Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company

Housing Needs and Demand Assessment for Fort Augustus & Glenmoriston

Developed for the Fort Augustus & Glenmoriston Community Company

L & L Fraser Ltd
RURAL COMMUNITY PROJECTS

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fort Augustus, like many rural Scottish communities, faces significant housing challenges that impact its long-term sustainability. The Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company is exploring opportunities to develop affordable housing projects, including Glentarff House and the Janitor's House, following the successful 12-unit Caledonian Court development in 2021 and the purchase of properties in Bunoich and Invermoriston. To support these initiatives, an updated Housing Needs Assessment has been undertaken to evaluate the current and future housing demand in Fort Augustus.

The assessment utilises national and local data sources, as well as direct community consultation, to determine the extent of housing need. Key findings highlight:

- **Demographic Change:** The population has seen fluctuations, with growth in older age groups and a decline in younger residents. The 0-9 age group has halved since 2001, raising concerns about school roll sustainability.

- **Employment and Housing Pressure:** Local businesses struggle to attract and retain staff due to a lack of affordable and available housing. Sectors such as education, healthcare, and trades are particularly affected.

- **Housing Availability and Tenure:** The housing stock has grown over the years, but most development has been larger, higher-value properties. Affordable housing options, particularly for younger residents and families, remain limited.

- **House Prices and Affordability:** The average house price in Fort Augustus is significantly above the Highland average. The presence of short-term let properties, particularly at the Highland Club, distorts market figures and reduces availability for local buyers.

- **Rental Market Constraints:** The private rental market is highly restricted, with no properties available at the time of the survey. Social housing re-let rates are low, with only five re-lets recorded in the previous year, underscoring the limited housing mobility within the village.

- **Impact of Short-Term Letting:** 27% of properties in Fort Augustus are used as short-term lets, contributing to affordability challenges for permanent residents. The financial incentives of short-term letting outstrip long-term rental income, encouraging more property owners to shift away from local housing provision.

- **Community Support for Affordable Housing:** 84% of survey respondents believe there is a housing shortage in Fort Augustus and support further development by the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company.

Findings from the Housing Needs Assessment confirm that there is an immediate and ongoing need for additional affordable housing in Fort Augustus. The report recommends prioritising development of two- and three-bedroom homes, bringing empty properties like Glentarff House back into long-term use, exploring low-cost home ownership options, and reintroducing vacant properties into the housing stock. The availability of affordable rental accommodation would also support economic growth, school sustainability, and demographic rebalancing.

BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

As a community Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston face many of the same challenges that other rural communities in Scotland face, including population instability and an ageing demographic, lack of workforce, connectivity, both transport and digital, employment, climate resilience and housing. Looking to help address some of these issues the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company is investigating the potential of developing additional phases of affordable housing over the coming years, starting with Glentarff House, hopefully followed by the Janitor's House located adjacent to Kilchuimen School. These projects follow the successful development of 12 new build affordable properties at Caledonian Court in 2021 and the purchase of properties in Bunoich and Invermoriston.

As part of the project development process for Glentarff House, and as a requirement for both the Scottish Land Fund and Rural and Islands Housing Fund, the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company has appointed L & L Fraser Ltd to undertake an up to date housing needs assessment for Fort Augustus.

The report aims to:

- Assess the level of housing need that currently exists in Fort Augustus and the potential demand for additional housing within Fort Augustus in relation to employment opportunities etc,
- Identify any barriers that households currently face in accessing housing within Fort Augustus
- Analyse the tenure and property types that households already living in Fort Augustus, as well as those potentially looking to move to Fort Augustus may favour,
- Assess how these findings might fit within the proposals for purchasing Glentarff House and the Janitor's House, and;
- Recommend potential courses of action to meet any identified housing needs within Fort Augustus.

This assessment will utilise available data from national and local sources, as well as a community consultation, to analyse the potential need for additional housing in Fort Augustus and the need for projects like Glentarff House and the Janitor's House.

The assessment primarily focuses on Fort Augustus, while a lot of the data utilised is at the wider data zone level, Fort Augustus as the largest settlement in the area has the facilities and transport links making it the more logical place for development supported by Highland Council's own strategic housing plan.

BACKGROUND

Located at the southern tip of Loch Ness, Fort Augustus lies midway between Inverness and Fort William on the Great Glen Way, a popular walking and cycling route. Fort Augustus is a key gateway for exploring Loch Ness and this makes it a hugely popular tourist destination. It is also on the route of the Caledonian Canal, which is another major tourist attraction. Tourism is a key industry for the area, but is also seen as a key source of some of the challenges facing Fort Augustus and the surrounding area.

Fort Augustus is the second largest settlement in the area with a population of around 700. Drumnadrochit, 24 miles to the north is larger at around 1,100 people and houses the area's other secondary school. Invermoriston, seven miles to the north, has a population of around 200, Foyers, 16 miles to the north on the east side of Loch Ness, has a population of around 250. Invergarry, seven miles to the south, has a population of around 350. Finally, Glenmoriston, around 15 miles away by road, has a population of around 150. This puts Fort Augustus in a key position to support some of the settlements around it, as well as act as a key tourist hub over the summer tourist season.

METHODOLOGY

The housing needs assessment outlined below is designed to establish whether there is demand for additional housing provision In Fort Augustus It will help provide the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company with some of the evidence they require to make the decision on whether to move beyond the feasibility stage and develop additional affordable rented housing to try and help sustain and grow the community's population and economy.

This report will utilise data from the local community taken from a survey that was available in paper form and online, other local data sets and relevant national datasets. Data utilised will include population and demographics estimates and projections, a housing market analysis, school roll forecasts, the social housing waiting list and housing stock data, property completions and the housing needs survey responses. This approach will combine the best data available, as well as input from the local community to assess the housing needs in Fort Augustus and the options that might be suitable for the development of additional housing. The data that is used is at Highland, output area, data zone and school catchment area levels depending on the granularity of the data available. Where possible data is used at a Fort Augustus level, but the majority of data will primarily be available at a data zone and output area level. This isn't ideal, but as Fort Augustus is the largest settlement within its data zone the majority of the households included will live in Fort Augustus.

Data is not available at a Glenmoriston level due to the very small size of the community. Most of the data utilised within the assessment is at a data zone level and this includes Glenmoriston. Some data is available at a Fort Augustus settlement level and this has primarily been used for comparison purposes. It is incredibly difficult to make housing needs recommendations at the Glenmoriston level due to the inability to access robust data at this level. However, an attempt is made to assess housing provision options for Glenmoriston as well as Fort Augustus.

Community consultation included the development of a eighteen-question survey seeking the community's view of the need for housing in Fort Augustus and the types of households who most require housing. There were 37 responses to the survey, meaning roughly 13% of the estimated 278 households in Fort Augustus completed the survey. While this response rate isn't very high, the 152 comments that were part of the survey added significant useful additional information and qualitative data.

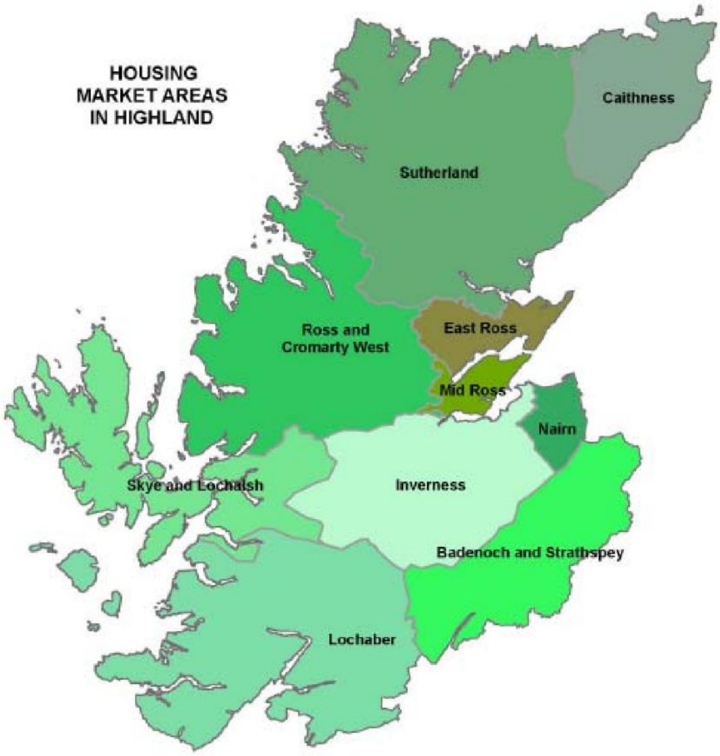
The approach taken in this housing needs assessment explores the potential need for housing from existing households and households that are keen to move into the community, like most housing needs assessments undertaken elsewhere. However, this assessment will also try to assess the community's potential need for housing to support community needs, like families to help sustain the school or other community services, the needs of local employers for additional staff and any demographic imbalances that would be beneficial to correct, like the loss of young local people or an ageing demographic. Delivering on community priorities like those listed above may well require additional housing. It is very possible that at the outset of potential property construction that no household(s) will be identified for the property from a waiting list. This is not a problem if the idea behind the project is to address a community need to attract in more households rather than to meet the specific needs of previously identified households. This approach requires the developing organisation to be conservative in the number of properties it develops in the initial phase, but it does not stop the organisation from planning out a larger second phase should the first phase prove successful and all properties are quickly allocated. The fact that the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company have already developed a number of affordable rented properties and have an active waiting list is an additional dataset that will help evidence demand,

As is common with housing surveys and needs assessments, the data presented here provides a snapshot of the housing need and demand at the time of writing. While every effort is made to produce estimates that are as accurate as possible, it is impossible to fully predict the number of households that will be looking for housing in Fort Augustus at the point where any housing project would be completed and ready for occupation.

BACKGROUND DATA

HIGHLAND'S HOUSING NEEDS AND DEMAND ASSESSMENT

Highland Council's Housing Needs and Demand Assessment was published in 2020 and includes an assessment of the housing needs in the Highland region over the next ten years and is used to help develop strategy documents like the Local Housing Strategy and the Local Development Plan. The Housing Needs and Demand Assessment breaks Highland down into ten different housing market areas. The map below shows the Housing Market Areas of Highland.



(Source: Highland Council)

Housing Market Areas are defined as areas that are relatively self-contained housing markets where individuals seek and purchase housing. The criteria for defining these Housing Market Areas include:

- **Self-Containment**: Each Housing Market Area is designed to be a relatively self-contained area in terms of housing search and purchase behaviours. This means that most people looking for housing within a Housing Market Area tend to move within the same area, indicating limited cross-boundary movement for housing purposes.
- **Data Availability**: The areas are structured to be large enough to provide useful data for planning purposes. This ensures that sufficient statistical information is available to inform housing policies and strategies effectively and allow for a 'robust and credible' assessment by the Scottish Government.
- **Local Relevance**: The Housing Market Areas are configured to reflect the diverse housing markets across Highland, acknowledging that different areas experience unique housing issues and trends. This local relevance is crucial for tailoring housing strategies to specific community needs.

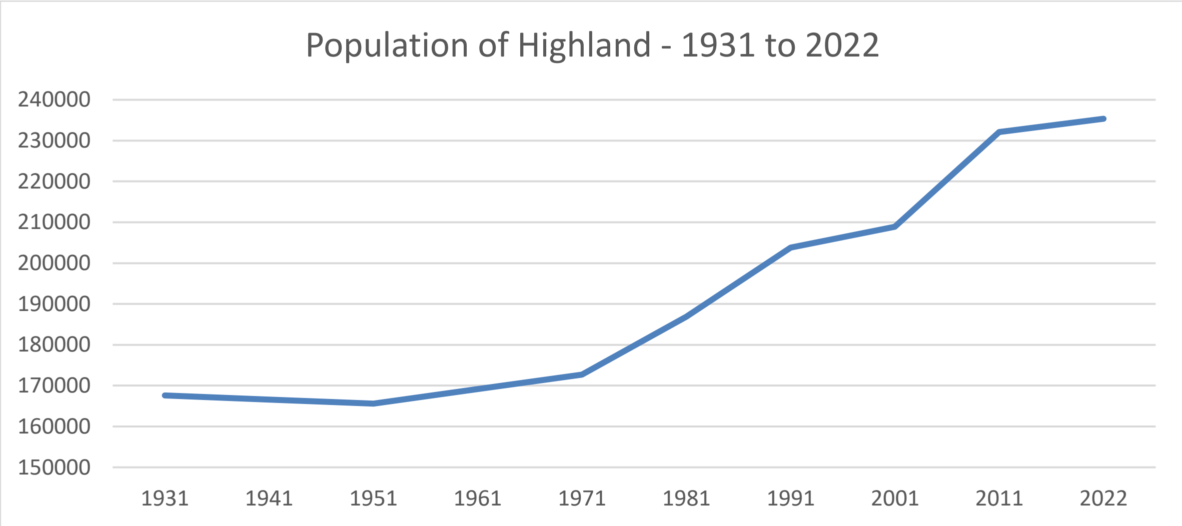
The process of developing these Housing Market Areas involved analysing housing search patterns, market behaviours, and demographic data to ensure that each area accurately represents a distinct housing market within the Highland region. This approach facilitates a more precise assessment of housing needs and demands, enabling the Council to develop targeted policies that address the specific requirements of each Housing Market Area.

While understandable from the perspective of developing the Housing Needs and Demand Assessment, having Fort Augustus included alongside the much larger Inverness is not ideal from a Fort Augustus perspective, as the figures will be hugely skewed towards Inverness and in most cases will have little relevance to Fort Augustus. Due to the scale of the Inverness Housing Market Area the data from the Housing Needs and Demand Assessment will generally only be used as a comparison to more local figures rather than a source of baseline data.

POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

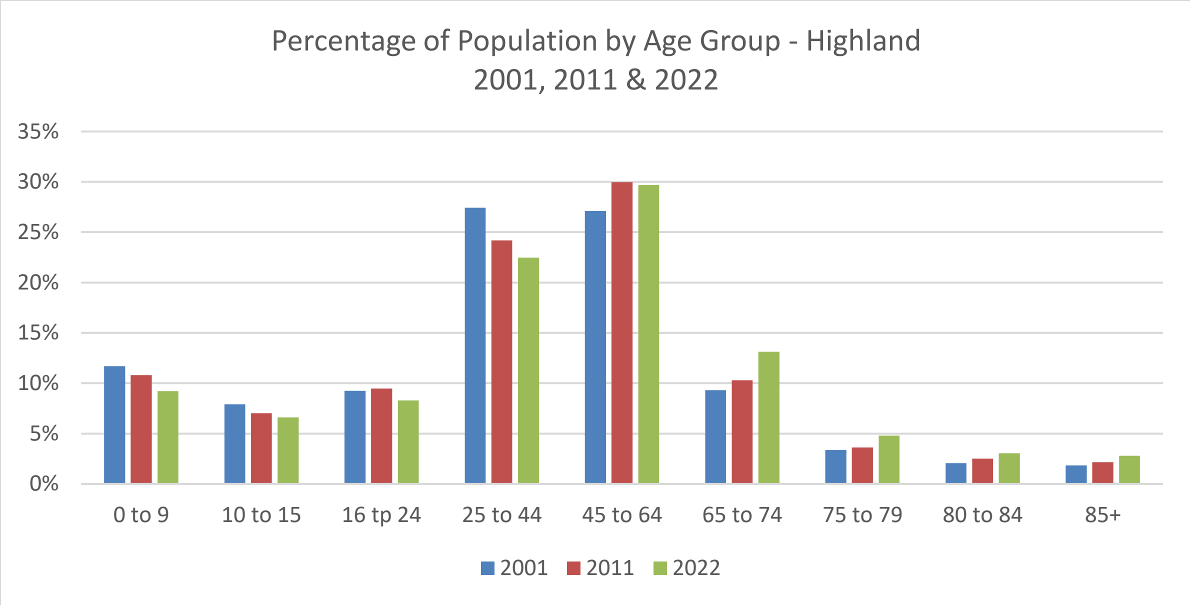
HIGHLAND

Highland's population has grown significantly over the last ten years at a rate of 5.1%, compared to a Scottish average of 1.8%. This is largely down to a strong positive net migration into the Highland region. The population at the 2022 Census was 235,348, up from 232,132 in 2011 and 208,914 in 2001. This is an increase of 26,434, or 12.65% over the 21 years between 2001 and 2022. The primary increase came between 2001 and 2011 and as the graph below shows this followed a previous spike in population between 1971 and 1991 where the population rose from 172,666 to 203,790.



(Source: Scotland's Census)

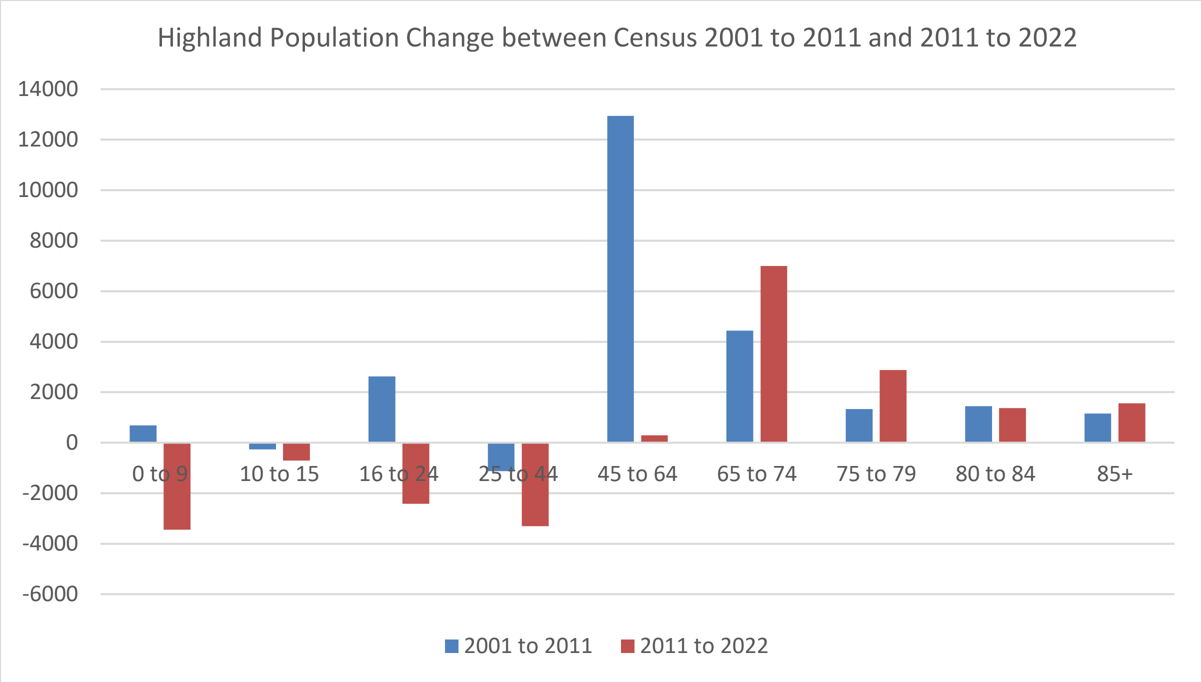
Breaking the Highland population down by age group we can see that like most other areas in Scotland the population in the age groups under 45 is falling, while the population in the age groups 45 and over is rising. The one exemption to this is the 16 to 24 age group, which grew between 2001 and 2011 and although it fell again to 2022 it is still above the 2001 figure. The graph below outlines the percentage of the total population of Highland that is made up of each age group. While the 16 to 24 age group has more people in it in 2022 than 2001, it makes up a smaller percentage of the overall population due to the increase in overall population in Highland.



(Source: Scotland's Census, 2001, 2011 & 2022)

The graph below outlines the percentage change from the 2001 Census to 2011 Census and then from 2011 Census to 2022 Census. As outlined above Highland saw a significant increase in population between 2001 and 2011 and as shown in the graph this was split across most of the age groups, except for the 10 to 15 and 25 to 44 age groups which saw drops in population. The 45 to 64 age group saw a huge increase in numbers, which probably helps increase the number of younger aged people coming into the area as there will have been some families amongst this significant increase. There were also quite significant increases in the 65 to 74 and 16 to 24 age groups, the latter being particularly impressive given this is the age group that areas without a large university often lose people to larger centres with higher education provision. The evolution of the University of the Highlands and Islands potentially helped reduce the number of young people leaving Highland, while also attracting others in from other parts of the UK and beyond.

The figures tell a different story between 2011 and 2022 where there are significant drops in the younger age groups, a slight increase in the 45 to 64 age group and significant increases in the 65 to 74 and 75 to 79 age groups, with comparable increases in the 80 to 84 and 85+ age groups.



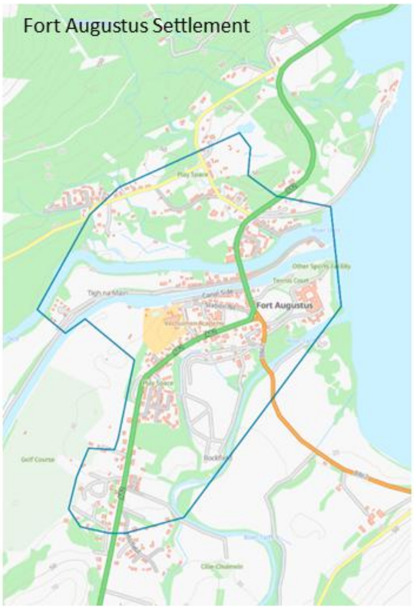
(Source: Scotland's Census, 2001, 2011 & 2022)

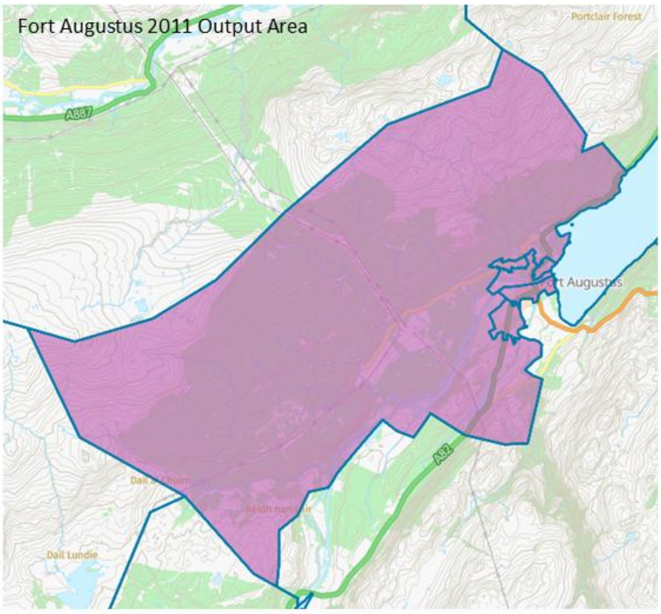
The population growth has focused on more central areas of Highland, with the likes of Caithness seeing declines in population, while Inverness and the surrounding areas have seen significant surges in population and housing development.

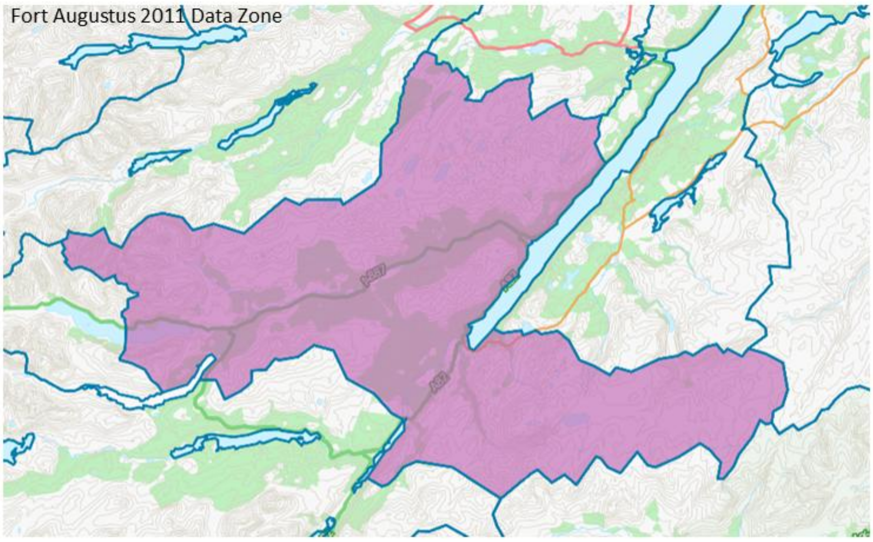
FORT AUGUSTUS

Breaking the figures down to a Fort Augustus level the 2022 Census provides two figures by different geographies. The first figure is for the settlement of Fort Augustus that contains most of the areas housing stock, but misses out some elements of the village. This geography isn't ideal as it misses out some properties, so will underestimate the actual population of Fort Augustus. The alternative geography is by 2011 data zones, this covers a much larger area than Fort Augustus, so while it does include all of the households within Fort Augustus it also includes a significant number of households from areas which are definitely not Fort Augustus. The 2022 Census doesn't yet support the 2011 Output Area geography, which is a pity as it is possible through Output Areas to build a dataset that is between the settlement and 2011 data zones. The 2001 Output Area geography is very similar to the 2011 data zone geography, so has not been utilised.

The settlement, 2011 output area and 2011 data zone geographies are shown in the three maps below.







(Source: Scotland's Census)

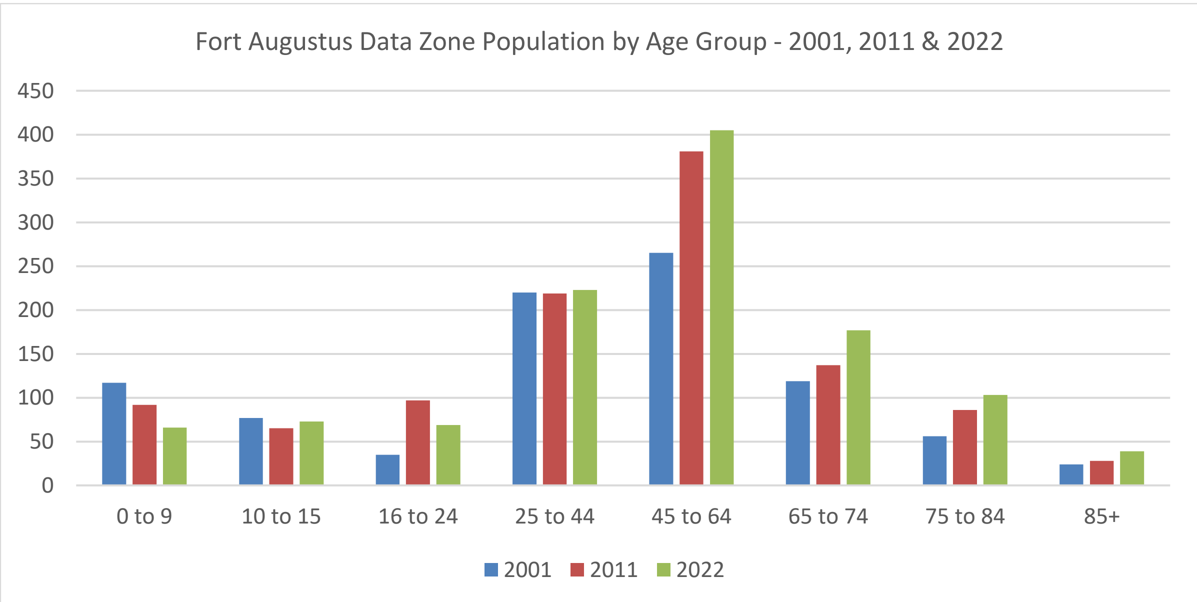
The settlement geography gives Fort Augustus a population of 568 (although the breakdown of age by single year only accounts for 553). This is a reduction from the 621 of 2011 but is higher than the 508 of 2001. It is difficult to find data on the Population of Fort Augustus prior to 2001 as the village was reported alongside other areas within previous census records. However, it has been possible to identify some figures from 1871 Census for the 'district' of Fort Augustus which have a population of 897 and the 1881 Census saw a small decline to 872. The change between 2001 and 2011 which saw an additional 113 people (22% increase) was significant and positive, however, the decline to 568 in 2022 is a concern.

The data zone geography gives the Fort Augustus and neighbouring area a population of 1,163, an increase of 58 from the 2011 Census which had a population of 1,105. It is not possible to assess the 2001 Census population at the 2011 data zone geography.

The 2011 Output Area geography gives Fort Augustus a population of 747 in 2011. This is assessed as the most accurate of the three geographies and it is unfortunate that the same geography is not yet available for the 2001 or 2022 Census data.

To try and get a more accurate 2022 Census figure for the Fort Augustus Output Area an extrapolation of the Fort Augustus data zone and settlement data has been undertaken using the 2011 Census data by calculating the percentage of the population of the Fort Augustus 2011 Data Zone population that is made up of the population of the output area and the size of the Fort Augustus settlement population compared to the output area. While this method is not foolproof and will not be entirely accurate, it does give an estimate for 2001 and 2022 output area figures. The 2001 figure is 611, which rises to the 2011 known figure of 747, and then on to 786 in 2022. This makes sense as it aligns with the increase in population across the 2011 data zone area and the expansion of Fort Augustus outside the traditional settlement boundary. The results of this approach indicate that the best figures to utilise for the Fort Augustus population assessment, are the 2011 data zone figures. The output area figures would be ideal, but with no updated figures beyond 2011 they are not up to date and the settlement figures, although significantly more focused, miss out on the expansion of Fort Augustus outside of the settlement boundary and will not accurately reflect the growth of the village. The remainder of this assessment will utilise the 2011 data zone figures, with the caveat that they incorporate a wider area than the village of Fort Augustus.

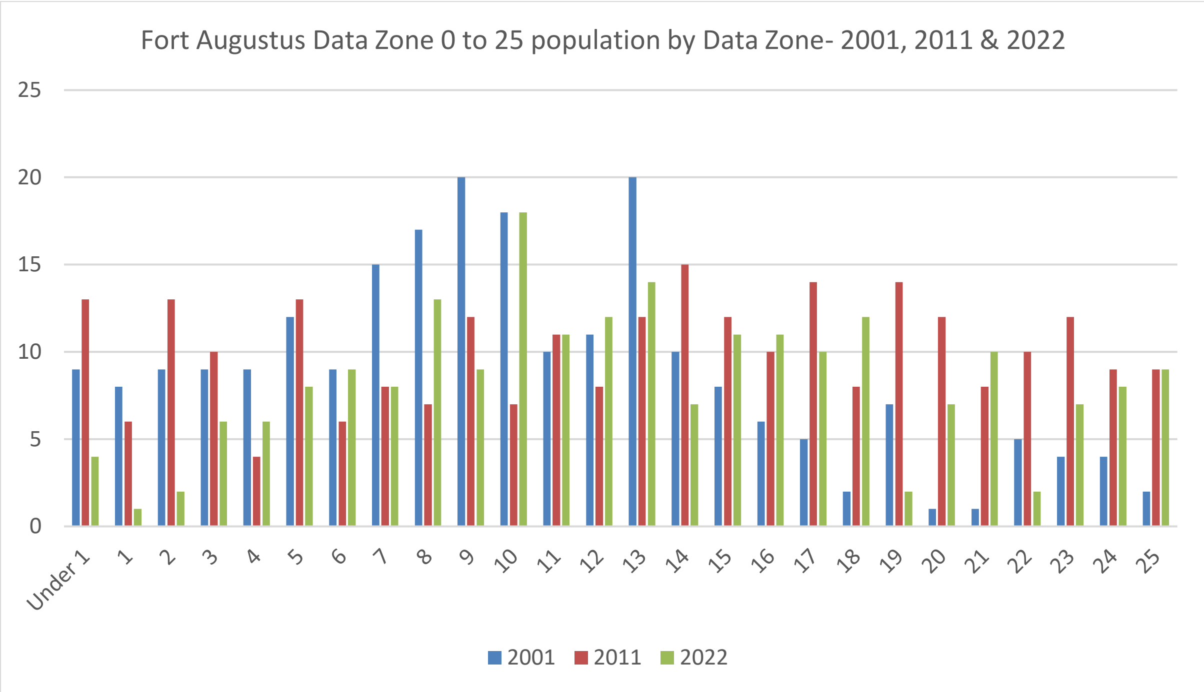
Breaking these figures down to individual age groups we can see that there have been huge variations in how individual age groups have changed over the last 20 years. The 0 to 9 age group has fallen between both 2001 and 2011 and 2011 and 2022 and at 66 is now just over half the 2001 figure of 117. The 10 to 15 age group hasn't changed significantly over the period, dropping to 2011 before rebounding in 2022, while the 16 to 24 age group shot up from 35 to 97 between 2001 and 2011, before falling back to 69 in 2022, which is still a marked increase on 2001. The 25 to 44 age group, has barely changed since 2001, while, the 45 to 64 age group shot up from 265 to 381 between 2001 and 2011, mirroring the large increase across Highland as a whole and grew slightly again in the 2022 Census reaching 405. The retired age groups are mirroring that of the wider Highland area and are showing increases across the board from census to census.



(Source: Scotland's Census, 2001, 2011 & 2022)

The population picture in Fort Augustus mirrors many other rural areas with an increase in older households and a decline in the younger population. Fort Augustus has done well to retain quite a lot of its younger population to date, however, the significant drop in the 0 to 9 population shows that work needs to be done to try and increase the number of families and younger people retained in and attracted to the area to try and help balance the population which is seeing a year on year increase in the older population.

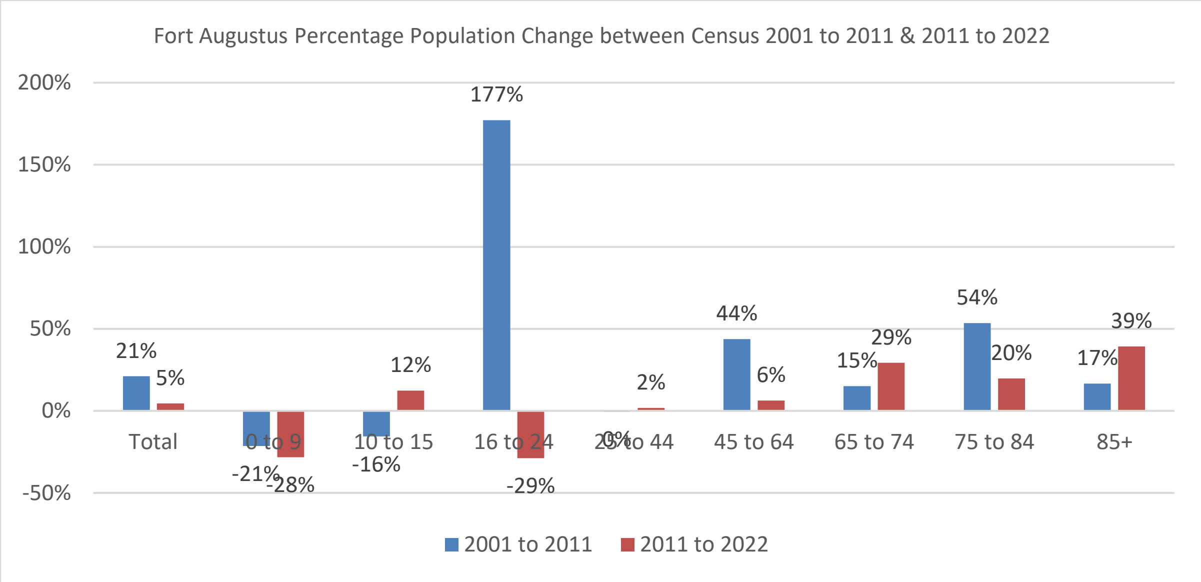
Exploring the Fort Augustus data zone under 25 population by census year provides some striking figures. In the 2001 Census 76% of the 231 population under 25 was 13 and under (176). The spread across the age groups for 2011 was much more evenly distributed at almost 50% for each age group and the total had jumped to 263 following a huge surge in the number of 14 to 25 year olds. By 2022 the total had dropped to 217 with 55% of the age group being in the 0 to 13 bracket.



(Source: Scotland's Census, 2001, 2011 & 2022)

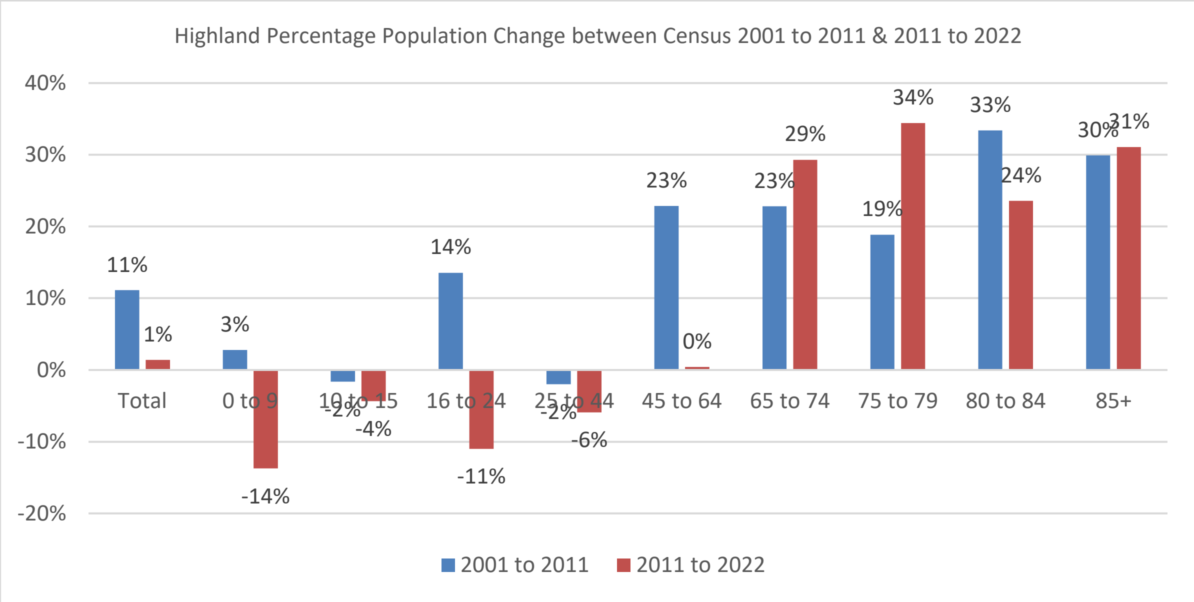
The graph above shows that there has been a real change in the make-up of the younger population in Fort Augustus. Having significantly fewer young children within the overall population has and will continue to pose a problem for the long-term viability of the secondary school within the village, and potentially even the primary school if more young families are not attracted to the area. The increase in the 14 to 25 age group between 2001 and 2011 was a huge positive and even though these figures have dropped to the 2022 Census, the fact that there is still quite a strong population in this age groups is positive. This increase may be down to more work being available locally, or more younger people needing to live with parents due to high house prices, but if these young people want to remain in Fort Augustus ensuring that suitable accommodation is available for them to remain would provide a significant boost to the long-term viability of the community.

The two graphs below outline the change in the population of each age group between the 2001 and 2011 and 2011 and 2022 census' for both Fort Augustus data zone area and Highland.



(Source: Scotland's Census, 2001, 2011 & 2022)

Comparing the graph for Fort Augustus above to the same population change in Highland over the same period we see some striking similarities in patterns, as well as some clear differences. The older populations over 65 increased in both Fort Augustus and Highland between 2001 and 2011 and 2011 and 2022 with some quite significant percentage increases at both the Fort Augustus and Highland levels, with the most significant increases coming over Highland as a whole. Both Fort Augustus and Highland saw significant percentage and number increases in the 45 to 64 age groups between 2001 and 2011, with smaller to no increase between 2011 and 2022. This has helped build the working age population. The key standout figure is the 177% increase in the 16 to 24 age group in Fort Augustus between 2001 and 2011, before dropping back between 2011 and 2022. Highland saw a much smaller increase between 2001 and 2011 and also had a subsequent fall between 2011 and 2022. Fort Augustus saw declines in the 0 to 9 and 10 to 15 age groups between 2001 and 2011, before seeing a small increase in the 10 to 15 age group, and a larger further decline in the 0 to 9 between 2011 and 2022. Highland saw an initial small increase in the 0 to 9 age group, but a large fall between 2011 and 2022. The 10 to 15 age group fell in both periods.



(Source: Scotland's Census, 2001, 2011 & 2022)

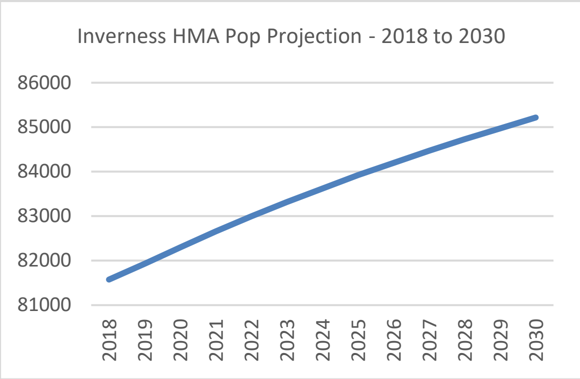
The above shows that while the Fort Augustus data zone area is following the wider Highland pattern in some areas and has outstripped the Highland area in percentage population increases in both census periods, there are worrying signs at the younger end of the population scale. On the reverse, the older population of Fort Augustus is increasing, but not at the speed and scale of Highland as a whole.

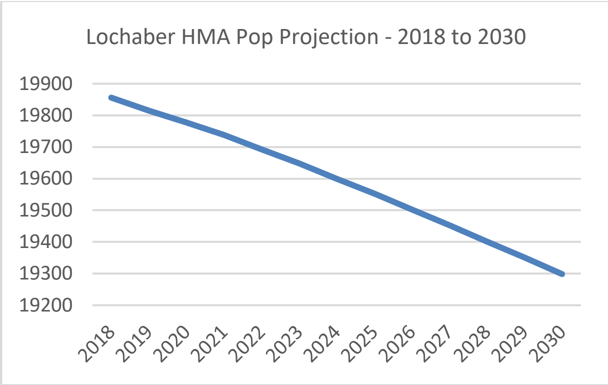
Fort Augustus has seen quite a change in population numbers, but also the make-up of its population over the last 20 years. The reduction in the youngest population age group, as well as the small, but significant rise in the oldest population age groups, have been largely balanced with an increase in the working age population. This leaves Fort Augustus with a larger population than 2001, but as outlined above, with slightly less balance across the age groups. If more can be done to provide housing for younger households and families it will help redress the balance in the population into the longer-term and enhance the sustainability of the area. In population terms this means projects like those already delivered and those being proposed by the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company to deliver additional affordable rented housing to Fort Augustus will help grow and sustain the village and surrounding area.

POPULATION PROJECTIONS

Population projections have been developed for the Highland Housing Market Areas, but as discussed above with Fort Augustus included within the same Housing Market Area as Inverness the figures available don't provide any real information on what might happen in Fort Augustus and other rural areas within the Housing Market Area as it is so heavily dominated by Inverness. The two graphs below show the projected populations for the Inverness and Lochaber Housing Market Areas. This assessment anticipates that the population of Fort Augustus is more likely to follow a similar pattern to the Lochaber Housing Market Area than the Inverness Housing Market Area, therefore while Fort Augustus is not in the Lochaber Housing Market Area, this section on population projections will utilise the Lochaber Housing Market Area data, as well as the Inverness Housing

Market Area data to give what is thought to be a more relevant picture to Fort Augustus in particular.

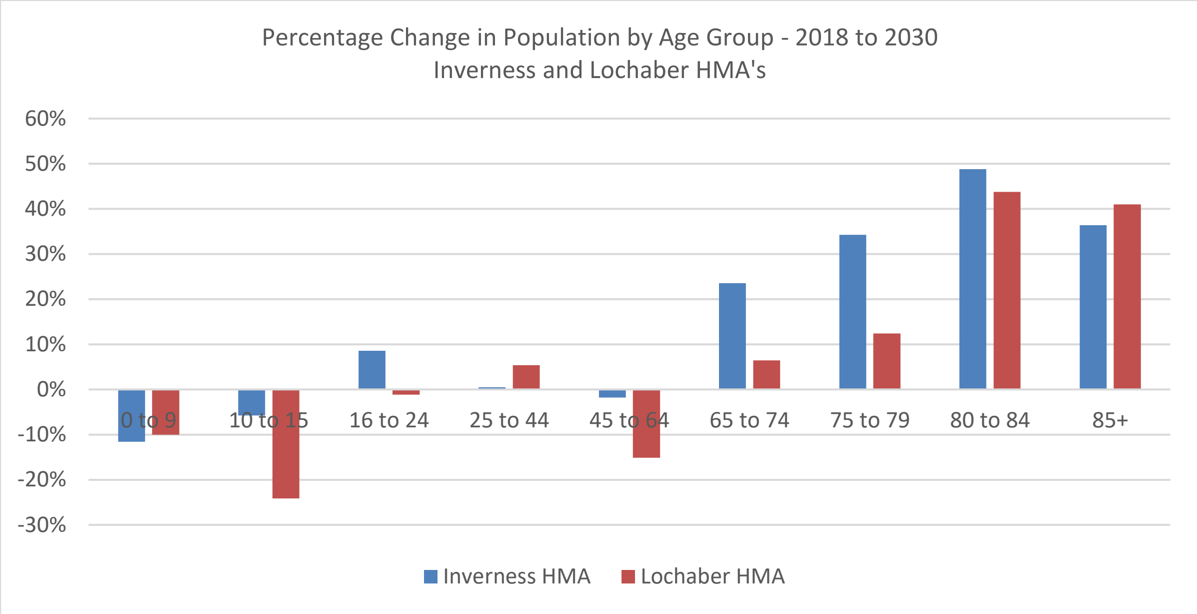




(Source: Improvement Service)

The graphs above show that the population of the Inverness Housing Market Area is projected to steadily increase from 2018 to 2030, while the Lochaber population is projected to decline. It is difficult to benchmark the first four years of the projection against the 2022 Census as the Housing Market Area geographies are different to the Census output geographies, which makes a direct comparison impossible. However, it is thought that population levels in the key settlements within both the Inverness and Lochaber Housing Market Areas have grown slightly between from the 2018 mid-year estimates, that the projections are based on, to the 2022 Census. This does not fit well with the Lochaber projection, which showed a decline year on year, however this is a pattern that has been reflected in a number of other rural and island areas where populations have grown when they were projected to decline. There is the potential that Covid-19 and the ability to more readily work remotely has helped increase populations in more rural areas, which obviously could not have been foreseen in the 2018 based projections prior to Covid-19.

The graph below outlines the projected percentage change in the population by age group between 2018 and 2030 for both the Inverness and Lochaber Housing Market Areas. Both areas are projected to see a further decline in the youngest two population age groups, which is not good news. The Inverness Housing Market Area is projected to see an almost 10% increase in the 16 to 24 age group, while the Lochaber Housing Market Area is projected to see a very slight decline. This pattern is reversed for the 25 to 44 age group where Lochaber Housing Market Area is due to see the larger increase, while Inverness Housing Market Area remains stable. The 45 to 64 age group sees falls in population for both areas, however, there is projected to be a much larger fall in the Lochaber Housing Market Area than the Inverness Housing Market Area. There are projected increases across all of the oldest population age groups, much like most other areas of rural Scotland, but the Inverness Housing Market Area is projected to see much larger increases in the 65 to 74 and 75 to 79 age groups.

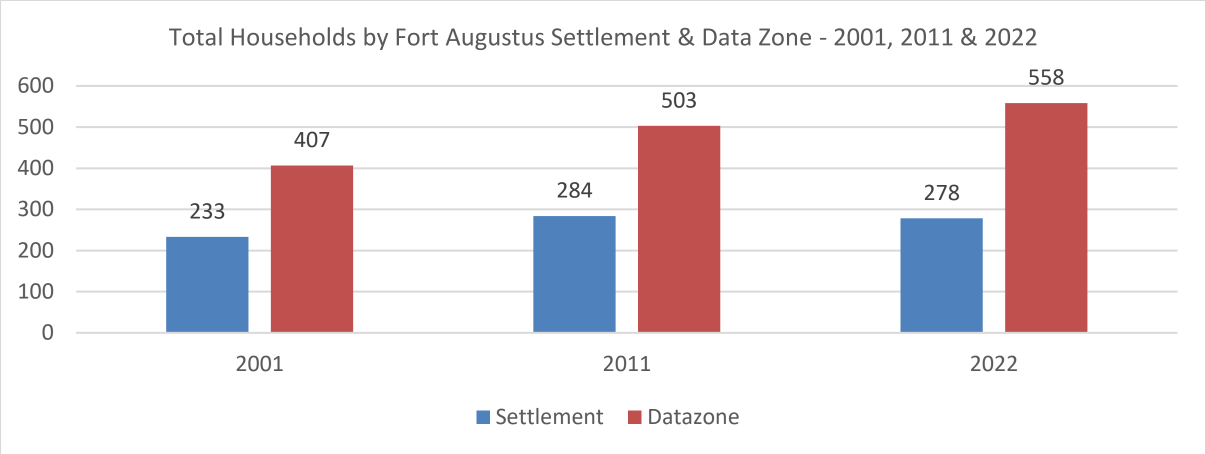


The above analysis shows that the expectation is for the continued decline of the younger population and either a slight increase or stagnation in the 16 to 24 and 25 to 44 age groups, with the potential for a slight or larger fall in the older working age age group and then a continued increase in the older age groups. These projections are based on estimates that do not include the impact of external factors like Covid-19 or policy decisions at a national, regional or local level. That means, the community of Fort Augustus has the potential to take actions that will help counter any potential drop in the younger age population in particular to help positively rebalance the areas demographic, rather than see a continued reduction in younger people.

Increasing the population of Fort Augustus, especially with additional younger people and families, should be a key priority and will help offset the projected population falls that are outlined in the graphs above as well as sustain the community and the area’s economy. For this to be successful it is very likely that additional housing across a range of tenures will be required.

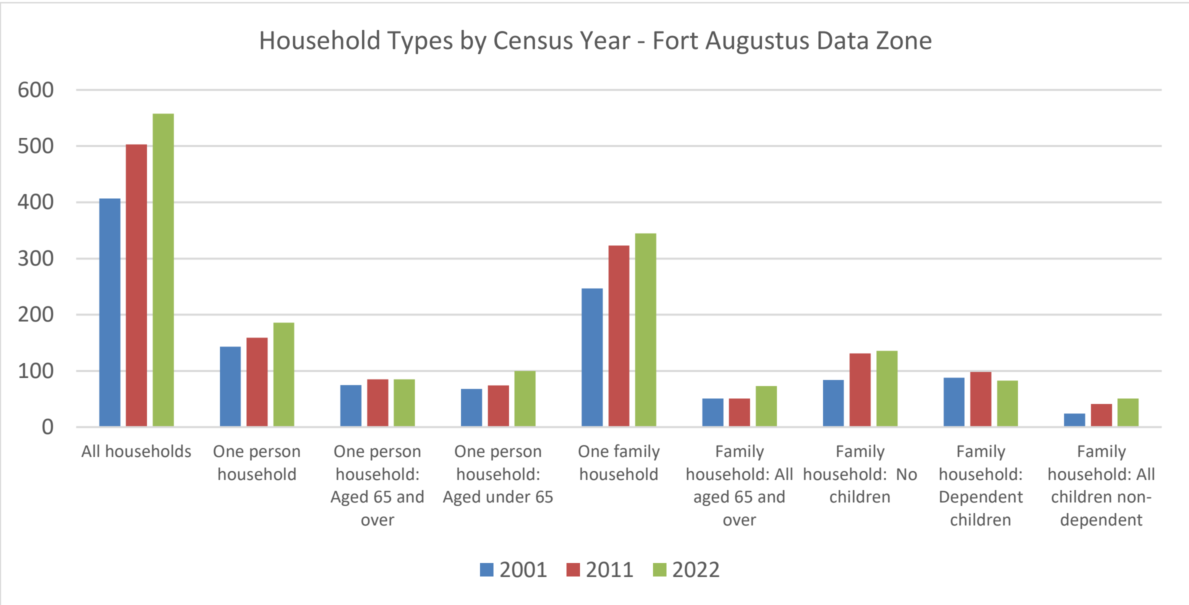
HOUSEHOLDS

The Fort Augustus data zone has seen a marked increase in the number of households between 2001 and 2022 increasing from 407 to 558. The number of households within the Fort Augustus Census settlement area has increased from 233 to 278. The table below outlines the changes. As would probably be expected there is a larger increase in the data zone than the core settlement, showing that the majority of the development within the area has been outside the historic core. The slight decline in the number of households in the core settlement between 2011 and 2022, while the larger data zone area continued to grow, shows that a small amount of the housing stock within the settlement was either becoming empty or being used for another purpose, like short-term holiday letting. The fact that the difference between 2011 and 2022 is six properties, shows that while there has been a loss of long-term properties within the Fort Augustus settlement between 2011 and 2022 there has not been a significant change.



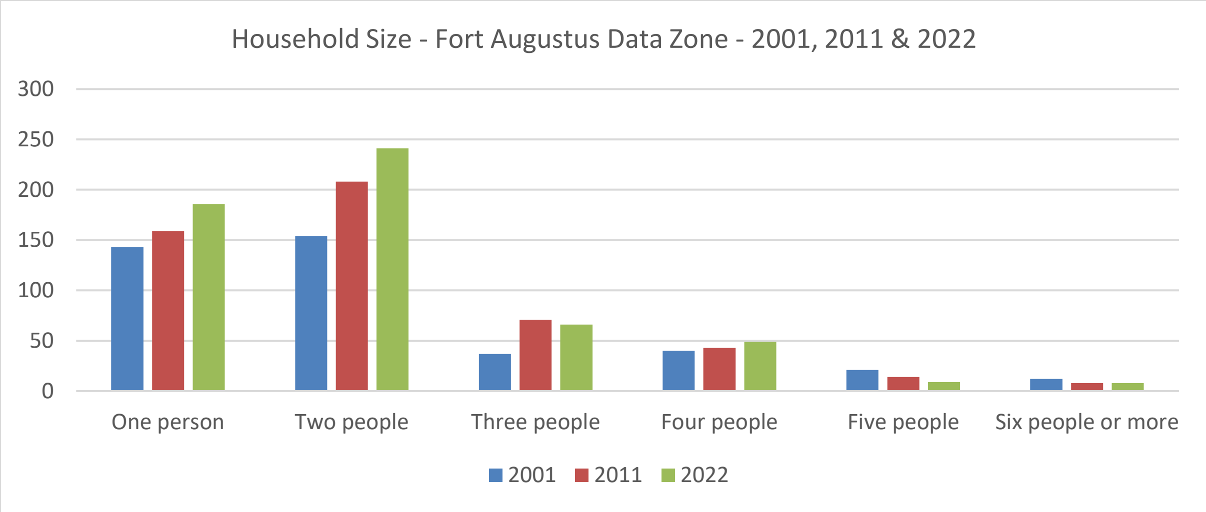
(Source: Scotland's Census, 2022, 2011 & 2001)

Each household type has increased over the period with single person households increasing from 143 to 186, with increases in both single person households under 65 and over 65, providing some hope that some younger people may be finding housing. The number of families has also increased, however, the number of families with children is the only household type to have fallen over the period, reinforcing the concerns raised in the population section above.



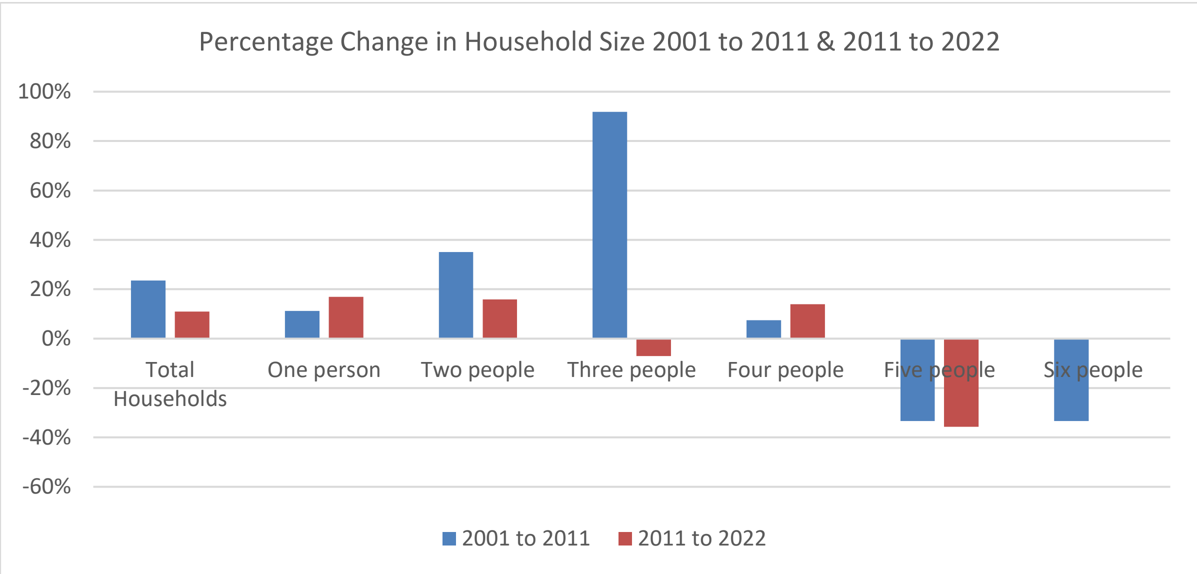
(Source: Scotland's Census, 2022, 2011 & 2001)

In terms of household size there has been a steady increase in both one and two person households. Three person households grew quite significantly between 2001 and 2011, before slipping back slightly to 2022. Four person households grew slightly in both periods and five person households dropped quite significantly in both periods. The number of six plus person households dropped between 2001 and 2011, but remained steady to 2022. These figures are outlined in the graph below.



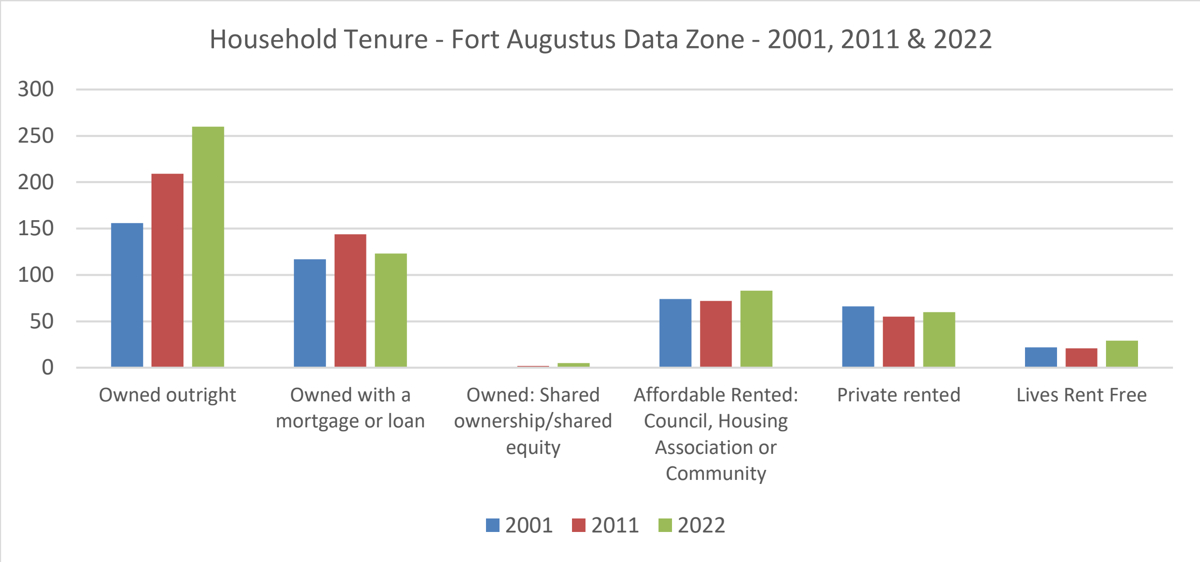
(Source: Scotland's Census, 2022, 2011 & 2001)

In terms of percentage change the graph below shows that the significant increase in the 45 to 64 age group, as well as the increase in the 10 to 15 age group between 2001 and 2011 was largely down to couples and couples with one child moving into the Fort Augustus area.



(Source: Scotland's Census, 2022, 2011 & 2001)

Turning to household tenure we can see that much like many rural areas there are a significant percentage of properties in Fort Augustus that are owned outright. This has increased over the last 20 years and shows people who have stayed and paid off their mortgage as well as those who have been unable to move and purchase for cash. The fact the number of people buying with a mortgage has dropped between 2011 and 2022 shows that it is becoming increasingly difficult for households that rely on mortgage finance to access the market. There has been a slight increase in the amount of affordable rented housing, thanks to the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company's development on the outskirts of the village. The very low levels of low-cost home ownership shows a significant gap in the tenancy options within the village, particularly for younger households and families that are struggling to get on the housing ladder and compete in the mainstream market. The number of private rentals has dropped, which is the case across much of Scotland, however, the slight rebound between 2011 and 2022 is good news. Whether this can be sustained given the increasing pressure being applied to the private rental sector is as yet unknown.



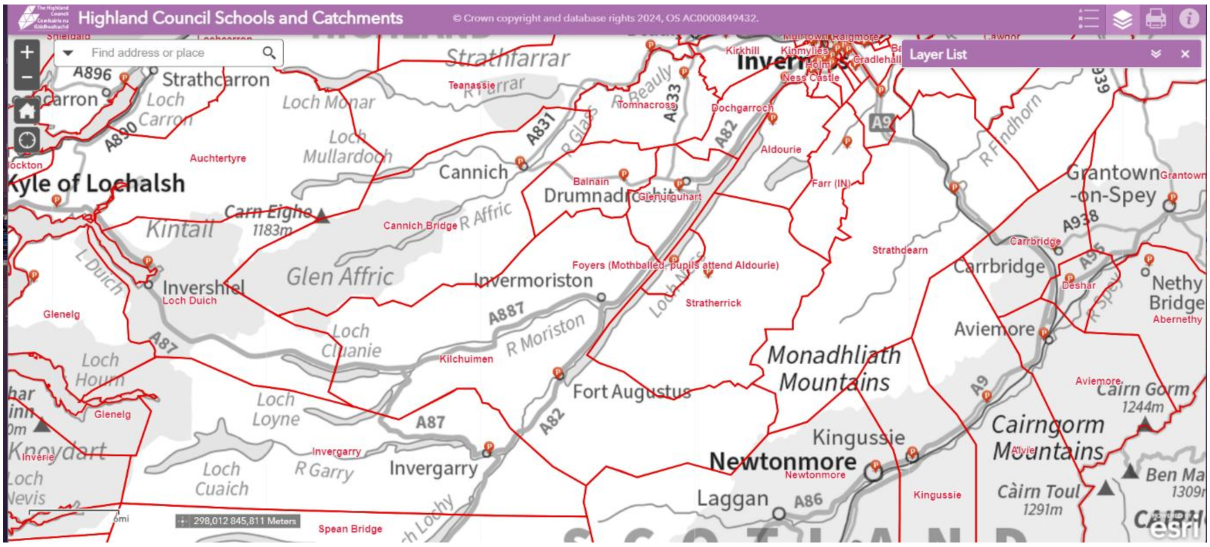
(Source: Scotland's Census, 2022, 2011 & 2001)

The increase in households within the Fort Augustus data zone, and the relatively stable household numbers within the core Fort Augustus settlement are positives. The fact that there are very, very few low-cost home ownership options, a reduction in properties owned with a mortgage since 2011, not many private rentals, only a very small increase in affordable rentals and a huge increase in properties that are owned outright shows that while the market is functioning, it is not providing well for those younger households who are not able to access market purchase and would not be prioritised for social rented housing. This is a key demographic that the community wants and needs to retain, so additional housing that could support them needs to be considered.

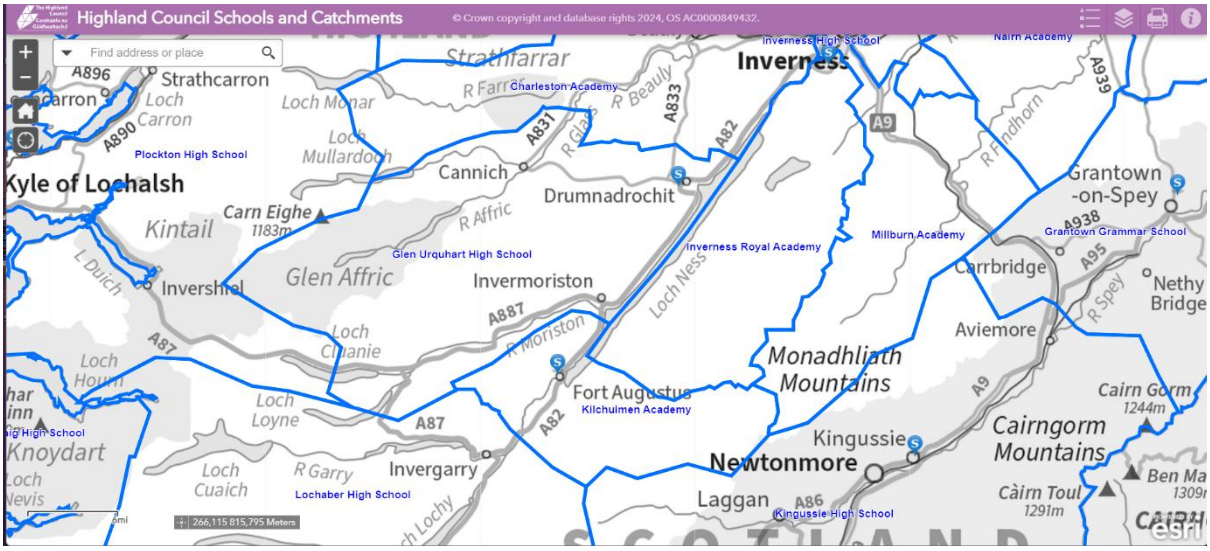
SCHOOL ROLL

Fort Augustus has one school which contains both primary and secondary phases. Kilchuimen Primary School has 35 children and strangely a larger catchment area than Kilchuimen Academy which has 43 children in 2024/25.

The pictures below, taken from the Highland Council's Schools and Catchments online portal shows the primary school catchment areas in red and the secondary school catchment areas in blue. As can be seen the Kilchuimen Primary School catchment area includes Invermoriston and an area to the west towards Inversheil, The Kilchuimen Academy catchment area stops on the Fort Augustus side of the River Moriston. This means that some children who go to Kilchuimen Primary School will actually leave and go to Glen Urquhart High School in Drumnadrochit. The boundary of the Inverness Royal Academy also buffers up on Kilchuimen Academy to the North east. Lochaber High School in Fort William is to the south and Kingussie High School to the east.



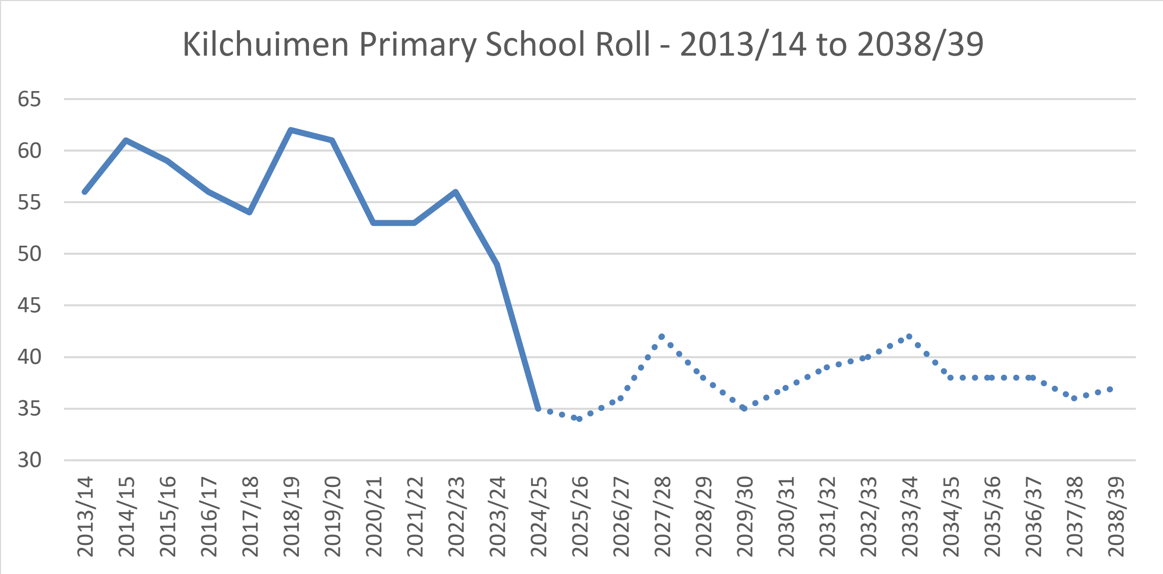
(Source: Highland Council Schools and Catchments)



(Source: Highland Council Schools and Catchments)

These forecasts are estimates based on analytical work undertaken within Highland Council, but if more younger households and those with children of primary school age and below can be retained in and attracted to Fort Augustus it will help support and sustain the school roll of both Kilchuimen Primary School and Academy.

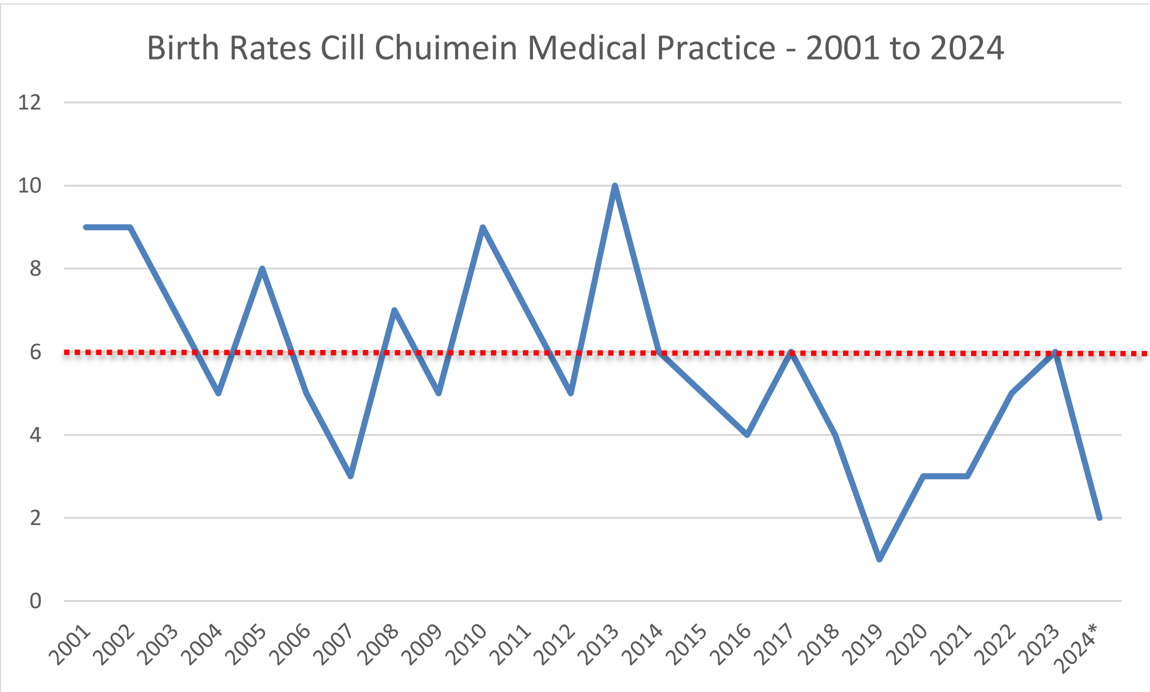
The graph below outlines the school roll for Kilchuimen Primary School from 2013/14 to a forecasted total at 2038/39. Actual figures are in solid blue and forecasts are dashed.



(Source: Highland Council)

The graph shows quite a change in the Kilchuimen Primary School roll since 2013/14, with a high of 62 in 2018/19 and the current 35. The drop from 2023/24 to 2024/25 is significant and as can be seen from the following forecast numbers are not expected to rise beyond 42 again. Increasing the primary school roll by retaining and attracting more younger people and families is something that the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company could look to do through its housing projects and would provide significant benefits to the local community.

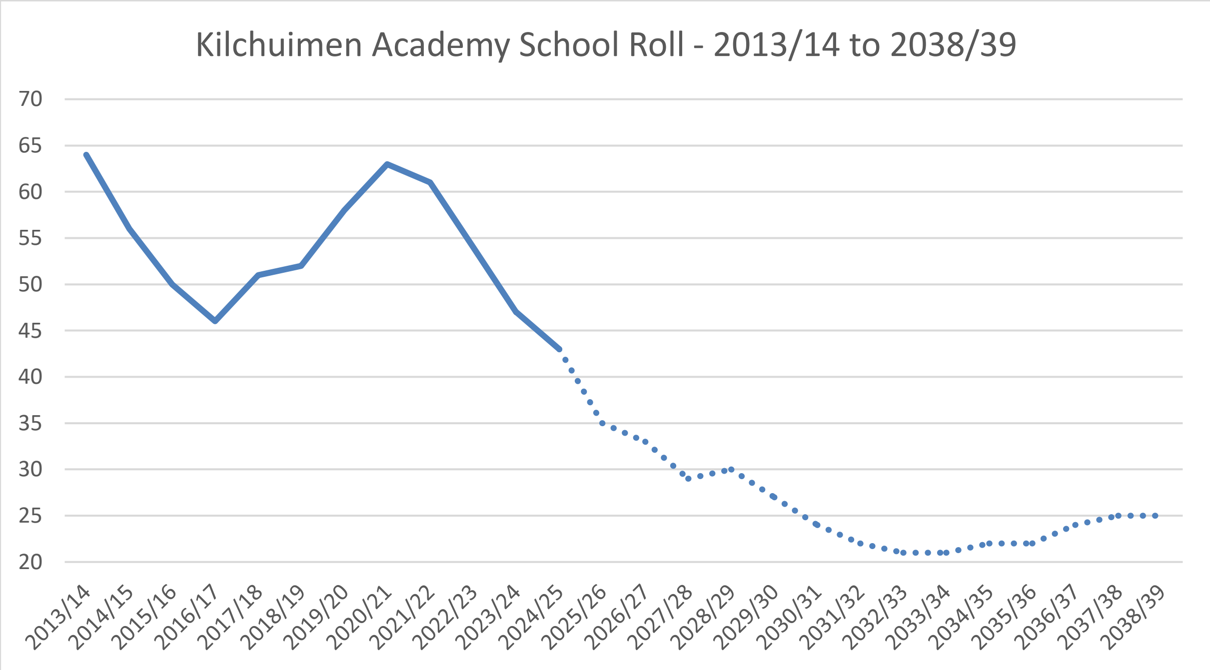
To help inform the potential future nursery roll NHS Highland has provided birth figures for mothers registered at the Cill Chuimein Medical Practice in Fort Augustus. The graph below outlines the trend in births from 2001 to the end of October 2024.



(Source: NHS Highland)

The graph shows that births have ranged from one to ten over the 24-year period, with an average of six births a year (shown by the red line). Prior to 2015 the birth rate was largely over the average and was only below the average in five years over the 14-year period. From 2015 to 2024 the birth rate has only reached the average of six on two occasions and has never been higher than six over the ten-year period. This shows a steady decline in the birth rate in Fort Augustus that, if left to continue will see the nursery and primary school rolls decline further in line with the forecasts presented above.

In terms of secondary school pupils the graph below outlines the school roll and forecast for Kilchuimen Academy from 2013/14 to 2038/39. The graph shows a school roll of 64 at the start of the period, which quickly dropped to 46 in 2016/17, before rebounding to 63 in 2020/21. The latest figures for 2024/25 show that the roll has once again dropped and at 43 is now lower than the previous low of 46 in 2016/17. However, unlike the period after 2016/17 the roll is now forecast to continue dropping, reaching a low of 21 in 2032/33, before rebounding slightly to 25 in 2038/39.

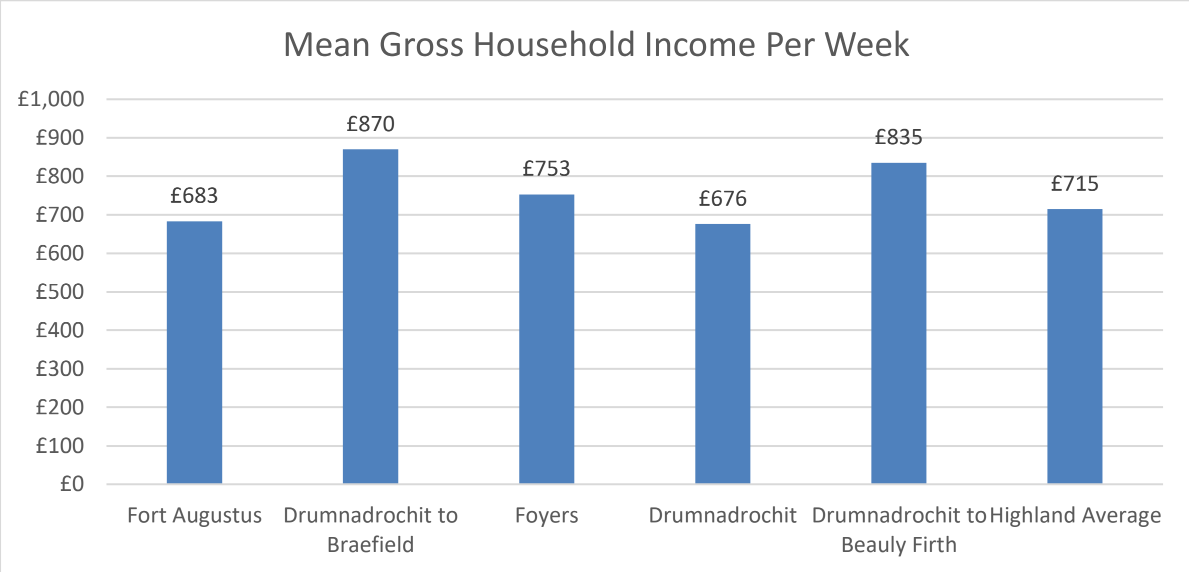


(Source: Highland Council)

This is a significant drop of 61% since 2013/14 and 34% from the current level in 2024/25 which, when viewed with the catchment area map above, the fact that there is only one other school among the Highland regions 29 secondary schools that is forecast to have a roll below 30 by 2038/39 and the ongoing need for local authorities to make budgetary savings raises questions about whether the Kilchuimen Academy is under potential threat of closure at some point in the medium-term. The primary school is very unlikely to be under threat given the wider catchment area and the fact that primary schools usually have smaller catchment areas than secondary schools, but if the community wants to do what it can to retain the secondary school at Kilchuimen the roll will have to grow and that will require more families to remain in and move to the Fort Augustus area and for the falling primary school roll to also be arrested and the decline reversed.

INCOME

The most up to date data for the average weekly household income that specifically covers the Fort Augustus data zone was published by the Scottish Government and is based on 2018 figures. The mean gross household weekly income for the Fort Augustus area is estimated at £683. This comes to £35,519 for the full year. The graph below shows the average weekly income against the neighbouring data zones and as can be seen only the centre of Drumnadrochit has a slightly lower income level, while the other three areas are significantly higher than Fort Augustus and the Highland average is £22 higher at £715.



(Source: Scottish Government, 2018)

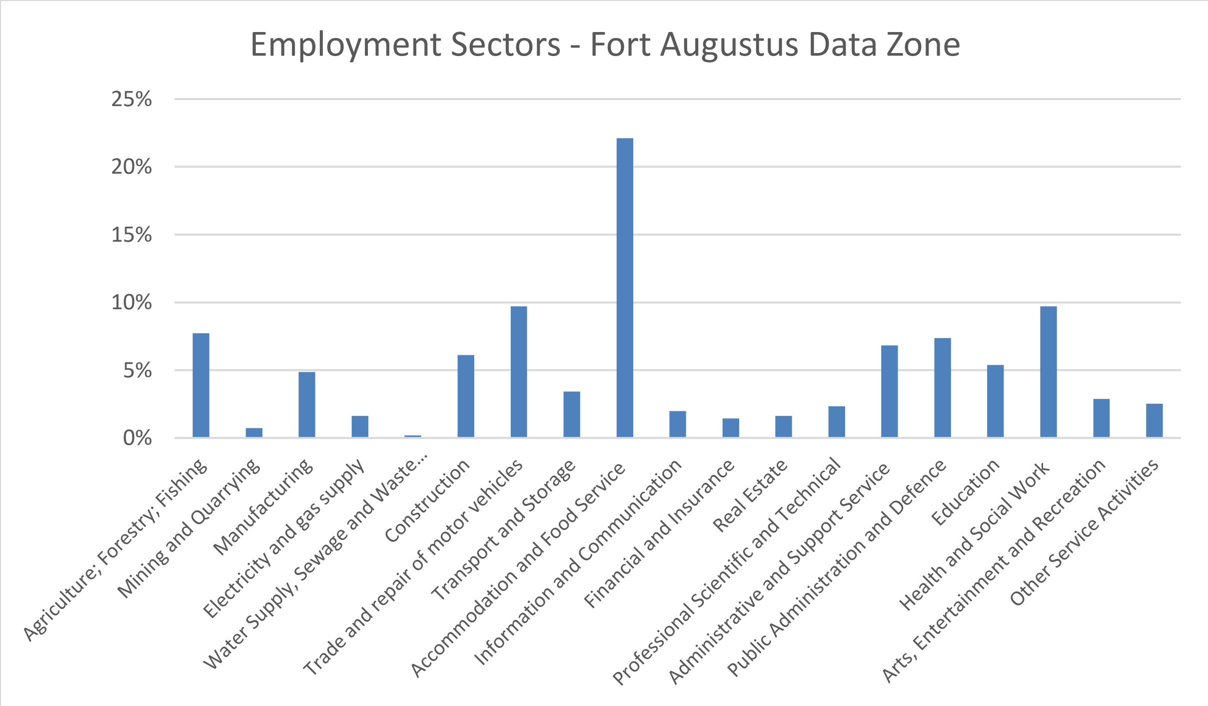
The rental and house sales sections below with explore affordability of the different housing options when compared with the 2018 income levels.

EMPLOYMENT

There are a number of areas of the local economy in Fort Augustus that are struggling to attract significant employees or fill certain roles. Teachers, paramedics, health workers (at home care and Home care workers), trades (e.g. plumbers, electricians etc), and childcare are all in short supply. Hospitality and Tourism roles are always in demand but are of course often seasonal and low paid, so can be difficult to fill.

Fort Augustus has a number of larger employers, generally around tourism, but also in construction, health care and other public sector roles.

The graph below outlines the different employment sectors within Fort Augustus. As would be expected tourism, in the form of accommodation and food services is far and away the largest sector of employment within Fort Augustus, employing 22% of workers. Surprisingly the trade and repair of motor vehicles is, along with health and social work the next highest percentage at 10%. Agriculture and fishing, public administration and administrative and support services are next a 7%, and construction following closely behind at 6%. Manufacturing and education come in at 5%, with transport and arts, entertainment and recreation the other main sectors. These are outlined in the graph below.



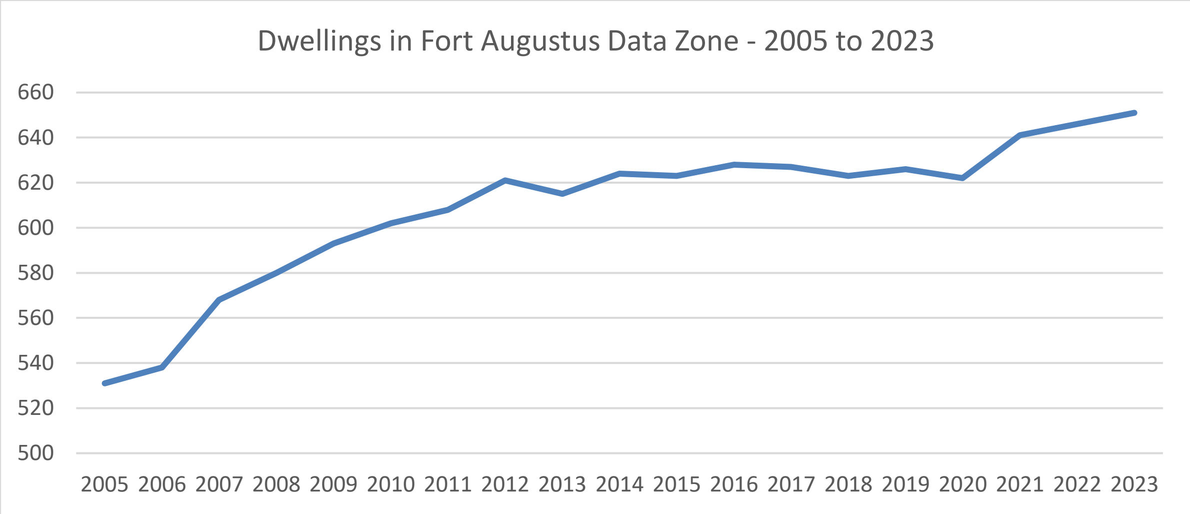
(Source: Scotland's Census 2022)

Scottish and Southern Energy Network's are developing the Skye Reinforcement Project which will see a transmission cable run from Skye past Fort Augustus. There will be a large sub-station developed near Fort Augustus and this is going to require a significant labour force to deliver. To facilitate this development Balfour Beatty have applied for planning permission to develop a site for up to 350 workers.

HOUSING STOCK

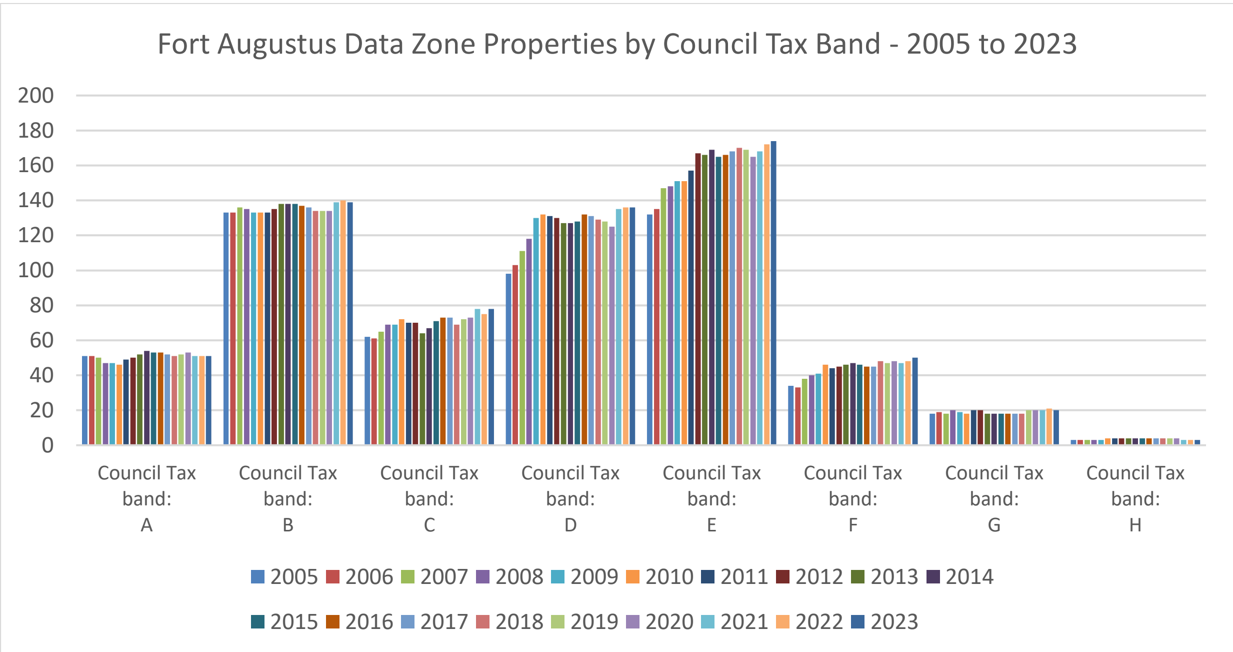
HOUSING NUMBERS

Housing stock within the Fort Augustus data zone has been gradually increasing for over 20 years as outlined in the graph below which gives estimated figures of 531 dwellings in 2005 and 651 in 2023. There are no corresponding figures for the settlement of Fort Augustus, but if the household figures above are an indication there may well have been a slight increase, but it appears much of the growth in housing stock has come outside the historic core, which is to be expected.



(Source: National Records of Scotland, Small Area Statistics)

In terms of the Council Tax make up of the housing stock the graph below outlines the change in the number of properties in each council tax band by year. The graph outlines that the largest increases have come in the D and E bands, with F in third. There has been a 2.4% increase in the number of band D properties, a 1.9% increase in E's and a 1.3% increase in F's and this shows that the majority of new house development in the area has been larger and more expensive housing that attracts a higher council tax banding. The percentage of the housing stock that is classed as band A has dropped by 1.8% and band B by 3.7%.

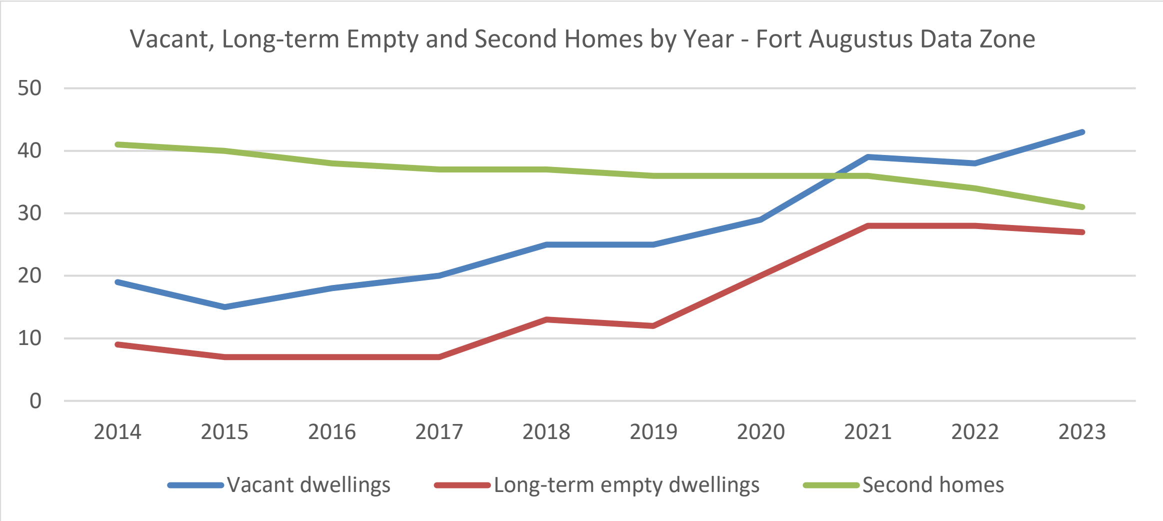


(Source: National Records of Scotland, Small Area Statistics)

Empty homes are a key issue within the Highland Council area, rising from 434 in 2013 to 3,334 in 2023[1]. Data for the Fort Augustus data zone indicates that the number of vacant dwellings and long-

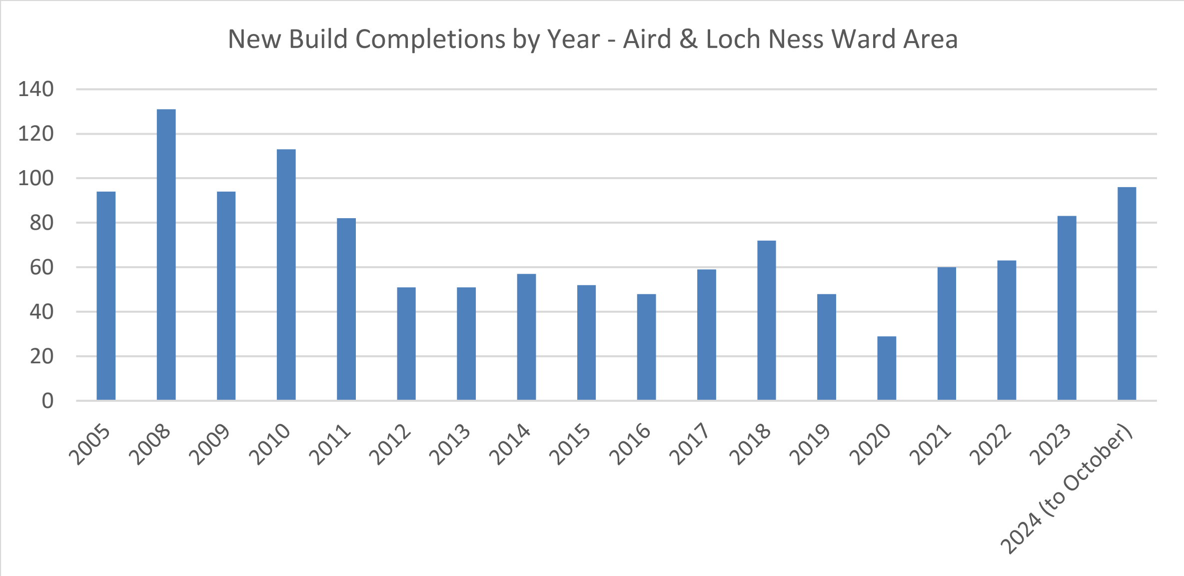
[1] Inverness Courier, *Nearly 670 per cent increase in long-term empty properties in Highland*, 20 December 2023

term empty dwellings has grown steadily since 2014. In 2014 there were 19 vacant dwellings, including 9 long-term empty dwellings. By 2023 this figure had jumped to 43 vacant dwellings, of which 27 were long-term empty dwellings. This is a huge jump and if these properties could be brough back into long-term residential use it would have a hugely beneficial impact on the availability of housing within Fort Augustus. The number of second homes has dropped between 2014 and 2023, however, it is possible that some of these may have moved from council tax to non-domestic rates if they are being utilised as short-term rentals as well as second home holiday accommodation, which is probably likely in a number of cases. If this is in fact the case it is likely that the number of second homes has gone up, rather than fallen, but this is not possible to verify. The graph below shows the change in vacant properties, long-term vacant properties and second homes in the Fort Augustus data zone.



(Source: National Records of Scotland, Small Area Statistics)

In terms of new build housing completions there isn't data publicly available at a Fort Augustus settlement or data zone level. The smallest geography that could be identified was Highland Council ward areas, which while larger than is ideal do provide some information on completions over the years in the area around Fort Augustus. The graph below outlines the completions in the Aird and Loch Ness ward from 2005 to 2023. Completions started strongly prior to the 2012 financial crash, averaging 102 properties a year from 2005 to 2011. between 2012 and 2022 the average fell to 53 properties a year. It is only in the last two years that completions once again started to climb with 83 in 2022 and 96 in 2024 from January to October. Local knowledge outlines that the majority of these new build properties that have been developed have been built in Drumnadrochit.



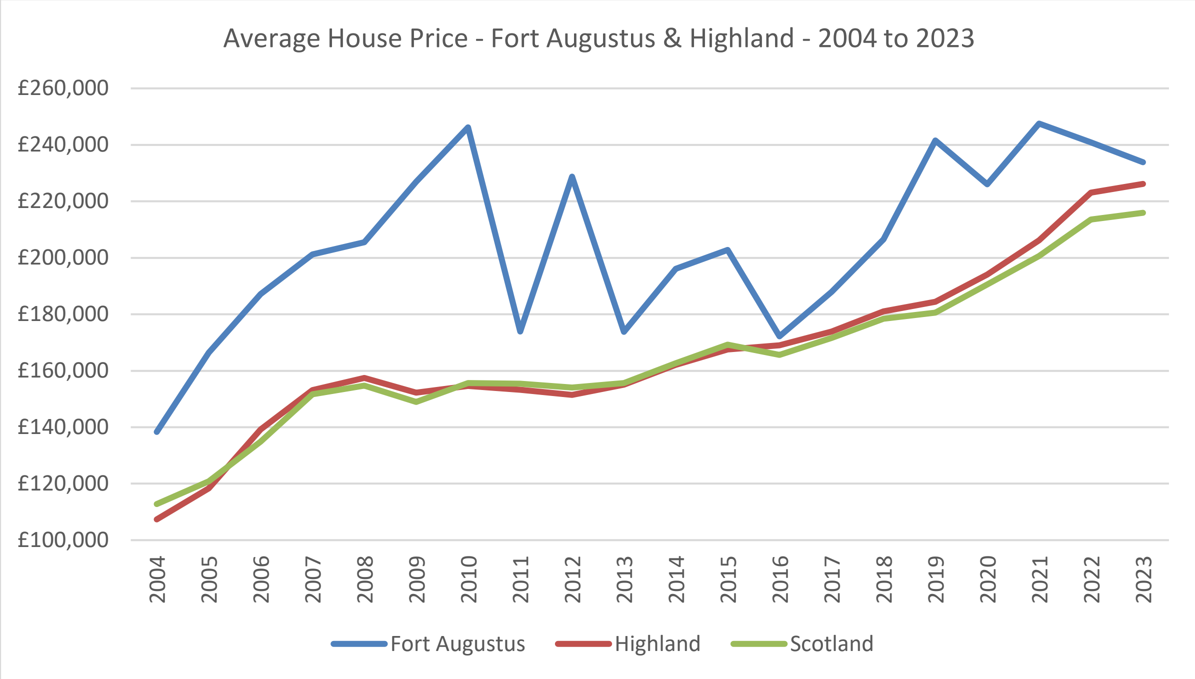
(Source: Highland Council)

If these completion rates can be sustained it will help increase the available housing options for households, and at least slightly reduce the pressure on the housing market. However, the significant increase in materials prices, the huge amount of housing development required to support the offshore wind industry in Highland, as well as the significant Scottish and Southern Energy Networks development programme that will see a new cable from the west coast over to Beauly, which will require significant housing units developed to house the required workforce.

Fort Augustus has been identified as a priority area for new development within the Highland Council Strategic Housing Investment Plan 2025 to 2030, although no specific sites appear to have been identified for development.

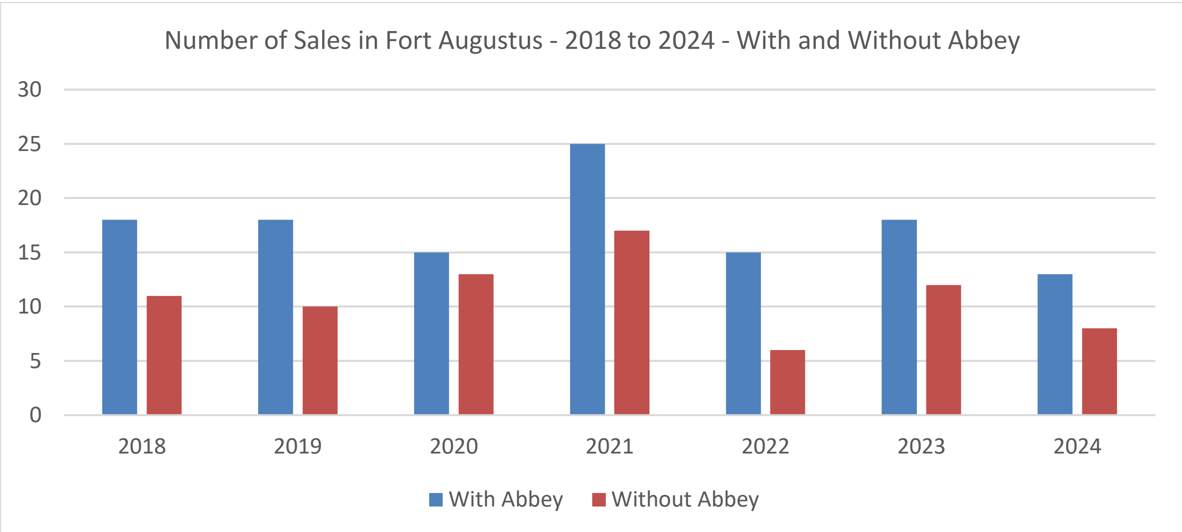
HOUSE SALES

The average house price in the Fort Augustus data zone has varied significantly over the years. In 2004 the average house price was £138,332 and increased rapidly to £246,201 in 2010. The average price in the Highland region as a whole increased from £107,351 to £155,650 over the same period, showing just how large the Fort Augustus increase was. However, there was significant change over the next decade with prices dropping significantly and then increasing rapidly from year to year. This was probably at least partially impacted by national forces like the 2008 crash, the 2012 credit squeeze, the run up to the independence referendum and the Brexit referendum. By 2019 prices had once again topped £240,000. There was a decline in 2020 to £225,000 before another post Covid-19 surge to £247,532m before prices began to slowly fall back again towards the Highland average over 2022 and 2023. The change in the house prices in Fort Augustus, Highland and Scotland are outlined and compared in the table below.



(Source: Registers of Scotland Monthly House Prices data)

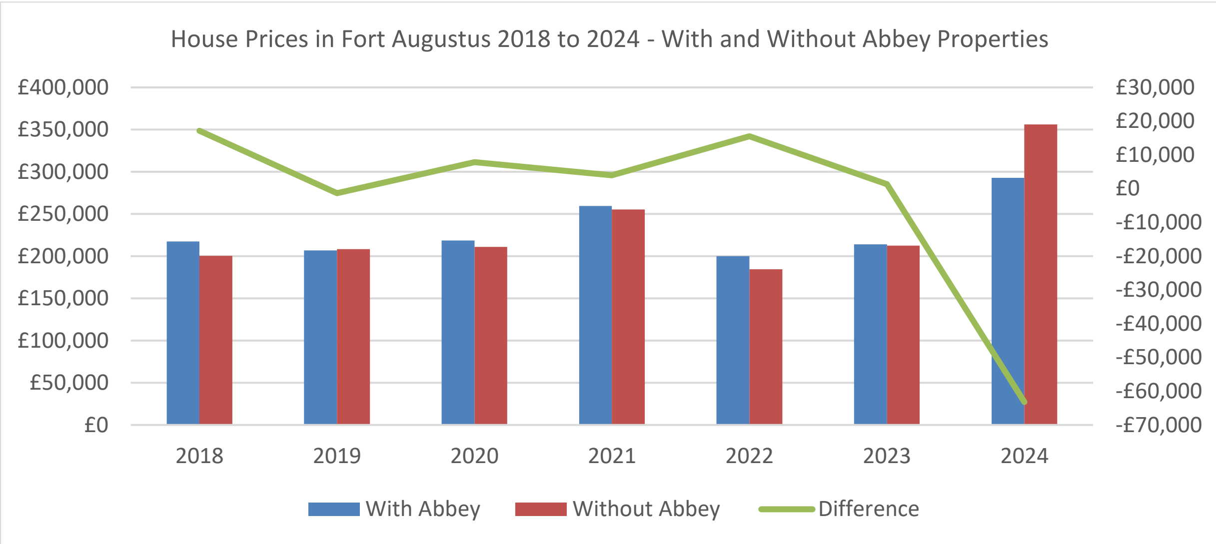
Fort Augustus is different from many areas due to the presence of the Highland Club at the St Benedict Abbey. The Abbey has 97 apartments and 12 cottages within its grounds and the vast majority are holiday homes and holiday lets. Each apartment and cottage is sold individually, which means that sales of properties at the Abbey make up quite a significant proportion of sales within Fort Augustus each year. For this reason the analysis of house sales in Fort Augustus includes figures with and without the Abbey properties with the aim of giving a better idea of the number of property sales and prices for permanent housing within the Village. The graph below outlines the number of sales in Fort Augustus with and without the Abbey included using information from Rightmove.



(Source: Rightmove)

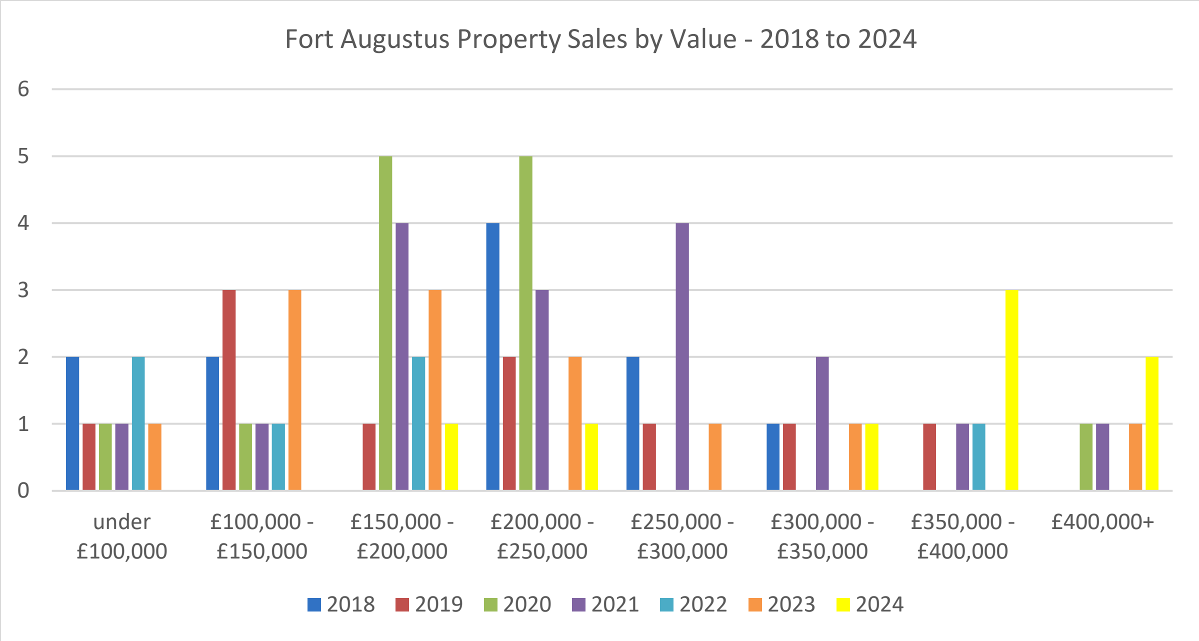
As the graph shows a significant percentage of sales in Fort Augustus are within the Abbey grounds with 45 sales between 2018 and mid-2024, compared to 77 sales in the rest of Fort Augustus. The average number of sales in Fort Augustus without including the Abbey is eleven, but the lowest figure in 2022 is six. This shows a real lack of available housing for purchase within Fort Augustus, which is masked if the Abbey figures are included.

In terms of average sale price, the graph below shows that between 2018 and 2023 when the St Benedict's Abbey properties are included the average sale prices are about £7,431 higher and 2019 was the only year where the average sale price was lower when Abbey properties are included. However, 2024 tells a very different story with the average price being £63,207 higher when Abbey properties are not included. This can potentially be explained the fact there were only eight sales when the five Abbey sales were excluded and five of these were £365,000 and above, which had a huge impact on the average price for the year.



(Source: Rightmove)

The graph below outlines the sales for each year split into £50,000 increments to show the number of properties that sold at different in each year. As would be expected, more properties were sold in the lower value bands in 2018 than 2024, but the fact only two properties under £300,000 were sold in 2024, compared to nine a year prior in 2023 is a significant change and demonstrates the impact that the small number of sales can have on the ability of those who do not have significant capital and equity to be able to access market housing in Fort Augustus.



(Source: Rightmove)

The above analysis shows a number of things. Firstly, as already mentioned there are not very many house sales in Fort Augustus most years, with an average of 17 if Abbey properties are included and 11 if they are not. This means that competition for the available properties is high and with high average prices, as outlined above, competition for any more affordable market housing will be steep. There are on average seven sales under £200,000 each year, which does provide a number of more affordable options for households who have affordability constraints. While there is a healthy average the range is from two to twelve, showing that it is difficult to predict year to year what may come to the market. If more affordable rented and low-cost home ownership options could be bought to the market in Fort Augustus it would provide additional affordable properties that would enhance the options available to those households less able to compete in the housing market.

There is also the potential for significant additional pressure in the housing market due to the new normal of higher interest rates, even though the Bank of England base rate has dropped to 4.25% recently, It is very unlikely that interest rates will drop back to the very low levels seen over the last 15 or so years, which will increase pressure on younger households in particular who will be more reliant on mortgage finance than households that have built up significant equity over the years due to price increases. This in turn means it is very likely households coming off very low fixed-rate interest rates will face potentially significant increases in their monthly mortgage costs over the coming years. This will add increased pressure to the housing markets in Highland and while it may put some downward pressure on house prices, the continued high demand for properties to live in, for second homes or for short-term rentals, as well as the limited supply of new build housing may well insulate the housing market in Fort Augustus from significant price slumps.

An assessment has been undertaken of the housing that is currently for sale in Fort Augustus and there are 17 properties for sale with an average asking price of £213,408. However, 8 of these properties are for sale at the Highland Club, with an average asking price of £250,625. Of the 9 other properties 6 of them are for sale at the Loch Ness Highland Resort, with an average asking price of

£152,998. There are only 3 properties for sale in Fort Augustus that are not part of a luxury second homes complex or as part of a holiday lodge complex with an average price of £234,983. These 3 properties (2x 3-bedroom and 1x 4-bedroom) are also the only properties for sale that are not 1 or 2 bedroom. The accommodation at the Loch Ness Highland Club is unlikely to be suitable for long-term occupation and the Highland Club properties, while suitable for long-term occupation are generally over the average house price.

The lack of available long-term housing for sale in Fort-Augustus will certainly limit the potential of households looking to purchase, however, the fact that there is so much dedicated second-home and holiday accommodation available for purchase hopefully reduces the competition for the few properties that are suitable for long-term occupation.

RENTAL PROPERTIES

PRIVATE RENTAL MARKET

Fort Augustus has a stable rental market. Rents are generally below Inverness, but the average rent for a two-bedroom house is around £650, while a 3-bedroom is £695. This compares to data from 2021 developed as part of the Highland Council Housing Needs and Demand Assessment that showed average rents for a 2-bedroom property in the Highland Council area to be around £678, with lower quartile rents at £620. This puts the Fort Augustus figure in the lower half of the average rent figures, but well above the lower quartile. These figures are a number of years out of date though and there are not official statistics to work with.

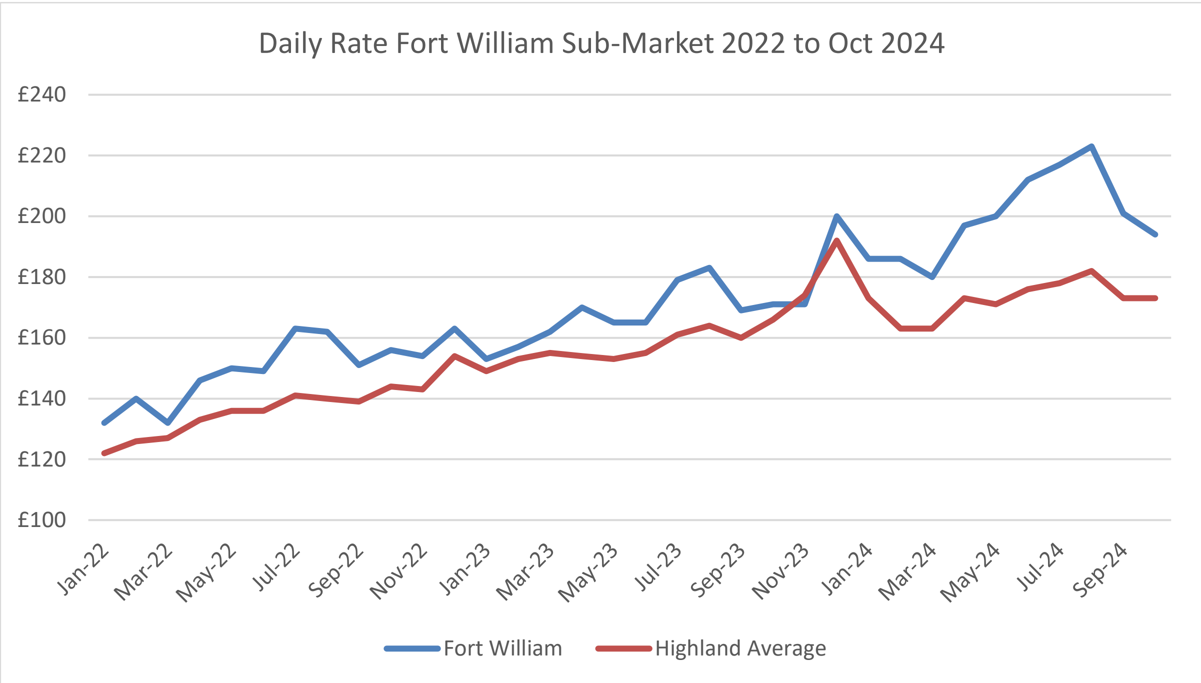
Research has shows that there are no properties listed as available for rent in Fort Augustus at the time of writing. It is possible that some properties are available and are being let by word of mouth rather than via a letting agent, but the complete lack of available housing online shows that the private rented sector in Fort Augustus is not in a position to house many, if any, of the households in Fort Augustus who are currently looking for housing. However, there was an indication from the housing needs survey that there are rental properties sitting empty in Fort Augustus. It has not been possible to confirm this.

Regulation of the private rented sector is being further enhanced by the Scottish Government, with increased tenants' rights, restrictions on rent increases and evictions and increases in the requirements around energy efficiency all expected to increase pressure on the private rented sector as some landlords look to either sell up or more likely in a high tourism area like Fort Augustus, move to short-term letting. The increase in interest rates over the last year will add additional pressure to landlords that have mortgages on the properties they rent out, particularly if they are unable to increase rents to help meet additional costs. These changes to national legislation and monetary policy may well have a negative impact on the availability of private rented property in Fort Augustus and Highland more widely.

SHORT TERM RENTAL MARKET

The number of short-term rentals for tourists and visitors are increasing across Scotland with websites like Airbnb making it much easier to rent out accommodation on a short-term basis. The growth in services like Airbnb has also significantly increased the potential income that property owners can make from holiday accommodation in high-tourism areas like Fort Augustus. Highland has over 10,340 active Airbnb listings, and the Fort William sub-area, of which Fort Augustus is part, has around 1,560 listings. Fort Augustus itself has 176 registered short-term lets, 27% of the 651 dwellings within the Fort Augustus data zone. As of December 2024. Drumnadrochit (155) and Fort William (549) also have significant numbers of short-term lets and the smaller surrounding villages have proportionally high numbers too with Glenmoriston (15) and Invermoriston (18). The Highland market area scores 90 out of 100 on the Airdna analytics site, while the Fort William sub-area scores 80 (December 2024). Rental demand is strong for both areas (80), and revenue growth is stronger in Fort William (66) than Highland as a whole (59). The Fort William sub-area does suffer from a higher degree of seasonality (24) than the Highland area (50), which highlights the huge tourism demand there is in peak season and the significant drop off over the winter months.

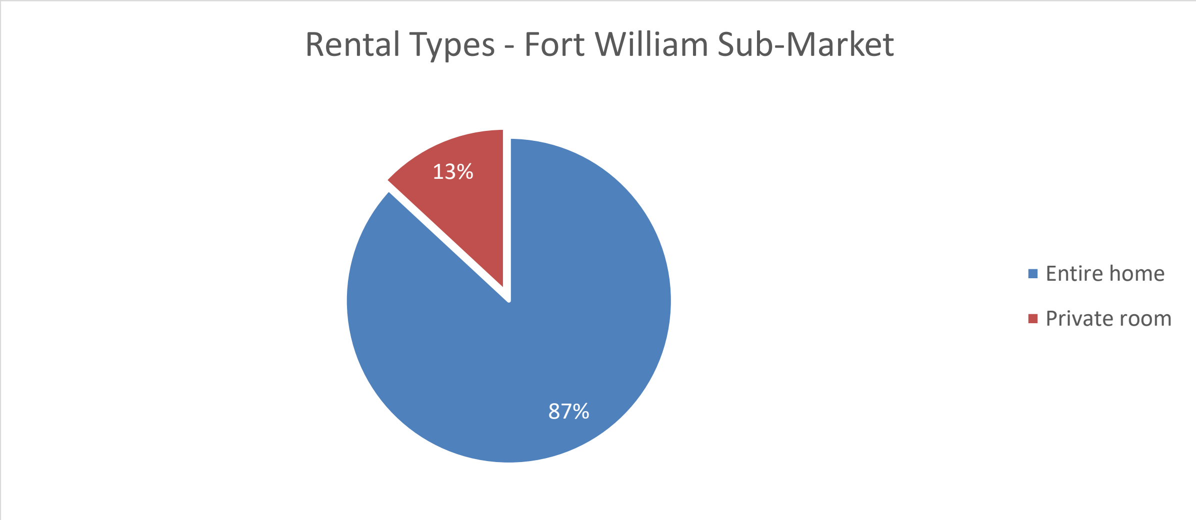
In terms of rates of return the Fort William sub-market has seen steady growth for the last three years rising by around £60 a night between August 2022 and August 2024. The graph below outlines the increase in daily rate and the divergence there has been between the Highland wide figure and the Fort William sub-market over the summer of 2024. This shows the continued strength of the Fort William sub-market area.



(Source: Airdna November 2024)

In terms of overall annual revenue, the average revenue per-property in the Fort William sub-market is £42,600, which is a 25% increase on the previous year. This shows the huge attraction of short-term lets compared to the longer-term private rental market where it is unlikely that revenue would be more than 20% of that figure.

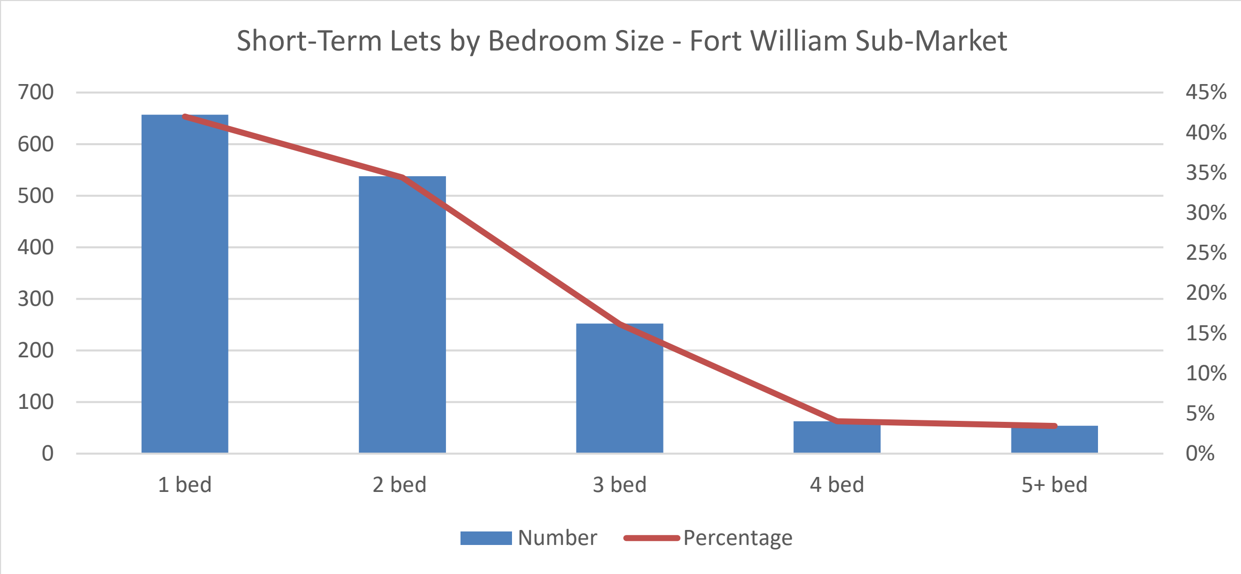
The increase in self-catering and short-term lets since the introduction of sites like Airbnb and Vrbo has meant that it is easier than ever to rent out tourist accommodation and attract clients. This has meant that a lot of properties across Scotland in peak tourism areas have been converted from long-term housing to short-term holiday accommodation. The graph below shows the split between properties that are let out entirely as a self-catering let and those which are operated more on a bed and breakfast model where only private rooms are rented out.



(Source: Airdna November 2024)

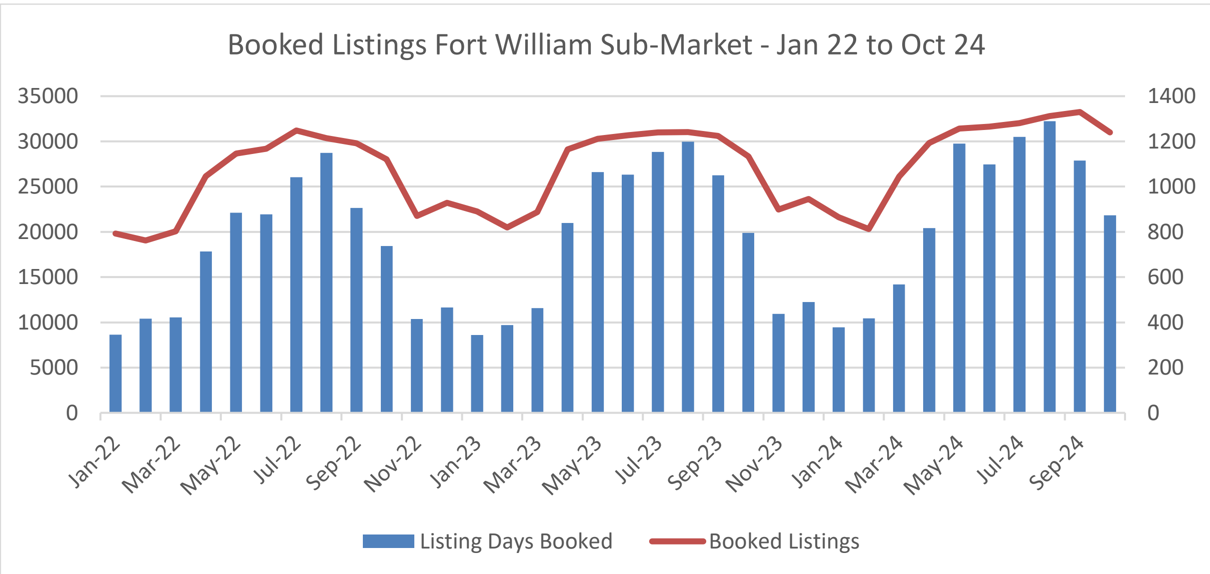
The graph clearly shows that the vast majority (87%) of rentals within the Fort William sub-market are entire properties, with 1,361 being available in the sub-market alone. The Highland wide figure is very close at 85%. This split has likely increased since the introduction of the Licensing of Short-term Lets order in 2022 which introduced a range of requirements for properties that were to be used as short-term let holiday accommodation. A number of hosts stopped letting out properties as short-term lets and holiday accommodation, particularly those who were operating as bed and breakfasts within their own home. There were a number of reasons for this including the requirements for additional fire safety measures, additional documentation and complexity, upfront costs for property upgrades and the difficulty in meeting the requirements in older properties. This has meant the reduction in the amount of holiday accommodation available, without an increase in the number of properties available for other uses. It has also impacted on the incomes of some households.

The graph below shows the number of properties by bedroom size that are listed as short-term lets in the Fort William sub-market. The vast majority are smaller one (657) and two (538) bedroom properties, but there are over 252 three-bedroom, 63 four-bedroom and 54 five-bedroom properties. This is a significant number of properties across the property spectrum and is certainly impacting the amount of housing available for permanent housing.



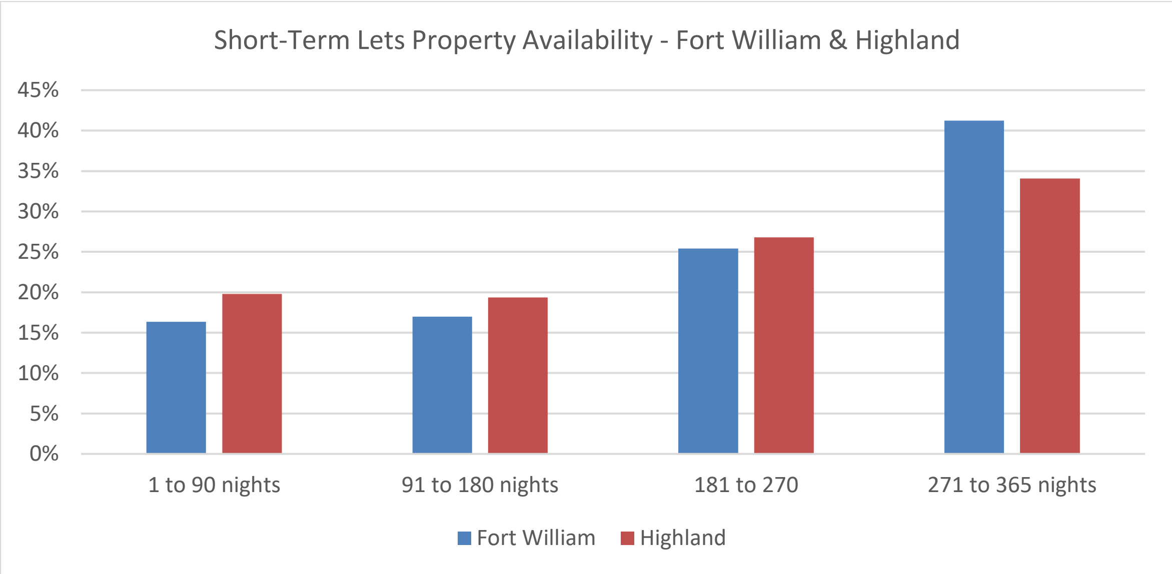
(Source: Airdna November 2024)

Assessing the tourist season within the Fort Augustus shows the peaks and troughs that are expected with the majority of Scottish tourism markets. However, the tourist season appears to be expanding further into the shoulder months of spring and autumn in the Fort William sub-market, much like it is elsewhere in Scotland. The graph below outlines that from April to October there are at least 1,000 booked listings within the Fort William sub-market, which equates to at least 17,000 booked days across the properties in the area each month. This has been steadily rising for the last three years. It would be interesting to assess how this compares to pre-Covid figures, but unfortunately those figures are not available. Even at the lowest point in the year there have never been under 760 booked listings a month in the Fort William sub-market. This shows that while there is a seasonal variation in the local market, there is still a relatively strong demand for holiday accommodation even in the off-season.



(Source: Airdna December 2024)

Prior to the introduction of the Private Residential Tenancy law which came into being in 2017 it was possible for holiday accommodation to be let out over the off-season as 'winter lets'. This provided households with up to six months accommodation. It did then make it more difficult to source accommodation over the summer months, however, it often provided households looking to move to the area with initial housing before they found something more permanent. The inability to rent out a self-catering property over winter without risking forming a permanent tenancy has mean that properties either sit empty over the off-season or that the rental is available to book for more of the year. The introduction of Airbnb, as well as specialist management agents have meant that many self-catering property owners have made their properties available for more of the year. The extension of the tourist season into more off-peak months would also have reduced the number of properties available for winter lets, as a winter let needed to be at least 6 months. The graph below outlines the availability of short-term lets in the Fort William sub-market and the wider Highland market.



(Source: Airdna November 2024)

The graph shows that over 40% of properties are available for the vast majority of the year, with only 33% available solely for the peak tourist season. This can bring benefits to the community as it increases the tourist season and the number of visitors coming into the area in the off-season, helping to secure jobs and sustain local tourism businesses. However, the fact that over 500 properties in the Fort William sub-market area remain empty and unused for more than six months of the year evidences some underutilisation of the housing stock.

It is impossible to accurately calculate how many of the properties utilised as short-term lets within Fort Augustus may have previously been private rentals or owner-occupied properties. Like many areas in the Highlands and Islands the tourism market is important to Fort Augustus, but if too many properties that have previously been used for long-term rental or owner-occupied accommodation are removed from the housing market to be used as short-term holiday accommodation or second homes, it increases pressure on the remaining long-term properties that are available. This is adding pressure to the local community and limiting the ability of those looking to live in Fort Augustus to find suitable accommodation, which in turn impacts on the ability of businesses, many of which are tourism businesses, to find the workforce they require.

This is a key issue in areas like Skye where between 35 and 50% of the island's housing stock is used for short-term lets. Fort Augustus does not have the same level of issue, but the fact that short-term lets in Fort Augustus and the surrounding area are likely to make significantly more money than an equivalent private rented tenancy does needs to be taken account of when considering the potential future use that those in ownership of the existing housing stock within the area might consider. This makes the development of community led and controlled housing in Fort Augustus all the more important as it will provide affordable housing which cannot be moved into short-term let accommodation ever. It may also be possible as part of a development for the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company to develop some small short-term let holiday units to help meet the need for short-term accommodation without using stock from the wider housing market. This approach may well also provide an income to help with future affordable housing projects or other priorities for the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company.

FORT AUGUSTUS AND GLENMORISTON COMMUNITY COMPANY OWNED AND MANAGED HOUSING

The Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company started renting affordable community led housing in 2017 when it purchased a property at Bunoich Crescent and developed two three-bedroom properties. The Community Company also owns 12 properties at Caledonian Court which was completed in 2021 and represent one of the largest community housing projects in rural Scotland. An additional property was also purchased in Invermoriston, taking the total properties owned by the Community Company to 15. The Community Company also manages three other properties on behalf of private landlords.

The Community Company sees very little in the way of turnover of its housing stock, with only 3 tenants leaving properties since 2017, 1 of these was due to the death of the tenant.

The Community Company's interested in housing list currently has 33 households on it. There were 31 applications for the last vacant property (a 2-bedroom). There were fewer applicants (2) for a 3-bedroom property in Invermoriston that the Community Company owns which came available in 2023 and 8 applicants for a 2-bedroom flat in Fort Augustus in 2023. When the Caledonian Court properties were completed and advertised for rent there were 36 applicants.

This shows that there is always more demand for housing than there is available, particularly in Fort Augustus itself, meaning that it is very likely that should the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company decide to develop additional housing over the next few years properties will be in high demand. However, the scale of potential development should be considered. The large 12 property development at Caledonian Court met a significant need for housing at the time, however a similar scale of single tenure development again may prove slightly to risky. A multi-tenure development that also includes two to four low-cost home ownership if possible would provide suitable scale and a range of options for potential occupiers.

SOCIAL RENTED HOUSING

Highland Council, Albyn Housing Society and Cairn Housing Association all have social rented housing stock in Fort Augustus. The majority of the housing stock is split across 1-bedroom (17), 2-bedroom (29) and 3-bedroom (25) properties, with a further 3 4-bedroom properties. This gives a good mix of housing stock and a total of 74 properties.

There are 123 households on the Highland Housing Register for Fort Augustus, with 29 of those having Fort Augustus as their first-choice location. The majority of the demand is for 1-bedroom properties (18 first-choice and 84 in total), with 2-bedroom (4 first choice and 18 in total), 3-bedroom (3 first-choice and 11 in total) and 4-bedroom (4 first-choice and 10 in total) making up the remainder.

It is likely that a large percentage of the households that are eligible for a 1-bedroom property (singles or couples) would rather have a larger 2-bedroom property if they were to have children or for older couples if they at some point required separate rooms. If this was allowed it is likely that the largest demand would be for 2-bedroom properties rather than 1-bedroom, but the Highland Housing Register, and most other social housing waiting lists across the country, do not allow that approach.

In terms of property re-lets there were 5 in Fort Augustus in total over the 2023 to 2024 financial year. This is a small percentage of the total housing stock and shows that it is very difficult to access affordable social rented housing in Fort Augustus. The table below outlines the waiting list, stock numbers and re-lets figures.

	Demand using 1st choice 01.04.2024	Demand using all choices 01.04.2024	Total Supply 01.04.2024	Re-Lets 01.04.2023 to 31.03.2024
Bed size	**Total**	**Total**	**Total**	**Total**
Bedsit/1 Bed	**18**	**84**	**17**	**1**
2 Bed	**4**	**18**	**29**	**3**
3 Bed	**3**	**11**	**25**	**1**
4+ Bed	**4**	**10**	**3**	**0**
Total	**29**	**123**	**74**	**5**

(Source: Highland Housing Register)

HOUSING NEEDS SURVEY RESPONSES

RESPONSES OVERVIEW

As part of the needs assessment a Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston wide housing needs survey was undertaken to gauge the opinion of community members on the availability of and potential need for additional housing in Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston.

The survey ran from late November 2024 to late January 2025 and there were 37 completed responses in all indicating a 13% response rate from the estimated 278 households in Fort Augustus. While this is not a high response rate in terms of actual numbers, it does follow another recent consultation on the areas Place Plan and took place over the Christmas period, which may have impacted on return numbers. There were 152 comments from respondents throughout the survey showing a very good level of engagement from those who took part and this has added to the quality of the data received.

The survey was available online, as well as in the shop and the consultancy team also attended a Tuesday lunch club while in Fort Augustus to discuss the potential need for housing with those in attendance. The results of the survey are outlined below.

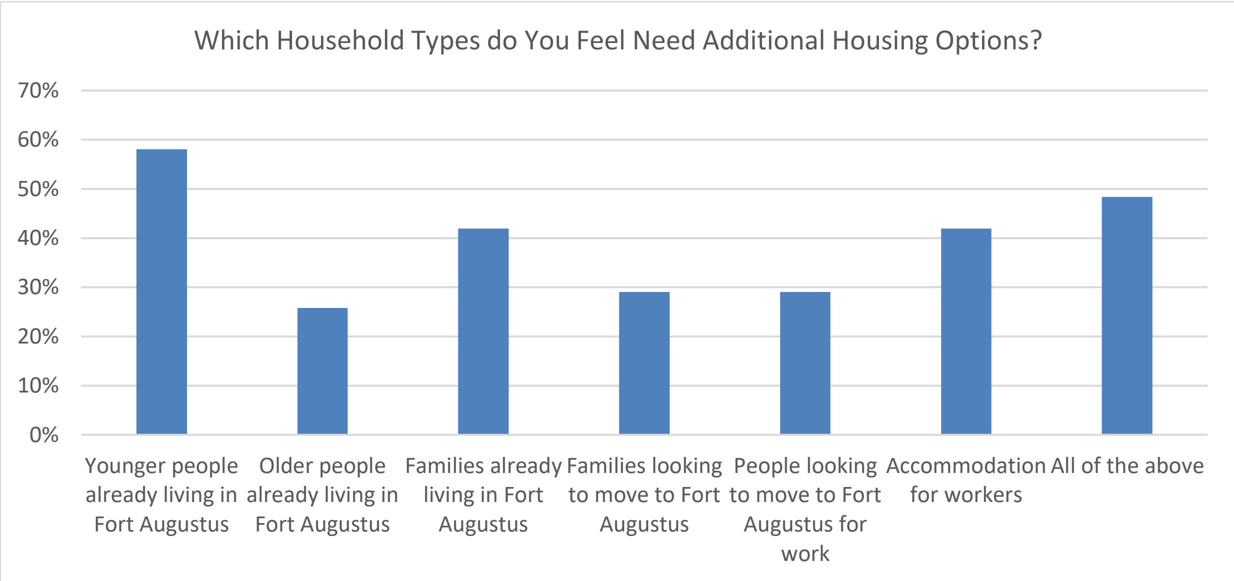
NEED FOR HOUSING

The majority of comments in the survey support the need for an increase in the amount and availability of long-term housing in Fort Augustus. 84% of those who responded (31 of the 37) said they feel there is a need for additional housing in Fort Augustus. 84% of respondents (31 of the 37) also supported the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company's desire to purchase and develop additional housing in Fort Augustus. There was also a clear indication from the majority of respondents that they feel there is a lack of available housing for younger people and those wanting to stay in or move to Fort Augustus. This shows clear community support for the need for and development of additional housing in Fort Augustus as a priority.

When asked who respondents thought needed the new housing respondents felt was required there was clear support for a number of different household types and 48% of respondents felt housing was needed for all household types, showing the clear support for the development of any housing types to help retain and draw more households into Fort Augustus. In terms of specific household types 58% felt younger households already in Fort Augustus need additional housing options, 42% feel families already in Fort Augustus and 42% feel there is a need for accommodation for workers. Young people and families were consistently the main priority groups that were discussed by those engaging with the survey and consultancy team. The fact that almost half of respondents picked the 'all of the above' category shows that there is a general feeling, although it was not shared by all respondents, that additional housing is needed across the board in Fort Augustus and that even though there is some market housing for sale etc available it is not affordable for many residents.

Finally, older people already living in Fort Augustus (26%) was the group deemed to least need support to access housing and were deemed most likely to be able to find suitable housing. However, one or two of those who were spoken to did identify that there might be some local older residents who may want to downsize from a larger property and if suitable smaller 2-bedroom properties were available for older people it would free up these larger properties for families or use as B&B's. The fact Fort Augustus is somewhere that is in high demand for holiday accommodation means that it may well be harder for those looking to remain in the area, due to the competing demands for available accommodation and the high potential income generating opportunities for short-term lets.

These results show the importance the community is putting into population and community sustainability and is in line with many other rural and island areas in Scotland. Additional housing alone will probably not persuade a significant number of young people to stay or families to move to the area, however, without the available housing it will be very difficult to retain or attract younger people, families and workers to take up the jobs available in Fort Augustus. The graph below outlines the household types that survey respondents feel would be the target of new housing development.



(Source: 2024 Fort Augustus Housing Needs Survey)

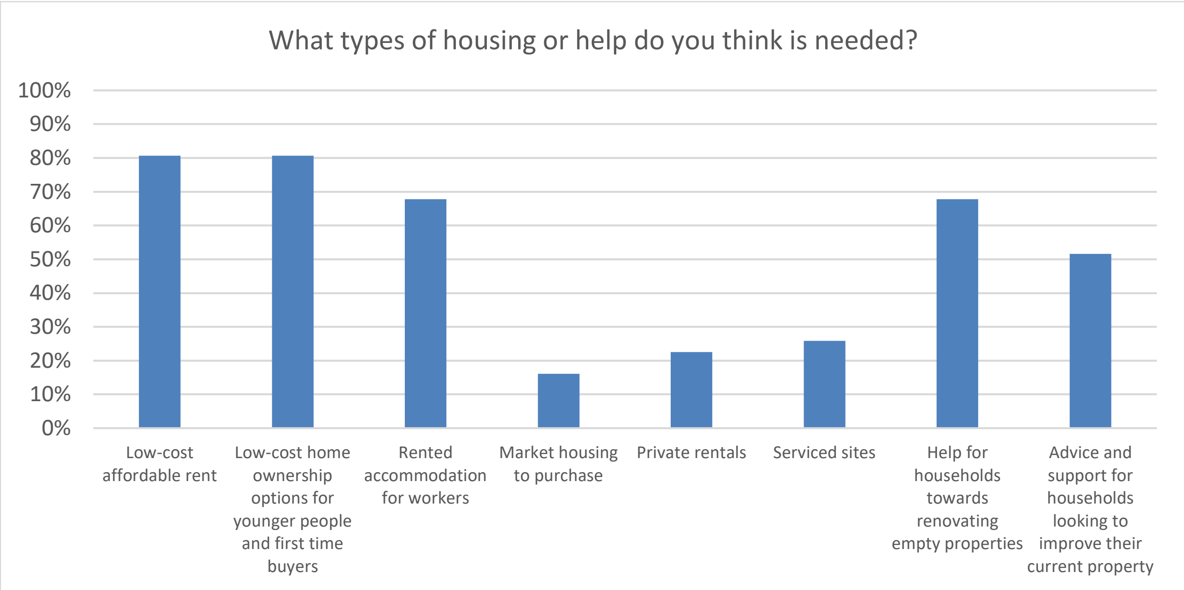
The need for additional community members to work within Fort Augustus's varied economy came up a lot in the survey responses with at least six different respondents saying that they currently live in Fort Augustus and are in unsuitable accommodation, either because it was shared with other households or because it is too small, or because their landlord is looking to sell. There were also a significant number of comments about the need for housing for local people and those looking to move to the area for work. Because some local businesses have workers accommodation a number of households looking for housing are based in Fort Augustus because they have moved to take up work, but while they are currently housed, they would much prefer to find something more long-term and suitable for their needs. It was mentioned by more than one respondent that should they be unable to find suitable accommodation they would need to leave Fort Augustus, even though they would love to stay and put down roots properly. Some respondents also stated that they know of locals from Fort Augustus who are considering leaving the community due to the lack of available housing, while at least two others stated that they were in that position themselves. This shows the importance of developing at least some additional housing within the community to help retain those who are already here and looking for housing, with an additional priority of making housing available for those looking to move to the community to take up work.

HOUSING TYPES

When asked about the type of housing that the community felt was needed low-cost affordable rent and low-cost home ownership scored the highest with support from 81% of respondents.

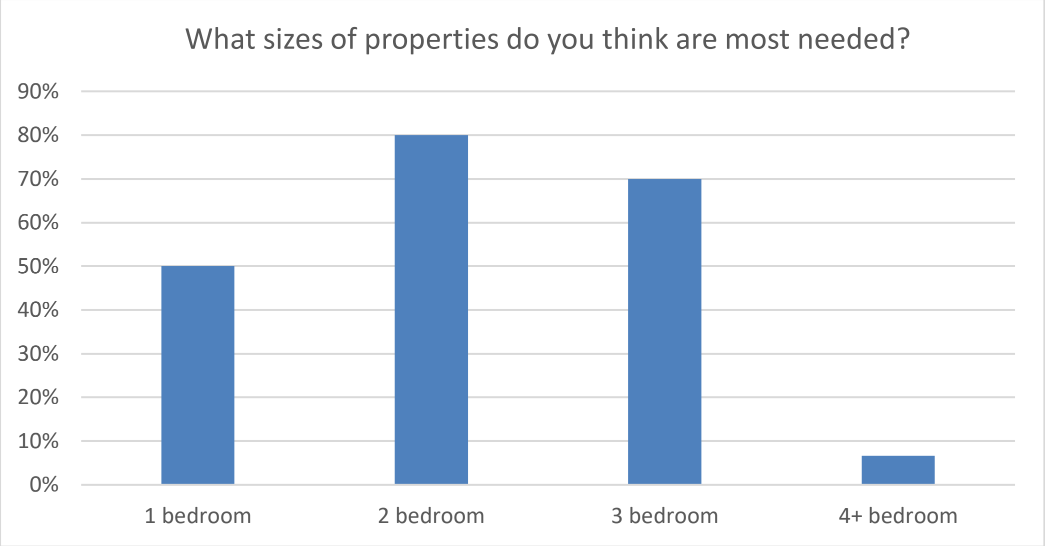
Help towards renovating empty properties and rented accommodation for workers also scored highly at 68%. There were a number of comments about there being a number of empty properties in Fort Augustus and there were also some comments about the importance of developing Fort Augustus in a sustainable and sympathetic way. The redevelopment of empty properties within the village would meet both of these desires and maximise the use of the existing empty homes stock. Accommodation for workers is also something that can be easily understood given the fact that a number of local businesses have purchased housing in the village to house their staff. If dedicated accommodation for workers could be identified it would potentially leave more of the housing stock available for permanent residents and those workers who may look to stay on in Fort Augustus full time.

Advice for households looking to upgrade their property came 5th with 52% support. There was then a steep drop to serviced sites (26%), private rentals (23%) and market housing (16%). These figures clearly indicate that most of those responding to the survey feel that those who can afford to meet their housing needs in the market are able to do so, while additional affordable housing options are required to support those who struggle to meet their housing needs in the market.



(Source: 2024 Fort Augustus Housing Needs Survey)

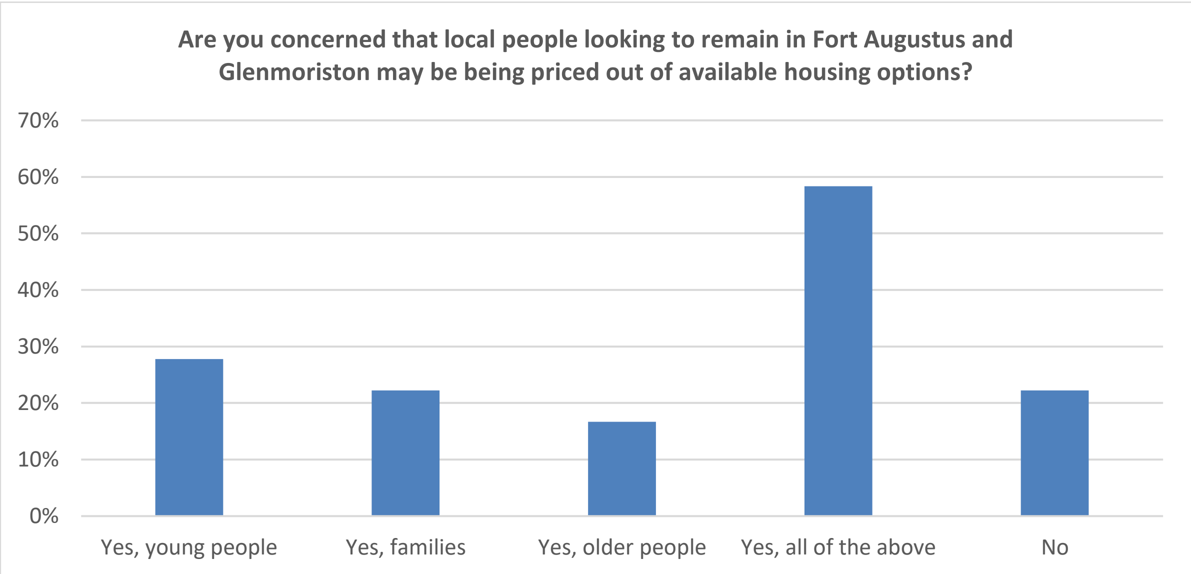
In terms of the property sizes that community members thought were most in need two (80%) and three-bedroom (70%) properties were seen as the priority. This is entirely expected as two-bedroom properties are flexible and can support a range of household types. Three-bedroom properties are also the most utilised family housing. One-bedroom housing (50%) received some support, but there were a few comments about the added flexibility of slightly larger two-bedroom properties for young people and also older people looking to downsize. Two-bedroom properties are also more useful when small numbers of properties are being developed as they are more flexible. Some one-bedroom housing, particularly in the centre of the village, would be useful though. Four-bedroom properties received a very low level of support (7%).



(Source: 2024 Fort Augustus Housing Needs Survey)

PERCEIVED LOCAL DEMAND

The survey asked a few questions around housing need for local people. Firstly, a question was asked about whether respondents were concerned that local people from various groups are being priced out of available housing in Fort Augustus. 58% of respondents said that they were concerned that all of the groups mentioned were being priced out of the local market. In terms of concern about specific groups local young people (23%), local families (22%) and local older people (17%) scored similarly, with young people and families scoring higher than older people, as would probably be expected in an area that is lacking housing for workers and has a significant affordability issue. However, 22% of respondents said they don't think local households are being priced out of housing in Fort Augustus. This shows the feeling of respondents was not unanimous.



(Source: 2024 Fort Augustus Housing Needs Survey)

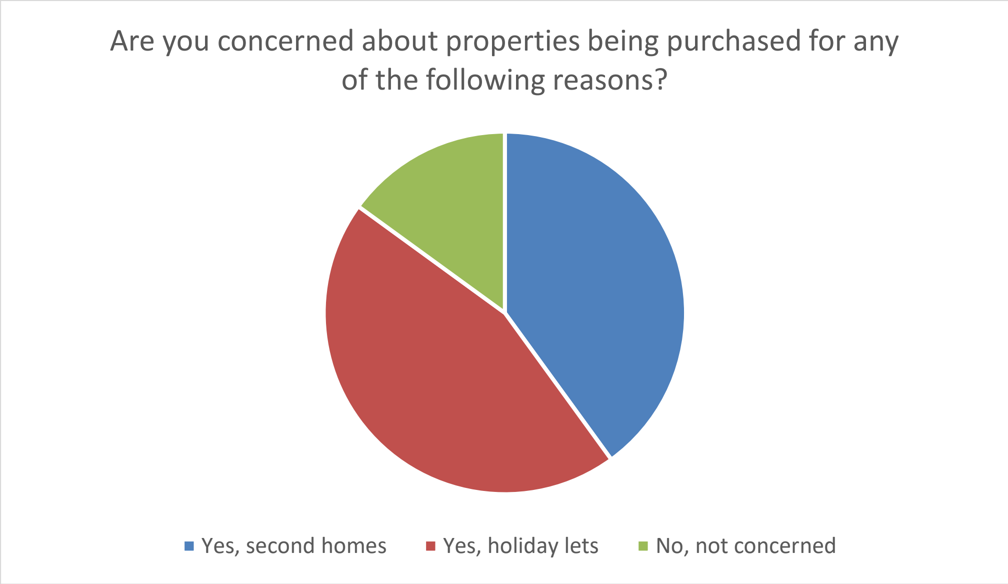
The main views on why respondents felt local people were struggling to find housing in Fort Augustus focused on the availability of housing, either for sale or rent, that housing that did become available for sale was often purchased as a holiday home or to run short-term lets and that the cost of housing was an issue. Each of these elements were mentioned in various comments throughout the survey.

(Source: 2024 Fort Augustus Housing Needs Survey)

A lot of respondents stated that they felt short-term lets and second homes were potentially part of the problem removing properties from the long-term market. There was an understanding that tourism is an important part of the local economy in Fort Augustus and that those who own property have the right to do with it as they wish and sell to who they like, but there were over a dozen comments around short-term lets and holiday homes impacting on the available housing for those looking to live within Fort Augustus.

This was echoed in the question which asked about whether respondents were concerned about properties being purchased as second homes and holiday lets. 67% of those who answered the question said they were concerned about second homes and 75% were concerned about properties being purchased and used as holiday lets. However, 25% said they were not concerned.

There were a range of comments on this question from those just stating that there are too many holiday homes and short-term lets, to those stating that property owners can do with the property as they like. These are all understandable opinions and generally cut to the heart of the housing issue in Fort Augustus, like many other rural and island communities with vibrant tourism markets that are also high on the list of desirable second home areas. The balance of long-term housing for those looking to live in the community and those looking to either run a business utilising an available property or purchasing it for their own part-time use is very difficult to get right and often, due to the way the housing market functions local households that cannot afford market housing are priced out of the market by those who can and high levels of demand in these areas makes that more likely and in turn drives prices higher.

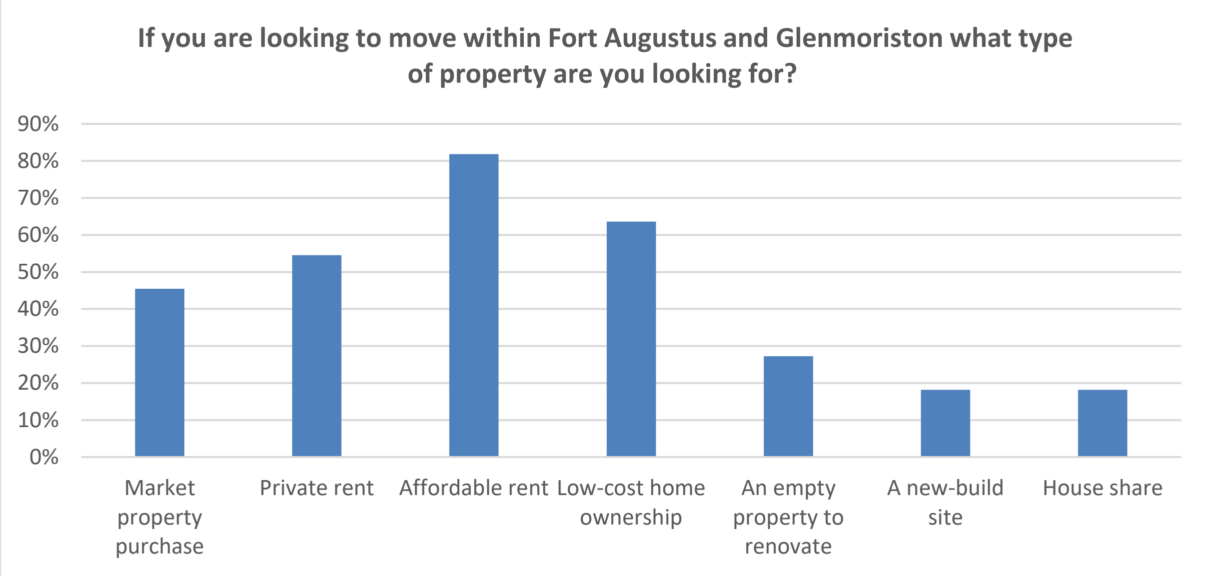


(Source: 2024 Fort Augustus Housing Needs Survey)

In terms of their own accommodation 75% of respondents said that their accommodation was suitable for the needs of their household. Of the 9 households (25%) who said their property wasn't suitable for their needs 86% (6) said the property is too small, 57% (4) said the property is in a poor state of repair and 43% (3) said it was expensive or hard to heat.

In terms of what households are looking to do over the next two years 41% (15) are not looking to move, which is a comparably low figure when compared with the average response from communities to this sort of survey. 30% (11) are looking to move within Fort Augustus, which shows the desire of many households to remain within the community, if they can find suitable housing. 3% (1) household is looking to leave Fort Augustus but remain in the Highland region and 27% (10) are not sure what they will do. From the comments on this question many of those who said 'not sure' want to remain in Fort Augustus, but to do so they need to find suitable accommodation. Three households also stated that they might look to move if the village became too over developed.

Of the 11 looking to move within Fort Augustus 9 (82%) were interested in affordable rented housing, 7 (64%) were interested in low-cost home ownership, 6 (55%) in private rent, 5 (45%) in private sale, 3 (27%) in an empty property to renovate, 2 (18%) in a self-build site and 2 (18%) in a house share. The strong demand for affordable rented housing from those already in the community and looking to move is positive as it provides evidence of local demand for housing that may be developed by the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company. The demand for low-cost home ownership also shows a desire to purchase and invest long-term in Fort Augustus. The small number of households looking for market purchase, even compared to private rent, shows that the majority of respondents feel market purchase in Fort Augustus is beyond their budget. The graph below outlines the results.



(Source: 2024 Fort Augustus Housing Needs Survey)

The fact that there is some potential local demand for housing that might be built by the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company is positive. Eleven households looking to potentially move within Fort Augustus, with significant interested in affordable rent and low-cost home ownership options provide some evidence of demand already within the community.

PERCEIVED INCOMER DEMAND

When asked if they knew of anyone looking to move to Fort Augustus 2 of the 37 (5%) said they knew of family looking to move to the area, 7 (19%) said they knew of people looking to move to Fort Augustus for work and 78% (29) said they did not know of anyone looking to move to the area. This focus on people looking to move to the area for work is understandable given the difficulty some employers are having filling jobs in the area. There were a range of comments in the survey from people who have moved to the area to work and want to stay, but are struggling to find suitable long-term accommodation to allow them to.

The responses to the question early in the survey that explored the household types respondents felt most needed housing in Fort Augustus focused primarily on local people within the area already, however, accommodation for workers scored 42%, people looking to move for work 29% and families looking to move to Fort Augustus 29%. These households are also included in the 'all of the above' which 48% of respondents selected. This shows that while those responding to the survey feel local people should potentially be a priority, there is significant need for housing for those looking to come into the community to work.

As outlined above in the school roll forecasts and demographic sections, additional families moving to the area will also help grow the school roll and rebalance the community's demographic.

SUPPORT FOR PROPOSED PROJECTS

The results of the survey shows considerable support for both additional housing within Fort Augustus and for the Fort Augustus And Glenmoriston Community Company's desire to develop additional housing within Fort Augustus. 84% of those who responded (31 of the 37) said they didn't feel there was sufficient housing in Fort Augustus. And 84% (31 of 37) also supported the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company's desire to develop housing within the community. Of those who did not support the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company's desire to develop additional housing one or two individuals were concerned with the potential for over development within the village, while two others didn't feel a case had been made for the need for additional housing. The vast majority of the 152 comments within the survey spoke about the need for additional housing to help support and sustain the community and allow households, particularly young people and those who have moved to Fort Augustus to work, to remain in the community. There were also a range of comments on how hard many households are finding it to access housing and the perceived impact of holiday homes and short-term lets.

The survey responses show that there is clear support for both the need for additional housing in Fort Augustus and the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company's desire to develop additional housing to support the community. However, there were some respondents that feel additional housing is either not required, has not been evidenced or is not something the Community Company should be focusing on. These voices were however in the minority. The responses to the consultation on the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Our Place, Our Plan also had affordable housing as a priority area that needs addressing.

CONCLUSIONS

This Housing Needs Assessment reinforces the critical role of housing in sustaining the Fort Augustus community. The combination of demographic shifts, employment pressures, high property prices, and an undersupply of affordable housing across rental and low-cost home ownership has created an urgent need for targeted housing interventions.

Without additional affordable housing, Fort Augustus risks continued population decline among younger age groups, exacerbating pressures on local services such as Kilchuimen Primary and Academy. The limited availability of long-term rental and ownership properties makes it difficult for workers and families to establish themselves in the community, negatively impacting local businesses and public services.

The Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company has already made significant contributions to local housing, and there is strong community support for further development. Moving forward, a balanced approach is needed, incorporating:

- Development of affordable rented and low-cost home ownership properties.
- Engagement with property owners to bring vacant homes back into use.
- Continued monitoring of housing trends, particularly short-term lets, to ensure long-term housing sustainability.

By addressing housing availability, the community can create a more balanced and resilient population, supporting economic stability, education, and long-term sustainability in Fort Augustus. The findings of this report provide a strong evidence base for securing funding and progressing with planned housing developments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the analysis and conclusions above there are a number of recommendations for the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company to explore.

The first recommendation is that the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company explore the potential to develop a small initial phase of affordable rented housing. This may include a refurbishment of an existing property or two or a couple of new build properties. This would allow the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company to increase its affordable housing holdings in a strategic and steady manner. A phased approach will also reduce the project and operational risks which would come with a larger single phased project.

It is also recommended that the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company explores the potential for a wider five-year plan for additional housing within the community. Recommendation one suggests a small phase of property purchases and refurbishment, but should a larger site be identified there is the potential for a larger project, maybe not quite as large as Caledonian Court, which would allow for the development of a larger number of properties, which could hopefully also include some low-cost home ownership as well as affordable community rent. Should the Scottish Government continue the Rural and Islands Housing Funding into the next parliament and open up other funds for workers housing to community groups there may well be the potential to look to those funds as well.

In terms of the potential for housing in Glenmoriston, the data that is available has made it difficult to assess housing need within the community. However, the approach that has previously been utilised by the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company of purchasing a single property in Glenmoriston and renting it out as affordable rented housing has worked well, is low risk, and can be replicated should another suitable property come onto the market. This approach will provide additional affordable rented housing in Glenmoriston when possible, but will allow the majority of development to be focused on Fort Augustus which being the larger settlement has the facilities and transport links making it the more logical place for development supported by Highland Council's own strategic housing plan.

It is recommended that the Highland Council take on board the results of this assessment and use them when planning the upcoming 2025 Strategic Housing Investment Plan and explore the potential for specific sites and projects for development within Fort Augustus. Highland Council are also encouraged to explore the potential for workers accommodation within Fort Augustus utilising the Scottish Government's Rural Affordable Homes for Key Workers Fund which would allow Fort Augustus to attract and retain key workers within the village and help sustain the community in the long-term.

Finally, since Balfour Beatty is looking to develop a workers camp for 350 workers just south of Fort Augustus to support the Scottish and Southern Skye Reinforcement Project it is recommended that the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company engage with Scottish and Southern Energy Network and Balfour Beatty about any potential opportunities that might arise around their developments.