



PLANNING &  
DEVELOPMENT SERVICE

# NEWSLETTER

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# SUTHERLAND LOCAL PLAN

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The Highland Council is in the process of preparing a new Local Plan for Sutherland. It will cover all land use issues, including housing, business and industry, retailing, infrastructure, recreation and environmental protection to guide the future development of the area. It will also indicate policies for the conservation of the built, natural and cultural heritage and encourage improvement of the physical environment.

In November 2005 the first Newsletter was issued and views were sought on issues to be considered. Background papers relating to housing, economic development and the environment were prepared together with Ward Profiles. This information is available at [www.highland.gov.uk](http://www.highland.gov.uk) (do a search for Sutherland Local Plan). Every household in Sutherland was notified and all stakeholders, statutory agencies, community groups, the voluntary and private sector, landowners and the public were asked to comment.

To date, some 500 responses have been received from a wide range of interests and the public, raising more than 3000 points for consideration. **Tables of all comments received and the matters raised are available at the Sutherland Local Plan website.** These responses are now being fully investigated.

This second issue of the Sutherland Local Plan Newsletter provides a summary of the main themes arising from initial consultation with stakeholders and the public and identifies key issues for the Plan.

## Housing

The availability of housing is essential to stop the drift of people from Sutherland, regenerating the population and encouraging economic growth. Affordable homes for rent and ownership, as well as accommodation for first-time buyers, families and the elderly are required, either through new build or renovating and occupying vacant homes. Holiday/second homes contribute to rising house prices.

Land for development might include poorer or underused-neglected grazing/crofting areas, although in certain places croft land should be avoided and developed only by exception to revitalise townships. Traditional building forms and high quality design should be promoted and inappropriate ribbon development discouraged. Responses to the consultation identified opportunities within the main communities; these require to be investigated for their suitability and availability for development.

## Objectives

Further consideration needs to be given to matters raised by stakeholders and the Local Plan should:

- Identify land with sufficient choice and capacity to meet projected housing needs over the next decade;
- Ensure a supply of land for housing can be delivered within or adjoining settlements;
- Encourage an appropriate mix of accommodation.

## Economy

Economic development – retaining and growing the workforce – is an essential part of the regeneration of Sutherland. Initiatives to generate jobs need to be supported by a choice in housing, improved skills/training, modern services and infrastructure, better communications and environmental. The consultation identified possible opportunities for economic development within main settlements together with an indication as to where existing investment might need further promotion.

## Objectives

Consideration needs to be given with the appropriate agencies, to initiatives designed to:

- Secure a competitive economy, including links with adjoining areas;
- Identify the main economic “drivers” for the future;
- Review the effectiveness of existing land supply for economic development and maximise the use of vacant/underused accommodation.

## Services

The priority is to address local deficiencies and improve the range and quality of facilities and improve the appeal of places to visitors. The size and distribution of the population and accessibility to centres will influence future investment. The viability of services may depend on innovation in the delivery of schemes. The consultation drew out the main requirements throughout the area and also indications of local service priorities.

## Objectives

Further consideration needs to be given to:

- The location of facilities;
- The potential for improved local facilities;
- The investments needed to support better transport networks.

## Environment

The diverse natural and cultural heritage of Sutherland – its habitats, species, scenery and artefacts – is a major asset. This must be protected and promoted to maximise the areas economic prospects, including its appeal to visitors. Possible opportunities were identified by the public together with an indication as to where existing investment might be promoted further.

## Objectives

Safeguarding and promoting the exceptional natural and cultural heritage should involve:

- Respect for the character of communities and promotion of the highest design standards for new development;
- A balance of measures to protect the environment and maximise development/management of resources.

## Next Steps

A series of local meetings/workshops will be arranged during the late summer of 2006 across Sutherland.

## Contacts

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You can contact the Sutherland Local Plan team direct by:

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The Sutherland Area Planning and Building Standards Manager is Allan Todd. He manages the team of local officials based in Dornoch who deal with planning applications and building warrants.

The Local Plan team would welcome any comments or information that you have. Further copies of this newsletter are available at [www.highland.gov.uk](http://www.highland.gov.uk) (do a search for Sutherland Local Plan).