

What is a Masterplan Consent Area?

A Masterplan Consent Area (MCA) is a way to accelerate the delivery of a development site. It does this by focusing and coordinating community, developer, councillor, officer and agency input at an early stage.

An MCA is an optional legal power introduced by the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, available since December 2024 to allow a local council to accelerate the delivery of development. An MCA Scheme, if made, establishes the principle of development on the site and grants planning permission for specified types and forms of development within a specified area subject to specified conditions and exclusions.

Why is the Council exploring potential Masterplan Consent Areas?

The principal reason to progress MCAs within Highland is to address presently unmet housing need and demand.

The Highland Housing Challenge was declared by the Highland Council on 27 June 2024 and set a housing target of 24,000 homes in the next 10 years. The Council confirmed the role of MCAs in meeting this target on 26 June 2025 via its approval of a Highland Housing Challenge Partnership Action Plan.

Against this target it is anticipated that only 14,920 housing units will be delivered in Highland over the next 10 years so there is projected shortfall of over 9,000 units over that period.

The Council's new Highland Local Development Plan will allocate new housing sites, however it will not be finalised until 2028 and not adopted until 2029, and subsequent planning permissions and completions will take at least 4 years thereafter.

MCAs can provide a shorter-term solution to provide additional deliverable housing sites. This will enable the Council to respond more quickly to newly emerging opportunities such as the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport project and to address other ongoing housing pressures such as long waiting lists for affordable housing.

Address ongoing housing pressures

Respond to projected shortfall of 9,000+ housing units

Provide additional deliverable housing sites

What is the process to establish a Masterplan Consent Area?

Scottish Government has approved and published legislation and guidance that set out how Masterplan Consent Areas should be consulted upon, prepared and approved.

- Town and Country Planning Act 1997 (as amended) Section 54 MCA Provisions
- The Town and Country Planning (Masterplan Consent Areas) (Scotland) Regulations 2024
- Masterplan Consent Areas Guidance, 2025

The guidance outlines seven key steps required to prepare and establish an MCA Scheme (below).

We are currently at Stage 2.

For Stage 1, in November 2025, the Highland Council decided to proceed with initial community consultation on the potential for an MCA at 3 locations.

- Essich Road (Inverness)
- Ardersier
- Embo (by Dornoch)

Stage 1

Identify and agree potential MCA site(s)

Stage 2

Early engagement on potential MCA site

Stage 3

Public consultation on proposed MCA Scheme

Stage 4

MCA Scheme Representations considered by PAC

Stage 5

If required: Predetermination hearing and Notification to Ministers

Stage 6

Council adopt or 'make' the full MCA Scheme

Stage 7

Notify decision on MCA Scheme

When can community input to the MCA process?

At Stage 2, communities have the opportunity to provide engagement feedback on the potential MCA site. Further, the Community Council is a statutory participant at this stage, as per the MCA Regulations.

MCAs will follow a collaborative masterplanning process with developers, the Council and community representation. A community representative will be embedded in the design team, with monthly involvement in the Scheme development.

At the end of Stage 3, when the Proposed Scheme is submitted to the Council, communities can provide feedback on the MCA Scheme (representations).

Today, you can provide your feedback via:

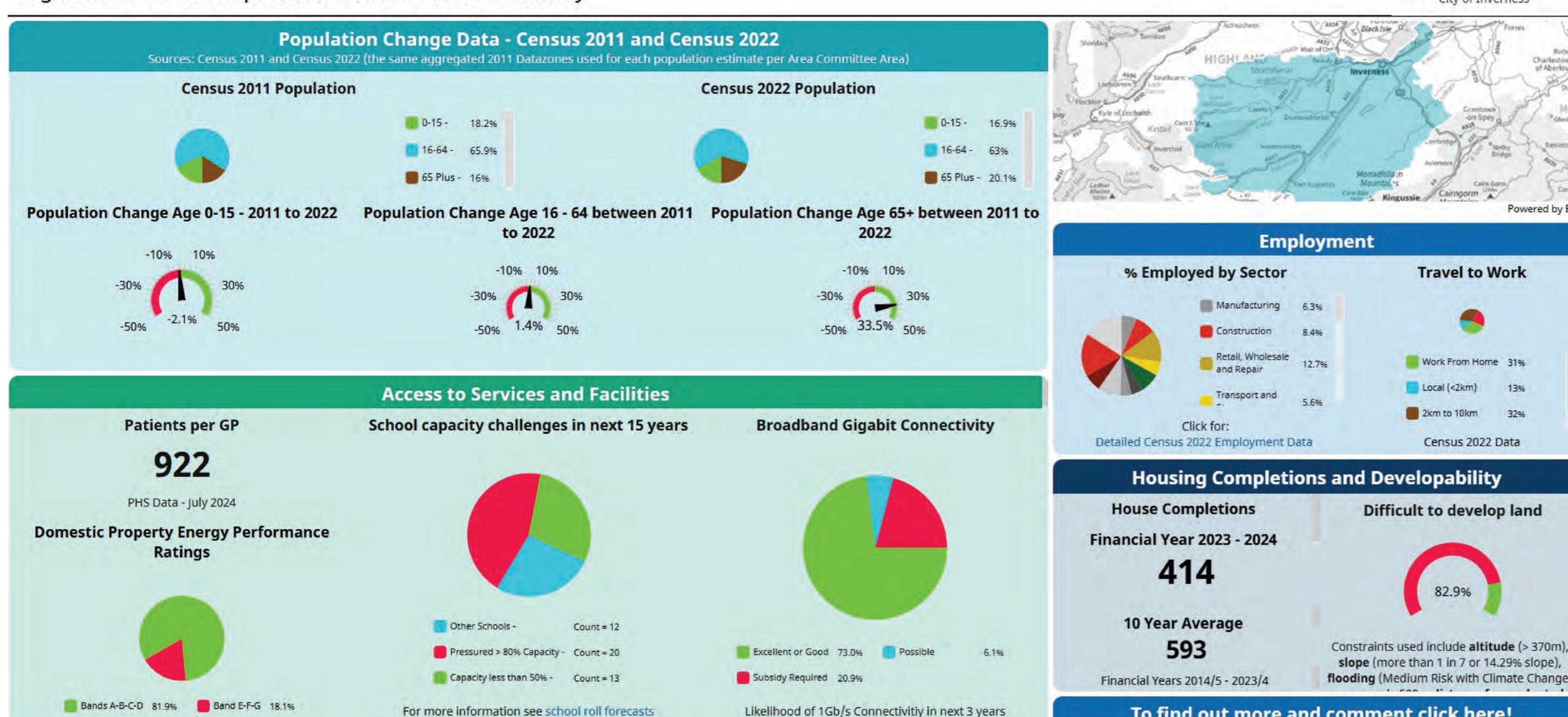
- Filling out a paper feedback form and posting in the black box**
- Scanning this QR code and filling out the online feedback form**



Online Feedback Form

Local Area Profile and Housing Need

Highland Local Development Plan Area Profile Summary



The Highland Housing Register (HHR) in Ardersier lettings area - where Ardersier is a households first choice - has 44 households on the Housing List and 23 on the Transfer List, a total of 67 households.

For households' first choice, the demand by dwelling type is:

- Bedsit/1bed = 40 households
- 2 Bed = 14 households
- 3 Bed = 5 households
- 4+ Bed = 8 households
- Total = 67 households

School Capacity

The Ardersier community is served by two main schools:

- Culloden Academy has capacity for 1330 pupils, and it is currently at 85% of this capacity. School roll forecasts estimate that by 2040, it will be at 78% capacity.
- Ardersier Primary has capacity for 150 pupils, and it is currently at 64% of this capacity. School roll forecasts estimate that by 2040, it will be at 49% capacity.

The draft Highland Housing Need and Demand Assessment (2025) identified key housing tenures needed:

- Accommodation to buy (61%)
- Mid-market rent (60%)
- Low-cost home ownership (57%)

The size of accommodation most needed to reduce workforce housing pressures is 2-bedroom homes.

GP Capacity

The branch surgery at Ardersier is part of the Nairn Healthcare Group. Nairn Healthcare Group has over 15,000 patients registered as of October 2025. The patient list has increased 4.5% since 2019.

In the Ardersier surgery there is a lack of capacity and additional 2 consulting rooms have recently been fitted out to provide a total of 5 consulting rooms. The registered patient list continues to grow.

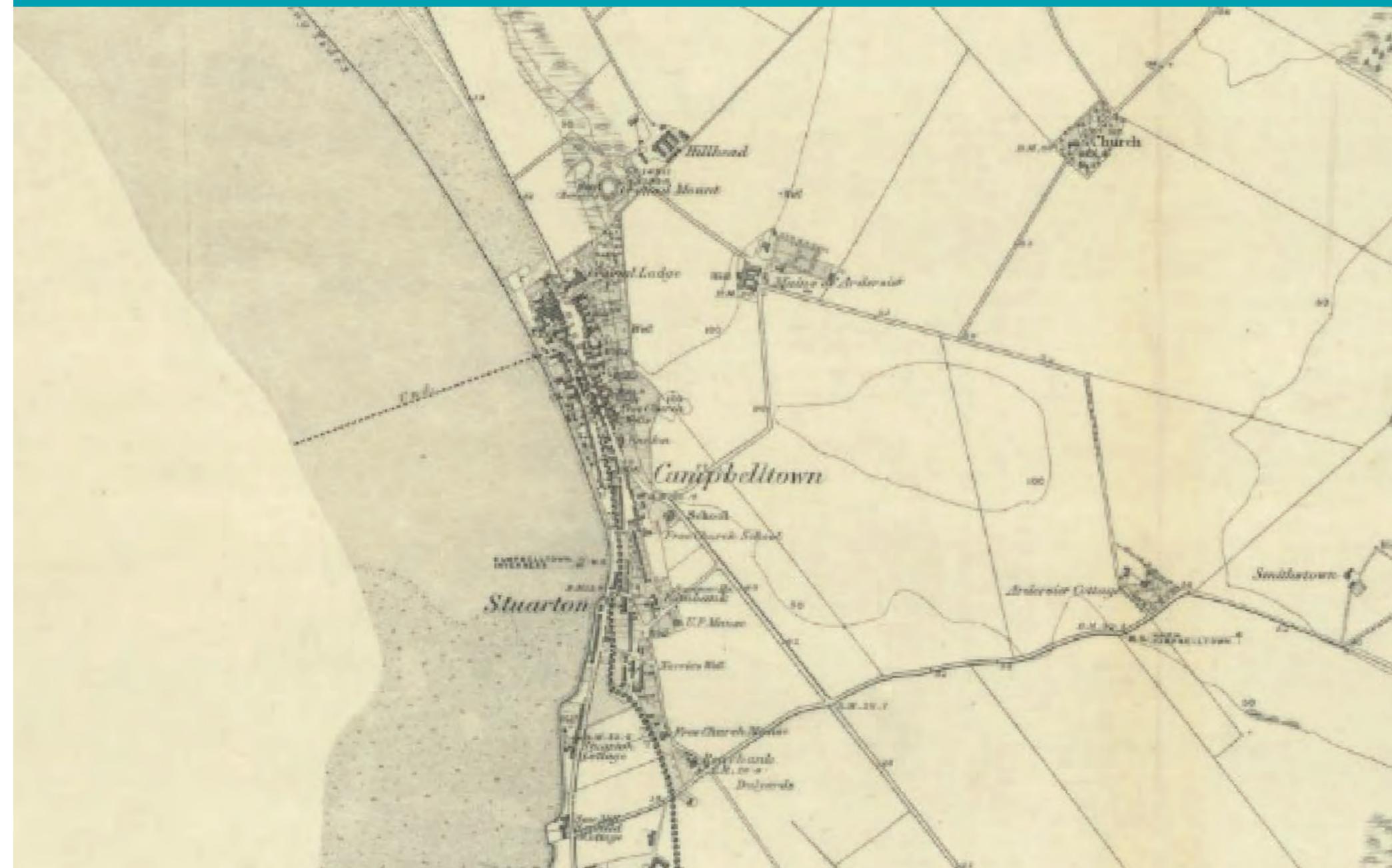
Understanding future employment growth helps Council to estimate housing requirements.

The Highland Housing Workforce Study 2025 projected a 4% increase in the workforce, with 3,500+ new roles in the next 12 months. This is higher than the average employment growth rate of 0.8% in Scotland (2024-2027), as per regional economic estimates from Ernst & Young.

The draft Highland Housing Need and Demand Assessment (2025) has forecasted that from 2025-2040, over 8,600 FTE jobs (direct additional employment) will be created from the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport and 2,900+ FTE jobs from other Regional Transformation Opportunities (onshore and offshore wind, green hydrogen, marine energy, pumped storage hydro, SSEN transmission upgrades).

Significant employment growth in Highland means more housing is needed

Historic Maps

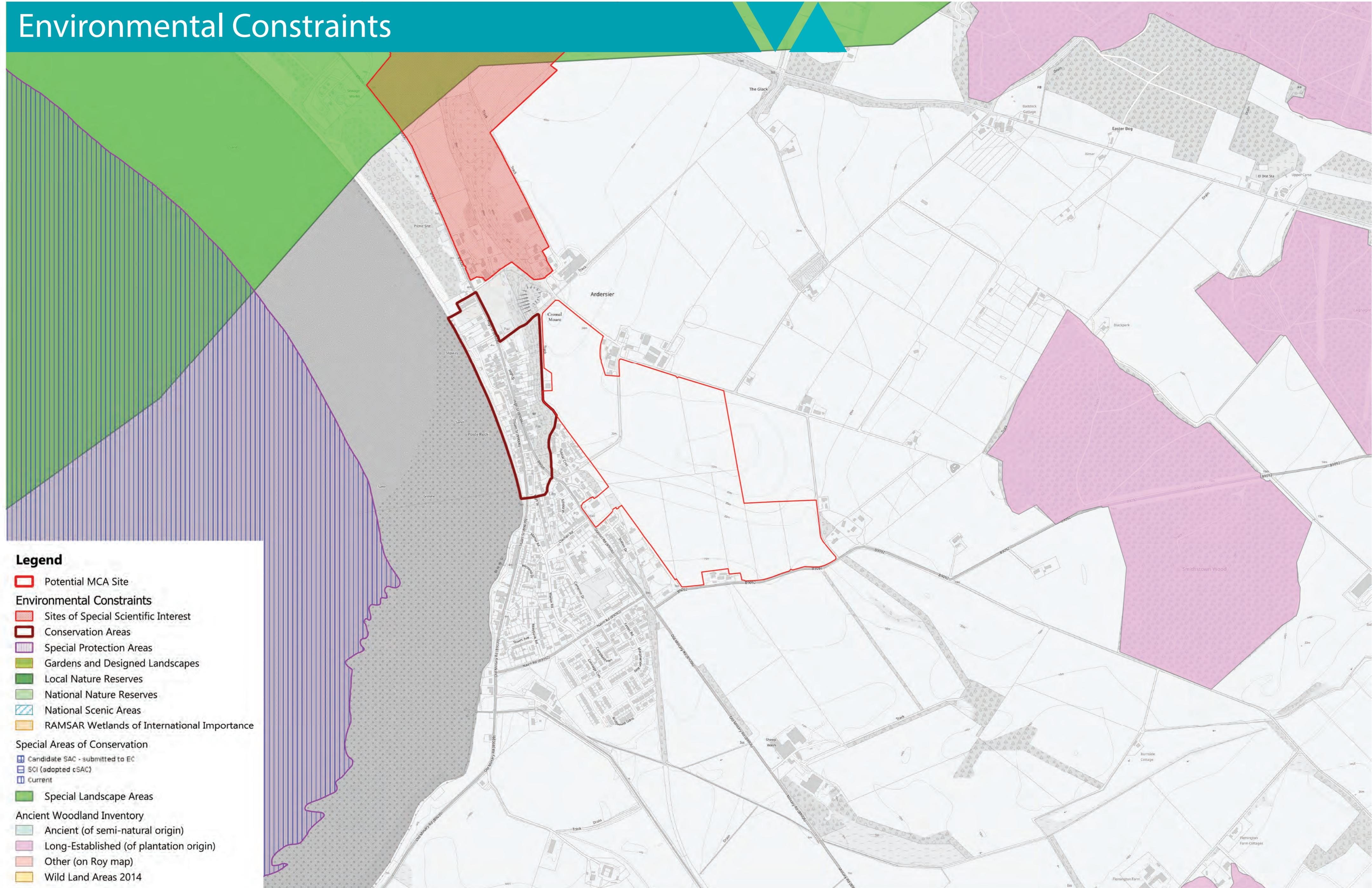


1870



1967

Environmental Constraints



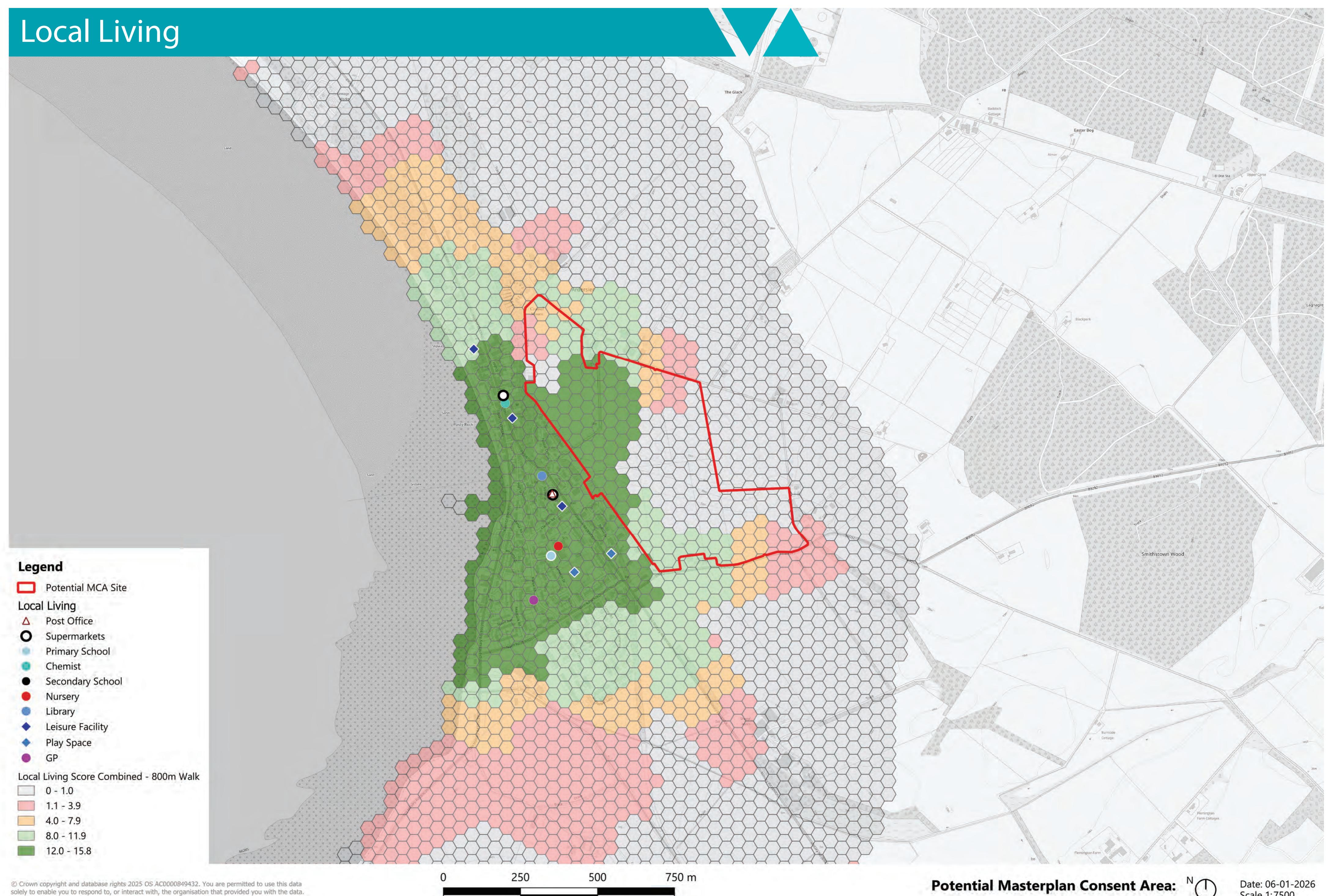
Roads and Transport



Flood Risk



Local Living



The Ardersier Sewage Works currently has capacity available.

The relevant Water Treatment Works currently has capacity for 11,800+ units.

Legend

- Water Main
- Foul Sewer
- Surface Water
- Combined Sewer

Electricity Network

Legend

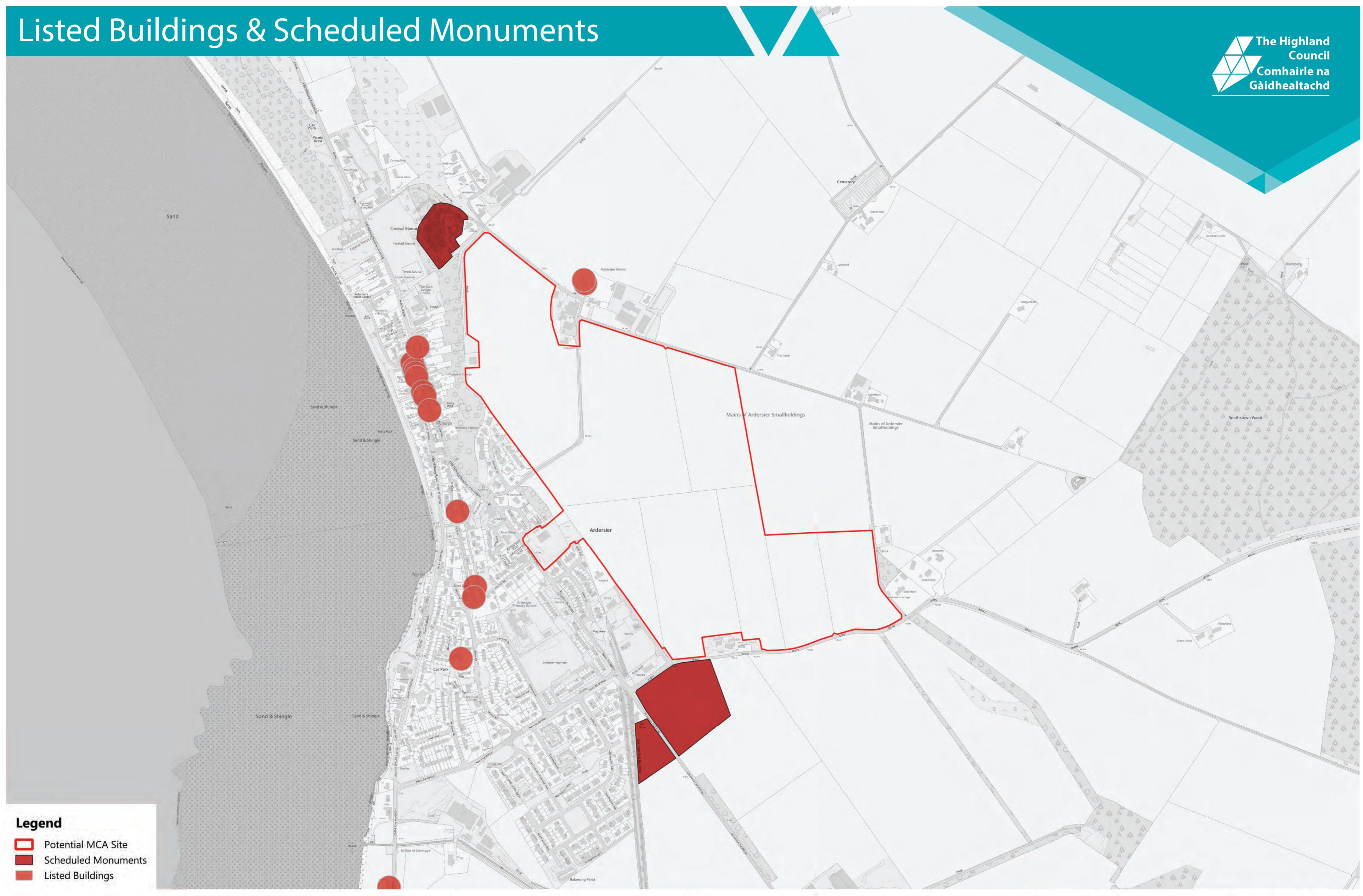
- Potential MCA Site
- Electricity_HV_OH_2008
- Electricity_HV_UG_2008
- Electricity_LV_OH_2008
- Electricity_LV_UG_2008

0 250 500 750 m

Potential Masterplan Consent Area:
Ardersier

Date: 06-01-2026
Scale: 1:5000

Listed Buildings & Scheduled Monuments



Legend

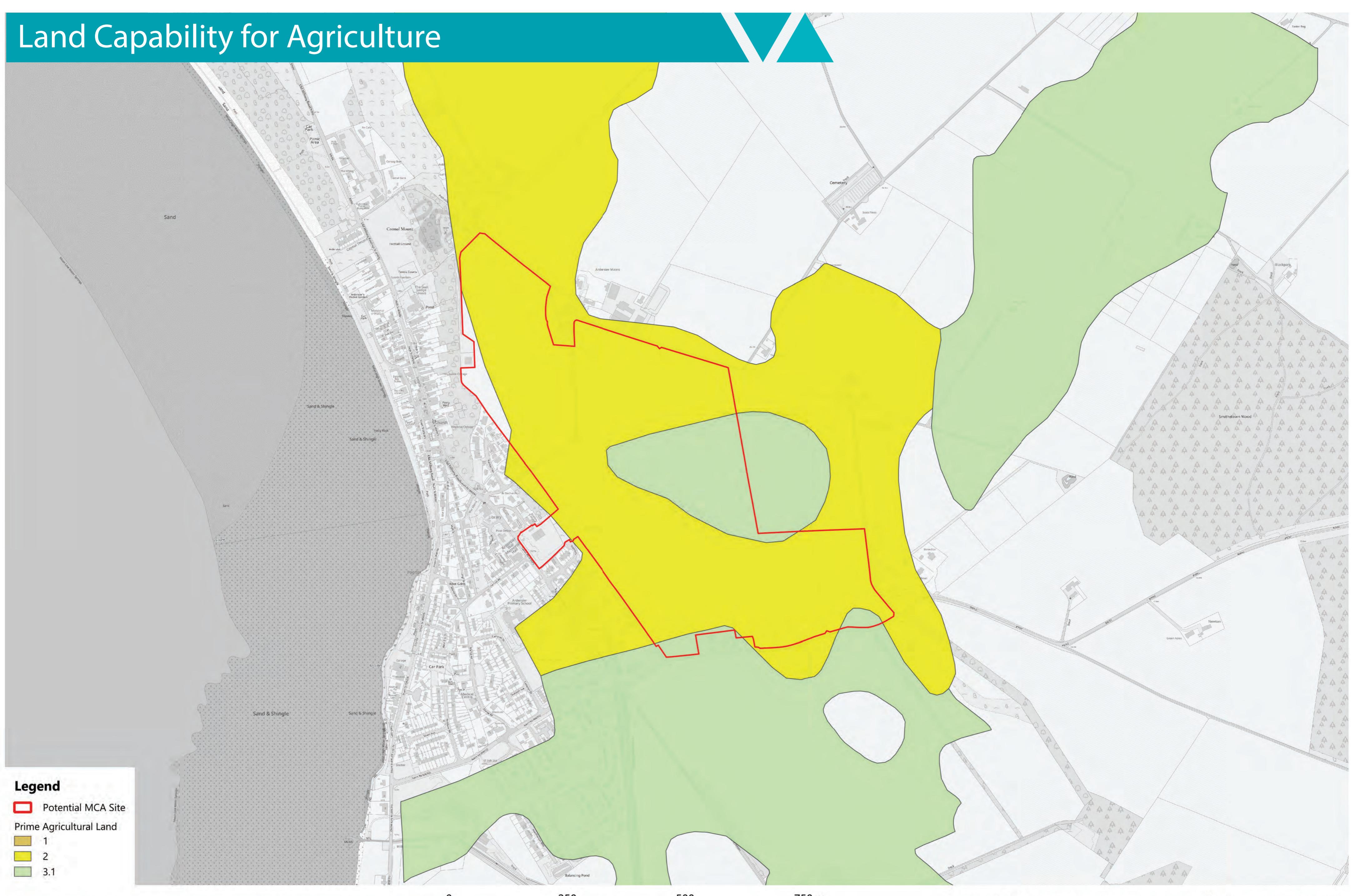
- Potential MCA Site
- Scheduled Monuments
- Listed Buildings

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Potential Masterplan Consent Area: N
Ardersier Date: 06-01-2026
Scale: 1:5000

Land Capability for Agriculture



Legend

- Potential MCA Site
- Prime Agricultural Land
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3.1

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Potential Masterplan Consent Area: N
Ardersier Date: 06-01-2026
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