SUTHERLAND LOCAL PLAN

Written Statement - Pre-Deposit Draft - May 2008*

*Please first read the explanatory note inside this cover

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICE
THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

The Highland Council
Comhairle na Gaidhealtachd
SERVING The Highland Community

ABOUT THIS VERSION OF THE LOCAL PLAN

The Council recently consulted on a draft Sutherland Local Plan and an accompanying draft Environmental Report during Winter 2007-08. However, since their publication the Scottish Government has queried the extent to which the consultation procedures that the Council has been following and has intended to follow would fit with the legal requirements for environmental assessment. The Council has therefore decided to consult further on the Plan and Environmental Report and to consult on a Supplement to the Environmental Report, before it makes any more decisions about the contents of the Plan.

To be clear about what version of the Plan is now available for comment and what stage it is at, the Council has given it a new title: "Pre-Deposit Draft, May 2008". The amended Plan Stages are explained further in paragraph 2.3 of the Written Statement part of the Pre-Deposit Draft Local Plan.

The content of the Plan only differs from the October 2007 version in references to its title and plan stages, including references to arrangements for consultation. In the Written Statement the amendments have been limited to: the front cover and addition of this explanatory note, the header on each page, the foreword, the contents page and paragraphs 2.3, 2.9 and 2.10 in section 2 "Introduction & Context", including addition of the diagram. In the Map Booklet the amendments have been limited to: the front cover and addition of this explanatory note. Please note that on the footers of each page of the Map Booklet and on the titles of the large folded maps, the title of the document has not been changed but those are to be regarded and referred to as part of the "Pre-Deposit Draft, May 2008".

There is now opportunity for the public to submit comments on the documents available. Details of how to submit comments are provided in paragraph 2.9 of the Local Plan Written Statement and in the Supplement to the Environmental Report. The deadline for comments is referred to in the Public Notice and on the Council's website.

However, your attention is particularly drawn to the explanation in paragraph 2.9 of the Local Plan Written Statement that if you have already submitted representations to us as part of the recent consultation on the Plan and Environmental Report referred to above, please do <u>not</u> send these to us again. They will be carried forward and considered carefully by the Council after the new deadline.

Doing further consultation at this stage on both the Plan and its Environmental Report (including Supplement) provides opportunity to ensure that the process of Strategic Environmental Assessment is sound and that the work carried out so far on the Local Plans, including input from the public and organisations, is used to maximum effect. This addresses the concern which has been raised by the Scottish Government and which was considered by the Council's Planning, Environment & Development Committee on 19 March 2008.

FOREWORD

I am pleased to present the Pre-Deposit Draft version of the Council's new Local Plan for Sutherland. This is the land-use Plan which the Council wishes to use to guide development and investment in the area over the next few years and through that to help deliver the Community Strategy.

The Plan's intention is to accommodate significant growth in population overall and to enable communities to grow sustainably to meet their needs. A growing population requires homes, jobs, services and facilities and the Plan aims for these needs to be met effectively. More affordable housing and better design quality in development should be key outcomes if the Plan is successful.

Meanwhile, Sutherland's important assets- natural, built and cultural- will be safeguarded. Retaining the richness of the area will be important to its future prosperity.

By preparing and implementing the Sutherland Local Plan, the Council can make significant progress with its administration's programme. However, achieving everything set out in the Plan will require many other organisations and individuals to play their part too.

We have drawn up the policies and proposals following consideration of the many comments received from the public and other interested parties and organisations on an earlier issues and options paper, Sutherland Futures. We are grateful for that interest. We are committed to continuing and effective opportunities for participation and now invite the submission of representations on this Pre-Deposit Draft Local Plan.

**Councillor Drew Hendry
Chairman: Planning, Environment
& Development Committee**

RO-RÀDH

Tha mi toilichte Ro-Thasgaidh de Phlana Sgìreil ùr na Comhairle do Chataibh a chur an làthair. Seo am Plana cleachdadh –fearainn a tha a' Chomhairle airson a chleachdadh mar iùl a stiùireas leasachadh is tasgadh san sgìre thar nam bliadhnaichean romhainn gus cuideachadh le lìbhrigeadh Ro-innleachd na Coimhearsnachd.

'S e amas a' Phlana gun còmhdaich e fàs ann an àireamh an t-sluaigh is gun toir e cothrom do choimhearsnachdan fàs gu seasmhach gus coinneachadh rim feumalachdan. Tha barrachd sluaigh a' cur feum air dachannan, obraichean, seirbheisean is goireasan agus tha am Plana ag amas air coinneachadh riutha sin gu math. Bu chòir gum biodh barrachd thaighean air an ruig daoine agus càileachd dealbhaidh nas fheàrr nam prìomh bhuilean coileanaidh ma shoirbhicheas leis a' Phlana.

Aig an aon àm, bidh sochairean nàdarra, togte agus cultarail a tha cudromach ann an Cataibh air an dìon. Bidh e cudromach sochairean na sgìre a ghleidheadh gus gun soirbhich le cùisean san àm ri teachd.

Le bhith ag ullachadh is a' cur an gnìomh Plana Ionadail Chataibh, thèid aig a' Chomhairle air fìor adhartas a dhèanamh le prògram an riaghlaidh aice. Ach, gus na tha air a chur a-mach sa Phlana a choileanadh, feumaidh iomadh buidheann eile, is daoine fa leth, pàirt a ghabhail ann cuideachd.

Tha sinn air poileasaidhean is molaidhean a dhealbh an dèidh cnuasachadh air iomadh beachd a fhuair sinn on phoball is buidhnean eile air pàipear roghainnean, Sutherland Futures, a bh' againn roimhe seo air cùisean. Tha sinn nur comain airson sin. Tha sinn a' rùnachadh leantainn oirnn le cothroman compàirteachaidh èifeachdach agus tha sinn a-nis a' sireadh bheachdan air Ro-Thasgaidh de Phlana Sgìreil seo.

An Comhairliche Drew Hendry Cathraiche: Comataidh Dealbhachaidh, Àrainneachd & Leasachaidh

1 Contents

Accompanying Documents:

A **separate Map Booklet** contains the Settlement Text and Proposals Map Insets.
The Sutherland-wide Proposals Map and Golspie Inset Maps are on separate, larger, folded sheets.

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

NOTE
The following additional documentation may be included within or accompany future drafts of the Plan:

· A Highland Council landownership schedule;
· Gaelic place names in the map booklet and Gaelic translation of the introduction and context.
· An Action Programme;
· Monitoring;
· An Appropriate Assessment

The content may also be updated in terms of its factual content and supplemented by additional or different illustrative material.

2 Introduction & Context

2.1   How to Read and Use the Plan

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). 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

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 (referred to in this paragraph as 'recent consultation'). However, as set out in the explanatory note "About this version of the Local Plan" which is on the inside of the front cover of this document, the Council has

decided to provide now this further opportunity for people to comment on the contents of this Plan and its accompanying Environmental Report and opportunity to comment on a new Supplement to the Environmental Report. Please refer to that explanatory note which indicates the parts of the documents that have changed- they are few. All the consultation undertaken so far, together with this current consultation, will now be treated as being 'pre-deposit consultation'. Once this consultation is closed the Council will consider all of the comments or representations received to the recent or current consultations. After that the Council will publish a further full draft of the Plan incorporating any changes the Council wishes to make. It will be a formal Deposit Draft Local Plan, accompanied by a revised Environmental Report and there will be opportunity at that time for the public to submit representations for consideration. After that a public examination chaired by a person independent of the Council will be held to deal with any unresolved issues. This person will judge whether further changes to the Plan are required prior to its final adoption. The Plan Stages are set out in the diagram on page 3. Please note that The Plan's content is already a factor in deciding on planning applications.

2.4   Existing Local Plans

This Sutherland Local Plan has been prepared for the Plan Area as defined on the Proposals Map. Once adopted, the Sutherland Local Plan will replace existing adopted Local Plans in so far as they relate to that Plan Area. In the meantime the existing adopted Local Plans still affect planning application and other investment decisions and are available via www.highland.gov.uk.

2.5   The Development Plan

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.

2.6 Other Factors

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

- national planning policy and guidance which is prepared by the Scottish Goverement and includes the National Planning Framework, Scottish Planning Policy Guidelines, Circulars and Planning Advice Notes (available via www.scotland.gov.uk);

- other Highland-wide policies such as the Highland Structure Plan, Development Plan Policy Guidelines and Development Briefs (a full list is available via 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;

- national, UK and European legislation such as the Town and Country Planning Scotland) Act 1997 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).
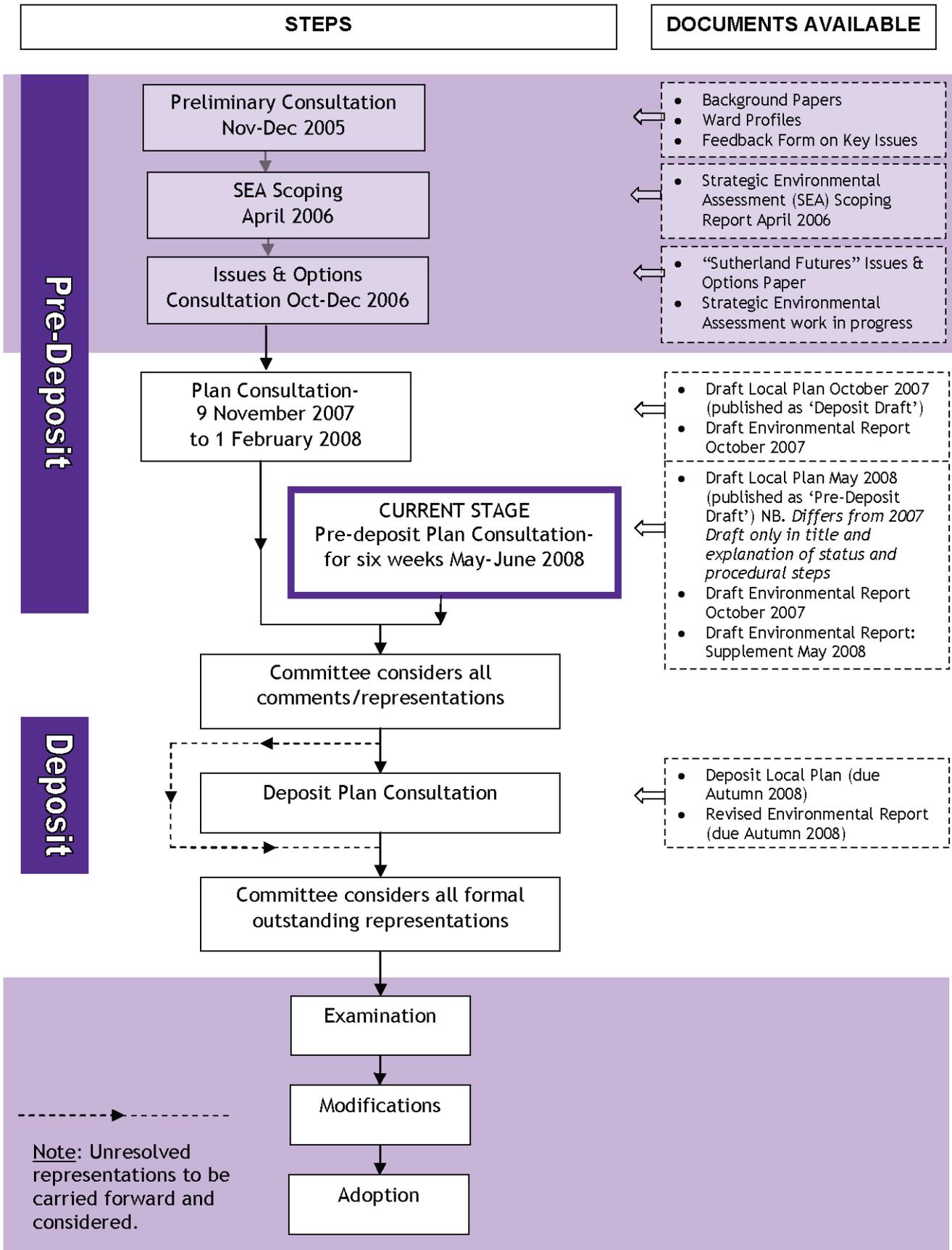
2.7   Purpose

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.

2.8   Timescale

The Plan deals with the period to 2014 (assuming adoption at the end of 2009). However, it includes a longer term vision spanning into the 2020s. References to long term mean outwith the current 5 year Plan period.

STEPS	DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE

Pre-Deposit

Preliminary Consultation
Nov-Dec 2005

- Background Papers
- Ward Profiles
- Feedback Form on Key Issues

SEA Scoping
April 2006

- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Scoping Report April 2006

Issues & Options
Consultation Oct-Dec 2006

- "Sutherland Futures" Issues & Options Paper
- Strategic Environmental Assessment work in progress

Plan Consultation-
9 November 2007
to 1 February 2008

- Draft Local Plan October 2007 (published as 'Deposit Draft')
- Draft Environmental Report October 2007

CURRENT STAGE
Pre-deposit Plan Consultation-
for six weeks May-June 2008

- Draft Local Plan May 2008 (published as 'Pre-Deposit Draft') NB. *Differs from 2007 Draft only in title and explanation of status and procedural steps*
- Draft Environmental Report October 2007
- Draft Environmental Report: Supplement May 2008

Committee considers all comments/representations

Deposit

Deposit Plan Consultation

- Deposit Local Plan (due Autumn 2008)
- Revised Environmental Report (due Autumn 2008)

Committee considers all formal outstanding representations

Examination

Modifications

Adoption

<u>Note:</u> Unresolved representations to be carried forward and considered.

2.9   Comments on the Plan

This is the Pre-Deposit Draft of the Plan. Any comments on any part of its content (or of the associated Environmental Report and its Supplement) should be sent in writing to:

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

stating the name and address of the person making the comments, the title of this Plan and where appropriate the matters objected to and the reasons, to arrive no later than the deadline referred to in the Public Notice and on the Council's website.

However, anyone who has already submitted representations to the Council as part of the consultation on the Plan and Environmental Report during Winter 2007-08 and who has had an acknowledgement of receipt, should <u>not</u> submit those again. The submissions that were received will be carried forward and considered carefully by the Council after the new deadline.

Likewise, once we publish the next draft of the Plan and provide opportunity for submission of representations, we will carry forward and consider any unresolved representations submitted in response to the recent or current consultations.

At key stages throughout this process we will keep in touch with anyone who has submitted comments or representations on the Draft Plan, about progress with the Plan, about opportunities for their involvement and about our response to their submissions.

2.10 Further Information

Further information can be obtained from

> David Cowie (01463 702827) - please ask to speak to another member of the Sutherland Local Plan Team if David Cowie is not available

Or alternatively you can e-mail the team at

> sutherlandlp@highland.gov.uk

and more generally via locally 'deposited' consultation material and the Council's web-site

> www.highland.gov.uk

3 Plan Objectives

3.1   Key objectives provide a focus to the Plan and help us to ensure that its individual policies and proposals are relevant and necessary, so that the Plan is 'fit for purpose'.

3.2   The Local Plan will play a key role in helping to achieve the community's strategic objectives. In particular it needs to help deliver those aspects of the Community Strategy/Plan which have land-use planning implications. The Sutherland Partnership developed "A Strategy for Sutherland 2005 – 2009" and has since developed "A Community Plan for Sutherland- an action grid springing from the Sutherland Partnership Strategy" (2006). The overarching aim of the Community Strategy for Sutherland is:

"Positively influencing population change in Sutherland to achieve, over time, a vibrant, viable and revitalised population that enjoys a high quality of life."

3.3   The main theme of the Community Strategy is "Strengthening Our Communities" and under that the Community Plan sets out seven **strategic objectives (SO):**

SO1. Promoting opportunities for young people

SO2. Putting people first

SO3. Welcoming talent

SO4. Growing our economy

SO5. Confident & thriving settlements

SO6. Promoting environmental benefits

SO7. Making partnership more effective

3.4   The Local Plan also needs to relate to the seven strategic themes of the "Highland Structure Plan" (2001). The key objectives for the Local Plan are therefore set out below under the seven strategic themes of the Structure Plan and with cross-reference made to the most relevant strategic objectives (SOs) of the Community Plan, to indicate how the Local Plan will contribute.

3.4.1 Conserving and promoting the Highland identity

For Sutherland:

a. Conserve and promote the uniqueness of Sutherland's identity, and its contribution to the identity of the Highlands as a whole, whilst recognising the diversity within Sutherland itself and the relationship with adjacent areas.

b. Accommodate growth and change in a planned way, ensuring that Sutherland's valuable assets- natural and other- are conserved. These assets are of key importance to the future growth of the economy, to achieving quality living environments and to identity.

c. Respect evidence of the way in which communities have interacted with their environment, which is a key part of identity and heritage.

d. Provide opportunity for the continuance of traditional land and sea based activities and industries, particularly crofting, forestry and fishing and their rejuvenation, for example the creation of forest crofts through community-led schemes.

Helps meet SO1 and SO2.

3.4.2 Adopting a proactive approach to the wise use of the natural environment

For Sutherland:

e. Safeguard important assets of the natural environment for their own sake and as an asset to the Sutherland community.

f. Recognising that inevitably the community's existence impacts upon the natural environment, to minimise and mitigate against negative impacts through good planning of future development, for example avoiding putting flood-sensitive development in areas at high risk of flooding.

g. Take positive advantage of opportunities provided through development to improve upon the richness of the existing natural assets, for example through enhancing biodiversity. It can also be sustainable in its own right and may involve activities which use Sutherland's natural environment in ways which benefit communities and the economy of the area.

h. Promote opportunities for renewable energy development, particularly small-scale community-led schemes, and implementation of sustainable waste management solutions.

Helps meet SO2, SO3, SO4 and SO6.

3.4.3 Taking an integrated approach to improving accessibility to goods, services and markets

For Sutherland:

i. Recognise that large parts of the Sutherland community will remain car-dependent and that many people already travel far for some services. Furthermore some parts of Sutherland are dependent upon adjacent areas for certain services, for example secondary schooling in Ullapool and Thurso.

j. Do what we can to encourage the retention of key local services in Sutherland's communities, including a strategic network of fuel stations, and promote innovation in the delivery of public services as part of sustainable communities.

k. Focus large scale development on larger settlements and/or at transport/utility nodes which can offer a range of services within easy reach.

l. Recognise the positive role to be played by innovative and integrated private, public and community transport solutions in bolstering the sustainability of rural communities.

m. Deliver improvements required to services and facilities in step with housing development. An Action Programme will seek to guide implementation and track progress.

Helps meet SO1, SO2, SO4, SO5 and SO6.

3.4.4 Consolidating the settlement hierarchy

For Sutherland:

n. Confirm the settlement hierarchy through the Plan's Strategy. It is emphasised that this hierarchy and the settlement development areas identified are for land-use planning purposes and is not intended to identify the wider extent of communities which associate themselves with those settlements.

o. Provide an adequate supply of land identified for new development to sustain places in supporting homes, jobs, services and facilities to meet communities' needs.

p. Accommodate substantial new development in a sustainable way, particularly in certain settlements in accordance with the hierarchy, as part of the overarching theme to strengthen communities, whilst in other settlements provide for community growth but on a smaller scale.

Helps meet SO2, SO3, SO4, SO5 and SO6.

3.4.5 Creating an improved business environment

For Sutherland:

q. Provide a range of sites for employment development whilst also operating a framework of policies which accommodate employment-generating development on other sites- particularly where it supports the sustainability of fragile communities and does not harm interests of acknowledged importance.

r. Through this, accommodate the needs of traditional land and sea based industries whilst also providing opportunity to respond to new small and medium scale enterprise and entrepreneurialism.

s. Provide a range of opportunities for housing provision, including affordable housing, linked with planning of services and facilities, including infrastructure investment, helping to provide for the needs of prospective employees.

Helps meet SO1, SO3, SO4, SO5 and SO6.

3.4.6 Addressing the need for quality living environments

For Sutherland:

t. Contribute to the creation, enhancement or regeneration of communities following sustainable development principles.

u. Examine the details of individual planning proposals as well as the context within which various proposals fit in with the existing built environment and relate to the natural environment.

v. Seek good design quality, place-making and innovation in new development and encourage the retention of key services in communities.

Helps meet SO1, SO2, SO3, SO5 and SO6.

3.4.7 Working in partnership with the community and other agencies

For Sutherland:

w. By working with the community and other agencies in implementing the Local Plan, deliver aspects of the Community Plan.

x. Drive delivery of the Local Plan through an Action Programme, indicating which organisations will be involved in implementation of the Local Plan and a timescale for implementation, and check progress on implementation of these through regular monitoring. It is important to monitor progress towards achieving the objectives of the Plan and the agreed actions, both generally and in detail where necessary. Only by undertaking such monitoring will the Council know whether the Local Plan remains fit for purpose or requires review.

Helps meet SO1, SO2, SO5 and SO7.

4 Key Forecasts, Strategy and Vision

A - Key Forecasts

4.1 As shown in Table 1, the 2008 population of Sutherland is estimated to reach 13,956. Using national data and accepted pan-Highland assumptions this is projected to decrease by 2% by 2018. Deaths will continue to outnumber births and whilst overall there is set to be positive in-migration this will be insufficient to offset the losses of population. Despite this, there would be a 6% increase in the number of households due to changing patterns of households and this means that some housing development would be necessary to cater for the population's needs.

4.2 In common with the rest of Highland, the population of Sutherland is ageing and this trend is expected to continue. The age profile of the Area's population is projected to change significantly over the next 10 years. The number of older people is set to increase whereas the number of core workforce and young people is set to decrease. A 29% growth in those 65 or older and a 24% decline in children are the headlines. This is due to declining birth rates, the inevitable ageing on of the current population, the older age profile of in-migrants and the continued out-migration of young adults. However, it is also important to note that the core workforce would fall by 9% which could reduce the economic output of the area and hinder the ability to provide

and run the necessary services to sustain Sutherland's communities.

4.3 Against this backdrop, the overarching aim of the Community Strategy for Sutherland is:

"Positively influencing population change in Sutherland to achieve, over time, a vibrant, viable and revitalised population that enjoys a high quality of life."

In line with this aim and the Local Plan's vision and objectives, the strategy of this Local Plan is therefore based on increasing in-migration and reducing out-migration (particularly of young people). This will of course also have the added benefit of sustaining local primary schools and other facilities. The Plan's provisions are therefore based not on Table 1 but on a vision of maintaining a stable working age population (in terms of number of people) to 2026, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 1 - Populations projections using national data and accepted pan- Highland assumptions			
Projection	**2008**	**2018**	**2008-18 Change**
Population*	13956	13639	-317 (-2%)
Younger People (0-15)	2096	1590	-506 (-24%)
Core Workforce (16-64)	8515	7720	-795 (-9%)
Older People (65+)	3345	4329	+984 (+29%)
Households	6704	7082	+378 (+6%)
Additional Dwellings (Houses) Required 2008-2018 (assumes a similar proportion of future second / holiday home ownership and a 25% flexibility allowance to allow developers a choice of landowners, locations and markets)			557(c. 60 p.a.)

* based on former areas; Edderton was not in Sutherland.

Table 2- Vision for stable working age population			
Projection	2008	2018	2008-18 Change
Population	14225	15066	+841 (+6%)
Younger People (0-15)	2151	1868	-283 (-13%)
Core Workforce (16 - 64)	8706	8725	+19 (+0%)
Older People (65+)	3368	4473	+1105 (+33%)
Households	6805	7691	+886 (+13%)
Additional Dwellings (Houses) Required 2008-2018 (assumes a similar proportion of future second/holiday home ownership and a 25% flexibility allowance to allow developers a choice of landowners, locations and markets			+1304 (c. 130 p.a.)

4.4 Under the Plan's strategy, it is anticipated that enough land to accommodate a little over 1,300 additional houses will need to be identified in Sutherland for the period to 2018, which represents 130 new houses per annum. This includes, though, a 25% flexibility allowance to allow developers a choice of landowners, locations and markets. Taking this into account, the actual number of homes anticipated to be required for that period is around 1,040 (104 per annum). On average over recent years, around 50 houses have been built per year within Sutherland as a whole although the completion rate has been increasing and in 2006 some 67 houses were completed. The level of building will need to approximately double if the strategy is to be delivered. We are confident that this can be achieved though. The Plan makes adequate provision for housing through its allocations and other policy provisions.

4.5 Table 3 illustrates that land allocated for housing development (including for affordable housing and any housing element of mixed use proposals) is sufficient to meet the requirement, including the 25% flexibility allowance. In fact, the policies of the Plan additionally provide scope for some housing development to occur on 'windfall' sites, to a greater or lesser extent both within and outwith the settlement development areas. Land identified in the plan for longer term growth is not included in these figures and is therefore additional to it, to be brought forward through Plan monitoring and review if required. Confidence in achieving housing delivery also arises from the fact that there are significant allocations which have been allocated in previous Plans and which are now likely to come forward, that 'volume housebuilders' are showing more active interest in developing in Sutherland than has been the case historically, that we have sought through consultation to allocate sites that are effective (likely to be able to be brought forward for development) and that affordable housing programmes are set to continue.

Table 3 How the allocations meet requirements	
Additional Dwellings (Houses) Required 2008-2018 (from Table 2)	1304 (c.130 p.a)
Total Housing Capacity of Allocated Sites (based on indicative capacities and not including Long Term sites)	1420

4.6 An ageing population will require increased care provision and has clear implications for the Plan in terms of allocating land for housing and community facilities. These implications mean that the Plan should identify sites that are accessible to community facilities and any public transport connections, suited to the provision of housing for varying needs or sheltered accommodation and suited to additional care home provision.

4.7 The Local Plan needs to identify an adequate supply of land for building both affordable and private housing for existing residents and those moving into the area. Analysis of house prices in Sutherland, and in particular the prices of previously owned houses, shows that prices have increased between 2004 and 2006 by more than the Highland average in both Wards covered by this Plan. The price rise in Ward 1 (North, West & Central Sutherland), at £64k, is in fact the biggest rise of all the Wards in Highland. Examining just the lower quartile prices for previously owned houses (often used as a measure of affordability for those on lower incomes) again reveals significant increase in both Sutherland wards, greater than the average for Highland. This illustrates a growing problem of non-affordability in the Plan area. Table 4 provides figures from the Council's housing lists which further illustrates a demand for affordable housing in the Plan area.

Table 4 - The Council's Housing Lists	
The Highland Council housing waiting list as at April 2007 (total of 'first preference' instances where first preference is located within Sutherland; not including Housing Association lists)	373
The Highland Council housing transfer list as at April 2007 (total of 'first preference' instances where first preference is located within Sutherland; not including Housing Association lists)	66

4.8 There continues to be demand for housing stock which may be used as second/holiday homes and will therefore not be available for use by permanent households. The percentage of dwellings in Sutherland which were either vacant or being used as a second/holiday home as at 2004 was 18.2% according to Council tax records and this pattern has been taken into account in drawing up the Plan. Communities are concerned about the impact that part-time occupancy has on their wellbeing. The Council cannot control the ownership and occupation of housing on the open market. If the housing stock is limited to the existing there are real constraints for local people in seeking homes, with little availability and choice. However, by enabling new development, which will include affordable housing provision, they will have more opportunity to stay in or enter the local housing market and meet their housing needs. There is significant pressure on the housing market in many parts of Sutherland due in part at least to demand from outwith the area. Records of house sales over the last 16 years show that Sutherland has a higher proportion of sales to people coming from outside Sutherland (44%) than is the case in the other parts of Highland (on average, 25%). Within Sutherland, the figure is higher in the West (50%) than in the North (42%) or East (43%). The Local Plan will seek to ensure that suitable housing is available for all that require it.

4.9 Forecasting employment land requirements with any accuracy is very difficult because of the lack of comprehensive and recent local data. Assumptions about existing job numbers, the number of persons requiring work (economically active) in the future and average employment densities (how much land is required to accommodate a specified number of jobs) are all uncertain.

4.10 However, it is worth noting that Sutherland does not have high unemployment. The May 2007 figure stood at 2.4% - around the proportion for Scotland although a little above the proportion for Highland.

4.11 Sutherland's economic structure varies from the Highland average in terms of under-representation in the business, manufacturing, retail and distribution sectors. It relies more heavily on the primary sector particularly in agriculture/crofting, fishing, tourism, public administration, education and health. The natural resource industries also play an important part in the economic, social and cultural life of Sutherland.

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.

Housing Allocation : Ord Place, Lairg

Industrial Allocation : Culag, Lochinver

Housing Allocation : Rosslyn Street, Brora

B - Strategy

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. That way it will be able to fully share in and contribute towards Highland prosperity.

A Strategy for Sustainability

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 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

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.

4.21 Amongst Sutherland's villages Bonar Bridge, Ardgay, Durness, 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.

Main Centre : Dornoch

Key Village : Bonar Bridge

Small Village : Portskerra

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 coincidentally, 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 Lairg, Bonar Bridge and Ardgay through a mix of brownfield/renewal development, enhancement and a broader choice of land for development. Several smaller villages including Edderton, Rogart, Embo 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.

Supporting Key Services : Golspie

Renewal Opportunities : Ardgay
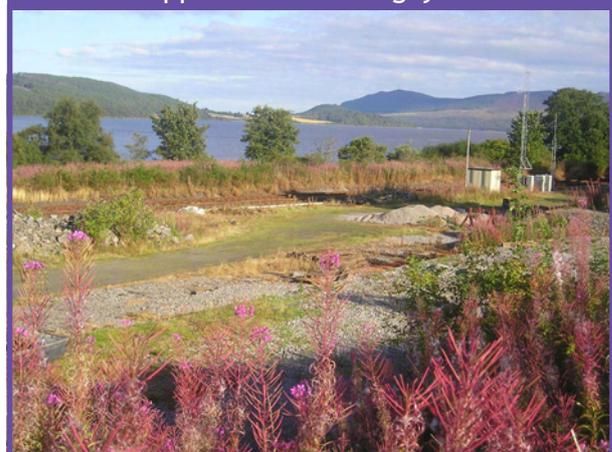
Small Scale Development : Scourie

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

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 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.

Affordable Housing : Bettyhill

Tourist Asset : Smoo Cave
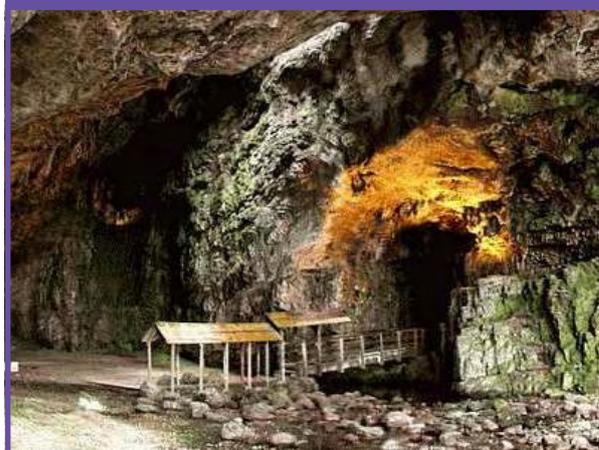
Tourist Asset : Dornoch Links

Economic Development Oportunity : Golspie Business Park

4.30 The HITRANS Strategy (2007) flags the option of by-passing Golspie and Brora in particular, although the earliest that schemes may be prepared would be towards the end of the period covered by this Local Plan. This Plan does not therefore identify routes for safeguarding but the definition of the settlement development areas tightly around the existing built form and allocated sites will help to maintain options for future investigation. 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.

4.31 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

4.32 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 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. 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 sheltered housing 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.

4.33 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.

Caring for the Heritage

4.34 The diverse natural and cultural heritage of Sutherland – its habitats, species, 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 (guided by the Council's "Renewable Energy Strategy and Planning Guidelines") and particularly small-scale community-led schemes, archaeological/ geological interpretation, countryside access, recreation and outdoor pursuits, wildlife management and traditional activities.

4.35 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.

Sustainable Communities

4.36 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

4.37 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

4.38 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. 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.

Monitoring and Review

4.39 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 then we will seek to work with the interested parties to establish the reasons why and, if necessary, propose the deallocation of sites and allocation of alternative sites as part of future Plan review. It will also be important to monitor jobs growth and changes in employment, housing affordability and need and changes in the profile of Sutherland's population.

C - Vision

4.40 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

4.41 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?

Heritage Asssets: Dornoch Cathedral

4.42 A Regenerating Place: A Network of Strong Communities

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 21st 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.

4.43 A Competitive Place

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 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 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".

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 in the priority coastal ridge and hinterland areas 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.

4.44 A Connected and Accessible Place

a. A9 improvement schemes - notably the long awaited by-passes of Golspie and Brora – could be Regional Transport Authority priorities, worked up as proposed schemes. Congestion relief, community safety and shortened journey times are anticipated. The Development Plan of the time protecting any formal preferred and programmed route announced in each case and future expansion options for communities being fitted with these routes, enabling enhancement of their commercial thoroughfares.

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 may have been explored further through the preparation and review of Highland-wide 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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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 Dornoch Firth as 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 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. Sutherland being a place people value... and they aim to keep it that way.

5 General Policies

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.

It is very important that users of this Plan note that each planning application will be assessed against all policies and legislation relevant to the particular proposal and location. Conformity with a single policy will not necessarily indicate that a proposed development is acceptable.

Policies

1 Settlement Development Areas

The Plan highlights the importance of supporting existing communities. As a result, we have defined *Settlement Development Areas*. These are the preferred areas for most types of development, including housing. This is consistent with the Structure Plan Policy H3, which says that housing development will generally be within existing and planned new settlements. Because of this, we hope to meet the majority of the housing requirement, set out in the Vision / Strategy, within the *Settlement Development Areas*. This makes best use of existing infrastructure and services and protects the character of the surrounding countryside. When defining settlement development areas we have taken account of a number of things, including:

- the quality of neighbouring croft or agricultural land;

- the type of land;

- the ability of the landscape to allow for development;

- the pattern of existing settlements; and

- the availability of infrastructure.

The Plan aims to allow enough room for future development (including infill development) while recognising the physical limits due to the landscape and ground conditions. As a result, where possible we have drawn the boundaries of the settlement development areas relatively widely around the existing built-up areas.

For each of the *Settlement Development Areas*, the Plan will set out a number of *Objectives* which will include *Development Factors* and *Developer Requirements* which will need to be taken into account in that particular area. This will include for example, important views which should be retained or other improvements required.

Policy 1 Settlement Development Areas

We will support proposals within *Settlement Development Areas* (as shown on the Proposals Map insets) as long as they meet the requirements of Structure Plan Policy G2 Design for Sustainability, as shown on page 32 of this Plan.

We will also judge proposals in terms of how compatible they are with the existing pattern of development, how they conform with existing and approved adjacent land uses, and the effect on any natural and cultural heritage feature within these areas (see Policy 4, Box 1 and Background Maps).

Developments which are judged to be significantly detrimental in terms of the above criteria shall not accord with the Local Plan.

2 Land Allocations

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.

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
LT	Long Term
C	Community
OS	Public Open Space
R	Retail
MU	Mixed Use
B	Business
I	Business and Industry

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 process. 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.

Indicative site capacities are given where appropriate in the settlements section of the Plan for housing or part housing allocations.

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.

3 Wider Countryside

It is recognised that given the rural nature of much of the Plan area, there will continue to be demand for development outwith the settlement development areas. The Local Plan seeks to balance recognising the countryside as an economic resource with development potential against the possible effect of any development on the natural, built and cultural heritage of the area.

Development can have a significant impact upon the character of the landscape. Proposals should be sympathetic to this and landscape is a key consideration under Policy G2 of the Structure Plan. The impact will depend upon the type of development and the type of landscape character present and there may be potential for mitigation to be included in proposals. The Caithness & Sutherland Landscape Character Assessment (1997) broadly classifies the types of landscape character present and provides advice about assessing proposals. Where necessary it will be referred to as a material consideration when examining proposals. Landscape impact is a consideration throughout the Plan area but is particularly important outside Settlement Development Areas where sites are not allocated for specific uses in the Plan and where there is generally less intensive development already part of the landscape, or where there is no development at all (see Appendix 3 landscape character assessment).

Development in the wider countryside may help support communities in fragile rural areas who are having difficulties in keeping their population and services. There are in particular many 'townships' in the Plan area, not defined by Settlement Development Areas but where there is significant settlement within a locality and which is identifiable loosely as an established rural community. Development which is considered appropriate in the countryside and which would be compatible with existing townships might be located in those communities with particular advantage (if that is compatible with other policies of the Development Plan), as it may help to support existing communities through sustainable development.

The general approach to development outwith the settlement development areas is set out in Policy 3. However, it should be read in conjunction with all other relevant policies of the Plan; it is particularly important to highlight that it should be read in conjunction with Policy 4 and, in the case of housing development, with Policy 16.

Policy 3 Wider Countryside

Outwith Settlement Development Areas, proposals may be acceptable where they help repopulate communities, strengthen services and reflect the character of development in the surrounding area. Suitably designed proposals will be supported if they:

· are consistent with other policies in the Highland Structure Plan and this Local Plan;
· are in accordance with the existing settlement pattern and avoid, where possible, the loss of locally important croft land; and
· account for drainage constraints or can otherwise be adequately serviced and do not involve undue public expenditure or infrastructure out of keeping with the rural character of the area.

4 Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage

The outstanding natural, built and cultural heritage of the Plan area has to be fully considered when development proposals come forward throughout the area. The Plan identifies three categories based on the type and importance of natural, built and cultural heritage they contain. These categories are local and regionally important, nationally important and internationally important.

Local and regionally important features are mostly identified by The Council, and contribute to the identity of the Plan area.

- Areas of Great Landscape Value

- Category B and C listed buildings

- Sites and Monuments Record archaeological sites

- War memorials

- Settlement setting

- Inventoried semi-natural woodland

- Amenity trees

- Views over open water

- Remote landscapes of value for recreation

- Locally important croft land

- Sites of Local Nature Conservation Interest

- Geological Conservation Review sites

- Isolated coast

- Archaeological Heritage Areas

Nationally important natural, built and cultural heritage features are identified by national organisations or by The Council under national legislation.

- Scheduled Ancient Monuments

- Category A listed buildings

- National Nature Reserves

- Sites of Special Scientific Interest

- Inventoried Gardens and Designed Landscapes

- National Scenic Areas

- Inventoried Ancient and Long-Established Woodland

- Tree Preservation Orders

- Conservation Areas

Internationally important natural and cultural heritage features are identified under government directives and European conventions.

- Special Protection Areas (including proposed)

- Special Areas of Conservation (including candidate)

- Ramsar sites

How sensitive these features are to development depends on their level of importance and on the nature and scale of development and the likely effect on the feature in question. Policy 4 therefore sets out the tests against which all development which affects these heritage features must be assessed. Only the most important feature is shown on the Proposals Map, and other features may exist beneath these.

Note that the individual Proposals Maps do not show coverage of these Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage features within the settlement boundaries to allow for the clear illustration of the proposed land allocations. However, the full extent of these features, including their coverage within settlements, can be found on the Background Maps which are contained in the Map Booklet.

The impact on all natural and cultural heritage features must be addressed however when considering and assessing development proposals, and the Background maps which are contained in the Map booklet of the Plan set out the locations of all these different features in so far as they have been mapped digitally on our system.

Features identified by the Council as being present at the time a proposal is considered and which are of the types indicated under the policy, but which have not yet been mapped, will still be subject of protection under this policy. Also, the boundaries of some features (such as Areas of Great Landscape Value) are in the process of being refined and reviewed and Appedix 1(pages 43-48) indicates the current position.

Policy 4 Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage

When making decisions on development proposals we will take account of the level of importance of, and the effect on, the natural, built and cultural heritage (see Appendix 1 and Background Maps).

1. In areas of **local/regional importance** we will allow developments if we believe that they will not have an unreasonable impact on the amenity and heritage resource, particularly where it can be shown that they will support communities in fragile areas who are having difficulties in keeping their population and services.

2. In areas of **national importance** we will allow developments that can be shown not to compromise the amenity and heritage resource. For national designations, where there may be any significant adverse effects, these must be clearly outweighed by social or economic benefits of national importance. It must also be shown that the development will support communities in fragile areas who are having difficulties in keeping their population and services.

3. In areas of **international importance** we will allow developments if they will not adversely affect the integrity of the site. Proposals that would adversely affect the relevant interest for which the site is designated will only be allowed if there is no alternative solution and there are imperative reasons of over-riding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature. Where a priority habitat or species (as defined in Article 1 of the Habitats Directive) would be affected prior consultation with the European Commission is required, unless the development is necessary for public health and safety reasons.

5 Affordable housing

The Council's Local Housing Strategy identifies the existence of unmet housing need in the Plan area and its Area Delivery Plan seeks opportunities to increase the supply of both affordable rented housing and low cost affordable houses. To help meet need for affordable homes, the local plan aims to make sure that new housing development makes a contribution towards the supply of affordable housing. This applies to= development on both allocated and unallocated sites. The Council's Development Plan Policy Guideline on Affordable Housing, in its revised form (2007), reflects the policy in this Plan and provides guidance as to its application.

The Housing Strategy Local Action Plan will indicate any areas where a contribution of more than 25% will be expected. It will also indicate the tenure split required for affordable housing in order to best meet needs.

Policy 5 Affordable Housing

In accordance with the Development Plan Policy Guideline on Affordable Housing, on sites allocated for housing with an indicative overall capacity of four or more houses the Council will expect to either negotiate a Section 75 Agreement with the landowner(s) and other interested parties, or utilise other mechanisms to provide for a contribution towards affordable housing (as defined in the Guideline), such contribution normally being a minimum of 25%. Negotiations will be subject to market and site conditions, and the contribution may be in the form of land, housing units or a financial contribution.

On these allocated sites, and to prevent the subdivision of larger plots, where an application is made for less than four houses, developers will be expected to provide a financial contribution in proportion to the number of units proposed, and a Section 75 agreement (or other mechanisms) will be required to ensure that any further development on the site will include an appropriate proportion of affordable housing.

This will also apply to proposals for development on sites not allocated for housing within this Local Plan and which would be expected to accommodate four or more houses at density levels consistent with the existing settlement or density patterns. When making decisions on development proposals we will take account of other policy considerations, such as the level of importance of, and the effect on, the natural and cultural heritage (see Appendix 1 and Background Maps).

Proposals which include affordable housing should be carefully designed to fully integrate the affordable housing plots as part of a single, overall development of the site and the affordable homes should be indistinguishable from the general market homes.

In the landward areas, a contribution towards affordable homes attributed against the primary landholding, will apply in respect of every fourth dwelling granted planning permission, within that same landownership.

6 Designing for Sustainability

SPP1 The Planning System makes it clear that the planning system should link principles and actions to enable sustainable development. This is reinforced under the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006 which requires the planning authority to exercise its development planning function with the objective of contributing to sustainable development. Highland Structure Plan Policy G2 sets out the requirement for all development to be designed for sustainability. As a result, the Council will normally require planning applicants to demonstrate, by means of a Sustainable Design Statement (SDS), that their proposals take account of sustainable design practice. For example, applicants will be expected to investigate the use of grey water and micro renewable energy systems.

We have developed a Development Plan Policy Guideline on Designing for Sustainability to provide further advice to applicants about what will be assessed. As part of the implementation of the Guideline, we will develop further guidance on the level of detail sought in SDSs for various thresholds sizes and types of development. By raising the sustainability 'rating' of new development across Sutherland there may be opportunity to promote an uplift in the standard of services and facilities generally, for example in waste water treatment. A minimum threshold will be set to exclude very minor developments.

Policy 6 Designing for Sustainability

We will judge development proposals against a 'Design for Sustainability' statement which we will normally require developers to submit with their planning applications in line with the Development Plan Policy Guideline on Designing for Sustainability.

7 Waste Water Treatment

The best way to deal with the effluent generated by larger developments and/or settlements is by means of a 'publicly' maintained network of sewers and related sewage plants. SEPA as the relevant environmental agency has adopted a policy to encourage such treatment.

However, it is necessary to allow other private sewage treatment options in certain circumstances, in particular, where settlements are smaller, more dispersed in pattern and often not served by adequate existing or programmed existing public sewage systems.

Policy 7 Waste Water Treatment

Connections to the public sewer will be required for development proposals in the main settlements identified in the plan with a population equivalent of more than 2000 and wherever significant development is proposed. Elsewhere a connection to the public sewer will be required, unless the applicant can demonstrate that:

1. Connection is not feasible, for technical or economic reasons, or,

2. The receiving waste water treatment plant is at capacity and Scottish Water has no programmed investment to increase that capacity; and

3. The proposal is not likely to result in or add to significant environmental or health problems.

Planning permission for developments with private waste water systems will only be allowed where proposals satisfy (1) or (2) above, and satisfy (3). Any such systems in areas adjacent to waters designated under EC Directives must discharge to land rather than water.

8 Waste Management

Sustainable waste management is an important consideration for The Council. The role of the Plan is to direct waste management uses to the most appropriate locations, which are generally either existing or former waste management sites or on business and industrial land where they are compatible with existing or proposed uses.

The Highland Structure Plan sets out the strategic policy framework for all types of waste management use, but the Highland Area Waste Plan and the National Waste Strategy are very important considerations. The Settlements section of the Plan sets out specific waste facility site safeguards.

Policy 8 Waste Management

Proposals for waste management facilities will be assessed in line with the approach set out within the Highland Structure Plan and take into account the Highland Area Waste Plan and the National Waste Strategy.

In line with the Highland Structure Plan, waste management facilities will be supported on business or industrial land provided they are compatible with surrounding uses and meet other criteria relating to environmental impact and transportation.

Proposals for redevelopment of existing waste management facilities will be assessed against the Area Waste Plan and National Waste Strategy, and will be subject to consultation with SEPA.

The Council will also take into account the extent to which development proposals effectively manage and promote the reduction, reuse, recycling and recovery of waste.

9 Flood Risk

Coastal and fluvial flood risk is likely to increase with projected climate change. It is therefore important not to allocate land at risk for inappropriate development. Flood risk has been an integral to the choice of site allocations. Additional guidance on these issues - including maps of the medium to high flood risk areas (1:200 or greater annual probability of flooding)- may be sought from the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA). These maps are the starting point for the consideration of the flood risk implications of development proposals.

Additionally we will have regard to any other information known to be available, especially any more detailed or up-to-date assessments of flood risk, in order to properly take account of the potential for flooding both from rivers and from the sea.

Policy 9 Flood risk

Development proposals in areas susceptible to flooding, being areas with a medium to high flood risk (1:200 or greater annual probability of flooding), will need a flood risk assessment to be submitted with the planning application. Development proposals outwith the medium to high flood risk areas will generally be acceptable unless local circumstances dictate otherwise.

However, development proposals *within* the medium to high flood risk areas will normally be restricted to:

·   Within built-up areas - residential, commercial and industrial development, providing that flood-prevention measures to the appropriate standard already exist or are under construction. Water resistant materials and construction methods should be considered to mitigate the effects of flooding.
·   On undeveloped or sparsely developed areas - essential infrastructure, navigational, recreation, transportation, environmental or conservation uses, as well as job-related residential uses with a locational need. Alternative lower risk locations should always be explored first, and any essential infrastructure should be designed to remain operational during floods.

Developments may also be possible where they are in accord with the flood prevention or management measures as specified within a Local Plan allocation or a Development Brief. Any developments, particularly those on the flood plain, should not compromise the objectives of the EU Water Framework Directive.

10 Other Development Considerations

Physical Constraints

There are a range of public health and safety factors that need to be assessed when considering development proposals. These are listed in the policy below and cover issues such as noise, odour, slope stability and pollution.

Sources for further information on the physical constraints listed, where available, are given in footnotes.

Policy 10 Physical constraints

Subject also to the principle of development, developers will be expected to demonstrate appropriate mitigation if their proposals affect or are affected by the constraints below (where appropriate these are shown on the background maps)

· Poorly drained areas
· Within 1,000m of large wind generators
· ENA Standards 43-8: "Overhead Line Clearances" (distance from power lines) [1]
· Areas of excessive slope (with a gradient of over 1 in 7)
· Existing or former waste management sites
· Land with possible contamination issues
· Areas that could erode or subside
· Safeguard areas around sewage treatment works [2]
· Within 400m of an active quarry
· Waters that the EU Shellfish Directive apply to [3]
· Waters that the EU Shellfish Hygiene Directive apply to
· Waters that the EU Bathing Waters Directive apply to [4]

1 http://www.energynetworks.org
2 The Sewerage Nuisance (code of practice) (Scotland) http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/04/2014033/0
3 http://www.sepa.org.uk/data/shellfish/directive.htm
4 http://ec.europa.eu/water/water/water-bathing/index-enhtml

11 Protected Species and Habitats

Certain species are protected under European and/or UK law and their presence on or near a development site will require consideration. Similarly, certain habitats are a general development consideration.

Sources for further information on the habitats and species protected, where available, are given in footnotes.

Policy 11 European Protected Species

We will assess development proposals for any disturbance to a European Protected Species, [5] as listed below, or damage to a breeding site/resting place. Any development in such an area requires a separate licence from Scottish Ministers (or the local authority under a recent consultation) to enable works to proceed.

Animals

Bats (all species)
Wild Cat
Otter
Dolphins, porpoises & whales
Loggerhead turtle
Green turtle
Kemp's Ridley turtle
Hawksbill turtle
Leatherback turtle
Natterjack toad
Great crested newt
Sturgeon

Plants

Killarney fern
Slender naiad
Yellow marsh saxifrage
Floating-leaved water plantain

Policy 12 Article 10 features

Article 10 features of the Habitats Directive (see Glossary) – We will assess development proposals for any adverse effects on natural heritage features that form part of wildlife corridors, including woodlands, lochs, watercourse margins and wetlands.

Policy 13   Scheduled Species

The presence of species protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981,[6] as amended by the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, will be considered as a material consideration in any proposals for development.

5 Habitats directive: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/habitatsdirective/index_en.htm
6- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981: http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-3614

14 Surface Water Drainage

Localised flooding can be caused or worsened by inadequate surface water drainage arrangements in new developments. Best practice can be encouraged by a general policy requirement, cross-referenced to the latest CIRIA document on the subject of Sustainable Drainage Systems, namely "The SUDS Manual" (2007) and to Scottish Water's Technical Manual "Sewers For Scotland" which is being redrafted to incorporate SUDS.

Policy 14   Surface Water Drainage

Development proposals must meet the guidance set out in The SUDS Manual and in Sewers For Scotland, including the making of agreements for the on-going maintenance of surface water drainage systems.

15 Developer Contributions

It is necessary and appropriate to mitigate the impact of new development. Existing deficiencies in public services, facilities or infrastructure can be made worse by new building and new deficiencies created. The principle of proportionate developer contributions is underpinned by the general policy below and may be secured through a Section 75 Agreement where necessary.

The Council is moving towards a position where its Local Plans will provide specific information on the anticipated deficiencies to be met and mitigation to be provided through developments. We have specified deficiencies under the "developer requirements" for the proposals in this Plan but others may emerge during the consideration of planning applications. Applicants for planning permission should therefore discuss these matters with the Council prior to submission of their applications for specific development proposals.

The following are examples of issues for which developer contributions may be sought (this is not an exclusive list) and a broad indication of how need will be assessed:

Potential Developer Contributions

Education and library provision	The effect of the development on secondary, primary and nursery school capacity and public library provision.
Healthcare facilities	Whether a development will have an effect on the relevant NHS trusts facilities considered to be 'under pressure' by the NHS.
Recycling facilities & waste management	The effect of the development on existing recycling facilities.
Transportation	The effect of the development on transport and infrastructure assessed against the relevant Local Transport Strategy.
Community facilities including Care in the Community	The effect of the development on existing community facilities and whether the development will increase the burden on care services.
Strategic landscaping, open space and outdoor access	The need for new or enhanced strategic landscaping, open space (including play areas) or outdoor access nearby taking account of the Core Path Plan.
Sports facilities	The effect of the development on demand for facilities and the unmet demand in the settlements nearby.

Policy 15 Developer Contributions

The Council will seek appropriate developer contributions in association with development proposals emerging from partnership activity, from the development plan process and from planning applications. This will be proportionate to the scale, nature, impact and planning purposes associated with the development, and may be in addition to contributions made by a developer as part of an Affordable Housing agreement. Where public signage is to be provided as part of a development, the Council will encourage bilingual provision.

16 Housing in the Countryside

This policy is necessary in order to conform to Structure Plan Policy H3 and in particular the part dealing with housing development within the hinterland of towns where there is generally tighter restraint than in other parts of the countryside. The policy sets out exceptions and further information about these is available in the Council's "Housing in the Countryside" Development Planning Policy Guideline. In the case of Sutherland, a hinterland area is identified around Tain which extends into the Plan area. The boundary has been refined, protecting countryside areas subject to commuter housing pressures and is defined on the Proposals Map of the Local Plan.

Limited potential for development has been identified at Evelix (up to 6 units) where there are opportunities for suitably sited and designed houses to consolidate the existing grouping, subject to the adequacy of services and infrastructure. Outwith this area potential relates only to proposals that meet with the exceptions indicated in the policy. Like the DPPG, this policy also seeks to reflect Structure Plan Policy H2 dealing with new settlements.

This policy should be read in conjunction with all other relevant policies of the Plan; it is particularly important to highlight that it should be read in conjunction with Policy 3 and Policy 4.

Policy 16: Housing in the Countryside

The Council will presume against housing in the open countryside of hinterland around towns as defined within the Local Plan (see Glossary, Proposals Map, Structure Plan Policy H3: Housing in the Countryside and the approved Development Plan Policy Guideline). Exceptions to the policy will only be made where:

· A house is essential for land management or family purposes related to the management of the land (retired farmers and their spouses);
· Social housing is required to meet a demonstrable local affordable housing need;
· Housing is essential in association with an existing or new rural business;
· The house proposed is a replacement of an existing dwelling which does not meet the requirements for modern living and where the costs of upgrading are not justified on economic or environmental grounds (subject to the existing dwellings being demolished);
· The proposal involves conversion or reuse of traditional buildings or the redevelopment of derelict land;
· The proposal forms part of a comprehensively planned new settlement which meets the criteria set out in Structure Plan Policy H2 "New settlements". However, in the Sutherland Local Plan area this will only take the form of new crofting townships.

Where exceptions are justified, all proposals should accord with the general policies of the Plan, and indicate suitable drainage and other servicing, avoid conflict with natural and cultural heritage interests including locally important croft land and hazards, and be suitably sited and designed [Structure Plan Policy G2].

In the open countryside outwith the hinterland of towns, we will assess proposals in the context of Policy 3 Wider Countryside and, in the case of proposals which form part of a comprehensively planned new settlement, will support them if they meet the criteria set out in Structure Plan Policy H2 "New settlements". However, in the Sutherland Local Plan area the development of new settlements will only take the form of new crofting townships.

17 Commerce

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 8: Town Centres and Retailing.

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.

Network/ Hierarchy/ Scale	Centre	Function/Role
Sub-regional/town centre	No centres of sub-regional status present but the central area of GOLSPIE may be regarded as a 'Town Centre' location.	comparison/ convenience retailing; mixed uses
Sub area centre	Dornoch, Brora, Lairg, Bonar Bridge/ Ardgay, Helmsdale, Lochinver, Bettyhill, Kinlochbervie, Durness, Tongue.	comparison/ convenience retailing; mixed uses
Villages	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.

18 Design Quality and Place-Making

This policy seeks a high quality of design in development within the Plan area and the creation of high quality environments in which people can live and work. It responds to the place-making agenda by reflecting the drive of a wide range of Scottish Government policy and guidance which is usefully referenced in the 'easy-read' guide "Design Snapshot" (2007) and includes, for example PAN67 "Housing Quality", PAN68 "Design Statements", "Designing Places: A Policy Statement for Scotland" and other key documents.

Policy 18: Design Quality and Place-Making

New development should be designed to make a positive contribution to the architectural and visual quality of the place in which it is located. Applicants should demonstrate local distinctiveness of architecture and design in their proposals.

Where relevant we will judge proposals in terms of their contribution to place-making. They should have regard to the historic pattern of development in the locality and should, where relevant, be an integral part of the settlement. We will examine proposals to ensure that people may move safely and conveniently within the development and, where appropriate, to facilities in other parts of the settlement. Proposals will also be examined in terms of their creation of attractive and effective streetscapes.

Appendix 1 - Definition of Natural & Cultural Heritage Features

The Background maps which are contained in the Map Booklet set out the locations of all these different features in so far as they have been mapped digitally on our system. However, features identified by the Council as being present at the time a proposal is considered and which are of the types indicated below, but which have not yet been mapped, will still be subject of protection under Policy 4.

NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE FEATURES

🟥	International Importance (Policy 4.3)
🟨	National Importance (Policy 4.2)
🟩	Local/Regional Importance (Policy 4.1)

Features of International Importance

Type	Background	Policy Framework
Special Protection Areas (SPA) (including proposed)	Classified by Scottish Ministers under the EC Wild Birds Directive (79/409/EEC), which provides for the protection, management and control of all species of wild birds. SPAs form part of the EU Natura 2000 network of nature conservation protection.	National Planning Policy Guideline 14 "Natural Heritage" (January 1999) and Structure Plan Policies N1, G6 and G2.
Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) (including candidate)	Designated by Scottish Ministers under the EC Habitats and Species Directive (92/43/EEC), aimed at the maintenance or restoration of certain natural habitats and wild species at favourable conservation status. SACs (including candidate) form part of the EU Natura 2000 network of nature conservation protection. Certain qualifying features are of "European Priority Interest" (e.g. active blanket bog) where additional regulatory provisions apply.	National Planning Policy Guideline 14 "Natural Heritage" (January 1999) and Structure Plan Policies N1, G6 and G2.
Ramsar Sites	Approved by Scottish Ministers under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as waterfowl habitat, signed in Ramsar, Iran in 1971. Such sites are wetland sites of international importance, usually because of their value to migratory birds.	National Planning Policy Guideline 14 "Natural Heritage" (January 1999) and Structure Plan Policies N1, G6 and G2.

The Background maps which are contained in the Map booklet set out the locations of all these different features in so far as they have been mapped digitally on our system. However, features identified by the Council as being present at the time a proposal is considered and which are of the types indicated below, but which have not yet been mapped, will still be subject of protection under Policy 4.

NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE FEATURES

International Importance (Policy 4.3)

National Importance (Policy 4.2)

Local/Regional Importance (Policy 4.1)

Features of National Importance

Type	Background	Policy Framework
Scheduled Ancient Monuments	Designated by Scottish Ministers under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 as being of national importance.	National Planning Policy Guideline 5 "Archaeology and Planning" (January 1994) and Structure Plan Policies BC1, G6 and G2
Category A Listed Buildings	Compiled by Scottish Ministers under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 as being of national importance by virtue of special architectural or historic interest.	National Planning Policy Guideline 18 "Planning and the Historic Environment" (April 1999) and Structure Plan Policies BC5, G6 and G2.
National Nature Reserves	Declared under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 as areas considered to be of national importance for their nature conservation interest.	National Planning Policy Guideline 14 "Natural Heritage" (January 1999) and Structure Plan Policies N1, G6 and G2.
Sites of Special Scientific Interest	Designated by Scottish Natural Heritage under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and in future the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 as areas of land or water which are of special interest by reason of flora, fauna, geology or physiography.	National Planning Policy Guideline 14 "Natural Heritage" (January 1999) and Structure Plan Policies N1, G6 and G2.

Type	Background	Policy Framework
Inventoried Gardens and Designed Landscapes	Contained within the Inventory of Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes in Scotland compiled and maintained jointly by Historic Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage.	National Planning Policy Guideline 18 "Planning and the Historic Environment" (April 1999) and Structure Plan Policies BC4, G6 and G2. Under the Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) (Scotland) Order 1992, both HS and SNH must be consulted on any proposed development that may affect these sites or their setting.
National Scenic Areas	Established by Order under planning legislation by the Secretary of State in 1981 on the basis of "Scotland's Scenic Heritage" (Countryside Commission for Scotland, 1978). They are defined as areas of "national scenic significance ……. of unsurpassed attractiveness which must be conserved as part of our national heritage".	National Planning Policy Guideline 14 "Natural Heritage" (January 1999) and Structure Plan Policies G6 and G2.
Inventoried Ancient and Long-Established Woodland	Contained within the Inventory of Ancient, Long-Established and Semi-Natural Woodland prepared by the former Nature Conservancy Council (1989) and updated by more recent surveys of woodland cover. Specifically this includes ancient woodland and long-established woodland of semi-natural origin. They are regarded as having the greatest value for nature conservation.	National Planning Policy Guideline 14 "Natural Heritage" (January 1999) and Structure Plan Policies G6 and G2.
Conservation Areas	Designated by The Council under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 as areas of special architectural and historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. Planning permission will be required within such areas for specific types of development that would otherwise be permitted development, including demolition.	National Planning Policy Guideline 18 "Planning and the Historic Environment" (April 1999) and Structure Plan Policies BC5, G6 and G2.
Tree Preservation Orders	The Council has specific powers to protect trees and woodland if it appears to them to be "expedient in the interests of amenity". The principal effect of a Tree Preservation Order is to prohibit the cutting down, uprooting, topping, lopping or wilful damage of trees without the specific consent of the Planning Authority. Special provisions also apply to trees within Conservation Areas.	Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1999, Town and Country Planning (Tree Preservation Order and Trees in Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Regulations 1975 (and 1981 amendments) and Structure Plan Policy F5

The Background maps which are contained in the Map Boooklet set out the locations of all these different features in so far as they have been mapped digitally on our system. However, features identified by the Council as being present at the time a proposal is considered and which are of the types indicated below, but which have not yet been mapped, will still be subject of protection under Policy 4.

NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE FEATURES

International Importance (Policy 4.3)

National Importance (Policy 4.2)

Local/Regional Importance (Policy 4.1)

Features of Local / Regional Importance

Type	Background	Policy Framework
Areas of Great Landscape Value (AGLV)	Identified by The Council by virtue either as being large scale areas of regional importance for scenic quality, or as being small scale areas of local scenic and recreational value. Large scale proposed AGLVs are indicatively identified in the Structure Plan. We are currently refining those indicated in the Structure Plan and in each case the most up-to-date proposed boundary available will be the one included in mapping for this Plan. Small scale areas have not yet been identified.	National Planning Policy Guideline 14 "Natural Heritage" (January 1999) and Structure Plan Policies G6 and G2.
Category B and C Listed Buildings	Included by Scottish Ministers within a list of buildings (broadly defined to include for example walls and bridges) of special architectural or historic interest to ensure that any alteration, extension, repair or demolition of such interest is controlled.	National Planning Policy Guideline 18 "Planning and the Historic Environment" (April 1999) and Structure Plan Policies BC5, G6 and G2.
Sites and Monuments Record Archaeological Sites	A record maintained and continually updated by The Council's Archaeological Unit of all known archaeological sites in Highland, including a location and brief description. The importance of such sites in terms of protection or professional recording prior to disturbance is advised on a case-by-case basis.	National Planning Policy Guideline 5 "Archaeology and Planning" (January 1994) and Structure Plan Policies BC1, G6 and G2.
War Memorials	Highlighted in order that the ambience and setting of war memorials should not be adversely affected by inappropriate or unsympathetic development and in order that the Royal British Legion Scotland should be consulted where The Council believes such an adverse effect may occur.	Structure Plan Policy G2.

Type	Background	Policy Framework
Settlement Setting	Identified by The Council. These are areas of land which are on or close to the edges of settlements or adjacent to main approach routes and which are considered to contribute significantly and positively to the intrinsic setting of the settlement and to be part of its character worthy of retention. They can include areas between groupings of settlements in close proximity to each other (allowing for any expansion provided for by the Settlement Development Areas) to protect the open land from development that would lead to settlements coalescing and losing their individual identity. This recognises that development should generally be within existing settlements.	Structure Plan Policies H3 and G2, Scottish Planning Policy 3 "Planning for Housing" (February 2003) and National Planning Policy Guideline 15 "Rural Development" (February 1999).
Inventoried Semi-Natural Woodland	Contained within the Inventory of Ancient, Long-Established and Semi-Natural Woodland prepared by the former Nature Conservancy Council (1989) and updated by more recent surveys of woodland cover. Specifically this includes long-established woodland of plantation origin, other woods on "Roy" woodland sites (1750 map) and other semi-natural woodland areas identified by ground survey. They are regarded as being important for nature conservation.	National Planning Policy Guideline 14 "Natural Heritage" (January 1999) and Structure Plan Policies G6 and G2.
Amenity Trees	Areas of woodland (both broadleaved and coniferous) identified by The Council as having local amenity importance by virtue of contribution to landscape value, providing framework and containment for settlements, informal recreational opportunities or association as community woodlands. In so doing they contribute to the character or amenity of a particular locality.	National Planning Policy Guideline 14 "Natural Heritage" and Structure Plan Policy G2.
Views Over Open Water	Identified by The Council to protect relatively narrow areas of land between roads or railways and the coastline or lochshores where such land provides a foreground to scenic views.	Structure Plan Policies T6 and G2.
Remote Landscapes of Value for Recreation	Identified by The Council to recognise that certain areas have value for more demanding forms of outdoor recreation. These areas also offer qualities of remoteness, a relative lack of evidence of human activity or change, a seeming high degree of naturalness, and a sense of enclosure or space. The Council, in discussion with SNH, is working on the identification and refinement of these areas and in each case the most up-to-date proposed boundary available will be the one included in mapping for this Plan.	National Planning Policy Guideline 11 "Sport, Physical Recreation and Open Space" (June 1996) and NPPG 14 "Natural Heritage" (January 1999) (in the context of wild land) and Structure Plan Policy G2 and paragraph 2.5.22 (in the context of wild land).

Features of Local / Regional Importance

Type	Background	Policy Framework
Locally Important Croft Land	Identified by The Council on advice from crofting interests where it is considered that the continued use of the land for agriculture is important locally for the viability of crofting in the area. This work has not yet been undertaken generally across the Plan area although where specific representation has been made on particular areas of land then we have taken that into account in preparing this Plan.	Structure Plan Policies A1 and G2.
Sites of Local Nature Conservation Interest	Identified by The Council on advice from groups with expertise in local nature conservation interests, such as Scottish Natural Heritage, the Scottish Wildlife Trust and Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) Groups. These sites have local importance for habitats and species. These sites are provisional and require to be refined following detailed survey or assessment and in consultation with SNH and landowners. Not yet digitally mapped.	National Planning Policy Guideline 14 "Natural Heritage" (January 1999) and Structure Plan Policies N1 and G2.
Geological Conservation Review Sites	Identified by Scottish Natural Heritage or by a Regionally Important Geological Site Group, being sites of local or regional importance for the protection and study of geology and geomorphology. Not yet digitally mapped	National Planning Policy Guideline 14 "Natural Heritage" (January 1999) and Structure Plan Policy G6.
Isolated Coast	Identified by The Council, being remote stretches of coast (including islands) characterised by an absence of settlements or other onshore development, no presence of offshore activity, and affording extended views lacking obvious signs of human activity, both onshore and offshore. This work requires to be carried out on a Highland wide basis and has not yet been undertaken.	National Planning Policy Guideline 13 "Coastal Planning" (August 1997), Planning Advice Note 53 "Classifying the Coast for Planning Purposes" (October 1998) and Structure Plan Policy G2 and paragraph 2.5.22 (in the context of wild land).
Archaeological Heritage Areas	Identified by The Council as being of exceptional archaeological and historic significance by virtue of the importance, number and location of features, density of monuments/sites, and opportunities for interpretation.	National Planning Policy Guideline 5 "Archaeology and Planning" (January 1994) and Structure Plan Proposal BC3 and Policies G6 and G2.

Appendix 2 - Glossary

This section explains some of the terms we use in this document. The Council has tried to minimise use of planning jargon however, the following glossary may aid users' understanding. Please note the explanations given are not intended as legal definitions of the planning terms used.

Affordable housing: Broadly defined as housing of a reasonable quality that is affordable to people on modest incomes. In some places the market can provide some or all of the affordable housing that is needed, but in other places it is necessary to make housing available at a cost below market value, to meet an identified need. The main ways through which this is achieved are:

· social rented accommodation;

· low cost housing for sale, for example shared ownership, self-build or other subsidised or discounted housing for sale; and

· some private sector rented accommodation, available at lower cost than market rents, and provided either by local landowners or commercial landlords.

Allocation: Land identified in a local plan as appropriate for a specific use or mix of uses.

Article 4 Direction: Some types of development do not need planning permission beyond the general planning permission granted under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992 (as amended). An Article 4 Direction is an order made by Scottish Ministers which suspends (for specified types of development on specified properties) that general permission and so requires planning applications to be submitted in those cases.

Article 10 Features: Wildlife habitat features which provide 'corridors' or 'stepping stones' between habitat areas and that help plants and wildlife to move from one area to another. Examples include rivers and their banks, areas of woodland, and traditional field boundaries. Protecting and managing these areas through the land use planning system is promoted in Article 10 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) Regulations 1994.

Brownfield land: Land which has previously been developed. Redevelopment of it may include:

· reusing existing buildings by converting them;

· demolishing buildings and building new ones;

· clearing empty land and building new buildings;

· establishing a new use of the land, with or without new buildings; and

· infill development.

Commerce: For the purposes of this Plan and specifically Policy 17, the term 'commerce' encompasses retail, office and leisure development (Use Classes 1-3, 7, 10 & 11).

Design Statement: will explain the design principles on which the development is based and illustrate the design solution. More information and advice can be found in Planning Advice Note 68, Design statements.

Developer contributions: Payments made to us or another agency, or work in kind, to help improve the infrastructure (for example, roads, open space, waste-water treatment, restoring worked-out mineral sites) so that the development can go ahead.

Development brief: A detailed document for an area allocated for development in a local plan. The brief provides information to possible developers on issues such as the preferred siting, design and layout of buildings, and the need for associated infrastructure and services.

Development factors: The factors that we must take into account when deciding where development can take place and the nature of that development.

Flood Risk Assessment: an assessment carried out to predict and assess the probability of flooding for a particular site or area and recommend mitigation measures including maintenance.

Fragile areas: Areas which are in decline or in danger of becoming so as a consequence of remoteness and socio-economic factors, such as population loss, erosion of services and facilities and lack of employment opportunities. In some areas the natural heritage is a dominant influence on appropriate land management.

Framework plan: An outline plan (prepared by public agencies) that provides guidance on how a large site should be developed, including issues such as landscaping, access and internal layout.

General strategic policies: Policies set out in the Highland Structure Plan. We assess all development proposals against these policies so that development might be sustainable. They reflect the need to take account of:

· the community, the economy and environmental interests;

· the importance of development which benefits local communities; and

· the need to work with our partners to achieve the plan's aims and objectives.

Greenfield land: Presently undeveloped land, in use, or generally capable of being brought into active or beneficial use for agricultural, forestry or amenity purposes.

Hinterland: based on commuting patterns to and from major employment centres where the thrust of policy is to manage growth, self sustaining communities and protect the countryside. Hinterland areas relate to Inverness and the Inner Moray Firth (Nairn, Dingwall, Alness, Invergordon, Tain) Fort William, Wick and Thurso. These areas maybe reveiwed as part of the forthcoming Highland-wide Local Development Plan which we will begin consulting on in 2008.

Housing requirement: The number of housing units for which land must be identified to meet future demand. We work this out by considering market demand, changes in the number of people and households, the existing housing stock and the existing availability of land for housing.

Ineffective housing stock: Housing which is not lived in permanently because it is empty or a second or holiday home.

Infrastructure: The basic services needed to support development. These include roads access and water and sewage facilities.

Infill development: Building a limited number of buildings within a small gap in existing development.

Key village: Part of the settlement hierarchy set out in this Local Plan. It comprises Bonar Bridge, Ardgay, Durness, Tongue and Scourie.

Local centre: Part of the settlement hierarchy set out within the Highland Structure Plan (see below). The local centres in Sutherland are Dornoch, Golspie, Brora, Lairg, Lochinver, Kinlochbervie and Bettyhill.

Local Housing Development Fora: A group of council services, public agencies, housing associations and other housing-related interests which regularly meet to consider the need for and opportunities for affordable housing.

Long term allocations: Indicate the direction that the next Local Plan will take in terms of future development beyond the five year lifespan of this Local Plan.

Main centre: Part of the settlement hierarchy set out in this Local Plan. It comprises the Structure Plan's Local Centres (Dornoch, Golspie, Brora, Lairg, Lochinver, Kinlochbervie and Bettyhill) and additionally Helmsdale.

Masterplan: A document that explains how a site or series of sites will be developed. It will describe how the proposal will be implemented, and set out the costs, phasing and timing of development. A master plan will usually be prepared by or on behalf of an organisation that owns the site or controls the development process.

Material consideration: Matters we must consider when making a decision on a planning application. Scottish Executive guidance states that there are two main tests in deciding whether a consideration is material and relevant.

· "It should serve or be related to the purpose of planning – it should therefore relate to the development and use of land.

· It should fairly and reasonably relate to the particular application."

Although the person making the decision needs to consider whether a matter is material, it is ultimately a matter for the courts to decide.

Mixed Use: This refers to the practice of allowing more than one type of use on a site. This can for example mean a combination of housing, business, and community uses, or that any of these uses are suitable on the site. The Plan specifies the appropriate uses in each case.

Permitted development rights: These relate to certain types of development (usually minor) which do not need planning beyond the general planning permission granted under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992 (as amended).

Precautionary principle: The principle that authorities should act cautiously to avoid damaging the environment or wellbeing of communities (in a way that cannot be reversed) in situations where the scientific evidence is not proven but the possible damage could be significant.

Section 75 Agreement: A legal agreement made between the landowner and the planning authority (often with other people) which restricts or regulates the development or use of land. It is normally used to agree and to secure developer contributions.

Settlements: Groups of houses, some that do and some that don't have facilities, identified through the settlement hierarchy. You can find a more detailed definition in the 'Development Plan Policy Guideline Housing in the Countryside'.

Settlement Development Areas (SDAs): Areas defined by this Plan in and around certain existing settlements, being the preferred areas for most types of development.

Settlement hierarchy: The definition of settlements within the Highland Structure Plan as 'regional', 'subregional' or 'local centres' depending on the size of their population and the services they contain (for example, education, health, transport and retail); and within this Local Plan the definition of settlements as 'main centres', 'key villages' and 'small villages'.

Small village: Part of the hierarchy of settlements set out in this Local Plan, 'small villages' are those settlements which are neither 'main centres' nor 'key villages' but do have settlement development areas identified for them.

Sub-regional centre: Part of the settlement hierarchy set out within the Highland Structure Plan (see above). There are no sub-regional centres within the area covered by the Sutherland Local Plan.

Sustainable design: Design which reduces the possible negative effects on the environment as far as possible and makes the most of social and economic benefits.

Sustainable development: Sustainable development has been defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". It has increased in importance in both national and European policy guidance and is a pivotal consideration in the planning process.

Sustainable drainage systems (SUDS): Drainage techniques used with developments to help return excess surface water run-off to natural watercourses (rivers, streams, lakes and so on) without negatively affecting people and the environment. These might include, for example, ponds or reed beds to hold water before it runs into a watercourse. A Sustainable Urban Drainage System Design Manual was published by CIRIA in 2000, is now updated in CIRIA's The SUDS Manual (2007) and is supported by Scottish Executive planning guidance.

Appendix 3 - Landscape Character Assessment

Background

The Planning Acts require Development Plans to indicate measures for the conservation of the natural beauty and amenity of each area. This may be achieved by:

· positively guiding development to preferred locations where landscape capacity, services and other planning considerations are most favourable;

· policy protection of or regard for acknowledged features ranging from National Scenic Areas such as the Dornoch Firth, to maintenance of open seaward views from important visitor routes, and safeguarding of prized local assets such as amenity woodland;

· promoting good quality design, including incorporation of suitable guidelines to assist developers;

· restoration of derelict or otherwise spoiled landscapes through appropriate environmental programmes or land management mechanisms; and

· enhancement and interpretation of landscape features.

The Council's strategic landscape conservation policies are set out in L3 and L4 of the Highland Structure Plan, approved by the Scottish Ministers in March 2001. As Local Plans must conform to the provisions of the Structure Plan it is important to assess and understand the character of the landscape, its quality and relationship with land use activities.

Caithness & Sutherland Landscape Assessment

A detailed appraisal of landscape character and change in Caithness and Sutherland was completed by a Scottish Natural Heritage consultant in September 1997. It is part of a national programme carried out with the benefit of a steering group comprising officials from the Highland Council Planning Service, Caithness & Sutherland Enterprise, the Forestry Authority and Scottish Natural Heritage.

The aim is to promote a general understanding of the Caithness and Sutherland landscape, character and the forces for change acting upon these. As a broad based study, it highlights the key landscape issues in relation to pressures for development and other land use change. It does not state where, or in what form, landscape development and change should take place. It is intended as a guide to the preparation of landscape policies and consideration of future proposals.

Landscape Character Types

The study has identified fifteen different landscape character types and six subtypes. These are described, the key forces for change are analysed and guidance given in each case. The detailed scope of guidance is set out in the full report (260 pages). The Area Planning and Building Standards Manager has a copy. Additional copies are available from Scottish Natural Heritage, North Highland Area or on www.snh.org.uk.

Potential Uses

The study can be used to inform planning consultations and Public Local Inquiries where landscape considerations are an issue. They can also be used to help the Area Planning and Building Standards Manager to advise potential new applicants how to integrate a proposed new house in the countryside into its surroundings. In preparing the new Sutherland Local Plan it has been used as one of a range of criteria to help identify broad areas with various levels of sensitivity to and appropriateness for development.