

The Highland Council

**Sutherland Local Plan
Adopted June 2010**

Finalised Environmental Report



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Non-Technical Summary

Background

The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the Sutherland Local Plan has been drawn up in accordance with the *Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes (Scotland) Regulations 2004*.

The SEA must be taken into account by the Council in developing the Local Plan which is eventually adopted. It must be available for public comment alongside the Plan itself. As the Local Plan passes through further stages of scrutiny, including the Examination, the SEA must be updated to reflect any changes in the Plan.

The Sutherland Local Plan Environmental Report has been subject to three periods of consultation: the Draft Environmental Report October 2007, Augmented Environmental report (including supplement) May 2008 and the Revised Environmental Report November 2008. Appendices 2, 3 and 7 set out all the comments received during consultation at each stage of the SEA process and how they have been taken into account.

Appendix 1 of the Environmental Report: Relevant documents for Sutherland provides information on relevant international, national, regional and local documents for Sutherland, outlining their objectives and main requirements and how they are affected by the local plan.

Summary of the Likely Significant Effects of the Local Plan (section 2)

This section briefly outlines the main effects of the local plan on the environment. The general policies are expected to have a positive effect on the environment overall with a number of the general policies in the development plan supporting the protection and enhancement of the natural environment and as such ensuring that there will be few harmful effects on the environment as a result of development proposals. It is extremely difficult to predict the possible effects of a Local Plan proposal on the environment so a matrix has been used to help evaluate the impacts of each potential allocation.

The Purpose of the SEA and Local Plan Context (section 4)

The consideration of environmental factors has always been integral to the production of a Local Plan. However, there was never a defined process or report produced. The Strategic Environmental Assessment provides a more comprehensive and transparent means of assessing the environmental issues that would normally be considered in the plan-making process.

The strategic objectives of the Local Plan are to create quality living environments and sustainable development.

Methodology (section 5)

The SEA process has informed the Plan process of the likely significant environmental effects of the plan policies and allocations and we have looked at ways of mitigating against possible negative effects.

The environmental baseline data was collated from a number of sources to give a view of the current condition of the Local Plan area and offers a means of providing a source of information against which the potential effects of the Local Plan can be assessed and monitored.

The environmental assessment of the Local Plan has involved the evaluation of the Local Plan objectives against each of the SEA objectives. Generally, the Local Plan objectives have scored positively against the SEA objectives. Where there has been a conflict between the SEA and Local Plan objectives we have offered a form of mitigation against this negative impact.

Predicted Environmental Baseline and Issues (section 6)

Potential environmental problems that affect the Plan area have been identified through initial discussions with communities, the Consultation Authorities and an analysis of data currently available.

Potential Environmental Problem	Environmental Receptor this relates to	Implications for Local Plan	Response in Local Plan
Negative impact of development on traditional crofting settlement character	Historic Environment	The Local Plan must ensure that a policy framework is in place which will ensure development fits with the existing settlement character.	General Policies 1 and 4
Negative impact of development on natural, built and cultural heritage features	Biodiversity and Designated Natural Heritage Features	The Local Plan will seek to maintain a high quality natural heritage and taking account of built/cultural heritage sites	General Policy 4
Decay of listed buildings	Historic Environment	The Local Plan should identify key sites for redevelopment.	General Policy 4
Negative impact of access on habitat, species and the historic environment	Historic Environment and Biodiversity	The Local Plan will seek to ensure a balance between the demand for development while protecting the quality and character of the environment and ensure a key link with the access strategy and core path planning work.	General Policy 4
Tidal and riverine flood risk to new and existing development	Flood Risk	The Local Plan will seek to ensure that land at risk from flooding is not identified as suitable for development	General Policy 9
Reduced quality of watercourses and the coastal environment	Water	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.	General Policy 14
Continued reliance on	Potentially	The Local Plan will provide clear	General

inappropriate waste management practices	Contaminated Land	reference to the Area Waste Plan and fully assess the need for additional waste management facilities.	Policy 8
Negative impact of development on air quality	Air Quality	Due to the negligible air pollution in Sutherland and the lack of large development proposed particularly general industrial, the Local Plan does not require a General Policy specifically on air quality. However we will be relying upon the policy in the Structure Plan.	General Policy 4 and Structure Plan policy
Potential negative effect of identified contaminated land	Potentially Contaminated Land	The Local Plan will encourage development on suitable brownfield sites ensuring that contamination issues are fully addressed at the earliest possible stage.	General Policy 10
Negative impact of inappropriate aquaculture development	Water	The Local Plan will seek to balance the need for economic development in aquaculture against the quality of the environment. Aquaculture Framework Plans and Coastal Zone Management Plans deal with such development issues and the Highland-wide Local Development Plan will pursue the issue further.	General Policy 3, balanced with General Policy 4 and others
Loss of good quality croft land	Population and Historic Environment	The Local Plan will seek to ensure that good quality croft land is safeguarded from inappropriate development	General Policy 4
Loss of native woodland cover	Biodiversity	The Local Plan will identify areas of native woodland and ensure that the impact on these areas is fully considered in development proposals.	General Policies 4, 11, 12 and 13
Loss of peatland cover	Biodiversity	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.	General Policies 4, 11, 12 and 13
Loss of land for recreation	Population	The Local Plan will recognise the importance of recreation and tourism and seek to put in place a policy framework which reflects this.	General Policy 2 and SPG on Open Space
Negative impact of development on the key species and habitats promoted through the	Biodiversity	The Local Plan will ensure the key species and habitats promoted through the Local Biodiversity Action Plan are fully	General Policy 12

Local Biodiversity Action Plan		considered.	
Increased travel/energy use	Population and Air Pollution	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.	General Policy 19
Lack of sustainable design and construction techniques	Air Pollution	The Local Plan will promote sustainable design	General Policy 6 and SPG on Sustainable Design
Lack of provision of affordable housing	Population and Fragile Areas	The Local Plan will ensure a policy framework is in place to allow the delivery of affordable housing.	General Policy 5
Poor use of sustainable drainage schemes	Water	The Local Plan will provide clear reference to the key requirements for sustainable drainage systems.	General Policy 14
Potential negative impact on landscape character	Landscape	The Local Plan will take into account the ability of the landscape to allow for development.	General policy 1

Local Plan Strategic Options and Alternatives Considered (section 7)

SEA requires that “reasonable alternatives” to the Plan are considered. At the highest level the option are to do a plan or to not do a plan. As the local plan is a statutory requirement, to not do a plan is not an option. Growth Amount and Growth Management options were considered.

The Plan’s General Policies and their compatibility with the SEA Objectives (section 8)

SEA objectives were identified:

1. Protect and Enhance Human Health
2. Minimise exposure to noise and vibration
3. Reduce and prevent crime and fear of crime
4. Increase social inclusion
5. Protect and where appropriate enhance the historic environment
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. Reduce single houses/small groups of houses in open countryside
10. Improve quality of built environment
11. Reduce vulnerability to the effects of climate change
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 building 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. Avoid impact to and where possible enhance the water environment
20. Maintain water abstraction, run-off and recharge within carrying capacity (inc. future capacity)
21. Reduce contamination, safeguard soil quantity and quality
22. Protect, enhance and where necessary restore designated wildlife sites and protected species
23. Improve biodiversity, avoiding irreversible losses
24. Provide appropriate opportunities for people to come into contact with and appreciate wildlife and wild places

The SEA Objectives are informed by the need to cover the range of issues outlined in Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations. They provide a means of assessing the policies and objectives of the Local Plan. There could be cumulative effects relating to landscape character, water quality and biodiversity. This section identifies where general policies may have a small or significant positive or negative effect and where one or more policies score a negative effect, there is the possibility that cumulatively or in combination, these could produce a significant environmental impact. The main policies that may impact on the SEA Objectives are Policy 1 Settlement Development Areas, Policy 3 Wider Countryside, Policy 16 Housing in the Countryside and Policy 17 Commerce. Relevant policy modifications responding to the concerns of SNH, Historic Scotland and SEPA have been made which have the effect of further safeguarding from individual and cumulative effects of development.

Appropriate Assessment has also been carried out to ensure that the policies and proposals are not likely to have a significant effect on European sites. The work undertaken and documented acknowledges relevant changes that have previously been made to the emerging policies and proposals of the Plan, which have improved the safeguarding of habitats and species. The effective operation of the General Policies will provide significant mitigation. For the Appropriate Assessment all Local Plan policies were screened both individually and cumulatively to determine whether it was likely that any significant effects on Natura sites could arise due to their implementation. Policies identified as likely to have a significant effect were identified as requiring an appropriate assessment which was undertaken in order to try to establish whether or not there would be an adverse effect on the integrity of Natura sites. Section 6 of the Appropriate Assessment includes a discussion on cumulative effects and section 9 outlines a menu of mitigation measures.

Monitoring the environmental effects of the Plan (section 9)

We have decided to create a monitoring framework for use in both the Sutherland Local Plan and the Highland wide Local Development Plan. The monitoring framework is available in the SEA post adoption statement. While this focuses on environmental issues, it will be an integral part of the monitoring of the local plan to try and avoid unnecessary duplication. Monitoring may confirm that the Plan is effective or may highlight the need to revise how the Plan is implemented or to review it.

1. Pre-Amble

- 1.1 The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes (Scotland) Regulations 2004 implement the requirements of a European Directive that asks for the production of Strategic Environmental Assessment on certain plans and programmes. Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a means of considering the potential environmental impacts of a development plan. This procedure looks at the natural, built and cultural heritage of an area and assesses whether or not these will be negatively or positively affected by development plan proposals.
- 1.2 The consideration of these impacts by the Environmental Report at an early stage in the Plan process makes it less likely that the development plan will exhibit any harmful effects. The SEA is a mechanism by which it is possible to predict what effects the Plan is likely to have on the environment and whether they are considered significant. This Report offers possible mitigation measures should there be potential harm to natural, built and/or cultural heritage.
- 1.3 The SEA process also offers an opportunity for the public to become involved in the assessment of the development plan on the environment. This Report will be published alongside the Adopted Sutherland Local Plan. There are no further opportunities for consultation. Copies of this Finalised Environmental Report are available at:
- The Area Planning and Building Standards Office, Drummuie, Golspie;
 - The Planning and Development Service Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness.
- 1.4 The Finalised Environmental Report is available for inspection free of charge during normal opening hours. The documents are also available on The Highland Council website at www.highland.gov.uk (search for Sutherland Local Plan).

2. Summary of the Likely Significant Effects of the Local Plan

- 2.1 The general policies and allocations for uses such as housing, business and community have been assessed against a set of environmental objectives (the SEA objectives).
- 2.2 The general policies are expected to have a positive effect on the environment overall. This conclusion is based on the fact that the Development Plan for the Sutherland area has the following strategic objectives relating to the environment:-
- Address the need for quality living environments
 - Adopt a proactive approach to the wise use of the natural environment
 - Conserve and promote Highland identity
- 2.3 A number of the general policies in the development plan support the protection and enhancement of the natural environment and as such ensure that there will be few harmful effects on the environment as a result of development proposals. A potentially insensitive planning application will need to adhere to all of the general policies in the Plan, and if such a

development is to go ahead, it would need to offer some mitigation measures to avoid detrimental effects to the environment.

- 2.4 The potential negative effects caused by development proposals can act to:-
- Reduce the amount or disturb important ecosystems and species. The Plan should consider the impact of the potential loss of inbye land which is one of the most biologically diverse land types found in Sutherland, supporting a range of crops and associated wildlife. There are also other potential negative effects associated with the loss of croft land which relate to the possible harmful effects on landscape character or settlement character, and the setting of towns and villages in the landscape. There is a need to carefully consider the potential impacts of development in crofting townships such as Stoer and Melness.
 - Negatively impact on the water environment, including streams, rivers, lochs, ground water, wetland habitats and flood plains. For example the Plan needs to be aware of the need to preserve the water environment of shellfish waters like those in Loch Laxford and Loch Eriboll and to monitor, or mitigate against any development that may impact on this.
 - Reduce bank side vegetation. This can not only serve to remove that habitat and its associated species, but also reduce the bank stability and lead to erosion. It is particularly important to limit the removal of bank side vegetation in areas that exhibit a potential flood risk according to the SEPA flood mapping as erosion will be more prevalent there.
- 2.5 It is extremely difficult to predict the possible effects of a Local Plan proposal on the environment. We have compiled a SEA matrix to help us evaluate the impacts of each potential development site considered by the Council. These matrices are an Appendix to this document.
- 2.6 The paragraphs above have dealt with the potential negative impacts of the Local Plan's proposals. However, a proposal may also have some significant positive environmental effects. Some fragile areas that are suffering from a loss of services may benefit from the identification of sites for future housing, especially affordable housing development. The population of Sutherland is decreasing at present; however there is still a high demand for the creation of new homes due to the increase in the number of households. If new housing is sympathetically designed it can act to improve the settlement character of an area and give it a more coherent identity. Development that is planned rather than ad hoc should be better for the environment. For example an allocated site may have a developer requirement to maintain a watercourse which would be better for the environment.

3. Introduction and Background

- 3.1 **The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive (2001/42/EC)** is the EC Directive on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment. The development plan for the Sutherland area requires the production of an SEA and this Finalised Environmental Report accompanies the publication of the Adopted Sutherland Local Plan.
- 3.2 This Environmental Report explains the SEA process. The process has included the production of a Scoping Report which helped to identify a methodology for assessment and the likely effects of the Local Plan. The

Scoping Report was sent out to the three consultation Authorities (Scottish Natural Heritage, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, and Historic Scotland) for comment. We received their responses in June 2006. A Draft Environmental Report was published in November 2007 alongside a Deposit Draft of the Local Plan for a consultation period of 12 weeks. The Scottish Government urged the Council to re-consult on its assessment of the environmental effects of the Local Plan to offer an earlier and more effective opportunity for comment on these effects and the Council's consideration of them. Therefore the Council decided to publish an augmented Environmental Report in May 2008 alongside the Pre-Deposit Draft of the Local Plan for a further consultation period of 6 weeks to offer another opportunity for comment before making decisions about the contents of a new, more finalised, Deposit Draft Plan. The comments received from the Consultation Authorities in January and June 2008 have informed the content of this revised Report and are contained in Appendices 2 and 3 at the end of this document. Following the Examination of the local plan an SEA Update Statement was published in April 2010. This was not giving the opportunity for further comment, but to outline the changes that would be made to the finalised Environmental Report in response to the final comments received from the Consultation Authorities.

The Key Facts Sutherland

- 3.3 The Scoping Report produced in 2006 contained the following key facts on Sutherland:

“The Sutherland Local Plan area 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).”

- 3.4 It should be noted that there has been a refinement of the plan area following The Highland Council ward boundary changes, which may slightly alter these figures. Over time more information will become available for these new ward areas and this will be reflected in our regular monitoring reports.

3.5 The Sutherland Local Plan

Local Plans set out detailed policies and proposals for the development management of a given area. The Sutherland Local Plan will be utilised to guide decisions on planning applications that are lodged within the Plan's jurisdiction.

- 3.6 This Local Plan has been prepared for that part of the Highland area comprising the district of Sutherland (made up of Highland Council Wards 1: North, West & Central Sutherland and 5: East Sutherland & Edderton). It will eventually replace four existing plans:

Golspie & Lairg Local Plan (adopted 1983);
North West Sutherland Local Plan (adopted 1987);

South & East Sutherland Local Plan (adopted 2000);
Tongue & Farr Local Plan (adopted 1995).

- 3.7 For the avoidance of doubt, this Plan once adopted will replace certain other, older Local Plans (namely Caithness Local Plan 2002, Wester Ross Local Plan 2006 and Ross & Cromarty Local Plan 2007) but only in so far as they related to any part of the Sutherland Local Plan area.
- 3.8 All of these plans still affect planning applications and other investment decisions and are available via www.highland.gov.uk.

Map 3.1 Sutherland Local Plan Area



4. The Purpose of the SEA and Local Plan Context

4.1 The Purpose of the SEA

The objective of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive (2001/42/EC) is to provide for a high level of protection of the environment

and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development. The SEA aims to identify and mitigate significant environment effects arising from certain plans and programmes. The Directive requires that an SEA be carried out on every Local Plan and an Environmental Report produced.

4.2 The consideration of environmental factors has always been integral to the production of a Local Plan. However, there was never a defined process or report produced. The Strategic Environmental Assessment provides a more comprehensive and transparent means of assessing the environmental issues that would normally be considered in the plan-making process.

4.3 Objectives of the Local Plan

The strategic objectives of the Local Plan are set out below under the seven strategic themes of the Highland Structure Plan (2001). This Highland-wide document, approved by Scottish Ministers, provides the regional policy framework for local plan objectives and policy content. The objectives aim to create quality living environments and sustainable development. They are listed below:-

4.4 Conserving and promoting the Highland identity

- a. Conserve and promote the uniqueness of Sutherland's natural, built and cultural 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 natural, built and cultural 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, cooperative working and effective woodland practice.

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

- e. Safeguard important assets of the natural environment for their own sake and as an asset to the Sutherland community.
- f. Recognising that the community's existence will impact in some way upon the natural environment, to avoid or otherwise 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.

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

- i. Recognise that whilst opportunities will be pursued to increase the availability of sustainable travel choice and to improve accessibility, given the rural nature of the Plan area significant use of the private car can be expected to continue for many trips 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, support provision of accessible and varied leisure and re-creational facilities 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.

4.7 Consolidating the settlement hierarchy

- 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.

4.8 Creating an improved business environment

- 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.

4.9 Addressing the need for quality living environments

- 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.

4.10 Working in partnership with the community and other agencies

- 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.

4.11 Links to Other Plans and Programmes

The Local Plan needs to take into account a number of other plans, programmes and strategies in its formulation. There are a wide range of documents that will influence the objectives and proposals of the Plan. Appendix 1 at the end of this report identifies the plans, programmes and strategies which we have considered in the production of the Local Plan. The appendix highlights the environmental objectives of these documents and considers how the Local Plan will aim to contribute to these objectives.

4.12 The Main Plans and Programmes to be considered

The relevant plans, programmes and strategies have been divided into various tiers from International importance to local importance. They are available in appendix 1. (It should be noted that as of February 2010 all the SPPs have been replaced by one SPP.) Examples of these documents include:-

International Tier – Kyoto Protocol (1998)

UK National Tier – Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended, 1981)

Scotland National Tier – Choosing Our Future: Scotland's Sustainable Development Strategy (Scottish Executive, 2005)

Scottish National Planning Policy Tier – SPP 7 Planning and Flooding (2004)

PAN 61 Planning and Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (2001)

Regional Tier – The Highland Council's Planning for Sustainability in the Highlands DPPG (2006)

Local Tier – Sutherland Biodiversity Action Plan (2003)

5.0 Methodology

5.1 The Highland Council's Approach to SEA

The Council's approach to the SEA process follows the guidance set down by The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Scottish Executive. There has been an emphasis on integrating the Local Plan objectives with those of the SEA process. The strategic environmental assessment of the 'Site Options' and the aims of the SEA have been integral to the development of the Plan.

5.2 The Finalised Environmental Report has been produced at the same time as the Adopted Local Plan. The SEA process has informed the Plan process of the likely significant environment effects of the Plan policies and allocations and we have looked at ways of mitigating possible negative effects.

5.3 The SEA Process

The SEA process works in conjunction with a number of stages in the development plan process and are as follows:-

- Scoping the likely significant environment effects
- Formulating environmental objectives and criteria
- Assessing the Plan and alternatives to the Plan, which includes an examination of the Plan's objectives, policies and allocations
- Publication of a Draft Environmental Report with the Pre-Deposit Draft Local Plan
- Preparing the Deposit Draft Local Plan with the revised Environmental Report
- Consideration of the content and format of the final version of the Environmental Report and finalisation of the means of monitoring the Plan's policies and proposals prior to the adoption of the Local Plan
- Inclusion of a statement explaining how environmental considerations have been integrated into the Plan; how the consultation authorities views and the public's responses have been taken into account; and the reasons for choosing the Plan as adopted as opposed to other alternative policies and proposals considered
- Monitoring of the significant environmental effects of the Plan and considering the possible need for review of the Plan and the SEA Environmental Report.

5.4 SEA Screening

Section 5 (3) (a) of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 has now established that all statutory development plans require an SEA.

5.5 Environmental Baseline

The baseline data was collated from a number of sources to give a view of the current condition of the Local Plan area. The data includes information about population statistics, life expectancy, fragile areas (all obtained from GRO(S)), designated areas such as National Scenic Areas, Special Protection Areas and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SNH data), and information gained from completing the SEA matrixes for each potential development site which identifies issues in relation to the percentage of sites at potential flood risk and contamination. The environmental baseline data offers a means of providing a source of information against which the

potential effects of the Local Plan can be assessed and monitored. We need to monitor whether the policies and proposals of the Plan have an effect, whether positive or negative, on the resources of the Plan area. The refinement of the environmental baseline data and intentions for monitoring are discussed in section 9.

5.6 **SEA Scoping**

The Council produced a Scoping Report for the Plan area and sent this to the consultation authorities. The Scoping Report set out the key facts for the area, the SEA objectives, the areas of international, national and local/regional importance, and attempted to identify the potential effects of the Local Plan and how these could be assessed. We received comments on the Scoping Report in June 2006 and these were taken into account in the formulation of the draft Environmental Report published in October 2007.

5.7 **Assessing the Local Plan against the SEA**

The environmental assessment of the Local Plan has involved the evaluation of the Local Plan objectives against each of the SEA objectives (listed in paragraph 7.10); this is shown in Table 7.1 below. Generally, the Local Plan objectives have scored positively against the SEA objectives. This is probably because we have carried out the SEA and Local Plan process simultaneously. Where there has been a conflict between the SEA and Local Plan objectives we have offered a form of mitigation against this negative impact.

5.8 The scoring system provides clarity relating to the significance of the effects on the environment. Most of the Plan objectives will not significantly impact on the SEA objectives. The objectives that will impact are those which actively encourage the expansion of settlements and transport proposals. Even if the new transport proposals are sustainable, they still involve new development and therefore the possible destruction of certain habitats and species. Table 7.1 outlines the various strands of mitigation that we suggest will help address any concerns.

5.9 It is important that designated areas are treated sympathetically. "For features of **international importance** (Natura 2000 (SPA, SAC) and Ramsar sites), developments likely to have a significant effect on a site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, and which are not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site for nature conservation will be subject to an appropriate assessment. Where we are unable to ascertain that a proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of a site, we will only allow development if there is no alternative solution and there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature. Where a priority habitat or species (as defined in Annex 1 of the Habitats Directive) would be affected, development in such circumstances will only be allowed if the reasons for overriding public interest relate to human health, public safety, beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment, or other reasons subject to the opinion of the European Commission (via Scottish Ministers). Where we are unable to ascertain that a proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of a site, the proposal will not be in accordance with the development plan within the meaning of Section 25(1) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997". (Sutherland Local Plan, General Policy 4 Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage).

5.10 Identification of Effects on Natura Interests

The Council has progressed Appropriate Assessment work under the requirements of the EU Habitats Directive. Officers have engaged with SNH staff who have contributed to this piece of work. Discussions with both SNH and SEPA in respect of the policies and proposals of the Draft Local Plan and the Strategic Environmental Assessment of it have helped to identify and address potential shortcomings. The Council completed an Appropriate Assessment Report of the Deposit Draft Local Plan in June 2009 and revised it in December 2009. The work undertaken and documented acknowledges relevant changes that have previously been made to the emerging policies and proposals of the Plan, which have improved the safeguarding of habitats and species. The effective operation of the General Policies will provide significant mitigation. Further changes have resulted from the Assessment and been made to the Local Plan. The conclusions are that, with appropriate safeguarding and mitigation as provided for, including modifications made following Examination, the Local Plan will not adversely affect the integrity of the SPA/SAC/Ramsar sites. A final Appropriate Assessment Report of the Local Plan will be published alongside the adopted Local Plan.

5.11 Difficulties Encountered in the SEA Process

There have been problems gathering relevant, up to date, information and assessing the likely impacts of the Plan on environmental objectives. It has been difficult to obtain data sets that are pertinent to the Plan area as many cover the Highland area as a whole. The baseline data has involved a trawl of The General Office for Scotland data, Scottish Natural Heritage information pertaining to designated nature conservation sites and NHS neighbourhood statistics. There has also been an assessment of the SEA matrixes that have been completed for each 'Site Option'. The availability of data and potential actions to gather fundamentally important data will be reviewed as discussed in section 9 on monitoring.

5.12 SEA Matrixes

It has also been difficult identifying relevant questions to ask in the assessment of each 'Site Option' to thoroughly cover such aspects as material asset and landscape, the historic environment, biodiversity and climatic factors. We have also been required to assess the human health and population impacts that the Plan's policies and proposals will have. It has proved difficult to separate the environmental effects from the socio-economic effects. The Population and human health issues have centred on providing housing for the community including affordable housing provision, providing open space, ensuring access to services and encouraging active travel and healthy lifestyles. Environmental and socio-economic effects often conflict greatly, and it is difficult to decide which should be assigned more importance in a given situation.

5.13 Environmental Impact Assessment

The assessment of sites which are proposed to be allocated in the Plan also encounters problems where there are no detailed plans for the site or for how it should be constructed or accessed. Some specific proposals which may come forward as planning applications on allocated sites will require an Environmental Impact Assessment at that time. This detailed assessment is not appropriate at Local Plan level. Below is a link to guidance on the Environmental Impact Assessment (Scotland) Regulations 1999. The

regulations specify which types and sizes of development require Environmental Impact Assessment.

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/11/30082353/14>

5.14 Appropriate Assessment

5.15 Appropriate Assessment of the Local Plan is required under the Conservation (Natural Habitats & c) Regulations 1994 (as amended) in order that the planning authority as competent authority may determine the likely impact of it on the conservation interests for which a European nature conservation site has been classified. A final Appropriate Assessment Report of the Local Plan will be published alongside the adopted Local Plan.

6. Predicted Environmental Baseline and Issues

6.1 Environmental Baseline for the Sutherland Area

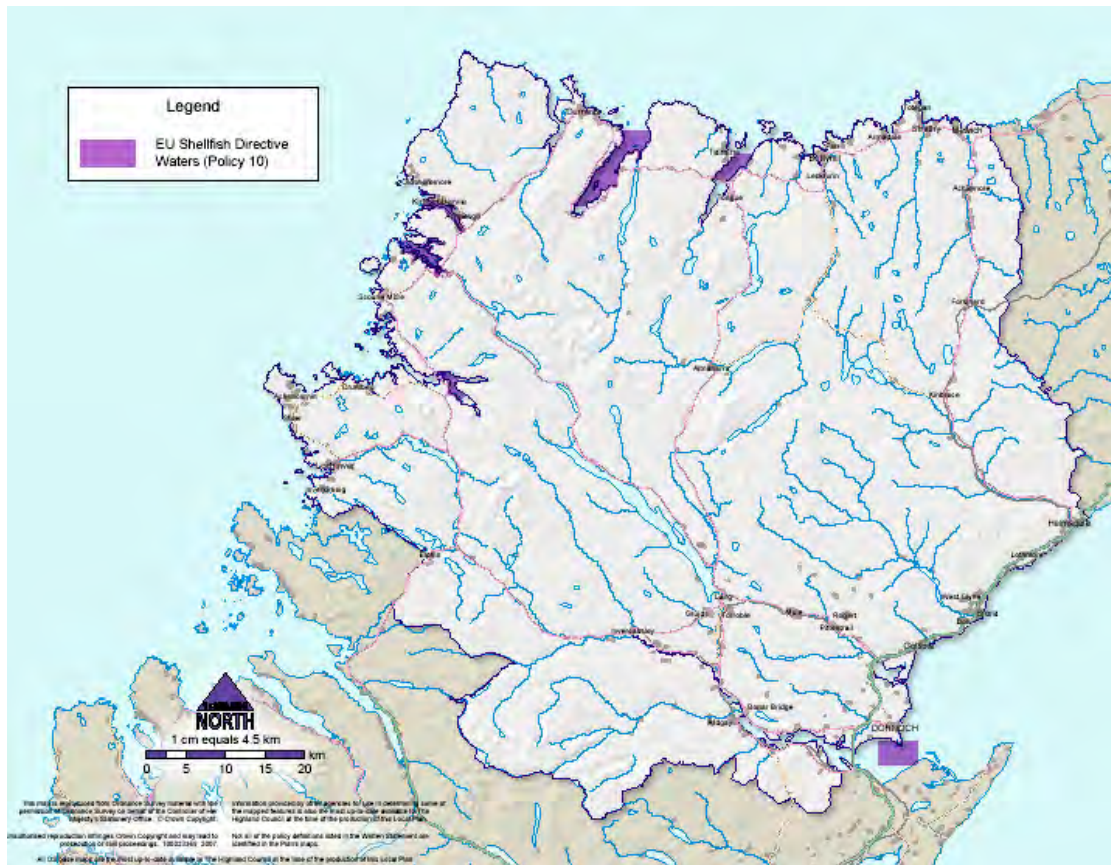
This part of the Environmental Report examines the current baseline data and trends that are considered to be relevant to the production of the Local Plan. Improved mapping is available within the Map Booklet of the Local Plan. As new or relevant data becomes available to the Council we will include it. Table 6.1 below summarises the main statistics for the area.

Table 6.1 Key Baseline Facts

Environmental Receptor	Key Facts
Biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 92 UK Priority Species ▪ 51 UK Priority Habitats ▪ 15 Local Priority Habitats ▪ 214 Local Priority Species ▪ 15 Rural Stewardship Scheme Species ▪ Habitat types in Sutherland include: Blanket bog; Purple moor grass and rush pasture; Lowland meadows; and Upland scrub. ▪ UK BAP Species in Sutherland include: Black Guillemot; Brown trout; Yellowhammer; and Pine martin.
Designated Natural Heritage Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 4 NSA sites ▪ 12 SPA sites ▪ 25 SAC sites ▪ 96 SSSI sites ▪ The percentage of coverage of NSAs, SPAs, SACs and SSSIs is shown in table 6.2 and is also illustrated in map 6.3 ▪ 2 RAMSAR sites ▪ 8 AGLV ▪ 5 TPO
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 2001 Census: 13,778 ▪ Life Expectancy: The average age for Caithness and Sutherland females is 78.9 years and 73.7 years for males. ▪ 21.1% of the population in Ward 1 (North, West and Central Sutherland) are over 65 and 23.4% of the population in Ward 5 (East Sutherland and Edderton) are over 65. (this is higher than the Highland average of 17.6%)
Historic Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 322 listed buildings (A: 19; B: 187; C: 116) ▪ 1 Conservation Area ▪ 297 SAM ▪ 4 Gardens and Designated Landscapes ▪ 8,065 Archaeological Sites (HER)
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dornoch is the only beach in the Local Plan area to be included in the Scottish Bathing Waters report, carried out by SEPA in 2006. The area is currently classified as excellent bathing water. ▪ 7 out of 104 Shellfish Harvesting/Growing Waters as designated by SEPA under EC Shellfish Waters Directive (79/923/EEC) are located in Sutherland (the shellfish growing areas are plotted on map 6.1 below) ▪ 6 River and marine SACs.

Air Pollution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relatively low atmospheric pollution
Flood Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The percentage of allocations which are in areas with a medium to high flood risk – 1:200 or greater annual probability of flooding is 20% (it was 11% in the deposit draft local plan however the plan is taking a more precautionary approach by asking for more flood risk assessments)
Potentially Contaminated Land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The percentage of allocations which are potentially contaminated is 11% (it was 15% in the deposit draft local plan)
Brownfield Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The percentage of allocations which are brownfield is 20% (it was 17% in the deposit draft local plan)
Vacant and Derelict Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There are 2 allocations included in the Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land Survey
Fragile Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There are large parts of the Plan area, outside the major settlements and the east coast settlements, that can be classed as fragile areas because more than one of their key services is more than a 10 minute drive away and by public transport this figure is often tripled. Map 6.2 illustrates this below.

Map 6.1 EU Designated Shellfish Waters in Sutherland



Map 6.2 Highland Fragile Areas Map 2003

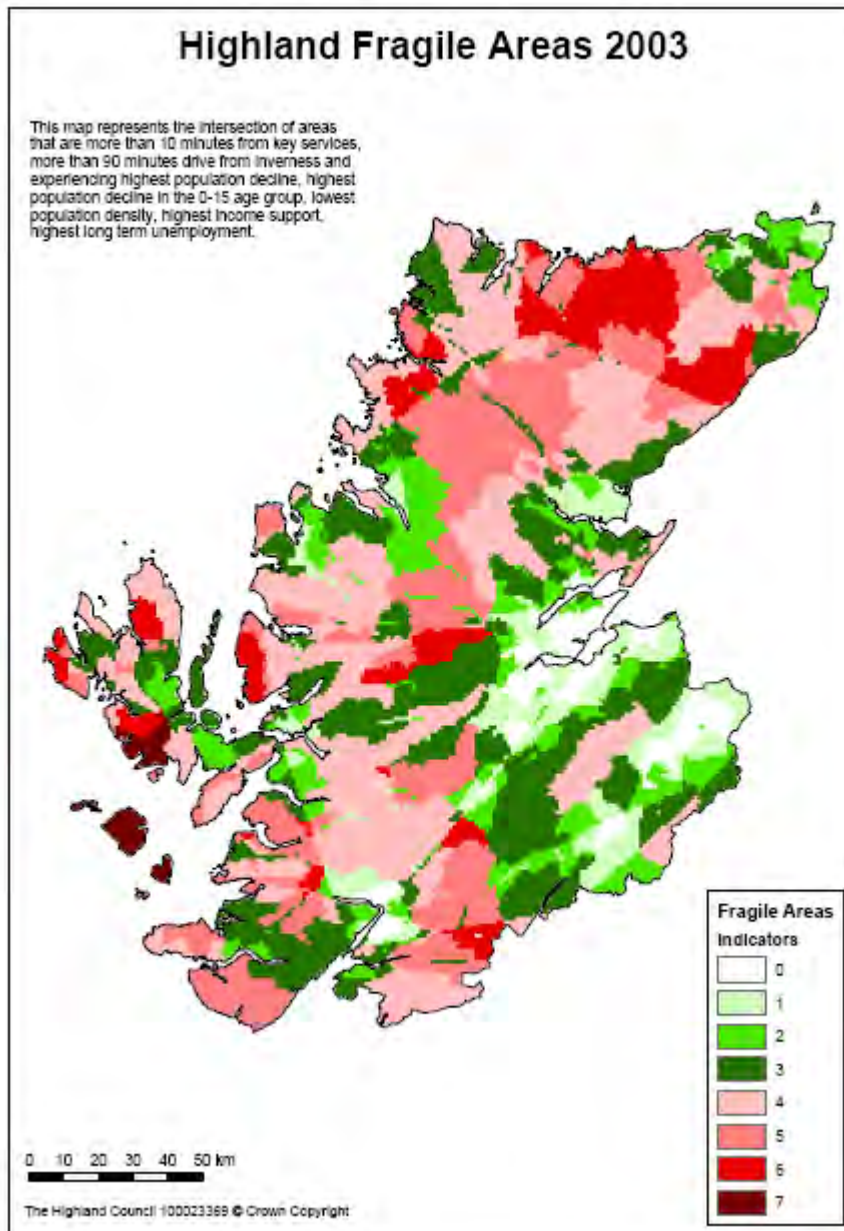


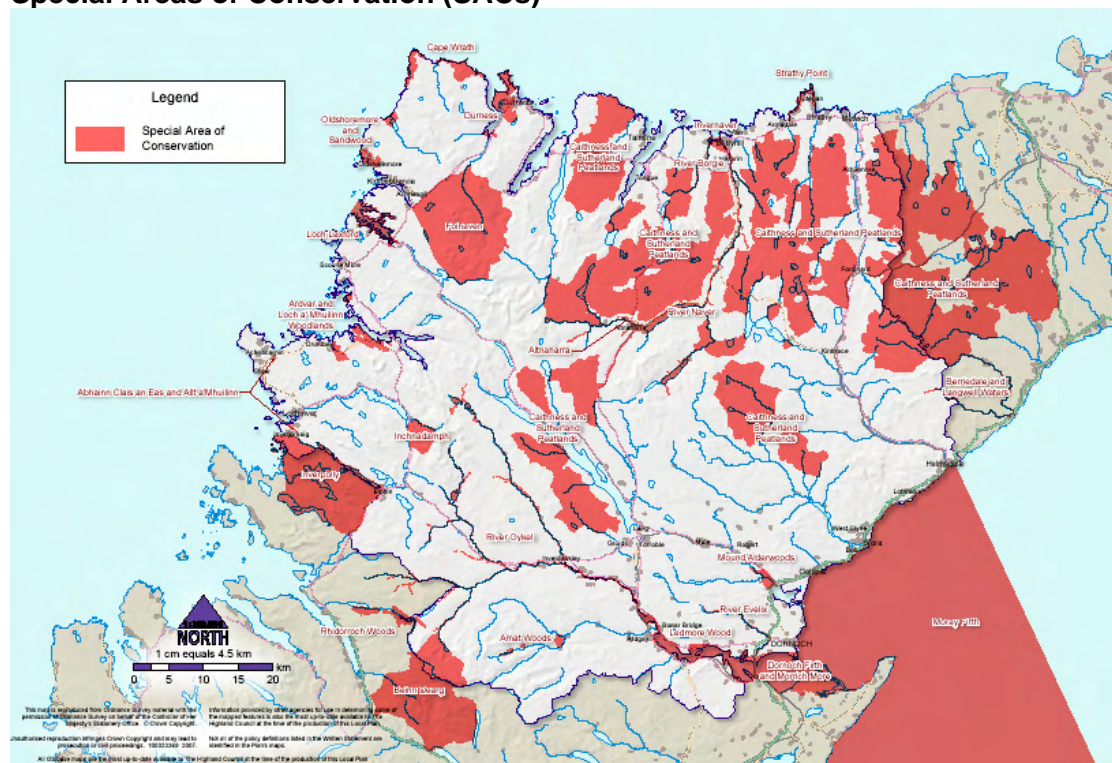
Table 6.2 Percentage of land covered by NSAs, SPAs, SACs and SSSIs

Type of designation	Sutherland
NSAs	17.7%
SPAs	19.4%
SACs	20.2%
SSSIs	28.3%

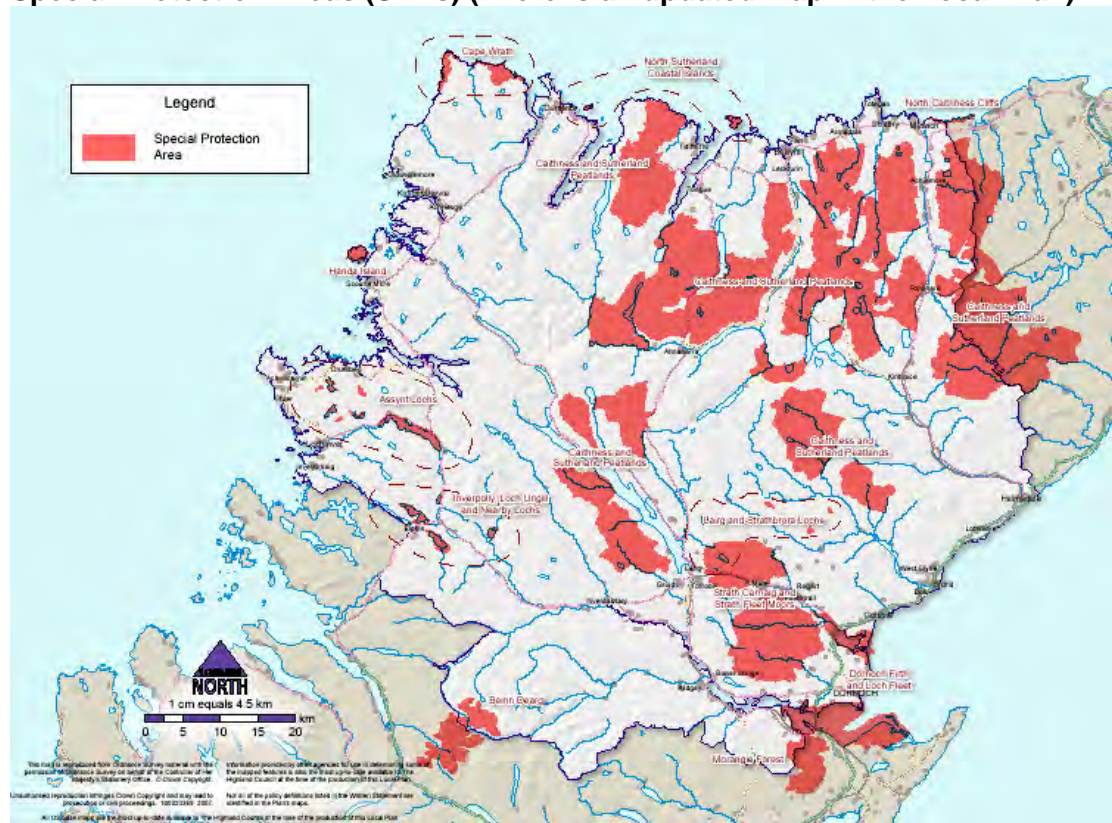
Map 6.3 Percentage of NSAs, SPAs, SACs and SSSIs in Sutherland

The maps below are extracts from the Map Booklet of the Sutherland Local Plan Deposit Draft November 2008. Larger scale maps can be viewed in the Local Plan map booklet.

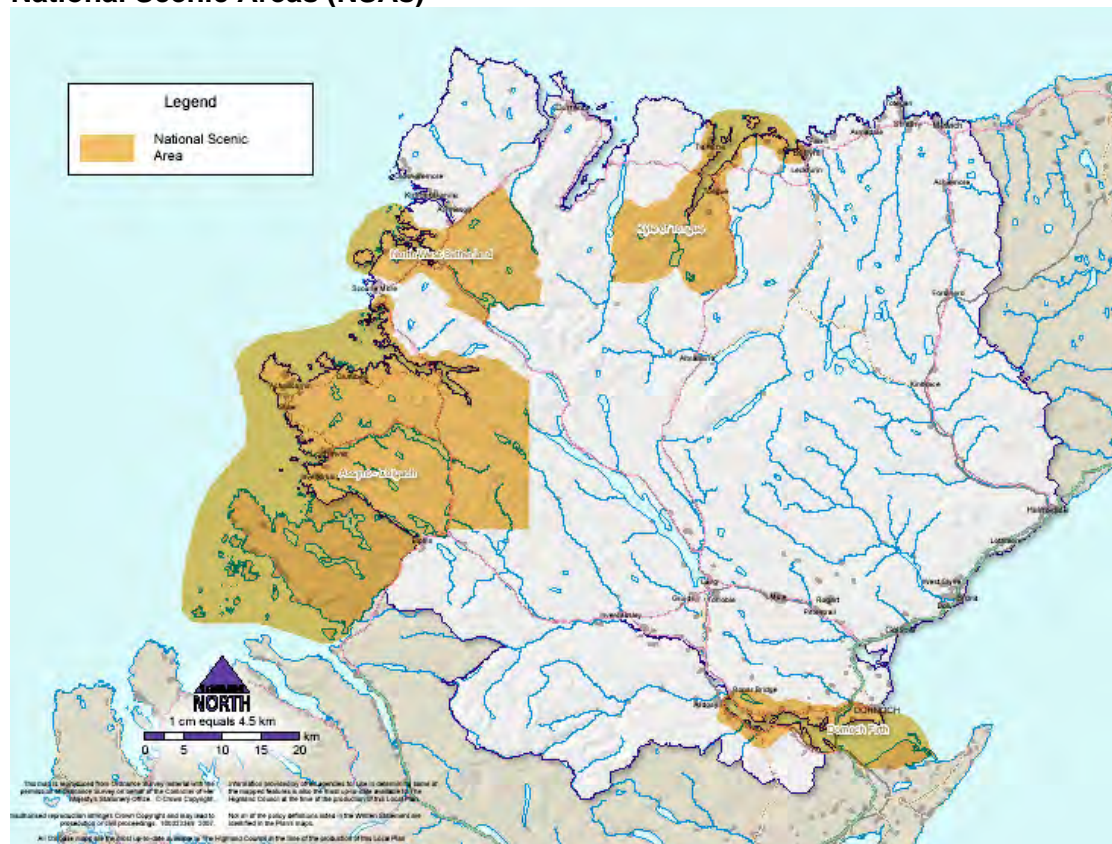
Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)



Special Protection Areas (SPAs) (There is an updated map in the Local Plan)



National Scenic Areas (NSAs)



Negative impact of access on habitat, species and the historic environment	Historic Environment and Biodiversity	The Local Plan will seek to ensure a balance between the demand for development while protecting the quality and character of the environment and ensure a key link with the access strategy and core path planning work.	General Policy 4
Tidal and riverine flood risk to new and existing development	Flood Risk	The Local Plan will seek to ensure that land at risk from flooding is not identified as suitable for development	General Policy 9
Reduced quality of watercourses and the coastal environment	Water	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.	General Policy 14
Continued reliance on inappropriate waste management practices	Potentially Contaminated Land	The Local Plan will provide clear reference to the Area Waste Plan and fully assess the need for additional waste management facilities.	General Policy 8
Negative impact of development on air quality	Air Quality	Due to the negligible air pollution in Sutherland and the lack of large development proposed particularly general industrial, the Local Plan does not require a General Policy specifically on air quality. However we will be relying upon the policy in the Structure Plan.	General Policy 4 and Structure Plan policy
Potential negative effect of identified contaminated land	Potentially Contaminated Land	The Local Plan will encourage development on suitable brownfield sites ensuring that contamination issues are fully addressed at the earliest possible stage.	General Policy 10
Negative impact of inappropriate aquaculture development	Water	The Local Plan will seek to balance the need for economic development in aquaculture against the quality of the environment. Aquaculture Framework Plans and Coastal Zone Management Plans deal with such development issues and the Highland-wide Local Development Plan will pursue the issue further.	General Policy 3, balanced with General Policy 4 and others
Loss of good quality croft land	Population and Historic Environment	The Local Plan will seek to ensure that good quality croft land is safeguarded from inappropriate development	General Policy 4
Loss of native woodland	Biodiversity	The Local Plan will identify	General

cover		areas of native woodland and ensure that the impact on these areas is fully considered in development proposals.	Policies 4, 11, 12 and 13
Loss of peatland cover	Biodiversity	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.	General Policies 4, 11, 12 and 13
Loss of land for recreation	Population	The Local Plan will recognise the importance of recreation and tourism and seek to put in place a policy framework which reflects this.	General Policy 2 and SPG on Open Space
Negative impact of development on the key species and habitats promoted through the Local Biodiversity Action Plan	Biodiversity	The Local Plan will ensure the key species and habitats promoted through the Local Biodiversity Action Plan are fully considered.	General Policy 12
Increased travel/energy use	Population and Air Pollution	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.	General Policy 19
Lack of sustainable design and construction techniques	Air Pollution	The Local Plan will promote sustainable design	General Policy 6 and SPG on Sustainable Design
Lack of provision of affordable housing	Population and Fragile Areas	The Local Plan will ensure a policy framework is in place to allow the delivery of affordable housing.	General Policy 5
Poor use of sustainable drainage schemes	Water	The Local Plan will provide clear reference to the key requirements for sustainable drainage systems.	General Policy 14
Potential negative impact on landscape character	Landscape	The Local Plan will take into account the ability of the landscape to allow for development.	General policy 1

6.3 Limitations of Data

There is a wealth of data on offer to the Highland Council to inform the baseline data for this Environmental Report. However, there are a number of factors which can limit the validity of this data:-

- Some parts of the Plan area have been more widely studied than others. Therefore, the quality and accuracy of information for some areas will be greater than for others.

- Collation of data can be prominently gathered on a Highland wide basis, therefore, it has proved difficult at times to dissect this information for the Sutherland area only.
- The data relevant to this Report is held in different forms. If information is held in databases and Geographic Information Systems it can be more easily queried than information which is only in the printed form in reports, books or even on websites.

Data limitations are discussed further in section 9 on monitoring.

6.4 Evolution of the Environment without the Local Plan

The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive (2001/42/EC) requires an assessment of the likely future of the environment should the Local Plan not be produced. The negative trends highlighted in table 6.3 above are likely to continue if there are no planning policies to help guide development to appropriate locations subject to suitable planning conditions.

7. Local Plan Strategic Options and Alternatives Considered

7.1 Alternatives

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.

7.2 Plan Preparation:

The main options concerning plan preparation, covering the ‘do nothing’ option at the highest level, are:

- PP1. Prepare a Local Plan
- PP2. Not prepare a Local Plan

- 7.3 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 four adopted Plans, which were adopted in 1983, 1987, 1995 and 2000. In addition, there would be continued reliance on the Highland Structure Plan and other relevant policy such as national planning policy. The Directive requires the likely evolution of the environment without the Plan to be considered. The potential problems identified in Table 6.3 are expected to continue in the absence of new policy or actions to address them.

Option PP1, Prepare a Local Plan, was chosen.

7.4 Growth Amount:

- 7.5 During the preparation of the “Sutherland Futures” issues and options consultation paper, a number of scenarios for population growth were considered. These were outlined in particular in the ‘Key Forecasts’ and ‘Towards a Sustainable Strategy’ sections of Sutherland Futures and also in the Draft Local Plan in the ‘Key Forecasts’ and ‘Strategy’ sections. The main scenarios referred to are:

- GA1. Number of people taking up residence in Sutherland reduced by half
- GA2. Projected population using national data and accepted pan-Highland assumptions
- GA3. Vision for a stable working age population

7.6 Options for low to medium levels of growth- GA1 and GA2- would generally result in lower requirement for new development such as housing and businesses than would option GA3. In simple terms this might appear to lead to lower levels of adverse effect on the environment. However, that basic analysis ignores the potential positive effects for the environment that can derive from well planned development, including redevelopment and regeneration. For example, these potential positive effects for the environment might arise due to: greater pressure to identify brownfield and derelict land capacity in order to accommodate development; as a result of positively identifying sites to accommodate growth, reduced pressure to permit sporadic development; potential to create open spaces and new habitats as part of development; as a result of the quantum and focussing of investment, greater scope for environmental improvements and sustainable communities to be achieved. Whilst the 'high' Growth Amount option has the potential to lead to additional environmental pressure being put on resources, the actual amounts of development and the management and distribution of it in Sutherland mean that any such addition to pressure is small overall. Furthermore, the specific policies and proposals of the Plan that provide for growth have been subject to SEA in their preparation and pick up on any particular issues. As indicated in the Draft Local Plan, the higher level of growth required to support option GA3 will bring social and economic benefits to Sutherland if properly planned. This will depend in part upon the strategy for the management of growth.

Option GA3, Vision for a stable working age population, was chosen.

7.7 Growth Management:

7.8 The main options for growth management, in terms of how the Local Plan might guide the location of development, are:

- GM1 Focussing growth through defining settlement development areas including boundaries for small townships
- GM2 Focussing growth through defining settlement development areas but not including boundaries for small townships
- GM3 Focussing growth without defining settlement development areas
- GM4 Dispersing growth throughout the Plan area

7.9 Essentially these options concern the extent to which the Local Plan should identify specific areas in order to provide clarity about development opportunity. Identifying settlement development areas has the advantage that it helps to provide such clarity and focus and in particular to promote sustainable development principles as outlined in the Draft Local Plan 'Strategy'. It is particularly valuable given the choice of Option GA3 for a higher level of growth to be accommodated in Sutherland. This needs to be carefully planned, having regard to likely environmental, social and economic effects and the need to promote delivery of such growth. Settlement development areas can help to consolidate the benefits that may be derived from development in order to strengthen the service centres of communities.

Balancing with this can be a policy framework which provides for the possibility of development outwith settlement development areas, of a type and scale which has regard to the principles of sustainable development, to constraints within and outwith the settlement development areas and to opportunities to support fragile communities. For the very small scale development that might be appropriate in dispersed townships, it would be difficult for the Local Plan to pre-empt site selection and addressing proposals through general policies of the Plan, in particular policies 3, 4 and 16 of the Draft Local Plan, is appropriate. The explanation of the methodology used in looking at individual site options, particularly in north and west Sutherland (see paragraph 8.10) is relevant here. The identification of settlement development areas helps to positively plan for development in areas where there is likely to be most pressure for it and promotes meaningful consultation on the Draft Local Plan and the addressing of any potential environmental pressures through specific provisions in the Plan or through the general policy framework. Furthermore, the specific policies and proposals of the Plan that provide for growth will be subject to SEA in their preparation.

Option GM2, Focussing growth through defining settlement development areas but not including boundaries for small townships, was chosen.

7.10 SEA Objectives

The Environmental Report identifies 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

7.11 SEA objectives (listed below) were identified to incorporate the above areas, and these form the basis on which the plan is assessed. The 24 SEA objectives were agreed in principle with the Consultation Authorities during the development of the Strategic Environmental Assessment methodology for Wester Ross Local Plan.

25. Protect and Enhance Human Health
26. Minimise exposure to noise and vibration
27. Reduce and prevent crime and fear of crime
28. Increase social inclusion
29. Protect and where appropriate enhance the historic environment
30. Enhance landscape and townscape character
31. Value and protect diversity and local distinctiveness
32. Retain and improve quality and quantity of publicly accessible open space

33. Reduce single houses/small groups of houses in open countryside
34. Improve quality of built environment
35. Reduce vulnerability to the effects of climate change
36. Increase proportion of energy from renewable sources
37. Minimise waste, then re-use or recover it through recycling, composting or energy recovery
38. Reduce need for energy
39. Increase use of sustainable building techniques
40. Reduce air pollution to levels that do not damage natural systems, including contribution to climate change
41. Reduce the need to travel
42. Increase potential use of public transport
43. Avoid impact to and where possible enhance the water environment
44. Maintain water abstraction, run-off and recharge within carrying capacity (inc. future capacity)
45. Reduce contamination, safeguard soil quantity and quality
46. Protect, enhance and where necessary restore designated wildlife sites and protected species
47. Improve biodiversity, avoiding irreversible losses
48. Provide appropriate opportunities for people to come into contact with and appreciate wildlife and wild places

7.12 Highland Structure Plan Sustainability Objectives

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 24 SEA objectives.

Table 7.1 Local Plan Objectives and their relation to the SEA Objectives

Predicted impact (+ green = positive, - red = negative, 0 yellow = neutral)

Environment Effect Scoring

Symbol	Description of Effect
+	Small positive effect
++	Significant positive effect
0	Neutral or no effect
-	Small negative effect
--	Significant negative effect

We recognise that levels of mitigation will vary, but the scores recorded in table 5.1 are based on “typical” current practice. However, we will strive for as much mitigation as possible. The following assessment has been undertaken with the assumption that the General Policies of the Local Plan will be used for mitigation purposes.

SEA Objectives Plan Objectives																									
	Human Health	Noise	Crime	Social Inclusion	Historic Environment	Landscape/Townscape	Local Distinctiveness	Open Space	Housing in the Countryside	Built Environment	Climate Change	Renewable Energy	Waste Management	Energy	Sustainable Building Techniques	Air Pollution	Sustainable Travel	Public Transport	Water Environment	Water Abstraction	Contamination	Designated Wildlife/Protected Species	Biodiversity	Access to Wildlife	

SEA Objectives Plan Objectives	Human Health	Noise	Crime	Social Inclusion	Historic Environment	Landscape/Townscape	Local Distinctiveness	Open Space	Housing in the Countryside	Built Environment	Climate Change	Renewable Energy	Waste Management	Energy	Sustainable Building Techniques	Air Pollution	Sustainable Travel	Public Transport	Water Environment	Water Abstraction	Contamination	Designated Wildlife/Protected Species	Biodiversity	Access to Wildlife	
a) Conserve & promote the uniqueness of Sutherland's natural, built and cultural identity, & its contribution to the identity of the Highlands as a whole, whilst recognising the diversity within Sutherland itself and the relationship with adjacent areas	+	0	0	0	+	+	++	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	0	
Discussion and Possible Mitigation	The Plan Objective specifically mentions the conservation of the natural, built and cultural heritage and specifically that of Sutherland, therefore it has a significant positive effect on local distinctiveness.																								
b) Accommodate growth & 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.	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	+	+	0
Discussion and Possible Mitigation																									
c) Respect evidence of the way in which communities have interacted with their environment, which is a key part of natural, built and cultural identity and heritage.	0	0	0	0	+	0	+	0	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Discussion and Possible Mitigation	Amended General Policies 4, 11, 12 and 13 provide mitigation for any potential negative impacts on such interests as croft land, landscape, habitats and species.																								

SEA Objectives Plan Objectives	Human Health	Noise	Crime	Social Inclusion	Historic Environment	Landscape/Townscape	Local Distinctiveness	Open Space	Housing in the Countryside	Built Environment	Climate Change	Renewable Energy	Waste Management	Energy	Sustainable Building Techniques	Air Pollution	Sustainable Travel	Public Transport	Water Environment	Water Abstraction	Contamination	Designated Wildlife/Protected Species	Biodiversity	Access to Wildlife
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, cooperative working and effective woodland practice.	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Discussion and Possible Mitigation																								
e) Safeguard important assets of the natural environment for their own sake and as an asset to the Sutherland community.	+	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	+	+	+
Discussion and Possible Mitigation																								
f) Recognising that the community's existence will impacts in some way upon the natural environment, to avoid or otherwise 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.	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0
Discussion and Possible Mitigation																								

SEA Objectives Plan Objectives	Human Health	Noise	Crime	Social Inclusion	Historic Environment	Landscape/Townscape	Local Distinctiveness	Open Space	Housing in the Countryside	Built Environment	Climate Change	Renewable Energy	Waste Management	Energy	Sustainable Building Techniques	Air Pollution	Sustainable Travel	Public Transport	Water Environment	Water Abstraction	Contamination	Designated Wildlife/Protected Species	Biodiversity	Access to Wildlife
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.	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	+	+	+
Discussion and Possible Mitigation																								
h) Promote opportunities for renewable energy development, particularly small-scale community-led schemes and implementation of sustainable waste management solutions.	0	-	0	0	0	-	-	0	0	0	+	++	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	0
Discussion and Possible Mitigation	The Highland Renewable Energy Strategy provides mitigation for this Plan Objective. Emerging planning guidelines will provide a robust spatial framework for consideration of wind energy proposals.																							
i) Recognise that whilst opportunities will be pursued to increase the availability of sustainable travel choice and to improve accessibility, given the rural nature of the Plan area significant use of the private car can be expected to continue for many trips 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.	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	0	-	0	0	-	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Discussion and Possible Mitigation	Whilst the Local Plan recognises that there will always be a certain amount of reliance on private cars, it is encouraging sustainable travel choices through General Policy 19 Travel.																							

SEA Objectives Plan Objectives	Human Health	Noise	Crime	Social Inclusion	Historic Environment	Landscape/Townscape	Local Distinctiveness	Open Space	Housing in the Countryside	Built Environment	Climate Change	Renewable Energy	Waste Management	Energy	Sustainable Building Techniques	Air Pollution	Sustainable Travel	Public Transport	Water Environment	Water Abstraction	Contamination	Designated Wildlife/Protected Species	Biodiversity	Access to Wildlife	
j) Do what we can to encourage the retention of key local services in Sutherland's communities, including a strategic network of fuel stations, support provision of accessible and varied leisure and recreational facilities and promote innovation in the delivery of public services as part of sustainable communities	+	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Discussion and Possible Mitigation																									
k) Focus large scale development on larger settlements and/or at transport/utility nodes which can offer a range of services within easy reach.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Discussion and Possible Mitigation																									
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	+	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Discussion and Possible Mitigation																									
m) Deliver improvements required to services and facilities in step with housing development. An Action Programme will seek to guide implementation and track progress.	+	0	0	+	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	+	
Discussion and Possible Mitigation																									

SEA Objectives Plan Objectives	Human Health	Noise	Crime	Social Inclusion	Historic Environment	Landscape/Townscape	Local Distinctiveness	Open Space	Housing in the Countryside	Built Environment	Climate Change	Renewable Energy	Waste Management	Energy	Sustainable Building Techniques	Air Pollution	Sustainable Travel	Public Transport	Water Environment	Water Abstraction	Contamination	Designated Wildlife/Protected Species	Biodiversity	Access to Wildlife
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 settlement.	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Discussion and Possible Mitigation																								
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.	0	0	0	+	0	-	0	0	++	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Discussion and Possible Mitigation	Where there is potential negative impact on landscape/townscape, developer requirements have been specified, such as masterplans and design briefs, to address such issues. A reference to the Landscape Capacity Study for Sutherland is also included in the Local Plan. This objective is trying to ensure that there is an adequate supply of land for development; it does not necessarily mean that development will happen. By identifying suitable locations the Local Plan is trying to encourage development in appropriate places and decrease the negative impact of sporadic development.																							
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.	0	0	0	+	0	0	+	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0
Discussion and Possible Mitigation																								

SEA Objectives	Human Health	Noise	Crime	Social Inclusion	Historic Environment	Landscape/Townscape	Local Distinctiveness	Open Space	Housing in the Countryside	Built Environment	Climate Change	Renewable Energy	Waste Management	Energy	Sustainable Building Techniques	Air Pollution	Sustainable Travel	Public Transport	Water Environment	Water Abstraction	Contamination	Designated Wildlife/Protected Species	Biodiversity	Access to Wildlife
Plan Objectives																								
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 interest of acknowledged importance.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Discussion and Possible Mitigation																								
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.	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Discussion and Possible Mitigation																								
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.	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0	0	0	0	0
Discussion and Possible Mitigation																								
t) Contribute to the creation, enhancement or regeneration of communities following sustainable development principles.	0	0	+	+	+	+	+	+	0	+	+	+	+	+	+	0	+	+	+	0	+	+	+	+
Discussion and Possible Mitigation																								

SEA Objectives Plan Objectives	Human Health	Noise	Crime	Social Inclusion	Historic Environment	Landscape/Townscape	Local Distinctiveness	Open Space	Housing in the Countryside	Built Environment	Climate Change	Renewable Energy	Waste Management	Energy	Sustainable Building Techniques	Air Pollution	Sustainable Travel	Public Transport	Water Environment	Water Abstraction	Contamination	Designated Wildlife/Protected Species	Biodiversity	Access to Wildlife
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	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Discussion and Possible Mitigation																								
v) Seek good design quality, place-making and innovation in new development and encourage the retention of key services in communities	+	0	+	+	+	+	++	+	0	++	0	+	+	+	++	0	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	+
Discussion and Possible Mitigation																								
w) By working with the community and other agencies in implementing the Local Plan, deliver aspects of the Community Plan.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Discussion and Possible Mitigation																								
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.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

SEA Objectives	
Plan Objectives	Human Health
	Noise
	Crime
	Social Inclusion
	Historic Environment
	Landscape/Townscape
	Local Distinctiveness
	Open Space
	Housing in the Countryside
	Built Environment
	Climate Change
	Renewable Energy
	Waste Management
	Energy
	Sustainable Building Techniques
	Air Pollution
	Sustainable Travel
	Public Transport
	Water Environment
	Water Abstraction
	Contamination
	Designated Wildlife/Protected Species
	Biodiversity
	Access to Wildlife
Discussion and Possible Mitigation	

8. The Plan's General Policies and their compatibility with the SEA Objectives

8.1 SEA Objectives

The SEA Objectives are informed by the need to cover the range of issues outlined in Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations. This Schedule covers issues such as material assets and landscape, the historic environment, biodiversity, flora and fauna, air, water, soil and climatic factors and human health. The SEA Objectives are also informed by environmental issues that are particularly prevalent in the Sutherland area. These Objectives are listed below:-

1. Protect and Enhance Human Health
2. Minimise exposure to noise and vibration
3. Reduce and prevent crime and fear of crime
4. Increase social inclusion
5. Protect and where appropriate enhance the historic environment
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. Reduce single houses/small groups of houses in open countryside
10. Improve quality of built environment
11. Reduce vulnerability to the effects of climate change
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 building 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. Avoid impact to and where possible enhance the water environment
20. Maintain water abstraction, run-off and recharge within carrying capacity (inc. future capacity)
21. Reduce contamination, safeguard soil quantity and quality
22. Protect, enhance and where necessary restore designated wildlife sites and protected species
23. Improve biodiversity, avoiding irreversible losses
24. Provide appropriate opportunities for people to come into contact with and appreciate wildlife and wild places

8.2 The 24 SEA Objectives provide a means of assessing the policies and objectives of the Local Plan. The tables below offer an assessment of the Plan's general policies against the SEA objectives.

8.3 Assessment of environmental impacts of Local Plan general policies

Site matrices will show developer requirements that are required for mitigation.

(The General Policies listed below are from the Adopted Sutherland Local Plan)

Policy 1 Settlement Development Areas – We will support proposals within *Settlement Development Areas* (as shown on the Proposals Map insets) if they meet the requirements of Structure Plan Policy G2 Design for Sustainability, as shown on the page following Policy 6 of this Plan..

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

Predicted impact (++) significant positive effect, + small positive effect, 0 neutral or no effect, -- significant negative effect, - small negative effect)

SEA Objective	Human Health	Noise	Crime	Social Inclusion	Historic Environment	Landscape/Townscape	Local Distinctiveness	Open Space	Housing in the Countryside	Built Environment	Climate Change	Renewable Energy	Waste Management	Energy	Sustainable Housing Techniques	Air Pollution	Sustainable Travel	Public Transport	Water Environment	Water Abstraction	Contamination	Designated Wildlife/Protected Species	Biodiversity	Access to Wildlife
Policy																								
SDA	+	-	0	+	0	0	0	+	+	0	+	+	+	+	0	0	+	+	+	0	0	+	0	0
Discussion and Possible Mitigation of Negative Effect	<p>Noise - The design of settlements to promote active travel could offset potential noise pollution.</p> <p>Historic Environment - There are allocations within SDAs which have developer requirements as mitigation. If it is likely that any built heritage is going to be affected then a developer requirement can be used as mitigation.</p> <p>Climate change, renewable energy, energy and designated sites – by encouraging development within SDAs it is more likely that district heating schemes are viable. Concentrating development in established settlements encourages less car use. Any new development is also likely to be in keeping with existing settlement patterns.</p> <p>Landscape – proposals will be judged against how compatible they are with landscape character.</p>																							

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.

Predicted impact (++ significant positive effect, + small positive effect, 0 neutral or no effect, -- significant negative effect, - small negative effect)

SEA Objective																								
Policy	Human Health	Noise	Crime	Social Inclusion	Historic Environment	Landscape/Townscape	Local Distinctiveness	Open Space	Housing in the Countryside	Built Environment	Climate Change	Renewable Energy	Waste Management	Energy	Sustainable Housing Techniques	Air Pollution	Sustainable Travel	Public Transport	Water Environment	Water Abstraction	Contamination	Designated Wildlife/Protected Species	Biodiversity	Access to Wildlife
Devt. Factors and Developer Requirements	+	+	+	+	0	+	+	+	+	+	0	+	+	+	+	0	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Discussion and Possible Mitigation of Negative Effect	<p>Historic Environment – this general policy has a neutral impact on the historic environment. Contamination – this general policy can have a positive impact on contamination as a developer requirement can be used as mitigation.</p>																							

Policy 3 Wider Countryside – Development in the wider countryside including crofting townships may be supported where it:

- helps to maintain and strengthen local population and services, particularly within communities currently experiencing difficulty (fragile areas);
- is sympathetic to existing patterns of development in the area;
- is compatible with landscape character and capacity;
- is located, if possible, to avoid the loss of locally important croft land;
- is of an acceptable design and;
- is adequately serviced (to address drainage constraints and avoid undue public expenditure or infrastructure out of keeping with the rural character of the area).

Note: Housing in the countryside of the hinterland around towns (see glossary, Proposals Map and Structure Plan Policy H3) will be assessed in the context of Policy 16: Housing in the Countryside.

Predicted impact (++ significant positive effect, + small positive effect, 0 neutral or no effect, -- significant negative effect, - small negative effect)

SEA Objective	Human Health	Noise	Crime	Social Inclusion	Historic Environment	Landscape/Townscape	Local Distinctiveness	Open Space	Housing in the Countryside	Built Environment	Climate Change	Renewable Energy	Waste Management	Energy	Sustainable Housing Techniques	Air Pollution	Sustainable Travel	Public Transport	Water Environment	Water Abstraction	Contamination	Designated Wildlife/Protected Species	Biodiversity	Access to Wildlife
Wider Country-side	0	0	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	0	0	-	-	0	-	--	--	-	0	0	0	0	0
Discussion and Possible Mitigation of Negative Effect	<p>Social Inclusion and Housing in the Countryside – the negative aspects associated with housing in the wider countryside can be offset by a permissive approach to affordable housing in the countryside and the promotion of the development of new crofts which can both enable greater social inclusion by offering affordable accommodation solutions.</p> <p>Reduce the Need for Energy - The Council will encourage the promotion of the renewable energy generation in the wider countryside.</p> <p>Air Pollution, Sustainable Travel, Public Transport, Water Environment – The Council will encourage the use of active and public transport to reduce any potential pollution problems.</p> <p>Designated Wildlife/Species – The Council will highlight designated areas in the development plan and will aim to avoid the unsympathetic development of these areas. One house in the countryside is less likely to have impact, however it is acknowledged that lots of single houses could have a cumulative impact, but these effects are not predictable.</p> <p>Landscape character – the third bullet point in the General Policy has changed and Landscape Character Assessment principles are being strengthened in the Local Plan. We are encouraging developers to be aware of landscape however a design guide is not yet available. There is also a bullet point which states that we may support development where it is sympathetic to existing patterns of development in an area.</p> <p>Biodiversity and designated wildlife – neutral effects as General Policies 11, 12 and 13 have been amended to provide mitigation.</p> <p>Water environment – private systems should discharge to land rather than water.</p>																							

Policy 4 Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage - All development proposals will be assessed, taking into account any impact on the feature and its setting, in the context of the policy framework detailed in Appendix 1. The following criteria will also apply:

1. For features of local/regional importance we will allow developments if we believe that they will not have an unacceptable impact on the amenity and heritage resource.

2. For features of national importance we will allow developments that can be shown not to compromise the amenity and heritage resource. 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. For features of international importance (Natura 2000 (SPA, SAC) and Ramsar sites), developments likely to have a significant effect on a site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, and which are not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site for nature conservation will be subject to an appropriate assessment. Where we are unable to ascertain that a proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of a site, we will only allow development if there is no alternative solution and there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature. Where a priority habitat or species (as defined in Annex 1 of the Habitats Directive) would be affected, development in such circumstances will only be allowed if the reasons for overriding public interest relate to human health, public safety, beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment, or other reasons subject to the opinion of the European Commission (via Scottish Ministers). Where we are unable to ascertain that a proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of a site, the proposal will not be in accordance with the development plan within the meaning of Section 25(1) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997.

Note: Whilst Appendix 1 groups features under the headings international, national and local/regional importance, this does not suggest that the relevant policy framework will be any less rigorously applied. This policy should also be read in conjunction with the Background maps.

Predicted impact (++) significant positive effect, + small positive effect, 0 neutral or no effect, -- significant negative effect, - small negative effect)

SEA Objective	
Policy	
	Human Health
	Noise
	Crime
	Social Inclusion
	Historic Environment
	Landscape/Townscape
	Local Distinctiveness
	Open Space
	Housing in the Countryside
	Built Environment
	Climate Change
	Renewable Energy
	Waste Management
	Energy
	Sustainable Housing Techniques
	Air Pollution
	Sustainable Travel
	Public Transport
	Water Environment
	Water Abstraction
	Contamination
	Designated Wildlife/Protected Species
	Biodiversity
	Access to Wildlife

Heritage	0	0	0	0	++	+	+	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	++	+	+
Discussion and Possible Mitigation of Negative Effect	<p>The word "unreasonable" has been changed in the General Policy to "unacceptable". This General Policy is aimed at protecting, not enhancing the natural, built and cultural heritage.</p>																								

Policy 5 Affordable Housing - In accordance with the Supplementary Planning Guidance 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 Guidance), 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, built 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 terms of standard of design and average density.

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 the same landownership.

Predicted impact (++) significant positive effect, + small positive effect, 0 neutral or no effect, -- significant negative effect, - small negative effect)

SEA Objective	Policy	Human Health																						
		Noise																						
		Crime																						
		Social Inclusion																						
		Historic Environment																						
		Landscape/Townscape																						
		Local Distinctiveness																						
		Open Space																						
		Housing in the Countryside																						
		Built Environment																						
		Climate Change																						
		Renewable Energy																						
		Waste Management																						
		Energy																						
		Sustainable Housing Techniques																						
		Air Pollution																						
		Sustainable Travel																						
		Public Transport																						
Water Environment																								
Water Abstraction																								
Contamination																								
Designated Wildlife/Protected Species																								
Biodiversity																								
Access to Wildlife																								
Affordable Housing																								
Discussion and Possible Mitigation of Negative Effect	Historic Environment – Affordable housing providers are more likely to use historic buildings than private developers.																							

Policy 6 Designing for Sustainability – We will judge development proposals against a ‘Design for Sustainability’ statement where developers have been required to submit one with their planning application in line with the implementation of the Development Plan Policy Guideline on Designing for Sustainability.

Predicted impact (++ significant positive effect, + small positive effect, 0 neutral or no effect, -- significant negative effect, - small negative effect)

SEA Objective	Policy	Human Health	
		Noise	
		Crime	
		Social Inclusion	
		Historic Environment	
		Landscape/Townscape	
		Local Distinctiveness	
		Open Space	
		Housing in the Countryside	
		Built Environment	
		Climate Change	
		Renewable Energy	
		Waste Management	
		Energy	
		Sustainable Housing Techniques	
		Air Pollution	
		Sustainable Travel	
		Public Transport	
Water Environment			
Water Abstraction			
Contamination			
Designated Wildlife/Protected Species			
Biodiversity			
Access to Wildlife			

Design for Sustainability	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Discussion and Possible Mitigation of Negative Effect	<p>Policy G2 is from the Structure Plan, therefore it can not be changed; It also covers crime. The supporting text for the General Policy has been updated. Historic Environment – the DPPG covers design of the historic environment. The DPPG covers habitats, crime and noise (safe and secure environments). The General Policy has been amended and Design for Sustainability Statement will normally be required with planning applications. A Checklist will be rolled out in due course.</p>																							

Policy 7 Waste Water Treatment – Connection to the public sewer is required for all new development proposals within settlement development areas (with a population equivalent of more than 2000) or wherever single developments equivalent to 25 or more units are proposed.

In all other cases a connection to the public sewer will be required, unless the applicant can demonstrate that:

- 1) the development is unable to connect to public sewer for technical or economic reasons; and
- 2) that the proposal is not likely to result in or add to significant environmental or health problems.

The council's preference is that any private system should discharge to land rather than water.

For all proposals where connection to the public sewer is not currently feasible and Scottish Water has confirmed public sewer improvements or first time public sewerage within its investment programme that would enable the development to connect, a private system would only be supported if:

- the system is designed and built to a standard which will allow adoption by Scottish Water;
- the system is designed such that it can be easily connected to a public sewer in the future.

Typically this will mean providing a drainage line up to a likely point of connection. The developer must provide Scottish Water with the funds which will allow Scottish Water to complete the connection once the sewerage system has been upgraded.

Predicted impact (++ significant positive effect, + small positive effect, 0 neutral or no effect, -- significant negative effect, - small negative effect)

SEA Objective																																				
Policy	Human Health	Noise	Crime	Social Inclusion	Historic Environment	Landscape/Townscape	Local Distinctiveness	Open Space	Housing in the Countryside	Built Environment	Climate Change	Renewable Energy	Waste Management	Energy	Sustainable Housing Techniques	Air Pollution	Sustainable Travel	Public Transport	Water Environment	Water Abstraction	Contamination	Designated Wildlife/Protected Species	Biodiversity	Access to Wildlife												
Waste Water																																				

Treatment	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	+	+	+	0
Discussion and Possible Mitigation of Negative Effect	Changes have been made to the General Policy to ensure positive effects are achieved.																									

Policy 8 Waste Management – Proposals for waste management facilities will be assessed in line with the approach set out within the Highland Structure Plan subject to taking into account the Highland Area Waste Plan, the National Waste Plan, the National Waste Strategy Scottish Planning Policy and where relevant SEPA's Thermal Treatment Guidelines. Developers will be expected to demonstrate how these considerations have been taken into account.

Waste management facilities will be supported:

- On business or industrial land in line with the Highland Structure Plan; or
- In the case of community composting facilities and recycling points, in other locations close to source;

provided that they are compatible with surrounding uses and meet other criteria relating to environmental impact and transportation.

Existing or former waste management facilities and their sites shall be safeguarded, except where demonstrated to be surplus or no longer suitable to meet future requirements. Development proposals on or adjacent to the site of such a facility will be assessed against the National Waste Strategy, the National Waste Plan, and the Highland Area Waste Plan, and will be subject to consultation with SEPA. If the proposed development would adversely affect the operation of the waste management facility, or would be likely to cause the site of the facility to be unavailable or unsuitable for future waste management purposes, for which it will be required, the proposed development will not be favoured.

In considering proposals for any type of new development, the Council will also take into account the extent to which they effectively manage and promote the reduction, reuse, recycling and recovery of waste during the construction and operation of the development including any measures for waste separation and collection at source.

Predicted impact (++ significant positive effect, + small positive effect, 0 neutral or no effect, -- significant negative effect, - small negative effect)

SEA Objective																																							
Policy	Human Health	Noise	Crime	Social Inclusion	Historic Environment	Landscape/Townscape	Local Distinctiveness	Open Space	Housing in the Countryside	Built Environment	Climate Change	Renewable Energy	Waste Management	Energy	Sustainable Housing Techniques	Air Pollution	Sustainable Travel	Public Transport	Water Environment	Water Abstraction	Contamination	Designated Wildlife/Protected Species	Biodiversity	Access to Wildlife															
Flood Risk	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Discussion and Possible Mitigation of Negative Effect	Water environment, human health, climate change – the General Policy has been amended and we are trying to avoid flood risk areas where possible.																																						

Policy 10 Physical Constraints – Subject also to the principle of development, developers will be expected to demonstrate appropriate mitigation, to the satisfaction of the Planning Authority, if their proposals affect or are affected by the constraints below (where appropriate these are shown on the background maps). Where relevant developers will need to have regard to both existing constraint features and to those consented but not yet built.

- **Poorly drained areas**
- **Wind farms/turbines**
- **ENA Standards 43-8: "Overhead Line Clearances" (distance from power lines)**
- **Areas of excessive slope (with a gradient of over 1 in 7)**
- **Regard must be had to the safeguarding of new, existing and former waste sites (in accordance with SPP10Scottish Planning Policy) as well as to any potential impact that the operation of facilities on such a site might have on the proposed development**
- **Areas that could erode or subside**
- **Safeguard areas around sewage treatment works**
- **Within 400m of an active quarry**
- **Any waters that an EU Directive applies to in accordance with PAN79**
- **Areas affected by Radon Gas**
- **Hazardous Sites as shown on the Hazard Sites consultation area map**
- **Radio Telecommunications Services**
- **HSE Notifiable Hazardous Sites**
- **Trunk, A Roads and Rail Lines There is a national policy presumption against new junctions onto Trunk Roads and developers will be required to justify setting this aside.**
- **Trunk Water Mains and Water Catchment Areas**

- Land with possible contamination issues (Where the past history of land-use/management indicates that contamination may have occurred, developers will be required to undertake a risk assessment to establish the level of contamination if any; provide an assessment of the impact of contamination including any contaminant migration and effect on the water environment controlled waters together with provisions for treatment/amelioration; and decontaminate the site before any unit is occupied and decontaminate the site prior to any further occupation.)

Predicted impact (++) significant positive effect, + small positive effect, 0 neutral or no effect, -- significant negative effect, - small negative effect)

SEA Objective																																									
Policy	Human Health	Noise	Crime	Social Inclusion	Historic Environment	Landscape/Townscape	Local Distinctiveness	Open Space	Housing in the Countryside	Built Environment	Climate Change	Renewable Energy	Waste Management	Energy	Sustainable Housing Techniques	Air Pollution	Sustainable Travel	Public Transport	Water Environment	Water Abstraction	Contamination	Designated Wildlife/Protected Species	Biodiversity	Access to Wildlife																	
Physical Constraints	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0	0	+	0	0	0	++	0	+	0	0	0																
Discussion and Possible Mitigation of Negative Effect	Changes have been made to the General Policy. Waste management – a cross reference to SPP10 has been made in the General Policy, therefore there is a positive effect.																																								

Policy 11 Protected Species – Where there is good reason to believe that a protected species is present on site or may be affected by a proposed development, we will require a survey to be carried out to establish any such presence before determining the application.

Development that is likely to have an adverse effect on European Protected Species (see Glossary) will only be permitted where:

- There is no satisfactory alternative; and
- Development is required for preserving public health or public safety or other imperative reasons of overriding public interest including those of a social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment; and
- Development will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the population of the species concerned at a favourable conservation status in their natural range.

Development that is likely to have an adverse effect on protected bird species (see Glossary) will only be permitted where:

- There is no other satisfactory solution; and
- Development is required in the interests of public health or public safety.

Development that is likely to have an adverse effect on other protected animals and plants (see Glossary) will only be permitted where the development is required for preserving public health or public safety.

Predicted impact (++ significant positive effect, + small positive effect, 0 neutral or no effect, -- significant negative effect, - small negative effect)

SEA Objective	Policy	Human Health	Noise	Crime	Social Inclusion	Historic Environment	Landscape/Townscape	Local Distinctiveness	Open Space	Housing in the Countryside	Built Environment	Climate Change	Renewable Energy	Waste Management	Energy	Sustainable Housing Techniques	Air Pollution	Sustainable Travel	Public Transport	Water Environment	Water Abstraction	Contamination	Designated Wildlife/Protected Species	Biodiversity	Access to Wildlife
		Protected Species	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	++	++
Discussion and Possible Mitigation of Negative Effect		This General Policy has been amended as suggested by SNH.																							

Policy 12 Other Important Species - Development proposals should avoid adverse effects on the following species if not protected by other legislation or by nature conservation site designations:

- Species listed in Annexes II and V of the EC Habitats Directive
- Priority species listed in the UK and Local Biodiversity Action Plans
- Species of principal importance included on the Scottish Biodiversity List
- Badgers under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992

We will use conditions and agreements to ensure that harm to these species is avoided.

Predicted impact (++ significant positive effect, + small positive effect, 0 neutral or no effect, -- significant negative effect, - small negative effect)

SEA Objective	Policy	Human Health	+
		Noise	0
SEA Objective	Policy	Crime	0
		Social Inclusion	0
SEA Objective	Policy	Historic Environment	0
		Landscape/Townscape	+
SEA Objective	Policy	Local Distinctiveness	0
		Open Space	+
SEA Objective	Policy	Housing in the Countryside	0
		Built Environment	0
SEA Objective	Policy	Climate Change	+
		Renewable Energy	0
SEA Objective	Policy	Waste Management	0
		Energy	0
SEA Objective	Policy	Sustainable Housing Techniques	0
		Air Pollution	0
SEA Objective	Policy	Sustainable Travel	0
		Public Transport	0
SEA Objective	Policy	Water Environment	+
		Water Abstraction	0
SEA Objective	Policy	Contamination	0
		Designated Wildlife/Protected Species	++
SEA Objective	Policy	Biodiversity	++
		Access to Wildlife	++
Important Habitats			
Discussion and Possible Mitigation of Negative Effect	The General Policy has been amended as suggested by SNH.		

Policy 14 Surface Water Drainage – All proposed development must be drained by Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) designed in accordance with The CIRIA SuDS Manual and, where appropriate, the Sewers for Scotland Manual 2nd Edition. Planning applications should be submitted with information in accordance with PAN 69 paragraphs 23 and 24.

Predicted impact (++ significant positive effect, + small positive effect, 0 neutral or no effect, -- significant negative effect, - small negative effect)

SEA Objective	Policy	Human Health
		Noise
SEA Objective	Policy	Crime
		Social Inclusion
SEA Objective	Policy	Historic Environment
		Landscape/Townscape
SEA Objective	Policy	Local Distinctiveness
		Open Space
SEA Objective	Policy	Housing in the Countryside
		Built Environment
SEA Objective	Policy	Climate Change
		Renewable Energy
SEA Objective	Policy	Waste Management
		Energy
SEA Objective	Policy	Sustainable Housing Techniques
		Air Pollution
SEA Objective	Policy	Sustainable Travel
		Public Transport
SEA Objective	Policy	Water Environment
		Water Abstraction
SEA Objective	Policy	Contamination
		Designated Wildlife/Protected Species
SEA Objective	Policy	Biodiversity
		Access to Wildlife

Surface Water Drainage	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	++	+	0	0	+	+
Discussion and Possible Mitigation of Negative Effect	The General Policy has been amended to enhance the positive effects. Water environment – where we have been aware of poor surface drainage we have asked for net betterment.																								

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.

Predicted impact (++ significant positive effect, + small positive effect, 0 neutral or no effect, -- significant negative effect, - small negative effect)

SEA Objective	Policy	Developer Contributions	Discussion and Possible Mitigation of Negative Effect
	Human Health	+	
	Noise	0	
	Crime	0	
	Social Inclusion	+	
	Historic Environment	0	
	Landscape/Townscape	+	
	Local Distinctiveness	0	
	Open Space	+	
	Housing in the Countryside	0	
	Built Environment	0	
	Climate Change	0	
	Renewable Energy	0	
	Waste Management	+	
	Energy	0	
	Sustainable Housing Techniques	0	
	Air Pollution	0	
	Sustainable Travel	+	
	Public Transport	+	
	Water Environment	+	
	Water Abstraction	0	
	Contamination	+	
	Designated Wildlife/Protected Species	0	
	Biodiversity	0	
	Access to Wildlife	+	

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 Interim Supplementary Guidance). Exceptions to the policy will only be made where at least one of the following apply:

- A house is essential for land management or family purposes related to the management of the land (retired farmers and their spouses);
- Affordable 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, built and cultural heritage interests including locally important croft land and hazards, and can be suitable sited and designed [Structure Plan Policy G].

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.

Predicted impact (++) significant positive effect, + small positive effect, 0 neutral or no effect, -- significant negative effect, - small negative effect)

SEA Objective																																							
Policy	Human Health	Noise	Crime	Social Inclusion	Historic Environment	Landscape/Townscape	Local Distinctiveness	Open Space	Housing in the Countryside	Built Environment	Climate Change	Renewable Energy	Waste Management	Energy	Sustainable Housing Techniques	Air Pollution	Sustainable Travel	Public Transport	Water Environment	Water Abstraction	Contamination	Designated Wildlife/Protected Species	Biodiversity	Access to Wildlife															
Housing in the Countryside	0	0	0	-	+	-	-	0	-	0	0	0	-	-	0	-	--	--	-	0	0	0	0	0	0														
Discussion and Possible Mitigation of Negative Effect	<p>Social Inclusion and Housing in the Countryside – the negative aspects associated with housing in the wider countryside can be offset by a permissive approach to affordable housing in the countryside and the promotion of the development of new crofts which can both enable greater social inclusion by offering affordable accommodation solutions.</p> <p>Waste Management – the Council will encourage recycling through Council policy through the provision of waste recycling facilities.</p> <p>Energy. Reduce the Need for Energy - The Council will encourage the promotion of the renewable energy generation in the wider countryside.</p> <p>Air Pollution, Sustainable Travel, Public Transport, Water Environment – The Council will encourage the use of active and public transport to reduce any potential pollution problems.</p> <p>Designated Wildlife/Species – The Council will highlight designated areas in the development plan and will aim to avoid the unsympathetic development of these areas.</p> <p>Historic Environment – the policy does not specifically promote refurbishing buildings however it is an exception in the hinterland, therefore it had a positive impact.</p> <p>Housing in the countryside – this is not a significant negative effect as in certain areas it is still a restrictive approach. Landscape character and local distinctiveness – a design guide will be prepared for the revised Housing in the Countryside SPG. Landscape Character Assessment principles are being strengthened in the Local Plan.</p> <p>Biodiversity – neutral impact as General Policies 11, 12 and 13 have been amended and provide mitigation.</p>																																						

Policy 17 Commerce – The Council will encourage retail, office, and leisure development (Use Classes 1-3, 7, 10 & 11), within the following network of centres.

Hierarchy / Scale	Centre(s)	Function/Role
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.	Mixed use Comparison & Convenience
Sub-Area Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dornoch • Brora • Lairg • Bonar Bridge/ Ardgay • Helmsdale • Lochinver • Bettyhill • Kinlochbervie • Durness • Melness/Tongue • Scourie 	Mixed use Comparison & Convenience
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.

Predicted impact (++ significant positive effect, + small positive effect, 0 neutral or no effect, -- significant negative effect, - small negative effect)

SEA Objective	Human Health	Noise	Crime	Social Inclusion	Historic Environment	Landscape/Townscape	Local Distinctiveness	Open Space	Housing in the Countryside	Built Environment	Climate Change	Renewable Energy	Waste Management	Energy	Sustainable Housing Techniques	Air Pollution	Sustainable Travel	Public Transport	Water Environment	Water Abstraction	Contamination	Designated Wildlife/Protected Species	Biodiversity	Access to Wildlife
Policy																								
Commerce	+	-	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	+	+	0	0	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0
Discussion and Possible Mitigation of Negative Effect	Any potential for negative impact from this General Policy can be offset by General Policy 4. Noise can be mitigated by encouraging active travel.																							

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 sensitivity and respect towards 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 and open space 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 and other open space.

Predicted impact (++ significant positive effect, + small positive effect, 0 neutral or no effect, -- significant negative effect, - small negative effect)

SEA Objective	Human Health	Noise	Crime	Social Inclusion	Historic Environment	Landscape/Townscape	Local Distinctiveness	Open Space	Housing in the Countryside	Built Environment	Climate Change	Renewable Energy	Waste Management	Energy	Sustainable Housing Techniques	Air Pollution	Sustainable Travel	Public Transport	Water Environment	Water Abstraction	Contamination	Designated Wildlife/Protected Species	Biodiversity	Access to Wildlife
Policy																								
Place Making	+	0	+	+	+	+	++	+	0	+	0	0	0	0	+	0	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0
Discussion and Possible Mitigation of Negative Effect																								

Policy 19 Travel -

Development proposals that involve travel generation must include sufficient information with the application to enable the Council to consider any likely on- and off-site transport implications of the development and should:

1. be well served by the most sustainable modes of travel available in the locality from the outset, providing choice of mode wherever possible, having regard to key travel desire lines;
2. be designed for the safety and convenience of all potential users;
3. be designed for the safety and convenience of all potential users;
4. incorporate an appropriate level of parking provision, having regard to the travel modes and services which will be available and key travel desire lines and to the maximum parking standards laid out in Scottish Planning Policy or those set by the Council.

The Council may seek the implementation and monitoring of Travel Plans in support of significant travel generating developments.

Where site masterplans are prepared, they should include consideration of the impact of proposals on the transport network.

In assessing development proposals the Council will also have regard to any implications arising from the Core Path Plan, which will be a material consideration

Predicted impact (++ significant positive effect, + small positive effect, 0 neutral or no effect, -- significant negative effect, - small negative effect)

SEA Objective	Human Health	Noise	Crime	Social Inclusion	Historic Environment	Landscape/Townscape	Local Distinctiveness	Open Space	Housing in the Countryside	Built Environment	Climate Change	Renewable Energy	Waste Management	Energy	Sustainable Housing Techniques	Air Pollution	Sustainable Travel	Public Transport	Water Environment	Water Abstraction	Contamination	Designated Wildlife/Protected Species	Biodiversity	Access to Wildlife
Travel	+	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	+	0	+	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0
Discussion and Possible Mitigation of Negative Effect	Human health – small positive effect is due to the encouragement of active travel.																							

8.4 Summary of the Environmental Impacts of the Local Plan’s General Policies

There could be cumulative effects relating to landscape character, water quality and biodiversity. The table below shows an overview of the overall scoring of the General Policies and their compatibility with the SEA Objectives. It identifies where general policies may have a small or significant positive or negative effect and where one or more policies score a negative effect, there is the possibility that cumulatively or in combination, these could produce a significant environmental impact. The main policies that may impact on the SEA Objectives are Policy 1 Settlement Development Areas, Policy 3 Wider Countryside, Policy 16 Housing in the Countryside and Policy 17 Commerce. Policy 1 could have a potential negative impact on noise; however the design of settlements to promote active travel could offset potential noise pollution. Policies 3 and 16 could have a potential negative impact on social inclusion, landscape, local distinctiveness, housing in the countryside, waste management, energy, air pollution, sustainable travel, public transport and water environment. Impact on Landscape character can be mitigated by encouraging good siting and design for developments. Policy 6 encourages sustainable design and a DPPG on Designing for Sustainability is currently being reviewed. Landscape Character Assessment principles are also included in the Local Plan. A permissive approach to affordable housing in the countryside and the promotion of new crofts can both enable greater social inclusion by offering affordable housing solutions. The Council also

encourages active transport which should help mitigate against air pollution, sustainable travel and public transport. Waste management can be mitigated by encouraging recycling facilities. It is also recognised that the cumulative impact of numerous small developments in the countryside may ultimately lead to negative environmental impacts, but these impacts are not predictable. However, the mitigation provided by the framework of general policies should mitigate or discourage these negative impacts. Policy 17 could have a potential negative impact on noise, however the promotion of active travel could offset potential noise pollution. For landscape character it is likely that there could be cumulative negative effects if policies 3, 4 and 16 are not properly applied. However if they are applied correctly and the mitigation identified in the Local Plan is applied, then the cumulative impacts should be reduced. The Reporter also recommended deletion of some sites which decreases the cumulative negative impacts. There is also a Landscape Capacity Study for Sutherland which helped to inform site allocations in the Plan. Its use helped to limit cumulative negative impacts by mitigation through siting and design considerations. The water environment could be subject to negative cumulative impacts if multiple houses are built in the countryside that are not connected to the public sewer. If policies 3, 16 and 7 as modified are applied then the potential for cumulative effects are reduced. Modifications to Policy 7 together with newly added SDA developer requirements, have helped to safeguard the water environment not only in respect of housing in the countryside. For biodiversity there are no obvious negative impacts from the general policies and indeed by applying general policies 11, 12 and 13 there could potentially be a positive cumulative impact. Although there are some local concentrations of development proposals in the Plan, based around settlement locations, Sutherland's settlements are relatively small as is the scale of growth planned, therefore the potential for cumulative negative impacts is generally less than would be the case if a number of larger scale developments were proposed. Relevant policy modifications responding to the concerns of SNH, Historic Scotland and SEPA have been made which have the effect of further safeguarding from individual and cumulative effects of development.

- 8.5 Appropriate Assessment has also been carried out to ensure that the policies and proposals are not likely to have a significant effect on European sites. The work undertaken and documented acknowledges relevant changes that have previously been made to the emerging policies and proposals of the Plan, which have improved the safeguarding of habitats and species. The effective operation of the General Policies will provide significant mitigation. For the Appropriate Assessment all Local Plan policies were screened both individually and cumulatively to determine whether it was likely that any significant effects on Natura sites could arise due to their implementation. Policies identified as likely to have a significant effect were identified as requiring an appropriate assessment which was undertaken in order to try to establish whether or not there would be an adverse effect on the integrity of Natura sites. Section 6 of the Appropriate Assessment includes a discussion on cumulative effects and section 9 outlines a menu of mitigation measures.

++ significant positive effect	
+ small positive effect	
0 neutral or no effect	

- small negative effect	
-- significant negative effect	

SEA Objective	Human Health	Noise	Crime	Social Inclusion	Historic Environment	Landscape/Townscape	Local Distinctiveness	Open Space	Housing in the Countryside	Built Environment	Climate Change	Renewable Energy	Waste Management	Energy	Sustainable Housing Techniques	Air Pollution	Sustainable Travel	Public Transport	Water Environment	Water Abstraction	Contamination	Designated Wildlife/Protected Species	Biodiversity	Access to Wildlife
SDA	+	-	0	+	0	0	0	+	+	0	+	+	+	+	0	0	+	+	+	0	0	+	0	0
Devt. Factors and Developer Requirements	+	+	+	+	0	+	+	+	+	+	0	+	+	+	+	0	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Wider Countryside	0	0	0	-	0	-	-	0	-	0	0	0	-	-	0	-				0	0	0	0	0
Heritage	0	0	0	0		+	+	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0		+	+
Affordable Housing	+	0	0	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Design for Sustainability	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Waste Water Treatment	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	+	+	+	0
Waste Management	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+		+	0	+	0	0	0	0	+	+	0	0
Flood Risk	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Physical Constraints	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	+	0	0	+	0	0		0	+	0	0	0
Protected Species	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Other Important Species	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Important Habitats	+	0	0	0	0	+	0	+	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0			
Surface Water Drainage	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	0		+	0	0	+	+

Developer Contributions	+	0	0	+	0	+	0	+	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	0	+	+	+	0	+	0	0	+
Housing in the Countryside	0	0	0	-	+	-	-	0	-	0	0	0	-	-	0	-				0	0	0	0	0
Commerce	+	-	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	+	+	0	0	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0
Place Making	+	0	+	+	+	+	+	+	0	+	0	0	0	0	+	0	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0
Travel	+	0	0	+	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	0	0	+	0	+	+	+	0	0	0	0	0	0

Assessment of Plan Allocations

8.6 How Environmental Problems were Considered in the Plan Allocations

When considering the allocation of sites for uses such as housing, business and community, we need to take into account the environmental issues facing The Highland Council. The Plan allocations have, where possible, tried to avoid sites or interests that are designated for their natural, built and cultural heritage. However, there is considerable pressure for housing in the area, particularly affordable housing and this has led to conflict between socio-economic and environmental interests. In order to fully consider the possible environmental problems that may be created by the Plan allocations we have assessed each proposed site against a set of criteria contained in a matrix which is shown below:-

SEA SITE ASSESSMENT MATRIX SITE REFERENCE:

NO.	SEA ISSUES: REGULATIONS CATEGORY: CHECKLIST QUESTION	Y/N	+ve -ve or n/a	OPPORTUNITIES TO MITIGATE, IMPROVE OR N/A
1	Will the allocation affect the provision of open space within the area?			
2	Will the allocation encourage walking, cycling and public transport use?			
3	Does the allocation provide an opportunity for planning gain in terms of encouraging more sustainable travel patterns?			
4	Will the allocation involve "off-site" road improvements that will contribute to road safety?			
5	Are there scope for road safety measures as part of the allocation?			
6	Is the allocation near any existing "bad neighbour" uses?			
7	Are there any contaminated land issues affecting the allocation?			
8	Will the allocation affect any landscape			

	designation?			
9	Is the allocation on derelict, vacant or other brownfield land?			
10	Is the allocation within the current settlement boundary?			

NO.	SEA ISSUES: REGULATIONS CATEGORY: CHECKLIST QUESTION	Y/N	+ve -ve or n/a	OPPORTUNITIES TO MITIGATE, IMPROVE OR N/A
11	Will the allocation affect the distinctiveness or the enjoyment of the local landscape?			
12	Will the allocation affect any remote landscape of value for recreation (wild land)?			
13	Will the allocation affect a Conservation Area?			
14	Will the allocation impact on any listed building? and/or its setting?			
15	Will the allocation affect a site identified in the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes?			
16	Will the allocation affect any locally important archaeological site identified in the Sites and Monuments Record?			
17	Will the allocation impact on any Scheduled Ancient Monument and /or its setting?			
18	Will the allocation affect any natural heritage designation or area identified for its importance to nature conservation?			
19	Will the allocation affect any protected or priority habitat or species?			
20	Is the allocation likely to provide or use energy from a local, renewable source?			
21	Is the allocation at risk from fluvial or coastal flooding?			
22	Will the allocation impact on ground water or surface water drainage, in the area?			
23	Will the allocation have a physical impact on existing watercourses?			
24	Will the allocation offer opportunities for sustainable waste management?			
25	Can the allocation be connected to the public water and sewerage system?			
26	Will the allocation have a significant impact on the local landform?			
27	Will the allocation affect or be affected by coastal erosion?			
28	Does the allocation offer opportunities for shelter from the prevailing wind and for solar gain?			
29	Will the allocation have any impact upon local air quality?			
30	Will the allocation have an impact on light pollution levels?			

8.7 This matrix has been completed for each potential development site and has provided a means of assessing the sustainability of each Plan proposal.

8.8 Mitigation

The matrices have flagged up potential problems with regard to the likelihood of an allocation interfering with LBAP species and habitats, designated areas such as NSAs, SPAs and SSSIs, flood risk potential, contamination issues and the historic environment. Where a problem has been identified a means of avoiding, minimising and mitigating the potential negative impact has been offered.

8.9 It is stated within the Local Plan Policy 7 – Waste Water Treatment that it is “the Council’s preference that any private system should discharge to land rather than water” which helps manage discharge and minimise the potential adverse impact on the water environment. It was also identified during consultations with SEPA, the regulative body, that they would look at development proposals on a site specific basis as and when they are submitted for consents. Additionally, the Council commended changes to the Plan under Examination Issue 102 to include a “drainage to land” development factor for those SDAs where water bodies could otherwise be affected, thus preventing in those cases further proliferation of private outfalls. For avoidance of doubt, it was agreed with SNH that this should include those SDAs draining to Natura water bodies where no public sewerage solution exists and that was commended to the Reporter. This would in particular include, but would not necessarily be limited to, qualifying settlements likely to significantly affect the River Oykel SAC and/or the Dornoch Firth and Morrich More SAC and/or the Dornoch Firth and Loch Fleet SPA/Ramsar site or the Durness SAC. For other settlements, on consideration of Natura sites involved, of likely significant effects (sensitivities) and of developer requirements prevailing for Site Allocations, it would possibly be determined that the SDA development factor would not be required for Natura purposes (although it could be required for the purposes of protecting water bodies). The Local Plan has subsequently been modified to include the relevant SDA development factors.

8.10 It was stated within the Deposit Draft Local Plan Policy 7 – Waste Water Treatment that “Connection to the public sewer as defined in the Sewerage (Scotland) Act 1968 is required for all new development proposals” except under the circumstances stated within the Policy. Within the text 5.7 Waste Water Treatment it states that “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. Developers should refer to SEPA’s Policy on the Provision of Waste Water Drainage in Settlements, for information”. These Policy provisions helped manage discharge and minimise the potential adverse impact on the water environment. Whilst there has been some modification of that policy and its supporting text, these principles remain. Additionally, the Council commended changes to the Plan under Examination Issue 102 to include certain developer requirements in respect of site allocations, for public sewer connection where technically/ economically feasible to connect and where not feasible then allowing for interim private arrangements as an alternative only where they will be compatible with and make a future public connection/ scheme more likely (but note that for certain sites the Council provided an alternative response under the relevant Examination Issues dealing with

those sites). The Local Plan has subsequently been modified to include the relevant developer requirements for sites.

- 8.11 For certain sites it is the Council's preference that any new development should drain to sea loch rather than freshwater catchment. (NB. This potential mitigation measure has in fact not been needed for this Local Plan.)
- 8.12 It was stated within the Deposit Draft Local Plan Policy 9 – Flood Risk Assessment that “Development proposals within or bordering areas susceptible to flooding, being areas with a medium to high flood risk (1:200 or greater annual probability of flooding), will need to demonstrate that the probability of flooding and any required mitigation has been assessed; a flood risk assessment will need to be submitted with the planning application. Development proposals outwith the medium to high flood risk areas may be acceptable unless local circumstances dictate otherwise, and a Flood Risk Assessment may be required”. Further changes to Policy 9 were commended to the Examination Reporter with reference to Scottish Planning Policy 7 (SPP7) which were to help clarify when a flood risk assessment would be required. The Policy has subsequently been modified in different fashion but to similar effect. In addition the Council commended to the Examination Reporter under Examination Issue 102 and under other settlement and site-specific issues the inclusion of particular developer requirements for certain sites. Further to those commended changes, and for the avoidance of doubt, the Council as a consequence of this appropriate assessment further commended to the Reporter as follows: that for both Invershin SDA and South Bonar Industrial Estate SDA a development factor should be included which referred to the need for the design of waste water arrangements in development proposals to have regard to the risk of, and seek to avoid, flooding leading to contamination of the Natura site. The Local Plan has subsequently been modified to include the relevant SDA development factors and developer requirements for sites.
- 8.13 General policies have been modified to alleviate the concerns that development proposals and policies may have an impact on Natura sites. Modifications to the policies provide greater protection to these sites. (Additionally it may be noted that the Council commended a change (under Examination Issue 102) to add a development factor for SDAs to reference any adjacent Natura sites, and the Plan has subsequently been modified to include those development factors.)
- 8.14 Open Space areas are safeguarded within Settlement Development Areas (SDAs) through Policy 1 - Settlement Development Areas and outwith SDAs by Policy 3 – Wider Countryside. Policy 2 – Land Allocations relates to the allocation of Open Space and within the glossary states that the Local Plan “specifically allocates (green space) in order to safeguard them from development”. This reduces the likelihood of open spaces being developed for other uses which might more significantly affect Natura sites than does the open space use.
- 8.15 The Local Plan’s proposals do not promote vehicle access to sand dunes at Dornoch and coastal protection schemes can help protect sediment issues. However, whilst the policies and proposals offer some safeguarding, there remains a likely significant effect that could possibly lead to adverse effect on the integrity of the Natura sites. This is due to pressure on sand dunes for recreational access that may involve vehicular access as far as a parking

point and access on foot thereafter, and potential disturbance to wintering or breeding birds. This is particularly of concern given the likely significant effect arising from proposals in combination with one another and the high level of use already existing. These concerns also arise at Embo. Mitigation measures were commended to the Reporter by the Council in respect of Dornoch; following consideration of the matter, the Plan has subsequently been modified in respect of both settlements, broadly as follows:

- That for each of Dornoch and Embo SDAs, this issue is explained in the supporting text and a development factor included which states: that where appropriate, new development proposals on sites allocated for development (in Dornoch) or significant new development proposals (in Embo) shall be accompanied by a recreational management plan which examines any likely increased pressures from recreational accessing of the sand dunes or disturbance to wintering or breeding birds, arising from the development (with appropriate assessment to be undertaken if the Natura site interests are likely to be significantly affected) and that where necessary, avoidance or mitigation measures should be provided;
- That the Plan also indicate that the Council will liaise with SNH and key local interests to coordinate submitted management plans and assess cumulative effects, and that the procedure will be subject to monitoring under the Action Programme for the Local Plan.

- 8.16 Where appropriate, new development proposals may be required to carry out an otter survey and any other appropriate surveys to ensure no significant effect on qualifying features caused by disturbance, pollution or any other impact. Policy 11 – Protected Species – states “where there is good reason to believe that a protected species is present on site or may be affected by a proposed development, we will require a survey to be carried out to establish any such presence before determining the application”. For relevant SDAs the following development factor has been agreed with SNH was commended to the Reporter for inclusion in the Plan: *“Adjacent SAC qualifying features include otter. A survey to determine the presence or absence of otters should accompany any planning applications, except for modest extensions and alterations to existing buildings, within 250m of a watercourse, coast, loch or pond.”* The Plan has subsequently been modified to include that development factor where relevant, subject to minor rewording that does not materially change its meaning.

8.17 Site Options and Alternatives Considered

- 8.18 Appendix 5 to this report sets out the position statements for settlements including site options and alternatives that were considered during the Plan process but which were not allocated in the Deposit Draft Local Plan. It summarises the findings and explains why the sites were not proposed for allocation by the Council, setting this in the context of the selection of sites that were allocated. In some cases there have been concerns raised through SEA which have influenced that decision, although that is not always the case. Examples of these different outcomes are provided, including illustration of how SEA influenced the contents of the Deposit Draft Plan. SEA matrices for the site options that were not allocated in the Deposit Draft Plan are to be found in Appendix 6. There are sites which were allocated in the Deposit Draft that following Examination are no longer allocated. Where appropriate a note has been put beside the matrices for these allocations to make the reader aware.

- 8.19 In North West Sutherland and Tongue and Farr the methodology used in developing the Sutherland Futures options and then the Draft Plan allocations and Settlement Development Areas (SDAs) needs separate explanation. In these areas historically single house and small scale development is a large contributor to meeting housing needs. This is partly because much of the land is in crofting tenure and because of the level of development.
- 8.20 There is a need for some allocations within the larger communities but cumulative, small scale development makes an important contribution. To examine the potential within these settlements and to appropriately define settlement development areas (SDAs), it was therefore sensible to consider them. Many of these sites however did not require allocation but it was worthwhile to get feedback on their suitability and effectiveness.
- 8.21 This has meant that many small sites identified in Sutherland Futures or thereafter have been considered suitable but do not require allocation in the Local Plan. After assessment many of these options only needed to be retained within the SDA or to come forward and to be considered against the general policy framework of the Local Plan.

8.22 Examples which highlight the influence of SEA

- 8.23 This section helps illustrate how SEA has influenced the Local Plan process, in terms of site selection and site mitigation. The SEA is an important part of the Council's consideration on whether a site should be allocated as it influences the officer's report and recommendations and hence Committee's decision-making. However its impact in helping identify appropriate mitigation measures for sites is just as important.

An example where SEA suggested appropriate mitigation within a Settlement Development Area (SDA)

Scourie has an example of a mitigation measure which came about through SEA of an option from Sutherland Futures which did not go forward as an allocation but remained within the SDA. The option north of the Free Church was a suitable site but did not require allocation. However triggered by question 4 the SEA it identified that a developer requirement for contributions to bring back the 40 mph speed limit, widen the bellmouth junction and for structural improvements and passing places was necessary.

Examples where SEA suggested appropriate mitigation for allocated sites

Lochinver - H2 Cnoc A' Mhuillinn

Through the SEA the following development requirements were developed.

- Moving the speed restriction and provision of a footpath link - in response to question 4.
- A requirement for a design statement respecting its village entrance location, limiting the eastern area to 1 ½ storey housing and looking for careful siting throughout - in response to question 8 and 11.

Lochinver - I2 Land adjacent to the Assynt Leisure centre

Through the SEA the following development requirements were developed.

- Development should be set back from the quarry walls with no further freshening of bare rock faces – in response to question 26
- Buildings to be kept low and within the envelope of the quarry and finished in suitable natural colours and materials – in response to question 8+11
- Although flood risk does not directly impinge on the site itself the developer will be required to carry out a Flood Risk Assessment in line with SPP7 in order to demonstrate that proposals enable emergency access to the site during 1 in 200 year events – in response to question 27
- Consideration of past uses required before determining whether an assessment of potential contamination issues is required – in response to question 7

Further mitigation identified but not through SEA

The herons must not be disturbed by development close to their nest between March and August. This is not a protected species and the SEA therefore does not deal with it explicitly but it is a natural heritage consideration identified by a member of the public and after consultation with the local ranger it was decided this was how we should mitigate the impact.

Point of Stoer – H2 south of the radio mast

Through the SEA the following development requirements were developed.

- This is undulating cnocan landscape with some rocky outcrops. Development should be dispersed and sympathetically sited within the landform to minimise earthworks and the need for blasting – in response to question 8 and 26
- Also the heights, rooflines and orientations could be varied to reflect the underlying terrain – in response to question 11
- An environmentally acceptable private sewerage system is required – in response to question 25

Kinlochbervie - H3 Land at Cnoc Ruadh

Through the SEA the following development requirements were developed.

- Reduce speed limit to 30 mph to get visibility. There may be access gradient issues and since the access is opposite an existing road this will need to be addressed – in response to question 4
- Suitable for linear development, new housing should seek to preserve traditional relationship of a croft house with its land – in response to question 11
- This site may be at risk from flooding. A flood risk assessment should be submitted with any planning application.

Further mitigation identified but not through SEA

Remains of the boundary stone walls should be left as intact as possible and prior to any alteration an extensive photographic record would need to be made recording the feature in its original setting. This is not identified in the Sites and Monuments Record and so is not dealt with explicitly in the SEA. However it is an important built heritage feature for interpretation of the historic landscape and therefore merits protection.

Tongue MU2 - north of St Andrews church

Through the SEA the following development requirements were developed.

- Proposals should be sympathetic to the setting of the church and address any impact on Tongue house designed landscape - in response to question 14 and 15
- A design statement should accompany an application here - in response to questions 8,11 and 14
- A footway is required to connect to the existing and the speed limit would need to be moved - in response to question 4

Melness MU2 – west of the Craggan Hotel

Through the SEA the following development requirements were developed.

- Careful siting and design to ensure it fits with the strong settlement pattern - in response to question 8 +11
- The road would need to be brought up to adoptable standards - in response to question 4.
- Requirement to retain and integrate watercourses as natural features within development – in response to question 23.

Examples where SEA leads to not allocating an option

Site 2R, Melvich - Halladale bridge site

This site was not allocated because the SEA indicated some concerns, and other sites assessed better. The SEA shows issues over landscape impact, connection to public drainage, and distance to services. The only way to mitigate these concerns effectively is to reduce the potential to a few dispersed houses which could be assessed against the general policies.

Site 3R, Drumbeg - South of Loch Ruighean an Aitinn

This site is not suitable and feasibility is doubted. SEA ruled out this proposal due to the engineering works necessary, change to landform, and the resultant landscape impact this would have. The impact within the NSA would be too significant and no satisfactory mitigation could be achieved.

Examples where factors other than SEA lead to not allocating an option

Sites 6, 7 and 8, Bettyhill - East of Dunollie, South of the school house, and North of Farr View

These sites were removed after objection from the Crofters Commission that this land is locally important croft land.

Site 1, and 3, Scourie - West of the caravan and camping site & West of Park Terrace

These sites were not allocated because of their agricultural value and the crofter's reluctance to release it for development. However in terms of the SEA it is a good site.

Site 8, Scourie - South of the Free Church

This site was recently apportioned land from the common grazings and therefore the Crofter's Commission objected to its future development. It was felt that the croft land here should be protected from development as there are other more suitable and effective alternative sites available. In terms of SEA it came through as an acceptable site.

Site 3R, Bonar Bridge - Land north of Bonar Bridge, adjacent to Tulloch Cottage

The proposal for this site was for potential tourism use with 2 or 3 properties being built. The Landscape Capacity Study indicates that it is unlikely to be suitable for development due to landscape value; however this could potentially be mitigated via appropriate and sensitive siting and design. However the SEA is not the only reason for rejecting the site as an allocation. The site, whilst in close proximity to Bonar Bridge, is not within the village or adjacent to any built part of the village. To include it as an allocation within the SDA would mean greatly extending the northern end of the village. The proposal would be better judged as a development within the wider countryside against the wider local plan policies.

Examples where a combination of factors including SEA lead to not allocating an option

Site 3R, Culkein Drumbeg - West of Loch Drumbeg

This site requires a substantial length of access along the peat road which makes only small scale proposals feasible as this would not require public adoption of the road. However a larger proposal would also be sensitive in terms of landscape character. Therefore it is only suitable and effective for a lower level of development which can be assessed against the general policies of the Local Plan rather than being allocated.

Site1, Kinlochbervie - Manse road north

This site was not allocated on the basis of the agricultural value of this land, feasibility due to access considerations, and because of the issues established in the SEA about setting of the church and breaking the village envelope.

Example of a site which is still being taken forward as an allocation even though SEA highlights some issues

Pittentrail MU1 - Mart Site

The SEA assessment indicated that the south-eastern corner of site was at risk of 1 in 200 year fluvial flooding and there may be potential contamination issues to be assessed and resolved. However the site is a brownfield site within the settlement boundary. It is a prominent site within the centre of the village which the community is keen to see redeveloped. The concerns highlighted do not preclude the possibility of some development on the site, subject to the careful consideration and resolution of the issues.

Point of Stoer - MU1 south of the radio mast

This is a sensitive site, comprising of undulating cnochan landscape with some rocky outcrops, and it cannot be connected to the existing small public sewerage system. However there was no suitable land which could feasibly connect to the sewerage system. Also this site does have attributes: it is supported by the local crofters – being located on common grazings, and had community support; it is also well located for local facilities. The SEA highlighted that the issues with the site could be suitably mitigated. This mitigation included a requirement for a Design Statement and for agreement to be reached between SNH and the Council on its detail. We also identified that development should be dispersed and sympathetically sited within the landform to minimise earthworks and the need for blasting. Also the heights, rooflines and orientations could be varied to reflect the underlying terrain.

Furthermore we added a requirement for an environmentally acceptable private sewerage system.

9. Monitoring the environmental effects of the Plan

- 9.1 The SEA Directive and the 2004 Regulations require this Environmental Report to include “a description of the measures envisaged for monitoring” the significant environmental effects of the Plan in order, amongst other things, to identify at an early stage unforeseen adverse effects, in order to be able to carry out appropriate remedial action. To avoid duplication, existing monitoring arrangements may be utilised.
- 9.2 As set out in one of the Local Plan’s objectives, an Action Programme will set out how, when and by whom specific actions will be undertaken in order to implement the Plan and will form a basis for the monitoring of action. 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 prepare a Monitoring Report on a regular basis, drawing on a number of sources of information. It will include relevant updating of key baseline data concerning Sutherland’s environment in order to monitor the environmental effects of the Plan as required by SEA.
- 9.3 We have decided to create a monitoring framework for use in both the Sutherland Local Plan and the Highland wide Local Development Plan. The monitoring framework is available in the SEA post adoption statement. While this focuses on environmental issues, it will be an integral part of the monitoring of the local plan to try and avoid unnecessary duplication..
- 9.4 Monitoring may confirm that the Plan is effective or may highlight the need to revise how the Plan is implemented or to review it. It will also inform future SEA of development plans in the Highlands, for example in terms of usefulness of mitigation measures and of indicators.

10. Future Development of the Local Plan and SEA

10.1 Public Consultation

The Plan has now been adopted by the Council and as such is no longer open for consultation.

10.2 Next Steps

We will produce an action program and the plan will be monitored as per the monitoring framework.