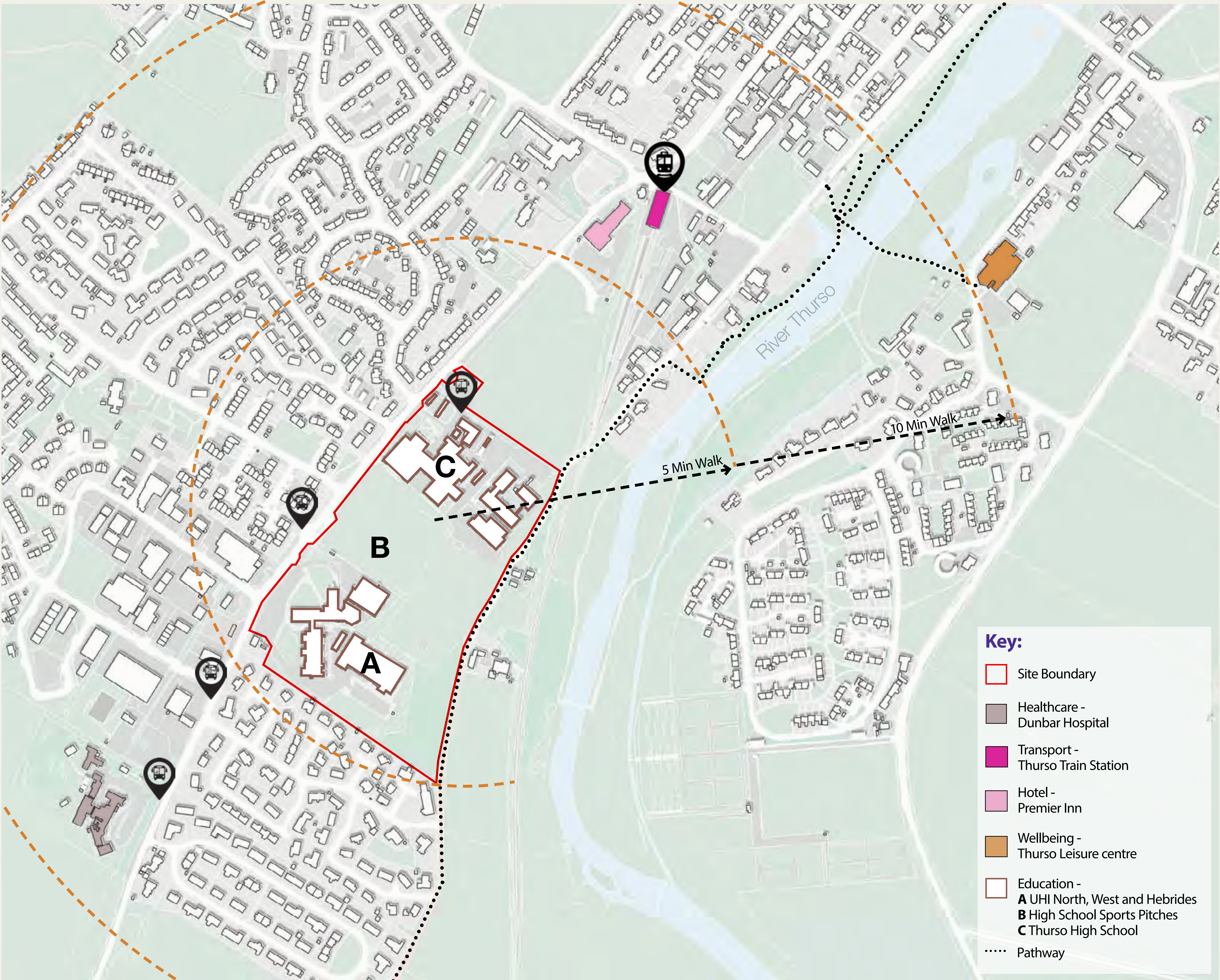
On and around the existing High School, and the UHI North, West and Hebrides campus there are opportunities for significant transformation and improvements to be made to education, community sport & leisure facilities, and strengthened connections to the UHI campus. The scale and extent of the opportunity can be seen in the map and aerial view below.

What services could be accommodated in your? Community PoD:

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Education | Replacement High School/0-25+Education Campus |
| Sport & Leisure | Enhanced community facilities |
| Healthy Living | Provide generational care |

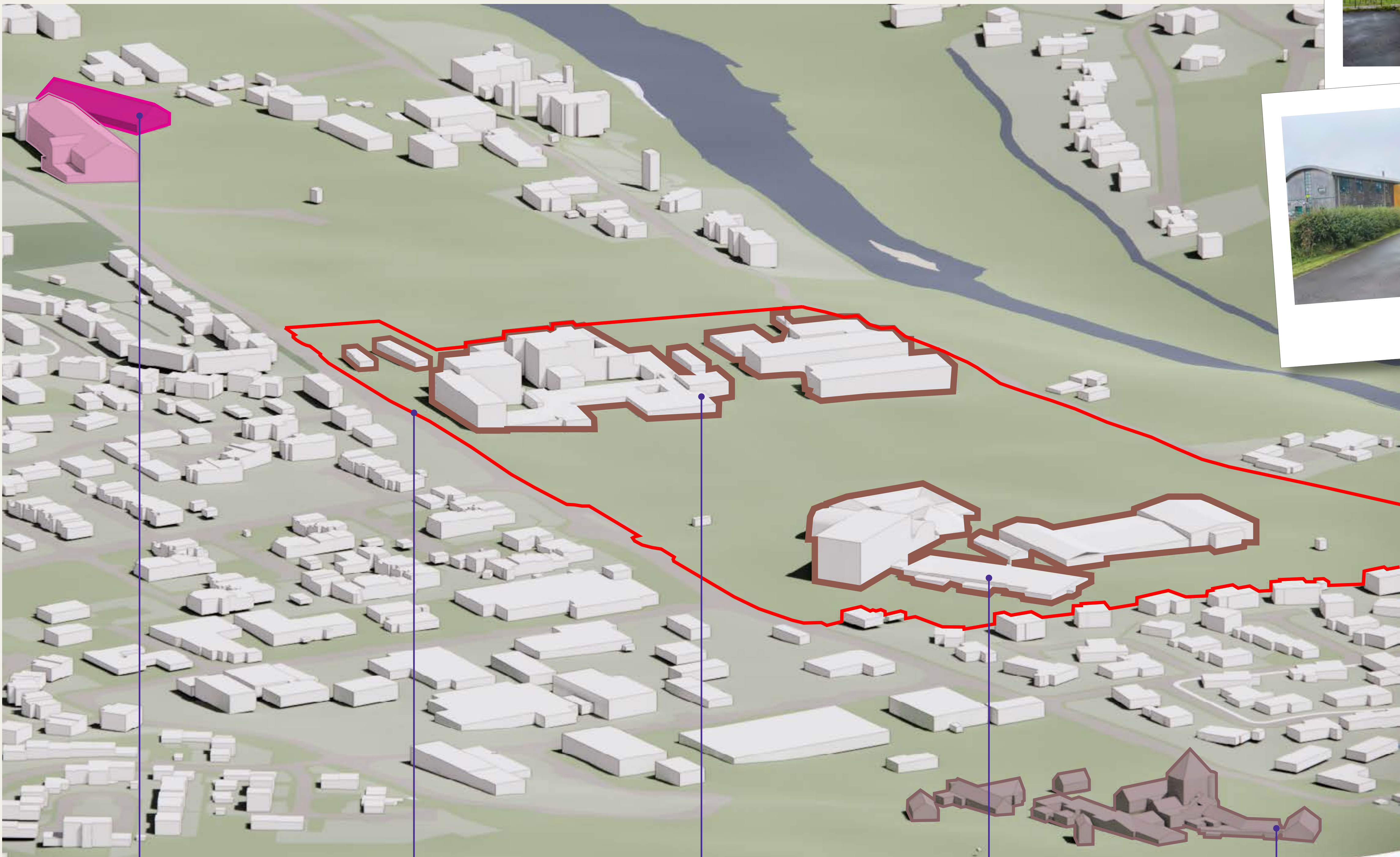
Who are the potential partners?

There are a number of partners who could take advantage of the opportunity this development presents, ranging from local government, emergency services, healthcare, leisure and education.



Thurso: Points of Delivery

Aerial View of Potential Location



Key:

- Confirmed Site Boundary
- Education
- Healthcare - Dunbar Hospital
- Transport - Thurso Train Station
- Hotel - Premier Inn

Thurso Train Station
and Premier Inn

Identified Community
PoD Site

Thurso High School

UHI North, West and
Hebrides

Dunbar Hospital

Thurso: Points of Delivery

What Happens Next?

Based on discussions and agreement with The Highland Council and building on recent successful engagement with Partners, the following next steps to develop the Thurso Points of Delivery (PoDs) are proposed.



1. Continuation of Partner, Public and Stakeholder engagement



2. Further Development of PoD Opportunities



3. Developing the Next Stages of the Business Case



Thurso Community PoD Consultation Survey available online here.

Questions

1. What services would you like to see accommodated in your Community PoD?

- ☐ Education
- ☐ Enhanced community facilities
- ☐ Sport and leisure
- ☐ Wellbeing and social activities

2. To help us understand how the PoD can best serve the community, what are your top priorities for sport and leisure facilities?

3. To help us understand how the PoD can best serve the community, what are your top priorities for wellbeing and social activities?

4. Education provision is one element of the community PoD approach. The future configuration of schools is a key factor in identifying suitable sites in terms of capacity, location, and suitability. Please select your preferred option (listed below).

Option 2: Education Campus (one primary school). Thurso High, a combined large primary school, early learning and childcare (ELC) provision, and additional support needs (ASN) base, all located on one campus (location confirmed as current high school site with playing fields)

Option 3: Education Campus (two primary schools). Thurso High, one primary school, early learning and childcare (ELC) provision, and additional support needs (ASN) base, on one campus, with a second primary school located elsewhere with revised catchment areas.

Option 4: Separate high school and one large combined primary school.

Option 5: Separate high school and two separate primary schools with revised catchment areas.

5. Please explain why you have chosen the above option over the others.

6. When thinking about education provision, what do you consider the key factors are when making a final decision?

- ☐ Travel Time
- ☐ Campus Size
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Distance
- ☐ Easier Transitions

7. There are also opportunities to strengthen connections between the local high school, primary schools, and the UHI North, West and Hebrides campus.

What benefits do you think there are to school provision and college/university provision being on the same education campus?

8. There are also opportunities to strengthen connections between the local high school, primary schools, and the UHI North, West and Hebrides campus.

What disadvantages do you think there are to school provision and college/university provision being on the same education campus?

9. Are there any uses for the thurso PoD you think we’ve missed?

10. Are there specific groups and/or topics of interest you feel we should give additional attention to for the future phases of engagement on the Thurso PoD?

11. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

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Partners in the Transformation Journey

