

**The Highland Council**  
**Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee**  
**4 November 2015**

Agenda Item	8
Report No	PDI 63/15

**Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan**

**Report by Director of Development and Infrastructure**

**Summary**

This report presents the Caithness and Sutherland Proposed Local Development Plan (CaSPlan) for approval by the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee. This latest stage in preparing the Plan takes account of feedback gathered through consultations on a Main Issues Report held between October 2014 and February 2015, and an Additional Sites and Issues Consultation held between March and April 2015. In preparing this plan officers have also been guided by the Caithness and Sutherland Area Committee who agreed an interim position on the matters raised in these previous consultations.

In accordance with the Council's Scheme of Delegation, this Committee is now asked to approve the Proposed Plan as the settled view of the Council, subject to finalising environmental assessments, to enable a full public consultation to be undertaken. Committee is also asked to approve the accompanying Proposed Action Programme as a basis for discussion and working up with Community Planning Partners and other key parties, for publication and consultation alongside the Proposed Plan.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 The Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan) is the second of three area local development plans to be prepared by the Highland Council. Together with the Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP) and more detailed Supplementary Guidance, CaSPlan will form the Council's Development Plan against which planning decisions will be made in the Caithness and Sutherland area.
- 1.2 The Main Issues Report (MIR) consultation for CaSPlan ran from 30 October 2014 to 6 February 2015, to which 258 responded with comments. This was followed by an Additional Sites and Issues Consultation that was undertaken from 13 March 2015 to 24 April 2015, to which 57 responded with comments. **Appendix A** sets out a full summary of the issues raised during these consultations and the proposed Council response. In May, the Caithness and Sutherland Area Committee considered the key issues raised in these responses, and agreed an interim position which is also summarised in **Appendix A**. This has guided officers' further work in preparing the Proposed Plan. Since then, officers have further developed the recommended Council

response to the matters raised, informed also by further technical consultations, environmental assessments and discussions. Please note that the site numbers used in **Appendix A** are those taken from the MIR. In the Proposed Plan some of the site numbers have changed; a table is provided in **Appendix A** to assist cross-referencing.

- 1.3 The Proposed Plan for approval is in **Appendix B**. In accordance with the Council's Scheme of Delegation it is being presented for approval by the Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee as the Council's settled view as to where future development should and should not occur in the Caithness and Sutherland area over the next 10-20 years. It includes a vision and spatial strategy, details of placemaking priorities, the allocation of sites for development (with developer requirements) and a small number of planning policies. It is accompanied by a Proposed Action Programme in **Appendix C** for consideration, which sets out actions required to deliver the Plan's policies and proposals.

## 2. The Proposed Plan

- 2.1 The report to Caithness and Sutherland Area Committee in May highlighted the key issues raised in consultation responses and presented a suggested Council response. The main updates taken into account in preparing the Proposed Plan since the interim position agreed by Area Committee can be summarised as follows:
- we have reworked the Strategy map and provided new explanatory text, with some amendments – including a revised description of the support for growth in more rural areas. The Strategy map in the MIR included representation of assets of the area, but the Proposed Plan version focusses more on depicting the main aspects of the strategy itself;
  - the latest iteration of policies for “Town Centre First” and “Growing Settlements” are in line with those presented in the HwLDP MIR;
  - as Committee will be aware from the HwLDP MIR, figures from a new Housing Needs and Demands Assessment (HNDA) are nearing completion. We have based the Proposed Plan on the ‘continued growth scenario’ set out in this emerging HNDA. Justification for this approach is set out within the Proposed Plan and will be supplemented by a Housing Background Paper to be published alongside the Proposed Plan;
  - whilst CaSPlan is based on the ‘continued growth scenario’, the sites preferred by the Council significantly exceed the housing land requirement for the plan area. In view of this we have identified a number of site allocations as ‘long term sites’. These sites indicate the preferred direction for growth beyond the period covered by this Plan and can be considered further when the plan is reviewed. The Plan still provides a generous supply of housing land within site allocations and in some settlements masterplans will set out longer term phasing for larger sites;
  - site choices have been firmed up for allocation in the Plan and developer requirements specified for each allocation;

- the waste management site at Seater is now added in to CaSPlan and identified as suitable in principle for further waste management facilities, in order to transfer existing site-specific content from the HwLDP to CaSPlan;
- the Green Network content of the Plan has been developed, with green network issues identified in placemaking priorities for settlements and in some cases identified on settlement maps; and
- appropriate 'hooks' for the preparation of Supplementary Guidance for certain areas and sites have been included and the 'hook' for the Dounreay Planning Framework (currently DPF2) has been included, so that it can be transferred from the HwLDP to CaSPlan.

### **3. Engagement with the Highland Community Planning Partnership**

- 3.1 A paper was taken to the Highland Community Planning Partnership (CPP) Board meeting on 11 September 2015, introducing new responsibilities for the CPP Board and Chief Officers Group in the process of preparing and delivering Local Development Plans that reflect shared priorities for community planning. The aim is to secure buy-in from Community Planning Partners at key stages of preparing these plans and their associated Action Programmes. As a first step in introducing these arrangements the CPP Board agreed the Highland-wide Local Development Plan MIR and the emerging issues for the Proposed CaSPlan. We aim to conclude sign-off of the Proposed CaSPlan by liaising with partner organisations in advance of publication for consultation.
- 3.2 We also intend to discuss and develop the Proposed Action Programme with Community Planning Partners, Key Agencies, parties named in the Action Programme and Scottish Ministers in readiness for consultation alongside the Proposed Plan. This will include reporting it to the CPP Chief Officers Group on 11 November 2015 and to the CPP Board on 2 December 2015.

### **4. Status of CaSPlan and its Relationship to the Highland-wide Local Development Plan**

- 4.1 The Proposed Plan will carry some weight in decision-making on planning applications once it has been approved by Committee. Only once CaSPlan is statutorily adopted will it be constituted as part of the Development Plan and hence carry full weight. The Caithness Local Plan and the Sutherland Local Plan (each as continued in force 2012) continue to form part of the Development Plan until CaSPlan is statutorily adopted and at that point replaces them.
- 4.2 The Proposed Plan explains that any allocation and/or text in the HwLDP that relates to sites within the CaSPlan area will be updated by CaSPlan's content. It also explains that the Council is undertaking a review of the HwLDP and that the MIR (currently on consultation) proposes to provide consistent planning policies for the whole of Highland, including policies for "Town Centre First" and "Growing Settlements". It explains that in the meantime CaSPlan contains policies on these two important issues but that ultimately they will be superseded by the new HwLDP policy framework in due course.

## 5. Next Steps

5.1 There are a number of tasks to be carried out before we launch consultation on the Proposed Plan. These include:

- completion of the associated environmental assessments;
- preparing the required schedule of Council-owned land that is affected by any of the policies, proposals or views expressed in CaSPlan, to be appended to the Proposed Plan when we consult on it;
- minor post-Committee changes to the Proposed Plan including formatting, typographic and illustrative amendments and any consequential amendments following completion of the associated environmental assessments, which will be agreed in consultation with the Chair of this Committee;
- conclude the sign-off of the Proposed Plan by the Community Planning Partnership through liaison with the partner organisations;
- discussion on and working up of the Proposed Action Programme with Community Planning Partners, Key Agencies, parties named in the Action Programme and Scottish Ministers in readiness for consultation alongside the Proposed Plan; and
- preparations for publicity and consultation.

5.2 The Proposed Plan, together with the Proposed Action Programme and the Revised Environmental Report, will be published for an 8 week period of consultation (likely to formally commence in early January 2016). Whilst the Proposed Plan stage is important (as it is likely to be the last opportunity for people to make comments that can be considered through the subsequent formal stages leading to adoption), the Council is presenting its 'settled view' on the contents of the Plan and the main opportunities for the public to get involved to influence the Plan's contents have already been carried out. The emphasis at Proposed Plan stage is on providing information about the Proposed Plan, answering people's questions on it and helping people understand the stage we are at and the arrangements for formally submitting representations. Arrangements for consultation will include the following:

- the Proposed Plan will be published online via our consultation portal, and a paper copy placed in each public library in the CaSPlan area;
- public adverts, press releases and social media to spread the word about the consultation;
- directly notifying those who responded to the MIR and Additional Sites and Issues consultations and those who have asked to be notified via our consultation portal;
- notifying the neighbours of sites proposed as allocations for development in the Proposed Plan;
- attending ward forums; and
- encouraging people wherever possible to submit their representations on the Proposed Plan via our consultation portal.

5.3 Following consultation on the Proposed Plan, a report will be prepared and brought to this Committee to enable consideration of representations received and agree any amendments to the Council's position (target August 2016). An Examination will probably then be required to consider any outstanding issues of representation, with the Examination Report to be considered before the Council can progress through the final statutory stages to adopt the Plan.

## **6. Implications**

### **6.1 Resource**

Resources to deliver the Local Development Plan are available from the Development and Infrastructure Service budget.

### **6.2 Legal**

The Proposed Plan once approved will be treated as a material planning consideration for development management purposes, to be accorded appropriate weight in each case.

### **6.3 Equalities**

An Equalities Impact Assessment screening was undertaken for the MIR and has been revisited for the Proposed Plan.

### **6.4 Climate Change/Carbon Clever**

The MIR outlined specific options for delivering the Carbon Clever initiative that have been considered further through preparation of the Proposed Plan (and through the review of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan). A Strategic Environmental Assessment, integral to the production of the MIR, assessed the potential impacts of development options. We consulted on the Environmental Report and have prepared a Revised Environmental Report to inform decisions on the content of the Proposed Plan, helping steer development towards the most suitable locations. We have also prepared a Habitats Regulations Appraisal draft record. We need to complete some steps on these environmental assessments so that they can be published alongside the Proposed Plan.

### **6.5 Risk**

There are no known risks arising from this report.

### **6.6 Gaelic**

All headings in the Proposed Plan will be provided in Gaelic.

### **6.7 Rural**

CaSPlan will complement the Highland-wide Local Development Plan in addressing a range of development-related rural issues.

## Recommendation

The Committee is invited to:-

- note the summary of responses to the Main Issues Report and Additional Sites and Issues consultations, the interim position that was agreed by Area Committee and agree the responses proposed, as shown in **Appendix A**;
- agree the Proposed Plan as set out in **Appendix B** for an 8 week public consultation commencing January 2016, subject to minor post-Committee changes including formatting, typographic and illustrative amendments and any consequential amendments following completion of the associated environmental assessments, agreed in consultation with the Chair of this Committee;
- approve the accompanying Proposed Action Programme set out in **Appendix C**, for discussion and working up with Community Planning Partners, Key Agencies, parties named in the Action Programme and Scottish Ministers, and subsequent publication for consultation alongside the Proposed Plan;
- acknowledge that the Proposed Plan as approved, being the settled view of the Council, will be treated as a material planning consideration for development management purposes as of 4 November 2015.

Designation: Director of Development and Infrastructure

Date: 19 October 2015

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## Background Papers:

All available on the CaSPlan website [www.highland.gov.uk/casplan](http://www.highland.gov.uk/casplan)

- CaSPlan Main Issues Report + responses
- CaSPlan Monitoring Statement + addendum: Housing Background Paper (Committee version)
- CaSPlan Environmental Report + Revised Environmental Report (Committee version)
- CaSPlan MIR EQIA Screening + Proposed Plan EQIA Screening (Committee version)
- CaSPlan Additional Sites and Issues + responses
- CaSPlan Habitats Regulations Appraisal Draft Record (Committee version)