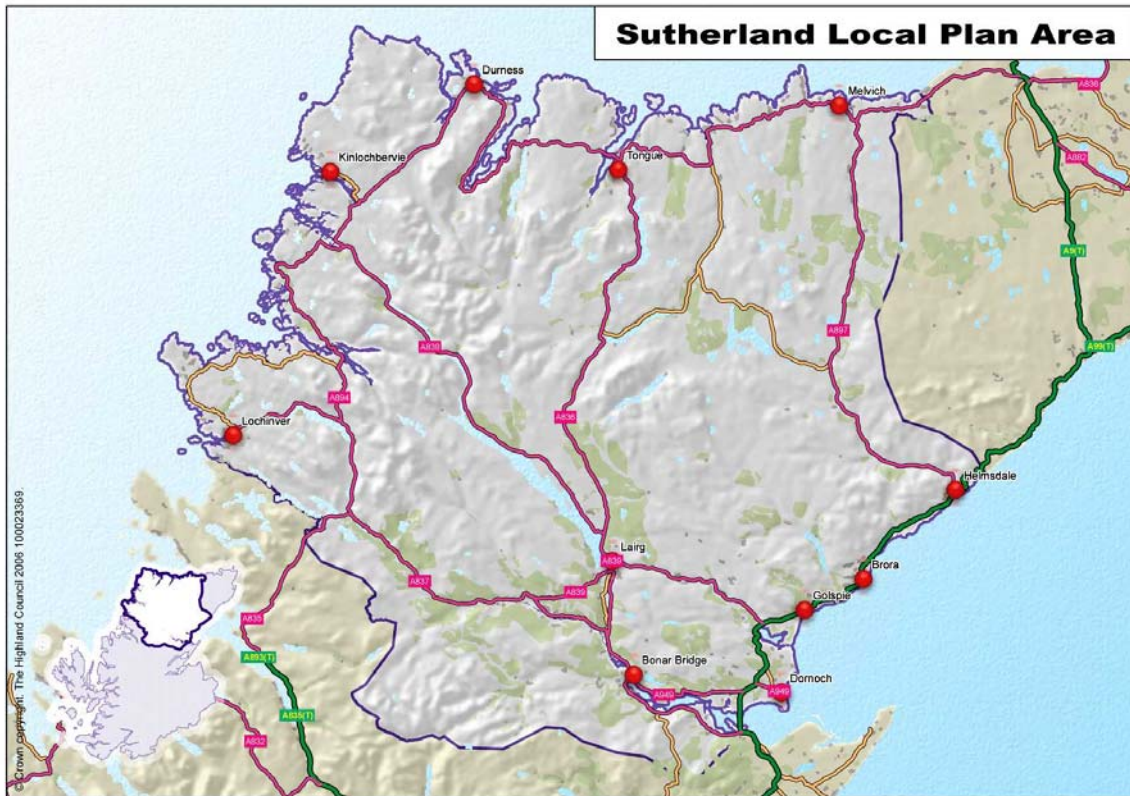


Sutherland Local Plan
Strategic Environmental Assessment
Scoping Report
April 2006



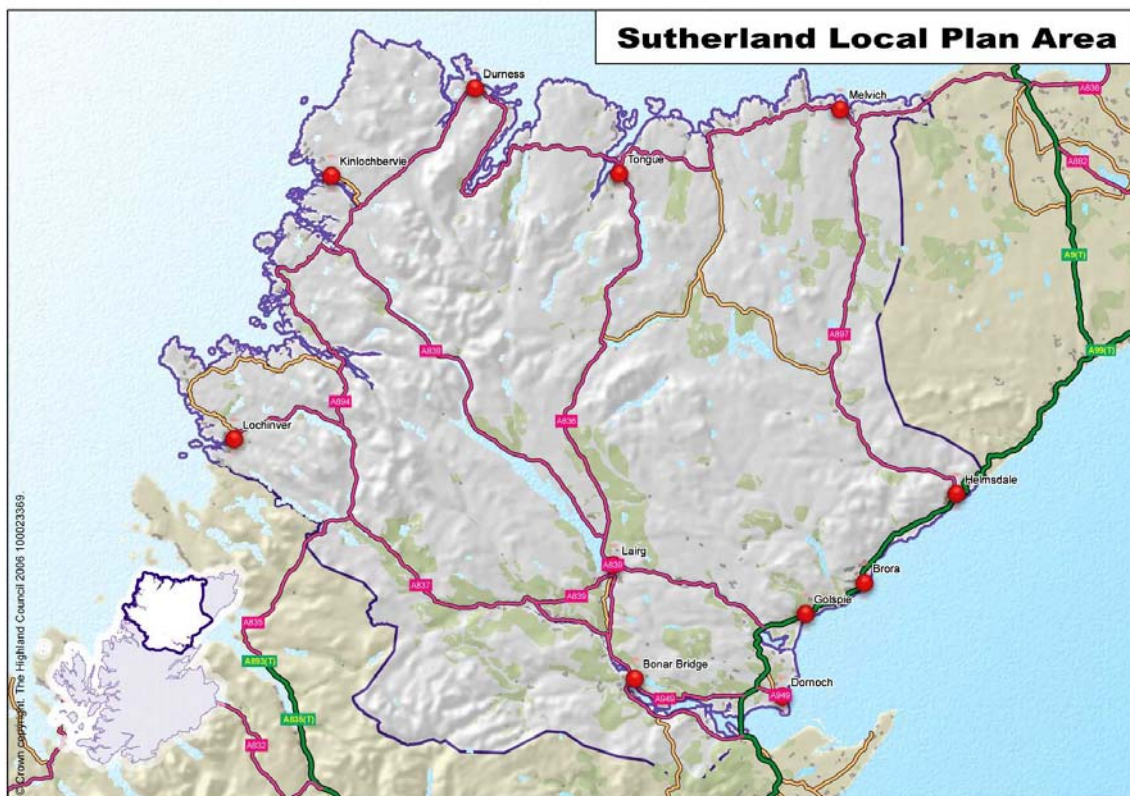
1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) scoping report is to set out sufficient information on the Sutherland Local Plan to enable the Consultation Authorities to form a view on the consultation periods and the scope and level of detail that will be appropriate for the environmental report.
- 1.2 This report has been prepared in accordance with Regulation 17 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes (Scotland) Regulations 2004.
- 1.3 The Highland Council is also preparing Local Plans for the Skye and Lochalsh and Lochaber areas. Separate scoping reports have been prepared for these plans, but it is intended that as far as possible, a consistent approach is taken both to the preparation of the plans and to the methodology and format of the strategic environmental assessment.
- 1.4 The Highland Council's approach to carrying out the Strategic Environmental Assessment is based on the methodology developed whilst preparing the retrospective SEA for the Wester Ross Local Plan, in partnership with the Consultation Authorities. In addition to carrying out the SEA, The Council will also carry out a sustainability appraisal of the Local Plan, to balance environmental considerations with social and economic objectives.
- 1.5 For further information on the Sutherland Local Plan, please contact Brian Mackenzie on 01463 702276 (brian.mackenzie@highland.gov.uk) or Katie Briggs on 01463 702271 (katie.briggs@highland.gov.uk).

2. KEY FACTS

Sutherland Local Plan

- 2.1 The Sutherland Local Plan area (see Map) extends over 6,071 square kilometres and is an area of high quality natural environment and diverse historical background. It has a population of 13,800 and at 2.2 persons per square kilometre, is the most sparsely populated area of Highland. Sutherland has a significantly higher proportion than Highland of its population aged 65 and over (21.9% compared to 19.6%) and a lower proportion aged under 16 (17.8% compared to 19.6%). There are currently around 7800 residential addresses within Sutherland. Some 18% of these are not occupied by permanent residents (second/holiday homes and vacant properties).



- 2.2 The key natural and cultural heritage features present in Sutherland are indicated in the maps in Appendix A.
- 2.3 Natural heritage designations cover a diverse range of habitats in Sutherland. In terms of international designations there are two wetland **RAMSAR sites**: one covering Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands; and the other covering Dornoch Firth and Loch Fleet. There are also many European designated sites, with 24 **candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSACs)** for habitats and species and 12 **Special Protection Areas (SPAs)** for wild birds, both of which afford a high level of protection. There are 94 nationally designated **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)**, which can cover important biological, geomorphological and geological

areas. There are also 4 **National Nature Reserves**, which are also SSSI's, but are managed by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) or under agreement with land owners.

Table 1: Nature conservation designations

	Area coverage in Sutherland (ha.)	% of Sutherland LP area	Area in Highland (ha.)	% of Highland
RAMSAR site	94,470	15.4%	167,877	6.87%
Candidate Special Areas of Conservation	119,015	19.4%	542,436	20.8%
Special Protection Areas	101,630	16.5%	310,420	11.9%
Sites of Special Scientific Interest	155,288	25.3%	443,091	17%
National Nature Reserves	1,582	0.3%	84,792	3.3%
Total designated for nature conservation (*)	156,988	25.6%	615,958	23.6%

(*) This accounts for overlaps between different designations – cSACs and SPAs are also SSSI

- 2.4 The quality and diversity of the Sutherland Landscape is evident in the designation of 4 **National Scenic Areas** (NSAs): Assynt/Coigach, North West Sutherland, Kyle of Tongue and the Dornoch Firth. These comprise mainly mountainous and contrasting coastal scenery.
- 2.5 In terms of the local or regional landscape designations there are 5 existing **Areas of Great Landscape Value** (AGLV) at Loch Fleet, Loch Migdale, Loch Brora, Ben Klibreck and Ben Griams. Additional AGLV are proposed through the Structure Plan for the coastal areas of Cape Wrath, Strathy Point and Loch Eriboll.
- 2.6 Any building or structure which is considered to be of special architectural or historic interest is listed by Scottish Ministers. Those of national importance are listed as “Category A” (e.g. Dunrobin Castle), those of regional importance are listed as “Category B”, and those of local importance are listed as “Category C”. There are some 322 **listed buildings** in Sutherland.

Table 2: Listed buildings in Sutherland

Category of Listed Building	Number
A	19
B	187
C	116
Total Listed Buildings in Sutherland	322

- 2.7 Areas which are considered to have special architectural or historic interest are designated as **Conservation Areas**. At present there is only one Conservation Area in Sutherland which covers Dornoch’s historic core. There are proposals in existing Local Plans to designate the core areas of Embo, Golspie and Helmsdale, as well as the whole of Achfary.

- 2.8 There are 4 areas in Sutherland that are listed in the **Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes** in Scotland: Dunrobin Castle, Kildonan Lodge, Skibo Castle and Tongue House. National guidance requires the settings as well as the gardens themselves to be safeguarded from unsympathetic development.
- 2.9 Sutherland's history and relative remoteness means many archaeological features of all periods remain well-preserved, with almost 8,000 features recorded, including 294 Scheduled Ancient Monuments, and many more yet to be discovered. The arguably more significant archaeological features include: Dornoch Cathedral, Dunrobin Castle, the Bronze Age house-sites, field systems, and Neolithic cairns found around Ord Hill in Lairg, the many brochs, and the ruins of villages and townships abandoned during the clearances.

The Local Plan

- 2.10 The new Local Plan will replace the existing plans: Golspie and Lairg Local Plan adopted July 1983; North-West Sutherland Local Plan adopted May 1987; South and East Sutherland Local Plan adopted May 2000; and Tongue and Farr Local Plan adopted October 1995.
- 2.11 Initial work on the Local Plan has involved the circulation of information on the Local Plan to every household in Sutherland, and the preparation of three background papers – on housing, economic development and environment – for feedback. A large number of comments have been received and these are being drawn together along with ongoing work on site options. It is proposed that this initial work will inform the site options/main issues report and community workshops planned for late August/September 2006 with a Deposit Draft Local Plan being available in early 2007.
- 2.12 It is intended that the policy approach within the new Local Plan for Sutherland will follow as closely as possible the format of the Wester Ross Local Plan, which is nearing adoption. This Local Plan has adopted a relatively straightforward policy approach, involving the following key elements:
- Settlement Development Areas are identified for most towns and villages as the preferred areas for most types of development, including housing. These make best use of existing infrastructure and services and protect the character of the surrounding countryside.
 - Land is specifically allocated for general housing, affordable housing, business and industry, community uses and redevelopment within the larger settlements.
 - It is recognised that there will continue to be a demand for development outwith the settlement development areas. The Local Plan strategy identifies three categories of countryside based on the type and importance of natural and cultural heritage they contain. A specific policy applies to proposals within these areas.
 - In addition to the allocation of land for affordable housing, a specific policy detailing the requirements for larger developments is contained within the Plan.

- Other development considerations which are required to be taken into account, for example flooding issues or sustainable design are the subject of a specific policy.

2.13 The detail of all the policies and proposals to be contained within the Plan will of course be the subject of full consultation with all the stakeholders involved in plan preparation, but at this stage the Wester Ross approach offers a consistent starting point from which to move forward. The full details of the Wester Ross Local Plan policies are shown in Appendix B for information.

3. PLAN CONTEXT

Relationship with other plans and programmes

- 3.1 There are a number of plans, programmes and environmental objectives that will be analysed for their relationship with the Sutherland Local Plan. These are indicated below and the views of the Consultation Authorities are sought on the documents identified. The environmental report will include a detailed appraisal of the implications of the individual plans and programmes and how these have been incorporated within the Local Plan.

National Planning Policy

- 3.2 The Local Plan will be produced in accordance with Scottish Executive Planning Policy, such as SPPs (Scottish Planning Policy) and NPPGs (National Planning Policy Guidelines), as well as the National Planning Framework and the emerging Planning etc. (Scotland) Bill.

National and International Legislation

- 3.3 National and International law has an impact on the contents of the Local Plan. EU Directives such as the Air Quality Directive, Water Framework Directive and following the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Biodiversity Action Plan all need to be taken into consideration. Relevant national legislation includes the Wildlife and Countryside (Scotland) Act 1981, the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, and the Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Act 2003.

Structure Plan

- 3.4 The Sutherland Local Plan will incorporate the main objectives of the Highland Structure Plan, which was approved by Scottish Ministers in March 2001.

Other Plans and Policies

- 3.5 The Highland Council will prepare the Sutherland Local Plan in conjunction with other relevant Council policy guidance and agency strategies. These will include:

- Highland Area Waste Plan
- Highland Forestry and Woodland Strategy
- Aquaculture Framework Plan for Eddrachillis Bay to Kylesku, Loch Eriboll and Loch Inchard
- Housing Highland's Communities: Local Housing Strategy
- Scottish Water's Q and S III programme (when published)
- Sutherland Local Biodiversity Action Plan
- Highland Community Plan 2004 – 2007
- Highland Access Strategy
- Highland Gypsy and Traveller Action Plan
- Sutherland Settlement Landscape Capacity Study
- Caithness and Sutherland Landscape Character Assessment 1997
- A Strategy for Sutherland 2005 – 2009, Sutherland Partnership

Environmental baseline – description of data gathering

3.6 The regulations require that a wide range of environmental information is collected and analysed to inform the Strategic Environmental Assessment. In carrying out the retrospective SEA on the Wester Ross Local Plan, the availability of the information likely to be required was investigated. The following tables indicate the information identified as being potentially useful in the Sutherland Local Plan SEA. These indicators relate directly to the SEA objectives and are divided into the same categories. The views of the Consultation Authorities are sought on the nature, type and availability of the information which is detailed or indeed on specific indicators which may be missing.

Table 3 Population and human health

SEA Objectives	Key Information
1. Protect and enhance human health.	<p>Years of healthy life expectancy at Highland level (currently 66.2 for males and 68.9 for females)</p> <p>Mortality by cause – Percentage recorded deaths by cancer, heart disease and violent/accidents at Highland level</p> <p>Number of transport accidents – total numbers as recorded by Northern Constabulary at Highland level</p> <p>Number of deaths by road traffic accidents by Northern Constabulary Command Area</p> <p>Access to key services at settlement zone level - % of households that are 0 – 5 minutes drive time from a doctor, a shop, primary school, petrol filling station</p> <p>Population size - % Population increase/decrease between 1991 Census and 2001 census and subsequent Council Area level population estimates.</p> <p>Age profiles – Area % population over 65 and under 16 compared to the Highland wide figures</p>
2. Decrease noise and vibration.	<p>Number of people affected by ambient noise levels – no information currently available.</p> <p>Number of noise complaints received by Area.</p>
3. Reduce and prevent crime and the fear of crime.	<p>Recorded crimes per 1000 population – Northern Constabulary</p>

<p>4. Improve social inclusion, redress inequalities related to age, gender, disability, race and faith</p>	<p>Local crime statistics - % increase/decrease of crimes for the previous two years – Northern Constabulary Command Area</p> <p>Fear of crime surveys - % of population which think there is a serious crime problem at Scotland-wide level</p> <p>Information related to the equalities and wellbeing assessment of the plan</p>
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Table 4 Cultural Heritage and landscape and material assets

SEA Objectives	Key Information
<p>5. Preserve historic buildings, archaeological sites and other culturally important features.</p>	<p>Total number of Listed Buildings</p> <p>Total number of Conservation Areas</p> <p>Total number of Archaeological sites (HER sites)</p>
<p>6. Enhance countryside and Townscape character.</p>	<p>Percentage of dwellings which are currently vacant</p> <p>Number of vacant and derelict sites as identified within the Vacant and Derelict Land survey</p>
<p>7. Value and protect diversity and local distinctiveness.</p>	<p>Number of Gaelic speakers from census figures</p>
<p>8. Improve the quantity and quality of publicly accessible open space.</p>	<p>Proportion of population within 200m of parks and open spaces</p>
<p>9. Avoid inappropriate single houses/small groups of houses in open countryside.</p>	<p>Information from monitoring planning applications - number of developments approved outwith settlements</p>
<p>10. Improve the quality of the built environment.</p>	<p>Proportion of dwellings with any disrepair</p>

Table 5 Air, water, soil and climatic factors

SEA Objectives	Key Information
11. Reduce vulnerability to effects of climate change.	<p>Number of development sites in flood risk areas</p> <p>Areas identified in SEPA flood risk maps</p>
12. Increase the proportion of energy from renewable resources.	<p>Total number of and extent of electricity generated from renewable energy sources and CHP (power stations) located in the area</p>
13. Minimise waste and re-use or recover it by recycling, composting or energy recovery.	<p>Tonnes of waste being sent to landfill at Council Area level</p> <p>Recycling rate at Council Area level</p> <p>Number of recycling facilities in the area</p>
14. Reduce need for energy.	<p>Energy consumption per building and per occupant when available</p> <p>Green Tourism Business Scheme - % of ATB membership with Green Tourism award</p>
15. Improve use of sustainable building techniques.	<p>Number of buildings utilising sustainable design principles can be gauged from the intended use of Sustainable Design Statements by The Council.</p>
16. Reduce air pollution to levels that do not damage natural systems.	<p>Achievement of Emission Limit Values – number of companies in the area on European Pollutant Emission Register</p> <p>Number and proportion of people living in Air Quality Management Areas</p>
17. Reduce the need to travel.	<p>Access to key services - % of households that are 0 – 5 minutes drive time from a doctor, a shop, primary school, petrol filling station</p> <p>Total vehicle kilometres at Highland Council area</p> <p>Distance travelled per person per year by mode of transport at Scotland wide level</p> <p>Modal split of travel to work/education at Highland level</p> <p>Proportion of population with access to broadband</p>

18. Increase potential use of public transport.	Information on public transport availability using Highland Council data % of visitor attractions accessible by public transport
19. Limit water pollution to levels that do not damage natural systems.	Quality (biology and chemistry) of rivers, canals and freshwater bodies
20. Maintain and restore key ecological processes (e.g. hydrology, water quality, coastal processes and groundwater).	Quality and quantity of groundwater Details of aquaculture being carried out in the area
21. Maintain water abstraction, run-off and recharge within carrying capacity (including future capacity).	Water use by sector, (megalitres per day) at Scotland level Proportion of developments utilising sustainable drainage schemes Number of dwellings where drainage is directed to public or private sewer
22. Reduce contamination, safeguard soil quantity and quality.	Any information available on levels of contamination Number of Greenfield and Brownfield sites being developed Loss of good quality croft land (if such land is identified within Local Plans.

Table 6 Biodiversity, flora and fauna

SEA Objectives	Key Information
23. Avoid damage to designated wildlife sites and protected species.	Number and type of designated sites in the area Reported levels of damage to designated sites if available from SNH Reported condition of locally important wildlife sites using information from LBAP groups where available
24. Improve biodiversity, avoiding irreversible losses.	Achievement of Local Biodiversity Action Plan targets where appropriate Total area of protected peatlands

<p>25. Provide opportunities for people to come into contact with and appreciate wild life and wild places.</p>	<p>Total area of remote landscapes of value for recreation (or wild land)</p> <p>Number of developments approved within remote landscapes of value for recreation (or wildland) where designated</p> <p>Proportion of ancient and semi-natural woodland of total land area of Sutherland</p> <p>Number of developments affecting ancient and semi-natural woodland</p> <p>Total number and area of SACs, SPAs and Ramsar sites</p> <p>Number/area of local nature reserves and designated sites</p> <p>Proportion of land designated for particular quality or amenity value, including publicly accessible land and greenways</p>
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Environmental problems

3.7 Potential environmental problems that affect the Plan have been identified through initial discussions with communities, the Consultation Authorities and an analysis of data currently available. These are summarised in Table 7 below. Feedback from the Consultation Authorities is sought on the scope of environmental problems identified. As noted previously, the key natural and cultural heritage features in Sutherland are shown on maps within Appendix A, and these will give further context to the issues raised below.

Table 7 Potential Environmental problems in Sutherland

Potential Problem	Implications for Local Plan
Negative impact of development on traditional crofting settlement character	The Local Plan must ensure that a policy framework is in place which will ensure development fits with the existing settlement character
Negative impact of development on natural and cultural heritage features	The Local Plan will seek to maintain a high quality natural heritage and taking account of cultural heritage sites
Decay of listed buildings	The Local Plan should identify key sites for redevelopment
Negative impact of access on habitat and species	The Local Plan will seek to ensure a balance between the demand for development whilst protecting the quality and character of the environment and ensure a key link with the

Potential Problem	Implications for Local Plan
	access strategy and core path planning
Tidal and riverine flood risk to new and existing development	The Local Plan will seek to ensure that land at risk from flooding is not identified as suitable for development
Reduced quality of watercourses and the coastal environment	The Local Plan will seek to put in place a policy framework which takes into account any potential detrimental impact on watercourses or the coastal environment
Continued reliance on inappropriate waste management practices	The Local Plan will provide clear reference to the Area Waste Plan and fully assess the need for additional waste management facilities
Negative impact of development on air quality	The Local Plan will identify any areas of poor air quality and ensure any development proposal takes any negative impact in this into account
Potential negative effect of identified contaminated land	The Local Plan will encourage development on suitable brownfield sites ensuring that contamination issues are fully addressed at the earliest possible stage
Negative impact of inappropriate aquaculture development	The Local Plan will seek to balance the need for economic development in aquaculture against the quality of the environment. Clear cross reference to Aquaculture framework plans will be provided
Loss of good quality croft land	The Local Plan will seek to ensure that good quality croft land is safeguarded from inappropriate development
Loss of native woodland cover	The Local Plan will identify areas of native woodland and ensure that the impact on these areas is fully considered in development proposals
Loss of peatland cover	The Local Plan will seek to ensure that the impact on areas of important peatland cover is fully considered and that such areas are protected where appropriate
Loss of land for recreation	The Local Plan will recognise the importance of recreation and tourism and seek to put in place a policy framework which reflects this
Negative impact of development on the key species and habitats promoted through the Local Biodiversity Action Plan	The Local Plan will ensure the key species and habitats promoted through the Local Biodiversity Action Plan are fully considered
Increased travel/energy use	The Local Plan will seek to reduce the need to travel by promoting development within existing settlements whilst recognising the needs of the rural area
Lack of sustainable design and construction techniques	The Local Plan will promote sustainable design

Potential Problem	Implications for Local Plan
Lack of provision of affordable housing	The Local Plan will ensure a policy framework is in place to allow the delivery of affordable housing
Poor use of sustainable drainage schemes	The Local Plan will provide clear reference to the key requirements for sustainable drainage systems

4. SCOPE AND LEVEL OF DETAIL PROPOSED FOR STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Alternatives

- 4.1 SEA requires that “reasonable alternatives” to the Plan are considered. Alternatives are outlined here in order to set the context for the following two sections of this report – scoping of SEA issues and consideration of a framework for the assessment of environmental effects.
- 4.2 The preparation of a Local Plan is a statutory duty placed on the Council. It is therefore not an option to not prepare the Plan. However, it is good practice to consider a “do nothing” approach. For Sutherland this would be to continue to rely on the existing plans (Golspie and Lairg Local Plan adopted July 1983; North-West Sutherland Local Plan adopted May 1987; South and East Sutherland Local Plan adopted May 2000; and Tongue and Farr Local Plan adopted October 1995). Some of these plans are now considerably out of date and no longer fit for purpose. In addition, there would be continued reliance on the Highland Structure Plan and other relevant policy such as national planning policy.
- 4.3 It is important to note however that, in discussion with the Consultation Authorities, communities and other interests, The Council will be assessing alternative development strategies as part of the plan preparation and SEA process. These alternatives will be an integral part of the Environmental Report.
- 4.4 The Directive requires the likely evolution of the environment without the Plan to be considered. The potential problems identified in Table 7 are expected to continue in the absence of new policy or actions to address them.

SEA Objectives

- 4.5 The Environmental Report will identify the likely significant effects of the plan, with specific reference to the following aspects of the environment:
- Biodiversity
 - Population
 - Human health
 - Fauna
 - Flora
 - Soil
 - Water
 - Air
 - Climatic figures
 - Material assets
 - Cultural assets, including architectural and archaeological heritage
 - landscape
 - The inter-relationship between these

4.6 SEA objectives were identified to incorporate the above areas, and these form the basis on which the plan will be assessed. The 25 SEA objectives as shown in Table 8 were agreed in principle with the Consultation Authorities during the development of the Strategic Environmental Assessment methodology for Wester Ross Local Plan.

4.7 The Council's starting point in identifying the SEA objectives was the 15 sustainability objectives set out in The Highland Structure Plan (2001). These were expanded and further developed by taking account of guidance from a number of sources and now total 25 SEA objectives. These have been grouped by the regulatory category which applies.

Table 8 SEA Objectives

Ref	SEA Objective	Regulations Category
1	Protect and enhance human health	Population and human health
2	Minimise exposure to noise and vibration	
3	Reduce and prevent crime and fear of crime	
4	Improve social inclusion	
5	Preserve historic buildings, archaeological sites and other culturally important features	Cultural heritage, material assets and landscape
6	Enhance landscape and townscape character	
7	Value and protect diversity and local distinctiveness	
8	Retain and improve quality and quantity of publicly accessible open space	
9	Avoid single houses/small groups of houses in open countryside	
10	Improve quality of built environment	
11	Reduce vulnerability to the effects of climate change	Air, water, soil and climatic factors
12	Increase proportion of energy from renewable sources	
13	Minimise waste, then re-use or recover it through recycling, composting or energy recovery	
14	Reduce need for energy	
15	Increase use of sustainable housing techniques	
16	Reduce air pollution to levels that do not damage natural systems, including contribution to climate change	
17	Reduce the need to travel	
18	Increase potential use of public transport	
19	Limit water pollution to levels that do not damage natural systems	
20	Maintain and restore key ecological processes (e.g. hydrology, water quality, coastal processes, groundwater)	
21	Maintain water abstraction, run-off and recharge within carrying capacity (inc. future capacity)	Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna
22	Reduce contamination, safeguard soil quantity and quality	
23	Avoid damage to designated wildlife sites and protected species	
24	Improve biodiversity, avoiding irreversible losses	
25	Provide opportunities for people to come into contact with and appreciate wildlife and wild places	

Framework for assessing environmental effects

- 4.10 All policies within the Local Plan will be subject to detailed assessment against all the SEA objectives and criteria. This process will identify as far as possible what level of environmental impact the operation of these policies will have and any mitigation or improvement which will be required.
- 4.11 Most of the proposals and land allocations that are zoned within the Local Plan also require assessment. However, a number of sites that are zoned within the Local Plan, and that may have significant environmental effects, will not be assessed in detail because they have full planning permission for development. These proposals will be highlighted and the Environmental Report will note their main potential environmental effects.

Assessment proformas

- 4.12 To predict the effects of the Local Plan on the environment, the individual policies will be assessed using the proforma as shown at Appendix B. The views of the Consultation Authorities are requested in relation to this matrix. Appendix B also contains the summary of the assessment carried out on the four main policies contained within the Wester Ross Local Plan. The views of the Consultations Authorities are also sought on the results of this assessment, as it is hoped that similar policies will be brought forward through the Sutherland Local Plan.
- 4.13 A primary purpose of the Local Plan is to identify areas of land for development and it is critical that each proposed site is assessed to determine its suitability. In the Wester Ross Local Plan exercise SEA objectives were incorporated in this assessment and adapted to form several questions. The Site Checklist, shown in Appendix D has the SEA objectives phrased as clear, unambiguous questions. Again the views of the Consultation Authorities are sought on the suitability of this matrix for sites to be identified within the Sutherland Local Plan. Obviously the outcomes for each individual site option will be assessed against the other potential site options.
- 4.14 In addition to the environmental appropriateness of a site, the practicality of a site in terms of infrastructure provision as well as other economic and social concerns will be considered separately from the SEA process.

5. NEXT STEPS

Proposed consultation timescales

- 5.1 This scoping report will be made available on The Highland Council web-site and referred to in a newsletter which will be distributed widely throughout the Local Plan area during May 2006.
- 5.2 The views collected during this consultation period will be used in producing the Environmental Report. Views are invited as to whether the Consultation Authorities will commit to an SEA group covering the strategic environmental issues raised through this scoping report and subsequent feedback being set up to progress the SEA process in Highland.
- 5.3 Following production of the Deposit Draft and Environmental Report, both documents will be subject to full public consultation.

Anticipated milestones

- 5.4 Milestone activities and dates are:
 - Proposed publication date for Site Options/Main Issues report – August 2006
 - Proposed consultation period for Site Options/Main Issues report – September/October 2006
 - Deposit Draft Local Plan – early 2007
 - Anticipated Adoption Date of Local Plan - early 2008

Appendix A – Key natural and cultural heritage features in Sutherland

1. Areas of International Importance:
 - RAMSAR Sites
 - Special Protection Areas
 - Special Areas of Conservation

2. Areas of National Importance
 - National Nature Reserves
 - Sites of Special Scientific Interest
 - National Scenic Areas
 - Tree Preservation Orders
 - Inventoried Ancient and Long Established Woodland
 - Inventoried Gardens and Designed Landscapes
 - A Listed Buildings
 - Scheduled Ancient Monuments
 - Conservation Areas

3. Areas of Local/Regional Importance
 - Inventoried Semi-natural Woodland
 - Category B and C Listed Buildings
 - War Memorials
 - Sites and Monuments Record Archaeological Sites
 - Areas of Great Landscape Value

Appendix B - Wester Ross Local Plan Policies, extracted from the Intention to Adopt Local Plan January 2006

9.1 We will assess all development proposals against the relevant national planning policies and structure plan policies, in particular the General Strategic Policies relating to design for sustainability, impact assessments, contributions from developers and the precautionary principle. The following policies also apply.

Policy 1 Settlement Development Areas

We will support proposals within Settlement Development Areas (as shown on the proposals map) as long as they meet the Structure Plan Policy G2 Design for Sustainability, as shown on page 16 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 Box 1 and Background Maps) and trees.

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

Policy 2 Countryside

When making decisions on development proposals outwith Settlement Development Areas, we will take account of the level of importance of, and the effect on, the natural and cultural heritage (see Box 1 and Background Maps) and compatibility with Structure Plan Policy G2 Design for Sustainability.*

1. In areas of local/regional importance with

- no local designation we will support proposals as long as they meet the Structure Plan Policy G2 Design for Sustainability, particularly where it can be shown that they will support communities in fragile areas who are having difficulties in keeping their population and services.*
- local or regionally important features 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.

Box 1 Hierarchy of natural and cultural heritage features

<p><i>Local/regional importance</i></p>	<p><i>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</i></p>
<p><i>National importance</i></p>	<p><i>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</i></p>
<p><i>International importance</i></p>	<p><i>Special Protection Areas (including proposed) Special Areas of Conservation (including candidate) Ramsar sites</i></p>

Policy 3 Affordable housing

In accordance with the Development Plan Policy Guideline Affordable Housing, on allocated sites with an indicative overall capacity of four or more houses, The Council will expect to negotiate a Section 75 agreement with the landowner/s and other interested parties, or use other mechanisms, which provide for a contribution towards affordable housing (as defined in the Guideline). 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 and will be on the following proportions:

*Gairloch 30%
Lochcarron 30%
Ullapool 30%
All other settlements (where there is a demonstrable need) 25%*

On these allocated sites, 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 unallocated sites which would be expected to accommodate four or more houses at density levels consistent with the existing settlement pattern.

Policy 4 Other development considerations

1. Design for sustainability – We will judge development proposals against a ‘Design for Sustainability’ statement which developers will need to put forward with their planning applications, in line with the Development Plan Policy Guideline Design for Sustainability.

2. Waste management – We will assess proposals for waste management facilities under the conditions set out in the Highland Structure Plan and in line with the Highland Area Waste Plan.

3. Surface water drainage – Development proposals must meet the guidance set out in the Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems Design Manual for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

4. Flood risk – Development proposals in areas susceptible to flooding will need a flood risk assessment (which the developer must pay for). We will assess them in terms of their suitability in line with the categories set out in the Development Plan Policy Guideline Flood Risk.

5. Physical constraints – Development proposals must consider whether they would be located within areas of constraint (as set out in Box 2 and, where possible, shown on the background maps). Within these areas, developers must show that their proposal is compatible with the constraint or that action is taken to reduce negative effects.

6. Article 4 Directions (see Glossary) – In areas affected by Article 4 Directions permitted development rights, as specified, are suspended. Developers should refer to the background maps to identify where Article 4 Directions apply.

7. 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.

8. Development factors – Developers must take account of the details set out in the Proposals Maps. We will give particular consideration to the total effect of private water and sewage systems.

9. European Protected Species – We will assess development proposals for any disturbance to a European Protected Species, as listed in Box 3, 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.

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

Developments which are judged to be significantly detrimental in terms of the above criteria and for which no satisfactory mitigating action can be taken shall not accord with the Local Plan.

Appendix C

- 1. Assessment pro-forma for Local Plan policies against each SEA Objective**
- 2. Completed summary pro-formas for the Wester Ross Local Plan policies**

Ref	SEA Objective	Regulations Category	Assessment of Impact		Key Success Factors, Mitigation and Monitoring
			+	positive	
			-	negative	
			+/-	minor	
			++/--	major	
			0	neutral	
			?	uncertain	
1	Protect and enhance human health	Population and human health			
2	Minimise exposure to noise and vibration				
3	Reduce and prevent crime and fear of crime				
4	Improve social inclusion				
5	Preserve historic buildings, archaeological sites and other culturally important features	Cultural heritage, material assets and landscape			
6	Enhance landscape and townscape character				
7	Value and protect diversity and local distinctiveness				
8	Retain and improve quality and quantity of publicly accessible open space				
9	Avoid single houses/small groups of houses in open countryside				
10	Improve quality of built environment				
11	Reduce vulnerability to the effects of climate change	Air, water, soil and climatic factors			
12	Increase proportion of energy from renewable sources				

Ref	SEA Objective	Regulations Category	Assessment of Impact		Key Success Factors, Mitigation and Monitoring
			+	positive	
			-	negative	
			+/-	minor	
			++/--	major	
			0	neutral	
			?	uncertain	
13	Minimise waste, then re-use or recover it through recycling, composting or energy recovery				
14	Reduce need for energy				
15	Increase use of sustainable housing techniques				
16	Reduce air pollution to levels that do not damage natural systems, including contribution to climate change				
17	Reduce the need to travel				
18	Increase potential use of public transport				
19	Limit water pollution to levels that do not damage natural systems				
20	Maintain and restore key ecological processes (e.g. hydrology, water quality, coastal processes, groundwater)				
21	Maintain water abstraction, run-off and recharge within carrying capacity (inc. future capacity)				
22	Reduce contamination, safeguard soil quantity and quality				
23	Avoid damage to designated wildlife sites and protected species	Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna			

Ref	SEA Objective	Regulations Category	Assessment of Impact + positive - negative +/- minor ++/-- major 0 neutral ? uncertain	Key Success Factors, Mitigation and Monitoring
24	Improve biodiversity, avoiding irreversible losses			
25	Provide opportunities for people to come into contact with and appreciate wildlife and wild places			

Completed summary sheets for the assessment carried out on the Wester Ross Local Plan

WRLP Policy 1 Settlement Development Areas	SEA Objectives Category			
	Population and human health +	Cultural heritage, material assets and landscape +/-	Air, water, soil and climatic factors ++	Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna +/-
	<p>Commentary:</p> <p>The thrust of the Policy is broadly positive because the Settlement Development Area boundaries are drawn to take account of natural heritage interests and other environmental factors. The Consultation Authorities were involved in this process. Development within Settlement Development Areas also ensures that it can be linked to any existing public infrastructure. In implementing the policy references should be made to other Local Plan policies, in particular Policy 4.1, as well as the Development Plan Policy Guidance on Design for Sustainability. It is, however, recognised that there may be longer term cumulative negative impacts on the environment because the policy does not permit development only if the impact of individual applications is judged to be “significant”.</p>			
<p>Key Success Factors, Mitigation and Monitoring:</p> <p>The potential cumulative impact will be highlighted through regular monitoring. Monitoring will include numbers of applications submitted, numbers approved and refused both within and outwith Settlement Development Areas as well as numbers approved on areas of physical constraint or natural and cultural heritage importance. Mitigation of any environmental impacts or environmental improvement would be negotiated as part of a planning application and may include, for example, tree planting, flood alleviation works provision of natural areas to enhance biodiversity or new community infrastructure (such as footpaths).</p>				

WRLP Policy 2 Countryside	SEA Objectives Category			
	Population and human health +	Cultural heritage, material assets and landscape -/?	Air, water, soil and climatic factors -/+	Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna -/?
	<p>Commentary: The thrust of this Policy is about balancing the protection of the environment with community viability but in doing that there may be some negative impacts on the environment depending on implementation. It is unlikely, however, that there will be much development of a scale which will have significant negative impacts. It is important to recognise that Policy 1 aims to focus most development within Settlement Development Areas. However, the nature of small scattered communities within Wester Ross means that there will always be a need and demand for development outwith settlements. The aim of this policy, therefore, is to ensure that any development outwith Settlement Development Areas takes account of natural and cultural heritage features, particularly those of national and regional importance. The implementation of the Development Plan Policy Guidance on Design for Sustainability will also be significant.</p>			
<p>Key Success Factors, Mitigation and Monitoring:</p> <p>Any negative impacts on the environment will be highlighted through monitoring the number and type of applications received, approved and refused in areas which contain natural and cultural heritage features of local, national and international importance. Potential mitigation would include ensuring that development takes account of any relevant features and the Design for Sustainability Guidance. Tree planting and other mitigation action would be negotiated at the time of any planning application.</p>				

WRLP Policy 3 Affordable Housing	SEA Objectives Category			
	Population and human health	Cultural heritage, material assets and landscape	Air, water, soil and climatic factors	Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna
	++	+	0	0
<p>Commentary: Sites specifically allocated for affordable housing have been assessed for their environmental impact. The thrust of this policy is positive in terms of maintaining living and working communities with a range of house types. The impact of the policy on other objectives is neutral.</p>				
<p>Key Success Factors, Mitigation and Monitoring:</p> <p>Monitoring will indicate the level of contribution made to affordable housing and where enhancement of the environment can be achieved through high quality design and for example tree planting, flood alleviation works, provision of natural areas for biodiversity or new community infrastructure (such as footpaths).</p>				

WRLP Policy 4 Other Development Considerations	SEA Objectives Category			
	Population and human health ++	Cultural heritage, material assets and landscape ++	Air, water, soil and climatic factors ++	Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna ++
	<p>Commentary: The thrust of this policy is very positive in that its purpose is to protect and enhance the environment. It is, however, recognized that in mitigating the effects of, for example, a physical constraint or potential flood risk, there may be some negative impact on the environment. It is also possible that there may be indirect negative effects arising from waste management proposals. Although the policy aims to avoid this by the requirement for “satisfactory mitigating action”, it will be a matter of judgement as to what is considered satisfactory and this may require a balance between environmental and other factors. In addition, development is only not permitted if the impact in terms of the criteria included within the policy is judged to be “significantly” detrimental.</p>			
<p>Key Success Factors, Mitigation and Monitoring:</p> <p>Any negative impacts on the environment will be highlighted through monitoring the number and type of applications where these criteria have applied and the mitigation implemented. The Policy itself requires mitigating action where necessary and this will vary according to individual circumstance and applications. The implementation of this policy itself will enhance the environment and there is potential in taking mitigation for further enhancement.</p>				

Appendix D Site Assessment Checklist

The Environmental Report will contain the relevant site name and map.

Part 1 SEA Issues

SEA REGULATIONS CATEGORY	CHECKLIST	RESPONSE	OPPORTUNITIES TO MITIGATE OR IMPROVE
Population and human health	Is there scope for provision of open space within this site?		
	Is there potential for a layout which maximises safety?		
	Is there a need for street lighting?		
	Are there opportunities for planning gain in terms of footpaths or facilities?		
	Does the site contribute to road safety by improving access arrangements?		
	Is there scope for traffic calming as part of the scheme?		
	Is the site near any “bad neighbour” uses?		
	Are there any contaminated land		

SEA REGULATIONS CATEGORY	CHECKLIST	RESPONSE	OPPORTUNITIES TO MITIGATE OR IMPROVE
	issues?		
	Is the site suitable for development for a community use?		
	Is it well located in relation to other services?		
Cultural heritage, material assets and landscape	Is the site located within or adjacent to a local/regionally, nationally or internationally important area?		
	Would the development of the site contribute to the improvement of derelict or vacant land?		
	Is the site within the current SDA?		
	Does the site fit well within the landscape?		
	Does the site conform to SNH Landscape Capacity Study (where available)?		
	Is the site within a Conservation Area?		
	Is the site close to any listed buildings or other built heritage features?		

SEA REGULATIONS CATEGORY	CHECKLIST	RESPONSE	OPPORTUNITIES TO MITIGATE OR IMPROVE
	Is development on the site likely to impact on any archaeological sites identified in the Historic Environment Records?		
Biodiversity, flora and fauna	Is the site within a designated area?		
	Are there any linkages to the relevant LBAP?		
	Are there any endangered plants or species on or near the site?		
Air, water, soil and climatic factors	Does the site conform with the guidance set out in the Sustainable Design Guidance?		
	Are there opportunities for linkages with any renewable energy source?		
	Is there scope to provide on site waste management facilities?		
	Is the site at risk from flooding?		
	Are there any constraints in relation to the nature of the terrain? (i.e. is the site steep, boggy, rocky etc)		
	Can the site be connected to the public		

SEA REGULATIONS CATEGORY	CHECKLIST	RESPONSE	OPPORTUNITIES TO MITIGATE OR IMPROVE
	system?		
	Is the site accessible by foot or by public transport?		

