

Agenda Item	12
Report No	DSA/08/25

## THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** Dingwall and Seaforth

**Date:** 10 February 2025

**Report Title:** Dingwall and Seaforth Area Place Plan

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

### 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report invites Members to consider and adopt the Dingwall and Seaforth Area Place Plan (**Appendix 1**)
- 1.2 In November 2021, Highland Council and the Highland Community Planning Board agreed to develop a Place Based Framework across each Committee Area within Highland, including the development of an Area Place Plan (APP) for each Area. The aim was to consolidate local priorities already within existing plans and draw together community aspirations with priority issues and outcomes for local development and community planning to secure a clear, accepted way forward for each area.

The process means understanding communities and delivering a shared vision by targeting resources, investment and action, achieved by working and collaborating together and provides a method to track and promote the impact of both spending and project delivery.

- 1.3 The Dingwall and Seaforth Area Place Plan clearly notes the aspirations expressed by the communities within its boundaries, many of which link across to proposed or potential actions contained as part of wider Highland Plans such as the Highland Investment Plan, Highland Local Development Plan, Highland Outcome Improvement Plan and the Strategic Housing Investment Plan. The APP highlights the need for new buildings for both Dingwall Primary and St Clement's School; the wish for a community type building which can be utilised as a multi-functional space e.g. a youth club, family friendly activities, café/drop in etc; the need for affordable homes which are energy efficient and suitable for all; a desire for improved health and wellbeing services and facilities including both care and mental health.

## 2. Recommendations

### 2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. **CONSIDER** and **ADOPT** the Dingwall and Seaforth Area Place Plan (APP)
- ii. Support and promote the APP where possible in terms of its consideration within other Plans and Strategies across or impacting the Dingwall and Seaforth Area
- iii. **NOTE** that to progress the work and aspirations set out in the Plan future steps will include creation of detailed action plans.

## 3. Implications

### 3.1 **Resource:** although no additional resource is requested at this time there are potential future resource implications to deliver the plan priorities. However, every attempt will be made to maximise use of external funding where projects are led by the Council.

Ongoing involvement in Place Planning activity requires input and commitment from services across the Council and its Partnerships to ensure Place Plans provide the framework to support targeting resources, service delivery and provide a clear vision for attracting external investment. The Area Place Plans will help the Highland Council, partners and communities secure funding by evidencing the impact of every pound spent and the actions associated will provide clarity and manage expectation around how and where resources are prioritised.

### 3.2 **Legal:** No legal implications identified at this time rising from the adoption of the Dingwall and Seaforth Area Place Plan, which is a commitment to support the vision.

### 3.3 **Risk:** The Dingwall and Seaforth Area Place Plan will help coordinate future activity and investment in the Area but requires clear communication and coordination of resources across partners and sectors. 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.

Only by working together will it be possible to deliver the shared vision articulated.

### 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – there are no known Health and Safety risks

### 3.5 **Gaelic:** No Gaelic implications have been identified at this time, although a focus on place and considering the priorities for a local area has potential to support a focus on Gaelic language and culture if identified by communities and partners.

## 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 An Integrated Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken. The conclusions have been subject to the relevant Manager Review and Approval. The Screening process has concluded that the Plan should have a positive impact on promoting equality, addressing inequality (including socio-economic) and targeting the priorities of the people of Dingwall and Seaforth and therefore a full impact assessment is not required.

Members are asked to consider the information in the table below and the summary in **APPENDIX 2** to support the decision-making process.

Impact Assessment Area	Conclusion of Screening / Full Assessment
Equality	Positive impact
Socio-economic	Positive impact
Human Rights	No impact
Children's Rights and Wellbeing	Positive impact
Island and Mainland Rural	Positive impact
Climate Change	Positive impact
Data Rights	No impact

## 5. Background

### 5.1 What is an Area Place Plan?

In November 2021, Highland Council and the Highland Community Planning Board agreed to develop a Place Based Framework across each Committee Area within Highland, including the development of an Area Place Plan (APP) for each area. The aim was to consolidate local priorities already within existing plans and draw together community aspirations with priority issues and outcomes for local development and community planning to secure a clear, accepted way forward for each area.

This is in line with place-based approaches to planning for the future of each Committee area. During 2024/2025, the Area Place Plans are being produced as a clear statement of shared priorities for development and investment, service delivery and community action, meeting that 2021 commitment.

### 5.2 The Place Principle / Place-based Approach:

The Place Principle is a Scottish Government initiative to encourage better collaboration and community involvement. It is about understanding the issues, opportunities and relationships in a Place, to allow partners to work effectively together to improve the quality of life for our communities. Knowing how a community is structured and how it works helps enable better decision making on investment, service delivery and how to coordinate change.

This does not only relate to Area Place Plans - the place principle links the APP to other major strategies, such as the Highland Investment Plan, the Highland Local Development Plan and the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan as well as others, tying in to previous and existing workstreams such as the Place Standard work carried out in early 2024.

## 6. Production of the Dingwall and Seaforth Area Place Plan

### 6.1 Development:

The process of developing the Dingwall and Seaforth Area Place Plan meant understanding communities and delivering a shared vision by targeting resources, investment and action, achieved by working and collaborating together, and provides a method to track and publicise the impact of both spending and project delivery.

The APP reflects engagement and involvement of communities within the area during 2024, with the identification of key issues being mainly community led – both in terms of utilising the outcomes of existing consultations and the checking of these with communities themselves, minimising gaps in information, resulting in prioritisation of outcomes as well as investment, service planning and delivery within the area, promoting an inclusive and accessible approach. It aims to be transparent and honest (about resources as well as need), striving towards clear communication and sharing of information and intelligence. It is designed to be useful for all stakeholders, whether public or private sector, community group or developer, within the local and wider contexts.

The Dingwall and Seaforth APP was developed in conjunction with a wider group of stakeholders, including representation from: Elected Members; Highland Council Services and Project / Programme Teams (Community Development, Whole Family Wellbeing, Education, Housing Management, Housing Development, Roads, Amenities, Active Travel and Environment; Development Planning; Estates); Highlife Highland; NHS Highland; Mid Ross Community Partnership; Police Scotland; Scottish Fire and Rescue Service; Highland Third Sector Interface; Highland and Islands Enterprise; Community Councils and Community Development Companies. All are thanked for their input to the Area Place Plan.

The Stakeholder group advised on the public engagement strategy. Specific mechanisms for engagement included:

- Advertised online surveys and ideas boards (both general and child focused) – <https://engagehighland.co.uk/hub-page/dingwall-and-seaforth>
- Public drop in sessions
- Focused stakeholder workshop
- Highlife Highland colleagues facilitated input from young people via the Youth Forum.
- Hard to reach communities were offered information and support should they wish to enable them to participate, and stakeholders themselves promoted not only the events but also the views and thoughts of those they worked with and the views of their particular groups and members.

6.2 The Plan sets out the aspirations and ambitions of the Dingwall and Seaforth community to:

- Articulate long term shared strategic and linked outcomes for the whole area
- Support informed local, regional and national decision making about public services, budgeting, planning policy and other policy areas.
- Support community action and provide partners with evidence for funding bids
- Build on the good work already happening across and within Dingwall and Seaforth and make the most of opportunities and new investment.

6.3 **Vision for the Future:**

The Dingwall and Seaforth APP highlights the community vision for the future: –

*For Dingwall and Seaforth to be a vibrant community, where people want to be.*

*A place where support flows between individuals, communities and services, where relationships are strong and the area is as sustainable and resilient as it can be.*

*Health, wellbeing and opportunities should be available to everyone, as should having access to facilities, services and homes which are affordable, accessible and fit for purpose now and for the future.*

#### 6.4 **Community Aspirations and Priorities:**

The APP reflects where communities within Dingwall and Seaforth would like to be, and possible routes / suggestions made to assist in getting there. Many of the aspirations span various priorities and pieces of work, linking in with existing as well as developing plans and strategies, whether regional, local or service based.

These have been categorised against the overarching priority headings of People, Place and Prosperity, which are shared across the Highland Community Planning Partnership. This allows them to be easily read and transferred across the actions and workstreams of the wider plans and strategies. An additional heading for Cross-cutting Issues / Themes has been added to reflect the strength of community feeling on those topics (Health and Social Care, Education and Housing).

The key priorities under each heading are listed below, and further explained within the APP and its appendices.

#### 6.5 **People:** Considers our communities, their wellbeing and their needs.

- Community Safety
- Community Wellbeing
- Police presence
- CCTV monitoring
- Community events
- Safe spaces to socialise
- Social Enterprise

**Place:** Considers the environment, its characteristics, places to go, things to do, how to move around and the appearance of our towns, villages and buildings.

- Green and Blue Spaces
- Natural and Cultural Heritage
- Accessibility (mobility and transport)
- Community facilities
- Public conveniences
- Road safety
- Renewables

**Prosperity:** Reflects local opportunities in terms of finance, work, community wealth building and principles.

- Business development
- Local businesses and tourism
- Impacts, barriers and ideas for promotion
- Cost of living
- Public sector budget spend

#### **Cross-cutting Topics:**

Health and Social Care:

- Mental health and wellbeing

- Access to health, care and associated services
- The capacity of our services

#### **Education:**

- School provision and capacity including classroom support
- School estate in terms of fitness and maintenance
- Community and Adult learning
- Early years and childcare

#### **Housing:**

- Availability of affordable energy efficient housing for all sectors of the community
- Fit for the future
- Development

Consideration was also given to whether joint working and co-location could be utilised to improve collaboration and efficiency while providing improved outcomes for those within communities, as well as whether different uses of public and other buildings could widen access and opportunities.

Essentially, the Dingwall and Seaforth APP condenses understanding of community aspirations with the aim of informing and influencing other plans, strategies and frameworks to the betterment of all who live, work, study and visit the area, helping communities to grow and thrive.

## **7 How the Plan Should be Used**

- 7.1 The Plan has been written for the local community, community organisations, businesses and Highland Community Planning Partners. To achieve the aspirations and outcomes set out in the plan, it will require all partners: community, public, third and private sector to work together.

The APP should be used as it is intended – as a tool to bring people together to inform decision making, to collaborate on and achieve better outcomes for the community and those within it.

- 7.2 The Plan is an ambitious evidence based statement of community aspirations, based on the views from the local community. It therefore provides all who are responsible for delivering services, looking after assets or with a vested interest in the Dingwall and Seaforth Area with a tool to inform decision making about service design, delivery and investment.

It requires collaboration based around two key principles – **resetting the relationship** between the public sector and local communities and **thinking differently** about funding and resources. It should foster greater opportunity to:

- Support and enable the community to influence and understand their future
- Empower the local community as an active partner
- Create more trust and collaboration between communities, authorities and public bodies; and
- Enable equitable and smoother delivery of services and investment.

- 7.3 To support this in practice, public sector partners and funders are asked to utilise the Plan to inform discussion and decision making on service design, delivery and budget allocation. The Plan should help influence how budgets are allocated, how services

could be delivered, provide evidence for decision making, inform policy and support communities to acquire and develop their own income-generating assets and funding sources.

This can be achieved by Elected Members, Council officers, Statutory and Community partners considering the plan in various forums; e.g.

- Highland Council meetings
- Mid Ross Community Partnership
- NHS Highland Adult Services Mid Ross Locality Plan Group
- Local Housing Development Forum

## **8. Next Steps: Action Planning, Governance and Delivery**

- 8.1 At the time of writing this report, discussions around next steps including action planning, governance and delivery of the Dingwall and Seaforth Area Place Plan are ongoing and require input and engagement from all Stakeholders involved with the APP.

As it moves from development to delivery, the APP can continue to act as a vehicle to bring different interest groups together to collaborate on the shared vision for the future.

- 8.2 In conclusion, the anticipated benefits and impact of the Dingwall and Seaforth Area Place Plan are that it will:

- Consolidate local priorities from across a variety of plans and strategies – local, regional and national
- Develop shared understanding of community priorities, aspirations and opportunities for the future
- Re-set relationships by strengthening collaborative working and trust between communities, public and third sectors
- Provide a framework for delivering a shared vision, aspirations, outcomes and actions in a way reflective of the needs of the Area
- Target resources, investment and action in line with local priorities
- Improve communication providing greater certainty to communities on how partners will support change moving forward
- Track the impact of spending and project delivery against local aspirations and priorities.
- 

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive – Place

Date: 27 January 2025

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Appendices:

- Dingwall and Seaforth Area Place Plan – Appendix 1
- Integrated Impact Assessment – Appendix 2

- Dingwall and Seaforth APP Appendix 3: Community Aspirations – Expanded
- Dingwall and Seaforth APP Appendix 4: Engagement Report
- Dingwall and Seaforth APP Appendix 5: Population Statistics / Area Information





# Dingwall & Seaforth Area Place Plan

## Gaelic Title

<https://engagehighland.co.uk/dingwall-and-seaforth-place-plan>



## Executive Summary

### Gaelic Title

The Dingwall & Seaforth Area Place Plan (D&S APP) has been developed in conjunction with various services, organisations and most importantly the communities within our Area. It aims to capture Community Aspirations, Strengths and Opportunities within one overarching Plan which should be used or referred to by services, groups and organisations operating in the Dingwall & Seaforth Area, with a view to ensuring provision and developments reflect our collective community wants, needs and priorities.

Through the process of producing the APP, it became clear that many of our Community priorities and aspirations reflect those we have been voicing for some time, but also that new upcoming ideas and opportunities were being identified.

In order to make the APP easier to utilise, our aspirations have been categorised under the primary headings of People, Place and Prosperity to reflect the groupings being used by many of the major organisations such as Highland Council, NHS Highland and the Community Partnership.

**People:** considers our communities and their wellbeing, the people who make them up and their needs.

- Community safety
- Community wellbeing
- Police presence
- CCTV monitoring
- Community events
- Safe spaces to socialise
- Social enterprise

**Place:** looks at our environment, its characteristics, places to go, things to do, how we move around and the appearance of our places – our towns, villages and buildings.

- Green and Blue spaces
- Natural and Cultural heritage
- Accessibility (both in terms of mobility and transport)
- Community facilities (including public conveniences)
- Road safety
- Renewables

**Prosperity:** turns to our local opportunities in terms of finance, employment, community wealth building and its principles.

- Business development
- Local businesses and Tourism
- Impacts, barriers and ideas for promotion
- Cost of living
- Public Sector budget spend

Through categorising the elements, there were some cross-cutting services, agencies and issues, which were grouped separately given the strength of feeling around these and their impacts.

#### Health & Care:

- Mental health and wellbeing
- Access to Health, Care and associated services
- The capacity of our services

#### Education:

- School provision and capacity including classroom support
- School estate in terms of fitness for purpose and maintenance
- Community and Adult learning
- Early years and Childcare

#### Housing:

- Availability of affordable, energy efficient housing for all sectors of the community
- Development and homes fit for the future

Consideration was also given to whether joint working and co-location could be utilised to improve collaboration and efficiency while providing better and improved outcomes for those within our communities, as well as whether different uses of public and other buildings could be explored to widen access and opportunities.

Essentially, the Dingwall & Seaforth Area Place Plan condenses understanding of our community aspirations with the aim of informing and influencing other plans, strategies and frameworks to the betterment of all who live, work, study and visit our Area, helping our communities grow and thrive. It can also be used to evidence and facilitate funding applications or to provide inspiration for groups wishing to make a difference.

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## Introduction

### Gaelic Introduction

**Dingwall & Seaforth** - a vibrant community with a proud heritage and ambitious future. Its past is a chequered landscape of land-based and coastal industries; of communities united to ensure its heritage and culture would survive – and looking ahead to the opportunities now presented by significant public and private sector investment, better infrastructure, ambitious economic development projects and a cohesive community.

With this long and valued history the area looks towards a bright future. Our area matters, and it is only through being part of the wider context of Place and Plans within Highland (as well as our local ones) that we will be able to achieve the best outcomes for our communities.

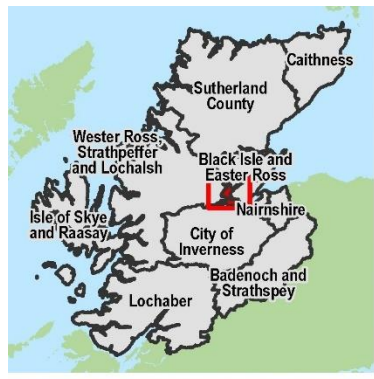
This Dingwall & Seaforth Area Place Plan aims to be both ambitious and realistic, covering the aspirations within our community and with a strong focus on outcomes for the whole of our Area. It will help inform local and regional decision-making about public services, budgeting and policy areas, as well as helping inform wider statutory plans. It recognises the good work already taking place in our area and supports community action to make the most of these opportunities.

### Thank you

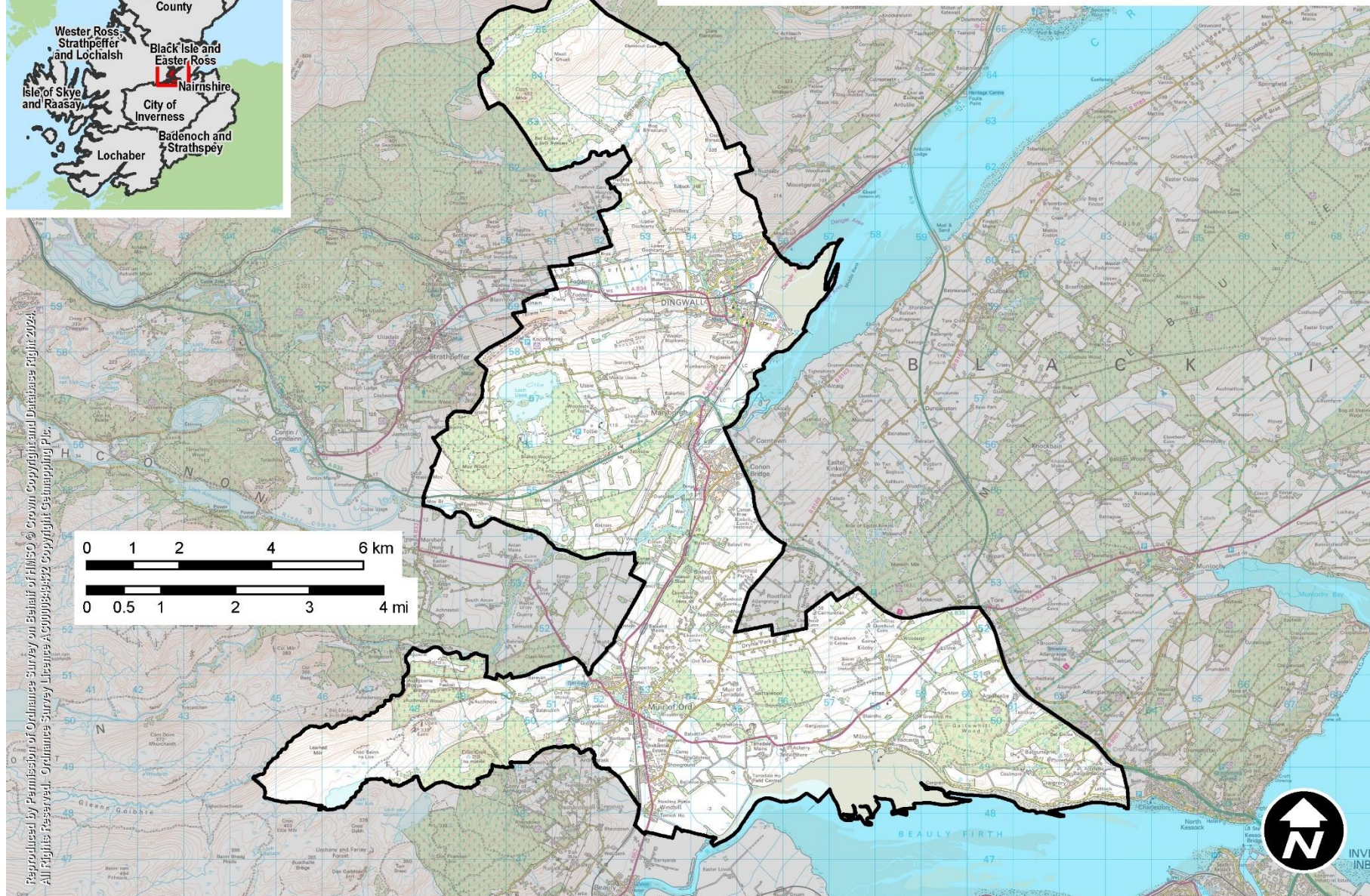
We would like to thank everyone who took part in either the direct engagement work for this Area Place Plan, or for the previous consultations which have also informed it. Gathering and utilising information from a variety of sources, both direct and indirect, strengthens the validity of the findings and means that the topics included have been raised by many different people from a wide variety of sectors and in different forums.

Detailed information regarding notes and responses from the Survey, the Ideas Boards and the Stakeholder workshop can be found in the associated documents to the APP, available on the website.





## Dingwall and Seaforth Area Place Plan





## Context

### Gaelic Header

In November 2021, Highland Council and the Highland Community Planning Board agreed to develop a Place Based Framework across each Committee area within Highland. The aim was to consolidate local priorities already within existing plans and draw together priority issues and outcomes for Local Development and Community Planning – all to secure a clear, accepted way forward for each area.

It meant understanding communities and delivering a shared vision by targeting resources, investment and action. This is achieved by working and collaborating together and provides a method to track and publicise the impact of both spending and project delivery.

The approach aligns with the key principles of a Place Based Approach. The Area Place Plan reflects engagement and involvement of communities within the area, with the identification of key issues being mainly community led – both in terms of utilising the outcomes of existing consultations and the checking of these with communities themselves, minimising gaps in information.

This coordinated approach not only results in prioritisation of outcomes but also of investment, service planning and delivery within the area, promoting an inclusive and accessible approach. It aims to be transparent and honest (about resources as well as need), striving towards clear communication and sharing of information and intelligence. Above all, it is designed to be useful – for all stakeholders, whether public or private sector, community group or developer, young or old, within the local and wider contexts.

**This Area Place Plan (APP) has been prepared and supported by the people and services within the Dingwall & Seaforth Communities.**

Development was facilitated by The Highland Council and involved a wide Stakeholders' group engaged throughout the process, including Highland Councillors and Highland Council services; Community Councils; Community Development Companies; Highlife Highland; Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE); Highland Third Sector Interface (HTSI); Mid-Ross Community Partnership; Whole Family Wellbeing; NHS Highland; Scottish Fire and Rescue Service; Police Scotland – as well as consulting with other specialist groups and colleagues where required.

## Methodology

To remove duplication and identify gaps, existing plans, strategies and documentation were analysed, with the common themes from those and their accompanying consultations collated. These were then considered by community groups and individuals using an engagement strategy which was also developed and agreed by the Stakeholders' Group. Engagement mechanisms included - online questionnaires (with hard copy also available) and a series of face to face public drop in sessions. This allowed all members of the public (both resident and visitor) to comment on identified priorities and to suggest new areas and sectors on which partners should focus their attentions.

The Area Place Plan is an ambitious statement of our aspirations and ambitions. Not everything in the Plan may be accomplished as both the local and national circumstances change. Communities also change and therefore it is vital that this Plan is recognised as a 'live' document which will morph and change as priorities and opportunities change. It is part of an agenda for the future, to guide community actions as well as help inform decision-making by the public, private and third sector organisations alongside local communities and groups, helping prioritise project development and funding where required.

Our Dingwall & Seaforth Area Place Plan (D&S APP) aims to:

- Focus on long term strategic challenges facing the whole of Dingwall & Seaforth.
- Keep the best of what is valued about our Area and help shape it for the better.
- Link to local and national decision-making about public services, budgeting, planning policy and other policy areas.
- Help support community action, for example as supporting evidence for funding bids or the development of Local Place Plans whereby individual local communities can prepare their own more detailed plans should they wish
- Build on the good work that is already happening across our Area, as well as that adjacent to and impacting Dingwall & Seaforth.
- Make the most of opportunities as they arise such as the Green Freeport, as well as helping identify challenges and potential benefits.
- Represent everyone who lives or works in the area as well as those we welcome as visitors; communities, families, businesses, services, under-represented groups; all ages, ethnicities, backgrounds and needs; taking into account sensitive or contentious topics, balancing with sensitivity and acknowledging the need for flexibility as circumstances change.



## The Planning Landscape

The Area Place Plan sits alongside Local Place Plans, Community Planning processes, Development and Delivery Plans and help bring community actions and aspirations together in one document.

It therefore makes sense for it to be linked as far as possible to these wider plans including the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan and the Highland-wide Local Development Plan, in addition to the many other activities, plans and organisations which include or cover our Area. Examples include the National Planning Framework (NPF4) which has recently been adopted and those Highland-wide Development and Investment Plans, the National Strategy for Economic Transformation, the Highland Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy, the Highlands and Islands Enterprise Strategy, the Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) and many others, critically also linking to the Highland Outcomes Improvement Plan (HOIP), Highland Local Development Plan (HLDP), Highland Investment Plan (HIP) and the strategic overarching Highland Delivery Plan (HDP). It should be noted that at the time of developing this Area Place Plan, several of these wider plans are under review.

To ease linkage between our Dingwall & Seaforth Area Place Plan and those previously mentioned wider statutory and strategic documents, the community aspirations highlighted in the APP have been mapped against the overarching HOIP priority headings of People, Place and Prosperity, as well as cross-referencing to the wider plan landscape.

Ensuring we link with wider, cross-boundary, cross-sector and interagency plans and strategies ensures we are in the best position we can be to understand and benefit from initiatives such as the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport which aims to put Highland at the heart of the local and national journey to net zero while boosting employment, diversifying the economy and addressing our ageing population.

We note that the actions within an Area Place Plan may take some time to be delivered and the Plan needs to remain a live document which can be referred to and updated as circumstances change – it can only be realised if our local communities, groups and partners step forward, working together towards common goals.

## Our Area

### Gaelic Header

To be able to step forward it is essential to understand our Area – its history, communities and aspirations – how our landscape and towns have formed, developed and evolved as well as where we would like them to be. Understanding this helps us all to see not only our past but understand our present and visualise our future.

Our towns and communities have grown and changed over time, and our Area has a rich history and a past we are proud of and can celebrate. Castles, churches, local landmarks and legends (as well as some legendary characters!) – they all demonstrate the important role Dingwall and its environs have played over many centuries. This is amply demonstrated by the conferring of Royal Burgh status on Dingwall in 1226.

To find out more about this rich history, visit Dingwall's outstanding museum - <https://www.dingwallmuseum.info/> or have a look online at <https://www.rossandcromartyheritage.org/home/mid-ross-communities/dingwall/>

In true Highland tradition, Dingwall & Seaforth is a welcoming area with a proud history of providing community support and welcoming new faces (whether fleeing war in the past or becoming New Scots now in our present). This all goes to show our area has a history of innovation, the desire for improvement and growth, and links to our inherent Scottish humour as well as our passion for where we live, play, study and work.

There are many facets to our present, some of which are expressed in terms of Government statistics and population breakdowns, and some of which are more focused on our services, our projects and who we are as a community. Our population has changed over time, and recent statistics indicate it is currently increasing, with slightly higher numbers of both young (0-16) and older (65+) residents compared to the Highland average.

The recent Place Standard and Local Living exercises carried out by Highland Council's Development Plans Team show that our Area compares positively in many ways to other parts of Highland, but also highlight some areas whereby perhaps we do not score so strongly and provide us with topics to consider alongside the engagement findings for this Area Place Plan.

*Information on our population statistics and trends as well as specifics about our Area with regards to Local Living and the Place Standard and relevant related maps can be found in the associated documents to the APP, available on the website.*

## What We Know – Our Strengths and Challenges

### Gaelic Header

Many plans, strategies and consultations were reviewed at the beginning of the Area Place Plan process for Dingwall & Seaforth. These were gathered from various sources, including individual services, organisations, partnerships and groups, many of whom were invited to contribute as part of the Stakeholder group should they wish.

Through both the desktop analysis and the engagement processes a number of points were raised repeatedly and highlighted as strengths within our Area, as well as a number of challenges for consideration; listed below.

#### STRENGTHS:

**Local Enterprise & Retail:** The wide variety of independent shops and producers, and the quality of their wares; the desire for improvement and innovation.

**Community Spirit:** The willingness of people within our communities to help improve their surroundings, to make our areas more pleasant and accessible, and to help support others.

**Adaptability:** Our community has adapted many times in the past, and shows great capacity for change and improvement – the challenges which the pandemic brought showed we still care about those in our area, and make every effort to ensure our communities are healthy and resilient.

**Services & Education:** The quality of provision by both Dingwall Academy and Highlife Highland have been commented upon as being consistently good, although buildings may be in need of upgrade and service bandwidth could be widened, the quality of service was not in question.

**Environment:** Our varied landscape covers many different environments, and includes Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation and Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance, all of which are valued and preserved; as well as green and blue spaces where we can meet, play and exercise. Recent environmental improvements have been commended by our communities, such as the Peffery Way improvements, recent works in Pefferside Park and community litter picks etc.

## CHALLENGES

**Dingwall High Street:** The general condition of the High Street, including empty retail units, the Commercial Bar, CCTV/monitoring

**Evening Activities:** Safe, welcoming places for our young people to meet and socialise; café culture type environments for all ages to enjoy

**Transport Related Issues:** Difficulties accessing activities and services (particularly in evenings and at weekends) due to limited public transport routes and timetables; pedestrian safety particularly in smaller villages and areas where people are required to cross the A9 (national speed limit) to access public and school transport; traffic management with respect to vehicles speeding through village and town centres.

**Health and Wellbeing Issues:** Access to mental health support, counselling, training and signposting; physical access to appointments (in light of transport issues as well as availability); Range of physical activities, cost and accessibility of these

**Environmental Appearance & Access:** Community Woodland and Allotments would be welcomed; improvements to Pefferside Park; increased access to safe and well maintained walks, cycle paths and routes which can be used by all; inclusive events and activities; environmental sustainability.

**Historic Value:** Access to and maintenance of historical sites around the area, including the MacDonald Monument and St Clements Church & Aisle in Dingwall, Redcastle Mortuary at Killearnan; Dingwall Museum accessibility (times and mobility).

**Services & Education:** Capacity of service provision; physical state of buildings and estate – particularly with respect to St Clement's School, Dingwall Primary and Ross Memorial Hospital.

**Affordable Housing:** Availability of suitable homes, which are affordable and economical to run; properties suitable for all ages and requirements; provision for those who are no longer able to live independently but would like to remain within their communities alongside friends, family and neighbours.

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## Our Vision & Community Aspirations

### Gaelic Header

Our vision for the future is for Dingwall and Seaforth to be a vibrant community, where people want to be – a place where support flows between individuals, communities and services, our relationships are strong and our area is as sustainable and resilient as it can be. We hope for health, wellbeing and opportunities for everyone within our area, having facilities, services and homes which are affordable, accessible and fit not only for purpose now but for the future.

This Area Place Plan reflects where we would like to be and the possible routes / suggestions our community and residents have made to assist our getting there. We recognise many of our aspirations span various priorities and pieces of work and have categorised them here under the overarching priority headings of People, Place and Prosperity which are shared across Highland Council and the Community Planning Partnership. This allows these priorities to be easily read and transferred across to the actions and workstreams of the wider Plans and Strategies. However, it is also recognised that not all aspirations may be achievable quickly and this may be due to factors such as funding, feasibility or other resource implications.

#### People:

- Our Community & its Wellbeing

#### Place:

- Activities & Things to Do
- Travel, Transport & Roads
- Our Towns & Villages

- Environment & Climate

#### Prosperity:

- Finance, Economy & Prosperity

#### Cross-Cutting Services & Agencies

## People:

### **Our Community and its Wellbeing:** *Considering Community Wellbeing, Community Safety*

Although there is a strong sense of community cohesion and wellbeing across Dingwall and Seaforth, and generally our communities are safe and welcoming, there are suggestions which could strengthen this, make our communities more joined socially and help those who have some concerns around safety as well as our community as a whole feel more inclusive.

It is felt *"There is a clear feeling of community but this is across multiple community identities"* and *"...Dingwall and the surrounding area has a distinct and proud culture. This should be embraced and nurtured."* Greater support for and recognition of community wellbeing as a whole, as well as activities bolstering it across our Ward from all public services would be helpful.

More often than not, we feel that living, studying and working here benefits us in many ways; socially, financially and physically

#### Community Safety:

- CCTV cameras and monitoring:
  - CCTV monitoring to prevent vandalism, reduce intimidation and worry.
- Police presence:



- Increased Beat presence and set opening hours for the Police Station.

### Community Wellbeing & Cohesion:

- Community events:
  - Planned and publicised calendar covering events of all sorts across our Area for both visitors and locals.
- Safe spaces to socialise:
  - Gender based, age based and intergenerational opportunities for socialising in the evenings and safe transport options to/from these.
  - Youth Centre for our young people
- Social enterprise / Craft cooperative:
  - Food festival
  - Cooperative type shop where local small producers can showcase and sell without too many overheads

## Place

### Activities & Things to Do: *Including history, language and culture*

Our rich history and environment have created an area which is not only fertile with stunning landscapes and views, but one which gives huge opportunity for things to enjoy, learn and do.

### Things to Do & Places to Go:

- Open Air Spaces:
  - Maintenance & Development of Parks, walking routes and cycle paths
  - Provision and maintenance of good quality playparks and play areas for our children

- Preservation of Sites of Special Scientific Interest, rare wetlands and the like.
- **Tourism:**
  - Historic Sites and linked celebrations promoted and marketed
  - Black Isle Show
  - North Coast 500 links strengthened and promoted
  - Promote the unique features and histories of our local distilleries.
- **History (including Monuments & Historic Sites):**
  - Preservation and opening of historic sites including the MacDonald Monument in Dingwall
  - Exploring and supporting Community ownership / transfer of sites
  - Support and promotion of Dingwall Museum
  - Promoting awareness of our history and linking this with tourism and development opportunities e.g. Dingwall 800, Viking links, prehistoric sites.
  - Preserve unique or rare features and links to our own and wider historical significance within our boundaries such as the Killearnan Morthouse
- **Language & Culture:**
  - Widen understanding of all cultures and languages within our communities
- **Evening Culture:**
  - Develop evening economy and culture within the Area – pubs / cafes; evening classes / activities (not just exercise related); family friendly activities cinema/bowling etc.
- **Community Facilities:**
  - Better utilisation of Dingwall Leisure Centre and Dingwall Library
  - Opening up rural facilities / buildings for community / public use – evening classes / activities, toilet access

**Travel, Transport & Roads:** *Including Public & Community Transport, Roads, Pavements and general getting around.*

We appreciate that there are perhaps several constraints with respect to this, both in terms of personal choice and service provision, not to mention affordability and practicability of potential solutions. With this in mind, we have tried to limit proposals for this to ones which will genuinely improve lives and safety.

### Getting About Our Area:

- **Public Transport:**
  - Better route and timetabling provision needed, particularly including evenings and weekends
- **Community Transport:**
  - Little available at present – schemes could be developed and promoted e.g. Little Bus in Culbokie
  - Include options for rural areas for access to services, appointments and activities, including evenings
- **Active Travel:**
  - Completion of the full length of the Peffery Way
  - Safe crossing at Conon Bridge to the cycle path
  - Cycle route between Conon Bridge and Muir of Ord as well as one between Dingwall and Evanton
  - Cycle racks and storage facilities at points throughout the Area.

### Roads & Pavements:

- **Pedestrian Safety and the A9:**
  - Speed limit concerns regarding pedestrian crossing of the A9 near Tore Roundabout
- **Junction Safety at the A835 Conon Bridge junction:**
  - Road safety / speed measures to improve safety for all road users
- **Traffic Calming Measures:**
  - Traffic calming measures at noted spots across the area – particularly near the filling station in Tore and the main road through Conon Bridge.
- **Dingwall Link Road:**

- The completion of the Dingwall Link Road continues to be a priority for the local community.

### **Our Towns & Villages:** *Considering how our Area looks, its accessibility and general facilities.*

Some comments with respect to our towns and villages link with Service plans already, and in some cases members of our communities have been finding ways to help with the appearance of our towns and villages. This section

#### General Presentation:

- **Maintenance of Paths & Open Spaces:**
  - Routine general maintenance such as strimming, delittering and pathway improvement required
  - Explore development of a 'Tools Library' accessible to all
  - Explore programmes such as 'Pathway Pirates' to improve our towns and spaces
- **Appearance of our Buildings and Civic Centres:**
  - Refresh and invigorate our civic centres, leisure and sports facilities
  - Encourage and ensure upkeep, cleaning and maintenance of assets and buildings, whether public or private ownership
  - Commend and thank those in our businesses and communities who enhance our towns
  - Consider a 'best kept' initiative to encourage people to restore the appearance of our area

#### Accessibility:

- **General Accessibility:**
  - Generally good accessibility affected by condition of roads and pavements or transport options
  - Improvements to transport, roads and pavements required to improve accessibility
- **Accessibility and Our Public Spaces:**
  - Most public spaces at least somewhat accessible for most however improvements in maintenance and promotion required such as repairs to damaged walkways, ramps and vegetation

- Lack of public toilets / conveniences – whether not available at all or closed – this needs addressed.

#### General Facilities:

- **Public Conveniences:**

- Poor availability of public toilets across the Area - this needs to be improved, whether this be through better monitoring and increased opening of existing facilities, or the consideration of alternative means of providing these.

- **Bins:**

- Increased provision of both public and dog waste bins.

#### **Environment & Climate:** *Considering Green & Blue spaces; Energy related issues, Renewables, Energy Efficiency, Net Zero, Renewable Transport, Digital Connectivity and Community Resilience*

Our Area is fantastic, we have extensive areas of natural beauty and opportunities to make the most of our environment through our access to green and blue open spaces as well as looking towards preservation of the same through not only protecting and improving it in the present but for the future while looking at new and improved technologies and options.

#### Physical Spaces:

- **Parks & Open Spaces:**

- Better upkeep, maintenance and improved facilities within our parks.

- **Conservation Areas:**

- Preservation and monitoring of protected and unique sites including SSIs, wetlands etc.

#### Environmental Concerns:

- **Community Resilience:**

- Prioritise maintenance of roads and pavements including gritting in winter
- Regular clearing, inspection and maintenance of drains and culverts
- **Digital Connectivity:**
  - Better promotion and support for rollout, particularly in rural communities
- **Energy Efficiency, Energy Related Initiatives and Net Zero:**
  - Support to adopt / afford change and energy related initiatives
  - Review of net zero and energy initiatives along with finance / options associated with these
- **Renewable Transport:**
  - Improved access to charging stations for electric vehicles
  - Improved pedestrian and wheeling paths as well as increased cycle paths across the Area

## Prosperity:

### **Finance, Economy & Prosperity:** *Looking at Businesses, Services & Jobs; Prosperity and Cost of Living*

These topics are of concern throughout our community; whether in terms of businesses and employment, cost of living and the impact on people within our area; while considering ways to generate income here, as well as keep spend local. There is a general feeling that our community as a whole is facing challenges in terms of our current economic well-being; with rates impacting the availability of businesses to start or expand; public service funds being stretched and a general trend that all are trying to maximise return for spend. Many in our area shop locally on at least some form of regular basis, however it is noted that many also purchase elsewhere or online due to range of choice or cost.

The five pillars of Community Wealth Building (which are Spending, Fair Employment, Land & Property, Financial Power and Inclusive Ownership) should cut across all actions proposed to build prosperity across our Area, and we should seek to capitalise on emerging opportunities such as the Green Freeport, actively looking to include initiatives which can assist building our future.

- **Business Development:**
  - Reevaluation of business rates applicable to empty units
  - Cooperative type shop for local small producers
  - Food festival showcasing local produce and options
  - Linking to NC500 tourism
  - Tourist office / base
- **Local Businesses:**
  - Encourage growth and development of local businesses and producers
  - Initiatives to support and promote local food resources
  - Widen options for evening culture and retail in general.
  - Explore opportunities for employee ownership or share schemes in local businesses.
- **Public Sector Spend:**
  - Greater Public sector support for local businesses, producers and suppliers
  - Evaluation of where community benefit grants and developer contributions are spent
  - Community want and need taken into account with respect to community benefit grant and developer contribution spend.
- **Employability Issues:**
  - Promotion of fair work practices and the real living wage, and support for employers working towards this.
  - Consider provision of entrepreneurship programmes or workshops as well as skills development sessions
- **Public Parking:**
  - Should charging ever be required, this should be invitation to pay with money returned to the local area
- **Cost of Living:**
  - Consider establishing initiatives to assist mitigating the effects of the cost of living crisis
  - Expand food sustainability through local supply chains, allotments and community growing areas.
  - Establish community share points (food, toys, swap shops)
  - Provide where needed personal care and wellbeing packs without stigma or cost

- Establishment of accessible warm spaces to minimise the impact of fuel poverty particularly given the removal of the winter fuel payments

## Cross-cutting Services & Agencies:

*Covering Health & Care, Education and Housing: Availability and access to provision, joint working and co-location*

Many of the topics which fall under this subheading link directly to either NHS Highland strategies and plans; the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (People strand); or the Mid Ross Community Planning Partnership, and yet more link to plans such as the Active Travel Masterplan and service/organisation specific plans.

### Health & Care

- **Mental Health & Wellbeing:**
  - Greater access to services, including counselling
  - Education, including signposting and inputs on strengthening individual and community understanding of issues and services
  - Remind young people of support available to them in school and youth forums
- **Access to Health Care & Associated Services:**
  - Strengthen capacity in terms of GP and NHS Dental provision
  - Ensure services are as accessible as possible
  - Consider this as part of ongoing and future development issues in terms of pressure on services from population change
- **Social Care:**
  - Increased capacity within community based care at home services, whether public or third sector provision
  - Stronger collaboration between services and providers
  - Strengthen resources within Children's Care, Learning and Protection services



- NHS Hospital Provision:

- Renovation / expansion of Ross Memorial Hospital to accommodate modern facilities and NHS provision

## Education

- School Provision & Capacity:

- New premises for Dingwall Primary and St Clement's School
- Maintenance and upgrades to other Primary schools within the Area
- Increased options and provision of classroom support for both pupils and teachers

- Community Learning:

- Increased promotion and awareness of Community Learning opportunities
- Establishment of sessions within existing Highlife facilities, community spaces or if developed a new community hub
- Consideration of public transport routes and times to be taken into account when planning classes/sessions

- Early Years & Childcare:

- Consideration of capacity and changing demographics to be taken into account when looking at future planning and developments.

## Housing

- Access to Affordable Housing:

- Suitable provision of affordable housing should be available to all sectors of our community.
- New and upgraded homes should be energy efficient, good quality, well maintained and adaptable.

- Housing Development:

- Homes needed to support all sectors of our communities, not just now but in the future
- The supporting infrastructure in terms of public transport, school places and healthcare capacity as well as sewerage and roads needs to be taken into account when considering development and provision of homes.
- Regeneration and repurposing of old and existing buildings should be considered as well as new builds

- Homes should where possible be energy efficient and adaptable
- All ownership and residence types should be available
- Care home, sheltered and supported accommodation needs to be included within provision
- Empty Homes:
  - Restrictions on holiday lets, disincentivising second homes and considering further conditions should be explored

### Service Improvement through Joint Working and Co-Location

- Co-Location & Joint Working:
  - Improved collaboration and efficiency through co-location to improve effective, timely and positive outcomes
  - Consideration of improving communication routes with both clients and other services should be taken forward by all organisations and services
- Different Utilisation:
  - Consider different modes of access to buildings and location of amenities
  - Explore whether toilets in public buildings could be accessible as public toilets
  - Widen options for use of public buildings and schools outwith core hours
  - Consider hosting of a tourist information facility within public buildings
  - Explore not only cost savings but wider benefits – keep people and the community at the centre

## Summary

### Gaelic Heading

In conclusion, the development and writing of the Dingwall & Seaforth Area Place Plan has condensed the understanding of our communities and their aspirations into a summary of action and activities:

- Marketing and promotion of our towns and areas, what there is to do and see – both for locals and visitors
- Expanding access to sites and areas, improving opening hours, access and opportunities
- Our appearance improved, general maintenance taken care of and prioritised – both urban and environmental
- Public facilities available and accessible
- Improvements to our paths, pavements and roads – making them safer to use, travel and cross
- Greater options for and access to public and community transport across our area, particularly in terms of rural and evening/night time coverage, and the ability to access necessary appointments
- Local businesses and start ups encouraged to develop and grow – making things easier for this to happen and minimising empty units by maximising opportunities and prosperity for all.
- Support local cafes, pubs etc to consider opening into the evenings and providing a variety of settings where we can meet and build social connections
- Maximising opportunities for our children and young people by providing education and development activities in buildings which are modern – not just fit for purpose but suitable (as far as possible) for future generations as well
- Improved mental health services and understanding across our area – through service provision, community education and signposting
- Opening up our spaces and improving them – giving us access to better health and wellbeing through green and blue spaces, opportunities to exercise and socialise safely outside

- Developing community hubs of various types – somewhere such as a youth centre for our teenagers and young people; also places where people can meet, partake in activities both social and educational; building community cohesion in and across our area – places which can be used for many purposes.
- Improved access to and visibility of Police Scotland services – manned hours at the Police Station, more beat presence
- Better access to and coverage of health and care services – improved facilities at Ross Memorial Hospital (ideally a new community hospital); more availability of GP and NHS Dentistry services; increased levels of support and care in the community available from NHS, social work and care providers.
- Homes which are suitable for all sectors of our community; affordable, energy efficient and well maintained / in good condition; with sufficient provision of housing and adaptations where required.
- Installation of CCTV where practicable to increase community safety in areas of concern (and also to reduce vandalism)
- Better maintenance and management of our towns, public and open spaces to ensure not only acceptable provision but healthy and positive places which we can better utilise for the benefit of all

It is important that Dingwall & Seaforth grow and thrive, becoming the version we envisage to the betterment of all who live, work, study and visit our Area, as well as those who provide the services we need and use, and we hope this Area Place Plan assists in this, asking that all Services, Organisations and Funders consider the priorities we have highlighted when considering areas for improvement or change.

## Appendices

### Gaelic Header

There are a number of appendices / associated documents linked to the Dingwall and Seaforth Area Place Plan. These are listed in the table below for reference, although not included as part of this document for ease of printing. They can be found on the Area Place Plan website.

<https://engagehighland.co.uk/dingwall-and-seaforth-place-plan>

1	Appendix 1: Community Aspirations - Expanded
2	Appendix 2: Engagement Report
3	Appendix 3: Population Statistics & Area Information

## INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Impact Assessment Area	Conclusion of Screening / Full Assessment
Equality	The APP has identified priorities for children, young people and families, as well as improved services and community for all
Socio-economic	Positive impacts – the APP has aspirations with respect to education. It also covers issues around transport, housing, cost of living, development of opportunity and business
Human Rights	No rights will be negatively affected by the activity within the Plan. All partners involved take a rights based approach in their practice
Children's Rights and Wellbeing	The APP has aspirations which directly positively affect children and young people. It also reflects a desire for family friendly activities and safe forms of transport for all. No rights will be negatively affected.
Island and Mainland Rural	Transport and connectivity issues have been covered within the plan to promote positive impact for people living in more rural parts of the Area
Climate Change	Renewable energy, renewable transport and active travel are included within the plan, as well as preparation for adverse weather particularly flooding. There is aspiration to conserve and preserve SSIs and other green and blue spaces. Any anticipated potential impacts identified are positive.
Data Rights	No impact



## D&S APP – Appendix 3 – Community Aspirations (Expanded)

## Appendix 1: Community Aspirations - Expanded

The Community Aspirations bulleted within the body of the Area Place Plan reflect where we would like to be and the possible routes / suggestions our community and residents have made to assist our getting there, and has them categorised under the overarching headings People, Place and Prosperity, while also highlighting Cross-Cutting Services & Agencies.

This appendix expands on those bullet points and should be taken in conjunction with those summarised points.

### People:

#### **Our Community and its Wellbeing:** *Considering Community Wellbeing, Community Safety*

Although there is a strong sense of community cohesion and wellbeing across Dingwall and Seaforth, and generally our communities are safe and welcoming, there are suggestions which could strengthen this, make our communities more joined socially and help those who have some concerns around safety as well as our community as a whole feel more inclusive.

It is felt *"There is a clear feeling of community, but this is across multiple community identities"* and *"...Dingwall and the surrounding area has a distinct and proud culture. This should be embraced and nurtured."* Greater support for and recognition of community wellbeing, as well as activities bolstering it across our Ward from all public services would be helpful.

More often than not, we feel that living, studying and working here benefit us in many ways; socially, financially and physically.

#### Community Safety:



- **CCTV cameras and monitoring:** It was suggested that CCTV cameras could be useful, particularly in terms of minimising vandalism to public amenities (if CCTV covered the outside of public toilets, this might deter those who cause damage as well as potentially being able to identify them). This would also be useful for monitoring the High Street in Dingwall, reducing any sense of intimidation or worry while out and about.
- **Police presence:** Increased Police visibility around our communities would be welcomed, as well as having fixed opening hours for the Police Station.

#### Community Wellbeing & Cohesion:

- **Community events:** A planned and publicised calendar covering events of all sorts across Dingwall & Seaforth throughout the year, which could also be marketed to visitors and tourists.
- **Safe spaces to socialise:** Our communities would welcome safe spaces to socialise, as well as having gender-based, age-based and intergenerational opportunities. In particular our young people would welcome a youth centre or similar where they can socialise, is an alcohol-free space and has activities (such as pool tables, etc – something similar to the youth hub in Alness). These need to be open in the evening, and for there to be safe transport options and routes to and from these around our area (as well as safe ways home from Inverness in the evening and at night), increasing our ability to meet like-minded people, grow social networks and increase community cohesion.
- **Social enterprise / Craft cooperative:** There are many local small craft producers and enterprises who may be willing or interested in coming together to form a shared outlet for their wares, generating income for the producers while encouraging local sustainability, increasing social and shopping opportunities and increasing footfall through the area. This could link with social enterprise opportunities, employment and work experience opportunities.

## Place

**Activities & Things to Do:** *Including history, language and culture.*

Our rich history and environment have created an area which is not only fertile with stunning landscapes and views, but one which gives huge opportunity for things to enjoy, learn and do.

#### Things to Do & Places to Go:

- **Open Air Spaces:** We have many lovely open-air spaces within our Area, with some of these being of particular note as sites of special scientific interest, rare wetlands and the like. We are also fortunate to have areas such as Pefferside Park, Ferry Point and the Peffery Way as well as a range of walking routes and cycle paths. It is important that these are maintained and developed – the recent works to the Peffery Way have been an excellent improvement, but we would like to see this extended so the whole distance is accessible and promoted. Ferry Point with its fantastic views is worth improving – through improved pathways, pavements and seating. To fully utilise our open-air spaces for leisure, activities and improving our mental and physical health they need general maintenance – strimming, delittering, pathway improvement – this should be prioritised to allow us to make the most of our environment.
- **Tourism:** We are superbly positioned to benefit from the North Coast 500 as it passes our doorway. We also have a number of historic sites and links which could be promoted and celebrated such as the MacDonald Monument or our Viking heritage. In 2026 Dingwall will celebrate its 800<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as a Royal Burgh, which would not only potentially benefit Dingwall but also the rest of our area. We have fantastic events such as the Black Isle Show which happen within our boundaries, and if an annual events schedule or calendar was to be produced it would not only boost our sense of community and things to do for those living, studying and working locally but also those visiting our area, whether from nearby towns and villages or from further away.
- **History (including Monuments & Historic Sites):** With several monuments of note, some of which would require more input and renovation than others, these need to be not only preserved for the future but maintained, opened and promoted for the present. The MacDonald Monument in Dingwall is a prime example of where re-opening the tower would not only provide a tourist draw, but help local people become closer to our history, as well as providing a purpose for exercise to its site. Community ownership / transfer could be explored, which could then generate funds for its own maintenance and management. Community Asset Transfers (CATs) could be looked at with respect to some of our monuments and sites should local groups be willing to take these on (in terms of CATs, Highland Council support and advice would be welcomed as the process is felt to be awkward and unwieldy). There are opportunities to support Dingwall Museum (which is volunteer run) as well as looking at other parts of our History which could link with economic and community development such

as Dingwall 800, our Viking Links and the many prehistoric and historic sites within our area, including opening and showcasing the Newton Room.

- **Language & Culture:** As part of Highland, Gaelic language and culture are well represented and supported, however other languages and cultures within our communities are not as well represented or known, and more could be done to identify and promote these, particularly in ways which help all sectors of our communities integrate, learn about and respect each other.
- **Evening Culture:** Although there are things to do in our Area, our evening economy and culture are lacking – this could be resolved through private businesses (such as welcoming pubs and cafes); community activities and places (youth centre, community café, evening classes / activities which are not sport/exercise related) or through enterprises such as a cinema (whether fixed or movable e.g. Screen Machine) or family friendly activities such as bowling.
- **Community Facilities:** Both Dingwall Leisure Centre and Dingwall Library can be highlighted as being fantastic resources, although sometimes underutilised. Organisations are asked to ensure that these facilities remain in use and are not closed down, with a similar plea in respect to smaller more rural facilities which are key to those communities. It would be fantastic to see these, along with our other community focused buildings open more frequently / for longer, offering other opportunities as well such as non-exercise related evening classes or activities, as well as potentially having their toilets available for use by the public (particularly in areas where no other public conveniences are available).

### **Travel, Transport & Roads:** *Including Public & Community Transport, Roads, Pavements and general getting around.*

We appreciate that there are perhaps several constraints with respect to this, both in terms of personal choice and service provision, not to mention affordability and practicability of potential solutions. With this in mind, we have tried to limit proposals for this to ones which will genuinely improve lives and safety.

### **Getting About Our Area:**

- **Public Transport:** Many within our communities are dependent on public transport to get around, and still more would consider using it if better provision were available. Some of this is to do with route provision and some around timetabling. Our more rural areas feel this more than our centres, particularly affecting the ability to get to appointments, use services and amenities, participate in social and other events and this very much links on to safety concerns with respect to the ability to get home at night. The lack of suitable public transport routes, reliability and timetabling covering the area causes issues with respect to both bus and rail travel. Transport providers could look at expanding existing schemes to provide better options for those in our locale, e.g. extending the Highland Rail Pass to cover Moray/Aberdeenshire too.
- **Community Transport:** Most of our communities are either not well served by community modes of transport, or people are not aware of the schemes available. More could be done to develop and promote community transport schemes – this should be explored. For example, the Little Bus in Culbokie is seen to be an excellent example which could be replicated. This would help people, particularly older people or those with disabilities in our outlying areas to access services, including but not limited to shopping, local medical appointments, activities and the like. It might be possible to include evening / nighttime coverage, particularly times where social events are planned thereby allowing people to participate fully.
- **Active Travel:** There have been some improvements made to active travel routes locally, but our communities would like to see more done in this regard. Completion of the full length of the Peffery Way would be welcomed; as would safe crossing at Conon Bridge onto the cycle path; a cycle route from Conon Bridge to Muir of Ord; and a cycle/walking route from Dingwall to Evanton. Cycle racks and storage facilities away from supermarkets would be appreciated.

#### Roads & Pavements:

- **Pedestrian Safety and the A9:** The A9 is a main trunk road, at times dual carriageway, and runs mostly at National Speed Limits while passing through our area. This leads to extremely serious concerns about public safety. In order to use the limited public transport which is available, as well as our young people necessarily catching school buses; people need to cross this road (at a point where vehicles are often travelling at 70mph down a dual carriageway). This is dangerous, particularly for those who may have mobility issues, small children, buggies or simply be travelling at a busy time of day or in poor lighting / visibility conditions. We would like to see speed limits reduced

on this part of the road, or some other measures put in place to protect our citizens. Transport Scotland and Highland Council are asked to consider this as a matter of some urgency due to the level of concern within the community.

- **Junction Safety at the A835 Conon Bridge junction:** This junction is particularly busy, and vehicles often appear to use the junction with little concern for others. Roads departments are asked to consider whether any measures can be put in place to improve safety for all road users.
- **Traffic Calming Measures:** There are some roads within our Area where traffic calming or other measures to improve road safety would be appreciated – notably in Tore near the filling station and the main road through Conon Bridge. We ask that these be considered as to their feasibility and instated if appropriate.

### **Our Towns & Villages:** *Considering how our Area looks, its accessibility and general facilities.*

Some comments with respect to our towns and villages link with Service plans already, and in some cases members of our communities have been finding ways to help with the appearance of our towns and villages. This section

#### **General Presentation:**

- **Maintenance of Paths & Open Spaces:** As mentioned under Things to Do & Places to Go above, our open-air spaces need general maintenance – strimming, delittering, pathway improvement. This is not limited to those spaces we can use for exercise and social purposes, but also our town centres, verges and general ways to get about. Local people have already shown a willingness to help with this, with several local groups forming from volunteers who have seen a way to help improve their area and enhance their sense of community and civic pride. This is to be commended and supported – ideas such as a ‘Tools library’ as exists in Inverness or a programme such as the ‘Pathway Pirates’ in Aviemore should be explored and if possible supported by not only those willing to volunteer to strim, etc, but also those who could host or facilitate these through to those who could encourage participation in other ways such as local businesses, skills training, etc.
- **Appearance of our Buildings and Civic Centres:** Our civic centres look tired and faded – with some regeneration and investment (both financial and effort) they could be brought back. It is important our places are well presented to encourage wellbeing of those who live,

work and study here, as well as encourage investment, visitors and development. Our buildings could do with upkeep – cleaning and maintenance. This is not just the responsibility of services and organisations, who would be responsible for maintenance of those assets and buildings which they own and are responsible for, but also that of landlords and private building owners who could work together to improve our facades. This does not in any way detract from the good work several of our local businesses and community members do to enhance the appearance of our town through taking care of hanging baskets, fountains and the much-loved guerilla crocheting, and we wish to commend their efforts here while attempting to encourage others to also help restore the appearance of our area in ways they can. Perhaps some initiatives such as ‘best kept building / street’ could be encouraged as a means to do this, which could link back to suggestions under maintenance above.

#### Accessibility:

- **General Accessibility:** Overall accessibility is viewed to be generally good across Dingwall & Seaforth, although this is impacted by the condition of roads and pavements, as well as availability of transport options. Improvements in these areas would increase how accessible our towns, activities and opportunities are for all within our community which would in turn impact our community and personal health and wellbeing positively.
- **Accessibility and Our Public Spaces:** Most of our public spaces are at least somewhat accessible for most groups of people, however this could be evaluated and improved where necessary – better maintenance and promotion of areas would help with this; particularly in terms of loose / damaged paving or walkways, overgrown vegetation encroaching on paths and considering availability of ramps if required in main areas. The availability of public toilets is a concern with respect to utilising our public spaces, as they are often closed, vandalised or in poor condition, leading some to avoid these areas due to this.

#### General Facilities:

- **Public Conveniences:** The availability of public toilets across the Area is poor, and needs to be improved, whether this be through better monitoring and increased opening of existing facilities, or the consideration of alternative means of providing these. It may be these CCTV as mentioned earlier could be of benefit, or the opening of facilities in other buildings, particularly public buildings or community halls. Provision of these amenities is essential and requires consideration across Dingwall and Seaforth.

- **Bins:** Littering is seen as an eyesore across our Area, particularly in our Parks and main streets. Increased provision of public bins, as well as dog waste bins would be beneficial and hopefully reduce incidences of littering and fouling. We would welcome consideration from Waste Services with respect to this.

**Environment & Climate:** *Considering Green & Blue spaces; Energy related issues, Renewables, Energy Efficiency, Net Zero, Renewable Transport, Digital Connectivity and Community Resilience*

Our Area is fantastic, we have extensive areas of natural beauty and opportunities to make the most of our environment through our access to green and blue open spaces as well as looking towards preservation of the same through not only protecting and improving it in the present but for the future while looking at new and improved technologies and options.

**Physical Spaces:**

- **Parks & Open Spaces:** Many of the parks within our Area could do with improvement – mostly in terms of maintenance through better upkeep, less littering and improved facilities within them, however they are very much valued. Our communities would wish these to be prioritised – these spaces are key not only in environmental terms but also for our physical and mental well-being.
- **Conservation Areas:** There are a number of key sites within Dingwall and Seaforth which are currently protected due to the unique nature of those physical spaces as well as the species which inhabit them. These require to be preserved and monitored. We appreciate the organisations and studies already doing this and wish to note our support.

**Environmental Concerns:**

- **Community Resilience:** Although parts of our Area are noted as being at risk of flooding, there is little evidence that this is a priority. We appreciate this is impacted by budgets and service capacity; however this means roads and pavements are not maintained and gritted as frequently as required, and drains / culverts are not cleared and inspected. Regular inspection and maintenance would be welcomed thereby reducing the potential impact of storms and other severe weather events.

- **Digital Connectivity:** Connectivity and digital inclusion within our area are acceptable, however it would be appreciated if this could be better promoted, and the rollout of better coverage and connectivity supported to happen more quickly, particularly within our rural communities.
- **Energy Efficiency, Energy Related Initiatives and Net Zero:** People within our communities have generally, where possible, feasible and affordable, have made any adaptations or adoptions they can to help their homes be more energy efficient; and would potentially be keen to progress this further should there be support to adopt / afford change and energy related initiatives. Unfortunately currently cost and reliability concerns as well as our geography mean that although our communities appreciate the need to move towards Net Zero, it seems almost out of reach. Review of initiatives and finances / options related to these would be welcomed.
- **Renewable Transport:** In terms of electric vehicles, these are not yet commonplace within our communities, although improvements in charging stations for these may be welcome. Reducing carbon emissions in the Area is important, and improving local transport infrastructure is key – we would like to see better public transport (possibly utilising electric vehicles) as well as improved pedestrian or wheeling paths and increased routes for cycle paths to assist us in reducing our carbon footprint in terms of renewable or active transport options.

## Prosperity:

### **Finance, Economy & Prosperity:** *Looking at Businesses, Services & Jobs; Prosperity and Cost of Living*

These topics are of concern throughout our community; whether in terms of businesses and employment, cost of living and the impact on people within our area; while considering ways to generate income here, as well as keep spend local. There is a general feeling that our community as a whole is facing challenges in terms of our current economic well-being; with rates impacting the availability of businesses to start or expand; public service funds being stretched and a general trend that all are trying to maximise return for spend. Many in our area shop locally on at least some form of regular use, however it is noted that many also purchase elsewhere or online due to range of choice or cost.



- **Business Development:** There are a number of empty units which could be brought back into use across the area, most notably on Dingwall High Street. It is felt that the level of business rates applied to these not only makes them uneconomic or unaffordable to start-up businesses, but also to existing businesses who may wish to expand. It would be prudent if possible to consider whether these could be altered, even if only for an initial period, to help fill these units and bring life back to the town, perhaps also looking at the suggestions for a cooperative type shop for local small producers (and perhaps expanding to be a NC500 start/end of trip 'last chance to buy' for producers along the NC500 who might wish to join with Dingwall and Seaforth producers to maximise range), or whether a tourist base or youth centre / community café could utilise space.
- **Local Businesses:** There are many fantastic local businesses and producers within our area - these are to be commended with respect to their offerings and quality; and should be encouraged to grow and develop. There are several types of business which it is felt may be welcomed locally (either in terms of startup or service growth) including something to support and promote local food resources – in terms of what is produced as well as places to eat, drink and socialise in the evenings. A wider range of shops would be welcomed, although people will visit Inverness or shop online if they cannot buy locally.
- **Public Sector Spend:** Given we have so many local businesses, producers and suppliers, to help our economy be more sustainable, the possibility of greater public sector support for these should be provided – whether utilising local contractors and firms; local produce being used in school and hospital meals; or exploring options such as start-up grants. It would also be appreciated if community benefit grants and developer contributions could be spent within those communities which would then be improved with community want or need taken into account re spend.
- **Employability Issues:** To assist with sourcing and retaining employees, fair work practices and the real living wage should be promoted, and employers working towards this supported. Entrepreneurship programmes or workshops could be beneficial, as well as skills development to help retain talent.
- **Public Parking:** At present, public parking around our area is free – it is felt this encourages people to visit and to use our local businesses and facilities; that free parking is a major asset. If there comes a time when charging is required, this should be done as invitation to pay with money returned and spent to improve our local area.
- **Cost of Living:** The recent (and ongoing) cost of living crisis has caused significant impact to how our area looks and is now, to the community as a whole and to individuals within it. It has affected how it feels living, studying and working here. It is thought that more

could be done to help mitigate these effects, some of which would have a knock-on effect on community cohesion and social capital. Food sustainability through local supply chains, allotments and community growing areas would benefit our communities and producers. Community share points, whether food share, community fridges / larders, toy banks and swap shop type events (e.g. Waste Not) would be welcomed as would places to locate or host these. Some of these could also be used to hold personal care and wellbeing packs for those in need. There is local concern around the axing of winter fuel payments, so a drive for accessible warm spaces may be necessary to help promote attendance and minimise the impact of fuel poverty for all.

## Cross-cutting Services & Agencies:

*Covering Health & Care, Education and Housing: Availability and access to provision, joint working and co-location*

Many of the topics which fall under this subheading link directly to either NHS Highland strategies and plans; the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (People strand); or the Mid Ross Community Planning Partnership, and yet more link to plans such as the Active Travel Masterplan and service/organisation specific plans.

### Health & Care

- **Mental Health & Wellbeing:** Although we appreciate there are challenges with respect to service capacity, mental health and wellbeing are especially important within our communities. We would like to see greater access to services, including counselling, as well as inputs and signposting as to how we can strengthen our individual and community understanding of these issues and what we can do as well as services with which we can link. Our young people in particular would greatly value support in this regard. We would like to propose that services such as Highlife Highland continue to provide opportunities through the Youth Forum, as well as Education strengthening and reminding our young people of the support available to them in schools, making sure they are aware it is a safe place to talk and access support. We understand that Mental Health is one of the priority workstreams for the Mid Ross Community Planning Partnership and ask that they continue working to improve resources in all forms.

- **Access to Health Care & Associated Services:** Some concern exists around availability and access to NHS Services within our communities, notably GP and NHS Dental appointments – in terms of both capacity within the provision and physical ability to access options (especially for those reliant on public transport or taxi availability). With large forthcoming developments in our Area, along with the potential for additional pressure on services from new residents, population changes and workers from the Green Freeport, it is essential that the knock on to NHS provision is considered as part of this. Other health care services such as pharmacies are generally available and accessible.
- **Social Care:** With changing demographics, it is important that the delivery of care at home is considered within all impacting services, strategies and plans. The community based services (whether NHS, private or third sector) are essential and greatly valued, but increased provision will be required in order for people to continue to live at home in their communities for as long as possible and as independently as possible, which will also reduce pressure on care homes and hospital services. We would welcome increased collaboration between services and providers to ensure our community is as fit for purpose for the future as possible. In terms of social care, it must also be noted that our children and young people also deserve care services which enable them to be cared for, supported and encouraged to utilise their potential so Care, Learning and Protection sectors of our Social Work services also need resources.
- **NHS Hospital Provision:** Ross Memorial Hospital has served our communities well over the past 150 years, and is a much-valued asset, hosting not only beds, but community and outreach services as well as the 24hr GP service for our area. Our communities would like to see this hospital renovated or expanded to accommodate modern facilities and NHS provision, although we note that we are fortunate in having Raigmore Hospital as a tertiary centre nearby.

## Education

- **School Provision & Capacity:** With new housing developments planned for our Area (which are rightfully needed) there is some concern around school capacity not only with respect to current but also potential future pupils, both at Primary and Secondary levels. The current Dingwall Academy and its associated Highlife Highland Library and Leisure Centre are valued and felt to not only be suitable and good quality buildings but also in terms of service and facility provision. Our Primary Schools, while also valued and providing excellent service for our children, are felt to be less satisfactory in terms of the physical buildings, and indeed it is felt that new provision is required (particularly in terms of Dingwall Primary and St Clement's Schools). It should be noted that St Clements School is crucial in terms of service provision and absolutely invaluable in terms of local need, For our children and young people to continue to receive good quality

education in facilities and buildings which are fit for purpose, and as far as possible designed with future need and development in mind must be a key consideration in any and all related Plans and Strategies. In this Area Place Plan we would like to see the provision of new schools for Dingwall Primary and St Clements, as well as the maintenance and upgrading of the other primary schools in our area to ensure our young people are well provided for and can access as many opportunities as possible for their (and our areas) futures. We would also like to see greater options for classroom support where applicable, reducing pressure on teachers and the associated impacts on our childrens learning.

- **Community Learning:** There is little awareness of Community Learning opportunities – can these opportunities be better promoted to ensure this is not a service at risk of closing due to lack of use. Sessions such as evening classes or activities which do not centre around fitness or exercise would be welcomed. It may be these could be hosted within the existing Highlife Highland facilities, our community spaces or if developed a community hub. Consideration being given to public transport routes and times when planning these would be appreciated given the issues covered elsewhere within the APP.
- **Early Years & Childcare:** Although there is a fair amount of provision available, there are concerns about continued capacity given future developments and changing demographics, particularly with respect to out of school hours and pre-nursery spaces. This needs to be considered when looking at future planning and developments.

## Housing

- **Access to Affordable Housing:** This is key across our communities – there needs to be suitable provision of affordable housing available to all sectors of our community. Homes need to be fit for purpose, not just now but for the future – energy efficient, of good quality, well maintained and adaptable – we need homes which cater across the lifespan. Homes which meet our current and potential need. We appreciate that there are concerns not only in our area, but Highland wide and across Scotland regarding the housing crisis and believe this is crucial in considering our future.
- **Housing Development:** We all recognise the need for housing development, regeneration and build. Homes are desperately needed in our local area not just to meet current demand but also future growth. Feedback indicates we need homes for those who live and work locally, for young people setting up home, for families of varying size, single people, and crucially older people and people with additional requirements such as disability or support needs. It is key that the infrastructure to support new homes (not just things such as sewer

capacity and roads, but also public transport, school places and healthcare capacity) is considered when developing these, as well as looking at regeneration and repurposing of existing buildings rather than straight new builds. It would be good to see these homes being energy efficient and adaptable (fit homes) where possible, and to have a variety of social rented and affordable purchase homes available as well as mid market rent and shared equity. The requirement for care homes, sheltered and supported accommodation needs to be recognised not only for those who need those homes at present but also to assist the health and care sector in their capacity and role, as availability of these spaces is decreasing whilst the need and demand for them is increasing.

- **Empty Homes:** There are many empty properties across our area, some of which could potentially alleviate pressures on the housing sector if they were available for use. It is felt that restrictions on holiday lets, disincentivising second homes and considering further conditions on private developers might help with this and could be further explored.

#### Service Improvement through Joint Working and Co-Location

- **Co-Location & Joint Working:** We hope that co-locating public services will make them more efficient, causing them to work more closely together and resulting in better service provision for our communities. Having different organisations and associated services linking better with each other should result in better communication between them, better use of facilities and less repetition of story for clients. Regardless of location, all services are asked to consider ways of improving their communication with both clients and other services – particularly those in the same organisation or related sectors with a view to improving effective, timely and positive outcomes.
- **Different Utilisation:** Facilities and services could be used in different ways, perhaps having public and community services sharing space, or by changing how we look at access to those buildings and the location of amenities – for example public toilets in public buildings such as council offices, community halls or museums; use of school buildings out of hours or County Buildings hosting a tourist information type facility. This should be explored both in terms of service improvement and efficiency but also in terms of cost savings and associated benefits – keeping people and the community at the centre is imperative through this.





## D&S APP – Appendix 4 - Engagement Report

## Introduction

This report covers the Engagement workstream for the Dingwall & Seaforth Area Place Plan, across the online survey and ideas boards published on EngageHQ (available 28 August 2024 – 30 September 2024); the public drop in sessions held in Dingwall Library on 28 & 29 August 2024 and the Stakeholder workshop of 4 September 2024.

The findings detailed in this report have informed the main document of the Dingwall & Seaforth Area Place Plan and are reflected in the Community Aspirations section of the Plan itself. They have also been shared with the Stakeholder Group and other partners to help inform their own work, particularly nothing the Highland Investment Plan and the Highland Local Development Plan.

As outlined within the Area Place Plan, our engagement strategy was influenced and informed by existing consultation documents and data and linked with others in an attempt to minimise repeated consultation on similar issues.

## Engagement Responses - Survey

The Engagement Survey was comprehensive and developed to minimise repeated consultation by sharing findings with other projects and plans related to the Area Place Plan. Questions were developed in conjunction with the Dingwall & Seaforth Area Place Plan Stakeholders Group as well as specialist colleagues from the Services involved.

### Survey Response Analysis:

#### Demographics

- 82% of respondents indicated they were answering as individuals and on their own behalf, with 9% answering as a service provider on behalf of their organisation and the remaining 9% answering as business owners/investors in the town.
- 9% of respondents were aged under 16, with 18% aged between 16 and 24, and the remaining 73% aged 25-64.
- All respondents were either employed or in education.
- 55% were resident in Dingwall & Seaforth, 27% worked in the area but lived elsewhere, and the remaining 18% attended education in the area but lived elsewhere.
- 27% had lived/worked/attended education here for 1-5 years, another 27% for 6-10 years with the remaining 46% having a relationship with the area for more than 10 years.
- 46% lived within the Dingwall Community Council Area; 18% the Ferintosh Community Council Area; 9% in the Conon Bridge CC Area; 9% living within the Maryburgh CC boundaries; a further 9% under Muir of Ord CC, and the remaining 9% elsewhere (not in a Community Council Area within Dingwall & Seaforth)

#### Community Wellbeing

- Almost half (46%) of respondents felt there was a general sense of community wellbeing in our area, with the remainder equally split between being unsure and feeling there wasn't a sense of this. Additional text responses indicate "*There is a clear feeling of community but this is across multiple community identities*"; "*There was lots of effort but it achieved little as was unsupported at Council level*"; "*There was lots of moaning but suspected it was from people who expect everything handed on a plate to them*"; "*In general people do seem to*



*care about each other – the Facebook noticeboard whilst full of moans is also really helpful when folks need help or ask questions"; " There are a variety of well-being activities such as wellbeing walks being run by the academy and many after school clubs"; " There is a sense of community but it's limited. Dingwall and the surrounding area have a fairly distinct and proud culture. This should be embraced and nurtured"; "Lack of interest in neighbourhood. Quick turnover of tenants, when I moved in people had lived in same house/flat for years"; " Very welcome in schools and generally schools want to partner".*

- Previous community feedback had indicated there should be more to assist with a number of issues. When asked to indicate whether they agreed, and how they would rate the importance of these, respondents indicated:
  - **Availability of mental health and / or counselling support:** Almost half (46%) of the respondents indicated this was very important to them, with a further 27% indicating they classed it as somewhat important. 18% indicated they had no strong feelings either way and only 9% indicated it was not particularly important.
  - **Access to mental health and / or counselling support:** Responses mirrored those for availability of these services.
  - **Training on how to recognise wellbeing issues in yourself / others and signposting:** 36% indicated they felt this to be very important, followed by a further 18% noting this as somewhat important. A further 36% had no strong feelings either way with the remaining 10% marking this as not particularly important. *It can be noted that younger people had a particular concern in this area.*
  - **Safe spaces to socialise – age based:** 73% of responses indicated this was very important with the remaining responses noting somewhat important.
  - **Safe spaces to socialise – gender based:** 46% indicate very important, 18% somewhat important, with 27% indicating no strong feelings either way and the remainder selecting not particularly important.
  - **Safe spaces to socialise – intergenerational:** 64% of responses selected very important, 27% somewhat important and 9% no strong feelings either way.
  - **Open air spaces to socialise – green / blue space:** The vast majority of respondents (91%) indicate this issue was very important to them with the remaining 9% selecting somewhat important.
  - **Open air spaces to socialise – café culture, evening economy etc:** Responses were nearly evenly split across somewhat (45%) and very (55%) important.
  - **General evening economy:** 9% had no strong feelings about this topic, with 55% feeling it was somewhat important and 36% very important.
  - **Walking / wheeling / cycling routes which are safe and well maintained:** Again, the vast majority of this (91%) of responses indicated this issue to be very important to them, with the remainder indicating somewhat important.

- **Affordable access to exercise:** 73% felt this issue to be very important, with 18% indicating it was of some importance and the remainder feeling it was not particularly important to them.
- **Choices of different types of affordable exercise:** 9% of respondents indicate this is not particularly important to them with the remainder evenly split across feeling it is somewhat or very important.
- **Allotments / community growing spaces:** 82% felt this was somewhat important, with only 9% feeling it to be very important and the remaining 9% with no strong feelings on this topic.
- When asked if they felt that living, working or being in education here benefited them, and given the option to select several responses, 36% of respondents indicated they felt being here benefited them physically; 36% felt it benefited them mentally; 18% indicated it benefited them socially; 36% financially and 64% felt it was they benefited generally.
- When asked if they felt disadvantaged, again given the option to select several responses, 16% felt disadvantaged mentally; one third socially; 16% financially and one third felt disadvantaged generally.
- Additional space was provided where respondents could identify anything else they would like to share about community wellbeing and the following were noted: *"Need more amenity space and an improvement in the appearance of the town centre"; "Lack of a single decent pub or place to have a civilised drink in the evening is a real pity. The closure of the National regular punters won't help this. The Mallard is frankly no zone, the beer garden is a cage, and the lack of any local ales is shocking. Meeting other like-minded people is a challenge with such limited social venues. A decent pub with local ales or a licensed café open till 9 or 10pm would suffice. Strathpeffer, Maryburgh and Conon Bridge all manage this so why can't Dingwall?"; "Not enough mental health"; "Community wellbeing is important"*

### Activities and Things to Do

- Respondents were asked to indicate whether they felt there were sufficient activities available locally for a number of groups, and could indicate Yes / No / Don't know. Responses were as follows:
  - **Families with a child under 12 years old:** 9% of respondents felt this group was sufficiently catered for, 36% felt there were not sufficient activities available for this group and the remainder were unsure.
  - **Families with young children:** Responses mirrored those for families with a child under 12.
  - **Primary school aged children:** 9% indicated they felt this group had sufficient activities available to them, 27% indicating they felt there was not enough, and the remaining responses were unsure.
  - **Secondary school aged children:** 18% felt there were sufficient activities, with the same number feeling this group was not well catered for, and again the remainder unsure.

- **People aged 16-24:** 18% of responses indicated sufficient availability, 27% that there was insufficient provision for this group and the remainder unsure.
- **People aged 25-64:** 45% of responses indicated this group had sufficient activities available, with the remaining responses equally split between no and unsure.
- **People aged 65+:** 36% of respondents felt this group were well catered for, with 45 % unsure and the remainder feeling this group were insufficiently catered for in terms of activities.
- **Intergenerational groups:** Responses indicated most people were unsure as to intergenerational activities (73%) with the remaining responses split 2:1 for no to yes.
- **Gender specific groups:** 91% felt that there were sufficient gender specific group activities, with 9% indicating there were not.
- **Lone parent families:** All respondents indicated they felt lone parent families to be well catered for.
- **Families that include children or adults with disabilities:** 18% of responses indicated they felt there were sufficient activities for these families, 9% thought there were not and the remainder were unsure.
- **Larger families:** 9% felt there were sufficient activities for larger families, an equal number felt there were not and the remainder were unsure.
- **Minority / ethnic families:** 9% of respondents felt there was sufficient provision with the remainder of respondents unsure.
- **People with disabilities:** 91% of respondents were unsure as to whether there were sufficient activities available to people with disabilities, with the remainder feeling there was provision.
- **Visitors:** when asked whether they felt there were sufficient activities available to visitors, 27% felt there were, only 9% were unsure and 64% felt there was not sufficient provision.
- When asked what activities people felt were missing and why, the following text responses were gathered: *"Access to MacDonald monument, St Clement's Aisle, etc"; "Need more outdoor activities and entertainment for locals and visitors"; "Good quality attractions that appeal to both locals and visitors. £36 million on a 'worldclass' attraction in Inverness while all the other towns in Highland get nothing is all wrong. Attractions that pull in footfall to support the local economy. Viking Heritage is such a wasted opportunity. You won't get / don't deserve private investment or volunteer support if you don't have the infrastructure to support that."; "A really good place where all ages could socialise"; "More shops and places for visitors and locals would be great. Get those empty shops rented out. It looks awful that so many are empty. A decent pub serving local ales. A skate or pump track for the kids would be amazing. More cycle paths / footpaths e.g. Dingwall to Evanton to enable link up with the paths to Alness etc. Currently the route between Dingwall and Evanton is quite scary – narrow and full of potholes with cars giving little consideration"; "Don't know about daytime activities or activities for children. No children and work during the day but evening activities missing. Evening classes (not exercise) would be good."; "Options for teens"*

- With respect to what might prevent them from going to an activity; the largest barrier (67%) was activity times; followed by transport routes (33%); cost/affordability of activities (33%); transport timings (22%) then accessibility and childcare both at 11% of responses. (Respondents could select more than one option).
- Half of those who responded felt they were informed about activities and options for things to do in the local area, 20% did not feel informed; 20% would like to know more and the remaining 10% were unsure.
- Free text space was provided for respondents to indicate if there was anything else they would like to share about activities and things to do in our area, and the following were submitted: *"Council owns and controls assets that could be bringing a whole lot more benefit to the area yet they are neglected/closed/hidden. Why is a world renowned facility such as the Newton Room hidden away, while you have empty units lying on the High Street – give it visibility in one of those units and raise the whole profile of the town, and give the Museum more space – and support them to bring it into the 21<sup>st</sup> century – refer again to Inverness Castle bias. What is the 10 year strategy for the Town Hall now it has a repaired roof? Why is the front door to this Common Good asset closed, and it not a centre of civic life and pride? Why is a town of this size on National Cycle route totally devoid of non-supermarket provided cycle parking? 1 year ago this was raised with members – nothing happens. If there was activity and things done we would have a bit more faith in Highland Council! Needs a family attraction linked to caravan site – another common good asset that is not being utilised by Council to bring as much benefit as possible to the town"; "The leisure centre is amazing. Please do not allow the Council to shut this"; "Safe spaces for teens would be good".*

#### Appearance of our Area

- Only 36% of respondents were satisfied with the current appearance of our towns and villages. 9% had no strong feelings either way; 45% were unsatisfied and 9% very dissatisfied.
- When asked why they thought this and how it could be improved, the following free text responses were recorded: *"General feeling of neglect, especially Commercial Bar and environ. Update of path network also needed."; "Too many empty shops on the high street which gives a bad impression to visitors. The few amenity areas in Dingwall are shabby and unkempt looking. Pavements and roads need improvement, all pathways aren't being maintained with litter and weeds everywhere."; "General cleaning and maintenance. You don't need people to tell you this – members and officials should be able to see the dirt, neglect, uneven and dangerous pavements etc etc. The excuse of lack of money is not valid – how much is being wasted? What is the Common Good Fund for and why does HC website say its been closed to applications due to lack of funds – when in fact there is reportedly significant sums in there? How accountable are Members re best use of this money and what it achieves? So many same issues raised again and again by community re seagulls, vegetation, parks etc etc – you must know what they are by now"; "Could do with some empty shops being filled"; "The pond in the centre of Dingwall is a mess. More frequent cutting of path verges etc so that folks with less mobility, buggies etc can use the paths. I'd be happy*

*to join the strimming volunteers if someone can lend me a strimmer. Gutters and roofs cleared of vegetation. Seagulls discouraged or bird proofing applied to buildings”; “More transport availability”; “Dingwall is a district centre but lacks the investment it deserves – most communities say that but look at the green spaces and parks in Dingwall compared to say Nairn. The park can be a major asset and opportunity for the town but has been neglected”; “Dingwall has too many derelict / shabby buildings e.g. Commercial Bar – need demolition orders and owners of empty buildings should still have to clean windows, collect mail, weed”*

- Previous community feedback had indicated the following topics matter locally. When asked to indicate whether they agreed or not respondents indicated:
  - **Improvements to Pefferside Park:** 73% of respondents definitely agreed, with 9% somewhat agreeing and the remainder neither agreeing or disagreeing
  - **Development of community woodland – possibly near Knockbain Farm:** All responses indicated agreement (64% definitely, remainder somewhat)
  - **Improved nature walks and routes:** All were in agreement, with 73% indicating definitely and the remainder somewhat.
  - **Improved access to green space:** Responses mirrored those to improved nature walks and routes
  - **Rewilding of areas:** 36% definitely agreed, with a further 27% somewhat in agreement. 27% neither agreed nor disagreed, with the remainder somewhat disagreeing with this.
  - **Appearance of verges, park areas, wasteland:** 45% definitely agreed this was important, with 36% somewhat agreeing and other respondents having no strong feelings either way.
  - **Availability of public bins:** 73% of respondents definitely agreed this issue was important, with the remainder somewhat agreeing.
- Responses to asking about any particular areas or buildings which were good or bad and why produced the following: *“Commercial Bar is in desperate need of action, also to open up that vennel”; “Old Commercial Bar building is in shocking condition and the walks along the canal are shabby and could be a great asset to the area if they were improved. MacDonald monument should be opened to the public as an attraction and Pefferside Park revamped”; “Commercial Hotel – High Street – what an eyesore, drags whole town down and blocks former pedestrian access from car parks yet again adversely affecting High Street. Get an improvement notice enforced. General lack of preservation of conservation area – UPVC windows in Royal Hotel etc just dilutes what town could be with little effort. Council office should have been retained on High Street and the one they are in used for housing – would have kept life on the High Street and added to already being redeveloped residential area”; “Some of the vacated premises on the High Street”; “The town centre has lots of buildings with vegetation in the gutters etc. This looks awful. Not a good look for tourists to see. I appreciate that this needs the landlord or owner to cooperate. Too many seagulls in the town. Educating people not to feed them – there is some person that buys cheap bread in Tesco then feeds it to the seagulls”; “School building and library are good”; “The area around Lochgorm Furniture is a great opportunity for*

redevelopment. It currently looks a mess. CPO the building at the entrance from Maryburgh which is an eyesore. Also the land next to the railway station – Network Rail land?"; "Empty shops on Dingwall High Street an eyesore. Owners should at the very least clean windows and pick up mail. Commercial Bar needs demolished and after the money spent on Town Hall, great improvement, why is the clock continually at wrong time? Council housing schemes that are on list for demolishing and rebuilding should not be left to rot with no timeline of improvements"; "Bad: row of houses as you come into Dingwall from the Mart look awful for years! Commercial Bar demolish, the empty buildings on High Street".

- When asked are there any particular green or blue spaces you think are good or bad and why, responses received indicate: "Path network in need of attention. I really like the Ferry Point area"; "Peffer'side Park and surrounding area needs attention. The Peffer'side Way is a massive improvement and should be completed all the way"; "Paths down to Firth are lovely walk but need to be maintained and publicised. Canal could be an attraction. Peffery is understood to be in hand, through work initiated by private sector"; "Ferry Point is nice, the walks around town are OK but lots places the paths get really overgrown in summer. I got burned by either normal hogweed or cow parsley recently whilst walking round the paths (behind Old Evanton Road). The Peffery Way is ace – the sooner the full length gets made into a proper trail the better"; "Dingwall park is always maintained, not much rubbish"; "Nearly all green areas are overgrown, kerbs and pavements full of weeds! The zig zag leading to Deas Avenue is an absolute disgrace and has been for a long time not safe to push a pram or wheelchair".
- Three text responses were received to the final Appearance question asking if there was anything else about how things look in our area: "Investment in the High Street and facilities badly needed as we are falling behind other towns in the country"; "We look neglected and run down, and lack of overall strategy shows across the area"; "All looks run down".

### Accessibility of Public Spaces

- Respondents were asked to indicate how accessible they felt our public spaces were for a number of groups, and could select from very accessible, somewhat accessible, no strong feelings either way, somewhat inaccessible and very inaccessible. Responses were as follows:
  - **People with physical disabilities:** 18% of respondents felt our public spaces were very accessible for this group, 45% selected somewhat accessible, with 18% having no strong feelings wither way and the remainder equally split between somewhat inaccessible and very inaccessible.
  - **People with hidden disabilities:** The majority of respondents (64%) had no strong feelings either way, with 9% feeling very accessible, 9% somewhat accessible and the remaining 9% very inaccessible.
  - **Older people:** 9% indicated they felt public spaces were accessible to older people, with 18% responding somewhat accessible. 36% had no strong feelings; 27% felt these spaces were somewhat inaccessible and 9% very inaccessible.



- **Young people:** 18% of respondents were equally split across somewhat and very inaccessible with respect to young people, however 27% thought very accessible, 9% somewhat accessible and the remainder with no strong feelings either way
- **People with young children:** The majority (55%) of respondents had no strong opinion on this, with the remainder equally split four ways across the remaining options (9% to each of very inaccessible, somewhat inaccessible, somewhat accessible and very accessible)
- **Visitors:** Only 9% felt that public spaces were very accessible to visitors; with 27% indicating somewhat accessible; 18% somewhat inaccessible and 9% very inaccessible. The remainder had no strong opinion on this.
- With regards to what might help make our public spaces more accessible, five responses were received: *"Pavements on the High Street are very uneven with people tripping on loose lock block paving and other paths needing cleared from weeds and vegetation"; "Maintain car parks, access routes onto High Street, sort out the pavements at east end of High Street and routes into it. Signage and marketing so that people know what's there. Cycle parking on the High Street. Bus stops away from Tesco. Properly defined parking on the High Street with speed controls so it works for pedestrians and those that access it. Get public spaces open! MacDonald Monument. Town House. Quality Museum with public toilets, open all year round."; "Make sure there are ramps or lifts where needed. As I don't suffer from any mobility issues I confess I don't really notice."; "More car parking spaces"; "Better pavements."*
- The free text responses to whether there were any public spaces which were particularly good or bad in terms of accessibility and why, as well as if there was anything else people would like to share about accessibility issues in our area were as follows: *"Peffery way very good in parts but could be improved by completing the middle part. High Street as mentioned above."; "High School and Library are good but not sure how close public transport takes people."; "Public car parking"; "too many people tripping / falling on pavements."*

### Travelling around our Area

- A number of challenges faced while travelling around our communities were polled, with two thirds of respondents noting the condition of pavements as an issue; followed by the condition of our roads and the cost of travel (ticket price, cost of fuel) both with 56% of respondents indicating these as limiting factors. The lack of suitable public transport options and the lack of cycle routes were each noted by 44% of respondents, with one third of all answers also indicating a lack of walking / wheeling routes. Both cycle storage facilities and parking were highlighted by 11%,
- The top priorities for our community in terms of transport related infrastructure were felt to be *"Condition of paving on High Street"; "Safe crossing at Conon onto cycle path"; "Moving everyone round to where they want as cost effective and efficiently as possible"; "More frequent public transport and cycle/walking route from Dingwall to Evanton so it links with the tracks to Alness and beyond. The Peffery Way fully done – I appreciate a landowner is the sticking point here."; "Lack of cycle route between Conon Bridget and Muir of Ord – it is*

*the missing link for all the communities”; “Regular and reliable bus/train service”; “State of the roads and transport times”; “Smaller communities do not seem to have a regular bus route any longer which can be isolating”.*

- **Public Transport (Additional Questions):**

- **Satisfaction with current public transport options:** 60% of respondents are not satisfied with current options, and the remaining 40% selected acceptable. No responses were received against very satisfied.
- **Frequency of public transport use:** 80% of responses indicated they use public transport once or maybe a few times a month (but not as often as weekly), with the remainder using it rarely – perhaps a few times a year. The main reasons influencing the frequency of use were timetable/scheduling issues (80%); lack of routes (40%); lack of methods of public transportation (20%); cost (20%) and reliability (20%). One respondent indicated they do not currently use public transport as it is too infrequent.
- **What would encourage more use of public transport** responses read *“Designed around working day”; “Frequency, especially early morning / late evening”; “More frequent service, particularly evenings to and from Inverness and also more buses to Strathpeffer / Contin. Scotrail actually providing the service they are supposed to rather than constantly striking / work to rule. This makes planning any train trips a total pain as you don’t know whether the service will actually run.”*
- **Other comments re public transport in our area:** *“The Highland Rail Pass (1/2 price travel card) could be extended to say Aberdeen? You can already use it for Fort William to Glasgow so it seems odd this other major city is excluded.”; “Having heard from other people the lack of buses from rural communities stops them from coming to Dingwall”; “I don’t really need to go anywhere. I live and work in Dingwall and enjoy my days off at home”.*

- **Community Transport (Additional Questions):**

- **Awareness of community transport options:** Only 25% of those responding to the community transport section were aware of options available locally (and found the service acceptable, although did also indicate it is not a service they personally use); meaning 75% of respondents were unaware of community transport operating within our area. Those
- **What would encourage use of community transport** responses indicate *“We need support to develop options and publicise availability” and “Not aware it even existed!”*. Respondents also noted *“I am lucky enough to have a car”; “I don’t think I need it” and “Didn’t know there was any!”* – one response also queried *“Where it goes and when?”*.

## Community Safety

- 30% of respondents felt very safe within our community, with a further 50% feeling safe. The remaining 20% indicated they felt neither safe nor unsafe.



- Factors which influenced thinking on this were felt to be time of day (50%); overgrown vegetation (50%); uneven pavements (37%); lighting (25%); gritting & winter maintenance (25%); CCTV and general appearance of surroundings both at 12% of responses; and other comments added *"Sadly there are a lot of drug users in our area"* and *"No evidence of policing"*.
- Areas which were felt to be particularly unsafe and why include *"The crossing of A835 from Tore at Corntown / Canon Bridge junction. 2 Corntown residents have been killed as pedestrians"*; *"Uneven pavements on High Street causing trip hazards as with overgrown vegetation on paths"*; *"No areas particularly unsafe"*; *"Anywhere if alone"*.
- When asked what might help improve feelings of safety in our community the following free text responses were gathered: *"More police presence in town"*; *"Drug control. Visible / accessible policing"*; *"The police walking about, not just on a Saturday when County playing at home"*; *"Beat police"*; *"If more safe spaces for teens, less hanging about which can be daunting when walking by"*.

### Service Availability

- The following responses were received when asking what services are most important for you and why? *"Schools, library, leisure, bin collections"*; *"Leisure"*; *"Leisure facilities (sports centre, pool, parks, green spaces, paths for walking and cycling), bin collections, availability of GP, Dentist, health care"*; *"Emergency, Police services"*.
- People were asked whether they felt the following services were sufficiently available in the local area, and could select definitely agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree or definitely disagree:
  - **Early Years provision:** 28% somewhat agreed there was sufficient provision with the remainder neither agreeing nor disagreeing.
  - **Primary schools:** 57% somewhat agreed, with a further 28% neither agreeing nor disagreeing. 14% somewhat disagreed there was sufficient provision
  - **Secondary schools:** 14% definitely agreed, 71% somewhat agreed and the remainder neither agreed or not.
  - **Supported education for children and young people:** Only 14% somewhat agreed, with a further 14% definitely disagreeing. The remaining respondents selected neither agree nor disagree.
  - **Adult / Community learning:** around one third of responses somewhat agreed there was sufficient provision, with the remainder neither agreeing nor disagreeing.
  - **General Practitioners:** 62% somewhat agreed there was sufficient GP coverage for the local area, with 12% unsure. The remaining responses definitely disagreed there was sufficient provision.
  - **Hospitals:** 50% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the level of availability being sufficient, with three quarters of the remaining responses somewhat disagreeing and the rest definitely disagreeing.

- **Dentists:** Responses were evenly split between somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree and definitely disagree, meaning that 50% of respondents clearly felt an insufficiency in service.
- **Pharmacies:** 25% definitely agreed sufficiently available; 37% felt somewhat agree; 25% no strong feeling either way and 13% somewhat disagreed.
- **Other health care related services:** 71% neither agreed nor disagreed, with the remainder equally split between somewhat disagreed and definitely disagreed.
- **Care and support services for adults:** Only 16% of respondents somewhat agreed there was sufficiency of service, with 50% neither agreeing or not, and the remaining split evenly across somewhat and definitely disagreed.
- **Childcare services:** 16% indicated they felt there services were somewhat sufficiently provided, with the remainder neither agreeing nor disagreeing.
- **Libraries:** No respondents felt that services were lacking, although 25% did indicate they were unsure, 50% somewhat agreed and the remaining 25% definitely agreed with sufficient availability of service provision.
- **Indoor sports facilities:** Again, no responses were received which indicated disagreement with the level of provision – 25% had no fixed opinion either way, with the remainder evenly split across somewhat and definitely agree sufficiency.
- **Outdoor sports facilities:** Nearly 30% of responses indicated they somewhat agreed, with the remainder neither agreeing nor disagreeing.
- **Community centres:** Only 16% of responses indicated they somewhat agreed with this, with the same figure somewhat disagreeing – the remainder had no strong thoughts either way.
- **Community owned facilities:** 28% somewhat disagreed with this with the remainder neither agreeing or not.
- **Post Offices:** The majority of responses showed people strongly agreed there was sufficient provision (57%), with a further 14% somewhat agreeing. The remaining 29% somewhat disagreed with this.
- **Banks and Financial services:** Strongly disagree responses were three times the level of any other response for this statement, with 43% falling under that category and only 14% for each of somewhat disagree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat agree and strongly agree.
- **Shops:** Slightly more negative than positive responses were received, with 14% strongly disagreeing and a further 43% somewhat disagreeing there were sufficient facilities, however 28% somewhat agreed and 14% strongly agreed there was adequate provision.
- When asked whether there were gaps in the services available, 83% of responses indicated they felt there were, and the following free text responses were submitted to indicate where they felt those were: *"Only one bank in a main market town, council service point not in main part of town. Police station not manned most of the time."; Not enough GPs for growing population. More paths for cycling and walking.*

*More shops, cafes, pubs etc rather than empty shells and no Home Bargains does not count.”; “Seeing a Doctor that you saw before. Banks, shops, restaurants also lacking.”; “Shops – clothing, children’s shoes, gift shop, European restaurant, lingerie store.”; “Classroom support in primary schools.” Two further responses were raised within the ‘anything else’ free space – “More shops needed but bored of reading about how bad Dingwall is, most towns the same. Lucky to still have independent shops but need more.” And “Cuts within schools mean less PSA support and more pressure on teachers which then reduces our children’s learning.”*

### Joint Working and Co-Location

- 62.5% of respondents thought that co-locating public services would make them more efficient and cause them to work more closely together resulting in better service provision for our communities (in terms of different organisations within the same building etc). 25% were unsure and only 12.5% felt this would not result in this.
- In terms of having public services and community facilities located together, 72% felt this would help, with the remainder equally split between feeling unsure and feeling this would not be of benefit.
- Two thirds of respondents felt we could be using our local facilities and services in different ways, with the remaining third being unsure about this. When asked how we could use these facilities or services differently the following responses were received *“Public toilets in public buildings such as council offices or museum. Access to those in halls in villages.”; “Maybe it’s more a case of better publicising them? The Library for example is excellent but whenever I visit it’s always quiet.”; “Better communication between services / departments would be a start”.*
- All respondents agreed that services and communities working together would be beneficial not only for our communities as a whole but also the individuals within them.
- Further comments noted were *“County Buildings could incorporate tourist information and toilets for public use as Ormidale Place toilets always closed due to vandalism. I realise that this won’t happen but if we want to encourage visitors we need basic services and facilities.”; “Use of schools after school hours.”* And *“In my experience time spent co-locating services rarely is cost effective. We need better communication and clearer roles of our organisations.”*

### Community Asset Transfers

- Half of those who responded were aware that communities can request assets held by public agencies, with the remainder unaware. Some were aware of aspiring community projects which could potentially be helped by owning or leasing a publicly held asset, with the following projects being suggested: *“MacDonald Monument, St Clement’s Aisle”; “MacDonald Monument”; “Macdonald Monument”.*

People felt that Community Asset Transfer processes were *"Fraught with delays and difficulties, especially working out what are common good resources"* and *"Not currently being facilitated by Highland Council."*

## Housing

- People felt the key opportunities for housing were around town centre regeneration rather than new sites and more affordable homes for people on low incomes whether to buy or to rent. There was some feeling that there was little opportunity.
- Key challenges with respect to housing were the lack of affordable housing, the lack of infrastructure to support new homes, the cost to the Council, that landlords were viewed as money-grabbing, and it was felt that there were too many substandard properties with not enough money coming in.
- Highlighted gaps in provision were *"lack of low cost affordable housing"*; *"the lack of maintenance in council properties – that too may were sold with huge discounts years ago equals not enough rent coming in now, cutbacks of funding to all councils, mismanagement of money"*; *"Single people"*.
- 80% of respondents felt that more housing was needed in the local area; 100% of those felt housing was required for people living or working locally, with 75% indicating it was required for young people setting up home; 50% for older people and 25% for each of families, single people and people with additional requirements (disabilities etc).
- When asked what types of homes were needed, 75% of responses indicated they felt sheltered or supported housing was required; with 50% noting a need for energy efficient properties, and 25% each selecting the following options – care homes, properties adapted for mobility or disability needs (accessible / adaptable / fit homes), student type accommodation and smaller sized homes.
- In thinking about how these homes should be provided, again more than one choice could be selected. 100% of respondents selected all three of the following options (renovation/ repurposing old buildings – social landlord for social rent; renovation / repurposing old buildings – social landlord for mid market rent; renovation / repurposing old buildings – social landlord for shared equity purchase). 75% also selected provision through private development for sale (renovation of old buildings) as did 75% for social rented properties in general (Council, Housing Association). 25% of responses indicate homes should be provided through private developments for sale (new build) with 25% also noting new build for social rent (social landlord) and again 25% selecting affordable purchase properties in general.
- 100% of responses indicated they felt that reducing empty homes might help the situation, with 50% also indicating that restrictions on holiday lets might assist, and a further 25% of responses for each of conditions on private developers and disincentivising second homes.
- When asked to rank their levels of concern about aspects of housing in the local community, responses track as follows:
  - **Affordability:** 14% expressed a high level of concern regarding this, with 72% somewhat concerned and the remaining 14% neutral.
  - **Availability:** responses mirrored those for affordability.

- **Build quality:** 14% expressed high concern around build quality, 28% had some level of concern and the remainder of responses were neutral.
- **Property condition:** 14% high level of concern, 72% somewhat concerned and the remainder of responses neutral
- **Energy efficiency:** 28% of respondents were highly concerned, with a further 28% somewhat concerned. The remainder were again neutral.
- **Neighbourhood safety:** 57% of responses reflected some level of concern about neighbourhood safety, with 28% neutral and the remainder not particularly concerned.
- **Access to services (schools, parks, shops, etc):** 14% show high levels of concern, similarly 14% somewhat concerned, 57% neutral and the remaining responses were not particularly concerned.
- **Pressure on infrastructure (sewers, water, etc):** 43% were highly concerned about this, with a further 43% somewhat concerned and the remainder neutral.
- **Transport links:** 18% indicated this was of high concern, 57% somewhat concerned and the remainder neutral.
- **Ease of commuting to employment:** this was of concern (14% high, 57% some) again with the remainder neutral.
- Free text comments regarding housing locally read *"Need for more housing and improved infrastructure and transport links to accommodate this"; "If you allow more houses to be built you have to also include GP, Dentists, schools, nurseries etc"; "Council tenants should have to look after property and gardens."*

### Our Area's History

- With a rich history, people were asked for their thoughts regarding the history, historical features or importance of the area which they would like noted: *"Dingwall has a rich history that needs to be celebrated, especially for 800yr anniversary in 2026."; "MacDonald monument is the most iconic and historic feature inside the town and needs to be accessible to public. Rich history of the town not widely known by locals and should be celebrated more."; "Viking Heritage could be majored on as an attraction"; "As mentioned Dingwall has a distinct heritage, not just as a Viking centre but our local language and strong connections with the north and west of Scotland. It's really the capital/gateway of the Highlands."; "We should make more effort to promote our history. Viking trail, etc.".* Parts of local history which people felt particularly proud of were submitted: *"Vikings, Medical, Royal Burgh, role in land reform in 19<sup>th</sup> Century"* and *"Cromarty car park, Monument, Tulloch Castle, Brahan Seer and Ross County, although not that proud of them at moment!"*
- Responses indicate care should be taken to preserve St Clement's Aisle, conservation of the town centre, the Town Hall, MacDonald Monument, Museum and some of the old buildings. It was felt more should be done to promote or celebrate Dingwall 800, the fact it is a

town centre of small independent businesses (not a Tesco town) and the independent butchers, baker, fruit & veg as well as other shops – that Dingwall is better than some towns in this regard. The historic heart of the town and the buildings which are there are valued.

- Community feedback had previously indicated a number of historic sites which were viewed as important, and respondents were asked to indicate their agreement (definitely agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree and definitely disagree):
  - Preserving and opening the Hector MacDonald Monument:** All responses were in agreement (75% definitely agree, 25% somewhat agree)
  - Preserving St Clement's Aisle (Dingwall):** All responses were in agreement, equally divided between definitely and somewhat.
  - Preserving St Clement's Church (Dingwall):** 25% of responses definitely agreed, 25% somewhat agreed with the remainder neither agreeing nor disagreeing.
  - Access to Dingwall Museum:** Again all responses were in agreement this was important (75% definitely, 25% somewhat)
  - Celebrating Dingwall's Viking links:** All (100%) of respondents selected definitely agree
  - Celebrating Dingwall 800:** Again, 100% of respondents definitely agree with this.
  - Promoting the historic closes in Dingwall:** 100% definitely agree.
  - Celebrating our local military history (Seaforth Highlanders, WWII etc):** 50% of responses definitely agree, with 25% somewhat in agreement and 25% neutral.
  - Preserving the former primary school building in Muir of Ord (possibly for community use):** 50% of responses were neutral with respect to this, with the remaining equally divided between somewhat and definitely in agreement.
  - Further capturing the heritages of droving and the railway in Muir of Ord:** All responses were in agreement (75% somewhat, 25% definitely).
  - Preserving the Gilchrist Mausoleum (Muir of Ord):** 25% of responses indicated definite agreement, 25% somewhat and the remaining 50% neither agreed nor disagreed.
  - Preserving and celebrating historical and prehistoric sites:** All (100%) of responses selected definitely agree.

### Language & Culture

- 75% of respondents felt that Gaelic language and culture were well represented in the area.
- More detailed questions around whether people felt Gaelic language was well supported yielded the following:
  - Early years provision:** Two thirds of respondents definitely agreed, while the remaining third neither agreed nor disagreed.
  - Primary education:** Responses were equally split across definitely agree, somewhat agree and neither agree nor disagree.
  - Secondary education:** Responses mirror that of primary education.



- **Adult / Community learning:** One third of respondents somewhat agreed with the remainder neutral
- **General activities within the area:** One third definitely agreed that Gaelic language was well supported with the remainder neither agreeing nor disagreeing
- **Specific activities within the area:** One third somewhat agreed, with the rest neutral.
- **Signage and documentation:** Three quarters definitely agreed, with the remainder somewhat agreeing.
- **Public services:** One third somewhat agreed, with the remainder neither agreeing nor disagreeing
- **Private businesses and services:** All responses were neutral.
- **Community organisations and services:** Responses mirrored those for public services.
- **Media, Arts, Culture and Heritage:** Two thirds of respondents felt they somewhat agreed Gaelic language was well represented here, with the remaining third neutral.
- When asked to consider other languages and cultures within our community, 50% of respondents did not feel these were well represented with the remaining 50% unsure.
- Only one free text comment was received regarding language(s) and culture(s) in the area: *"Nothing apart from Gaelic that is obviously supported. Political issue that is not a priority."*

### Economic Prosperity

- Rating the current economic well-being of our community resulted in 12.5% of respondents feeling it was stable, 75% noting it was facing challenges and the remaining 12.5% felt it was struggling. No responses were received to indicate a sense of growth or thriving.
- Free text responses expanding on these ratings read: *"Shops closing down or lying empty due to expensive rates. Negative press reporting of area, lack of investment by Council in town centre."; "Town centre losing occupiers"; "From a limited perspective of my own and friends situations"; "Empty shops, Council nearly bankrupt and council tax freeze for 2024 meaning that 2025 will likely see double figure increases"; "Everywhere facing challenges. Personally, I think things are getting better but we can't take anything for granted, need to keep trying to make things even better."; "We need to bring people to our town as there is not enough choice for shoppers"; "Seems to be a massive increase in people struggling with mental health".*

### Public Parking

- 75% of respondents felt that public car parks should not be used to generate income, with the remainder split evenly between yes – but not if you live or work here and yes – only if money is returned to the local area.

- Additional comments noted: *"Access to free parking is a major asset to the town and our role as a county town."; "Need to keep free parking and keep loading areas from being used by public."; "Invitation to pay as per Nairn acceptable – anything beyond this will kill the town centre. Needs to be fair – people working may find paying daily unaffordable and then businesses lose staff."; "I don't think charging for the Dingwall car parks is a particularly clever idea."; "If you charge for parking in Dingwall you will kill those few shops that remain. People will go to Tesco, Lidl and Home Bargains (when it opens). Please please do not charge to park in Dingwall unless it's purely on an invitation to pay basis."; "As a non driver I find drivers inconsiderate and selfish. Why use the free parking, they may have to walk 50 metres, they can park in a loading bay / disabled bay / on double yellow lines because no one there to stop them! Pedestrian area of Dingwall resembles a car park most of the time."*

### Businesses, Services & Jobs

- When asked what types of businesses and services people felt were needed in our community, the following free text comments were received: *"More to celebrate the local food resources"; "Places to eat and drink in evenings"; "A really good bar / restaurant / social area. The Canon Hotel is a good example but it's in Canon Bridge – it serves good beer and food and it's a nice place to socialise in"; "Decent pub serving local beers and good pub grub – not the Mallard. Ideally with outdoor seating / beer garden. More cafes / licensed places open in the evening – the closure of the National to the public will leave a gap which a new business could fill. Another GP and NHS Dentist please. Leisure facilities although need to make sure that these complement the leisure centre"; "Dingwall needs a gents clothing shop, another shoe shop, a sportswear shop, a restaurant"; "European restaurant, children's shoes, clothing store, lingerie shop, gift shop"; "Entertainment venues for kids and families like cinema, bowling, etc".*
- 60% of those who responded indicated they use businesses and services available in the area on a daily basis, with the remainder using them regularly. For those who responded where they shop if not locally, this was split between other towns and online.
- Factors which were seen to prevent use of these were lack of choice (100%) and a preference to go elsewhere for more choice (33%). It was felt that having more choice and types of stock might make them more likely to use local businesses and services (*"Decent beer in the pubs!"; "Sometimes the local shops don't have what I need and thus Inverness has to be visited – e.g. for DIY stuff"; "More choice"*).
- Responses to the question asking whether the respondent works in a local business / service, 40% work for a business, 20% own a business, 20% provide a service and the remaining 40% none of the above.
- It was felt that the following might encourage new businesses or create jobs in our communities:
  - Grant support for businesses that want to grow (80%)
  - Encourage public sector spend with local SMEs (80%)
  - Regenerated town centre(s) (80%)



- Affordable business rates (80%)
- Investment in infrastructure (80%)
- Improved transport links (60%)
- Suitable premises to rent / buy (60%)
- Business start-up grants (60%)
- Retaining talent (40%)
- Strategically attracting new private sector investment (40%)
- Parking (40%)
- Encouraging employers to pay the real living wage (40%)
- Entrepreneurship programmes and workshops (20%)
- Encouraging employers to support fair work practices (20%)
- One respondent added *"I work in a local independent shop, over the 38 years that I have worked there I have seen a lot of changes. What I have learnt is that the national shops don't survive because the buyers buy for the UK, not the Highlands. I think we need to encourage small independent, quirky shops to come to Dingwall. People seem to appreciate the service they get, the old fashioned way! As for job creation, we struggle to get staff."*

### Cost of Living

- Respondents felt that the cost of living crisis over the past few years has caused significant impact to how our area looks and is now (100%); to the community as a whole (83%); to people they know (66%); to them personally (33%) and to how it feels living / working / attending education in our area now (33%).
- When asked if they felt disadvantaged, again given the option to select several responses, 16% felt disadvantaged mentally; one third socially; 16% financially and one third felt disadvantaged generally.
- Community feedback had previously indicated some initiatives that might be welcomed and respondents were asked to indicate their agreement (definitely agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree and definitely disagree):
  - Food sustainability through local supply chains (locally grown produce available in our shops / used by our services such as in hospital / school meals etc): All responses were in agreement (50% definitely agree, 50% somewhat agree)
  - Food sustainability through allotments / community growing areas: All responses were in agreement, equally divided between definitely and somewhat.

- **Food banks:** Responses were equally split (one third each) across somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree and somewhat disagree.
- **Community share / community fridges or larders:** Half of respondents somewhat agreed with these types of initiatives potentially being welcome, with two thirds of the remaining feeling they definitely agreed and the remainder neither agreeing nor disagreeing.
- **Reduction in food waste and recycling of this:** Half the respondents definitely agreed with this, with two thirds of the remaining responses indicating somewhat agree and the rest neither agreeing nor disagreeing
- **Easily accessible benefit and welfare advice:** 50% of responses somewhat agreed this would be welcome, with the remainder neutral.
- **Toy banks:** 40% definitely agreed with a further 40% somewhat agreeing, and the last 20% neutral.
- **Swap shop type events (including somewhere to hold them):** Half the respondents definitely agreed with this, with two thirds of the remaining responses indicating somewhat agree and the rest neither agreeing nor disagreeing
- **Personal care and wellbeing packs:** Two thirds of those responding agreed with this (50% of all responses somewhat and 16.6% definitely). The remaining were equally divided between neutral and somewhat disagree.
- **Charity shop initiatives:** One third definitely agreed, a further third somewhat agreed and the remainder split between neutral and somewhat disagree.
- Additional comments with respect to Cost of Living read *"Big impact on elderly and people not having so much disposable income to spend in the area"* and *"Lots of elderly will be cold this winter thanks to axing the winter fuel payments."*

### Community Learning

- Results indicate that the majority are unaware of local opportunities to access community learning (83% not aware), and it was not known whether the area was well served in this regard.
- One response was received nothing that transport would be a barrier in trying to access community learning opportunities or services.

### Energy Related Initiatives

- It was not generally felt our area benefits from energy related initiatives (43% no, 43% don't know, 14% yes).
- With respect to what could be done differently / better with respect to energy related initiatives the following were raised: *"More initiatives and better community gain from commercial projects, ideally used to develop the Dingwall Community Development Company"; "More community funding, much higher level of benefit. Strategic approach."; "With the amount of wind farms, hydro and the general infrastructure passing through the area I think they should be encouraged to invest more in the community."; "We are about to have the*

*whole of the Eastern Highlands plastered in pylons and substations with no benefit to the area. We still have some of the highest electricity costs – this is a total joke."*

### Energy Efficiency

- In terms of their own homes, 43% of those responding felt their home was very energy efficient, with 28% moderately efficient and the remainder feeling their home was not energy efficient.
- Steps taken to improve energy efficiency in the home included *"Insulation and energy efficient appliances / lighting"; "Insulation, renewable energy sources and efficient appliances"; "Installed solar panels"; "Replaced 45 50w halogens with 5w LED bulbs. Replaced some inefficient double glazing. Added solar panels and battery to home"; "Council renovated in late 1980s. Double glazing, new kitchen, bathroom, doors, central heating. More insulation put into loft. 30ish years later Council replaced back boiler gas fire with combi boiler. Surveyor visited to check windows, doors, etc. Need replacing but no money. Not entitled to new kitchen because "looked after it too well"; "Insulation, energy efficient appliances"*
- 57% of respondents are currently using renewable energy sources at home, with 14% thinking about using renewable sources, a further 14% having considered but decided against and the remainder not considered at this time. Barriers to adopting renewable energy were noted as *"Roof space"; "Cost" and "Council flat on list for demolition"*
- 71% indicated they would be interested in community initiatives aimed at increasing energy efficiency (E.g. group purchasing of solar panels, energy audits, etc) with the remainder of responses split between maybe and no. The types of support which would encourage people to participate were listed as *"Community owned renewable projects"; "Planning permission to enable"; "Financial benefits" and "Help with cost"*

### Net Zero

- 50% of respondents felt it was somewhat important to them that Dingwall and Seaforth become a net-zero community. A further 12.5% felt this was very important, however the remaining 37.5% indicated this was not important to them.
- It was felt the following could be prioritised to achieve this *"Better insulation for existing homes. New homes should be built with good insulation and no gas boilers installed"; "Community support to increase awareness, access funding etc"* however one response noted *"It's not important to me because I am realistic and it will never happen"*
- 50% of those who completed additional questions on net zero indicated they would strongly support stricter regulations on new buildings and renovations to meet net-zero energy standards, with a further 25% also supportive. 25% of respondents would oppose stricter regulation. Concerns about these regulations were noted as *"Lack of skills to deliver means progress will be non-existent" and "Costs"*

- One respondent was aware of existing net-zero initiatives in our community *"The blooming awful Spittal to Beaully power line that seems set to destroy massive amounts of the countryside"* and indicated that *"If SSEN and the Scottish Government actually listened to communities rather than paying lip service and doing whatever they wish I might engage more"*.
- With respect to net zero in our area one further comment was received *"Really disappointed THC set such high rates for Journey Chargers in Highland. This is counterproductive as people will go elsewhere and our community will lose out on significant footfall in the High Street"*,

### Renewably Powered Transport

- When asked about types of transportation they used most frequently, 87% indicated personal car, 50% walking/wheeling, 25% bicycle and 25% public transport – bus. No responders currently had an electric/ rechargeable vehicle – comments regarding whether people would consider switching to an electric vehicle if infrastructure such as charging stations were more accessible read *"No"*; *"No the cars need a better range and to be more affordable"*; *"More charging points and those that exist actually working"*. People were either dissatisfied with the availability of public electric vehicle charging stations in the area (33%) or felt it was not applicable.
- It was felt that improvements in local transport infrastructure could help reduce carbon emissions in our area – 100% of respondents indicated better pedestrian / wheeling paths would help, with 71% indicating increased public transport would assist. 57% would like more bike lanes, 43% would like to see more electric vehicle charging stations and others would like to see people encouraged to stop taking the car and walk where possible.
- One comment was received regarding renewably powered transport *"Not enough charging points (that work) for EVs to risk this yet plus electricity is expensive"*.

### Community Resilience

- 12.5% of respondents felt our community was well prepared for flooding or severe weather events, with a further 12.5% feeling it was somewhat prepared. 25% felt it was neither prepared nor unprepared, with 37.5% feeling it is somewhat unprepared. The remaining 12.5% feel it is not prepared at all / is very unprepared.
- When asked to elaborate on reasoning, the following responses are recorded: *"So far in 3 years we've got through major storms with little impact."*; *"I haven't seen or heard anything re flood defence"*; *"Lack of manpower within Council means that roads / pavements are not gritted, drains are not cleared."*; *"Drains need regular clearing. I live in flood area and this has not been happening."*

### Digital Connectivity and Inclusion

- Half of the respondents were satisfied with the level of digital connectivity / coverage in the local area, with a further 25% dissatisfied and the remaining quarter unsure.
- Only 12.5% of respondents were aware of support services which promote Digital inclusion.
- It is felt *"The rollout of full fibre is going very very slowly"* and *"Slowly improving but still slow broadband in rural areas"*.

### Closing Thoughts

- Only one comment was received as to final thoughts on services, organisations or opportunities missing from our area and what they would like to see, which indicates *"CCTV and a Police presence."*
- When asked if there was anything people would like to flag as being particularly good or of benefit in our communities and areas, it was noted *"You need to focus on what the mechanisms are for addressing the priorities identified here. Easy to identify them, harder to help address them"* and *"The Little Bus in Culbokie is a fantastic scheme and should be replicated elsewhere"*

## Engagement Responses – Ideas Boards

Ideas Boards, which essentially utilise online post its, were part of the online public engagement. Comments from physical post its at the drop in sessions were also added to the online boards, allowing contributors to see topics raised by others.

- A path between Dingwall & Evanton that keeps folks off the roads for cycling / walking / running
- Clear the gutters and roofs in the town centre (Dingwall) and make things seagull proof
- Shops: Get the High Street in Dingwall working – rent / rate reductions rather than seagulls and empty shops
- Sort out the pond in Dingwall please
- More frequent public transport so that a car is less essential
- Better insulation for houses and buildings
- More doctors, dentists etc to compensate for the extra houses being built
- The state of the Meikelfield development – when is it being upgraded?
- Highlife Leisure Centre in Dingwall is fantastic – it's friendly, welcoming and with a real sense of community
- There's a strong sense of farming community in Dingwall – this feels good
- Dingwall has a good range of independent shops, which is a plus – could more be encouraged?
- It would be good to have a selection of nice pubs or cafes – somewhere to go of an evening
- We need confidence this plan won't be just Dingwall focused
- Developer contributions for housing in Conon Bridge are not being used locally in Conon
- Traffic issues in Conon Bridge – road issues, speeding around the village – we need improved signage
- Buses and other vehicles speed through Conon Bridge
- Can the junction into Conon Bridge on the A835 be looked at?
- There are amenities issues in Conon – there is no village hall

- Is there scope for a re-balance of windfarm money?
- Dingwall needs a USP – it is long overdue, e.g. Viking Heritage Centre; Activity Centre / bowling / cinema; Covered area of High Street / coffee shop style/culture; Summer diary of events – annual dates marketed, support with THC Applications (road closures etc)
- The link road – the broken promise
- Dingwall Primary and St Clements Schools need upgraded
- CCTV for central Dingwall?
- Support for new / small businesses in Dingwall High Street
- Access to the MacDonald Monument in Dingwall for both locals and visitors
- Transport routes from rural areas to leisure and evening / night time activities – including ways home (also from Inverness) at night time (after going out or being at activities)
- Community car schemes might be helpful
- Safety issues around crossing the dual carriageway (A9) to reach bus stops – especially an issue for people with mobility issues or those with small children / buggies etc
- The loss of NHS Patient Transport has badly affected people in more rural areas
- Concerns about road safety and traffic volume on the Tore roundabout – it is not fit for purpose given the volume of traffic
- Concerns about the bottleneck on the A835 and safety for road users and pedestrians – lamp posts and electric posts around the narrow part of the road / roundabout to garage – there is no path for pedestrians.
- Killearnan church and churchyard are an ancient site – preservation of the ancient morthouse in the grounds.
- A new hospital to replace Ross Memorial
- Attractions and marketing for NC500
- Need a Ward Manager for long term town planning, funding support and admin.
- Dingwall Town hall could be welcoming and marketed.
- Area upkeep – need weeding, strimming, gutters etc.
- Development and provision of allotments
- Revamp Pefferside Park – “a jewel in our crown”.



- Clear core paths and market for visitors
- Highland Council buildings need upkeep.
- Support needed to work with Vennel owners.
- Renewal of Common Good contracts involving the community
- Summer activities similar to Averon Centre / Black Isle Leisure Centre would be good.
- Less restrictions at the Recycling Centre
- Youth Centre – something and somewhere safe for young people to socialise which has activities.
- Cinema / Screening Area
- Children's Hub – with playgroups, mother & baby groups etc
- A Multipurpose Hub building – a space which can be used for many purposes – possibly using an existing vacant building? Space which could be used for cinema screenings, kids' activities, facilities and meeting space, perhaps a café-hub type approach at the heart which could generate income as well
- Trimming of trees and bushes to improve visibility on roads
- Can something be done about the potholes?
- Prioritise Dingwall and Seaforth focus over Inverness-centric policies and projects.
- Dingwall in Bloom is great – local volunteers and shopkeepers working together to keep our town blooming – hanging baskets, fountains etc.
- Dingwall Museum could do with more volunteers to help keep it open longer / more days – it's a great resource.
- Historical marker at site of old Dingwall Castle – reputed birthplace of MacBeth. Although the castle is gone can we commemorate its historical significance and alleged links to MacBeth?
- The High Street is Dingwall's heritage and tourism jewel. How could it be enhanced? Dingwall is a historic and attractive old important town. And yet it looks a bit tired, faded. The High Street is the historic old centre which unusually for a Highland town contains lots of local and unusual shops. This could be a great tourist attraction, especially as the NC500 is so close. What could be done to enhance the High Street? Suggestions: 1) Reduce business rates on shops; 2) Encourage a cooperation between the current businesses, rather than competition; 3) Maintain the present structure and fabric; 4) Support the Museum (I would say that being a Museum Trustee!)

- How to make Community Groups more visible? Such as U3A or Men's Shed or Dingwall Museum or Dingwall Community Development Company or Dingwall Community Council. They have their much-overlapping memberships, but something is needed to stop every event feeling like a one-off
- Might CCTC outside the public toilets stop the vandalism?
- Dingwall needs some sort of tourist base / tourist information centre.
- It would be really great to have a craft-cooperative type shop where local small / independent makers could 'rent' a section/shelf, maybe with a percentage going to keeping the place open / staffed.
- Public representatives could do more to promote the town rather than being negative about it.
- Bring Hector MacDonald Monument into Community Ownership. Built by public subscription the community should now return to reinstate this fascinating monument. The National Wallace Monument in Stirling should be used as a case study.
- Encourage and support sit down restaurants on the High Street. There are numerous food vans serving a variety of menus situated in the town. These small businesses should be accommodated and encouraged to trade on the High Street. The Highland Food and Drink Trail would make a great case study.
- Restore the old Canal Pier down the Point. Over James Bridge to the right above the small beach the Telford Pier is impassable over the Summer. At a minimum cutting this back to allow access and perhaps signage as an attraction. At the maximum erosion repairs to the path
- Repurpose Pefferside Park Pond. If the pond is going to be wilded it should still be maintained. Is there a possibility of incorporating it into an educative role such as Dingwall Academy's Biology curriculum.

## Engagement Responses – Stakeholder Workshop

Alongside the public engagement sessions, the stakeholder workshop aimed to capture not only thoughts on what living, working or providing services in our area were gathered but also expanded ideas discussed around what could make this better and generate improvement.

### What's Good

- Green spaces
- Local football team
- The Mart (internationally recognised)
- Independent shops (local)
- 1<sup>st</sup> community owned distillery
- Viking heritage
- Telford Canal
- Bus / Rail links
- Free parking!
- Close to Inverness
- Gaelic & Deaf education
- Stunning Town Hall
- National Food winners
- Sense of community
- Busy community centre
- We have a castle!
- Busy leisure centre
- National Hotel Civic Pride needed
- MacDonald Monument
- The views!

### What's Not So Good

- Statutory organisations lack of resources
- Rural poverty
- Community Council funding
- Lack of local services
- Services being cut
- Activities for young people
- Poor access onto main routes from Conon
- Poor infrastructure
- Transport links
- Play areas need better maintenance
- Lack of affordable housing
- Transport for older people to get about
- School children crossing A9 (Dangerous)
- Volunteer fatigue
- Volunteers financing venues / travel out of own pocket
- Community council grants slashed
- Young people need affordable starter homes
- Older people need small energy efficient housing
- Shops are closing on the High Street

- Constant housing expansion in Conon but amenities not in place to support

### What needs to happen to make it better?

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better times for buses for young people</li> <li>• Need the link road!</li> <li>• Promote Dingwall as the market town</li> <li>• Manage expectations of public</li> <li>• Need support with funding!</li> <li>• Commercial Bar – repurpose</li> <li>• More / Ensure community benefits</li> <li>• Need better dog mess strategies</li> <li>• Set times the Police Station is open</li> <li>• Development of the High Street</li> <li>• Need a Minor Injuries Unit</li> <li>• Expanding capacity for the Third Sector</li> <li>• Encourage more community involvement</li> <li>• Need a Ward Manager!</li> <li>• More support needed for Third Sector (funding)</li> <li>• Need a Family Activity (e.g. cinema / bowling)</li> <li>• We need a farmers market</li> <li>• Improve services for the elderly especially in rural areas</li> <li>• Need better promotion</li> <li>• Need shops filled</li> <li>• Recruiting volunteers</li> <li>• Transformational funding for 3<sup>rd</sup> sector</li> <li>• Improve public transport in rural areas</li> <li>• Better upkeep of are</li> <li>• Need Pefferside Park revamped</li> <li>• Need to build on RCFC's national platform</li> <li>• Need regular annual events</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need better litter strategies</li> <li>• Need parking strategies to allow bin lorries through</li> <li>• Need better road surfaces</li> <li>• Need to reverse the local apathy to the area</li> <li>• Local companies and promoting local shops</li> <li>• Need updated CCTV in town centre</li> <li>• Awareness of tourist hot spots in the area</li> <li>• Need allotments</li> <li>• Ross Memorial Hospital modernised</li> <li>• Better partnership working</li> <li>• Need better mental health services</li> <li>• Need a Viking centre</li> <li>• Need core paths cleared</li> <li>• Need Town Hall to be community run</li> <li>• Need better access to ASN assessment</li> <li>• Need more NHS Dentists</li> <li>• Need vennels sorted out</li> <li>• Need proper town planning</li> <li>• Need a live resilience plan</li> <li>• More support from public and private sector</li> <li>• Need a USP – urgently</li> <li>• Need to tap into NC500</li> <li>• Need MacDonald Monument open</li> <li>• Improve access to medical care, banks and post offices in rural areas</li> <li>• Local awards in each town / village</li> <li>• Social aspect – Fort William town team</li> <li>• Tools library like Clach works in Inverness</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

- Improve road conditions, in particular A9 North Kessock to Tore, Tore roundabout and adjoining roads
- Adopt a street/path – suggestion of Path Pirates in Aviemore
- Improve civic pride

## Conclusion

We would very much like to thank all members of the community, stakeholders and partner organisations who took time to participate in Engagement sessions regarding the Dingwall & Seaforth Area Place Plan – their time and input are invaluable and truly much appreciated.

With this document being available online, as part of the appendices to the Dingwall & Seaforth Area Place Plan, available for use and shared with others developing related plans and evidence bases we hope the contributions made by the communities and services within our Area are widely referenced and cognisance given to these within priorities and planning.



## D&S APP – Appendix 5 – Population Statistics / Area Information

## Introduction

This document sets out to provide information not only about the Dingwall & Seaforth Area itself but also its population. It covers population statistics and information gathered from the Census and other government sources, as well as the recent Highland Place Standard and Local Living workstreams – these are still live strands at the time of producing the Area Place Plan, so may be subject to change. The most recent versions of these can be found on The Highland Council website.

A number of maps relevant to the Dingwall & Seaforth Area have also been included; including both Natural Heritage and Cromarty Firth Marine Research GIS (the latter produced by the Sea The Value programme facilitated by Aberdeen University), as well as the relevant Inner Moray Firth development plan and the Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy map for Highland.



## Population Statistics & Area Information

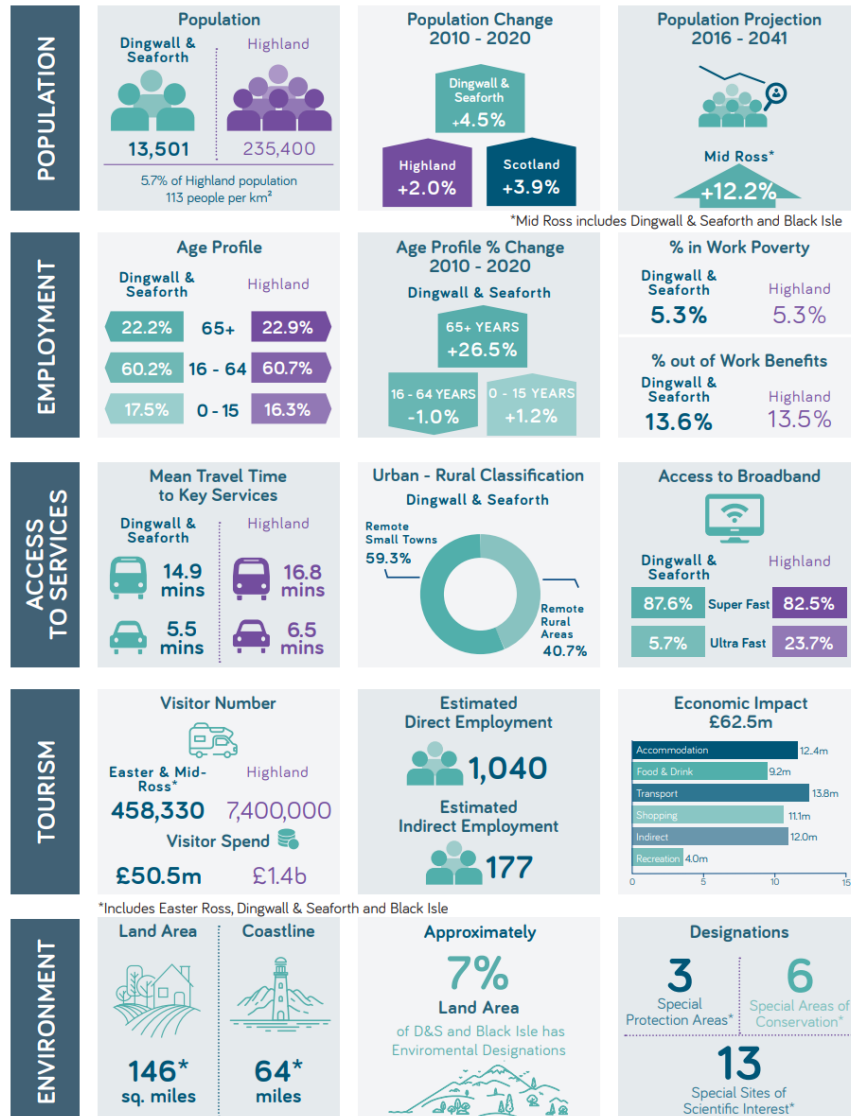
The population information within this section has been gathered from Government or other public service published data and summarised here.

From our population statistics, which are collected mostly at a Mid Ross level, it can be seen that almost one third of the population of our Area live within the urban areas of Dingwall and Conon Bridge, with the remainder living within areas which would be classified as rural – of those approximately three out of five live in remote rural areas, most of which are out with the Dingwall & Seaforth boundary.

These publicly available statistics indicate that the age profile of Mid Ross (which can be inferred to be similar when condensed to the immediate area given the larger settlements) is broadly similar to the wider Highland profile – rounding to nearest percentages as per the 2021 survey 16% of the population are children aged 0-15 years, 60% are of broadly working age (i.e. 16-64 years) and the remaining 24% are aged 65 and over. At that point, the population of the Mid Ross area had increased by 16% over the previous year, however that increase was disproportionately divided across the age bandings, with a 68% increase in the 65+ group opposed to a 9% increase in the working age population and a 3% decrease in the child group. This resulted in the ration of working age to older people being lower in Mid Ross (at 5:2) than both Highland and Scotland as a whole. Birth rates vary annually however over the past decade has decreased within the area, as evidenced in the figures. The mortality rate in Mid Ross remains consistently lower than in Highland as a Region, although following the widespread pattern across Scotland improvement in this rate has stalled, which remains a concern within the wider picture of population health and growth. For Highland in general, particularly out with its main city, annual deaths exceed births and as a result population growth depends on net gain in migration, and predictions for 2030 over the past few years estimate that the overall population of the Mid Ross area and in turn Dingwall & Seaforth, will continue to grow, although indications show this is likely to be among older age groups and a corresponding decrease in both working age and child populations.

With respect to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, the Dingwall Central data zone ranks within the 20% most deprived small areas in Scotland, however it also indicates that a lower proportion live in the most deprived quintiles within the country as opposed to Highland as a whole, and most of the population reside within quintile 3 and 4 areas.

## DINGWALL & SEAFORTH AREA PROFILE



## KEY FACTS



Several recent studies and consultations have been conducted which can be read alongside the high level information contained in our Area Profile (previous page). These include the work on the Highland Place Standard (please see appendix on Plan Landscape for links) and the Local Living Tool (again link available on Plan Landscape appendix). Some of the data and figures generated from these indicate slight changes within our population. New Area Profiles may be produced in due course reflecting this.

Some updated facts and figures emerging with respect to Dingwall & Seaforth are as follows:

- **Population Total** (taken from Census 2022) indicates 13,029 people residing in our Area, which equates to 35.4% of the population of Highland.
- **Population Change** (2011-2022) shows population growth of +6.9%, which is greater than both the Highland (+1.4%) and Scottish (+2.7%) averages.
- **Age Profiling** (taken from Census 2022) indicates a higher proportion of young people aged under 16 (18.2%) and older people aged 65+ (22.5%) than both Highland and Scotland wide profiles, although the number of live births at Raigmore Hospital dropped by 16.5% between 2008/2009 and 2022/2023.
- **Proportion of Homes in SDA** (taken from Council Tax Data 2023) is 89.3%
- **Household Data** (taken from Census 2022) indicates 6,074 occupied households in Dingwall & Seaforth
- **House Completions** show a long term average of 65 per year, which makes up 6% of the Highland long term average
- **School Capacities** show some capacity constraints as per the school roll forecasts of April 2024, particularly with regard to Ben Wyvis Primary and Tarradale Primary (these can be accessed on Highland Council's website)
- **Water and Sewerage Capacities** show some spare water capacity at Loch Glass, and some capacity at most main settlement sewerage works, although some potential network capacity issues at Conon Bridge, Dingwall, Maryburgh and North Kessock, and no spare capacity at either Dingwall or Tore sewage facilities.
- **Road Capacity Constraints and Investments** noted peak time congestion within Dingwall worsened by capacity of rail level crossings and side junctions, as well as local safety concerns around the Conon Bridge A835 junction and Muir of Ord village centre. We are also aware of road safety concerns around the Tore roundabout and the village itself (particularly with respect to pedestrian safety, visibility

and road speeds). Generally road safety and maintenance issues dominate concerns- with more limited investment targeted to address these matters.

- **Poverty Concerns** – the most recent Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) (2020) highlighted extremes within Dingwall and to a lesser degree Conon Bridge. Poverty appears most pronounced within central Dingwall, and more detail can be found on the SIMD website (<https://simd.scot/#/simd2020/BTTFTT/13/-4.2280/57.4670/>)
- **Health Facility Capacity** information indicated that during 2022/2023, Ross Memorial Hospital in Dingwall had a lower percentage bed occupancy than other Highland Hospitals, and a 100% record of seeing A&E patients within the target 4 hours. GP practice provision is concentrated at Muir of Ord (which is a branch surgery of the Beauly practice) and at Dingwall, where as of July 2024 there were 11,600 patients registered across the 12 General Practitioners, which is above the Highland average ratio of 770 patients per GP.
- **Broadband speeds** – only 1,480 households (1.3% or the 11,727 households within Highland as a whole) have taken up ultrafast (FFTP or Broadband Voucher scheme for up to 1Gc/s via R100 contract) broadband by February 2024 even though half of the population within Inverness district could access it.
- **Visitors to Highland** – a 2023 Visit Scotland survey of 1,041 overnight visitors to Highland found that half were international and half from the UK. Most were older or retired (75%), and the most popular reason to visit was due to the scenery/landscape, with hiking and visiting castles the top activities. Half of those visiting stayed in serviced accommodation.
- **Employment** (taken from the Inverness Travel to Work Area 2023) indicated that wider travel to work area accounted for 35,000 full time employees (almost half of all Highland jobs), with a gross average weekly pay of £744.80, productivity in terms of GVA/filled job at £53,700 compared to the UK average of £57,721, and an average commute time of 15 minutes.
- **Unemployment** (taken from Highland June 2024 figures) show unemployment levels at 3,235 (equating to 2.2% of the economically active population)
- **Employment Sectors** - 2020 HIE data for the Inner Moray Firth Area (Dingwall & Seaforth counts within this) shows the top three employment sectors for this area being human health & social work (19.8%); wholesale & retail (14.8%) and accommodation & food services (11.1%)
- **Environmental and Other Constraints:** 47% of the Dingwall & Seaforth area is covered by significant development constraint in terms of altitude, future flooding, national or international environmental designation (NSA, SAC, SPA, NNR, SSRI, Peatland [Class 1 & 2], TPO,

Ancient Woodland Inventory, land over 370m, being over 500m from the adopted road network, future 1 in 200 year fluvial and coastal flood risk areas and current 1 in 200 year pluvial areas).

The Dingwall & Seaforth Area covers most of Mid-Ross and accommodates most of its population. The county town of Dingwall is the pre-eminent place in terms of administration, employment and higher-order facilities. Our Area has particularly good road and rail transport connections compared to most of Highland, and fewer physical and environmental constraints to development than other areas. Although varied, our landscape is principally rolling farmland and often has attractive coastal views across the Cromarty and Beauly Firths. Our settlements are concentrated in a series of small towns or large villages, many of which are along the old A9 route and the railway lines. Development in Dingwall is constrained by flood risks and gradient issues, although other settlements such as Muir of Ord and Conon Bridge may be able to accommodate a greater share of future development and growth.

Dingwall & Seaforth is close enough to Inverness to take advantage of the facilities and employment opportunities available in and around the City, but distant enough to be relatively unaffected by the effects of rapid growth there such as traffic congestion and overburdened medical and school facilities, although local facilities in our Area come under pressure from lack of availability further West across Highland, particularly in terms of dental coverage.

There are also challenges, notably in terms of addressing flooding issues in Dingwall, controlling sporadic housing in the countryside development which has adverse landscape and service provision cost impacts, and making sure our main towns and villages do not become dormitory communities or commuter-ville for Inverness jobs.

Revitalising the town and village centres with community hub facilities and our settlements with employment opportunities are noted as ways to help with this. Our Area is well placed to take advantage of job spin-offs from the Inverness and Cromarty Green Freeport project and land is already safeguarded for employment use at Muir of Ord, Maryburgh and Dingwall.

## Place Standard Findings

The Place Standard tool is a way of assessing places – whether well-established, undergoing change or still being planned. It provides a framework to structure conversations about place, based around fourteen questions, allowing thought about the physical elements of a place (such as buildings, spaces and transport), as well as social aspects (like whether people feel they have a say in decision making). By pinpointing the assets of a place as well as areas where it could improve it provides a lens through which communities, service providers and planners can view towns and communities to better understand current and future potential.

During the first half of 2024, Highland Council undertook the Highland Place Standard exercise with the view to utilising information gathered to help shape future plans, including the Highland Local Development Plan (HLDP) and with the thought that it could also help inform Area Place Plans where findings were broken down by Committee area, aiming to highlight what needs to be protected, changed or improved so communities and organisations have what is needed for the future.

Public perceptions of the physical and social aspects of place were scored on a scale of 1-5 (very poor to very good).

Unfortunately, the response rate for the Place Standard Survey were relatively low (61 plus an additional 19 young people through Highlife Highland facilitated youth sessions), however the information gathered was of good quality and resulted in the following scores:

**Dingwall & Seaforth Average Score (2.9)** is equivalent to the Highland Average Score.

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

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

**Domains for which Dingwall & Seaforth compares well with the 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.

#### **Domains for which Dingwall & Seaforth scores low compared with the 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.

#### **General Qualitative Feedback:**

A number of general qualitative feedback comments were received within the Place Standard work for our Area:

- High regard for opportunities for walking and cycling to amenities, alongside concerns about path surfaces causing issues for prams and pushchairs, wheelchairs and those with poor mobility; lack of lighting on key paths; road safety due to speeding vehicles; and cycling connections beyond Dingwall.
- Common requests for improved connectivity between towns; 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 around general maintenance, including vacant and dilapidated buildings, roads and footpaths; some call for turning vacant lots into mini parks or areas for socialising
- Pefferside Park and the Leisure Centre are well used and appreciated as opportunities for exercise, however more modern play equipment across the area, particularly for younger children would be welcomed.
- Access to employment outwith 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 availability of 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.

### Facilities and Services:

Through the general Place Standard Survey, a number of positive aspects shone through in the feedback on facilities and services in our Area, as well as suggested areas for improvement. Our young people provided additional feedback through the Highlife Highland supported Youth Forum, which is also noted here.

### Positive Aspects:

**Accessible Facilities:** Many respondents appreciate having local access to key services including schools, libraries, and leisure facilities. In general, people found the pricing reasonable (although young people disagreed with this and noted cost as being a factor in not utilising these as they would wish) and mentioned that schools were well-equipped.

**Dingwall Academy & Library:** Both were frequently praised for their accessibility and integration with the community and seen as models for other services.

**Community Spaces:** The presence of existing community centres, church halls, youth clubs and the integrated library in Dingwall Academy were highlighted as valuable resources, although it was noted some require maintenance.

**Convenient Shopping:** Several comments reflected the ease of access to shops such as Tesco, Lidl and local stores.

**Local Independent Businesses:** Independent shops were 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 & 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 organising 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.

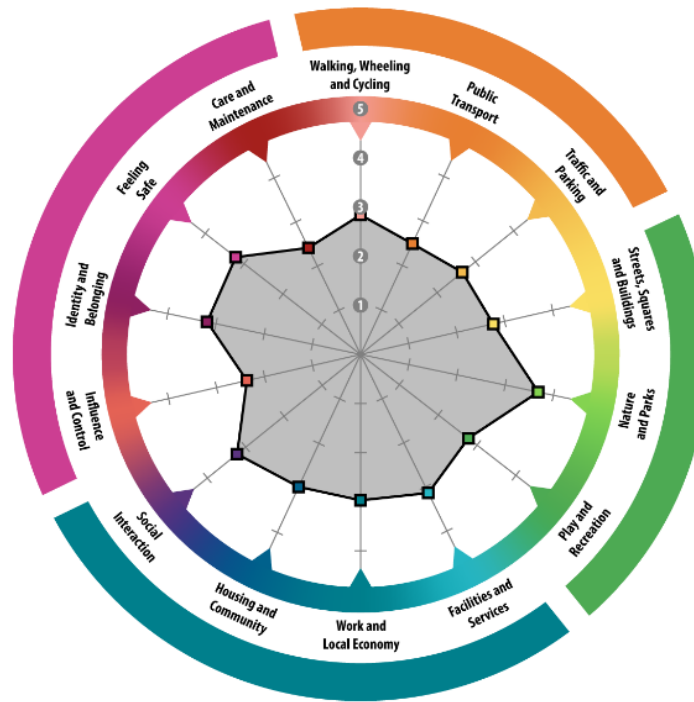
**Funding and Staffing for Public Services:** A recurring theme is the lack of sufficient funding and staffing in public services like schools, mental health services and social work, leading to a strain on resources and lower quality of service.

**Overcrowding in Schools:** With increasing populations in some areas, concerns about overcrowded schools and the impact on children's education were raised.

## Youth Feedback:

Our young people were conscious of the lack of free-to-use meeting spaces which they could utilise, as well as the perceived lack of affordable opportunities for physical activities. Some concern was raised around feeling safe on the High Street, particularly from young women and girls. The group were concerned about insufficient access to mental health support for young people, as well as a lack of voice and influence over decisions affecting them.

## Dingwall and Seaforth

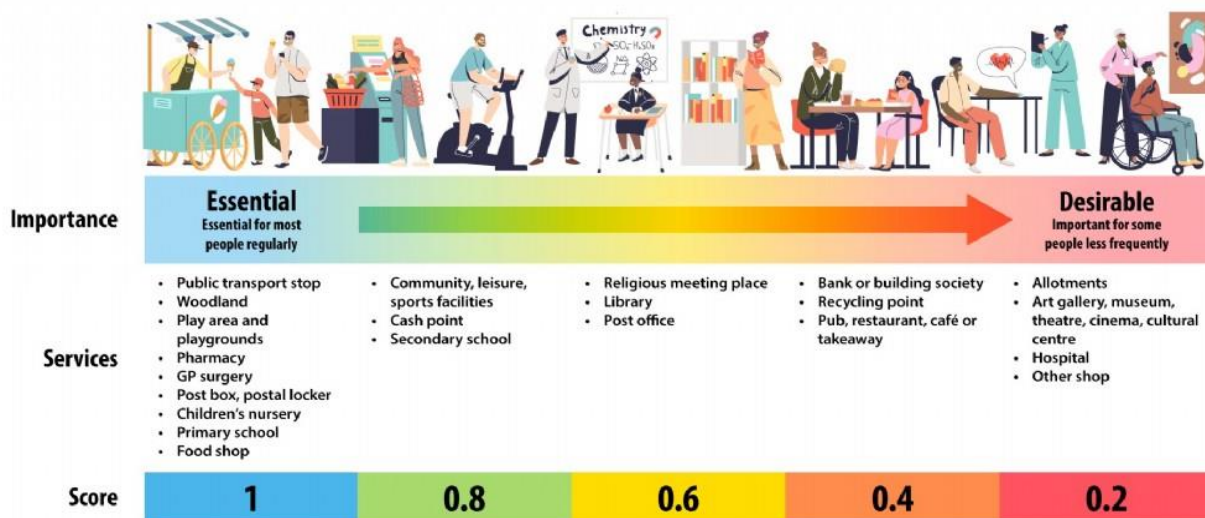


Overall, in summary, while facilities like schools, libraries and local shops are valued, concerns focus on decline of the town centre, poor maintenance and upkeep, and perceived lack of investment in existing facilities and services.

## Local Living Outcomes & Mapping

The Local Living concept promoted by Scottish Government aims to provide people with the opportunity to meet most of their daily needs within a reasonable distance of their home.

Within Highland, the Council's Development Plans Team developed a tool to help assess how well our places meet the principles of local living, by plotting the location of a variety of services such as shops, greenspace, leisure and learning and the accessibility to these services within a timed walking distance. Using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping, Highland was split into thousands of small hexagonal 'cells' within which services were counted and the scores for each service calculated to give an overall weighted score for each cell (reflected in the number in each cell, which indicates how well that part of a settlement scores in terms of local living).



For the Dingwall and Seaforth Area the team surveyed 19,547 Hex Cells – of these 5,641 fall within SDAs. Of that number, 2,026 cells contain the 5,664 residential properties within the area (Residential Cells).

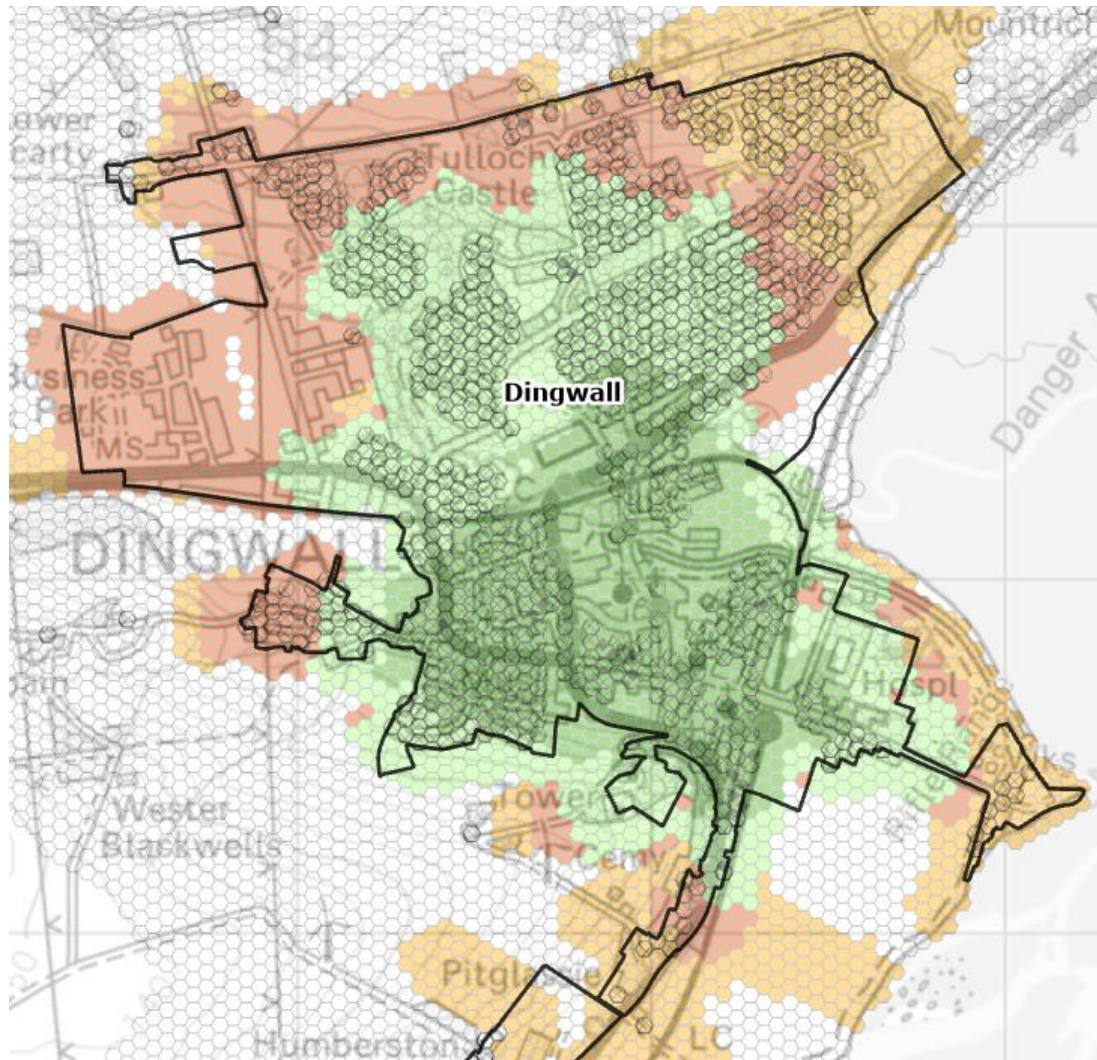
Within those Residential Cells:

- 73.7% of residential properties are in cells classified as either Very Highly Walkable (1969) or Highly Walkable (2202).
- 4.8% of residential properties (270) have Few or No Walkable Services.

The Average Local Living Total score for a residential property in one of these Residential Cells in the Dingwall & Seaforth Area Committee Area is 10.0 (out of a maximum possible of 16). The highest scoring residential cells are in the area shown and score 15.6 out of the maximum possible. Dingwall and Muir of Ord SDAs have the highest average residential score (at 10.5 per property) while Maryburgh SDA has the lowest average residential property score with an average of 6.5.

		Count of Cells		Council Tax Registered Properties @ Sept 2023						Count of Residential Properties					Percentage of Residential Properties				
SDA or Growing Settlement (GS)	Name	Hex Cells in SDA/GS	Residential Cells	Residential Properties	Total LL Score x Residential Count	Average Residential Property Score	Highest LL Score	Overall Residential Density (for Residential Cells in SDA/GS)	Very High Number of Walkable (VHW)	High Number of Walkable Services (HWS)	Some Walkable Services (SWS)	Few Walkable Services (FWS)	none	Grand Total	VHW	HWS	SWS	FWS	none
	Conon Bridge	793	414	1009	10189	10.1	11.2	2.44	0	928	81	0	0	1009	0.0%	92.0%	8.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Dingwall	2339	847	2778	29234.2	10.5	15.6	3.28	1145	1070	349	209	5	2778	41.2%	38.5%	12.6%	7.5%	0.2%
	Maryburgh	533	206	522	3379.8	6.5	9.2	2.53	0	106	411	0	5	522	0.0%	20.3%	78.7%	0.0%	1.0%
	Muir of Ord	1910	545	1337	13973.8	10.5	13.4	2.45	824	98	370	44	1	1337	61.6%	7.3%	27.7%	3.3%	0.1%
	(Part of) Tore	66	14	18	91.6	5.1	7.2	1.29	0	0	12	6	0	18	0.0%	0.0%	66.7%	33.3%	0.0%
	<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>5641</b>	<b>2026</b>	<b>5664</b>	<b>56868.4</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>15.6</b>	<b>2.80</b>	<b>1969</b>	<b>2202</b>	<b>1223</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>5664</b>	<b>34.8%</b>	<b>38.9%</b>	<b>21.6%</b>	<b>4.6%</b>	<b>0.2%</b>

## Dingwall



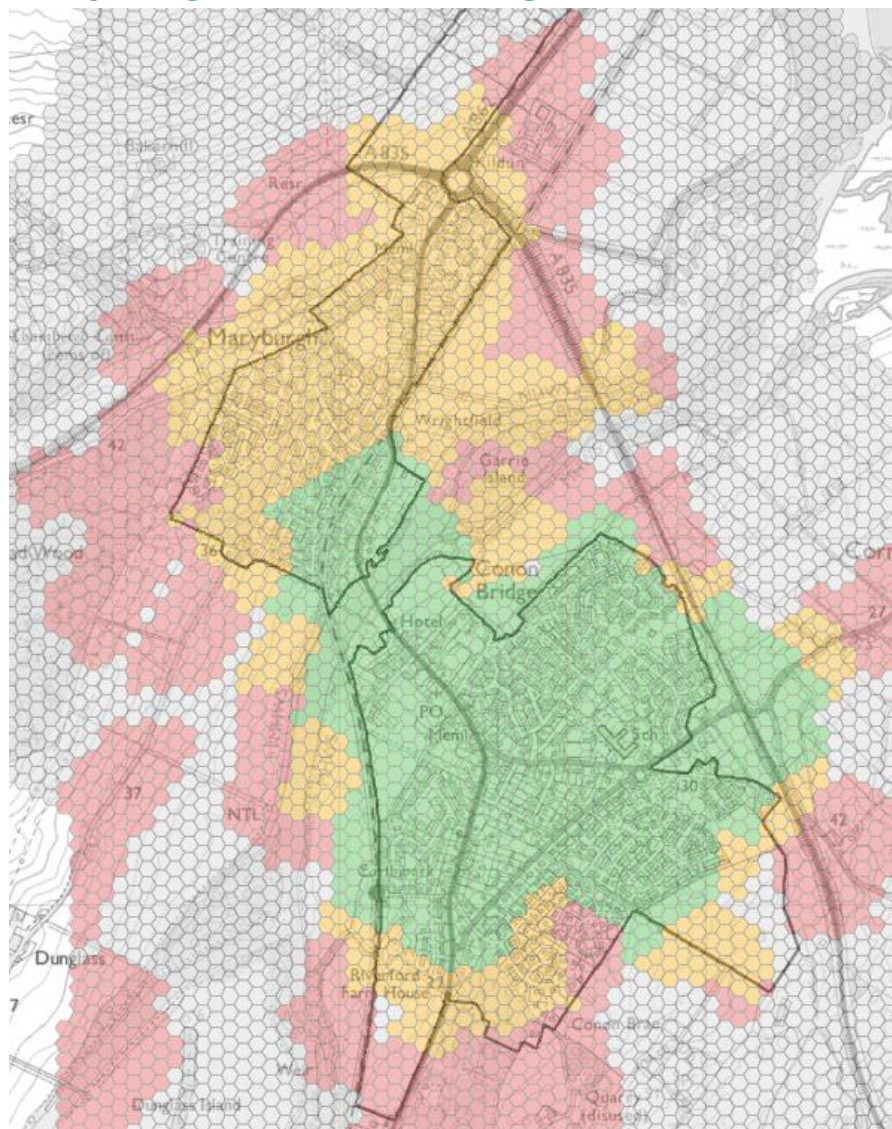
- ☒ Residential Property Count
  - Count of Points
  - ☐ 0 - 1
  - ☒ 2 - 10
  - ☒ 11 - 100
- ☒ Local Living - Access to Services Score
  - TOTAL
  - ☐ 0 - 1.0
  - ☐ 1.1 - 3.9
  - ☐ 4.0 - 7.9
  - ☐ 8.0 - 11.9
  - ☐ 12.0 - 16.0







## Maryburgh & Conon Bridge



### ✓ Residential Property Count

#### Count of Points

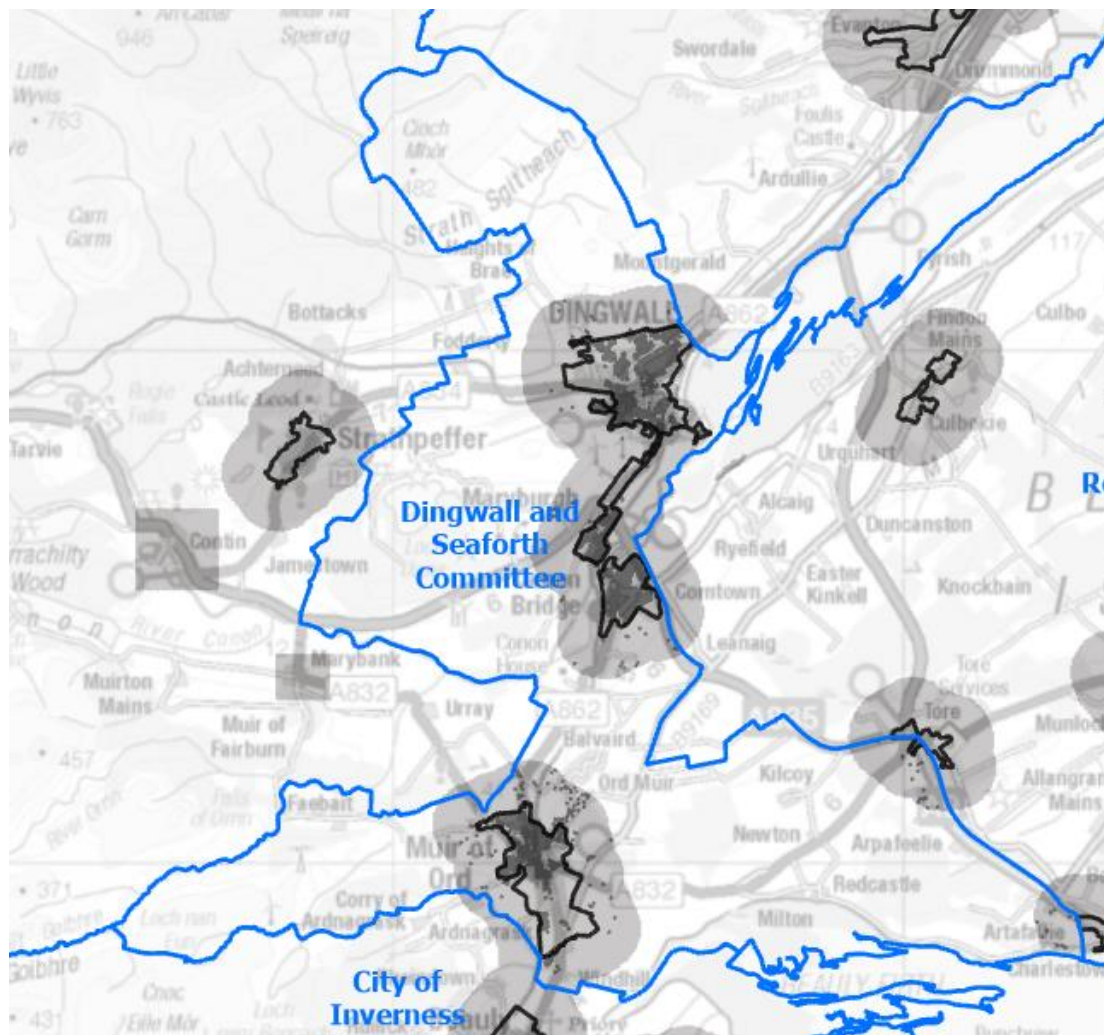
- 0 - 1
- 2 - 10
- 11 - 100

### ✓ Local Living - Access to Services Score

#### TOTAL

- 0 - 1.0
- 1.1 - 3.9
- 4.0 - 7.9
- 8.0 - 11.9
- 12.0 - 16.0

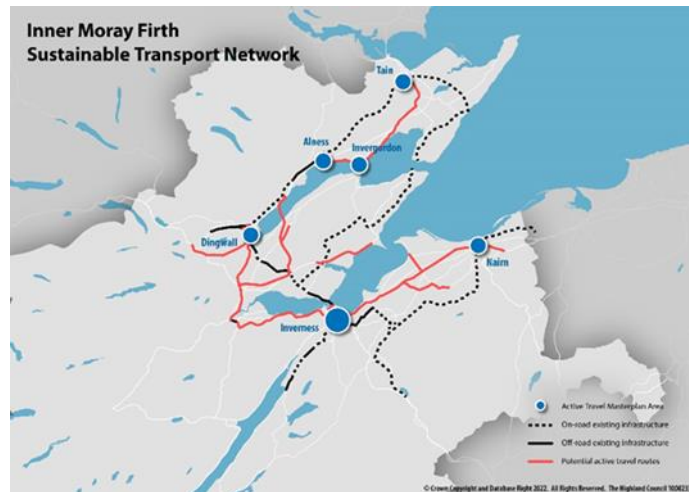
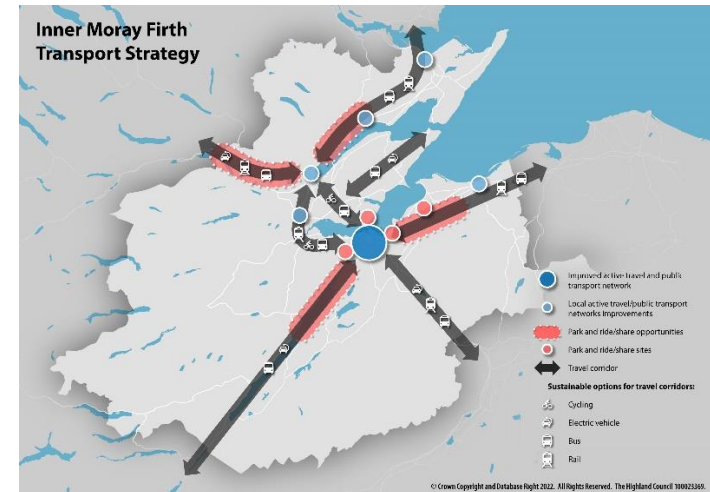
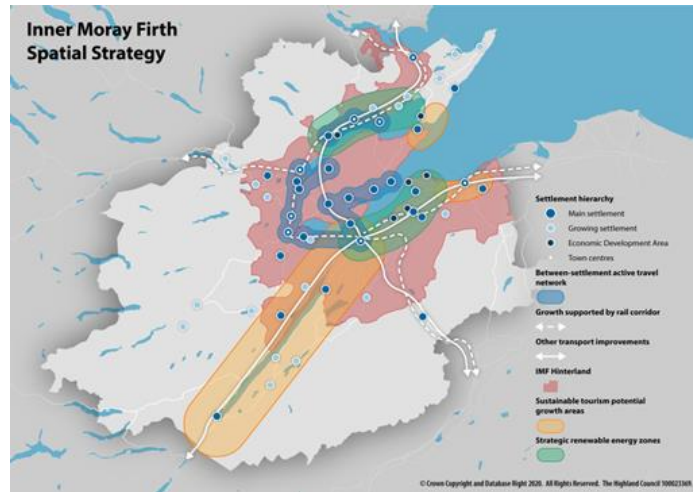
## Dingwall & Seaforth Committee Area







## Relevant Inner Moray Firth Development Plan Maps





# Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy for Highland Map

