Chapter 8 : Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places

Information required by the Act regarding the issue addressed in this section	Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 as amended: Section 15(5)(a): • the principal physical, cultural, economic, social, built heritage and environmental characteristics of the district. Section 15(5)(b): • the principal purposes for which the land is used. Section 15(5)(ch): • the desirability of maintaining an appropriate number and range of cultural venues and facilities (including but not limited to, live music venues) in the district. Town and Country Planning (Development Planning) (Scotland) Regulations 2023: Regulation 9 • RSS (once statutory provisions come into effect)
NPF4 LDP Requirements	NPF4 Policy 25: • LDPs should be aligned with any strategy for community wealth building for the area. • Spatial strategies should address community wealth building priorities; identify community assets; set out opportunities to tackle economic disadvantage and inequality; and seek to provide benefits for local communities. NPF4 Policy 26: • LDPs to allocate sufficient land for business and industry, taking into account business and industry land audits. • LDPs should ensure that there is a suitable range of sites that meet current market demand, location, size and quality in terms of accessibility and services. • LDP allocations should take account of local economic strategies and support objectives of delivering a low carbon and net zero, and a fairer and more inclusive wellbeing economy. NPF4 Policy 29: • LDPs to identify the characteristics of rural areas within the plan area, including the existing pattern of development, pressures, environmental assets, community priorities and economic needs of each area. NPF4 Policy 30:

- LDPs should support the recovery, growth and long-term resilience of the tourism sector.

NPF4 Policy 31:

- LDPs should recognise and support opportunities for jobs and investment in the creative sector, culture, heritage and the arts.

NPF4 Policy 33:

- LDPs should support a landbank of construction aggregates of at least 10-years at all times in the relevant market areas, whilst promoting sustainable resource management, safeguarding important workable mineral resources, which are of economic or conservation value, and take steps to ensure these are not sterilised by other types of development.

Links to Evidence

(THC062) Planning Applications for Mineral Extraction
(THC063) Highland Minerals Audit
(THC064) THC Initial STL Analysis
(THC065) Scottish Government Practice Principles for Community Benefits from Onshore Renewable Energy Developments
(THC066) Highland Social Value Charter Update
(THC067) THC Regional Tourism Infrastructure Summary
(THC068) THC Visitor Management Plan
(THC070) Draft Housing Need and Demand Assessment 2026 Calculation

Ref no.	Online Resources	Date Accessed
THC010	Ardgour Local Place Plan	29.06.26
THC011	Black Isle Local Place Plan	29.06.26
THC012	Broadford and Strath Local Place Plan	29.06.26
THC024	Caol Local Place Plan	29.06.26
THC026	Croy and Tornagrain Local Place Plan	29.06.26
THC013	Dores and Essich Community Local Place Plan	29.06.26
THC014	Duror and Kentallen Local Place Plan	29.06.26
THC022	Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Local Place Plan	29.06.26
THC015	Gairloch Local Place Plan	29.06.26
THC016	Garve and District Local Place Plan	29.06.26
THC029	Glen Urquhart Local Place Plan	29.06.26
THC021	Golspie Local Place Plan	29.06.26
THC017	Kinlochleven Local Place Plan	29.06.26
THC028	Kyle of Sutherland Local Place Plan	29.06.26
THC018	Lochalsh Local Place Plan	29.06.26
THC027	Morvern Local Place Plan	29.06.26
THC023	Nairnshire Local Place Plan	29.06.26

	THC025	Sleat Local Place Plan	29.06.26
	THC019	Stratherrick and Foyers Local Place Plan	29.06.26
	THC020	Torridon and Kinlochewe Local Place Plan	29.06.26
	THC491	Scottish Gov Urban Rural Classification	11.08.25
	THC492	ONS Highland Labour Market Profile	11.08.25
	THC493	NW2045 Socio-Economic Profile	27.01.26
	THC494	Census 2022 Table 5a Location of usual residence and place of work	27.0126
	THC495	Location of usual residence and place of work by method of travel to work	27.08.25
	THC496	June/July 2025 HIE Business Panel	11.01.25
	THC497	Demographic Challenges in Highlands & Islands Focus on Peripheral & Fragile Areas	10.11.25
	THC498	A Scotland for the Future	10.11.25
	THC499	Identifying fragile rural areas in CNP	16.05.26
	THC500	Fragile Areas Mapping	10.11.25
	THC501	Place-based policy approaches to population challenges Lessons for Scotland	10.11.25
	THC502	A Scotland for the Future	27.01.26
	THC503	Highland Regional Economic Strategy	27.01.26
	THC504	HOIP 2024–2027	27.01.26
	THC505	Highlands and Islands Enterprise Strategy	27.01.26
	THC506	NW2045 Opportunities and Potential Development Models	10.11.25
	THC507	NW2045 vision	10.11.25
	THC508	Action Plan to address Rural Depopulation	27.01.26
	THC509	Scottish Islands Typology Overview 2024	11.08.25
	THC510	Highland Areas for Potential Resettlement	11.08.25
	THC511	Regional Transformational Opportunities in the Highlands and Islands Report 2025	15.05.26
	THC512	Developing a new model to maximise local economic benefits from development in Moray and Highland	27.01.26
	THC513	Consultation to review Good Practice Principles for onshore and offshore renewable energy	15.05.26
	THC514	Highland Council’s response to Scottish Government Good Practice Consultation	15.05.26
	THC515	Community Benefits & Shared Ownership for Low Carbon Energy Infrastructure	15.05.26
	THC516	Scotland Marine Economic Statistics (2022)	27.0126
	THC517	Draft Energy Strategy &Just Transition Plan	27.08.25

	THC518	Onshore Wind Sector Deal	11.01.25
	THC519	Scotland Offshore Wind Skills Priorities and Action Plan	10.11.25
	THC520	ICFGF Outer Boundary Map	10.11.25
	THC521	ICFGF Tax Sites Maps	10.11.25
	THC522	ICFGF Customs Site Map	10.11.25
	THC523	ICFGF Full Business Case	27.01.26
	THC524	Scottish Gov Cities and Regions Policy	27.01.26
	THC525	Masterplan Consent Area Guidance	19.03.26
	THC526	Economy & Infrastructure Committee Nov 25	27.01.26
	THC527	Investment at speed is needed to deliver clean energy by 2030	10.11.25
	THC528	Loch na Cathrach pumped storage hydro	10.11.25
	THC529	Workforce Resilience Strategy	27.01.26
	THC530	SSEN published details of £450m investment in the north of Scotland's electricity system.	11.08.25
	THC531	City Region & Growth Deal Delivery Board	11.08.25
	THC532	Inverness & Highland City-Region Deal Annual Report (2024/2025)	27.01.26
	THC533	Scottish Sea Fisheries Statistics 2023	27.0126
	THC534	Scotland's Marine Economic Statistics 2022	27.08.25
	THC535	The Social and Economic Benefits of Home Building in Scotland	11.01.25
	THC536	Nature-based Jobs and Skills Action Plan	10.11.25
	THC537	Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 15	10.11.25
	THC538	Map of all Council Owned Properties	10.11.25
	THC539	THC Community Asset Transfer Webpages	10.11.25
	THC540	Community Asset Transfer Report 2024-2025	15.05.26
	THC541	Developing a new model to maximise local economic benefits from development in Moray and Highland	27.01.26
	THC542	Community Wealth Building Strategy	15.05.26
	THC543	Scottish Government Good Practice Principles	27.01.26
	THC544	Onshore wind: policy statement 2022	27.01.26
	THC545	Social Value Charter for Renewables Investment (HSVC)	15.05.26
	THC546	Chief Planner and Ministerial letter Sept 2024	10.11.25
	THC547	Bunloinn Wind Farm	10.11.25
	THC548	Implications of Highland Council's Social Value Charter	27.01.26
	THC549	Ofgem Energy Pricing	11.08.25

THC550	SSEN Transmission Community Benefit Fund	11.08.25
THC551	Scotland Outlook 2030	27.01.26
THC552	Covid-19 Tourism Recovery Programme	27.0126
THC553	Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan 2023-2028	27.08.25
THC554	Visitor Levy (Scotland) Act 2024	11.01.25
THC555	Guidance on the Visitor Levy for Local Authorities	10.11.25
THC556	Local Housing Strategy	10.11.25
THC557	Our Programme for Our Future Highland	10.11.25
THC558	Visitor Levy for Highland (Committee Report)	16.05.26
THC559	Visitor Scotland Survey 2023 Highland Profile	10.11.25
THC560	Research into the impact of short-term lets on communities across Scotland	27.01.26
THC561	Short-Term Lets and Planning Circular 1/2023	27.01.26
THC562	Non-Statutory STLCA Planning Policy	27.01.26
THC563	STL Public Register	10.11.25
THC564	Small area Statistics on Households Dwellings	10.11.25
THC565	Lochaber Committee	27.01.26
THC566	Wester Ross, Strathpeffer & Lochalsh Committee	11.08.25
THC567	Skye and Raasay Committee	11.08.25
THC568	Sutherland Committee	27.01.26
THC569	City of Inverness Committee	11.08.25
THC570	Short Term Let Control Area policy	11.08.25
THC571	Impact of Short Term Lets in Scotland Report	27.01.26
THC572	Sustainable Tourism Strategy	15.05.26
THC573	Economic Impact of Residential and Short Term Let Properties in Edinburgh study	13.04.26
THC574	Regulatory Aspects of Short-Term Rentals in the EU	27.0126
THC575	Study by the Centre for Cities	27.08.25
THC576	Highland's Gaelic Language Plan 2024-2029	11.01.25
THC577	2022 census data	10.11.25
THC578	Ainmean-Aite na h-Alba	10.11.25
THC579	Evidence from HIE	10.11.25
THC580	Creative Scotland announce largest portfolio	10.11.25
THC581	Scotland's Creative Learning Plan	27.01.26
THC582	Fay Young article	27.01.26
THC583	Map of Highland Quarries	10.11.25
THC584	Aggregate Minerals Survey	10.11.25
THC291	Highland Business and Industrial Land Audit	16.05.26

In order to avoid repetition of content contained elsewhere within the Evidence Report, this chapter should be read in conjunction with other chapters. We recognise the crossovers between the Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places, and other topic chapters including:

- **Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy**
- **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**
- **Chapter 6: Coastal Development**
- **Chapter 7: Flood Risk Management**
- **Chapter 9: Housing**
- **Chapter 10: Transport**
- **Chapter 11: Infrastructure First**
- **Chapter 12: Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings**
- **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**

Where relevant and significant, the Council has referenced specific crossovers to other policy areas within this chapter.

Summary of Evidence

8.1 This chapter presents the Council's evidence in relation to business and industry, the Highland economy and rural development. The Council considers it has undertaken thorough engagement with stakeholders for this chapter and collected sufficient evidence on the topic for the Proposed Plan development. This Summary of Evidence focuses on information relating to:

- **Economic Profile and Rural Development**
- **Business and Industry**
- **Community Wealth Building**
- **Tourism**
- **Culture and Creativity**
- **Minerals**

<u>Economic Profile and Rural Development</u>

8.2 The population of the Highlands in the 2011 census was 232,132, increasing to 238,060 in mid-2021. Between 2001 and 2021, the population of the Highlands has increased by 13.9%, but this growth has not been balanced across the authority. Over the same period, Scotland's population rose by 8.2%.

8.3 As an authority with a growing city and surrounding accessible rural area, coupled with a vast remote (and very remote) rural area, the Council recognises that the Highland economy has traditionally been intrinsically a rural economy. Table 8:1 illustrates that compared to Scotland, Highland's population has a wider geographic distribution across both urban and rural areas.

Table 8:1 Population and area (%) in each Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification (2022)

		Large Urban	Other Urban	Accessible Small Towns	Remote Small Towns	Very Remote Small Towns	Accessible Rural	Remote Rural	Very Remote Rural
Population	Highland	0	32.0	7.7	5.6	6.1	17.5	12.7	18.4
	Scotland	40.8	30.9	9.7	0.6	1.4	12.1	1.9	2.7
Area	Highland	0	0.17	0.01	0.05	0.05	3.3	8.9	87.6
	Scotland	0.9	0.9	0.3	0.02	0.07	32.6	23.1	39.2

8.1 The ONS Highland Labour Market Profile reveals that as of December 2024, the Highland economy comprises 125,500 economically active individuals, equating to 81.5% of Highland's working age population, as summarised in Table 8:2. Highland's workforce is characterised by higher levels of economic activity, and lower unemployment than Scotland at large. While a lower share of Highland's workforce is economically inactive overall, Highland's economically inactive population is characterised by greater levels of long-term sickness than Scotland.

Table 8:2 Economic Activity / Inactivity in Highland

Jan 2024 – Dec 2024	Highland		Scotland
	(#)	(%)	(%)
Economically Active	125,500	81.5	77.0
In Employment	124,100	80.5	74.5
Employees	105,000	70.6	66.1
Self-Employed	18,800	9.9	8.1
Unemployed	2,800	2.2	3.2
Economically Inactive	26,600	18.5	23.0
Long-Term Sick	11,200	42.1	33.7

8.2 The sectoral distribution of Highland's workforce also differs from Scotland, again evidenced by the ONS Highland Labour Market Profile and summarised in Table 8:3. Highland has a greater share of employees employed in primary industries (agriculture, forestry and fishing), water supply & sewerage; and accommodation and food service activities, and a smaller share of employees working within information and communication, financial and insurance activities, professional and scientific activities, and supporting administrative services.

8.3 In a 2026 report on labour market pressures across Scotland, the ratio of people who want to work compared to job vacancies is among the lowest for local authorities in Scotland, at 3 in Highland (2024). The report demonstrates that most of the people who live in Highland also work here (>90%), however Highland contains multiple labour markets including island communities, remote mainland areas, and Inverness and its surrounding travel-to-work area.

Table 8:3 Highland Employee Numbers by Industry Sector (2023)

Industry Sector	Highland		Scotland
	(#)	(%)	(%)
A : Agriculture, forestry and fishing	6,000	5.1	2.0
B : Mining and quarrying	400	0.3	1.0
C : Manufacturing	6,000	5.1	6.9
D : Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	1,000	0.9	0.7
E : Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	2,500	2.1	0.8
F : Construction	7,000	6.0	5.1
G : Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	16,000	13.7	13.2
H : Transportation and storage	6,000	5.1	4.5
I : Accommodation and food service activities	15,000	12.8	8.7
J : Information and communication	2,250	1.9	3.2
K : Financial and insurance activities	800	0.7	3.3
L : Real estate activities	1,500	1.3	1.4
M : Professional, scientific and technical activities	6,000	5.1	7.2
N : Administrative and support service activities	6,000	5.1	6.9
O : Public administration & defence	6,000	5.1	6.4
P : Education	9,000	7.7	8.4
Q : Human health and social work activities	20,000	17.1	16.0
R : Arts, entertainment and recreation	4,000	3.4	2.7
S : Other service activities	1,500	1.3	1.7
T : Activities of households as employers; undifferentiated goods-and services-producing activities of households for own use	0	0.0	0.0
U : Activities of extraterritorial organisations and bodies	0	0.0	0.0

8.4 Owing to the scale of the Highlands, authority averages mask significant local variations, some of which are significantly unbalanced with reliance on few economic sectors. This is particularly evident in North West Sutherland using the NW2045 Socio-Economic Profile where tourism (accommodation and food service activities), primary industries, and the construction sector are all twice as concentrated, relative to Highland, while health and social work employment is underrepresented, which may indicate a shortage of essential services – a concern given the Local Area's ageing population. Compounded vulnerabilities arise as these employment sectors are more susceptible to economic shocks and lower levels of innovation. **Tourism** and **Fragile Areas and Areas for Resettlement** are discussed later below.

8.5 One of the benefits of Highland's size and significant remote rurality is that the workforce is therefore highly contained with Census 2022 Table 5a Location of usual residence and place of work evidencing that 2.5% of Highland jobs in 2022 were undertaken by those living elsewhere, while 3.89% of Highland residents have a place of work outwith the Council area as summarised in Table 8:4.

8.6 Overall this is a net outflow of 1,622 workers – which is lower than the 2,124 recorded in 2011. This is not sector specific and reflects the total workforce. Even with more hybrid working arrangements across the country since 2011 – this still reflects a more contained workforce than other comparable rural areas. The 2.5% of Highland jobs worked by external residents compares with 26.16% for Stirling, 9.6% for Aberdeenshire and 10.52% for Perth and Kinross. This evidences that employment and economic multipliers in Highlands are more localised, with less leakage of spending, but similarly also means that displacement rates of existing jobs in response to new job creation are more localised and amplified, and these factors have distinct implications demonstrated later in **HNDA Economic Uplifts.**

Table 8:4 Highland Location of usual residence and place of work data 2022 (Census 2022)

Highland Residents: Work Destinations			Highland Employment: Worker Origins		
Usual Place of Work	**Sum**	**%**	**Usual Place of residence**	**Sum**	**%**
Scotland			**Scotland**		
Highland	110,211	96.1	Highland	110,211	97.5
Moray	805	0.7	Moray	1,523	1.4
Argyll and Bute	153	0.1	Argyll and Bute	165	0.2
Aberdeenshire	144	0.1	Aberdeenshire	141	0.1
Aberdeen City	75	0.1	Aberdeen City	60	0.05
City of Edinburgh	110	0.1	City of Edinburgh	67	0.06
All other Council Areas	534	0.5	All other Council Areas	884	0.8
Outwith Scotland			**Outwith Scotland**	0	0
England	467	0.4	-	-	-
Wales and N. Ireland	15		-	-	-
Outside UK	546	0.5	-	-	-
Offshore Installation	1,614	1.1	-	-	-
Total Working Residents	**114,211**	**100**	**Total Jobs**	**113,051**	**100**
Highland to Highland	110,211	96.1	Highland to Highland	110,211	97.5
Highland to External	4,462	3.9	External to Highland	2,840	2.5

8.7 The June/July 2025 Highlands and Islands Enterprise Business Panel (facilitated by Ipsos) provided a summary of market sentiments. Most businesses considered current economic conditions, the cost of labour and availability of labour and skills to be risks to their business with few considering them to be opportunities. Changing international trading conditions (and uncertainty therein) were considered, with 40% saying it was neither an opportunity nor a risk, and 37% saying it was a risk (the most widespread concern related to price rises on imported goods). Most businesses (79%) were importers (sourcing goods from outside Scotland), with 78% importing from the rest of the UK.

8.8 More than half of businesses felt that tourists and visitors coming to the area, renewable energy projects, community-led projects or developments, and large construction or infrastructure projects were an opportunity for their business. Tourism growth sector businesses were also more likely to be striving for growth, saw tourists and visitors coming to the area as an opportunity for their business, and felt ready to capitalise on this.

Fragile Areas and Areas for Resettlement

8.9 NPF4 Policy 29 c) lends support for development proposals in remote rural areas, where new development can help to sustain fragile communities, while Policy 29 d) lends support for development proposals that support the resettlement of previously inhabited areas. There are correlations with NPF4 Policy 17 – Rural Homes, discussed in **Chapter 9: Housing**. As evidenced in Table 8:1, substantial proportions of Highland's land mass and resident population are therefore classed as remote rural.

8.10 Developing a policy framework to enact these criteria requires an assessment to evidence and identify areas of fragility, and clarify where such a policy would therefore be applied. Several reports and datasets have been considered in this regard. Demographic Challenges in the Highlands and Islands – A Focus on Peripheral and Fragile Areas outlines that Remote areas of Scotland are more likely to experience population decline than urban and accessible areas, while large urban areas (settlements of over 125,000 people) are a magnet for population growth. This highlights the challenge for the Highlands where over 40% of the population live in remote areas (42.8% compared to 6.6% across Scotland as shown in Table 8:1) and the lack of large urban areas in the authority.

8.11 The age structure within areas is critical to growing and sustaining communities. The older population structure of the Highlands has been linked to its attractiveness as a retirement destination. Due to the natural ageing of the population and in-migration of people aged 65+, numbers in this age groups have grown considerably.

8.12 Reflecting this, dependency ratios (the number of dependents (under 16's and over 65's) per 100 people of working age (16-64)) across the region are higher than the national average and projected to increase significantly.

8.13 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 remote small towns of Wick and Thurso. The area has one of the oldest age structures in Scotland, and a correspondingly high dependency ratio. The area also has a high proportion of vacant homes and second homes. Demographic Challenges in the Highlands and Islands – A Focus on Peripheral and Fragile Areas identifies that both the experienced and forecasted population decline in Caithness and Sutherland merit a focused policy response.

8.14 Lochaber, Skye and Wester Ross experienced overall population growth of 0.5%, although this was fuelled by growth in Skye, as mainland areas experienced population decline of 0.4%. This decline was concentrated in Fort William and surrounding areas (-0.3%). The population growth of 185 people experienced in the area overall was significantly lower than the growth in those aged 65 and above (1,636 people). Along with Shetland, the area had the greatest increase in the 65+ population across the Highlands and Islands between 2011 and 2018. At 6.8%, the proportion of dwellings that were second homes was higher than all local authorities in Scotland. In addition, Skye in 2019 had the greatest concentration of Airbnb rentals in Scotland with 18.6% of all dwellings having an Airbnb listing (e.g. at least renting a room) and 11.4% of whole properties being listed on Airbnb.

8.15 The Inner Moray Firth experienced population growth of 2.7%, with growth across all areas except remote small towns (-0.6%). It is expected that much of the in-migration to Highland (+4,544 people) is to this area, although Highland as a whole has experienced negative natural change of 1,501 people. The growth in those aged 65 and over (5,797 people) was greater than the overall increase of people in the area (4,167). The area has the 6th highest proportion of second homes in Scotland.

8.16 'Shrinking factors', fragile areas and areas identified for re-settlement, encompass a broad range of inter-related factors spanning economic and socio-demographic indicators, and in Highland are linked to housing provision. Scotland's first national population strategy A Scotland for the Future identifies diverse and cross-cutting demographic challenges and sets out a programme of work and actions to address these challenges and harness new opportunities. Action 23 specifically, is, "*to drive forward planning reform to improve how we plan our future places and support local government in considering planning as a strategic tool to respond to population change*."

8.17 Data-zones meeting both criteria as of 2021, evidently experience the most substantial population decline and enable future steps identifying potential policy target areas. Very remote small-town data-zones are the most severely affected, in that over 30% meet both shrinking criteria.

8.18 The Council have expanded upon this methodology to broaden the indicators of fragility to include economic aspects and housing pressures, and utilised concurrent analysis undertaken as part of the HNDA for this purpose. The Council's Fragile Areas Mapping illustrates datazones meeting criteria linked to indicators of fragility as identified within previous wider analysis, namely:

- **Demographic Indicators**
  - Decline in population from 2001-2021 (NRS)
  - Consecutive population decline for any five-year period within 2001-2021 (NRS)
  - High proportion (31.5% or greater) of population aged 65+ (NRS)
- **Economic and Housing Indicators**
  - Limited number (3 or less) of employment sectors represented (NOMIS)
  - Number of employment sectors overly relied upon (NOMIS)
  - High proportion of Long-Term Empty Homes (NRS)
  - High proportion of Second Homes (NRS)
  - High proportion of Short Term Lets (STL Licence Register)
  - Average Income above or below income required to afford average house price (CACI & Sasines)
  - High proportion (>50%) of house sales from buyers originating outwith Highland (Sasines)

8.19 The approach taken to define and analyse Fragile Areas and their indicators, was developed through analysis that was shared collaboratively in discussions with the CNPA, as identified in the Identifying fragile rural areas in the Cairngorms National Park, the Council further developed these indicators for the Highland context. The Fragile Areas Mapping indicates that extensive areas of Wester Ross, Skye, Caithness, Sutherland, Badenoch and Strathspey meet various criteria. A generous criteria approach requiring only one indicator of fragility to be met results in almost all of the Highland Council's remote rural area meeting the definition of fragile. A more proportionate approach is therefore to require one demographic criteria and one economic and housing criteria to be met, which reveals areas that are experiencing multiple aspects of fragility and which merit a supportive policy framework to encourage population growth. The Council continues to collaborate with colleagues to refine these areas further so that fragile areas can be operationalised within HLDP.

8.20 Place-based policy approaches to population challenges: Lessons for Scotland analyses a range of policy approaches to population challenges and discusses the concept of Repopulation Zones (RZs), which originated through the Convention of the Highlands and Islands (COHI) forum between local authorities, HIE, other public sector service providers and the third sector. It is considered that both

Demographic Challenges in the Highlands and Islands – A Focus on Peripheral and Fragile Areas and Place-based policy approaches to population challenges: Lessons for Scotland played a role in the development of the NPF4 policies 17 and 29.

8.21 RZs as conceived by the COHI working groups are intrinsically place-based initiatives, focused upon bounded areas of population decline, intended to be managed by the respective Council. Within Highland, North West Sutherland was proposed as one RZ, which remains a consideration within the Highlands and Islands Enterprise Strategy and remains an area of focus for the Council that continues to receive Scottish Government funding from the Addressing Depopulation Fund. A settlement officer was specifically appointed for North West Sutherland in November 2022 and remains in post who provides a range of support and advice relating to housing issues in the area.

8.22 In this area, a key challenge is the availability of housing of an acceptable quality and size (starter or family homes). There is a close link with employment with business development often being hampered by difficulty recruiting staff due to non-availability of suitable accommodation. These issues are not unique to North West Sutherland but are recognised as being acute in this region. There are compounded by provision of childcare and education as fewer children provides less opportunity for childcare businesses to be financially viable. Part of the funding from the Scottish Government will be used to investigate potential new models to deliver childcare that meets the particular needs of rural communities in North West Sutherland who are more likely to need access to flexible childcare to accommodate non-standard seasonal work patterns; childcare before/after school, weekends and holidays; and they need to be very local to avoid long travel times and to avoid routes that can be disrupted in adverse weather. It is expected that models tuned to local needs could be replicated across other rural areas of the Highlands. It would be sensible for HLDP to consider designating this broad area as an area suitable for re-settlement or repopulation so that a supportive framework is in place for future development, but this would still require balance between other LDP and NPF4 policies, as the area contains several natural designations, and a coastal zone area.

8.23 The NorthWest2045 project represents a diverse collective of organisations from across the North West Highlands which support the RZ, having commissioned the NW2045 Socio-Economic Profile alongside the NW2045 Opportunities and Potential Development Models, which centres on wind energy opportunities, community wealth building and natural capital opportunities. The NW2045 vision was updated in 2025 which seeks a repopulated rural economy and resilient, thriving communities.

8.24 The Action Plan to address Rural Depopulation sets out the Scottish Government's strategic approach to addressing challenges of population attraction and retention within communities facing population decline. It highlights that:

- There is no quick fix to population challenges, such as those found in parts of the Highlands and Islands. Housing, jobs, critical infrastructure, talent attraction, and migration are all central to the challenge.
- Long-term coherence across policy is critical; between national, regional, and local actors to drive successful local attraction and retention.
- Local leadership matters. Policies and initiatives to support local population levels need buy-in from communities.
- Targeted population policy interventions, such as 'Repopulation Zones', need to be carefully calibrated; unintended consequences on neighbouring areas and lack of community buy-in are risks that have damaged targeted population interventions elsewhere, in the past.

8.25 The Action Plan to address Rural Depopulation sets out 83 actions spanning a wide range of areas such as transport and connectivity, affordable housing, digital connectivity, crofting, the blue economy, community wealth building, and repopulation. Key actions of note are to publish an evaluation of the island skills and repopulation pilot, including recommendations for next steps, alongside continued support for locally-led repopulation initiatives (including North West Sutherland).

8.26 A HIE attempt to resettle an area of north west Skye in the 1990s only had limited success principally because of there being no social or economic imperative for people to live and work in that location. In terms of resettlement of remote and depopulated rural areas then the evidence suggests that such an approach won't work unless there is a social or economic imperative to return to that location.

8.27 Since then, the Council has tried more indirect approaches which have proved more successful such as engaging with large rural estates and landowners to persuade them to release land to local community trusts for housing development with rural burdens so that it can be retained in perpetuity for those with a local connection. Community land transfers have been successful at stimulating local initiative, control and development for example at Assynt, Eigg, Knoydart and Applecross but building, sensibly and cost effectively, has been focused close to existing facilities and infrastructure networks not in deserted Highland glens. New settlements within or resettlement of Highland glens cleared 200 years ago make little social or economic sense unless there's a new imperative to be in that location such as new industry and its employment being located there, such as happened when the aluminium smelter was constructed at Kinlochleven.

8.28 As the Action Plan to address Rural Depopulation indicates that repopulation initiatives require public buy-in to be successful, The Council has additionally considered registered Local Place Plans that have raised specific concerns regarding depopulation, unbalanced populations, and/or aspirations for repopulation. A collation of these areas and the North West Sutherland study area have been provided in the Highland Areas for Potential Resettlement map. Some of these areas overlap with areas that have been otherwise identified as potential Fragile Areas.

8.29 The Council has also considered the Scottish Islands Typology Overview 2024 which classifies 161 of Scotland's islands into ten categories based on population, access to local amenities, and access to mainland Scotland. This analysis reveals 26 islands within the Highland Council area within various typologies (including previously inhabited) as depicted in Table 8:5.

Table 8:5 Highland Islands Characteristics Scottish Islands Typology Overview 2024

Scottish Islands Typology (2024) class	Grouping	Population		
		1981	2011	Change
Reliant Inner Isles Mid/low population. Low access to local amenities. High access to mainland.	Raasay	152	161	6%
Reliant Outer Isles Low population with growth and decline. Low levels of access to local amenities. Mid to low levels of access to mainland.	Eigg	64	83	30%
	Muck	20	27	35%
	Rum	17	22	29%
Outpost Islands Very low population with growth/decline. Lowest levels of access to local amenities. Lowest levels of access to mainland.	Canna & Sanday	18	21	17%
Mainland-Connected Islands Higher than average, growing population. High levels of access to amenities.	Skye	7,269	10,008	38%
Unserviced Islands Lowest population levels. No public amenities. None, though some connected to the mainland by private fixed links.	Eilean Shona	12	2	-83%
	Eilean Tioram	9	6	-33%
	Isle of Ewe	11	7	-36%
	Rona	3	3	0%
	Scalpay	6	4	-33%
	Soay	8	1	-88%
	Tannara Mòr	8	4	-50%
Previously Inhabited Islands No inhabitants. No public amenities.	Carna	-	-	-
	Cnoc na h-Airigh	-	-	-

No ferry connections	Cnoc nan Uibhean	-	-	-
	Eilean Ban	-	-	-
	Eilean Donnan	-	-	-
	Eilean Dubh	-	-	-
	Eilean Fladday	-	-	-
	Eilean Horrisdale	-	-	-
	Islands of Stroma	-	-	-
	Isle Martin	-	-	-
	Ornsay	-	-	-
	Pabay	-	-	-

Business and Industry

8.30 The Regional Transformational Opportunities (RTOs) in the Highlands and Islands Report 2025 provides an assessment of the economic opportunities with the greatest potential to bring transformational change to the region (including Highland, Moray, Argyll and Bute, Na h-Eileanan Siar, Orkney, Shetland and Arran and Cumbrae), this being defined as opportunities which will bring clear and substantial shifts and major cross-cutting impacts at scale, rather than more localised and incremental changes. These opportunities covered within the scope of the study include:

- Offshore wind
- Onshore wind
- Hydro pumped storage
- Green hydrogen
- Marine energy
- Space
- Marine biotechnology and processing
- Life sciences, digital health and social care
- Natural capital
- Critical infrastructure developments

8.31 Collectively, the RTOs Report evidences that the RTOs present a once-in-a-generation opportunity for the Highlands and Islands, with a potential investment pipeline – overall economic opportunity of over £100 billion. This scale of investment across the c.250 projects identified potentially exceeds previous waves of investment in the post-war era from 1943-1965, and on capital expenditure on exploration and development of oil and gas resources on the UK Continental Shelf, between 1965-1980. It is expected that this will support over 114,000 FTE job years in construction, around a further 18,000 direct FTE operational and maintenance jobs by 2040 and generate more than £76.6 billion in GVA.

8.32 This regional opportunity is largely but not exclusively energy driven, with offshore wind accounting for the largest share of RTO investment (40%). Pumped storage hydro (13%), onshore wind (11%) and green hydrogen (9%) together account for a further third. Private sector investment in supporting infrastructure such as ports and harbours and SSEN's Pathway to 2030 Grid Upgrade is also marked, accounting for over a fifth of potential investments. However, the real value is in the aggregate impact of all the RTOs. This is not only in terms of the sheer scale of the economic potential, but also the spread of investments across a number of different sectors. This multi-sectoral project portfolio reflects a mixed-economy model which will help to diversify the regional economy, driving growth and building resilience.

8.33 Highland accounts for over two-fifths (41%) of the total potential investment in the region, with a clear clustering of potential investment activity for RTOs such as onshore wind, pumped hydro storage, green hydrogen being concentrated in the Highlands specifically. Regional Transformational Opportunities research assesses the estimated temporary increase in working age population during peak construction as 9,260 (or 6.8%), with an associated long-term increase in working age population of 8,360 (or 6.1%) based on operational employment requirement. This indicates that there will be concentration of temporary employment for development and construction phases in a number of areas in the region, including the Cromarty Firth and North, West and Central Sutherland, while permanent operational employment is likely to be concentrated in areas including Culloden and Ardersier, Cromarty Firth and Tain and Easter Ross. With a need for more workers, the region will need more housing to accommodate workers and their families in an already challenging housing landscape heavily impacted a lack of supply as discussed fully in **Chapter 9: Housing**.

Renewable Energy Sector

8.34 As detailed in **Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy**, renewable energy generation will play a crucial role in Scotland's energy transition and its journey toward achieving net zero emissions by 2045. The renewable energy sector continues to have a wide range of impacts on the Highland economy. Highland's legacy of strategically important oil and gas fabrication sites, abundance of renewable energy resources, and national direction to achieve net zero by 2045 presents a significant economic opportunity for the 'green economy' and transformation for Highland, which is already underway.

8.35 BiGGAR Economics was commissioned to investigate the economic and community benefits which have arisen during the construction and operation of energy developments in Moray and Highland, and to consider how benefits might be maximised in the future. The analysis Developing a new model to maximise local economic benefits from development in Moray and Highland shows the onshore wind sector is hugely important for the economy of the north of Scotland. It was estimated that in 2023 the onshore wind sector supported around 500 jobs across Moray and Highland. Since the late 1990s most of the impact of the sector has been associated with the development and construction of wind farms. These opportunities have been realised by general construction companies and their supply chains, which have been able to react to fluctuations in demand by working in other sectors. Since 2019 this has started to change with most jobs now supported by operations and maintenance activity. This has primarily been driven by increases in specialist services to the onshore wind sector, such as turbine maintenance.

Table 8:6 Cumulative Spend by Energy Areas of Activity in Highland 2023 (BIGGAR Economics)

Areas of Activity	Cumulative Spend
Development - all activity up to the breaking of ground. Accounts for around 5-10% of total capital expenditure. Often contracted to businesses in Scotland, with businesses in Moray and Highland providing some input - for example in environmental services and planning.	£170m
Turbine – the manufacture, transportation and assembly of the wind turbines accounts for most capital expenditure, typically between 50% and 60%. Most occurs outside the UK, where the main manufacturers are based but there are opportunities for local ports and specialist haulage services.	£87m
Balance of Plant – balance of plant includes all the additional engineering works required to prepare a site for the arrival of the turbines. Most of this work is completed by general civil engineering contractors. This is the largest area of economic opportunity for Highland, Moray and the wider Scottish economy; and	£757m
Grid Connection and Electrical Balance of Plant - this includes construction of substations and installation of specialist electrical equipment. Potential opportunity for the north of Scotland economy.	£142m
Total Spend	**£1,157m**

8.36 Since 1998, an estimated £4.5 billion has been spent on the development and construction of 2.6 GW of wind energy projects in the region while ongoing operations and maintenance expenditure is estimated to amount to around £128 million/year. The social and economic impacts of this investment are highly significant. It is estimated that the capital expenditure undertaken to develop these sites has generated a cumulative economic impact of £0.9 billion and supported around 17,670 years of employment in Moray and Highland; and each year the ongoing operations of these wind farms generates a further £34 million GVA for the region and supports more than 400 jobs. Developing a new model to maximise local economic benefits from development in Moray and Highland, in its assessment of direct, indirect and induced impacts, finds that four core areas of activity amount to a cumulative spend of £1,157m in 2023 as shown in Table 8:7.

8.37 As well as generating economic impact during development and construction, onshore wind farms continue to support impacts throughout their operational lives. BiGGAR Economics estimated that in 2023, the operations and maintenance expenditure associated with onshore wind farms was equal to £101 million for wind farms in Highland. Of this, the biggest areas of expenditure (excluding rents to landowners) were transmission costs and turbine maintenance, followed by operational management and other expenses.

8.38 A breakdown of Gross Value Added (GVA) and employment is broken down by development/construction alongside annual operations in Table 8:8, again highlighting the significant economic impact of the energy sector in Highland.

Table 8:7 Energy Industry Economic Impact 2023 within Highland (BIGGAR Economics)

	Cumulative Development and Construction Impact	Annual Operations Impact
Total GVA (£m)	**830**	**31**
Direct GVA	623	21
Indirect GVA	86	3
Induced GVA	121	7
Total Employment (Years)	**15,840**	**370**
Direct Employment	11,440	240
Indirect Employment	1,370	40
Induced Employment	3,030	90

8.39 The future economic impact of wind farms in the north of Scotland will include the construction impact of any new or repowered sites (where a number of older wind farms are expected to be repowered with new, higher capacity turbines), the operational impact of these sites once complete and the ongoing operational impacts of existing sites as summarised in Table 8:8. Community benefits provided by the Energy sector are detailed separately in **Community Wealth Building.**

8.40 Scotland Marine Economic Statistics (2022) evidence that, in 2022, Scottish offshore wind had an estimated turnover of £4.2 billion in 2022 (generating 5,242 GWh of electricity, 15% of all renewable energy generation in Scotland), 1.4% of overall

Scottish turnover. Between 2014 and 2022, the turnover increased by 3590%, which reflects the growth of the offshore wind industry.

Table 8:8 Future Economic Impact to 2050 (BIGGAR Economics)

	Annual Average	Cumulative
GVA (£m)	**62**	**1,713**
Development and Construction of New Sites*	70	524
Operation of New Sites	24	644
Repowering Sites	19	545
Employment (Years)	**1,050**	**29,010**
Development and Construction of New Sites*	1,340	10,150
Operation of New Sites	300	8,080
Repowering Sites	390	10,790

** To 2030*

8.41 Scotland's Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan sets the key ambitions for Scotland's energy future including maintaining or increasing employment in Scotland's energy production sector against a decline in North Sea oil production. Further work is being progressed to ensure the gas transition is operationalised in a way that is fair, planned and orderly.

8.42 In this regard, the Onshore Wind Sector Deal supports the enhancement of current skills and training provision to deliver the needs of the wind industry. Scotland's Offshore Wind Skills Priorities and Action Plan places increasing the supply of a skilled workforce for meeting the demands of the offshore wind sector as its first objective. Opening in 2024, the Aurora Renewable Energy Training Centre has the objective of training 2000 renewable energy workers annually, aiming to eliminate the need for personnel in the sector to travel out with the Highland area to access specialist training.

Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport

8.43 The scale of change in the renewables and energy sectors was not foreseen in the preparation of HwLDP. The IMFLDP2 **(THC003)** identified two specific areas; comprising parts of the Moray and Cromarty Firths – defined as strategic renewable energy zones - which are well-placed to form a world-leading renewable energy cluster, utilising the natural deep-water accesses, dockside space and existing skills. The area's nationally important status was further recognised in 2023, through the Scottish Government and UK Government jointly identifying Inverness and Cromarty Firth as one of the two new Green Freeports in Scotland, known as ICFGF.

8.44 Green Freeports in Scotland are delivered in partnership with the Scottish and UK Government, and the sites zoned within them benefit from a package of devolved and reserved tax and other incentives, where normal tax and customs rules do not apply. The ICFGF is a public private coalition of key partners including the Council, businesses, port operators and the UHI.

8.45 Freeports contain two forms of sites, namely tax sites and customs sites. Customs sites benefit from the absence of tariffs in importing goods for processing. Investors and employers within the Tax sites are not required to pay Land and Buildings Transaction Tax for their commercial buildings while the freeport status remains in place, which is until 2034. Development within the freeport sites may also quality for full relief of Non-Domestic Business Rates (NDR) for a five-year period (although in ICFGF this is extended to ten years), and employers National Insurance contributions for a three-year period for new recruits who work on-site at least 60% of the time. The formal designation and finalisation of the legal status of the Green Freeport tax sites came into effect on 8 April 2024, which rendered them live, and enabled businesses to benefit from them from that point onwards.

8.46 ICFGF consists of a number of sites which total 520ha as shown in the ICFGF Outer Boundary Map. The sites contain multiple deep-water quays, laydown areas for storing offshore wind components and large construction and assembly shops. Specific areas within the designation include:

- **Highland Deephaven:** a 50ha industrial site on the Cromarty Firth, near Evanton. Parts of the site were formerly an airfield,
- **Port of Cromarty Firth (Invergordon):** a 83ha port site,
- **Port of Nigg:** a 196ha port site,
- **Ardersier:** a 153ha brownfield site of former industrial land on the Moray Firth is being developed by owner Haventus as an offshore renewable energy manufacturing, assembly and marshalling hub. Ardesier is the UK's largest brownfield port.
- **Inverness:** 37ha spanning sites at the Port of Inverness, Former Longman Landfill, and the Inverness UHI Campus.

8.47 All of the sites are tax sites as shown in the ICFGF Tax Sites Maps, while the Port of Nigg also contains a customs site as shown in the ICFGF Customs Site Map, while additional customs sites may be taken forward in the future. Following submission of the full business case (FBC) to the Scottish and UK Government for approval, the Memorandum of Understanding was signed in September 2025, which unlocked the £25m seed capital funding and deemed the ICFGF operational. The Highland Council fulfils the role of Accountable Body for ICFGF, meaning it is accountable to Government for the expenditure and management of centrally funded public money – including capacity (RDEL) funding, seed capital investments and retained NDR income generated from the Green Freeport Tax Sites.

8.48 HLDP will need to plan and make provision for the business and industrial land required to support this transition. Scottish Government Cities and Regions Policy sets out that Green Freeports must support four key policy objectives:

- promoting regeneration and high-quality job creation – Scottish Government's lead policy objective.
- promoting decarbonisation and a just transition to a net zero economy.
- establishing hubs for global trade and investment.

8.49 The objective of high-quality job creation is one area with profound implications for HLDP. The ICFGF FBC assesses that the 10-year tax site designation is estimated to deliver significant capital investment over a 25-year period totalling £6.5bn, provide NDR revenues of £547m for re-investment in the region, and create a forecasted 18,300 jobs for the UK, 11,300 of which would be in the Highlands. The anticipated diversity of jobs created is also markedly different than the existing employment opportunities in the region. Beyond the FBC the aim is to establish a Delivery Programme to monitor the ongoing timing and delivery of each element of the Green Freeport. This will help the Council's ongoing role as Accountable Body and the respective resourcing of planning advice and applications for the ICFGF developments and the associated jobs and wider housing and infrastructure.

8.50 The ICFGF FBC strategic case contains a series of measures which support the delivery of two core targets: the first around delivering the Government's UK 60% content target for at least 1 GW per annum of FLOW capacity (which, at 2022 prices, implies annual GVA of some £2bn p.a., with additional operations and maintenance activities), and the second relating to creating sufficient high quality long-term jobs to halt and then reverse the historic and forecast decline in the Highlands' working age population by the mid-2040s. The importance of this change in demographic projections has profound implications for other aspects of HLDP as discussed in **Chapter 9: Housing** and **Chapter 11: Infrastructure**, and future service provision across all Council services.

8.51 Masterplan Consent Areas (MCA)s are a new upfront consenting mechanism introduced by the Planning (Scotland) 2019 Act where the planning authority proactively sets out, and grants consent, in an MCA 'Scheme' for development it wishes to be delivered, subject to any conditions. The Council has considered the Scottish Government's recently published Masterplan Consent Area Guidance in this regard. In contrast to a planning application route, an MCA is led by the local authority alongside delivery partners and can include four types of consent, including planning permission and Roads Construction Consent, which can be in place for up to 10 years.

8.52 The Council considers that MCAs provide significant potential to support the delivery of major projects and enable large scale infrastructure to meet housing needs. One of the 6 commitments announced by the Council at the October 2024

Housing Summit was to prepare 3 MCAs by the end of June 2026. Subsequently, the Council's Economy and Infrastructure Committee of November 2025, agreed to progress 3 potential MCA sites identified to support the ICFGF, at Ardersier, Embo and Essich Road (Inverness), cognisant of several criteria, including proximity to ICFGF jobs, development industry interest and readiness for delivery. Following public consultation on the three potential MCA sites, Council agreed on 14 May 2026 to progress a Proposed MCA Scheme for all three sites. The implications of delivery of the MCAs is discussed in further detail in **Chapter 9: Housing** and **Chapter 11: Infrastructure.** The MCAs are mentioned here due to their connection to the changes in demographic projections resulting from the ICFGF.

8.53 The Council will continue to play an important role in enabling and supporting the progress of these initial ICFGF related developments and related developments through planning and other regulatory processes. The ongoing support and confidence of Key Agencies and Scottish Government teams will be essential in the next stages. The Scottish Government has developed a protocol that guides how national and local partners across all sectors will be expected to work together to deliver the scale and range of anticipated benefits and impact. In line with this approach the Council is working proactively with the Key Agency Group and partner organisations in addressing these requirements. As part of this work greater certainty is sought on nationally led infrastructure projects – particularly the Tomich junction, the A9/A96 'East Link' project and the A9 and A96 dualling projects (discussed in **Chapter 10: Transport**) – that are deemed to be critical enabling infrastructure for the setup and operation of the Green Freeport.

Evidence of Ongoing Renewable Sector Investment

8.54 The considerable impact that the ICFGF is projected to have on the Highland workforce has considerable implications for the regional economy and thus warrants an overview of investment realised thus far.

8.55 Sumitomo Electric's has undertaken a £350m investment in a new subsea cable manufacturing facility at the Port of Nigg. The Sumitomo cable factory was granted planning permission in February 2024 and the building contract has now been let.

8.56 Port of Ardersier owner Haventus has also secured a further £100m in joint credit from the Scottish National Investment Bank and UK Infrastructure Bank to fund the redevelopment of Ardersier Port in Scotland, boosting the UK's offshore wind capability. This follows an initial £300m cash injection from energy investment firm, Quantum Capital Group, in 2023.

- SSEN Transmission, is investing over £20bn to upgrade the network infrastructure across the north of Scotland between now and 2030 as the region plays a leading role in the clean energy transition. Investment at speed is needed to deliver clean energy by 2030 and to provide certainty for investors and developers in the energy sector, and specifically Loch na Cathrach pumped storage hydro (PSH) scheme is expected to require as many as 500 workers during the peak construction period.

8.57 To lead the development of the energy network, SSE alone increased its workforce from 11,000 to 14,500 in the last 2.5 years, and each job it creates generates four more in its supply chain. SSEN Transmission Workforce Resilience Strategy (2024) reports the growth in directly employed workforce from 702 to 3,310 to the end of RIIO-T2 period. For RIIO-T3, ongoing work to address skills gaps and attracting skilled applicants are proposed, recognising only 1% of those leaving education choose to work in the energy and utilities sector and the time that it takes to develop the specialised skills required for energy sector (for example, 3 to 7 years of post-university experience is required to become a fully qualified power networks engineer, especially at the highest voltage levels). Overall recruitment is expected to exceed 4,000 during the T3 period, to meet the extensive capital programme including future tCNSP2 commitments. Recruitment also seeks to address the fact that 20% of the sector's workforce is expected to retire within the next decade.

8.58 Engagement with SSEN noted that upgrades to the transmission network require specialised skills that cannot regularly be provided locally in Highland. For this reason, SSEN Transmission projects often provide accommodation for workers and some agreement around provision of legacy infrastructure (e.g. serviced housing sites). SSEN Distribution projects most likely use local contractors, and so worker accommodation is not required.

8.59 The Workforce Resilience Strategy reported, in 2022, SSEN-Transmission commissioned Deloitte to research skills shortages in the onshore transmission industry. The findings revealed that all suppliers anticipated workforce pinch points, with a lack of skilled workers identified as one of the top three barriers to delivering the required UK electricity capacity.

8.60 In April 2025, SSEN published details of £450m investment in the north of Scotland's electricity system. At least 300 skilled jobs will be created or secured through this programme. To support the realisation of SSEN's RIIO-ED2 commitments, the five newly appointed Framework Contractors are looking to recruit locally.

8.61 Where feasible, land use allocations to support network development and renewable generation and energy storage may be informed by the clean power 2030 pipeline from NESO and SSEN-Transmission, SSEN-Distribution Strategic Development Plans and longer-term Network Development Plans for the Distribution networks, which are detailed in **Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy.**

Inverness City Region Deal

8.62 City Region Deals are packages of funding agreed between the Scottish Government, the UK Government and local partners. They are designed to bring about long-term strategic approaches to improving regional economies, aiming to help harness additional investment, create new jobs and accelerate inclusive economic growth. City Region Deals are implemented by regional partners and overseen by the Scottish City Region and Growth Deal Delivery Board.

8.63 The Inverness and Highland City Region Deal was signed in 2017 and involves committed funding of £135m from the Scottish Government, £53m from the UK Government and supplemented by £127m from the Council and regional partners over a ten-year period, which ends in March, 2027, before the likely adoption of HLDP. The deal seeks to boost key sectors such as tourism and life sciences, and digital connectivity which is separately detailed in **Chapter 11: Infrastructure**.

8.64 Since the signing of the Deal, both public and private investments have continued to expand considerably. Partner investment projections have increased to over £45.2 million, contributing to an overall Deal value that now exceeds £401.1 million. Below is the latest summary of the total contributions and impacts associated with the City-Region Deal. Three projects (Science Skills Academy, Innovative Assisted Living, Inverness Castle) have now claimed all the funding within their Deal envelope, they will continue to report on benefits until the end of the Deal.

Table 8:9 Contributions associated with the Inverness & Highland City Region Deal (Annual Report 2024/2025)

Project	Total (£)	UKG/SG (£)	THC (£)	Partners (£)
Life Sciences Innovation Centre*	9,000,000	9,000,000	0	3,775,000
Northern Innovation Hub*	12,860,971	11,000,000	0	1,861,000
Longman Land Remediation	10,000,000	10,000,000	0	0
Science Skills Academy	3,951,800	3,000,000	545,000**	407,000
Innovative Assisted Living	4,709,770	4,171,000	200,000	339,000
Inverness Castle	47,076,239	29,936,000	15,555,000***	4,585,000
Affordable Housing	134,010,000	30,760,000	103,145,000	105,000
Corran Ferry Infrastructure	30,000,000	20,000,000	10,000,000	0
A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton & A9/A82 Longman Junction	71,103,433	71,103,433	0	0
West Link and Inshes	64,356,000	0	64,356,000	0

**Includes European Funding,*
***Includes UK Shared Prosperity Fund,*
****Includes Common Good Funding, Lottery Funding, City Centre WiFi Project*

Marine economy

8.65 As evidenced in **Chapter 6: Coastal Development and Aquaculture,** the blue economy plays a significant role in Highland, even as the wider economy is increasingly diversified today. It is not the intention to repeat evidence related to coastal and marine sector industries and development, but it is important within this Chapter to recognise their economic contribution within the Highlands. Scottish Sea Fisheries Statistics 2023 evidence that landings for Highlands region in 2023 amounted to 46,657 tonnes, valued £105.6 million and the industry directly employs 666 people on Scottish registered vessels. Scotland's Marine Economic Statistics 2022 evidence that Atlantic salmon production value for the North Coast and West Highlands equated to £472 million in 2022, equating to 37% of Scotland's national production value. Shellfish aquaculture has evolved significantly in the region over recent years, with mussel and oyster farming now forming a notable part of the local marine economy. Though, employment in the sector remains modest in absolute terms, with about 241 full time, part-time, and casual staff across all shellfish farms in Scotland.

8.66 Highland's coast continues to provide food, employment and economic stability to wider Scotland. There will be an ongoing need to support these industries as a vital part of the economy whilst also challenging rural depopulation, the climate crises and restoring biodiversity so that future generations can continue to benefit from these resources. Data from the NOMIS Business and Employment Register evidences the contribution that coastal-related employment makes to the Highland economy, with fishing and aquaculture notably highlighted. This role is particularly evident within some of Highland's more remote rural and fragile communities in Wester Ross, Lochalsh, Skye, Sutherland and Lochaber.

8.67 Scotland's Marine Economic Statistics 2022 provide higher estimates of the marine sector contribution to the Highland economy, estimating that approximately 9,000 people are directly employed in the marine sector in Highland, which represents 13% of Scotland's total marine sector workforce, equating to £337 million of approximate Gross Value Added (aGVA).

Other Employment Sectors

8.68 Housebuilding: The Social and Economic Benefits of Home Building in Scotland by Homes for Scotland (2019) report the home building sector supported 79,200 jobs, equivalent to 3.5 jobs for every home built. This was made up of 45,000 direct jobs, 24,750 indirect jobs and 9,450 induced jobs. Private sector home building is also a key contributor to the delivery of transport improvements that benefit the wider community or council area. Highland and Moray contributed 7% of total homes built in 2019/20, creating direct employment of 3,320 and 5,845 total (direct, indirect and induced). The direct economic output of this activity in Highland and

Moray was £133m, and total (direct, indirect and induced) £251m. As well as employment, housebuilding also contributes to increased investment in local infrastructure, Council Tax and national tax revenue.

8.69 The condition of the retail sector, in town centres, was considered in the 2024/25 Town Centre Health Check in **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**.

8.70 Tourism plays a major role in Highland's economy, in 2023, attracting 8.4 million visitors, generating around £2 billion of economic impact and supporting (directly or indirectly) around 26,500 (full time equivalent) jobs. Therefore, we wish to sustain this sector but better assess the potential adverse effects of visitor pressure. Other Evidence Papers consider this issue in relation to transport and heritage. Further evidence about the Tourism sector and its contribution to Highland economy are provided in **Tourism**.

8.71 NRS Dounreay decommissioning programme currently employs approximately 1,500 people directly. The programme has been extended until the 2070s which will sustain employment opportunities throughout the period, however staff numbers are expected to change and NRS Dounreay is supporting staff to plan their futures, and supporting the community to diversify its economic base.

8.72 NatureScot Nature-based Jobs and Skills Action Plan, includes estimates of the size of the nature-based jobs sector in Scotland and identifies actions to realise the growing opportunity in areas like peatland and woodland restoration, natural flood management.

HNDA Economic Uplifts

8.73 The Council's HNDA in progress is further detailed in **Chapter 9: Housing**. However, bringing this section on Business and Industry to a close requires an acknowledgement that the economic landscape has changed remarkably since the existing HwLDP was adopted in 2012. The Highland economy, while markedly focussed on resource extraction, has diversified to encompass greater nature-based and renewable resource extraction sectors, which have wider dispersed benefits for land management, environment agencies and consultancy sectors who facilitate this pipeline of development.

8.74 Tracking, projecting and forecasting the needs of the Highland economy into the lifespan of the HLDP is highly challenging owing to the rapid, dynamic manner in which new investments have been announced, which often correspond to different time-periods, involve a mix of direct and indirect employment making double-counting critical, and involve an effective, fit for purposes planning system to facilitate national developments to achieve. One critical agreed assertion among all stakeholders however, is that the HLDP should be better placed to facilitate and plan for the Highland economy throughout its lifespan than HwLDP was in 2012, with projected investment pipelines indicating that the regional Highlands and Islands economy in 2040 could bear little semblance to that at present.

8.75 HIE's RTO research provides an evidence base that seeks to identify, map and quantify the economic impact of key economic sectors. Each RTO presents a huge opportunity in its own right, and a number are closely aligned, for example renewable energy generation and green hydrogen. However, the real value will be achieved by pursing these RTOs simultaneously - the combined impact will far exceed what the individual RTOs can deliver and there will be synergies in investment and supply chain development. With over 250 proposed investments, the economic pipeline of the RTOs is unprecedented in the Highlands and Islands, and possibly even Scotland and much of the UK (beyond the South East of England) at this point in time. It far exceeds that witnessed in previously transformational periods for the region. That said, despite being the most recent detailed assessment of the economic transition, the ICFGF Full Business Case was not prepared at the time HIE's research was published, and the impact of the ICFGF specifically in this context was lesser understood. Since then, investment within the ICFGF has progressed, again highlighting the difficulty of forecasting and projecting in the region at the present time.

8.76 As part of undertaking the ongoing HNDA, the Council undertook an engagement programme with economic development partners to bring consensus on what was known and committed for future job creation in the Highland Council area, to feed directly into the baseline inputs and growth scenarios for the HNDA. This involved a series of workshops with HIE, SSEN, Dounreay, and the ICFGF, to avoid undue reliance on anticipated job numbers within published documents that reflected a fixed point in time. The employment-led estimates were therefore considered and agreed by stakeholders. The consensus reached within the engagement programme was that for the RTOs specifically:

- 110 RTO projects in Highland
- Total investment potential of £29.5bn from 2025-2040
- 42,230 FTE job year, or
- 8,360 long-term, direct additional operational employment, with a temporary increase in employment (1,370) during peak construction

8.77 Scale of requirements for workforce housing are therefore shown in Table 8:10.

8.78 This was subsequently adjusted for indirect and induced job growth using an agreed employment impact multiplier (0.85) reflecting impact of energy sector growth, and adjustment for supply chain impact experienced in Highland (80%).

*Table 8:10 Scale of Workforce Housing Requirements agreed by stakeholders for HNDA (**THC070**)*

Project	Long-term direct additional jobs created by projects in Highland
ICFGF (2025-2040)	8,633
Wider RTO projects	2,910
Kishorn Port (Midpoint scenario 2025-32)	800
SSEN – Transmission	200
SSEN – Distribution	300
Dounreay 20-year plan	800
Total scale of requirement	**13,643**

8.79 It was subsequently adjusted for job displacement with a displacement factor of 4% reflecting annual energy sector job loss over the first ten years of projection, adjusted for the ratio of homes needed per worker (1: 0.9). This is reflected in Table 8:11 and referred to in the engagement summit outputs of the draft HNDA Calculation (**THC070**).

*Table 8:11 HNDA Job Growth: Workforce Housing Projections (**THC070**)*

New Direct Job Growth (from Table 8:10)	13,643	
Indirect & Induced Job Growth	+ 9,277	* Does not assume 100% of supply chain impact remains in Highland despite very contained employment market. Used 1.85 multiplier derived from SG's Type II economic multipliers for Repair and Maintenance (1.85 - 1.9)
Adjustment for Job displacement	- 2,400	Adjustment for supply chain impact in Highland: 80%. Economic impact multiplier energy sector growth: 1.85 10-year displacement rate applied as highest volume job growth takes place in Years 1-10. Likely displacement rate will reduce in later years which justifies a 10 not 20-year projection period
Total Jobs	**= 20,520**	
Ratio of homes needed per worker 0.9: 1	**18,468 homes**	Does not assume direct relationship between new jobs and new homes needed despite evidence of sub optimal economic performance linked to workforce shortage and ageing workforce

8.80 The HNDA scenarios consider the extent of housing delivery required to enable projected growth in the Highland economy and utilises these estimates so as to ensure that there is a direct follow-through between economic projections and housing estimates, as discussed in **Chapter 9: Housing**.

Business and Industrial Land Audit

8.81 A Highland Business and Industrial Land Audit was completed in 2018 for land available for Use Classes 4 (Business), 5 (General Industry) and 6 (Storage and Distribution) at 1 January 2019. There were 325 sites available, 94 immediately available representing 221.2ha of immediately available land. An overview of the audit by Housing Market Area is in Table 8:12. A baseline audit was also completed in 2022, identifying approximately 6,148 ha of existing possible land including Class 4, 5 or 6 activities (excluding whole sites of electricity generation infrastructure, previously undeveloped or developed land) in Highland.

8.82 The 2018 audit was desk-based and included sites located within or entirely comprising LDP/LP allocated business, industrial and mixed-use areas, windfall business and industrial sites with planning permission (granted between 01/01/2016 and 01/01/2019) and additional sites with a business or industrial description on OS mapping (excluded from main findings). The 2022 baseline of existing possible BIL was estimated from a desktop exercise using OS mapping and aerial photography and validated with Streetview.

8.83 The audit excluded sites allocated exclusively for housing, mixed-use sites without a business or industrial element, sites or portions of large sites that have been built out or have buildings in what has been assessed to be in active use present on site, and land where changes of use from one Class 4, 5 or 6 use to another Class 4, 5 or 6 use is to take place.

8.84 As per Scottish Planning Policy (SPP), the 2018 BILA differentiated between those sites that were serviced, serviceable within five years and those subject to constraints that would prevent development within that period. The proportion of land available in each category, by Housing Market Area, is provided in Figure 8:1. The three site availability categories were defined as:

- **Immediately Available:** Land that is serviced and has no major constraints to immediate development.
- **Five Year Availability:** Land that has some minor constraints such as a lack of servicing or a requirement for improved access, that can be prepared for development within a period of five years.
- **Major Constrained:** Land that is subject to major constraints such as substantial pluvial or fluvial flood risk, recognised contamination problems or other severe forms of constraint. It is considered that these sites would require flood

protection, remediation or other work and would be available within more than five years.

Table 8:12 Summary of BILA 2018 and baseline (Source: 2018 BILA, 2022 BILA baseline)

Housing Market Area	2018			2022
	Number of sites available	Number of immediately available sites	Immediately Available Land (ha)	Existing baseline BIL (ha)
Badenoch & Strathspey	14	4	1.3	176.1
Caithness	31	19	26.6	374.1
East Ross	40	23	61.2	301.1
Inverness	69	19	53.1	579.2
Lochaber	47	3	0.4	424.5
Mid Ross	27	4	0.9	74.0
Nairn	15	2	2.2	71.8
Ross and Cromarty West	11	4	63.2	116.8
Skye and Lochalsh	46	6	5.0	129.1
Sutherland	25	10	7.4	180.3
Total Highland	**325**	**94**	**221.2**	**2,845.4***

**includes 148.5ha of land identified with no HMA recorded.*

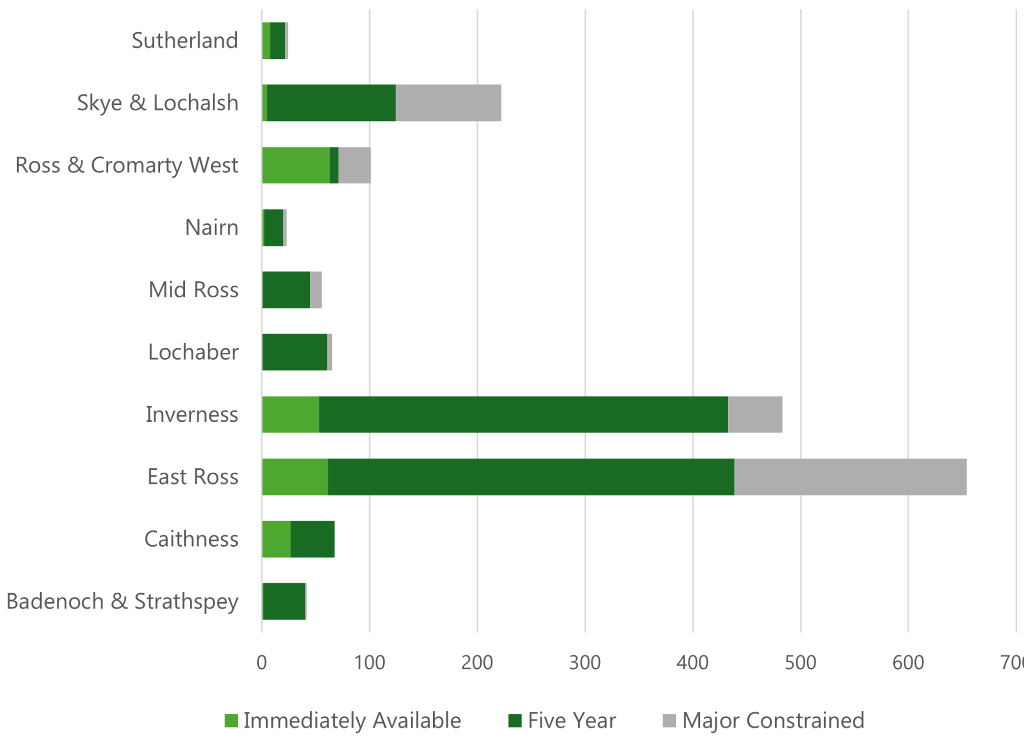

Figure 8:1 Business and Industrial Land by Housing Market Area, and availability category (Source: 2018 BILA)

8.85 The Highland economy supports a wide range of business and industrial uses. Generally, business and industrial land in Highland comes forward through a mixture of windfall development and allocated sites. At the time of the audit in 2018, an increase in tourist numbers had boosted the local economy and growth in the renewables industry was continuing. Future developments were anticipated to be related to the oil and gas industry, education sector-linked life sciences and specialist manufacturing.

8.86 The availability of development land of sufficient quantity and quality for the needs of business and industry is essential if Highland is to enjoy long-term sustainable growth. The scale of job creation projected with the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport and the land requirements of supporting business and industrial activities will necessitate the allocation of additional employment land.

8.87 An updated BILA will be prepared to inform the new HLDP, to bring the evidence on employment land in Highland up to date. In particular, the updated BILA will consider inclusion of renewable energy developments (transmission, distribution and generation) and summary of employment density associated with different business and industrial use classes or land-use activity types. The intention is to pursue a business and industrial land policy similar to Policy 7 of Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 (IMFLDP2) **(THC003)**. For IMFLDP2, the 2018 BILA was used to inform the local development plan strategy, Policy 7 and relevant site allocations for business and industrial use. IMFLDP2 highlighted the fundamental shortfall in industrial land in and around Inverness and highlighted that without investment, it was likely to pose a major risk to the IMFLDP2 area's future competitiveness and restrict economic growth. Despite demand remaining high, the existing stock of industrial property is relatively old and no new supply is in the pipeline. The private property development sector has not responded to this market opportunity other than where there is a guaranteed business or industrial tenant or owner-occupier. Similarly, public enterprise agencies in Highland now rarely intervene in the market to provide speculative employment units for fear of distorting the private market. There is a strong demand for, and significant underinvestment in, small scale industrial units which serve local businesses and communities. These units form an important part of the commercial property market providing incubator and start up opportunities. To address this imbalance in the supply and demand for industrial land, IMFLDP2 introduced a new Industrial Land Policy which aims to better protect the current supply of industrial sites, including the industrial allocations which are set out in that Plan for such uses, and supports new windfall employment development if the proposal and site-specifics are appropriate.

Community Wealth Building

8.88 Communities across the Highlands face a range of social, economic and environmental challenges as discussed in **Chapter 13**, **Chapter 9** and **Chapter 5**. These will not be solved by traditional approaches to economic development which are based on the presumption that as the economy grows, wealth is generated for all. Community wealth building provides an alternative approach and a practical response that aims to keep wealth within a local area. It is often described as a people centred approach to economic development and aims to ensure every area and community can participate in, and benefit from, economic activity.

8.89 Community Wealth Building is a practical approach to economic development focused on five pillars of activity, namely:

- Inclusive ownership,
- Workforce/ Fair Employment,
- Financial Power,
- Land and Property and
- Spending;

8.90 These pillars are the key areas of focus due to the economic levers they represent. All of the pillars play a complementary role in the retention of wealth in local places and regions for the benefit of communities. Increased spend with local businesses and higher levels of inclusive or community forms of ownership means that more money stays in the communities that create the wealth through higher incomes, fairer employment opportunities and a greater say over the use of local and regional assets.

8.91 The Council's agreed Community Wealth Building Strategy 2024-2027 embeds the five pillars and provides a framework that sets out how Highland Council as an organisation will utilise its activities to maximise the impact of investment in local areas and support more local ownership of assets and wealth. Community wealth building / benefit is also a cross-cutting theme within the Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Strategy 2025-2035, where maximising the economic and community benefits from renewable energy investments and driving the regions move to net zero and climate resilience and adaption are within the six core goals. Community Wealth Building was also agreed as one of the 7 cross-cutting priorities within the Delivery Plan of the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP 2024–2027).

Community Asset Transfer

8.92 The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 introduces a right for community bodies to request to own, lease or use public sector assets at a discount on market value through a process known as Community Asset Transfer (CAT).

Community ownership of assets has an important role in supporting people to create local opportunities and transform their communities, responding to local challenges by taking control of land and buildings where they live. It is therefore a key priority for the Council to support greater community ownership. The Council has maintained and published an accessible Map of all Council Owned Properties to inform community groups interested in a Community Asset Transfer.

8.93 The Act places a requirement on relevant authorities, including local authorities, to publish an annual report on community asset transfer activity for each financial year for the Scottish Government. As indicated in the Council's annual Community Asset Transfer Report 2024-2025, the Council has transferred 34 assets and approved over 50 requests (this reflects approvals for which conveyancing is ongoing) since the asset transfer legislation came into force in 2017.

8.94 Most recently, in 2024/2025 the Council received five new asset transfer requests, all to be considered under the Community Empowerment Act, three of which were for ownership and two for the lease of land or buildings. The Council agreed to seven asset transfer requests (two from applications submitted in 2024/25 and five submitted in previous years) and refused no requests during the year 2024/25. Discounts given across CATs ranged from 30% to 100% of the asset's market value.

8.95 While the full list of current and concluded requests are available on the Council's Community Asset Transfer Webpages, the seven agreed Community Asset Transfers in 2024/2025 were:

- Fort William Men's Shed, discounting their lease of an industrial unit to ensure economic viability of the Shed;
- Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO for ownership of a park and riverside walk to develop a community garden with allotments and open amenity space;
- The Place Youth Club discounting their lease of a vacant industrial lot in Alness to ensure economic viability of ongoing use;
- Elphin, Ledmore & Knockan Community Association for ownership of Elphin Hall to improve facilities (toilets, heating, energy efficiency);
- Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company for ownership of the Memorial Hall to improve the facility for continued community use;
- Raddery House Limited for ownership of the former Black Isle Education Centre and Raddery Woodland to develop the site for community use; and
- Balvonie Park Association for ownership of land to create a community woodland and orchard.

Social Values Charter for Renewables Investment

8.96 In Highland, the scale of renewable energy development as detailed in **Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy**, presents a significant opportunity to contribute to community wealth building and delivering decarbonisation in the interests of securing a just transition. It is an opportunity to identify and secure regional and local outcomes and ensure that the wider Highland community can benefit more from profits being generated from development.

8.97 Developing a new model to maximise local economic benefits from development in Moray and Highland demonstrated the estimated value of community benefit funding from the Energy sector as around £7.3m in Highland, with 45 of the 156 community council areas eligible to apply for community benefit funding from one or more onshore wind farms, and with communities in Inverness-shire, Caithness and Sutherland potentially receiving the greatest distribution of funding. For many years there has been a practice for onshore wind developments to contribute the equivalent of £5,000 per installed MW per year to a community benefits package, a value promoted through Scottish Government Good Practice Principles and the Onshore wind: policy statement 2022. In mid-2023, 88% of operational wind farms in Highland had an associated community benefit fund and the average value of funding provided was nearly £3,000/MW.

8.98 Although this figure falls well short of the £5,000/MW recommended in good practice guidance, many of the developments to which they relate were constructed before 2014, before this figure became established good practice. The lower value of funding associated with older wind farms suggests opportunities may have been missed in the past and therefore the Council considers it imperative that this scenario is not repeated. While only 20% of operational sites were providing £5,000/MW+ developers of 90% of planned wind farms in 2023 expressed an intention to establish a community benefit fund worth at least £5,000 per MW per year. The Council considered this commissioned analysis from Biggar Economics in the preparation of Social Value Charter for Renewables Investment.

8.99 Adjacent to NPF4 Policy 25, NPF4 Policy 11c) states that for energy development, "Development proposals will only be supported where they maximise net economic impact, including local and community socio-economic benefits such as employment, associated business and supply chain opportunities." Scottish Government Practice Principles for Community Benefits from Onshore Renewable Energy Developments **(THC065)** outlines that community benefits are a renewable industry led voluntary initiative to support communities located near developments and are not a material consideration in a planning application. This has been iterated again in the Chief Planner and Ministerial letter September 2024. The Council notes that within the previous planning consent for the construction and operation of the Bunloinn Wind Farm, the Council also sought the imposition of two conditions seeking to guarantee certain economic or financial benefits in respect of the setting up of a Scheme for Community Benefit. The Scottish Ministers considered that the financial contributions sought under such a scheme and the benefits which it is envisaged it may finance, are not connected to the proposed development and therefore do not consider that the Scheme for Community Benefit is a material consideration to be taken into account.

8.100 Embedded within the Financial Power pillar of the Council's Community Wealth Building Strategy, Social Value Charter for Renewables Investment (HSVC) sets out the community benefit expectations the Council has from developers wishing to invest in renewables in Highland. It also outlines what the Highland partnership – public, private and community – will do to support and enable this contribution. It aims to: embed an approach to community wealth building into Highland; maximise economic benefits from our natural environment and resources; engage and involve relevant stakeholders to understand how we can continually improve our impact; and unlock economic opportunities for the area.

8.101 The HSVC sets out a £5,000 per MW expectation towards a community fund, and an additional £7,500 per MW towards a central strategic fund, which will support and enable economic development, increase prosperity and achieve equity for *all* communities across Highland. Given the current voluntary nature of the social value investors and developers need to commit to, the Council considers it important to set out a framework for Highland to support discussions and negotiations with suppliers and clarity on the price and privilege of doing business in Highland. Developing a more consistent approach to levering social benefit from renewables investment will assist in delivering greater benefit for Highland communities. However, there are communities which have not had the same opportunities, have not developed the same high-level capacity and as a result have been unable to maximise the opportunities from the local funds directly available. It is therefore important that some communities need support in the form of capacity building to be able to maximise the funds available to them. There are also communities for whom, an active role in distributing funding, is not something they want to be involved with. Consequently, the Charter proposes to develop a mechanism that will enable a collaborative approach with these communities to create a mechanism for them to transfer their residual community benefit sums to a strategic fund to bring added value to their community.

8.102 Despite earlier commissioned analysis from Biggar Economics informing the development of the HSVC, analysis from seven onshore wind farms in Highland, Biggar's subsequent Implications of Highland Council's Social Value Charter adopts a critical stance on the HSVC, indicating that the majority of the economic Gross Value Added (GVA) benefit comes from the supply chain. This includes companies that work on the development and construction of the projects, and those that work throughout the operational lifetime of the wind farm. The analysis of the projects found that the impact within the supply chain was 6 times greater than the value of the community benefit funding. Biggar Economics within this analysis contend that the HSVC could reduce the financial viability of onshore wind projects in Highland by increasing the effective hurdle rate, and operational costs over the lifetime of the asset, and reduce the number of new onshore wind projects by 80%. This translates to only 520MW constructed, rather than the 2.6GW required to achieve Scotland's targets (as evidenced in Developing a new model to maximise local economic benefits from development in Moray and Highland, and a cost to the Highland economy could be £2 billion over the next 30 years, with almost £200 million less funding available to communities.

8.103 The Council's Highland Social Value Charter Update **(THC066)** from May 2025 outlines engagement undertaken with the developers responsible for the 103 live energy planning applications as of the end of July 2024. Forty-five companies were invited to meet with Council officers to discuss the charter and explore opportunities for collaborative working. The ultimate objective being to agree the terms of a 'Partnership Agreement' in accordance with the objectives of the nine-point charter. SSEN Transmission (SSEN-T) will be the first company to sign up to the objectives within the HSVC with initial commitments focussed on housing, public road and bridge improvements and supporting skills and training. Two other partnership agreements are being progressed and renewed and continued engagement efforts with the remaining developers is being pursued as detailed in **THC066**.

8.104 In December 2024, the Scottish Government launched a consultation to review the Good Practice Principles for onshore and offshore renewable energy, aiming to enhance community benefits provided by developers. The Scottish Government have also commissioned research on the provision of community benefits across renewable energy technologies. The feedback will inform a refresh of the Good Practice Principles in late 2025. The Highland Council's response to this included the recommendation of Legally Enforceable Commitments – The Good Practice Principles should transition from voluntary guidance to enforceable requirements, ensuring developers are held accountable for delivering community benefits. The Scottish Government does not currently have the power to legislate for community benefits, which lies with the UK Government. The UK Government separately published a working paper Community Benefits and Shared Ownership for Low Carbon Energy Infrastructure, which seeks views on the potential introduction of a mandatory community benefits scheme for low carbon energy infrastructure and how best to facilitate shared ownership of renewable energy generation infrastructure.

8.105 While Highland is making a significant contribution to renewable generation, to reduce energy costs nationwide and address the cost of living crisis – in Highland itself, average electricity costs in North Scotland are above the Great Britain average, shown in Table 8:12, except for the single rate standing charge which is lower than the GB average. Gas standing charges and unit rates in Highland are aligned to the Great Britain average. Renewable energy development is already making a positive contribution to local communities through job creation, investing in local supply chains and other voluntary community benefits through the HSVC.

Table 8:13 Average daily electricity and gas standing charges and unit rates, 1 October to 31 December 2025 (Source: Ofgem)*

	North Scotland	GB Average	% of GB Average
Average daily standing electricity charge, single rate (pence per day)	53.78	56.39	95%
Average electricity unit rate (pence per kWh)	27.28	26.57	103%
Average daily standing electricity charge, multi rate (pence per day)	64.39	56.33	114%
Average electricity multi rate (pence per kWh)	26.04	25.41	102%
Average daily standing gas charge (pence per day)	36.73	36.61	100%
Average gas unit rate (pence per kWh)	6.27	6.32	99%

**Average charges across payment methods: prepayment meter, direct debit and standard credit*

8.106 [Scottish Power Renewables – have contributed £67million to communities across Scotland to date – provided through Evidence Report consultation. The SSEN Transmission planned programme of investment up to 2030 is expected to exceed £20 billion across our operating area, including the Highlands, which would lead to up to £100 million in non-repayable funding to communities in the coming years across the north of Scotland operating area through the SSEN Transmission Community Benefit Fund.

8.107 As part of the Partnership agreement through the SVRC, SSEN Transmission is has planned to provide new homes for their circa 200 long-term direct employment workers in Highland over the period 2025-2030. This is further discussed in **Chapter 9: Housing.**

8.108 Local Place Plans, also highlight opportunities for community wealth building, including community assets and opportunities for providing community benefits and addressing social inequalities. These are considered in **Summary of Local Place Plan Priorities**.

Land Reform and Community Land Ownership

8.109 The Land Reform (Scotland) Bill was passed by the Scottish Parliament in November 2025. The Bill aims to further improve transparency of land ownership, help ensure large scale land holdings deliver in the public interest, and empower communities by providing more opportunities to own land and have more say in how land in their area is used. The Council considers that the Bill as passed could have implications for rural development applications within the Highlands, owing to a greater expectation among Highland communities, that community-led developments by virtue of being community-led carry a stronger presumption in favour of development than in other cases, and often a lack of explicit understanding that all policies of the plan are to apply, including in most cases of controversy, natural heritage features. There have been numerous previous cases where this tension has arisen, and where the perception that the planning system serves to protect the natural environment before the social and economic needs of fragile communities is widely alluded to.

8.110 As passed, Part 1 of the Bill deals with the management and sale of land and has provisions related to the management of, community engagement about and the right to buy and transfer 'Large Land Holdings', defined as over 1,000 hectares in scale. Part 1, Section 1 introduces a new obligation on landowners of large holdings to produce Land Management Plans (LMPs), developed through engagement with local communities. These plans must set out the ownership structure of and a long-term vision of management proposals for, the holding. Section 2 provides increased opportunities for community bodies to register an interest in a large land holding. Before the sale of such holdings, the possibility of registering a community interest in buying the land must be publicised. If an interest is registered, the land cannot be sold until the registered body has been notified and given the opportunity to exercise its right to buy. Large land holdings may not be transferred until the Scottish Government has made a lotting decision. To assist in this process, a newly created Land and Communities Commissioner role will consider whether land at a certain scale can only be sold in lots, with each lot transferred to a different party.

8.111 The forthcoming secondary legislation will be imperative in refining the Bill to ensure it meets its objectives in a way that is fair to all parties affected and will influence the practical frameworks used to increase community land ownership, which may interact with the planning system.

Tourism

Strategic Context

8.112 Tourism represents one of the most significant sectors of the Highland economy, owing to the array of historic, cultural and natural heritage assets which continue to attract growing numbers of visitors. The rural context of the Highlands creates unique challenges for tourism, which are recognised as having impacts on land use. Scotland Outlook 2030 recognises that tourism can bring a wealth of economic, social and cultural benefits to communities, cities and regions, perpetuating growth and stimulating job creation. Scotland has for the first time in the last few years experienced the global phenomenon of high visitor volumes in certain areas, driven by social media.

8.113 High visitor volumes associated with tourism has widespread and multi-faceted impacts on the economy and other policy remits, with associated impacts on transport and other infrastructure, housing, town centre vitality and the diversity of our retail offering (discussed in **Chapter 10: Transport**, **Chapter 11: Infrastructure**, **Chapter 9: Housing, Chapter 13: Design Wellbeing Local Living and Placemaking** respectively).

8.114 The Council has developed a Sustainable Tourism Strategy, which embodies the following priorities:

- Our People – To improve the quality of life and provide high quality job opportunities for Highland people, addressing the demographic challenges and helping to create the conditions for tourism to grow harmoniously with the people who live here.
- Our Place – To ensure sustainable and responsible tourism that enhances the natural environment and nurtures our cultural heritage, improves community wellbeing and creates thriving and prosperous places across Highland.
- Our Economy – To support a vibrant and dynamic visitor economy that has year-round appeal, spread evenly across the region and contributes towards a sustainable and responsible industry.

8.115 *LDP Guidance* highlights the Scotland Outlook 2030 as a relevant source of evidence, with the allied £25million Covid-19 Tourism Recovery Programme launched in March 2021 featuring 10 recovery proposals:

- International Demand Building
- Destination and Sector Marketing Fund
- ScotSpirit holiday voucher scheme – social tourism
- Days Out Incentive Fund
- Visitor management strategic infrastructure planning and delivery
- Tourism and Hospitality Talent Development Programme 2021-2022 (phase two)
- Leadership development to boost product innovation
- Destination Net Zero
- Scottish Tourism Observatory
- Investment models to support Scottish tourism recovery

8.116 While the impacts of all 10 recovery proposals are felt across the Highlands, of most significance is the Visitor management strategic infrastructure planning and delivery. The Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Fund pilot initiative was set up to support more extensive and collaborative projects from visitor hotspots across Scotland. These hotspots were facing immediate and damaging pressures on their infrastructure or faced negative impacts on communities as a result of significant increases in visitor numbers since the summer of 2020. As a result, 11 Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plans (STIDPs) were funded by VisitScotland's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) within the first batch supporting the two national parks and local authorities in highly pressured areas, which included the Highland Council.

8.117 The Highland Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan (2022) purpose is to identify key priorities for tourism infrastructure in Highland over the medium term – broadly defined as being the next 2-5 years. This strategy looked at publicly accessible infrastructure, either provided by the public sector or by third parties / commercial stakeholders if the infrastructure is easily made available to visitors that are not otherwise customers of the business concerned.

8.118 The Highland STIDP (2022) identifies a number of hotspot areas, where multiple sites experience multiple pressures across different types of infrastructure. It proposes more holistic solutions that frequently involve a package of measures that, when combined, are expected to address the pressures experienced at these locations more effectively than individual interventions would. Addressing the issues in the hotspot areas is anticipated to require funding of both a national (RTIF, NatureScot etc) and local nature (Council place-based funds, Coastal Communities Fund, Town Centre Fund, etc). The plan also identifies tourism infrastructure needs in other areas of Highland which experience pressures at individual sites but may not have the wide range of pressures seen in the hotspot areas.

8.119 The following 8 hotspots were identified in the STIDP (refer to page 5 for map):

- Glen Etive and Glencoe
- The Road to the Isles (Glenfinnan to Mallaig)
- Glen Nevis
- The Isle of Skye
- North West Highlands (Loch Broom to Durness)
- Applecross and area
- Fortrose – Rosemarkie – Chanonry Point
- The Aviemore to Glenmore corridor

8.120 While these hotspots were identified in line with RTIF criteria (designed to flag strategically important tourism infrastructure needs at a national level), the entirety of the Highland area faces tourism pressures requiring attention. Further, some smaller communities which have a lower carrying capacity can also be strongly affected by tourism pressures although the visitor numbers might not be as high nor the impacts as pronounced. To reflect this reality, the *Highland STIDP* organises the identified priorities into two tiers:

- The first tier covers priorities located in the eight strategic hotspots, where tourism infrastructure is urgently needed to address multiple pressures at multiple sites. These are also the priorities which could be considered to be of national significance and so most likely to attract (national) RTIF funding.
- The second tier covers more locally important priorities across all the rest of the Highland area, which are more likely to be addressed through other more local funding streams. These are individual sites outwith the main hotspot areas and face similar pressures or have ambitions to attract more visitors to alleviate pressure from more popular areas.

8.121 As much of the infrastructure used by visitors is also used by Highland residents in their day-to-day activities it can be difficult to define exactly what *tourism infrastructure* is. Following principles set out in the STIDP, infrastructure considered particularly relevant to visitors included in the STIDP infrastructure audit are:

- Car parking (off-road, roadside laybys and dedicated overnight parking)
- Electric Vehicle charge points
- Public toilets
- Motorhome waste disposal facilities
- Public Wi-Fi-services

8.122 The *STIDP* recognises that many of these facilities are also for local use, and the linkages between these and other Evidence Report Chapters is noted:

- **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking** – provides evidence on provision of public conveniences, and the impacts of tourism on these facilities (and Council's provision of these).
- **Chapter 10: Transport** - Annual average daily totals (AADT) and parking records indicate significant pressures in the aforementioned hotspot areas. Such transport-related pressures are likely exacerbated by the promotion of inherently car-based tourist initiatives such as the North Coast 500, which promotes individual car trips of over 500 miles to complete the route. Evidence of tourism impacts on the transport system in Highland are considered in **Chapter 10: Transport.**
- **Chapter 11: Infrastructure** discusses digital infrastructure and waste management, including motorhome waste facilities.

8.123 The STIDP indicates all the Tier 1 tourism infrastructure projects located in the identified hotspot areas that the Highland Council and its partners plan to take forward as priorities, summarised in Table 8:14. The Council is now halfway through the plan's implementation period, with project delivery actively ongoing.

*Table 8:14 Priority Tourism Infrastructure Projects (STIDP for potential costs, **THC067** for progress)*

Glencoe and Glen Etvie	**£745,000**	**Status**
Glencoe Greenway - A82 Glencoe Active Travel Project	£500,000	Under construction
Glencoe Village & Ballachulish Public Toilet Upgrades	£220,000	Complete
Glencoe Village Car Park	£ TBC	Awaiting full funding package
Glen Etive Road End Parking	£25,000	No progression
Glen Nevis	**£442,221**	
Glen Nevis Roadside Parking (Achintee)	£61,600	No progression
Glen Nevis Road End Car Park (Steall) / Lower Falls Parking and Bridge Replacement	£145,621	Complete
Event Car Parking Nevis Forest	£177,000	No progression
Expansion of the North Face Car Park	£58,000	No progression
Road to the Isles (Glenfinnan to Mallaig)	**£326,610**	
B8008 Parking and Traffic Management	£326,610	No progression
Isle of Skye	**£1,320,000**	
Visitor Car Park and Public Transport Improvements	£610,000	No progression
Dunvegan Public Toilet Upgrade	£110,000	Upgraded outwith RTIF
Bayfield Car Park Expansion and Toilets	£600,000	Complete
Applecross	**£132,000**	
Motorhome Stopover Site	£132,000	No progression
North West Highlands (Loch Broom to Durness)	**£2,873,871**	
Parking Improvements across North West Sutherland	£368,359	No progression
Smoo Cave Parking and Toilet Upgrade	£337,000	No progression
Blairmore Car Park and Toilets, Sandwood Estate	£198,000	Awarded
North West Sutherland Public Toilet Upgrades	£502,000	Under construction
Stac Pollaidh Visitor Facilities	£642,000	Starting preliminaries
Achmelvich Visitor Facilities	£826,512	Under construction
Fortrose – Rosemarkie – Chanonry Point	**£298,000**	
Chanonry Point Visitor Parking	£298,000	No progression
Whaligoe Steps (Tier 2)	**£90,000**	
Whaligoe Steps Car Parking	£90,000	No progression
Potential total costs of proposed projects	**£6,227,701**	

8.124 *Highland STIDP* focusses on longer-term infrastructure priorities, so it purposely excludes shorter-term projects and actions that are part of the Council's day-to-day service delivery, such as ongoing maintenance, waste management or the deployment of access rangers. These measures are picked up in the Highland Council's Visitor Management Plan 2022 **(THC068)**, which has been a parallel piece of work. Managing visitor movements and influencing visitor behaviour are critical aspects of developing sustainable tourism. The Council's activity in relation to visitor management is largely focussed on the provision of some of the underlying infrastructure and associated services as well as on informing and educating visitors on good practice.

8.125 The overarching principles for infrastructure projects within the *Highland STIDP* set out the kind of infrastructure the Council want to support and the sustainable societal changes it wants to encourage:

- Carbon conscious: facilitating transition towards carbon-free society, including support for non-car based travel options, EV vehicle charging, planting with infrastructure, retrofit options, and consideration of lifecycle emissions.
- Respectful of the physical carrying capacity
- Respectful of the social carrying capacity
- Respectful of environmental carrying capacity
- An infrastructure that becomes part of the landscape
- A strategic approach to infrastructure project development

8.126 The Highland STIDP is currently under review and an updated plan is anticipated in 2026, in preparation for applying for Regional Tourism Infrastructure funding. A more extensive Strategic Tourism Investment Plan will be developed over a longer period. The new Tourism Investment Plan will combine visitor management planning with strategic infrastructure development planning to provide a single cohesive strategy.

8.127 Cairngorms National Park authority have also prepared a Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Development Plan 2023-2028, which includes plans for tourism infrastructure investment in partnership with Highland Council, such as comfort scheme partnerships for public conveniences or EV charge points. Council is a landowner, funder and project delivery partner for a range of proposed projects related to tourism in the Cairngorms National Park Area.

8.128 Since 2019, the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) has offered rounds of grant funding totalling £19 million for projects across rural Scotland. The Regional Tourism Infrastructure Summary for Highland Council **(THC067)** outlines that Council has been allocated just over £6.8 million across 33 projects. This is 43% of total projects, and 35% of total funding allocation across Scotland. A summary of successful grant funding of projects, by round is provided in Table 8:14. Additional RTIF grants were also received for design, for the development of projects. **THC067** also presents the grant funding received for STID projects including for the development of the STIDP, STID design grants of almost £90,000.

*Table 8:15 RTIF Summary of Funding Rounds and Projects (Source: **THC067**)*

Round One	
Bealach na Ba Scenic Viewpoints Blà Bheinn Toilets and Parking, Skye Old Man of Storr Visitor Facilities Glenfinnan Viaduct – Visitor Parking Lochinver Motorhome Facilities Mallaig Visitor Facilities	**RTIF Award Value** £1.1m **Project Value** £1.6m
Round Two	
Helmsdale Public Conveniences Cromarty Tourism Development Project Glen Nevis Visitor Facilities Old Man of Storr Footpath Improvement Project Glenfinnan Footbridge and Path Portree Parking Isle of Eigg Visitor Facilities	**RTIF Award Value** £1.5m **Project Value** £3.0m
Round Three	
Sustainable Visitor Infrastructure in Glencoe Sustainable Visitor Infrastructure in Glen Etive Photographers knoll Footpath – Old Man of Storr Loch Ness Visitor Facilities Elgol Visitor Facilities The Cludgie Project – Phase two Ardnamurchan Lighthouse Project Dornoch car and coach parking	**RTIF Award Value** £1.6m **Project Value** £2.7m
Round Four	
Duisdale AIRES Gairloch Beach Visitor Facilities Dog Falls, Glen Affric Visitor Facilities Isle of Canna Visitor Facilities Trotternish Peninsula Visitor Facilities	**RTIF Award Value** £0.89m **Project Value** £1.5m
Round Five	
Stac Pollaidh Visitor Facilities North West Highland public toilet provision Achmelvich Beach Car Park and Toilets Glencoe Greenway	**RTIF Award Value** £1.5m **Project Value** £3.2m

8.129 The Highland Sustainable Tourism Strategy hails the strength and contribution of the Tourism sector in Highland, celebrating near year-on-year year growth for 20 years amounting to 8.4 million visitors in 2023, with associated direct spend of £1.68bn, and direct employment of 21,784. Yet the Sustainable Tourism Strategy recognises that the environmental impacts of tourism, plus the pressure put on communities, infrastructure and services, pose significant challenges. The lead drivers of the tourism sector in Highland are:

- Landscape and scenery
- Culture and Heritage
- Sports and Outdoor Adventure
- Food and Drink
- Ancestral Tourism
- Screen Tourism
- Marine Market

8.130 The purpose of this strategy is to set out the Highland Council's long-term ambition for a sustainable tourism sector and contribution up to 2030 and beyond. It will shape how the Council will work with others, invest its resources, and co-invest with partners, including future income streams such as the visitor levy and any other external funds which can be secured. Internal engagement is underway to develop relevant actions relating to the Focus Areas and corresponding service activities identified within the Sustainable Tourism Strategy.

Visitor Levy

8.131 The Visitor Levy (Scotland) Act 2024 has provided the powers for local authorities to now choose whether to place a levy on visitors staying overnight in paid accommodation. It is a familiar mechanism across the world to generate the necessary funds to reinvest in the sector. To accompany the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Act 2024, Guidance on the Visitor Levy for Local Authorities has been published. This guidance was prepared by an Expert Group of stakeholders led by VisitScotland to assist local authorities and others with an interest in a Visitor Levy Scheme„ The Guidance states that when developing an outline for a potential Visitor Levy Scheme, local authorities should be able to draw a clear link to the objectives of its local tourism strategy and other related strategies. This ensures that any scheme objectives link to wider strategic thinking on the visitor economy, and how any net proceeds raised could best sustain, support and develop facilities or services substantially used for or used by persons visiting the scheme area for leisure or business purposes.

8.132 The Highland Sustainable Tourism Strategy therefore provides clear objectives that would guide any subsequent levy in force. With the growth of the tourism sector in Highland, the Council has long seen a visitor levy to have real potential to generate change in the ways we manage visitors and support the industry to deliver positive change for everyone. A combined effort is underway to address and resolve the complex and often deep-rooted housing challenges within the region (discussed further in **Chapter 9: Housing**), particularly in relation to improving access to quality affordable homes in areas of need and supporting our rural areas and tourism businesses to thrive. The Council recognises that those working in the tourism industry have a need to live in their local communities. To try and address this it is proposed that some of the visitor levy income will be targeted towards assisting in the delivery of affordable housing options in rural communities. Specifically given the high cost of delivery in rural areas which has been identified in the Council's Local Housing Strategy and Strategic Housing Investment Plan.

8.133 Implementing a Visitor Levy for Highland is a priority action within the Our Programme for Our Future Highland and an outline Visitor Levy Scheme for Highland ran for public consultation from November 2024 until March 2025. On 2 December 2025 the Minister for Public Finance wrote to Council Leaders to confirm that the Scottish Government intends to introduce legislation early in the new year to give councils greater flexibility over how they design and implement a visitor levy. On 11 December 2025, The Highland Council agreed to await the outcome of the intended legislative process for either a single fixed amount or a range of fixed amounts for different purposes or areas before deciding whether to proceed with a Visitor Levy for Highland (See Committee Report). In the meantime, Officers would continue to work with Scottish Government, CoSLA and the Visitor Levy Reference Group to consider emerging changes and related matters.

8.134 The commencement of a Visitor Levy Scheme must be at least 18 months from the date a local authority formally decides to proceed to introduce a Visitor Levy in their area. In effect, this means that the earliest a visitor levy can be introduced in Highland is by autumn 2026 and it would be expected to be in place during the lifespan of HLDP.

8.135 The Council also remains committed to investigating and pursuing options to secure similar income from those visitors who fall out with the Visitor Levy legislation. This includes the 300,000 cruise ship passengers and a significant number of motorhomes visiting the region each year. We will continue to work with Government and other stakeholders to seek powers that will enable local authorities to secure income from cruise ship and motorhome visitors.

Highland Tourism Trends

8.136 The Council has acquired Global Tourism Solutions Scottish Tourism Economic Activity Monitor (STEAM) data reports (**THC069**) which cover the most recent period available until the end of December 2024. Key findings of this evidence are summarised in Table 8:16.

*Table 8:16 Highland Tourism Summary Statistics (**THC069**)*

	2024	2023	+/-%
Visitor Days (million)	19.35	19.48	-0.7%
Visitor Numbers (million)	9.40	8.81	6.7%
Direct Expenditure (£Bn)	2.129	1.999	6.5%
Economic Impact (£Bn)	2.616	2.459	6.4%
Direct Employment (FTEs)	27,892	28,676	-2.7%
Total Employment (FTEs)	33,284	34,018	-2.2%

8.137 Overall, this evidence submission **(THC069)** suggests that;

- The tourism industry has continued to grow linearly in the Highlands, reaching some 9.40 million visitors in 2024, with growth between the year 2022 and 2023 most notable.
- In 2024, tourism supported approximately 33,284 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) total jobs.
- Economic impacts of tourism growth are realised differentially across sectors, with the sectors most strongly impacted being accommodation (24%), transport (16.6%), shopping (12.7%) and food & drink (10.1%), of approximately £2.6 billion economic impact in the year 2024.
- Non-serviced accommodation (self-catering premises that do not include services like housekeeping, meals or a front desk) continues to increase its share of total tourism sector as reflected in visitor numbers, visitor days and economic impact, while the number of serviced accommodation establishments and available beds is declining.
- Tourism stays are now less confined to a peak-summer period than they were in 2013, with strong growth in all seasons, making the sector a year-round industry.
- Growth in day visitors has occurred but remained relatively level between 2023 and 2024.
- For staying visitors, the average length of stay is approximately 2.5 days, a trend which has declined linearly by 0.5 days since 2013.

8.138 The growth in non-serviced accommodation and the transition from an industry with distinct summer peak periods to one that operates year round, have in combination signalled a shifting relationship between Highland residents and the tourism industry, where tourists are now increasingly more likely to stay in accommodation that directly competes with the local housing supply, and for longer periods in the year where competing demands on infrastructure are experienced. What this means for the plan, is that a more managed and plan-led approach to guiding sustainable tourism development towards appropriate locations will be required.

8.139 VisitScotland's Visitor Scotland Survey from 2023 Highland Profile indicates the profile of Highland's tourists. This Highland Profile webpage also provides the Highland Local Area Factsheet and equivalent Inverness Local Area Factsheet which suggests that the visitor profile for those coming to Inverness specifically, differs from those on wider Highland-wide trips. The key takeaways are that Inverness visitors stay for shorter periods, but more likely in serviced accommodation, and may have come from further afield on first time visits, than Highland-wide visitors that stay for longer, more likely in non-serviced accommodation on repeat visits.

Table 8:17 Scotland Visitor Survey 2023 Profile of Highland and Inverness Visitors

Domestic/International	Highland	Inverness
Domestic Visitors	**47%**	**34%**
• Scotland residents	12%	4%
• Rest of UK	35%	30%
International Visitors	**53%**	**66%**
• Europe	22%	23%
• North America	22%	30%
• Australasia	7%	10%
• Rest of World	1%	3%
Composition		
First Time visitor	37%	50%
Repeat Visitor	63%	50%
Average number in travel party	2.6	2.6
Children (under 16) in party	13%	9%
Life Stage		
• Pre-nesters	13%	16%
• Families	12%	8%
• Older Independents	48%	45%
• Retirement Age	27%	31%
Accommodation and Duration		
Average stay	4.1 nights	2.3 nights
Serviced Accommodation*	**50%**	**75%**
• Hotel, motel, Inn	34%	54%
• Guest house, B&B	19%	13%
• Hostel	4%	7%
Non-Serviced Accommodation*	**60%**	**28%***
Self-catering / non-serviced rentals	29%	23%
Camping, caravaning, motorhome	26%	4%
Friend's or relative's home	4%	2%

**Serviced and non-serviced accommodation adds to more than 100% due to some people staying in more than one accommodation type*

Tourist Accommodation

8.140 Tourist accommodation has until now benefitted from a supportive policy framework in Highland, and has been permitted in instances where equivalent applications for permanent residential housing would have received less support in policy terms. This is evidenced in instances of woodland removal, where tourist accommodation has been interpreted as providing greater public benefit (and therefore more likely to meet the criteria of the Control of Woodland Removal policy) than private residential dwellings. Similarly in Hinterland areas (discussed further in **Chapter 9: Housing**), tourist accommodation has been exempt from the presumption against housing development. While it is evident where areas of strong tourism appeal are in Highland, the Council has not adopted a plan-led spatial policy for tourism accommodation previously, such as directing tourism development towards resorts or designated tourism towns. Holiday parks are however common, but these tend not to be plan-led and are considered on a case-by case basis through the development management stage. This means that tourism accommodation of all forms is relatively widespread across the authority.

8.141 The Council's Global Tourism Solutions (GTS) STEAM data report (**THC069**) suggest a supply of 25,260 serviced accommodation beds in Highland in 2024 summarised in Table 8:17, with approximately 82% of these located within hotels and the remainder in guest houses and B&Bs.

Table 8:18 Highland Tourism Accommodation Establishments and Beds available 2024 ***(THC069)***

	2024		Change on 2023		Change on 2013	
	Est.	**Beds**	**Est.**	**Beds**	**Est.**	**Beds**
Serviced Accommodation	**1,193**	**25,260**	**-242**	**-1,600**	**-190**	**+761**
• +50 room	51	9,016	0	0	+5	+1,043
• 26-50 room	38	2,728	-2	-125	0	+137
• <26 room	720	8,964	-124	-608	+199	+1,811
• Guest houses/ B&Bs	384	4,552	-116	-867	-394	-2,230
Non-Serviced Accommodation	**5,771**	**67,169**	**+332**	**+2,785**	**+4,430**	**+30,716**
• Self-catering	5,618	45,529	+330	+2,118	+4,358	+27,979
• Touring/Camping	153	21,640	+2	+667	+72	+2,737
Paid Accommodation Total	**6,964**	**92,429**	**+90**	**+1,185**	**+4,240**	**+31,477**
Serviced Share of total	17%	27%				
Non-serviced share of total	83%	73%				

8.142 The non serviced accommodation sector represents a significantly larger share of beds, with 67,169 split approximately 67% / 33% between self-catering and touring / camping. Serviced accommodation, however, remains a significant generator of economic impact, representing approximately £1.15 billion in 2024 and 9,918 FTE in terms of direct employment supported.

8.143 The GTS Highland STEAM Report **(THC069)** however, indicates that despite serviced accommodation representing a smaller share of all paid tourist accommodation beds available, the majority of Highland's visitor numbers correspond to those staying serviced accommodation as shown in Figure 8:1, despite the relatively modest growth on the number of serviced establishments and beds depicted in Table 8:18. Despite serviced accommodation visitor numbers remaining higher than non-serviced, the longer length of stay by non-serviced accommodation visitors means that both serviced and non-serviced accommodation clearly generate a significant and comparable economic contribution through direct and indirect expenditure.

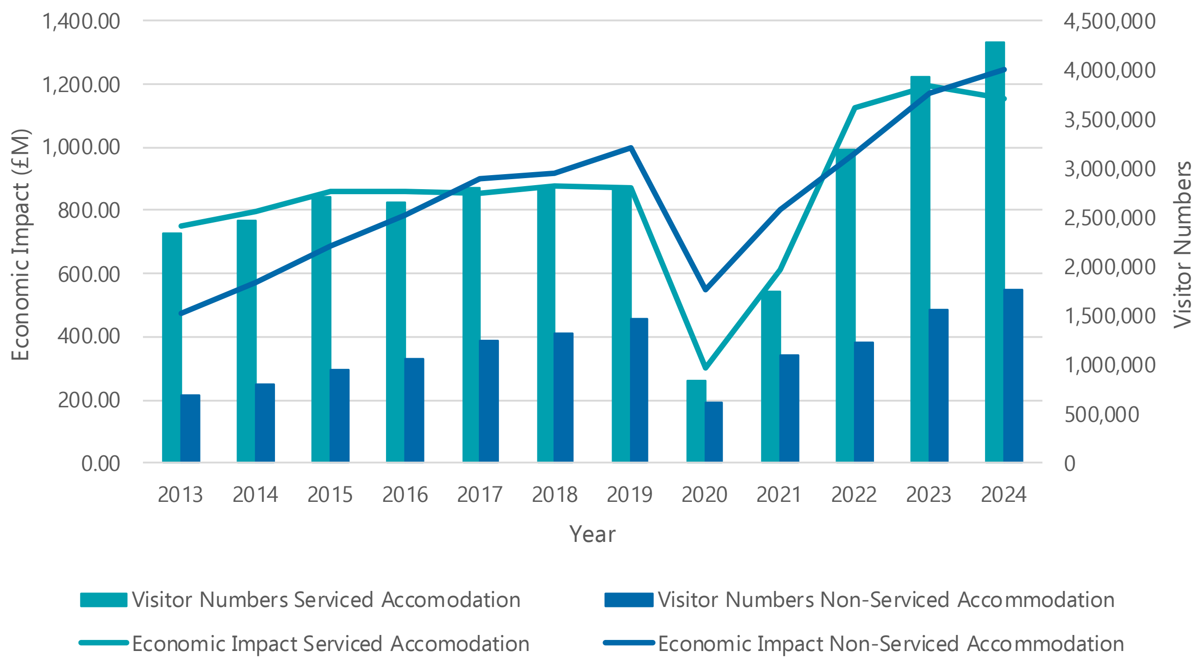

Figure 8:2 Highland Visitor Numbers and Economic Impact by Accommodation type 2012-2024 (THC069)

8.144 The economic contribution generated by serviced accommodation providers is therefore considered strong considering they only account for 17% of total establishments and 27% of total beds available, and on some years are evidenced to make a higher economic contribution than non-serviced accommodation as shown in Figure 8:1. Serviced tourism accommodation also does not compete with local housing supply (unlike some forms of non-serviced accommodation) and HLDP therefore will consider providing a policy context that supports and directs future tourism accommodation solutions towards serviced accommodation to capitalise on economic benefits without incurring pressures in the local housing market.

Short-term Let Accommodation

8.145 Short-term let (STL) properties are one form of self-catered, non-serviced accommodation which have grown in popularity, facilitated by the rise of digital platforms. In general, STLs cover a wide range of on the ground scenarios, including proposals for newly built short term let accommodation (pods cabins, lodges and purpose-built holiday homes) alongside conversions of previous uses including garden buildings (garages, steadings, residential and non-residential use classes). Many homeowners opt to convert existing residential dwellings for STL use which offers flexible, furnished short term accommodation, either in the form of homesharing (where typically spare rooms are let with the homeowner remaining resident), or secondary letting – where the homeowner does not usually reside. In most cases, it is secondary letting, or the short term letting of entire properties that has the potential to influence housing markets. The faster relative rise in this form of STL accommodation presents challenges as the benefits provided from tourist accommodation must be considered against the social costs borne by communities, most directly through an incremental reduction in the housing supply as stated within the Short-term lets: licensing scheme and planning control area legislation - Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment (BRIA). In several cases, STLs are not operated by individual homeowners, but by professional operators and investors managing entire properties. STLs tend to be spatially concentrated, and although providing a service, are evidently incrementally removing stock from the housing supply in some of Highland's most challenging housing markets. Highland is not unique in experiencing intense debates surrounding their positives and negatives.

8.146 Research into the impact of short-term lets on communities across Scotland used a case study approach to assess the positive and negative impact of short-term lets (STLs) in Scotland, with a focus on communities, particularly on neighbourhoods and housing. Two case studies within this were in Highland, Fort William with its expanding Highland tourism centred around outdoor activities, and Eilean a' Chèo (Skye) as an established tourism area based around its landscape and island experience.

8.147 It was also found that STLs were geographically focused, and estimated that half of all Airbnb listings in Scotland were concentrated with just 24 electoral wards, including seven within the Highland Council Area. Geographic concentration was also illustrated by penetration rates of Airbnbs relative to amount of dwellings: in

Scotland overall Airbnb listings were found to account for only 1.2% of dwellings, but in Skye this rose to 18.6% (the highest rate by ward in Scotland). One key limitation of this study is that the assessment relates to Airbnb listings as of May 2019 which comprise a substantial part of the STL market but not all of it, since some landlords do not use this platform.

8.148 Research into the impact of short-term lets on communities across Scotland evidences that properties were changing from long-term private lets and owner-occupation into STLs, which was voiced as a major area of concern in Edinburgh, Fort William and Skye due to the impact this was considered to be having on shortage of housing supply and affordability. A related negative impact in the rural areas of Fort William and Skye was identified by many community and business participants on availability of labour supply and on wider local economic development due to housing shortages. While the increase in tourism was associated with local economic benefits, it was also identified with bringing some disbenefits of congestion, significant demands on the local infrastructure, and changes to communities. Tourism impacts on traffic flows and parking penalty charge notices are evident within the transport related-evidence outlined in **Chapter 10: Transport,** with over 15% growth in traffic volumes along the A87 Inverness-Portree route and a 98% increase in penalty charge notices issued in Skye from 2022-2024. In Fort William, business participants felt that any benefit from tourism was outweighed by the fact that local businesses and other organisations struggled to recruit staff due to the lack of residential options.

Short Term Let Control Areas

8.149 Since Research into the impact of short-term lets on communities across Scotland was published, The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 introduced provision for Planning Authorities to designate all of part of their area as a short term let control area (STLCA). The Scottish Government's Short-Term Lets and Planning Circular 1/2023 provides guidance on the establishment of STLCAs and the need for planning permission for STLs and highlights that a planning authority might want to designate a STLCA, and so ensure that planning permission will always be required for a change of use of a dwellinghouse to use for STL, for one or more of the following policy objectives:

- to allow consideration of impacts on the availability of residential housing;
- to allow consideration of impacts on the character or amenity of a neighbourhood;
- to allow consideration of impacts on different types of building;

8.150 The policy objectives sought will likely influence the evidence required. Planning authorities should consider whether there are systemic material planning considerations across one or more areas in the planning authority, where systemic may mean the same consideration repeated many times or that there is a cumulative impact from the use of dwellinghouses as STLs. While the Short-Term Lets and Planning Circular 1/2023 does not provide an exhaustive list of evidence examples, it provides some useful indicators namely:

- Lack of affordable and appropriate housing for local residents, perhaps indicated by a high share of sale volumes to, and high prices paid by, non-residents.
- Detrimental impact on local amenity, with some businesses, schools or other services that serve, and are reliant on, permanent residents closing or relocating.
- Changes to the look and feel of a neighbourhood, such as multiple keyboxes on many buildings or structures or noise on streets and in stairwells.
- Signs that local services are struggling, such as many instances of overflowing bins.
- A significantly higher level of complaints relevant to use of dwellinghouses as STLs from neighbours spread across a number of tenements or properties than in a comparable area, within or outside the planning authority area

8.151 One of the seven Highland Council electoral wards that was identified as having a high share of STLs relative to total dwellings from Research into the impact of short-term lets on communities across Scotland was Badenoch and Strathspey. On 20 December 2022, Scottish Ministers approved the proposed designation of Ward 20 (Badenoch & Strathspey) as a STLCA. This STLCA came into force at 12pm on Monday 4 March 2024. After this date, planning permission was required for the change of use of a dwellinghouse (as defined in the Act and Regulations), where the owner does not reside in the property, to a STL. These planning applications are determined in accordance with the Development Plan and a Non-Statutory STLCA Planning Policy. STL are also subject to separate licensing requirements under Schedule 3 of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (Licensing of Short-term Lets) Order 2022 which provide legal permission to let out accommodation to guests who stay on a temporary basis.

8.152 Following the declaration of the Highland Housing Challenge in November 2023, speculation has continued regarding the role of STLs and their impact on the availability of housing in recognition of the additional pressures on the housing market over the next 10 years; the impact of economic growth associated with the ICFGF and the pressure associated with an increase in workforce coming into the area to deliver the SSE infrastructure works required for new transmission infrastructure outlined in **Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy**. The continued growth of the tourism economy in the Highlands has reinforced debate as to whether more areas warrant consideration for designation as STLCAs. Many of the most scenic and attractive locations for tourists are in remote rural areas, with a notable absence of volume housebuilders. The competing demands on limited housing stock in our remote rural areas with restricted pipelines of future housing, warrants an assessment of the planning mechanisms that can be utilised to best manage Highland's housing supply in the long-term public interest.

8.153 Given the inter-related nature of tourist accommodation and residential housing supply, the Council has specifically assessed the impact of STLs and second homes within the HNDA which is detailed further in **Chapter 9: Housing**. Progressing what was known at the time Research into the impact of short-term lets on communities across Scotland was published, the introduction of a mandatory short term let licensing scheme in October 2022 means that the Council now maintains a STL Public Register which provides a more robust basis on which to interrogate STL prevalence across the authority rather than Airbnb listings in isolation, and identifies secondary letting STLs specifically, where the property let is not the only or principal home of the host.

8.154 The STL Public Register also classifies STLs as either detached, semi-detached, terraced, self-contained flat, or unconventional accommodation, which includes pods, chalets and other forms of non-standard accommodation that would not be transferrable to housing stock for permanent occupation. The number of STLs (minus unconventional accommodation STLs) within each data zone as of 30 July 2025 was compared against the number of dwellings within each data zone (as retrieved from the National Records of Scotland Small area Statistics on Households and Dwellings 2024). This provides an *Adjusted Rate of STL*. This initial STL analysis **(THC064)** was initially presented at Full Council in September 2025. Key findings of the initial analysis included:

- In total there are 8,350 STLs in Highland, which equates to 6,913 STLs when unconventional accommodation STLs are excluded. 6,913 therefore represents the number of potential *dwellings* being used as STLs.
- STLs differ between urban and rural contexts. In Inverness, the majority of STLs are flats, whereas the majority of STLs in rural data zones are detached properties, or often unconventional accommodation (pods and chalets).
- The Average Adjusted STL Rate across all of Highland is currently around 5%, but at smaller scales, the rates are as high as 30%.
- Higher Adjusted STL Rates are more concentrated in Central Inverness, Loch Ness, Skye, Northwest Sutherland, Lochaber and Badenoch and Strathspey.
- In Inverness, the data zones with the highest Adjusted STL Rates are located in Inverness Muirtown (22.41%), Inverness Central, Raigmore and Longman (20.26%) and Inverness Crown and Haugh (18.18%).
- Just under 5% of all newbuilds completed across Highland in the past 5 years are now registered STLs, which ranges between 44-65 units per year, as shown in Table 8:18.
- Adjusted Rates of STL are continuing to increase in the majority of data zones (181 of 312). Skye & Lochalsh, North West Sutherland, Wester Ross, Lochaber

and Inverness Central are identified as areas where Adjusted STL Rates are High and continuing to grow faster than the Highland Average.

- Since the introduction of the Ward 20 Badenoch and Strathspey STLCA, all data zones within this ward have seen their Adjusted STL Rates decline or rise more slowly than the Highland average. This stalling or decline in the Adjusted STL Rates in Ward 20 is likely caused by the STLCA having a potential deterrent effect.

8.155 The Adjusted STL Rate of 5% across Highland differs from the figure of 3.5% presented for Highland in the Biggar Economics Impact of Short Term Lets Report published in 2024. The Council considers its own figures **(THC064)** to be more reflective given it's derivation from the STL Public Register, and current given the analysis is correct as of July 2025.

*Table 8:19 Rate of newbuild housing completions transferred to STL (5 Year Totals) (Source: Appendix 4 of **THC064**)*

Ward	Housing Completions	Became STLs	Rate
Aird and Loch Ness	332	19	5.7%
Badenoch and Strathspey	441	33	7.5%
Black Isle	199	7	3.5%
Caol and Mallaig	299	21	7.0%
Cromarty Firth	256	4	1.6%
Culloden and Ardersier	763	6	0.8%
Dingwall and Seaforth	252	1	0.4%
East Sutherland and Edderton	213	14	6.6%
Eilean a' Cheò (Skye)	387	60	15.5%
Fort William and Ardnamurchan	248	18	7.3%
Inverness Central	122	3	2.5%
Inverness Millburn	107	2	1.9%
Inverness Ness-side	623	3	0.5%
Inverness South	504	13	2.6%
Inverness West	295	12	4.1%
Nairn and Cawdor	185	7	3.8%
North, West and Central Sutherland	65	8	12.3%
Tain and Easter Ross	104	4	3.8%
Thurso and Northwest Caithness	51	4	7.8%
Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh	220	25	11.4%
Wick and East Caithness	124	11	8.9%
Highland	**5790**	**275**	**4.7%**

8.156 The Containment Analysis undertaken of sub-Highland Housing Market Areas as part of the ongoing HNDA, highlight areas with a high proportion of sales to those outwith the local areas, the Highlands, or indeed outwith Scotland. Five Housing Market Areas of Highland have relatively low levels of containment, revealing high levels of demand for housing from those outwith the local area. The Housing Market Areas with the lowest levels of containment have the highest proportion of STLs and second homes as shown in Table 8:19.

*Table 8:20 Rates of Short Term Lets, Second Homes and Containment of sub-Highland Housing Market Areas (**THC064**)*

Housing Market Area (HMA)	HMA Containment	Sales from Scotland, UK & Elsewhere	Second Homes	Short Term Lets
Badenoch & Strathspey	51%	49%	8%	10%
Caithness	77%	23%	1%	2%
East Ross	78%	22%	1%	2%
Inverness	81%	19%	1%	4%
Lochaber	61%	39%	4%	10%
Mid Ross	80%	20%	1%	2%
Nairn	67%	33%	2%	2%
Ross & Cromarty West	47%	53%	9%	12%
Skye & Lochalsh	45%	55%	6%	18%
Sutherland	48%	52%	7%	8%
Highland	**71%**	**29%**	**3%**	**5%**

8.157 While the Council considers it clear that high prevalence of external sales, second homes and short term lets are evident at housing market level across key areas of the authority, it is worth iterating that Highland's individual housing market areas are large, and an assessment of sales at data zone level using 5 year totals was undertaken as part of the HNDA to examine the impact on smaller communities, which presents a stark picture, with sales to external (non-Highland or Moray) purchasers exceeding Highland sales in 49 of Highland's 312 data zones.

8.158 While the implications of this analysis insofar as they relate to proposed housing policy are discussed in **Chapter 9: Housing**, it is acknowledged that further STLCAs may be proposed or in force by the time HLDP is adopted. **THC064** outlines the Council's internal policy for taking forward further STLCAs, which are first to be agreed for progression at Area Committee Level. The Area Committees that have sought to progress with the introduction for further STLCAs include:

- Lochaber,
- Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh,

- Skye and Raasay,
- Sutherland, and
- The City of Inverness.

8.159 The Council's Economy and Infrastructure (E&I) Committee are the responsible committee for authorising the further statutory stages in accordance with the Planning circular 1/2023: short-term lets and planning. E&I Committee in February 2026 agreed to commence the notification and consultation processes with two new STLCAs, one for a larger rural Highland STLCA, and one for Inverness City. This consultation is scheduled to conclude in June.

8.160 The Council's existing Short Term Let Control Area policy is non-statutory, relates to Ward 20 Badenoch and Strathspey, and is used alongside NPF4 Policy 30e. Bringing such a policy within the statutory development plan (HLDP) is recognised as a priority, and reviewing this to ensure the policy is applicable to urban and rural contexts which may potentially be beyond Ward 20 should further STLCA's be designated following the statutory process.

8.161 Where short term lets are concentrated in a single street or neighbourhood, there may be associated impacts on community cohesion as indicated within Research into the impact of short-term lets on communities across Scotland. There are, however, economic benefits associated with short term lets, and the Biggar Economics Impact of Short Term Lets in Scotland Report suggests that the economic impacts associated with STL use tend to be higher than those associated with residential use. The main driver of this is that visitors tend to spend more than residents, particularly in the hospitality sector. The Biggar Economics Impact of Short Term Lets in Scotland Report suggests that the impact of STLs is concentrated in Highland, with 23% of the total economic impact for STLs in Scotland, demonstrated within Highland specifically. This however conflicts with a separate Economic Impact of Residential and Short Term Let Properties in Edinburgh study commissioned by Edinburgh City Council, which found that there are positive economic impacts from the use of properties for both residential use and short term let use, but the gross value added (GVA) effects are greater for residential uses than short term lets across all property types and all areas in Edinburgh. Although it is noted that the employment effects are greater for short-term lets in most cases, however, although tourism jobs are valuable, they are not as valuable in GVA terms as other economic activity in the city.

Tourism sector employment

8.162 Tourism employed over 33,284 FTE jobs across all of Highland as of December 2024 according to the Council's commissioned Global Tourism Solutions STEAM Report **(THC069)**. This includes both direct and indirect employment as shown in Table 8:20.

Table 8:21 Sectoral Distribution of Highland Tourism Economic Impact and Employment in 2023 and 2024

	Economic Impact (£Bn)		Employment (FTEs)	
Sector	**2023**	**2024**	**2023**	**2024**
Accommodation	595.93	629.01	13,630	12,944
Food and Drink	270.52	264.16	3,783	3,695
Recreation	118.46	113.37	1,644	1,574
Shopping	329.19	332.19	4,421	4,462
Transport	433.55	435.09	5,198	5,217
Direct Revenue	1,747.65	1,773.82		
VAT	349.53	354.76		
Direct Employment			**28,676**	**27,892**
Indirect Employment			**5,342**	**5,392**
Direct Expenditure	**2,097.18**	**2,128.59**		
Indirect Expenditure	**482.72**	**487.14**		
Total	**2,579.90**	**2,615.73**	**34,018**	**33,284**

8.163 The economic impacts presented in Table 8:20 represent the most recently available evidence, but the pace of growth in this sector makes it challenging to use reflective figures for any length of time. The Highland Sustainable Tourism Strategy, published in 2024 reports the increased direct spend and employment from tourism in Highland from 2012 to 2023, estimating that tourism represents 17.8% of the Highland wide workforce, yet the estimates presented within this are lower than those within the Council's 2024 STEAM Report **(THC069)**. The Biggar Economics Impact of Short Term Lets in Scotland Report suggests that STL's specifically contribute £199.9m GVA and 6,786 jobs to the Highland economy. These figures are again lower than the Council's STEAM Report **(THC069)**. Much of the variation in these numbers is potentially due to the relatively recent ability to disaggregate where much of the non-serviced STL accommodation is situated, as The Regulatory Aspects of Short Term Rentals in the EU in-depth analysis requested by the HOUS Special Committee on the regulatory aspects of short-term rentals in the EU highlights that public authorities do not often have access to accurate, precise data about owners, locations and activity patterns of short term rentals in their territory. In Highland, the STL Public Register provides some recent conclusiveness on their spatial distribution, but the number of properties licensed for secondary letting in the Highland Council exceeds the number of non-serviced accommodation bed spaces in the Council's STEAM Report **(THC069)** meaning that even this could prove to be underestimating the non-serviced accommodation impacts despite being higher than comparable figures from other recent studies. It is in this fast-evolving context that the Council accepts that a highly considerable even if difficult to quantify economic contribution is made by the tourism sector, and particularly the non-serviced tourism accommodation sector, and STLs specifically. However, the Council considers that STLs (unlike other forms of serviced and non-serviced tourism accommodation) are not merely a service, they often occupy a housing unit that would previously have been used for and/or may be needed for long-term residential use. The growth of STLs is considered within The Regulatory Aspects of Short Term Rentals in the EU report to be "entangled with other dynamics that contribute to the crisis of housing affordability and accessibility in many European cities, towns and villages."

Culture and Creativity

Introduction

8.164 Culture and creativity are central to the identity, wellbeing, and prosperity of the Highlands. The area is internationally recognised for its rich cultural heritage, distinctive traditions, Gaelic language, and world-class natural and historic landscapes. These elements combine to shape a strong sense of place that is unique to the Highlands and highly valued by residents, communities, and visitors alike.

8.165 The Highlands' cultural assets range from ancient archaeological sites, castles, and historic towns to a thriving contemporary art scene, vibrant festivals, and grassroots community initiatives. Creativity is also expressed through music, literature, craft, design, and digital innovation, with the Highlands nurturing both traditional practice and emerging creative industries. This combination of heritage and innovation ensures culture remains a living, evolving part of Highland society.

Character of the Area

8.166 Inverness, known as the Capital of the Highlands is a city rich in culture and, in 2019, a study by the Centre for Cities ranked Inverness as the most culturally dense city in the UK outside of London. The ranking reflects the city's broad cultural offering from performing arts, to live music, virtual arts and heritage attractions such as Inverness Museum and Art gallery. The city also benefits from a strong creative industries base, including digital media, crafts and design. Festivals and events such as the Northern meeting, Inverness Film festival and the new Inverness Castle Experience further reinforce Inverness's role as a regional anchor for culture and creativity.

8.167 Beyond Inverness, the wider Highland region supports a dynamic network of cultural activity across its towns, villages, and islands. Community owned and artist led venues support the cultural and creative sector in remote areas. The creative use of community halls, heritage buildings, and outdoor landscapes further reflects the adaptability and resilience of cultural practice in the Highlands.

Gaelic Influence

8.168 Cultural life plays an important role in sustaining communities, particularly in rural and island areas where local traditions, storytelling, and events foster community cohesion and pride. Participation in culture and creative activity contributes to individual wellbeing, supports intergenerational connections, and strengthens community resilience.

8.169 Gaelic is a defining feature of Highland culture, central to the area's identity and international reputation. Its use in music, theatre, literature, and visual arts provides a living cultural link to the past, while also inspiring contemporary creative expression. Gaelic-medium education, festivals such as the Royal National Mod, and cultural organisations including Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. Cultarlann Inbhir Nis and Fèisean nan Gàidheal to name a few. Recognition of Gaelic within public life also serves as to enhance the profile of the Highlands, reinforcing its unique cultural assets within Scotland and internationally

8.170 The passing of the Scottish Languages Act, which received Royal Assent in July 2025, marks a significant milestone in the recognition and promotion of Scotland's linguistic heritage. The Act gives both Gaelic and Scots official status, and for the first time establishes statutory duties to address the needs of Gaelic speakers in the home, in schools, and early years settings, in workplaces, and across communities. This ensures that Gaelic is not only preserved but actively supported through practical measures that embed the language into daily life.

8.171 Among its provisions, the Act requires public bodies to plan for increased opportunities to access Gaelic-medium education, to support Gaelic use in community settings, and to improve visibility of Gaelic in the public sphere through signage, publications, and digital services. It also places emphasis on enabling Gaelic in the workplace, creating fairer access to services for Gaelic speakers, and fostering opportunities for learning and use of both Gaelic and Scots.

8.172 Highland Council has already established a number of mechanisms to promote and sustain Gaelic, providing a strong foundation from which to meet these new duties. Highland's Gaelic Language Plan 2024-2029 sets out the strategic direction for Gaelic across a five-year period and demonstrates a continued commitment to supporting national objectives for the language. Oversight of this work is provided by the Council's dedicated Gaelic Committee (Comàtaidh na Gaidhlig), which is tasked with promoting Gaelic culture, monitoring delivery, and guiding the Council's response to emerging legislative requirements. The Council has also drawn on 2022 census data, including encouraging growth in Gaelic speakers from 87,000 recorded in 2011 to 130,000 in 2022, to inform its approach and prepare for the designation of Areas of Linguistic Significance envisaged by the Act.

8.173 Highland's record in delivering Gaelic Medium Education provides a further example of long-term investment, with purpose-built facilities established in

Inverness, Lochaber, and Portree, alongside a wider programme of early years and primary provision. Visibility of Gaelic across the public realm has been strengthened through collaboration with Ainmean-Aite na h-Alba to ensure consistent bilingual signage, while investment secured through the Gaelic Language Act Implementation Fund has supported early years initiatives, adult learning opportunities, and community-based activities. Together these measures demonstrate that Highland Council has already embedded Gaelic within its governance and service delivery, aligning local action with national priorities.

8.174 In preparation of the plan, consideration will be given both to the statutory duties and Highland's established structures for Gaelic promotion and support. Relevant policy areas will integrate the requirements to strengthen Gaelic use and visibility, with particular attention to education, community development, service provision, and cultural infrastructure. By building on excising commitments, that plan will contribute to the national objective of consolidating Gaelic as a living language, while supporting inclusive and resilient communities across the Highlands.

Positive impacts of the industry

8.175 The culture and creativity sector is a vital contributor to the economic, social and cultural wellbeing of the Highland area and while specific Highlands GVA data isn't detailed it contributes to the growing part of Scotland's £5.7bn creative economy. Although figures for the Highlands alone are more limited, regional research by Highlands and Islands Enterprise demonstrates the sectors strong presence within the Highlands economy, supporting thousands of jobs and a market value measured in the hundreds of millions of pounds, with many microbusinesses, sole traders and freelancers across disciplines contributing to the regions economic fabric.

8.176 Beyond direct sector contributions, creative and cultural activity generates wider economic and social multipliers. Cultural events and festivals in Scotland are well-regarded for drawing visitors, stimulating hospitality and retail spending, and adding to the attractiveness of locations and destinations for both residents and tourists. This effect feeds directly into local economies that might otherwise experience seasonal fluctuations in activity.

8.177 The creative sector also plays an important role in fostering innovation and skills development. Creative practices continue to evolve in response to future economic and technological change, with creative activity increasingly embedded within digital, design led and entrepreneurial practices. Evidence from Highlands and Islands Enterprise indicates that 85% of employers across Scotland report a growing need for creative skills to support innovation, highlighting the importance of the creative sector in equipping the wider workforce with adaptable, transferable and future-focused skills.

Employment and Investment

8.178 The total employment figure for Scotland in the arts, entertainment and recreation is 71,000. Within Highland, the total employment figure is 4,000 making up 5.63% of the Scottish total (NOMIS 2025).

8.179 In January 2025, Creative Scotland has announced the largest portfolio of cultural organisations ever to be supported on a multi-year basis with more than £200m in support to be provided to 251 organisations over the next three years, covering the period 2025-2028. In Highland, 13 cultural and creative organisations have acquired multi-year funding spanning some £10.3m. Five of these organisations were new to multi-year funding. The successful benefactors of this funding are diverse ranging from music to visual arts, literature and multi-disciplinary artforms, but are also diverse in the operational delivery of their output. Some organisations are strongly centred around provision in a fixed location such as Eden Court, Moniack Mhor, or and the Lyth Arts Centre; while others encompass peripatetic community and/or youth engagement provision such as the Fèis movement which include Fèisean Nan Gàidheal Fèis Rois Ltd. HLDP shall be cognisant of the investment made within these organisations to support growth and jobs within the sector.

Highland Offering

8.180 The closure of the Ironworks Venue in Inverness in early 2023 has left a significant gap in the cultural infrastructure of the Highlands. For over 15 years, the Ironworks operated as the region's leading purpose-built live music venue, hosting local, national and international performers. Opened in 2006, it quickly established itself as a focal point for the Highland music scene, offering professional setting for touring artists while also providing opportunities for emerging local talent to perform to larger audiences.

8.181 The Ironworks played a vital role in shaping the cultural identity of Inverness and the wider Highland area. It regularly drew audiences from across the region, boosting the nighttime economy and contributing to Inverness's reputation as a cultural hub. The venue was instrumental in supporting the development of the Highland Music industry, providing employment opportunities, and fostering a vibrant creative community. Its flexible space was also used for community events, festivals, and gatherings extending its influence beyond live music alone.

8.182 With its closure, there is now a recognised gap in provision for live music and cultural events of scale within the Highlands. While smaller venues and community have, and festival infrastructure continue to play an important role, none fully replace the capacity, technical specification and reputation of the Ironworks. This has led to concern among artists, audiences, and cultural organisations about the long-term sustainability of live music in the region.

8.183 NPF4 Policy 31 makes clear that planning does not support the loss of valued cultural venues unless it can be demonstrated that the use is no longer viable and that no suitable alternative community, cultural or creative use can be found. The closure of the Ironworks underlines the importance of this policy principle and highlights the risks to cultural provision when such facilities are lost without replacement.

8.184 In preparation of the plan, Highland will reflect the requirements of Policy 31 by seeking to safeguard existing cultural infrastructure, resisting the loss of venues where possible, and supporting proposals that bring forward new or replacement facilities. The plan will encourage adaptive reuse of existing spaces for cultural purposes, explore opportunities for dedicated live music provision, and recognise the contribution of cultural venues for both the creative economy and community wellbeing. Highland will therefore seek to safeguard all culture venues, regardless of size, recognising their collective importance to the cultural fabric, identity, and creative life of the region.

8.185 Highland is home to a number of larger cultural venues that operate at a regional scale and play an important role in delivering arts, performance, film and creative activity. These venues provide access to a breadth and quality of cultural experiences that would otherwise be limited in a largely rural and geographically dispersed region. They contribute significantly to cultural participation, creative development and the wider economy.

8.186 Eden Court in Inverness is the most prominent of these venues and is recognised as one of Scotland's leading cultural centres outside the major cities. It provides year-round programmes of theatre, dance, music, comedy and film. Alongside exhibition space for visual arts and a wide range of participatory and educational activity. Eden Court supports professional and emerging artists, offers opportunities for skills development, and delivers outreach and engagement programmes that extend its reach beyond Inverness to communities across Highland. The venue acts as a cultural focal point for the region, attracting audiences from a wide geographic area and contributing to the vitality of Inverness as a regional centre.

8.187 Other larger venues across Highland also play an important role in supporting cultural activity at scale. These include theatres, art centres and performance spaces in key settlements that host touring productions, local performances, film screenings and festivals. Together, these venues provide essential infrastructure for the delivery of such cultural events, support local creative practitioners and enable communities to engage with a diverse range of artistic and cultural experiences.

8.188 The contribution of these venues extends to support education and lifelong learning through workshops, youth performances and community projects and offer a supporting role in Highland's tourism industry and local economies. Scotland's Creative Learning Plan recognises that cultural organisations play an active role in providing secondary education and training for creative subjects, particularly where local schools cannot offer them. This is known to occur at Eden Court through a programme of outreach and engagement. Safeguarding creative and cultural assets is therefore important in the context of supporting wider provision of education.

8.189 Smaller venues form the foundation of the Highland music ecosystem, offering essential opportunities for emerging artists to perform, and build audiences. They also enable touring acts to reach rural audiences, contributing to cultural equality and inclusion across the region. Many are supported by volunteer effort, local fundraising and community ownership.

Table 8:22 Selection of smaller Cultural Venues in Highland

Venue	Genre/Live Music Offer	Key Relevance Notes	Owned/ Run By
Strathpeffer Pavilion	Hosts bands, touring acts, ceilidh	a very good example of a rural village setting with venue capacity for bands/live acts.	Community Trust
Applecross Hall	Live music events, folk, ceilidh, etc	Demonstrates a very remote venue staging bands/events	Local residents as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated organisation (SCIO)
Rosehall Village Hall	Part of the Highland halls tour hosting live concerts bands and traditional music.	Network of village halls across Highland used for live music	Community Run
Coigach Community Hall	Live concerts by folk and rock musicians	Demonstrates very remote locations can have capacity for live band/music venues.	Community Run
Knoydart Community Hall	Shortlisted as a significant music venue	Extreme remote venue, showing live music in off grid settings.	Local residents as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated organisation (SCIO)

8.190 Music festivals such as Belladrum Tartan Heart Festival, The Gathering, Black Isle Calling, and Skye Live reinforce the economic and social impact of live music activity. These festivals attract both local and national audiences, promote the Highlands' creative identity, and support local businesses through tourism and event related spending.

8.191 Highlands distinct network of museums and galleries play a vital role in sustaining cultural identity, supporting communities, and contributes to the local economy. The range from nationally significant institutions to small community run venues. Collectively they interpret Highland's archaeology, clan histories, Gaelic language and culture, crofting and land use, maritime heritage, industrial and military history, and the regions recognised landscapes and biodiversity. Many also provide contemporary artistic and creative spaces, showcasing local, national and international artist and supporting creative practice in rural and island contexts. A questionnaire was issued to museums and galleries across Highland area to improve understating of how these facilities operate and how they serve their local communities. Although the response rate was relatively low, the responses received provided a valuable insight into day – to – day operation of these facilities, their role in supporting community and visitor access to culture, and their future aspirations and needs. This information has helped to identify common challenges and opportunities and underpins the LDP requirement to safeguard these valuable facilities for future generations.

8.192 Highland also benefits from an extensive and well distributed public library network, comprising of 63 libraries across the Highland Council region, alongside mobile and outreach services. This network is fundamental to cultural life in a region characterised by it large scale geography, dispersed settlements and rural and island communities. In many remote communities, libraries are one of the few publicly accessible indoor civic spaces, making them especially important for social inclusion and community resilience. Beyond their traditional role, Highland libraries function as a multi-purpose cultural and community hubs. They host exhibitions, author talks, Gaelic language activities, local history and archive access and children's programmes. Libraries also make a significant contribution by tackling digital exclusion providing access to computers, Wi-Fi and digital support which is particularly important in areas with limited connectivity or for residents who may otherwise face barriers to online services.

8.193 Libraries also contribute to wider policy objectives, including health and wellbeing, equality community empowerment and sustainable development. By offering sage and welcoming spaces that are free at the point of use, they help reduce social isolation, support mental wellbeing and enable cultural participation.

8.194 There are over 300 community halls in Highland which are typically multi-functional and adaptable spaces. In many settlements the community hall is the primary, or only, public indoor space available for gatherings, events and creative activity. As such, these buildings play a critical role in supporting social cohesion reducing isolation and strengthening community identity and resilience. They are often managed by local voluntary committees or community trusts, reinforcing local ownership and stewardship. These community halls also play a role in economic resilience, supporting music and cultural events, tourism activity, local producers and creative practitioners. A similar questionnaire to that issued to museums and galleries was also distributed to community halls across Highland area. While the response rate was again relatively low, the responses received clearly demonstrated the extensive, varied and highly significant role that community halls play in supporting residents. Their value extends beyond what can be easily quantified, providing essential spaces for cultural activity, social interaction, learning, wellbeing and community resilience. The evidence highlights that the communities these facilities serve would be markedly less vibrant and resilient without them. It is therefore clear that the future LDP must safeguard these vital facilities and, where possible, support their ongoing use and long-term sustainability.

8.195 Museums and galleries, libraries and community halls together form part of the core of Highland's cultural infrastructure. While differing in scale, governance and function, these assets share a common role in supporting cultural participation, creative activity, community wellbeing and place-based identity across a predominantly rural and dispersed region. Their collective importance is amplified by Highland's geography, where across to culture is often dependent on locally based multi-functional facilities rather than large, centralised venues.

8.196 In line with NPF4 Policy 31 these facilities contribute directly to the protection, enhancement and delivery of cultural assets and creative spaces. They support inclusive access to culture and enable community led activity, safeguard heritage and local identity and provide adaptable spaces that respond to changing social economic and environmental needs. Importantly, these also contribute to wider NPF4 policy outcomes including resilient communities, health and wellbeing, rural sustainability and low carbon-living.

Future Highland

8.197 The creative sector in the Highlands faces pressing threats that put at risk both livelihoods and the cultural assets which define the region. Industry press has warned that persistent funding pressures, fragile business models for freelance business, and the slow pace of strategic investment combine to erode capacity across performing, music, screen and community arts sectors. These resources have been amplified by rising costs and post-pandemic instability, prompting calls for targeted interventions. A recent article by Fay Young highlights that the cumulative effect sustained by budgetary squeeze and policy drift on Scotland's creative economy and argues that without decisive investment and structural support the sectors ability to generate social, cultural and economic returns will be diminished.

8.198 Looking ahead, the Highlands has potential to build a more resilient and confident cultural and creative economy if future investment and strategic coordination are sustained. The emerging Regional Economic Strategy led by the Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Partnership (HIREP) sets out ambitions for inclusive growth, improved connectivity, skills development and place-based investment over the next decade. These priorities align closely with the needs of the creative sector and provide a framework within which culture and creativity can contribute to wider regional objectives, including population retention, wellbeing and the attractiveness of places to live and work. Beyond the HIREP, national strategy for culture, digital creativity, tourism and community wealth building also points toward opportunities for creative businesses and practitioners to play a greater role in regional development, particularly through collaboration with sectors such as tourism, renewable energy, education and heritage.

8.199 The LDP will provide a supportive and proportionate foundation by recognising the importance of culture and creativity to sustainable development by enabling cultural activity. This includes supporting flexible use of existing buildings, encouraging the reuse of underutilised spaces, protecting key cultural assets and ensuring development and infrastructure can accommodate creative and cultural activity where appropriate.

Minerals

8.200 LDPs should support a landbank of construction aggregates of at least 10-years at all times in the relevant market areas, whilst promoting sustainable resource management, safeguarding important workable mineral resources, which are of economic or conservation value, and take steps to ensure these are not sterilised by other types of development.

Highland-wide Local Development Plan 2012 (HwLDP)

8.201 The HwLDP published in 2012 sets out how the Council will support the following areas for mineral extraction: extension of an existing operation / site, re-opening of a dormant quarry, a reserve underlying a proposed development where it would be desirable to extract prior to development. In 2016, a main issues report was published for the HwLDP where existing mineral policies (HwLDP Policy 53 and 54) were reviewed for their effectiveness at supporting the local economy and infrastructure requirements for the region. That HwLDP review was subsequently not progressed to Proposed Plan stage but aborted in light of then forthcoming changes to the development planning system. However, one of the key considerations was to undertake a mineral audit to highlight the supply of reserves across existing sites and help to identify local market areas and suitable locations for borrow pits. Whilst a mineral audit was undertaken in 2016, results were never sufficiently analysed to inform the Council of potential market areas and the existing aggregate landbank at the time. Hence, a 2025 mineral audit was undertaken to help fill this gap and determine where quarries are located, what aggregate they primarily extract and how much they produce on an annual basis. A Map of Highland Quarries illustrates the distribution of known quarries across the authority, with some also in the CNPA.

Highland Geology

8.202 The BGS Geoindex Mapping provides layers that identify the underlying geology of the Highlands. The layer used in this instance were ‘bedrock geology 1:625,000’. The supply of sand (old red sandstone) is primarily located in the East of the Highlands, including almost all of Caithness, the Black Isle and Inverness and Nairnshire. The central spine of Highland consists of various rock types, such as psammite, igneous felsic and metamorphic pelite rock. This ‘central spine’ refers to Sutherland to Lochaber, incorporating areas such as Glen Affric and Glenmoriston. Much of north-west Highland and Skye is also various rock formations consolidated over millions of years, however there is also a large area of sandstone referred to as the Torridon Group. On the southern side of the Great Glen Fault Line, much of the underlying geology belongs to the Grampian Group, which is psammite and semipelite rock.

8.203 Whilst there is an abundance of rock and sand/gravel aggregate that could theoretically be worked, a number of constraining factors – particularly environmental designations – across the Highlands limit the potential for mineral extraction. For example, The Flow Country World Heritage Site covers a large area of the North Highlands across Sutherland and Caithness and is protected for its globally significant peat quantity that allows for considerable carbon sequestration. There are also many SSSI’s, SPA’s, SLA’s, WLA’s, NSAs and Geological Conservation Review sites in the region that are each protected for their particular environmental characteristics as detailed in **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**.

Aggregate Minerals Survey (AMS) 2023

8.204 Published on the 6th August 2025 by The British Geological Survey (BGS), the Aggregate Minerals Survey (AMS) provides an in-depth and up-to-date understanding of national and sub-national sales, inter-regional flows, transportation, consumption and permitted reserves of primary aggregates. The survey aims to provide comprehensive data for monitoring and facilitating aggregates provision at a local, regional and national level. The findings of the surveys can inform the development of minerals policy in respect to the production, movement and consumption of aggregates.

8.205 In Scotland, 46% of active sites responded to the survey. Constraints on the overall responses to surveys were confidentiality concerns and unallocated sales of unknown destination. General results revealed a 4% increase in the total sales of primary aggregates in Scotland from 2019 to 2023 (20.8Mt to 21.7Mt), albeit a decrease in Highland's total sales of primary aggregates as shown in Figure 8:1. Despite this slight decrease, Highland maintains its status as the largest producing region in Scotland at 6.3Mt, equivalent to 29% of total primary land-won aggregates sales in Scotland. Highland therefore plays a pivotal role in the overall sales of primary aggregates in Scotland, largely due to the Glensanda super quarry in Ardgour.

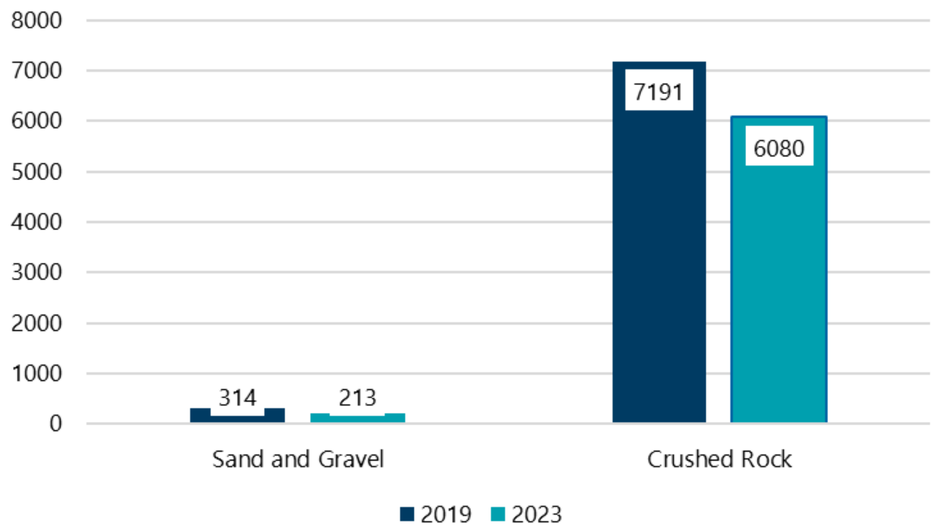

Figure 8:3 Comparison of sales of primary aggregates in 2019 and 2023 - Highland (Thousand tonnes) Sourced from AMS 2023

8.206 Figure 8:2 indicates that Highland's total sales of both sand and gravel and crushed rock has decreased by 16% over the last four years. Whilst there is no definitive explanation provided for this within the AMS report, it could be suggested that the effects of the COVID19 pandemic on the global economy is a contributary factor.

8.207 While Highlands' overall contribution to nation-wide sales is high (29%), consumption rates are far lower. Only 4.8% of Scotland's overall primary aggregates consumption is within Highland; the majority of aggregates extracted in Highland are exported outside the region with 7% of sand and gravel exported and 93% of crushed rock exported. The primary locations for the sales of crushed rock from Highland are England (53%) and Europe (545%), whilst exported sand and gravel predominantly reaches Argyll and Bute. Of the 743,000 tonnes of consumed aggregates, 535,000 are crushed rock and 208,000 are sand and gravel. Crushed rock aggregate minerals are primarily limestone, igneous rock and sandstone whilst the sand and gravel is all land-won minerals.

Table 8:23 Highland Aggregate Exports by Destination (thousand tonnes) (Source AMS 2023)

	Sand and Gravel		Crushed Rock	
Argyll and Bute	13	93%	20	0.4%
Ayshire	-	-	-	-
Western Isles	-	-	-	-
Dumfries and Galloway	-	-	-	-
East Central Scotland	-	-	28	0.5%
Forth Valley	-	-	-	-
North East Scotland	-	-	1	0.02%
Orkney & Shetland Islands	-	-	-	-
Tay Area	-	-	6	0.1%
West Central Scotland	-	-	60	1.1%
England	-	-	2994	53%
Wales	-	-	-	-
Outside GB	1	7%	2536	45%
Total	**14**	**100%**	**5645**	**100%**

Table 8:24 Highland and Scotland Balance of Primary Aggregates (Thousand tonnes) AMS 2023

Sand and Gravel	Sales	Exports	Imports	Consumption*
Highland	213	14 (7%)	9	208 (93%)
Scotland	4089	1323 (33%)	1296	4055 (67%)
Crushed Rock	**Sales**	**Exports**	**Imports**	**Consumption***
Highland	6080	5645 (93%)	101	535 (7%)
Scotland	17625	9228 (53%)	3073	11397 (47%)

**Sales – Exports + Imports = Consumption*

8.208 As evidenced in Table 8:23 Highland exports a significantly higher quantity of crushed rock (5,645Mt) than sand and gravel (14Mt), approximately 400 times as much. Sand and gravel is primarily extracted in the east coastal area of Highland in the Inner Moray Firth area, whereas hard rock extraction takes place in all sub-areas of the region, and as stated previously, is extracted on a large scale at Glensanda, located in Ardgour off of Loch Linnhe. Therefore, a large share of crushed rock exports in Scotland are from Highland.

8.209 The rates of aggregate consumption in Highland are lower than other authorities across Scotland. It is expected that the rates of consumption in Highland will significantly increase given the infrastructure required to facilitate projects around the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport (ICFGF), in addition to tackling the housing challenge declared across Highland. Major transport projects such as the dualling of the A9 and proposed improvements to the A96 will also require a steady supply of aggregates to facilitate their development.

8.210 Overall, there is limited importation of crushed rock aggregates into Highland, likely due to the supply that is already accessible through multiple quarries across the region. The AMS 2023 indicates that the majority of aggregates imported to Highland come from Moray and Aberdeenshire from North-East Scotland, all of which is crushed rock.

8.211 The majority of crushed rock sales are out with Scotland, predominantly from Glensanda where materials are transported by water to England and Outside GB. The specific locations outside GB have not been revealed within the AMS 2023, nor have the specific locations within England. A very small percentage of sales are within Scotland in areas such as West and East Central Scotland.

8.212 The primary major end use of aggregates in Highland are 'other screened and graded aggregates, accounting for 68% of the total figure for Highland as shown in Figure 8:3.

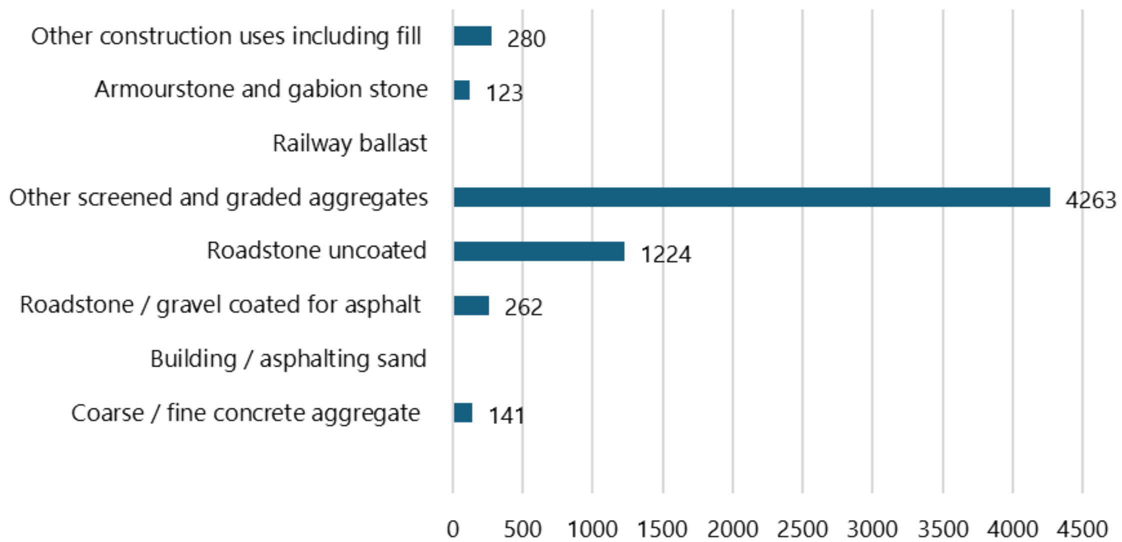

Figure 8:4 Summary of sales of primary aggregates (sand and gravel and crushed rock) by major end use in Highland (thousand tonnes) AMS 2023

8.213 While next to no sand and gravel is transported by water, the vast majority (5,624 thousand tonnes) of crushed rock is transported from Glensanda to England and Outside GB by water. Rail is not utilized in Highland as a method of transporting aggregates, however sizeable quantities of both sand and gravel and rock are transported along roads.

Table 8:25 Permitted Reserves of land-won primary aggregates in active and inactive sites at 31 December 2023 - Highland (Thousand tonnes) (AMS 2023)

	Sand and Gravel	Years supply	Crushed Rock	Years supply
Active Sites	1404	6.5	722,144	130.1
Inactive Sites	2480	11.7	968	0.2
Total	3884	18.2	723,112	130.3

8.214 Using consumption rates from the AMS 2023 survey and the general figures illustrated in Table 8:23, calculations were made to determine the estimated year's supply of sand and gravel and crushed rock as shown in Table 8:24.

8.215 While there is no immediate risk of crushed rock permitted reserves becoming depleted in the Highlands, the sand and gravel resource is dwindling and must be addressed through potentially identifying new sites for extraction as well as promoting the extension of sites where environmental factors are well considered and any potential impacts are mitigated. Geological mapping demonstrates that there are available resources within Highland to facilitate development, although consideration will have to be given with regards to conflicting land development requirements such as the provision of housing and industrial infrastructure.

Borrow Pits

8.216 A review of The Highland Council's planning applications for minerals extraction and borrow pits **(THC062)** in the last 10 years identified a total of 178 applications for the formation / extension of a borrow pit across the region, and 74 of these were approved by either The Council, CNPA or The Scottish Government when part of a proposal designated as a National Development. While these would benefit from further spatial disaggregation, the majority of these borrow pits were proposed to support the construction process for wind farms and the ancillary infrastructure required to facilitate the overall development on site. Therefore, most of these borrow pits were worked on a temporary basis for an exclusive development, and hence it is difficult to determine how many current borrow pits may be operational across Highland, and whether their purpose extends beyond supporting development needs within the renewable sector.

Establishing a Market Area

8.217 Unlike other aggregate market areas in Scotland, the distribution of aggregates from Highland is an anomaly in that the majority of the aggregate market is outside Scotland, predominantly England and Outside GB entirely. Therefore, there is not a currently observed trend within Highland for the transportation of aggregates to a particular area, however the variety of infrastructure development scheduled to progress within the Inner Moray Firth area means the provision of aggregate resources will need to be sufficient and readily available from local operators across Inverness, Nairnshire, Easter Ross etc.

Highland Council and Cairngorms National Park Authority Minerals Audit

8.218 The Minerals Audit **(THC063)** received responses for 12 sites; there were 35 sites identified by the Council across Highland, so this therefore represents a response rate of 34%. Some of these sites fall within the Highland Council part of the Cairngorms National Park Authority area, and hence we decided to take a collaborative approach to this exercise. Responses were received from widely dispersed locations, and for the purpose of confidentiality specific locational trends cannot be disclosed as this may reveal individual operator information which may be commercially confidential/sensitive.

8.219 From the quarry locations initially identified, a large percentage were based in the east side of the region, either within close proximity to Inverness or across Caithness / Sutherland. Whilst there is technically, potential for the extraction of minerals across the majority of Highland, physical and environmental features, as mentioned within the geology section, constrain the potential for aggregate extraction. Hence the general trend for quarries in Highland is that they are located alongside major road networks and nearby settlement development areas where employees are likely based. Land ownership and proximity to likely markets are additional factors that influence the location of quarries in Highland.

8.220 The questionnaire included a total of 9 questions, the last of which was deliberately open-ended to allow operators to provide additional comments if desired.

*Table 8:26 Permitted Reserves of land-won primary aggregates in sites on 31st July 2025 - Highland (Thousand tonnes) (Highland Minerals Audit **THC063**)*

	Sand and Gravel	Years supply	Crushed Rock	Years supply
2024 Aggregate Output	331,947	10.6	474,313	43.4
Average Output 2020-2024	291,196	12.1	529,143	38.9
Estimated Consented Reserves	3,530,000		20,596,000	

8.221 In alignment with the general trends of the AMS 2023, results have identified a greater reserve of crushed rock in Highland. It may be noted that there was no return from Glensanda; such a return would have undoubtedly added substantially to the overall crushed rock statistics but given that Glensanda is focussed on exporting to out with Highland then the returns received from other quarries provide more of a focus on understanding the supply to meet Highland's own end use needs. In addition to receiving qualitative information, we also received general comments from some operators. There has been interest from operators to extend their sites in response to increased demand for aggregates in Highland. Information was also provided on the wider distribution of sales from quarry locations in the region. Responses demonstrated that small quantities are transported from Highland to various other local authorities such as Angus, Moray, Stirling, Argyll and Dumfries & Galloway etc.

8.222 A key takeaway from both the findings of the audit and the results of the AMS is that, in the mid to long-term future the Council must ensure there are opportunities to extract sand and gravel, particularly within a reasonable proximity of projected development clusters where resources will dwindle quickly to facilitate a demand for new infrastructure. Crushed rock on the other hand is abundant within Highland, and current rates of extractions shouldn't impose any resource constraints for the foreseeable. The underlying geology of Highland identifies that both these aggregates are available, however sites must be strategically placed and justified against alternative forms of development with proper remediation and environmentally conscious practises in place, as reflected within the implications section.

Summary of Stakeholder Engagement

8.223 A full breakdown of all stakeholder engagement undertaken to support the Evidence Report is provided within the Log of Engagement **(THC001)**. A summary of the key stakeholder engagement activities undertaken for this chapter are presented below.

Stakeholders and Key Agencies

8.224 All meetings and engagement exercises with stakeholders and key agencies are detailed within the Log of Engagement **(THC001)**. Prior to the drafting of the HLDP Evidence Report an early engagement exercise HLDP Evidence Consultation was undertaken from 31st Jan – 2nd May 2025. Responses to the HLDP Evidence Consultation (including from key agencies) are included in **(THC006)**. Drafts of the evidence presented in this chapter were then circulated to key agencies, listed below, and a range of other stakeholders, not listed, on 30 January 2026:

- SEPA
- Scottish Water
- NatureScot
- Historic Environment Scotland
- Highlands and Islands Enterprise
- HITRANS
- NHS Highland
- Crofting Commission
- Transport Scotland
- SportScotland

- Business Improvement Districts (Fort William, Dornoch, Loch Ness, Inverness, Nairn)
- ICFGF
- SSEN-T, SSEN-D
- NRS Dounreay
- Chambers of Commerce (Caithness, Lochaber, Inverness)
- Minerals Operators, Quarry Operators/Agents

8.225 A summary of feedback received is presented below:

8.226 SEPA **(THC089)** had no comments to add for this chapter. NatureScot **(THC088)** responded with one comment which suggested that along with the other protected areas noted, we advise that it would be relevant to refer to Geological Conservation Review (GCR) sites in the Minerals section 8.201, under 'Highland Geology.' The Council have noted this and added this reference.

Homes for Scotland (THC090)	
Main views raised	Recognise work undertaken to identify Fragile Areas/Areas for Resettlement and 'Repopulation Zones' such as NW Sutherland. Any repopulation requires both public buy-in and a range of local jobs to make any area attractive to live in. Whilst focus for new housing will be around the ICFGF, there will be a need for appropriate number of new homes in other settlements and rural areas to both attract people to those areas and help sustain local services, such as schools and retail provision. Welcome recognition of the social and economic benefits of home building and reference to the HFS report detailing this.
Council's response	The Council welcome this response and will remain aware of points raised throughout the site selection stage of HLDP.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, Homes for Scotland are content with this evidence chapter.
Proposed plan implications	No implications have arisen from these comments.
Actions for proposed plan stage	The Council will remain aware of points raised throughout the site selection stage of HLDP.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise - HIE (THC090)	
Main views raised	***Resettlement Opportunities*** HIE welcomes the Council's exploration of opportunities for resettlement in remote rural areas, with a focus on small-scale housing projects aligned with an infrastructure-first approach. This work is urgent, as delays risk missed housing opportunities, particularly community-led projects. While infrastructure provision will remain challenging in some remote areas, support may be required for projects where only sub-optimal infrastructure is available, or can be delivered. ***Fragile Areas*** HIE notes that the Council recognises that a community's fragility is influenced by changing demographic, economic and geographic factors, and welcomes that the framework for fragile areas will be dynamic and updated annually to reflect evolving indicators. Definitions and timing of updates will be crucial so that implementation of policies can be alive to changes.
Council's response	The Council welcome this response and will remain aware of points raised.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, HIE are content with this evidence chapter.
Proposed plan implications	No implications have arisen from these comments.
Actions for proposed plan stage	The Council will remain aware of points raised throughout the HLDP.

Summary of Local Place Plan Priorities

8.227 Ardgour Local Place Plan **(THC010)** has identified the following priorities relating to Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places:

- Reduce impact of tourism on housing through higher taxation of second homes, and legal provisions against transformation of existing homes to full-time holiday lets.
- Vending machines, and other opportunities to sell local products to visitor, and signage to orientate them better.
- Create website to showcase heritage & culture & promote everyday Gaelic.

8.228 Black Isle Local Place Plan (**THC011**) has identified the following priorities relating to Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places:

- Improve & deliver current active mobility plans considered essential to achieve rural 20min neighbourhoods & to encourage slower kind of tourism that better benefit the local economy.
- Create local, year-long businesses to help community in shoulder season.
- Investigate a Black Isle heritage/cultural centre that could equally be dispersed as a network of local centres in each village.

8.229 Broadford and Strath Local Place Plan (**THC012**) has identified the following priorities relating to Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places:

- Add signage to better direct tourist flows to attractions and footpaths.
- Increase ranger presence to signpost campers to local facilities and regulate anti-social behaviours.
- Limit expansion of STL onto crofting land and ensure a share of STLs are dedicated to seasonal workers.
- Better inter-villages connection through safer active mobility.
- Higher focus on activity-based tourism as an investment to capture tourism capitals and fight depopulation.
- Explore potential for heritage trail or 'Eco- Museum'.
- Protect Gaelic place names and explore ways to promote and support this.

8.230 Caol Local Place Plan (**THC024**) has identified the following priorities relating to Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places:

- Add noticeboards around village walkways of history e.g. Shorefront/ Canal.
- Promote Room 13. Ensure people know about creative facilities

8.231 Croy and Tornagrain Local Place Plan (**THC026**) has identified the following priorities relating to Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places:

- Identify possible groups interested in documenting & providing signage to encourage visitors at locally important sites.
- Need more effective public transport for locals and visitors.
- Lack of affordable homes means some businesses struggle to recruit.
- Insufficient space to work and inadequate resources, services, infrastructure for new employees to become established in the area.
- Cultural heritage needs safeguarding.

8.232 Dores and Essich Local Place Plan (**THC013**) has identified the following priorities relating to Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places:

- Improve cycling network & infrastructure provision were identified as a crucial avenue for tourism expansion.

- Providing additional parking spots as tourist flows currently clog existing facilities of hospitality businesses and hurts their revenue.
- Police is too absent to regulate anti-social behaviour, rangers seen as a good alternative for the most common misdemeanour.
- Aldourie Castle Estate and former Dores Parish Church Cemetery & War Memorial, important architectural heritage.

8.233 Duror and Kentallen Local Place Plan **(THC014)** has identified the following priorities relating to Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places:

- Reducing the negative externalities of tourism through better signage about the significance of local places (cemetery, woodland).
- Development of active mobility infrastructure to serve both locals and tourists.
- Opportunities to create a heritage centre and add more historical plaques.

8.234 Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Local Place Plan **(THC022)** has identified the following priorities relating to Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places:

- A comprehensive review of visitor management is needed. Including better visitor signage, information and heritage interpretation.

8.235 Gairloch Local Place Plan **(THC015)** has identified the following priorities relating to Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places

- Develop a shared area for local practical trades and small businesses
- Develop tourism infrastructure such as campervan and motorhome facilities
- Experiment implementation of a bike hire facility, mostly oriented to tourists.
- Better control the expansion of the STL market to keep an adequate housing stock for local young population.
- To improve communications infrastructure to stimulate employment and remote work in the area.
- Install information boards advertising local businesses and services.
- Encourage businesses to remain open throughout winter.
- Conservation and interpretation of heritage should be a key part of improving tourism's positive impact on the local community. The canal should obviously be the focal point, but many more others: history, culture, leisure activities, scenery and nature.

8.236 Garve and District Local Place Plan **(THC016)** has identified the following priorities relating to Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places:

- Redevelopment of former Garve hotel site to stimulate employment,
- Tourism infrastructure needed such as campervan waste disposal,
- Improved economic landscape, job opportunities and services.
- Better collaborate with HES to develop local churches as places of tourism.

8.237 Golspie Local Place Plan **(THC021)** has identified the following priorities relating to Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places:

- Encourage young families to stay/come through improved ICT and public transport connections.
- Move economy away from tourism to have more long-term job opportunities,
- Improve core paths and cycling infrastructure.
- Create a village hub that includes a community café, supermarket, laundrette and cycle hire.
- Add new interpretation signage and heritage path network, opportunity for heritage centre.

8.238 Kinlochleven Local Place Plan **(THC017)** has identified the following priorities relating to Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places:

- Developing the business base of the area, and reopening landmark businesses (i.e. ice climbing centre).
- Focus of both businesses and education on activity-based tourism to make the village into a regional landmark in the matter.
- Reuse Aluminium Story as a hub for community arts, crafts, heritage and visitor information.

8.239 Lochalsh Local Place Plan **(THC018)** has identified the following priorities relating to Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places:

- More traffic calming measures.
- Better walking amenities to channel Eilean Donnan visitors to the village.

8.240 Nairnshire Local Place Plan **(THC023)** has identified the following priorities relating to Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places:

- The Nairn Museum is currently housed within Viewfield House. The museum's position as custodian of Nairnshire's heritage and history should be strengthened, by integrating it with wider cultural activity.
- Alternative uses for Viewfield House include relocation of museum to the Court House, repurposing the building and space for a green space-led regeneration, events and alternative evening economy, emphasis on attracting young people.
- The activities of the Wasps centre should be incorporated into future cultural development planning for Nairnshire.
- Focusing on creating the space and conditions for businesses to expand and accommodate growth, business support, and employment conditions.
- Businesses struggling to find adequate physical space to expand operations. With shortages of skilled workers to fill essential roles across all sectors.
- Possible harbour area commercialisation needs comprehensive tourism plan.
- Proposed tourist hub and a Nairnshire focussed tourism strategy is needed.

8.241 Sleat Local Place Plan **(THC025)** has identified the following priorities relating to Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places:

- Suggest weaving Gaelic language and heritage throughout new projects.
- Preserve local culture by enhanced Gaelic language initiatives, development of cultural events programme, support for traditional arts and crafts, creation of heritage education programmes and enhancing local archives.
- There are plentiful opportunities for diverse creative and artistic expression with a desire to maintain traditional industries in harmony with new enterprises and sustainable tourism.
- Focusing on business support, tourism management and traditional industries to build a resilient local economy.
- Worker housing shortage impacting local businesses.
- Creation of flexible workspace hub and trades-focused business units.

8.242 Stratherrick and Foyers Local Place Plan **(THC019)** has identified the following priorities relating to Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places:

- Retain Foyers Post Office and shop.
- Explore potential for woodland crofting in appropriate forestry and woodland locations out with the villages.
- Explore avenues to revitalise existing industrial heritage for housing and tourism purposes.
- Develop existing core paths, beaches and piers to attract more loch-based tourism and activities.
- Create heritage/nature learning centre for exploring Inverfarigaig Woods, Pass of Inverfarigaig and Loch Ness.

8.243 Torridon and Kinlochewe Local Place Plan **(THC020)** has identified the following priorities relating to Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places:

- Explore opportunities to transform existing rewilding projects into actual touristic attractions.
- Develop rail-based tourism opportunities, as Caledonian Sleeper has been an important financial help to the community.
- Explore new and improved ways of integrating the community into tourism development discussions.

8.244 Morvern Local Place Plan **(THC027)** has identified the following priorities relating to Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places:

- Promotes a diverse and resilient rural economy, aiming to secure year-round employment across multiple sectors (e.g. aquaculture, forestry, hospitality, trades, education and services);

- Strong support for traditional and land-based economic activity, including forestry and woodland management, crofting and agriculture, aquaculture, and peatland restoration;
- Retail is essential to both community sustainability and tourism offer, with support for improving availability of food, hospitality and everyday services;
- Tourism is a major economic industry with key priorities to increase visitor accommodation through hotels B&Bs and bunkhouses, and expand attractions;
- Major proposals include the Knock Park leisure development with motorhome facilities.

8.245 Kyle of Sutherland Local Place Plan **(THC028)** has identified the following priorities relating to Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places:

- Explicitly framed around creating an "economically thriving community", supporting business growth, tourism and inward investment;
- Strong emphasis on supporting existing local businesses, which are described as the backbone of local employment, essential to sustaining fragile rural communities.
- Key priorities include attracting new businesses to settlements, identifying mixed-use and business development sites;
- Promotion of entrepreneurship and new rural enterprises, including woodland smallholdings, game processing, distilling and other land-based businesses to support the traditional rural economy;
- Priority to maintain and improve local shops, garage and service businesses with recognition that retail and service decline (loss of banks, petrol stations, hotels since 2008) has weakened local centres;
- Support for reoccupation and reuse of vacant commercial premises;
- Tourism identified as a major area of growth and potential with actions including the improvements to facilities and expansion of tourist accommodation (e.g. lodges at Gledfield Estate).
- A need for better visitor retention and local spend rather than pass-through tourism,
- Repeatedly highlights the abundance of short term let and holiday homes as a concern across the area with concerns on the availability of permanent housing. While it is accepted that these properties exist it may not be beneficial to the village to see these numbers expand without consideration to developing more permanent homes.

8.246 Glen Urqhuart Local Place Plan **(THC029)** has identified the following priorities relating to Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places:

- Strong focus on supporting local employment and reducing commuting, with the aim that more people can work locally rather than travel to Inverness;
- Priority to develop and diversify local businesses, including expansion of local produce and small enterprises and provision of appropriate sites and buildings for business activity;
- Support for crofting and land-based activity (particularly in East Glen Urquhart), reinforcing the rural economy base;
- Priority to revitalise and strengthen Drumnadrochit high street encourage local shops, produce and businesses, improve attractiveness and functionality of the centre;
- Support for new small-scale retail provision in rural settlements such as Balnain;
- Recognition that access to basic services is currently poor and uneven, and improving local retail/services is key to viability;
- Tourism identified as both a major opportunity and a current imbalance, with key priorities to encourage visitors to stay longer and spend locally, and develop a more sustainable tourism offer linked to local businesses.

Summary of Implications for the Proposed Plan

Rural Development

8.247 HLDP will be informed by the varying needs and economies of rural communities, ranging from pressurised, accessible rural areas of countryside in the IMF area, to remote and very remote rural areas experiencing declining populations, losing the critical mass needed to sustain and expand businesses and services.

8.248 HLDP will propose a policy framework for fragile communities building on the analysis undertaken within this evidence report, building primarily on socio-demographic and economic indicators. This framework will most likely offer policy support to rural development (and rural homes as discussed in **Chapter 9: Housing**), subject to other policies in the plan being complied with. Many of these potentially fragile areas are located in areas with numerous overlapping natural heritage designations, peatland/high carbon soils, woodland and historic environment assets as discussed in **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**. Any policy framework will require to afford appropriate consideration to these aspects to minimise conflict between the relevant policies.

8.249 HLDP will require to acknowledge continued support for the North West Sutherland repopulation zone and consider reflecting this within the spatial strategy, and will consider whether a formal consideration of this area as an area suitable for resettlement is appropriate. Other areas identified as suitable for repopulation as identified within community-led LPPs will be considered, but further engagement will likely be required to clarify whether communities expressly wish their areas to be designated in this way. As with fragile areas, any policy framework for areas suitable for resettlement will require to afford consideration of the relevant natural heritage and historic assets and minimise conflict between the relevant policies.

Business and Industry

8.250 HLDP will recognise the Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Strategy and will require to provide sufficient business land, and an appropriate policy framework to support development associated with the Inverness Cromarty Firth Green Freeport.

8.251 HLDP will require to support and facilitate the investment pipeline indicated by the RTOs concentrated in the Highlands, such as onshore wind, pumped hydro storage and green hydrogen, in recognising that these are of a transformational scale, with a likely restructuring impact on the age balance of the Highland population.

8.252 The forecasted workforce has recognised implications for housing delivery in Highland. The ongoing HNDA (while not complete in time for the Evidence Report Gate Check) will utilise the estimates detailed in **HNDA Economic Uplifts** to ensure that the HLDP has a robust and credible basis on which to allocate sufficient land for housing as discussed in **Chapter 9: Housing**.

Community Wealth Building

8.253 HLDP will be informed by the Council's Community Wealth Building Priorities and ongoing work streams to deliver these, which include but are not limited to delivery of housing, rural childcare solutions, renewable community energy.

8.254 HLDP will be informed by any forthcoming refreshed good guidance principles relating to energy developments, alongside any UK Government amendments to community benefit legislation which may alter the current status of community benefits as material consideration. The Council's HSVC shall until then remain the framework for guiding the voluntary expectations of community benefits.

Tourism

8.255 HLDP will require to develop a more robust tourism policy that adequately responds to the scale and diversity of the tourism sector, and guides tourism development accordingly in both urban and rural settings. It is accepted that a greater plan-led approach to tourism and tourist accommodation is required.

8.256 HLDP could more proactively direct future tourism towards serviced accommodation types, but notes that the evidence suggests, and the industry argues strongly that tourists increasingly prefer non-serviced accommodation types. This by extension, means that tourists are increasingly seeking individual experiences, choosing private modes of transport which increases the carbon footprint of the industry. Possible solutions may be for increased support for apartment-hotels within touristic areas well served by other hospitality businesses, and other forms of non-served accommodation which can support tourists without removing housing from the housing supply in rural areas.

8.257 HLDP will recognise the growth of STL accommodation where the accommodation type is a form of dwelling that could otherwise be used for permanent housing. HLDP will be informed by the Badenoch and Strathspey short-term let control area and the potential progression of further control areas, to ensure that all changes of use of dwellinghouses to use for the purpose of short term letting in these areas are brought within the scope of the planning system without the need to consider if a particular change of use is or is not a material change of use. HLDP will recognise that control areas may depending on their location be progressed to pursue one or more policy objectives such as to allow consideration of the impacts on availability of residential housing, or on the changing character or amenity of a neighbourhood. In this regard, HLDP will specifically:

- Progress in cognisance of any further designated short term let control areas,
- Review and consider amending the current Non-Statutory Short Term Let Control Area Planning Policy which may require amendment to reflect the contexts of any newly designated Short Term Let Control Areas, and
- Incorporate it formally within the HLDP so that the Council's policy position can form part of the statutory development plan.

8.258 HLDP will consider specific guidance on the siting and design of pods/chalets and other forms of unconventional accommodation as there is frequent demand for such accommodation in a variety of locations ranging from secluded woodland, agricultural and croft land, and also in residential urban and suburban settings, with varying levels of amenity associated with these instances. The Council will consider whether tailored guidelines and policy requirements for particular. settings are appropriate for such developments

8.259 HLDP will recognise that transport infrastructure plays a vital role in facilitating sustainable tourism and in coordination with other policies, will require to safeguard appropriate distances for potential expansion, investment and increased capacity within rail, bus, ferries, ports and active travel infrastructure, which can benefit Highland residents, but offer opportunities to grow the tourism sector by providing for those who can/do not drive. Facilitation of sufficient coach parking provision is also recognised as encouraging more sustainable travel among our tourists, rather than encouraging single car journeys where possible. Scenic rail routes present a significant opportunity to attract tourists in more sustainable ways and HLDP will require to consider if a relevant supportive policy framework is appropriate for signposting further tourism development toward such assets.

Culture and Creativity

8.260 HLDP will recognise the role of the cultural and creative sector and will require to have suitable policy framework to ensure that venues are not repurposed and lost to the sector unless appropriate criteria are met to ensure the sustainability of the industry. It is recognised that community buildings often provide suitable spaces for cultural and creative organisations in Highland and a suitable policy framework is required to reflect this.

8.261 HLDP will require to facilitate inclusive cultural and creative development, whereby proposed developments for such uses in more accessible areas that support sustainable travel, local living and access among deprived communities are afforded suitable policy support. Mixed-use sites in Highland's previous plans have not included cultural and creative uses specifically within them, which will be considered in the development of HLDP.

8.262 HLDP will support community lead and place based cultural provision, aligning with community objectives and will recognise the role of local stewardship.

8.263 HLDP will encourage and support proposals that deliver multi-purpose, adaptable cultural spaces capable of supporting live music, performance, events and community use.

Minerals

8.264 HLDP will ensure sufficient reserves of construction aggregates in response to the 10 year landbank requirement set out within NPF4. Safeguarding new sites and identifying new sites for sand and gravel extraction to support a projected increase in industrial activity related to the energy sector and the ICFGF is essential.

8.265 HLDP will ensure geological sites for potential mineral extraction will be safeguarded from sterilisation by competing land uses unless there is a specific location need for development to take place in the selected area. Remediation plans will commence post-extraction, whilst environmental impacts will be carefully managed during the extraction process.

8.266 HLDP should promote means of recycling materials to mitigate the depletion of natural reserves, supporting sustainable development goals. The use of recycled materials should be encouraged to reduce resource dependence and environmental impact.

8.267 HLDP must ensure that the construction industry is sufficiently supported and with resource availability in the right locations. Any future sites and site extension zones should be strategically located considering transportation links.

Statements of Agreement / Dispute

Agreement on Evidence

8.268 Agencies who responded and agreed with the evidence and content presented include Homes for Scotland.

Disputes with Stakeholders

8.269 None at the time of submission to Gate Check.

Information Gaps

8.270 It is considered that community-led Local Place Plans would be informative evidence sources of relevance to this section of the Evidence Report, and several are understood to remain in production at the time of writing. To 30 April 2026, 20 communities have formally registered Local Place Plans. Any Local Place Plans registered will be considered in the production of the LDP if timeously available.