

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Agenda Item	4
Report No	BIER-12-25

Committee: Black Isle and Easter Ross

Date: 12 May 2025

Report Title: Easter Ross Area Place Plan

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report invites Members to adopt the Easter Ross Area Place Plan

The Easter Ross Area Place Plan within Appendix 2 has been developed using a Place Based approach and does not set out to replace existing plans and policies for the area. Instead, it aims to capture and present what the common themes and priorities are and aims to serve as a comprehensive document that not only reflects the aspirations of the local community but also aligns with existing strategic and localised plans, ensuring that Easter Ross thrives as a prosperous area where people want to live, work and visit.

This report also provides an update on next steps for progressing the plan.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:-

- i. **Consider and adopt** the Easter Ross Area Place Plan, using it as a tool to inform and support decision making about Easter Ross;
- ii. **Support and promote** the plan where possible in terms of its consideration within other plans, strategies, development and funding opportunities across or impacting the Easter Ross area; and
- iii. **Note** the next steps for progressing the work set out in the plan.

3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** – No additional resource is requested. Highland Council support for initiatives outlined in the Plan may have resource implications in the future which would be subject to appropriate Committee or Service decision making.

Ongoing involvement in Place Planning activity requires input and commitment from services across the Council to ensure Place Plans provide the framework to support targeting resources, service delivery and provide a clear vision for attracting external investment. The Plan 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** – There are no legal implications rising from the adoption of the Easter Ross Area Place Plan.
- 3.3 **Risk** – The Easter Ross Area Place Plan will help to coordinate future activity and investment in the area. Developing a place-based approach is encouraged through the Scottish Government's Place Principle, the Christie Commission recommendations and is required by the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 for community planning.
- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – there are no health and safety risks arising from the report.
- 3.5 **Gaelic** – 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 has a positive impact on promoting equality, addressing inequality (including socio-economic) and targeting the priorities of the people of Easter Ross and therefore a full impact assessment is not required. Members are asked to consider the summary below and detailed in **Appendix 1** 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	No Impact
Data Rights	No impact

5. Background

- 5.1 In 2021, Highland Council made a commitment to develop Area Place Plans mainly based on Area Committee boundaries. The Plans have been developed and facilitated in various ways across Highland, as each area is different. In Easter Ross, much of the engagement was carried out as part of the Community Planning process using a place-based approach and does not set out to replace existing plans and policies for the area. Instead, it aims to capture and present what the common themes and priorities are and aims to serve as a comprehensive document that not only reflects the aspirations of the local community but also aligns with existing strategic and localised plans, ensuring that the area thrives as a sustainable, liveable, and prosperous community. Clarification on the difference between Area and Local Place Plans is noted below.

5.2 Area Place Plan

The Place Principle is a Scottish Government and CoSLA initiative to encourage better collaboration and community involvement. It is about understanding the issues, opportunities and relationships in a place, to allow effective partnership working to improve the quality of life for communities. Knowing how a community is structured and how it works helps make good decisions on investment, service delivery and how to coordinate change.

In Highland, Area Place Plans are being developed to provide an overview of existing strategies and projects. Community engagement builds a shared understanding of how Place underpins development, service delivery and how communities and organisations work together. These plans will be a future guide to maximise the impact for people living in an area, based on shared understanding of local need.

At its simplest, APPs will create a shared vision for an area, outlining priority outcomes and how they will be achieved. The Plans will make clear what activity is happening in each area, the outcomes being sought, when they are intended to be delivered and who is responsible for doing so.

5.3 Local Place Plan

Following recent changes to the national planning system, communities have been invited to consider preparation of their own Local Place Plans – a community's proposals for development of use of land and buildings in their local area. Currently across Highland, many groups are engaging their local community to reflect how to make their place better, agree priorities for the future and how to act on them – often working with others.

While Local Place Plans have a particular role in the planning system, they may also highlight other priorities for service delivery and community action.

6 How the Plan was Prepared

- 6.1 The Easter Ross Area Place Plan was developed alongside the Easter Ross Community Partnership (ERCP). The ERCP is one of nine Community Partnerships across Highland dedicated to tackling inequalities. Bringing together public sector partners, third sector organisations, and local agencies, ERCP serves as a collaborative forum to identify shared local priorities and coordinated actions.

A wide group of stakeholders were involved in developing the Plan including representation from: Highland Council (Elected Members and services); High Life Highland, NHS Highland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Police Scotland; Highland Third Sector Interface; Highlands and Islands Enterprise; Community Councils; The Place; Tain YMCA; Architecture and Design Scotland; Invergordon Community Development Trust; Christian Community Action Support Team; Balnagowan Estate; APEX Scotland; Balintore Youth Club; Port of Cromarty Firth; Scottish Centre for Community Development; Seaboard Development Trust; Alness Partnership; Youth Highland and Youth Forum reps from Tain, Invergordon and Alness.

All are thanked for their input to the Area Place Plan.

The Area Profile set out at **Appendix 4** provides an overview of the key information relating to Easter Ross.

6.2 Existing Plans

To remove duplication and identify gaps, existing plans relevant to the Easter Ross area have been collated (links are set out within the APP) and the common themes from these have been included within the Area Place Plan.

6.3 Engagement

Various engagement opportunities took place throughout 2023-2024 including:-

- Regular Stakeholder Meetings with representatives from the Easter Ross Community Partnership
- Cross Sector Workshops involving over 100 participants representing 22 individual organisations
- Online Place Standard Survey capturing 87 responses
- 8 targeted focus groups with young people, families and vulnerable adults
- 3 pop up stalls at community events in Tain, Invergordon and Alness
- Online Workshop with Community Councils

The responses received are detailed in the Engagement Report at **Appendix 3**. These responses have informed the Easter Ross Area Place Plan and have been shared with relevant partners to help inform their own work.

7 Priorities for Easter Ross

7.1 For ease of reference between the Easter Ross Area Place Plan and wider statutory and strategic documents, the emerging Priorities for Easter Ross have been aligned to the three pillars of People, Place and Prosperity.

7.2 People

- Mental Health and Addiction Support: One of the key priorities outlined under this theme was the need to strengthen mental health services and addiction recovery support plans. The need for a focus on early intervention, reduction of stigma, and improved access to addiction recovery services was also highlighted.
- Ageing population and increased number of people living with chronic diseases: Provide support to enable people to live longer in their own home through increased access to care at home for those in need. Change mindset and behaviours through education in self-management and increase social prescribing.
- Community Hubs: Improved equity and access to services through the development of cross-sector, multi-agency hubs to provide local access to healthcare, mental health services, social care, and other essential services. Such hubs would reduce travel times and improve service delivery for vulnerable populations.
- Youth and Family Support: Increasing opportunities through Whole Family Wellbeing, including job training, access to affordable childcare, and youth services, is highlighted to retain and attract families to the area. Emphasis was placed on the need for targeted support for families in poverty, with a focus on maximising incomes and reducing isolation.
- Decrease suicide and alcohol and drug specific deaths.

7.3 Place

- **Active Travel, Transport and Connectivity:** Promote active travel (walking, cycling, wheeling) as a key aspect of future infrastructure development. Investments in safe walking and cycling routes, particularly in Alness, Invergordon, and along the coast, are prioritised to reduce car reliance, safety and improve health outcomes. Improvements are also sought to public transport links with a focus on timetabling and connections. Upgrading road infrastructure at Tomich Junction. Improved signage and wayfinding for walking and cycling routes for navigation and safety.
- **Housing and Development:** There is a pressing need for affordable, mixed-housing developments to accommodate the ageing population, young families, and local workers. Engagement identified key areas for future housing, such as brownfield sites in Invergordon and Seaboard Villages. Housing developments must also be environmentally sustainable, incorporating energy-efficient designs and renewable energy sources. Many people called for improvements to road conditions and infrastructure to enhance the safety and appearance of streets.
- **Heritage and Culture –** Calls for the safeguarding and conserving of key heritage sites and cultural assets, particularly in Tain and Milton. Commitment from partners to work together to actively seek out new uses for redundant buildings, including exploring community ownership.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Easter Ross' rich natural environment is seen as both an asset and a constraint. The plan emphasises safeguarding the area's built, cultural, and natural assets, while promoting sustainable energy practices. Initiatives such as community energy schemes, tree planting, and water conservation are highlighted as essential for the area's future.

7.4 Prosperity

- **Job Creation and Training:** A key priority is increasing employment opportunities, particularly for young people and those facing barriers to getting and sustaining work. Priorities for targeted training programmes aligned with new industries such as renewable energy, green hydrogen, and sustainable tourism are called for. Supporting small businesses and social enterprises is also seen as vital for creating long-term local employment. Support best working practices through promoting the Highland Employer Charter.
- **Sustainable Tourism:** Many recognised the growing potential of tourism, especially with the rise of eco-tourism and the North Coast 500 (NC500) route. Improved tourist infrastructure, such as waste disposal facilities for campervans, public toilets, and visitor attractions including a digital heritage trail, is essential for making Easter Ross a more attractive destination.
- **Community Wealth Building:** Calls were made for initiatives to promote community wealth, including; adoption of fair work practices (including promotion of the Real Living Wage), maximise local spend through procurement activity, increase local supply chain development, explore shared ownership models for both renewable energy and local businesses. This approach aims to ensure that economic growth benefits local communities and reduces inequality.

- Embed Inclusive Decision-Making – work meaningfully with communities to shape how benefits from renewable developments are used to ensure funds are directed towards prioritised local and strategic needs. Use the Highland Social Value Charter to achieve strong governance and community engagement to empower communities in managing and directing benefit funds.

7.5 How the plan will be used

This Plan will provide all those with an interest in or those responsible for providing services and looking after assets in Easter Ross with a helpful tool to:-

- Establish a shared understanding of local needs and opportunities.
- Inform decisions on service design and delivery.
- Provide evidence to support funding bids for projects.
- Encourage public, private, and community collaboration for long-term sustainable growth.
- Make best use of available resources and forward plan for when funding and investment becomes available.
- Link with local and national decision-making processes, influencing public services, budgeting, and planning policies to reflect the needs and aspirations of the Easter Ross community.

7.6 Development and Delivery of the Easter Ross Area Place Plan

A bespoke action plan will be created to set out the route for delivery of the priorities within the Easter Ross Area Place Plan. The action plan will seek to:-

- further understand and develop each priority, in discussion across all sectors;
- set out to identify the best mechanism for delivery and the range of partners to be involved
- assess potential barriers
- assess potential funding opportunities
- provide estimates of timescales

Not all priorities will be achievable in the short to medium term, however, priorities within this plan have the widest community support and this plan, along with appendices, can be used to evidence and inform developments and funding decisions.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 28 April 2025

Authors: Helen Ross, Senior Community Development Officer
Fiona Richardson, Community Support Manager
Phil Tomalin, Community Support Manager

Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Integrated Impact Assessment
Appendix 2 – Area Place Plan
Appendix 3 – Engagement Report
Appendix 4 – Area Profile

EASTER ROSS APP INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Impact Assessment Area	Conclusion of Screening / Full Assessment
Equality	The plan identifies the issues of the entire community; however it does aim to support improvements to services aimed at young, elderly, disabled people and/or improve their access to services.
Socio-economic	The plan identifies a range of socio-economic issues relating to opportunity including access to education, training and apprenticeships, employability support and removing barriers to work such as childcare and transport. It highlights the issues faced by the rural small town and remote rural communities in Easter Ross including transport and housing, and how initiatives can help to improve household income through support and services such as social care, food larders, and other public sector and voluntary support.
Human Rights	No negative impact No human rights will be negatively impacted by the plan. A rights-based approach has been taken to the co-production of the plan. This will continue into delivery, monitoring and evaluation.
Children's Rights and Wellbeing	Children's rights will not be negatively impacted through this plan. A rights-based approach has been taken in the development which will continue through to delivery, monitoring and evaluation. Many of the priorities within the plan focus on improving services and supports for children, young people and families, e.g. increasing childcare provision, access to education and employability prospects for young people, youth spaces and appropriate, safe public transport. In delivering the ambitions in the plan, there will also be an ongoing focus on community engagement and collaboration to ensure that local voices, including those of children and young people, continue to be heard and integrated into decision-making processes.
Island and Mainland Rural	The plan highlights issues faced by communities living in remote small towns and remote rural areas.

Climate Change	The plan focuses on developing sustainable, well-designed communities that are resilient to economic and environmental changes. The plan also aligns with the recommendations for community led climate action which were identifies through the Climate Action Towns Project which took place in Alness and Invergordon in 2021-2024. Actions to mitigate impacts on climate and environment include, enhanced public transport, local food production, energy efficiency measures for homes and businesses, increase and maintain green spaces, raise awareness about climate change.
Data Rights	No impact

Easter Ross – Our Place Our Future



Contents

Page 3	Introduction
Page 4	Area Place Plan Explained
Page 5	The Easter Ross Area Place Plan – Our Place Our Future
Page 6	Easter Ross At a Glance
Page 8	How the Plan was developed
Page 10	Challenges and Opportunities
Page 13	Priority Themes – Getting into the detail
Page 18	How the Plan will be used
Page 19	Appendices

Introduction

Welcome to **Our Place Our Future**, a shared Area Place Plan (APP) for Easter Ross. **Our Place Our Future** presents a shared vision and set of ambitions aimed at shaping the area's future in terms of community development, infrastructure, economy, and environmental sustainability.

This Plan does not set out to replace existing plans and policies for the area, instead it aims to capture and present what the common themes and priorities are from the range of existing plans – all sense checked and validated through engagement and conversations with those who live in Easter Ross and those who provide services to the people of Easter Ross. The Area Place Plan is not a detailed action plan, but provides an overview of challenges and opportunities to inform future development of community and partnership led action planning.

This plan aims to be a useful tool for people who live and work in Easter Ross by helping to:

- Establish a shared understanding of local needs and opportunities.
- Inform decisions on service design and delivery.
- Provide evidence to support funding bids for projects
- Encourage public, private, and community collaboration for long-term sustainable growth.
- Make best use of available resources and be prepared when new funding and investment opportunities arise.

The plan has been developed in partnership with local communities and key partners within Easter Ross. The plan sits in line with the Scottish Government's Place Principle, which prioritises collaboration among communities, public agencies and the private sector to achieve a shared vision for Easter Ross.

We hope you enjoy reading it and more importantly, we hope the priorities set out in this plan reflect what you see, hear and feel in your community. No one wants to see this plan sit gathering dust on a shelf. We want individuals, groups, service providers, funders and decision makers to pick it up, read it, use it to start conversations about improvement, investment and change. We need public agencies, organisations and local people to get involved in delivering on the priorities, update them as needs change and celebrate achievements along the way.

Area Place Plan explained

Our Place Our Future focuses on Easter Ross, stretching from the Arduillie Roundabout in the west through to the Tarbet Ness Lighthouse in the east. It is one of a suite of plans prepared for each sub regional area of Highland in partnership between Highland Council, public agencies, the third sector and local communities.

Brief Background to Area Place Plans

Highland Council and the Highland Community Planning Partnership maintain a commitment to develop Area Place Plans (APPs). Each Area Place Plan is tailored to the context, needs and local capacity of the Area. This means they have been developed and facilitated in various ways across Highland, recognising that each area is different.

Each plan features a vision for the area with ambitions and priorities for people and place. The aim is to inform and support the targeting of resources, service delivery and to provide a clear vision to help attract external investment, to ensure investment helps to realise local priorities. The plan will help the Highland Council, partners and communities make better decisions about service design and delivery and provide clarity and manage expectations around how and where resources are prioritised.

Area Place Plans don't sit in isolation; they inter-relate with a number of other plans, including community-led Local Place Plans (LPPs), the Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HLDP), the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP), the Highland Investment Plan (HIP), the Highland Delivery Plan (HDP) and Community Partnership Plans, among many others.

The Easter Ross Area Place Plan – Our Place Our Future

Our Place Our Future aims to be both ambitious and realistic, pulling together aspirations articulated by individuals, groups and service providers from communities across Easter Ross with a focus on outcomes for the area as a whole. As outlined above it will help inform local and regional decision making about public services, budgeting and policy areas, as well as helping inform those wider statutory plans. It recognises the good work already taking place in our Area and supports community action to make the most of opportunities.

Our Shared Vision

The overarching vision for Easter Ross centres on working together to create the conditions for communities to be:

Engaged, Attractive, Sustainable, Thriving, Empowered, and Resilient

and sets out strategic priorities under three main themes:

People | Place | Prosperity

People – Enhancing Quality of Life	Place – Building Sustainable Communities	Prosperity – Driving Economic Growth
The People theme emphasises improving the well-being and quality of life for all residents by addressing mental and physical health, inequality, poverty, and access to services.	The Place theme focuses on developing sustainable, well-designed communities that are resilient to economic and environmental changes. It emphasises improving infrastructure, housing, and the local environment to create attractive, inclusive, and healthy living spaces.	The Prosperity theme is centred around economic diversification, job creation, and sustainable tourism. The plan seeks to capitalise on emerging opportunities, such as renewable energy, tourism and distillery sectors

Some of the priorities within the plan will be achieved in the short term but others will take longer to realise. The plan is live and dynamic and will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis. The [Easter Ross Community Partnership](#), as a forum of public and third-sector partners, will take on the role to oversee the delivery of the plan.

Guiding Principles

During the engagement process of developing this plan, service providers and members of the community called for a commitment to **good communication** and continued focus on **trust** and **relationship building**. With many recognising the shared benefits of this plan will depend on **meaningful conversations**, **transparency**, **trust** and a **commitment** from everyone to foster and maintain **positive relationships**.

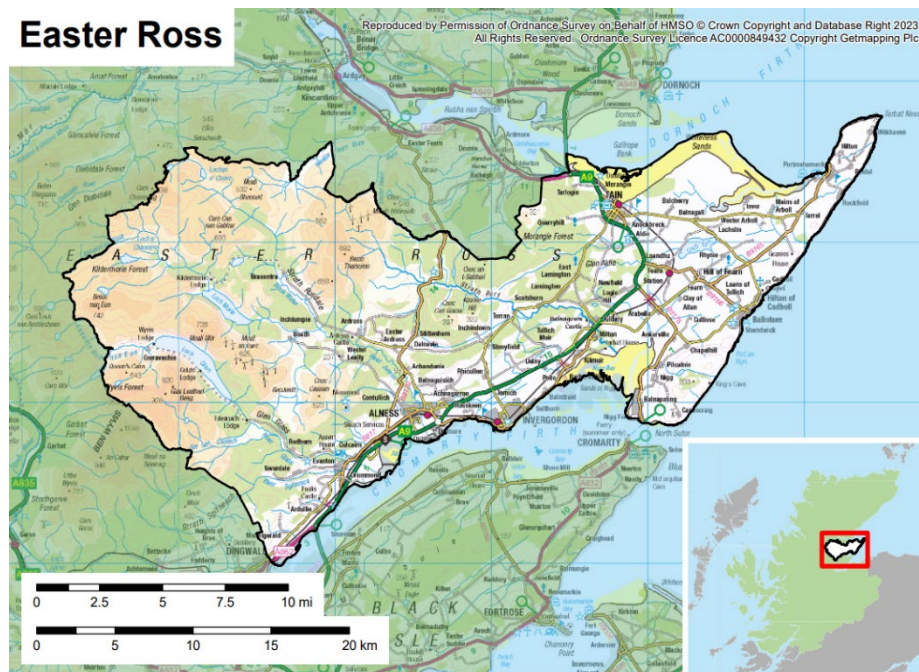
In delivering the ambitions in the plan, there will also be an ongoing focus on community engagement and collaboration to ensure that local voices continue to be heard and integrated into decision-making processes. Monitoring and reporting back to the community will be critical to ensure transparency, accountability and importantly, continued understanding of community need.

Easter Ross at a Glance

Our Place

Easter Ross is known for its blend of history, culture, and natural beauty. Bordered by the Cromarty Firth to the south, the Dornoch Firth to the north, and the North Sea to the east, Easter Ross features rolling farmland, picturesque coastal villages, and significant archaeological sites. The area is steeped in history, with ancient Pictish stones, medieval churches, and Victorian market towns. Tain, Scotland's oldest Royal Burgh, is a notable historical site with architecture spanning several centuries. Easter Ross has a rich cultural heritage, with traditional music, festivals, and local crafts. The area is also home to several whisky distilleries and has been used as a location for film and television. The coastal and rural landscapes provide habitats for a variety of wildlife, making it a great destination for nature enthusiasts. The economy of Easter Ross is supported by agriculture, fishing, and tourism, with a growing focus on renewable energy.

Easter Ross has long history of settlement because it contains much of Highland's flatter, better drained, agriculturally productive land, has a drier and sunnier climate than the Highland average, and sheltered deep water ports which were



initially used for military purposes. Despite these advantages, significant development and population didn't establish until the 1960s and 1970s with the inward investment in heavier industries such as those servicing offshore oil and gas production.

Each of the principal towns has road and rail transport connections, and fewer physical and environmental constraints to development than other areas. The landscape is principally rolling farmland often with attractive coastal views across the Cromarty, Dornoch and Moray Firths. Settlement is concentrated in a series of small towns or large villages most of which are strung along the old A9 route and railway line. The rural hinterland is upland, far less populous and large parts of it have been afforested.

How well does the Area function?

The area is both close enough and well connected enough to Inverness to take advantage of its facilities and employment opportunities but sufficiently separate not to be affected too much by the "overheating" effects of rapid growth. It is also close to emerging employment opportunities connected with the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport (ICFGF) initiative.

Challenges do exist, notably in terms of A9 junction capacity issues, control of sporadic housing development in the countryside, which has adverse landscape and service provision cost impacts, and making sure that the main towns and villages are as self-sufficient as possible in terms of a mix of uses and local access to daily needs. Revitalising towns with community hub facilities providing shared services are a key way to do this. The area is well placed to take advantage of the job opportunities from the Green Freeport and land is already safeguarded for employment use at Nigg, Evanton, Alness and Invergordon. Rural parts of Easter Ross face significant challenges with public transport. The low population density and dispersed communities make it difficult to provide frequent and reliable services. This can impact residents' access to employment, education, healthcare, and other essential services.

Our People

There are **21,531** people living in Easter Ross which makes up 9% of the Highland population. The main settlements are Tain, Invergordon, Alness and Evanton. Demographic trends have seen a **2.4% reduction in the population since 2011**. Compared with the Highland average there is a higher proportion of young people, 19.4% aged 0-19yrs. The proportion of those aged 65yrs+, 23.2%, is similar to the Highland average. There is a lower proportion of working age people than the Scottish average.

The individual settlements of Easter Ross enjoy a strong sense of community with around 140 active third sector and community groups in and around each of the communities. In addition, Easter Ross has 12 Community Councils which are in place to represent and promote local issues and opportunities in each community.

Education provision - There are 3 secondary schools: Tain Royal Academy, Invergordon Academy and Alness Academy with a combined pupil roll of 1,633. There are 17 primary schools across Easter Ross with a total pupil roll of 1,660, as well as 16 Early Learning & Childcare settings with 386 children and 1 standalone special school with 29 pupils. The Sunday Times named Easter Ross Primaries in the top 5 in Highland in the 2025 League Table.

Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) identifies 6 areas (data zones) in Easter Ross which are among the 20% most deprived in Scotland with the SIMD data highlighting several key points:

- **Income and Employment:** Some areas in Easter Ross experience higher levels of income deprivation and unemployment compared to the national average
- **Education:** There are disparities in educational attainment, with certain areas showing lower levels of qualifications among residents.
- **Health:** Health outcomes vary, with some areas facing higher rates of chronic illnesses and lower life expectancy.
- **Access to Services:** Rural areas in Easter Ross often have limited access to essential services, which can exacerbate deprivation.
- **Crime:** Crime rates can be higher in certain pockets, impacting overall community safety.
- **Housing:** Housing quality and availability can be a concern, with some areas having higher rates of substandard housing.

Employment – Alness and Invergordon Travel to Work Area 2023 data = 7,000 (full and part-time) jobs which makes up 8% of Highland's jobs. Gross average weekly full time pay = £773.90. Unemployment 2024 Highland data sets out claimant count at 3,440 or 2.4% of economically active. Employment sectors - 2020 HIE data for Inner Moray Firth area shows the top 3 employment sectors in Inner Moray Firth: human health and social work (19.8%), wholesale and retail (14.8%) and accommodation and food services (11.1%).

Strategic Fit – the fit with other Plans and Strategies

This plan doesn't aim to replace or duplicate other plans and strategies, it takes account of and has been informed by a range of existing plans, strategies and engagement. **Appendix One** provides a useful directory of key local, regional and national plans and their priorities which are relevant to Easter Ross.

How the Plan was developed - Engagement Activity

This Plan has been written in partnership with local communities, public and third sectors. To achieve this, we undertook a range of engagement activity throughout 2023 and 2024 to gain a shared understanding of the needs and aspirations of those who live, work and visit in Easter Ross.

We established a cross-sector steering group tasked with analysing existing plans and consultations related to Easter Ross. The findings were then presented to stakeholders which kickstarted conversations and workshops (detailed below) which generated hundreds of valuable contributions setting out aspirations, ideas and priorities for Easter Ross.

What was included in the desktop review?

Our desktop review involved analysing the following plans, strategies and engagement findings...

- 2 Our Place Our Future Issues and Visioning Workshops involving key stakeholders from public, private, third and community sectors identifying the current issues, outcomes for the future and action needed to get there.
- 8 focus group conversation workshops with stakeholders, community groups, Community Councils, young people and families to establish what it's like to live and work in Easter Ross, gaining real insight into the lives and experiences of residents and service providers.
- Area Place Plan pop up stalls at 2 Talking Town Events to get more feedback from members of the public and service providers.
- Online 'Place Standard' survey, capturing information from 87 respondents on what it's like to live, work, play and visit in Easter Ross. Data was gathered from Easter Ross evidencing what people thought should be protected, changed and improved.
- Place Standard focus groups with 81 young people from Youth Forums in Tain, Invergordon and Alness. Workshop-based activity gathered data on the 14 Place Standard categories.
- Individual meetings with statutory and third sector partners to inform the content of the plan.

Individual Meetings with Partners | Inner Moray Firth Development Plan 2 (2024) | Easter Ross Community Partnership Priorities | Easter Ross Cares Stakeholder Findings (Spring 2023) | NHS Highland Easter Ross Area Profile (2022) | Have your Say Highland Easter Ross findings, Autumn 2022 | Climate Action Towns engagement and report (2024) | Place Making Priorities (2024) | Education Priorities (2024) | SIMD | THC Community Support Coordinator's end of project report (2023) | Town Centre Health Checks (2023) | Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (2024/27) | Highland Community Learning and Development Plan (2021-24) | Active Travel Masterplan | Easter Ross Talking Town Events (2023) | Funding activity | National Planning Framework 4



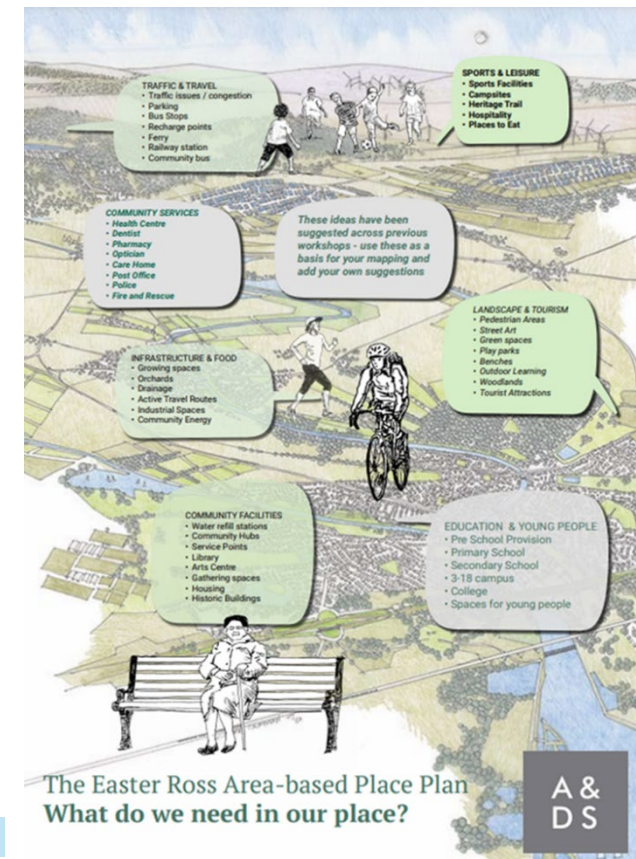
Challenges and Opportunities

Communities and partners told us that the challenges facing Easter Ross are significant and require a committed partnership response to tackle them. Some of these significant challenges are as follows:

- Finance - public and third sector budgets are 'strapped', with limited money in the pot to deliver essential services; such as mental health support and maintenance of our roads, social housing and green spaces.
- Access to Services – limited transport connectivity in rural villages creates barriers for those accessing core services such as health including GP practices, employability and training.
- Housing – many reported a lack of affordable housing, including mid-market rentals.
- Inequality and Poverty – the cost-of-living crisis is pushing prices up across the board, particularly with energy, food and rent, making it harder for people to make ends meet.
- Ageing population – Easter Ross, like the rest of Highland, is faced with an ageing population, some with long term health conditions. This, coupled with workforce shortages, is putting pressure on health and social care services across Easter Ross.
- Drug and Alcohol Use – high levels of drug and alcohol use and associated mental health and wellbeing issues. With drug use closely linked to poverty, people living in the most deprived areas were 18 times more likely to experience problem substance use, compared to people in the least deprived communities.

Specific Challenges for Young People

- Youth Services: Post Covid rise in referrals to youth services with increase in mental health needs.
- Neurodiversity: mainstream education can be challenging leading to poor outcomes and limited employment prospects.
- Crime: young people can be targets for online crime, with reported rise in 'Sextortion.'
- Health: concerns about young people using alcohol, illegal drugs and increased use of vapes. Lack of knowledge about health implications.
- Travel: lack of public transport in rural areas increases pressure on young people to pass the driving test, with the driving theory test being a particular barrier for some.
- Barriers: School leavers can be a hard-to-reach group with increased time required to build trusted relationships and provide continuity of support via established youth work.



Emerging Opportunity for Easter Ross

Inverness Cromarty Firth Green Freeport

Key to conversations around challenges and opportunities for the future, was recurring mention of Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport (ICFGF) <https://greenfreeport.scot/> ICFGF is a partnership of public and private sector organisations which aims to ensure the Cromarty Firth and wider region becomes a major global hub for green energy and deliver benefits to Highland communities and the decarbonisation agenda.

With Easter Ross being at the centre of Green Freeport activity many recognised it as a huge opportunity for economic regeneration and transformational change. Whilst many were optimistic about the potential investment and other opportunities, others sought clarity about what the green Freeport is, what benefit it would bring specifically to Easter Ross, and how opportunities would be made available for local communities and their residents. Some people shared their concerns that the ICFGF could exacerbate existing pressures on services such as schools and GP surgeries, housing shortages - particularly for those already struggling to find affordable accommodation in the area.

People spoke of being ready to welcome new people into the area but also made it clear that some people locally would need extra help and support to build skills and confidence necessary to benefit from anticipated job opportunities. The community has requested more opportunities to engage with ICFGF and suggested working through existing mechanisms such as the Easter Ross Community Councils and the Community Partnership.

Climate Action Towns

The [Climate Action Towns](#) project in Alness and Invergordon took place over 2021-2024 and was part of a broader initiative by Architecture & Design Scotland, aimed at supporting community-led climate action in small towns across Scotland. As part of the project a series of workshops were delivered which uncovered wider climate, social and infrastructure issues which have informed the priorities within this plan. Specific recommendations relating to climate action were identified to help Easter Ross communities tackle climate change effectively:

- **Community-Led Initiatives:** Encourage and support community-led climate action projects. This includes providing resources and guidance to local groups to develop and implement their own climate action plans.
- **Improving Public Transport:** Enhance public transport options to reduce reliance on private vehicles. This can help lower carbon emissions and improve accessibility for residents.
- **Energy Efficiency:** Promote energy efficiency measures in homes and businesses. This includes retrofitting buildings to improve insulation and reduce energy consumption.
- **Green Spaces:** Increase and maintain green spaces to support biodiversity and provide recreational areas for the community. Green spaces also help mitigate the effects of climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide.
- **Education and Awareness:** Raise awareness about climate change and its impacts through educational programmes and community events. This helps build a culture of sustainability and encourages more people to take action.

- **Local Food Production:** Support local food production to reduce the carbon footprint associated with transporting food from distant locations. This can include community gardens and local farmers' markets.
- **Waste Reduction:** Implement waste reduction strategies, such as recycling programmes and initiatives to reduce single-use plastics.

Priority Themes – Getting into the detail....

Our Place Our Future is organised around three key themes: **People**, **Place**, and **Prosperity**, each representing an area of focus to support improved outcomes. In future, decision making about service design and delivery should seek to support the delivery of the following priority outcomes as identified through the community engagement.

People: Enhancing Quality of Life

The People theme emphasises improving the well-being and quality of life for all residents by addressing mental and physical health, inequality, poverty, and access to services.

What are the current issues and challenges?

- Ageing Population: Placing a strain on health and social care services.
- Health and Social Care: Increasing demand for health and social care services, including mental health and addiction support. Ageing workforce.
- Continued Post Covid Recovery: Ongoing economic, social and health consequences of the pandemic.
- Public Services have constrained budgets making it challenging to fund essential services and infrastructure projects.
- Third Sector organisations are often reliant on small, time limited grants making it challenging to forward plan and sustain services.
- Advocacy for increased **local control over decision making, including funding necessary to address local needs** – including the role of local volunteers in maintenance and civic activity.

Priorities

- Mental Health and Addiction Support: One of the key priorities outlined under this theme was the need to strengthen mental health services and addiction recovery support plans. The need for a focus on early intervention, reduction of stigma, and improved access to addiction recovery services was also highlighted.
- Ageing population and increased number of people living with chronic diseases: Provide support to enable people to live longer in their own home through increased access to care at home for those in need. Change mindset and behaviours through education in self-management and increase social prescribing.
- Community Hubs: Improved equity and access to services through the development of cross-sector, multi-agency hubs to provide local access to healthcare, mental health services, social care, and other essential services. Such hubs would reduce travel times and improve service delivery for vulnerable populations.

- Youth and Family Support: Increasing opportunities through Whole Family Wellbeing, including job training, access to affordable childcare, and youth services, is highlighted to retain and attract families to the area. Emphasis was placed on the need for targeted support for families in poverty, with a focus on maximising incomes and reducing isolation.
- Decrease suicide and alcohol and drug specific deaths.

Place: Building Sustainable Communities

The Place theme focuses on developing sustainable, well-designed and supported communities that are resilient to economic and environmental changes. It emphasises improving infrastructure, housing, and the local environment to create attractive, inclusive, and healthy living spaces.

What are the current issues and challenges?

- Environmental Constraints: **Managing climate change** and the protection of prime agricultural land pose challenges to expanding housing and industry.
- Infrastructure Constraints: The area's infrastructure, particularly roads, water, sewerage, and digital connectivity, is under strain.
- Public and Third Sector Finance: **Strained budgets** are making it challenging to fund essential services and infrastructure projects. Third Sector organisations reliant on small, time limited grants. This makes it challenging to forward plan and sustain services.
- Care home provision: Closures raise concerns about the availability of **local care provision** for residents in Easter Ross. This, coupled with challenges in maintaining sufficient staffing levels, further impacts availability.
- Older social **housing stock** is in need of upgrading, including building condition, heating and insulation. Perceived need for significantly increased social housing and mid-market rental property for both residents and seasonal workers. Demand for smaller, accessible homes for elderly and disabled people.
- Concerns about limited access to GP appointments, distant pharmacies, and the absence of **medical facilities** in some communities.
- Widespread concern over poor **pavement** condition (particularly for wheelchair users and those with poor mobility), **road condition** (potholes, surfaces and crumbling gutters). Desire for segregated routes for walking, with zebra crossings and dedicated cycling lanes.
- Importance of commuting to Inverness for employment opportunities is challenged by **public transport links and integration** between train and bus services. Perceived high cost, infrequency and unreliability of some public transport services, particularly direct connections between settlements.
- While there is high regard for the area's **architectural heritage**, concerns were raised about **vacant town centre property**, derelict buildings and maintenance of public spaces – including overgrown areas, blocked drains and regular flooding. General frustration with the **condition of school buildings, town halls and public spaces**.
- Demand for **community-focused outdoor areas** with seating, shelter, bins and amenities like cafes and toilets. Improved drainage and accessibility of existing green spaces for year-round use.
- Poor **maintenance of some formal play areas** – broken equipment, overgrown areas and broken glass, lack of bins for dog waste. Demand for play spaces designed for older teenagers and adults. **Maintenance of existing community facilities** was also raised as a significant concern.

Priorities

- **Active Travel, Transport and Connectivity:** Promote active travel (walking, cycling, wheeling) as a key aspect of future infrastructure development. Investments in safe walking and cycling routes, particularly in Alness, Invergordon, and along the coast, are prioritised to reduce car reliance, safety and

improve health outcomes. Improvements are also sought to public transport links with a focus on timetabling and connections. Upgrading road infrastructure at Tomich Junction. **Improved signage and wayfinding for walking and cycling routes** for navigation and safety.

- **Housing and Development:** There is a pressing need for affordable, mixed-housing developments to accommodate the ageing population, young families, and local workers. Engagement identified key areas for future housing, such as brownfield sites in Invergordon and Seaboard Villages. Housing developments must also be environmentally sustainable, incorporating energy-efficient designs and renewable energy sources. Many people called for improvements to road conditions and infrastructure to enhance the safety and appearance of streets.
- **Heritage and Culture** – Calls for the safeguarding and conserving of key heritage sites and cultural assets, particularly in Tain and Milton. Commitment from partners to work together to actively seek out new uses for redundant buildings, including exploring community ownership.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Easter Ross' rich natural environment is seen as both an asset and a constraint. The plan emphasises safeguarding the area's built, cultural, and natural assets, while promoting sustainable energy practices. Initiatives such as community energy schemes, tree planting, and water conservation are highlighted as essential for the area's future.

Prosperity: Driving Economic Growth

The Prosperity theme is centred around economic diversification, job creation, and sustainable tourism. The plan seeks to capitalise on emerging opportunities, such as renewable energy, tourism and distillery sectors.

What are the current issues and challenges?

- **Economic Pressures:** While Easter Ross has a lower unemployment rate than the national average, some areas, particularly Alness and Invergordon, face high levels of poverty. The Plan emphasises the need to create jobs, particularly through renewable energy and tourism, to diversify the economy and reduce inequalities.
- **Public and Third Sector Finance:** Strained budgets are making it challenging to fund essential services and infrastructure projects. Third Sector organisations are typically reliant on small, time limited grants, making it challenging to forward plan and sustain services.
- **Scale of Renewables -** Recognition of diverse opinions and social, economic and environmental implications, particularly by communities most impacted by increasing levels of development.

Priorities

- **Job Creation and Training:** A key priority is increasing employment opportunities, particularly for young people and those facing barriers to getting and sustaining work. Priorities for targeted training programmes aligned with new industries such as renewable energy, green hydrogen, and sustainable tourism are called for. Supporting small businesses and social enterprises is also seen as vital for creating long-term local employment. Support best working practices through promoting the Highland Employer Charter.
- **Sustainable Tourism:** Many recognised the growing potential of tourism, especially with the rise of eco-tourism and the North Coast 500 (NC500) route. Improved tourist infrastructure, such as waste disposal facilities for campervans, public toilets, and visitor attractions including a digital heritage trail, is essential for making Easter Ross a more attractive destination.
- **Community Wealth Building:** Calls were made for initiatives to promote community wealth, including; adoption of fair work practices (including promotion of the Real Living Wage), maximise local spend through procurement activity, increase local supply chain development, explore shared ownership models for both renewable energy and local businesses. This approach aims to ensure that economic growth benefits local communities and reduces inequality.
- **Embed Inclusive Decision-Making –** work meaningfully with communities to shape how benefits from renewable developments are used to ensure funds are directed towards prioritised local and strategic needs. Use the Highland Social Value Charter to achieve strong governance and community engagement to empower communities in managing and directing benefit funds.

How the plan will be used

The Plan has been written for the local community, third sector organisations, businesses and Easter Ross 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 Plan 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. The Plan is an ambitious evidence-based statement of community aspirations, based on community engagement. It therefore provides all who are responsible for delivering services, looking after assets or with a vested interest in the Easter Ross area with a tool to inform decision making about service design, delivery and investment.

It requires collaboration based around the 2 key guiding principles of an ongoing commitment to **good communication** and continued focus on **trust and relationship building**. In doing this, the plan will:

- 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.

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.

Take Away Message

The Easter Ross Area Place Plan is a visioning document which sets the scene for subsequent development of action plans to support progressing local ambitions and aspirations and addressing local issues together. The priority themes of People, Place and Prosperity seek to create resilient, sustainable and thriving communities that are well prepared for the future. Successful implementation requires long term collaboration and investment to ensure that the area's full potential is released and the vision fully realised.

Appendix One : existing plans of relevance to Easter Ross

Area	Plan	Lead Organisation	Purpose	Weblink
Easter Ross	Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2	Highland Council	Land use strategy, including allocation of sites for potential future development.	https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/178/development_plans/202/inner_moray_firth_local_development_plan
Easter Ross	Nigg Development Guidance	Highland Council	Outline masterplan for plausible development options.	https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/download/209/nigg_development_master_plan
Easter Ross	Tain Town Centre Action Plan	Highland Council	Priorities to make the town centre more active, attractive and accessible.	https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/15653/tain_town_centre_action_plan
Highland	Highlands Outcome Improvement Plan	Highland Community Planning Partnership	Vision to reduce socio-economic inequalities across Highland.	https://highlandcpp.org.uk/about-hcpp/highland-outcome-improvement-plan/
Highland	Children & Young People's Participation Strategy	Multi-Agency	Strategy for involving children and young people in the work of public sector partners.	www.childrensrighthighland.co.uk/children-young-peoples-participation-strategy
Highland	Active Travel Strategy	Highland Council		https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/28781/active_travel_strategy
Easter Ross	Inverness & Cromarty Firth Green Freeport: Update on Business Case	ICFGFP	Update on progress with the Full Business Case and its relevance to Highland communities and businesses.	https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/ad/meetings/id/83432/item_3_inverness_and_cromarty_firth_green_freeport_%E2%80%93_full_business_case_update_fbc
Easter Ross	Alness & Invergordon Active Travel Strategy	Highland Council	A series of actions to progress support for an essential transition to low carbon transport.	https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/24974/alness_and_invergordon_active_travel_masterplan_issue

Easter Ross	Easter Ross land management plan	Forestry Land Scotland	Woodland management west of Tain. Currently being updated.	https://forestryandland.gov.scot/what-we-do/planning/active/easter-ross-lmp
Easter Ross	Evanton Community Wood Long Term Forest Plan	Forestry Land Scotland	Plan for enhancement of the recreational and biodiversity features of the woodland whilst ensuring the sustainable management of the timber resource.	https://web-cdn.org/s/1277/file/evanton_ltfp_draft_text-sjl-amend-16-08-2018.pdf
Scotland	Shaping Our Future Service - Consultation	Scottish Fire & Rescue Service	Public comment on priorities for fire and rescue services.	www.firescotland.gov.uk/get-involved/consultations/shaping-our-future-service-your-say/
Highland	Local Policing Plan	Police Scotland		www.scotland.police.uk/spa-media/ehak3cc1/highland-local-policing-plan-2023-2026.docx
Scotland	Corporate Plan	Scottish Canals		https://d1hxd0sho1wxko.cloudfront.net/production/general/Scottish-Canals-Corporate-Plan-2023-28-Final-C.pdf
Highland	Operating Plan	Highlands & Islands Enterprise		www.hie.co.uk/about-us/policies-and-publications/strategy-and-operating-plan/
Inner Moray Firth	My Life in the Highlands & Islands: Inner Moray Firth Summary Report	Highlands & Islands Enterprise	Summary of research into views and experiences of living, working and studying across the area; including, access to services, housing and business, net zero, community participation.	https://www.hie.co.uk/research-and-reports/our-reports/2022/october/13/myliferesearch/
Easter Ross	Climate Action Towns – Learning from Climate Action Towns. How to embed Climate Action in your place	Architecture & Design Scotland	How to embed Climate Action in your place	https://www.ads.org.uk/resource/climate-action-towns

Place Standard Survey – Easter Ross Results

Qualitative Feedback – Themes arising in relation to Walking, Wheeling & Cycling:

Based on the responses provided, here are the top 10 emerging themes:

1. **Access to Nature and Scenery:** Many respondents appreciate the scenic beauty of their area, including greenery, trees, and views of natural landscapes like beaches and harbours.
2. **Walking and Cycling Infrastructure:** There's a strong emphasis on the accessibility and condition of walking paths, cycle paths, and overall pedestrian infrastructure. While some find it good, others mention issues like poor pavement conditions and lack of dedicated cycling lanes.
3. **Environmental Benefits:** The environmental aspects, such as fresh air, reduced pollution, and being environmentally friendly, are frequently highlighted as positive aspects of the area.
4. **Health and Exercise:** The benefits of outdoor exercise, such as walking and cycling, are frequently mentioned. Respondents appreciate the health advantages and the impact on mental well-being.
5. **Local Amenities and Services:** The proximity of services like shops, doctors, and other amenities is noted as a positive aspect, though some mention that accessing services often requires leaving the village.
6. **Traffic and Safety:** Light traffic is seen as a benefit for walking and cycling, whereas issues with busy roads and unsafe conditions for cycling are concerns for some respondents.
7. **Green Spaces and Cleanliness:** The presence of well-maintained green spaces and a clean environment are valued, while litter and occasional vandalism are mentioned as issues.
8. **Accessibility Challenges:** Several responses highlight challenges related to accessibility, particularly for individuals with restricted mobility. Poor pavement conditions and lack of suitable infrastructure for wheelchair users are noted.
9. **Community and Social Benefits:** The social and community aspects of outdoor activities, such as meeting people and reducing loneliness, are appreciated by respondents.
10. **Weather and Seasonal Factors:** The impact of weather conditions, like wind and rain, on outdoor activities is mentioned as a negative aspect.

These themes capture a broad range of sentiments about the area's environment, infrastructure, and its impact on residents' quality of life.

Concerns arising for Walking, Wheeling & Cycling:

Based on the responses, here are the top 10 emerging themes:

1. **Need for Improved Cycle Paths:** Many respondents express a desire for more and better-maintained cycle paths and routes. This includes creating safer, dedicated cycling lanes and improving existing ones to enhance cycling safety and accessibility.
2. **Poor Pavement Conditions:** There is widespread concern about the state of pavements, including issues such as uneven surfaces, broken slabs, weeds, and general disrepair. Many respondents highlight the need for better maintenance and repair.
3. **Traffic and Speed Issues:** Concerns about high vehicular traffic and speeding are prominent. Respondents suggest reducing traffic speeds, particularly in residential areas, to make roads safer for both cyclists and pedestrians.
4. **Accessibility Challenges:** Accessibility for individuals with disabilities or mobility issues is a recurring theme. Suggestions include making paths and pavements more user-friendly, installing better signage, and adding more seating and rest areas.
5. **Need for Better Signage and Wayfinding:** Improved signage for walking routes and cycle paths is requested. Clearer signposting would help with navigation and safety for pedestrians and cyclists.
6. **Maintenance and Cleanliness:** There is a call for better cleanliness and maintenance of paths and roads, including addressing issues like litter, dog mess, and overgrowth. Ensuring regular upkeep is seen as essential.
7. **Infrastructure Improvements:** Respondents frequently mention the need for general improvements to road infrastructure, including fixing potholes, resurfacing roads, and addressing crumbling gutters.
8. **Safety Concerns:** Safety is a major concern, with requests for measures to protect both cyclists and pedestrians. This includes the need for pedestrian crossings, better lighting, and reducing hazards on paths.
9. **Segregation of Modes of Transport:** There is a desire for segregated routes for walking and cycling, similar to those in other countries, to improve safety and reduce conflicts between different types of road users.
10. **Community and Local Management:** Suggestions include involving local councils and communities in maintaining and improving paths and roads. Some responses mention the need for better local management of overgrowth and public spaces.

These themes reflect a broad range of concerns and suggestions aimed at improving the safety, accessibility, and quality of walking and cycling infrastructure in the area.

Qualitative Feedback – Themes arising in relation to Public Transport:

Based on the responses, here are the top 10 emerging themes regarding public transportation:

1. **Reliability and Timeliness:** Some responses highlight that public transport is generally reliable, with buses and trains running on time, though others report issues with timeliness and inconsistency.
2. **Cost and Affordability:** Cost is a major concern, with mentions of high fares and issues with affordability. Some appreciate free transport options, such as bus passes for seniors or disabled individuals, while others find the service too expensive.
3. **Availability and Frequency:** There is a mix of feedback on availability. While some find the service regular and accessible, others mention infrequent service, limited routes, and difficulties in finding timetables.
4. **Cleanliness and Modernity:** Positive comments often mention that buses and trains are clean and modern. However, there are also complaints about maintenance issues and outdated facilities.
5. **Accessibility and Convenience:** Accessibility for disabled passengers and overall convenience are discussed. Some find public transport easy to use, especially with accessibility passes, while others face challenges with service availability and accessibility.
6. **Environmental Impact:** Some responses highlight the environmental benefits of using public transport, such as reducing petrol costs and having a lower impact compared to driving.
7. **Infrastructure and Service Quality:** Feedback includes both praise for well-maintained infrastructure and criticism of poor service quality, such as unreliable services and lack of proper connections.
8. **Local vs. Long-Distance Travel:** There are mixed reviews on local versus long-distance travel. Some find local buses and trains suitable, while others struggle with connections to other towns and cities.
9. **Impact on Daily Life:** Public transport's role in daily life is mentioned, with some seeing it as a useful alternative to driving, while others find it restrictive or inadequate for their needs.
10. **General Sentiment and Usage:** Overall sentiment ranges from positive experiences, particularly with free transport and regular service, to frustration with limited routes, high costs, and poor service.

These themes reflect a range of experiences and opinions about public transportation, including its effectiveness, accessibility, cost, and impact on users' daily lives.

Concerns arising for Public Transport:

Based on the responses, here are the top 10 emerging themes related to public transport:

1. **Cost and Affordability:** Many respondents are concerned about the high cost of public transport. They find it expensive compared to other forms of travel, and this is seen as a major barrier to using public transport.
2. **Frequency and Reliability:** There is a strong demand for more frequent and reliable services. Issues include infrequent buses and trains, unreliable schedules, and the impact of cruise ship seasons on availability.
3. **Accessibility and Coverage:** Respondents seek better accessibility, including more bus stops, expanded routes to smaller towns and rural areas, and improved connections between different modes of transport.
4. **Impact of Cruise Ship Season:** The influx of cruise ship passengers significantly affects the availability and reliability of public transport, making it difficult for locals to use the service during peak seasons.
5. **Quality of Service:** Feedback includes a mix of positive and negative comments on service quality. While some find the buses and trains clean and modern, others experience problems such as broken shelters, inadequate seating, and poor maintenance.
6. **Information and Communication:** There are concerns about the lack of clear and accessible information regarding timetables and service updates. Better access to up-to-date information and improved communication about service disruptions are needed.
7. **Infrastructure Issues:** Problems with infrastructure, such as broken bus shelters, inadequate signage, and poorly maintained roads, are frequently mentioned. These issues affect the overall experience and accessibility of public transport.
8. **Direct and Efficient Routes:** Many respondents desire more direct routes that avoid unnecessary transfers and reduce travel time. There is also a call for better integration between buses and trains.
9. **Service Expansion and Improvement:** Requests include expanding service hours, particularly late into the evening, and improving the frequency and reliability of buses and trains. There is also a desire for more affordable and user-friendly services.
10. **Environmental and Social Impact:** Some responses highlight the benefits of public transport for reducing environmental impact and offering a more sustainable alternative to car travel. There is also mention of the need for public transport to better serve both residents and visitors.

These themes capture a wide range of concerns and suggestions about public transport, reflecting the need for improvements in cost, frequency, accessibility, and overall service quality.

Qualitative Feedback – Themes arising in relation to Traffic & Parking:

From the responses, here are the top 10 themes related to traffic and parking:

1. **Traffic Volume and Congestion:** Many responses indicate that traffic is generally light and not too busy in the area. Some mention specific issues such as heavy traffic during school pick-up times or general dissatisfaction with traffic levels.
2. **Parking Availability:** A common theme is that parking is ample, particularly in town centers and around local shops. Many appreciate the availability of free or inexpensive parking.
3. **School Parking Issues:** There are concerns about school-related parking congestion, where parents start parking early to secure a spot, leading to difficulties in picking up children safely.
4. **Speed Limits and Traffic Laws:** Responses frequently mention that speed limits are adhered to and that the 20 mph limit in certain areas has improved safety.
5. **Parking Quality:** Many respondents appreciate that parking provisions are well-maintained and often free. There are also mentions of sufficient off-street parking.
6. **Air Quality:** Some responses highlight that traffic does not appear to significantly impact air quality, noting low pollution levels along main routes.
7. **Ease of Parking:** The ease of finding parking spaces, especially near shops and local amenities, is positively noted. There is a sense of convenience related to parking accessibility.
8. **Parking for Disabled Individuals:** Positive comments are made about parking spaces being available and accessible for those with Blue Badges, making it easier for disabled individuals.
9. **Traffic Speed and Safety:** Responses mention that traffic speeds are generally safe and that most drivers adhere to speed limits, contributing to overall safety on the roads.
10. **Parking and Traffic Issues:** Some responses express dissatisfaction with the overall parking situation, including too many cars leading to narrower roads and insufficient parking spaces in certain areas.

These themes reflect a mixture of positive experiences with parking and traffic, alongside specific concerns about school parking, traffic congestion, and the adequacy of parking provisions.

Concerns arising for Traffic & Parking:

From the responses provided, here are the top 10 themes related to traffic and parking:

1. **Parking Availability and Quality:**
 - **Free Parking:** Many appreciate the availability of free parking in towns and around local amenities.
 - **Limited Parking:** There are concerns about limited parking spaces, particularly in busy areas like town centers and schools. Requests for more parking spaces and better allocation are common.
2. **Speed Limits and Traffic Flow:**
 - **20 mph Speed Limits:** Some respondents feel that the new 20 mph speed limits are too low, causing traffic jams and delays. They also mention that these limits can be challenging to adhere to due to road conditions and vehicle power.
3. **Road Conditions:**
 - **Potholes and Road Repairs:** A frequent complaint is the poor condition of roads, including numerous potholes and the need for better maintenance. This impacts driving conditions and safety.
4. **Traffic Management Issues:**
 - **Obstructive Parking:** Problems with delivery vehicles blocking roads, vehicles parked on pavements, and general obstruction are noted as significant issues affecting traffic flow and pedestrian safety.
5. **Cyclist and Pedestrian Safety:**
 - **Cyclists and Cycle Paths:** Concerns about cyclists riding inappropriately on roads rather than using designated cycle lanes. Requests for better cycle paths are mentioned.
 - **Pedestrian Safety:** Issues with vehicles parked on pavements and the need for more zebra crossings to ensure pedestrian safety.

6. Parking Enforcement and Regulations:

- **Abuse of Disabled Bays:** Complaints about people using disabled parking spaces without proper authorization.
- **Enforcement:** There are calls for better enforcement of parking regulations, including monitoring parking on pavements and adhering to speed limits.

7. Traffic Calming Measures:

- **Speed Bumps and Traffic Lights:** Requests for better traffic calming measures, such as improved signage for speed bumps and more traffic lights at key junctions to enhance safety.

8. Parking for Residents:

- **Resident Parking:** The need for more residential parking spaces and improved management of parking permits is highlighted, especially in areas with high car usage.

9. Public Transport and Alternatives:

- **Improving Public Transport:** Some responses suggest that better public transport options could reduce reliance on cars and alleviate parking issues.

10. Traffic Accidents and Blackspots:

- **Accident Blackspots:** Concerns about high-accident areas, particularly at junctions with major roads like the A9. There are suggestions for more roundabouts and better traffic management to address these issues.

These themes reflect a broad range of concerns related to traffic and parking, including the need for better infrastructure, more effective enforcement, and improved safety measures for both drivers and pedestrians.

Qualitative Feedback – Themes arising in relation to Streets, Squares & Buildings:

Based on the responses, here are the top 10 themes related to the appearance and maintenance of public spaces and buildings:

1. **Scenic and Green Spaces:**

- **Green Spaces and Parks:** Many respondents appreciate the presence of green spaces, parks, and well-maintained areas like the rose garden. These contribute to a positive aesthetic and provide recreational areas.
- **Historic and Natural Beauty:** The scenic and historic features of towns, including old buildings and historic sites, are valued for their charm and character.

2. **Maintenance of Streets and Public Spaces:**

- **Well-Kept Streets:** Streets are generally seen as clean and well-maintained, reflecting a sense of community pride. Efforts like grass cutting and litter management contribute to this perception.
- **Problems with Maintenance:** Some respondents highlight issues with road conditions, including potholes and uneven surfaces, which detract from the overall appearance.

3. **Historic Buildings and Architecture:**

- **Historic Preservation:** There is appreciation for the preservation of historic buildings and the overall architectural character of towns.
- **Dilapidated Buildings:** Conversely, some areas suffer from poorly maintained or derelict buildings, which negatively impact the visual appeal.

4. **Community Efforts and Local Initiatives:**

- **Voluntary Maintenance:** Positive mentions of local efforts such as maintaining hanging baskets, cleaning up streets, and preserving green spaces.
- **Community Pride:** The general community spirit and pride contribute to well-kept areas and public spaces.

5. **Litter and Pollution:**

- **Litter Issues:** Some areas face problems with litter and waste, affecting the cleanliness and attractiveness of public spaces.
- **Flooding and Waste:** Frequent flooding and issues with waste management are noted as areas needing improvement.

6. **Public Space Features:**

- **Good Amenities:** Features such as well-lit streets, good crossings, and a variety of shops contribute to the positive aspects of public spaces.
- **Safety and Accessibility:** Ensuring that streets are safe, well-lit, and accessible for all users, including those with disabilities.

7. **Parking and Accessibility:**

- **Parking Facilities:** There are mixed views on parking, with some appreciating the availability of parking spaces, while others note issues related to accessibility and space.
- **Accessibility Issues:** Concerns about parking on pavements and accessibility for disabled individuals.

8. **Visual Appeal and Aesthetics:**

- **Aesthetic Improvements:** The visual appeal of public spaces, including the use of murals and colorful features, is valued.
- **Neglected Areas:** Areas that are not visually appealing due to poor maintenance or lack of attention.

9. **Local Character and Heritage:**

- **Maintaining Local Character:** The preservation of local character through the maintenance of traditional buildings and historical sites is seen as positive.
- **Lack of Improvement:** Some feel that efforts to enhance local character and heritage are lacking in certain areas.

10. **Road Conditions and Infrastructure:**

- **Infrastructure Issues:** Problems with road surfaces, such as potholes and poor maintenance, affect the overall quality of public spaces.
- **Need for Better Roads:** Calls for improvements to road conditions and infrastructure to enhance the safety and appearance of streets.

These themes illustrate a mix of appreciation for the scenic and historic aspects of public spaces, as well as concerns about maintenance, litter, and infrastructure issues.

Concerns arising for Streets, Squares & Buildings:

From the responses, the top 10 themes concerning the maintenance, aesthetics, and functionality of public spaces and buildings are:

1. **Decline in High Street Vitality:**

- **Empty Shops and Ghost Towns:** Many respondents express concern about the high streets turning into ghost towns with vacant shops and a loss of community feel.
- **Lack of Diversity:** There's a call for more diverse shops and the return of street markets to rejuvenate the high streets.

2. **Maintenance Issues:**

- **Poor Building Maintenance:** Concerns about poorly maintained buildings, both residential and commercial, affecting the overall appearance of towns.
- **Weeds and Overgrowth:** Significant issues with weeds, overgrown walkways, and general neglect of public spaces.

3. **Litter and Cleanliness:**

- **Litter Problems:** Litter, including dog mess and general refuse, is a major issue, impacting the cleanliness and attractiveness of streets and parks.
- **Insufficient Waste Management:** Requests for more bins and better management of waste, particularly in public areas.

4. **Public Spaces and Amenities:**

- **Need for Improved Public Spaces:** Suggestions for improving public gardens, adding more benches, and enhancing local green spaces.
- **Lack of Maintenance in Public Areas:** Issues with the maintenance of public spaces such as parks and waterfront areas.

5. **Road Conditions and Infrastructure:**

- **Potholes and Poor Road Conditions:** Frequent mention of potholes and poor road surfaces needing urgent repair and maintenance.
- **Blocked Drains and Pathways:** Problems with blocked drains and uneven pathways that affect usability.

6. **Safety and Security:**

- **Perceived Safety Issues:** Concerns about safety in certain areas, including feelings of unease around pubs and the need for improved security measures.
- **Inadequate Street Lighting:** Calls for better street lighting to enhance safety and visibility.

7. **Community and Local Engagement:**

- **Lack of Community Feel:** Some feel that the community spirit has diminished and that more local engagement is needed.
- **Voluntary Efforts:** Positive mentions of local voluntary work to maintain and beautify public spaces.

8. **Council and Property Management:**

- **Council Property Issues:** Complaints about council-owned properties and the need for significant improvements and maintenance.
- **Council Services and Investment:** Requests for better investment and services from the council, especially in non-Inverness areas.

9. **Accessibility and Infrastructure Improvements:**

- **Better Accessibility Features:** Calls for improvements such as more drop kerbs and better signage to enhance accessibility for all users.
- **Improvements to Infrastructure:** General suggestions for upgrading infrastructure, including road surfaces and public facilities.

10. **Historic and Aesthetic Value:**

- **Preservation of Historic Buildings:** Appreciation for historic buildings and efforts to maintain their aesthetic value.
- **Aesthetic Improvements Needed:** Criticisms of the current aesthetic state of some areas, including suggestions for more greenery and better upkeep of old buildings.

These themes reflect a mix of concerns about the decline in public space quality and vibrancy, coupled with specific requests for maintenance, community engagement, and improvements to infrastructure and safety.

Qualitative Feedback – Nature & Parks

From the provided comments, here are the top 10 recurring themes:

1. **Access to Nature and Green Spaces:** Many comments mention easy access to nature, countryside, woods, and green spaces, emphasizing the availability of natural areas within or near the towns and villages.
2. **Parks Quality and Availability:** There are mixed feelings about parks. Some people note that parks are available, while others feel there are too few or that existing parks are poorly maintained and not well-used.
3. **Beaches:** Several comments highlight proximity to beaches, though opinions differ about their usability. Some mention difficult access or rocky terrain, while others appreciate the beach as a valuable natural asset.
4. **Walking and Cycling Paths:** A number of comments mention established walking routes, trails, and paths, including well-maintained ones in woodland and countryside areas, though safety issues on roadsides are noted.
5. **Wildlife and Biodiversity:** People appreciate the local wildlife, including birds, wildflowers, and animals, viewing these natural elements as part of the beauty of the environment.
6. **Mental and Physical Well-being:** Many comments emphasize the positive impact of nature on mental health, relaxation, and physical exercise, valuing green spaces as a way to unwind and stay healthy.
7. **Community Involvement in Nature:** Some mention local communities maintaining green spaces and woods, while criticizing the lack of proper maintenance from authorities like the Council.
8. **Forestry and Conservation Concerns:** People express concerns about preserving unspoiled natural areas, particularly the impact of farming practices like the use of fertilizers and insecticides.
9. **Rural Living:** A sense of pride in rural living and the connection to the countryside is evident, with comments reflecting enjoyment of the peace, beauty, and open space of rural areas.
10. **Recreational Opportunities:** Spaces like parks and natural areas are valued for offering recreational activities, including dog walking, play areas for children, and scenic walks for enjoyment and relaxation.

Concerns arising for Nature & Parks

Here are the top 10 themes from the comments provided:

1. **Improved Parks and Play Areas:** Many comments call for better-maintained parks with more facilities for children, including play equipment, seating, and recreational areas like bike and skate parks.
2. **Cleanliness and Maintenance:** Frequent requests are made for more bins, cleaner parks and beaches, regular upkeep of public areas, and maintenance of footpaths and car parks.
3. **Dog Fouling and Waste Management:** Several comments express frustration about dog fouling and emphasize the need for more dog waste bins and stricter enforcement of rules to keep parks clean.
4. **Walking and Cycling Paths:** Many people suggest creating or improving walking and cycling routes with better signposting, safer paths, and more connections between parks and towns.
5. **Beach Access and Cleanliness:** The beach is often mentioned as needing better access for the public, including paths and facilities like toilets, as well as efforts to keep it clean and usable.
6. **Preservation of Green Spaces and Wildlife:** Concerns are raised about the loss of natural areas to development, with some calling for protection of wildlife, woodlands, and ancient trees.
7. **Accessibility for All:** There is a strong desire for more inclusive and accessible spaces, including easy-to-walk paths for people with disabilities, and facilities for families and the elderly.
8. **Reduction of Overdevelopment:** Many comments express concern about the impact of commercial and residential development on green spaces, wildlife, and the natural environment, particularly wind farms and other infrastructure.
9. **Community Amenities:** Suggestions include adding more community facilities such as public toilets, seating areas, cafes, and areas for community events like summer fairs or concerts in parks.
10. **Environmental Stewardship:** Several comments emphasize letting spaces grow more wild, reducing mowing, creating wildflower areas, and fostering biodiversity by allowing natural regeneration to support pollinators and wildlife.

Qualitative Feedback – Parks and Recreation

Based on the provided text, here are the top 10 themes that emerge:

1. **Availability of Outdoor Spaces:** There is a lot of green space, natural beaches, woodlands, and parks in the area, offering opportunities for leisure and play.
2. **Facilities for Kids:** Some areas provide well-maintained play parks, skate parks, and bike tracks, though others lack proper facilities. Some places have new play equipment, but accessibility and maintenance vary.
3. **Maintenance Issues:** While some outdoor areas and parks are well-maintained, others suffer from neglect, broken equipment, vandalism, or being in disrepair, affecting their usability.
4. **Rural Accessibility:** In certain villages, kids lack accessible play areas nearby, with the closest parks often being miles away. This impacts opportunities for children's leisure and community engagement.
5. **Community Engagement:** Active local communities contribute to maintaining parks and green spaces, creating positive environments through their efforts. This community-driven upkeep helps promote sociability and mental health.
6. **Sporting Facilities:** Well-respected rugby and football clubs, along with ample open spaces and fields, provide good quality facilities for sports and physical activities.
7. **Safety Concerns:** Some spaces, such as basketball courts, are marred by broken glass or lack safety measures, reducing their appeal for families and children.
8. **Diverse Natural Resources:** The area benefits from natural terrain such as beaches, forests, and natural open spaces, but some feel there's not much variety in the types of outdoor landscapes.
9. **Social and Mental Health Benefits:** Access to outdoor spaces and activities contributes positively to mental health, reduces loneliness, and promotes social interaction between children, parents, and the community.
10. **Unequal Distribution of Facilities:** There are disparities between different villages, with some having no facilities or playparks while others have good equipment and well-maintained areas, highlighting inequality in access to leisure resources.

Concerns arising for Parks and Recreation

Here are the top 10 themes that emerge from the comments:

1. **Lack of Maintenance:** Many parks and leisure facilities are poorly maintained, with outdated equipment, litter, and overgrowth. Requests for regular maintenance and cleaning are common, as many parks have fallen into disrepair.
2. **Removal and Neglect of Facilities:** Several parks and play areas have been removed, and existing ones are often left unattended. Equipment has been dismantled by councils without being replaced, leading to a lack of spaces for children to play.
3. **Need for Investment:** There's a call for more investment from councils to rebuild and maintain parks, with a focus on improving spaces for children and communities, such as upgrading play areas, benches, and toilets.
4. **Limited Play Spaces for Different Age Groups:** A lack of spaces for teenagers and older children has been highlighted, contributing to anti-social behavior. There's a desire for areas designed specifically for teens, as well as for older adults.
5. **Safety Concerns:** Local outdoor areas feel unsafe, particularly at night, with issues like vandalism, broken equipment, and poor lighting. There are also concerns about accessibility and safety for children and elderly people.
6. **Impact of Dog Waste:** Dog mess in public spaces is a frequent issue, with calls for more bins, restrictions on dog access, and better enforcement of rules to keep play areas clean and safe.
7. **Desire for More Green Spaces and Community Areas:** There is a strong demand for well-maintained green spaces with trees, flowers, and accessible paths, as well as community-focused areas with seating, shelter, and amenities like cafes and toilets.
8. **Facilities for Sports and Recreation:** Tennis courts, running tracks, and other sports facilities are often underused or neglected. Requests for upgraded or new sports facilities, including skate and bike parks, are frequent.
9. **Poor Drainage and Muddy Conditions:** Poorly drained parks and muddy conditions limit the usability of many areas, particularly after rain. Calls for better drainage, boardwalks, and paths to improve accessibility are common.
10. **Community Involvement and Support:** There's a push for more support for local communities to manage and maintain parks and recreational spaces, as they are better suited to understand and address the needs of local residents.

Qualitative Feedback – Facilities and Services

Here are the top 10 themes from the comments:

1. **Accessibility of Services:** Many people highlight good accessibility to essential services such as libraries, shops, and health centers, although some mention having to rely on nearby towns for access.
2. **Quality and Availability of Schools:** Schools receive mixed feedback. Some praise local primary schools, while others express concern about poor conditions, overcrowded buildings, and limited subject offerings, particularly in secondary schools.
3. **Shops and Retail Options:** While some people feel there are enough shops, others complain about a lack of variety, especially for clothing, or limited local options, forcing them to travel for better choices.
4. **Limited Services in Rural Areas:** Several comments emphasize the lack of local services in villages and rural areas, including a shortage of shops, medical services, and public transportation, making life difficult without a car.
5. **Public Libraries:** Libraries are often praised for being accessible, offering good community activities, and having helpful staff, but some feel libraries in their area are too small or have limited hours.
6. **Leisure and Sports Facilities:** Mixed feedback on sports and leisure facilities, with some noting good access to swimming pools and gyms, while others report poor maintenance, limited opening hours, or a lack of facilities altogether.
7. **Community Halls and Local Spaces:** Community halls and spaces like Carnegie Halls are valued, especially in villages, where they serve as central hubs for local activities and gatherings.
8. **Transport and Connectivity Issues:** Several comments highlight poor public transport options, particularly in rural areas, which limits access to services and forces reliance on cars.
9. **Challenges with Health Services:** There are concerns about limited access to GP appointments, distant pharmacies, and the absence of medical facilities in some communities.
10. **Improvement Over Time:** Some feel services are improving, citing recent developments like the construction of new schools, better access to sports facilities, or improving shopping options in nearby towns.

Concerns arising for Facilities and Services

Here are the top 10 themes from the comments:

1. **Lack of Youth Services and Spaces:** A recurring issue is the need for more "third spaces" like clubs, sports facilities, or social spaces for young people to reduce antisocial behavior and provide better engagement opportunities.
2. **Decline in School Quality:** Many express dissatisfaction with the state of schools, both in terms of physical infrastructure and the quality of education. There's concern about overcrowded classes, lack of teachers, and insufficient pupil support.
3. **Limited and Inconvenient Services:** Many comment on poor opening hours for libraries, gyms, and leisure centers, making it hard for working individuals and families to access services. There's also a need for more doctors and better healthcare availability.
4. **Deterioration of High Streets:** Many feel that their local high streets are in decline, with empty shops, an overabundance of beauty salons and takeaways, and limited variety in retail, which discourages both residents and tourists.
5. **Need for More Local Businesses:** Calls for more local shops and businesses, particularly independent or diverse retail options, are frequent. Some suggest community-run shops or more investment to attract businesses to the area.
6. **Recreational Facilities for All Ages:** There's a demand for better indoor sports facilities, pools, and clubs for both children and adults. Many feel that local facilities are outdated, poorly maintained, and lack suitable opening hours.
7. **Public Transport and Accessibility:** Several comments mention the lack of reliable public transport, especially in rural areas, limiting access to shops, services, and schools. Safer walking and cycling routes are also highlighted.
8. **Inadequate Healthcare Access:** Many report difficulties in accessing GP services, with long waits for appointments and limited availability, particularly in more remote areas.
9. **Infrastructure and Community Investment:** People express frustration about aging infrastructure, with outdated school buildings, lack of investment in town halls, and poor maintenance of public spaces.
10. **Desire for Chain Stores:** Some express a desire for popular chain stores and fast-food outlets like McDonald's, which they feel would improve the local economy and provide more variety in shopping and dining options.

Qualitative Feedback – Work and Local Economy

Here are the top 10 themes from the comments:

1. **Limited Local Employment Opportunities:** Many express that there are not enough jobs in the local area, especially in smaller towns and villages, and many must travel to larger towns like Inverness for work.
2. **Youth Employment and Apprenticeships:** Several comments highlight that there are good opportunities for young people, particularly in apprenticeships, which seem to be increasing in availability.
3. **Volunteering Opportunities:** Volunteering is mentioned as a positive alternative to paid employment, with a variety of local charities and services offering positions.
4. **Job Security in Local Employment:** Those who are employed locally, especially in sectors like healthcare (e.g., NHS), feel a sense of job security, even though jobs might be limited.
5. **Commuting to Larger Towns:** Due to the scarcity of local jobs, many mention commuting to Inverness or other larger areas for work. The area's proximity to major roads like the A9 makes commuting easier for some.
6. **Remote and Work-from-Home Jobs:** The ability to work from home, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic, is seen as a positive development, allowing people to remain in rural areas while accessing employment.
7. **Poor Public Transport:** Lack of reliable public transport is a barrier to employment, especially for jobs involving shift work, as many jobs require having your own transport to access them.
8. **Job Availability vs. Wages:** While there are jobs available, particularly in certain sectors like oil and gas, other sectors are characterized by low wages, making local employment less appealing.
9. **Language Barriers in Local Jobs:** Some mention that language barriers, such as needing to speak Polish for certain jobs, can be a barrier for local residents seeking employment.
10. **Retirement and Volunteering:** Retired individuals note that there are still opportunities for those who wish to volunteer and remain active in the community, particularly in sectors like food banks or community services.

Concerns arising for Work and Local Economy

Here are the top 10 themes from the comments:

1. **Lack of Skilled and White-Collar Jobs:** There is a significant concern about the lack of high-quality, skilled jobs for young people in the Highlands. Many feel that employment opportunities in white-collar professions are based on connections rather than qualifications, limiting career prospects.
2. **Need for Local Jobs and Businesses:** Many comments express the need to attract more businesses to the area to create local jobs. There is a desire for a revitalized manufacturing industry and more diversity in available workplaces to reduce the need to commute.
3. **Transport Challenges:** Poor public transport and high commuting costs are frequently mentioned as barriers to accessing jobs. More reliable, frequent, and affordable transport options are needed to help people get to work, particularly those in rural areas.
4. **Underpaid Jobs and Limited Opportunities for Young People:** Young workers often face underpayment, and there are limited opportunities for apprenticeships and career development. Improving wages and creating more training programs are seen as essential to encourage youth retention.
5. **Volunteering and Training Opportunities:** Some suggest a need for more accessible volunteer opportunities and training programs, especially those that cater to individuals with transportation or childcare challenges. Expanding options for those who cannot drive is also highlighted.
6. **Seasonal and Low-Paying Jobs:** Many jobs in the Highlands are seasonal, particularly due to tourism, and are not sufficient to sustain young people or families. The need for stable, long-term employment is emphasized to retain workers in the area.
7. **Hybrid and Remote Work:** Flexible work environments, including remote or hybrid work opportunities, are seen as a positive change, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic. People express that this flexibility could help individuals balance work with family or other responsibilities.
8. **Public Investment and Support for Local Development:** There is a call for more investment in local infrastructure and services, such as social housing and transportation, to make the Highlands a more viable place for people to live and work long-term.
9. **Improving Accessibility to Apprenticeships and Education:** Ensuring young people have access to apprenticeships, further education, and transport links to those opportunities is critical. There is a concern that without these opportunities, young people will leave the area for better prospects elsewhere.
10. **Need for More Information and Awareness:** People express frustration with the lack of awareness about local job opportunities, training programs, and volunteering positions. Improved communication and advertising of these opportunities would benefit the community.

Qualitative Feedback – Housing and Community

Here are the top 10 themes from the comments regarding housing and community:

1. **High-Quality New Build Housing:** There is general praise for the new mid-market and social housing developments. Many see the new builds, especially those around the academy, as positive, with good quality construction and accessibility for different needs.
2. **Community Spirit and Friendly Atmosphere:** A strong theme is the sense of community, with people often commenting on how lovely and friendly the residents are, and how people are ready to engage and support each other.
3. **Diverse Housing Options:** There is a mix of social housing, private properties, and new builds available, which provides variety in terms of size, style, and affordability. This diversity allows for a range of demographics, from families to retirees.
4. **Need for Upgrades to Older Housing:** Despite the new builds, there are concerns that older social housing is run down and has not been properly maintained over the years. Several people express a need for upgrading older housing stock.
5. **Antisocial Behavior and Problematic Neighbors:** While community spirit is often praised, some comments highlight issues with antisocial behavior in certain areas, particularly in council housing. Frustration is expressed about the local council not addressing these problems effectively.
6. **Limited Social Housing Availability:** There is a shortage of social housing, with some people feeling they have little hope of securing a council house, despite the need for affordable options in the community.
7. **Poor Infrastructure to Support Housing Growth:** While new homes have been built, there is a concern that services and infrastructure, such as transport and community facilities, have not kept pace with housing development, leading to frustration.
8. **Variety of Housing Types:** The area is noted for having a range of house types, from starter homes to larger villas, which appeals to different segments of the population, including young families and older individuals.
9. **Disparities in Housing Quality:** While new builds and some older housing are seen as high quality, others feel that the local council housing is poor and needs modernization. This creates a divide between well-maintained homes and those in disrepair.
10. **Rural and Peaceful Living:** Many people appreciate the peace and quiet of the rural communities in the area, highlighting the tranquillity and the overall pleasant environment for living.

Concerns arising for Housing and Community

Here are the top 10 themes based on the comments regarding housing and community:

1. **Outdated Social Housing:** Many comments highlight the poor condition of existing social housing, mentioning issues like mould, lack of maintenance, and houses that have been neglected over time. Renovation and upgrades are seen as urgent needs.
2. **Lack of Affordable and Social Housing:** There is a significant concern over the lack of affordable housing for local residents, particularly for young people and first-time buyers. Many locals feel priced out of the housing market due to rising prices and the influx of people buying second or third homes.
3. **Shortage of Rental Properties:** There is a scarcity of rental opportunities, which is affecting both local residents and seasonal workers. This is exacerbated by the rise of short-term holiday lets, pushing rental prices up and limiting availability.
4. **Antisocial Behavior:** Several comments refer to high levels of antisocial behavior in certain areas, with some residents feeling isolated and unsupported. There are concerns that council tenants are not maintaining their homes and gardens, which affects the entire community.
5. **Isolated Communities:** Some areas, such as Milnafua, are described as isolated within the larger community, leading to feelings of exclusion and a lack of integration. More community events and spaces are suggested to help bridge this gap.
6. **Demand for Smaller and Accessible Homes:** There is a need for more diverse housing options, particularly smaller homes (e.g., 1-bedroom flats) and accessible housing for the elderly and disabled. Many existing homes do not meet the needs of all residents, particularly in terms of accessibility.
7. **Emphasis on Affordable and Social Housing:** Some respondents feel there is too much focus on building affordable housing for social needs, which they believe reduces opportunities for local residents to buy quality homes. A balance between private and social housing is desired to raise the overall demographic.
8. **Impact of Holiday Homes and Second Houses:** The rise of holiday homes and second properties is seen as a major issue, limiting the availability of homes for locals and pushing prices up. This trend is believed to be negatively affecting the long-term sustainability of communities.
9. **Need for Community Interaction and Spaces:** Many feel there is a lack of opportunities for communities to come together, and more community events, gardens, and spaces are suggested as ways to reduce social issues and foster a stronger sense of community.
10. **Improvement in Housing Management:** There is a call for better housing management from local councils, including regular inspections, better maintenance, and more accountability for tenants who do not take care of their properties. Improving housing management is seen as crucial for maintaining the overall quality of life in the area.

Qualitative Feedback – Social Interaction

Here are the top 10 themes based on the comments regarding social interaction and meeting places in the community:

1. **Cafes and Restaurants as Social Hubs:** Many people mention local cafes and restaurants as key places to meet friends, have coffee, and engage socially. These are seen as vital for community interaction and mental health.
2. **Youth Centres and Clubs:** Youth-oriented spaces like the Alness Youth Centre and other clubs are appreciated for providing young people with places to meet, socialize, and stay engaged in the community.
3. **Outdoor Spaces:** Beaches, parks, and mountains are valued as outdoor meeting spots, offering opportunities for casual social interactions in a natural setting.
4. **Community Events:** Community-organized events, particularly through local development trusts and centers like the Mercat Centre, are seen as valuable for bringing people together and fostering social connections.
5. **Lack of Meeting Places:** There are several mentions of a shortage of indoor public spaces or cafes in certain areas where people can gather and meet. Some feel that there are limited options outside of existing cafes and clubs.
6. **Mental Health and Wellbeing:** Many comments emphasize how socializing, especially through cafes or community events, plays a critical role in mental health, reducing isolation, and combating depression.
7. **Welcoming Community:** The general friendliness and welcoming nature of local people are frequently mentioned, contributing to the ease of socializing in informal settings.
8. **Intergenerational Activities:** While there are activities available for both youth (like clubs) and older adults (like knitting groups or bowling clubs), there seems to be a gap in activities that cater to middle-aged adults or those in between.
9. **Limited Council Support:** Some express dissatisfaction with the local council's lack of support for social venues and community spaces, feeling that the council could do more to facilitate social interaction.
10. **Importance of Community Spaces for Health:** The connection between community engagement and physical and mental health is highlighted, with respondents noting that socializing helps them stay mentally active and reduces loneliness.

Concerns arising for Social Interaction

Here are the top 10 themes from the feedback regarding community meeting places and opportunities for social interaction:

1. **Lack of Affordable Meeting Spaces:** Many comments highlight the need for more affordable, accessible places for community gatherings, such as cafes, halls, and casual meeting spaces. Existing venues are often seen as too expensive or inaccessible.
2. **Limited Cafes and Restaurants:** While cafes and restaurants exist, they are often considered too expensive or limited in number, with a desire for more affordable options. Some express frustration with the lack of family-friendly and casual dining spots.
3. **Lack of Outdoor Social Spaces:** There is a notable absence of well-maintained parks and green spaces where people can gather and socialize. Suggestions include adding more benches, picnic areas, and better-maintained open spaces.
4. **Community Halls and Public Buildings:** Several people mention the need for community halls and public buildings to be open more often, especially during the day, and to be accessible to all age groups. Many halls are in poor condition and require refurbishment.
5. **Need for Activities for Adults:** There is a demand for more social activities for adults, including clubs, bingo, whist drives, and events targeted at older adults, not just youth. This includes a desire for social events to be better publicized.
6. **Social Isolation and Mental Health:** Social isolation and its impact on mental health are recurring themes, with many calling for more community-driven efforts to combat loneliness, especially through safe, regular social spaces and events.
7. **Poor Public Transport and Accessibility:** Transport limitations, especially for those without cars, make it difficult for people to access existing social facilities. Improved public transport and cycle paths are frequently mentioned as solutions.
8. **Refurbishment of Community Spaces:** Many people feel that community venues such as the West End Hall and other local spaces are in urgent need of refurbishment to make them more welcoming and useful for social interaction.
9. **More Activities for Teenagers and Young People:** There's a desire for more clubs and activities specifically for teenagers, with concerns that current provisions are limited or inaccessible to this age group.
10. **Outdoor Amenities and Maintenance:** The lack of toilets, seating, and overall maintenance in outdoor spaces like the beach and parks is seen as a barrier to socializing. Better facilities would make these spaces more attractive for gatherings.

Qualitative Feedback – Having a Say

Here are the top 10 themes based on the feedback regarding community involvement and local governance:

1. **Local Support and Engagement:** Many respondents appreciate the support from local councillors, community council members, and youth workers, highlighting their proactive involvement in community matters.
2. **Feeling Valued and Empowered:** There's a strong sentiment that being listened to and having one's opinions valued contributes to a sense of belonging and empowerment within the community.
3. **Limited Engagement Opportunities:** Some residents express frustration with the limited avenues for involvement, feeling that despite the existence of meetings and councils, meaningful engagement is lacking.
4. **Perception of Council Disinterest:** A recurring theme is the perception that Highland Council and local government bodies are not genuinely interested in the needs and well-being of the community, leading to feelings of neglect.
5. **Community Organizations and Meetings:** Many people acknowledge the role of community councils, local clubs, and organized meetings in facilitating community engagement, although participation may depend on awareness.
6. **Need for Better Communication:** There is a call for improved communication regarding how to get involved and where to express opinions, as some feel that current channels are ineffective or poorly publicized.
7. **Skepticism About Impact:** Some respondents are skeptical about whether their input truly influences decision-making, citing past experiences where consultations seemed to have no tangible outcomes.
8. **Participation in Local Events:** Several comments highlight the importance of local events, school involvement, and community newsletters as ways to stay connected and informed about community matters.
9. **Diverse Opinions and Inclusion:** The desire for a community that reflects diverse opinions and not just the views of the council is expressed, indicating a need for broader representation in decision-making.
10. **Challenges in Decision-Making Processes:** There's a perception that decisions are often made without adequate consideration of community input, with many feeling that local and central governments are out of touch with residents' needs.

Concerns arising for Having a Say

Here are the top 10 themes from the feedback regarding community involvement and local governance:

1. **Perceived Lack of Listening:** Many respondents feel that local councils, particularly Highland Council, do not genuinely listen to community concerns or incorporate feedback into decision-making.
2. **Communication Barriers:** There are significant frustrations around poor communication from local authorities and schools, with calls for better advertisement of meetings, clearer channels for input, and centralized information sources.
3. **Community Disunity:** Participants note a lack of unity among community groups, often citing infighting and a closed-off attitude toward newcomers, which hinders broader participation.
4. **Ineffective Consultations:** Many express skepticism about consultations, feeling that decisions are pre-made and that their input does not lead to meaningful change.
5. **Need for Increased Engagement:** There is a desire for more opportunities for residents to get involved, such as more community elections and greater outreach from local government to encourage participation.
6. **Desire for Action and Follow-Up:** Respondents want to see tangible outcomes from their concerns, emphasizing the importance of follow-up actions after issues are raised.
7. **Vocal Minorities:** The perception that community councils often represent the views of a vocal minority discourages quieter residents from expressing their opinions, leading to a lack of diverse representation.
8. **Calls for Improved Local Governance:** Many advocate for more localized control and decision-making power, arguing that community councils should be better funded and equipped to address local needs.
9. **Need for Open and Inclusive Meetings:** There is a strong preference for in-person meetings where community members feel heard and valued, rather than online consultations that feel impersonal.
10. **Frustration with Local Politics:** A significant number of comments reflect dissatisfaction with the current political climate, describing local politicians as disconnected and unresponsive to the needs of the community.

Qualitative Feedback – Identity and Belonging

Here are the top 10 themes regarding community pride and identity:

1. **Community Spirit and Kindness:** Many respondents express pride in the kindness and supportiveness of local people, highlighting a strong sense of community.
2. **Historical Significance:** The town's rich history, including being the oldest burgh in Scotland and its notable landmarks, contributes to residents' pride.
3. **Natural Beauty:** The area's scenic landscapes, including the Dornoch Firth and local natural environments, are sources of pride and enjoyment for residents.
4. **Identity and Belonging:** A sense of belonging and being part of the community fosters participation and encourages individuals to take care of their surroundings.
5. **Safety and Friendliness:** Many feel that the town is a safe and welcoming place, enhancing its appeal as a residential area.
6. **Community Engagement:** Participation in community activities and volunteerism is emphasized as vital for maintaining a vibrant local culture.
7. **Challenges to Pride:** Some residents express concern that neglect and declining conditions in the area make it harder to feel proud, contrasting past pride with current challenges.
8. **Support for Local Initiatives:** There is appreciation for local organizations and community efforts that strengthen the area and support residents.
9. **Environmental Awareness:** Respecting and caring for the natural environment is seen as crucial for community pride and identity.
10. **Collective Identity:** Despite challenges, many feel that the village retains a unique character and spirit that visitors admire, underscoring a shared sense of identity.

Concerns arising for Identity and Belonging

Here are the top 10 themes based on the feedback:

1. **Negative Perception of Alness:** Young people feel stigmatized about living in Alness, facing judgment from peers in other areas, leading to a sense of pride being diminished.
2. **Housing Concerns:** Calls for better housing options, including more social housing, are prevalent, with residents expressing dissatisfaction with current conditions.
3. **Community Spirit and Engagement:** There is a desire to enhance community spirit and involvement, with suggestions to involve more diverse groups, including those who are often marginalized.
4. **Neglect and Maintenance Issues:** Many residents point out the town's physical decline, including potholes, litter, and poorly maintained public spaces, suggesting that improvements are necessary to foster pride.
5. **Local Amenities and Services:** Concerns about the lack of shops, recreational facilities, and poor-quality schools contribute to a feeling of deprivation in the area.
6. **Mental Health and Safety:** There are calls for better mental health services and safety improvements, with residents expressing anxiety about their well-being in the community.
7. **Environmental Responsibility:** A push for cleaner public spaces, reduced litter, and greater community involvement in maintaining the area is highlighted as crucial for improving local pride.
8. **Community Collaboration:** The need for local groups and initiatives to work together more effectively is emphasized, suggesting that unified efforts could lead to positive change.
9. **Social Issues:** Residents express concerns about drug-related problems and racism, indicating that social challenges need to be addressed to improve community cohesion.
10. **Infrastructure Improvements:** There are requests for better transportation options, road maintenance, and infrastructure to support community needs, particularly for younger and older residents.

Qualitative Feedback – Feeling Safe

Here are the top 10 themes based on the feedback:

1. **General Sense of Safety:** Many residents express feeling safe in their homes and the community, highlighting low crime rates and supportive neighbors.
2. **Community Support:** There's a strong sense of community, with people looking out for each other and being readily available to help when needed.
3. **Mixed Perceptions of Safety:** While many feel secure, some residents cite serious concerns about crime, including drug-related issues and violent incidents, which create anxiety.
4. **Mental Health Benefits:** Feeling safe contributes positively to mental health, allowing residents to relax and enjoy their lives without fear.
5. **Rural Advantage:** The rural setting is noted as a factor in safety, with residents appreciating the peace and quiet that comes with living in a less densely populated area.
6. **Freedom of Movement:** Residents value the ability to walk around freely, day or night, without fear of harassment or attack.
7. **Peace of Mind:** Many express relief in knowing they can leave their doors unlocked or open without concern, contributing to a sense of security.
8. **Visibility of Law Enforcement:** There is a perception that police presence is low, which some residents see as a positive aspect of the community policing itself, while others express concern over the lack of visibility.
9. **Community Cohesion:** The sense of belonging and connection among residents fosters confidence and encourages people to engage more with their surroundings.
10. **Mixed Experiences:** Some feedback reflects confusion or disagreement about safety, indicating that experiences can vary significantly between individuals, highlighting the complexity of community safety perceptions.

Concerns arising for Feeling Safe

Here are the top 10 themes based on the feedback:

1. **Safety Concerns:** Many residents, especially young people, report feeling unsafe in certain areas, particularly when walking alone at night or through poorly lit spaces.
2. **Antisocial Behavior:** There are widespread concerns about antisocial behavior, including vandalism, drug use, and disruptive activities by teenagers, which contribute to feelings of insecurity.
3. **Police Response:** A call for improved response times from police, ambulance, and fire services, with many feeling that current response times are inadequate.
4. **Increased Crime Rates:** Residents report a perceived increase in crime, particularly violent crime, and express a desire for more effective measures to combat it.
5. **Visible Police Presence:** A strong desire for more visible policing, with suggestions for foot patrols and community engagement initiatives to foster better relationships between the police and residents.
6. **Community Responsibility:** Many residents emphasize the need for community members to take responsibility for their surroundings, including tidying up and keeping dogs under control.
7. **Youth Engagement:** There is a belief that providing more activities and safe spaces for teenagers could reduce antisocial behavior and aggression in the community.
8. **Local Infrastructure:** Concerns about the state of roads, footpaths, and public spaces, with requests for improvements to enhance safety and community pride.
9. **Substance Abuse Issues:** Residents highlight issues with drug use and the presence of drug dealers, calling for stricter enforcement and intervention strategies.
10. **Community Cohesion:** Some feedback indicates a desire for stronger community ties and initiatives that promote understanding and cooperation among residents to foster a safer environment.

Qualitative Feedback – Care and Maintenance

Here are the top 5 themes based on the feedback:

1. **Community Involvement:** Residents express a willingness to engage in community efforts like tidy-up days, but frustration persists over ongoing littering and neglect.
2. **Housing Conditions:** There are significant concerns about the state of housing, with many properties falling into disrepair, including boarded-up windows and poorly maintained tenant properties.
3. **Pride in the Environment:** A well-maintained environment fosters community pride and improves residents' mental health, leading to a stronger sense of belonging and happiness.
4. **Local Maintenance Issues:** Feedback highlights the need for better maintenance of public spaces, including overgrown gardens, littered streets, and broken infrastructure, with calls for more action from local authorities.
5. **Visitor Perception:** The appearance of the community affects how residents and visitors view the area, with a clean and well-maintained environment generating positive impressions and supporting local tourism.

Concerns arising for Care and Maintenance

Here are the top 5 themes based on the feedback:

1. **Poor Infrastructure Maintenance:** There are widespread complaints about the condition of roads and pavements, particularly regarding potholes, overgrown greenery, and litter. Many residents feel that these issues are neglected by local authorities.
2. **Lack of Community Responsibility:** There's a strong sentiment that some residents do not take pride in their properties or public spaces, leading to mess and disrepair. Suggestions include encouraging better maintenance of gardens and communal areas.
3. **Insufficient Local Services:** Residents express frustration over the lack of adequate local services, including regular cleaning, timely repairs, and responsiveness from the council regarding maintenance issues.
4. **Community Engagement and Improvement Initiatives:** Suggestions for community-led initiatives, such as clean-up days and gardening projects, reflect a desire for greater involvement in improving the local environment and fostering a sense of pride.
5. **Need for More Waste Management Facilities:** There is a call for more bins (for general waste and dog waste) and improved waste management to combat littering and promote cleanliness in the area.

Adaptation

Here are the top 5 themes based on the feedback:

1. **Need for Improved Public Services:** Residents are calling for better public transport options, including increased frequency and reduced costs, as well as improved accessibility to recycling and waste management services.
2. **Housing and Infrastructure Improvements:** There are strong demands for repairs and renovations of existing homes, including kitchens, windows, and general upkeep, alongside better infrastructure to support cycling and walking.
3. **Environmental Responsibility and Sustainability:** Many suggestions focus on enhancing green spaces, increasing recycling options, and promoting environmental practices in new housing developments, such as tree planting and rainwater harvesting.
4. **Community Engagement and Local Initiatives:** Residents express a desire for more community involvement in environmental projects, such as community gardens and education on sustainable practices, to foster a sense of ownership and responsibility.
5. **Concerns Over Council Management and Spending:** There is frustration regarding council decisions on budget allocation, particularly regarding the management of bins and waste, with calls for more effective use of funds for essential community needs.

Net Zero

Here are the top 5 themes based on the feedback:

1. **Skepticism Towards Government Initiatives:** Many respondents express doubt about the feasibility of achieving net-zero goals under the current SNP government, suggesting that such initiatives are unrealistic.
2. **Need for Improved Public Transport:** There is a strong call for better public transport options, including more trains and affordable bus fares, to reduce reliance on cars and make public transit a viable alternative.
3. **Focus on Local Sustainability:** Suggestions emphasize the importance of supporting locally grown food, reducing waste, and establishing zero waste shops to foster community resilience and sustainability.
4. **Energy Efficiency and Green Energy Support:** Respondents advocate for better insulation, new heating solutions, and financial assistance for homeowners transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources.
5. **Concerns Over Industrial Impact and Environmental Protection:** There are calls to halt heavy industrial activities and wind farm developments that negatively affect local communities and wildlife, while emphasizing the need to protect natural resources.

Other

Here are the top 10 themes based on the feedback:

1. **Drug Issues and Crime:** A significant concern about the presence of drugs, drug dealers, and associated crime, leading to feelings of insecurity among residents.
2. **Poor Infrastructure and Maintenance:** Complaints about the state of roads, paths, and community facilities, which contribute to a sense of neglect and low morale.
3. **Lack of Community Services:** Frustration over the decline of local amenities such as parks, libraries, and access to healthcare services, impacting residents' quality of life.
4. **Youth and Employment Opportunities:** Concerns about the lack of local job prospects and activities for youth, leading to a diminished sense of community and potential for young people to leave the area.
5. **Housing Affordability and Quality:** Issues with the condition of council housing and the availability of affordable housing for young residents, exacerbated by the rise of holiday rentals.
6. **Environmental Impact of Development:** Resistance to overdevelopment from renewable energy projects and infrastructure that threatens local ecosystems and landscapes.
7. **Ineffective Local Governance:** A strong sentiment that the Highland Council is not adequately addressing community needs or listening to resident concerns, leading to distrust.
8. **Safety Concerns:** Issues related to speeding traffic, poor road conditions, and overall safety in the community, particularly for vulnerable populations.
9. **Healthcare Access:** Frustration with difficulties in accessing healthcare services, including GP and maternity services, highlighting a need for better support for residents.
10. **Community Engagement and Voice:** A call for increased public participation and a stronger local voice in decision-making processes, to ensure that residents feel heard and valued.

ER Engagement Comments

H&WB

Where are we now?

Local surgeries - terrible

Lack of MH services

MH services required

Inadequate health services

Drug issues need dealt with "bad problem right now"

NHS vacancies - unable to fill skilled posts

Anti-social behaviour is a blight on our communities as a landlord what does HC do - needs action.

More GPs

More dentists

Need better healthcare in schools

Drugs, alcohol and suicide issues

Individuals with disabilities excluded

Drug and alcohol issues are cultural and intergenerational

Not enough addiction support

Not enough recovery groups

Lack of services for mental health

No Alness and Invergordon GP

Cahms waiting list is too long

Mental Health and addiction, understaff, no sufficient support and lack of infrastructure

Mental health - lack of services

No trust in services - i.e. the police

Too many drug deaths

issues with anti-social behaviour and substance misuse

Lack of anticipatory care planning in health

Good mental health sense of control

Bad dentist - Invergordon

More GPs, health advice in schools as chemists are too busy

Hard to get a doctor's appointment

Bad dentist in Invergordon

No regular doctors - constantly explaining your situation. We have to go to Inverness for care for our son who has complex needs. We had to fight for Cahms support which is ok because we could do this, but I fear for families who aren't able to do this

People need to be able to access services locally

Substance use is a big issue here

Where do we want to be by 2030 and beyond?

Health centre working better for the people

Patients discharged when well with a care package

Fully staffed hospitals

Be creative in supporting MH - e.g. train hairdressers as councillors

Need access panel to ensure those with disabilities are heard

More H&WB cradle to grave

More social prescribing
Better collaboration for organisation of childcare provision
Support for isolation
NHS rooms to support clients
Empower so people can walk and cycle
More investment in neighbourhood support for communities and individuals
More infrastructure across the geography, services can't reach the wider area - for wellbeing
More community activities for older people
Access to health support and guidance
More access to services
No addiction counselling - well needed in the area
Health promotion of self-management / self care
Less (no people) using prescribed meds for mental health
No deaths by suicide
Bricks need to put in place to deal with addictions / access grass routes
Increased access to support groups
Quality of life at all stages
Loneliness addressed
People feel connected

Education

Where are we now?

No toilet rights in school
Need a college
More activities for the care of little ones
Gaps in services - early years
Lack of childcare provision has an impact on wellbeing and the economy
Not able to use education spaces since Covid (school lets)
Flexible / Local services needed to work with chaotic families
Difficulty engaging people
HLH and adult youth service funding - positive engagement
Lack of education on drug misuse
Opportunities in construction, nigg skills and oil rigs
School is OK / good, but we need more support
Issues with toilet rights in school
No dentists - not enough - in school
Not enough teachers
Not enough time at lunch time when tourists are here

Where do we want to be by 2030 and beyond?

More UHI variety in courses
New Scots - diversity, cultural, language meeting needs
Language classes for kids - teaching kids ESOL
More disability clubs, barriers to inclusive support
Evaluate outcomes of investment e.g. of summer activities
Skills and training for job vacancies
Life skills training for work
Need for more school nurses - boots chemist is too busy

Need more school health care
Work experience in S3, more job opportunities
More jobs for under 16s
More long term jobs
Skills retention within Easter Ross
Clear pathways to opportunities - match skills with employers needs

Environment

Where are we now?

Local green areas not cared for
Access to high quality environment or wild spaces in walking
Geographical challenges will affect carbon footprint

Where do we want to be by 2030 and beyond?

Town turbines and solar arrays
Easily accessible and well signed walking paths
A tidier environment
Dog parks that are free
Oyster farms
Improved children service provision
Plant trees
Plant fruit trees on public land
Seed grass for income generation
More recycling bins
Support with energy and heating
Community energy - wind, solar, thermal storage, tanks like flasks
Need cycle lanes
Need ecofriendly buildings
Cleaner environments at local parks
More ecofriendly places
More and bigger benches at parks
More community parks
Need art centre / hub facility
Repair shops repurpose reuse etc
More recycling bins
Investment into community programmes to address climate change, smaller individual programmes like encouraging recycling and food growing but also bigger infrastructure projects
Connected to nature
Water bottle refill station in towns and in schools
More bins for recycling

Economy

Where are we now?

Lack of connectivity impacting on jobs & FE, impacts cost of living
Common barriers - employability, access to affordable transport in the right places at the right times

Flexible childcare in evening and weekends to allow people to work
Poverty alleviation through employment, helping people into work, helping people into work to maximise
Smaller local businesses are not approached
Need for young people to train locally for skilled roles
Short term contracts leading to insecurities
High unemployment
High in work poverty
High dependency on benefits
Inequity in job market
Recruitment challenges
Need for workforce training
Need for professional training to increase skills
No local business association
Issue with social deprivation
Low paid jobs for U18s - this is particularly challenging for those who have caring responsibilities. Limited options - mostly in hospitality for younger workers
Finding work locally is a challenge

Where do we want to be by 2030 and beyond?

Growth in economically active population
Growth in median wages
Flexible affordable childcare
Repopulation not depopulation
Encourage small shops such as bakers and butchers - more choice in small communities
Jobs that pay well and are sustainable over a long period of time
Town centre shops in use with housing above
More businesses locally
More social enterprises
More job opportunities
Encourage businesses struggling with staff issues - vacancies very few applicants
Reintroduce funding for development - development officers for areas
SFRS as role models / mentors promoting healthy lifestyles
Opportunities for mentoring and work experience
Shops serving locals before tourists
Community wealth building
Funding for project officers to support community led initiatives
Local opportunities for local people
Locals before tourists
Town centre regeneration
More development trusts
Part / full time development officers in each community
Job opportunities for young people required
More jobs that hire under 16s
Innovation in creating jobs and opportunities
Economic growth for the area to be more attractive
More animal shelter - volunteering to help out
Locally trained and resident workforce
Training targeted at emerging industries

Long term employment for 30 plus
Jobs across all sectors valued and well paid
Community benefit from business would support
Job opportunities to attract the working age population into the area
Need for fairer distribution of wealth
Engaging the right people
Would like to see more placement opportunities
Long term employment for many without feast and famine contract
Invergordon needs a butcher
Jobs for all
Diversity of jobs
Resilient economy
Local childcare and employability support
Clarity and accessibility of opportunity - economy - cost of living

What's Good Etc

Not having a service point in Invergordon
Lack of service delivery in small villages
Public transport especially in small villages/hamlets
Lack of visibility of Community Councils across the area
Tain High Street
No Bank
Lack of Community Benefits from windfarms etc
Lack of Housing Support
Action 4 Children provision in Milnafua/Milton finished due to 3 year funding finished
Play parks - not enough and equipment where there are some, is in poor state
ICT support availability
Housing Repair support provided by Albyn
Public transport can't be just the school bus

What needs to happen to make it better?

Access to service point in Invergordon
need more outreach work in small villages
Better playparks for children and older people
Better playparks, youth clubs - especially youth club provision for primary aged children
Don't forget about smaller communities as the Green Freeport progresses
Improve transport - links, availability, affordability
Increase the number of activities aimed at families - not all families want to drop off kids and leave
Milnafua needs its own community space that is fit for purpose
More after school clubs
More places to play that are safe and fun
Easier and more communication with local populace
Improved recruitment of teachers to primary schools

Organising Ourselves

Where are we now?

Fractured relationships are preventing us from moving forward

Positive - community spirit

Where do we want to be by 2030 and beyond?

Communities take personal responsibility

SFRS work in partnership to achieve better outcomes for all service users

Routes to participate in local decision making

Pay people for the time when asked to consult - for lived experience

Better communication from public sector to community

Working in partnership to support families

Safer environments

Culture for creativity

Partnership on an equal footing

Empowered communities

Community led opportunities

Avoid duplication - e.g. CLD plans v community partnerships

Face to face meetings needed - online engagement does not work

Culture we want to create is an engaged, resilient, empowered and connected community

Be honest, if something doesn't work - learn from it

Community benefit and business investment needs to be targeted towards local priorities to make a real investment ICF - no green washing

More networking opportunities

Services get to know one another - understanding roles to problem solve together

Networking and understand voluntary agencies etc

Good, strong, well supported community and 3rd sector but this shouldn't be replacing public sector / plugging the cuts gaps

Strong networked 3rd sector and community groups who work with partner to influence service provision

Need good partnerships

Need to decentralise funds to local groups

Mapping of services

Accessible local services required

Equitable access to services

A place people spend time in

Local opportunities

Pride and clarity of needs

Good communication

Services on the doorstep

Services on the high street

Connected communities

Partnerships - link opportunities and aspirations

Early intervention

Active CLD in partnership

Piggyback CLD

Clear paths to success

Multi agency training - to enable better future opportunities

Remove the gap in access between Ross-shire and services only available in Education

Better community planning engagement

Drive advertisement for inclusion in community planning for the future

Further than we are now
Less talk and more action
Communities with control, influence and hope
Collaboration built on trust
Trusted voices and guidance
Equality and respect for diversity
Move from issues to identifying local solutions - issues mapped in neighbourhoods then reflected on wider area
Long term funding security
Engaged, empowered, connected, resilient
Strong partner relationships
Pride requires a sense of influence and control
Long term funding
Culture where everyone is engaged, empowered, connected
Social wellbeing, collaboration, environment (key words expressed)

Transport

Where are we now?

Lack of connectivity impacting on jobs & FE, impacts cost of living
Not enough public transport
Poor safe routes to school
We need safe routes for walking and cycling
Lack of buses on a daily basis
Consider investments to move more of us out of cars
Inadequate transport links
Roads in poor state of repair
Lack of consistency and reliability
Issues with frequency and timings to access college
Poor transport links - infrequent, expensive and unreliable
Lack of wheelchair taxi availability
Positive that we have free travel for youths

Where do we want to be by 2030 and beyond?

Good transport links & a better bus service
Need better public transport
Need cycle paths
Free travel needed
Need core paths with maps and signs
Later / earlier buses needed to get home safe
More bus stops
More zebra crossings
Green public transport
Affordable. Reliable and frequent travel needed
More transport for rural areas e.g. Portmahomack only has the school bus
Transport access to services, e.g. for drugs and alcohol support
Connectivity for accessing services
Better links for weekend workers into areas of employment
Need around active travel safety
Free rail travel

People choose active travel first
Affordable and reliable transport
Quality transport - viable services, promotions, active alternatives

Youth

Where are we now?

BDRG has a youth programme
Depopulation
Young people leave and don't return - lack of opportunity
2016 report found youth work changed the lives of 1 in 10 of the Scottish population
SRY - the value of youth network sector in Scotland is worth £7 of every £1 of public money
Children's services being cut
Limited opportunities for young people in their locality
No support for young people who are falling through the net going through school
Not enough informal learning opportunities
Through social media, young people are connected and interlinked
Free transport - negative enabling young people to congregate in towns with anti-social behaviour
Free transport - positive is access to jobs and college and asylum seekers can access activities
Not much to do in the holidays. Not everyone can travel to do activities and visit places
Lack of opportunities for kids to do
Big offering in Tain for Youth. Is this the same in Invergordon / Alness areas (food volunteer work)
Easy access to inappropriate websites

Where do we want to be by 2030 and beyond?

Vocational courses need
More sports activities
Youth clubs opened more
More parks
Extracurricular activities - more clubs for primary and secondary without the need to travel to Inverness
Safe spaces for young people to meet
There are a number of youth orgs in this locality - please talk to them
More Youth Enterprises
More youth club open days
Need safe spaces
Additional services / opportunities for young people specifically secondary school age
Share services for support and work of youth services
Developing life skills - numeracy etc
More opportunity for partnership working, sharing of resources
Good opportunities so young people can choose to stay / return to the area
More availability with teen gym - HLH
Need to empower young people and support the 3rd sector
Public drinking and drug dealers been taken care of

Attitudes need to change with the amount of pressure on us.

Infrastructure

Where are we now?

Lack of infrastructure for internet and broadband

Too many potholes

No wheelchair access to beaches

Need to invest in our High Streets

Where do we want to be by 2030 and beyond?

Additional community policing

More large bins for camper vans during the season

Village streets need to be able to cope with buses

Smaller minibuses needed

Public toilets that are actually opened

Repurposing empty high street building into eco buildings

Regenerate high streets - back to thrive

Need for community hubs to meet the needs of service users

Improve inclusion and access to services

Equality of access at a fair cost - utilities, travel, food, health and housing

Welcoming built environment

Vibrant high streets

More shops needed

Bigger shops like Morrisons

Community centre for the kids

Modern community centre

New schools - 3-18 campus

Open youth club - more sport access

Need for a bank

Town centre improvements

Cost of Living

Where are we now?

Foodbanks, cost of living crisis is still very real

High levels of childhood poverty

Hot meals - need transport to deliver

Fuel poverty - need solutions

High energy costs

Foodbanks, cost of living crisis is still very real

Food poverty

Shops are too expensive

Families are struggling

Increase in people living in poverty

People travelling to the job centre from outlying villages are paying up to £16 return

Closure of care home has pushed individuals into poverty

Where do we want to be by 2030 and beyond?

Community larders in place of foodbanks
Community food grow spaces and support to instil confidence
More community gardens and fridges
Access to services delivered locally
Fairer distribution of wealth
People supported to maximise their income
Poverty reduced

Culture & Tourism

Where are we now?

Strengths - great food and drink products
Cultural hub in Invergordon - theatre and arts centre
Strength in the Pictish trail
Dry climate with no midges in the east
Book and arts festival, annual September event to generate local investment on ER peninsula
Make Invergordon
Missed opportunity with cruise ships and the NC500
Lack of investment in communities, results in resentment to tourists
Locals not prioritised

Where do we want to be by 2030 and beyond?

Realising the potential of our town for tourism, e.g. the tanks
Easter Ross becomes more of a destination
ER as a destination, celebrated and positively perceived. All here and across the UK
Promoting local history
Tourists need their own buses
Locals prioritised
Tourist tax must go to the local area
Joined up tourism offer for Easter Ross
Easter Ross peninsular walking trail
Off the wall recognised
Need to celebrate Easter Ross as a fantastic place with equality of access
Easter Ross as a destination for everyone

Third Sector Support

Where are we now?

Service provision versus community led action
Community organisations are based in poor buildings, some belonging to local authority - how do we improve
Empty or disused arts building with lack of innovative planning
Delivering services competing with businesses
Fund chasing

Where do we want to be by 2030 and beyond?

Longterm 3rd sector funding

More funding to help sustain 3rd sector groups, that lasts more than a year

Investment in communities

Core funding for active community delivering programmes

3rd sector support for contracts, best person to deliver services and outcomes, range of services / contract and commissioning - voluntary sector trust

3rd sector framework - contract opportunities

Understand the impact of closure of historic clubs - e.g. the loss of SOAR

Take voluntary sector seriously, pound for pound better outcomes

More joined up thinking with voluntary and statutory

Need to be recognised as valued and skilled partner

Recognise and value the 3rd sector's role - long standing and ongoing

Poverty

Where do we want to be by 2030 and beyond?

Need rent

Need for community shop - pay what you can

More foodbank for homeless / in need

Housing

Where are we now?

Lack of private housing

Poor social housing stock

Housing needs more funding to sort out issues with old stock homes

Vulnerable people in inappropriate accommodation

Lack of social housing supply

Housing costs too high

No help with housing issues - benefits apps

Need a holistic approach to meet needs around tenancy management

Where do we want to be by 2030 and beyond?

More housing private and council

Need more houses to rent and build

Need rentals for young people or people moving into the area

Housing to meet needs

Housing support for early intervention and prevention

Increased sheltered housing - to fit demand

Increase social housing for families

Access to local housing (air bnb impact)

Need adequate housing

Town centre housing required

Quality housing - future proof

More housing

Quality future proofed housing

Affordable housing

Combat outward migration

Care

Where are we now?

Care at home unable to provide care due to staffing issues, cannot fill posts
Care packages for vulnerable people who are stuck in hospital bed blocking
Lack of foster care to keep children in the area they are from
Childcare in school holidays - major issue
Cost and availability of childcare
Childcare is a huge issue. I would like to take up a job for a couple of hours per day but I just can't do it because of lack of affordable childcare

Where do we want to be by 2030 and beyond?

Respite care required
Need for daycare
Removing barriers for learning for carers
Raise profile on power of attorney - positive, palliative services
More social prescribing

ER Workshop 2 Comments

Vision

Safe/Safety
Connection to each other and out environment
Inspired Natural Resources (Environment)
Aspirational and leading the way
Innovative
Innovative and forward thinking - working together to make Easter Ross....
Circular Economy
Agricultural collage in Ross Shire that links with the Nigg Skills Academy (schools link in and refer too)
Engaged
Attractive
Sustainable
Thriving
Empowered
Resilient/Ross
Green Tourism - making the most of our natural assets

Education and Learning

What is the key challenge/difference we need to make about this priority

Training and development opportunities for communities - we can't expect communities to 'do for themselves' without training and support
Access to school facilities - school lets - no access since covid. Too expensive
We are not tapping into social platforms to connect young adults
Schools should be seen as community assets
No facility for adult learning
Digital support for young people around engaging with services, form filling etc
Measure social impact of providing reduced lets. Focus on income generation for individual venues doesn't take the bigger picture into consideration. If community support and clubs, what is the impact on public services overall? Is there more of an ask of social work, mental health etc?
Request for work experience from S3 but only possible from S4 because of law

The education issues highlighted from workshop 1 are not education issues - most are public health!

Teaching in Alness Academy. Teachers not aware of who is in and out of class

Lack of respect in schools resulting in fighting

We need to reduce anti-social behaviour (less trouble and drama)

What is currently happening where/whom

Community events

Lack of provision from HLH particularly in areas of deprivation

Shared budgets for 3rd sector youth provision

Providing holiday activities to combat holiday hunger

The Place is open 6 days a week. Offer free workspaces for partners

Public/Voluntary sector hive of spaces. Stops its use

The field provide 1-1 support with young people not engaging with school. Helping young people complete awards for qualification. Social Enterprise with young people. Providing young people with volunteering opportunities

Telecare tech support with learning by NHS

Health Self-care by NHS Health and Social Care

Near Me' health education with various NHS professionals

If we had time, money, opportunity, what would we do

Need after school club in Evanton

Increase provision in rural areas for childcare

We need to embrace the Arts more - funding for this gets cut. Arts are essential for health and wellbeing

Early intervention re drug and alcohol

Reinvest in community services - paid youth workers to run clubs, family support work within CLD. Community Development Workers to support and train community volunteers. Is there value in re-instating community wings in schools?

Broaden curriculum to meet economic need

Funds to staff after school activity

Services to support health literacy

Curriculum should be area specific / area based to meet area need

Community hub including school

Target support pharmacy / chemist services with medication

Holistic educational facility

Leg Clubs where community nurses visit to social clubs, lunch clubs to deliver health care, reduce stigma

Place

What's wrong with it

Place - ownership & local responsibility / accountability - local control & influence

Infrastructure - resilient, connected communities working in partnership

Culture

How do we decide on scale of place - area/local

What is the key challenge/difference we need to make about this priority

Unequal spread of wind/community benefit

What future for town hall?

Community facility needs: venue for adult/family learning

We desperately need a place in Easter Ross for Community Learning

Ongoing connections locally with decisions being made

Understand very local need when situating a service

Clarity on how negotiated and influenced
Cultural activity - arts, groupwork, male attractive places to spend time and visit
Lack of information about Green Freeport
Easter Ross Community Learning Venue very needed for Adult Learning, Family Learning, CLD / signposting venue
Place as a connection to others locally and organising ourselves
Capacity regarding funding
More litter facilities around Easter Ross and NC500
Ensure local benefit from renewables growth across Highland
Attitudes need to change with the amount of pressure on us. In Dingwall no outside safe space
Young people are concerned the future looks like - no shops - overcrowded schools and no room to build new houses

What is currently happening where/whom

Transport links affected by weather
Emergency service provision under threat
Declining road conditions
Flooding & Fires
Diversions
Public uncertainty
Providers of activity clubs, etc... across Area, but poor links between them to access opportunity

If we had time, money, opportunity, what would we do

Local community development officer needed
Dial-a-bus fleet of small electric buses/vans to connect small communities. Demand led
Map community assets incl. 4x4s and tractors
Facilities as multi-use - youth, business, community space
Transport links to where activities take place already underway
Place as civic, open, public space needed for interaction belonging etc which builds capacity
Tain needs a roundabout at either entrance of the royal borough
Bike paths need to be incorporated with the A9 please
Infrastructure of Highland/Easter Ross Roads / Condition
Revive Community energy Scotland type support for local aspirations
H&I community energy company regs borrowing
Expert guidance support and lending
Need facilitation to foster community spirit
Local litter points at community facilities and businesses by levy funded at purchase
We need a coffee bar in Invergordon

Environment

What is the key challenge/difference we need to make about this priority

Green Freeport - Do we understand it? Lack of communication

Planning for capacity to adapt and become more resilient

National Environment/Climate policy does not fit within Easter Ross. Need for info: infrastructure. Effluence. De-commissioning. Fly Tipping. Bio-digester concern. Free Port concern.

Does anyone locally offer info/learning/advice

Wildfires

There is very little provision within Easter Ross for accredited insulation installation companies or heating companies

Not enough infrastructure: roads, skilled labour, how to decommission.

Needs a shift to planning around climate across the public sector now. Switching from awareness to action.

There's a challenge of how much this is/can be prioritised when competing with reactionary crisis in management

Availability of recycling centres - more access

Lack of faith that national policy is sensitive to Highland/rural context, e.g. EVS, insulation, oil heating, pumps

change in agricultural practices, adaptation of regenerative techniques

renewables being implemented but dubious mechanisms for community wealth and its impact on wealth divide between different communities

promote sustainable land management; flooding, fires, role for FLS

Peatland restoration and woodland creation

Availability of recycling centres - more access

Green Freeport

More use of traditional buildings and ease of planning and building requirements

Carbon capture, peatland restoration, woodland planting by the private sector

What is currently happening where/whom

Green Freeport

HLH Countryside Rangers Meadow Marketing Project

If we had time, money, opportunity, what would we do

Community owned renewables

Enhance recycling facilities

Community allotments

Recycle Centre in Seaboard/Fearn area

Free uplift of big rubbish household items

Promote outdoor access and responsible behaviour

Social housing well built, warm, low carbon footprint, cycle storage, active travel routes and good public transport

Health and Wellbeing

What is the key challenge/difference we need to make about this priority

Access must be improved to GP medical services
Reduction in deaths by substance use and suicide
Education
No joined up mental health and addiction services
huge underspend in HDAP it should provide beds
What is the root of local drug, alcohol and mental health issues?
Stigma over poverty : voucher for people to makes their own choices for their needs
Information on services in local areas
We need access to residential options with support for those with drug and alcohol addiction. Currently out of area experience months to wait
need recovery/safe place for those with drug and alcohol issues
The drug use in Alness needs to change and vandalism. Underage drinking.
Underage sex in Alness Academy bathrooms
people's attitudes towards young people, mental health
Increase in the number of young people vaping - too accessible to get vapes
young people are asking for more after school job options
Young people highlight that is too easy to get drugs

What is currently happening where/whom

SFRS drop ins/warm spaces
community NHS hubs. POA, ILM, DNACPR
Same people in ER are illiterate and do not have electronic devices. A matter of pride holds them back
We need to educate and challenge youngsters in 1st year around drugs and alcohol
We need mental health and addiction services round a table
NHS promotion of self-care in the community
MacMillan Marie Curie a therapy hospice service
NHS Community Welfare Check by Health and Social care
CAB advice on energy benefits and cost of living benefits
No childcare or affordable childcare

If we had time, money, opportunity, what would we do

Link to digital info and skills
Affordable childcare
NHS resource to provide remote clinic based community health groups
Wheelchair taxi
Skills development
FIT homes
Need better links mental health and drug and alcohol services
People live in their homes longer independently - home is safe, affordable, supported
Supporting childcare
Community transport
Parental support
People are connected in their community
Health literacy - need to address stigma
Support people to have choice - in control of their lives
Ensure full spend of drug and alcohol funds
Change vapes packaging

Job, Business and Skills

What is currently happening where/whom

Mentoring - take time to guide in the right direction (4th yr)
Community councils with income of £300-£800 per year not able to help communities solve problems
opportunity for communities to challenge this through Govt. Democracy Matter consultation
Local employability Partnership for Inner Moray Firth
Upskilling parents through employability team
Therapeutic interventions for those needing support

If we had time, money, opportunity, what would we do

Links and pathways from 3rd sector to corporate sector from training to actual jobs
Community Windfarms
Community Solar Arrays
Community Wealth Building
Holistic Learning Facility for all Organisations
Promotion of values of living and working in Highland
A kick start style scheme for Freeport area
Restart work experience

Connectivity

What is the key challenge/difference we need to make about this priority
Sort roads. Vehicles are being damaged
No cycle paths
Suitable public transport (bus) time

What is currently happening where/whom

Repair cafes - limited HLH
Education - Safe cycling etc
Existing path network not for all on National Network
Speed restrictions 20mph
Free bus passes
Environmentally friendly car club (see Moray TSI)

If we had time, money, opportunity, what would we do

Locally based transport options - shuttle buses. Where people want to go and when
Education related to Active travel
Cycle proficiency at various stages
Affordable options - subsidies
Funded support for driving lessons/licence
Need bus transport that gets people in for 9am
Detail on the connectivity sheet
Free train travel for young people

A Positive Thing in my Place

Delivering Food Banks. Drop in facility for community. Youth Club for young people providing volunteering opportunities to young people. 1-1 support with local young people not engaging in school. The Place Drop In, Alness. The Field Alness.

Environmental Beauty (Natural) in Easter Ross

Seaboard Centre

Seaboard Polytunnel

Balintore Scout Hut (Youth)

John Ross Centre

Balintore Inn

Balintore Football Pitch (Youth Football)

Balintore Harbour

Shandwick Bay

Hilton of Cadboll Stone

Shandwick Stone

Mermaid of the North

Sculpture Park

Paterson's Fishing Heritage Centre

Playpark at the Seaboard Centre

Costal Walk

Biggest Assets - Moray Firth, Heritage and Culture

Tain Cinema

Tain Museum

Collegiate Church

Tain Architecture

Tain Links

Tain Golf Course

Glenmorangie Distillery

Alness local takeaways

Alness Academy - Alness is known for its new and modern school

The Highlife Highland Youth Centre (Alness)

Having the youth space/safe space

Having our free bus passes

Getting Green Freeport status - will bring more jobs

Invergordon leisure centre

Invergordon girls' group on a Wednesday

Ross County Girls Football

Young Scot cards

Invergordon chippy

Youth Centre (Joss Street)

Balintore Commercial Inn needs renovated badly ideal site on the harbour. At

Balintore Harbour

Tain Town Hall

Tain Cinema

Tain High Street Pavements

Rural primary school. Enforce the catchment areas - Newmore, Ardross, Inver, Edderton, Rosehall

Public transport - Easter Ross Peninsula

Invergordon Town Hall as an arts and cultural venue

Relocation of where campervans park up to ease congestion in villages. Create campervan Park (know exactly where to put it)

Tennis Courts next to the Seaboard Centre(run down poor surface) needs funding!
Rose Garden Tain
Hall across from Evanton Primary School - use for school clubs. Youth Highland
Diamond Jubilee Hall

A number of 3rd sector organisations, e.g. Rokskool music/WASPS - Arts Venue
Lighting and power points for events (Tain Rose Garden)

Highland Local Development Plan

Ionadail na Gàidhealtachd Plana Leasachaidh

Evidence Consultation



Easter Ross | Ros an Ear

In this section:

4.1 Introduction	3
4.2 How well does the area function?	5
4.3 Facts and figures	5
4.4 Place Plans and Outcomes	8
4.5 Place Standard	10
4.6 Local Living	14

4.1 Introduction

Highland Local Development Plan Area Profile Summary

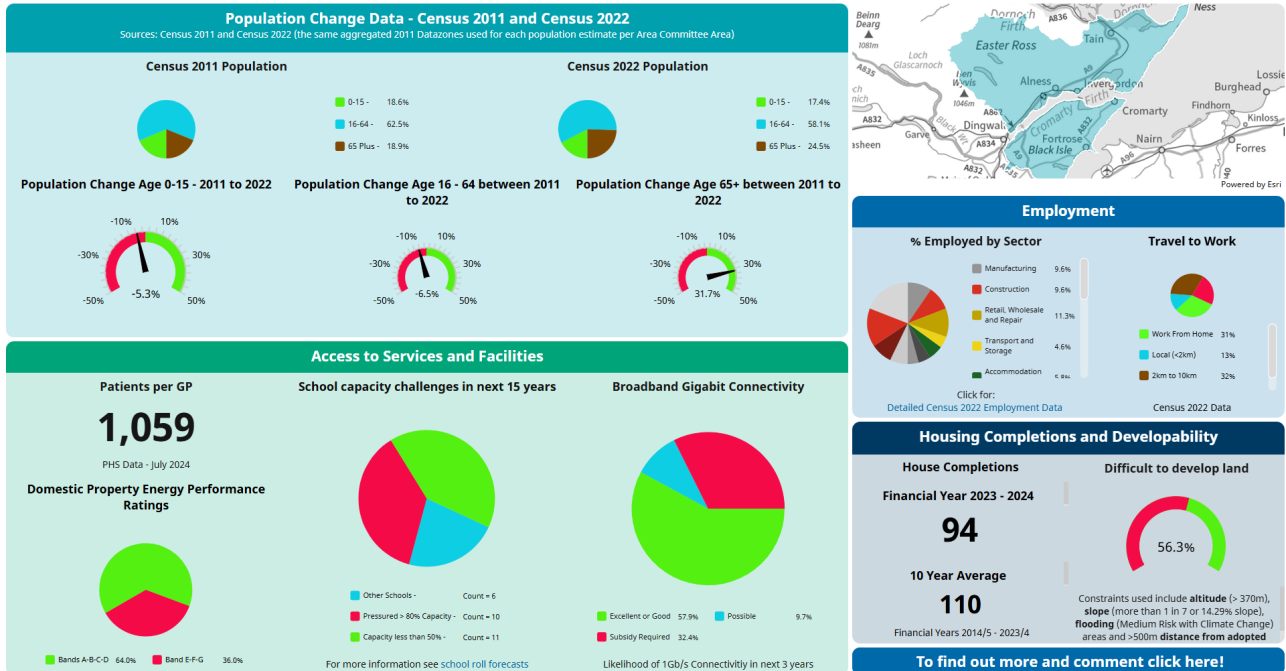
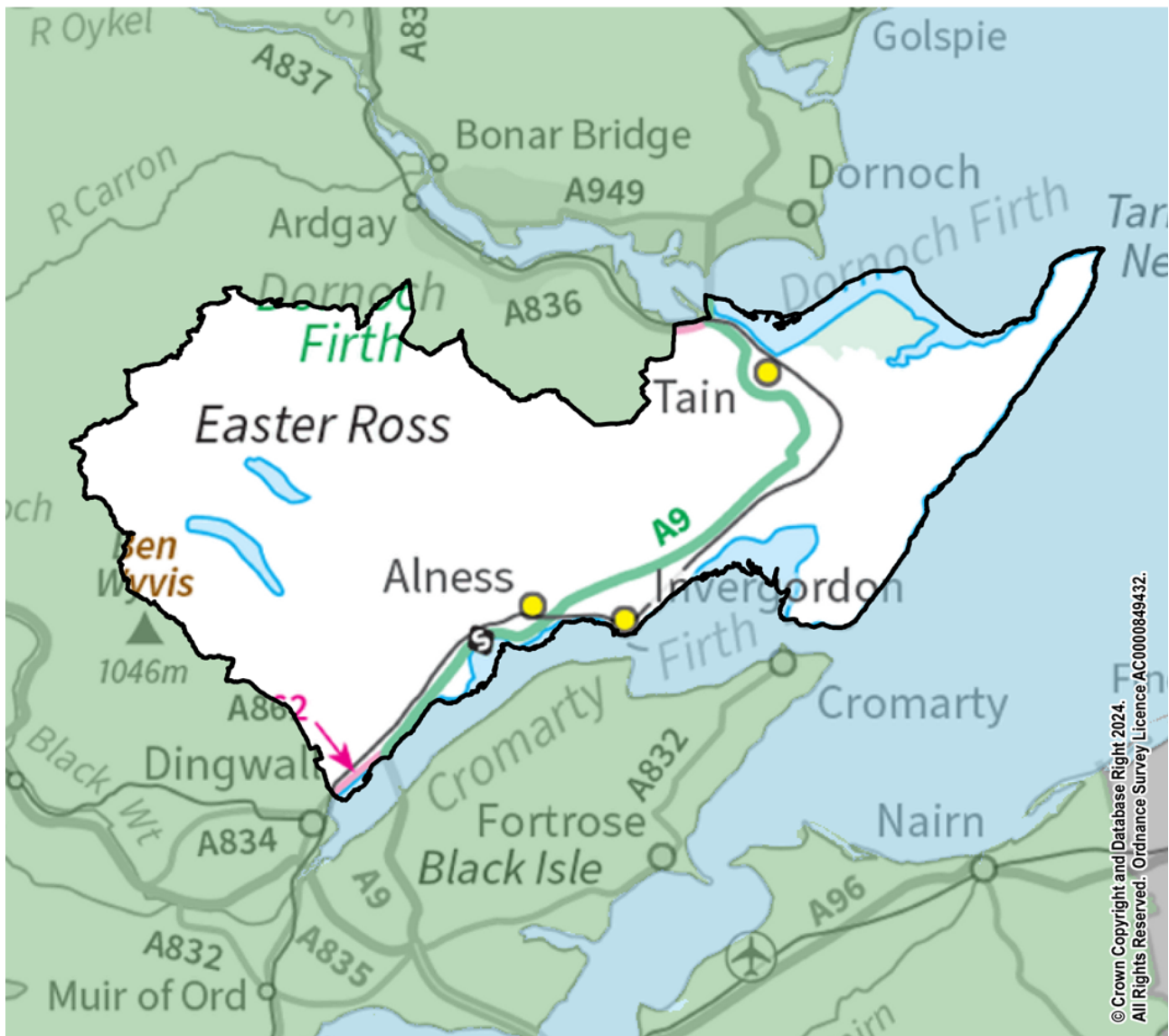


Figure 10 Dashboard summary for Black Isle and Easter Ross

The full dashboard is available [online](https://highland.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/68ad627480e642db8da883c94e2e04e7) ⁽¹⁷⁶⁾.

The principal settlements are (main settlements defined within the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 in order of sustainability) Alness, Invergordon, Tain, Evanton, and Seaboard Villages.

176 <https://highland.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/68ad627480e642db8da883c94e2e04e7>



Map 13 Easter Ross area

The Easter Ross Area has long history of settlement because it contains much of Highland's flatter, better drained, agriculturally productive land, has a drier and sunnier climate than the Highland average, and sheltered deep water ports which were initially used for military purposes. Despite these advantages, significant development and population didn't establish until the 1960s and 1970s with the inward investment in heavier industries such as those servicing offshore oil and gas production.

Each of the principal towns has good road and rail transport connections compared to the rest of Highland and fewer physical and environmental constraints to development than other areas. The landscape is principally rolling farmland often with attractive coastal views across the Cromarty, Dornoch and Moray Firths. Settlement is concentrated in a series of small towns or large villages most of which are strung along the old A9 route and railway line. The rural hinterland is upland, far less populous and large parts of it have been afforested.

4.2 How well does the area function?

The Area functions well compared to other parts of Highland. It is close enough and well connected enough to the City of Inverness to take advantage of its higher order facilities and employment opportunities but sufficiently separate not to be affected too much by the “overheating” effects of rapid growth such as traffic congestion and overburdened medical and school facilities. It is also close to emerging employment opportunities connected with the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport (ICFGF) project.

Challenges do exist, notably in terms of A9 junction capacity issues, controlling sporadic housing in the countryside development, which has adverse landscape and service provision cost impacts, and making sure that the main towns and villages are self-sufficient as possible in terms of a mix of uses and local access to daily needs. Revitalising the towns with community hub facilities such as the 3-18 Tain Campus is a key way to do this. The Area is well placed to take advantage of the job spin offs from the ICFGF project and land is already safeguarded for employment use at Nigg, Evanton, Alness and Invergordon.

4.3 Facts and figures

Infrastructure Capacities

Digital Connectivity – as of September 2024 only 4,478 premises in Highland had taken up ultrafast (1Gb/s) (FFTP or Broadband Voucher scheme for up to 1Gb/s via the R100 contract) digital connectivity. Within the Black Isle and Easter Ross Area there are 17,260 premises 10,008 (58%) of

which have the potential to access 1Gb/s speeds, 5,577 (32%) where it may be possible that a commercial provider will provide such speeds within the next 3 years and 1,675 (10%) premises where a public subsidy will be required and that subsidy is currently not programmed.

School Capacities – there were (recently resolved but developer contributions still payable), physical capacity constraints at Bridgend Primary, Couhill Primary, Kiltarn Primary, Obsdale Primary and Craighill Primary. See [school roll forecast](#)⁽¹⁷⁷⁾ for more information.

Water and Sewerage Capacities - there is spare water capacity at the sub-regional Loch Glass water source and works and at most main settlement sewage works but potential network capacity issues at Tain, Alness, Invergordon, and Evanton. However, there is limited spare capacity at the Evanton sewage works.

Significant Road Capacity Constraints and Investments – all the main settlements are bypassed by the A9 so intra settlement congestion is low however most A9 junctions have safety and capacity issues. Elsewhere, road safety and maintenance issues predominate with more limited investment targeted to address these matters.

Health Facility Capacity – during 2022/23 the County Community Hospital at Invergordon had over 95% bed occupancy but still performed well in terms of 99.9% A&E attendees being seen within 4 hours. All 3 GP practice groups at Alness, Invergordon and Tain have (July 2024) patients per GP numbers in excess of the Highland average.

Other Key Facts and Figures

A summary of this information is available in the [HDLP dashboard](#)⁽¹⁷⁸⁾.

- Population Total - (Census 2022) 21,531 (9.1% of Highland's population)

177 https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/878/schools/818/school_roll_forecasts

178 <https://highland.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/68ad627480e642db8da883c94e2e04e7>

- Population Change - (Black Isle and Easter Ross) (2011-2022) +0.9% (Scotland +2.7%, HLDP +1.8%)
- Age profile - (Census 2022) 0-16 (19.4%) 65+ (23.2%) (higher proportion of young and similar proportion of old than Highland, lower proportion of working age than Scotland profile) – however falling birth rates and numbers is a general trend with the number of live births at Raigmore Hospital dropping 16.5% from a peak of 2,140 in 2008/2009 to 1,787 in 2022/2023.
- Proportion of Homes within Main Settlements (Council Tax Data 2023 for Black Isle and Easter Ross committee area) 77.5%.
- Households – (Census 2022) 10,053 occupied households.
- House Completions - long term average 77 per year which is 7% of Highland long term average completions – full details via the [house completions dashboard](#) ⁽¹⁷⁹⁾
- Energy Efficiency of Housing Stock – (Scottish Govt FOI Release 2024) – Area has a lower (6%) proportion than Highland (10%) of residential accommodation with best A or B Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Rating but a marginally lower (11%) proportion than Highland (13%) with worst EPC rating of F or G.
- Poverty – the most recent [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation \(2020\)](#) ⁽¹⁸⁰⁾ highlights that some of the most deprived parts of Highland lie within the Area at Alness, Invergordon and Balintore.
- 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 (75%) were older or retired, the most popular reason for choosing to visit was the scenery/landscape, half stayed in serviced accommodation, and hiking and visiting castles were the top attractions and activities.
- Employment – Easter Ross is covered largely by the Alness and Invergordon Travel to Work Area, which in 2023 supported 7,000 (full and part-time) jobs (8% of Highland's jobs), with a gross average weekly full time pay £773.90.

179 <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/f827c80f82364d7b82ba5eca454f9f5e>

180 <https://simd.scot/#/simd2020/BTTTTFTT/13/-4.2280/57.4670/>

Area Profile 4: Easter Ross

- Working from Home and Commuting – (Ward data from Census 2022) – 26.6% of the workforce work mainly from home (lower than Highland and Scotland averages) but 45.2% commute more than 10km to work (much higher than the Highland and Scotland averages).
- Unemployment – (Highland June 2024) 3,235 or 2.2% of economically active.
- Employment sectors – (2020 HIE data for Inner Moray Firth area) the top 3 employment sectors within the Inner Moray Firth area are: human health and social work (19.8%), wholesale and retail (14.8%) and accommodation and food services (11.1%).
- Environmental and other constraints - 56% of the Black Isle and Easter Ross Area is covered by significant development constraint in terms of altitude, future flooding, national environmental, or international environmental designation (NSA, SAC, SPA, NNR, SSSI, Peatland [Class 1 and 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).

4.4 Place Plans and Outcomes

The following plans and documents contain a range of community and community partnership priorities that will be considered in shaping the plan content for the area. Where one of these plans falls partly within a number of our HLDP Area Profiles, we have referenced it only under the profile for the area in which it is mainly located.

Local Place Plans

Local Place Plans in The Highland Council area can be found via the Council's Local Place Plan Register, which comprises:

- [Directory of Local Place Plans](http://www.highland.gov.uk/localplaceplanregister) ⁽¹⁸¹⁾
- [LPP online map](https://highland.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/sidebar/index.html?appid=01a0cf2180c64c2cb8dc71dc22bbbfe1) ⁽¹⁸²⁾.

181 <http://www.highland.gov.uk/localplaceplanregister>

182 <https://highland.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/sidebar/index.html?appid=01a0cf2180c64c2cb8dc71dc22bbbfe1>

Completed and Registered

None to date.

In Preparation

Kiltearn Local Place Plan.

Area Place Plan

Highland Council is currently finalising the preparation of an Area Place Plan (APP) which collates an overview of local priorities development, investment and service delivery across Easter Ross - identified through stakeholder and public engagement in addition to reviewing the content of existing plans and strategies across public and community partners. The APP will comprise a key source of evidence for consideration in development planning, future service delivery and community action.

Community Partnership Plan

Easter Ross Community Partnership (CP) has been set up to bring together key public sector bodies, third sector organisations, and other key groups and agencies to work collaboratively to tackle inequalities and prevent disadvantage across the area. By working together to identify priorities, share resources and improve the lives of residents and the services they receive, the CP is the forum for partners to come together to actively work towards improving the lives of residents across the area. The information can be accessed [online](https://highlandcpp.org.uk/community-partnerships/easter-ross-community-partnership/) ⁽¹⁸³⁾.

Easter Ross Community Partnership is presently working up a plan for its area which will be directly aligned with the above mentioned Area Place Plan.

183 <https://highlandcpp.org.uk/community-partnerships/easter-ross-community-partnership/>

4.5 Place Standard

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

Black Isle and Easter Ross

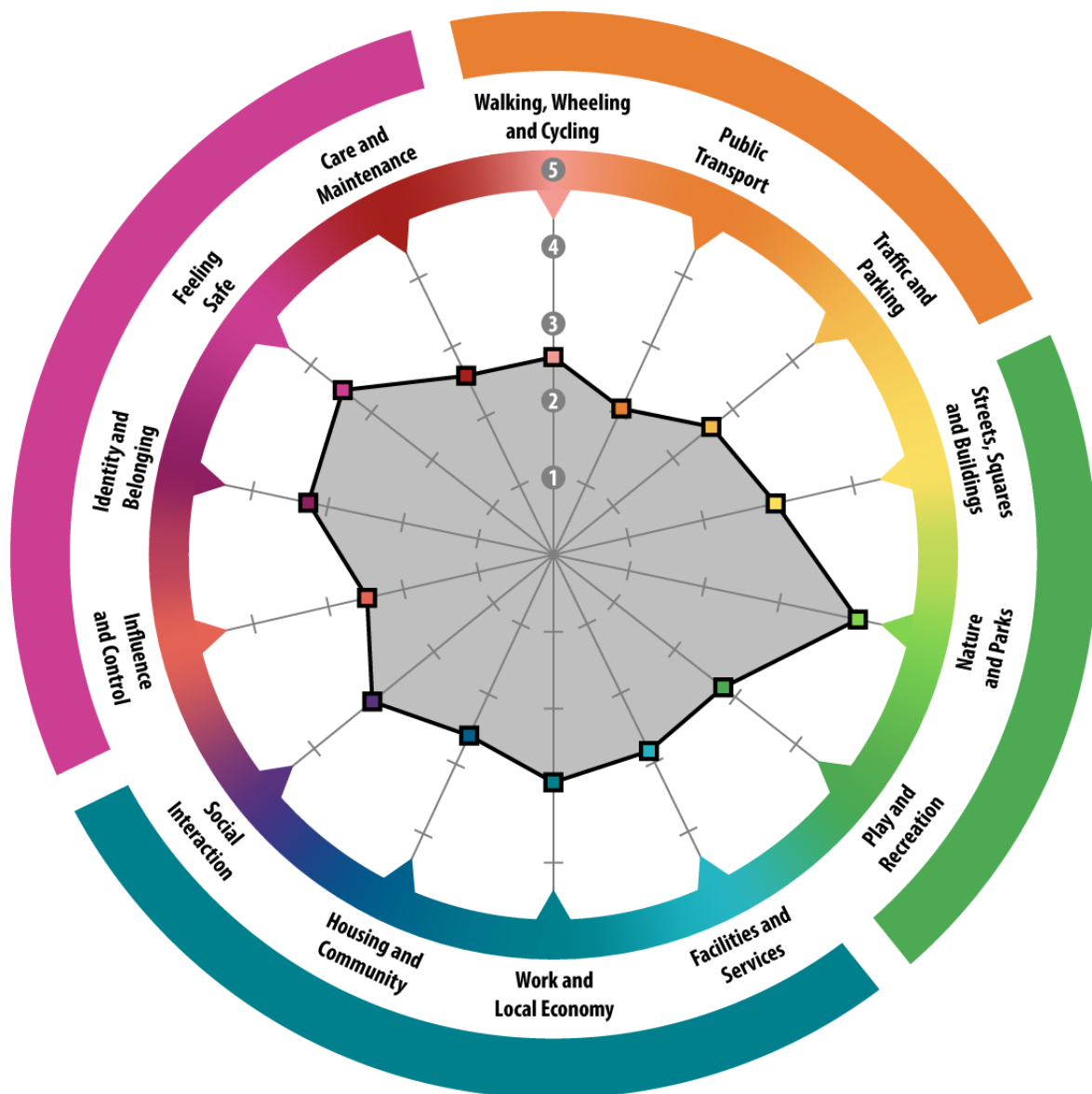


Figure 11 Black Isle and Easter Ross Place Standard results

Easter Ross Average Score (2.7) is joint lowest among sub-regional areas in Highland.

Area response rate for the Place Standard Survey:

87 online responses.

81 young people engaged in HLH facilitated sessions.

Highest scores for area:

Nature and Parks (3.9); Feeling Safe (3.4); Feeling Proud and Part of Place (Identity and Belonging (3.1); Work and Local Economy (2.9)

Lowest scores for area:

Public Transport (2.0); Play and Recreation (2.4); Housing and Community (2.4); Care and Maintenance (2.4); Influence and Control (2.4)

Domains for which Easter Ross compares well with rest of Highland:

Traffic and Parking (2.6) scored joint third highest in Highland.

Work and Local Economy (2.9) scored joint fourth highest in Highland.

Domains for which Easter Ross scored low compared with rest of Highland:

Facilities and Services (2.8) scored lowest in Highland.

Social Interaction (2.9) scored joint-lowest in Highland.

Spaces grouping (3.0) scored joint-lowest in Highland; within which:

Play and Recreation (2.4) and Nature and Parks (3.9) both scored lowest in Highland.

Streets, Squares and Buildings (2.7) scored joint-lowest in Highland.

Civic and Stewardship grouping (2.8) scored joint-lowest in Highland; within which:

Area Profile 4: Easter Ross

Care and Maintenance (2.4) scored joint-lowest in Highland.

Feeling Proud and Part of Place (Identity & Belonging (3.1) scored lowest in Highland.

Having a Say and Feeling Listened to (Voice and Influence) (2.4) scored joint-lowest in Highland.

Feeling Safe (3.4) scored joint second lowest in Highland.

Qualitative Feedback

Positive Aspects

General proximity of shops, amenities and medical services within the area, although sometimes requiring leaving the local neighbourhood. However, rural residents are dependent on traveling by car to access services.

Accessible opportunities for recreational walking and cycling; access to outdoor exercise in green spaces and natural landscape.

General appreciation for sufficient, well maintained and free parking around amenities and town centres.

Importance of local nature and biodiversity, including benefits from community managed woodland and green spaces.

General regard for public libraries, leisure and sport facilities, while noting poor maintenance and limited evening opening hours.

High regard for the quality of recent new build social and mid-market housing, of benefit to families and retirees. However, there is a perceived lack of associated community facilities and transport links.

Areas for improvement

Older social housing stock is in need of upgrading, including building condition, heating and insulation. Perceived need for significantly increased social housing and mid-market rental property for both residents and seasonal workers. Demand for smaller, accessible homes for the elderly and disabled.

Concerns about limited access to GP appointments, distant pharmacies, and the absence of medical facilities in some communities.

Widespread concern over poor pavement condition (particularly for wheelchair users and those with poor mobility), road condition (potholes, surfaces and crumbling gutters). Desire for segregated routes for walking, with zebra crossings and dedicated cycling lanes.

Improved signage and wayfinding for walking and cycling routes for navigation and safety.

Importance of commuting to Inverness for employment opportunities is challenged by public transport links and integration between train and bus services. Perceived high cost, infrequency and unreliability of some public transport services, particularly direct connections between settlements.

While there is high regard for the area's architectural heritage, concerns were raised about vacant town centre property, derelict buildings and maintenance of public spaces – including overgrowth, blocked drains and regular flooding. General frustration with the condition of school buildings, town halls and public spaces.

Demand for community-focused outdoor areas with seating, shelter, bins and amenities like cafes and toilets. Improved drainage and accessibility of existing green spaces for year-round use.

Poor maintenance of some formal play areas – broken equipment, overgrowth and broken glass, lack of bins for dog fouling. Demand for play spaces designed for older teenagers and adults.

Maintenance of existing community facilities was also raised as a significant concern.

Advocacy for increased local control over decision making, including funding necessary to address local needs – including the role of local volunteers in maintenance and civic activity to address perceived decline of the area.

Youth concerns arising from HLH workshops:

Appreciation for youth facilities and public open green spaces for recreation; concern over closure of Youth Centre, due to lack of funding. Concerns over maintenance and cleanliness of open spaces as dependent on limited local volunteers. Little pride in place.

Path maintenance, including broken glass is an impediment to getting around by bike and scooter.

Feeling unsafe around Alness high street and some areas of housing at night time.

Appreciation for local high street shops, alongside lack of awareness of local library services and concern over out of town locations for major retail.

Concern over the poor condition and relative isolation of housing stock in Milnafua area of Alness.

Notable uncertainty regarding future decisions & opportunities: green freeport; climate action; identity of the area; school estates; funding (including common good).

4.6 Local Living

The mapped Local Living results are available in the Council's [online mapping tool](https://highland.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/interactivelegend/index.html?appid=61119b67e8264086a5f25394c67190d7) ⁽¹⁸⁴⁾.

In the area of the Black Isle and Easter Ross Committee Area we surveyed **60844 Hex Cells**

Of these **19395** - fall within SDAs or the area of Growing Settlements.

4692 Cells contain the **12351** Residential properties in the area (Residential Cells)

Within these Residential Cells:

184 <https://highland.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/interactivelegend/index.html?appid=61119b67e8264086a5f25394c67190d7>

73.7% of residential properties are in cells classified as either **Very Highly Walkable (3979)** or **Highly Walkable (5124)**

4.8% of residential properties (599) have Few or No Walkable services

The **Average Local Living Total score** for a Residential Property in one of these Residential Cells in the Black Isle and Easter Ross Committee Area is **9.9** (out of a maximum possible of 16)

Tain SDA has the **highest** average residential score in Easter Ross (at **12.7** per property)

Rhicullen/Newmore Growing Settlement area residential properties score an average of **2.7**

Question 25

Easter Ross Area Profile

Do you think that the evidence outlined in for the Easter Ross Area Profile is sufficient and appropriate to prepare the future Plan's policies and proposals for this Area?

If not, what evidence do you believe is missing or misinterpreted? Where and from whom can any missing evidence be obtained?



