

Agenda Item	11
Report No	CP/27/25

The Highland Council

Committee: Communities and Place

Date: 6 November 2025

Report Title: Area Place Planning – Progress Update and Next Steps

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 A Place Based Framework for planning and investment in communities was agreed by Highland Council in December 2021 - [Highland Council December 2021](#) and endorsed by the Community Planning Partnership. This approach set out a new way of working for the organisation, building on the recognition that Place underpins and is the lens through which we deliver our services and work together in partnership with our public sector and community partners.
- 1.2 Part of this framework included the development of Area Place Plans, which would support delivery of place-based funding and services as well as under-pinning the ambitions of both the Council and the wider Highland Community Planning Partnership. It was agreed that these would be based on Area Committee geographies. This place-based framework enables the alignment of objectives across multiple layers of plans such as registered Local Place Plans, Local Development Plans, Regional Spatial Strategy and Community Partnership Plans.
- 1.3 The development of Area Place Plans supports the delivery of one of the Strategic Priorities within the Council's programme, Resilient and Sustainable Communities: *Helping our communities to be prosperous, sustainable and resilient, making a positive difference to the lives of people.*
The plans also underpin and support a range of objectives set out in the Council's Operational Delivery Plan. In addition, the plans provide a community based lens for highlighting opportunities for investment. A good example of this is how they will support the identification of investment opportunities for the Strategic Fund of the Social Value Charter.
- 1.4 The development and adoption of Area Place Plans (APPs) is largely complete, with all Committee areas now having adopted a bespoke APP. The exception is the draft Badenoch and Strathspey Area Place Plan which is being presented to Area Committee on 3rd November and a verbal update on the outcome of that discussion will be provided to this Committee
- 1.4 This report summarises the rationale behind creation of the plans, their current status and the next steps for delivery of the identified priorities.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:-

- i. **consider and note** this annual report, recognising the extensive engagement carried out across communities; and
- ii. **agree** to support the targeting of service programmes and external funding to meet the Area Place Plan priorities when appropriate.

3 Implications

3.1 **Resource implications** - while the Area Place Plans contain priority projects for delivery, these will each be subject to discussion and development of specific funding packages, therefore there is no direct resource implication at this time.

3.2 **Legal implications** - Area Place Plans have no legal status. However, those which are registered 'hybrid' Area / Local Place Plans will be taken into account in the preparation of the Highland Local Development Plan (LDP) and the wider Area Place Plans will support the development of the LDP.

3.3 **Risk implications** - there are no specific risk implications arising from Area Place Plans.

3.4 **Health and Safety** - there are no specific health and safety implications as a result of the report.

3.5 **Gaelic** - there are no specific Gaelic implications as a result of the report.

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 This is an annual update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5 Background

5.1 A Place Based Framework for planning and investment in communities was agreed by Highland Council in December 2021 - [Highland Council December 2021](#) and endorsed by the Community Planning Partnership. This approach set out a new way of working for the organisation, building on the recognition that Place underpins and is the lens through which we deliver our services and work together in partnership with

our public sector and community partners. The approach to place underpins a number of commitments in the Council's Programme and the Council's Operational Delivery Plan, in particular the strategic priority outcome of Resilient and Sustainable Communities:

Helping our communities to be prosperous, sustainable and resilient, making a positive difference to the lives of people.

- 5.2 Part of this framework included the development of Area Place Plans, which would support delivery of place-based funding and services as well as under-pinning the ambitions of both the Council and the wider Highland Community Planning Partnership. It was agreed that these would be based on Area Committee geographies. This place-based framework enables the alignment of objectives across multiple layers of plans such as registered Local Place Plans, Local Development Plans, Regional Spatial Strategy and Community Partnership Plans.
- 5.3 The Area Place Plans developed aim to support and underpin the future approach to service delivery, service planning and area reviews. In doing so, the Plans support effective realisation of broader Council Priority objectives, by demonstrating clear alignment of service delivery and investment with local priority need and aspirations. Integral to this approach is partnership working and community involvement.
- 5.4 A single APP has now been adopted for each Committee area, with the exception of Badenoch and Strathspey (which is being presented to Committee on 3rd November). Most areas have multi-layers of plans including Local Place Plans¹, locality plans, community development plans etc. Consolidating local priorities which are currently set out across a variety of existing plans, Area Place Plans draw together these various priority outcomes to secure a clear and accepted way forward for each Area.

This delivers:-

- an inclusive vision for the future of each Area;
- a defined approach for how each Area will respond to local and national challenges and opportunities, including identified projects to deliver on these priority outcomes; and
- clarity on who will be responsible for doing so and the status of actions intended to deliver this vision.

6. Area Place Plans – Status and Next Steps

- 6.1 The following provides an overview of the Area Place Plans across Highland. Two were developed as community led plans and double as both the Local Place Plan and Area Place Plan – Black Isle and Nairnshire. A number have identified priorities under the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan Strategic Outcomes of People, Place and Prosperity. The delivery arrangements within each Area are agreed locally by the local partnership.

¹ LPPs are optional but for those communities wishing to progress them, have a legislative basis in planning law and reflect a specific community's proposals for development of use of land and buildings in their local area. They often also reflect wider community priorities. The development of Area Place Plans has taken account of any LPPs within an area but recognise that many communities do not have these in place.

6.2 **Caithness** – The Caithness Area Place Plan was adopted at the Caithness Committee on 28 April 2025 and is arranged under the themes of People, Place and Prosperity. Specific issues highlighted under these themes are as follows:

- People: Focuses on health and wellbeing, challenges raised by lack of local healthcare/ specialist appointments, also a focus on accessible public transport and transport links.
- Place: Focuses on active travel network and infrastructure and connectivity, issues highlighted were potholes and general road conditions, town centre investment.
- Prosperity: More diverse economy, strengthening pathways from schools and promoting whole family approach and opportunities, addressing childcare availability and depopulation, encouraging tourists to stay longer by promoting the county.

Work has begun to highlight the priorities within the APP across Council services asking teams to familiarise themselves with the plan. Building on that the team will engage with existing partners and forums to identify priorities that they could collaborate on. Some of the priorities are now underway with work on the improvement of Wick High Street and the Whole Family Wellbeing Programme has formed their Caithness Local Partnership Network Group, with many priorities mentioned by young people are priorities identified at the meeting

6.3 **Sutherland** – The Sutherland Area Place Plan was adopted at Sutherland County Committee on 2 June 2025. The Sutherland priorities are arranged under People, Place and Prosperity.

- People: Focusses on access to healthcare, health and wellbeing, addressing depopulation and community capacity and resilience.
- Place: Focusses on environment and climate, housing, infrastructure and connectivity, roads and pavements, public transport and digital connectivity.
- Prosperity: Focusses on employment and economic opportunities, support for local businesses, education and childcare, tourism and seasonal work, young people's priorities.

Discussions are ongoing with a range of partners to establish the Sutherland delivery structure.

6.4 **Easter Ross** – The Easter Ross Area Place Plan was adopted at the Black Isle and Easter Ross Committee on 12 May 2025. In common with a number of the other plans, the Easter Ross priorities are arranged under People, Place and Prosperity.

- People: Focuses on improving the wellbeing and quality of life for all residents by addressing mental and physical health, inequality, poverty and access to services. Priorities under this theme include mental health and addiction

support, supporting people to live longer in their own homes through increased access to care at home, cross sector community hubs providing key services, whole family supports including childcare, training and employability support.

- **Place:** Focuses on developing sustainable, well designed and supported communities that are resilient to economic and environmental change. Key priorities are on improving infrastructure, housing and connectivity. Current actions are on supporting communities to take up the opportunity to develop their own local place plan, establishment of an ER transport forum and developing a joined-up tourism offer.
- **Prosperity:** Is centred around economic diversification, job creation and sustainable tourism. Key actions being progressed are fast tracked supported adult social care recruitment event and ER community wealth building pilot.

The Easter Ross Area Plan is being delivered through 3 Community Partnership working groups – People, Place and Prosperity and each has action plans in place. Aligning the APP work with the Community Partnership streamlines and avoids duplication and enables shared delivery from the get-go.

6.5 Black Isle – In 2024, 'Opportunity Black Isle' Local Place Plan for the Black Isle was registered by the Council for planning purposes and adopted by the Black Isle and Easter Ross Committee as a tool to inform and support decision-making about the Black Isle.

The local community has been using the Place Plan to good effect to support delivery of actions in the Plan which the community itself can take forward. For example, the Raddery House Group have referred to the Place Plan throughout their planning process. Several small community groups have been in touch requesting data from the consultations that were held in their area, including Resolis Hall who are in the process of looking at viable activities they can put on for the Resolis community. Tore Hall have used the information in the Place Plan to actively take forward their vision to make Tore Hall a community hub. Work has also been ongoing regarding pavement accessibility in Fortrose. Whilst the Community Councils have worked towards establishing a board that is fit for purpose, it has been gratifying to see the community use the Plan to inform decision making within their groups and organisations.

In addition, the community has been organising itself to work collaboratively with the public and private sectors to progress delivery of actions in the Plan which rely on those sectors. This has focused on establishing a community-led 'Opportunity Black Isle' board whose sole responsibility is to advocate and support delivery of the Plan at the strategic Black Isle level, working with the public, private and community sectors.

The board is open to Councillors from Wards 8 and 9, nominees from Community Councils across the Black Isle and elected local residents and has an independent chair. The Community Council nominees and independent chair are organising an open recruitment process to elect the local resident members, with the intention that the board will be fully up and running by the end of 2025.

One of many examples of the kind of advocacy and collaborative work that the board

will be undertaking is to work collaboratively with the Green Freeport, the Council, NatureScot and others to ensure that local community aspirations for the Green Freeport are factored into decision-making and delivery, as expressed in the Place Plan - including an environmental baseline survey to establish a benchmark for monitoring the impacts of the Green Freeport.

6.6 Dingwall and Seaforth - The Dingwall and Seaforth Area Place Plan (DSAPP) was adopted by the Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee on 10 February 2025.

The priorities identified in the DSAPP are grouped under the overarching themes of People, Place, and Prosperity, which align with the Highland Community Planning Partnership's strategic framework. An additional category, Cross-cutting Themes, has been included to reflect strong community sentiment on broader issues. The priorities span a wide range of topics, including community safety, wellbeing, events, facilities, learning opportunities, and the overall appearance and presentation of the town and surrounding villages.

To support implementation, a Delivery Group has been established. This group is action-focused and aims to ensure tangible outcomes that align with the plan's objectives. Membership includes individuals from the original stakeholder engagement group, who helped shape the plan, as well as new representatives who bring valuable perspectives and expertise. The Delivery Group works closely with the local Community Partnership to raise awareness, foster collaboration, and avoid duplication of effort.

Although still in its early stages, the Delivery Group has already completed several actions, including:

- Hosting internal service meetings to raise awareness of community priorities;
- Supporting a police review of CCTV coverage, with a commitment to conduct Environmental Visual Assessments where needed;
- Collaborating with justice services to organise a litter pick at the main entrance to Dingwall; and
- Assisting the local Youth Forum in exploring options to improve their current meeting space

6.7 Wester Ross, Strathpeffer & Lochalsh (WRSL) – The WRSL Area Place Plan was led by the Wester Ross Biosphere and adopted at the WRSL Area Committee on the 20 January 2025.

The Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Area Place Plan clearly notes the aspirations expressed by the communities within its boundaries and acknowledges the range of Community Action Plans and Local Place Plans that have already been developed by Community organisations. The APP highlights the urgent need for suitable and affordable housing; managing tourism in a way that puts community needs first; improved digital connectivity; better provision of public transport; and addressing the increasing age gap in the population, taking into consideration the needs of those both young and older; and a desire for improved health and wellbeing services and facilities including both care and mental health.

Discussions around next steps including action planning, governance, and delivery of the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Area Place Plan are ongoing and require input and engagement from all Stakeholders involved with the APP.

- 6.8 **Skye and Raasay** - Skye & Raasay Futures (SARF) was presented to the Skye and Raasay Area Committee and adopted on 30 August 2021. Initially SARF started out as an infrastructure investment plan, however, as the consultation process progressed with support and co-ordination from Architect and Design Scotland, SARF developed into an Area Place Plan. Key to the Plan was identifying 7 key priorities in consultation with the community, these being, Climate Action and Resilience, Strengthening Communities, Diverse and Green Economy, Transport Infrastructure, Health and Education, Digital Infrastructure and Organising Ourselves.

Following adoption of SARF, the next steps included formation of a SARF Board, the purpose of the Board being to bring together key stakeholders to collaborate on the implementation of a shared plan for the area. The Programme Board is represented by all sectors involved in shaping and delivering change in the community. The Board aims to supplement the work of individual organisations and partners by overseeing and supporting the progress and delivery of projects and co-ordinating and signposting funding opportunities and resources. The Board is intended to represent all sectors of the community. Membership includes:

- The Highland Council;
- Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE);
- Community Planning Partnership;
- Lochalsh & Skye Housing Association;
- West Highland Chamber of Commerce and other groups representing business community;
- NHS Highland;
- Skye and Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Organisations; and
- Development trust and other bodies.

The board will invite relevant individuals, organisations and Elected Members to come on to the board as and where necessary to share their specialist knowledge and input.

- 6.9 **Lochaber** - The Lochaber Area Place Plan was formally adopted by the Lochaber Committee on the 27 January 2025, with agreement to use it as a strategic tool to inform and support decision-making across the area. This Area Place Plan reflects extensive community consultation and outlines shared aspirations across Lochaber, drawing from both Community Plans and emerging Local Place Plans.

The Area Place Plan identifies high-level priorities including access to services, transport and connectivity, housing, community infrastructure, economic development, environmental sustainability and collaborative working. The next phase involves developing action plans for each priority, with some early work already underway. While a formal delivery group has not yet been established, collaborative work is actively taking place between Council services and Partners and the plan is already being used as evidence to support funding applications, helping to demonstrate community priorities and strategic alignment to external funders. The plan's adoption

itself is a milestone that provides a framework for future delivery and investment within Lochaber.

The Plan recognises the Fort William 2040 plan, widely recognised as one of the first Place-based plans in Highland.

As part of the plan's implementation and engagement efforts, a Partnership Event will take place in November 2025, which has been organised in collaboration with the Lochaber Community Planning Partnership and The Highland Council. The event will showcase local initiatives, share best practices, promote awareness of local resources and opportunities, foster collaboration and strengthen connections.

- 6.10 **Nairnshire** – The “Our Nairnshire Local Place Plan” is a registered Local Place Plan and was adopted as an Area Place Plan in May 2025 as a source of evidence of community aspiration, to inform wider decision making about spatial planning, service delivery, options for asset management, development and investment for the Nairn and Cawdor Ward.

The high-level priorities identified are:

- Sustainable Futures;
- Jobs and Businesses;
- Town and Village Centres;
- Green Space and Leisure; and
- Getting Around

A delivery group has been established led by Nairn Improvement Community Enterprise – NICE. They have met to discuss how they take priority projects forward, with an early project being the dune resilience project. A working group has been formed to progress this and project coordinator employed.

- 6.11 **Inverness** – the Inverness City Strategy was approved by the Area Committee in February 2025.

The themes and priorities identified are:

- The recognised prime destination for locals and visitors alike to spend their time and money. A place where businesses want to invest and develop high quality, attractive offerings;
- A living, working city: More quality homes for all in welcoming mixed-use neighbourhoods, with easy access to work, facilities and leisure, without overwhelming services to the detriment of existing residents. Protection of built and cultural heritage assets of the city;
- A green and healthy city: Open green space accessible to all with improved parks and open spaces. Biodiversity restored and enhanced - nature networks are functioning across the city and connect with the rural hinterland, allowing nature to thrive. A greener city and city centre not only supports health and recreation but also contributes to civic and cultural vitality;
- Zero-carbon: A city at the heart of a region that is leading the world on renewable technologies, now and for future generations. A just transition to a

zero-carbon transport network across a city where all homes and businesses are powered by renewable energy;

- Accessible and connected: Better connected to the rest of Scotland, the UK and the rest of the world for passenger and freight transport, with welcoming connections to Inverness Airport, the rail network, the bus network, the Port of Inverness, Trunk Road Network and the Caledonian Canal. Walking, wheeling, cycling, public transport and other sustainable travel choices have become viable, intuitive choices for city residents, visitors and commuters. A modal shift in transport reintroducing 'life' to city streets – creating more space for civic life and community interaction, and improved resilience to climate change; and
- Digital city: Support for remote working and co-working spaces; 5G connectivity and continued roll-out of full-fibre network. Integration of real time traffic flow data, parking availability and public transport timings. Smart City applications to control street lighting, energy production, storage, smart-heating, ventilation.

Update reports are provided to Inverness Community Partnership and a stakeholder working group piloting prioritisation of city streetscape improvements will hold its first meeting in October 2025.

6.12 **Badenoch and Strathspey** - the Badenoch & Strathspey Area Place Plan is being considered at the Badenoch & Strathspey Area Committee on 3 November 2025. The Badenoch & Strathspey priorities in the draft Plan are arranged under People, Place and Prosperity.

- The 'People' theme focusses on healthcare, health and wellbeing, addressing depopulation as well as community capacity and resilience.
- The 'Place' theme focusses on environment, housing, infrastructure and transport.
- 'Prosperity' theme focusses on employment and economic opportunities, support for local businesses, education and childcare, tourism and seasonal work and young people's priorities.

Discussions are ongoing with a range of partners to establish the Badenoch & Strathspey delivery structure and Action Plan.

7. Next Steps

7.1 All finalised Area Places Plans and supporting documents are available from the Highland Community Planning Partnership site under the relevant Community Partnership section - [Community Partnerships | Highland Community Planning Partnership](#). The progress on each Area Place Plan will be reported annually to Area Committees, allowing the opportunity for Members to receive detailed updates on progress, not just by Highland Council but by other delivery partners too. Members will also be able to consider any new projects or aspirations put forward by their communities and properly understand how these projects can be supported.

7.2 The Area Place Plans are therefore a critical resource for prioritising and directing resource and investment as they reflect the broader priorities for the area and provide an important community based lens. This is both to focus existing Council and partner funding streams but also to support new and additional funds coming forward. A good example of this is how they will support the identification of investment

opportunities for the Strategic Investment Fund of the Social Value Charter and this will be detailed as part of a paper to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee on 13 November.

- 7.3 Area Place Plans will be a key element of the Highland Investment Prospectus which is currently being developed and the identified themes and projects will be the regional focus for both potential public and private investment opportunities.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive – Place

Date: 10 October 2025

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