

What is a Masterplan Consent Area?

A Masterplan Consent Area (MCA) is a way to accelerate the delivery of a development site. It does this by focusing and coordinating community, developer, councillor, officer and agency input at an early stage.

An MCA is an optional legal power introduced by the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, available since December 2024 to allow a local council to accelerate the delivery of development. An MCA Scheme, if made, establishes the principle of development on the site and grants planning permission for specified types and forms of development within a specified area subject to specified conditions and exclusions.

Why is the Council exploring potential Masterplan Consent Areas?

The principal reason to progress MCAs within Highland is to address presently unmet housing need and demand.

The Highland Housing Challenge was declared by the Highland Council on 27 June 2024 and set a housing target of 24,000 homes in the next 10 years. The Council confirmed the role of MCAs in meeting this target on 26 June 2025 via its approval of a Highland Housing Challenge Partnership Action Plan.

Against this target it is anticipated that only 14,920 housing units will be delivered in Highland over the next 10 years so there is projected shortfall of over 9,000 units over that period.

The Council's new Highland Local Development Plan will allocate new housing sites, however it will not be finalised until 2028 and not adopted until 2029, and subsequent planning permissions and completions will take at least 4 years thereafter.

MCAs can provide a shorter-term solution to provide additional deliverable housing sites. This will enable the Council to respond more quickly to newly emerging opportunities such as the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport project and to address other ongoing housing pressures such as long waiting lists for affordable housing.

Address ongoing housing pressures

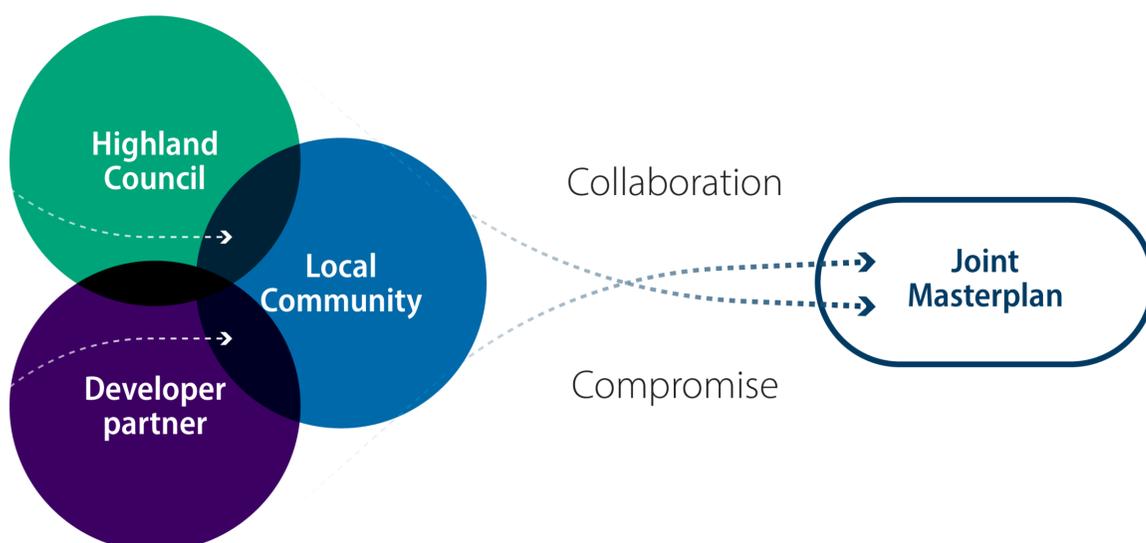
Respond to projected shortfall of 9,000+ housing units

Provide additional deliverable housing sites

What is the joint masterplanning process?

*Less Detail
Low Certainty
Less Commitment*

*Greater Commitment
Greater Certainty
Greater Detail*



Conventional development follows a developer-led approach

- Stage 1 >> Stage 2 >> Stage 3 >> Stage 4 >> Stage 5 >> Stage 6 & 7 >> Stage 8
- Identify and agree potential MCA site(s) Early engagement on potential MCA site Public consultation on proposed MCA Scheme PAC consider MCA Scheme Representations If required: Predetermination hearing and Notification to Ministers Council adopt the MCA Scheme Decision notified MCA Scheme delivery by developer

What is the process to establish a Masterplan Consent Area?

Scottish Government has approved and published legislation and guidance that set out how Masterplan Consent Areas should be consulted upon, prepared and approved.

- Town and Country Planning Act 1997 (as amended) Section 54 MCA Provisions
- The Town and Country Planning (Masterplan Consent Areas) (Scotland) Regulations 2024
- Masterplan Consent Areas Guidance, 2025

The guidance outlines seven key steps required to prepare and establish an MCA Scheme (below).

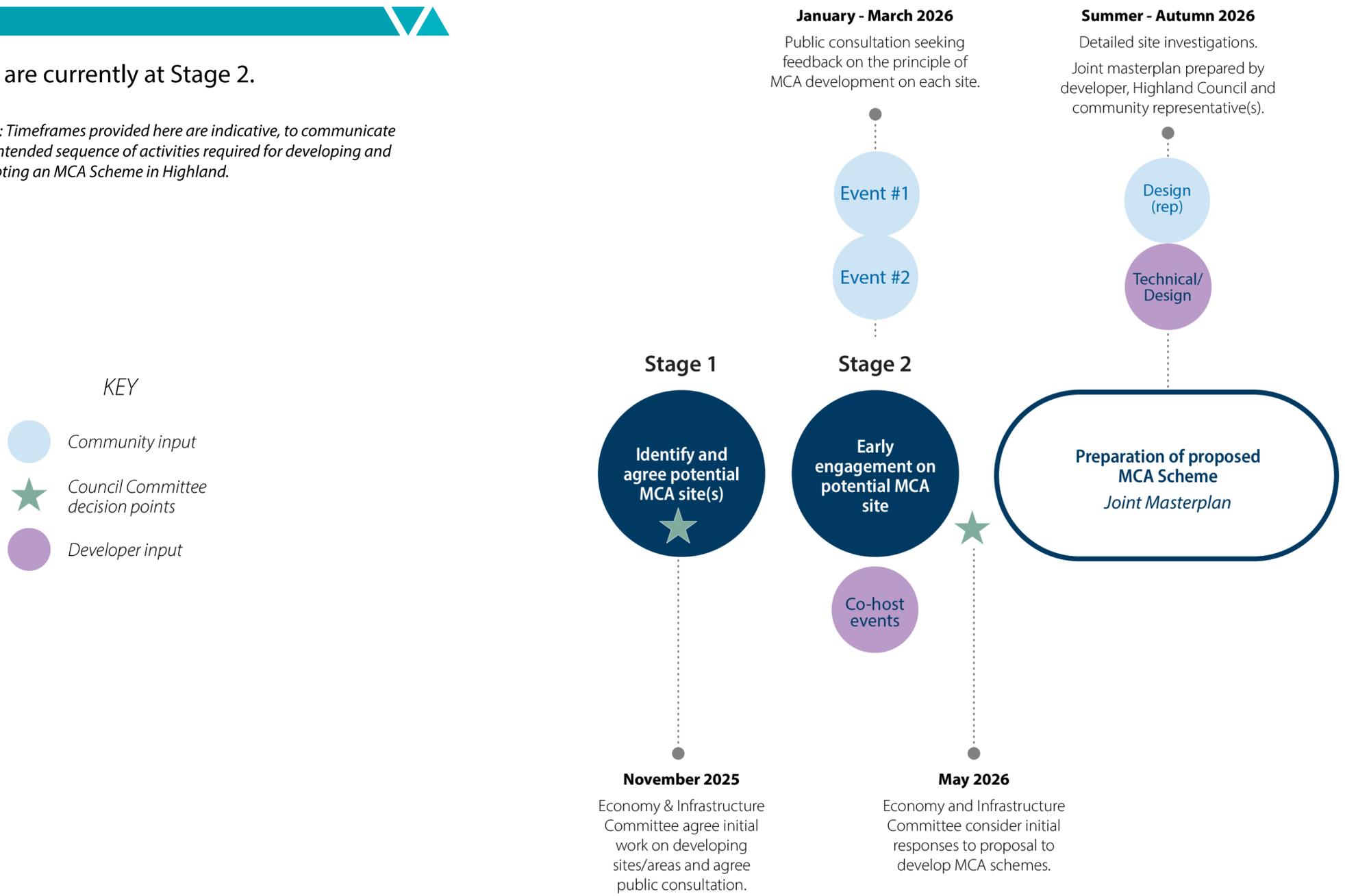
For Stage 1, in November 2025, the Highland Council decided to proceed with initial community consultation on the potential for an MCA at 3 locations.

- Essich Road (Inverness)
- Ardersier
- Embo (by Dornoch)

Indicative timeline for MCA Scheme development

We are currently at Stage 2.

Note: Timeframes provided here are indicative, to communicate the intended sequence of activities required for developing and adopting an MCA Scheme in Highland.



Purpose of this event: providing feedback

At Stage 2, The Town and Country Planning (Masterplan Consent Areas) (Scotland) Regulations 2024 require the Council to “provide feedback to members of the public in respect of comments received by the planning authority” regarding possible proposals to make a masterplan consent area scheme.

During and following the first public event, Highland Council and the potential developer have received comments from members of the public, including Community Council(s), on the possible proposal for a Masterplan Consent Area. All feedback presented at this final event (for Stage 2) relate to comments received on or before 13 February 2026.

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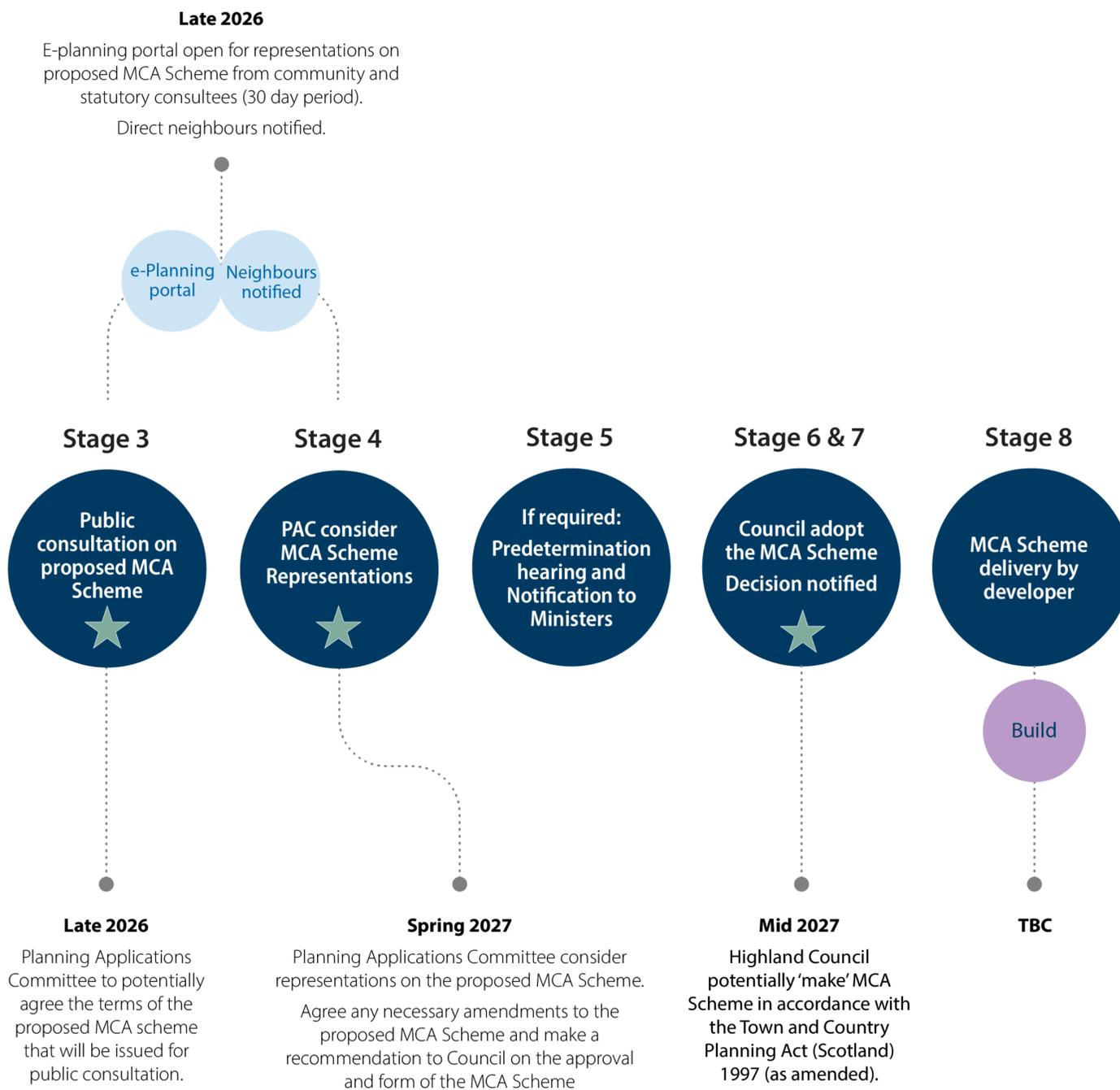
When can community input to the MCA process?

At Stage 2, communities have the opportunity to provide engagement feedback on the potential MCA site. Further, the Community Council is a statutory participant at this stage, as per the MCA Regulations.

Between Stage 2 and 3, there will be a joint, collaborative masterplanning process with developers, the Council and community representation. The Council wishes to embed a community representative in the design team, with monthly involvement in the proposed MCA Scheme development.

At Stage 3, when the Proposed MCA Scheme is submitted to the Council, communities can provide further written feedback on the MCA Scheme, by way of representations.

At Stage 4, the Planning Applications Committee will consider these representations on the proposed MCA Scheme.



Next Steps

The Economy & Infrastructure Committee meeting on 28 May 2026 will consider initial responses to each potential MCA scheme. Council officers will prepare a report for Committee which considers all public comments received up to 31 March 2026. This report will be published on the Council website in the Committee agenda.

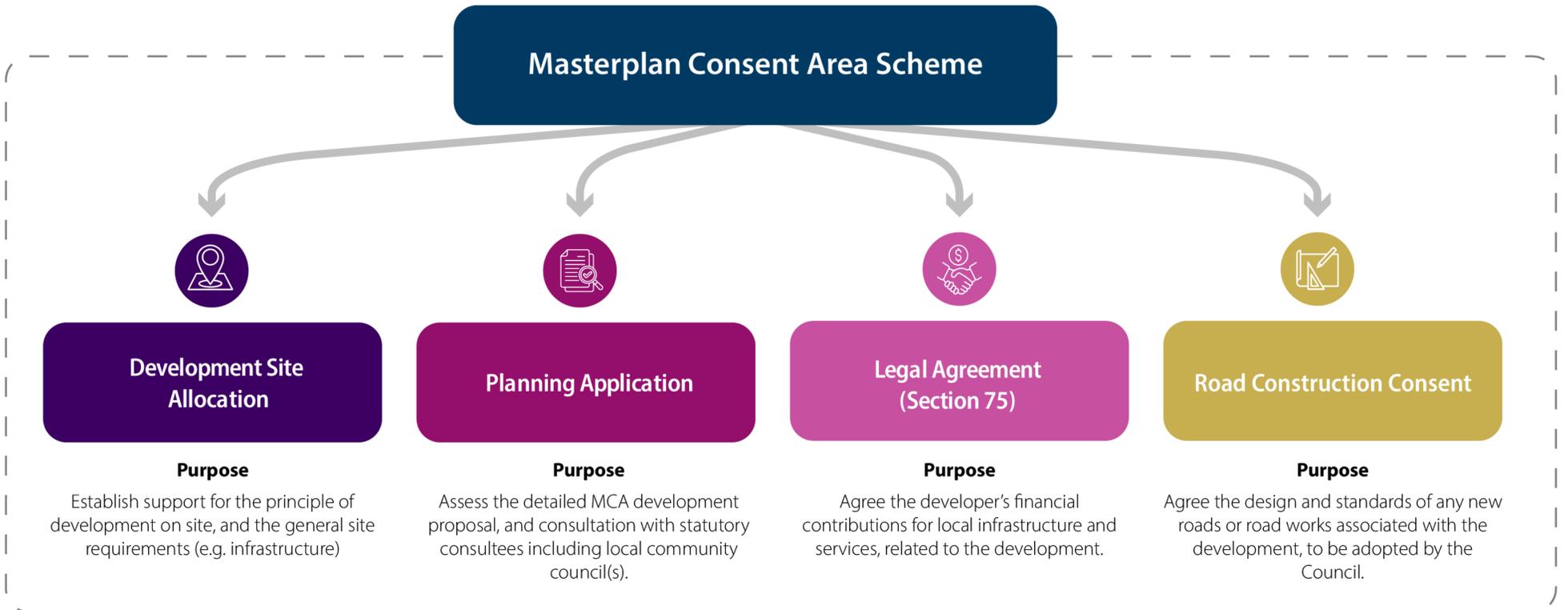
If a potential MCA site is selected to progress to preparing a proposed MCA scheme, a joint masterplanning group will be established, including a community representative(s).

If a potential MCA site is not selected to progress at this committee, there is nothing to preclude a developer partner putting their site forward for consideration in the new Highland Local Development Plan.

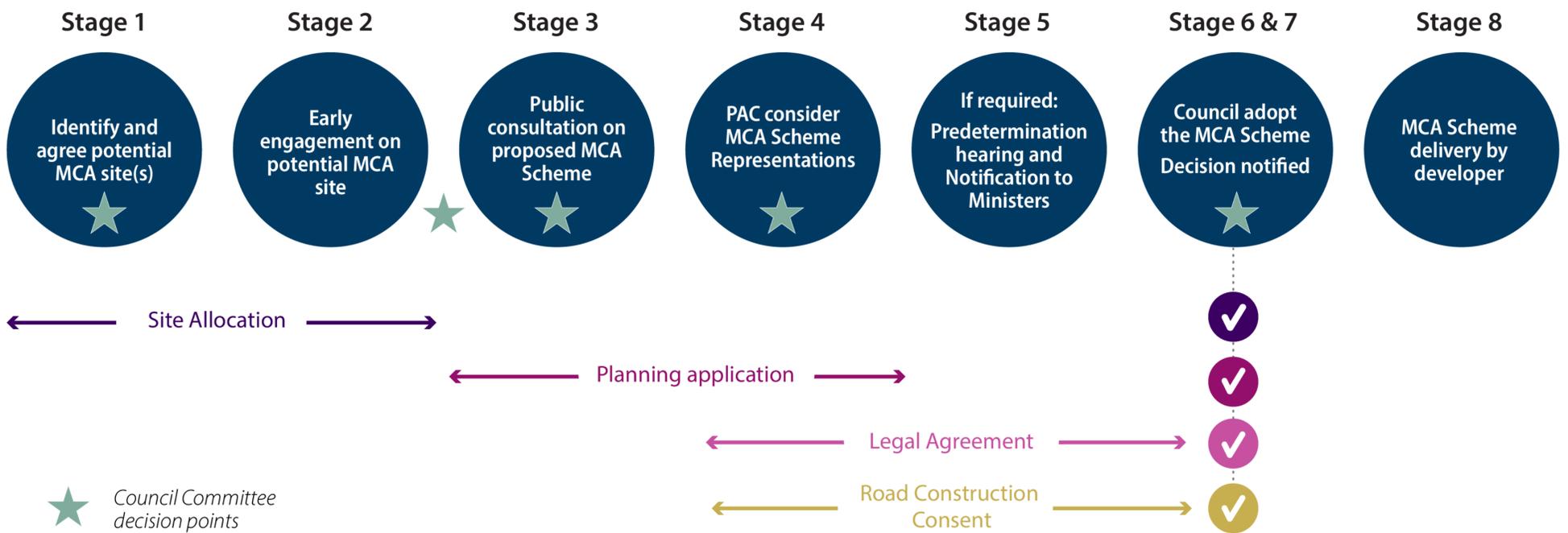
Initial responses to each potential MCA site will be considered on 28 May 2026

What does an MCA Scheme approval include?

At Stage 6, an MCA Scheme is adopted by Council. Highland Council intends that each MCA Scheme will include four elements conventionally used to approve development proposals.



When are the MCA Scheme elements prepared and approved?



Environmental Impact Assessment

Every proposed MCA Scheme will be screened under the 2017 EIA Regulations and a screening opinion will be prepared by Highland Council.

- If an EIA is required, the Council will issue an EIA scoping opinion.
- If an EIA is not required, environmental considerations remain a material consideration in the planning assessment of a proposed MCA Scheme

Today, you can provide your feedback via:

- Filling out a paper feedback form and posting in the black box
- Scanning this QR code and filling out the online feedback form

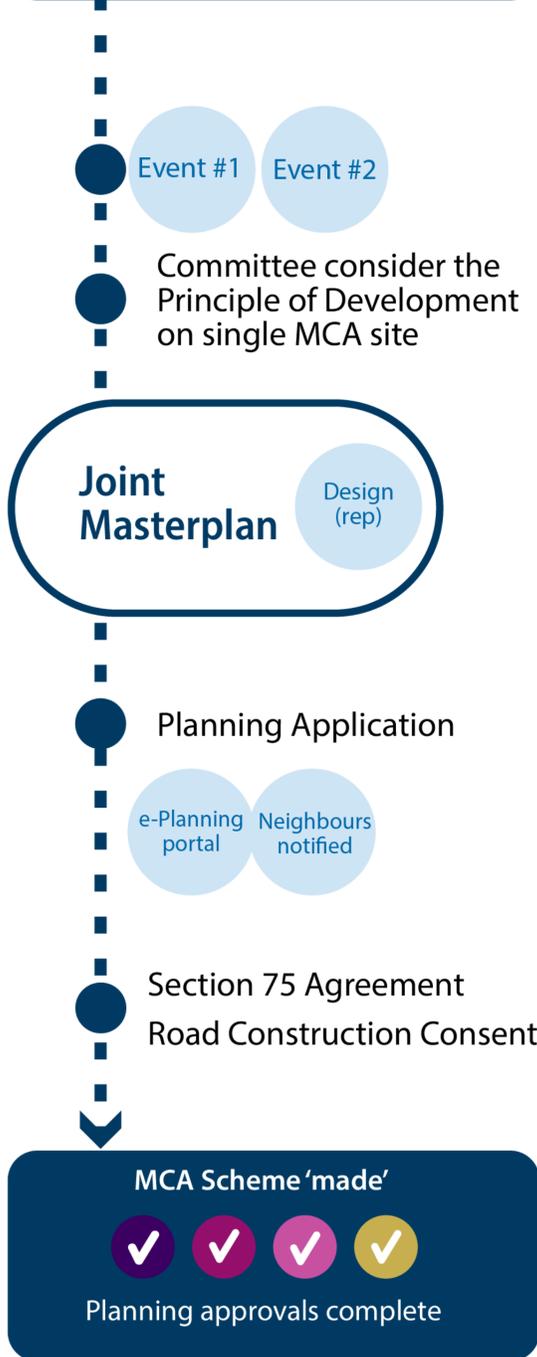


The final deadline for comments in Stage 2 is 31 March 2026.

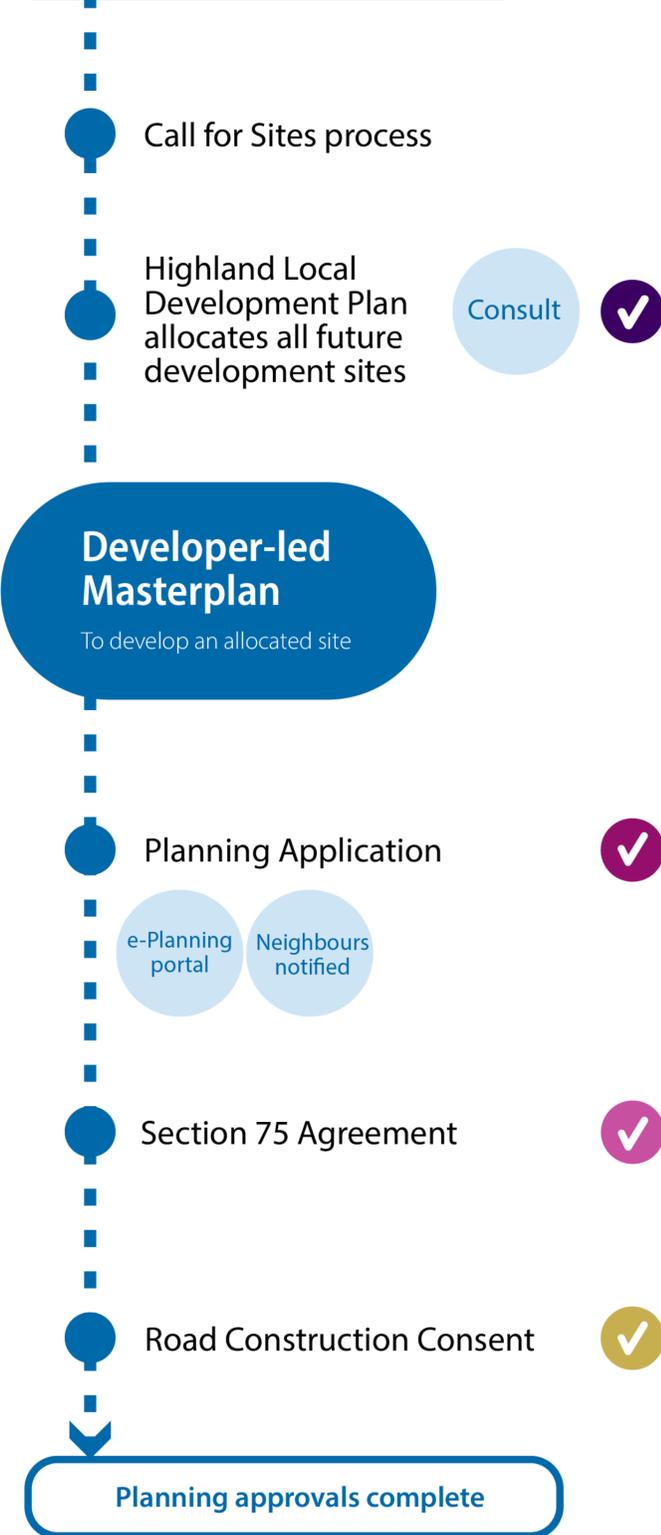
Approaches to seeking planning approval

There are two main ways developers can pursue approval for development in Highland: a conventional, sequential approach or a joint approach through a Masterplan Consent Area Scheme

MCA Approach



Conventional Approach



The Highland Council and Tulloch Homes undertook a community engagement event, on the site becoming a possible Masterplan Consent Area (MCA), consisting of a drop-in, presentation and roundtable on Monday 19 January at Culduthel Christian Centre. Recorded attendance at the afternoon drop in was 55, with 30 recorded at the roundtable. Including paper, email and online, we received 20 written comments.

10 responses noted in their feedback that they were opposed to the principle of development of the site as an MCA or, felt that other sites would be more appropriate. We respect this position and it will be reported to the Council's Economy and Infrastructure Committee to inform their decision making.

From those whom we felt were not opposed to the principle of the MCA, the following text indicates how concerns raised might be addressed if the MCA proceeds to Stage 3:

Access and Capacity Constraints on Essich Road

Issues raised:

- Capacity and condition of the single-track Essich Road, considering other development pressures and existing access needs.
- Issues with safety and capacity of the Torbreck / Essich Road junction which has constrained visibility.
- Unsuitability of the local road network for walking and cycling, prompting more car traffic.
- Constraints on upgrade works, including the bridge over the Big Burn and land required for road widening or passing places.
- Lack of options for Safer Routes to Schools, with particular concern over options to access the Inverness Royal Academy.
- Concerns over the capacity of the wider road network, especially the Southern Distributor Road.



Response:

The Developer Partner will produce a **Transport Statement** including a detailed analysis of the site and the local transport context, developed from both desktop research and field survey data across all travel modes (private car, public transport and active travel). The Developer Partner will have to prove to the Council's Transport Planning Team that the transport impacts will be manageable on the wider public road and active travel network.

Considering the current layout of Essich Road, it is likely that a **package of improvement works to Essich Road** and potentially beyond, will be secured via planning condition to the satisfaction of the Council's Transport Planning Team. These could include selective widening of the road, the installation of traffic lights and controlled crossing points and formation of off-road foot or cycle paths.

Flood Risk

Issues raised:

- Concerns over the density of watercourses around the site area, the flood risk and potential downstream effects of development, especially on the Big Burn and on properties to the north of the MCA site, and on Torbreck Road.
- SEPA flood risk mapping does not accurately represent more frequently observed instances of flooding from residents.
- Concern over the potential for increased flood event frequency, and bigger flood events due to climate change.



Response:

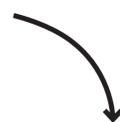
The Developer Partner will produce a **Flood Risk Assessment (FRA)** considering all sources of flooding affecting the site, alongside a **Drainage Impact Assessment (DIA)** describing how the development will manage foul and surface water drainage.

These documents must demonstrate to the Council's Flood Risk Management Team that the development will not increase flood risk or result in environmental harm to other properties and land and that the new housing will itself, be safe from flooding.

Affordable Housing

Issues raised:

- How will affordable housing be considered through the MCA?



Response:

In the Inverness area, all new developments **need to achieve no less than 35% affordable housing.**

Local Services Capacity

Issues raised:

- Ness Castle Primary School is approaching capacity.
- Inverness Royal Academy is approaching capacity.
- The local GP practices are at capacity.
- Concerns over the lack of access to community facilities, including shopping, within a walkable distance of the site.
- Infrastructure needs to be delivered in advance of development.
- What procedures will ensure that the developer lives up to their obligations?



Response:

The Developer Partner must reach a **legal agreement with the Council under Section 75** of the Town and Country Planning Act. The agreement will consider what financial contributions are needed to compensate for the impacts of the development in terms of education, community facilities and transport.

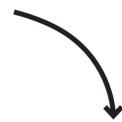
The planning permission for Ness Castle Primary School includes a second phase with additional primary and nursery classroom accommodation. Any further investment in the Inverness Royal Academy necessary would also need to be considered through the Section 75 agreement.

We accept healthcare capacity is an issue. However, investment in these facilities is reserved to NHS Highland and is not within the control of the Highland Council or Developer Partner.

Natural Heritage

Issues raised:

- Badgers and other protected species are known to be present around the site.
- Any development needs to make a meaningful contribution to local biodiversity.
- The site is within a nature corridor and provides a 'green wedge', giving separation between other developments in South Inverness.
- The site contains quality agricultural land that should be safeguarded.
- Concerns for the welfare of horses being kept on adjacent ground.



Response:

The Developer Partner will produce an **Ecological Impact Assessment** (EclA) showing how development will affect habitats, species, designated sites and ecological processes. The EclA must also provide mitigation measures against any impacts identified.

The Developer Partner must demonstrate how they can deliver a minimum of 10% biodiversity enhancement, preferably on-site. The EclA will identify opportunities for enhancing biodiversity and demonstrate how these will be delivered to the satisfaction of the Council's Ecology Team.

The site is located on agricultural land classified as 3.2 on the land capability classification for agriculture developed by Macaulay Land Use Research Institute (now the James Hutton Institute). While not within the definition of prime agricultural land by National Planning Framework 4 (Class 1, 2 or 3.1), the value of retaining this land against achieving new housing, together with the potential impacts to agricultural operations in the surrounding land, will require to be considered by the relevant Committee in deciding if the site should proceed to the proposed MCA stage.

Water, Sewerage and Electrical Services

Issues raised:

- Concerns over low water pressure from the main in the vicinity of the site.
- Concerns over the lack of sewerage and electrical services around the site.



Response:

The Developer Partner will undertake enquiries with Scottish Water and SSSEN to discuss the state of current utilities provision and how this can be upgraded to service the proposals, without detriment to existing properties in the locality.



- Legend**
- ▭ Potential MCA Site
 - Road Network**
 - ▬ A Road
 - ▬ B Road
 - ▬ Local Road
 - ▬ Bus Routes
 - Transport Stops**
 - Bus or Coach on Street
 - ▬ Core Paths



Potential Masterplan Consent Area:
Land at Essich Road, Inverness



Date: 06-01-2026
Scale 1:2000

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