

# SUTHERLAND LOCAL PLAN

## Written Statement

Adopted Plan June 2010

Plana Ris An Deach Gabhail  
An t-Òg mhios 2010

# PLANA IONADAIL CHATAIBH

## Aithris Sgrìobhte

**(As Continued in Force) (April 2012)**

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICE  
THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL



## How to Read and Use the Plan

This Local Plan (as continued in force) must be read in conjunction with the Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP). The HwLDP contains the Spatial Strategy, Vision and all general policy against which development proposals will be assessed. General policies within the Highland-wide Local Development Plan can found in Sections 18 to 23 (inc).

## Sutherland Local Plan (as continued in force)

The adopted Highland-wide Local Development Plan replaced the Highland Structure Plan (March 2001) (except within the Cairngorms National Park) and updates/supersedes the “general policies” of the existing adopted Local Plans. In order to retain the other elements of the existing adopted Local Plans (including but not limited to; site allocations, settlement development areas not covered by the Highland-wide Local Development Plan and site specific policies) a Parliamentary Order was laid before Scottish Parliament on 16th March 2012 to enable these elements to remain in force to the extent so specified as required by Schedule 1 of The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 As Amended. The Order is called The Town and Country Planning (Continuation in force of Local Plans) (Highland) (Scotland) Order 2012 and came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012.

The elements of the adopted Local Plans which remain in force are included within the Retention Schedule as contained in Appendix 7 of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan. These retained elements of local plans will remain retained until the time a new area Local Development Plan is prepared covering that area. At that time the retained elements of the local plan will no longer be part of the Development Plan.

The Retained Elements of the Plan are contained in the following sections of this document, the original Local Plan documents have been redacted to remove or shade out sections of text no longer in force. The continued in force parts of the Plan remain with the HwLDP providing the general policy context for these sections of text and mapping.

## Habitats Regulation Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment

For the Order to be passed it had to be clear that the retained elements of the adopted local plans have met the requirements of European Community Law with respect to Habitats Regulation Appraisal (HRA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment. The Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA) considers all the policies and proposals of the adopted local plans which are intended to be retained in force. The Plan must be read alongside the HRA.

## Provisions of Local Plan Map(s) as continued in force

The provisions of the Proposals Map (including any inset contained in or accompanying it and the policies and proposals shown on such inset) and related notations, referencing and explanatory text, only to the extent to which those provisions show, illustrate or explain any provision of the local plan which is continued in force by the Parliamentary Order\* and as detailed in the Retention Schedule.

The Retention Schedule (extract) below lists the retained elements to the area Local Plan.

## Sutherland Local Plan 2010 (Adopted: 24 June 2010)

<b>Provisions of Sutherland Local Plan to continue in force</b>	<b>Limitations and exclusions</b>
1. The provisions of the Written Statement contained in—	
Chapter 2 (introduction and context)	
Chapter 4 (key forecasts, strategy and vision)	Other than provisions of Section A (key forecasts)
Chapter 5 (general policies)	Only the provisions of—
	paragraph 5.2 (land allocations) and policy 2 (development factors and development requirements); and
	paragraph 5.17 and policy 17 (commerce) to the extent to which policy 17 relates to development for retail purposes [within the locations specified in that policy]
2. The provisions of the Proposals Map (including any inset contained in or accompanying it and the policies and proposals shown on such inset) and related notations, referencing and explanatory text	Only to the extent to which those provisions show, illustrate or explain any provision of the local plan which is continued in force by this Order.

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### Accompanying Documents: Sgrìobhainnean Co-cheangailte:

A separate **Map Booklet** contains the Settlement Text and Proposals Map Insets as well as Background Maps. The Sutherland-wide Proposals Map is on a separate, larger, folded sheet.

The Strategic Environmental Assessment which is required by strategic environmental regulations can be found in the **Environmental Report**.

The Habitats Regulations Appraisal of the Local Plan, which includes **Appropriate Assessment**, is likewise available for reference as a separate document.

#### NOTE

Following adoption of the Local Plan the following additional documentation will be produced and made available:

- Strategic Environmental Assessment: Post-Adoption Statement;
- An Action Programme;
- Monitoring information.

Documents are made available on [www.highland.gov.uk](http://www.highland.gov.uk)

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## 2 Introduction & Context

### 2 Ro-ràdh & Co-theacsa

#### 2.1 How to Read and Use the Plan

#### 2.1 Mar a bu chòir am Plana a Leughadh is a Chleachdadh

The Local Plan is made up of maps and text. If you are interested in finding out what the Plan means for your particular area then you need to read both. The easiest way to find your community is by using the large Proposals Map which shows the whole area covered by the Plan. Once you've found your community, the Proposals Map will show you which text you need to read and whether there is more detailed mapping and text available. The larger communities will have this detail shown on a separate "Inset". For example, if you wanted to find what the Plan means for Lairg then you would find it on the Proposals Map which would tell you that there was a detailed "Inset" available and its reference number. The Lairg "inset" sets out all the text and mapping specific to that place.

2.2 However, to get the complete picture, you also need to read the Plan's "General Policies" which are listed in section 5 below as these can also affect a local issue. Larger or more controversial proposals may also be affected by the Plan's "Strategy" (section 4B) and "Vision" (section 4C). All development proposals will be assessed for the extent to which they contribute to the achievement of the plan objectives in section 3. These proposals may also require knowledge of policy or law at Highland-wide, national and European level. Links to this further reading are given in the "Other Factors" below.

#### 2.3 Plan Stages

#### 2.3 Ìrean a' Phlana

The Plan's current content reflects extensive community and other stakeholder consultation. The Council has considered comments made on the key land use issues for the area at the start of plan preparation and comments made on the Main Issues and Options contained within 'Sutherland Futures'. The Council subsequently published and consulted on a Deposit Draft of the Plan and an accompanying Draft Environmental Report. However, the Council then decided to provide further opportunity for people to comment on the contents of the Plan and its accompanying Environmental Report and opportunity to comment on a new Supplement to the Environmental Report. All that consultation was then treated as being 'pre-deposit consultation'. The Council considered all of the comments or representations received to those consultations. The Council then published a further full draft of the Plan which incorporated any changes the Council decided to make. It was the formal Deposit Draft Local Plan, accompanied by a revised Environmental Report and there was opportunity for the public to submit representations for consideration. The Council wrote to those people and organisations who submitted representations on the earlier drafts of the Local Plan, asking them to consider which of their representations had, and which had not, been resolved by the changes made to the Plan. The Council requested an indication as to which representations were unresolved and were maintained and confirmed as representations to the Deposit Draft 2008. Those that were, were carried forward and considered further after the close of the

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consultation period on the Deposit Draft together with the other representations received. After that a public examination undertaken by two people independent of the Council was held to deal with any unresolved issues. These people (reporters) judged whether further changes to the Plan were required prior to its final adoption. Their Report of Examination was received by the Council on 8 January 2010 and is available for reference. It was considered by the Council and a number of modifications were made to the Plan and published prior to its adoption. The Plan Stages are set out in the diagram at the end of this section. The stages from examination stage onwards were carried out under transitional arrangements following introduction of the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006. The Plan's content was already a factor in deciding on planning applications as it progressed through its latter stages.

## 2.4 Existing Local Plans

### 2.4 Planaichean Ionadail a tha ann Mar-thà

This Sutherland Local Plan has been prepared for the Plan Area as defined on the Proposals Map and shown diagrammatically on the map below. Upon its adoption, the Sutherland Local Plan replaces earlier adopted Local Plans in so far as they relate to that Plan Area. Prior to that, the earlier adopted Local Plans were still affecting planning application and other investment decisions.



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## 2.5 The Development Plan

### 2.5 Am Plana Leasachaidh

The Highland Structure Plan, which was approved by Scottish Ministers and came into effect on 26 March 2001, together with the Local Plan comprises the statutory development plan. Both contain policies intended to guide development and land use change. Decisions on individual planning applications must accord with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. It should be noted that the Council has begun preparing a new Highland wide Local Development Plan and will be preparing other Local Development Plans, as referred to below, which will in time replace the Highland Structure Plan and this Local Plan.

## 2.6 Other Factors

### 2.6 Nithean Eile

In preparing a local plan and in making decisions on planning applications, The Council must also take into account other factors, such as:

- national planning policy and guidance which is prepared by the Scottish Government and includes the National Planning Framework, Scottish Planning Policy, Circulars and Planning Advice Notes; this Plan does not attempt to name all of the documents that might be relevant to a particular case and it is therefore advisable to check for available and current documents (via [www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk));
- other Highland-wide policies such as the Highland Structure Plan, Development Plan Policy Guidelines/ Supplementary Planning Guidance and Development Briefs (a full list is available via [www.highland.gov.uk](http://www.highland.gov.uk) or from the contacts below);
- the strategies and plans of other public agencies like Highlands & Islands Enterprise, Scottish Natural Heritage and Scottish Environment Protection Agency; an Appendix to the Environmental Report for this Local Plan provides an extensive list of documents but it is advisable to check for other available documents and for currency;
- National, UK and European legislation such as the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 as amended and the strategic environmental assessment regulations, which places a requirement to demonstrate how the Plan will affect the environment (available via [www.opsi.gov.uk](http://www.opsi.gov.uk)).

**2.7** Over the next few years the Council will be implementing the provisions of the new Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006. The new Act has introduced new requirements for development plans to replace the existing Structure Plan and Local Plans whilst the Scottish Government's National Planning Framework has been reviewed and has been given increased significance. This Local Plan was able to continue through its process to adoption but eventually the Council will come to replace it with a new-style Local Development Plan. The Council's intentions for future plan-making and preparation of guidance are set out in its

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Development Plan Scheme which is available on the Council's website. The first new-style plan that is being prepared is the Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HLDP) dealing with pan-Highland and strategic issues. The Council is therefore undertaking a range of work to inform the review or development of planning policy on such issues for the HLDP and, as such, this Sutherland Local Plan does not cover those. The Development Plan is of considerable importance in decision-making and the provisions of the new Act enhance its importance.

## 2.8 Purpose

### 2.8 Adhbhar

The Plan is to:

- provide the principal framework for deciding on planning applications by identifying the most appropriate uses for land in the area - allocating sites for redevelopment or new building for housing, business and other activities, together with policies to protect public amenity and heritage features.
- contribute to the wider corporate and public vision for the Area - taking forward the Community Plan and providing a basis for partnership working and securing resources, including European funds.
- provide co-ordination between the infrastructure, development and conservation programmes of public agencies and voluntary groups, with the aspirations of the private sector.
- ensure effective participation by everyone with a legitimate stake in the area's future, and in particular to enable local people to influence the planning of their own communities.

## 2.9 Timescale

### 2.9 Sgèile-ama

The Plan deals with the period to 2015. However, it includes a longer term vision spanning into the 2020s.

## 2.10 Further Information

### 2.10 Tuilleadh Fiosrachaidh

If you have queries about the Local Plan, further information can be obtained from the Sutherland Local Plan Team by writing to:

Director of Planning & Development, The Highland Council, Planning & Development Service, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness IV3 5NX

Alternatively you can telephone the team on 01463 702827,

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e-mail the team at [sutherlandlp@highland.gov.uk](mailto:sutherlandlp@highland.gov.uk) ,

fax on 01463 702298

or visit the Council's web-site [www.highland.gov.uk](http://www.highland.gov.uk)

If you wish to discuss the preparation and submission of a planning application, please contact the Area Planning and Building Standards Office at:

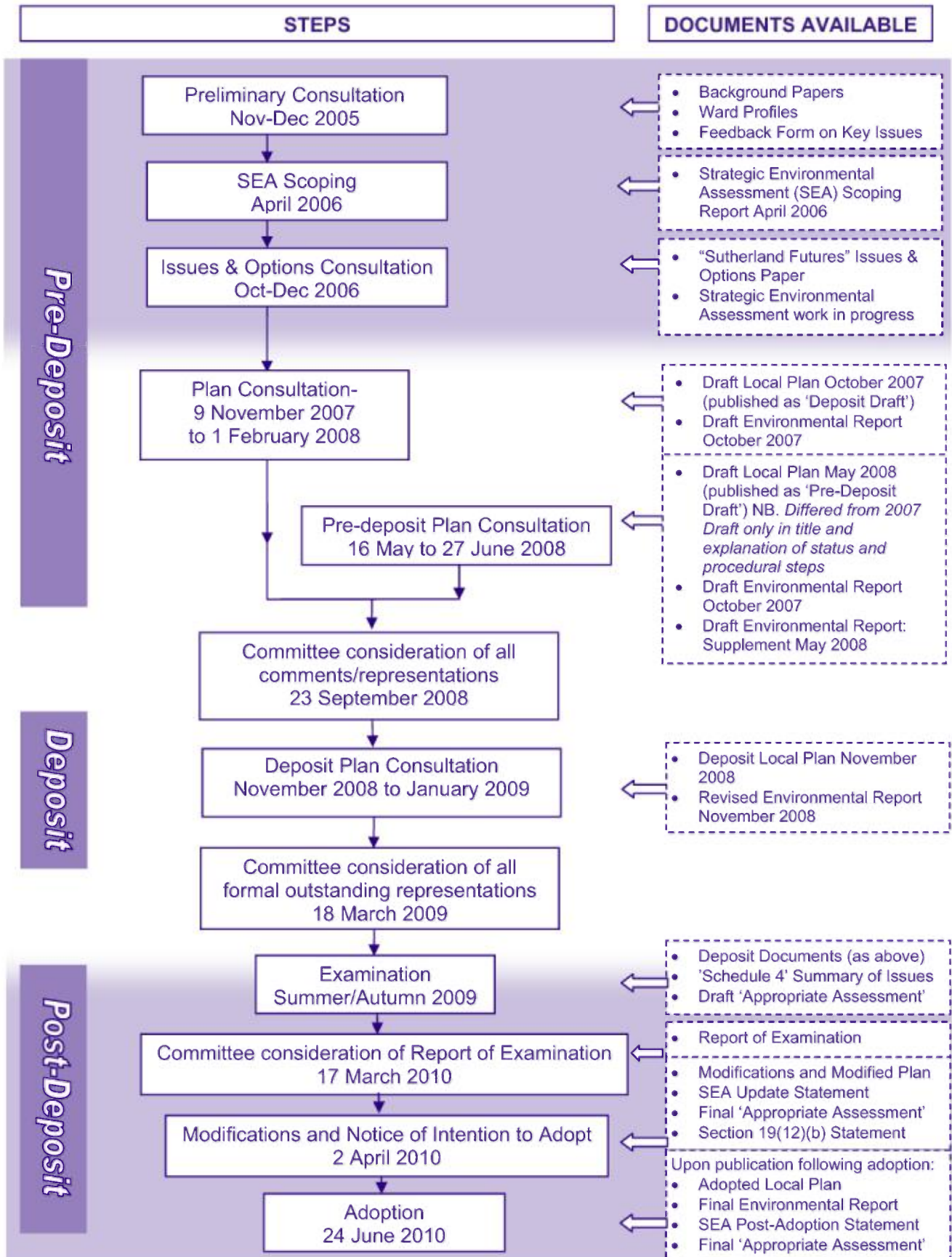
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**4.12** A significant number of jobs were lost in textile manufacturing, telecommunications, transport and distribution and fishing in the last 20 years, which have had a profound impact on some communities. While unemployment is low, so is the number of jobs. This continues to cause many young people to leave Sutherland as well as for further education and training. However, a survey of people who left over the past 20 years found that a massive 75% of them would like to return to the Sutherland area if suitable jobs were available for them and their families.

**4.13** We have therefore sought to ensure that adequate land is available to cater for a range of future business, industrial and other job-creating activities and that the policy framework enables entrepreneurs to explore a range of options for locating and accommodating their proposals. We have also sought to ensure that an adequate housing supply is in place for workers associated with future investment.

## **B – Strategy**

### **B – Ro-innleachd**

**4.14** The “ideal future” or *Vision* for Sutherland is set out in section 4C of this document. This *Vision* is given sharper focus by the key Plan objectives (section 3) and by the following *Strategy*. These key ideas and proposals have evolved through extensive consultation with the public and key agencies.

**4.15** The over-arching aim is for Sutherland to grow its population, compete in the global economy and sustain the highest standard of services while maintaining and enhancing the outstanding quality of the natural, built and cultural heritage of the area. That way it will be able to fully share in and contribute towards Highland prosperity.

### **A Strategy for Sustainability**

#### **Ro-innleachd airson Seasmhachd**

**4.16** What happens in the next 5-10 years is vital to a sustainable future. Whilst aspiration and ambition need to be balanced with reality, it is essential to sow the seeds of long-term regeneration and economic stability. In particular, as highlighted in Section 4A *Key Forecasts*, the strategy is aimed at addressing population trends by providing opportunity for young and working age groups to stay or settle in Sutherland and contribute to its present and future. This is no easy task and operation of the Local Plan alone would be insufficient to deliver this change. The themes and principles of the Plan’s *Vision* are closely allied to those of the Community Plan and need to be taken forward through the Community Planning Partnership and the strategies and programmes of the agencies, working with the private sector and communities themselves.

**4.17** This requires a sustainable development strategy capable of delivering up to 1,300 new houses in Sutherland over the next ten years. The affordability of housing will need to be addressed both in terms of meeting the deficit for affordable homes and influencing the affordability of new housing generally by ensuring a sufficient supply of land for development and creating the conditions that encourage local people to stay. That will depend upon attracting sufficient work and economic investment to Sutherland. The Local Plan seeks to

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ensure that a range of strategically located sites are available for this and that it also contains a policy framework which enables consideration of proposals for economic development on sites not specifically allocated for the purpose, and for traditional industries, particularly in rural areas. Attracting work and economic investment, bringing healthcare, education and leisure facilities into the 21st Century, promoting transport choices and keeping custody of the outstanding heritage are essential to Sutherland's wellbeing and prosperity.

**4.18** Growth and regeneration will be driven by promoting Sutherland's assets and opportunities and by addressing its deficiencies and constraints. A sustainable future should be founded on the following "drivers" and principles and a framework which promotes the right development, in the right location, at the right time.

### Regenerating Communities

#### Ag Ath-nuadhachadh Choimhearsnachdan

**4.19** The Highland Structure Plan identifies a high level settlement hierarchy which comprises Regional Centres (Inverness), Sub-Regional Centres (Thurso, Wick, Dingwall, Fort William and Portree) and Local Centres. There are therefore no Regional or Sub-Regional Centres within Sutherland but the Plan area will be influenced by some of them. Seven of the Local Centres identified are in Sutherland and these are: Dornoch, Golspie, Brora, Lairg, Lochinver, Kinlochbervie and Bettyhill. Two Local Centres outside Sutherland will have an influence on the Plan area- Tain and Ullapool. Indeed, parts of Sutherland are dependent on centres outwith the Plan area for some everyday services, such as secondary schooling.

**4.20** The Local Plan's *Main Centres* therefore comprise the Local Centres and additionally Helmsdale, which of the remaining settlements in particular displays an enhanced role similar to that of some of the Local Centres. These settlements will accommodate significant new development supportive of their roles, including sites for strategic development as appropriate.

Main Centre : Dornoch



Key Village : Bonar Bridge



Small Village : Portskerra



**4.21** Amongst Sutherland's villages Bonar Bridge, Ardgay, Durness, Melness, Tongue and Scourie play key roles as service centres and places of development and as such are the *Key Villages* where development will support and enhance their roles.

**4.22** A number of *Small Villages* provide basic facilities for local communities and opportunity to accommodate the immediate development needs of the local communities and including support for some fragile communities.

**4.23** This settlement hierarchy provides a strategic framework for future development, having regard to the role played by settlements and to the opportunity to accommodate sustainable growth. There are Settlement Development Areas identified for all of these settlements. In addition there are smaller townships and housing groups. We have considered the possibility of identifying settlement development areas for them but have decided instead to rely upon the Plan's policy framework (especially those protecting assets) for the consideration of the merits of individual proposals. This may provide opportunity for some small scale development, particularly where it would support fragile communities and may provide opportunity for suitable community-led proposals.

**4.24** The settlement hierarchy provides an indication of main settlements which are most likely to be able to accommodate larger-scale development sustainably.

**4.25** Some 60% of the County's population is located in the south-east Sutherland and Kyle of Sutherland communities, which have also absorbed around 60% of new homes built in Sutherland in the past decade. These include the main centres supporting key services, some of which serve Sutherland as a whole. Close proximity to the Inverness and Inner Moray Firth economic growth "hub" and the A9 improvement corridor presents scope to extend housing market opportunities within Sutherland. Major allocations of land for expansion are identified at Dornoch, Golspie and Brora together with programmed infrastructure. The Plan seeks to maintain the momentum of regeneration in

Supporting Key Services : Golspie



Renewal Opportunities : Ardgay



Small Scale Development : Scourie



Lairg, Bonar Bridge and Ardgay through a mix of brownfield/renewal development, enhancement and/or a broader choice of land for development. Several smaller villages including Edderton, Rogart and Rosehall are capable of supplementing housing choice where the scale of building is in keeping with their character.

**4.26** In the west and north-west of Sutherland, coastal communities have grown overall - approximately 240 houses have been added in 20 years. Whilst the shortage of development land has been acute, the housing market is much less fluid. The Plan seeks to deal with those shortages and identify preferred directions for development in Lochinver and Kinlochbervie through its land allocations. Opportunities are identified for Durness and Scourie to consolidate further where development is reconciled with amenity, crofting and service network considerations. A range of small villages and townships offers opportunities for small-scale building, reinforcing their economic and social fabric.

**4.27** In the north and the sparsely populated interior, the population has fallen by 11% and less than 120 houses built, since 1981. These are the most fragile communities, vulnerable to rationalisation of services. The Plan seeks to promote available sites within Helmsdale, Bettyhill, Tongue and Melvich, securing affordable accommodation whilst also encouraging the outlying rural settlements to strengthen through small-scale development to meet community needs.

**4.28** Through its allocations and policies, the Local Plan seeks to secure the provision of affordable homes and community infrastructure to assist in regenerating communities.

### Creating Prosperity A' Cruthachadh Saoibhreis

**4.29** Important strands of the strategy aimed at creating prosperity include: strengthening interaction with the growth "hub" to the south and Caithness to the north, particularly in the context of the decommissioning of Dounreay, diversifying the employment base in those parts of the County with

Affordable Housing : Bettyhill



Tourist Asset : Smoo Cave



Tourist Asset : Dornoch Links



## Economic Development Opportunity : Golspie Business Park



greater self-containment and a genuine drive to sustain jobs and regenerate the remote, landward areas. Sutherland needs to maximise sustainable development of, and add value, in the resource-based landward sectors, grow its small business and service economy, promote its tourism and heritage assets and attract “footloose” e-commerce and inward investment which might be drawn to the Area by its accessibility and exceptional environment. Major improvements to transport infrastructure will help to facilitate these objectives. The A9 regional road network is vital to prospects. Improvements near Helmsdale are progressing in steps. There may be opportunities in the future to shorten journey times whilst improving local communities. Continued promotion of the Invernet commuter rail service can be expected to increase custom, and the strategic “gateway”/ distribution role of Lairg will maintain the rail-freight capacity of the Far North Line which is an important contributor to economic and social prospects of communities in Central Sutherland. There may be opportunities to promote strengthening of rail-freight infrastructure through the further development of a network of strategically located sidings with loading facilities.

**4.30** The HITRANS Strategy (2007) identified a network hierarchy, which in Sutherland comprises:

- *Strategic Rail Network*- Inverness to Wick/Thurso;
- *Strategic Road Network*- Inverness A9 (T) to Wick/Thurso;
- *Regional Road Network*-
  - A836 Tain to Lairg/ A838 to Rhiconich /B801 Kinlochbervie
  - A837 Lochinver to Ledmore jct/ A835 Ullapool
  - A836 Bettyhill to Thurso;
- *Local Road Network*-
  - A839 The Mound to Lairg A839/A837 to Ledmore jct
  - A836 Lairg to Tongue
  - A836 Bonar Bridge to Lairg
  - A897 Helmsdale to Melvich
  - A838 Rhiconich to A836 Bettyhill
  - A894 Laxford Bridge to Skiag Bridge.

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As part of a wider network they provide a link towards onward travel, be it by road, rail, ferry or air. The HITRANS Strategy concluded that the priority for the A9 North Corridor (encompassing road, rail, bus-based public transport) should comprise works at Conon Bridge and speed enhancement measures on the existing alignment of the Far North Rail Line, together with the delivery of a Route Action Plan approach on the A9 North road to provide climbing lanes and other improvements (including bypasses) to reduce the average journey time on the road. The HITRANS Strategy flags the option of by-passing Golspie and Brora in particular. The HITRANS Strategy also identified the A838 Kinlochbervie to Lairg road, for route enhancements in the medium term.

**4.31** However, since the HITRANS Strategy was prepared the Scottish Government has undertaken its Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR) which identifies interventions to be delivered, designed or developed beyond 2012 and primarily between 2012 and 2022. Projects relevant to the Sutherland Local Plan area are as follows:

- Strategic Road Safety Plan;
- Maintenance and Safe Operation of Scotland's Rail Network;
- Integrated ticketing;
- Rail system enhancements, including the replacement of the Radio Electronic Token Block signalling in the Highland region and;
- Road safety improvements in North and West Scotland.

A number of other measures in the STPR will have positive implications for the Sutherland area, including projects aimed at increasing the frequency of rail services and reducing journey times between Aberdeen and Inverness, and the Highland Mainline Rail Improvements Project aimed at improving network capacity for passengers and freight between Inverness and Perth.

**4.32** The Council is in the process of reviewing and replacing its Local Transport Strategy (LTS). The LTS will need to identify priorities for local delivery in the light of what the HITRANS Strategy identified and of what has and has not been included in the STPR.

**4.33** The Local Plan's Vision refers to the possibility of three substantial future transport interventions in Sutherland- namely bypasses for Golspie and Brora and a Dornoch Firth rail crossing. The HITRANS Strategy had flagged the option of by-passing Golspie and Brora as already noted, although the timeframe it indicated for possible preparation of schemes was at the earliest towards the end of the period covered by this Local Plan. The HITRANS Strategy did not include a Dornoch Firth rail crossing in like manner within its priorities but such a scheme is being promoted by a campaigning group with some wider support. However, none of these three transport interventions are currently identified as national priorities for investment in the STPR referred to above. Given these facts, this Local Plan does not therefore identify routes for safeguarding. However, the definition of the settlement development areas tightly around the existing built form and allocated sites will help to maintain options for possible investigation in the future. The section of this chapter dealing with Implementation, Monitoring and Review indicates in broad terms what would need to happen for such schemes to progress

**4.34** Economic development opportunities are needed in most communities. Capacity



exists on existing sites or sites are allocated in the Plan for business and/or industry at Dornoch, Golspie, Brora, Helmsdale, Lairg, Ardgay and Bonar Bridge, with some provisions elsewhere including as part of mixed use development schemes. Large areas of reclaimed land created as part of the major fishery port expansion schemes are the centre-piece of economic development opportunities in Lochinver and Kinlochbervie. Diversification initiatives promoting new opportunities for tourism should focus on their harbours and related infrastructure. A major drive towards sustainable economic recovery and employment must be a priority for the agencies and communities in the north and west, embracing a careful mix of land management and resource development, including e-business, welfare/ self-help schemes and home-working.

### Supporting Communities

#### A' Toirt Taic do Choimhearsnachdan

**4.35** The priority is to support existing services, address remaining deficiencies and improve the range and quality of facilities, their viability being dependent on a critical mass of people and accessibility to centres. Stemming “leakage” of retail spending and modernising recreation, community hospital and public service facilities, requires strategic investment at locations which offer optimum convenience to Sutherland as a whole, reduce travel and assist sustainability. The Dornoch-Golspie-Brora axis is well placed to ‘compete’ for larger-scale (in a Sutherland context) commercial development and leisure provision. Golspie has become the location of a new Council offices complex by refurbishment of the historic buildings at Drummuie; and work has started on replacement of Migdale Hospital at Bonar Bridge. With substantial investment in health, education and community/leisure services throughout Sutherland, less than 20% of residents now require to travel more than 10 minutes to core services (health, shop, post office, school and filling station). There may be opportunities to develop housing for older people close to health centres, as an integral part of the care in the community regime. Sustaining community transport and mobile and roving services is a vital “lifeline” in the remote, sparsely populated interior: Altnaharra, Achfarry, Kinbrace and Inchnadamph.

**4.36** First-time water and drainage facilities have gradually been installed in most communities and a number of further improvements are programmed, for example waste water systems at Edderton. However, further operational deficiencies and shortcomings in the capacity of utility systems impose significant constraints in some key centres. Water supplies at Dornoch (to cater for medium to longer term growth), Bonar Bridge and Ardgay and waste water systems at Melvich and Helmsdale need to be given priority for upgrading. Developer contributions - determined by network capacity studies - are increasingly sought to upgrade connecting infrastructure. In parts of the landward area, the regeneration of townships is hindered by distance to electricity supplies and the high cost of connecting the service. The Council may from time to time make additional information available about constraints affecting development opportunity, such as constraints arising from infrastructure capacity.

## Caring for the Heritage A' Gabhail Cùram don Dualchas

**4.37** The diverse natural and cultural heritage of Sutherland – its habitats, species, landscape, scenery and artefacts – is a major asset. The most important designated assets are subject of legal protection and the Council has to fulfil certain responsibilities in that regard. However, many other assets are also of value individually and collectively and the Plan seeks to ensure that they are safeguarded. Sutherland's heritage must be protected and promoted to maximise the area's economic prospects, including its appeal to residents, workers, investors and visitors. An integrated and balanced regime of land uses able to draw investment in dependent, "downstream" or support activities is required. This could embrace, for example, forestry and other resources, on and offshore renewable energy and particularly small-scale community-led schemes, archaeological/geological interpretation, countryside access, recreation and outdoor pursuits, wildlife management and traditional activities. Renewable energy projects will be guided by the Council's "Renewable Energy Strategy and Planning Guidelines" (HRES) and, in the case of on-shore wind energy, by the new Highland wide Local Development Plan and new Supplementary Guidance currently being prepared to provide a revised spatial planning framework in accordance with Scottish Planning Policy. The environmental impacts, including landscape impact, of proposals will be a significant consideration.

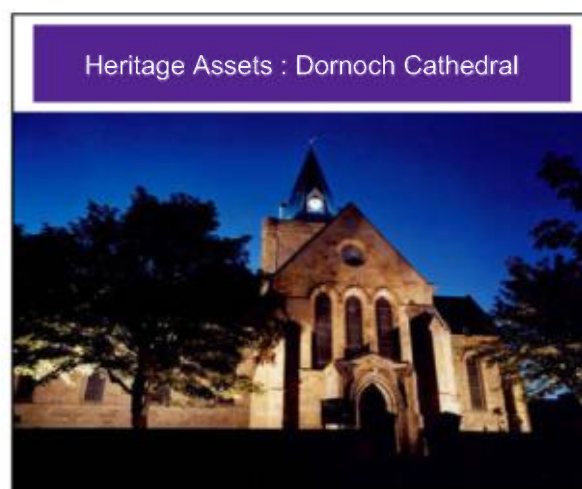
**4.38** This should be based increasingly on community stewardship, excellence in environmental management and sustainable principles and an approach which balances the potential for development and minimizes its impacts on the natural, built and cultural heritage.

## Sustainable Communities Coimhearsnachdan Seasmhach

**4.39** Sustainable communities will offer choice in housing, local jobs and modern facilities, enhanced focal points or distinctive character, safe and convenient connections, capacity in infrastructure and measures to protect their amenities and setting. The local planning framework may also involve Development Briefs for larger sites or in circumstances where action needs to be co-ordinated.

## Sustainable Design Dealbhadh Seasmhach

**4.40** Quality design - how development fits and functions - will be essential in all proposals and in all communities. Development should relate well to neighbouring buildings or activities, and sit comfortably with the grain and texture of places, function safely and efficiently, with ease of connection to services for all users and enhance the "public realm". Certain circumstances may be more suited to continuity of patterns or styles, than variety - and vice-versa; but there is always room for excellence and innovation. Well designed places - whether



in urban situations, villages or townships - should be vibrant, legible, stimulating, viable, safe and flexible. The principles of the Council's approved guidance "Designing for Sustainability in the Highlands" are at the heart of a prosperous future and sustainable communities in Sutherland.

### **Sustainable Services** **Seirbheisean Seasmhach**

**4.41** Core services and community facilities across Sutherland are, to a large extent, located according to the size and distribution of the population and its accessibility to/distance from the centres at which the services are located. This is supplemented by mobile and roving services to the more remote, most sparsely populated areas. The viability of services and facilities may be dependent on service providers pooling resources and innovating in the delivery of schemes. Deficiencies need to be addressed and the quality and accessibility of services and facilities improved where necessary. In fragile communities this can have a vital effect in strengthening them and putting them on a more sustainable footing. The strategy and policies of this Plan have a part to play in achieving that. At a micro level we have identified that individual developments have a part to play through developer contributions. At a macro level the coordination of the Local Plan with other plans and strategies and the role of the Action Programme will be important.

### **Implementation, Monitoring and Review** **Buileachadh, Sgrùdadh is Ath-bhreithneachadh**

**4.42** Implementation of the Local Plan will require action by the Council and by many other organisations and individuals. The Council does not control all of these matters but will rely on collaborative working and liaison. Delivery of certain projects, schemes and aspects of the Plan's 'Vision' would in particular be dependent upon other priority-setting and decision-making processes that are wholly or partly outside the Council's control and have not yet been undertaken. For example:

- Any case for a major transportation scheme should result from an appraisal using the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG). Progressing such schemes will be dependent upon their inclusion in the appropriate list of priorities and commitment to funding. Whilst regional priorities were set out in the HITRANS Strategy, the Scottish Government's subsequent Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR) has not included them all in its national priorities for investment. The Council is in the process of reviewing and replacing its Local Transport Strategy (LTS); the LTS will need to identify priorities for local delivery in the light of what the HITRANS Strategy identified and of what has and has not been included in the STPR.
- Any consideration of a National Park for the whole or part of Sutherland would have to follow the procedures as set out in the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 whereby the Scottish Ministers in the first place make a 'National Park proposal'.
- Any potential to bid for World Heritage Site status for the Flow Country would be considered once the review of the Tentative List has commenced and the requirements are clearer.

As set out in one of the plan's objectives, an Action Programme will set out how, when and by whom specific actions will be undertaken and will form a basis for the monitoring of action.

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Monitoring progress on the implementation of the Local Plan will be vital and where necessary will lead to policies and proposals being reviewed. We will in particular monitor the delivery of homes and jobs. We will prepare a Monitoring Report on a regular basis, drawing on a number of sources of information including our own Housing Land Audit and Business & Industrial Land Audit. If sites prove to be ineffective in delivering growth within the timescales required then we will seek to work with the interested parties to establish the reasons why (such as infrastructure issues) and, if necessary, propose the de-allocation of sites and allocation of alternative sites as part of future Plan review. It will also be important to monitor retail development, indicators of the health of town centres, village facilities, jobs growth and changes in employment, housing affordability and need and changes in the profile of Sutherland's population. There will also be a range of matters concerning Sutherland's environment that will be monitored as required by the Environmental Report. This Local Plan will eventually be reviewed and replaced by a new-style Local Development Plan under the Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006 as referred to in the Council's Development Plan Scheme.

## **C – Vision**

### **C – Lèirsinn**

**4.43** The Local Plan's long-term Vision for Sutherland can be summed up under four themes. Sutherland should be:

- A Regenerating Place: A Network of Strong Communities
- A Competitive Place
- A Connected and Accessible Place
- A Place of Outstanding Heritage: Safe in the Custody of Local People

**4.44** We cannot be certain about everything that will happen in the Plan area in the coming years and Sutherland's future depends upon the actions not only of the Council but of many other organisations and individuals. However, if there is success in delivering the Strategy of this Plan (set out in section 4B) then we think there could be success in achieving the Vision set out here. So what in particular might characterise Sutherland in about twenty years' time if that were the case?

#### **4.45 A Regenerating Place: A Network of Strong Communities**

#### **4.45 Àite ag Ath-ùrachadh: Lionradh de Choimhearsnachdan Làidir**

- a. A Sutherland population that has grown to exceed 15,000 and in particular includes significant numbers of young and working age persons in support of the Community Plan, with enhanced opportunities for education and employment locally.
- b. Excellence in design of new development and regeneration, founded in "sustainable principles".

- c. Growth of the urban centres in the A9 corridor, driven by proximity to Inverness and the Inner Moray Firth sub-region and the quality of life offered. The east coast centres (Golspie, Dornoch and Brora) being marketed on their unique assets and vying for major new investment in commercial and community facilities.
- d. The main centres in central Sutherland (Ardgay, Bonar Bridge and Lairg) having enhanced positions as service centres, placing these communities on a more sustainable footing.
- e. Improved economic prospects of the west coast ports (Lochinver and Kinlochbervie), closely tied with development of reclaimed land and with development of housing and infrastructure for community growth proceeding.
- f. The north and west coast communities (particularly Durness and Scourie), reinforced as local and visitor focal points on the A838.
- g. Generally across Sutherland and along the north coast particularly, local housing needs being met whilst respecting the capacity of services and the importance of land for crofting. Population gains will be evident as 'fragility' is reduced.
- h. Bettyhill, Tongue and Helmsdale continuing to support viable services and meeting local housing needs effectively.
- i. Small villages and townships accommodating small-scale development which strengthens and supports those communities.
- j. Most communities well-equipped with community and health/day facilities and halls, with investment in new or upgraded provision where necessary.
- k. Communities increasingly seeing new 21<sup>st</sup> Century "fit-for-purpose" schools at the centre of their continued rejuvenation, providing a focus for social and community life. The sparse population and distance continuing to sustain the more remote schools.
- l. One-stop-shops proving to be a model for viable rural services, for example local shops and filling stations and community run business co-operatives.
- m. Local Gaelic traditions continuing to be an influence on community life, education and regeneration.

#### **4.46 A Competitive Place**

##### **4.46 Àite Farpaiseach**

- a. An exceptional environment, thriving local communities and clean energy sources which prove an important incentive to business location.
- b. The main east coast settlements complementing, rather than competing with one another for investment and new economic opportunities and that have Business Parks and Industrial

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Parks providing modern accommodation, in sustainable locations within or near to the settlements.

- c.** Strong employment ties with Inverness and the Inner Moray Firth sub-region - and increasingly Caithness; a Sutherland economy that is not self-contained. Sutherland will be playing its part in the successful implementation of the Caithness & North Sutherland Socio-Economic Strategy addressing the consequences of the decommissioning of Dounreay.
- d.** Choice in public transport which makes for efficient commuting, although a high proportion of the workforce in fact employed within the Plan area.
- e.** The main centres in central Sutherland supporting thriving local enterprises.
- f.** IT/broadband coverage and performance improvements, driven through the partnership project work of the Council and other organisations, having encouraged investment with access to the global market place. Small-scale, technology-based e-businesses springing up.
- g.** Secondary and processing streams adding value to large-scale development of resources.
- h.** The Shin and Kildonnan forests in central Sutherland could be supplying timber processing and bio-mass plants to the south, for which important railheads (Lairg and Kinbrace) continue.
- i.** Traditional highland sporting estates embracing local enterprise.
- j.** West coast port communities that have diversified with emphasis on new tourism ventures, small businesses and outdoor activities. Fishery stocks could be replenishing, rekindling interest in new locally-registered fishing boats.
- k.** Tourism and the leisure and recreation industries continuing and growing in importance to help sustain many communities. Specialist heritage excursions and sports holidays encouraging important investment in the Area's accommodation, facilities and infrastructure. Ever increasing visitor numbers drawn by Sutherland's assets, success built on the North Highlands Initiative "Pleasure in the Extreme". A major contribution to this being made by the North-West Highlands European Geopark and by the experience of 'wildness' available in parts of Sutherland (distinguishing between actual and perceived wildness). Enhanced interpretation of heritage assets and promotion of heritage trails.
- l.** Mixed agriculture and farm-forestry dominating in the fertile seaboard and northern straths, supported by low intensity production, sustainable practices and market-led incentive schemes.
- m.** Traditional design values reinvigorating crofting areas.
- n.** Continuing local agricultural and crofting traditions and services.
- o.** Strengthening of crofting townships and the possibility of new crofting townships, including development of forest crofts.
- p.** Job creation being sustained in the longer term.

q. Wind farms, developed in accordance with HRES and the new HLDP and SG for On-Shore Wind Energy, could be exporting to the National Grid, if major improvements in transmission capacity are achieved. Success in the siting and impact of turbines, and their integration with community, wildlife and landscape.

r. Exploration of opportunities to potentially gain economic and/or community benefit from Sutherland's valuable natural resources, such as through working its mineral resources, renewable energy generation (including small-scale community schemes) and the possibility of innovative combined schemes. If any such proposals come forward formally, their merits, benefits and impacts would need to be considered carefully in respect of society, economy and environment. This would include Environmental Impact Assessment where required. Large development proposals or those for a special use may well raise strategic issues of at least Highland significance and possibly be driven by national needs and in that case will need to be guided by higher level strategic policies.

#### **4.47 A Connected and Accessible Place**

#### **4.47 Àite Co-cheangailte is Ruigsinneach**

a. A9 improvement schemes - notably the long awaited by-passes of Golspie and Brora. These were identified in the HITRANS Strategy with congestion relief, community safety and shortened journey times anticipated. Further exploration through review of Highland-wide, regional and national planning and transportation strategies, may be appropriate if new priorities are identified and with due consideration to the economic, social and environmental impacts of such schemes. In the event of such schemes being favoured and any formal preferred and programmed routes being announced, the Development Plan of the time could protect such routes.

b. Integrated transport solutions for passengers and for freight: frequent community bus routes giving more convenient access to work and services; a network of cycle routes, preferably segregated linking the main communities; promotion of tourist-based cycle routes; a significant increase in rail-freight which consolidates Lairg as a major transit/ break-of-bulk and distribution "hub" for the north-central Highlands as part of a network of strategically located sidings with loading facilities (serving the import and export needs of the forestry, farming, fuel supply, aggregates and renewables industries) which could be underwritten by a consortium.

c. Substantial increase in passenger numbers on the Far-North rail line as efficiencies reduce the Inverness-Wick journey time. A sustained, full peak-time return Invernet commuter service extending to Lairg, Ardgay and Bonar Bridge. The rail service as a key driver in their economic prospects, as well as places further north and west. The possibility of a Dornoch Firth rail crossing (which is being promoted by a campaigning group with some wider support) may have been explored further through the preparation and review of Highland-wide, regional and national planning and transportation strategies, with due consideration given to the economic, social and environmental impacts of such a scheme. In the event of such a scheme being favoured and any formal preferred and programmed route being announced, the Development Plan of the time could protect such a route.

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- d. Maintaining and pursuing the case for twin-tracking the 'lifeline routes' or 'locally important roads' to the north and west coast communities and seeking improvement of other roads which are under stress, such as the Dornoch-Embo road, and progress made with route enhancement scheme(s) such as the A838, where identified or confirmed as priorities.
- e. Deficiencies in the water and waste-water networks across Sutherland relieved through on-going investment.
- f. The Area's expertise and associations with hydro-electricity generation underpinning the development of renewables. Wave farm technology earmarked for testing, community-based energy systems in place, and bio-fuel technologies having enabled residual agricultural and forestry products to be utilized.

#### **4.48 A Place of Outstanding Heritage: Safe in the Custody of Local People**

#### **4.48 Àite le Dualchas Air Leth: Sàbhailte ann an Lànhan an t-Sluaigh Ionadail**

- a. Sutherland offering a superlative visitor experience.
- b. Marketing of low-impact specialist pursuits, ecotourism and field activities in the North-West Highlands European Geopark, underpinned by its endorsement by UNESCO. Across Sutherland, enhanced interpretation of heritage assets and promotion of heritage trails that respect the need to safeguard the assets.
- c. Community-led campaigning and critical assessment of the economic and social benefits could examine the possibility of National Park status. Major incentives would derive from the creation of jobs, community and resource development and conservation management.
- d. The core Flow Country, subject of sensitive management regimes, could be part of a major ecological restoration and bio-diversity programme with advancement from 'tentative' to 'confirmed' World Heritage status.
- e. The important contributive role of Sutherland's National Scenic Areas to the future well-being of the area being recognised and managed effectively. The Dornoch Firth as a unique landscape and ecosystem, supporting organic farm produce, sensitive sporting practices, land and water-borne recreation, abundant wildlife habitats, inshore fisheries and specialist pursuits. This is the "Green Firth" - a marketing cachet drawing custom across the globe and a fitting setting for the world-class Skibo Castle and Royal Dornoch Golf resorts.
- f. Recent development of flood-sensitive uses located away from floodplains and tidal "buffers", allowing scarce resources for protection works to be targeted at vulnerable communities. Sutherland's river systems are part of the River Basin Management Plan prepared under the EC Water Framework Directive. An integrated approach is improving water quality, maximizing land management, regenerating habitats and protecting salmon fisheries.



- g.** Sutherland hosting national events and known as a world-class venue, for example Dornoch boasting an International Golf Academy, Golspie's Highland Wildcat Routes providing a National Mountain Biking and Orienteering circuit and Regatta events being drawn to the West Coast.
- h.** Forest design improvements, and effective safeguarding for both natural and designed landscapes, for habitats and species, for geological interests and for archaeological interests.
- i.** The possibility of strategic Regional Woodland Parks serving the market for outdoor land and water based pursuits, supporting accommodation and facilities in the south east and central parts of Sutherland (around Golspie and Lairg) whilst the Ferrycroft Countryside Centre at Lairg attracts important numbers of visitors with woodland and other interpretation. Community Woodland Schemes could be establishing and maturing, such as in and around Dornoch and Brora.
- j.** Under the Land Reform legislation, communities promoting land restoration, conservation and public access schemes. Core Paths, locally-managed woodland and small-scale recycling schemes could be common-place.
- k.** Recognition of the value and role of biodiversity, coastal and marine areas, native woodlands, geodiversity and remote and wild landscapes (distinguishing between actual and perceived remoteness or wildness).
- l.** Sutherland being a place people value... and they aim to keep it that way.

## 5 General Policies

### 5 Poileasaidhean Coitcheann

**5.0.1** The fundamental part of this Plan strategy is to direct the right sorts of development to the right places, thereby *making better places*. The Plan sets out below a range of general policies to achieve its objectives.

**5.0.2** Users of the plan should note that each proposal will be assessed on its individual planning merits having regard to the relevant development plan policies and other material considerations. Compliance with a single policy will not necessarily indicate that a proposed development is acceptable.

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## 5.2 Land Allocations

### 5.2 Sònrachaidhean Talmhainn

**5.2.1** The Vision / Strategy recognises that most of the future growth in the Plan area will be in the main settlements. These include the communities:

- which have experienced the greatest development pressures;
- where the main services are;
- where the best transport links are; and
- where larger-scale industrial and business development is the most practical.

**5.2.2** Within the *Settlement Development Areas* we have allocated sites for the following types of land use, in the table below.

Allocation	Type of Land Use
H	Housing
AH	Affordable Housing
C	Community
OS	Public Open Space
MU	Mixed Use
B	Business
I	Business and Industry

**5.2.3** The Plan also identifies a number of *Developer Requirements* which are associated with these sites and which must be addressed by developers in taking proposals forward on them. These have been identified through consultation or through the Strategic Environmental Assessment or Appropriate Assessment processes. In some cases the Action Programme which will accompany the Plan will identify the need for a development brief or master plan to be prepared prior to the site being developed.

**5.2.4** Indicative site capacities are given where appropriate in the settlements section of the Plan for housing or part housing allocations. At planning application stage a more detailed appraisal will be undertaken of the actual site capacity in the context of assessing whether the developer's proposed scheme is appropriate.

## Policy 2 Development Factors and Developer Requirements

Developers must take account of the details set out on the Proposals Map insets. We will give particular consideration to the total effect of private water and sewage systems.

## 5.17 Commerce

### 5.17 Malairt

**5.17.1** This policy will provide a context for consideration of retail developments within the Plan area. It is intended to support existing centres of settlements in providing for a range of commercial and leisure needs of the wider community. This will help in the retention of services and facilities which serve both the settlement and the wider rural area. The policy also seeks to apply a sequential approach to site identification and to follow the approach advocated in Scottish Planning Policy.

## Policy 17 Commerce

The Council will encourage retail, office, and leisure development (Use Classes 1-3, 7, 10 & 11), within the following network of centres.

Hierarchy / Scale	Centre(s)	Function/Role
<b>Sub-Regional/ Town Centre</b>	No centres of sub-regional status present but the central area of GOLSPIE may be regarded as a 'Town Centre' location.	Mixed use Comparison & Convenience
<b>Sub-Area Centre</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dornoch</li> <li>• Brora</li> <li>• Lairg</li> <li>• Bonar Bridge/ Ardgay</li> <li>• Helmsdale</li> <li>• Lochinver</li> <li>• Bettyhill</li> <li>• Kinlochbervie</li> <li>• Durness</li> <li>• Melness/Tongue</li> <li>• Scourie</li> </ul>	Mixed use Comparison & Convenience
<b>Villages</b>	Various	Local shop

[Specific opportunities for land assembly / redevelopment are allocated within the relevant settlement sections.]

Outwith the above centres, proposals will be judged against the following criteria:

- its compliance with the sequential approach to site identification;
- its accessibility by means of public transport, walking and cycling;
- its impact, including any cumulative impact, on the vitality and viability of a centre defined in a Highland development plan;
- its fit with the aim of creating a retail hierarchy in which travel is minimised;
- whether the type and scale of development proposed can reasonably be accommodated within a centre defined in the Plan;
- the extent to which the proposals meet with identified deficiencies;
- whether any developer funded mitigation of the above is offered.