

Agenda Item	<b>4</b>
Report No	<b>HC/42/24</b>

## The Highland Council

**Committee:** Highland Council

**Date:** 12 December 2024

**Report Title:** Highland Investment Plan – Progress Update

**Report By:** Assistant Chief Executive – Place

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1.1 The Highland Investment Plan (HIP) commits £2.1 billion of capital funding over a twenty-year period, based on the ring fencing of 2% council tax per annum, or an equivalent revenue stream. These funds will be capitalised to create an investment fund that will be used to tackle the major capital challenges that Highland Council faces: transport and roads; schools and community facilities; depots and offices – as part of work towards a single public estate and integrated community operating model. One of the key objectives will be to initiate a programme of improvements to our school estate, with 92 of our 196 operational schools currently rated as “C – Poor” for condition and/or suitability.
- 1.1.2 The first section of this report projects this future capital pot, forecasting its likely scale based on currently available information over the next five years. This is done to provide assurance to Members about the potential quantum of funding available and associated financial implications.
- 1.1.3 There is an update on the routes to procurement that could be utilised to sustain such an ambitious programme and secure best value from the investment fund. This includes a range of options, ranging from traditional procurement routes to structured joint ventures.
- 1.1.4 As previously agreed, there is an update on the options appraisal and engagement processes that have been conducted in Dingwall and the early work beginning in Thurso, to ascertain how a master-planning approach can enable a new generation of community facilities. In each case officers provide recommendations as to preferential ways forward based on evaluation of place-based options. A place-based report for Dingwall is presented at Appendix 1 which establishes a preferred site for a future POD, work will now be done with stakeholders to establish some of the essential components of this POD, so as to establish the potential levels of investment required. The report shows a short list of options now to be explored further in relation to Thurso, which will be progressed further, on the same basis as Dingwall.

There is also an update on progress and timescales for the completion of Stage 2 of the options appraisal process for each of the five other Phase 1 HIP locations, which will inform investment decisions to be taken at the next budget meeting of the Highland Council.

- 1.1.5 The report contains updated concept designs for future Points of Delivery (PODs) for Members to reflect on, which are best seen as part of the overall approach to asset reconfiguration which has been agreed by Council. A link is provided to a selection of images and animations outlining the approach being taken to asset reconfiguration.
- 1.1.6 The report also sets out the opportunity for the Council to contribute a sum of £150,000 to ongoing flood mitigation works, which will offer a strategic, nature-based solution to some of the risks to the town from flooding on the River Peffery. This will help unlock some of the planning issues at Dingwall Business Park, which will have a wider economic development to the town. This will be funded from existing budget allocations within the approved capital programme, and Member agreement is sought.
- 1.1.7 The Highland Investment Plan is part of the wider drive towards asset reconfiguration, one of the key drivers for our delivery plan. This is in recognition that many of our assets are in poor condition or no longer retain their prior functionality. The plan requires that we relinquish assets as required, refurbish those we are committed to, and create new builds as part of a place making plan. Only through this process can we shift and free up resource towards what our communities need for the future.
- 1.1.8 Members are reminded that the establishment of community and other types of PODs is linked to plans to modernise service delivery and will be a key driver for the future operating model of the Highland Community Planning Partnership. Such a future operating model needs to be seen as part of a strategy to provide more integrated local services across the ten council areas, effectively devolving council operations over time and ensuring that all places benefit from this new approach. This is essential to sustain communities and population through a revised partnership service delivery model. Section 11 shows the process by which this work is being developed.

## 1.2 **Purpose/Context**

- 1.2.1 In May 2024, the Council approved a report setting out the HIP approach and identifying the priorities for Phase 1.
- Seven project locations where work would be progressed to prepare local masterplans and options appraisals.
  - An initial list of five projects to be progressed to design and tender stage.
- 1.2.2 A subsequent report to the Council meeting in June outlined the processes that will be followed to support the delivery of new Community PODs across Highland, including local engagement with communities and partners, a place-based master planning approach, and a robust option appraisal process. The priorities and timescales for the Phase 1 Community POD locations at Dingwall and Thurso were also agreed.

- 1.2.3 A further report was provided to the Council meeting in October on progress in developing the place-based master planning approach and the option appraisal process for delivering new Community PODs across Highland.
- 1.2.4 In identifying options for the future configuration of services the Council is taking account of the views of local people and evidence of local issues and priorities. The option generation process is being aligned with Area Place Plans that are being prepared across Highland, and evidence that is being gathered for the future Local Development Plan, both of which are the subject of ongoing engagement.
- 1.2.5 Over the summer the Council carried out a 'Place Standard' consultation which aimed to gather views on people's lived experience in Highland including how people can access services and facilities. Feedback is now being considered from over 1000 individual responses and from workshops held with young people across Highland in conjunction with Highlife Highland. The Council has also undertaken analysis of journey times to services from residential properties across Highland which will be fed into the consideration of options in future engagements with communities and stakeholders.
- 1.2.6 This information is helping to inform the options for configuring services in each part of Highland taking account of the particular characteristics and requirements of communities. It will also be taken into account in preparing a new Highland Local Development Plan for which separate engagements with partners and communities will be undertaken in the new year.
- 1.2.7 The wider context of the Highland Investment Plan is to establish a prospectus of investible developments that can attract private sector partners. As with the Highland Housing Challenge, it is a potential vehicle for the utilisation of resource that might become available through the Social Value Charter from Renewables and also, for some developments, the NDR concessions built into the Green Free Port.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- i. **Note** the potential indicative quantum of capital funding available over the five-year period and the associated financial implications.
  - ii. **Note** the procurement approach to develop the five agreed Phase 1 projects to tender stage and the progress in exploring procurement routes for the delivery of other future HIP projects.
  - iii. **Agree** the proposed location for a Community POD development in Dingwall and to commence discussions with the landowner regarding the future purchase of the required site area.
  - iv. **Agree** a contribution of £150,000 from the approved capital programme towards the flood mitigation work being carried out in Dingwall.
  - v. **Note** the progress in identifying the short-list of options to be taken forward to the next stage of the options appraisal process for the Community POD location in Thurso and that the Stage 3 outcome will be reported to the Council meeting in June 2025.

- vi. **Note** that the outcomes from Stage 2 of the options appraisal process for each of the five other prioritised Phase 1 locations at Alness, Brora, Dornoch, Golspie and Invergordon (i.e. a short list of options for each location) will be reported to Council on a phased basis throughout the course of 2025.
- vii. **Note** the progress in developing concept designs for future Community POD arrangements and the work being progressed in relation to how these facilities should operate differently in future.
- viii. **Approve** the timeline of future decisions on the Highland Investment Plan in 2025, as described in section 11.4.
- ix. **Note** the progress in developing a Learning Estate Strategy and that the final version will be reported to the Education Committee meeting in February 2025.

### 3. Implications

#### 3.1 Resource

- 3.1.1 Members will recall from the May 2024 Council report that established the HIP, that the funding of the HIP would be part of the annual budget setting process. This was based on the need to align capital investment decisions with the revenue budget process, and utilising the strategies adopted in May 2024 to link revenue budget growth and revenue budget setting decisions, to the funding of the HIP.
- 3.1.2 The formal setting of the revenue budget in February/March 2025 will be where implications of the HIP are reflected, and decisions made for funding to support the HIP. Beyond the core costs of borrowing for capital, which are covered within this report and the separate Medium-Term Financial Plan report on this agenda, capital investment can also result in other revenue consequences, e.g. running costs and maintenance associated with Council assets.
- 3.1.3 Revenue consequences may be positive or negative, potentially a saving or reduction in revenue costs where assets are combined or replaced, or new additional costs for new assets created. Such costs will need assessed as specific priorities, projects and project scopes are defined, and managed also as part of the Council's revenue budget planning.

#### 3.2 Legal

- 3.2.1 Delivery of the HIP will significantly assist the discharge of various statutory powers and duties of the Council, including those related to Roads, Education and Health and Safety.

#### 3.3 Risk

- 3.3.1 As was set out in the May 2024 HIP report, the funding of the HIP was linked to annual revenue budget decisions, and growth in the revenue budget and earmarking of funding being the mechanism to support the HIP. By implication there are risks relating to the extent to which the Council's financial outlook and budget plans can support the HIP, for example if the Council was faced with a more challenging financial position than expected.

3.3.2 The HIP sought to mitigate such risks by making clear as an approach that the overall level of costs of borrowing would not exceed 10% of the Council's revenue budget, as a mechanism to ensure plans were affordable, prudent, and sustainable. The separate Medium Term Financial Plan report on this Council agenda, provides further context to the financial outlook and budget planning process for 2025/26.

3.3.3 The strategic prioritisation of projects has been built into the Highland Investment Plan, with a focus on tackling issues by priority: seek retrofit options where possible; collocate where possible; deal with emergencies as priority; prioritise developments to provide appropriate capacity; and lastly, enable council policy objectives.

### 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)**

3.4.1 The adopted approach to health and safety was included in the December 2023 report to Council. This set out a hierarchical approach to where we would prioritise capital resources, specifically: "where the health and safety of staff and other service users, stakeholders, or visitors are at actual or potential risk." (section 9.5).

### 3.5 **Gaelic**

3.5.1 The HIP will have a positive impact in relation to maximising the objectives of the Gaelic Language Plan. Several schools that currently deliver Gaelic Medium Education will be in scope for investment, with others potentially having the capacity to expand their provision. The implementation of this approach will be modelled as part of the ongoing process.

## 4. **Impacts**

4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies, or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

4.3 At this point, Members are being asked to decide on the location of the Community POD in Dingwall but not on the full scope of facilities and services that will be included. A screening for impact has been undertaken on the proposed Community POD location and this has concluded that a full impact assessment was not required at this stage. However, the screening will require to be updated if either a statutory school consultation is required or when considering what services will be co-located and at that point a full impact assessment may be required.

4.4 A summary of the conclusions of the screening are outlined below. This builds on the previous screening for impact that was undertaken on the principles and approach outlined in the HIP. It is anticipated that the proposed community POD for Dingwall is likely to have a positive impact for the local community. A new educational provision is likely to support improved outcomes for children and young people and a positive impact on the rights of children and young people. Should a decision be taken in the future to locate St Clement’s School there, then there could be a particular positive impact on children and young people with disabilities through improvements to learning outcomes and the quality of accommodation. However, any future decision would be subject to a separate impact assessment. There is the potential for positive socio-economic impact as a consequence for the co-location of services within one location to enable better access for families. The overall location of the Community POD is within close proximity to the secondary and leisure provision within the town.

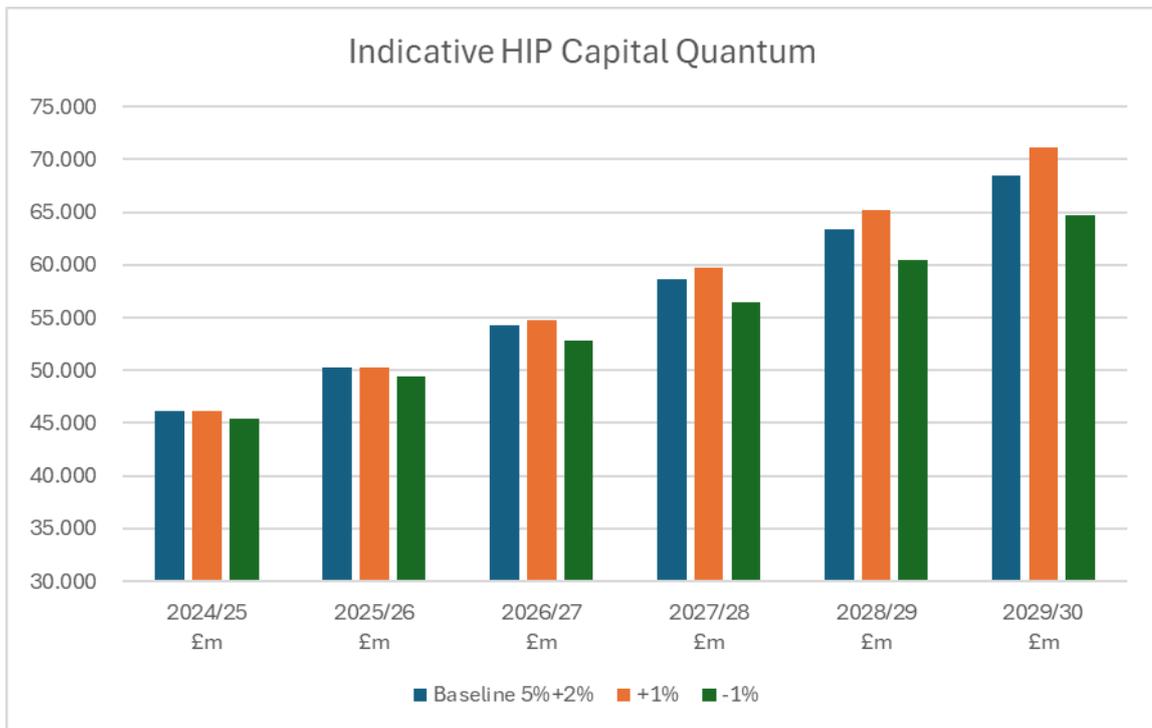
4.5

<b>Impact Assessment Area</b>	<b>Initial Screening Summary</b>
Equality	<i>Potential Positive</i>
Socio-economic	<i>Potential Positive</i>
Human Rights	<i>Potential Positive</i>
Children’s Rights and Well-being	<i>Positive</i>
Island and Mainland Rural	<i>No impact</i>
Climate Change	<i>Positive</i>
Data Rights	<i>No impact</i>

4.6 As noted at 4.3, further assessment is required to consider impact on what is included on the site of the Community POD. This will ultimately depend on the specific dimensions and components of the POD. In particular, work will be carried out to establish the positive and negative impacts that there would be for those with protected characteristics whose needs would potentially be addressed through future POD developments. Best practice across the country in meeting the needs of such groups, including children with additional support needs, will be factored in to support final decisions on what the Dingwall Community POD should encompass.

**5. Indicative HIP Capital Quantum**

5.1 The separate Medium-Term Financial Plan report on the agenda for this meeting sets out the underlying funding principles forming part of the HIP approach agreed in May 2024. That separate report also provides further context to updated funding assumptions and scenarios, and resultant implications. It also projects the potential capital quantum for the HIP over a 5-year period (5 years plus current). That quantum is also re-stated below. This represents the HIP quantum derived from a 2% p.a. earmarking of council tax income or an equivalent sum. This quantum would be over and above the current approved 5-year capital programme and an assumed baseline programme over the longer-term, as described in the May 24 report.



	2024/25 Current Year £m	Next 5 Years £m	5 Years plus Current £m
Baseline 5%+2%	46.200	295.077	341.277
+1% on baseline	46.200	301.079	347.279
-1% on baseline	46.200	283.890	330.090

- 5.2 This indicative quantum is based on a range of assumptions, and these can and will vary, and in particular the quantum is dependent on annual revenue budget funding decisions to create that quantum and will in turn vary in scope depending on variables such as type of project, expected life of the asset, and interest rate levels. The graph gives an indication of quantum on a core baseline scenario, and indications of how a change to the baseline might alter the quantum. A constant across these scenarios is the core principle of the annual earmarking of a sum equivalent to 2% of council tax p.a. But the extent to which the base on which that 2% applies will also vary the quantum is illustrated in the graph.
- 5.3 Council tax and budget decisions are of course taken on an annual basis, and it will be the March 2025 Special Council meeting where the Council will formally make its budget and council tax decisions for 2025/26 and 'create' the funding to establish a capital quantum in that year.
- 5.4 Given capital investment is multi-year and results in longer-term commitments, it is important that Members understand that a single year earmarking of HIP funding will only result in circa £45-60m of capital quantum in a single year. Given this report is focused on an initial 5-year phase of the HIP, and much larger scale investment over that period, investment priorities will require the Council to make year on year revenue funding commitments to create the 2% earmarking to support the HIP. HIP decisions now and in the coming months will potentially forward commit the Council in terms of revenue budget implications over the medium-term.

- 5.5 The May 2024 HIP report illustrated how the HIP could support roads capital investment, as well as school/property/points of delivery (POD) investment. Member decisions to date have agreed increases in roads capital investment up to and including 2026/27, with it being the HIP that would provide for further funding which could sustain/increase roads capital beyond that date.
- 5.6 The table below illustrates how that funding quantum could be categorised, subject to member priorities and decisions, between roads capital and other HIP priorities. This is based on the HIP analysis as set out in the May 2024 report related to roads capital. As noted earlier in this report, the quantum is illustrative and requires the appropriate annual funding decisions by Members to create and release funding for the HIP.
- 5.6.1 The quantum will also vary depending on specific project and priority decisions; therefore, some form of re-assessment of the quantum and alignment of HIP capital spend profiles will be necessary. Given the phased nature of the HIP, there will be an ongoing process of update and re-assessment of the quantum and commitments made, on an ongoing process.

		Future 5 Years					
	Current 24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28	28/29	29/30	Total
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Indicative Roads HIP Capital	see note	see note	see note	14.2	14.6	14.9	43.7
Balance of HIP quantum	46.2	50.3	54.2	44.4	48.8	53.6	297.5
Total Indicative HIP quantum (baseline)	46.2	50.3	54.2	58.6	63.4	68.5	341.2

Note: Council budget decisions of February and then March 2024 agreed £40m of additional capital over 3 years up to and including 2026/27 for roads capital investment. The table reflects an assumption, as was the case in May 2024, that the HIP could then make provision for the period 2027/28 and beyond. The roads line above is in addition to an assumed core capital allocation to roads of c£7.8m p.a.

## 6. Procurement Routes

- 6.1 A key element of delivering the HIP is the evaluation of procurement options and the identification of potential challenges and opportunities, particularly in relation to the capacity of the construction market to deliver the programme in the future. As part of the background work related to the HIP, the Council has engaged the Shared Procurement Service to carry out an in-depth assessment of the procurement approach that should be used in driving forward the significant level of investment proposed.
- 6.2 A full market testing exercise has been undertaken and the outcomes clearly show that the conventional routes to procurement are more expensive and less sustainable than the other available routes, which are either to utilise a framework, or enter into a partnership vehicle. The cost benefits will allow more value to be achieved (enabling more and more complex PODs to be built).

- 6.3 Subject to Council approval, officers will progress negotiations with the identified and preferred Partnership model. This will also include developing a delivery strategy, which defines the terms of engagement and long-term delivery commitments, including agreement on relevant Key Performance Indicators and Metrics which align with the objectives of the HIP. As part of this engagement, we will also develop proposals to construct a coordinated regional delivery plan, assessing delivery across wider partners and agencies.
- 6.4 Whilst it is anticipated that the preferred approach set out in the work being prepared can be put in place relatively quickly any project coming to a decision point may be subject to existing procurement processes in the meantime, with all the normal vehicles available to progress projects to construction. As previously agreed, five Phase 1 projects are being progressed to design and tender stage. The procurement route for each project may need to be agreed in advance of determining a procurement strategy for the future HIP portfolio of projects. The proposed approach for each of these projects in such a scenario would be as follows.
- **Beauly Primary and Dunvegan Primary:** These could be packaged with new build projects of a similar scale and location in the approved capital programme. This could reduce lead-in times, achieve economies of scale, and tie in with procurement processes that are already underway: e.g. Beauly could be grouped with Tornagrain, and Dunvegan with Broadford.
  - **Charleston Academy:** The Stage 2 Concept Design is due to be completed by the end of February 2025. The procurement options to complete Design Stages 3 and 4 and progress the project to tender stage are being assessed.
  - **Fortrose Academy and Inverness High:** These projects are a combination of refurbishment and partial demolition/rebuilding that will be carried out in phases. These would be viewed as stand-alone projects and the procurement options for each are being assessed.
- 6.5 The first stage of the process involved the facilitation of information gathering through a structured engagement approach with key Council Officers: programme sponsors; senior leadership; stakeholders and technical leads. This was designed to establish a consensus as to the importance and prioritisation of critical success factors, that would be used, to inform dialogue with interested parties in the market.
- 6.6 An informal 'soft market engagement' procedure then followed and has been completed to provide market intelligence and a supporting evidence base in respect of the appointment of a development partner/s, to support Highland Council deliver the parameters and objectives of the Highland Investment Plan (HIP).
- 6.7 The engagement was designed to understand market capacity, expertise and commitments to support the extended commissioning and next steps which will require the provision of a range of turn-key services, encompassing change management, business case development, place planning, project and design development, partnership working, construction related activities and creative approaches to secure further inward funding and investment in line with our Community Wealth Building priorities. After market research a range of partnership models, frameworks and contractors were identified.

6.8 Sixteen organisations were invited to participate in this process with ten responses received and subsequent interviews undertaken.

The following criterion for discussion were set out as part of the expression of interest process and subsequent engagements:

- **Value for Money:** Partners with a proven track record of providing best value through systems, procedures, collaborative working, and innovation.
- **Resource:** Partners with an appetite to provide expert resources to supplement internal capabilities including technical, commercial and change management.
- **Risk Transfer:** Partners with an appetite to accept transfer of commercial, delivery and technical risks.
- **Funding Innovation:** Partners with a proven track record of raising finance and supplementary investment.

6.9 The high-level analysis of the responses and the engagement sessions showed:

- Evident and genuine enthusiasm and appetite from partners to be involved on a longer-term basis and appetite to a longer term 'joint partnering' approach, supported by internal engagement seeking a change to a traditional approach.
- All have varying levels of capacity, skills, and experience in existence across the region and all alluded to working knowledge and experience of the area albeit to varying degrees.
- Best solutions would require a partnership model involving a mix of sub supply chain organisations to deliver dependant on scope and timing of individual projects and programmes.
- Clear requirement for visibility of proposed activity pipeline over next 10 years whilst appreciating it may be indicative at this stage, to deliver outcomes and objectives per the HIP.

6.10 The Commercial & Procurement Services Team has numerous sources of benchmark data, market intelligence, independent professional understanding and feedback from other Councils who have either recently undertaken and/or completed significant capital infrastructure and investment related programmes of work. This has been collated to compliment the specific market engagement activity relating to the HIP.

An initial quantitative and qualitative appraisal has assessed the following models of delivery which are summarised:

- **Traditional**

This route through Public Contracts Scotland is the fall-back position for any public procurement. This method will result in the longest time from instigation to appointment and will require significant resource to manage when undertaking programmes of this scale, particularly when a significant volume of individual tender exercises for numerous specialist contractors will be required.

- **Frameworks**

Examples of these framework providers include: SCAPE, Crown Commercial Service (CCS), Scottish Procurement Alliance (SPA) and Scotland Excel. All frameworks will note the following benefits to using their method:

- Rigorous supplier selection
- Time and money savings on procurement exercises
- Direct award available
- Full compliance with public procurement regulations
- Partnerships

These organisations will take a more hands-on approach to procurement through forming strategic development partnerships to provide both access to a range of market suppliers and specialised programme management support. Two examples of this model are Clear Futures and Hubco although they may take very different approaches to achieving the aforementioned.

- 6.11 To assist with the Quantitative and Qualitative Assessment a recent comparator exercise, commissioned through an independent industry consultant, conducted by the North Territory Partnering Board, of which Highland Council is a key participant, along with Scottish Futures Trust (SFT) was the model used to form the basis of assessment including research over 100 sample projects.

Quantitative Analysis:

Three indicative project values were assessed against each delivery model covering sample projects across the following range: £10m, £40m and £80m. Each delivery model has capped or maximum percentage on-costs. On-costs being additional non-prime related costs. These include designer fees, risk, overhead & profit, and development fees.

Qualitative

A range of qualitative measures were also tested as part of both our research and the formal engagement procedure in addition to the value for money assessment recorded above, including:

- Resource: appetite to provide expert resources to supplement internal capabilities including technical, commercial and change management.
- Risk Transfer: appetite to accept transfer of commercial, delivery and technical risks.
- Funding Innovation: proven track record of raising finance and supplementary investment.
- Community Wealth Building Outcomes: building local resilience, working with community groups, and developing supply chains within localities in line with the objectives of our HOIP.

- 6.12 It is the view that whilst this assessment methodology is at a point in time it is transparent and robust. It is recommended that this forms the basis of decision making on procurement routes as and when scopes of the HIP programme are further defined at committed commissioning stages.

- 6.13 The analysis highlights the Partnership Model has the potential to provide the best value for money solution overall. In relation to project development costs (such as preliminaries, design team fees, risk, margin, overheads, Stage 1 and 2 development fees and pre-construction fees) **are estimated** at 22% of the total construction cost. This compares to 27.8% for the Framework Model and 30% for the Traditional Model. With a projected £2.12bn for the HIP, the project development costs for a Partnership Model are estimated to be £121m less than the Framework Model and £168m less than the Traditional Model.
- 6.14 The assessment methodology provides both a quantitative and qualitative evidence base. It is recommended to commence engagement with prospective Partnerships and scoping with the identified partnering model which best supports the identified objectives in the HIP. This will also include developing a delivery strategy, which defines the terms of engagement and long-term delivery commitments, including agreement on relevant Key Performance Indicators and Metrics which align with the objectives of the HIP. As part of this engagement, we will also develop proposals to construct a coordinated regional delivery plan, assessing delivery across wider partners and agencies.

## 7. Dingwall Workstream

### 7.1 Place-Based Approach

- 7.1.1 A substantial amount of work has been undertaken on the development of a place-based approach for Dingwall. This exercise has been assisted through the engagement of Hub North Scotland Ltd (HNSL) who have prepared the summary report that is attached at Appendix 1, and along with Stantec who developed the Five Case Business Model Methodology that was outlined in the October report. The full report is available to view at this [link](#).
- 7.1.2 **Overview of Objectives:** The place-based approach prioritises outcomes for communities to "live well locally" and ensures alignment of national, regional, and local objectives. Key alignments include:-
- Scottish National Performance Framework: A vision for wellbeing and sustainable, inclusive growth for all in Scotland.
  - Highland Outcome Improvement Plan and Our Future Highland: Emphasis on a place-based approach through collaboration and partnership to meet community needs.
  - Local Focus: Specifically, for Dingwall, the approach supports 'Living Well Locally,' informed by relevant local outcomes.
- 7.1.3 **Summary of Approach:** In partnership with the Highland Council, HNSL conducted an initial place-based review to understand and test the requirements and needs for Dingwall. This focused on options for establishing new community, office, and depot facilities through the proposed POD model as part of the HIP. Key activities included:
1. Vision Development: Creating a Place Narrative that describes a shared story for Dingwall to identify needs now and in the future.
  2. Engagement: Collaboration with Partners to identify outcomes and confirm service and investment plans, while testing and challenging objectives.

3. Options Analysis & Planning: Raising awareness and identifying potential future opportunities for Partner alignment and joint models of delivery to identify the assets needed to support this.

The place-based review included creating a dataset of available cross-Partner assets and developing a map of opportunities for collaboration. An interim Outline Business Case was developed to assess options, ensuring that investment and subsequent approval can be prioritised and aligned with tangible outputs and benefits for the Dingwall community.

7.1.4 **Dingwall the Place – Needs, Challenges & Opportunities:** Places are defined as 'locations with meaning' that support people and communities, providing a context for effective, prioritised investment. A place-based approach focuses on future joined-up service delivery to help people live, work, study, and experience their place. Key points from the Place Narrative for Dingwall are as follows:-

- Economic & Cultural Hub: Dingwall is recognised for its community spirit and recreational facilities but is facing challenges including reduced commercial presence, investment, and outward migration.
- Connectivity & Public Estate: Opportunities exist for better local access to coordinated services, community development, and investment attraction.
- Community Engagement: It is important to attract, retain, and support residents and visitors, positioning Dingwall as a destination in its own right.
- Sustainability: Leveraging Dingwall's location and assets for energy transition, carbon reduction, and addressing climate and biodiversity crises.
- Dingwall Placed Based Report | Dingwall -Point of Delivery (POD) Report

7.1.5 **Place Narrative:** This consolidates data and community input to identify strengths and challenges, providing a framework for future focus and investment opportunities. This process enabled the identification of opportunities, discussed with Partners to ensure alignment with objectives and measurable outcomes. The key areas of focus highlighted by Partners included:

- Learning Work for All
- Making Services Accessible
- Enhancing the Attractiveness of "The Place"
- Creating "A Place" for Nurture
- Facilitating Community Leadership
- Redeveloping Existing Assets
- Promoting Sustainability

7.1.6 **Consultation & Engagement:** In developing the Place Narrative and in addition to work undertaken by the Highland Council Planning Department to develop the Regional Development Plans, and Community Engagement within Dingwall with regards to developing the Area Place Plan, HNSL has engaged with key public sector partners. These engagements created an understanding of emerging service models and existing asset portfolios, identifying opportunities for collaboration. Key elements included:

- **Group Understanding:** Sharing between partners the key public sector plans, objectives, and requirements to improve service delivery.
- **Opportunity Development:** Creating opportunities that ensure synergy and deliver outcomes to communities through a multi-service and portfolio approach.
- **Asset Maximisation:** Making use of available assets in line with the Place based principles for investment.

7.1.7 **Opportunities:** This collaborative process has informed the development of opportunities and potential solutions, that aim to maximise the use of assets and improve service delivery in Dingwall, thus ensuring effective and coordinated investment to meet community needs as follows:

- **Community POD:** Potential for shared or aligned service functions, training facilities, "satellite" services, efficiencies, and other opportunities for operational and customer-focused provisions for both currently utilised and underused assets within Dingwall.
- **Office POD:** Potential for shared "back office" space, aligned service functions, training facilities, efficiencies, and other opportunities for operational provisions for both currently utilised and underused assets within Dingwall.
- **Depot POD:** Potential for multi-agency/partner storage, maintenance, and "washdown" facilities, with the possibility to incorporate and align with "office" or business facilities.

7.1.8 **Consideration of Options:** By understanding Dingwall's prioritised needs and opportunities and engaging with partners, the place-based review developed a "Map of Opportunity" identifying possibilities to explore across Dingwall, which could accommodate Community, Office, or Depot PODs. Some sites can accommodate multiple POD users, various pods, and potentially residential spaces.

7.1.9 **Outline Business Case:** An interim Outline Business Case for the Dingwall Community POD has been prepared, following the Five Case Business Model Methodology. This included setting project spending objectives, identifying critical success factors, and assessing potential options. The outcome of this is that the preferred way forward at this stage in terms of meeting the goals of the HIP would be Option 3, as detailed on Page 9 in Appendix 1. Further development will be required to progress to a fully populated Outline Business Case by March 2025.

## 7.2 Dingwall Community POD Site

- 7.2.1 The previous statutory consultation to relocate St Clement's School that was concluded in 2022 highlighted the limited availability of suitable sites for a new school campus in Dingwall. Following the approval of the HIP approach earlier this year, work was undertaken to identify a site that could accommodate a Community POD development. A suitable site has been identified and although it is not currently in Council ownership, positive discussions have taken place with the landowners, Albyn Housing, regarding the potential acquisition of the site.
- 7.2.2 The proposed site was not considered to be a viable option during the original statutory consultation process for St Clement's as the introduction of a separate school campus adjacent to the Primary School would have exacerbated the traffic issues and other restrictions that exist there. However, relocating the Primary School to this larger site would allow other co-located facilities to be included as part of an overall design layout that would overcome the previously identified restrictions. Also, a new distributor road to the north of this site has recently been completed.
- 7.2.3 Appendix 2 identifies the location of the proposed Community POD site (the lower part of Site Reference DW02) and includes the relevant land areas that would be required for each of the component parts, i.e. the Primary School, the potential co-location of St Clement's School, and other co-located community and partner facilities. Part of the existing Primary School site would need to be retained and incorporated within the new campus development to ensure adequate road and footpath access, car parking and drop-off areas, and compensatory green space.
- 7.2.4 As part of the area place plan development, a series of engagement events were held to consider priorities for the Dingwall and Seaforth area. Included in this were views regarding the future use of buildings, of the opportunities for better use premises for delivering services and for co-location. Council officers have also engaged directly with Parent Councils and specific community groups to raise awareness and understand views on the HIP approach and the potential opportunities for Dingwall. A public drop-in event was held in Dingwall in November along with an online event to engage with the local community and obtain feedback. The initial feedback has been generally supportive of the longer-term strategic approach and the concept of a community POD, but some comments were made regarding the lack of information on the significant heritage of Dingwall, facilities to support tourism and visitors and how to improve the use of premises on the High Street. This and other feedback will be taken on board and further engagement will take place once proposals have been developed and particularly on what services may be aligned and integrated within the Community POD. A summary of engagement can be found at Appendix 3.
- 7.2.5 A commitment has been made to rebuild St Clement's School and retain its unique identity. The importance of this has been reflected in the engagement responses received to date. The options appraisal process will determine the best method of achieving that, with consideration given to the benefits of the following shortlisted options.
- **Option A:** A new build on the recently acquired site at Dochcarty Brae based on the statutory consultation completed in 2022.
  - **Option B:** A new build co-located on the proposed Community POD site. A statutory consultation would be required if the preferred option was for the school to be located here.

- 7.2.6 Officers are continuing to engage with the St Clement's Parent Council and Ward Members to assess the two options and identify the potential benefits of each. The outcome of this will be reported to the Council meeting on 27 March. The feedback received thus far has highlighted the various pros and cons of the different options that have been put forward, and this is the subject of continuing engagement as we develop the POD location and design.
- 7.2.7 Community, sports, and leisure facilities in Community PODs will be designed to support the integration of school and community activities and maximise usage. A study will be undertaken to look at the wider leisure offerings in Dingwall, including the Highland Football Academy facilities, to determine the most suitable and sustainable long-term solution for the site while maintaining current and future community access needs. The existing Dingwall Leisure Centre will also be assessed to determine the level of future capital investment that would be necessary to sustain and improve the services provided and to complement any new community facilities that may be contained in a new Community POD.
- 7.2.8 Members are asked to agree the proposed location for a Community POD development in Dingwall and to commence discussions with the landowner regarding the future purchase of the required site area. It should be noted that a statutory consultation would not be required for Dingwall Primary School to be located on this site. However, as identified in Paragraph 7.2.5, a statutory consultation for the relocation of St Clement's School would be required if the preferred option was for the school to be co-located on this site.
- 7.2.9 The overall asset map for Dingwall encapsulates the challenge in Highland areas. There is a complex map of community facilities, some of which are in poor condition or suitability. There is a need for urgent investment. But strategic decisions require to be taken to maximise any such investment, based on priorities and a realistic picture of what can be achieved. There is an opportunity to provide the community with what it needs for the future, but the lessons of previous investments need to be learned, where such investment has added to and not addressed the issues in wider place-based asset map. Also, achieving best value in the investment in Dingwall creates greater potential to invest in other areas and maximise the benefits of the plan Highland wide.

### 7.3 **Dingwall Flood Scheme**

- 7.3.1 A Scottish Government funded project is underway carrying out a variety of nature restoration projects throughout the River Peffery catchment, upstream of Dingwall. In addition to the improvement to biodiversity and reduction in net carbon emissions, these works, which include peatland restoration, creation of wet woodlands, reconnecting the river with its floodplains and flow attenuation, cumulatively help to reduce peak flow in the River Peffery. The measures are most effective for regular flooding such as may be experienced every 2 to 10 years. Works to date have been delivered through Nature Restoration funding from Nature Scot, as well as in agreement with local landowners and Forestry and Land Scotland.

- 7.3.2 As Members will be aware, the existing bund around the Dingwall Business Park provides some relief from flood risk associated with the River Peffery. This bund, which is immediately adjacent to the river, is not a formal Flood Protection Scheme and was not constructed under relevant flooding legislation as flood works. This results in new development within the business park being considered at flood risk and therefore impacting the potential for new business growth within the park (and therefore benefits are lost to Dingwall). One of the primary concerns with the existing bund performance for planning purposes, is how it would perform in high return period flood events due to the erosive action of the river on the toe of the existing bund.
- 7.3.3 Design work to model the impact of re-meandering the River Peffery as it flows past the Dingwall Business Park flood bund in order to move the main flow away from the toe of the bund has been carried out. The resulting proposals would significantly reduce shear stresses on the bund, therefore increasing the integrity of the bund during flooding events. In addition, reconnecting the river with its floodplains, enables a reduction in the peak of pass forward flows downstream towards the town of Dingwall itself.
- 7.3.4 The works adjacent to the business park are unable to be funded as part of their overall catchment works. Members are therefore requested to consider contributing to the funding of this important element of the project. Partial funding commitment has already been agreed by HIE and a further £150k from the Council would enable the works to proceed in 2025. This is a great opportunity for the Council to partner in a project which is capturing carbon, improving biodiversity, and reducing flood risk within the River Peffery catchment, reducing flood risk within Dingwall and potentially unlocking development opportunities within the business park.

## **8. Thurso Workstream**

- 8.1 Work has also been progressing in Thurso to identify the long list of options as part of the master-planning approach. Place planning is not new to Caithness and has been progressed over the last 18 months through the Caithness Demonstrator Project. Funded by the Scottish Government, this has aimed to learn about how organisations, services and communities can work together in new ways to improve local outcomes in Caithness. Public, third and community sector partners have been working together to consider how to make best use of local assets and resources, including local spaces. Thurso has been one of the areas of focus and the learning from this has provided an important base on which to commence the master-planning work.
- 8.2 Although educational provision is just one element of the Community POD approach, the future configuration of schools is a key factor in identifying suitable sites in terms of capacity, location, and suitability. Also, the requirement to carry out a statutory consultation in the event of any closure or relocation of existing schools means that this needs to be considered at the initial stage of the HIP option appraisal process. All resulting options would be appraised in terms of their ability to maximise the opportunities for co-location of Council, community, and partner services.

- 8.3 An initial assessment by Council Officers has produced the following long list of potential options for future education provision. These fall into five distinct categories, each of which would have a range of sub-options based on using either existing sites or any other sites that may be identified as suitable.
1. **3-18 Campus (One Primary School):** Thurso High, a combined primary school, Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) provision and Additional Support Needs (ASN) bases all located on one campus.
  2. **3-18 Campus (Two Primary Schools):** As above but with primary school provision split between the 3-18 campus and one other primary school located elsewhere and with revised catchment areas.
  3. **Status Quo:** Three primary schools (with ELC) on separate sites from the High School, each with ASN bases as required.
  4. **Separate Campuses (One Primary School):** As above but one combined primary school on a separate site from the High School.
  5. **Separate Campuses (Two Primary Schools):** As above but two separate primary schools with revised catchment areas.
- 8.4 Officers have engaged with Members from the two Caithness Wards and the Head Teachers of the High School and the 3 Primary Schools, and a meeting is to be arranged with the Chairs of the Parent Councils. Members have proposed that Option 3 should be discounted at this stage as retaining three Primary Schools on separate sites would not be in line with the previously agreed principles of the overall HIP approach and therefore not best serve the needs of the Thurso community for decades to come. It is therefore proposed that the short-list of Options 1, 2, 4 and 5 will be taken forward to Stage 3 of the options appraisal process.
- 8.5 Stage 3 will also comprise the development of a wider place-based approach to maximise the use of assets and improve service delivery in Thurso and will follow the process that was adopted for Dingwall as set out in Section 7.1. This will align with the work to develop an Area Place Plan for Caithness and engagement to progress the master-planning in Thurso will be combined with engagement for the wider place planning approach.
- 8.6 The outcomes at the end of Stage 3 will be a preferred location for a Community POD in Thurso, the development of a “Map of Opportunity” identifying possibilities for co-location of Council, community and partner services in a Community, Depot or Office POD, and the assessment of potential options through an interim Outline Business Case. It is proposed that these outcomes will be reported to the Council meeting in June 2025.

## **9. Other Phase 1 Locations**

- 9.1 Seven locations were agreed as priorities for delivery within Years 1 to 10. This required local masterplans and options appraisals to be developed, initially focussed on the schools listed in each location. The priorities and timescales for Dingwall and Thurso were agreed in June 2024 and are covered elsewhere in this report.
- 9.2 Engagement with Ward Members has commenced for the five other locations (AIness, Brora, Dornoch, Golspie and Invergordon) and this will be extended to other stakeholders in the coming weeks. It is proposed that the outcomes from Stage 2 of the options appraisal process (i.e. a short list of options for each location) will be reported on a phased basis to the Council meetings throughout the course of 2025.

## **10. Concept POD Design Work**

- 10.1 As highlighted in the report to the Council meeting in October, there has been considerable progress on developing the forms of different POD arrangements and the associated concept designs and layouts. Our internal design team is conducting this work and the further progress since October is available to view in the images and animations-

[Concept - Point of Delivery \(POD\) Design Work |](#)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JwUWNRCAK\\_0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JwUWNRCAK_0)

- 10.2 The Council has committed to creating a new generation of community-based facilities, from which partners can provide a more integrated service offering. The refinement of the POD concepts will act as a catalyst for the future delivery of modern Council and potentially partner services, meeting emerging community needs and the requirement for future partner and community integration.
- 10.3 All future place-based projects must support further integration and enable the evolution of lifelong services for people in the Highland area. This type of investment will be a key economic driver, maximise community benefit and support activity to sustain Highland communities.
- 10.4 Importantly, by demonstrating the benefits of bringing services together we will be able to improve the experience of members of the public that access any of these services. Also, there would be clear benefits for services co-located in a POD facility, bringing them into proximity with other professionals, resources and facilities that otherwise would be of lower quality, or much more remote from them.
- 10.5 There is therefore work on-going through our delivery plan to progress the future operating model for such facilities, which will be intended to operate more locally and in a more integrated fashion, allowing over time the devolution of powers and duties to local, integrated operations. This work will be progressed through the design stages with partners and surfaced through the appropriate political channels within the Council strategic committees and in partnership forums.

## 11. Next Steps

- 11.1 Members will understand that the purpose of this report is to provide a clear pathway through the Highland Investment Plan to the creation of the new network of community-based facilities across the Highland area. It has therefore charted a financial course to the creation of the investment fund which will be achieved by ring fencing revenue streams over the next few years, with regular updates on the likely scale of the pot brought, subject to borrowing rates and estimated levels of capital investment that might be achieved. It has furthermore established that a preferred procurement model will be to enter into a partnership arrangement with one of the available partnerships / frameworks which will have significant investment and delivery advantages compared to traditional routes to procurement. It has thirdly updated on progress in relation to place-making engagement in Dingwall and Thurso and sought approval for a preferred location for the Dingwall POD.
- 11.2 To maintain the pace of this work and ensure that rigorous due diligence is in place, it is intended that reports will come to full Council in March asking for financial approval for a number of projects to proceed, based on the outcome of the budget setting process. At the subsequent Council in March the finalisation of the preferred procurement route will establish the most effective means to ensure best value from such routes.
- 11.3 As was documented in section 6.4, specific decisions will be required in March regarding the allocation of resource to a number of school build projects from an earlier phase. There is a requirement also to begin engagement on options for a number of other areas identified as phase one priorities for POD consideration. There is a requirement to further progress engagement and consultation.
- 11.4 The timeline proposed for future decisions by Highland Council in 2025 is as follows:
- **March 7 Decisions**
    - Commitment of revenue equivalent to 2% council tax as part of the 2024 – 2025 budget as part of the overall settlement
  - **March 28 Decisions**
    - The specific partnering arrangement to be utilised for the purpose of procuring partners for the £2 billion Highland Investment Plan
    - The allocation of budget to a number of phase-one projects (section 6.4) which can be accelerated to procurement by the most effective route.
    - The specific dimensions of the Dingwall POD and the budget required for it – and depending on the outcome of further community engagement and impact assessment, seek approval to begin statutory consultation.
  - **June 26 Decisions**
    - The design work on the future council operating model to be deployed in PODs to enable more effective and joined up service provision.
    - The preferred model for the Thurso POD based on more comprehensive place-based mapping.
    - The outcomes of engagement on for each of the five other prioritised Phase 1 locations at: Alness, Brora, Dornoch, Golspie and Invergordon on a phased basis.

- 11.5 Of course, as the work of the Highland Investment Plan progresses there will be a need to establish how the budget raised will be deployed most effectively to meet the expectations of the programme and there may be opportunities to use the funding set aside from the scheme to support other specific projects or programme. Updates on this work will be built into future reports to the Housing and Property Committee. This will include finding ways to support refurbishment of schools, depots, offices and to match fund with specifically related community projects.
- 11.6 Work on developing a Learning Estate Strategy has been progressing. This document will provide a platform for investment and set out a strategic approach for managing the learning estate that will link in with the outcomes of the Highland Investment Plan. Learning environments should meet the needs of all learners by supporting and facilitating joined up learning and teaching, enhancing wellbeing, and meeting varying needs to support inclusion and transition. It is proposed that the final version of the Learning Estate Strategy document will be reported for approval to the meeting of the Education Committee in February 2025.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive – Place

Date: 2 December 2024

Authors: Finlay MacDonald, Chief Officer – Property and Assets  
Robert Campbell, Service Lead – Capital Planning and Estates Strategy  
Brian Porter, Chief Officer – Corporate Finance and Section 95 Officer  
Alison Clark, Chief Officer – Housing & Communities  
Craig Innes, Head of Commercial and Procurement Shared Services

Background Papers: Establishing the Highland Investment Plan and Mechanisms to Fund and Deliver It (May 2024) [Report](#)  
Highland Investment Plan – Next Steps (June 2024) [Report](#)  
Highland Investment Plan – Progress Update (October 2024) [Report](#)

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Dingwall Place-Based Report  
Appendix 2 – Proposed Site for the Dingwall Community POD  
Appendix 3 – Engagement Update

# Appendix 1 – Dingwall Place-Based Summary Report

## Introduction & Overview

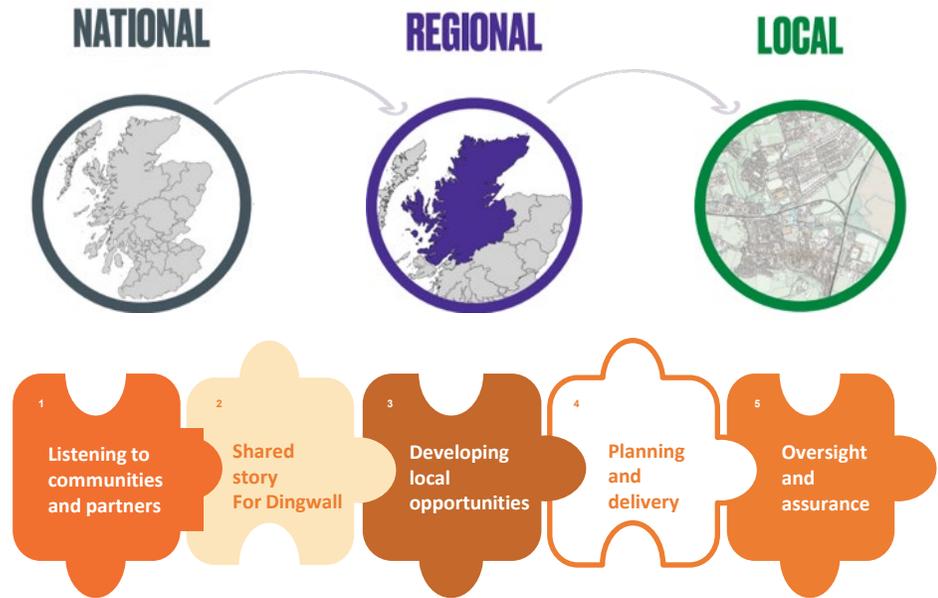
The focus of the hub North Scotland (hNSL) activities were to support **The Highland Council (THC)** with the scoping & definition of the initial phases of the **Highland Investment Plan**.

This Place based review has focused on requirements for **Dingwall**, outlining considerations and short-listed options for establishing a new generation of **Points of Delivery (PODs): community, office and depots**. A similar approach has commenced for **Thurso** leading to the identification of a long-list of opportunities.

A **Place Based Approach** puts individuals at the heart of the solution to allow them to “**live well locally**” and follows a “**golden thread**” to ensure alignment from **National** (set by Scottish Government & Others) to **Regional** (set by THC) to **Local** objectives and requirements.

Key hNSL activities undertaken include:

- Developing a **Vision** (Place Narrative) for Dingwall to understand key areas of needs
- **Engaging with Partners** to identify aligned opportunities
- Developing a **Map of Opportunity**: ensuring needs and outputs are focused on Dingwall.
- Creating an initial **Place Programme**
- Capturing a list of available **Assets**
- Development of an **Interim Outline Business Case** for Dingwall Community POD. This allows:
  - Assessing future focus for Investment (and subsequent approval)
  - Prioritisation
  - Measurement of impact
  - Tangible outputs and benefits for the Dingwall Community



# Place Narrative - A Shared Story for Dingwall

The Place Narrative is contained within the hNSL report.

The Place Narrative or **Vision** is developed to arrive at an understanding of its **current position** and **future needs**.

## Key Questions:

What is the current position?



What kind of place is Dingwall?



What are the Challenges and Opportunities?

What does this mean for the future?



Dingwall – its own Place



Working together in new ways



Growing Sustainably

## Analysis:

Using ongoing “golden thread” alignment, each area of Opportunity was further analysed to consider what key elements of a **delivery “enabler”** was required. In turn these were also considered and aligned against key **POD elements** within the **Highland Investment Plan** which could deliver these **benefits for Dingwall**.

### Focus – Partner Opportunities for Community Points of Delivery (PODs):



Positive: Making Learning Work for All



Making Services Accessible



Making the Place More Attractive



Making a Place for Nurture



Making it easier for communities to lead



Opportunity to redevelop existing assets



Making it Sustainable



### Key elements of Enablers (e.g.):

- Focus on Needs & priorities of the Community
- Multi Partner Solutions
- Convenient & Accessible for the Customer
- Sum is Bigger than the Parts
- Effective & Efficient
- Sustainable
- Output & Outcome Focused
- Making a Difference

**The above work has been fully informed by engagement with the Corporate (Public Sector) Partners.**

# Place Narrative - A Shared Story for Dingwall – Guiding Principles

As part of developing the shared story and **Place Narrative** for Dingwall, **four guiding principles** emerged, which can be used to ensure that **future investment** in Dingwall is **clear, cohesive and effective** for the people who live, work, learn and play there.

This aligns with:

- Highland Outcome Improvement Plan
- Ambitions of partners
- Desire to rationalise existing assets
- THC Development Plans and other key data
- Community Engagement (by THC)



**Contributes positively to inclusive growth, local wellbeing and Net Zero potential in all parts of Dingwall**



**Facilitates a more accessible and connected Dingwall with Multi Partner Services**



**Builds on current successes & opportunities of Dingwall locality**



**Makes best use of resources – current & future**



# Identifying Opportunities with Partners

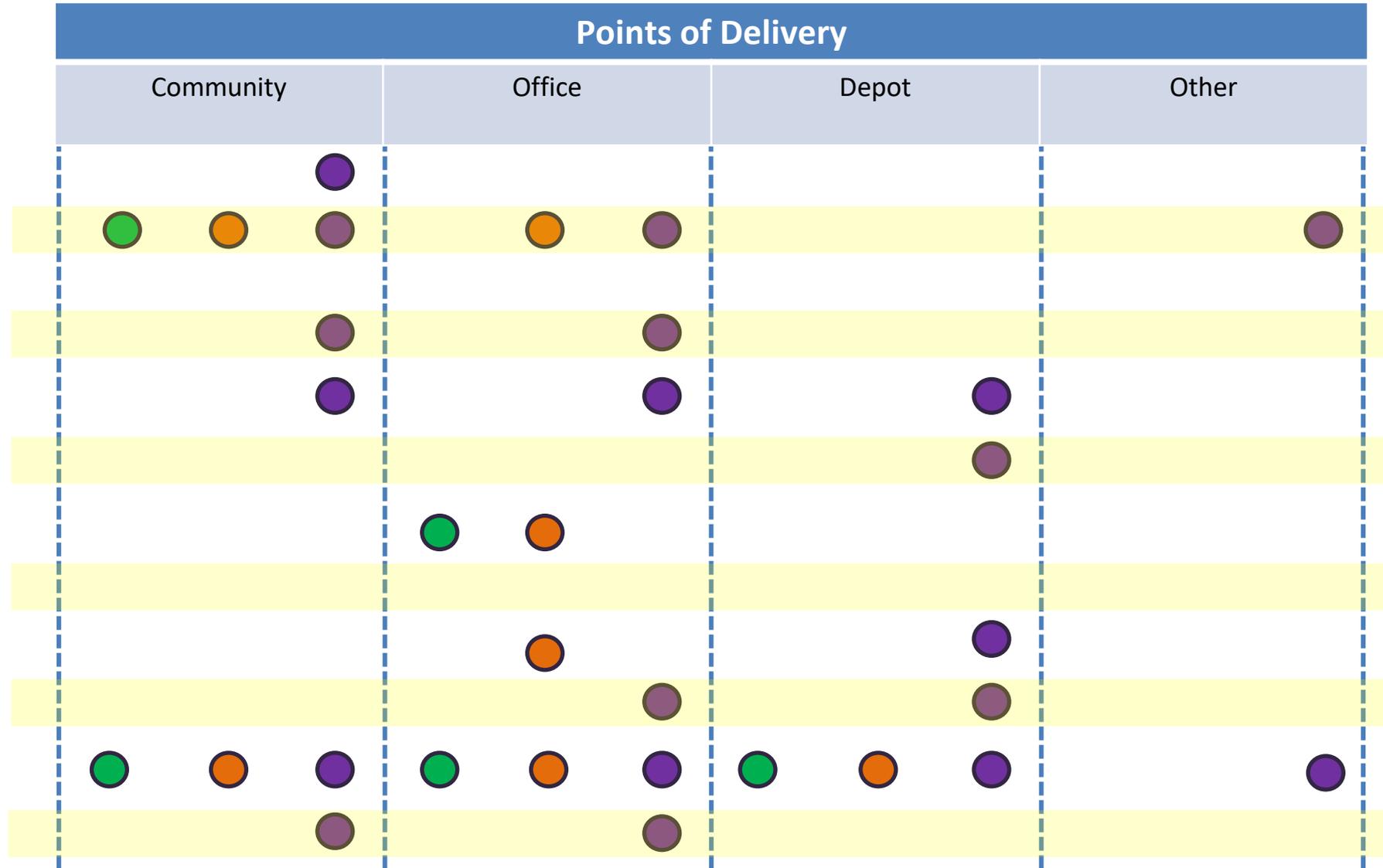
## Understanding Possible Alignment & Synergies

KEY ● Current Requirement ● Future Requirement ● Potential Requirement

All public sector partners face similar challenges: to develop affordable service models and the supporting infrastructure. This will require radical change from how services are currently delivered.

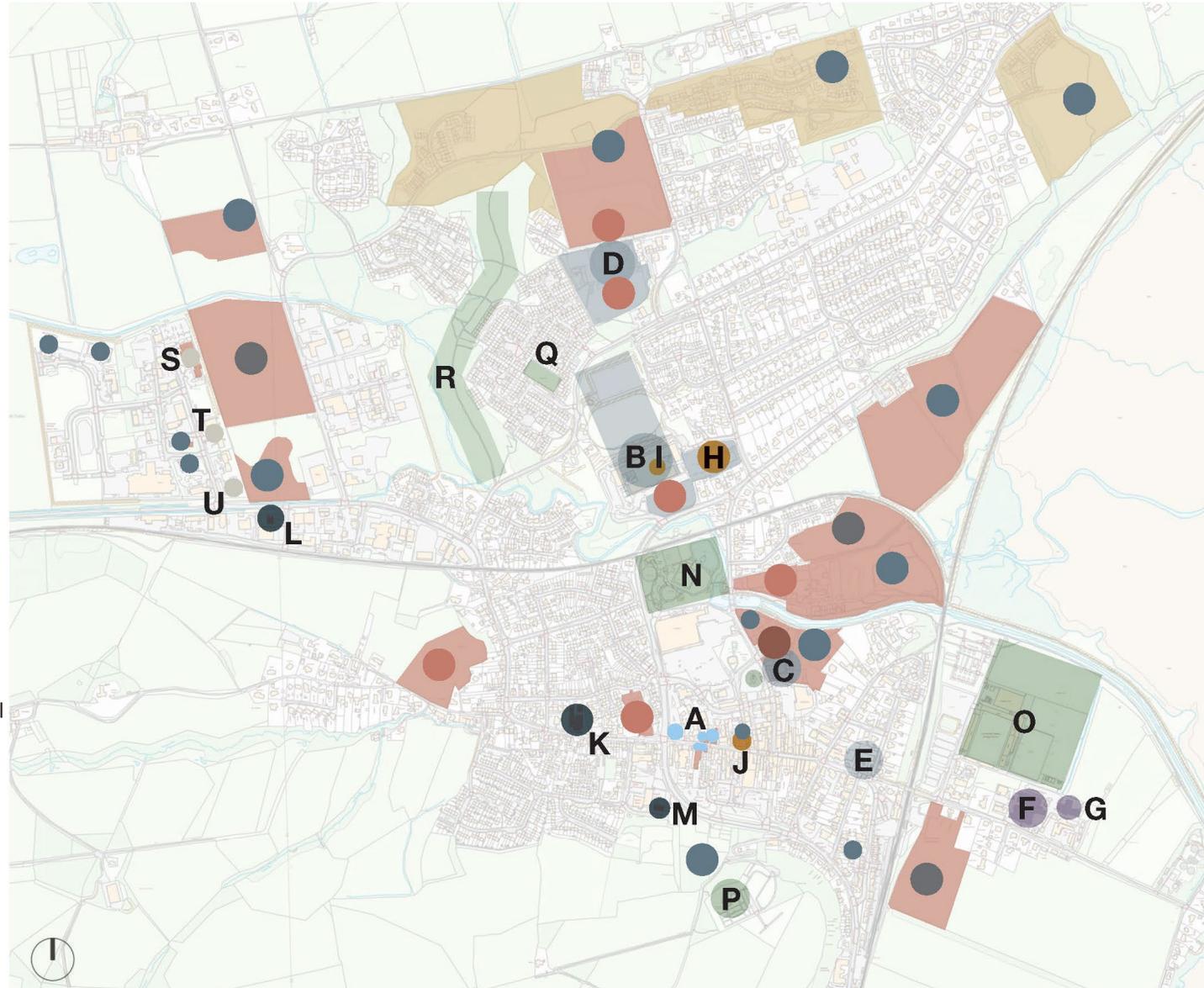
This diagram illustrates the interest from **Partners** in supporting the development of **PODs in Dingwall**. It will be further developed through the work of the **Highland Property Partnership**.

**The Highland Council**



# Map Of Opportunities – Existing Dingwall Assets

- High Street
  - Education
  - Health
  - Community
  - Blue Light
  - Outdoor
  - Environmental
- A. High Street Locations
  - B. Dingwall Academy
  - C. St Clement’s School
  - D. Dingwall Primary School
  - E. Highland Theological College
  - F. Ross Memorial Hospital
  - G. Ferry Road Health Centre
  - H. Dingwall Leisure Centre
  - I. Dingwall Library
  - J. Dingwall Museum / Town Hall
  - K. Dingwall Police Station
  - L. Dingwall Ambulance Station
  - M. Dingwall Fire Station
  - N. Pefferside Park
  - O. Jubilee Park & Football Club
  - P. Macdonald Memorial - Mitchell Hill
  - Q. Play Park
  - R. Core Path & Woodland
  - S. SEPA
  - T. Scottish Forestry
  - U. Nature Scotland



This diagram is comprised of an indicative set of assets and linkages to raise awareness of opportunities and does not represent the complete asset portfolio of Partners.

The Opportunity Sites work is included in the hNSL report. Refer **Appendix 3.**

# Map Of Opportunities

## Connecting Opportunities in Dingwall

This diagram is comprised of an indicative set of assets and linkages to raise awareness of opportunities and does not represent the complete asset portfolio of stakeholders.

### Key: Paths

-  National Cycle Route
-  Core Paths
-  Active Travel Improvements?

- National Cycle Route
- Potential New Site For Consideration
- Northern Lifelong Learning Green Link
- Lifelong Learning Cluster around Pefferside Park
- Library (High School)
- St Clements School / Church Site For Consideration
- High Street Civic Cluster: Council Headquarters Service Point
- Ross Memorial Community Health Campus



Depot



Community



Office



Residential



Mixed Use



# Map Of Opportunities

## Example: Opportunity 10 – Vacant High Street Properties



Community



Office



Residential



Mixed Use

### Opportunity Sites:

This example explores the opportunities associated with the vacant properties on the High Street.

The Opportunity Sites work is included in the hNSL report.

Refer Appendix 3.

### Comments on Site

- Conservation area
- Pedestrian zone
- Connected to Dingwall Service Point and Registration Office
- Proximity to landmarks - Museum/Town Hall, Cromarty Obelisk, St Clement's Church, Commonwealth War Graves, St Clement's School

### Next Steps: Feasibility Study

- Flood Risk Assessment
- Identify opportunities to protect & enhance Conservation Area
- Assess potential for improved energy efficiency/refurbishment
- Assess potential for reconfiguration, repurposing/change of use/ residential use, community partner delivery

### Example Vacant High Street Properties:

- A - Former Edinburgh Woollen Mill
- B - Former Original Factory Shop
- C - Former M&Co.
- D - Former Constituency Office

SCALE 1:2000



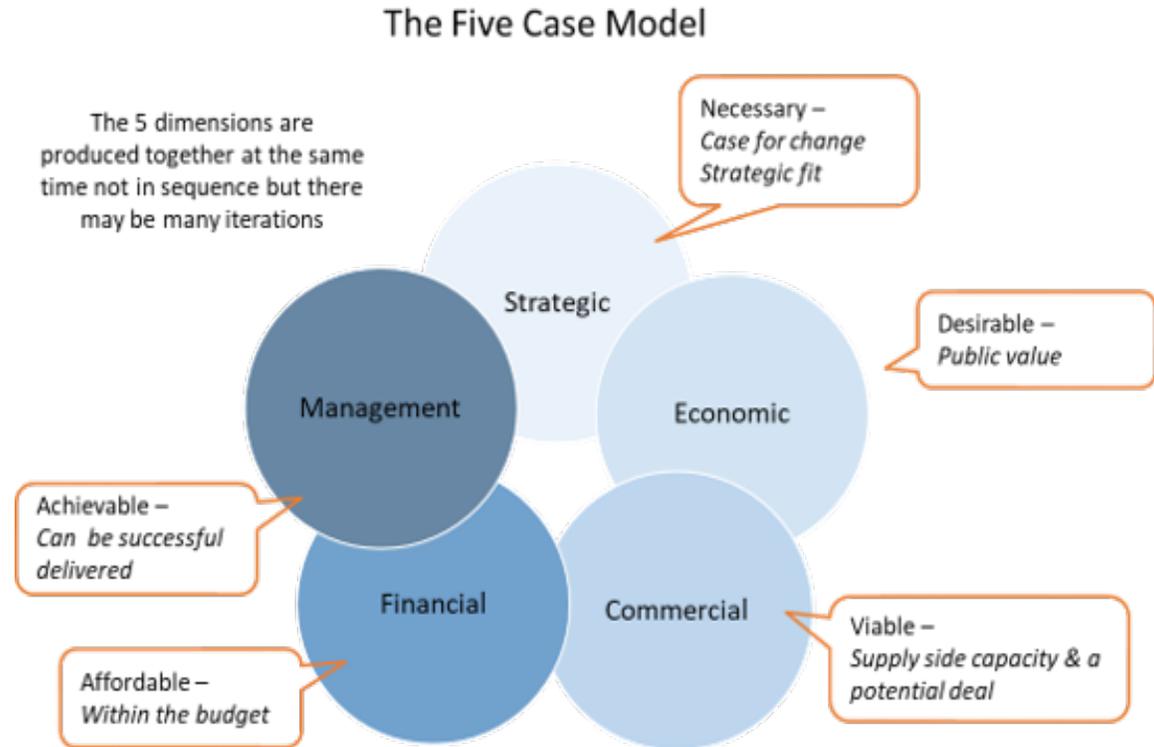
# Business Case Development – The Five Case Model

Following engagement with Highland Council, hNSL has prepared an **Interim Outline Business Case (IOBC)** for Dingwall Community POD, based on **HM Treasury Green Book & Building Better Business Case** guidance.

This included the agreement of **project spending objectives** and **critical success factors**, identifying a **short-list of four potential options**, and a **benefits assessment** of the four short-listed options. These findings are summarised on the next slide.

**Further stages of development** will be required after December 2024 to progress to a fully populated **Outline Business Case** and subsequently to **Full Business Case**.

The IOBC document is contained within Appendix 6 of the hNSL report.



# Business Case Development – Shortlist of Four Potential Options

1. **Option 0:** Continue running and maintaining existing assets, with Dingwall Academy remaining in its current location as part of a PPP contract.
2. **Option 1:** Improvements to education facilities only, with a replacement primary school at the preferred site (DW02, Dingwall North - South of Tulloch Castle). St Clement's could either be co-located on DW02 or placed separately at DW08 (Dingwall North - Dochcarty Brae).
3. **Option 2:** Enhancements to education, community, sports, and leisure facilities, including some improvements to other Council facilities like Child Health teams. This option also proposes a replacement primary school at DW02, with the same options for St Clement's as in Option 1.
4. **Option 3:** Comprehensive improvements to education facilities, a community leisure facility, flexible community space, and Council and partner office facilities. The primary school would be replaced at DW02, with St Clement's having the same location options as in previous options.

## Economic Appraisal Summary + Preferred Way Forward

Type	Option 0	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Impact on capital budget	None	Medium cost, medium benefit	Medium cost, medium benefit	High cost, high benefit
Impact on revenue budget	High cost, no benefit	Low cost saving, low benefit	Medium cost saving, medium benefit	High cost saving, medium benefit
Qualitative benefit score	1	11	13	17
Viability assessment	Pass	TBC	TBC	TBC
Affordability assessment	Pass	TBC	TBC	TBC

### Preferred way forward: Option 3

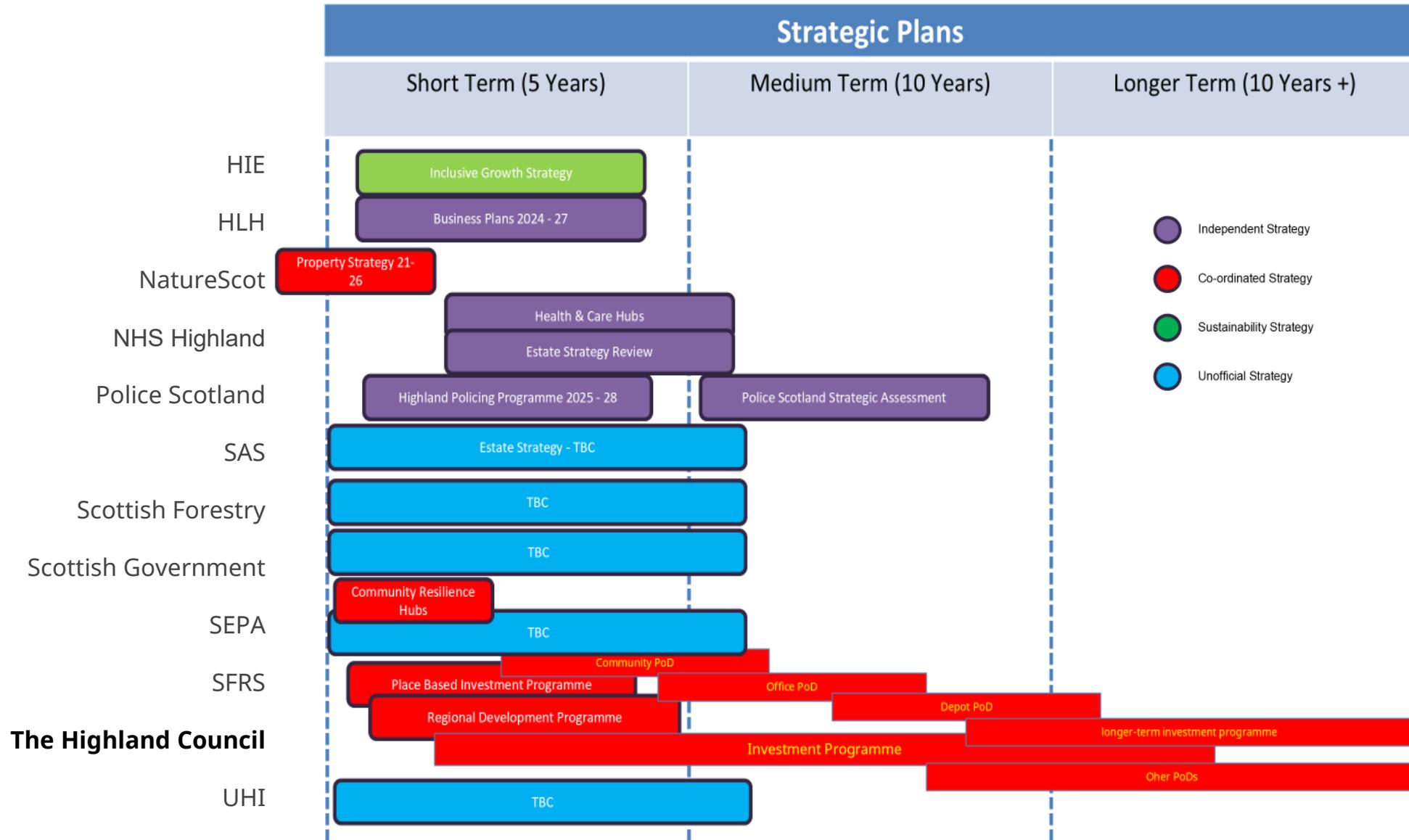
Based on scoring against spending objectives and meeting critical success factors, Option 3 is the best option to help the council achieve its strategic goals.

The IOBC document is contained within Appendix 6 of the hNSL report.

# Place Programme – Indicative Strategic Project Timelines

This programme should capture the relevant **local, regional** and potentially **national** investments underway or planned along with the relevant strategies and plans that inform the requirements for **infrastructure investment** and sustainable resources.

The **portfolio approach** through the **Place Programme**, supports prioritisation, sequencing, resource allocation and investment planning across all partners in the **public, community, third sector and private sector**. Examples of key activities discussed with Partners are illustrated here for alignment and consideration when **Programme Design** activities are underway.



# Appendix 2 Proposed Pod Site



Depot



Community



Office



Residential



Mixed Use

## Opportunity 6 Site North of Ross Avenue

Area: 5.6 hectares  
Local Development Plan: Part of DW02 Dingwall North - South of Tulloch Castle  
Local Development Plan Uses: Housing

### Comments on Site

- Existing woodland
- Gradient slopes downwards from North to South
- Zoned for housing in Development Plan
- Well connected to Primary School, existing and future residential areas

### Next Steps: Feasibility Study

- Assess potential for: mixed use, community partner delivery, active travel



Site North of Ross Avenue

SCALE 1:2000



## Appendix 3

### Dingwall Master Planning – Engagement Summary

Feedback from the local community has helped inform and shape the proposals for Dingwall and some of the areas to be progressed. Community views have been provided through the work on the Place Standard, the Area Place Plan and the HIP Master-planning work. This is summarised below.

#### Place Standard

The [Highland Place Standard tool](#) has gathered feedback on what makes for a good place to live, work, play, and visit. It is aimed at shaping future plans, strategies and investments and the consultation is being kept open to continue gathering views to inform the new Highland Local Development Plan. It aims to highlight what needs to be protected, changed, or improved, so we have what is needed for the future.

Respondents were asked to score their place (out of a maximum of 5) against 14 different themes and criteria and to provide further written commentary. The feedback gathered to date for the Dingwall & Seaforth area is summarised below and has been considered in generating options for service provision in the area.

In Dingwall & Seaforth Area the average score (2.9) is equivalent to the Highland average score. Responses have been received from 61 individuals, plus 19 young people engaged in sessions facilitated by Highlife Highland. The highest and lowest scoring criteria were as follows:

#### Dingwall & Seaforth – Place Standard feedback

**Highest scores for area:** *Nature & Parks (3.7); Feeling Safe (3.3); Facilities & Services (3.2)*

**Lowest scores for area:** *Care & Maintenance (2.4); Feeling Listened To (2.4); Public Transport (2.5)*

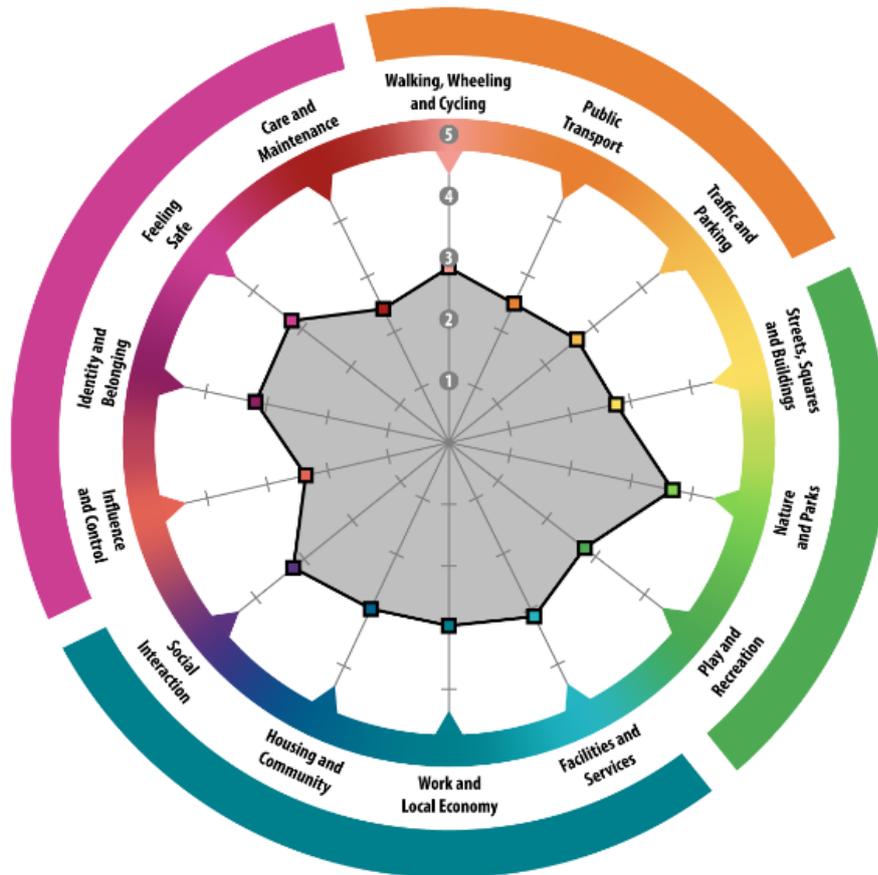
#### Themes/issues for which D&S compares well with rest of Highland:

- *Housing & Community (3.0)* scored joint-highest in Highland.
- *Facilities & Services (3.2)* scored second highest in Highland.
- *Walking, Wheeling & Cycling (2.9)* scored second highest in Highland.
- *Public Transport (2.5)* scored second highest in Highland.

#### Themes/issues for which D&S scores low compared with rest of Highland:

- *Nature & Parks (3.7)* scored lowest in Highland.
- *Pride in Place (3.2)* scored lowest in Highland.
- *Care & Maintenance (2.4)* scored second lowest in Highland.
- *Feeling Safe (3.3)* scored second lowest in Highland.

# Dingwall and Seaforth



Written feedback highlighted a range of other issues summarised below:

- High regard for opportunities for walking and cycling to amenities, alongside concerns about path surfaces causing issues for pushchairs, wheelchairs and those with poor mobility, lack of lighting on key paths, road safety due to speeding vehicles, and cycling connections beyond Dingwall.
- While the area benefits from rail and bus connections, there were common requests for improved connectivity between towns and improved punctuality and cleanliness of services, alongside better seating at bus shelters and improved accessibility for disabled users.
- Extensive free parking in Dingwall is greatly appreciated, although concerns were raised over insufficiency of disabled parking spaces.
- Issues are raised over general maintenance, including vacant and dilapidated buildings, roads and footpaths. Some call for turning vacant lots into mini parks for socialising.
- Pefferside park and the leisure centre are well used and appreciated as opportunities for exercise. However, comments call for more modern play equipment across the area, particularly for younger children.
- Access to employment out with local opportunities in retail, hospitality and education tends to promote commuting to Inverness by car.
- There is appreciation for a variety of social and affordable housing, but affordable housing is regarded as insufficient to meet needs of residents and key workers. There are concerns over the maintenance of existing housing stock.
- Calls for improved flood defences.

## **Qualitative Feedback specific to Facilities & Services:**

### Positive Aspects:

- **Accessible Facilities:** many respondents appreciate having local access to key services such as schools, library, and leisure facilities. They find the pricing reasonable (c.f. young people disagree) and mention that schools are well-equipped.
- **Dingwall Academy & Library:** frequently praised for their accessibility and integration with the community, seen as models for other services.
- **Community Spaces:** People highlight the presence of existing community centres, church halls, youth clubs, and the integrated library in Dingwall Academy as valuable resources, although some facilities require maintenance.
- **Convenient Shopping:** Several comments reflect the ease of access to shops like Tesco, Lidl, and local stores.
- **Local Independent Businesses:** independent shops are mentioned as contributing positively to the local economy.

### Areas for Improvement:

- **High Street Decline:** There is significant concern about the declining state of the high street, with many empty shops, limited variety, and competition between similar businesses. Suggestions include reducing rates for larger stores and supporting independent businesses to fill the empty spaces.
- **Maintenance and upgrade:** Several facilities, such as the leisure centre, swimming pool, and youth centres, are described as outdated, drab, or in need of an upgrade.
- **Underutilised Community Spaces:** Existing community facilities are underused and respondents suggest organizing more events to encourage their use.
- **Healthcare Access:** Difficulty in accessing healthcare services like GP appointments and NHS dentists is a problem, with respondents feeling neglected in some cases.
- **Transport and Accessibility:** Issues around transport and accessibility were highlighted, especially for disabled individuals and those without cars. There is also concern about parking around schools and the need for better cycling and walking infrastructure.
- **Funding and Staffing for Public Services:** A recurring theme is the lack of sufficient funding and staffing in public services like schools, mental health services, and social work, leading to a strain on resources and lower quality of service.
- **Overcrowding in Schools:** With increasing populations in some areas, concerns about overcrowded schools and the impact on children's education were raised.

In summary, while facilities like schools, libraries, and local shops are valued, concerns focus on decline of the town centre, poor maintenance and upkeep and perceived lack of investment in existing facilities.

### **Youth concerns arising from HLH workshops:**

- Lack of free to use social spaces for young people to meet and socialise.
- Perceived lack of affordable opportunities for physical activities.
- Young females do not feel safe on Dingwall High Street.
- Insufficient access to mental health support for young people.
- Lack of voice and influence over decisions affecting young people.

## **Area Place Plan**

The development of the Dingwall & Seaforth Area Place Plan began early in 2024. The purpose of the place plan is to create a shared set of priorities and outcomes for the local area, The place plan will set out the community's ambitions, aspirations but also potential areas for investment

Whilst the plan will set out a wide range of priorities under the themes of people, place and prosperity, throughout the development of the APP, places and services within the Area have been central to the background information and to the engagement feedback, both public and sector.

There has been considerable mention throughout the process around buildings, whether public sector owned/operated or private – both good and bad. Positive mention was had around Dingwall Academy in terms of building quality, service provision and support, as well as Dingwall Leisure Centre, which people felt was a fantastic (and possibly underutilised) resource.

Assets which did not fare as well in comment were specific and general terms around the upkeep and presentation of Dingwall High Street (notably the Commercial Bar [privately owned] and the empty shop units [some privately owned, some public sector owned]). General appearance and maintenance for both were mentioned, as it was felt public (and other) buildings were tired and could do with a refresh in places.

Feedback received suggested better use could be made of existing buildings, whether for co-located provision, establishment of a youth centre / community hub, or redevelopment into affordable housing – these could also require the development of new buildings / facilities.

Both Dingwall Primary and St Clement's schools were mentioned specifically as requiring new and suitable premises to be provided, with other primary schools mentioned around upgrades and upkeep. The community would welcome improvements to Ross Memorial Hospital as well, as has previously been raised with NHS Highland both in terms of building and service capacity.

In terms of services, gaps were highlighted notably around mental health and social care, classroom support, youth activities, with access to GP and dental care being noted. There was concern about the capacity of services, not just now but for the future, particularly in terms of childcare, education and NHS access should new housing etc be developed without associated input into social and physical infrastructure to support these.

It was felt that better / different use of our buildings to help facilitate better use of facilities and improved provision of services could be welcomed, whether that be public sector and community colocation or simply new ways of working within partner organisations, as long as it made things easier for the communities as well as the services/organisations involved, resulting in better communication and improved outcomes.