

Agenda Item	<b>10</b>
Report No	<b>HC/34/21</b>

## HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** The Highland Council

**Date:** 9 December 2021

**Report Title:** **Future Highlands Strategic Partnership Priority 4: Place – Place Based Planning and Investment in Communities**

**Report By:** The Chief Executive

### **1. Purpose/Executive Summary**

- 1.1 Following Members' support for the development of the "Future Highlands" strategy at the Council meeting in September 2021, this report provides an update on the progress being made on the Strategic Partnership Priority (SPP) 4 "Place – Place Based Planning and Investment in Communities, and includes the high-level strategy at Appendix 1.
- 1.2 The opportunities for collaboration on this SPP were highlighted in the October 2021 Council report including:
- Placed Based Collaboration
  - Economic Recovery and Sustained Growth
  - Connectivity
  - Tourism and Visitor management

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- Note progress made to develop the 4th strand of 'Future Highlands' which is 'place' and agree the Strategy for SPP4 at Appendix 1;
  - Agree the approach to SPP4, including the Place Based Framework, as set out in Appendix 1;
  - Note that this means it will underpin the approach to Council service delivery, service planning and area reviews in the future;

- Agree that officers seek Community Planning partners' adoption of the Place Based Vision, Values and 8 step process as set out in Appendix 1 to transform how different organisations work together for communities;
- Note that this approach with Partners will build on the discussions with Members in the Member seminar in May 2021 on supporting community ownership and the Member seminar in August 2021 on improving community planning;
- Note the Partnership approach being adopted to lead on economic recovery, connectivity and visitor management and the actions and next steps outlined; and
- Note that further updates on all five Strategic Partnership Priorities will be brought to future Council meetings.

### 3. **Implications**

- 3.1 Climate Change: climate change action underpins the four opportunities for collaboration above. Climate change action is found in place-based partnerships e.g. in active travel, energy efficient housing initiatives, renewable energy arrangements and often feature in improvements undertaken by community bodies acquiring assets from the Council. Green economic recovery is a key feature of Council collaboration as outlined in this report and to the previous Council meeting. Having a strong digital connectivity strategy is essential to delivering climate action, through reducing the need to travel and providing more effective means of monitoring and analysing the actions being taken to reduce the Council and partners' carbon emissions.
- 3.2 Resource: this report, in Appendix 1, highlights place-based funding available and how this can be utilised and directed to support local place-based priorities. It also highlights the opportunities for directing Council resources based on the priorities of a local place. This is illustrated by the positive impact of the Visitor Management Plan resources allocated by the Council. The Economic Prosperity Fund agreed by the Council is being allocated to efforts to support economic recovery and sustained growth. In addition, the delivery of the City Region Deal funding of £20m (UK Government funding), through HIE will deliver significant improvements in digital connectivity, beyond that already committed through the Scottish Government's R100 funding. Further opportunities to lever-in funding from the UK and Scottish Governments, partners and the private sector will also be explored.
- 3.3 Legal Impact/Risk: developing a place-based approach is encouraged through the Scottish Government's Place Principle, the Christie Commission recommendations and is required by the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 for community planning.
- 3.4 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island):

Place affects the lives, outcomes and opportunities of Highland residents and communities. The strategy set out at Appendix 1 sets out the benefits of applying a place lens to all that we do so that we can understand local needs and strengths and support the development of local priorities in working with communities and partners. This has the opportunity to have a positive impact on promoting equality, addressing inequality (including socio-economic) and targeting the priorities of rural and island areas. Community Planning Partners have a legal duty to focus on reducing inequality by working collaboratively and this is supported by a focus on place.

### 3.5 Gaelic:

A focus on place, and considering the priorities for a local area, will support a focus on Gaelic language and culture. This is illustrated through the development of Skye and Raasay Futures where one of the key priorities is linked to promoting Gaelic.

## 4. **Background**

- 4.1 Taking the Christie Principles as a guide, the Future Highlands Strategy takes a proactive collaborative approach to capitalising on the unique opportunities and natural assets available in the Highlands relating to green energy; tourism; workforce; and innovation, science and skills. The intention behind it is to encourage economic stability, recovery and growth which will revitalise Highland communities and towns and support affordability across public services in the Highlands.
- 4.2 The Strategy supports all aspects of the Council's overarching Vision: Ambitious, Sustainable, Connected, recognising that Partnership is a strategic driver in the Council's Organisational Framework and, following the support given to the approach at the Council meeting in September, discussions are now underway with partners across all sectors.
- 4.3 The 5 Partnership Priorities need to be seen as interlinked rather than standalone and acknowledging and developing the connected characteristics of the priorities will enable partners to make the most of the inter-relationships; streamlining how resources are allocated and maximising the outcomes that are delivered. The expectation is that this approach will strengthen the voice and raise the profile of the Highlands in Scotland, the UK and further afield to make the most of opportunities to draw investment into the region.
- 4.4 The interlinking nature of the priorities is particularly true in relation to the fourth SPP and focus of this paper, **Place – Place Based Planning and Investment in Communities**. Place underpins and is the lens through which we deliver our services and work together in partnership, with our public sector and community partners. This report sets out the vision for Place. Priority 4 underpins the Council's resources to work in partnership on place-based approaches with the need to coordinate public

investment around places better and under priority 2 an example of a place-based approach around health care innovation was agreed at the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2021 on the Sutherland Pathfinder Project for shaping the Sutherland Youth Action Plan and the Child's Plan. Further examples of place-based approaches are set out in Annex 1 to Appendix 1.

4.5 October Council considered and agreed the approach to SPP 1: **Green Energy Hub**. Much of Strategic Partnership Priority 2: **Health - Care Innovation** is seen in the context of the consultation and delivery of the National Care Service for Scotland by the Scottish Government which was the subject of a separate report to the Council in October 2021. How this strand develops will become clearer in the coming months. Strand 3: **People - Living Healthy, Thriving and Inclusive lives** will be brought forward for consideration to Council in March and the Medium-Term Financial Plan is driving forward the last SPP on **Investment – Financial Investment and Asset Strategy**. There are significant inter dependencies across all strands.

## 5. **Strategic Partnership Priority 4: Place – Place Based Planning and Investment in Communities**

5.1 The Scottish Government's Place Principle requests that all those responsible for providing services and looking after assets in a place need to work and plan together, and with local communities, to improve the lives of people, support inclusive and sustainable economic growth and create more successful places. It aligns with Christie Commission recommendations, community empowerment legislation and the Council's commitments to support greater local decision-making and community involvement.

5.2 There are examples of this approach already being taken across the organisation and in partnership, in the way in which we review and plan our services and how we come together and plan with our community and public sector partners around key community priorities. Place-based funding supports this activity, including the funds distributed through Area Committees.

5.3. Two Member seminars were held in advance of the Communities and Place Committee meetings in May and August 2021.

- The seminar in May focused on how the Council in collaboration with partners could support even more community ownership. One of the conclusions was for partners to work together to share experiences and coordinate resources and effort better to support more community ownership and to do this using the place-principle.
- The seminar in August highlighted that more was needed across the community planning partnership (CPP) to support the efforts of the 9 locally-

based community partnerships. In some community partnerships, some of the tools to support the place-principle have been used, especially around the use of the place standard to gather views on how local places are perceived and what needs to improve. The CPP is currently reviewing how to resource community partnerships better to coordinate public resources better and to streamline engagement, while paying particular attention to the most disadvantaged communities in their area. The proposed focus on place, should support and strengthen the approach to partnership and planning locally.

- 5.5 As a partnership there is a need to apply a place lens to all that we do so that we can ensure that local needs and strengths are understood and local priorities can be supported- alongside the wider national and regional policy context. Our approach to place should support partners coming together to collaboratively develop a set of local priorities that address the service and local needs of a community.
- 5.6 A Place Based Framework is proposed in Appendix 1. This incorporates a vision, principles and 8 step process to strengthen the Council's place-based approach. The aim is for the framework to underpin all areas of work, including the Future Highlands strategy to ensure that, as an organisation, we consider all that we do through the lens of a place. This will ensure that we can deliver against the priorities but also the needs of each local community.
- 5.6 This paper (at Appendix 1) also sets further context to the background, actions and next steps to deliver the Council's contribution to Economic Recovery and Sustained Growth, Digital Connectivity and the significant steps being taken to support the Tourism sector and enhanced visitor management.

## 6. Next Steps

- 6.1 Members are asked to consider and approve the high-level Strategy for **Strategic Partnership Priority 4: Place – Place Based Planning and Investment in Communities** at Appendix 1. This is populated with examples of the type of activity that will enable the Council and partners to achieve our goals through taking a collaborative approach but also leaves the way open for new partnership activity to be explored on both a pro-active and opportunistic basis.
- 6.2 For each of the Strategic Objectives, including the overarching objective of Place Based Partnership Approach, a set of next steps and key partnership actions is included. The Scheme of Delegation enables the Communities and Place Committee to provide strategic direction and oversight of the Council's Place Based Approach and to approve the Council's Place Based Strategy. It is proposed that progress is reported to future meetings the Communities and Place Committee, however the

renewed focus on place to our service planning, delivery, individual projects and approaches will also be visible through reporting to Strategic Committee and Boards.

Designation: Chief Executive

Date: 26.11.21

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## **Strategic Partnership Priority 4: Place – Place-based Planning and Investment in Communities**

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## 1. Introduction

Following the Highland Council's support for the development of the "Future Highlands" partnership approach in September 2021, it was agreed that a strategy would be developed to deliver against each of the five Strategic Partnership Priorities (SPPs). This paper directly supports SPP4 Place – Place Based Planning and Investment in Communities and in doing so outlines a "Place Based Framework" that is intended to underpin the delivery and coordination of all SPPs across all sectors.

The Strategy is set out in 4 sections:

- Place Based Partnerships
- Economy & Sustainable Growth
- Tourism
- Digital Connectivity

Section 2 sets out the **Strategic Objectives** across each of the four themes and introduces the theme of place and the background to developing our partnership approach to place.

Section 3 provides the **high-level objectives** against each of the 4 themes, whilst identifying key next steps for us in partnership with our public and community sector partners. This section leads with the introduction of a Place Based Framework which outlines a way of working going forward for the Council, communities and partners, with place at the centre.



## 2. Background to the 'Place' Strategic Partnership Plan Priority

### Strategic objectives

Place affects the lives and outcomes of Highland residents. Evidence shows a person's postcode directly affects their outcomes in life. The place where someone grows up affects their health and wellbeing, as well as their access to opportunities. It is where most people volunteer and contribute to community life. To tackle the broad range of opportunities and challenges facing us – environmental change, urbanisation, inequality, intergenerational disadvantage, and demographic shifts, we need to see them from a local perspective and work with local people and communities to address them. As a partnership there is a need to apply a place lens to all that we do so that we can ensure that local needs and strengths are understood and local priorities can be supported- alongside the wider national and regional policy context. To apply this place lens is to apply a place-based approach, focussing our effort and intention on communities and their strengths.

To make this happen, all organisations working for the future of a place need to work together to target the specific circumstances of a place.

As outlined above, there are four objectives under this SPP. Three are focussed on

- Economic Recovery and Sustained Growth
- Connectivity
- Tourism and Visitor Management

The aim of this document is to set out the joint activity required to deliver against these objectives. It sets further context to the background, actions and next steps to deliver the Council's contribution to Economic Recovery and Sustained Growth, Digital Connectivity and the significant steps being taken to support the Tourism sector and enhanced visitor management.

The fourth and final overarching objective - Place Based Partnership Approach - underpins not only this Strategic priority but the whole strategy as well as Future Highlands Strategy. Section 3 proposes a framework and way of working going forward for the Council, communities and partners, with place at the centre. Further background to this approach is set out below.

### Developing our Partnership Approach to Place

The proposed framework for how we work with our communities, partners and as an organisation, to focus on local priorities, services and address need around a place and its people. The aim is for the framework to underpin all areas of work, including the Future Highlands strategy to ensure that, as an organisation, we consider all that we do through the

lens of a place. This will ensure that we can deliver against the priorities but also the needs of each local community.

This approach is underpinned by several national and local drivers:

- **Scottish Government's Place Principle** – which requests that all those responsible for providing services and looking after assets in a place need to work and plan together, and with local communities, to improve the lives of people, support inclusive and sustainable economic growth and create more successful places. The place-based plans undertaken to date in Highland, such as Fort William 2040 and Skye & Raasay Future, have been designed to directly respond to the Place Principle by establishing a shared vision and proposition for a place and focus for partners to collaborate and coordinate its delivery.
- **Christie Commission 4 'P's** – which outlines how communities can be empowered to shape the design and delivery of services and the delivery of local and national outcomes. It covers four key themes of: prevention, performance, participation, partnership.
- **Community Empowerment Act** – there is a requirement for communities to be involved, enabled and empowered in shaping the services and priorities local communities need.
- **Localism** – there is a long-held Council commitment to support greater local decision making and local community involvement.

Alongside the drivers outlined above, the Council has also been leading the preparation of a Regional Spatial Strategy as part of its work to demonstrate Highland's future commitment to delivering national outcomes through the new National Planning Framework 4. This emerging RSS complements other corporate plans in Highland in setting a bold new 30 year strategy for the future of the region. The RSS shows how our network of Highland communities and our unique landscape, environment and heritage can contribute to the regional and national strategy. This is helping to create a clear strategy for investment in communities and infrastructure across the region.

There is already significant work underway that represents a place-based approach ranging from service delivery to the preparation of plans affecting a range of partners in a particular place. Some examples are set out in Annex 1. The Place Based Framework outlined in Section 3 seeks to formalise this emerging approach.

### 3. High-level Goals and Objectives

#### Strategic Objective 1: Place Based Partnership Approach

A Place Based Framework has been developed to put the priorities of place and people at the heart of how partners work together for the future of Highland communities. This paper seeks commitment from members to formally adopt the Place Based Framework as a way of working that is reflected across the Council, partner organisations and communities.

The **Vision** for the Place Based Framework is:

- For communities and partner organisations to work together to identify and deliver against shared outcomes and priorities
- Draw together people from different services to jointly attempt to solve local problems
- To target resources, funding and action to address the needs of people and place

The following **Principles** underpin the operation of the Place Based Framework:

- Community led – engagement and involvement of communities
- Co-ordination – a co-ordinated approach to prioritisation, investment and service delivery in an area
- Inclusive - an inclusive and accessible approach to address needs of all
- Communication - clear communication and sharing of information and intelligence
- Honesty - about resources and need
- Plain English, clear messaging = shared understanding
- Simplification – *the* plan for an area

The following illustrates the interconnecting elements that define the approach to place:

## The Place Based Framework



The Framework recognises that three key elements interlink to inform our thinking on Place:

- **Place Based Priorities** – the identification of key priorities and aims for that community/place. These plans can result from either community led or public sector led activity but showing shared commitment and collaboration.
- **Day to Day activity** – service delivery and community action are informed by the priorities of an area. Investment and direction of resources and targeting of need is informed by the priorities of a community. The Placed Based Priorities are in turn informed by the needs, community action and service knowledge.
- **National / Regional Approaches** - national and local strategic plans, priorities and spending inform the direction of Place Priorities and Day to Day service activity. In turn, local priorities and understanding of day to day need, informs Highland wide planning and priorities.

Drawing on the Scottish Futures Trust Place Guide an 8-step process for considering place is set out:

1. Why should we use a Place-Based approach?  
Agreeing the need to tackle complex challenges in places collectively
2. What do we want this approach to achieve and why?  
Agreeing the intended benefits of a collaborative approach
3. How will we work together in this place to realise these benefits?  
Agreeing ways of collaborative working & resourcing as partners & with communities
4. Understanding why the place needs to change?  
Meaningful engagement with communities and partners to confirm needs and priorities for action – being mindful of whose voices may not be heard
5. What should the future be?  
Collaboratively agreeing what success looks like and how to get there
6. What are the opportunities to deliver on the place ambition?  
Focusing on making the best of what exists and influencing future resource decisions
7. How do we work together to deliver the future place?  
Agreeing a co-ordinated programme of implementation
8. How to we ensure sustained success across time?  
Connecting the place ambition with project briefs, gateway reviews and outcome evaluation

Examples of how a place-based approach is already been adopted and used in practice, can be found at Annex 1.

### **Actions to enable the Place Based Framework**

The Place Based Framework has been designed to support how communities and public sector partners come together and take a collective approach to service design, planning and area priority planning taking a place-based approach. The implementation of this approach will be supported by a number of actions and workstreams underway including:

- Place Based funding – a number of local and national funding streams (Council Place Based Funding, Coastal Communities, Play Funding, Scottish Government Place Based Investment Fund) are now available to support investment and deliver against place

based local priorities. This also provides the opportunity for taking a Participatory Resourcing approach to the allocation of funding enabling community involvement in the prioritisation of resources /developing local priorities.

- Audit support – there are currently two internal audits being progressed to review the approach to place-based funds and secondly to review local democracy and governance arrangements. The learning from both audits should assist in supporting strengthening our approach to place.
- Community Partnership Approach – the Community Planning Board has recently agreed to revise its approach to locality planning with a new model of one plan per Community Partnership. Each plan should include targeted actions for specific geographical or communities of interest within the wider area but also enable a thematic approach for some issues where a wider area-based approach would be appropriate. The focus would remain on addressing inequality. There is the opportunity to align this approach with the ambition for developing a single overarching plan for each area incorporating all the priorities of a place. This approach requires to be discussed and agreed with partners.
- Revised approach to community asset transfer – a renewed approach to Community Asset Transfer was agreed at the last [Communities and Place Committee](#). A broader, proportionate and more streamlined approach, this aims to support greater community ownership and community activity.
- Community Support Co-ordinators – a 10 strong CSC team began on 2 August. Working as part of the broader Community Support and Ward Management team, the posts are temporary for 12 months. The role of the CSC is to focus on the needs of communities and community bodies, taking a community development role to support groups to take forward their plans and priorities. The role therefore links strongly to supporting the Council's place-based approach but also a broader community learning and development approach. An [update](#) on the work of the CSCs was provided at the last meeting of the Communities and Place Committee.
- Engagement Strategy – work is commencing to develop a Community Engagement and Involvement Strategy for the organisation. This needs to reflect how the organisation will engage and involve our communities in how we operate, and help support developing and improving our involvement and relationships with communities across Highland and their involvement in service design, planning and delivery. This will support how we deliver the Place Based Framework and approach.

- Local Place Plan guidance – the development of guidance to support local community groups undertake their own local community place plan.

## Next Steps

The Place Based Framework is an evolving approach to how we operate as an organisation and with our partners and communities, ensuring that place and people are at the centre of our way of working. There are several key next steps in progressing this approach:

1. Should the Council agree the place-based framework, work will be undertaken to discuss and agree this approach with our partners with a view to adopting this shared collaborative approach to place. This will be progressed through the Community Planning Partnership.
2. Work is required with Partners to agree the process for developing area place plans for each partnership area in Highland.
3. Consider the governance arrangements for monitoring, scrutiny and delivery of place-based partnership plans.
4. Consider best practice when evolving and implementing Highland's Place-Based Framework.
5. Internally, the Council needs to embed the principles of a place-based approach across the organisation to ensure that our approach to service design, delivery, planning and investment is focused on place and that as we develop new strategies and programmes, place is at the centre of our considerations.
6. The approach to place will support the evolution of the Council's structure, with a review of Area and Ward Management to be undertaken as agreed by Council in May 2021.
7. Note that the Place Based Framework will define how all of the Strategic Partnership Priorities are considered and implemented through the work of partners.

## Strategic Objective 2: Economic Recovery and Sustained Growth

The impacts of the pandemic and Brexit continue to have a significant impact on the Highland economy, and it is absolutely critical that a partnership approach to economic and recovery and sustained growth is put in place. Much good work has been set in place, working with other public sector partners, Scottish and UK Governments and the private sector, to ensure a joined up approach to future development opportunities. As reported to E&I Committee in May 2021, the vision for the Economic Recovery Strategy is as follows:

**Factoring in the unique economic challenges and opportunities that the region offers, we will deliver Highland solutions for our communities and businesses.**

**Our ambition is to support Highland people and businesses to help grow and develop the potential of our abundant natural resources and key sectors, encouraging economic stability and recovery which will help revitalise our communities and towns.**

### **Actions to enable Economic Recovery and Sustained Growth**

Members will be aware of the partnership efforts through the various recovery groups such as the Highland Economic Recovery Partnership and the City of Inverness and Area Economic Recovery Group. Working closely with others will allow us to move forward the actions required to deliver economic growth, including:

- Aid economic recovery by developing a prioritised list of interventions, in collaboration with services and partners, to maximise time-critical funding opportunities and attract external investment;
- Deliver on our ambition for The Highland Council to become one of the most energy-efficient & climate-ready Councils in Scotland and aid the just transition to net zero;
- Strengthen internal and external partnership working built on clear and consistent engagement designed to better understand local needs and requirements;
- With a significant proportion of Scotland's rural and island communities, continuing to support the protection and creation of jobs and consider emerging technologies through the development of large-scale construction and infrastructure projects and delivery of supporting strategies;
- Expedite digital connectivity across the region ensuring fair access for all;
- Encourage increased inward investment whilst ensuring Highland spend remains in Highland;
- Support and celebrate our cultural and natural heritage - which define the character of Highland - to boost tourism growth and make our region an increasingly attractive place to live and visit; and
- Listen to and engage with our communities to connect them with our peer network and encourage positive outcomes that promote resilience, prosperity and improved wellbeing.



There are a number of objectives that will allow performance to be monitored and for the opportunities for partnership working to be clearly set out. These objectives will include the following areas, which will of course develop with input from stakeholders: -

### **1. A Strong Highland contributing to Scotland's Economic Recovery**

- Setting out the Highland priorities for inclusion within the National Planning Framework 4 and associated Regional Spatial Strategy – much work has already been undertaken on this, with member input.
- Setting out transport priorities for inclusion within the National Transport Strategy and Strategic Priority Projects Review.
- Ensuring that Highland priorities are included within the UK Government's proposals for the Shared Prosperity Fund/Levelling Up Fund.
- Ensuring that the Highland City Region Deal continues to deliver outcomes that benefit the whole region, with a close focus on future Growth Deal opportunities.
- Ensuring that the impacts of Brexit on Highland businesses are fully understood, and appropriate action taken to support different sectors, whilst ensuring that the Highland area benefits from post-Brexit funding opportunities such as the Levelling Up Fund, the Community Renewal Fund and the Shared Prosperity Fund.

### **2. A Prosperous Highland**

- Implementation of the Economic Prosperity Fund to ensure a focus on employment and business growth.
- Developing a strategy for Community Wealth Building, building on the strong community and third sector activity in Highland, and delivering a set of actions that ensures greater local benefits arising from capital spend and procurement activities.
- Aligning the Council's Capital Strategy to contribute to wider economic recovery, including a focus on partnership with the public and private sectors, a co-ordinated approach to digital expansion and delivery of low carbon outcomes.

### **3. A Low/Zero Carbon Highland**

- Actions arising from the Programme Alignment work undertaken for the Council – ensuring that priorities related to the hydrogen economy and capturing benefits from the continued increase in renewable energy lead to sustained economic development within the Council area.
- Ensuring that Council led projects around renewable energy as well as opportunities such as Opportunity Cromarty Firth, the Sutherland Spaceport and

other significant port development projects are fully supported and a programme of work identified to support these.

- Ensuring that the pilot Land Use Partnership that the Council has been selected as a pilot for, takes forward the key actions required to ensure that rural land uses contribute to wider efforts to build Highland's place in Scotland and the UK as a major contributor to wider climate change targets.
- Identifying and supporting projects that will accelerate the hydrogen economy in Highland through working with public and private sector partners.

#### **4. A Healthy Active Highland**

- Setting out the key priorities for the development of the active travel networks across Highland.
- Setting out opportunities for the development of additional sports facilities, working in close partnership with SportScotland and High Life Highland
- Delivering a future strategy for Long Distance Routes across the region, building on the economic development benefits of existing routes.

#### **5. A Connected Highland**

- Delivering key capital infrastructure projects including Council schemes, whilst ensuring the delivery of Scottish Government schemes through the City Region Deal and the Infrastructure Investment Plan.
- Delivering new models for public transport, building on opportunities arising from national funding schemes such as the Bus Strategic Investment Fund.
- Bringing forward schemes to support the delivery of key links such as the continued operation of the Corran Ferry and the Wick Airport Public Service Obligation.

### **Next Steps**

The delivery of the huge range of projects set out above is challenging and can only be achieved by working in partnership with stakeholders from all sectors. The continued focus of this work will be to ensure momentum is maintained, including the following:

- Continued contribution to the Highland Economic Recovery Partnership, and other groups to ensure a cross-sector alignment towards challenges, for example labour market shortages or the issues of housing availability for employees;
- Delivery of City Region Deal and Levelling Up Fund projects, whilst ensuring all available funding opportunities are investigated, and the Council's position in respect of the Shared Prosperity Fund continues to be robustly communicated; and

- Implementation and Delivery of Local Place Plans to support Local Economic Recovery.

### Strategic Objective 3: Connectivity

Digital Connectivity is critical to the development of Highland as a place to live, work and visit. The Council has a key role in co-ordinating the activities of others who are responsible for the delivery of the infrastructure required to bring superfast broadband to the region – an essential building block of a strong economic and social future.

#### **Actions to enable Improved Connectivity**

Over the course of the last two years, The Highland Council has been the lead body for delivery of the Local full Fibre Networks (LFFN) partnership project consisting of Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), NHS Highland (NHS), Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and University of Highlands and Islands (UHI). As the lead partner the Highland Council provided the necessary procedures and resources used to deliver aspects such as procurement, project management guidelines, financial reporting and communications and engagement.

The project saw core networks created in 4 Highland settlements: Fort William, Inverness, Thurso and Wick by delivering gigabit capable connections to 152 public buildings (or anchor tenancies), provided by the 5 partners who sit on the Digital Programme Board. This has been successfully delivered and is a strong stepping stone towards wider roll-out.

Digital Connectivity continues to be the most challenging of the Inverness and City-Region projects owing to its reliance on the Scottish Government's Reaching 100% (R100) North Lot contract. Although the contract has been signed with BT following a period of delay owing to a legal challenge, the final coverage has had to be revised. It has therefore not been possible to develop the scope of the City region Deal project and draft a deliverable plan to extend the reach of the R100 project. HIE, Highland Council and both Scottish and UK Governments are investigating use of the UK Project Gigabit framework as the best means of delivering the project.

#### **Next Steps**

The emphasis continues to be very much on supporting partner activities including the Scottish and UK Government's delivery of R100 and Project Gigabit respectively. The next steps in terms of this partnership work are as follows:

- Continue to monitor and contribute to the delivery of the R100 project across Highland; and
- Continue to work with HIE and both Governments on the delivery of the £20m City region Deal Digital project to extend the reach of the R100 work and where possible supplement the provision of fibre networks.

### Strategic Objective 4: Tourism and Visitor Management

The Tourism sector is arguably the most important economic sector for Highland. Aside from the efforts to continue supporting the sector through the difficulties of the pandemic through the allocation of grants to businesses, the Council has been working in partnership with others to ensure that the opportunities for growth and development of the sector are supported. The links to VisitScotland and the delivery of funding streams such as the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund have been very important to deliver the infrastructure required. Similarly close liaison with Destination Management Organisations across the region have been important in identifying key requirements that will form future infrastructure plans.

Another important area of current and future activity is Visitor Management. A Highland Council Visitor Management Plan was approved by the Council's Tourism Committee on 21 April 2021. This plan was created to recognise and start to address the issues that were anticipated to occur due to the expected increase in the numbers of visitors to the Highlands as Covid restrictions were relaxed.

### **Actions to support Tourism and Visitor Management**

The Highland Visitor Management Plan was informed through close working between Council Services and national and local partners. It covered a range of different activities as set out below:

- Road & Parking improvements
- Car Parks
- Access Rangers
- Public Conveniences
- Waste Management
- Motorhome Facilities
- Public Transport
- Joint Activity with Cairngorms National Park Authority
- Engagement with Visitor Management Groups at a local and national level.

Evidence from the 2021 summer season – gathered from visitors, communities, partners and services themselves have been valuable in showing where interventions were successful but also where additional or further activity might be required. If the maximum benefit is to be achieved it is considered important that wherever possible future decisions should be based on firm evidence. The new Visitor Management Plan for 2022 will be presented to the Tourism Committee on 6<sup>th</sup> December, having being assured Council funding of £1.5m for the 2022 season.

The Council was successful in attracting funding to undertake consultation and produce a Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan that would identify the key priorities for our area. Work on the plan to date has included: -

- Reviewing and updating the previous audit of existing tourism infrastructure

- Mapping existing tourism infrastructure provision so this can be used in future to help provide more comprehensive information direct to visitors
- Analysis of responses to the consultation carried out previously with Members, communities and partners
- Engaging with other Council services to identify and include their priorities for future tourism infrastructure provision
- Engagement with public sector partners on their priorities and any proposed activities so as to avoid duplication of effort and maximise any visitor benefits
- Identification of a number of “hotspots” requiring either a more holistic approach or additional focus on them as strategic priorities

#### **Next Steps:**

- Deliver the Visitor Management Plan for the 2022/23 year;
- Continue to work in close partnership with other public sector agencies (NatureScot, HIE, VisitScotland, Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Cairngorms National Park Authority, Forest and Land Scotland) as well as Destination Management Organisations and private sector; and
- Submit the Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan to VisitScotland for further consideration with the Scottish Government by January 2022. It is hoped that this, along with the plans from other areas of Scotland will help guide any future tourism infrastructure funding programmes.

## Some Existing Examples of a Place Based Approach

### Example Scenario – Place Based Plans

In recent years the Council has led the preparation of a number of place-based plans that attempt to bring partners together around a common strategy, vision and actions for an area or collection of communities, typically at the ward level. Similar plans have been led by community organisations and partners with shared collaboration and commitment to engagement and delivery. This approach responds directly to the Scottish Government's Place Principle which expects partners across all sectors to create a proposition for a place by aligning their priorities, resources and funding to ensure better outcomes for people and places. The Highland approach has also prompted collaboration between partners in the ongoing implementation of change in these areas.

The approach to preparation of these plans is constantly evolving each one learning lessons from the last while also responding to the unique attributes, characteristics and challenges facing the communities in question. Some examples of these plans, and the unique approach taken to each is set out below:

- **Fort William 2040** – This is the earliest example of a place-based plan which sought to ensure that individual developments and service improvements contributed to people's wider priorities and outcomes for the future. A shared vision was developed with the community along with a series of projects and priorities, thereby creating a shared and ambitious portfolio for the area. Since its initial preparation a FW2040 Programme Board has been set up to monitor and oversee its delivery. During 2020 the Board was re-set and the number of partners grew from 5 to 8 and significant progress was made by the Council through its housing investment programme. The Board now has two partnership sub-groups, one focusing on transport given its importance to supporting other infrastructure developments and another on the legacy from the cycling world championships in 2023. The Board has been successful in attracting partnership funding from Crown Estate Scotland to match Council resource for a fixed term project manager to support programme coordination, new development opportunities and further sustainable stakeholder engagement. The work of the Board is of interest to the Scottish Government and it attracts Ministerial attention which is welcome in support of the Government's place-principle. Progress is currently reported to the Lochaber Area Committee.
- **Skye & Raasay Future (SARF)** – The process of preparing Skye & Raasay Future was initiated by the Council in partnership with HIE and included representatives from across community, private and third sectors. Partners are now being asked how best to engage all sectors in the ongoing governance and delivery of the plan. It is hoped that a new SARF Board will include community representatives and that this ongoing

partnership approach can aid delivery and help strengthen the case for future funding opportunities.

- **North West 2045** - NorthWest2045 (NW2045) group is one example of a place based approach coming from the bottom-up. Sutherland County Committee has adopted the group's long-term vision for north west Highland - "North West 2045 Our Future Our Choice". NW2045 was formed by a diverse group of local organisations working together to address the structural inadequacies of a large area facing depopulation, search of a better future for themselves and their children. NW2045 has consulted with the community and its vision identifies six priority areas for action over the next five years including developing affordable local housing and broadband solutions, scoping a local food strategy, and investing in community resilience and voice. Magnetised by its success, it is now delivering the Highland Council area Regional Land Use Partnership (RLUP) pilot (The Highland Council area RLUP received a government grant of £50,000 for recruiting staff, partner, and community liaison, and understanding and developing natural capital and data-related work). Its extensive community visioning process in 2020/21 to understand socio-economic and environmental issues has helped Scottish Wildlife Trust in its bid to secure a place in Round 2 of the Europe-wide Endangered Landscapes Programme, with a share of a multi-million pound nature protecting fund in sight.
- **The Small Isles and Knoydart** - Recent visits by Members and senior officers to the Small Isles and Knoydart, along with a virtual meeting with residents of Canna, illustrate the benefit of community-led place plans driving change and improvement in remote and island communities. Community effort and resilience lead the change and the Council and partners have supporting roles, often learning how to improve practice from solutions developed locally.

### **Examples Scenario – community partnerships**

During the Member seminar on community planning in August 2021. Good practice from the Sutherland Community Partnership was shared. Local Members work alongside officers, other public bodies and community bodies to understand issues, respond and plan for improvements. Community action is a particular strength.

### **Example Scenario – Service Planning and Design**

A place-based approach can also be taken when considering service reviews and service planning. The play park review is a current example of where a place-based approach is being taken to review and redesign a service. This approach focuses on: local engagement with Members and communities to identify play park priorities; solutions for upgrading, development or repurposing play areas; support from Community Support Co-ordinators and

the new Play Co-ordinator to support community involvement; and investing local place funds and national play funding to address and respond to the priorities identified.

### **Example Scenario – Community Place Based Activity**

A further way of applying the place-based approach is within a community setting to deliver against a specific community priority. There are several examples in Highland of where local groups and the Council are working together to develop and implement community green space and food growing projects where place based principles are being applied and are relevant to helping guide the process. Officers will support groups coming forward with ideas and the desire to develop growing projects by co-ordinating the support required and building capacity within the community, supporting access to funding and consider the opportunities around the community to deliver the priority. An important part of building the partnerships is ensuring both the project meets the needs of the community and will sustain the project once established.



