

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.

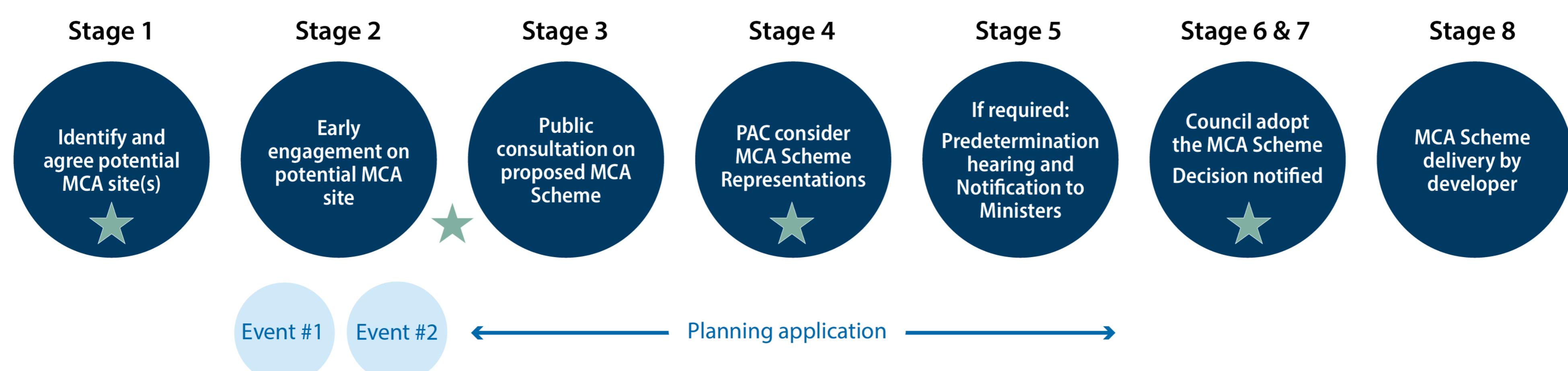
- Town and Country Planning Act 1997 (as amended) Section 54 MCA Provisions
- The Town and Country Planning (Masterplan Consent Areas) (Scotland) Regulations 2024
- Masterplan Consent Areas Guidance, 2025

The guidance outlines the 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)



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).

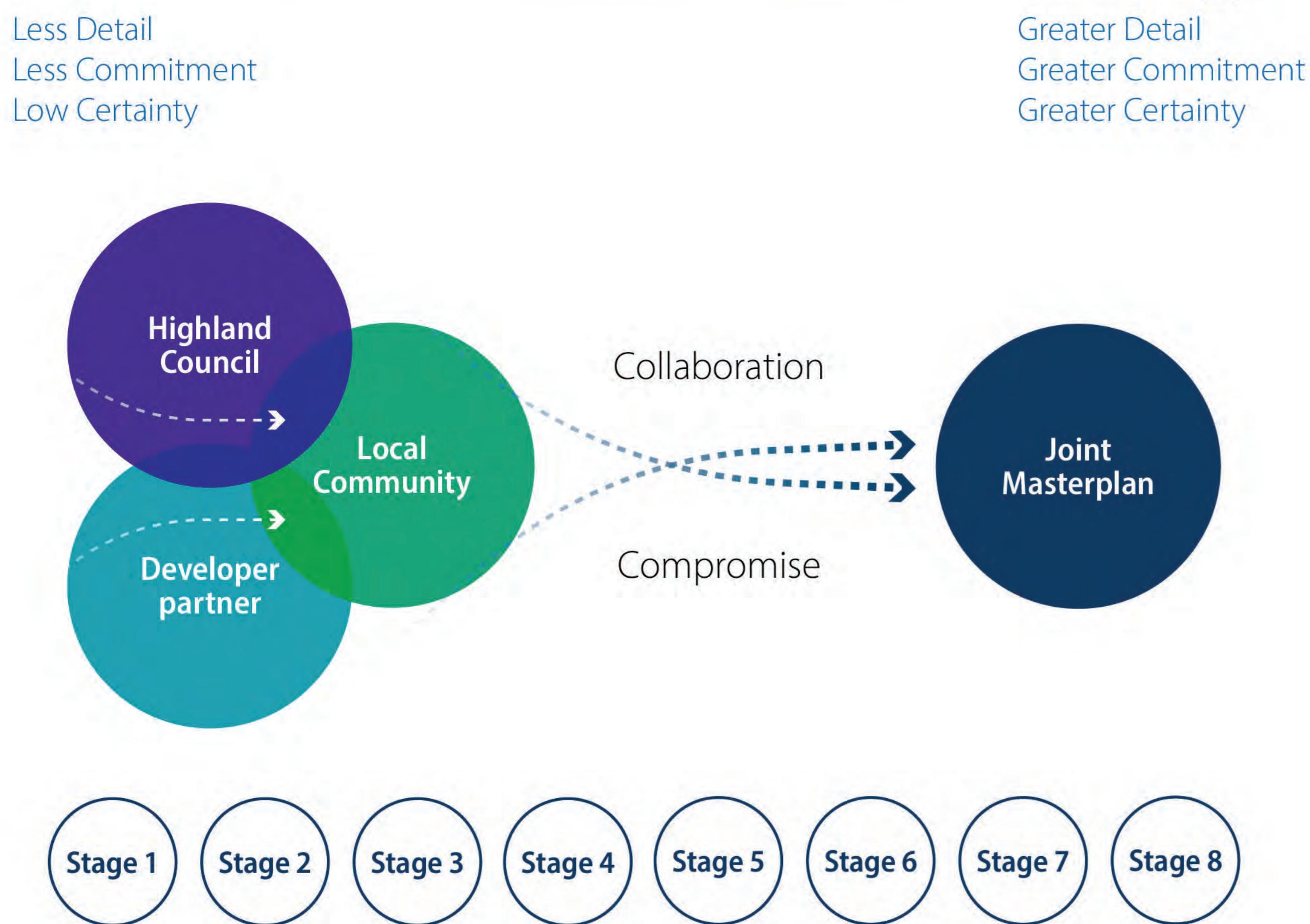
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Online Feedback Form

Masterplanning Process



Historic Maps



1874



1905

Understanding future employment growth helps Council to estimate housing requirements.

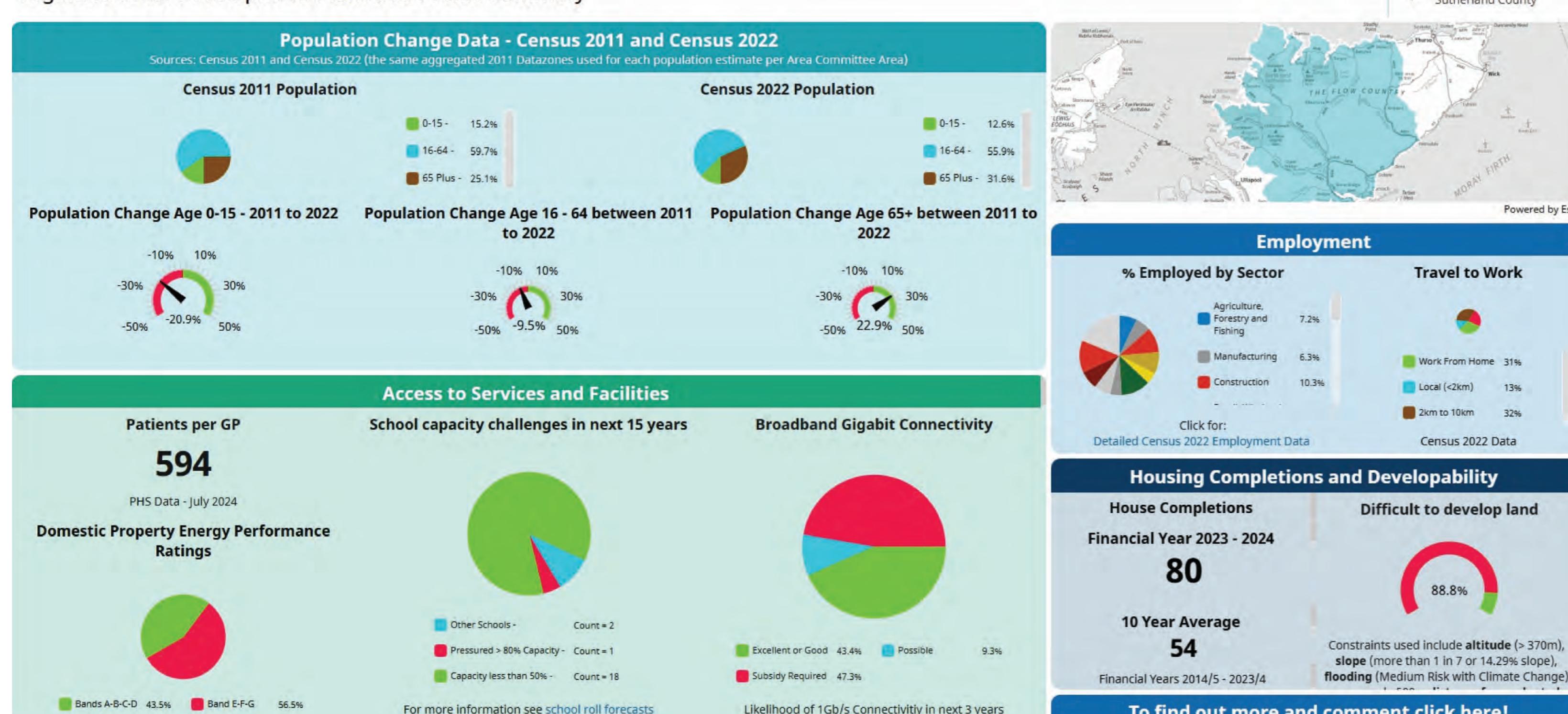
The Highland Housing Workforce Study 2025 projected a 4% increase in the workforce, with 3,500+ new roles in the next 12 months. This is higher than the average employment growth rate of 0.8% in Scotland (2024-2027), as per regional economic estimates from Ernst & Young.

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, SSE transmission upgrades).

Significant employment growth in Highland means more housing is needed

Local Area Profile and Housing Need

Highland Local Development Plan Area Profile Summary



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%)

To reduce workforce housing pressures, the size of accommodation most needed is 2-bedroom homes.

New housing development in Sutherland is required to deliver 25% affordable homes. Affordability is defined as good quality homes that are affordable to people on low incomes. This can include social rented, mid-market rented, shared-ownership, shared-equity, housing sold at discount (including plots for self-build), self-build plots and low cost housing without subsidy.

The Highland Housing Register (HHR) in East Sutherland lettings area (Dornoch and Embo) has 61 households on the Housing List and 36 on the Transfer List, a total of 97 households.

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

- Bedsit/1bed = 41 households
- 2 Bed = 14 households
- 3 Bed = 4 households
- 4+ Bed = 2 households
- Total = 61 households

School Capacity

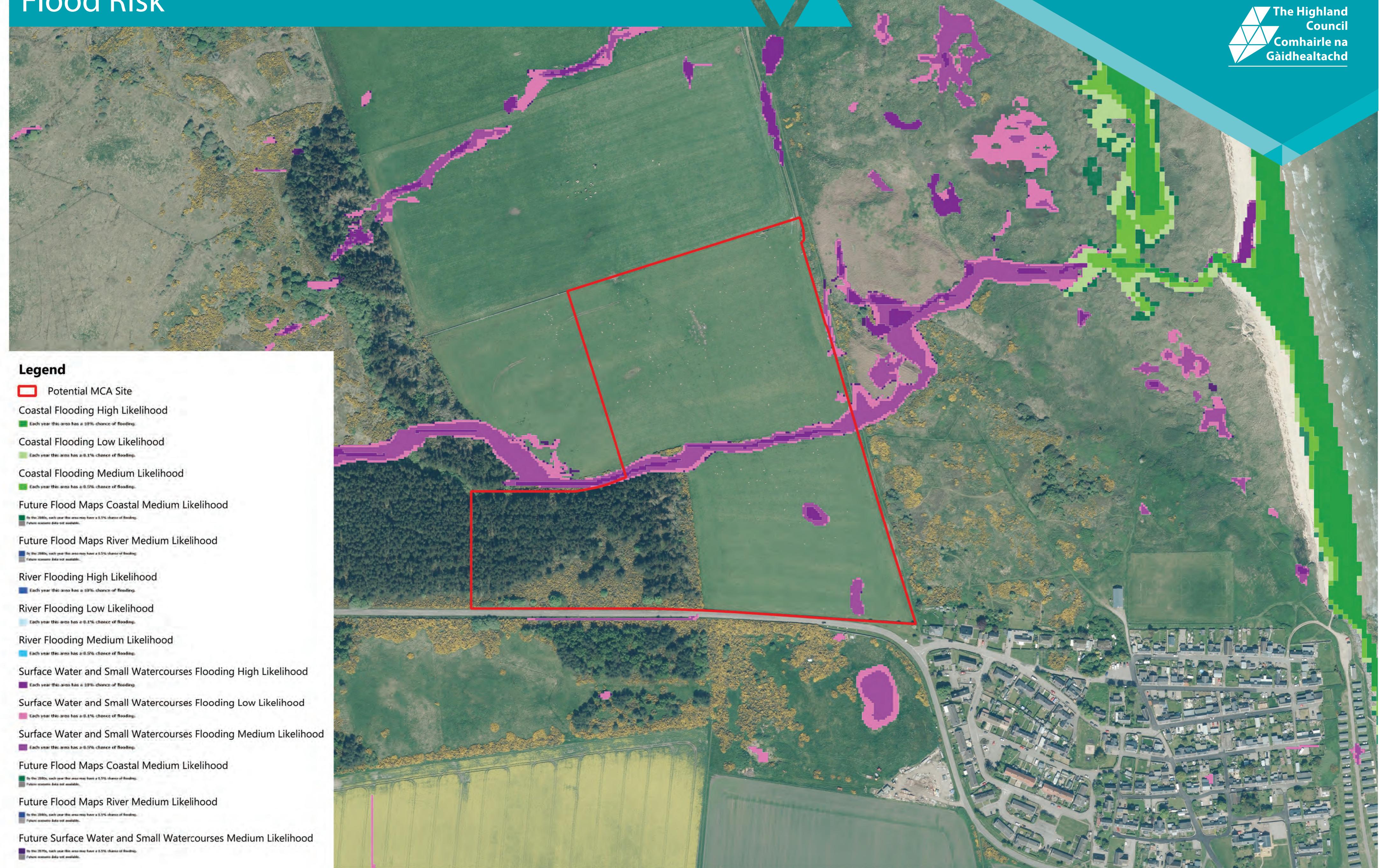
The Embo community is served by two main schools:

- Dornoch Primary has capacity for 188 pupils, and it is currently at 88% of this capacity. School roll forecasts estimate a peak at 91% between 2027-2030, and by 2039/40 it will reach 83% capacity.
- Dornoch Academy has capacity for 378 pupils, and it is currently at 60% of this capacity. School roll forecasts estimate that the roll will steadily decline, and plateau at a capacity of 45-46% by 2039/40.

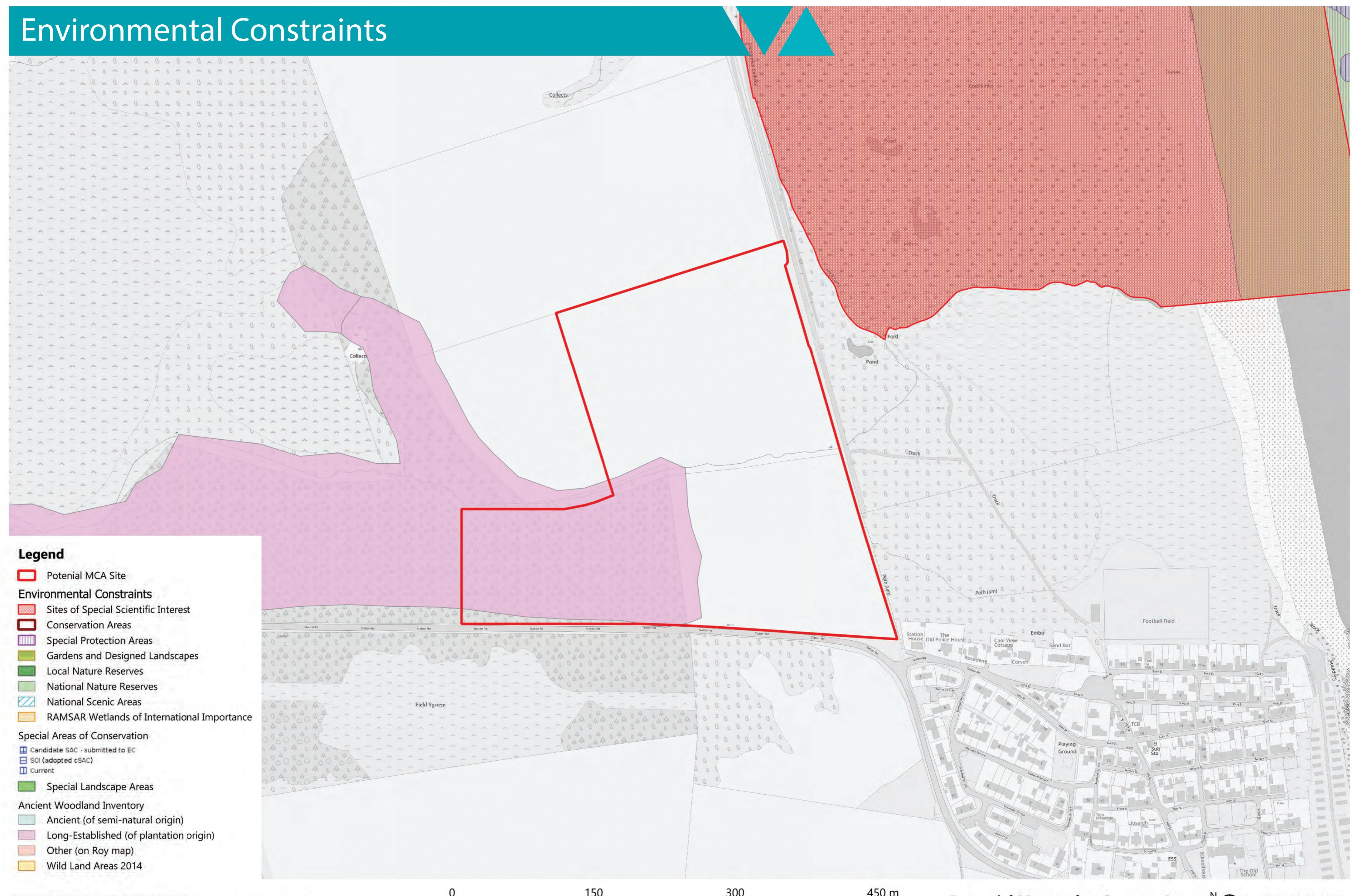
Roads and Transport

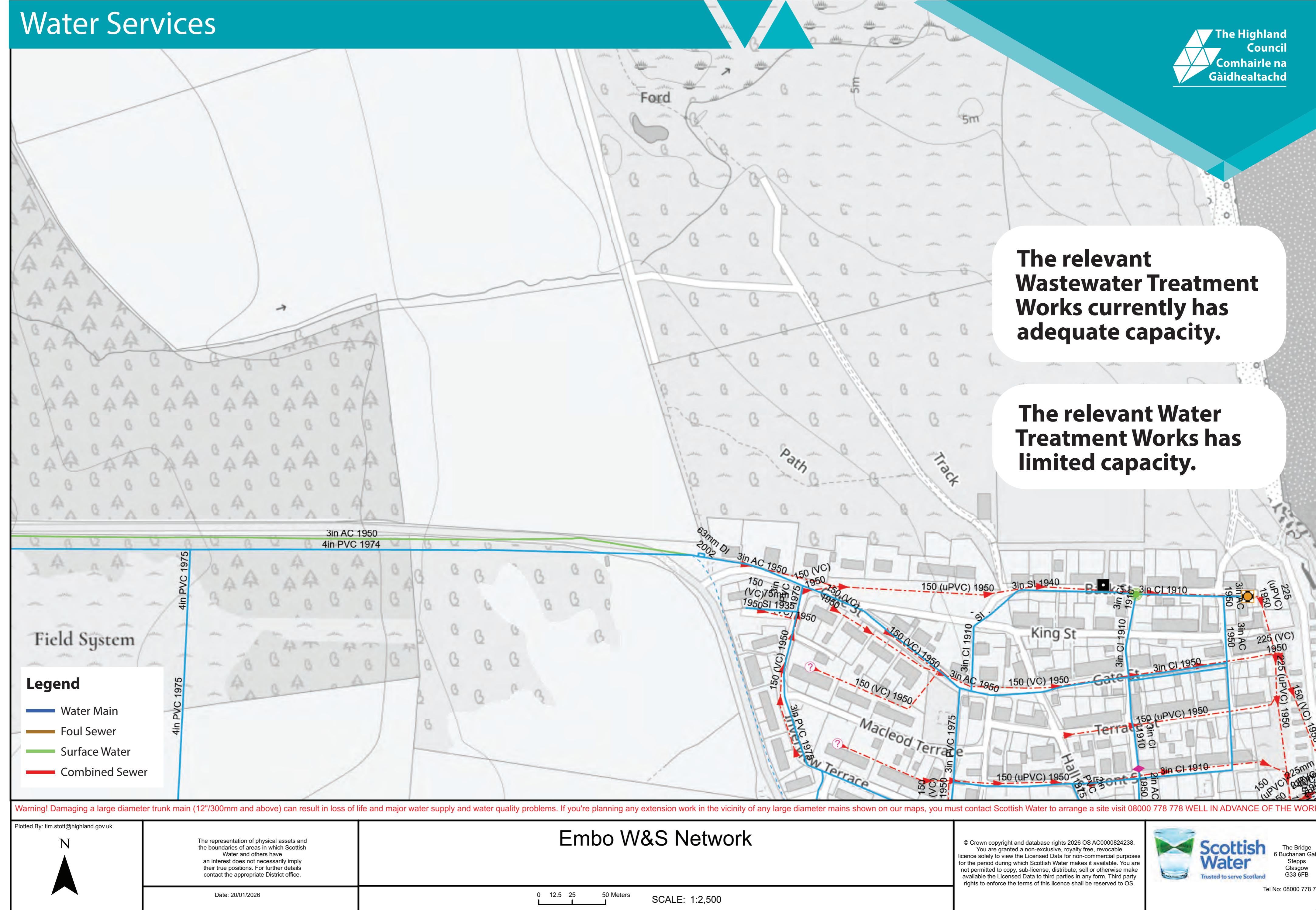


Flood Risk



Environmental Constraints





Land Capability for Agriculture

