

Chapter 14 : Performance of the Plan

Context

- 14.1 Paragraph 93 of the [Local Development Planning Guidance](#) advises that, as part of the preparation of the evidence report, the planning authority should
- Evaluate whether the *previous plan* has delivered its outcomes and allocations.
 - Identify any lessons learnt for the preparation of the new plan.
 - Consider the appropriateness of the previous spatial strategy.
- 14.2 Assessment of Highland’s previous plan requires a recognition of the unique tiered plan system that has been previously in place, in that the development plan for Highland currently comprises:
- National Planning Framework 4 2023
 - Highland-wide Local Development Plan 2012 (HwLDP) - **THC002**
 - Area LDPs:
 - Inner Moray Firth LDP2 2024 (IMFLDP2) – **THC003**
 - West Highlands & Islands LDP 2019 (WestPlan) – **THC005**
 - Caithness and Sutherland LDP 2018 (CaSPlan) – **THC004**
 - Cairngorm National Park LDP 2021
- 14.3 These components vary in terms of their coverage and have been adopted at various periods and therefore the timeline demonstrating what the development plan has been for Highland is shown in Table 14:1, while the geographic areas of coverage are shown in Table 14:2 and on the [HLDP Evidence Map](#).

Table 14:1 Highland’s Development Plan Time Series

	2012	2015	2018	2021	2024
HwLDP					
IMFLDP1					
CNPLDP15					
CaSPlan					
WestPlan					
CNPLDP2					
NPF4					
IMFLDP2					

Table 14:2 Highland's Development Plan Components by Area of Coverage

NPF4 (Applies in all instances)			
HwLDP (Applies Highland-wide excl. CNPA)			CNP LDP (Applies in CNPA Only)
CaSPlan (Caithness and Sutherland Only)	WestPlan (West Highlands and Islands Only)	IMFLDP2 (Inner Moray Firth Area Only)	

- 14.4 As the CNPA is responsible for producing its own LDP, and NPF4 is produced by the Scottish Government, this chapter focusses on the evaluation of the components of the development plan that have been led and produced by the Council as the Planning Authority, namely HwLDP and the area LDP's. The first Inner Moray Firth LDP was adopted in 2015 and was in place until IMFLDP2 was adopted in 2024. Where relevant, the performance of both these plans is assessed in this chapter.
- 14.5 It is important to understand that due to the tiered plan system in Highland, where general policies or land allocations feature in NPF4, HwLDP and area LDPs, the most up to date document prevails as the Council's policy for that site/issue.
- 14.6 The Cairngorms National Park sets the planning policy framework for its area (which includes a portion of the Highland Council area) through its own respective LDP and all planning applications in the National Park are determined in line with this policy framework.
- 14.7 However, planning applications within the CNPA are submitted in the first instance to the relevant local authority. The Cairngorms National Park then 'calls in' and determines the most significant planning applications for the National Park, leaving the remainder to be determined by the local authorities. Of the 1,266 planning applications determined since the Cairngorms National Park LDP 2021 was adopted, 94% of those have been determined by the constituent local planning authorities, of which 57% (716) have been determined by The Highland Council.

Delivery on Outcomes and Allocations

Outcomes

- 14.8 A significant period of time has passed since the adoption of the HwLDP in 2012. During this time, there have been significant social, economic and political changes at a local, national and international level, including the UK's exit from the European Union and the COVID-19 Pandemic. Many of these changes, whilst not directly related to planning or within control of the planning system, have had impacts on achieving the outcomes of LDPs.

HwLDP

- 14.9 The HwLDP contains a vision for the entire Council area, that reads *'By 2030, Highland will be one of Europe's leading regions. We will have created sustainable communities, balancing population growth, economic development and the safeguarding of the environment across the area, and have built a fairer and healthier Highlands.'* It outlines what, in land use terms, this means within five key headings. These headings are supported by a series of aims that are essentially the outcomes of the plan. These outcomes and their progress are presented in Table 14:3. The HwLDP also contains a series of outcomes for each of the three area LDP areas. These are presented in Table 14:4, Table 14:5 and Table 14:6. Detailed information on much of the commentary set out against each outcome can be found within the relevant Evidence Report Chapter.

Table 14:3 HwLDP Outcomes and Progress

Outcome	Progress
<p>We will have enabled Sustainable Highland Communities by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increasing the population of the Highlands to achieve a balanced age range and by providing opportunities for market housing and affordable housing both within settlements and within the Highland countryside; • providing developments which cater for Highland's ageing population; and 	<p>Some</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Census data indicates there has been a modest 1.4% population growth in Highland between 2011 and 2022 and that relative to the Scottish average, there is a higher proportion of its existing and projected future population in the older age groups; • HwLDP and area LDPs have allocated over 300 sites for housing, and provided a policy framework that supports new housing in the countryside in appropriate locations;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring the effective delivery of the plan strategy through efficient and transparent use of developer contributions and linking into Council and partner agency development programmes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of new care homes have been developed, including in Fortrose and Inverness, and other housing provided that is suitable for an aging population, however there has also been several care home closures throughout Highland; • The policy framework, including Developer Contributions Supplementary Guidance and LDP Delivery Programmes, has allowed for the efficient collection of developer contributions towards a range of infrastructure projects.
<p>We will have safeguarded our Environment by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring that development of renewable energy resources are managed effectively with clear guidance on where renewable energy developments should and should not be located; • ensuring that the special quality of the natural, built and cultural environment in Highland is protected and enhanced; • taking a lead in reducing the amount of greenhouse gases released into the air, adapted to the effects of climate change and limited the amount of non-renewable resources development uses; and • leading the way in the delivery of sustainable waste management set out in the Council's waste strategy and those brought forward by the private sector. 	<p>Some</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The policy framework, including Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance, has sought to provide clear locational guidance for renewable energy development; • The policy framework has sought to ensure the natural and built environment is protected and enhanced, a number of additional designations have been made, and guidance has been produced, including several Conservation Area Management Plans; • Highland has made a substantial contribution to renewable energy generation, including significant growth in onshore and offshore wind in the last 20 years; • Whilst Highland household waste recycling rates continue to be below the Scottish average, there has been significant investment in recent years, including the expansion of food waste collection and capital investment in waste infrastructure.
<p>We will have supported a Competitive, Sustainable and Adaptable Highland Economy by:</p>	<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numerous large scale employment sites that support a number of different sectors have

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing opportunities which encourage economic development and create new employment across the area focusing on the key sectors of life sciences, energy, tourism, food and drink, higher education, inward investment, financial and business services, creative industries, aquaculture and renewable energy, whilst at the same time improving the strategic infrastructure necessary to allow the economy to grow over the long term; • helping to deliver, in partnership with Transport Scotland and other transport bodies, transport infrastructure improvements across the area in line with the Council's Local Transport Strategy and the Scottish Government's Strategic Transport Projects Review; • promoting a positive and innovative approach to masterplanning new developments that contribute towards reducing the need to travel and encourage people to walk, cycle or use public transport; • promoting the development of tourism, whether in terms of additional accommodation or new facilities; • promoting the delivery of a twenty first century telecommunications network which allows all areas across the Highlands to better 	<p>been delivered, and are continuing to be developed across Highland, including the Inverness Campus, Inverness Airport Business Park, and Kishorn Yard and within ICFGF sites at Nigg, Invergordon, Evanton, Inverness and Ardersier. Inverness Castle is due to open as a major visitor cultural attraction in 2025. Highland's significant aquaculture industry makes a substantial contribution to the economy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There have been significant improvements to the transport network in Highland, including the delivery of the West Link in Inverness and A9 Berriedale Braes Improvement Project. Progress has made within Highland as part of the A9 dualling scheme, where the Tomatin to Moy section is under construction. Statutory processes for other major Transport Scotland projects, including A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton, A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) and A9/A82 Longman Junction Improvement Scheme have been progressed but firm funding and delivery timescales are yet to be confirmed. • New large mixed-use developments at Inverness have been successfully masterplanned through Council-led development briefs with focus on sustainable travel. • Tourism has grown significantly since 2012, with annual visitor numbers increasing by 65% (THC345). The policy framework is supportive of additional accommodation and there has been a significant rise in the number of short term lets across Highland, and a number of new hotels have opened in Inverness. New facilities have also been provided in a number of locations.
---	---

<p>access the opportunities in the wider global economy; and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring that the planning guidance for mineral development, coastal developments, forestry, agriculture, aquaculture and croft land is clear and consistent and that key resources are protected where appropriate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 87% of Highland now has access to Superfast broadband, and plans are in place for this coverage to be increased. • The policy framework provides a clear approach towards mineral, coastal and aquaculture development, and development that may affect forestry, agriculture, and croft resources. Guidance was published for coastal development, forestry and aquaculture.
<p>We will have achieved a Healthier Highlands by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing for the development of places that contribute to increasing healthy lifestyles, opportunities for quality open space provision and access to enjoy the outdoors; and • protecting and enhancing the green network within and around settlements leading to a cohesive and fit for purpose network of greenspaces and opportunities for active travel. 	<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Area LDPs identify and safeguard areas of quality open space and identify opportunities for developing green networks and active travel routes. New developments are required to provide areas of new open space consistent with the policy framework. Direct provision and/or developer contributions are sought towards active travel improvements where appropriate.
<p>We will have provided better opportunities for all and a fairer Highland by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promoting opportunities that allow for investment in services and infrastructure, and opportunities for investment and diversification in the economy, in our deprived areas and areas at risk of long term unemployment as a result of changes in the wider economy. 	<p>Some</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developer contributions allow for opportunities to seek investment for additional capacity in services and infrastructure; • Opportunities continue to be delivered throughout Highland, including in some areas of deprivation. For example ICFGF sites are close to a number of areas of deprivation, including parts of Alness, Balintore, Invergordon and Inverness. A key aim of the Green Freeport is to promote growth and regeneration. • Whilst the timescales for the decommissioning of Dounreay Power Station have been significantly extended, its 1,500 employees are being supported to plan their futures beyond

decommissioning and support is being provided to the community to diversify its economic base. A number of global companies have already provided new employment opportunities in the far north, in particular engineering, energy and communications firms.

14.10 The HwLDP explains that the counties of Caithness and Sutherland are facing many challenges and opportunities, and that it is important these opportunities help to meet the challenges of regeneration in the area, providing local employment and sustainable economic growth. It provides outcomes listed Table 14:4 that are aimed to be achieved by 2030.

Table 14:4 HwLDP Outcomes and Progress Caithness and Sutherland

Objective	Comment
<p>• be a regenerating place with a network of strong communities – through the promotion of attractive and thriving town centres, with the main centres having enhanced positions as service centres along with improved economic prospects of ports and harbours in the area.</p>	<p>Some</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The policy framework aims to encourage, promote and facilitate development in town centres, including a CASPlan 'Town Centre First' policy. Despite this framework, there have been significant changes in retailing in recent years, in particular the growth of online retailing. This has coincided with a rise in vacancy rates, with Wick significantly above the Highland average. • Several key ports and harbours in the area have benefitted from improvements, including at Scrabster and Gills Bay.
<p>• be a competitive place connected to the global economy – the exceptional environment, along with thriving local communities will provide an incentive to business location. The main east coast settlements complement each other, and there will be strong economic ties between the two counties and with</p>	<p>Some</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various business, particularly in the energy, tourism and food and drink sectors have chosen to locate in the area. HIE has continued to invest in business parks to provide additional units, including at Wick and Golspie. • Telecommunications networks and broadband coverage have improved, including delivery of Local Full Fibre Network in Wick and Thurso.

<p>the Inner Moray Firth area enabled by improved telecommunications networks and broadband coverage. Locally UHI will provide courses meeting local and international needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UHI provides a range of courses from their campuses at Dornoch, Halkirk and Thurso, including specialist renewable energy, golf and equine courses.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be a connected and accessible place – A9 improvement schemes, including Berriedale Braes, will be delivered, as well as there being a significant increase in rail freight consolidating Lairg and Georgemas as distribution ‘hubs’ along with strategically located sidings with loading facilities. Developments will promote increased passenger numbers on the Far North rail line through a full peak time return Invernet commuter service extending to Lairg, Ardgay and Bonar Bridge. The case for twin-tracking locally important roads, which are currently single track, will be maintained. Residents will have adequate water and waste-water networks. 	<p>Some</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Transport Scotland Berriedale Braes Improvement Project was completed in 2020, this improved journey time and road safety on this part of the A9. Georgemas Junction strategic rail freight and transport hub supports some freight movements and locations for new sidings continue to be explored. • Early parts of the plan period saw increases in rail passengers, however recently passenger numbers have not reached pre-pandemic levels. • Naver Bridge south of Bettyhill on the A836 is currently being replaced at a cost of £11M, this includes the upgrading a section of this road to twin track. Limited road upgrades have taken place elsewhere. • A number of water and waste-water improvement projects have been delivered, including upgrades to water mains at Wick and Occumster and sewer upgrade at Thurso.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be a place of outstanding heritage: safe in the custody of local people – by the protection and enhancement of the outstanding natural assets, including landscapes, geology, habitats and species of national and international importance. Economic opportunities will be realised associated with the Sutherland Geo-park, and the marketing of the ‘Green Firth’ around the Dornoch 	<p>Some</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The policy framework has sought to ensure the natural environment is protected and enhanced. • The North West Highlands Geo-park and Dornoch Firth area attract high numbers of tourists each year, many of whom stay in serviced accommodation. • The Flow Country World Heritage Site was inscribed by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in July 2024 with broad support from a range of stakeholders.

<p>Firth. The Flow Country will have been inscribed on the World Heritage Site list and enjoys the support of local communities, land managers and visitors alike. The high quality of life will be helping to increase and maintain population levels.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The population of Caithness and Sutherland fell by 5% and 3.1% respectively between the 2011 and 2022 Census, indicating an ongoing challenge to achieve this outcome.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be a centre of excellence for energy and engineering – Dounreay's current 2,000 strong workforce will have found alternative sources of employment both on and off site in terms of decommissioning and throughout Caithness and North Sutherland where a more flexible approach to business and housing development has provided a fertile context for growth in jobs particularly in the new engineering and energy sectors where employers make good use of their transferred skills. 	<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dounreay continues to be a site of major construction, demolition and waste management. The decommissioning programme was extended in 2024 from 2033 until the 2070s. This will have significant implications for continuing employment and investment in the area. It employs approximately 1,500 people directly and is supporting staff to plan their futures beyond decommissioning and supporting the community to diversify its economic base. • New job sectors are developing, particularly in the renewable energy sector.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have become an international centre of excellence for marine renewables – the Pentland Firth will be the location for marine renewables; related facilities and industries will be available locally. UHI through North Highland College will develop centres of excellence in marine engineering and environmental management. The spatial strategy supports the growth of this sector and an updated planning framework will be put in place to ensure opportunities are grasped. 	<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tidal energy site, known as MeyGen, has been operating in the Pentland Firth since 2018, with future phases planned. • Other related facilities and industries are available locally, including at Scrabster Harbour. • The UHI is at the forefront of research into climate change, marine science, aquaculture and renewable energy. • An updated planning framework, focussing only on onshore wind energy, was published in 2016.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a high-quality tourist industry – tourists attracted by the outstanding natural heritage, outdoor activities and key tourist destinations providing high quality facilities e.g. John O'Groats, Wick. Developments at UHI Dornoch campus and elsewhere will support the sector. 	<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The growth in popularity of the North Coast 500 route has been a catalyst to significant tourism growth, with large surveys reporting natural landscapes, scenery and nature-based activities are being cited as main motivators for visiting the region. • Tourism growth has put pressure on some key infrastructure, namely roads, parking and conversion of housing stock to tourist accommodation, these impacts potentially affect the quality of tourism experiences. • The John O'Groats masterplan has been realised, through the delivery of tourist accommodation, cafes, bars, visitor attractions and significant upgrades to the public realm. • UHI Dornoch – which provides specialist courses in tourism, hospitality and professional cookery – has been extended in recent years, including the provision of purpose-built student accommodation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a more diverse economy - other enterprises will have been attracted by a more flexible planning regime throughout Caithness. This will have reduced the area's former dependence on the nuclear industry although decommissioning will still provide some employment opportunities in the early years of this Plan. All sectors are now represented and welcomed. 	<p>Some</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various new enterprises, particularly in the energy, tourism and food and drink sectors have helped to diversify the economy. • Given the decommissioning programme for Dounreay has been extended until the 2070s it is expected that employment opportunities will remain throughout the plan period, and into the next plan period. Despite this, staff numbers are expected to change and Dounreay is supporting staff to plan their futures and supporting the community to diversify its economic base.

14.11 The HwLDP explains that the west coast's particular, peripheral and fragile nature also requires a tailored and positive vision. It provides outcomes listed Table 14:5 that are aimed to be achieved by 2030.

Table 14:5 HwLDP Outcomes and Progress West Highland and Islands

Objective	Comment
<p>• be better connected - residents, visitors and employers will have faster, more reliable, safer and more frequent connections. Trunk road (particularly the A82) and urban link road improvements at Fort William and Portree will have relieved local and regional economic constraints. Similarly, better facilities for ferry, rail, inter-modal freight transfer (particularly at Corpach), Caledonian Canal freight movements and marine access will have helped economic growth. Scheduled air travel will have been re-introduced via a seaplane connection to Loch Linnhe and an airstrip at Broadford. Residents will also have better active travel (walking and cycling) and public transport access to greenspace and schools. All will have better access to local waste recycling and to adequate water, sewerage, broadband and electricity networks.</p>	<p>Some</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated Transport Plan for Fort William is currently being prepared that aims to increase resilience and reliability on the trunk road. • Completion of the remaining section of the Portree link road between the A87 and A855 recently awarded loan funding, and construction anticipated in late 2025. • Several new ferries are planned to replace the aging fleet, and associated port improvements are being delivered, including a major upgrade at Uig. New infrastructure on the Ardgour and Nether Lochaber sides of the Corran Narrows has recently been granted planning permission and is expected to be delivered by 2027. • Challenges remain in delivery of aviation projects. • A number of active travel projects delivered, including as part of the flood prevention schemes at Coal and Lochyside and in Ullapool. • Improvements have been made to utilities, broadband and electricity networks.
<p>• have more efficient public service provision - services will be provided in better facilities in more accessible locations - for example, new health care facilities will have been provided at Blàr Mòr in Fort William and at Broadford.</p>	<p>Some</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New hospital opened in Broadford in 2022 and funding allocated for a new hospital at Blàr Mòr with anticipated construction in 2027. • Other new public services include a Joint Campus at Caol in Fort William that opened in 2017 and planned new Primary Schools in Broadford and Dunvegan on Skye.
<p>• have more affordable housing - particularly social rented</p>	<p>Good</p>

<p>accommodation - via creative, multi-agency delivery methods similar to that progressed at Home Farm, Portree. Also, surplus, publicly owned land and buildings whether forestry plantations or redundant schools, will have provided cheaper and available sites.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several affordable housing sites delivered, many of which were on surplus publicly owned land. This includes developments at Broadford, Armadale, Raasay, Staffin, Kilbeg, Fort William, Spean Bridge and Strontian.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a more diverse economy - particularly via renewable energy developments that deliver genuine and proportionate benefits to local communities. New opportunities associated with marine renewables will have been delivered in locations such as Kishorn in Wester Ross and west coast ports and harbours will also see supply side developments that enhance the local economy. Flexibility in the level of developer contributions sought will have attracted inward investment from more pressurised areas. 	<p>Some</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of renewable energy projects have been delivered, including large scale wind farms at Edinbane and Ben Aketil on Skye. • Adoption of the Social Value Charter for Renewable Energy Investment. • Following investment, Kishorn Port reopened as a renewable energy and construction facility in 2017; significant further investment is now underway to enable the port to play a pivotal role in the delivery of offshore wind projects. • Significant investment at other ports and harbours, include new ferry and extended pontoon facilities at Ullapool; upgraded harbour facilities, and a new terminal building at Uig. • Developer contributions have been sought towards key infrastructure where capacity issues have arisen.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have rationalised but protected its lifeline services - the larger villages within the remoter areas, for example Gairloch and Lochcarron, will have grown sufficiently to hold on to amalgamated services. 	<p>Some</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Census data shows the wider Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Ward area saw its population decline slightly between 2011 and 2022, despite this many lifeline services remain operational.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be re-connected with its land and natural resources - “working the land” will once again be a respectful balance between the limits of natural resources and the 	<p>Some</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The policy framework has contributed to achieving this balance. • Whilst a limited number of new crofts have been registered and some areas of peatland

<p>economic needs of local communities. New crofts, forest crofts, native woodland management, allotments and more effective husbandry of wider natural resources and heritage, will have all helped restore this balance.</p>	<p>have been restored, many of these land management-based outcomes are not directly within the control of the planning system and require intervention from a range of agencies.</p>
<p>• have a greater and more diverse age profile of population than currently projected - underpinned by better employment, housing and further education opportunities for younger people, for example at Baile Chlann Domhnaill: A' Chill Bheag (the new Kilbeg Village) on Skye. Sabhal Mor Ostaig, Lochaber and Skye and Wester Ross colleges will bring new residents to the area.</p>	<p>Limited</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New employment, housing and further education opportunities have been delivered in key areas, despite this census data found there to be significant increases in the proportion of the population aged 65+ between 2011 and 2022 in the Plan area. • Census data shows the population in Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh declined slightly, whereas Lochaber increased slightly and the Isle of Skye and Raasay more substantially at 4.3% since 2011. • First housing phases delivered at A' Chill Bheag. • The new Sabhal Mor Ostaig (Skye Gaelic College) building opened in 2015, and UHI North, West and Hebrides continues to operate several campuses in the area.
<p>• be a place of outstanding natural and cultural heritage - heritage assets including the landscape and wildlife will have been safeguarded and enhanced. The high quality of life and economic opportunities associated with these assets will be helping to increase and maintain population levels.</p>	<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The policy framework has sought to ensure the natural environment is protected and enhanced. • Economic opportunities associated with these assets have manifested in large increases in tourism numbers to key visitor attractions, including the Fairy Pools, Old Man of Storr, Glen Coe and the Glenfinnan Viaduct. • Census data shows population levels have been broadly maintained in Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh and Lochaber and

	increased by 4.3% on Isle of Skye and Raasay between 2011 and 2022.
<p>• have re-established and promoted its unique identity - as a centre for Gaelic culture and language and as having a high quality tourism product providing high quality facilities, service and exceptional cuisine based on high quality local produce. The area will be recognised and promoted as an all year round destination building on the current and ongoing branding associated with the Outdoor Capital of the UK, an internationally renowned “outdoor” destination and event/trail outdoor activity with a wide range of activities including skiing, mountain biking, sailing, climbing etc. based draw for tourists attracted by the area’s outstanding natural and cultural heritage.</p>	<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual visitor numbers to Highland have increased by 65% since 2012 (THC345). • Lead drivers of tourism sector include: landscape and scenery, culture and heritage, sports, outdoor adventure and food and drink. • High tourist season has stayed roughly constant date-wise, but winter tourism has soared across the region since 2012. • The Nevis Range has been upgraded in recent years, including a new hotel, bunkhouse and mountain bike trail. • Several high-profile sporting events have taken place in the area, including the Mountain Bike World Cup.

14.12 The HwLDP explains that pressure for development within the Inner Moray Firth requires a tailored vision on how best to harness this demand within the constraints that exist and to ensure that its benefits are dispersed across Highland.

Table 14:6 HwLDP Outcomes and Progress Inner Moray Firth

Objective	Comment
<p>• have increased the number of jobs, people and facilities - the Inner Moray Firth will be a larger and more efficient “engine” for the wider Highland economy. Growth of</p>	<p>Some</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Inner Moray Firth experienced population growth of 2.7%, with growth across all areas except remote small towns (THC445).

<p>jobs and population, especially to the A96 and Easter Ross Corridors will have continued the latter being underpinned by the competitive and sustainability advantage of its improved rail route connections. New and better facilities will have followed this growth in demand. Service centres such as Dingwall, Nairn and Tain will have grown to support the delivery of the facilities required.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ICFGFP is anticipated to bring further growth to the area, with the prediction of 11,300 new jobs within Highland and £6.5bn investment in sites and ports at Ardersier, Inverness, Highland Deephaven, Invergordon and Nigg as well as Inverness Campus. • Rail infrastructure improvements, including more frequent services and new stations at Conon Bridge and Inverness Airport. • Planning permission is in place for a new rail siding at a timber processing plant at Morayhill. • Nairn, Dingwall and Tain have seen modest population growth, where infrastructure improvements planned and under construction, include a replacement secondary school in Nairn and 3-18 campus in Tain.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a growing City – building on the growth and opportunities of its role as the major service and administrative centre, Inverness will have developed in a way that promotes the key aspirations of the updated City vision, focuses development where infrastructure exists or can be provided in the most efficient way and maintains a thriving City centre as the focus for services and retail provision. 	<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inverness has grown significantly, with over 6,000 house completions in the Inverness Housing Market Area since 2012 (House Completions Highland Dashboard). • Many house completions have contributed to achieving the spatial strategy for Inverness continues to be realised, with significant housing growth delivered at Culduthel/ Slackbuie, Milton of Leys and Inshes. Development at Ness-side, Inverness East and Westercraigs continues to be delivered. • Several key development sites in the city have been realised, including Inverness Castle in 2025, a new justice centre in 2020, £15.5M of improvements to the Northern Meeting Park and Bught Park completed in 2025 and a new prison due for completion in 2026. • Like many city centres across the UK, Inverness has faced challenges due to the growth of out of centre and online retailing. Despite this, its vacancy rate has decreased to 9.2% in 2024/25

	<p>which is below the Highland average of 12.2%. Some elements of the city centre appear to be thriving, particularly the food and drink sector during the peak tourism periods.</p>
<p>• have safeguarded and enhanced its special places - the firths around which the settlements and economic activity are located have retained their quality, support an abundance of internationally and nationally important wildlife and provide a special place for residents and visitors alike. The environmental limits of the area will have been respected, particularly in the countryside around its towns and along its coast, where the effect of sea level rising from climate change has been allowed for in the location of new development.</p>	<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The policy framework has ensured significant and sustained development close to sensitive coastal areas has allowed these special areas to be safeguarded and enhanced. • The policy framework, including the use of updated SEPA flood mapping, has sought to protect coastal communities and assets whilst allowing these areas to develop sustainably and adapt to climate change.
<p>• have made it easy for people and wildlife to move about through a green network – large scale and small scale habitat corridors have been protected and enhanced so that species can move about within and around development, including species that are affected by climate change. People will have better access to high quality places using a network of paths for walking and cycling, which contributes to quality of life, health and inward investment. Effective masterplanning will have ensured that linkage to the green network, accessible civic and</p>	<p>Some</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The IMFLDP2 identifies and safeguards areas of quality open space and opportunities for developing green networks and active travel routes. New developments are required to provide areas of new open space, including supplementary guidance. Direct provision and/or developer contributions are sought towards active travel improvements where appropriate. • New large-scale mixed-use developments at West and East Inverness have been successfully masterplanned through the use of Council led development briefs with a focus on green networks and sustainable travel, for example the Inverness Campus.

<p>greenspaces and enhanced access will have accompanied development.</p>	
<p>• have more efficient forms of travel – the area will have seen substantial improvements to the existing transport network through improvements to the road network, seeing an increase in the numbers of people walking, cycling as a result of the green network, and taking the urban rail/bus networks and delivery of better connections for local road freight to and from longer haul Caledonian canal, rail, sea and air routes. As part of these improvements, a new railway station will have been provided at Dalcross.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considerable improvements to transport networks, including delivery of new active travel routes to link key destinations in Inverness and within other Inner Moray Firth settlements. • Modest increases have been seen in the number of people walking and cycling. • Rail freight is a successful mode of transport, with Needlefield Rail Yard currently operating in Inverness and a new rail siding at a wood processing plant near Dalcross granted planning permission in 2025. • Two new rail stations opened, Conon Bridge in 2013 and Inverness Airport (Dalcross) in 2023. • Port of Inverness and Port of Cromarty Firth continue to support the movement of goods in and out of the region.
<p>• have resolved its infrastructure constraints - an effective partnership of all funding bodies will have removed the barriers to growth. As well as improvements to the A9 trunk road, the West Link, A96 upgrade, the Nairn By-pass and a new station at Dalcross will have been delivered. Broadband, electricity grid networks and drainage infrastructure will no longer restrict the economic potential of the area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges remain in resolving some significant transport constraints, whilst West Link in Inverness was completed in 2017 and the final section of A9 dualling in the Highland LDP area is under construction, firm funding and delivery timescales are yet to be confirmed for other major Transport Scotland projects, including A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton, A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) and A9/A82 Longman Junction Improvement Scheme. • Significant broadband improvements have taken place, alongside ongoing upgrades to electricity grid and drainage networks.
<p>• have diversified its economy - there will be more, different jobs. A new education campus accommodating a range of educational institutions, including a</p>	<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Inverness Campus opened in 2015, almost 50,000sqm of floorspace and 1,200 jobs have been delivered, including UHI Inverness and a National Treatment Centre, as well as other

<p>base for the University of the Highlands and Islands and Inverness College UHI, space for commercial spin-off companies and a regional sports facility, will have expanded educational opportunities and generated employment, helping stem the loss of young people from the region. Other ports and harbours, including Inverness and Invergordon will have supported the growth of tourist and renewables related economic development. More all weather tourist facilities related to the environment will have bolstered the role of the area as a tourist hub and gateway to the wider Highlands. The airport and its related business park will have expanded to accommodate increased national and international trade. The UHI will have developed a thriving City campus contributing to academic excellence in fields such as bio-technology and life sciences based on the Centre for Health Science. More traditional local industrial enterprises will also have been accommodated in a new location east of Inverness.</p>	<p>technology, life sciences, renewables and advanced manufacturing organisations. Ambitious phase 2 mixed use planning application for over 80,000sqm floor space is currently under determination.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans at advanced stage for a new floodlit all-weather pitch facility within Inverness Campus. • All ICFGF sites, including Inverness and Invergordon have ambitious renewables related expansion plans. • Port of Cromarty Firth (Invergordon) has seen significant growth in the number of cruise ships calling, with a peak of 130 in 2023. • A number of all-weather tourist facilities have been upgraded, including the Loch Ness Centre at Drumnadrochit and a number of distilleries. • Inverness Airport terminal building upgraded to accommodate additional passengers, and further expansion is being considered. • Several large-scale developments have been delivered within Inverness Airport Business Park, capacity remains for further development. • New facility for Scottish School of Forestry was completed in 2016 in Balloch, east Inverness.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be regenerated and renewed – brownfield land and buildings in the City and other settlements across the area will have been brought back into more productive use. This will range from buildings in our City and town centres and major 	<p>Some</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some reuse of land and buildings in the city and towns, including delivery of affordable homes within city centre sites at Union Street, Academy Street, Church Street and Raining’s Close and Nairn town centre.

regeneration areas such as the Longman landfill site, the Longman Industrial Estate core area and the Invergordon Tank Farm.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whilst there have been a number of new developments within the Longman Industrial Estate, challenges remain in delivering comprehensive regeneration at the Longman Landfill site and Invergordon Tank Farm.
--	--

CaSPlan

- 14.13 CaSPlan was adopted by the Council in August 2018. The HwLDP set out a broad vision and spatial strategy for Caithness and Sutherland, this was a starting point for the CaSPlan outcomes set out in Table 14:7.

Table 14:7 CaSPlan Outcomes and Progress

Objective	Comment
<p>Growing Communities: A network of successful, sustainable and socially inclusive communities where people want to live, which provide the most convenient access to key services, training and employment and are the primary locations for inward investment.</p>	<p>Some</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caithness and Sutherland have experienced greater population and working age population decline than all local authorities in Scotland. Decline has occurred in both remote rural areas and the towns of Wick and Thurso. • Town centres have faced significant challenges in recent years, in particular the growth of online retailing. This has coincided with a rise in vacancy rates in most Caithness and Sutherland towns, with Wick significantly above the Highland average at 23.9% in 2024/25. • Larger settlements in the area continue to provide a range of key services. • UHI provides a range of courses from their campuses at Dornoch, Halkirk and Thurso, including specialist renewable energy, golf and equine courses. • Some employment facilities are located within settlements, including Golspie Business Park and Wick Business Park. Town centres also provide employment facilities, particularly in the food and drink sector. Other significant

	employers are locations without settlements, in particular at Dounreay.
<p>Employment: A strong, diverse and sustainable economy characterised as being an internationally renowned centre for renewable energy, world class engineering, land management and sea based industries and a tourist industry that combines culture, history, adventure and wildlife.</p>	<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caithness and north east and central Sutherland, has attracted many proposals for generation, storage, use and transmission of renewable energy and associated employment, both on and off shore. • Sea based industries continue to provide employment, including fish farming and Scrabster Harbour for landing large catches of fish, as well as calls from cruise ships, cargo vessels and ferries. • The growth in popularity of the North Coast 500 route for the region. • Upgrades to visitor facilities at tourist attractions that celebrate the natural environment, including at the North West Highlands Geo-park and at Forsinard Flows within the Flow Country World Heritage Site.
<p>Connectivity and Transport: Enhanced communications, utilities and transport infrastructure that support communities and economic growth, with development anchored to existing or planned provision.</p>	<p>Some</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telecommunications networks and broadband coverage have improved, including delivery of Local Full Fibre Network in Wick and Thurso. • The Transport Scotland Berriedale Braes Improvement Project was completed in 2020, this improved time and road safety on this part of the A9. Naver Bridge south of Bettyhill on the A836 is currently being replaced at a cost of £11M, this will result in the upgrading a section of this road to twin track. Georgemas Junction strategic rail freight and transport hub supports some freight movements and locations for new sidings continue to be explored. • A number of water and waste-water improvement projects have been delivered, including upgrades to water mains at Wick and Occumster and sewer upgrade at Thurso.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A key factor that informed site allocation choices for development in CaSPlan was the availability of infrastructure, a number of these sites have been completed and are under construction. • Northwest 2045 is a cross-sectoral network operating across North West Highland to attempt to reverse trends of unaffordable housing for local people, falling school rolls and employment scarcity.
<p>Environment and Heritage: High quality places where the outstanding environment and natural, built and cultural heritage is celebrated and valued assets are safeguarded.</p>	<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The policy framework in national policy and the HwLDP has sought to ensure the natural environment is protected and enhanced. • A key achievement in the protection of natural assets was the inscribing of The Flow Country as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2024. • Several historic buildings restored to a high standard, for example The Barn Business Centre in Ardgay and Kyle House near Tongue, the latter winning a RIAS Architecture Award.

WestPlan

14.14 WestPlan was adopted by the Council in September 2019. Its outcomes are listed in Table 14:8.

Table 14:8 WestPlan Outcomes and Progress

Objective	Comment
Growing Communities: All places are better designed. Larger	Some

<p>settlements and their centres have retained and expanded facilities. Their populations have increased because of this better access to facilities and because they are safe, attractive and healthy places to live.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New high quality, modern developments, have been delivered, including a new hospital at Broadford and new private and affordable housing developments. • Vacancy rates in WestPlan’s recognised town centres (Fort William, Ullapool and Portree) remain below the Highland average and Portree continues to have a very low vacancy rate of 0.8% in 2024/25. • Census data from 2011 and 2022 The population in Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh declined slightly, whereas Lochaber increased slightly and the Isle of Skye and Raasay more substantially at 4.3%. • Place Standard results found the area to score relatively well in terms of safety and access to nature and park but less well for facilities and services, active travel and public transport. • Many improvements have been made to active travel connections, including in Coal and Lochside and Ullapool through the delivery of flood prevention schemes. • Fort William 2040 is a shared vision for the future of Fort William and Lochaber based around a number of themes that aim to deliver a range of improvements to the area, including affordable housing, visitor accommodation, improved connections and focus on taking advantage of water assets to support industry, tourism and communities.
<p>Employment: The local economy is growing, diverse and sustainable. West Highland has an enhanced reputation as a heritage tourism destination, as a base for marine renewables and as an effective place for working at home and with the land.</p>	<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economy continues to provide employment in traditional industries such as manufacturing and fisheries as well as more diverse opportunities in renewable energy and tourism. • The areas reputation as a heritage tourism destination continues to grow, with vastly increased visitor numbers to heritage

	<p>attractions, in particular the Glenfinnan Viaduct and a number of iconic castles.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further investment is now underway at Kishorn to enable the port to play a pivotal role in the delivery of offshore wind projects. • Census data shows the proportion of people working from home in 2022 was higher than both Highland and Scottish averages, suggesting the area is an effective place to do this.
<p>Connectivity and Transport: Public agencies and other partners co-ordinate and optimise their investment in agreed growth locations. Communities are better supported to become more self-reliant, to have more pride in their area and identity, to diversify their populations, and to have more control of local resources.</p>	<p>Some</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investment planned and taken place, including mixed use developments at Broadford, A' Chill Bheag and Blàr Mòr at Fort William. • Challenges to diversifying populations, with census data finding there to be significant increases in the proportion of the population aged 65+ between 2011 - 2022 in the Plan area. • A range of policy areas, rather than the planning system alone, can help to allow communities to become more self-reliant, for example contributions towards this have been made through the establishment of community trusts and community asset transfers. • Registered Local Place Plans haven begun to enable communities to convey their proposals for the use of land and buildings in their local area, including at Lochalsh, Broadford and Torridon and Kinlochewe.
<p>Environment and Heritage: Resources are better managed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A higher proportion of journeys are shorter, safer, healthier, more reliable and made in a carbon efficient way. • Water, heat sources, land and buildings are used, sited and designed in a way that is carbon 	<p>Some</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements have been made to a number of active travel routes to encourage modal shift towards active travel. • The policy framework in national policy and the HwLDP has helped to ensure that water, heat sources, land and buildings are used, sited and designed in a way that is carbon clever and respectful of heritage resources.

<p>clever and respectful of heritage resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waste is reduced, reused, recycled or treated as close to source as possible to generate renewable energy. • High quality places predominate where the outstanding environment and natural, built and cultural heritage is celebrated and valued assets are safeguarded. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant improvements have been made to waste and recycling, including a new Waste Transfer Station in Fort William that began operating in 2025 and a new facility is currently under construction in Portree. • The policy framework has sought to ensure the natural and historic environment is protected and enhanced.
---	---

IMFLDP

14.15 IMFLDP1 was adopted in 2015. This plan's vision was as set out in the HwLDP for the Inner Moray Firth area, no updated vision or outcomes were identified within this plan. For an overview of the progress in achieving the HwLDP vision for the area see Table 14:6. A number of the objectives described were achieved during the period IMFLDP1 was in force (2015 to 2024).

14.16 IMFLDP2 was adopted by the Council in July 2024. Its outcomes are listed in Table 14:9. Given the relatively recent adoption of this LDP it can be expected that progress on meeting some of its outcomes are at an early stage.

Table 14:9 IMFLDP2 Outcomes and Progress

Objective	Comment
<p>Environment: The Inner Moray Firth's built, cultural and natural assets will be safeguarded and appropriately managed. Water, waste, heat, land and buildings will be used, re-used, located and designed in a carbon clever way. Environmental quality of all places will be safeguarded and enhanced.</p>	<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The policy framework in national policy and the HwLDP, and new environment policies in IMFLDP2, have sought to ensure the environment is safeguarded and appropriately enhanced.
<p>Employment: The Inner Moray Firth economy will be growing, greener, circular and diverse. Local</p>	<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ICFGF was announced in 2023 and aims to boost innovation, create high quality jobs,

<p>enterprises will be national leaders in the life sciences, sustainable tourism and renewable energy sectors. More traditional sectors such as construction, food and drink and smaller scale general industry will have continued to thrive and provide jobs close to where people live reducing the need to travel.</p>	<p>promote growth and regeneration and make a significant contribution to achieving net zero ambitions. It is anticipated to create 11,300 new jobs within Highland over 25 years and £6.5bn investment. It is centred at ports in Ardersier, Inverness, Highland Deephaven, Invergordon and Nigg as well as sites at Inverness Campus.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Inverness Campus has continued to attract the life sciences sector, including the opening in recent years of the Life Sciences Innovation Centre and an NHS National Treatment Centre. It also attracted other sectors, with a new headquarters for a large energy and infrastructure provider currently under construction. • Sustainable tourism potential growth areas identified in the plan, particularly at Loch Ness, where the Tourism BID was named the first carbon neutral BID in the UK, have made progress towards sustainability. • More traditional sectors have continued to thrive and provide new opportunities, for example through the construction of housing sites in Inverness and Tornagrain and industrial development at the nearby Ardersier Port. • Shortages in industrial land in and around Inverness are understood to continue to pose a risk to competitiveness and economic growth.
<p>Growing Communities: Our communities will be sustainable, well-designed places with homes which meet people's needs. More people will want to live in Inverness and the larger towns and villages as they are attractive, safe, socially inclusive and healthy, with thriving centres and better access to services</p>	<p>Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The policy framework, in national policy, HwLDP and this plan's policies on placemaking, affordable housing, accessible and adaptable homes and transport seek to ensure our communities will be sustainable, well-designed places which meet people's needs. • Inverness continues grow, with over 500 housing completions in its housing market area

<p>and facilities. Inner Moray Firth communities will function as networks of locally resilient and self-supporting places with equality of access to local resources.</p>	<p>since the plan's adoption. Many of these completions were with key strategic growth sites at Ness-side, Inverness East and Westercraigs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In terms of local resources Local Living analysis found between 67% and 75% of homes within settlements had either a very high or high level of walkable services.
<p>Connectivity: It will be easy to move around and between settlements in the Inner Moray Firth area. Walking and cycling will be the logical choice for most day to day trips, with longer journeys made using an efficient, reliable public transport system and, in rural areas, shared transport and electric vehicles. Sustainable regional, national and global connections will be available from modern bus and rail stations, harbours and Inverness Airport. Improved digital connectivity throughout the Plan area will enable home working for most people, helping to reduce the need to travel.</p>	<p>Some</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The plan's sustainable transport strategy is contributing to the delivery of new and improved active links within and between settlements, including the £1.4M Culbokie Active Travel Village project that is currently under construction. • Number of electric vehicles and charging facilities has increased substantially throughout the plan area (THC133 and THC134). • Issues are ongoing relating to the reliability of public transport, in particular a national shortage of bus drivers is limiting an efficient and reliable public transport system. This is an issue outwith the control of planning system that will require ongoing multidisciplinary initiatives to overcome. • The Inverness Station Masterplan continues to progress in partnership with key stakeholders. • Port of Inverness and Port of Cromarty Firth continue to support the movement of goods in and out of the region, these ports, alongside other ICFGP at Ardersier and Nigg also have ambitious renewables related expansion plans. • Passenger numbers continue to increase at Inverness Airport, and new routes have been introduced to Gran Canaria and Lapland. Further expansion continues to be considered.

- Digital connectivity continues to be improved throughout the plan area, including through the Scottish Government R100 Programme.

Allocations

Housing

- 14.17 Detailed evidence on housing has been provided within **Chapter 9 Housing**, including data and commentary on housing completions and housing land supply. This section of the chapter should therefore be read in conjunction with **Chapter 9**, and further detail can be obtained from a number of sources, including the Council's [Housing Land Audit](#), [New House Completions Dashboard](#) and [Deliverable Housing Land Pipeline](#).
- 14.18 A range of sites are allocated for solely housing and housing as part of mixed-use sites in the HwLDP and the area LDPs. A breakdown is provided in Table 14:9 that outlines the progress of sites allocated for housing in each LDP. A number of sites, particularly in the Inner Moray Firth area, are allocated in both the HwLDP and relevant area LDP, a number of sites were also allocated in IMFLDP1 and rolled forward into IMFLDP2. This is reflected in Table 14:10, and as such these columns should not be summed.

Table 14:10 Progress of Sites Allocated for Housing

LDP	Number of sites allocated for housing*	Sites with planning consent**	Sites under construction***	Sites Complete
HwLDP	23	10	6	5
CaSPlan	67	33	11	5
WestPlan	106	49	18	11
IMFLDP1	188	37	35	45
IMFLDP2	133	83	41	7

**Includes mixed use sites where housing specified within the mix of uses*

***Sites with a live planning consent on 1 April 2024 (base date of HLA 2024)*

****Sites programmed in the HLA 2024 to have completions by April 2026, therefore assumed to be under construction at the time of writing.*

- 14.19 Table 14:9 demonstrates some progress on a number of sites allocated for housing in the HwLDP. Many of the HwLDP allocations are large scale sites that

are being developed in phases (including at Inverness East and Tornagrain) and therefore were expected to take a significant number of years to reach completion. A number of other sites in the HwLDP were not carried forward or were allocated for alternative uses in area LDPs. These reasons help to explain why a relatively small number of sites have been completed in the HwLDP.

- 14.20 In the CaSPlan and WestPlan areas, a considerable number of allocations have planning consent for all or part of allocated sites. Whilst a number of sites are under construction or complete, historic challenges to delivering homes in these areas of Highland continue to inhibit progress. The remote nature of many of these areas and physical constraints of development mean that there is a virtual absence of private, volume house builder interest in these areas.
- 14.21 The IMFLDP area experiences the most development pressure within Highland, and this is reflected in the number of housing allocations and the progress of sites in both IMFLDP1 and the more recently adopted IMFLDP2. A significant number of large-scale sites have been completed, are under construction and/or have planning consent. The highest number of housing completions is within Inverness city, where a number of strategic sites have made considerable progress, including the completions of Culduthel/Slackbuie, Milton of Leys and Inshes developments. Development at Ness Castle, Ness-side, Inverness East and Westerbraigs continues to be delivered.
- 14.22 A breakdown of housing completions per year in Highland is illustrated in Figure 14:1. The large number of completions, each year and collectively, helps to illustrate that Highland maintained a generous supply of deliverable housing land throughout much of the plan period. Figure 14:1 shows there were fluctuations in completions since 2012, with a significant drop seen in 2020/21 during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Subsequently completion numbers rose to peak levels and in recent years completions have decreased to become more comparable to pre-pandemic years.
- 14.23 Figure 14:1 shows also shows number of housing completions on allocated sites in comparison to the total number of completions. The portion of completions on allocated sites has generally increased since 2012, to a peak of 86% in 2022/23, suggesting a move towards a more plan lead system in Highland. Whilst the proportion of homes completed on allocated sites has decreased in recent years, it remains above levels pre-2018.



Figure 14:1 Housing Completions in Highland 2012/13 – 2024/25 (*House Completions in Highland*)

- 14.24 Table 14:11 shows the proportion of completions on allocated sites varies significantly across different LDP areas. Lower proportions of completions on allocated sites in the CaSPlan and WestPlan areas are typical in these geographies where a significant proportion of planning applications for housing and subsequent housing completions, are smaller windfall developments, located outwith allocated sites or settlements entirely. Completions on allocated sites in the IMFLDP area is significantly higher, reflective of the delivery of large-scale sites by major volume housebuilders, as well as a more restrictive policy framework for housing in the countryside. Data also shows that a substantial proportion of windfall completions were within LDP settlement development areas: 12% in CaSPlan, 18% in WestPlan and 10% in IMFLDP.

Table 14:11 House Completions by Plan Area and on Allocated Sites

LDP	Number of house completions*	Number of completions on allocated sites**	Proportion of completions on allocated sites
-----	------------------------------	--	--

HwLDP	13,045	1,767	N/A
CaSPlan	1,220	532	44%
WestPlan	2,602	852	33%
IMFLDP***	9,223	7,096	77%

**These completions include previous local plan/LDP allocations*

***Recorded completions to end of July 2025*

****This includes completions on both IMFLDP1 and IMFLDP2 sites*

Employment Land

- 14.25 Detailed evidence on employment land has been provided within **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**. This section of the chapter should therefore be read in conjunction with **Chapter 8**, and further detail can be obtained from a number of sources, including the Council's [Highland Delivery Programme](#) and [Business and Industrial Land Audit \(BILA\)](#). The BILA was prepared in 2018, an update is intended to be prepared when resources allow.
- 14.26 A range of sites are allocated for business and industrial use in the HwLDP and area LDPs. Each area LDP details employment land allocations within the Plan area's main towns and villages, as well as strategic sites which can generate significant employment activity outwith these settlements, known as Economic Development Areas.
- 14.27 The number and progress of sites in each of the LDPs is shown in Table 14:12. The data presented in Table 14:12 has been collected by desk top analysis of data available on the Council's planning and building standards software systems. The table provides a high level overview of the uptake of allocations where information was available. Future, more detailed studies, including a BILA, will present more detailed results.
- 14.28 The nature of the delivery of sites allocated for employment land differs greatly from many housing sites. Typically, allocated sites are delivered incrementally by a number of different developers and/or occupiers. It is therefore normal for sites to take a number of years to be fully built out. A number employment sites in the HwLDP were not carried forward or were allocated for alternative uses in area LDPs. These reasons help to explain why a relatively small number of sites have been completed. Despite this, the BILA did find there were significant constraints to the delivery of numerous employment sites for a range of reasons, including ownership, marketability, physical constraints and the level of

investment required to service sites. These reasons also help to explain the relatively slow uptake of a number of allocations.

- 14.29 Despite numerous sites remaining undeveloped, there are localised areas where there are known shortfalls, specifically in industrial land. The IMFLDP2 explains that there is a fundamental shortfall in industrial land in and around Inverness, to meet both large and small-scale business needs. To address this imbalance this plan includes a new industrial land policy which aims to better protect the current supply of industrial sites, new industrial land allocations and provides a supportive framework for new industrial development on unallocated sites. Due to the limited time period since IMFLDP2 was adopted it is difficult to comprehensively assess the performance of this policy. However, it is known that there has been significant interest for industrial development on several sites within and close to Inverness.
- 14.30 There have been a number of areas where substantial areas of employment land have been, and continue to be delivered, including Inverness Campus, Inverness Airport Business Park, Port of Cromarty Firth and Port of Nigg.

Table 14:12 Progress of Sites Allocated for Business and/or Industry

LDP	Number of sites allocated for business or industry*	Sites with planning consent**	Sites under construction***	Sites Complete
HwLDP	26	16	13	0
CaSPlan	57	23	23	0
WestPlan	85	26	23	0
IMFLDP1	134	56	52	4
IMFLDP2	102	33	29	0

**Includes mixed use sites where business and/or industry is included within the mix of uses*

***Sites with a live planning consent (HwLDP, CaSPlan, WestPlan and IMFLDP2 at 26 August 2025 and IMFLDP1 at 10 October 2025)*

****Sites where a Notification of Initiation of Development and/or Building Warrant Completion Certificate has been issued by the Council (HwLDP, CaSPlan, WestPlan and IMFLDP2 at 26 August 2025 and IMFLDP1 at 10 October 2025)*

Planning Appeals

- 14.31 The outcome of planning appeals, both local reviews and to Scottish Ministers, are a useful indicator of how local development plans are performing. Table

14.13 provides a breakdown of the proportion of original decisions upheld since the HwLDP was adopted.

Table 14:13 Outcome of Appeals 2012/13 – 2024/25 (HOPS Planning Performance Framework Archive)

Year	Type	Total Decisions (#)	Original Decision Upheld	
			No	%
2012/13	Local reviews	21	9	43
	Appeals to Scottish Ministers	20	4	20
2013/14	Local reviews	28	9.9	35.7
	Appeals to Scottish Ministers	19	12	63.2
2014/15	Local reviews	34	9	26.5
	Appeals to Scottish Ministers	24	24	33.3
2015/16	Local reviews	44	39	88.6
	Appeals to Scottish Ministers	25	10	40
2016/17	Local reviews	57	32	56.3
	Appeals to Scottish Ministers	TBC	TBC	TBC
2017/18	Local reviews	42	30	71.4
	Appeals to Scottish Ministers	19	11	57.9
2018/19	Local reviews	38	21	55.3
	Appeals to Scottish Ministers	17	9	52.9
2019/20	Local reviews	28	21	75
	Appeals to Scottish Ministers	15	10	66.7
2020/21	Local reviews	25	16	64
	Appeals to Scottish Ministers	10	5	50
2021/22	Local reviews	23	17	74
	Appeals to Scottish Ministers	23	8	35
2022/23	Local reviews	33	23	69.7
	Appeals to Scottish Ministers	15	8	53.3
2023/24	Local reviews	23	14	60.9
	Appeals to Scottish Ministers	17	8	47.1
2024/25	Local reviews	20	14	70
	Appeals to Scottish Ministers	12	5	42

14.32 The review of DPEA (Scottish Government Planning and Environmental Appeals Division) and Local Review Body (LRB) decisions below is focussed on the period

since the adoption of NPF4 in February 2023. This period was chosen rather than since HwLDP was adopted in 2012, due to fundamental shift in the development plan policy framework in Scotland upon the adoption of NPF4, whereby NPF4 became part of the development plan and provided an up to date policy framework for decision making.

Department of Planning and Environmental Appeals (DPEA)

- 14.33 There were 24 appeals to the DPEA in the period from February 2023 to August 2025 (excluding applications within in the CNPA area). Of these, 10 were at appeal because an officer approval recommendation had been overturned by Councillors at Planning Application Committee meetings. Of these, nine appeals were allowed, and one refusal was upheld.
- 14.34 Of the 14 instances where applications were refused at Planning Application Committee meetings consistent with the officer recommendation, there were five instances where the DPEA overturned the Council's decision. This represents 36% of appeals to the DPEA during this period. These applications were for a range of different developments, including different scales of residential development and energy developments. Numerous policies are referred to in these decisions including NPF4 policies 14, 11,17, 29 and HwLDP policies 28, 29, 35, 36 and 56.
- 14.35 Two proposals were for new homes. In one case, the Reporter allowed a house in the countryside as it was considered the proposal was consistent with NPF4 Policy 17 (a) to reinstate a former dwelling house, and that part (b) relating to local living was not applicable, and also because design policies and guidance were interpreted differently. Similarly, the second case was allowed due to different interpretations of design policies and weight was given to the efficient use of brownfield land.
- 14.36 Two other cases where the Council's decision was overturned were for energy applications. The first related to a wind farm re-design, where the Reporter concluded, contrary to the Council's reason for refusal, that the increased height of a number of turbines would not have a significantly detrimental visual impact. The other appeal allowed was for an anaerobic digestion plant, where the Reporter did not find any grounds to suspect any significant adverse effect on aviation safety, contrary to a key reason for Council refusal.
- 14.37 Given the small number instances where the DPEA overturned the Council's decision, the range of different developments and the differing reasons for

overturing Council decisions, there are no fundamental policy issues arising. A detailed policy issue which may require consideration is the application of NPF4 Policy with regard the part (a) criterion viii relating to reinstating former dwelling homes.

Local Review Body

- 14.38 There were 54 appeals to the Council's LRB during the same period (excluding applications within in the CNPA area). Most were Notices of Review (NoR) against the refusal of planning permission by an appointed officer, but a number were against certain planning conditions attached to a permission and for non-determination of a planning application. Of these appeals, 17 NoRs were upheld by the LRB, representing 32% of decisions. Commonly referred to policies in these decisions were NPF4 policies 4, 6,14,17 and 30, HwLDP policies 28, 29, 44, 51 and 52.
- 14.39 The majority of NoRs that were upheld were for single houses in the countryside. In a number of these cases, the LRB considered that a more pragmatic approach is required to the interpretation of NPF4 Policy 17(b) relating to the contribution of a development towards local living in a Highland context. As such, the LRB supported a number of applications that it considered to be within active travel distance of a limited number of community and/or commercial facilities. Other differences in policy interpretation that resulted in NoRs being upheld related to other elements NPF4 Policy 17 including identifying fragile communities and design considerations. NoRs were also upheld for tourist accommodation in the countryside where the LRB considered weight should be given to economic benefits, and less consideration towards any contribution to local living.
- 14.40 It will be important to continue to monitor the application of NPF4 Policy 17 and HwLDP and area LDP development in the countryside and growing settlement policies. This will help to inform whether a policy or policies in the HLDP are required for development in the countryside to allow for the specific circumstances of Highland, in particular for local living, fragile community and tourist accommodation considerations.

Legal Challenges

- 14.41 There have been a small number of legal challenges to planning decisions in the plan area in recent years, a number have been concluded and some are

ongoing. Those that have concluded have not raised any policy issues, including the Sutherland Space Hub legal challenge described below.

- 14.42 The Sutherland Space Hub was granted planning permission by The Highland Council in August 2021 for the construction of vertical launch space port with launch operations control centre, site integration facility, launch pad complex, antenna park, access road, fencing, services and associated infrastructure. The decision of the North Planning Applications Committee to grant permission was challenged via a judicial review. The hearing for this was held between 08 and 10 June 2021, and the Council were subsequently informed of the judgement in the case where the petition made to the Court requesting the decision of the Council to be quashed. The judgement dismissed the petition and therefore the planning permission stands. Given the outcome of this judicial review, it does not raise any policy issues.

Appropriateness of Spatial Strategy

- 14.43 The HwLDP explains that the plan sets out a balanced spatial strategy to support growth of all communities across Highland. It also outlines that it is important to ensure that development is, in the first instance, directed to places with sufficient existing or planned infrastructure and facilities to support sustainable development, and that new development will be directed to each settlement in proportion to its existing/planned capacity.
- 14.44 The HwLDP contains a single proposals map and a vision and spatial strategy diagram for each of the area LDP areas. Each area LDP also presents its own, updated vision and spatial strategy diagram. The commentary of the appropriateness of the spatial strategy below focusses on spatial strategies presented in current area LDPs.

Caithness and Sutherland

- 14.45 The CaSPlan Strategy Map shows the spatial strategy for the area which aims to address priorities through the Vision's four key outcomes. Commentary on achieving these outcomes was provided in Table 14:7 and overview of its appropriateness is provided below.
- 14.46 This Spatial Strategy was appropriate for the following reasons:
- Directed development to the most sustainable locations in the largest settlements with sufficient infrastructure capacity.

- Within remote and rural areas it took a flexible approach to development to help maintain and grow the population of these areas.
- Recognised tourism potential, including the North Coast 500, East Coast Tourism Corridor and an area for Coordinated Tourism Connections around the Dornoch Firth and Kyle of Sutherland.
- Focussed economic development within Caithness, identifying much of the area for business expansion, including several economic development areas.
- It sought to increase the vibrancy and vitality of town centres by steering a mix of uses to these locations, encouraging reuse of vacant land and buildings and increasing activity and potential custom.
- Supported the delivery of key infrastructure including digital fibre network and high voltage energy transmission network.
- It sought to value and enhance the natural environment by enhancing green networks and recognising the value of peatland resource.

West Highland and Islands

14.47 The WestPlan vision and spatial strategy diagram provides a visual representation of the key projects and policy proposals supported within the Plan, that aim to achieve the plans vision through four key outcomes. Commentary on achieving these outcomes was provided in Table 14:8. An overview of appropriateness of the wider spatial strategy is provided below.

14.48 This Spatial Strategy was appropriate for the following reasons:

- Directed development to the most sustainable locations in the largest settlements with sufficient infrastructure capacity.
- It maintained the Fort William hinterland to allow for a managed approach to housing development to help prevent unsustainable growth, protect its character, landscape and setting and breaching of service network capacities.
- It identified fragile areas where there is a flexible approach to development to help maintain and grow the population of these areas, including rural diversification.
- It sought to increase the quantity, quality and type of job opportunities by allocating land for industrial expansion at key harbours such as Kishorn, providing mixed-use allocations that could support home working, and by providing support for rural diversification in particularly fragile areas.

- It supported tourism expansion where it would better utilise the area's outstanding natural and cultural heritage for example at Inverlochy Castle, Aonach Mor and within Sleat.
- It sought to guide "destination" developments to sites within the principal town and village centres to bolster their role as well connected meeting places and as hubs for local facilities.
- It provided land allocations/safeguards to support new, faster and more reliable transport connections for business and tourist users, including link roads for Fort William and Portree, ferry service improvements particularly at Uig, cycle network improvements, air service improvements particularly at Ashaig and recreational sailing improvements.
- It sought to enable growth while respecting the built and natural environment that is highly valued by residents, businesses and visitors.
- It sought to provide protected, connected and enhanced green networks within/around every larger settlement.
- It supported the delivery of key infrastructure including broadband improvements and new health and school facilities.

Inner Moray Firth

- 14.49 The IMFLDP2 spatial strategy diagram shows the spatial priorities for delivering its four outcomes. Commentary on achieving these outcomes was provided in Table 14:9. An overview of appropriateness of the wider spatial strategy is provided below.
- 14.50 This Spatial Strategy was appropriate for the following reasons:
- Policies and proposals were incorporated to protect, enhance and create habitats such as riparian green networks.
 - It identified sites within existing settlements and town centres for employment, alongside a number of Economic Development Areas and strategic renewable energy zones where major new employment is expected to enable the transition to net zero.
 - It sought to reinforce the role of town centres as the prime destinations for people and business by helping centres to adapt to challenges and ensuring they continue to function as sustainable cores of our communities.
 - It directed development to the most economically viable and environmentally sustainable places.

- It maintained the Inner Moray Firth hinterland to allow for a managed approach to housing development to help prevent unsustainable growth, protect its character, landscape and setting and breaching of service network capacities.
- It identified three specific areas, the Loch Ness corridor, around Nairn and an area around the Sutors of Cromarty, as offering significant potential to grow as tourism destinations because of their locational and sustainable connectivity advantages.
- It promoted a pattern and mix of development that should minimise the need for unnecessary travel.
- It identifies a range of transport improvements, including between settlement active travel network, where growth is supported by rail corridors and other transport improvements.

14.51 The above overview of area LDPs demonstrates that the spatial strategies were largely appropriate. A significant amount of housing, mixed use and employment developments have been delivered throughout Highland that has helped to achieve these spatial strategies. However, as outlined in the outcomes and progress tables, as well as the lessons learned below, significant challenges remain. It is also important that HLDP embeds NPF4 national and regional spatial priorities, as well as reflecting fundamental changes in the economy and opportunities to provide a stronger spatial strategy to help facilitate management of land uses.

Lessons Learned

- 14.52 The Council hosted lessons learned workshops with officers from Development Management in spring and summer 2025. Within the lessons learned workshops, it was explained to officers that these lessons learnt could be in regard to the ease of interpreting and applying the policy, communicating it and defending decisions, or the standard of developments that result from it. Any development types that do not currently have a robust policy framework upon which to determine them were also discussed.
- 14.53 The lessons learned outlined below have focussed on lessons learnt since the publication of NPF4, looking forward to what the format of the HLDP will take without duplicating NPF4 policy. Lessons learned should be read in conjunction with implications for the plan of each Evidence Report chapter. The policies discussed below focus on those that have been found to be the most resource

intensive to apply, as such not all policy areas are covered. A comprehensive overview of the implications for the plan for all policy areas is covered within Evidence Report chapters.

- 14.54 The Council is also reviewing the future role of its current suite of statutory and non-statutory supplementary guidance documents. Given that supplementary guidance can no longer come forward for adoption, the Council is considering whether any key provisions covered in supplementary guidance need to be provided within the HLDP as policy and/or as detailed appendices.

Tiered LDP Framework

- 14.55 Despite not being part of a former Strategic Development Planning Authority, a tiered LDP framework continued in Highland with the adoption of the HwLDP in 2012 followed by three area LDPs. However, this has resulted in a complex policy landscape as planning considerations continue to expand.
- 14.56 HwLDP has emerged as the dominant player in regard to planning policy wording, while area LDP's in practice provide settlement or allocation specific context and requirements. Area LDPs do also contain general policies but, with the exception of IMFLDP2, many of these require review to reflect changing circumstances such as the recognition of the Climate and Ecological Emergencies, new trends and opportunities in the development industry and wider economy, and the evolution of national planning policy through NPF4.
- 14.57 The preparation of Area LDPs with a greatly expanded remit than was the case previously has resulted in a delay to updating the HwLDP owing to the increased resources needed to prepare LDPs. This means the overarching policies used in determining all planning applications have been in place since 2012, and were of a considerable age when NPF4 was adopted in 2023.
- 14.58 It is imperative that HLDP brings clarity and a consistency to planning policy across Highland, and updates policies used in decision making. While there is no requirement for HLDP to replicate NPF4, better alignment will reduce pressure on resources in communicating policy position.

Policy Lessons

Cultural and Natural Heritage

14.59 There are opportunities to refine and update policies relating to cultural and natural heritage. Matters that merit consideration for the HLDP are listed below, alongside implications for the plan provided in **Chapter 5 Nature and Environment** and **Chapter 12 Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings**:

- Separate policies should be provided for natural heritage and built heritage.
- Heritage policies should better align with NPF4 but still reflect Highland-specifics such as the Flow Country World Heritage Site.
- HLDP should identify Local Nature Conservation Sites, which will be reviewed through the Plan's process.
- The Council should continue its review of Local Landscape Areas (currently known as Special Landscape Areas in Highland) and reference these through the HLDP.
- Key aspects of the Council's Biodiversity Enhancement Planning Guidance should be incorporated into the HLDP, including the requirement for 10% biodiversity enhancement and mechanisms for the delivery of off-site biodiversity enhancement.
- All listed buildings, regardless of their category, should be considered as nationally important.
- Opportunity to provide additional detail on a number of built heritage matters, including a requirement for demolition of buildings in conservation areas to be accompanied by redevelopment proposals and Highland specific requirements for enabling development proposals.

Soils

14.60 There is an opportunity for any HLDP soil related policy to include additional detail for the assessment of development proposed on carbon rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitat (CPP). The following aspects should be considered alongside implications for the plan in **Chapter 5 Nature and Environment**.

- Whether small scale developments may be acceptable on CPP, for example telecommunication masts.
- Introduction of a requirement for sequential site selection.
- Ensure there is a presumption against development within CPP that has previously been restored.

- Provide clarification on how to judge when disturbance concerns are outweighed by wider public benefit, this could, for example, include affordable housing.
- Provide more consistent wording, for example similar to NPF4 Policy 6 Forestry, Woodland and Trees.
- Consider merit in a policy specifically mentioning the Flow Country World Heritage Site, including limitations for development and opportunities for restoration.

Coast

- 14.61 Any specific HLDP coastal development policy should consider alongside implications for the plan in **Chapter 6 Coastal Development and Aquaculture:**
- Provision of a clear and spatially informed policy framework to guide the sustainable development of aquaculture supporting the growth of both finfish and shellfish farming.
 - Whether community benefits and/or developer contributions should be required from aquaculture industry development.
 - Subsea connections to offshore windfarms.

Energy

- 14.62 HwLDP Policy 67 Renewable Energy Developments, Policy 68 Community Renewable Energy Developments and Policy 69 Electricity Grid Transmission Infrastructure all relate to energy. Much of the content of these policies no longer reflect the latest legislation, research, government policy and guidance and best practice on this topic and therefore an updated policy framework tailored to Highland circumstances is required. Key feedback that will be taken into account as part of this review is listed below alongside implications for the plan in **Chapter 4 Climate Change and Energy.**
- Much of the Policy 67 wording remains relevant and could be retained.
 - Nationally, there is a strong presumption in favour of energy generation, storage and transmission development. The HLDP will need to recognise this but set out how local circumstances justify a tailored approach within Highland.
 - There are opportunities to address some existing gaps in the policy, for example by making reference to the Council's Social Values Charter and the acceptability of proposals on areas of prime agricultural land.

- In addition to environmental constraints, HLDP should consider other potential constraints, such as amenity, and the proximity of settlements and proposed residential areas to future proposals for hubs, substations, and ancillary works.
- Important that Battery Energy Storage Systems are addressed, either within an energy policy or as a standalone policy. Future national and Highland guidance should also be considered.
- References to impacts on amenity at recognised visitor sites should be deleted as there is no evidence renewable energy development adversely affects tourism.
- The role of the associated Onshore Wind Supplementary Guidance should be considered, given it cannot be statutory supplementary guidance to the HLDP. Key parts could be written into policy, including its criteria that sets out key landscape and visual aspects that are used as a framework and focus for assessing proposals.
- The policy, or a related landscape policy, should make it clear that Special Landscape Areas are regionally important landscapes.
- Consider requirement for earlier consideration of the route of grid connections to renewable energy developments given that some routes can be located within very sensitive environments.
- Consider if there is a continuing role for a spatial framework, or other ways of identifying where there may be capacity for onshore wind farms.
- Consider whether a different policy approach should be given to genuine community renewable energy proposals, noting that NPF4 Policy 25 Community Wealth Building provides support to development proposals linked to community ownership.
- Much of Policy 69 is no longer required, however reference to removal of redundant infrastructure should be retained within any wider updated energy policy framework.

Transport

14.63 National and local planning and transport policy has evolved in recent years and there is now a much sharper focus on responding to the climate change emergency by reducing the need to travel unsustainably. Despite this, census data shows there is a persistent dominance of car-based travel in Highland. Given large parts of Highland are rural and sparsely populated, the plan will accept that vehicles will always be needed, including private cars, in some capacity to enable movement of people, goods and services. However, there is

real potential for modal shift in certain parts of Highland, in particular within larger settlements. It is important any HLDP policy considers feedback listed below alongside implications for the plan in **Chapter 10 Transport**:

- Embeds the NTS2 Sustainable Travel Hierarchy and Sustainable Investment Hierarchy.
- Ensures mechanisms are in place to allow developer contributions to be taken towards cumulative transport improvement schemes, for example road improvements (e.g. South Loch Ness Road Improvement Strategy or particular corridors/junctions) and active travel projects.
- Consideration of impact on Highland roads from HGV vehicles and abnormal loads particularly during construction of major developments, and preference for freight transport by rail and sea.
- Considers a review parking guidance, potentially reducing parking provision in areas where other options are available, as well requirements for electric vehicle parking.
- Introducing an ambitious transport strategy that builds upon IMFLDP Policy 9.

Design

- 14.64 NPF4 Policy 14 provides a high-level design policy. Any HLDP policy should provide a comprehensive policy with content similar to HwLDP Policy 28 Sustainable Design and Policy 29 Design Quality and Placemaking, without duplicating NPF4 policies that includes: amenity considerations, in particular including privacy, overlooking, daylight and sunlight, access, service provision and landscape and visual impact. Implications for the plan in **Chapter 13 Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking** should also be taken into consideration.

Rural Housing

- 14.65 HwLDP Policy 35 and Policy 36 relate to housing in the countryside. Policy 35 places a restrictive approach on new housing in Highland's most pressured areas, known as 'hinterland areas', around Inverness and other Inner Moray Firth settlements and Fort William. Policy 36 supports the principle of new housing development elsewhere in the countryside subject to detailed considerations, including siting and design. These policies are not wholly aligned with NPF4 Policy 17, there are a number of key differences (as detailed in **Chapter 9: Housing**), including:

- Opportunities to expand defined 'housing groups' in rural areas are not explicitly supported in NPF4;
- Introduction of consideration of how new rural homes will contribute towards local living;
- The use of The Scottish Government's sixfold Urban Rural Classification 2020 to identify remote rural areas which is derived differently from the Hinterland boundary; and
- Requirement for proposals to be supported in remote rural areas to support and sustain existing fragile communities; and support identified local housing outcomes.

14.66 NPF4 Policy 8 Green Belts focuses on broader matters of development beyond housing alone. Although the Highland Hinterland is a form of settlement management tool, this stops short of being classed as a green belt. NPF4 Policy 8 does not therefore align with HwLDP Policy 35 either, and has not been used in determining applications within pressurised areas of countryside in Highland.

14.67 The Council prepared a [Rural Housing Planning Policy Explanatory Note](#) in November 2024 to help ensure a clear and consistent understanding and interpretation of the combination of policies for rural housing as set out in NPF4 and Highland LDPs. Whilst this note contributes towards informed decision making it has emerged that, alongside implications for the plan outlined in **Chapter 9 Housing**, consideration will need to be given in the preparation of the HLDP to:

- The merits of introducing a rural homes policy or policies to allow for the specific circumstances of Highland, in particular tailored exceptions for new homes in rural areas and the ways new homes can contribute towards local living, fragile communities, and areas where concerted repopulation efforts and initiatives are ongoing.
- Reassessment of the Hinterland boundary and evaluation of need for divergence between Hinterland and Accessible rural area policies;
- A clear definition of fragile communities ideally mapped within the spatial strategy and proposals map.
- Identification of previously inhabited areas suitable for resettlement, as worded within NPF4, although this terminology is vague and differs from terminology used by other Government-led and supported repopulation efforts, and therefore introduces confusion when engaging on the issue.
- The introduction of a separate policy for other types of rural development, for example business and industrial proposals and community services.

Developer Contributions

14.68 There is acknowledgement that developer contributions is a complex topic and that detailed, robust policies and guidance are likely to be required. In particular, the following aspects should be considered, alongside implications for the plan in **Chapter 10 Transport** and **Chapter 11 Infrastructure First**:

- Most appropriate place for detailed guidance, potential for an appendix to the plan or non-statutory supplementary guidance.
- Introduction of developer contributions towards a wider range of infrastructure where suitably justified by evidence, including waste facilities and healthcare.
- Ensuring that tourism development adequately contributes towards relevant infrastructure as is currently not required to make contributions towards community facilities or open space.
- In the case of play parks, considering whether commuted sums towards existing adjacent parks are more appropriate than provision of new small play parks which have often been poorly maintained and offer poor range of equipment for all ages and abilities.
- The key role the Delivery Plan plays in identifying schemes contributions should be taken towards, including the South Loch Ness Strategy Road Improvement Strategy.
- Mechanisms to ensure all relevant developments are required to pay contributions, including allocated and windfall sites.
- Review levels of discount applied to small scale developments, likely some level of discount should still be applied in the interests of viability and resources.
- Ensure mechanisms are in place for contributions to be collected from small scale, piecemeal housing development when any specified thresholds are met.
- Where a need is justified require all new homes to contribute towards community facilities and affordable housing rather than being limited to developments of four or more homes.

Blue and Green Networks

14.69 There have been some challenges in implementing NPF4 Policy 20 Blue and Green Infrastructure to development proposals. The HLDP should consider providing greater detail, for example policy protection for access rights and core paths, including existing and planned/improved active travel routes and habitat corridors and greater consideration for opportunities within/near

settlements. There is also an opportunity to review IMFLDP2 greenspace and green network policies for inclusion in the HDLP. Implications for the plan of **Chapter 5 Nature and Environment** and **Chapter 13 Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking** should also be considered.

Flood Risk

- 14.70 The HwLDP does not reflect the latest legislation, research, government policy and guidance and best practice on flooding and therefore an updated policy framework tailored to Highland circumstances is required. In particular the HLDP should consider the probability of flooding from all sources and make use of relevant flood risk management plans, river basin management plans, surface water management plans, regional coastal change adaptation plan, flood protection schemes and flood studies for the area to inform strategic policy and local site-selection decisions using a precautionary approach. Forthcoming surface water management plans will support the Council in identifying in the HLDP a blue green network to be retained, protected and enhanced. Implications for the plan in **Chapter 7 Flood Risk Management** should also be considered.

Tourism

- 14.71 Both HwLDP Policy 44 Tourist Accommodation and NPF4 Policy 30 Tourism have been frequently used in the assessment of planning applications owing to the significant increase in tourism in Highland. In north Highland this can be attributed in part due to the North Coast 500. There has also been a significant increase in the number of Short Term Lets to accommodate tourists.
- 14.72 These policies have been found to have limited effectiveness in controlling the cumulative impacts of 'camping pod' type developments, directing when a new home associated with tourism accommodation may be acceptable and the consideration of accommodation for seasonal and construction employees.
- 14.73 There has been a significant rise in 'camping pod' type development throughout Highland, both within settlements and rural areas. Cumulative impacts, including landscape, transport, servicing and amenity considerations are having an impact on Highland communities. In particular amenity issues can arise for camping pod type developments located within urban gardens.
- 14.74 There has been ongoing debate in Highland regarding the role of Short Term Lets (STLs) and their impact on the availability of housing in recognition of

pressures on the housing market over the next 10 years. The continued growth of the tourism industry has reinforced the debate as to whether more areas warrant consideration for designation as Short-Term Let Control Areas (STLCAs).

14.75 Consideration will need to be given in the preparation of the HLDP to:

- The merits of introducing a tourism accommodation policy to allow for the specific circumstances of Highland, in particular to provide clear policy on circumstances when camping pods within settlements may be supported.
- Any circumstances where a new rural house for a manager of tourism accommodation may be supported.
- Address current policy void for worker accommodation, that is often proposed in the form of caravans or modular units for hospitality staff and construction workers.
- Consider preparing policy guidance, building upon guidance that was previously drafted for caravans.
- Potential for further STLCA which require review of the existing non-statutory STLCA Policy, so that this is made statutory and well suited for application in any STLCAs designated.

14.76 Implications for the plan in **Chapter 8 Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places** and **Chapter 9 Housing** should also be considered.

DRAFT