

Have your say in the future of Sutherland

“What development? How much? Where?” Give us your thoughts on how we should answer these- don't leave it until it's too late! We're preparing a new Local Plan and now you can get involved.

“But what is the Local Plan- and why is it so important?” When someone wants to build, or change what land is used for and they apply to us for permission, we look first at the Local Plan (and Highland Structure Plan). What they say about the site, development type or related matters such as environment will be very important considerations to us. So it is important to get the Local Plan right first and keep it up to date, because it will influence the future of *your* community.

Sutherland Futures, which is also available on our website www.highland.gov.uk sets out for discussion issues and options for development to 2016 and beyond:

- a *vision*, suggesting the kind of place Sutherland should be 20 years from now;
- a *strategy*, identifying the potential location of development and a framework for investment in services; and
- *settlement plans*, identifying key site options for development, together with an explanation of how any *other settlements* fit in.

“So, how can I get involved?”

- Come along to one of our exhibitions or meetings if you can- see back page.
- Let us have your written comments on the issues and options, using the enclosed form or by letter to the address on the back page. We need your comments by **Friday 15th December 2006**. We'll carefully consider all comments before deciding on what will be in the draft Local Plan early in 2007.

A VISION: SUTHERLAND 2025

Imagine Sutherland 20 years from now. What kind of place should it be ...?

A Regenerating Place: A Network of Strong Communities

The County population exceeds 15,000. Growth in the A9 corridor in South-East Sutherland has been driven by proximity to Inverness and the Inner Moray Firth sub-region and the quality of life offered by small *urban* centres in a prestigious coastal location. Dornoch, Golspie and Brora have grown as centres, offering choice in property, affordable homes, business opportunities and social facilities. Excellence in design of new development and regeneration is founded in “sustainable principles”, “green” technologies and increasingly, home-working opportunities: housing and business accommodation “under-one-roof”.

The east coast centres are marketed on their unique assets: Dornoch - its Victorian heritage, Cathedral and prestigious golf resort - central to a growing reputation as a place of learning and leisure; Golspie - with its Hospital, Government Offices and Business Park - a place of administration and services; and Brora - with its legacy of diverse industries in the woolen trade, distillery, mining and transmission – a regenerating economic/business place. These centres have been vie-ing for major new investment in a state-of-the-art Community Hospital campus, a major indoor Leisure Centre, a modern University of Highlands and Islands complex and 2,500 sq m of supermarket floorspace.



Left:
Heritage assets
(Dornoch
Cathedral)

Lairg, Ardgay and Bonar Bridge have enhanced their positions as service centres in central Sutherland. Investment in services, development land and affordable housing, place these communities on a more sustainable footing. At Lochinver and Kinlochbervie, economic prospects for the ports have been closely tied with development of land reclaimed with the harbour expansion schemes of the mid-80s. Longstanding “bottlenecks” in sites for housing and infrastructure have been overcome. The west coast communities Durness and Scourie, have evolved over time and have been reinforced as local and visitor focal points on the A838; whilst along the north coast, reconciliation of crofting and service capacities has enabled local housing needs to be met. Population gains are evident as these areas are less “fragile”. Bettyhill, Tongue and Melvich continue to support viable services; Helmsdale similarly.

new 21st century “fit-for-purpose” schools

Major investment in new community and health/day facilities together with upgraded halls rendered most communities well-equipped. Whilst the sparse population and distance continue to sustain the more remote schools, communities increasingly see new 21st Century “fit-for-purpose” schools at the centre of their continued rejuvenation: a focus for social and community life. *One-stop-shops* are proving to be a model for viable rural services: local shops and filling stations, community run business co-operatives and the like. Local Gaelic traditions are also an influence on community life, education and regeneration.

A Competitive Place

An exceptional environment, thriving local communities and clean energy sources are proving an important incentive to business location. The east coast settlements complement, rather than compete with one another for investment and new economic opportunities. Dornoch, Golspie and Brora support modern accommodation in Business Parks. Employment ties with Inverness and the Inner Moray Firth sub-region - and increasingly Caithness - continue to be strong. Sutherland is not a self-contained economy. Choice in public transport makes for efficient commuting, although a high proportion of the workforce is employed within the County. The central Sutherland villages of Lairg, Ardgay and Bonar Bridge support thriving local enterprises.

thriving local communities

IT/broadband coverage has encouraged investment with access to the global market place. Secondary and processing streams continue to add value to large-scale development of resources. The Shin and Kildonnan forests in central Sutherland supply timber processing and bio-mass plants to the south, for which Lairg and Kinbrace continue as important railheads. Traditional highland sporting estates are embracing local enterprise. Small-scale, technology-based e-businesses are springing-up.

Tourism (right: Smoo Cave)

Wind farms in the priority coastal ridge and hinterland areas are now exporting to the National Grid, facilitated by major improvements in transmission capacity. There is success in the siting and impact of turbines, and their integration with community, wildlife and landscape. Following a period when fisheries activity was dominated by foreign landings, Lochinver and Kinlochbervie have diversified with emphasis on new tourism ventures, small businesses and outdoor activities. Fishery stocks are replenishing, rekindling interest in new locally registered fishing boats.

Tourism continues to help sustain many communities. Specialist heritage excursions, and sports holidays have encouraged important investment in the Area's accommodation, facilities and infrastructure. Ever increasing visitor numbers are drawn by Sutherland assets, success built on the North Highlands Initiative "Pleasure in the Extreme". Mixed agriculture and farm-forestry dominate in the fertile seaboard and northern straths, supported by low intensity production, sustainable practices and market-led incentive schemes. Traditional design values are reinvigorating crofting areas. The drive to sustain jobs in the Far North is proving to be a cyclical. Rogart continues to regenerate, sustaining local agricultural traditions and services.



A Connected and Accessible Place

Following major upgrading at the Ord, A9 improvement schemes - notably the long awaited by-passes of Golspie and Brora - are Regional Transport Authority priorities. Congestion relief, community safety and shortened journey times are anticipated. These routes are well fitted to the expansion options now being taken up by communities, enabling enhancement of their commercial thoroughfares.

Frequent community bus routes run across the County, giving more convenient access to work and services. A network of segregated cycle routes links the main communities. Rail freight has significantly increased, consolidating Lairg as a major transit/break-of-bulk and distribution "hub" for the north-central Highlands, serving the import and export needs of consignees in the forestry, farming, fuel supply, aggregates and renewables industries, underwritten by the Highland Rail Partnership *Rail Freight Consortium*.

Passenger numbers on the Far-North line have doubled as efficiencies have reduced the Inverness-Wick journey time by 30 minutes. A full peak-time return Invernet commuter service extends to Lairg, Ardgay and Bonar Bridge. The rail service is a key driver in their economic prospects, as well as places further north and west. Overall economic and social benefits to these communities without an unacceptable level of environmental impact would be needed to justify a Dornoch Firth rail crossing.

The case for twin-tracking the lifeline routes to the north and west coast communities, continues to be made. On-going investment in utilities has relieved deficiencies in the water and waste-water networks across Sutherland. The Area's expertise and associations with hydro-electricity generation underpin the development of renewables. Wave farm technology is earmarked for testing, community-based energy systems are in place, and bio-fuel technologies have enabled residual agricultural and forestry products to be utilized.



Good Connections:
(top: Kylesku Bridge
left: Invershin
Railway Bridge)

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



Endorsement of the North-West Highlands European Geopark by UNESCO has underpinned marketing of low-impact specialist pursuits, eco-tourism and field activities. Sutherland offers a superlative visitor experience. Following a community-led campaign and critical assessment of the economic and social benefits, Scotland's third National Park remains a possibility. Major incentives would derive from the creation of jobs, community and resource development and conservation management. The core Flow Country, which as part of a major ecological restoration and bio-diversity programme, has World Heritage status.

sutherland is a place people value...they aim to keep it that way

The Dornoch Firth is a unique 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 - a fitting ambience for the world-class Skibo Castle and Royal Dornoch Golf resorts. Climate change has meant the tidal "buffer" being kept free from development, allowing scarce resources for protection works to be targeted at vulnerable communities. The central Sutherland river systems - the Cassley, Oykel and Shin - are part of the River Basin Management Plan prepared under the EC Water Framework Directive. An integrated approach is maximizing land management, regenerating habitats and protecting salmon fisheries.

Heritage assets
(Above: Carbisdale Castle)

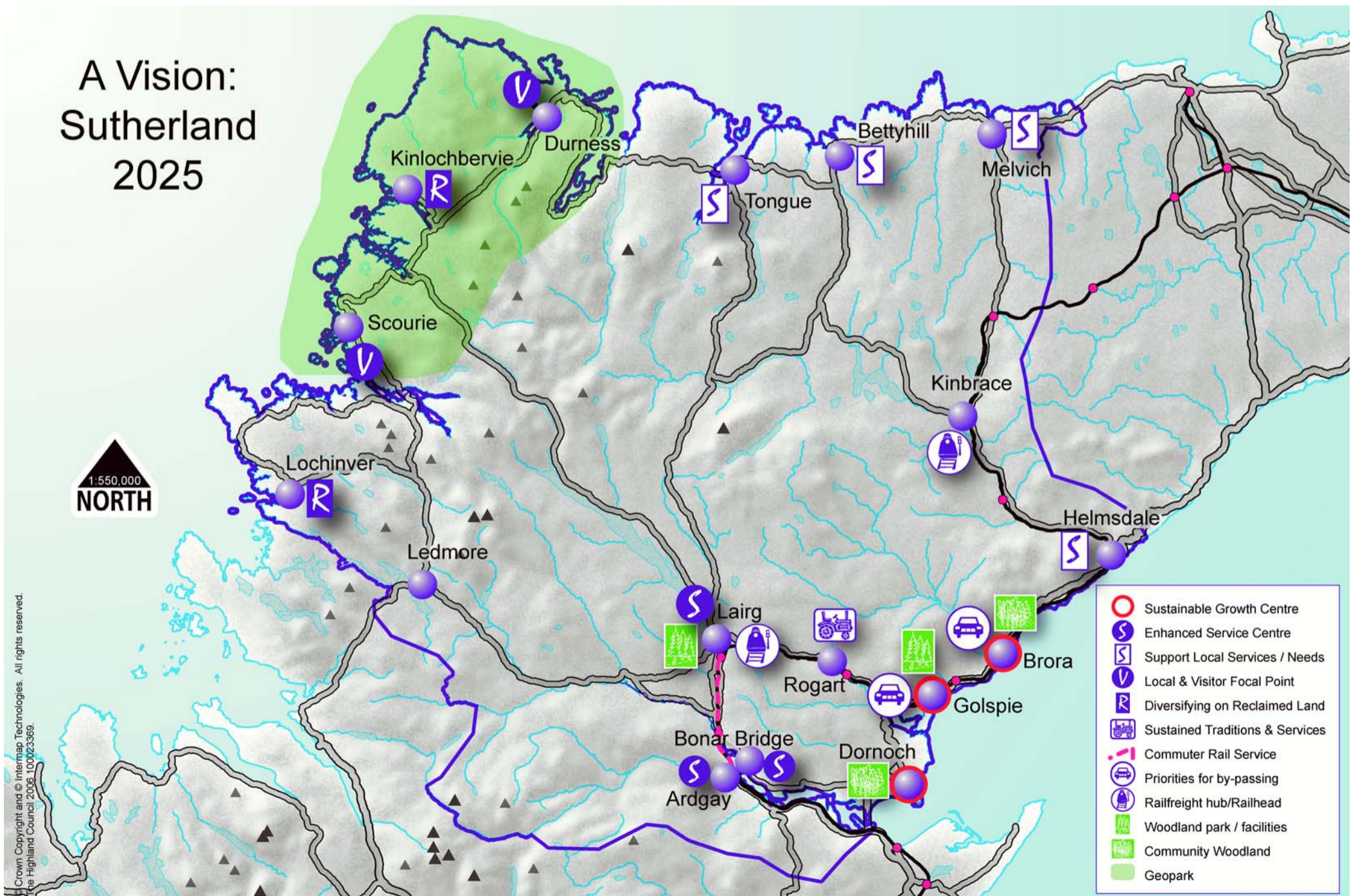
Sutherland hosts national events. Dornoch boasts an International Golf Academy; Ben Bhraggie Woods is a National Mountain Biking and Orienteering circuit, and Regatta events are drawn to the West Coast. Forest design improvements and safeguards for designed landscapes and the internationally renowned archaeological interest. Outdoor pursuits are a particular feature in Central Sutherland. Strategic Regional Woodland Parks support accommodation and facilities in Golspie and Lairg, and the major Woodland Interpretive Centre at Lairg attracts important numbers of visitors. Community Woodland Schemes in and around Dornoch and Brora are beginning to mature. Under the Land Reform legislation, communities are promoting land restoration, conservation and public access schemes. Core Paths, locally-managed woodland and small-scale recycling schemes are common-place.

Sutherland is a place people value...they aim to keep it that way.



Does A Vision: Sutherland 2025 reflect the Area's aspirations? What other main changes would you like to see?

A Vision: Sutherland 2025



Key Forecasts

The population of Sutherland in 2006 is estimated to be 13,700, which is equivalent to that in 1981. The demographic profile shows residents “ageing”, with significantly fewer young people and more in the retirement age-group than a decade ago. However, despite an average in-migration rate of some +65 persons per annum, forecasts indicate the population falling by 600 to 13,100 by 2025. Corresponding changes in the structure of the population assume a reduction in the number of young people (0-15 age group) by 800 and the core workforce (16-64), by 1,400; and an increase in the elderly (+65 age group) of 1,650 persons. Should the number of people taking up residence in Sutherland reduce by half, the County could support less than 12,400 within 20 years. Significant implications for the capacity of the population to regenerate and for the economy and services, therefore arise in either scenario.

To fully share in and contribute towards Highland prosperity, Sutherland must grow its population, compete in the global economy and sustain the highest standard of services. Increasing in-migration to +95 persons per annum over the next 20 years would sustain the population at its present level. However, retaining a workforce of 8,300 would necessitate a net average annual increase of +150 persons. This would raise the overall population by 10% but would still involve a deficit of 400 in resident young persons.



Building communities - not losing them
(above: The Emigrants, Helmsdale)

Towards A Sustainable Strategy

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. The themes and principles of *A VISION: SUTHERLAND 2025* 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.

1,300 new houses in Sutherland By 2016

This requires a sustainable development strategy capable of delivering up to 1,300 new houses in Sutherland by 2016 - including an outstanding deficit of 150 affordable homes - and of giving access to 800 new jobs. 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 the Area’s wellbeing and prosperity.

Growth and regeneration will be driven by promoting Sutherland’s assets and opportunities; 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.

? *How much growth? Do you agree that the priority is to stabilize the economy and regenerate the population?*

Regenerating Communities

Some 60% of the County’s population (8,300) is located in the south-east Sutherland and Kyle of Sutherland communities, which coincidentally, have also absorbed around 60% of new homes built in Sutherland in the past decade. These include the main centres supporting key services accessible to Sutherland as a whole. Close proximity to Inverness and Inner Moray Firth economic growth “hub” and the A9 improvement corridor presents scope to extend housing market opportunities within the County. Major allocations of **land for expansion** need to be identified at **Dornoch, Golspie and Brora** together with programmed infrastructure and a *vision* of the longer-term which combines an integrated community structure and environmental initiatives. Equally, priority needs to be given to maintaining the momentum of **regeneration in Lairg, Bonar Bridge and Ardgay** through a mix of brownfield/renewal, enhancement and a broader choice of land for development. Several smaller villages including **Edderton, Rogart, Embo, Culrain and Rosehall** are capable of supplementing housing options where the scale of building is in keeping with their character.

The west coast communities have strengthened overall - approximately 240 houses have been added in 20 years. Whilst the shortage of development land is acute, the housing market is much less fluid. A **preferred direction** for development needs to be identified in **Lochinver and Kinlochbervie**, supported by engineering works and initiatives aimed at the phased release of land. **Durness and Scourie** could consolidate further where development is reconciled with amenity, crofting and service networks; and a range of townships offer opportunities for building, reinforcing their economic and social fabric. 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. A flexible regime promoting available sites within **Helmsdale, Bettyhill, Tongue and Melvich**, securing affordable accommodation and encouraging the outlying rural settlements to strengthen, should be a priority.

Provision should be made to secure a proportion of housing development proposals as affordable homes and/or to identify suitable sites for affordable housing only.

HOUSING LAND SUPPLY NEEDS (HOW MANY HOUSES ARE REQUIRED)					
SUTHERLAND		EAST SUTHERLAND & EDDERTON		NORTH WEST & CENTRAL SUTHERLAND	
2006 - 2016	2006 - 11	2006 - 2016	2006 - 11	2006 - 2016	2006 - 11
1300	650-750#	800-850	400-425#	450-500	225-250#

#effective housing land supply requirement 2006-11

Creating Prosperity

Strengthening interaction with the growth “hub” to the south and Caithness to the north; diversifying the employment base in those parts of the County with greater self-containment, and a genuine *drive* to sustain jobs and regenerate the remote, landward areas are essential to prosperity. Sutherland needs to maximise development 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 - notably the option of **by-passing Golspie and Brora** and realignment at **Helmsdale** - should be safeguarded for the future to shorten journey times and improve 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 vital to economic and social prospects of communities in Central Sutherland.

By-passing golspie and BRORA ... should be safeguarded

Sites for economic development are needed in most communities. High quality Business Parks and/or service/industrial sites should be identified at **Dornoch, Golspie, Brora, Helmsdale** and **Lairg** and **Ardgay/Bonar Bridge**. 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 durable economic recovery and sustainable 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; e-business, welfare/self-help schemes and home-working.

Supporting Communities

The priority is to address remaining deficiencies and improve the range and quality of facilities: their viability 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 the County as a whole, reduce travel and assist sustainability. The **Dornoch-Golspie-Brora** axis is well placed to compete for the development of a large **supermarket** and **all-purpose leisure centre**. **Golspie** is already committed as the site of a new £5m Council **offices complex** by refurbishment of the historic buildings at Drummuie; and **Migdale Hospital** at **Bonar Bridge** is earmarked for replacement in 2008. With substantial investment in health, education and community/leisure services throughout Sutherland, less than 20% of residents (3,700) now require to travel more than 10 minutes to core services (health, shop, post office, school and filling station). Opportunities should be reserved for sheltered housing to develop adjacent to health centres in most villages, as an integral part of the *care in the community* regime. Sustaining **community transport** and **peripatetic services** is a vital “lifeline” in the remote, sparsely populated **interior**: Altnaharra, Achfarry, Kinbrace and Inchnadamph.

First-time water and drainage facilities have gradually been installed in most communities. However, operational deficiencies and shortcomings in the capacity of utility systems impose severe constraints in key centres. Water supplies at **Dornoch, Golspie, Brora, Helmsdale, Bonar Bridge** and **Ardgay**; and waste water systems at **Edderton, 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 stymied by distance to electricity supplies and the high cost of connecting the service.

Caring for the Heritage

The diverse natural and cultural heritage of Sutherland – its habitats, species, scenery and artifacts – is a major asset. This must be protected and promoted to maximise the area’s economic prospects, including its appeal to visitors. An integrated and balanced regime of land uses - embracing forestry and other resources, on and off-shore renewable energy, archaeological/geological interpretation; countryside access, recreation and outdoor pursuits; wildlife management and traditional activities - able to draw investment in dependent, “downstream” or support activities, is required.



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 and cultural heritage. This should be founded in three categories based on the status of designated land and its local, regional and national importance together with policies which permit or restrict development, according to whether or not it is sustainable.

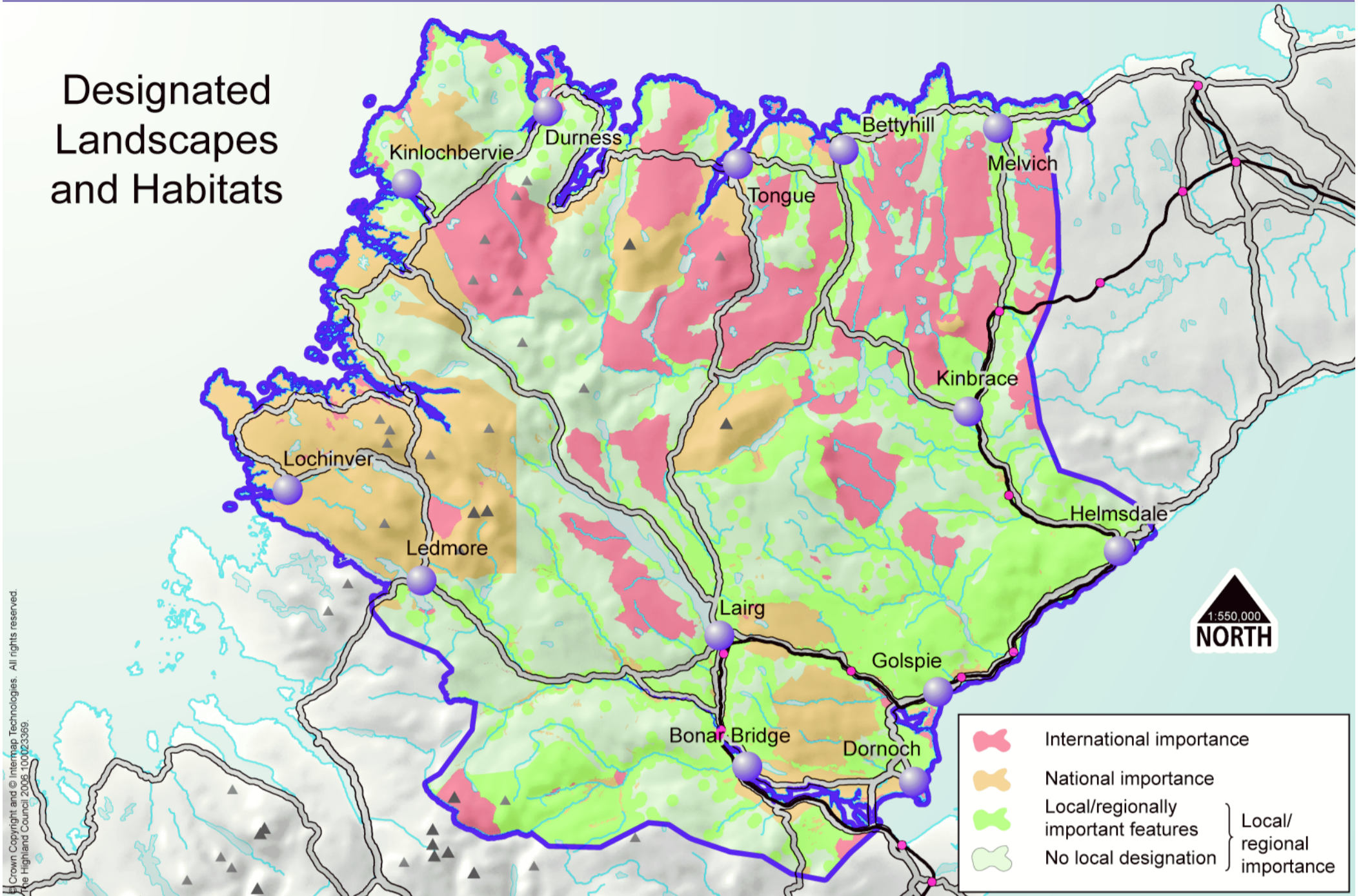
Guardians of our heritage (above: Highland Council Ranger)



Historic Settlement (above: Harbour)

RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

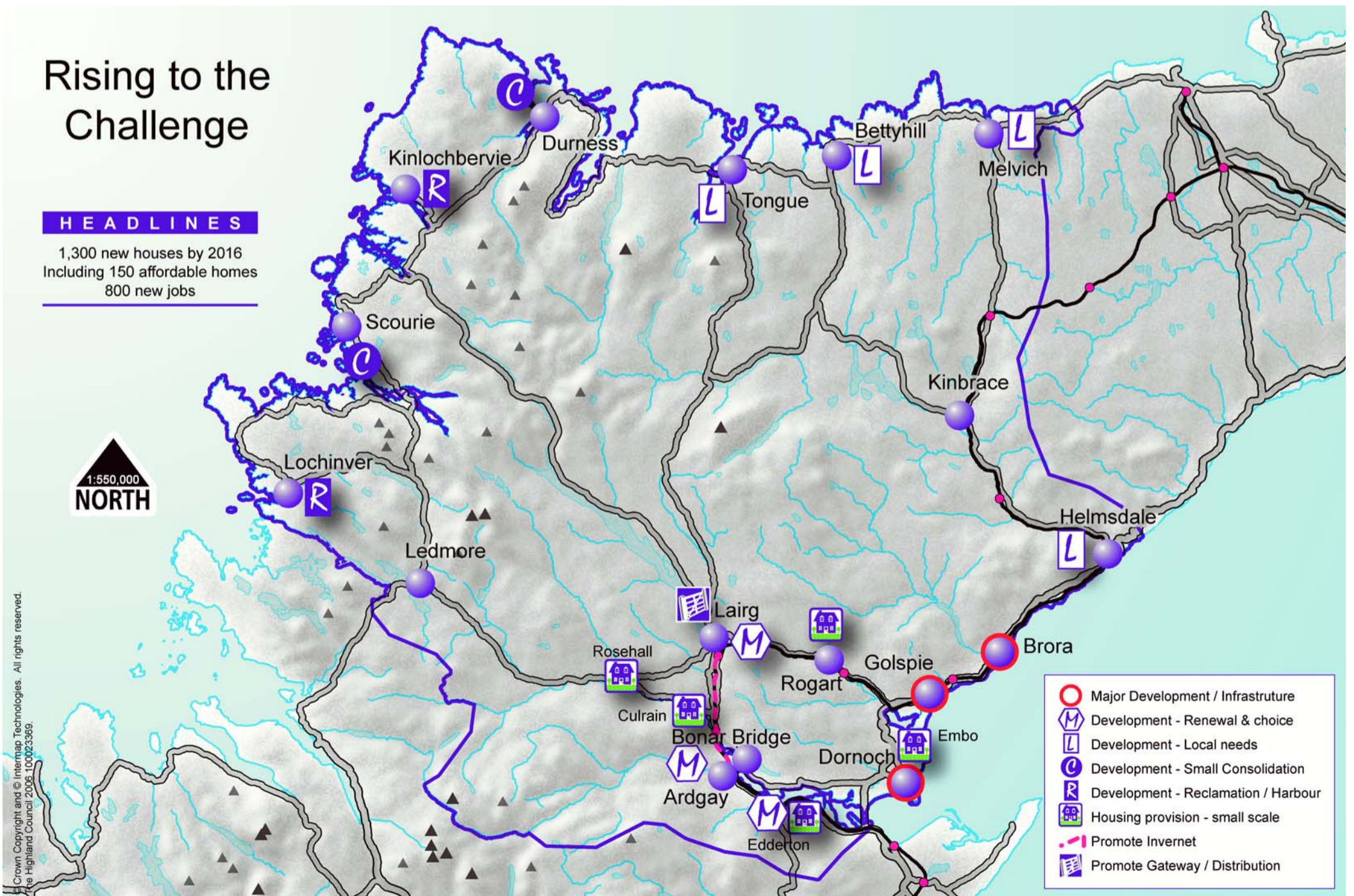
Designated Landscapes and Habitats



Rising to the Challenge

HEADLINES

1,300 new houses by 2016
Including 150 affordable homes
800 new jobs



RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

sustainable development: principles

Sustainable Communities

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 - which may involve Development Briefs for larger sites or in circumstances where action needs to be co-ordinated - will encourage development within:

- **Settlement Development Areas:** which will show opportunities for suitable infill, consolidation, redevelopment and refurbishment of established settlements, provided that proposals safeguard or enhance local amenity, open spaces and heritage;
- **Key Sites:** identified for their suitability for housing, business or community use; or a mix of these activities. These should be capable of development and available, within 5 years. At this stage, key sites represent a choice of development options within communities;
- **a Vision:** in certain communities (see diagrams), a view is taken about long-term expansion, related infrastructure and environmental action, beyond the next 5 years. This is intended to ensure that major development options are safeguarded for future consideration.



Sustainable Services - Education (top right: Kinlochberive)
Sustainable Design - (right: example)
Sustainable Communities - Affordable Housing (below: Scourie)



Sustainable Design

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

Core services and community facilities across Sutherland are located according to the size and distribution of the population and its accessibility to/distance from, the centres at which services are sustained; supplemented by peripatetic 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. The following template provides a basis for addressing deficiencies and improving the quality and accessibility of services and facilities.

SERVICES / FACILITIES*	INDICATIVE POPULATION	TYPICAL DISTANCE / TIME AWAY	PRESENT DISTRIBUTION
Further Education / High School, Supermarket, Business Park / Industrial Estate, Hospital	13,000+	100 km / up to 90+ mins	Sutherland
High School / Health Centre, Hospital	>1,500	40-50 km / 30-60 mins	Dornoch, Golspie, Brora, Kinlochbervie / Lochinver, Lairg / Bonar Bridge, Bettyhill
Primary School, Surgery, Shop / Post Office, Petrol Filling Station	<500	10 mins / 10-15 km	Ardgay, Drumbeg, Helmsdale, Rosehall, Scourie, Stoer, Durness, Tongue, Rogart, Portskerra / Melvich
Primary School, mobile / peripatetic, other "lifeline" services	<100	10-60 mins / 15-40 km	eg. Achfary, Altnaharra, Croik, Culrain, Kinbrace

* a minimum of two or more



Does this strategy properly reflect your community’s role and contribution to future prosperity?



If a large supermarket is to be developed in Sutherland, where should it be located?



The provision of affordable housing may be assisted by allocating land for affordable homes and by seeking to secure affordable housing as a proportion of private sector housing proposals. Which option might be preferable in your community?