

Highland Local Development Plan **Evidence Report**

Aithisg Fhianaise Plana Leasachaidh Ionadail na Gàidhealtachd

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Chapter 1 : Introduction

- 1.1 This is the Evidence Report for the Highland Local Development Plan (HLDP), prepared in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, as amended, and the Town and Country Planning (Development Planning) (Scotland) Regulations 2023.
- 1.2 The Highland Council prepares the Local Development Plan (LDP) for all its area except for the portion within the Cairngorms National Park, for which the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) is responsible. Much of the evidence presented in this Evidence Report is for our LDP Area only, but some evidence will include data for the Highland portion of the National Park, which approximately equates to the Badenoch and Strathspey Ward and Local Committee area.
- 1.3 The Council currently has four adopted LDPs for its development planning area. The Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP), adopted in 2012, provides general planning policies and site allocation detail for a number of strategic locations across Highland. The other three Area LDPs also contain a small number of general planning policies but are focussed primarily on settlement proposals and site allocation details, including more up-to-date content for the sites that were included in HwLDP. These LDPs are:
 - Caithness & Sutherland LDP (CaSPlan) adopted in 2018,
 - West Highland & Islands LDP (WestPlan) adopted in 2019, and the
 - Inner Moray Firth LDP2 (IMFLDP2) adopted in 2024 (being a replacement for the first IMFLDP adopted in 2015).
- 1.4 The development plan also includes a number of adopted Supplementary Guidance (SG) documents, relating to topic policies or site allocations in the LDPs. In accordance with paragraph 93 of the Scottish Government Local Development Planning Guidance (2023), this Evidence Report provides an evaluation of the adopted LDPs within **Chapter 14: Performance of the Plan**. In line with the guidance this evaluation assesses whether the previous plan has delivered on its outcomes, and allocations, identifying any lessons learnt for the preparation of the new plan and considers the appropriateness of the previous spatial strategy.
- 1.5 Following adoption of the IMFLDP2, the Council commenced the production of the HLDP Evidence Report. The new, single Highland Local Development Plan (HLDP) to be prepared, and to which this Evidence Report relates, will replace the four current LDPs. Upon adoption of HLDP, the development plan within the Highland development planning area will therefore comprise the National Planning Framework (currently NPF4 as adopted in 2023) and the HLDP.

- 1.6 Upon adoption of the HLDP, the Council's Supplementary Guidance will lose its status as part of the development plan.
- 1.7 The evidence presented within the Evidence Report has been grouped into Chapters that collate related policies, so that key evidence is not repeated in multiple areas. The structure of how these are covered is shown in Table 1:1 which should be interpreted as the Evidence Report **List of Topics**.

Table 1:1 Evidence Report List of Chapters

Evidence Report Chapter	Corresponding NPF4 Policies
Chapter 1: Introduction	-
Chapter 2: Area Profiles and Key Areas of Change	-
Chapter 3: Statement of Engagement	-
Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy	1, 2, 11, 19
Chapter 5: Nature and Environment	3, 4, 5, 6
Chapter 6: Coastal Development and Aquaculture	10, 32
Chapter 7: Flood Risk Management	22
Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places	25, 26, 29, 30, 31, 33
Chapter 9: Housing	8, 16, 17
Chapter 10: Transport	13, 18
Chapter 11: Infrastructure	12, 18, 24
Chapter 12: Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings	7, 9
Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking	14, 15, 20, 21, 23, 27, 28
Chapter 14: Performance of the Plan	-

- 1.8 The Highland Council is a large authority with predominantly rural areas and also significant urban areas including the City of Inverness. The Council contains nine administrative (committee) areas and incorporates a diverse range of communities, economies and environments, for whom some topics within the Evidence Report are of greater significance than others.
- 1.9 As an overview to this diversity, **Chapter 2: Area Profiles and Key Areas of Change** outline some key indicators and distinctions between the nine administrative areas to orient those perhaps less familiar with the Highlands. Where possible, the Council has therefore sought to gather and present information in a place-based manner, recognising that doing so for all the necessary policy remits adds considerable detail and depth.

- 1.10 The Evidence Report **Chapter 3: Statement of Engagement** sets out the engagement exercises undertaken by the Council and has been prepared to set out how the Evidence Report meets the statutory requirements of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 with regard to evidence requirements set out in sections 15(5) of the 1997 Act, and the engagement requirements set out in sections 16B(2) and 16B(4) of the 1997 Act. A summary of specific engagement exercises undertaken on individual policy areas and the outcomes, are provided within the respective chapters throughout the Evidence Report.
- 1.11 Each subsequent chapter contains a short position statement on the purpose of the Evidence Report chapter and the NPF4 policy areas within it. Where the Council considers that information gaps remain in the Evidence Report and thereby insufficiencies in information collection, these are stated alongside proposed steps to address these. In line with the Scottish Government [Local Development Planning Guidance](#) (2023) the Evidence Report attempts to avoid delving into site specific matters or take confirmed stances on matters of future policy, as they will be addressed at the Proposed Plan stage.
- 1.12 Each chapter also sets out where disputes and or information gaps have been identified following the public HLDP Evidence Consultation or circulation of earlier iterations among key agencies and stakeholders. Further details on these are provided within the respective chapters. Unless depicted in this manner, the Highland Council considers there to be no disputes or information gaps.
- 1.13 The HLDP Evidence Report has been produced in tandem with other key work that has informed its content namely:
- A Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA),
 - Nature Network Mapping,
 - Housing Land Audit (HLA),
 - Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA) and Open Space Audit (OSA),
 - Strategic Flood Risk Assessment,
 - Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Scoping, and
 - Local Place Plans and Area Place Plans.
- 1.14 The Council has also identified evidence gaps that will require to be addressed through further work to inform the proposed plan, and states clearly within the respective chapters where this is the case.
- 1.15 The Council is considering the use of [Masterplan Consent Areas](#) (MCAs) in Highland and has therefore already facilitated a Call for Development Sites process from January to May 2025, which sought bids from landowners, developers, and others for potential development sites to be considered for inclusion in the forthcoming Highland Local Development Plan and/or as candidate MCAs.

- 1.16 The Council's HwLDP is currently one of the oldest LDPs in force within Scotland, and adopting a new HLDP in accordance with the new processes introduced by the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 is a recognised priority. We started the process of reviewing the HwLDP with a Main Issues Report consultation in 2016. In December 2017, the Scottish Government published a Planning Bill outlining potential changes to the Scottish planning system. The Council decided to halt the HwLDP Review until more was known about the changes. The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 was subsequently made.
- 1.17 The Council is satisfied that it has undertaken appropriate and sufficient engagement and considers that the Evidence Report sets out necessary evidence for informing the production of the HLDP and its development strategy and policy framework. Following the Gate check assessment of the HLDP Evidence Report, the Council seeks to prepare the HLDP Proposed Plan.

List of Acronyms

APP	Area Place Plan
BILA	Business and Industrial Land Audit
CaSPlan	Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (2018)
CAT	Community Asset Transfer
CNPA	Cairngorms National Park Authority
CTA	Cumulative Transport Appraisal
CWB	Community Wealth Building
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
HES	Historic Environment Scotland
HIE	Highlands and Islands Enterprise
HiTrans	Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership
HLA	Housing Land Audit
HLDP	Highland Local Development Plan
HNDA	Housing Need and Demand Assessment
HST	Housing Supply Target
HSVC	Highland Social Value Charter (for Renewables Investment)
HwLDP	Highland-wide Local Development Plan (2012)
IMF	Inner Moray Firth
IMFLDP	Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan (2015)
IMFLDP2	Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 (2024)
LHS	Local Housing Strategy
LHLR	Local Housing Land Requirement
ICFGF	Inverness & Cromarty Firth Green Freeport
iLHLR	Indicative Local Housing Land Requirement
LDP	Local Development Plan
LPP	Local Place Plan
LTS	Local Transport Strategy
NHSH	NHS Highland
NPF4	National Planning Framework 4
RSS	Regional Spatial Strategy
RTS	Regional Transport Strategy
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SEPA	Scottish Environment Protection Agency
UHI	University of the Highlands and Islands
WestPlan	West Highlands and Islands Local Development Plan (2019)

Chapter 2 : Area Profiles and Position Statement

Highland Areas

- 2.1 The Highland Council serves one third of Scotland's land area spanning 26,484km² which includes the City of Inverness, a surrounding network of accessible rural towns and countryside, alongside remote, sparsely populated areas. Highland has the 7th highest population of the 32 authorities with 237,290 people ([NRS mid 2024 estimates](#)) with the lowest population density at 9 persons per km². There are 21 electoral wards and 9 administrative (committee) areas within the Council. Some committee areas represent a single ward owing to their large size, while many cover at least 2 wards.

Table 2:1 Highland Administrative Geographies

Area LDP	Administrative Area	Ward(s)	Settlements
IMFLDP2	City of Inverness	Inverness Central	30 SDAs and 19 Growing Settlements
		Inverness West	
		Inverness Millburn	
		Inverness South	
		Inverness Ness-side	
		Aird & Noch Less	
	Nairnshire	Nairn & Cawdor	
	Dingwall & Seaforth	Dingwall & Seaforth	
	Black Isle & Easter Ross	Black Isle	
		Cromarty Firth	
		Tain & Easter Ross	
WestPlan	Wester Ross, Strathpeffer & Lochalsh	Wester Ross, Strathpeffer & Lochalsh	23 SDAs and 18 Growing Settlements
	Isle of Skye and Raasay	Eilean a' Cheò	
	Lochaber	Caol & Mallaig	
		Fort William & Ardnamurchan	
CaSPlan	Caithness	Wick & East Caithness	15 SDAs and 18 Growing Settlements
		Thurso & Northwest Caithness	
	Sutherland	North, West & Central Sutherland	
		East Sutherland & Edderton*	
CNPA LDP	Badenoch & Strathspey	Badenoch & Strathspey	

* Partially extends into the IMFLDP2 Area at Edderton

- 2.2 Owing to this scale, there is significant variation in the profiles and characteristics of many diverse communities, economies and environments, which explains why the Council has previously prepared separate Area LDPs that are tailored to these. Authority-wide demographic and socio-economic indicators while useful, can often obscure wider variations at area or ward level. It is often impractical to insert settlement or facility specific detail within the body of the Evidence Report for many topics, as there are 78 settlement development areas (SDAs) within the Council, and a further 55 growing settlements. Detail at this scale is often best provided within supplementary documents to avoid tabular data exceeding multiple pages. In the interests of brevity therefore, much of the information within this Evidence Report is reported by ward or administrative areas.
- 2.3 [Place Planning in Highland](#) has been organised and administered at area level. The [Highland Local Development Plan Area Profile Summary](#) provides an interactive dashboard with demographic and economic indicators at area level.
- 2.4 The Highland Council's Area Place Plans (APP) which collates an overview of local priorities development, investment and service delivery across these Areas, identified through stakeholder and public engagement in addition to reviewing the content of existing plans and strategies across public and community partners.
- 2.5 Individual APPs have progressed differently, with some adopting a hybrid APP/LPP position owing to similar geographic coverage. While Black Isle and Easter Ross are now one administrative area, they were previously two during the period when their APPs were progressed. Place Standard Tool exercises (further detailed in **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**) have also been collated by Area level and are provided in the relevant APPs which include:
- [Caithness Area Place Plan](#)
 - [Easter Ross Area Place Plan](#)
 - [Black Isle Local Place Plan](#) (hybrid)
 - [Inverness Strategy](#)
 - [Lochaber Area Place Plan](#)
 - [Nairn and Nairnshire Local Place Plan](#) (hybrid)
 - [Skye and Raasay Future](#)
 - [Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Area Place Plan](#)
 - [Sutherland Area Place Plan](#)
- 2.6 The [Inverness Strategy](#) serves as the Inverness Area Place Plan. For those perhaps less familiar with Highland Geography, the APPs can be consulted upon to provide greater background to the profile, challenges and community aspirations for the diverse places within Highland.
- 2.7 The APPs will comprise a key source of evidence for consideration in development planning, future service delivery and community action.

- 2.8 The Highland Investment Plan – HIP detailed in **Chapter 8: Business Economy, Tourism and Productive Places** seeks to improve essential services and facilities provision in various locations across the Highlands, informed by APPs. A new generation of community facilities is being established for the Highlands, with Points of Delivery (PODs) seeing a range of public services brought together at single locations with master planning shaped by feedback from local communities.

Key Areas of Change

- 2.9 The profile, economy, opportunities and challenges within the Highlands at present have evolved since the HwLDP was adopted in 2012 and HLDP will therefore require responding to these, alongside concurrent planning reforms and direct development cognisant of a new reality. The key areas of change that the HLDP will require to accommodate are summarised in this section.

Strategic Energy and Infrastructure

- 2.10 Overall, the biggest change since 2012 is how the Highland economy is conceptualised. In 2012, economic policy focused on mitigating fragility in remote and rural areas. By the mid-2020s, the focus has shifted to managing transformational growth, ensuring local capture of value, and balancing environmental, social and economic outcomes. In 2012, the Highland economy was still largely characterised by tourism, public services, construction, food & drink and legacy hydro/oil-support activities. Since then, the economy has shifted decisively toward being nationally strategic in the net-zero transition.
- 2.11 The region is now seen by Scottish and UK Governments as a core delivery zone for offshore wind, marine energy, pumped storage hydro and green hydrogen, rather than a peripheral rural economy. **Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy** and **Chapter 8: Economy, Business Tourism and Productive Places** detail the recent growth and unprecedented scale of regional transformation opportunities in the sector. The designation of the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport (ICFGF) in 2023 is a clear marker of this shift, re-framing the IMF as a logistics, fabrication and operations hub for offshore energy. Renewables sites (particularly onshore wind) carry strong national policy support and are often sought in areas with sensitive landscapes or designated sites (detailed in **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**), meaning the HLDP will need to continue to suitably balance these aspects when directing strategic energy and infrastructure development.
- 2.12 The planning implication is that economic growth is now much more tightly linked to port capacity, grid reinforcement, land for energy manufacturing, and alignment between development planning and national infrastructure programmes than it was in 2012.

Housing Challenge

- 2.13 Scotland has declared a housing emergency and the planning system must increasingly justify any real or perceived burden to the delivery of homes. In 2012, housing need in Highland was largely discussed in terms of affordability and rural viability. In recent years, it is increasingly framed explicitly as a core economic issue, and a constraint to growth in the region. While **Chapter 9: Housing** provides the Council's evidence on this topic, the inter-relationship between housing and the wider economy including workforce housing, provides cross-linkages with **Chapter 8: Economy, Business Tourism and Productive Places**. This is not simply a planning consent issue. It reflects limited local construction capacity, high build costs in remote locations, and infrastructure constraints that delay or prevent implementation even where land is allocated. Major energy, infrastructure and service employers increasingly cannot expand, or recruit, because housing supply cannot respond at pace or scale. Acute affordability pressures driven by non-local demand are reflected in small local housing markets where house prices are increasingly disconnected from local income bands, coupled with cumulative loss of supply through conversions to second homes and short term lets in high-amenity areas with tourism and recreational potential.
- 2.14 The planning implication is that economic growth is now tied to housing availability. If housing delivery is not aligned in scale, location and timing with energy, infrastructure and service-sector growth, that growth will not happen locally. Allocating employment land without guaranteed workforce housing nearby now carries a high delivery risk. Ports, grid upgrades and Freeport investment depend on early delivery of workforce and rental housing alongside up-front resolution of water, wastewater and transport constraints. For site allocations, HLDP will increasingly need to prioritise locations where housing can unlock labour supply for strategic sectors.

Growth of Tourism

- 2.15 Tourism has grown strongly in volume since 2012 as detailed in **Chapter 8: Economy, Business Tourism and Productive Places**. The structure has shifted toward high-volume, spatially concentrated tourism, with acute pressures in Skye, Loch Ness, Wester Ross and the NC500 corridor, rather than dispersed year-round activity. This has created infrastructure strains and a growing debate around visitor levies and sustainable destination management, which was largely absent in 2012. Increased conversion of residential property to increase tourism accommodation has caused tourism growth to intensify housing competition rather than support supply. With staff shortages now affecting the tourism sector, tourism is therefore now indirectly constraining the workforce needed to sustain tourism itself, creating a self-limiting growth dynamic.

- 2.16 The planning implication is that tourism is no longer solely an economic development issue; it is a place-management and infrastructure-capacity issue, increasingly intersecting with housing and transport policy. Tourism and housing must be planned in tandem, where HLDP will have to balance the demands of the sector with retention of permanent communities essential to economic function.

Economic Opportunity and the Labour Market

- 2.17 One of the starkest changes since 2012 is the decoupling of economic opportunity from workforce capacity. Despite the economic investments in the region and the need for widespread strategic infrastructure, wider structural effects on the Highland economy detailed in **Chapter 8: Economy, Business Tourism and Productive Places** have presented challenges to the Highland economy. While Highland has always to some extent relied on net-migration to sustain the population, the UK exit from the European Union has coincided with a change to the demographic profile of Highland's net migration, who are now proportionally more represented by early retirees, not working-age households, changing the demographic profile and labour supply base. At the same time, employers consistently report recruitment and retention difficulties, particularly in construction, care, hospitality, energy and public services.
- 2.18 Improvements to digital connectivity have proved to be a welcome but imperfect solution to this issue as some of Highland's remote rural workforce are employed in home-based and remote roles. In 2012, poor broadband was a weakness of the Highland economy. **Chapter 11: Infrastructure** details that major public and private investment through UK and Scottish Government programmes has transformed connectivity, facilitated home-based and remote working, alongside the wider economy and service provision. Challenges remain in connecting a proportion who still lack comparable access. The planning implication is that digital infrastructure is now treated as essential economic infrastructure, equivalent in importance to transport and utilities.

Spatial Imbalance

- 2.19 The urban-rural disparity across the Highlands creates challenges. Rapid growth in population within the Inner Moray Firth (IMF) Area has outpaced investment in infrastructure and placed considerable pressure on road congestion, health facilities and schools. In contrast, the remoter rural areas generally have seen populations decline or remain heavily reliant on net-migration to remain constant. They often have greater infrastructure capacity but facilities dependent on resident populations are often of a considerable age and at risk of closure and relocation due to sustained declines in population.

- 2.20 Unlike urban authorities, land allocation alone does not unlock housing delivery in much of Highland. Allocated sites can remain undeveloped for long periods, affordable housing can be delayed despite need, and development can concentrate in locations with existing infrastructure, reinforcing spatial imbalance.
- 2.21 The City of Inverness is the economic, public facility and transport network hub for wider Highland, with the surrounding IMF area being better connected, and characterised by developable and agriculturally productive land and greater pressure for housing in the open countryside. The Council's previous approach to manage development in the accessible rural and hinterland countryside and to direct development in these areas to more sustainable locations remains broadly compatible with NPF4, albeit the transition away from settlement hierarchies towards the concept of local living will require a more holistic assessment as to what sustainable development means in practice.

Summary

- 2.22 The Council will produce a single LDP for Highland to replace its current four LDPs. This new HLDP will set the strategic land use framework to support economic growth, address the area's housing challenge and protect our culturally important natural and built assets for the benefit of all our communities into the 2030's and beyond. The new HLDP will be a new-style LDP, produced subsequent to the reformed approach to local development planning introduced under the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 and supported by National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4). Intended for adoption in 2028/2029, it will have a lifespan of 10 years and will therefore be in force during a critical point in Highland's economic transformation.
- 2.23 It is clear from the evidence gathered that there are significant economic opportunities that Highland can embrace, most of which are dependent upon the area's abundant natural assets and unique character. The sectors most likely to provide such opportunity are those relating to energy, tourism and the blue/green economy. This comes at a time where there are many challenges such as an ageing population, declining working age population, access to employment and services within our rural areas in particular, and also significant housing pressures. Having a robust LDP will support the expected outcomes and vision of the [Highland Outcome Improvement Plan](#) to 'Build a Thriving Highland for All'.
- 2.24 The Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport (ICFGF) detailed in **Chapter 8: Business, Economy, Tourism and Productive Places**, will continue to play a central role in the ongoing restructuring within the Highland economy. Wider economic diversification through the growth in the renewables and land economy sectors supports opportunities for jobs to support communities outwith the IMF area.

Position Statement

2.25 This position statement accompanies this HLDP Evidence Report. It regards each topic area covered and summarises where there is an evidence gap, or if the evidence has been disputed. Table 2:2 sets out which key stakeholders provided comments during the preparation of this Evidence Report, to which chapters they provided comments to, whether any evidence was disputed and if any evidence gaps have been identified. Following Table 2:2, each evidence chapter is summarised, and the reporter is signposted to where all identified evidence disputes or gaps can be found within this Evidence Report.

Table 2:2 Summary of representations, disputes and evidence gaps

Evidence Chapter	Stakeholder Representations	Evidence Dispute	Evidence Gap
Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy	NatureScot (THC088) Network Rail (THC431) Homes for Scotland (THC090) SEPA (THC089) HES (THC066) Scottish Forestry (THC438) RSPB Scotland (THC440) SP Renewables (THC429) Scottish Renewables (THC428) SSEN Distribution (THC437) SSEN Transmission (THC436) Defence Infrastructure Organisation (THC430) Highland Adapts (THC432) HIE (THC433)	Yes – THC446 is Council response to ScottishPower Renewables and Scottish Renewables representation, and points of difference and dispute that remain.	Yes – baseline assessment of lifecycle emissions relevant to types of development occurring in Highland.
Chapter 5: Nature and Environment	NatureScot (THC088) SEPA (THC089) RSPB Scotland (THC418) Homes for Scotland (THC090) HES (THC420) Scottish Forestry (THC416) SP Renewables (THC429) Scottish Renewables (THC428)	No	Yes – New Highland Forestry and Woodland Strategy commissioned and will inform HLDP.
Chapter 6: Coastal Development	NatureScot (THC088) Fisheries Management Scotland (THC067) SEPA (THC089)	No	No

and Aquaculture	Marine Directorate (THC092) Bakkafrost (THC075) Cromarty Harbour (THC076) HES (THC066) HIE (THC080) Scrabster Harbour (THC078) Scottish Seafarms (THC081) THC Flood Risk Management (THC069)		
Chapter 7: Flood Risk Management	NatureScot (THC088) SEPA (THC089) Homes for Scotland (THC090)	No	No
Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places	NatureScot (THC088) SEPA (THC089) Homes for Scotland (THC090)	No	Yes – BILA is out of date and needs updated before proposed plan
Chapter 9: Housing	HIE (THC080) NatureScot (THC088) SEPA (THC089) Homes for Scotland (THC090) HES (THC066) Cairngorm National Park Authority (THC199)	No	Yes – HNDA to be completed, MCA's are still progressing, Deliverable land supply needed to meet iLHLR will require updating to reflect this.
Chapter 10: Transport	SEPA (THC089) Transport Scotland (THC135) HITRANS (THC402) Moray Council (THC406) NatureScot (THC088) Network Rail (THC407) ScotRail (THC408) Walk Wheel Cycle Trust (THC410) THC Access Officer (THC414) THC Transport Planning (THC411) THC Active and Sustainable Transport (THC415) THC Corran Ferry Project Manager (THC413) CalMac (THC409)	No	Yes – limited active travel, community transport, and road transport trip data. Cumulative Transport Appraisal required to inform proposed plan.

Chapter 11: Infrastructure	HIE (THC080) – Awaiting response NatureScot (THC088) Homes for Scotland (THC090)	No	Yes - Current evidence on primary healthcare facilities is not considered sufficient. Community facilities condition and capacity remain unknown.
Chapter 12: Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings	HES (THC066) THC Contaminated Land Team (THC183) NatureScot (THC088)	No	Yes – Urban Capacity Study in key locations will be helpful to assess brownfield opportunities for future housing.
Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing and Local Living	NatureScot (THC088) SEPA (THC089) NHS Highland (THC120) THC Active Travel and Sustainable Transport (THC200) THC Environmental Health (THC201) SportScotland (THC202) Public Health Scotland (THC203) Defence Infrastructure Organisation (THC206)	No	No

Chapter 3 : Statement of Engagement

3.1 This chapter outlines the steps the Council has taken to consult and engage throughout the production of the Evidence Report by following the Scottish Government's [Effective Community Engagement in Local Development Planning Guidance](#). [Section 16A](#) and [section 16B](#) (2) and (4) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 set out the minimum legal requirements for people and organisations to engage with and outline that input from the following groups should be sought in producing the Evidence Report:

- **The Public**
- **Children and Young People**
- **Disabled People**
- **Gypsy Travellers**
- **Key Agencies**
- **Other Stakeholders/Specialist Groups**
- **Community Councils**

3.2 The following sections within this chapter outline how specific efforts were made to fulfil these requirements as defined in the Act.

The Public

3.3 The Council led opportunities for public engagement with the HLDP Evidence Report and communicated these through the Council's [HLDP webpages](#), the [Highland Development Plans Online Portal](#), and the [Development Plan Scheme](#). These opportunities were both general (relating to all LDP policy areas) and focussed (relating to specific LDP policy areas) in nature as set out below:

HLDP Evidence Consultation

3.4 The HLDP Evidence Consultation which ran from 31 January to 2 May 2025 was a public consultation that presented early drafts of this evidence report on the [Highland Development Plans Online Portal](#). It was a general consultation inviting engagement on all LDP policy areas. It also signalled areas of evidence gaps and provided opportunities to make the Council aware of further evidence and additionally sought views on what respondents thought of our evidence and the early conclusions we could draw from this. This was promoted using the Council's official communications channels, and was circulated to community groups and community councils, Councillors, Key Agencies, neighbouring local authorities, the development industry, and to a wide range of subscribers who have opted to receive such updates specific to development planning in the Highlands.

- 3.5 In some instances, respondents opted to upload their comments to the HLDP Evidence Consultation rather than by directly inputting this to the platform. In any event, both uploaded submissions and comments provided directly within the platform were considered.
- 3.6 A total of 286 comments were received from 68 respondents, which included members of the public, alongside key agencies, the development industry, community councils and interest groups among others. The Council compiled all feedback and in many instances was directed towards additional sources of information which was duly considered. The feedback from the HLDP Evidence Consultation is available within a compiled HLDP Evidence Consultation Report **(THC006)** and highlighted significant crossovers between policy areas. In contrast to the structure within the HLDP Evidence Consultation, the evidence as presented within the Evidence Report was thus restructured on the basis of this consultation to best collate related policy areas in an appropriate manner to avoid duplication and repetition.
- 3.7 There were also several in-person drop-in events held around Highland jointly with colleagues leading on Area Place Planning and on the Highland Investment Plan. This provided opportunity not only to raise awareness of the HLDP but also to explain the relationship between different plans and programmes.

Place Standard Tool

- 3.8 The Council's Place Standard Tool Consultation from 17 June to 16 August 2024 was an online public engagement opportunity that related specifically to the Place Standard Tool which is designed to support communities, public, private and third sector organisations to assess the quality of a place and to support the consideration of development planning and design within the framework of the 14 Place Standard themes and to deliver on the Six Qualities of Successful Places which are detailed further in **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**. High Life Highland additionally undertook specific Place Standard Engagement using bespoke materials for Children **(THC176)** and Young People **(THC177)**. The full breakdown of consultation feedback received within this is detailed in the respective Area Place Plans detailed in **Chapter 2: Area Profiles and Position Statement**. The Place Standard Tool could be completed by individuals and by groups. There were 990 responses, in addition to which young people were engaged through sessions facilitated by High Life Highland. High Life Highland is a charity, established by the Council in 2011 to deliver leisure services and community learning on its behalf. It delivers and supports adult learning, arts, leisure centres, libraries, museums, outdoor education, sport and youth work.

Local Living

- 3.9 The Council's Local Living Consultation from 17 June to 16 August 2024 was an online public engagement opportunity that related specifically to the Council's [Local Living Interactive Map](#) and the methodology behind it, which was developed in response to NPF4 Policy 15 as detailed in **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**. This was hosted on the [Highland Development Plans Online Portal](#) alongside the [Local Living Mapping Technical Note](#) to provide further context behind the development of the tool.
- 3.10 The consultation generated 27 responses with a total of 46 comments and were received from a range of parties, including individuals, community councils and community development organisations. A summary of the responses received, including the Council's consideration is shown in Local Living in Highland Consultation Report (**THC168**).

Housing Need and Demand Assessment

- 3.11 The HLDP Evidence Report was developed in tandem with a Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA), led by Arneil Johnston which is discussed further in **Chapter 9: Housing**. The HNDA was supplemented by primary research among Highland's communities to ensure that any gaps in secondary datasets could be addressed, particularly for informal housing arrangements, overcrowding, concealed households or localised affordability pressures. The primary research undertaken was the Highland HNDA Survey, which was led by Research Resource and undertaken in two stages from September to November 2025 over a ten-week period.
- 3.12 The first stage involved 850 telephone interviews with households living across the Highland Region. Households were randomly selected to take part by the Council and received a letter from Highland Council confirming this. Selected households were then contacted by Research Resource by telephone, unless they opted out of the survey process.
- 3.13 The second stage involved an online survey open to all residents in Highland aged over 16 who are main householders. The survey was promoted on social media by the Council, local organisations such as Community Councils and local employers.

Call for Development Sites

- 3.14 While not strictly part of the Evidence Report, the Council prepared for a Call for Development Sites in tandem with progression of the Evidence Report. Undertaking this step earlier in the progress was considered to be more suitable for the Highland context as it:

- Enabled the Council to identify the land being promoted for development within a large expansive area,
- Informed concurrent work to assess and progress suitable candidate Masterplan Consent Area (MCA) sites,
- Guided and informed engagement with infrastructure providers on deliverability and constraints
- Captured opportunities in smaller or rural settlements that don't always show up clearly in strategic data

3.15 A public consultation on the Call for Development Sites Draft Submission Template between 28 November 2024 and 3 January 2025 which prompted 25 responses principally from the development industry and was amended in light of these comments and made available as part of the Call for Development Sites between January and May 2025.

Children and Young People

3.16 The Council has engaged with Children and Young People using opportunities for general and focussed engagement on specific policy areas.

3.17 The Council ran a stall with engagement activities at the Highland Youth Parliament Conference held in June 2024, promoting to delegates the role of planning, evidence gathering for the HLDP and specifically the then live Place Standard Tool and Local Living Consultation as ways to get involved.

Place Standard Tool

3.18 In addition to the Place Standard Tool consultation undertaken with the wider public, High Life Highland additionally undertook specific Place Standard Engagement using bespoke materials for Children (**THC176**) and Young People (**THC177**). The full breakdown of consultation feedback received within this is detailed in the respective Area Place Plans detailed in **Chapter 2: Area Profiles and Position Statement**. Over 470 young people were engaged within group sessions and those group's views captured in the tool.

Play Sufficiency Assessment

3.19 The Council's [Playpark Strategy and Action Plan](#) (**THC233**) discussed further in **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking** was underpinned by consultations and surveys with children, disability groups, NHS and the third sector. The Council's primary engagement activity for this work included the Let's Talk about Play Parks survey which was designed for all age groups to be able to complete, as they were able to and received 1,151

responses, half of which were from primary school aged children. The full approach undertaken for this exercise and the findings from the engagement is detailed within the [Playpark Strategy and Action Plan](#) Appendix 1. The findings of these surveys later informed the development of the playpark assessment scoring methodology within the Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA), by reflecting what was important to respondents.

- 3.20 The draft PSA Report and Maps were published for public consultation between 16 January and 27 February 2026, alongside a targeted consultation focusing on play spaces that had received recent investment. This consultation concentrated on the 45 play spaces that had received investment since they were surveyed for the PSA, engaging 41 primary and 26 secondary schools whose catchment areas those play spaces are located within.
- 3.21 The consultation for the general public and organisations received 34 responses which included responses from Community Councils, Individuals, Councillors, Residential Associations, the consultation with school pupils received 100 responses (with one or more individual pupils (total 65) or pupil groups (total 35) from each of 17 schools which responded). In addition, 17 queries and/or comments on the Draft PSA were received by email, in addition to which, a range of questions were received about the PSA consultation
- 3.22 A summary of consultation responses is included within Appendix 1 to the Play Sufficiency Assessment – Consultation Outcomes report. Following the consultation, feedback was reviewed alongside factual updates and corrections, and where appropriate, changes were made to the PSA report and mapping. The PSA has now been finalised and is presented to the [Economy and Infrastructure Committee \(28 May 2026\)](#) for approval.

Housing Need and Demand Assessment

- 3.23 The University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) were part of the Council's Housing Market Partnership, a stakeholder group with key input in overseeing the development of the HNDA. UHI promoted the Highland HNDA Survey among their students to increase engagement among this demographic.

Disabled People

- 3.24 The Council's equalities officer liaised and provided contact details for a range of Highland equalities and disability groups which included children's disability services. These contacts were alerted to the HLDP Evidence Consultation and those who responded are shown in the HLDP Evidence Consultation Report **(THC006)**.

- 3.25 The HNDA estimates need and demand for specialist housing provision for disabled people is a required component in consideration. The Council's appointed consultant Arneil Johnston was provided with all records of quantitative evidence, and was introduced to other Council services, the HSCP and relevant officials within NHS Highland who provided further empirical, anecdotal and qualitative evidence related to disabled housing need and demand, including adaptations and in-situ solutions across the Highlands. The NHS and HSCP promoted the primary research among equalities and disability groups to widen participation and inform local evidence on existing need in Highland.
- 3.26 The primary research undertaken to support the HNDA also contained specific survey questions regarding specialist housing provision and was circulated among third sector organisations to increase outreach to those with disabilities.

Gypsy Travellers

- 3.27 Planning Officers liaised with other Council Services with inter-related remits for Gypsy/Travellers, including the housing service and NHS Highland, and sought input on how best to engage with the Gypsy/Traveller community. Officers were made aware of a Gypsy/Traveller community newsletter in circulation and provided input so that contact was included within several editions introducing the HLDP, and how to contact the Council regarding this to participate.
- 3.28 The Bingen Noggins Tobar Taking our Journey Project Impact Report led by Progress in Dialogue sets out the findings of ongoing engagement with the Gypsy/Traveller community in the Highlands. The project is a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project funded by the Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership, designed to explore the root causes of mental health challenges and substance use among Gypsy/Traveller communities in the Highland region. The key findings of this are contained within **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**. Over the course of the project, project partners carried out; community visits, household conversations, storytelling sessions, and knowledge exchanges, shaped by the leadership of Gypsy/Traveller Community Champions. In total, more than 60 community members informed the process, surfacing stories, experiences, and insights rarely included in mainstream mental health or addiction strategies. This research was focused on Gypsy/Travellers in housing in rural areas such as Caithness, Sutherland and Cape Wrath, in addition to communities living on Gypsy/Traveller sites, both private and Council-owned.
- 3.29 As the HLDP Evidence Report has been prepared in tandem with the HNDA, estimating need and demand for housing among the Gypsy/Traveller community is a required component in consideration as detailed in Chapter 9: Housing. The

Council's appointed consultant was provided with all records of quantitative evidence, and was introduced to other Council services who provided anecdotal and qualitative evidence from the various Gypsy/Traveller sites across the Highlands. These Council services additionally promoted the primary research among Highland's Gypsy/Travellers to widen participation and inform local evidence on existing need in Highland

- 3.30 The Council and Arneil Johnston additionally met with Mecopp and Progress in Dialogue to discuss best approaches for further engagement opportunities and to address gypsy/traveller considerations within the HNDA. The content related to Gypsy/Travellers within **Chapter 9: Housing** was informed by the matters raised in these discussions. A record of all meetings is provided within the Log of Engagement **(THC001)**.

Key Agencies

- 3.31 The Council has engaged with Key Agencies as defined by [Reg 25 of The Town and Country Planning \(Development Planning\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2023](#) in a number of ways.

Key Agencies Group (KAG)

- 3.32 In February 2023, the Key Agencies Group (KAG) invited expressions of interest for planning authorities interested in working with the group to pilot a collective place-based approach as part of development plan preparations in 2023-2024. The Highland Council was one of 22 planning authorities that expressed interest. Following KAG consideration, on 24 May 2023 it was announced that pilot work would be taken forward with six planning authorities, including Highland. The Key Agencies provided input through a number of meetings and workshops to support place-based approaches to key stages of evidence gathering analysis and reporting. Representatives from KAG and from the Council held the first joint workshop on 13 July 2023. A record of all KAG meetings is provided within the Log of Engagement **(THC001)**.

Other Key Agency Involvement

- 3.33 Key Agencies were alerted to the HLDP Evidence Consultation and those who responded are shown in the HLDP Evidence Consultation Report **(THC006)**. Key agencies represented a significant share of feedback received within the HLDP Evidence Consultation, and their feedback was incorporated within the drafting of the HLDP Evidence Report. In some instances, further meetings were arranged

with specific Key Agencies to clarify or discuss matters before proceeding, as noted within the Log of Engagement **(THC001)**.

- 3.34 Key Agencies were emailed consultation draft copies of HLDP Evidence Report Chapters throughout 2025 and invited to provide further comments on the sufficiency of the evidence and the extent to which their views had been taken into consideration. Dates of circulation are noted within the Log of Engagement **(THC001)** and their submissions to these iterations have been denoted with appropriate corresponding reference numbers. As other Evidence Report Gate Check outcomes have indicated that information should as far as possible be presented within the body of the evidence report itself, the views expressed by Key Agencies alongside the Council's consideration of them are summarised within the Summary of Stakeholder Engagement sections of the respective chapters throughout the Evidence Report.
- 3.35 Where applicable, the respective chapters indicate which Key Agencies have indicated that they consider our evidence to be sufficient for their purposes.

Other Stakeholders/Specialist Groups

- 3.36 Alongside Key Agencies, other stakeholders have a valuable role to play in delivering the HLDP, and have therefore informed the Evidence Report. The HLDP Evidence Consultation was promoted by email correspondence to other stakeholders such as the development industry and renewables industry, third sector organisations and a wide range of subscribers who have opted to receive such updates specific to development planning in the Highlands, and feedback received is provided within HLDP Evidence Consultation Report **(THC006)**.
- 3.37 In the preparation of the Evidence Report, the Council has specifically engaged with industry bodies holding relevant expertise on specific subject matters, where it was considered that no recent, Highland-specific evidence existed that reflected the scale of activity ongoing, the needs of the industries and future directions of travel. This includes:
- **Economic and Employment Projections:** the HNDA Housing Market Partnership consisted of a steering group to oversee the HNDA housing need projections and the economic and employment drivers of these. This included key industries in the Highland economy with specific workforce and student accommodation needs, such as SSEN-T, SSEN-D, NHS Highland, ICFGF, alongside Chambers of Commerce, and other coordinating agencies who directly lead on this remit such as HIE. Stakeholders attended a series of online workshops to inform this process.
 - **Aquaculture Industry:** tailored online and survey engagement was carried out between the 22nd May 2025 and 30th June with 14 representatives from

the aquaculture industry comprising finfish, shellfish and seaweed harvesting sectors. Of these, 10 responded with their comments and views. Further details of this engagement are provided in **Chapter 6: Coastal Development and Aquaculture**.

- **Ports and Harbours:** tailored online and survey engagement was carried out with 27 ports and harbour authorities and ran from the 3rd July 2025 to the 21st July 2025. Of these, 9 responded with their comments and views. Further details of this engagement are provided in **Chapter 6: Coastal Development and Aquaculture**.
- **Minerals Audit:** Operators of 35 known operational quarries identified from planning records were invited to complete the Minerals Audit Survey for a period of 6 weeks from mid-May until the end of July 2025. Results received for 12 sites provide a more informed response to NPF4's requirements regarding aggregate landbanks as outlined in **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**.
- **Culture and Creativity:** tailored online and survey engagement was carried out from 5th September to 1st October with 75 galleries and museums across the region. Seven responses were received, providing comments, views and insights into future requirements. We are also engaged with 400 community halls in the same format, that support culture and creativity across the region, with this consultation scheduled to close on the 21st November. Further details of this engagement are provided in **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**.

Community Councils

- 3.38 There are 158 Community Council areas within the Highland Council area (a small number – around 12 – of which are wholly or partly within the Cairngorms National Park). At any one point in time many of the areas (but typically not all) have a Community Council formed - and amongst Community Councils, the level of activity varies between them. Both the Place Standard Tool and the Local Living consultation were promoted to Community Councils. Community Councils were also alerted to the HLDP Evidence Consultation, an online briefing was held for them and those who responded to the consultation are shown in the HLDP Evidence Consultation Report (**THC006**). However, the primary mechanism for formal consideration of Community Council input to the HLDP Evidence Report was through the incorporation of Local Place Plans.

Local Place Plans

- 3.39 Local Place Plans (LPPs) are community-led plans setting out proposals for the development and use of land. Introduced by the [Planning \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#), and directed by the [Town and Country Planning \(Local Place Plans\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2021](#) which came into force on 22 January 2022, an LPP is for a community to set out its aspirations for its future development. Once completed and then registered by the planning authority, they are to be taken into account in the preparation of the relevant local development plan.
- 3.40 [Section 15A of the Town and Country Planning \(Scotland\) Act 1997](#) (as amended), requires planning authorities, before preparing a LDP, to publish an invitation to local communities to prepare LPPs, and to publish information on the manner in which and date by which such LPPs are to be prepared in order to be taken into account in the preparation of the LDP and the assistance available for local communities to prepare LPPs. The Council began promoting the Local Place Planning opportunity with its dedicated [LPP webpages](#) being launched on 29 December 2022, for which resources and templates have been progressively developed and added in order to inform Community Councils and Community-Controlled Bodies on the process and requirements for registered, valid LPPs. Once NPF4 had been adopted in February 2023, The Town and Country Planning (Development Planning) (Scotland) Regulations 2023 had come into force on 19 May 2023 and the Local Development Planning Guidance was published on 24 May 2023, the requirements and timescales for new-style LDPs was clearer and the new provisions were commenced. This enabled the Council to publish on 30 June 2023 its formal invitation to local communities to prepare LPPs. A dedicated workstream to assist communities and register LPPs also commenced at this time.
- 3.41 As at 30 April 2026, there are 20 communities in Highland that have registered LPPs, with a further 13 LPPs which have been formally submitted but are not yet registered and another 22 LPPs for which the Council has been notified by the community body of their intent to prepare. These are listed in Table 3:1. Each relevant Evidence Report chapter summarises relevant issues raised by local communities in those first 20 registered LPPs. Local Place Planning activity continues across Highland, with further preparation commencements, submissions and registrations ongoing. The Council's [Local Place Plan Register Directory and Map](#) provide a more up-to-date picture. However, some preparation commencements have yet to be notified to us, or have been notified to us but have yet to be added to that Map. It is the Council's intention that LPPs that become registered between 1st May 2026 and the date on which the Evidence Report passes the Gate Check will also be taken into account in the preparation of this HLDP from the outset. LPPs that are registered after the date on which the Evidence Report passes Gate Check will be taken into account at the

next available opportunity, which may include some consideration in the preparation of this HLDP.

- 3.42 LPP preparation involves the community body engaging with the community as well as a minimum 28 days' consultation with the relevant Councillors serving the area and Community Councils within or adjoining the area. The Council therefore recognises that LPP activity demonstrates further engagement with the public at large within the relevant areas.

Table 3:1 Highland Local Place Plans

Registered LPPs	Submitted LPPs	In Preparation LPPs
Ardgour	Balloch	Alness
Black Isle	Contin	Applecross
Broadford and Strath	Dunnet and Canisbay	Ardross
Caol	Edderton	Assynt
Croy and Tornagrain	Glengarry	Beaully
Dores and Essich	Helmsdale and District	Bettyhill, Altnaharra and Strathnaver
Duror and Kentallen	Kinlochbervie	Brora
Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston	Lairg	Dornoch and Area
Gairloch	Rogart	Durness
Garve and District	Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry	Holm
Glen Urquhart	Strathpeffer and District	Isle of Rum
Golspie	Tongue, Melness and Skerray	Kiltearn
Kinlochleven	Wester Loch Ewe	Kirkhill and Bunchrew
Kyle of Sutherland		Melvich
Lochalsh		South Knoydart
Morvern		Strathdearn
Nairnshire		Strathglass
Sleat		Strathnairn
Stratherrick and Foyers		Tain
Torridon and Kinlochewe		Thurso
		Uig
		Wick

Chapter 4 : Climate Change and Energy

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. - the principal purposes for which the land is used Section 15 (5) (d): - the infrastructure of the district (including systems for the supply of water and energy) Section 15 (5) (e): - how that infrastructure is used Section 15 (5) (f) - any change which the planning authority think may occur in relation to any of the matters mentioned in paragraphs (a) to (eb) Town and Country Planning (Development Planning) (Scotland) Regulations 2023: Regulation 9 requires the LDP to have regard to: - the location of Control of Major Accident Hazard establishments and/or pipelines The Climate Change (Local Development Plan) (Repeals) (Scotland) Order 2025 came into effect 1 November 2025 (repealing Section 3(f)). <i>Section 3 (f):</i> <i>LDPs must include policies requiring all developments in the area to be designed so as to ensure that all new buildings avoid a specified and rising proportion of the projected greenhouse gas emissions from their use, calculated on the basis of the approved design and plans for the specific development, through the installation and operation of low and zero-carbon generating technologies.</i>
NPF4 LDP Requirements	NPF4 Policy 1: - LDPs must address the global climate emergency and nature crisis by ensuring the spatial strategy will reduce emissions and adapt to current and future risks of climate change by promoting nature recovery and restoration in the area. NPF4 Policy 2: - The LDP spatial strategy should be designed to reduce, minimise or avoid greenhouse gas emissions. The six spatial principles identified in NPF4 should form the basis of the spatial strategy,

	helping to guide development to, and create sustainable locations. The strategy should be informed by an understanding of the impacts of the proposals on greenhouse gas emissions. • LDPs should support adaptation to the current and future impacts by taking into account climate risks, guiding development away from vulnerable areas, and enabling places to adapt to those risks. NPF4 Policy 11: • LDPs should seek to realise their area's full potential for electricity and heat from renewable, low carbon and zero emission sources by identifying a range of opportunities for energy development. NPF4 Policy 18: • LDPs and delivery programmes should be based on an integrated infrastructure first approach. Plans should: ○ Be informed by evidence on infrastructure capacity, condition, needs and deliverability within the plan area, including cross boundary infrastructure; ○ Set out the infrastructure requirements to deliver the spatial strategy, informed by the evidence base, identifying the infrastructure priorities, and where, how, when and by whom they will be delivered; and ○ Indicate the type, level (or method of calculation) and location of the financial or in-kind contributions, and the types of development from which they will be required. • Plans should align with relevant national, regional, and local infrastructure plans and policies and take account of the Scottish Government infrastructure investment hierarchy and sustainable travel and investment hierarchies in developing the spatial strategy. Consistent early engagement and collaboration between relevant stakeholders will better inform decisions on land use and investment NPF4 Policy 19: • LDPs should take into account the area's Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES). The spatial strategy should take into account areas of heat network potential and any designated Heat Network Zones (HNZ).
Links to Evidence	(THC052) Draft Updated Sectoral Marine Plan: Offshore Wind Energy (THC053) THC Regional Coastal Change Adaptation Plan (THC055) Highland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (THC056) Inverness West Bank and Inverness Castle Heat Network Feasibility Studies

(THC057) Heat Network Feasibility Report
(THC058) Highland Energy Project Mapping Technical Note
(THC059) Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2025 (including Appendix 2: Highland Local Climate Impact Profile)
(THC060) Climate Change Committee Minutes, 7 November 2024
(THC061) Net Zero Programme Update
(THC140) CONFIDENTIAL Strategic Planning Report Inverness IP
(THC141) CONFIDENTIAL Strategic Planning Report Conon Bridge – Invergordon IP
(THC074) Dava Moor, Nairn and Monadhliath Wind Energy Landscape Sensitivity Study
(THC143) Strategic Spatial Framework for Onshore Wind Energy: CaS
(THC138) Strategic Spatial Framework for Onshore Wind Energy: IMF
(THC139) Strategic Spatial Framework for Onshore Wind Energy: WH&I
(THC035) Response from Historic Environment Scotland
(THC039) Response from RPSB
(THC040) Response from Council to ScottishPower Renewables and Scottish Renewables Feedback on Chapters 4 & 5
(THC041) Scottish Renewables Response to Evidence
(THC042) ScottishPower Renewables Response to Evidence
(THC043) Response from Defence Infrastructure Organisation
(THC044) Response from Highland Adapts
(THC045) Response from SSEN Transmission
(THC046) Response from SSEN Distribution
(THC047) Response from Scottish Forestry
(THC080) Response from Highlands and Islands Enterprise
(THC088) Response from NatureScot
(THC089) Response from SEPA
(THC089) Response from Homes for Scotland
(THC152) Response from Network Rail

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
	THC192	Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009	01.08.25
	THC193	Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) Act 2024	16.10.25
	THC194	Update to the Climate Change Plan 2018-2032	16.10.2025
	THC195	The Environment Strategy for Scotland: Vision and Outcomes	20.10.2025
	THC196	Scottish National Adaptation Plan 2024-2029	20.10.2025
	THC197	National Performance Framework	01.08.2025
	THC198	Local Development Planning Guidance	01.08.2025
	THC199	Climate Change Act – Section 72: fourteenth annual report	01.08.2025
	THC200	Climate Change Act – Section 72: fifteenth annual report	01.08.2025
	THC201	The Climate Change (Local Development Plan) (Repeals) (Scotland) Order 2025	01.11.2025
	THC202	IPCC Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5 °C	01.08.2025
	THC203	UK Local Authority and Regional Greenhouse Gas Statistics	01.08.2025
	THC204	Scottish Greenhouse Gas Statistics 2023	01.08.2025
	THC205	Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy	14.05.2026
	THC206	Scottish Transport Statistics 2024	01.08.2025
	THC207	Progress in reducing emissions in Scotland 2023 report to parliament	20.10.2025
	THC208	Climate Projections for Scotland Summary	20.10.2025
	THC209	MetOffice Historic Station data	01.08.2025
	THC210	Climate Ready Scotland: Second Scottish Climate Change Adaptation Programme	20.10.2025
	THC211	15 key consequences of climate change for Scotland	20.10.2025

	THC212	<u>SWF statement on Morayshire Wildfires - Updated 10.07.25</u>	20.08.2025
	THC213	<u>Storm Floris - SSEN Report</u>	15.08.2025
	THC214	<u>Storm Floris - Met Office Report</u>	15.08.2025
	THC215	<u>Storm Floris - BBC Report</u>	15.08.2025
	THC216	<u>Highland Weather & Climate Story Map</u>	01.08.2025
	THC217	<u>Dynamic Coast Erosion Reporter</u>	01.08.2025
	THC218	<u>Dynamic Coast Differences between a high and low emissions future</u>	01.08.2025
	THC219	<u>Dynamic Coast Erosion Disadvantage</u>	01.08.2025
	THC220	<u>Dynamic Coast Social Vulnerability Classification Index (SVCI) for Scotland</u>	01.08.2025
	THC221	<u>Local Authority Climate Explorer</u>	01.08.2025
	THC222	<u>North Scotland Community Risk Register 2024</u>	20.10.2025
	THC223	<u>Summary for Scotland: Evidence for the third UK Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA3)</u>	20.10.2025
	THC224	<u>National Risk Register</u>	20.10.2025
	THC225	<u>NatureScot Research Report No. 1228: Anticipating and mitigating projected</u>	20.10.2025
	THC226	<u>Private Water Supplies and Climate Change</u>	20.10.2025
	THC227	<u>Highland Climate Change and Energy Map</u>	20.10.2025
	THC228	<u>Scottish Water Climate Change Adaptation Plan</u>	20.10.2025
	THC229	<u>Scotland future predictions of water scarcity: impact on distilleries & agricultural abstractors</u>	20.10.2025
	THC230	<u>Provision of Analyses of Scottish Fire & Rescue Service (SFRS) Incident Reporting System (IRS) Data in Relation to Wildfire Incidents</u>	20.10.2025
	THC231	<u>Regional Report Highland Climate Risk and Opportunity Assessment Economic Analysis</u>	20.10.2025
	THC232	<u>Highland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Map</u>	05.08.2025
	THC233	<u>Wildfire Risk Viewer Maps from EFFIS</u>	05.08.2025
	THC234	<u>Scottish Wildfire and Muirburn Extents</u>	05.08.2025
	THC235	<u>Energy Report HCROA Economic Analysis</u>	20.10.2025
	THC236	<u>Forest and Timber Report HCROA Economic Analysis</u>	20.10.2025
	THC237	<u>Food and Drink (Whiskey and Salmon) HCROA Economic Analysis</u>	20.10.2025
	THC238	<u>UK Climate Projections Headline Findings 2022</u>	20.10.2025
	THC239	<u>Indicators and trends: Extreme weather and infrastructure</u>	05.08.2025

	THC240	Scotland Climate Ready Plan for Railway 24-29	20.10.2025
	THC241	Just Transition and Climate Change Adaptation	20.10.2025
	THC242	The impacts of climate change on population groups in Scotland	27.08.2025
	THC243	Local Climate Adaptation Tool	05.08.2025
	THC244	Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)	05.08.2025
	THC245	Digital connectivity and climate change in Scotland – Evidence review	05.08.2025
	THC246	Scotland's Carbon Budgets	20.10.2025
	THC247	Highland Council Net Zero Strategy	15.05.26
	THC248	Scottish Biodiversity Strategy	20.10.2025
	THC249	Biodiversity: delivery plan 2024 to 2030	20.10.2025
	THC250	Scotland's Forestry Strategy	20.10.2025
	THC251	Woodland Carbon Code	20.10.2025
	THC252	Scotland's National Peatland Plan	20.10.2025
	THC253	The Flow Country WHS Nomination Dossier	22.08.2025
	THC254	Carbon Removal & Storage Project in Highland	20.10.2025
	THC255	Route Map for 20% car use reduction by 2030	20.10.2025
	THC256	National Transport Strategy 2	20.10.2025
	THC257	Hydrogen Action Plan	20.10.2025
	THC258	Economic Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on the Highland Region	20.10.2025
	THC259	National Flood Resilience Strategy	20.10.2025
	THC260	Using future climate scenarios to support today's decision making	20.10.2025
	THC261	NPF4 planning guidance for Policy 2	20.10.2025
	THC262	Planning (Scotland) Act 2019	06.08.2025
	THC263	Lifecycle Greenhouse Gas Emissions of NPF4 proposed National Developments (2022)	20.10.2025
	THC264	Research to Inform NPF4: Planning and Climate Change Guidance Report Issue 3	20.10.2025
	THC265	Sustainable Design Guide Supplementary Guidance - Highland Council	15.05.2026
	THC266	Carbon Guidance for Planning Applications, S36 & S37 consents	20.10.2025
	THC267	Wind farm carbon calculator: Scottish peatland	20.10.2025
	THC268	Wind farm carbon calculator Scottish peatland by ClimateXChange: research	20.10.2025
	THC269	Peatland Code	20.10.2025
	THC270	UK Land Carbon Registry	20.10.2025

	THC271	December 2020 Information Note - Climate Mitigation: Woodland creation & management	20.10.2025
	THC272	Energy Act 2023	20.10.2025
	THC273	Clean Power 2030 Action Plan	20.10.2025
	THC274	Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan	20.10.2025
	THC275	Electricity Act 1989	06.08.2025
	THC276	Pathway to 2030 Holistic Network Design 2022	20.10.2025
	THC277	Beyond 2030 report (2024)	20.10.2025
	THC278	Onshore wind: Policy Statement 2022	20.10.2025
	THC279	Highland Energy Project Mapping	06.08.2025
	THC280	Energy Trends – Regional Renewable Statistics	20.10.2025
	THC281	UK residual fuel consumption at regional and local authority level, 2005 - 2023	20.10.2025
	THC282	Strategic Spatial Energy Plan Summary	20.10.2025
	THC283	Local Energy Net Zero Accelerator data story	20.10.2025
	THC284	Highland Local Heat, Energy Efficiency Strategy	15.05.2026
	THC285	Distribution Future Energy Scenario 2024	20.10.2025
	THC286	Distribution Future Energy Scenario 2023	20.10.2025
	THC287	Scottish Onshore Transmission Network Boundaries	20.10.2025
	THC288	Pathway to 2030: SSEN-T Projects	20.10.2025
	THC289	Highland Housing Land Audit	06.08.2025
	THC290	Deliverable Housing Land Pipeline March 2025	15.05.2026
	THC291	Highland Business and Industrial Land Audit	06.08.2025
	THC292	SHEPD Network Development Report 2024	02.09.2025
	THC293	Strategic Development Plan areas (SSEN-D)	20.10.2025
	THC294	Thurso South SDP	20.10.2025
	THC295	Taynuilt SDP	20.10.2025
	THC296	NESO Gas Network Capability Needs Report(	20.10.2025
	THC297	Midstream gas system: update to the market	06.08.2025
	THC298	Planning Permission Appeal - PPA-270-2293	27.08.2025
	THC299	Highland Wind Turbine Mapping	06.08.2025
	THC300	Aviation Lighting Impact Assessment	22.08.2025
	THC301	Offshore Wind Policy Statement	06.08.2025
	THC302	Scotland Marine Economic Statistics 2022	06.08.2025
	THC303	Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy	06.08.2025
	THC304	National Marine Plan	20.10.2025
	THC305	Scotland's Hydrogen Assets	06.08.2025
	THC306	UK Hydrogen Strategy	27.08.2025
	THC307	Planning Improvement Hub - Hydrogen	20.10.2025
	THC308	Hydrogen Planning Process Map	20.10.2025

	THC309	A Guide to Early Engagement in Planning for Hydrogen Developers	20.10.2025
	THC310	Hydrogen webpage - SEPA	20.10.2025
	THC311	Town & Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Scotland Regulations 2017	20.10.2025
	THC312	Hazardous Substances Consent	20.10.2025
	THC313	Pollution Prevention and Control (Scotland) Regulations 2012 (PPC)	20.10.2025
	THC314	Highland Renewable Energy Strategy and Planning Guidelines	14.05.2026
	THC315	Onshore wind energy supplementary guidance	14.05.2026
	THC316	The Flow Country Planning WHS Planning Position Statement 2	14.05.2026
	THC317	Onshore Wind Sector Deal	14.05.2026
	THC318	North of Scotland Hydrogen Programme	06.08.2025
	THC319	Long-term Waste Management Communities & Place Committee Report	15.05.26
	THC320	Local Energy Scotland	06.08.2025
	THC321	Landscape Sensitivity Assessment Guidance	20.10.2025
	THC322	Social Value Charter for Renewables Investment - Highland Council	15.05.2026
	THC323	Local Heat & Energy Efficiency Strategy (Scotland) Order	06.08.2025
	THC324	Scottish House Condition Survey: Local Authority Analysis 2017-2019	06.08.2025
	THC325	New Build Heat Standard 2024	06.08.2025
	THC326	Heat in Buildings Strategy (2021)	20.10.2025
	THC327	Heat Networks (Scotland) Act 2021	06.08.2025
	THC328	Scotland Heat Map	06.08.2025
	THC329	Heat Networks Planning Database	06.08.2025
	THC330	Government's First National Assessment of Potential Heat Network Zones	06.08.2025
	THC331	Waste Site Capacity - SEPA	20.10.2025
	THC332	Large point emitters from National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory	20.10.2025
	THC333	SSEN Network Maps – Generation Availability	20.10.2025
	THC334	British Geological Survey - hydrogeology	20.10.2025
	THC335	Mine Remediation Authority Map	20.10.2025
	THC336	A Perfect Storm: Fuel Poverty in Rural Scotland	06.08.2025
	THC337	Scottish Fuel Poverty Index	06.08.2025

THC338	Consultation on increasing the threshold for applications under The Electricity Act	08.01.2026
THC339	Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment – Technical Report	16.03.2026
THC340	Battery Energy Storage Systems: planning guidance	19.03.2026
THC341	Transitional RESP (tRESP) Executive Summary	19.03.2026
THC342	Climate change duties: statutory guidance	20.03.2026
THC343	SSEN 2025 Report: Technology change log	09.04.2026
THC344	Beaully 132kv Supply Area Strategic Development Plan	22.04.2026
THC345	Fort Augustus 132kv Supply Area Strategic Development Plan	22.04.2026
THC346	Errochty 132kv Supply Area Strategic Development Plan	22.04.2026
THC347	Thurso South Strategic Development Plan	22.04.2026
THC348	Inverness and Aviemore 132kv Supply Area Strategic Development Plan	22.04.2026
THC349	Outer Hebrides and Skye 132kv Supply Area Strategic Development Plan	22.04.2026

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 that there are relevant crossovers between Climate Change and Energy and other topics including:

- **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**
- **Chapter 6: Coastal Development**
- **Chapter 7: Flood Risk Management**
- **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**
- **Chapter 9: Housing**
- **Chapter 10: Transport**
- **Chapter 11: Infrastructure**
- **Chapter 12: Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings**
- **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**

Where apparent, the Council has referenced relevant linkages between policy areas throughout the chapter.

Summary of Evidence

- 4.1 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:
- **National Context**
 - **Climate Emissions**
 - **Climate Impacts**
 - **Climate Risks**
 - **Vulnerability and Resilience**
 - **Climate Mitigation**
 - **Climate Adaptation**
 - **Energy**
 - **Heat and Cooling**

National Context

- 4.2 In 2019, the Scottish Government declared a climate emergency. The [Climate Change \(Scotland\) Act 2009](#), including its amendments, aims to ensure that Scotland will be fully net-zero by 2045. The Act contains a legal duty across the public sector to deliver the objectives of the Act (Section 44). In 2025, Scotland's interim targets for 2030 to 2040 were repealed and replaced with carbon budgets (statutory limits on greenhouse gas emissions) through the [Climate Change \(Emissions Reduction Targets\) Act 2024](#).
- 4.3 The pathway to achieve the Act's targets for emissions reduction is set out in the Scottish Government [Update to the Climate Change Plan 2018-2032](#), which outlines how Scottish Government intends to meet emissions reduction targets across all portfolio areas and sectors of the economy. It highlights the role of the planning system in guiding and achieving the outcomes with key priorities for development at a national level and policy on how local development planning should manage change.
- 4.4 [The Environment Strategy for Scotland: Vision and Outcomes](#) sets out a vision—By 2045: By restoring nature and ending Scotland's contribution to climate change, our country is transformed for the better - helping to secure the wellbeing of our people and planet for generations to come.
- 4.5 Scotland's climate change legislation also requires Scottish Ministers to set out Scottish Climate Change Adaptation Programmes (SCCAPs) to reflect the latest UK-wide evidence base on climate risk. The [Scottish National Adaptation Plan \(SNAP3\) 2024-2029](#) has 23 objectives that set out priorities for action in the next 5 years (2024-2029). Important enabling factors for effective adaptation include the National Planning Framework, the Place Principle, Flood Resilience Strategy, Biodiversity Strategy among other plans. Objective Development Planning (NC3)

states: “development planning (including Local Development Plans and associated delivery programmes) takes current and future climate risks into account and is a key lever in enabling places to adapt.”

- 4.6 In 2024, the Scottish Government proposed that building Scotland’s resilience to climate change becomes a national outcome in Scotland’s [National Performance Framework](#), anticipated to be launched in 2026. This change is proposed to drive climate action that aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and addresses the urgency and scale of the climate crisis.
- 4.7 In March 2026, Scottish Government published [Climate change duties: statutory guidance for public bodies](#) to support public bodies to implement their climate change duties under Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. Annex J – Sectoral Guidance: Planning and the Built Environment describes the planning system which provides opportunities and duty to respond to climate change, including through the Local Development Plan.

National Planning Framework

- 4.8 NPF4 is Scotland’s national spatial strategy and forms part of the statutory development plan. Meeting emission reduction targets is one of six statutory outcomes for the National Planning Framework. The six overarching spatial principles of NPF4 guide planning to respond to the global climate emergency. Addressing the global climate emergency and the nature crisis have formed the foundations for the spatial strategy as a whole. NPF4 policy intent and outcomes are directive in preparing for current and future climate change, principally through Policies 1 and 2:
- Policy 1 gives significant weight to the global climate emergency and nature crises and recognises that it is a priority for all plans and decisions. This policy has connections with all other policies.
 - Policy 2 ensures that greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are reduced, minimised or avoided in new developments as much as possible and that developments adapt to the current and future impacts of climate change.
- 4.9 Reducing emissions in the energy sector is a key part of the response to climate change. Policy 11 supports renewable energy development, Policy 19 helps to decarbonise heat, while Policy 18 encourages an infrastructure-first approach.
- 4.10 [Local Development Planning Guidance](#) notes that Policy 1 will be implemented by the cumulative impact of all the other policies, in particular policies 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. Implementation of NPF4 as a whole should underpin the response to the intertwined climate and nature crises. This Chapter makes connections between other relevant evidence report Chapters (and NPF4 policies therein) to demonstrate the interrelated body of evidence related to Policy 1.

- 4.11 Other NPF4 policies to varying degrees contribute to responding to climate change. Action on adaptation is supported via policies 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 20, 21 and 22. Action on emissions reduction and mitigation is supported via policies 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 20 and 24. This includes policies supporting the health of the natural environment, supporting transition of key emissions generating activities, support for more local living and, creating productive places that are consistent with our ambition for green growth in the future.
- 4.12 NPF4 includes the following definitions, which are referred to in this chapter:
- **Climate change adaptation** - Climate change adaptation is about responding to the changes that we have seen in our climate over the last few decades and preparing for the challenges that we will face as our climate continues to change.
 - **Climate change mitigation** - Climate change mitigation refers to efforts to reduce or prevent emissions of GHGs, which have a direct impact on global average temperatures, and reducing the current concentration of carbon dioxide by enhancing carbon sinks (for example, increasing the area of forest).
 - **Decarbonisation** - Reducing the amount of gaseous carbon compounds released by buildings, activities or operations.
 - **Just transition** - Ending our contribution to climate change in a way that is fair and leaves no one behind.
 - **Net zero** - Scotland has set a target to become 'Net Zero' by 2045. This means the amount of GHG emissions we put into the atmosphere and the amount we are able to take out will add up to zero.
- 4.13 NPF4 emphasises the importance of Scotland's quality natural environment in our approach to tackling climate change, and for our economy, health and wellbeing. Recognising links with **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**, there is increasing recognition that the climate and nature crises are intertwined. Natural assets can be managed and used to secure a more sustainable future and will play a crucial role in achieving a Just Transition to Net Zero.
- 4.14 NPF4 outlines that LDPs are required to identify and support National Developments relevant to their areas. For Highland, relevant National Developments to climate change and energy include Pumped Hydro Storage, Strategic Renewable Energy Generation and Transmission Infrastructure, Circular Economy Material Management Facilities, National Walking, Cycling and Wheeling Network, Digital Fibre Network and Energy Innovation Development on the Islands.
- 4.15 Regional Spatial Priorities for 'North and West Coast and Islands', 'North' and 'North East' Scotland, including of Highland as part of each of those areas, are identified in NPF4. These support emissions reduction through the transition to

low carbon and net zero energy and making sustainable use of environmental assets. These priorities include:

- Maximise the benefits of renewable energy whilst enhancing blue and green infrastructure, decarbonising transport and building resilient connections.
- Support coastal and island communities to become carbon neutral, thus contributing to net-zero commitments and reducing fuel poverty.
- Seize the opportunities to grow the blue and green economy, recognising the world-class environmental assets that require careful management and opportunities to develop skills and diversify employment.
- Protect environmental assets and stimulate investment in natural and engineered solutions to climate change and nature restoration, whilst decarbonising transport and building resilient connections.
- Maintain and help to grow the population by taking a positive approach to rural development that strengthens networks of communities.
- Support local economic development by making sustainable use of the areas' environmental assets to innovate and lead greener growth.
- Plan infrastructure and investment to support the transition from oil and gas to net zero whilst protecting and enhancing blue and green infrastructure and decarbonising connectivity.
- Focus on continued regeneration through the principles of local living and 20 minute neighbourhoods to sustain the skilled workforce and improve local liveability.
- Support continued economic diversification and innovation.

4.16 With regard to section 3F of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, the [Fourteenth Annual Report](#) from Scottish Ministers concluded that Section 3F is no longer necessary because NPF4 and the New Build Heat Standard (NBHS) goes beyond what Section 3F can achieve and the dominant operational GHG emissions source, heat, is addressed by NBHS. Following the annual report, Ministers commenced work to prepare the repeal Order.

4.17 The [Fifteenth Annual Report](#) from Scottish Ministers states that "*Section 3F was not designed for the new approach to LDPs*" (para 4.5). NPF4, Policy 2 in particular as well as policies 11, 19, and 26, which taken together with Policy 2, are considered to represent a "*more holistic approach to emissions reduction than is presented by the approach set out in Section 3F.*"

4.18 The [Climate Change \(Local Development Plan\) \(Repeals\) \(Scotland\) Order 2025](#) came into effect 1 November 2025 and this Section 3F has now been repealed.

Climate Emissions and Impacts

Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions

- 4.19 The 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) [Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5 °C](#) delivers a stark warning on the importance of limiting temperature rise to 1.5°C, in order to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. The report also warns of the extremely short window for action – limiting warming to 1.5°C will require global emissions to almost halve by 2030.
- 4.20 The Council declared a climate and ecological emergency in May 2019 and recognises that climate change is a wide-ranging problem with ecological, environmental, social and economic implications.
- 4.21 The [UK Local Authority and Regional Greenhouse Gas Statistics](#) published annually (with a two-year reporting lag), provides a nationally consistent set of emissions estimates at the local authority level. The latest publication provides data on territorial GHG emissions for Highland (2023) by sector (Figure 4:1).
- 4.22 The Highland (including part of Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA)), grand total of GHG emissions in 2023 was 2,904 kt CO₂e, and 12.3 t CO₂e per capita. The highest emitting sectors were Land-Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry (30.26%), Agriculture (21.43%), Transport (19.7%) and Domestic (12.4%).

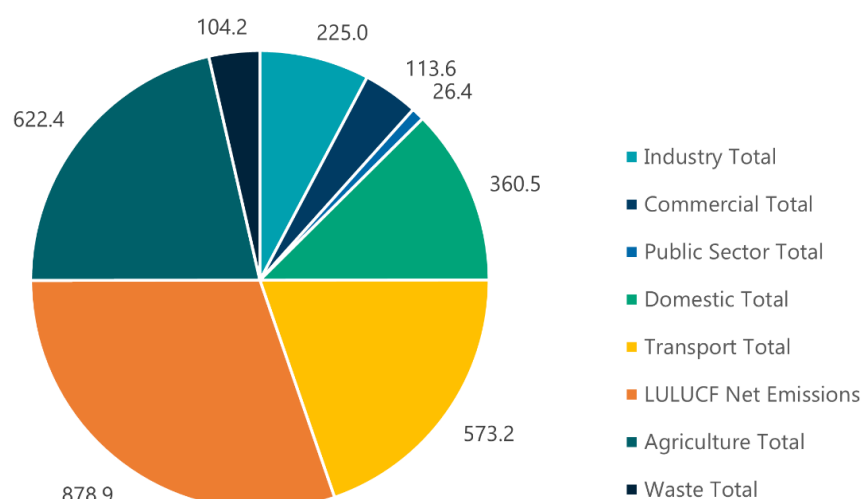


Figure 4:1: Highland local authority territorial GHG emissions, 2023 (kt CO₂e) (Source: [UK Local Authority and Regional Greenhouse Gas Emissions Statistics](#))

- 4.23 Land-Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) is a major source of emissions in Highland and is a critical consideration for planning for net zero. LULUCF includes carbon sinks from forestry and grassland mineral soils change and sources of emissions from peatland, cropland mineral soils change, settlements and other LULUCF (Figure 4:2). The decline in Forestry contributions to carbon

sinks is notable and could be attributed in part to the maturation of commercial woodland and associated felling (part of a ~50 year cycle). Considerations for carbon offsetting through Forestry are considered in **Lifecycle Greenhouse Gas Emissions**.

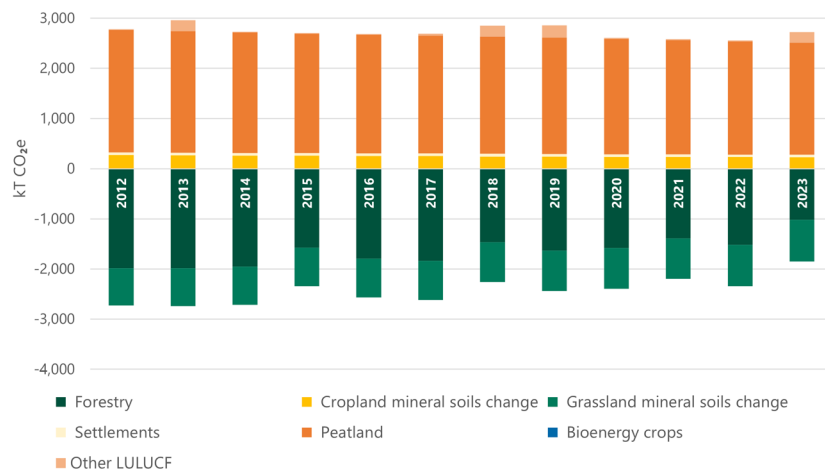


Figure 4.2 Highland LULUCF Net Emissions overview, 2012-2023 (Source: [UK Local Authority Greenhouse Gas Emissions Statistics](#))

- 4.24 In 2023, LULUCF emissions in Highland (including CNPA) were a larger proportion of total emissions, compared to the share of emissions from LULUCF in Scotland - 0.5 Mt CO₂e in 2023, forming just over 1.2% of total emissions ([Scottish Greenhouse Gas Statistics 2023](#)) whereas in Highland emissions from LULUCF were 30.26% (0.88MtCO₂e) of total CO₂e emissions. Therefore, in Highland the management and restoration of carbon sinks such as peatlands, forests and woodlands - as considered in the [Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy](#) (HFWS) as discussed in **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment** - are especially important for reducing GHG emissions from LULUCF.
- 4.25 While Agriculture in Highland (including CNPA) was a significant sectoral contributor to GHG emissions in 2023 (Figure 4:1), they were predominantly from livestock emissions (346.9 kt CO₂e) where there is no jurisdiction for planning to influence emitting activities. Evidence related to prime agricultural land and registered croft land is presented in **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**, while allotments and community food growing in urban settings is presented within **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**.
- 4.26 Transport is a considerable contributor to carbon emissions in Scotland, and even more so in Highland. While total Scottish net emissions from all sources decreased by 0.1% between 2021 and 2022 falling from 40.63 Mt CO₂e to 40.61 MtCO₂e, transport total emissions (including international aviation and shipping) comprised 31.7% of all net emissions from all sources, and increased from 11.8

Mt CO₂e to 12.9 Mt CO₂e, an increase of 9% ([Scottish Transport Statistics 2024](#)). Figure 4:3 shows transport emissions over time, by mode.

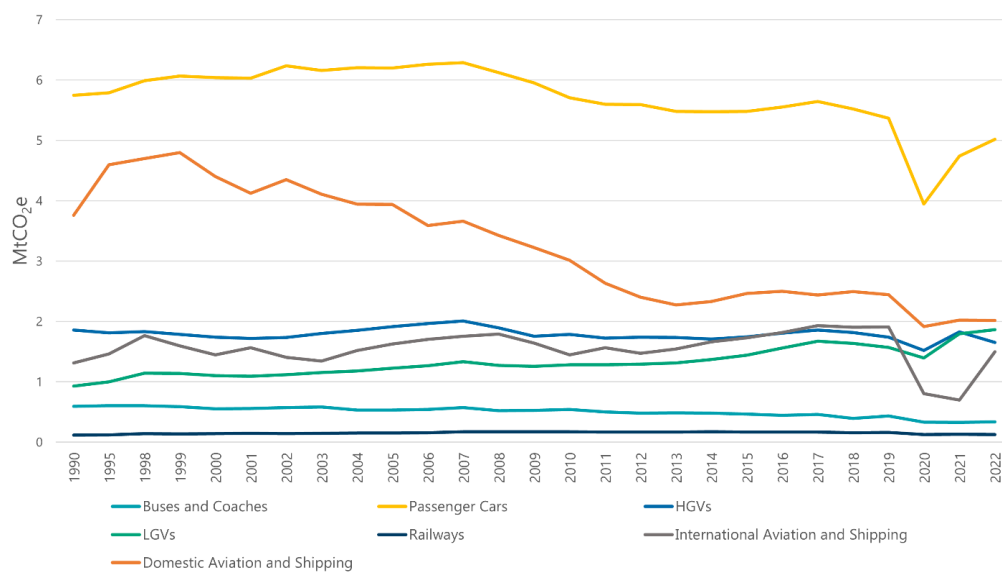


Figure 4:3 Estimated GHG emissions of Scottish transport for 2022 (Source: [Scottish Transport Statistics 2024](#))

- 4.27 In 2023, Highland (including CNPA) transport emissions were predominantly from Road Transport: 0.42 MtCO₂e from 'A Roads' and, 0.121 MtCO₂e from 'Minor roads' ([UK Local Authority and Regional Greenhouse Gas Emissions Statistics](#)). In the context of wider Scotland, domestic transport is also a major source of emissions 28.78% (11.4 MtCO₂e out of net emissions of 39.6MtCO₂e) ([Scottish Greenhouse Gas Statistics 2023](#)). Therefore, consideration of the transport system, including decarbonisation and mode-shift, are important for planning to reduce GHG emissions. This is further considered in **Chapter 10: Transport**.
- 4.28 The Domestic sector for emissions detailed in the [UK Local Authority and Regional Greenhouse Gas Emissions Statistics](#) comprises electricity, gas and other fuel sources such as oil and solid fuels. In Highland (including CNPA), domestic emissions have been trending downward since 2005, from 800 ktCO₂e to 360.5 ktCO₂e in 2023—most notably due to reduced emissions from electricity (Figure 4:4). This trend is also observable in Scotland-wide statistics ([Scottish Greenhouse Gas Statistics 2023](#)). The emissions from gas and other domestic fuel sources, such as wood burners, have remained relatively steady in Highland over the same period (Figure 4:4). This is discussed further, in **Heat and Cooling**.
- 4.29 Electricity supply has been the main driver of emissions reduction in Scotland to date as evidenced by the [Progress in reducing emissions in Scotland 2023 report to parliament](#) with significant reductions due to the phase-out of coal and ramp-up of low-emissions renewable energy generation.

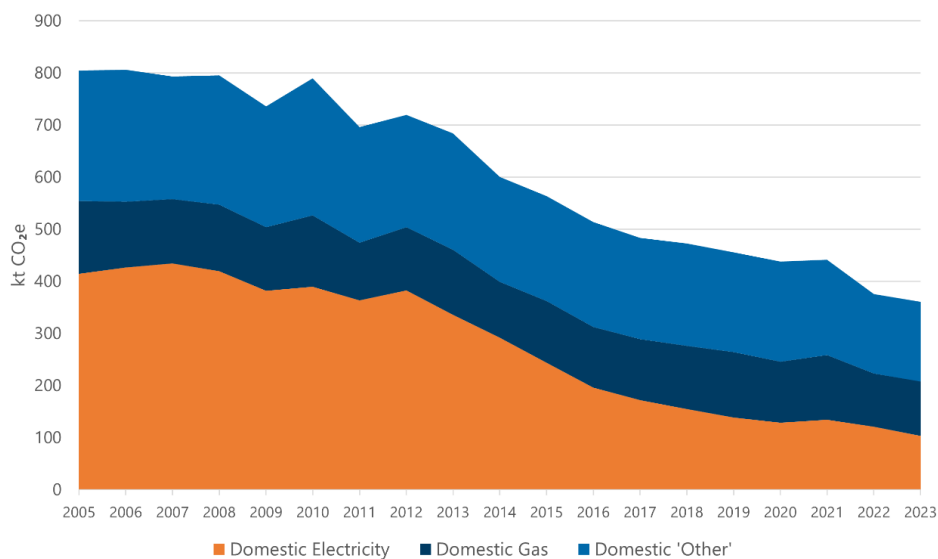


Figure 4:4 Highland Domestic GHG emission estimates by source (2005 - 2023)

- 4.30 Highland continues to make a major contribution to increasing renewable energy capacity, which is critical to support the transition away from fossil fuel energy generation. In 2023, electricity generation in Highland formed a proportionally small part of the local greenhouse emissions profile (Industry Total, Figure 4:1). Highland's growing renewable energy sector, discussed later in **Energy**, has wide ranging impacts on greenhouse gas emissions both in Highland and beyond, to Scotland and the United Kingdom, as emissions statistics are estimated at the point of use, not the source.
- 4.31 It is estimated that local authority emissions accounted for 2-3% of emissions in Highland as reported in the *Climate Change Committee Minutes 7 November 2024 (THC060)*. As part of the Council's statutory reporting through the Public Bodies Climate Change Duties Report return for 2023/24, the organisation reported consumption of electricity, gas, oil, Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG), biomass and water account for 73% of corporate emissions. Council fleet and staff travel account for 22% of corporate carbon emissions as reported in the Net Zero Programme Update, 7 November 2024 (THC061). In the minutes of the Climate Change Committee on that date, it was explained that data on Highland area-wide emissions was being collated by the Climate Intelligence Service, and a report in that regard would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

Climate Impacts

- 4.32 Climate impacts are the actual effects of climate change to both natural and human systems. Over the last few decades Scotland has experienced a warming trend, shifting rainfall patterns, and rising sea levels evidenced by the [Climate](#)

Projections for Scotland Summary. Scotland's ten warmest years on record have all occurred since 1997 (MetOffice Historic Station data) indicates that Scottish meteorological records date back more than 100 years, to 1873 in Stornoway, 1911 at Eskdalemuir and 1914 in Wick). From 2014-2023, average annual rainfall in Scotland has increased 10%. Since 2015, when the storm naming convention began, Scotland has been impacted by at least 60 named storms.

- 4.33 The changes in Scotland's climate that we are already experiencing are projected to continue and intensify, Climate Projections for Scotland Summary report, including:
- Average temperatures will increase across all seasons.
 - Typical summers will be warmer and drier.
 - Typical winters will be milder and wetter.
 - Intense, heavy rainfall events will increase in both winter and summer.
 - Sea levels will rise.
 - Reduced frost and snowfall.
 - Weather will remain variable and may become more unpredictable.
- 4.34 The Climate Ready Scotland: Second Scottish Climate Change Adaptation Programme identified and published 15 key consequences of climate change for Scotland, several of which interact with planning activities: (1) The productivity of our agriculture and forests, (3) The quality of our soils, (4) The health of our natural environment, (6) Availability and quality of water, (7) The increased risk of flooding, (8) The change at our coast, (9) The health of our marine environment, (11) The health and wellbeing of our people, (12) Our cultural heritage and identity, (13) The security and efficiency of our energy supply, (14) The performance of our buildings, and (15) Infrastructure – Network connectivity and interdependencies.
- 4.35 The latest Highland Local Climate Impact Profile 2025 (HLCIP) was presented to the Climate Change Committee in August 2025 (Appendix 2 of **THC059**). HLCIP (2025) uses media analysis to show how climate change is affecting people, infrastructure and Council services from 2012-2023 and is consistent with other climate change trends and impacts data. Communities across Highland are seeing and experiencing the local impacts of climate change through severe weather events such as storms, excessive rainfall/flooding, wind, wildfires, lightening, droughts and high temperatures/heatwaves.
- 4.36 HLCIP reports that, between 2012 and 2023, there has been a six-fold increase in adverse weather events in Highland. The most frequently recorded weather event is excessive rainfall flooding (41 news articles), followed by storms (33 articles). The weather event with the greatest change in frequency from 2012-2023 was droughts, followed by high temperatures. Impacts have also increased in number over this period. The impact with the highest number over 2012-2023 is travel

disruption/delays, followed by damage to biodiversity and damage to infrastructure. The impact with the greatest change over the HLCIP time period is reduced water supply/water quality with no recordings from 2012-2017 to 7 news pieces identified in 2023. These HLCIP findings are useful in providing local indicators and a rough guide to adverse weather events and their associated impacts across Highland.

- 4.37 In late June 2025, large wildfires in Dava and Carrbridge caused damage to around 8,716 ha of moorland and peatland and 1,036 ha of forest, reported the Scottish Wildfire Forum ([SWF statement on Morayshire Wildfires](#)). The fires threatened homes and damaged moors, forests, peatland and farming infrastructure such as fences. Smoke was an issue over a wide area. Many roads in the area had to be closed and residents were advised to close windows and doors on public health grounds. This incident underlined the requirement to improve Scotland's resilience and preparedness for the growing wildfire risk.
- 4.38 In August 2025, Storm Floris - a Category 2 Severe Weather Event - demonstrated the extent of damage and disruption which can be caused by extreme climate events. [Met Office reported](#) the strongest wind gust of 82 mph at Wick in Scotland, equalling the country's all-time August wind gust record, and [SSEN reported](#) that the widespread storm-force gusts caused considerable network damage, affecting power to 72,000 households. [BBC reported](#) major disruption to railway services, road closures, flight and ferry cancellations.
- 4.39 Since 2023, the [Highland Weather & Climate Story Map](#) has collated stories from people who live, work and visit Highland about first-hand experiences of weather and climate impact. Insights from this map will inform the Highland Climate Risk and Opportunity Assessment (HCROA) which is planned to begin in August/September 2025 for completion in December 2025, and subsequent publication in 2026.
- 4.40 Some of the most significant impacts of climate change within the Highlands will affect our coastal communities as mentioned in **Chapter 6: Coastal Development and Aquaculture**. The impact of rising sea levels, more extreme weather events, coastal change and risk will vary across the Highland area, depending on several factors including physical factors such as geology, existing manmade or natural defences, as well as societal factors, such as demographics and social vulnerability. The Dynamic Coast project, also discussed in **Chapter 6: Coastal Development and Aquaculture** and **Chapter 7: Flood Risk Management**, provides a strategic evidence base on climate change coastal risks and the extent of coastal erosion in Scotland, including:
 - The [Erosion Reporter](#) maps recent coastal erosion in Scotland and future erosion for high emissions scenarios to 2050 and 2100.

- The differences between a high and low emissions future demonstrate relative sea level rise ranges to the year 2100 are estimated from 0.27-0.29m (RCP2.6 50%) to 0.92-0.94m (RCP8.5 95%) in the Moray Firth. The largest relative sea level rise anticipated to the year 2100 is along the north and north-west coast of Highland which ranges from 0.33-0.37m (RCP2.6 50%) to 0.99-1.02m (RCP8.5 95%).
- Erosion Disadvantage uses Social Vulnerability Classification Index (SVCI) for Scotland which embeds SIMD datasets to present social vulnerability to coastal change (1 - highly vulnerable to 6 - highly resilient) for the entire coastline of Scotland. Highly and moderately vulnerable to erosion data zones in Highland include Inverness coastal areas, and parts of Loch Ness, Ross and Cromarty Central and Lochaber West.

4.41 The Local Authority Climate Explorer reports on changes to local areas projected due to climate change. For Highland, changes relative to 1981-2000 include:

- Summer annual average temperatures are projected to change by 0.7°C – 1.5°C under a 1.5°C global warming scenario, and from 2.8°C-3.7°C in a 4°C global warming scenario.
- Winter annual average temperatures are projected to change by 0.5°C–1.3°C under a 1.5°C global warming scenario, and from 2.0°C-3.0°C in a 4°C global warming scenario.
- The change in summer precipitation varies, from -8% to +7% in a 1.5°C global warming scenario, to -16% to +2% in a 4°C global warming scenario.
- The change in winter precipitation varies, from -4% to +10% in a 1.5°C global warming scenario, to -5% to +15% in a 4°C global warming scenario.
- By 2030, sea levels are projected to rise 13cm in a central future or 21cm in a high-impact future. By 2050, sea levels are projected to rise 21cm in a central future or 39cm in a high-impact future.
- The change in average number of Summer Days (maximum of over 25°C) rises to 8-13 days per year in a 4°C global warming scenario. In the most recent decades, 2001-2020, the average number of summer days modelled per year was 3.
- The change in average number of Hot Summer Days (maximum of over 30°C) rises to an average of 1-3 days per year in a 4°C global warming scenario. In the most recent decades, 2001-2020, the average number of hot summer days modelled per year was 0.
- The average annual number of Frost Days (daily minimum temperature is below 0°C) is projected to decrease from 70 to just 8-26 per year in a 4°C global warming scenario.

4.42 Highland Adapts highlights **(THC040)** that climate change impacts are not confined to a single policy area, and the challenges they presents will influence every aspect of the HLDP. When trying to understand climate change risk and

vulnerability, particularly when the scale of assessment is beyond project level, it can often be simpler to break the hazards and risks into smaller segments, however this approach risks obscuring the bigger picture. The full risk profile cannot be understood if we do not bring the segmented parts back together and consider how they behave in a wider context. Climate hazards often occur and interact simultaneously, increasing the likelihood of compounding or cascading risks (a chain reaction of events set off by an initial hazard). Understanding and preparing for these interconnected sequences is crucial, as they can escalate the complexity and severity of impacts.

- 4.43 These interactions also mean that the evidence base cannot be static. It must be iterative to reflect emerging relationships between hazards, sectors and communities, and to ensure that policy decisions remain based on current understanding. Thus, applying systems thinking to the evidence base can reveal where information needs to be shared across themes, where multiple datasets could be aligned, and where new evidence should be gathered to fill gaps. To this end, the challenge for adaptation lies not only in identifying evidence but in deciding what to do with imperfect, shifting and complex evidence. Unlike other policy areas, adaptation evidence continually changes as new science, local experience and socio-economic conditions evolve.
- 4.44 The [Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment 2026](#) (HCCROA) complements and contributes to this Evidence Report. It is the first regional assessment of climate change impacts on the Highland region and considers current impacts and forward-projections through the 2080s. The HCCROA covers risks and opportunities across five themes: built environment; community and economy; health and wellbeing; infrastructure; and land, nature, and food.

Score	Current level of risk or opportunity (2025)			Future level of risk or opportunity (2050s/2080s)			Urgency		Priority for regional collaboration?	
	Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High	No	Yes	No	Yes
# of Risks (%)	5 (11%)	21 (47%)	19 (42%)	0 (0%)	11 (24%)	34 (76%)	5 (11%)	40 (89%)	5 (11%)	40 (89%)
# of Opportunities (%)	2 (33%)	4 (67%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (67%)	2 (33%)	3 (50%)	3 (50%)	3 (50%)	3 (50%)
# of Total Risks and Opportunities (%)	7 (14%)	24 (48%)	19 (38%)	0 (0%)	15 (30%)	35 (70%)	8 (16%)	42 (85%)	8 (16%)	42 (84%)

Figure 4:5 Summary of HCCROA Risk and Opportunity Scores (Source: [HCCROA](#))

- 4.45 HCCROA gathered formal evidence sources and stories of lived experience. It identified 50 risks and opportunities and assessed these to identify the magnitude of risks (current and future, economy, landscape, people and cultural) and how risks and opportunities cascade and interact with others. Case studies

were used to understand a selection of climate risks and opportunities in Highland in more detail, across scales and contexts. The HCCROA highlights known evidence and knowledge gaps for each risk, and options for regional collaboration. Figure 4:5 shows the summary of HCCROA risk and opportunity scores – current and future – urgency and priorities for regional collaboration

4.46 The key findings of the HCCROA are:

- Climate change risks in Highland are already significant and widespread, causing measurable harm or disruption across the region. For example, 89% of risks are scored as Medium or High for current period.
- Climate risks are expected to intensify substantially between now and 2050s/2080s, in terms of both severity and prevalence. For example, 76% of risks scored as High for the future time period. All risks are expected to have significant impacts in Highland in the future.
- Urgent action would be beneficial for addressing climate change risks. All urgent Highland climate change risks (40 out of 45) are priorities for regional collaboration. While some impacts cannot be fully avoided, additional action in the next five years could improve how risks are managed and experienced. This is especially significant for decisions affecting long lived assets and systems, including housing, transport networks, energy and water infrastructure, and land management.
- Opportunities from climate change are fewer and are generally lower priorities for regional collaboration. No opportunities were identified within the built environment or infrastructure themes.

4.47 HCCROA options for regional collaboration are:

- Address risk across interconnected systems to limit cascading failures and protect lifeline connectivity. This could include critical asset mapping and prioritisation, scenario testing and lifeline routes and remote service continuity.
- Coordinate land and water management across boundaries and land uses. Risks affecting land, nature, and food systems frequently operate at catchment or coastal scales. Individual land-use decisions can have downstream effects on flooding, erosion, water quality, infrastructure and settlements. Regional collaboration could include catchment-scale restoration, and coastal habitats and blue-carbon.
- Develop skills and capacity where they are limited.
- Finance adaptation at a scale that cannot be delivered alone.
- Share evidence, assumptions, and limitations transparently. The assessment identifies needs for consistent monitoring, shared data, and transparent use of evidence to support decision-making.

- Enable communities and households to navigate disruption and long-term change. This includes fair management of long-term change: developing transparent, inclusive approaches to decisions related to settlement viability and relocation, where risks cannot be managed in place.

Climate Risks

- 4.48 Climate risks are the potential negative consequences that can occur from the impacts of climate change. Climate risk is a product of hazard, exposure and vulnerability.
- 4.49 Characteristics of Highlands that influence the climate risk experienced are evidenced from the [North of Scotland Community Risk Register 2024](#) and include the predominant rural and dispersed settlement pattern, limited transport links, ageing population and relatively high prevalence of coastal settlements and infrastructure and their exposure to coastal climate impacts. Combined with climate change impacts, key climate risks in Highland include: lifeline infrastructure damage or disruption (e.g. coastal transport links, power and communications), community isolation and disruption to access to employment, core services and amenities, damage or flooding to homes, property and businesses in vulnerable areas, economic losses (including tourism) and, exposure of vulnerable people to life and/or health threatening situations including physical isolation, pollution and unhealthy temperatures.
- 4.50 Every five years the UK Climate Change Committee prepares an Independent Assessment of UK Climate Risk. The most recent summary of the implications for Scotland is [Summary for Scotland: Evidence for the third UK Climate Change Risk Assessment \(CCRA3\)](#).
- 4.51 HM Government also produced a [National Risk Register](#) (2023), which presents the nation-wide natural and environmental hazards (among numerous other risk areas) and the impact and likelihood of risks such as wildfire, storms, high temperatures and heat waves, low temperatures and snow, coastal flooding, fluvial flooding, surface water flooding, and drought.
- 4.52 In Scotland, climate risks with a 'high future magnitude' score in [CCRA3](#) and where more action is required now to address them, include:
- [Impacts on biodiversity](#) (further discussed in **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**) are closely connected to the nature crisis, with implications for Highland's natural environment, biodiversity, habitats and species. The [Scottish National Adaptation Plan 2024-2029](#) also outlines that climate change is the biggest threat to Scotland's wildlife and habitats. Changing rainfall patterns, water scarcity, flooding, ocean warming and acidification, extreme heat and wildfire are all impacting the rate and extent of terrestrial, freshwater and marine species losses across Scotland.

- Impacts on the natural environment, as wetlands are especially sensitive to changes in water levels, the large projected increases in drought in Caithness in NatureScot [Research Report No. 1228](#) are particularly concerning due to the potential impacts this could have on TFCWHS. For areas along the west coast increases in droughts were projected to be lower however this could impact on the World Heritage Site within Sutherland, for example. These drought increases are likely to interact with other climate-driven changes and anthropogenic pressures, creating feedback loops that can negatively impact built and ecological environments. More frequent and/or prolonged periods of water scarcity cited in in NatureScot [Research Report No. 1228](#) may also reduce the ability of wetlands to fulfil their usual ecosystem functions including carbon sequestration and water management.
- Flood Risk (further detailed alongside the Highland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (**THC055**) in **Chapter 7: Flood Risk Management**) with [CCRA3](#) analysis estimates current flood damages at £11 million/year (equivalent annual damage) for the Highland region, which could increase to £20 million/year by mid-century and potentially double this amount by the end of the century, as evidenced by the [Regional Report Highland Climate Risk & Opportunity Assessment Economic Analysis](#).
- Drought and Water Scarcity, with over 2,500 Private Water Supplies (PWS) in Highland, serving a population of over 30,000 people, located in rural areas where treated mains water connections are not available. A study of [Private Water Supplies and Climate Change](#) in Scotland found that a handful of areas are at high risk of drought for the period 2020-2050, including settlements around Loch Broom and Dornoch Firth, Eigg, and low-lying areas of Inverness-shire, and PWS reliant on surface water are more vulnerable. Surface water fed Private Water Supplies are mapped in the [Highland Climate Change and Energy Map](#). NatureScot Research Report No. 1228: [Anticipating and mitigating projected identified increases in drought frequency and duration in all locations with the highest increases in Caithness](#). Drought conditions are the highest risk climate impact identified by Scottish Water, across both the 2-degree and 4-degree increase in warming scenarios to 2050, risking low river flows and or reservoir levels and impacting supply of potable water to customers ([Scottish Water Adaptation Plan](#)). Increasing droughts are likely to affect water users in the eastern parts of Scotland, particularly agriculture (livestock, arable and horticulture) and the distilling sector, according to research on [future predictions of water scarcity in Scotland: impact on distilleries and agricultural abstractors](#).
- Wildfires, where Highland has had more recorded (Incident Reporting System) wildfires than other authorities in Scotland, from [Provision of](#)

[Analyses of Scottish Fire and Rescue Service \(SFRS\) Incident Reporting System \(IRS\) Data in Relation to Wildfire Incidents](#). The [Regional Report Highland Climate Risk and Opportunity Assessment Economic Analysis](#) estimates current economic costs of wildfires in Highland at £0.3 billion/year which potentially increase fourfold by the mid-century. European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS) [Wildfire Risk Viewer Maps](#) of wildfire vulnerability indicates that the Inner Moray Firth area and north-east Caithness are the highest population vulnerability areas. Significant areas of Highland, especially west Highland areas, are ecologically vulnerable to wildfires. This aligns with NatureScot's [Scottish Wildfire and Muirburn Extents](#). EFFIS wildfire vulnerability is shown on the [Highland Climate Change and Energy Map](#).

- [Coastal Change](#), (detailed in **Chapter 6: Coastal Development and Aquaculture**), namely the viability of coastal communities and the impact on coastal businesses due to sea level rise, coastal flooding and erosion, where sea level rise due to climate change is expected to result in an almost doubling of the number of properties considered to be at coastal erosion and flood risk in Scotland by 2080s.
- [Landslides](#) (further detailed alongside Soils in **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**) where slope instability occurs when particular characteristics (such as geology, gradient, sources of water, drainage, or the actions of people) combine to make the slope unstable, but can be exacerbated by climate change effects including more intense rainfall and weather events.

- 4.53 [Regional Report HCROA Economic Analysis](#) reports regional economic risks of climate change in Highland are estimated to be equivalent to around -1.5% Gross Domestic Product (GDP) a year by the 2050s, rising to up to -3.3% a year by the 2080s.
- 4.54 In addition to the [Regional Report](#), Highland Adapts commissioned sectoral economic assessments of climate change impacts for three key sectors of the Highland economy as part of the Highland Climate Risk and Opportunity Assessment (HCROA) including [Energy](#), [Forest and Timber](#), and [Food and Drink \(Whiskey and Salmon\)](#).
- 4.55 Rising sea temperature and acidification is a risk to salmon production and extreme weather events and climate conditions impact whiskey production ([Food and Drink Sector HCROA Economic Analysis](#)), with the potential costs of impacts in the low tens of millions per year, rising to mid tens of millions by 2050s.
- 4.56 The [Forest and Timber Sector](#) HCROA economic analysis found potentially high costs from windstorms, changes in pests and diseases (focus on Phytophthora) and from wildfires, all of which could potentially increase with climate change. However, it noted that costs are likely to be larger if other risks are included, such

as other pests and diseases, changes in rainfall and extremes, and other effects along the value chain (such as forestry infrastructure and transport infrastructure). There is also some potential for positive effects from the extended growing season and other possible beneficial factors

- 4.57 The [Energy Sector HCROA Economy Analysis](#), the climate change impact economic assessment reported a total of £138m of climate-related disruption to electricity supply between 2001 – 2023 (Figure 4:6). For example, storms can impact construction and maintenance of energy infrastructure, and damage cables connecting islands.

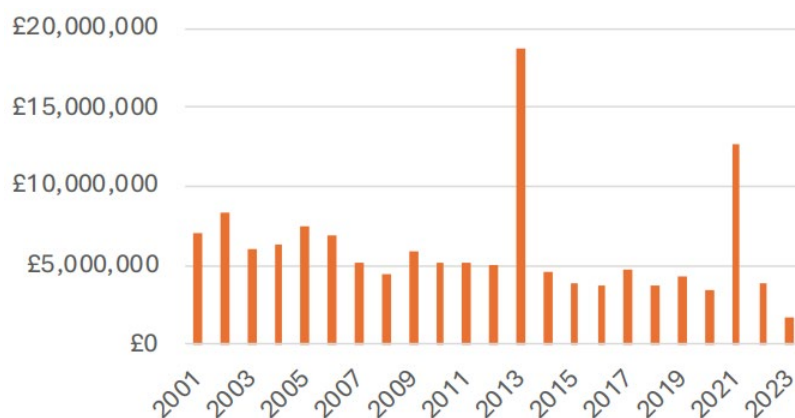


Figure 4:6 Economic impacts of climate-related electricity disruption in Highland (source: [Energy Sector Report HCROA](#))

- 4.58 [Energy Sector Report HCROA](#) identified current climate risks related to the generation of electricity, including:
- Ability to generate electricity compromised by extreme weather (e.g., extreme heat can impact the ability of solar panels to generate electricity).
 - Competing demand for water across sectors during periods of drought.
 - Weather delays and vessel availability compromising offshore wind deployment.
 - Local and global extreme weather impacting all aspects of the supply chain.
- 4.59 Hydroelectric power is vulnerable to low and high river flows and therefore to extreme weather events, though hydroelectricity may benefit from higher-than-average river flows. Although future rainfall projections are highly uncertain, evidence indicates that generation will increase in winter and decrease in the summer ([Energy Sector Report HCROA](#)). For hydroelectricity, across different net zero scenarios, changes could cause a minimum of £320m reduction to a maximum of £128m increase in hydroelectricity generation by 2050.

- 4.60 For onshore wind, the changing climate may affect the frequency and intensity of storms, storm tracks, and wind velocity. This could affect wind power generation in several ways including: variability in generation, damage to turbines, increased shutdowns, and intermittency in generation. Even a small reduction in wind generation has large economic consequences, with results suggesting a cumulative reduction in revenues in Highland of £1.3 – £1.5bn by the mid-2050s ([Energy Sector Report HCROA](#)). Conversely, an increase in wind speeds due to climate change has recognised benefits for the generation of electricity via wind (onshore and offshore).
- 4.61 Due to the long-term nature of investment in the Inverness & Cromarty Firth Green Freeport further discussed in **Chapter 8: Business, Economy, Tourism and Productive Places**, the economic impact of climate change may be very high if adaptation measures are not considered. Hydrogen production is a key project within the Green Freeport and represents a significant economic opportunity for Highland. However, it is a water-intensive process, requiring on average 12.6L – 30L of water for every kg of hydrogen. Climate change poses a serious risk to water availability in the area.
- 4.62 For energy demand, the general trend of warmer, wetter winters and hotter, drier summers outlined in [UK Climate Projections Headline Findings \(2022\)](#) are projected to result in a reduction in heating demand and an increase in cooling demand, due to rising summer temperatures and more frequent and extreme heatwaves.
- 4.63 There are a wide range of infrastructure risks that arise from extreme and challenging weather in Scotland. By way of a summary, ClimateXChange's [Indicators and trends: Extreme weather and infrastructure](#) analysis identifies four major impacts of extreme weather on Scottish infrastructure:
- Transport links interrupted by geo-hazards including landslides and scour damage to bridges.
 - Reduced water availability due to periods of reduced rainfall.
 - Dampness in buildings due to wind-driven rain. (When wind and rain coincide, water may penetrate vertical walls).
 - Damage to energy and ICT networks caused by storms, winds and lightning.
- 4.64 [Climate Ready Plan for Scotland's Railway \(2024-2029\)](#) sets out the actions Scotland's Rail will take over the next five years to improve the resilience of the railway against physical changes in climate. This includes direct intervention on infrastructure assets, as well as introducing additional climate science and adaptation capabilities to underpin and strengthen decision-making processes. Over the next five-years Scotland's Railway have set the challenge of achieving four key outcomes in this space:

- Ensuring the decisions we make are based on a maturing understanding of climate-related risk.
- Developing a long-term climate adaptation and resilience strategy to increasingly guide our investment decisions.
- Delivering a programme of asset refurbishments and renewals that deliver resilience to acute weather events, as well as preparing for longer term changes in climate.
- Delivering new and improved risk, assurance, competence, and data processes to underpin our climate ready journey

4.65 Successful delivery of this plan will allow Scotland's Railway to contribute positively to national objectives in this space, such as Scotland's National Adaptation Programme, while delivering benefits for the passengers and customers that we serve. This plan merges the legacy ScotRail Trains Ltd Climate Change Adaptation Plan with Network Rail's previous Weather Resilience and Climate Change Adaptation.

Vulnerability and resilience

- 4.66 The 2022 Climate Change Committee briefing [The Just Transition and Climate Change Adaptation](#) considers the distributional effects of climate change and adaptation, stating, *"the effects of climate change will be felt across all of society, but they will not affect the whole of society equally"*.
- 4.67 ClimateXChange analysis [The impacts of climate change on population groups in Scotland](#) considers that climate change vulnerability—how strongly people or ecosystems are likely to be (adversely) affected by climate change—depends on two sets of factors:
- The likelihood that people and communities are exposed to climate-related hazards, e.g. where they live and the dwelling type.
 - The characteristics of people and communities that make them more or less likely to experience a negative outcome if they were to be exposed to a hazard. These characteristics include e.g. age, health, income, property tenure and insurance cover.
- 4.68 [Local Climate Adaptation Tool](#) provides insight on how local UK climates will change, what health and community impacts may occur as a result, who will be most vulnerable and why and, which adaptations to consider.
- 4.69 Those experiencing multiple vulnerabilities are also more vulnerable to climate impacts. Characteristics that are likely to lead to increased vulnerability and reduced adaptive capacity across multiple categories of climate risk are evidenced from [The Just Transition and Climate Change Adaptation \(March 2022\)](#) and the [Local Climate Adaptation Tool](#) to be:

- Low income
- Older people, Under 5s, people with health conditions
- Rural residents
- Tenants in private or social housing
- People living in an area for a short time
- People who are socially isolated
- People with low personal mobility

- 4.70 Highland communities have increased vulnerability due to the higher proportions of these demographics within our communities than national equivalents, evidenced from the [North of Scotland Community Risk Register](#). **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking** discusses socioeconomic and health inequalities in greater detail, drawing on [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation \(SIMD\)](#) data.
- 4.71 [Local Development Planning Guidance](#) recommends taking into account unevenly felt effects and inequalities that may increase the climate vulnerability of different groups of people consideration of climate change.
- 4.72 ClimateXchange analysis [The impacts of climate change on population groups in Scotland](#) found that low income and poor health were strong drivers of social vulnerability to flooding, high temperature and poor air quality. In rural areas, like Highland, poor or no access to the internet and isolation heighten vulnerability. In urban areas, like Inverness, poor health, income deprivation, high levels of social and private renting, lack of local knowledge and limited mobility all contribute to vulnerability. This study highlights the importance of policy that enhances resilience to *multiple* climate hazards, through action and adaptation and increasing the capacity of the socially vulnerable to appropriately prepare for and recover from hazard events.
- 4.73 A recent study [Digital connectivity and climate change in Scotland – Evidence review](#) found digital connectivity and ICT can have either a positive or a negative effect on a just transition, either addressing or exacerbating existing inequalities such as access to digital connectivity and skills. Studies repeat the need for strong policy in this area.
- 4.74 One way to respond to climate vulnerability is to increase resilience. Resilience to climate change (or climate-readiness) is the ability or capacity for people or ecosystems to prepare, respond to and recover from the current and future impacts of climate change, with the right knowledge, systems and plans. Strategies for building physical resilience through the LDP are discussed in the following **Climate Adaptation** section.

Climate Mitigation

- 4.75 The [Update to the Climate Change Plan 2018-2032](#) sets out the policies and trajectories towards the overall emissions reduction target for Scotland. The [Climate Change \(Emissions Reduction Targets\) \(Scotland\) Act 2024](#) moved Scotland onto a carbon budget approach to emissions reduction - a carbon budget sets a limit on the amount of GHGs emitted in Scotland over a five-year period. The upcoming carbon budget Scottish Statutory Instrument will set levels for four budget periods: 2026-2030; 2031-2035; 2036-2040; and 2041-2045. [Scotland's Second Climate Adaptation Programme 2019-2045](#) reported that Scotland has almost halved its emissions since 1990, but ongoing efforts are required to meet the carbon budgets towards the 2045 target.
- 4.76 The Climate Change Committee published a report on [Scotland's Carbon Budgets](#) in May 2025, which sets out the Committee's advice on the level of Scotland's four carbon budgets from 2026-2045 (as percentage reductions from 1990 levels of carbon emissions) referred to as the Balanced Pathway. Since the introduction of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act in 2009, over 70% of the emissions reduction seen in Scotland has been in the energy supply sectors. This is largely due to the phase-out of coal and the ramp-up of renewable electricity generation.
- 4.77 The [Highland Council Net Zero Strategy](#) outlines the Council's approach to reduce corporate emissions and prepare for the unavoidable impacts of climate change, contributing to Scotland's legally binding target to become Net Zero by 2045. The Council's key interim targets are to reduce emissions by at least 75% by 2030 and at least 90% by 2040. The Council recognises that climate action can deliver comprehensive economic, environmental, social and health benefits and seeks to embrace the potential of the 'green economy' to create jobs and wealth. Future development of this Strategy is expected to broaden consideration of emissions reduction to include area-based emissions also.
- 4.78 A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a legal requirement that Local Authorities must undertake when they are preparing a new LDP. The main purpose of the SEA is to consider how the new LDP might affect the environment, so that the likely impact of a public plan on the environment can be minimised, where any such effect(s) are considered likely to be significant. The Highland LDP SEA Scoping Report is being prepared in parallel to this Evidence Report and will inform the assessment to be presented in the Environmental Report, with that assessment informing decisions on the contents of the Proposed Plan.
- 4.79 [Local Development Planning Guidance](#) encourages a whole-systems or area wide approach to emissions management and requires details of local opportunities for GHG sequestration and storage, either nature based or technological, where available. As NPF4 Policy 2 is expected to be delivered by effective delivery of

other NPF4 policies as a whole, there are cross-linkages here with other Chapters of this Evidence Report and their policies referenced therein.

Nature-based

- 4.80 Emissions reduction can be achieved by promoting nature recovery and restoration. [Scottish Biodiversity Strategy](#) outlines the role of biodiversity in helping to mitigate the impacts of climate change and [Biodiversity: delivery plan 2024 to 2030](#) is part of the strategic framework for biodiversity, in conjunction with the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy.
- 4.81 The creation of new forests and woodlands is recognised as an important tool for reducing GHG emissions. Nature-based opportunities for GHG sequestration and storage in Highland, are primarily from land use, forestry, and peatland restoration. [Scotland's Forestry Strategy](#) found that for each new hectare of forest and woodland created, it is estimated that, on average, seven tonnes of CO₂ will be removed from the atmosphere each year. Scottish Forestry's [Woodland Carbon Code](#) is the voluntary UK quality assurance standard for woodland carbon projects, and also manages the UK Land Carbon Registry.
- 4.82 [HFWS](#) identifies the mitigation potential of forestry and woodlands such as new tree planting and restocking on areas of deep peat, carbon offsetting (new woodlands), use of wood and biomass as an energy source, and increased use of timber as a building material to store carbon long term. This Strategy is in the process of being updated, and will consider carbon offsetting opportunities for productive and native woodlands.
- 4.83 The Balanced Pathway approach to [Scotland's Carbon Budgets](#) includes nature-based measures including restoring peatland and planting new woodland for land-based carbon sequestration. Nature-based measures are proposed to contribute 8% of the emissions reductions required by 2035 and increase to 13% by 2045. There is a delay between the planting of woodlands and the time it takes for them to reach peak rates of absorbing CO₂, so immediate action is needed to capture these benefits later in the Pathway. Rewetting and restoration of degraded peatlands delivers the majority of the emissions reductions in land use in the Balanced Pathway, with a rise in the proportion of peatland under such management from the current 29% to 45% in 2035, and to 67% by 2045. In the Balanced Pathway, the proportion of woodland cover in Scotland rises from the current 19% to 21% in 2035, and 23% by 2045.
- 4.84 [Scotland's National Peatland Plan](#) states that peatlands are the country's largest natural carbon stock and that a significant contribution can be made to reducing GHG emissions by managing the land to maintain existing peat deposits, and the extent and health of peat-forming habitats, and by ensuring that land use and management limits loss of stored carbon and enhances the sequestration of new

terrestrial carbon. It explains that restoring peat-forming habitats will be an important part of this, and that where restoration to open, peat forming habitats is not possible, management should still aim to reduce loss of the carbon stock and maximise any potential for carbon sequestration. The UK [Peatland Code](#) sets out the process to independently verify projects the restoration of peatland for achieving carbon credits, and real, measurable climate benefits.

- 4.85 According to [The Flow Country WHS Nomination Dossier](#), The Flow Country in Caithness and Sutherland alone stores about 400 million tonnes of carbon – more than double the amount stored in all of Britain’s woodlands.
- 4.86 The role of Highland in contributing to forest and native woodland restoration, alongside peatland restoration for climate mitigation is further discussed in **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**, but in summary, the Scotland [Update to the Climate Change Plan 2018-2032](#) includes commitments to:
- Incrementally increase the annual woodland creation target from 10,000 to 18,000 ha per year by 2024/25.
 - Achieve a target of at least 250,000 ha of peatland restored by 2030, of which Highland will make a notable contribution.
- 4.87 It is recognised that to achieve these commitments, contributions from both the public and private sectors will be required and therein some of the contributions can be delivered through development.

Technology-based

- 4.88 Negative Emissions Technology (NET) and Carbon Capture Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) opportunities for GHG sequestration and storage are emerging technologies with limited uptake at present in Highland. There is one small-scale carbon removal and storage [project in Highland](#) focused on biogenic carbon from a whisky distillery, capturing CO₂ from fermentation. The Council have identified that a stronger evidence base on the potential for these technologies in Highland and the associated planning implications would benefit HLDP preparation and will continue to engage with stakeholders on developments on these aspects.

Transport and Local Living

- 4.89 As shown in Figure 4:1 and Figure 4:3, road transport is the largest contributor to transport emissions in both Scotland and Highland. Transport Scotland’s [route map to achieve a 20 per cent reduction in car kilometres travelled by 2030](#) recognises that reducing car use is essential to decarbonising the transport system as part of the statutory emissions reduction targets set in the route map. **Chapter 10: Transport** fully details the Council’s transport baseline, and how the

proposed HLDP can facilitate the decarbonisation of transport in Highland. It is recognised that due to the geography and spatial isolation of communities in Highland, private car transport is often a necessity to retain access to goods, services, amenities and social connections for many communities, especially with consideration for a just transition to net zero.

- 4.90 Related to transport, digital connectivity is another factor which supports 'reducing the need to travel', the top of the Sustainable Investment Hierarchy in the [National Transport Strategy 2](#). Similarly, local living and 20-minute neighbourhoods (where appropriate) support transport policies which foster connected communities to reduce emissions, by changing how people move around, access services and connect in their community. **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking** further discusses local living opportunities and considerations for HLDP.
- 4.91 As an area with a significant tourism sector, which centres on our natural features and assets situated in rural, scenic locations with limited or no public transport accessibility, it is recognised that Highland's tourism sector is likely a significant contributor to our transport carbon emissions. As discussed in **Chapter 8: Business, Economy, Tourism and Productive Places**, HLDP will require to consider how to support tourism in ways that offer better sustainable transport options.

Energy Generation, Transmission and Consumption

- 4.92 The Climate Change Committee report on [Scotland's Carbon Budgets](#) in May 2025 advises on the level of Scotland's four carbon budgets from 2026-2045. The Balanced Pathway approach to the carbon budgets means that the capacity of variable renewables in Scotland (including offshore and onshore wind and solar) more than triples from 15 GW in 2023 to 49 GW by 2035, increasing to 66 GW by 2045. This provides 98% of electricity generation in Scotland in 2035 and caters for increasing demand in Scotland and the rest of Great Britain (GB). Grid storage, use of storable fuels on the GB-wide network, and smart demand flexibility ensure a reliable supply of electricity even in adverse weather years. These technologies need to be accompanied by rapidly expanding the transmission grid, upgrading the distribution network, and speeding up the grid connection process. To deliver clean electricity, the planning process to approve large electricity infrastructure projects in Scotland needs to be urgently improved.
- 4.93 Highland is a major contributor to renewable energy development in Scotland, significant work by SSEN Transmission (SSEN-T) and SSEN-Distribution rapidly expanding electricity networks, and a considerable onshore and offshore wind presence, which makes a significant impact on Scotland's national energy composition. This is discussed further in **Energy**. SSEN-T are delivering and

achieving at least a 10% biodiversity enhancement for all major projects which further contributes to tackling the climate and nature crisis arising from the effects of climate change.

- 4.94 The Scottish Government's [Hydrogen Action Plan](#) aims to establish Scotland as a leading nation in hydrogen production and use, with a goal of 5 GW of renewable and low carbon hydrogen by 2030 and 25 GW by 2045. It has a significant focus on decarbonising transport, recognising the potential of hydrogen and its derivatives to reduce emissions in various transport sectors, as discussed further in **Chapter 10: Transport**.
- 4.95 Emissions reduction from domestic activities include consideration of the siting and design of homes, including embodied carbon and operational energy efficiency, energy demand and fuel sources. Decarbonisation of buildings, both for existing stock (retrofit) and new development, is essential for meeting net zero emissions targets. The spatial planning opportunities and implications for reducing domestic sources of emissions are discussed further in **Heat and Cooling**, while housing policy is detailed in **Chapter 9: Housing**. Opportunities to retrofit buildings, conserve embodied carbon and support brownfield development in well-located areas are further discussed in **Chapter 12: Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings**.

Waste Management

- 4.96 While an assessment of the Council's waste infrastructure capacity is detailed in **Chapter 11: Infrastructure**, it is acknowledged that within Scotland it will be prohibited to send biodegradable municipal waste to landfill from 31 December 2025, and so the Council's Waste Service is required to establish compliant and suitable waste management practices. At present, [Long-term Waste Management Communities & Place Committee Report](#) states that biodegradable municipal waste is incinerated at a licensed facility in Dunbar, generating electrical energy for the national grid. There are a range of potential options to reduce emissions from waste across the Highlands including emissions from landfill (predominantly methane), the transport of residual waste to a processing facility and incineration. In addition, opportunities to re-use existing buildings, minimise waste, re-use materials or use natural materials can reduce embodied carbon emissions from development. **Energy from Waste** (EfW) is discussed further below in this Chapter.

Climate Adaptation

- 4.97 Whilst global efforts to reach net zero remain critical, adaptation will also be an important priority in supporting wellbeing and the economy in Highland over the next twenty years. Climate change adaptation, climate readiness, and climate-

proofing all refer to the process of making adjustments in response to or in preparation for current and future climate-related impacts, which in turn leads to climate resilience. The Council recognises how climate change impacts people and places across Highland differently. Adaptation action needs to be inclusive and targeted towards addressing the most vulnerable.

- 4.98 [Is Scotland climate ready? 2022 Report to Scottish Parliament](#) from the Climate Change Committee (CCC) is an independent assessment of progress in adapting to climate change in Scotland. This report notes that the [second Scottish Climate Change Adaptation Programme \(SCCAP2\)](#) vision is not sufficient to drive effective adaptation, specific time-bound objectives and actions are required. Progress in delivering adaptation has stalled across most sectors including those relevant to planning, and systems for monitoring and evaluation of adaptation is urgently needed, to monitor the changes to climate risks. Scotland has an opportunity to link Net Zero ambitions with climate adaptation, integrating fairness and [The Just Transition and Climate Adaptation](#) and Scottish Government holds the power to shift levers to implement a step-change in climate adaptation.
- 4.99 In Highland, the regional adaptation partnership is Highland Adapts - nine organisations working to build climate resilience across the region. Highland Adapts has led the development of the [Highland Weather & Climate Story Map](#), the [Economic Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on the Highland Region](#) including Regional Report and Sector Reports for Energy, Forest and Timber, and Food and Drink (Whiskey and Salmon), and the forthcoming Highland Climate Change Risk & Opportunity Assessment. These resources provide details about climate impacts and risks in Highland and will support our adaptation planning response in HLDP.
- 4.100 The Highland Climate Change Adaptation Strategy (**THC059**) was approved at the August 2025 Climate Change Committee, and sets out how The Council will act, in partnership with communities and stakeholders, to build a climate-ready Highland. The strategy outlines the climate trends, risks, and priority actions that will guide Highland in delivering a resilient future for all. The priority actions are: flood defence and coastal protection, nature-based solutions, heat and health resilience, resilient infrastructure and services, community preparedness and inclusion and, economic opportunities in adaptation.
- 4.101 Climate adaptation opportunities most relevant to Highland cover a range of NPF4 policy areas, similar to mitigation opportunities, and are summarised by topic as follows:
- [Biodiversity, Natural places, Soils, Forestry, Woodland and Trees](#) – through opportunities for nature-based solutions for climate adaptation, including facilitating nature networks, strengthening connections between them, restoring degraded habitats or creating new habitats, managing soils and

natural assets in a sustainable way, and protecting and expanding forestry, woodlands and trees (as discussed in **Chapter 5: Nature & Environment**). Nature-based solutions improve resilience to climate change. The [HFWS](#) highlights the role of trees and woodland in adaptation, including within Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS), tree planting to reduce flood risk (stabilising slopes, slowing water flow and forming riparian corridors) and consideration of species selection for enhance woodland adaptability and resilience to climate change.

- [Brownfield, vacant and derelict land, and empty buildings](#) – through re-using brownfield land and empty buildings which reduces the need for greenfield development, reducing the developed area exposed to climate risks, supporting nature recovery and biodiversity net gain (as discussed in **Chapter 12: Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings**). Also, [SNAP3](#) sets out Objectives C4 (New and Existing Buildings) and C5 (Cultural and Historic Environment) which refer to the importance of building maintenance, the passive qualities of traditional buildings for moderating extreme temperatures as well as retrofitting for energy efficiency.
- [Local Living and 20 minute neighbourhoods](#) – where people have the ability to meet their daily needs within a reasonable distance of home, this supports community resilience by providing sustainable alternatives to get around when other transport choices are not available following a major weather or climate event, and sustains local access to daily services and amenities through walking, wheeling or cycling access (as discussed in **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**).
- [Heating and cooling](#) – The design of buildings and how they are heated and cooled, is an important consideration as temperatures change, to ensure thermal comfort year-round for housing, and to meet heat and cooling demands from the operation of commercial and industrial activities efficiently. Opportunities to reduce the operational carbon emissions from heating and cooling are discussed below in **Heat and Cooling**.
- [Flood risk management](#) – Scotland's [National Flood Resilience Strategy](#) identifies flooding as Scotland's biggest climate adaptation challenge, and NPF4 makes clear that, *"LDPs should strengthen community resilience to the current and future impacts of climate change, by avoiding development in areas at flood risk as a first principle"* (as discussed in **Chapter 7: Flood Risk Management**).
- [Water management](#) – where management of water-based systems such as water supply, sewers and, renewable energy (including hydroelectric power generation, pumped hydro storage and water-intensive hydrogen generation) will need to adapt. Catchment land-use, network improvements, blue-green infrastructure and water management practices can help to

regulate water supply and improve resilience of supply, reduce flood risk and support energy generating capacity. [Scottish Water Climate Change Adaptation Plan](#) has identified 27 key water-related climate change risks and outline a long-term plan for strategic long-term adaptations to water systems and wastewater systems, and specific risks to assets or projects.

- [Blue and green infrastructure](#) – which can be optimised to support sustainable flood risk management, drainage and create places that are resilient to climate change (as discussed in **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**).
- [Digital infrastructure](#) – which can support resilience to extreme weather events and climate impacts, especially in isolated areas. Digital connectivity is identified in several Local Place Plans as a priority, which HLDP will take account of in preparing the Proposed Plan (as discussed in **Chapter 11: Infrastructure**).
- [Transport](#) – where adequate investment (including developer contributions where appropriate), and maintenance of resilient transport infrastructure can minimise damage and disruption from events (as detailed in **Chapter 10: Transport**).
- [Coastal Adaptation](#) – where the Regional Coastal Change Adaptation Plan (Regional CCAP) (**THC053**) enables communities to become more resilient to the impacts of climate change over time through the pathways approach to adapting to coastal change. The Plan identifies twenty-nine high-risk locations in Highland for further investigation and potential development of Local Coastal Change Adaptation Plans (as discussed in **Chapter 6: Coastal Development and Aquaculture**).

4.102 The links between emissions reduction and climate adaptation responses are numerous, and present opportunities to developed linked responses, such as addressing both energy efficiency and overheating in housing together.

4.103 Climate scenario analysis (or simply, scenario analysis) is a tool and process developed that can help address the complex data landscape, highly uncertain and difficult to communicate nature of risks from climate change. It assesses the impact of different plausible future climate change scenarios on an organisation, project or strategy. Research by ClimateXChange - [Using future climate scenarios to support today's decision making](#) – makes recommendations on a range of factors for a practical scenario analysis decision tool to help public bodies in climate adaptation planning, and strengthen consistency across the public sector in Scotland.

Lifecycle Greenhouse Gas Emissions

- 4.104 Lifecycle GHG emissions, or whole of life carbon, are the sum of emissions resulting from the materials, construction and operation of a building throughout its life, including demolition and disposal. This is often considered as the sum of embodied carbon emissions (emissions emitted in producing materials and construction) and operational emissions (emissions for running a building, including electricity, heating and cooling).
- 4.105 NPF4 planning guidance for Policy 2 Climate Mitigation and Adaptation was published by Scottish Government in June 2025. The guidance clarifies the intent NPF4 policy 2 that, for managing lifecycle GHG emissions, the level of detail considered or requested should be commensurate with and proportionate to the stage at which the project is being considered (i.e. development planning and development management). Early consideration of lifecycle GHGs is key to their effective minimisation, for any development. It presents the established practice in considering GHG emissions (embodied, operation and end of life), with relevant and established tools, databases, data sources and standards which can be applied in a proportionate and flexible manner to enable meaningful lifecycle GHG assessments for informed planning and decision-making.
- 4.106 The guidance presents factors that may have a bearing on whether information on lifecycle GHG emissions is required to assess a proposal, and if this should be qualitative or quantitative, including:
- The emissions reduction opportunity
 - Uncertainty or lack of detail
 - Assumed mitigation / other regulatory controls or standards (e.g. building regulations)
 - The importance of quantified data versus qualitative data for decision making
- 4.107 The Policy 2 guidance also notes that it is up to the decision-maker (usually the planning authority) to determine what information about lifecycle GHG emissions is needed to accompany a planning application. It is in both the applicant and planning authority's interest to establish requirements as early as possible to ensure the right level of quality information is sought and provided timeously. Highland recognises that the preparation of the HLDP is a key opportunity to establish these requirements, to support the preparation and consideration of planning applications in Highland in the future. Section 4.3 of the Policy 2 guidance outlines the development types that are unlikely to require assessment of lifecycle GHG: changes of use (including retrofit), householder development or equivalent scale of other development types, proposals for less than 10 residential units and non-residential buildings <1,000m² floorspace. These thresholds and those in guidance prepared by other planning authorities will be

used to inform the preparation of requirements on lifecycle GHG assessments for Highland.

- 4.108 The [Planning \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#) introduced a requirement for the National Planning Framework to include an assessment of the likely impact of each proposed national development's lifecycle GHG emissions on achieving national GHG emissions reduction targets, which is considered in Annex B of NPF4.
- 4.109 A research project on [Lifecycle Greenhouse Gas Emissions of NPF4 proposed National Developments \(2022\)](#) concluded that considering both direct and indirect effects, the lifecycle GHG emissions of the proposed National Developments would make a positive contribution to the 2030 carbon reduction targets, helping to reduce emissions. It is noted that since the publication of this research, Scotland's carbon reduction targets have been replaced by carbon budgets, however the general conclusion that National Developments make a positive contribution to emissions reduction remains valid. Overall, the greatest contributions to sectoral emission reductions are likely to be in terms of electricity and, to a lesser extent, transport. Where individual development proposals come forward for National Developments, this lifecycle GHG emissions assessment can be used to inform detailed project-level consideration of emissions.
- 4.110 Policy 2a) of NPF4 also requires development proposals to minimise lifecycle GHG emissions through siting and design, as far as possible.
- 4.111 [NPF4 Planning Guidance: Policy 2 - Climate Mitigation and Adaptation and Research to Inform National Planning Framework 4: Planning and Climate Change Guidance Report Issue 3](#) provide guidance on information sources, tools and models, methods and approaches that can be used to undertake whole life carbon assessment. The Council also notes that some other Planning Authorities have prepared and published their own guidance on this, such as Moray Council's [Carbon Guidance for Planning Applications and S36 and S37 consents](#).
- 4.112 In the most recent LDP prepared by Highland Council, IMFLDP2 (**THC003**) Policy 1 concerning Low and Zero Carbon Development sets a requirement for a "Low Carbon Development Section" in any supporting statement with a planning application as there is merit in requiring a developer to consider low carbon as part of a proposal in order to satisfy the legislative requirement and NPF4 policy requirements. The Council has not as yet prepared the Low and Zero Carbon Development guidance document referred to in the policy. In the interim the [Supplementary Guidance Sustainable Design Guide](#) is the most relevant of the Council's own guidance.
- 4.113 There is a growing awareness of the importance of GHG lifecycle analysis in other determinations (such as applications for consent under the Electricity Act 1989), and other local authorities developing or considering carbon guidance to support

implementation of Policy 2. The Council presently does not have an appropriate framework to assess such information in a robust manner, even if it were provided by an applicant, which is an implication for HLDP to consider.

- 4.114 For wind farm developments on Scottish peatlands, Scottish Government's guidance developed in 2008 ([Carbon calculator for wind farms on Scottish peatlands](#)) can be used to calculate the impact of wind farm development on peatland carbon stocks. This can be applied as part of a broader lifecycle GHG emissions assessment. Research on the [Carbon Calculator for wind farms on Scottish Peatlands by ClimateXChange](#) in 2024 highlighted recommendations and considerations for a review of this carbon calculator to make it more suitable for future use.
- 4.115 The UK has two government-backed voluntary carbon standards: the [Woodland Carbon Code](#) (version 3.0, 1 August 2025) and [Peatland Code](#). These standards provide a framework for measuring and monitoring the carbon benefits of new woodlands and peatland restoration projects in the UK. Every 5-10 years the progress of projects is independently verified, and a 'carbon credit' is issued for every tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent that has been successfully captured or avoided. Eligible Woodland Carbon Code and Peatland Code projects and their associated carbon benefits are publicly listed on the [UK Land Carbon Registry](#).
- 4.116 In 2020, Scottish Forestry published an information note [Climate Mitigation: Woodland Creation and management](#). It evidences that, faster-growing, generally coniferous tree species sequester carbon quickly in the medium to long term (50) by resourcing the use of renewable wood products and wood fuel in place of non-wood products that involve high GHG emissions in their manufacture, and fossil fuels. Slower-growing broadleaf tree species can accumulate high carbon reserves, within the woodland itself, in the very long term (>50-100+ years), but provide fewer substitution benefits.
- 4.117 The [Scottish Forestry information note](#) also refers to a recent study which found that creating a forest by planting native broadleaf tree species today (2020), and managing them as conservation woodlands, could typically sequester 1.9 tonnes of CO₂ per hectare per year over the period up to 2050, and typically 6.2 tonnes of CO₂ per hectare per year over the period up to 2100 with potentially more under low impact management systems. Creating a new "productive forest" now (2020), with the objective of managing it for wood production, typically contributes overall GHG savings equivalent to 3.5 tonnes CO₂ per hectare per year up to 2050, and typically 7.0 tonnes CO₂ per hectare per year over the period up to 2100. These estimates allow for net carbon sequestered in the wood products harvested from the forest and for product substitution effects. However, there is considerable variability depending on species used and management system. For example, planting higher yielding (YC20) improved Sitka spruce now

(2020), and managing for wood production can sequester more than 14 tonnes of CO₂ per hectare per year up to 2050, and more than 7 tonnes of CO₂ per hectare per year up to 2100. Product substitution effects can provide additional GHG savings of at least 3 tonnes CO₂ per hectare per year up to 2050 and at least 6 tonnes CO₂ per hectare per year up to 2100.

- 4.118 The [HFWS](#) classified land sensitivity to woodland expansion, to give a general impression of an area's suitability for woodland expansion that will help maximised benefits and integrate with adjacent land uses, rather than being prescriptive. Site-specific assessment of individual proposals for woodland expansion would still be required. It is suggested similar methodology could be applied to identify land suitable for carbon offset through woodland planting or peatland restoration in Highland.

Energy

National and Regional Context

- 4.119 The [Energy Act 2023](#) sets the legislative framework for an independent system planner and operator to help accelerate Great Britain's energy transition, leading to the establishment of the National Energy System Operator (NESO).
- 4.120 The [Clean Power 2030 Action Plan](#) sets out the UK Government's pathway to 2030 and tackling three major challenges: the need for a secure and affordable energy supply, the creation of essential new energy industries, supported by skilled workers in their thousands, and the need to reduce GHG emissions and limit our contribution to the damaging effects of climate change. This Plan sets targets for the 2030 capacities for Scotland in key energy technologies, including 43-50 GW of offshore wind, 27-29 GW of onshore wind, and 45-47 GW of solar power. Also, providing for flexible capacity, including 23-27 GW battery energy storage, 4-6 GW of long-duration energy storage, and development of flexibility technologies including gas carbon capture utilisation & storage, hydrogen, and substantial opportunity for consumer-led flexibility.
- 4.121 Scotland's [Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan](#) sets the key ambitions for Scotland's energy future:
- Over 20 GW of additional renewable electricity on and offshore by 2030.
 - Hydrogen to provide 5 GW or 15% of Scotland's current energy needs by 2030 and 25 GW of hydrogen production capacity by 2045.
 - Increase share of solar, hydro and marine energy to our energy mix.
 - Accelerated decarbonisation of domestic industry, transport and heat.
 - Establishment of a national agency – Heat and Energy Efficiency Scotland.
 - By 2030, new petrol and diesel cars and vans phased out and car kilometres reduced by 20%.

- Generation of surplus electricity, enabling export of electricity and renewable hydrogen to support decarbonisation across Europe.
- Energy security through development of our own resources and additional energy storage.
- A just transition by maintaining or increasing employment in Scotland's energy production sector against a decline in North Sea production.
- Maximising the use of Scottish manufactured components in the energy transition, ensuring high-value technology and innovation.

- 4.122 Furthermore, the Scottish Government [Onshore Wind Policy Statement \(2022\)](#) confirmed with regard to onshore wind, the ambition for a minimum installed capacity of 20 GW of onshore wind in Scotland by 2030. As of June 2022, Scotland had 8.7GW of installed onshore wind, so this ambition would more than double the installed onshore wind capacity within a period of 8 years.
- 4.123 While a national Strategy and Plan, it recognises that much of the action to deliver Scotland's energy transition will happen at a local and regional level. The just energy transition needs to meet the needs of different communities and workers, and deliver on the opportunities offered by different geographies and infrastructure assets.
- 4.124 Scotland has executive devolution for electricity infrastructure consenting in Scotland, but legislation under the [Electricity Act 1989](#) is reserved for Westminster.
- 4.125 The first [Strategic Spatial Energy Plan \(SSEP\)](#) for Great Britain is being developed by the National Energy System Operator (NESO), with publication scheduled for Autumn 2027. SSEP modelling and pathway development progressed through Q2 and Q3 2025, and a decision to re-run the SSEP modelling using refreshed data from DESNZ was made in November 2025 which has influenced the timeline for the Centralised Strategic Network Plan (CSNP) and Regional Energy Strategic Plans (RESPs). The first SSEP will be Great Britain-wide and will map potential zonal locations, quantities, and types of electricity and hydrogen generation and storage over time, to set out a long-term view of what energy sources are needed to reach net zero. The SSEP will not identify or recommend specific projects to be delivered. When available, the SSEP will inform the HLDP, including any spatial framework included to guide energy sector developments, although the extent of the usefulness of the SSEP for informing the HLDP in this way will depend upon how regionally or locally specific its content is. The SSEP works with and supports other important energy transition programmes, like the Centralised Strategic Network Plan (CSNP) and Regional Energy Strategic Plans (RESP). Note that SSEP will only identify optimal locations on a zonal basis, qualities and types of recommendations, it will not make site specific recommendations and should not be interpreted in this way.

4.126 In early 2025, NESO became responsible for producing Regional Energy Strategic Plans (RESP). These ensure a joined-up whole systems approach to energy planning so that local areas get the energy infrastructure they need to meet net zero and growth ambitions. There will be one RESP for Scotland. As part of supporting and engaging in the development of the transitional RESP (tRESP), in summer 2025 the Council responded to NESO's request for information on projects, programmes and initiatives across the region that will influence future energy needs. Individual submissions to the request for information are not published, however the [tRESP](#) was published in January 2026.

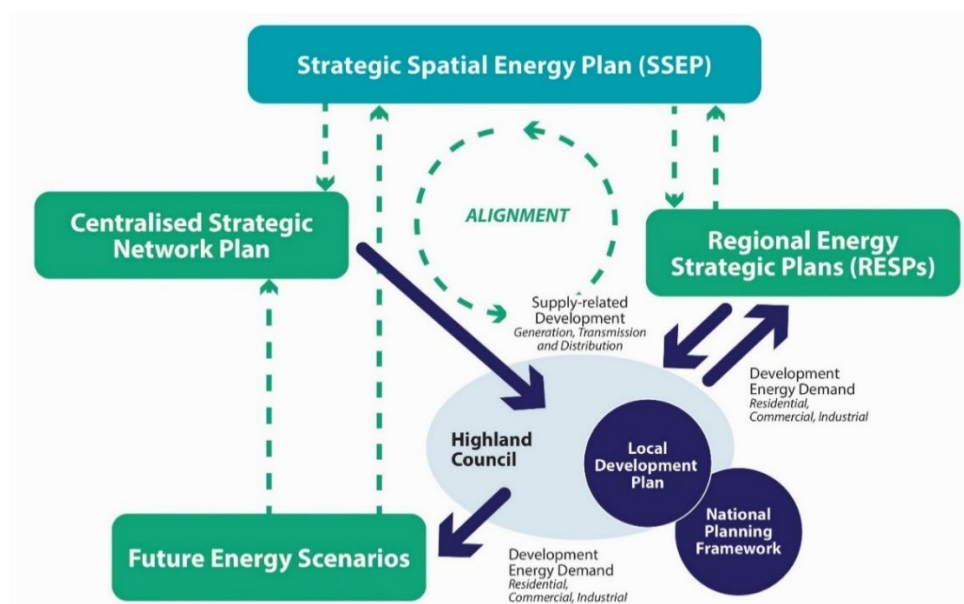


Figure 4:7 Relationship between HLDP and SSEP, CSNP, RESP and DFES

4.127 District Network Operators (DNO) can use the tRESP to inform their business planning processes. While the tRESP only considers the electricity system, when a full RESP is developed (publication planned for the end of 2028), consideration of other energy types such as hydrogen and gas will be considered. The RESP Methodology decision is expected in Q2 of 2026.

4.128 The CSNP, when fully developed with publication expected by the end of 2028 (dependent on the Secretary of State decision on the SSEP pathway), will be a network blueprint for the country, informed by the SSEP, mapping demand and optimal locations for onshore and offshore transmission infrastructure to support a decarbonised energy grid. Consultation on the CSNP methodology was undertaken by NESO during summer 2025. Two transitional CSNP have been developed in the interim:

4.129 The [Pathway to 2030 Holistic Network Design \(2022\)](#) sets out a single, integrated approach that supports large scale delivery of electricity from offshore wind, to

where it is needed across Great Britain. This was to help unlock the UK Government's ambition for 50GW of offshore wind by 2030.

- 4.130 [Beyond 2030 report \(2024\)](#): A national blueprint for a decarbonised electricity system in Great Britain recommended a coordinated offshore and onshore network design that can connect 86GW of offshore wind.
- 4.131 SSEN Transmission will need to develop their infrastructure projects in [Beyond 2030 report \(2024\)](#) further before they can be considered for funding. These options, along with any other proposals, will be assessed by NESO in a refresh of the second transitional CSNP analysis, hence known as the "tCSNP2 Refresh". This will be published by the end of June 2026.

Energy Development and Planning

- 4.132 The Scottish Government has an ambition to increase onshore wind capacity by 20 GW by 2030 as set out in the [Onshore wind: policy statement 2022](#). Highland is a global centre for the energy industry, with rich resources that are ideally suited to renewables development. Highland is already making a substantial contribution to renewable energy generation, including significant growth in onshore and offshore wind in the last 20 years, and growth of production and investment in renewable energy which has brought opportunities to the area.
- 4.133 Enhancing energy transmission and distribution networks in Highland, as well as elsewhere across the UK, is critical for further unlocking the region's renewable energy potential and enabling it to continue to play the vital role expected in the nation's decarbonisation. As the energy industry evolves and makes the transition to net zero, the region is well-placed to harness and deploy the existing skill set by securing new jobs and investment through the energy transition. Evidence in relation to the Energy sector's contribution to the Highland economy is provided separately in **Chapter 8: Business, Economy, Tourism and Productive Places**.
- 4.134 NPF4 sets out that LDPs should seek to realise their area's full potential for electricity and heat from renewable, low carbon and zero emission sources, by identifying a range of opportunities for energy development.
- 4.135 NPF4 Policy 11 Energy is explicit in being supportive of expanding all forms of renewable, low-carbon and zero emission technologies, including energy generation, storage, new and replacement transmission and distribution infrastructure and emerging low-carbon and zero emissions technologies including hydrogen and carbon capture utilisation and storage (CCUS).
- 4.136 NPF4 National Developments include 'Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure' clarified as national while previously major.
- 4.137 Decarbonising energy supply by transitioning to renewable energy is a key part of the response to climate change. The transition to renewables, particularly to

generation located in the UK, is also driven by the need for greater energy security – less reliance on other countries' oil and gas markets. Scottish Government's ambitious targets for achieving net zero by 2045 (with periodic carbon budgets) fuel the development of electricity generation and storage facilities by the energy sector. Drivers for the nature and location of these energy sector developments include: availability of renewable energy resource, availability/capacity of the grid, the need to balance the energy system, the policy framework that influences consenting decisions and other regulatory processes.

- 4.138 The Council's Development Management data was collated to give evidence on the scale and nature of applications for energy developments being considered in Highland. This data spans from initial baseline records of energy applications in 2015 to 31 December 2024. A summary of applications by energy type is provided in Table 4:1, and by planning authority in Table 4:2. Wind energy application data is provided as of December 2024, all other energy generation data is provided as of July 2025. Work is ongoing to improve the quality of data collected through planning applications to support Council's understanding of the scale, capacity and nature of energy development in Highland as it progresses. For example, aside from wind energy, there were limitations in getting consistent energy generation capacity figures (MW) for all other generation types and so number of applications, application stage and planning authority are presented to demonstrate the scale of energy developments in Highland. The [Highland Energy Projects Mapping](#) provides a spatial map of all planning applications and provides some energy capacity data. Where energy generation capacity data is poor quality or incomplete through development management data, the [National Statistics: Energy Trends – Regional Renewable Statistics](#) is the primary source used in this report.

Table 4:1 Highland Energy Applications – by generation type and status

Generation Type	Approved*	In Consideration	Scoping/Screening
Wind - Onshore	347	25	53
Wind – Offshore**	7	1	0
Hydro***	328	3	233
Solar	170	17	0
Tidal	1	0	2
Battery Storage	19	34	82
Biomass	208	0	17
Anaerobic Digestion	14	0	9

* Includes applications approved on appeal

** Not 'within' Highland as are offshore, but are closest to Highland coastline

*** Includes pumped hydro storage

4.139 Data from Council Development Management records in Table 4:2 shows the split of applications for energy developments considered by the Council and the ECU, and Table 4:3 for wind energy developments specifically (and by capacity). At the time of preparing this report, applications for onshore energy generation and storage developments with generating capacity in excess of 50 MW are determined by the Energy Consents Unit (ECU) of Scottish Government. There is currently a [consultation](#) underway by Scottish Government considering the threshold for applications under the Electricity Act 1989. The licences and consents required for offshore projects are administered by the Scottish Government's Marine Directorate – Licensing Operations Team (MD-LOT). As offshore wind projects are placed within the territorial sea adjacent to Scotland (0-12 nm) or the Scottish part of the Renewable Energy Zone (12-200 nm), these are below mean low water spring (MLWS) and therefore are not strictly within Highland, do not require planning permission or have a planning authority. Their inclusion in Table 4:1 and Table 4:2 is intended to highlight the implications for terrestrial development to support the offshore wind sector including but not limited to associated infrastructure within and/or servicing from Highland.

Table 4:2 Highland Energy Applications – number and percentage, by Consenting Authority*

Generation Type	Consenting Authority					
	Highland Council		ECU		MD-LOT	
Wind - Onshore	305	88%	42	12%	-	-
Wind – Offshore**	-	-	-	-	7	100%
Hydro***	313	95%	18	5%	-	-
Solar	185	99%	2	1%	-	-
Tidal	0	0%	-	-	1	100%
Battery Storage	28	90%	25	10%	-	-
Total	831	90%	87	10.5%	8	<1%

* Approved or in planning (not including refusals)

** Not 'within' Highland as are offshore, but are closest to Highland coastline

*** Includes pumped hydro storage

4.140 The Highland Council determines all other energy generation and energy storage development applications (noting that some other projects or components thereof benefit from Permitted Development Rights (PDR)) and provides recommended conditions and regulates the development following approved ECU applications. The share of onshore wind energy applications determined by both the Council and the ECU is shown in Table 4:3.

Table 4.3 Onshore Wind energy development applications in Highland, by status with number of applications, number of turbines and total MW production.*

	No. Applications		No. Turbines		Capacity (MW)		
	THC	ECU	THC	ECU	THC	ECU	Total
Constructed	264	20	642	453	1,746	1,313	3,059
Under Construction	**	**	**	**	89	121	210
Approved	36	17	134	125	471	1,324	1,795
In Planning	8	17	369	31	140	3,418	3,558
Total	-				2,446	6,176	8,622
Scoping/Screening	53		664		2,550		

* A small number (c<10) of redesigned schemes may result in double counting

** Data not available

4.141 Energy applications for energy network developments such as overhead lines, underground lines and substations are not included in these energy application summaries, at the time of issuing the draft Evidence Report, due to time constraints. The Council acknowledges that works of significant scale are ongoing or anticipated to improve the capacity of the grid.

Energy Consumption

4.142 Highland electricity and gas consumption statistics from 2023 are outlined in Table 4.4. Electricity consumption data is collated from the 142,100 domestic meters in Highland, and 16,000 non-domestic meters. For 2023, [sub-national statistics report residual fuel consumption](#) in Highland of 199.2 kilo tonnes of oil equivalent (across all fuels). Electricity consumption is also mapped spatially by postcode within the [Local Energy Net Zero Accelerator \(LENZA\) data story](#) which is integrated within the [Highland Climate Change and Energy Map](#).

Table 4.4 Highland Energy Consumption Domestic/Non-domestic (Source: Subnational electricity Consumption Statistics 2005-2023 & Subnational gas consumption statistics 2005-2023)

Energy Source	All Domestic			All non-domestic	
	Total consumption (GWh)	Mean consumption (kWh per household)	Mean consumption (kWh per meter)	Total consumption (GWh)	Mean consumption (kWh per meter)
Electricity	581.6	5,153.8	581.6	830.4	51,951.4
Gas	565.5	-	12,116.8	524.7	975,298.2

- 4.143 Electricity consumption in Highland is intrinsically linked to heating in Highland, due to the high (and increasing) proportion of properties with electric-sourced heating as evidenced in the [Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy \(LHEES\)](#) and discussed further in **Heat and Cooling**.
- 4.144 [DFES 2024](#) reports Electric Vehicles (25,400) as a key baseline electricity demand type in the North of Scotland and there has been a 50% growth in non-hybrid EV ownership since [DFES 2023](#), and an eight-fold increase is anticipated by 2030 (under the Holistic Transition scenario). This demand will have an impact on the electricity network. Electric vehicle uptake and the EV charging infrastructure network in Highland are discussed in **Chapter 10: Transport**.

Electricity Generation, Transmission and Distribution

- 4.145 The electricity grid and transmission network support development in Highland, though in some locations there are network capacity constraints or, planning constraints to options for grid connections such as the TFCWHS (across Caithness and Sutherland), the Cairngorms National Park, environmental designations, other pre-existing land management commitments such as established Habitat Management Plan areas and compensatory woodland planting plans. From a planning policy perspective, network constraints do not prevent development, and grid connections are not a material consideration in considering generating stations; however, these considerations do influence energy development patterns in Highland.
- 4.146 SSEN Distribution (SSEN-D) is responsible for the electricity distribution network in the north of Scotland and distributes the electricity from the transmission network to homes and businesses across their distribution areas. SSEN Transmission (SSEN-T) maintains and invests in the high voltage 132kV, 220kV, 275kV and 400kV electricity transmission network. SSEN-D maintains and invests in the low voltage network 33kV and below in Scotland. The [Scottish Onshore Transmission Network Boundaries](#) and power flow distribution for Scotland is published online: Highland is within the B0 – Upper North and B1a – North West boundaries.
- 4.147 [Pathway to 2030: SSEN-T Projects delivering a network for Net Zero](#) sets out how SSEN-T are investing over £20bn to upgrade the network infrastructure across the north of Scotland between now and 2030. Across Highland there are numerous National Development projects for grid transmission infrastructure of significant scale planned which enable the transmission and distribution of the renewable energy and support the transition to net zero by 2045. Certain sub-regions of Highland have a particularly high concentration of National Developments for grid and transmission infrastructure. SSEN-T published a

Project Map, and also provided a list of their proposed projects (current as of August 2025):

- Substations and HVDC converter stations
 - a. Banniskirk - Banniskirk Hub (Spittal Area 400kV substation and HVDC converter station) – SSEN-T
 - b. Carnaig - Carnaig (Loch Buidhe Area) 400kV substation – SSEN-T
 - c. Fanellan - New 400kV substation and Converter Station – SSEN-T
 - d. Bingally - Bingally 400kV Substation - SSEN Transmission
 - e. Fort Augustus (Auchterawe) - Substation 400kV Upgrade – SSEN-T
- New overhead transmission lines
 - a. 400kV overhead line between Banniskirk substation and Fanellan substation, via Carnaig substation - Spittal – Loch Buidhe – Beaully 400kV Connection – SSEN-T
 - b. 400kV overhead transmission line between Fanellan (Beaully) substation and Netherton (Peterhead) substation, Aberdeenshire - Beaully to Blackhillock to New Deer to Peterhead 400kV OHL-SSEN-T
- New underground transmission lines
 - a. Underground line between Banniskirk substation and Netherton (near Peterhead) substation
 - b. Underground line between Fanellan (Beaully) and Western Isles.

4.148 The Distribution Future Energy Scenario (DFES) 2024 reports a baseline of 3.8GW of operational generation and storage capacity (including non-renewable sources) connected to SSEN-D's network in the north of Scotland License Area. There is a pipeline of 14.7GW of generation and storage capacity that have connection offers to the distribution network. Table 4:5 shows the DFES 2024 baseline and 2030 projected generation for the license area. In Highland, these future capacity connections are predominantly onshore wind, battery energy storage and Solar PV. In DFES 2025, by 2035, the installed capacity is modelled to be 3.1 GW, representing a 1.9 GW increase from the 2024 DFES projections. The most up-to-date DFES data that is available will be used to inform the LDP preparation.

4.149 The 2050 outlook from DFES 2024 under the Holistic Transition scenario, is that renewable energy generation capacity is expected to reach just under 12 GW which is over three times the current deployment and is driven by growth in large-scale onshore wind (concentrated in Caithness, Sutherland and Skye) and solar PV of all scales. New DFES 2025 data suggests an increase to overall capacity of 720 MW higher by 2050 compared to DFES 2024, for the Holistic Transition scenario. The most up-to-date DFES data that is available will be used to inform the LDP preparation.

Table 4:5 DFES North of Scotland baseline summary and 2030 highlights of renewable energy generation capacity (MW) Source: [DFES 2024](#)

Capacity (MW)	Baseline (2024)	2030 highlights under Holistic Transition	Change
Renewable			
Solar PV	193	1,300	+1,107
Onshore Wind	2,200	3,900	+1,700
Marine	21	51	+30
Hydropower*	895	940	+45
Battery Energy Storage Systems	291	4,000	+3,709
Other			
<i>Waste and bioenergy</i>	<i>124</i>	<i>153</i>	<i>+29</i>
<i>Gas</i>	<i>48</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>-31</i>
<i>Diesel</i>	<i>134</i>	<i>134</i>	<i>-</i>
<i>Hydrogen</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>+18</i>

*Note the Hydropower figures do not include pumped hydroelectric storage due to such projects typically connecting at transmission level.

- 4.150 SSEN-D's Local Energy Net Zero Accelerator (LENZA) tool provides data for local authorities on electricity demand, electricity network topology and substation supply area capacity (primary and secondary) through a RAG analysis. A [LENZA data story](#) for Highland has been developed for this Evidence Report. SSEN-D note that LENZA data is time sensitive, and may change as new connections are enabled. Engagement with SSEN-D noted that higher voltage network connections which impact primary substation capacity (and may trigger upgrades) include Heat Network Zones, energy generation projects and most multi-unit housing projects. Larger energy projects may trigger requirements for transmission capacity upgrades. While the LENZA tool doesn't show line connections in the queue (and therefore their impact on substation capacity), NESO is currently analysing the queue and prioritising 'clean power 2030' projects to support the national energy decarbonisation target, but it is as of yet unclear what implications may arise from this as a result.
- 4.151 SSEN-D prepare Strategic Development Plans (SDPs), which assess the current network infrastructure and model projected electricity demand across the region to identify future network constraints and outline potential interventions to resolve them. On 23 July 2025, Highland Council submitted data for the DFES 2025. It included projected demand data from the [Highland Housing Land Audit](#), [Deliverable Housing Land Pipeline March 2025](#), windfall sites, the [Highland Business and Industrial Land Audit](#) as well as other data from Council projects

such as the EV charging pipeline and heat networks. This data informed the preparation of the [2025 DFES](#) and future SDPs. This up-to-date projected demand data considers the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport and IMFLDP2 energy demand. It is expected that SSEN Distribution (SSEN-D) will model the energy network requirements of anticipated future development and provide inputs to inform the HLDP Proposed Plan. SDPs also inform the 2-yearly Network Development Report for the SHEPD license area, setting out longer term Network Development Plans for the Distribution networks with information pertaining to network plans for the next ten years in relation to SSEN-D 11kV networks and above. The most recent [SHEPD Network Development Report 2024](#) brings together plans for the current price control period (RIIO-ED2, which runs until March 2028) and initial programmes for subsequent years, up to 2034. The next SHEPD is expected in 2026. Using latest available Distribution Future Energy Scenarios (DFES) at the time of publication, the NDR sets out SSEN-D proposed investments and likely areas for service requirements going forward.

- 4.152 The HLDP will have a significant impact on the potential future electricity load growth on SSEN-D's distribution network as most of the electricity generation in Highland is distribution-connected, rather than transmission-connected. As such, ongoing engagement between SSEN-D's SDP process and the HLDP development process is important to align strategic planning for grid development with development planning.
- 4.153 The Highland area includes eight SDP areas: Outer Hebrides and Skye, Fort Augustus, Beauly, Inverness and Aviemore, Mybster and Dounreay, Thurso South, Taynuilt and Errochty. An interactive map of [Strategic Development Plan areas](#) is available online. At the time of writing this Evidence Report, all SDPs were published and are expected to be refreshed with new DFES data in 2026. As more SDPs within Highland are updated, the Council will align the Proposed Plan with the published SDPs as appropriate.
- 4.154 [Thurso South SDP](#) - For the Extra High Voltage (EHV) system serving Thurso South mainland, the 132kV/33kV transformers at Thurso South could be close to full capacity due to the ongoing generation applications in this area. With the proposed capital works at Thurso South mainland, the Thurso South mainland network meets the future demand needs in 2050. HV/LV spatial plans indicate that there is no clear pattern to future demands on these lower voltage networks and so a forecast volume process is proposed. However, increasing use of low carbon technologies will impact capacity in the electricity network in the future such as for example, by increasing demand for electric vehicles and associated charging infrastructure. It is likely that a combination of flexibility and asset replacement will be employed to resolve the projected HV system needs.

- 4.155 Beaully SDP is informed by the DFES 2023, focusing on the area supplied by Alness, Beaully, Cassley, Grudie Bridge, Lairg, and Shin Grid Supply Points (GSPs) and includes the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport. The baseline energy mix is largely hydropower and onshore wind (total 360MW) with 0.5MW of battery storage (exclusively from domestic storage). By 2050, in the Consumer Transformation scenario, it is expected to be 80% onshore wind (total generation 910MW) and BESS increased to 220MW. EHV/HV spatial plan indicates areas of capacity shortfall, which is most critical around the Green Freeport substation supply area. HV/LV spatial plans have shown that there is no clear pattern to future demands on these lower voltage networks so SSEN are planning on a forecast volume basis. The SDP flags that further work is required in understanding how rural decarbonisation could impact load on the network. Specifically, the electrification of distilleries and ports along the east coast of the area and how to capture those plans in load forecasts.
- 4.156 Taynuilt SDP – This supply point is predominantly within the Argyll and Bute area, with a small area of rural Highland served along the Loch Linnhe coast from the Barcaldine primary substation.
- 4.157 Fort Augustus SDP – The SDP focus area is that supplied by Ceannacroc, Fasnakyle, Fort Augustus, Fort William, Kinlochleven and Quoich Grid Supply Points (GSPs) that make up the Fort Augustus 132kV substation supply area. The Fort Augustus 132kV supply area is experiencing high levels of battery storage and generation connection applications from Clean Power 2030. Due to the significant potential for renewable energy resources across the central highlands and the Fort Augustus 132kV supply area there is a list of contracted generation connections due to connect to the transmission network and SSEN Transmission currently have a large portfolio of works to be delivered to facilitate these connections and support the drive towards net zero. Projects include:
- Fort Augustus substation 400kV upgrade/reinforcement. This supports the upgrade to the second circuit of the Beaully – Denny overhead line (OHL) from 275kV to 400kV.
 - Coire Glas Connection
 - Bingally 400kV Substation
 - Quoich Power Station to Switching Station OHL Replacement
 - Glenmoriston Grid Transformer Replacement
 - Foyers Substation Extension Works
 - Ceannacroc GSP 2
- 4.158 In Fort Augustus SDP, based on the DFES 2023 projections, under the Consumer Transformation scenario, distributed renewable generation across the supply area will increase significantly from 298.241MW in the currently connected baseline to 496.17MW in 2050. Solar PV and onshore wind are expected to account for most

of the distributed generation increase from 2025 onwards. A cumulative storage capacity of approximately 111.55MW is projected by 2050 under the Consumer Transformation scenario, predominantly from standalone grid storage services. Spatial plans for future needs recognise the growing demand in the Fort Augustus 132kV distribution network which will likely require reinforcement of the 33kV circuits, and possible new GSPs given the significant growth from onshore generation anticipated. Also, increased integration of low carbon technologies (LCTs) (e.g. decarbonisation of ports and distilleries) connecting to the distribution network is expected to result in system needs on the High Voltage (HV) and Low Voltage (LV) networks.

- 4.159 Outer Hebrides and Skye SDP – The focus area of this SDP is the areas supplied by Grid Supply Points (GSPs) in the Outer Hebrides (Stornoway, Harris, and Ardmores GSPs) and Skye (Broadford, Dunvegan GSPs). The Outer Hebrides and Skye are supplied from a 132kV circuit from Fort Augustus, with several Grid Supply Points then feeding into SSEN Distribution's network. There has been a significant increase in generator connection applications in the Outer Hebrides and Skye, predominantly in renewable generation supporting the country's drive towards Net Zero. The SSEN Transmission's network Strategy to connect such projects consists of four developments: Stornoway – Beaulieu HDC link, Balallan switching station & 132kV overhead line (Isle of Lewis), Fort Augustus – Skye 132kV OHL reinforcement, Quoich Power Station to Switching Station overhead line replacement. Based on the 2024 DFES projections, under the Holistic Transition (HT) pathway, distributed renewable generation (that connects to the local distribution network) across the Skye region could increase from 37MW (baseline) to 265MW by 2050. The baseline value for hydropower is 8MW, onshore wind is 29MW. The largest increase in onshore wind projected to reach 194MW by 2050, followed by solar PV reaching 59MW cumulative installed capacity by 2050. Decarbonisation and expansion of industry, such as distilleries, is currently limited by grid constraints. Electrification of maritime transportation, using shore power to charge, could equate to a significant load at ferry terminals and demand requirements from 1-5MVA to meet Caledonian Maritime fleet decarbonisation targets. Increased penetration of low carbon technologies (LCTs) connecting to the distribution network will result in system needs on the High Voltage (HV) and Low Voltage (LV) networks and EHV system.
- 4.160 Mybster and Dounreay SDP – This SDP focus is the Mybster and Dounreay supply area, and considers DFES 2024 analysis. The Mybster and Dounreay network is made up of 33kV, 11kV, and LV circuits. It is a mix of rural and urban network spanning across the Scottish highland region. While much of the land is used for agricultural purposes, there is a mix of residential, commercial, and industrial land. Significant generation growth expected across the Mybster and Dounreay supply area. SSEN Transmission have studied and confirmed the need to

reinforce the onshore transmission infrastructure between Spittal and Beaulieu. To enable these reinforcements, a new 400kV substation is required in Loch Buidhe and will connect to a new 400kV connection between Spittal and Beaulieu and the existing Loch Buidhe 275kV substation. Decarbonisation of the agricultural sector and ports is an important consideration in this geographic area. The shipping sector is a new, large electricity customer, and the UK's target of achieving zero-emissions shipping by 2050 will lead to a substantial increase in the demand for electricity across the maritime industry. EHV system needs to 2035 are clear (upgrades to address low voltage in two circuits), for High Voltage (HV) and Low Voltage (LV) networks the increased integration of low carbon technologies (LCTs) connecting to the distribution network will result in system needs.

- 4.161 Inverness and Aviemore SDP – The focus of this area is that supplied by the Boat of Garten, Inverness, and Nairn Grid Supply Points (GSPs), some of which are in the Moray Council, Aberdeenshire and Perth and Kinross areas. The Inverness and Aviemore 132kV Supply Area is currently experiencing a significant volume of battery storage and generation connection applications. As Clean Power 2030 progresses, its implications for both ongoing projects and future system requirements will be carefully evaluated. To support generation, a new 400kV circuit running from the Beaulieu to Peterhead substations is planned by SSEN-T to be completed in the early 2030s. There are also new GSPs triggered by generation connections in the area; however, these projects may be subject to change due to the impact connections reform and Clean Power 2030. Substantial housing development within Nairn and Inverness GSP areas is expected, and SSEN-D are actively engaging with developers to understand future capacity requirements. Ardersier Port is developing as a major hub for offshore renewable energy infrastructure, and SSEN-D are also engaging with the Port to understand future capacity requirements. There are 18 registered distilleries in the GSPs and the decarbonisation of these distilleries, to align with the Scotch Whisky Industry target for net zero emissions by 2040, could significantly increase demand on local distribution networks. Other large demand consumers with long-term decarbonisation ambitions will drive electricity requirements, including Inverness Airport, Inverness Airport Business Park and major manufacturing facilities such as West Fraser in Dalraddy. Increased penetration of low carbon technologies (LCTs) connecting to the distribution network will result in system needs on the High Voltage (HV) and Low Voltage (LV) networks, as well as EHV system. It is likely that a combination of flexibility and asset replacement will be employed to resolve the projected HV system needs. For HV needs, flexibility is likely to be provided through Distributed Energy Resources (DER), Consumer Energy Resources (CER), and domestic/commercial Demand Side Response (DSR).

- 4.162 Errochty SDP – This supply point is predominantly within the Perth and Kinross area, with a small area of rural Highland east of Ben Nevis.

- 4.163 Due to the scale of energy generation and distribution in Highland and pace of growth in this sector, network capacity constraints are acute in some areas, such as Inverness, presenting a challenge to new connections for proposed developments. The HLDP will have a significant impact on the future electricity load growth within SSEN's distribution network, reflecting the unique position of Highland as a region where a vast majority of renewable generation is connected at distribution level rather than transmission level. This distinguishes Highland from many other parts of Scotland and places a particular emphasis on the need to align land use planning with grid development. The HLDP will therefore act as a critical source of spatial intelligence for SSEN's Strategic Development Plan (SDP) process, incorporating projected demand from housing growth, transport decarbonisation (including widespread EV adoption), and the electrification of heat identified through the Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES).
- 4.164 In practice, this means ensuring that the HLDP not only identifies suitable locations for renewable generation and storage but also anticipates the transmission and distribution network implications of large-scale electrification across Highland's dispersed settlements, islands, and rural communities. NPF4 policies (particularly Policy 11 on renewable energy, Policy 18 on infrastructure-first planning, and Policy 19 on heat) collectively require development plans to take a proactive role in supporting the grid transition. For Highland, this includes early engagement with SSEN-T and SSEN-D to identify substation areas, distribution bottlenecks, transmission requirements and other future reinforcement needs, so that energy and housing allocations in the HLDP are grounded in realistic delivery pathways.
- 4.165 Given that Highland contains eight SDP areas— Outer Hebrides and Skye, Fort Augustus, Beauly, Inverness and Aviemore, Mybster and Dounreay, Thurso South, Taynuilt and Errochty —the HLDP will need to consider spatial variations in grid capacity and constraints. For example, acute pressures are emerging in the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport area, where industrial decarbonisation and new housing delivery coincide with limited capacity at local substations. Similarly, electrification of rural industries such as distilleries and ports is forecast to create new demand hotspots in east coast areas, requiring coordinated planning.
- 4.166 Close collaboration between SSEN-D's SDPs and the HLDP will therefore underpin an 'infrastructure first' approach in line with NPF4 Policy 18, ensuring that the Council can deliver its statutory planning obligations under NPF4 while enabling the renewable energy sector to expand. By embedding this engagement, the HLDP can help to balance the dual pressures of hosting nationally significant renewable generation and delivering local development

needs, thereby ensuring that Highland's energy transition supports both the national net zero pathway and the resilience of local communities.

- 4.167 As per NPF4 Policy 11e), grid capacity constraints should not have a direct bearing on proposed energy generation development. Conversely, Policy 11e) does not relate to electricity consumers and it is recognised that there are impacts on development from when or where network capacity is enabled. However, the Council is keen to promote to the energy sector a joined-up approach whereby, in the interests of efficiency, we provide information on future development ideally through a single information provision process that is then used by the energy sector to inform all of the relevant energy network planning workstreams. Further, it may be beneficial to good planning overall if SSEN-T were to seek land use allocations to support energy network development where it is practical to do so. This is something that SSEN-T are considering and note is most practical if projects reach an advanced enough stage to provide sufficient certainty to the next LDP. Ongoing discussion with Council and SSEN-T will clarify timescales and practicalities to achieve this.
- 4.168 Engagement with SSEN-T noted that upgrades to the transmission network require specialised skills that cannot regularly be provided locally in Highland. For this reason, SSEN-T projects often provide accommodation for workers and some agreement around provision of legacy infrastructure (e.g. serviced housing sites). SSEN-D projects most likely use local contractors, and so worker accommodation is not required. The housing and accommodation implications of major energy developments are further considered in **Chapter 9: Housing**. Employment and economic considerations from energy development are considered in **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**.
- 4.169 Transport considerations are critical in that upgrades to energy transmission and distribution infrastructure contribute to a significant degree of freight transport (delivery of equipment and materials, construction traffic) in Highland. This often necessitates access to remote areas using the trunk and local road network, and requires careful route planning considerations, particularly in cases of abnormal load routing. These aspects are detailed further in **Chapter 10: Transport**.

Gas Network

- 4.170 NESO now serves as Great Britain's gas network planner. The [NESO Gas Network Capability Needs Report \(GNCNR\) \(2024\)](#) presents an independent view of the National Transmission System and its capability to meet current and future network requirements for gas. Key findings relevant to Highland from the GNCNR are that:
- The probability of network constraints remains very low over next 10 years.

- Beyond 2035, the energy system is faced with increasing uncertainty because of the evolving dynamics of technology, policy, market forces, and societal expectations. Due to the high degree of ambiguity and complexity, there is a further emphasis on the importance of strategic energy planning and adopting a holistic approach to ensure the UK addresses net zero and security of supply in the most efficient and economical way.
- 4.171 The GNCNR report findings will be used by National Gas Transmission (NGT) to propose network reinforcement options in the Strategic Planning Options Proposal (SPOP). Subsequently, NESO will evaluate any proposed reinforcement options and create a Gas Options Advice Document (GOAD) by the end of 2025. NESO is currently considering stakeholder responses to the Gas Options Advice (GOA) and the GOA methodology will be published in Q3 2025. The [GNCNR](#) represents a stepping-stone towards building a whole system Centralised Strategic Network Plan (CSNP), which will set out the coordinated, multi-vector approach to long-term energy network planning.
- 4.172 SGN owns and operates the low-pressure gas distribution network in Scotland. The regulator Ofgem (Office of Gas and Electricity Markets) sets price controls which impact how much SGN can invest, and what assets they can invest in. Ofgem is currently working on the RII0-3 price control framework for 2026-2031, which will determine the investment allowed for maintaining the gas network and how and when these costs will be recovered from consumers.
- 4.173 The UK government policy paper [Midstream gas system: update to the market](#) (June 2025), sets out the challenges facing the UK gas system during the transition to a net zero energy system. With gas demand declining in the coming decades, the role of the gas network is expected to change. The government proposes to develop future gas policy that ensures consumers and those working in the gas sector are protected and supported. Future options include continued use of the network for carbon neutral or negative gases, repurposing part of the network for other energy uses (e.g. conveying carbon dioxide for CCUS or hydrogen) or for non-gaseous uses. A just transition is a key consideration also. The government proposes to publish a call for evidence in 2026 seeking views on how to ensure the gas transition is operationalised in a way that is fair, planned and orderly.
- 4.174 Baseline fossil gas generation in the North of Scotland license area is 48 MW and generation decommissioning is estimated to reduce capacity to 17MW by 2030 ([DFES 2024](#)), including some fossil fuel modelled to convert to hydrogen generation.
- 4.175 Anaerobic digestion plants, producing biogas, also contribute to the gas network in Highland. Table 4:1 summarises that there are 14 approved Anaerobic Digestion projects in Highland, and 17 in scoping/screening. A recent planning

- application [PPA-270-2293](#) was approved at appeal for an anaerobic digestion plant and ancillary infrastructure near Inverness Airport. This application was considered with equal weight for NPF4 Policy 11 and Policy 12.
- 4.176 The [Highland LENZA data story](#) shows the gas topology, off-gas post codes and the energy sources used for heating (e.g. gas, oil, LPG, biomass, solid fuel or electricity). The extent of Highland's gas grid is centred around Inverness, settlements of the parts of the Inner Moray Firth area, Wick and Thurso. The gas grid in Wick and Thurso are independent systems, not connected by pipe to the national gas network. In Highland, 61% of buildings are off the gas grid, which is a much higher proportion than the UK average ([DFES 2024](#)).
- 4.177 At the time of preparing the IMFLDP2, SGN had previously provided to Council two (confidential) planning documents: Strategic Planning Report for Inverness Interconnection Point (IP) (2019) **(THC140)** and Strategic Planning Report for Conon Bridge – Invergordon IP (2019) **(THC141)**. These SGN planning documents for the gas network are informed by the site allocations of the proposed IMFLDP2 and the most recent [Highland Housing Land Audit](#) (at that time, 2017 HHLA). SGN reported the anticipated growth in Tornagrain and East Inverness which identified the need for additional reinforcement of the Inverness IP network. SGN were cognisant of committed development and would plan for network improvements accordingly. The Council seeks input from SGN regarding whether these remain reflective of the current context, and whether they are comfortable with these being shared with the DPEA as part of the Evidence Report Gatecheck.
- 4.178 For the Conon Bridge – Invergordon IP **(THC141)**, domestic growth potential to impact the gas network is relatively small, however the Industrial/Commercial allocation of sites in the IMFLDP2 was considered as potentially significant. Network reinforcement in this IP will be driven by industrial development at Invergordon, and to a lesser extent Evanton and Alness. Speculative infill development opportunities for off-gas areas in the Conon-Bridge IP were noted, in line with those investigated as part of the RIIO-GD2. As with all networks supplied via the Northern Transmission system, available capacity on the LTS network is a major dictating factor in assessing the capability of SGN's Network to accept additional demand in this area. It is important that committed demand and proposed development is closely monitored to ensure security of supply across all pressure tiers.
- 4.179 To support the transition to net zero, decarbonisation of heating is being progressed through the [Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy \(LHEES\)](#) including the consideration of Heat Network Zones, which are discussed in **Heating & Cooling**. Additionally, work is underway exploring options for retrofitting the gas network for potential hydrogen distribution.

Renewable Generation

4.180 In 2024, Highland's renewable energy generation and capacity is predominantly onshore wind and hydroelectricity (Table 4:6). There is significant offshore wind energy generation off Highland's coastline (see [Highland Council Turbine Mapping](#)); however, because the grid connection is made in neighbouring Moray (i.e. outwith Highland), these sites are not attributed to Highland in these regional renewable statistics. There are many solar photovoltaic sites, that are included, but the overall capacity they contribute to the network is disproportionately low compared to other renewable source sites. There has been a notable growth in onshore wind generation (Figure 4:) and capacity (Figure 4) from 2014-2024.

Table 4:6 - Renewable Energy Summary for key sources in Highland (2024) (Source: [National Statistics: Energy Trends – Regional Renewable Statistics](#))

	Solar PV	Onshore Wind	Hydroelectricity	Other*
Generation (MWh)	28,204	4,582,872	3,024,188	191,210**
Installed Capacity (MW)	40.0	2,043.8	818.8	42.3
# sites	11,700	275	309	18

*Other category includes Anaerobic Digestion, Offshore Wind, Wave/Tidal, Sewage Gas, Landfill Gas, Municipal Solid Waste, Animal Biomass, Plant Biomass and Cofiring.

**For Other generation in Highland, data on Wave/Tidal, Sewage gas and Landfill gas is suppressed (and excluded from the total Other figure) as the output of individual plants is no to be revealed but there is some generation in the category.

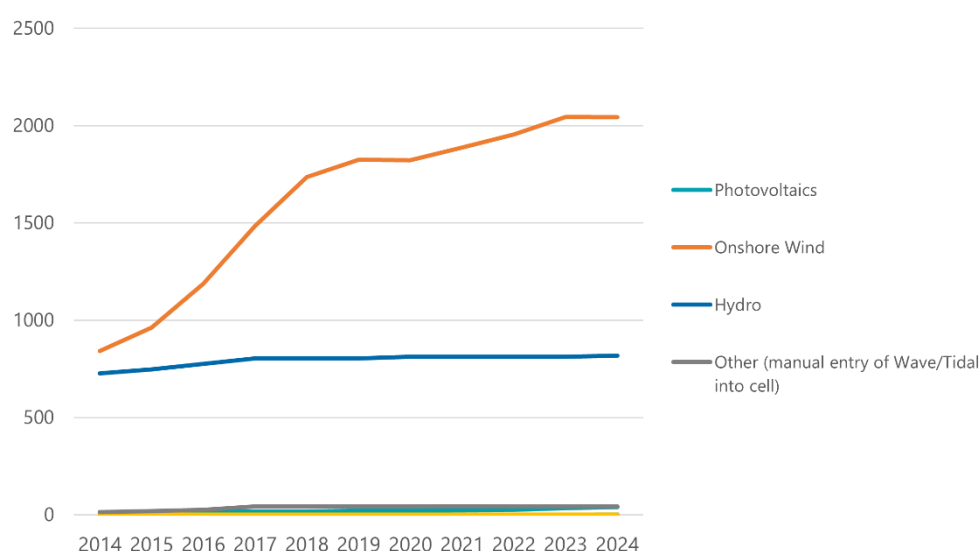


Figure 4:8 Renewable Energy Generation in Highland, 2014-2024 (MWh) (Source: [National Statistics: Energy Trends – Regional Renewable Statistics](#))

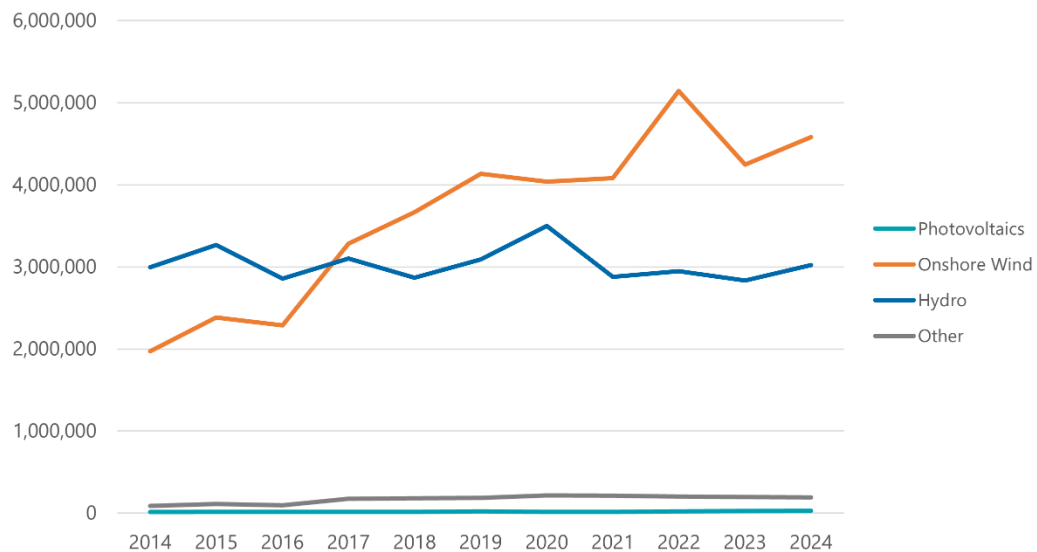


Figure 4:9 Installed Renewable Energy Capacity in Highland, 2014-2024 (Source: [National Statistics: Energy Trends – Regional Renewable Statistics](#))

- 4.181 The scale, distribution and height of existing and proposed renewable energy developments on land and sea in Highland can be understood and interpreted by using the [Highland Energy Project Mapping](#) prepared by the Council. The Council maintains this database from the development management system, with monthly updates, showing the location of each energy project that is the subject of a planning application or application under the Electricity Act 1989 (but excluding projects proceeding under permitted development rights). This evidence will support the development of a spatial strategy that realises Highland's full potential for electricity from renewable sources. A technical note explaining the data presented in Highland Energy Project Mapping, source of data and its limitations is provided in **THC058**.
- 4.182 In addition, the Council has previously developed [Highland Wind Turbine Mapping](#) (updated to 31 December 2024) with granular information on the location of wind turbines onshore and offshore and their status: constructed, under construction, approved, in planning, refused/expired/withdrawn or scoping/screening.
- 4.183 From Highland Development Management data a summary of approved, in planning and scoping/screening hydro energy generation and storage developments has been prepared (Table 4:1, Table 4:2 and Table 4:3). For ECU applications, whilst Highland Council is not determining decisions it is both a consultee for the application and responsible for recommending conditions and handling condition compliance.

Onshore wind

- 4.184 [National Statistics: Energy Trends - Regional Renewable Statistics](#) (2024) report 2.04 GW of installed onshore wind capacity in Highland (Table 4:6). As of July 2025, Council development management reports total constructed onshore wind capacity of 3.06 GW (Table 4:3). The number of onshore wind planning applications, by status and by planning authority, are reported in Table 4:1 and Table 4:2 respectively. The Council has been the determining authority in 88% of the onshore wind applications, from initial baseline records collated from 2015 up to 31 December 2024. It should be noted that these figures are not intended or presented as a forecast of future capacity, and it is understood that the decommissioning of onshore wind sites will be a further dimension affecting available capacity.
- 4.185 The past requirement for planning authorities to produce a Spatial Framework for onshore wind energy development that was set out in Scottish Planning Policy 2014 has not been carried forward into NPF4. In the context of Scottish Planning Policy 2014 (including the methodology for the spatial framework set out in its Table 1), the Council prepared [Onshore wind energy supplementary guidance](#) with a landscape sensitivity appraisal for the Loch Ness Area. An addendum in 2017 added a landscape sensitivity appraisal for Caithness, the Black Isle, Surrounding Hills and Moray Firth Coast. That Table 1 is available to view as Table 1 in [Onshore wind energy SG](#). The clearest steer provided by the Framework is 'Group One' (where development will not be supported) which comprises National Parks and National Scenic Areas, which is consistent with NPF4 Policy 11b). For Highland, the Spatial Framework for Onshore Wind Energy as a whole (Groups One, Two and Three) is still a useful planning tool to demonstrate constraints and where suitable sites for energy development may be located and will be used to inform HLDP. The Highland Spatial Framework mapping was updated in 2020 (to reflect updates to the underlying constraints layers) for Caithness and Sutherland (2020) **(THC143)**, Inner Moray Firth (2020) **(THC138)**, and West Highlands and Islands (2020) **(THC139)**. In 2021, a pilot landscape sensitivity study was commissioned by NatureScot and Highland Council for Dava Moor, Nairn and Monadhliath **(THC074)**. This study sought to support strategic planning and assist with the appraisal of specific wind energy development proposals in these landscapes, including consideration of cumulative and cross-border landscape and visual effects. It is recognised that other constraints (spatial or otherwise), further updated constraints datasets, or pointers to opportunities for development would also be considered for development of the Proposed Plan. In referring to constraints in this context, the Council means planning considerations which, through the consideration of potential impacts arising from proposed development, have the potential to influence siting, design and

suitability of development proposals. Further, by constraints the Council is not only referring to 'no go areas' for development.

- 4.186 NatureScot has recently published guidance on [Aviation Lighting Impact Assessment](#) (November 2024) which brings consistency to the assessment and illustration of effects on the landscape and visual resource from visible aviation lighting located on onshore wind turbines.
- 4.187 In Highland, the traditional period of consent to build and operate onshore wind has generally been a lifespan of 25 years, as set out in planning permission conditions, by or after which time the wind farm would need to be decommissioned. However, in recent years applicants are seeking operational periods in the order of 35-40 years. It is recognised that the decision for applying for repowering is a commercial one for the wind farm operator, rather than being driven by the timeframes on the conditions of any existing planning consent. This decision looks to strike an optimal balance between the remaining operational life of the wind farm and the prospects and benefits associated with introducing larger more efficient turbines, as well as onsite BESS.

Offshore wind

- 4.188 Scotland's [Offshore Wind Policy Statement](#) (2020) states a target of 8 - 11 GW of offshore wind capacity in Scottish waters by 2030, based off the commitment to reach net zero by 2045. The draft updated Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy (SMP-OWE) (**THC052**) sets the course for delivering this capacity, maximising deployment in Scottish waters whilst protecting marine users and our environment and is anticipated to be finalised in autumn 2025.
- 4.189 Additional offshore wind capacity will require further reinforcement of grid infrastructure, connections and battery storage. [SWP-OWE](#) identifies current infrastructure and available capacity for the short-term but there are still network constraints that will need to be addressed to support future development. Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult ("ORE Catapult") are examining these grid infrastructure and connectivity issues and possible solutions, to inform future revisions to the SWP-OWE Plan (**THC052**).
- 4.190 [Scotland Marine Economic Statistics 2022](#) evidence that offshore wind generated 5,242 GWh of electricity, 15% of all renewable energy generation in Scotland. Scottish offshore wind had an estimated turnover of £4.2 billion in 2022, 1.4% of overall Scottish turnover. The [Highland Energy Projects Mapping](#) Time Filter demonstrates the growth in offshore wind since 2010.
- 4.191 Offshore wind farms adjacent to Highland's coastline have an installed capacity of 2.42 GW, as shown in Table 4:7. The licences and consents required for offshore projects are administered by the Scottish Government's MD-LOT.

Table 4:7 Offshore Wind sites adjacent to Highland's coastline, by turbines, height and capacity (MW) (Source: THC Development Management and Marine Directorate Scottish Government).

Name	No. Turbines	Max Height	Operational capacity (mW)
<i>Beatrice Demo (no longer operational)</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>150</i>	-
Beatrice Offshore Wind	84	198	588
Moray East (MacColl) Offshore Wind Farm	46	204	437
Moray East (Stevenson) Offshore Wind Farm	30	204	285
Moray East (Telford) Offshore Wind Farm	24	204	228
Moray West Offshore Wind Farm	60	265	882
<i>Pentland Floating Offshore Wind Farm (consented, not yet constructed)*</i>	<i>Up to 6</i>	<i>300</i>	-
<i>West of Orkney Wind Farm (consented, not yet constructed)</i>	<i>125</i>	<i>360</i>	-
Total	428		2,420

**S36 application approved by Scottish Ministers*

- 4.192 At the time of preparing this Evidence, two energy network planning applications were under consideration for onshore connections for the offshore network: West of Orkney Wind Farm and Ayre Wind Farm (off the north-east coast of Highland, close to Orkney). Both proposed to connect to Banniskirk, where there are also multiple applications for BESS.
- 4.193 Pathway to 2030 Holistic Network Design (2022) (HND) sets out the network requirements to facilitate the connection of the 23 GW of in scope offshore wind projects. When combined with existing offshore wind projects and those already further advanced in their development, the HND should enable the connection of 50 GW of offshore wind in Great Britain by 2030. The HND includes the offshore transmission network, the onshore works essential to facilitate each connection and the network needed to transport the electricity around the country.
- 4.194 The National Marine Plan addresses the potential for interactions between renewable energy development and other marine users (including, but not limited to, recreational users, commercial fishers, other construction works, shipping traffic, ports and harbours). Marine and terrestrial planning need to be aligned, including for the electricity transmission grid and supporting infrastructure. While the HLDP does not have scope to consider the marine environment beyond 12 nautical miles from the coastline, there are impacts from offshore wind development on other coastal assets, such as shipping lanes and aquaculture which are discussed in **Chapter 6: Coastal Development and Aquaculture**.

- 4.195 In contrast with offshore wind energy development, where rounds of development bids are assessed in designated marine sectors defined in the [SMP-OWE](#), no such process of assessing cumulative onshore wind energy developments is in place, and is therefore currently unstructured and ad-hoc in nature (i.e. there are no allocated energy grid development sites), which makes development planning and development management challenging.

Hydroelectric and pumped hydro

- 4.196 In 2024, hydroelectric generation capacity in Highland was 818 MW ([National Statistics: Energy Trends – Regional Renewable Statistics](#)). Table 4:1 evidences that as of July 2025 there are 328 approved, 3 in planning and 233 scoping/screening applications in Highland for both pumped hydro storage or hydroelectric generation projects. The Council is in the process of improving data collection through development management for all hydro developments, which will enable more up to date capacity estimates for hydro in Highland.
- 4.197 The current and future pipeline of pumped hydro storage in Highland is set out in Figure 4:8. While Foyers is the only currently operational pumped hydro scheme in Highland since the 1970s with a 300 MW installed capacity, there are several consented pumped hydro schemes with a capacity of 3,550 MW including Red John (known as Loch na Cathrach more recently), Earba, and Coire Glas. In addition, the Kemp, Glen Earrach, and Fearna schemes are still being considered through the planning process and would have 4,400 MW if all were granted consent from the ECU.

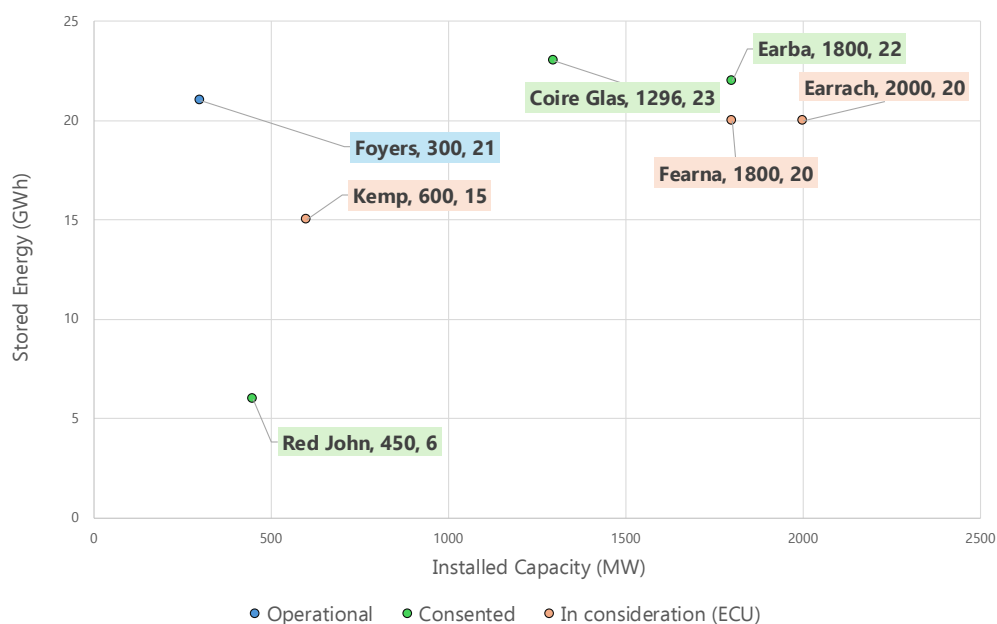


Figure 4:10 Highland Pumped Hydro Storage Installed Capacity and Stored Energy (Source: Development Management, Highland Council)

Solar Photovoltaics

- 4.198 In 2024, there was 40 MW of solar capacity installed in Highland ([National Statistics: Energy Trends – Regional Renewable Statistics](#)). The Scottish Government's [Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan](#) aims to deploy an additional 4-6 GW of solar capacity in Scotland by 2030. Table 4:1 evidences that there are 170 approved, 17 in planning and 0 scoping/screening solar applications in Highland. Of the 187 applications considered for solar development in Highland, 99% are determined by Council as a planning authority (Table 4:2).

Tidal

- 4.199 There is currently one tidal site 'MeyGen' operating adjacent to Highland's coast, in the Pentland Firth, which is being developed in stages. [National Statistics: Energy Trends – Regional Renewable Statistics](#) (2024) report that, of the total 7.7 MW of installed wave/tidal energy capacity in the UK, 3.7 MW is installed adjacent to Highland's coastline, but as there are no wave energy sites adjacent to Highland, this should be interpreted as meaning that the 3.7 MW relates to tidal. Table 4:1 evidences that there are 2 scoping/screening applications for tidal developments in Highland, which relate to variations to MeyGen.

Hydrogen

- 4.200 The production of low carbon hydrogen through commercial scale hydrogen electrolysis is still an emerging sector, with uncertainty around the scale of its future role in the energy system. The Scottish Government's [Hydrogen Action Plan](#) is targeting 5 GW of electrolysis by 2030 and another 5 GW by 2035. [Scotland's Hydrogen Assets](#) map shows existing Hydrogen Assets and Potential Demand.
- 4.201 The Council is in the process of developing a Highland Hydrogen Strategy which is being informed by the [UK Hydrogen Strategy](#). From an economic perspective [Regional Transformational Opportunities in the Highlands and Islands](#), which is further discussed in **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**, identified green hydrogen as a potential regional transformational opportunity (RTO). The Highlands and Islands region's potential for renewable energy generation, and levels of constrained energy in particular, as well as existing pipeline infrastructure makes the region well placed to become an exporter of green hydrogen. There is an interdependency with renewable energy generation and green hydrogen. Though, with the lack of infrastructure to support green hydrogen uptake, significant investment will be required to enable green hydrogen to scale in Scotland.

- 4.202 In 2024, Scottish Government established a [National Planning Hub](#) on hydrogen with an initial priority for supporting decisions on hydrogen planning applications, and providing local authorities with specialist expertise in hydrogen projects. Hydrogen has been identified by government and industry as having great potential to support Scotland's ambitions on net zero whilst there is a challenging consenting pipeline for hydrogen projects. The Hub also supports planning for hydrogen including guidance on the planning process ([Hydrogen Planning Process Map](#)), industry engagement guidance ([A Guide to Early Engagement in Planning for Hydrogen Developers](#)) and training for EIA and HSE.
- 4.203 SEPA has detailed information about hydrogen production, planning and environmental regulation requirements published on their website: [Hydrogen | Scottish Environment Protection Agency \(SEPA\)](#). Key environmental considerations from hydrogen are production and consumption, sustainable water use and discharges into water environment, Control Of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH) and consenting. For example, there is a preferred hierarchy for water use for hydrogen production: Reuse of final stage effluent, sea water, direct freshwater abstraction from sustainable ground / surface water, treated water / public water supply.
- 4.204 Planning permission will generally be required from the relevant planning authority (local authority or Energy Consents Unit of the Scottish Government) for hydrogen projects and relevant requirements under the [Town and Country Planning \(Environmental Impact Assessment\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2017](#) will also apply. [Hazardous Substances Consent](#) regulates the presence of hazardous substances to ensure risks to people and environment are properly addressed in land use planning. It is required from the planning authority (in consultation with both HSE and SEPA) where 2 or more tonnes of hydrogen is present on a site, or where hydrogen is present in addition to certain other chemicals.
- 4.205 The production of hydrogen is a listed activity under the [Pollution Prevention and Control \(Scotland\) Regulations 2012 \(PPC\)](#) as a Part A production of inorganic chemicals activity 4.2 (a) (i). A permit must be obtained from SEPA prior to any hydrogen being produced or burned as a fuel in any plant greater than 1MW net rated thermal input. Installations comprising of a combustion plant with a total RTI greater than 50MW require a Part A permit.
- 4.206 A hydrogen industry event hosted by Highlands and Islands Enterprise in Elgin in September 2025 noted the current challenges to developing the Hydrogen sector in the Highlands and Islands. It will require skills development (such as STEM, project management, safety), ongoing research and recruitments efforts to attract and retain talent. Outwith Highland, current areas of hydrogen activity are identified in the east coast of Scotland and the Islands.

- 4.207 The Cromarty Hydrogen Project, 12km north of Alness, is the first project in the Scotland Hydrogen Programme. It originated from a collaboration between the Port of Cromarty Firth, ScottishPower, Glenmorangie, Whyte & Mackay and Diageo and the project originator, Storegga during the feasibility stage. This project is looking to develop a green hydrogen production hub (10.6MW) in the Cromarty Firth region and revolves around the local distilleries forming the baseload demand for early phases of the project, which would enable them to decarbonise in line with their own ambitions and sector targets.

Renewable Energy Guidance

- 4.208 Existing guidance on renewable energy development such as the [Highland Renewable Energy Strategy and Planning Guidelines](#) and [Onshore wind energy supplementary guidance - Highland Council](#) and the 2021 pilot study landscape appraisal for Dava Moor, Nairn and Monadhliath (**THC074**) will be considered when preparing the Proposed Plan as to whether we will retain, review or extend these tools, either as incorporated into the HLDP or as non-statutory guidance. New tools and guidance may also be required to respond to the changing energy sector development context and new constraints data or areas (e.g. The Flow Country World Heritage Site (THCWHS)). For example, developing a more specific location, siting and design steer for emerging types of energy sector development, such as Battery Energy Storage Systems and Hydrogen, may be required. Similarly, consideration may need to be given to a more joined up spatial approach to the planning of renewable development proposals to enable assessment of cumulative effects, cohesive integrated design and environmental land management.
- 4.209 For the avoidance of doubt, the Council does not generally envisage allocating sites for energy developments within the HLDP (although we may consider doing so for limited types and purposes). However, the Council does consider that policies in the HLDP can include spatial policies, in terms of the both the identification and consideration of constraints and the identification of opportunities for energy developments. It remains the case that each development proposal will require specific assessment, including where appropriate Environmental Impact Assessment, and will be considered on its individual merits.
- 4.210 [The Flow Country Planning WHS Planning Position Statement 2](#) is relevant guidance for any development within TFCWHS, including renewable energy. This Planning Position Statement will be accompanied by the management plan for TFCWHS and guidance on the consideration of 'setting', noting that this will be appropriate to the criterion and attributes for which the Site is inscribed as further explained in **Chapter 5: Natural Environment**.

- 4.211 As part of the [Onshore Wind Sector Deal](#) Scottish Renewables has committed to creating a mechanism for onshore wind developers to submit information prepared as part of the consenting process to create a central geospatial database, including habitat management plans, peatland management and annual bird monitoring, which can be accessed publicly. If this is established and available, it may form useful Evidence for the preparation of the HLDP.

Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport

- 4.212 Highland's legacy of strategically important oil and gas fabrication sites and abundance of renewable energy resources off its coast mean it is ideally placed to be at the forefront of the fast-moving green energy revolution.
- 4.213 The Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport aims to realise significant local economic benefits from investment in renewable energy infrastructure, and is already coinciding with significant change within the Highland economy detailed separately within **Chapter 8: Business, Economy, Tourism and Productive Places**. It will be the prime location for assembly, operation and maintenance services for renewable energy development and extend to becoming an international base for fabrication and manufacturing of renewable energy components and a leading research and educational hub.
- 4.214 The Green Freeport is designed to support the ScotWind expansion through the [North of Scotland Hydrogen Programme](#). The programme aims to develop a state-of-the-art hub in the Cromarty Firth to produce, store and distribute green hydrogen at scale to the region, Scotland, other parts of the UK and Europe. The Cromarty Firth is an ideal location for the green hydrogen hub due to its proximity to large-scale renewable electricity supply and a high level of demand locally for this sustainable fuel, as shown on the map of [Scotland's Hydrogen Assets](#), including: distilleries, industry, transport (road, rail & aviation) and domestic applications, supported by local supply chain expertise and the Council's ambition for the region to become a hydrogen economy.

Battery energy storage systems

- 4.215 As the UK looks to achieve Clean Power by 2030 and a net zero power system by 2035, the rapid deployment of new large-scale battery energy storage systems (BESS) is projected under every future energy scenario. Low-carbon dispatchable power and flexibility are required to manage variable generation, meet peak demand, ensure security of supply, manage network constraints and maximise the economic value of abundant renewable energy when it is available. In Highland this is especially pertinent as the scale of renewable energy generation

and variability of generations creates localised network constraints that BESS can help to manage.

- 4.216 Certain site-specific factors, primarily grid capacity and access points to the electricity transmission network, are essential for the implementation of BESS. Scottish Government published [planning guidance on Battery Energy Storage Systems \(BESS\)](#) in March 2026. The purpose of the guidance is to assist applicants, decision-makers, and other participants in the planning system to effectively plan for BESS across Scotland. It seeks to support a clearer understanding of the specific technical, environmental, and wider issues associated with planning for BESS, and how these may be positively addressed through the planning process, to ensure that development is appropriately sited, well designed, and responsive to its context. The guidance recognises that BESS remains an evolving sector, with few currently operational sites and the potential for change of battery technologies likely in the future. It therefore encourages a proportionate, positive and collaborative approach between applicants and decision-makers with a strong emphasis on appropriate site selection and effective pre-application engagement.
- 4.217 The deployment of large-scale batteries has continued to accelerate in the north of Scotland licence area, with 110 MW connecting in the past year and a total baseline of 291MW of large-scale battery energy storage ([DFES 2024](#)). The pipeline of grid-scale battery storage sites that have a quote issued or accepted connection offer with SSEN was 9.3 GW across 221 sites in the licence area (an increase of 20% since DFES 2023).
- 4.218 By 2030, energy storage capacity in the North of Scotland is expected to reach 4.0GW ([DFES 2024](#)) but the deployment of large-scale battery storage is projected to slow in the 2030s and 2040s, as the market becomes saturated and alternative sources of flexibility see increased uptake, for instance smaller-scale battery storage, thermal storage and Vehicle-to-Grid (V2G). Also, with significant reforms to network connection policy and battery storage asset revenues becoming challenging for new entrants, it is likely that only a limited proportion of the BESS pipeline will progress through to development, even in the longer term. This is partially evidenced by only 2.3 GW (25% of the full pipeline capacity) being found to have obtained planning approval to date. With reference to BESS application statistics in Table 4:1, past trends observed through Council's Development Management pipeline indicates that a number of these BESS applications are likely to be speculative and not all are expected to be delivered.
- 4.219 The [Highland Energy Projects Mapping](#) Time Filter demonstrates the rapid increase in planning applications for operational large-scale battery storage sites in the last 5 years. The current Development Management data on BESS is not complete or accurate enough to support a reliable estimate of total BESS capacity

in Highland (as distinct from the SSEN North of Scotland licence area). Work is ongoing to improve the recording of planning application information to support the tracking of BESS installed and operational capacity in Highland.

- 4.220 Small-scale battery storage, in the form of domestic batteries and batteries installed at commercial and industrial properties with high energy demand, has a relatively small baseline in the North of Scotland licence area ([DFES 2024](#)) but has a potential to grow under every modelled scenario. Domestic battery uptake is closely tied to the uptake of domestic rooftop solar PV. In the past two years, over half of domestic PV installations have been installed alongside a domestic battery.
- 4.221 From a network perspective, SSEN procures Flexibility Services from owners, operators, or aggregators of Distributed Energy Resources (DERs) or Consumer Energy Resources (CERs), which can be generators, storage, or demand assets. These services are needed in areas of the network which have capacity constraints at particular times or under certain circumstances. SSEN purchases Flexibility Services from all types of providers (e.g. domestic or commercial).

Data centres

- 4.222 Data centres host and support the digital infrastructure that underpins modern life and are an emerging development type in Scotland. Green data centres are supported by NPF4 as part of National Development 12 – Digital Fibre Network (see **Chapter 11: Infrastructure**). NPF4 policy 24 supports the delivery of digital infrastructure as fundamental utilities, with the intent to encourage, promote and facilitate the roll-out of digital infrastructure across Scotland to unlock the potential of all our places and economy. Policy 24 is not explicit in referring to data centres; however, the intent of the policy is considered supportive of data centre development. Data centres generate excess heat and are recognised as heat source opportunities, for establishing heat networks as per NPF4 policy 19d).
- 4.223 There has been limited interest in data centre development in Highland to date. In 2020, Highland Council received a Screening and Major Pre-development application for one large-scale data centre development, which did not progress further. One small-scale data centre application was approved in 2010. However, as data centres are high energy users and the density and direct access to renewable energy sources available in Highland, it is reasonable to anticipate future demand for locating data centres in Highland within the life of the HLDP. The HLDP Call for Sites included one site proposal for a potential data centre use.

Nuclear Decommissioning

- 4.224 Scotland's national position affords no support at present for nuclear power generation, and NPF4 contains no nuclear-specific policies, or direction for the spatial strategy of LDPs. Scotland has only one remaining active nuclear power site generating electricity, which is outwith the Highlands. Within the Highlands, there is one civil nuclear site at Dounreay, in Caithness. It is a former prototype reactor that served as the UK's centre for fast reactor research and development, now at an advanced stage of decommissioning, and undergoing a large-scale clean-up and demolition project to return the site to a safe condition (discussed in **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**), led by Nuclear Restoration Services (NRS). The Vulcan Naval Reactor Test Establishment is an adjacent Ministry of Defence nuclear submarine test reactor site, preparing for decommissioning.

Energy from Waste

- 4.225 Incinerators in Scotland are fitted with technologies that enable energy to be recovered from the treatment of waste, known as Energy from Waste (EfW). EfW can be used to produce electricity only, heat only, or combined heat and power (CHP). Bioenergy and EfW accounted for 8.1% of all renewable electricity generated in Scotland in 2019 (2,472 GWh).
- 4.226 NPF4 is only supportive of new EfW proposals under limited circumstances where a national or local need has been sufficiently demonstrated (e.g. in terms of capacity need or carbon benefits) as part of a strategic approach to residual waste management and subject to specific criteria such as being connected to a heat network.
- 4.227 In November 2024, the Council Communities & Place Committee made a decision on Long-term Waste Management, that an Energy from Waste facility within the Highlands was not considered to be a suitable course of action. Instead, seeking a long-term contract with a merchant service provider operating within Scotland was considered the most appropriate strategic approach. There are six new merchant energy-from-waste facilities under development across Scotland, and so the supply capacity indicates greater certainty of future provision, and they are considered to provide enough capacity to serve the Highlands. Waste management and zero waste policy are further discussed in **Chapter 11: Infrastructure**.

Local and Community Energy

- 4.228 Local Energy Scotland provides an overview map of communally and locally owned, shared ownership and community benefit schemes in Scotland which

provide 1108MW of energy to communities. Compared to other local authorities, Highland has a high concentration of operational community-owned and local owned energy projects, including hydro schemes, biomass and turbine projects predominantly small scale (0.05 – 5.0MW capacity), with the exception of Boulfruch Wind Farm (12.75 MW) and Achairn Wind Farm (6.15 MW). Many Local Place Plans have aspirations for developing community energy or small-scale schemes to power community buildings – this is discussed later in this Chapter.

- 4.229 Remote islands including Rùm, Eigg, Muck and Canna are all completely 'off-grid' (not connected to the national electricity or gas networks). These remote islands are considering innovative ways to supply, distribute and generate energy including opportunities to ensure local maintenance and supply chain opportunities are realised.

Environmental impacts of energy development

- 4.230 While fulfilling Scotland's renewable energy targets is recognised as playing our part in mitigating the inter-related climate and biodiversity crises, it is recognised that the installation of renewable energy infrastructure can result in environmental impacts. Understanding cumulative impacts is an important planning consideration for energy developments and is required by NPF4 Policy 11 e). Notwithstanding this, it is understood that there are examples of well-designed developments delivering, for example, both climate and nature benefits simultaneously. Scottish Government's [Onshore Wind Policy Statement \(OWPS\) 2022](#) (specifically Chapter 3) acknowledges this and references guidance and good practice examples, in addition to which there are key corresponding outputs from the Onshore Wind Sector Deal workstreams.
- 4.231 Areas of Highland have different physical and environmental characteristics which impact their suitability for energy development. This includes established designations such as National Parks, National Scenic Areas, and Local Landscape Areas which are mapped as Evidence in **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment** and presented in the three Strategic Spatial Frameworks (**THC143, THC138, THC139**). Caithness, for example, has globally important blanket bog including The Flow Country World Heritage Site, as well as internationally important seabird colonies. Peatland ground conditions also impact the suitability of an area for subsurface infrastructure.
- 4.232 The Council acknowledges the value of landscape sensitivity studies (LSS), with regard for NatureScot's [Landscape Sensitivity Assessment Guidance](#) (2022), for identifying landscape sensitivities from energy development. With regard to policy NPF4 Policy 11 d) and Policy 4, the interface between development related to the Green Freeport and natural designations is highlighted in **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**, and additionally in **Chapter 6: Coastal Development**

and Aquaculture. Further discussion of sensitive landscapes and the implications for the HLDP is included in **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment.**

- 4.233 Engagement with the energy sector working in the coastal environment, considered in **Chapter 6: Coastal Development and Aquaculture**, highlighted their ongoing and active responsibilities with sharing information and data on environmental monitoring of sites.

Community Wealth Building

- 4.234 Aligned with Policy 25 Community wealth building, 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.”* Community benefit packages are voluntary arrangements offered by renewable energy businesses to communities located near developments, and are not a material consideration in a planning application. [Social Value Charter for Renewables Investment](#) sets out the community benefit expectations the Council has from developers wishing to invest in renewables in Highland. Matters on the economic and community benefits of the energy sector are fully evidenced in **Chapter 8: Business, Economy, Tourism and Productive Places.**

Heat and Cooling

- 4.235 Reducing emissions from homes and buildings by moving to cleaner heating and cooling systems is an important action for combatting climate change and achieving our national net zero target by 2045.
- 4.236 The [Local Heat & Energy Efficiency Strategy \(Scotland\) Order](#) was passed in May 2022. The Order mandates local authorities to prepare, publish, and update their LHEES and Delivery Plan. These must be published by 31 December 2023 and updated at least every 5 years thereafter. The Scottish Government has passed legislation and produced accompanying strategy documents relevant to the implementation of Local Heat & Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES). LHEES are at the heart of a place based, locally-led approach to the heat transition and underpin an area-based approach to heat and energy efficiency planning and delivery.
- 4.237 LHEES presents an opportunity to identify dwellings suitable for low carbon heating and promotes the importance of a fabric-first approach to improving energy efficiency. The LHEES main direct links to spatial planning is through the identification of potential heat network zones. Decarbonisation of housing stock, including retrofitting of renewable and low carbon energy systems, also has spatial planning implications largely through the consenting process.

- 4.238 The Council published its first [LHEES](#) in December 2023. It establishes a framework for heat decarbonisation in both public and private buildings, reducing energy demand, tackling fuel poverty, and contributing to net zero targets. [LHEES](#) includes a comprehensive summary of domestic and non-domestic building stock characteristics, energy efficiency and heating statistics for Highland and identifies area-based solutions and indicative zones for developing heat networks. Scottish Housing Condition Survey 2021 and 2019 data is used, among other data sources, to provide a summary of both domestic and non-domestic data. The LHEES is updated every 5 years.
- 4.239 The age of a dwelling, the built form and heating fuel all impact the running costs, energy performance and living conditions. [LHEES](#) reports that of the total 127,066 domestic properties in Highland (at the time of LHEES publication), 61% (77,648 dwellings) are in an off-gas grid area (spatially show in LENZA map in [Highland Climate Change and Energy Map](#)). The main fuel types in Highland are mains gas (34%), oil (28%) and electricity (26%). Areas with limited access to the gas grid are more likely to suffer from fuel poverty and are evidently more reliant on fossil fuels, like oil, LPG and solid fuels. In Scotland, primary heating fuels are mains gas and electricity but in Highland there are higher rates of oil and LPG fuels being used ([LHEES](#)).
- 4.240 Figure 4:9 demonstrates the range of domestic property ages and their EPC Bands & Ratings in Highland. Energy efficiency ratings in Highland fall below the average for Scotland, due to their age, heating fuel and levels of insulation. Over 65% of dwellings are in EPC bands D-G, and likely to require significant energy efficiency and heating upgrades to achieve a higher rating. The region has a high proportion of detached (38%) and semi-detached (21%) properties, and only a small proportion are small blocks of flats (12%). In Highland, 92% of homes have double or triple glazing. Beyond energy efficiency, refer to **Chapter 9** for more evidence on housing quality and rural homes in Highland.

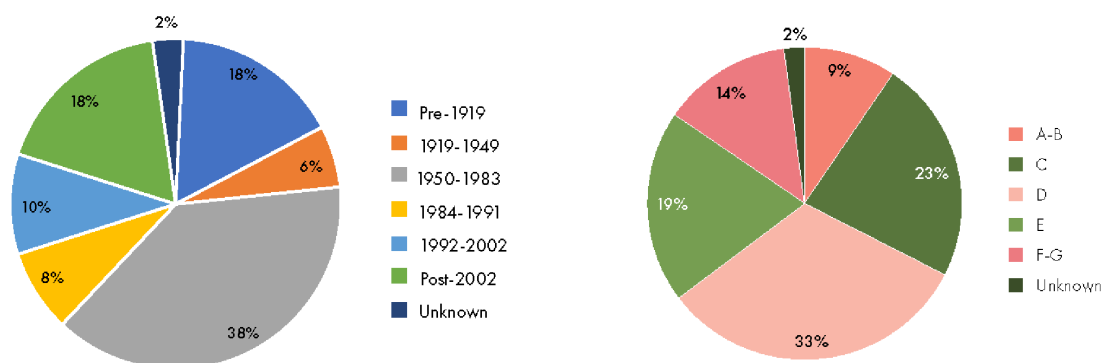


Figure 4:11 : Highland property age (L) and EPC banding (R) figures (Source: [LHEES](#) via [Scottish House Condition Survey](#))

- 4.241 [DFES 2024](#) identified domestic heat pumps (48,000) as a key baseline source of electricity demand in the North of Scotland, and the number of domestic heat pumps has increased substantially since DFES 2023. An increase to 229,000 domestic heat pump units is projected by 2030 under the Holistic Transition scenario, as new homes and off-gas homes install heat pumps.
- 4.242 At the time the LHEES was published there were 16,904 non-domestic properties in Highland, with 45% classed as very remote rural and 14% remote rural ([LHEES](#)). The highest heat demand by non-domestic typology split by floor area (MWh/yr) belongs to residential, hotels, offices and retail. The highest heat demand buildings by property age are those built post-1983 (374,292 MWh/yr) and pre-1919 (383,353 MWh/yr). The main fuel type for non-domestic properties is electricity (65%), followed by oil (17%), mains gas (8%) and other fuels (9%) ([LHEES](#)). The highest heat demand for typology split by fuel (MWh/yr) belongs to residential, retail, offices, hotels, clubs and community centres. Mains gas and oil-heated buildings in Highland have high potential for decarbonisation and are likely suitable for heat network connections as they will have a wet heating distribution system. Retrofit for heat networks for these buildings is likely to be less costly and complex compared with electricity heated buildings.
- 4.243 Poor energy efficiency is a driver for fuel poverty. Energy efficiency (single glazed windows, loft insulation and wall insulation) and fuel poverty by data zone are presented in the [Highland Climate Change and Energy Map](#).
- 4.244 [LHEES](#) analysis categorised on-gas and off-gas domestic properties by readiness for heat pump retrofit, to identify opportunities for decarbonisation. Category 1 identifies properties highly suited for heat pump retrofit with good levels of insulation and a wet heating system, excluding any consideration of electricity network impacts or costs of any network upgrades. Around 53% of on-gas properties are Category 1 properties, meaning that they can be considered heat pump ready. Around 24% of properties in off-gas areas are considered Category 1, meaning these properties would not need additional insulation measures before installing a heat pump and can be considered heat pump ready.
- 4.245 The [New Build Heat Standard 2024](#) (NBHS) applies to new buildings applying for a building warrant from 1st April 2024, as per the Scottish Government's [Heat in Buildings Strategy \(2021\)](#). New buildings must use a 'zero direct emissions heating system', such as a heat pump or heat network. An amendment to this standard in November 2024 allowed the use of bioenergy in both new homes and buildings, but as a secondary heating system only.
- 4.246 Through NPF4, development planning has a role in setting the ambition for optimising build quality (policy 16) and performance to minimise lifecycle emissions to assist in achieving net zero carbon (policy 2), embedding the circular

economy (policies 12 & 9), going above and beyond Building Standards Regulations.

Heat Networks

- 4.247 Heat networks distribute heat or cooling from a central source or sources and deliver it to a variety of different customers and buildings, avoiding the need for individual boilers or electric heaters in every building, and can contribute to decarbonising heating by transitioning from fossil fuels to low carbon heat. Often heat networks are developed in zones around public buildings which offer anchor loads (high heat demand) that drive the economics of heat works.
- 4.248 The [Heat Networks \(Scotland\) Act 2021](#) requires local authorities to carry out a review of potential areas for heat networks. The Act has set statutory targets that 2.6 Terawatt hours (TWh) of output by 2027 and 6TWh by 2030 – 3% and 8% respectively of current heat supply should be supplied by heat networks. Scottish local authorities have an obligation to review their area to consider if it is likely to be particularly suitable for construction or operation of a heat network and decide if the area should be designated as a heat network zone.
- 4.249 The [Scotland Heat Map](#) shows current heat demand by settlement or with a 50m grid. Within Highland, heat demand is clustered around Inverness city (655.27 GWh/yr), towns and settlements (up to 300GWh/yr) in the Inner Moray Firth, and Thurso, Wick, Brora, Golspie, Halkirk, Ullapool, Gairloch, Portree, Broadford, Kyle of Lochalsh, Fort William, Dunbeg, Kinlochleven, Spean Bridge, Newtonmore, Kingussie, Aviemore, Nethy Bridge, Grantown-on-Spey.
- 4.250 [Scotland Heat Map](#) also shows current operational and in development district or communal heat networks in Highland. [LHEES](#) highlights several of these as notably successful heat networks:
- District Heating Scheme Wick
 - Caol Community District Heating Scheme
 - Glen Mhor Hotel District Heating Scheme
 - The Aviemore Heating Project (Albyn Housing Society Ltd)
 - The Milton Burn, Aviemore
- 4.251 The [Heat Networks Planning Database](#) (April 2025), administered by the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), records two heat networks in Highland: Townhouse Carpark Energy Centre (Air Source Heat Pump) and Sabhal Mor Ostaig, Teangue (ASHP). The withdrawal of the planning application for Heather Brae District Heating Facility (biomass) is also noted.
- 4.252 The [Scottish Government's First National Assessment of Potential Heat Network Zones](#) (2022) identified areas where district heating could be economically viable, including areas with high linear heat densities where a substantial heat demand is

concentrated across multiple buildings within a relatively small area. Using stringent screening criteria (8000 kWh/m/yr linear heat density and requiring at least five anchor loads within a potential heat network zone), one large potential Heat Network Zone was identified within central Inverness. This Assessment provided valuable data which helped to inform and support the Council's LHEES development and subsequent work to progress heat network zone opportunities in Inverness, as outlined in this Chapter.

- 4.253 Highland's LHEES investigated indicative Heat Network Zones (HNZ) to understand the scale of potential and initial areas of focus. Using a radii-buffering approach the analysis identified clusters of buildings where potential anchor loads for a heat network were in proximity of each other. Existing infrastructure and constraints within indicative zones have been analysed, with strategic consideration given to how these zones could be further developed, considering heat source opportunities, technology and proximity to existing networks.
- 4.254 Opportunity summaries for each potential cluster to form an HNZ are presented in Figures 18 – 24 of the Highland LHEES, including the location, anchor loads, heat demand, constraints, nearby LDP allocations (from IMFLDP2 (**THC003**) or WestPlan (**THC005**) and total area and number of nearby green spaces with potential to be green heat sources (e.g. ground-source heat pumps). The potential zones shown as Heat Network Prioritised Clusters in the Highland Climate Change and Energy Map are:
- Invergordon Academy and Invergordon Sports Centre
 - Dingwall Academy and Highland Council Techs Depot
 - Highland Football Academy, Ross Memorial Hospital and The Health Centre
 - Inverness High School and the Highland Council Headquarters
 - The Justice Centre and Police Scotland
 - Police Headquarters and Bannatyne Health Clubs
 - Belford Hospital and The Nevis Centre
- 4.255 In November 2022, the Council applied to the Heat Network Support Unit (HNSU) for funding to conduct two feasibility studies to assess the opportunities in the development of district network in Inverness. These were Inverness West Bank and Inverness Castle. Inverness West Bank and Inverness Castle Heat Network Feasibility Studies (**THC056**) were presented to the Climate Change Committee in April 2023. Inverness was chosen as the first location to explore the feasibility of new heat network opportunities due to heat demand, the extent of Inverness currently connected to the gas grid and the opportunity of decarbonising heating, as well as market interest in developing heat network in Inverness.
- 4.256 To expand the potential for heat networks and support economic viability it was decided to take a broader approach and explore opportunities across a wider area beyond the original boundaries of the two Inverness sites. Three strategic

key areas for new heat network zones in Inverness were identified and chosen to undergo further feasibility analysis (also supported by HNSU), building on the findings and outputs of earlier work. This led to the development of four draft heat network zone boundaries, shown in the [Highland Climate Change and Energy Map](#), which are: Longman, City centre, Westbank and Raigmore. Multiple heat source options were considered by Council, through the Techno-Economic Model, to progress the analysis of potential heat networks. In this analysis, air source heat pumps (ASHP) were identified as the most suitable heat source for City centre, Westbank and Raigmore zones. Longman is proposed to utilise a waste heat source (Scottish Water Pumping Station). Back up gas boilers are also indicated for each network. Ultimately, depending on how the Council decide to progress/delivery models and other aspects it will be up to developers in most instances to take these forward, and they may choose to pursue alternative sources based on feasibility, temperature suitability cost, or other project-specific factors.

- 4.257 A summary of the four viable heat networks identified is in Table 4:9. Additional data on core plus infill development scenarios and network maps are provided in the Heat Network Feasibility Report **(THC057)**. For Longman and Raigmore there are additional scenarios that consider variations for linking or segmenting the heat network.

*Table 4:8 Summary of Viable Heat Networks (Source: Highland Council Climate Change Committee 21 May 2025 **THC057**)*

Criteria	West Bank (core)	City Centre (core)	Longman (full)	Raigmore (full)
Total Demand (MWh/yr)	24,015	21,540	-	48,750
Planned Growth in the Area	Low	Moderate/ High	Low	Moderate/ High
Council land share (%)	46.80	9.70	38.3	18
Number of Anchor Loads (>=500MWh/yr)	13	16	12	8
Number of connected buildings	23	17	14	15
Number of Council buildings	8	2	-	4
Fuel poverty mean (%)	29	36	n/a	n/a

Total social housing (units)	419	153	n/a	n/a
Primary heat source	ASHP	ASHP	Waste heat	ASHP
Carbon saving TCO ₂ e over 40 years	158,170	131,690	62,789	270,611

4.258 Following completion of the wider opportunity scan and engagement with the Council's Climate Change & Energy Team, analysis has been undertaken to assess potential opportunities for the development of heat networks in Aviemore, Dingwall, Alness, Tain, Invergordon, and Wick (north of the river). The findings indicate that Invergordon, Tain, and Aviemore present the strongest opportunities among the areas assessed, based on a combination of heat demand, strategic fit, and deliverability considerations.

4.259 The general methodology for evaluating the feasibility of a heat network zone area considers several factors, including:

- Heat demand: consideration for buildings in the area, heat demand by site/activity, existing heat systems, building and land ownership, and grid connections. The opportunity to target areas affected by fuel poverty are also considered.
- Heat sources: two types, renewable heat opportunities (wastewater, biomass, water sources, air source, ground source) and waste heat opportunities (excess heat or cold from industrial or commercial activities) as per Section 48(1)(a) (i)-(ii) of the [Heat Networks \(Scotland\) Act 2021](#).
- Technology appraisal: technologies vary, depending on the scale of the HNZ and heat sources available. A qualitative technology appraisal is carried out to assess the suitability of different low carbon technologies for a heat network. Technologies are assessed against various criteria, including resource availability, capital cost, spatial requirements.
- Energy centre: suitable location for an energy centre and route for heat network, impact on other underground services.

4.260 HNZ are not exclusive: In addition to HNZ, developers, community groups and other stakeholders can identify opportunities in areas outside the indicative heat network zones based on local demand or strategic interest. Council encourages innovation and community-led initiatives that align with decarbonisation goals. [LHEES](#) also considers small-scale heat network opportunities. From the 'heat-pump ready' property clusters in both the on- and off-gas areas, over 1,550 green spaces in the off-gas areas were identified as having high potential to be used for small-scale heat networks (e.g. shared ground source heat pumps) and over 760 for on-gas areas. Identified areas from this desktop analysis include

Thurso, Wick, Skye, Beauly and Muir of Ord. The [Highland Climate Change and Energy Map](#) includes Green Heat in Greenspaces data.

4.261 Site specific investigations are always required to confirm the potential and suitability of a heat resource, with reference to the range of heat source datasets which can indicate heat source potential. In Highland, a range of heat resource opportunities were analysed to explore potential for supporting heat networks, including:

- Excess or waste heat
 - Wastewater treatment works (unpublished data via Scottish Water),
 - [Waste sites](#) from SEPA (e.g. from incineration, anaerobic digestion, co-incineration)
 - [Large point emitters](#) from National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory which are expected to have large process heat demands.
 - Energy supply points (see [Scotland Heat Map](#))
 - Process loads (e.g. supermarkets, bakeries, breweries, distilleries, laundries, paper and pulp sites)
 - Data centres (no data centres currently in Highland)
 - Electrical substations via [SSEN](#) Generation Availability dataset
- Renewable heat opportunities
 - Green spaces (see [Highland Climate Change and Energy Map](#)) categorised as any nearby green spaces that could support potential low carbon heat solutions.
 - Geological and hydrogeological sources (see [Scotland Heat Map](#) and [British Geological Survey](#)). Limited data exists on the potential for tapping into geothermal resource for energy production and associated heat. These geothermal resources include:
 - Hot dry rocks (HDR), present around the Inner Moray Firth coastal and inland area inclusive of Dornoch, Tain, Alness, Dingwall, Fortrose, Inverness and Nairn as well as much of Caithness inclusive of Thurso and Wick.
 - Hot wet rocks (HWR), present around the eastern Inner Moray Firth settlements and south to Loch Ness, including of Nairn, Ardersier, Inverness and Drumnadrochit, also an area around Brora.
 - [Mine Workings - Mine Remediation Authority Map](#)
 - Wastewater: For Highland, Inverness is the only area with wastewater heat extraction opportunities (see [Highland Climate Change and Energy Map](#)).
 - Rivers and waterbodies, which act as heat sources or sinks (Ordnance Survey map shows proximity of heat demand to a waterbody)

- 4.262 The formal designation of Heat Network Zones depends on the progress of the Heat in Buildings Bill through the Scottish Parliament and the associated resource implications for designation and management.
- 4.263 A number of developers have recently approached the Council expressing interest in developing heat networks in Inverness and the wider local area. Inverness is their priority, with a view to expand further depending on how things evolve. This growing interest aligns with Council's strategic objectives around decarbonisation, energy resilience and supporting the transition to low-carbon infrastructure. In response, the Council has been working closely with its legal advisors to explore and assess a range of potential delivery models that could help unlock and accelerate the deployment of heat networks across the region. This work includes identifying viable governance structures, risk-sharing mechanisms, and partnership opportunities that would support long-term, sustainable delivery. To better understand the level and nature of market interest, the Council is preparing to issue a Request for Information (RFI) to the market in September 2025. The purpose of the RFI is to gather insights from potential developers, investors, and other stakeholders on their appetite for involvement, preferred delivery approaches, and any perceived barriers or enablers to progressing heat network projects in the area. The feedback received through this process will help inform the Council's next steps, including the potential development of a formal procurement strategy or partnership framework.

Fuel Poverty

- 4.264 Fuel poverty is where a household is unable to afford to heat their home to a comfortable temperature. It is defined by the Scottish Government as any household spending more than 10% (20% for extreme fuel poverty) of their income on energy, after housing costs have been deducted. Fuel poverty can be caused by low income, high fuel prices, poor energy efficiency and unaffordable housing prices.
- 4.265 In Highland, the rural geography, lack of gas connections (see [Highland Climate Change and Energy Map](#) LENZA data story for extent of off-gas areas), and acute issues of housing availability and affordability (See **Chapter 9: Housing**) are factors that contribute to the likelihood of fuel poverty. Data has been received on Fuel Poverty and once disaggregated it will be added to the [Highland Climate Change and Energy Map](#).
- 4.266 [A Perfect Storm: Fuel Poverty in Rural Scotland](#) highlights the overarching drivers of fuel poverty and a number of factors specific to rural areas, which impact fuel poverty rates:
- Cold and wet climates

- High cost of living
- The type and profile of employment and training available
- A shortage of affordable housing
- Ageing demographics
- Limited access to support services

- 4.267 Due to the rural nature of the Highlands, the overarching drivers of fuel poverty and the specific rural drivers compound in the region. This results in an overall fuel poverty rate of 47% in Highland (2022) which is significantly higher than the national average of 36% and the second highest rate of Scottish Local Authorities. These impacts are also visible in the figures for extreme fuel poverty, the average rate across Scotland is 18.5%, while the percentage of Highland households classed as extreme fuel poor is 29%.
- 4.268 An alternative indicator of fuel poverty is the [Scottish Fuel Poverty Index](#) score. Highland scored 0.65 based on the local authority area 'ability to pay' and 'demand' for fuel, the second highest fuel poverty score for a Scottish local authority.
- 4.269 The Council is committed to addressing fuel poverty through targeted, place-based retrofit programmes which improve the energy efficiency of homes and reduce household energy costs. These initiatives are strategically aligned with national climate, energy goals and specifically target fuel poor households. Multiple sources of external funding support delivery, including Energy Efficient Scotland Area Based Scheme, Energy Company Obligation, and SSE Renewables Funding. These funding streams enable the Council to take a coordinated, place-based approach to retrofit delivery, prioritising areas with high levels of fuel poverty and ensuring that interventions are tailored to local housing stock and community needs. This approach supports wider objectives around climate resilience, health and wellbeing and social equity.
- 4.270 The LHEES and NBHS are measures which respond to fuel poverty by tackling energy efficiency of buildings. LHEES are designed to identify areas with high fuel poverty, propose potential interventions to improve energy efficiency and decarbonise heat. In the context of the HLDP, a *spatial planning* mechanism to support fuel poverty reduction relates to the establishment of heat networks. That said, the LHEES is broader than this and the HLDP alone will not address all the drivers of fuel poverty. Mainly the larger scale heat network viability depends on high heat demand density, which is typically found in public buildings, commercial sites etc. Heat networks are one of the mechanisms to decarbonise heat, but are not a targeted fuel poverty solution especially in Highland due to the geography. For example, heat networks are not suitable for all areas, especially those with low-density domestic housing. Fuel poverty in such areas is

better addressed through fabric upgrades, individual low-carbon heating systems (like heat pumps), and targeted support.

Summary of Stakeholder Engagement

4.271 A full breakdown of all stakeholder engagement methods and exercises undertaken to support the Evidence Report is provided within the **Chapter 3: Statement of Engagement**. A summary of the representations made by Key Agencies and other stakeholders for the evidence contained within this chapter are presented below.

Stakeholders and Key Agencies

4.272 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 28 August 2025:

- SEPA
- Scottish Water
- NatureScot
- Historic Environment Scotland
- Highlands and Islands Enterprise
- HITRANS
- NHS Highland
- Crofting Commission
- Transport Scotland
- Highland Adapts
- Wider Council Services: Climate Change and Energy Team, Development Management, Environment.

4.273 A summary of feedback received from key agencies and other stakeholders is as follows:

- **NatureScot (THC088):** Agree evidence in Chapter 4 will be sufficient on matters relevant to NatureScot. **Council Response:** Noted. Statement of agreement provided within (**THC088**).
- **Network Rail (THC152):** Evidence on [Scotland Railway's Climate Ready Plan](#) provided. **Council Response:** Noted and included as evidence. Statement of agreement provided within (**THC152**).
- **Homes for Scotland (THC090):** Provided various additional sources of evidence considered relevant. **Council Response:** Noted and references added, and SEPA document is specifically referred to in **Chapter 7: Flood**

Risk Management. Several documents already included in Chapter. At this stage no disputes were raised, provided the additional documents were considered as evidence (**THC090**), which Council has done.

SEPA (THC089)

Main views raised	Planning Advice Note for Planning Authorities – LDP Evidence Gathering: Water Scarcity has been published, which provides additional evidence sources. SEPA notes that climate change is a topic that impacts on other chapters, but are content that issues related to flood risk, for example, are covered in other chapters.
Council's response	Planning advice Note considered, and relevant sources added to Chapter 4 and Chapter 7 .
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of agreement provided within (THC089).
Proposed plan implications	See Chapter 7.
Actions for proposed plan stage	No actions have arisen from these comments.

Historic Environment Scotland (THC035)

Main views raised	Welcomes recognition of overlap between historic environment matters and climate change, and notes linkages within SNAP (2024-2029) with historic environment in Objectives C4 and C5.
Council's response	Reference to linkages between historic environment and SNAP strengthened within Chapter 4 . Recognise overlap with climate change and historic assets.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of agreement provided (THC035).
Proposed plan implications	Have regard for SNAP 2024-2029

Actions for proposed plan stage	No actions have arisen from these comments.
Scottish Forestry (THC047)	
Main views raised	Add reference to the HFWS Seeks clarification of LULUCF emissions as emissions and removals from forests, cropland, grassland, peatland and settlements. Nationally sector emissions rose largely due to lower emissions sinks from forest land. Further meeting with Scottish Forestry (THC047) confirmed sufficiency.
Council's response	Reference to Strategy added, Figure 4:2 demonstrates the balance of LULUCF emissions and sinks. Add reference to the HFWS
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, follow up teams meeting with Scottish Forestry (THC047) confirmed sufficiency.
Proposed plan implications	HLDP Spatial Strategy will identify the significant potential for natural opportunities for greenhouse gas sequestration and storage, such as with woodlands and peatland and will require to develop a policy framework that protects existing natural assets alongside supporting their expansion.
Actions for proposed plan stage	Quantify the potential for natural opportunities for greenhouse gas sequestration and storage, as part of update to Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy.
RSPB Scotland (THC039)	
Main views raised	Overall agreement that evidence base is sufficient. Matters that would benefit from additional information include reference to Scottish Biodiversity Delivery plan , The Flow Country Planning WHS Planning Position Statement 2 , and development of spatial database including Habitat Management Plans as proposed in Onshore Wind Sector Deal .
Council's response	Noted, and references added. Agree to need to add references to further information.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of agreement provided within (THC039) .

Proposed plan implications	No implications have arisen from these comments.
Actions for proposed plan stage	No actions have arisen from these comments.
ScottishPower Renewables (THC042)	
Main views raised	The feedback sought clarity on: the role and intent of the SSEP, the application of the Highland Energy Projects Mapping, the decommissioning of capacity in onshore wind capacity data reported, the applicability of the strategic spatial framework for renewables with NPF4 and future LDP and ambiguity of the phrase 'joined up spatial approach' to renewables planning mentioned. Support for the emphasis on the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport, acknowledge the environmental impacts of energy development and the examples of the benefits also are available, and matters related to peatlands and peatland restoration.
Council's response	Matters noted, some clarifications made and additions to the chapter made where additional useful evidence has been identified. There are a number of matters raised that are for consideration at plan preparation stage. Full written response provided to ScottishPower Renewables (THC040) and see Disputes with Stakeholders.
Outstanding issues	• Council recognises the tension between the pursuit of different policy aims within the same area - and a need to prioritise those – and there is potential for some coexistence. There are examples of well-designed developments delivering, for example, both climate and nature benefits simultaneously. • ScottishPower Renewables states that "it would be beneficial to quantifiably understand the perceived pressure [to accommodate major and national energy infrastructure projects] mentioned". The Council is confident in its recognition of such pressure, based on the evidence already available and referred to within the Evidence Report, and has acknowledged that further analysis will help to further quantify and understand the pressure. • The Council maintains that the SSEP remains part of the evidence base for the HLDP. The Evidence Report has acknowledged that the SSEP will not make site specific recommendations and should not be interpreted in this way. • With respect to planning for onshore wind energy, the Council differs from Scottish Renewables in use of the term "constraints" – the Council uses it to refer not only to 'no-go areas' for onshore

	windfarms but also to other planning considerations which, through the consideration of potential impacts arising from proposed development, have the potential to influence siting, design and suitability of development proposals. Applying the Council's use of that the term, the considerations that were set out as Group 2 of the 'spatial framework' methodology (that was set out within Scottish Planning Policy 2014) remain considerations and therefore potential influences on development proposals, and hence to that extent at least such features for consideration are constraints • Council considers that policies in the LDP can include spatial policies, in the interests of good planning of development, in terms of both the identification and consideration of constraints and the identification of opportunities for energy developments.
Is agency content with the evidence?	No response provided following receipt of THC040 .
Proposed plan implications for	No implications have arisen from these comments.
Actions for proposed plan stage	No actions have arisen from these comments.

Scottish Renewables (THC041)

Main views raised	Feedback sought to strengthen reference to Scottish Government's Onshore Wind Policy Statement 2022, mention the benefits of increased wind speeds due to climate change for energy generation, seek support for projects that restore degraded peatland, clarity around the role of SSEP and the application of the Highland Energy Projects Mapping, clarity around decommissioning in onshore wind data reported and perception that data is a forecast, query on (additional) constraints that can be considered within the planning system and the status of strategic spatial framework for renewables with NPF4 and future LDP, support for the emphasis on the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport, and highlighting that not the benefits of local energy projects (now included in the map) will not materialise if they are not consented and built. Feedback encourages Council to consider risk of imposing undue restriction on renewable energy and infrastructure projects when reviewing supplementary guidance, and to

	be aware of forthcoming BESS guidance. Query about the use of the phrase 'safeguarded constraints layers' to describe potential mapping of future national developments and the intent of the phrase.
Council's response	Matters noted, some clarifications made and additions to the chapter made where additional useful evidence has been identified. There are a number of matters raised that are for consideration at plan preparation stage. Full written response from Council provided to Scottish Renewables (THC040), and email response from Scottish Renewables (THC041). As such, see Disputes with Stakeholders .
Outstanding issues	• The Council disagrees with Scottish Renewables' opinion that UNESCO does not acknowledge setting as a consideration for natural OUV, and considers that statement to be based on a cultural heritage focussed context for setting. Rather, a UNESCO World Heritage focussed context for setting as a consideration is applicable to all World Heritage (cultural and natural) and needs to be defined for each WHS individually. The Nomination Draft Management Plan for The Flow Country WHS acknowledges that the site is not identified for natural beauty (under criterion vi, although that should read criterion vii). The setting study that will define setting for the purposes of The Flow Country WHS specifically. However, to be clear, this will be influenced by the criterion for which the WHS is inscribed, not by those for which it is not inscribed. The Council's position is that the provisions of Policy 7 part I) are appropriate to, and are to be applied to, 'natural' World Heritage Sites as well as 'cultural' ones. • Council recognises the tension between the pursuit of different policy aims within the same area - and a need to prioritise those - and there is potential for some coexistence. There are examples of well-designed developments delivering, for example, both climate and nature benefits simultaneously. • The Council maintains that the SSEP remains part of the evidence base for the HLDP. The Evidence Report has acknowledged that the SSEP will not make site specific recommendations and should not be interpreted in this way. • With respect to planning for onshore wind energy, the Council differs from Scottish Renewables in use of the term "constraints" - the Council uses it to refer not only to 'no-go areas' for onshore windfarms but also to other planning considerations which, through the consideration of potential impacts arising from proposed development, have the potential to influence siting, design and suitability of development proposals. Applying the Council's use of that the term, the considerations that were

	set out as Group 2 of the 'spatial framework' methodology (that was set out within Scottish Planning Policy 2014) remain considerations and therefore potential influences on development proposals, and hence to that extent at least such features for consideration are constraints • Council considers that policies in the LDP can include spatial policies, in the interests of good planning of development, in terms of both the identification and consideration of constraints and the identification of opportunities for energy developments.
Is agency content with the evidence?	No. A response (THC041) was provided to say that previous comments stand.
Proposed plan implications	No implications have arisen from these comments.
Actions for proposed plan stage	No actions have arisen from these comments.
SSEN Distribution (THC046)	
Main views raised	Reiterated strategic planning elements of SSEN-D work including DFES, SDP and Distribution Network Options Assessment (DNOA). Clarification of the voltage levels for transmission network, listed projects pertaining to SSEN-T, pumped hydro storage excluded from hydropower figures due to the fact that these projects connect at a transmission level. Suggest inclusion of SSEN-D Network Capacity maps in lieu of LENZA map. Updated publication timeframes for all pending SDP to September/October 2025, and noting that Errochty and Taynuilt SDP includes a small area within Highland. Additional feedback provided in April 2026, on SDP publication, DFES 2025 and Network Development Plan.
Council's response	Updates actioned as suggested. Sought clarity from SSEN-D on capacity mapping and it was confirmed that use of LENZA data story is suitable for Evidence Report.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of agreement provided within (THC046) .

Proposed plan implications	No implications have arisen from these comments.
Actions for proposed plan stage	No actions have arisen from these comments.
SSEN Transmission (THC045)	
Main views raised	Provided clarification on several references to SSEN-D and SSEN-T, or unqualified references to 'SSE' and provided detail about how SSEN-T would approach including land use allocations for network development projects. Notes Climate Change Committee (CCC) Report Scotland's Carbon Budgets which provides evidence on the future carbon budgets and underpins the need for significant and rapid expansion to electricity networks, particularly the transmission components that SSEN-T are proactively working to deliver.
Council's response	Amendments made, and reference to CCC report included in several parts of Chapter 4 including emissions reduction through energy development and nature-based measures.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of agreement provided within (THC045) .
Proposed plan implications	No implications have arisen from these comments.
Actions for proposed plan stage	No actions have arisen from these comments.
Defence Infrastructure Organisation (THC043)	
Main views raised	Suggested minor changes to terminology in response, THC043 .
Council's response	Noted.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content	Yes, agreement on evidence implicit as all comments in THC043 were resolved.

with the evidence?	
Proposed plan implications	No implications have arisen from these comments.
Actions for proposed plan stage	No actions have arisen from these comments.
Highland Adapts (THC044)	
Main views raised	Evidence presented in Chapter 4 is considered largely sufficient in relation to climate change adaptation and resilience, noting Council's recognition of the forthcoming Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment (HCCROA) as a key piece of evidence base. Comments on further areas of clarification or update in THC044 .
Council's response	Noted and agree. Clarifications and additions made as suggested, in Chapter 4 and Chapter 7 . Circular economy considerations related to adaptation are included in Chapter 11: Infrastructure . On publication of the HCCROA, a summary of key findings was included in Chapter 4 and implications for the plan updated.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, conditional statement of agreement provided within THC044 , and later full unconditional statement of agreement provided in THC044 .
Proposed plan implications	HLDP will be informed by the Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment (HCCROA). The objective of the HCCROA is to prioritise the risks and opportunities from climate change to the Highland region's economy, society and environment from now until 2050/2080. The 50 risks and opportunities identified in this assessment, current and future level of risk, their urgency and priority for regional collaboration will inform the preparation of the Proposed Plan. HLDP especially will consider the connected systems of climate risk assessed by HCCROA, and the role of development planning in responding to risk areas, risks with high cascading potential, and systemic fragilities for climate adaptation and resilience, with particular regard for: • Nature-based and spatial planning solutions: Peatland restoration, riparian shading, and sustainable land-use can yield multiple resilience benefits. Spatial planning should also discourage development in erosion- and flood-prone areas.

	Reinforcing Physical Infrastructure: Transport and building systems often appeared in escalation chains. Upgrades to bridge drainage, culverts, and damp remediation services—especially in remote areas—can prevent manageable hazards from escalating.
Actions for proposed plan stage	TBC

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (THC080)

Main views raised	Comments on regional economic opportunities, labour market and infrastructure, request for statement of spatial need related to ICFGF, and spatial 'hooks' related to strategic energy planning provided.
Council's response	Noted, and responded to where relevant with the exception of several comments relate to Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places , which are considered therein. Abnormal load routes are considered in Chapter 10: Transport .
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content with the evidence?	N/A
Proposed plan implications	No implications have arisen from these comments.
Actions for proposed plan stage	N/A

Summary of Local Place Plan Priorities

4.274 Ardgour Local Place Plan (**THC010**) has identified the following priorities relating to Climate Change and Energy:

- Opportunities to make a bigger contribution locally to climate change.
- Support community-led renewable power generation & micro-grid options.
- Promote improvements to existing properties to higher EPC ratings.
- Innovative rural housing. Smart clachans/cohousing rural housing clusters with shared heating, power, growing space, guest rooms etc
- Update heating to reduce running costs of Treslaig Village Hall.
- New homes should enhance local character, community & zero-carbon.

4.275 Black Isle Local Place Plan (**THC011**) has identified the following priorities relating to Climate Change and Energy:

- Aim for net zero, resilient & sustainable community, regenerate biodiversity.
- Upgrade homes on lower Council Tax bands to higher EPC ratings.
- Aim for Cromarty Firth region to become a global green energy hub and deliver transformational benefits to communities.
- Build up community assets to generate income & run services, i.e. re-use former churches in Cromarty/Munlochy and community energy generation.

4.276 Broadford and Strath Local Place Plan (**THC012**) has identified the following priorities relating to Climate Change and Energy:

- Prepare for sea levels rising and storm damage pressure of climate change.
- Peatland in area is carbon store, valuable role in climate change mitigation.
- Opportunities to develop a local workforce that could support home improvements and energy-saving retrofitting, which is much in demand.
- Investment in water and renewable energy community heating system.
- Manage pressure & balance between renewable energy developments with maximum community benefits and minimum negative impacts on landscape, environment, biodiversity and tourism industry.

4.277 Caol Local Place Plan (**THC024**) has identified the following priorities relating to Climate Change and Energy:

- Introduction of a community garden as part of climate action.
- Request for Hi-Bike stations in Riverside/Old School Court, if feasible, to facilitate active travel.
- Kerb side food waste collection, if feasible, and informed by assessment as to extent to which it would be likely to be used.
- Concerns around the frequency of bus service, as the service is reduced.

4.278 Dores and Essich Local Place Plan (**THC013**) has identified the following priorities relating to Climate Change and Energy:

- Opportunity for the energy companies operating in the area to collaborate to support a community and/or electric bus service for the area.

4.279 Duror and Kentallen Local Place Plan (**THC014**) has identified the following priorities relating to Climate Change and Energy:

- No direct comments, general recognition of need to develop with climate change in mind.

4.280 Croy and Tornagrain Local Place Plan (**THC026**) has not identified priorities relating to Climate Change and Energy however it has an overarching theme of wanting to shape change in a way that communities become more resilient.

4.281 Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Local Place Plan (**THC022**) has identified the following priorities relating to Climate Change and Energy:

- Area of unrivalled natural heritage. Conservation of this heritage is vital for wellbeing, economy & identity and to tackle climate change.
- Upgrade EPC ratings on homes on lower Council tax bands with grants/low-interest loans & streamlined consents, so more climate friendly & cheaper.
- Tackle visitor situation in Fort Augustus, joint effort from Scottish Canals, Transport Scotland, THC & more to enable delivery of sustainable transport, climate change, road safety & community wealth building agendas.
- Encourage renewable power development to include measures to conserve wildlife, regenerate woodland, enhance biodiversity & countryside access.
- Landowners & renewables companies ceasing to lock gates in deer fences on hill tracks, preventing pedestrians exercising their legal right of access.

4.282 Gairloch Local Place Plan (**THC015**) has identified the following priorities relating to Climate Change and Energy:

- Reduce carbon footprint through the development of active travel routes and improved public transport

4.283 Garve and District Local Place Plan (**THC016**) has identified the following priorities relating to Climate Change and Energy:

- Community renewable energy for climate change & income generating.
- No further commercial wind farms.
- Well-insulated, energy efficient buildings and homes.
- Improved resilience from climate change, due to current reliance on private water supplies and need to mitigate flood risk.

4.284 Glen Urquhart Local Place Plan (**THC029**) has identified the following priorities relating to Climate Change and Energy:

- Concerns regarding disparity in housing quality, energy efficiency and affordability.
- Energy opportunities at the community level identified in the existing Local Energy Plan that was prepared for the area.
- Community benefits from renewable energy schemes.

4.285 Golspie Local Place Plan (**THC021**) has identified the following priorities relating to Climate Change and Energy:

- Explore tidal energy scheme in Golspie coastal change adaptation plan.
- Explore opportunity for pumped hydro: loch to north big burn/big burn.
- Develop opportunity for community owned power generation, reduce Golspie's carbon footprint and improve energy security.
- Home energy improvements for housing between Main St and Back Road.

- Community shares a will to deal with reality of coastal flooding through initiatives that maximise opportunities & minimise climate change risks.
- 'Greening the grey' hard flood defences.

4.286 Kinlochleven Local Place Plan (**THC017**) has identified the following priorities relating to Climate Change and Energy:

- Install community energy scheme.
- Provide advice and grants related to energy/heat grant schemes to enable upgrading to higher EPC ratings.
- Restore and enhance natural habitats & create community growing spaces.

4.287 Kyle of Sutherland Local Place Plan (**THC028**) has identified the following priorities relating to Climate Change and Energy:

- Incorporated the Community Action Plan's priority for Environmental – Climate Conscious Communities, actions to sustain and nurture the area's landscape, heritage and climate contributions for locals, visitors and nature itself.
- Climate change awareness – the communities are conscious that climate change is affecting the locality through coastal and fluvial flooding; This is particularly noticeable in the areas between Bonar Bridge and Ardgay and around Invershin and Rosehall, and areas affected by potential flooding risk becoming undevelopable which brings economic challenges.
- Despite the area's contribution to the national energy demand, fuel tariffs in the area are higher than elsewhere in the country, exacerbating fuel poverty.
- Concerns about the cumulative impact of energy developments on the environment and safety of rural communities, and calls for changes to planning in order to improve consideration of these issues.

4.288 Lochalsh Local Place Plan (**THC018**) has identified the following priorities relating to Climate Change and Energy:

- Recognise climate change will be major challenge for Lochalsh communities in medium to long term. Priorities include active travel routes, affordable, energy efficient homes, enhancing & retaining community facilities.

4.289 Morvern Local Place Plan (**THC028**) has identified the following priorities relating to Climate Change and Energy:

- Potential Killundine and Community Wind.
- Want to adapt to flooding increase. Options include Wetlands, bioswales, SuDS, green roofs, permeable pavements; and rain gardens.
- Protect road network from future climate change.
- Adapt housing to climate change, maximise energy efficiency. Support the building of new carbon neutral affordable housing.

- Want to ensure renewable energy development on the peninsula, by the community or commercial, emerges in consultation with community & need to balance aims for biodiversity, net zero & community benefit.
- Aim for Morvern to be a model carbon negative community by 2031.
- Opportunities being explored for renewable energy generation: hydroelectricity, wind energy & solar energy & potential battery storage.

4.290 Nairnshire Local Place Plan (**THC023**) has identified the following priorities relating to Climate Change and Energy:

- Promoting sustainability, resilience, and environmental stewardship.
- New development to improve flood map position, using protect, mitigate, adapt system approach. Assess green spaces for suitability for protection from flood risk, or use as river flood water attenuation.
- Support should be given to community-led energy generation schemes. All new and regenerated developments to include renewables.
- Support applications for community district heating schemes associated with community energy developments, redevelopment of public assets.
- Scope to modernise swimming pool using renewables
- New development must improve nature & biodiversity.
- Loch Flemington & water catchment area enhancement as part of system approach to water & flooding. This should perform important function in natural habitat, biodiversity, catchment scale mitigation.

4.291 Sleat Local Place Plan (**THC025**) has identified the following priorities relating to Climate Change and Energy:

- Community carbon reduction strategy.
- Local food growing programme.
- Energy efficiency improvement scheme.
- Climate adaptation planning.
- Environmental education programme.
- Using community-led renewable energy projects to benefit the whole of Sleat.
- Energy systems.
- Community-wide energy audit.
- Feasibility study for hydro scheme expansion.
- Establishment of energy advice service.
- Advocacy for fair rural energy tariffs.
- Portfolio of community-led renewable projects.
- Local smart grid management systems for resilient power infrastructure.
- Resilient backup systems for critical infrastructure.

4.292 Stratherrick and Foyers Local Place Plan (**THC019**) has identified the following priorities relating to Climate Change and Energy:

- Zero-carbon homes for all: easier home upgraded, adapted or extended.
- Potential community hydro on River Farigaig.

4.293 Torridon and Kinlochewe Local Place Plan (**THC020**) has identified the following priorities relating to Climate Change and Energy:

- New renewable schemes should consider appropriate community benefit.
- Balgy Gap needs mains electricity connection.
- Flood risk prevention through natural flood risk management & adaptation needed along whole coastline of Local Plan area.
- Climate change impacts needs to be considered in future developments actions may be required to reduce impact on existing settlements. Already roads in the area are covered by the sea during particularly high tides, heavy rains and storm surges e.g. in Inveralligin, Fasaig and Diabaig.

Summary of Implications for the Proposed Plan

Climate Mitigation and Adaptation

4.294 The Council's existing HwLDP (**THC002**) is of considerable age and precedes much of our current evidence base on climate emissions, impacts and vulnerability. It also precedes the current policy context whereby climate adaptation and reduced emissions are embedded within NPF4 and a wide array of national and regional policies. The most recent Area LDP prepared by Highland Council, IMFLDP2 (**THC003**), considers climate change impacts by targeting growth at locations that are the most economically viable and environmentally sustainable. Areas are classified by their likely future sustainability and viability as part of the plan's spatial strategy. It recognises the role of planning in delivering effective climate action – regulating how our built environment is designed and, that the decisions we make today will be with us for decades to come. HLDP will require to review and remain abreast of the most recent position, and support this across the whole of the Council area.

4.295 Alongside preparation of HLDP, a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) will be undertaken which shall consider how the new LDP might affect the environment, so that likely negative impacts on the environment can be minimised, where any such effect(s) are considered likely to be significant, and positive impacts on the environment strengthened. The SEA will therefore help the Council to identify and compare the environmental impacts of different options when preparing the HLDP, and to reach a decision as to which options would achieve the most amenable (best) outcomes for the environment based on a thorough consideration of reasonable alternatives. Decisions made on the contents of the HLDP will therefore be made in the light of understanding of environmental effects. The SEA will also help the Council to consider viable mitigation measures to lessen or avoid the negative environmental impacts of the

new HLDP. The Highland SEA Scoping Report is being prepared in parallel to this Evidence Report and will inform the SEA and hence also the Proposed Plan.

- 4.296 Core principles to influence development planning for climate mitigation and adaptation set out in [NPF4 Planning Guidance: Policy 2 - Climate Mitigation and Adaptation](#) will be considered in the preparation of the HLDP.
- 4.297 HLDP will consider how to develop proportional and flexible whole of life carbon guidance (guided by [NPF4 Planning Guidance: Policy 2 - Climate Mitigation and Adaptation](#)) to support the development management process to determine planning applications against NPF4 Policy 2, which requires that “development proposals will be sited and designed to minimise lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions as far as possible”.
- 4.298 HLDP will be informed by the Highland Climate Change Adaptation Strategy **(THC059)**. The Proposed Plan will have regard for the key areas set out in the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy where adaptation will be targeted to protect communities, assets, services and the environment. If timeously available, the Council’s Adaptation Action Plan (informed by the Strategy) will also be taken into consideration in the preparation of the Proposed Plan.
- 4.299 HLDP will be informed by the Highland Climate Change Risk and Opportunity Assessment (HCCROA). The objective of the HCCROA is to prioritise the risks and opportunities from climate change to the Highland region’s economy, society and environment from now until 2050/2080. The 50 risks and opportunities identified in this assessment, current and future level of risk, their urgency and priority for regional collaboration will inform the preparation of the Proposed Plan. HLDP especially will consider the connected systems of climate risk assessed by HCCROA, and the role of development planning in responding to risk areas, risks with high cascading potential, and systemic fragilities for climate adaptation and resilience, with particular regard for:
- Nature-based and spatial planning solutions: Peatland restoration, riparian shading, and sustainable land-use can yield multiple resilience benefits. Spatial planning should also discourage development in erosion- and flood-prone areas.
 - Reinforcing Physical Infrastructure: Transport and building systems often appeared in escalation chains. Upgrades to bridge drainage, culverts, and damp remediation services—especially in remote areas—can prevent manageable hazards from escalating.
- 4.300 HLDP will consider how to embed the [Local Climate Adaptation Tool](#) insights which provides insight on which adaptations to consider. For Highland, 196 climate adaptations are suggested, based on the local climate hazard risks (extreme storms, coastal security, flooding and drought, food and personal

security, marine health and hazards and temperature) which will be taken into consideration for the preparation of the Proposed Plan.

- 4.301 HLDP will have consideration for the 29 high-risk locations identified within the Regional CCAP (**THC053**) as discussed in **Chapter 6: Coastal Development and Aquaculture** and additionally be informed by the potential development of any Local Coastal Change Adaptation Plans prepared in response to these 29 high-risk locations.
- 4.302 To deliver a just approach to managing climate related risks, the outcomes for the most vulnerable need to be understood and well managed through the Proposed Plan. The process of identifying, and, if necessary, addressing the disproportionate risk faced by the most vulnerable is therefore a central component of a just approach to climate adaptation and Evidence regarding societal variations in climate vulnerability will inform the development of HLDP policies which are fair, meeting the needs of different groups and delivering multiple benefits for health, wellbeing, equity and employment. A key consideration for Highland is the just transition for the energy sector.
- 4.303 The HLDP will consider how to manage and mitigate local impacts of flooding and coastal erosion as part of the Coastal Change Adaptation Plan and Local Flood Risk Management Plan, and to consider the application of nature-based solutions (NBS) to help tackle local flooding, coastal erosion, as well as improving active travel options and access to green spaces, and to protect, restore and enhance the natural assets, including soils and landscape interests in a way which reduces carbon emissions (e.g. as a carbon sink or store).
- 4.304 HLDPs will consider how to provide for the development of places (including new development) that address water scarcity – a current and future climate risk within the global climate emergency and nature crisis - and are designed in a way so that they are climate resilient. LDPs are expected to promote and facilitate the development of a range of renewable energy developments, and these should be informed by water scarcity. In particular, certain technologies which may require water abstraction, or have an impact on the water environment.
- 4.305 The HLDP Spatial Strategy will identify the significant potential for natural opportunities for greenhouse gas sequestration and storage, such as with woodlands and peatland, and will require to develop a policy framework that protects existing natural assets alongside supporting their expansion.

Energy

- 4.306 As a national development there is a strong presumption in favour of energy development to meet national need established, and as defined, within NPF4. The Proposed Plan will consider current and proposed renewable energy projects

along with future development proposals associated with the ICFGF and other ports and harbours, including consideration of protected areas, design and mitigation (using the mitigation hierarchy) at the very start of the planning stage for developments and infrastructure requirements associated with the ICFGF.

- 4.307 The Proposed Plan will be cognisant of the ICFGF project, and renewable energy infrastructure requirements including onshore and offshore wind projects that have particular effects on landscapes / seascapes, protected areas, transport infrastructure and a wide range of environmental receptors. There may also be a need to update the citations for Highland's regionally important Special Landscape Areas, reflecting changes that have occurred to the baseline primarily due to built and consented renewable energy projects, as well as to have cognisance of the emerging pattern and scale of modern onshore energy infrastructure.
- 4.308 In addition to environmental constraints to energy development (e.g. SSSIs, NSAs) the Proposed Plan will have consideration for other potential constraints, such as on amenity, with regard to the proximity of settlements and any proposed new residential areas to future proposals and applications for hubs, substations, Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) and related ancillary works. The national BESS guidance will be considered in the preparation of HLDP.
- 4.309 For the Proposed Plan, a LENZA model of energy network impacts from planned development could be developed to inform SSEN about network demand and infrastructure requirements to support potential or allocated development sites, or promoted study areas, in addition to the data provided for DFES 2025 and future annual DFES submissions.
- 4.310 There is also a need for the HLDP to help inform the public, agencies and stakeholders about planned and consented renewable energy and associated grid infrastructure proposals, through spatial mapping to explain how and where Highland will experience change. There is scope for nationally important infrastructure projects to be mapped through allocations or safeguarded 'constraints layers to help inform future development and land management decisions. By this we mean (for example) there could be scope:
- to consider allocating in the LDP a site for a new substation that is within the scope of NPF4's National Development 3 (Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure), where it is not yet built but a site suitable in principle has been or can be identified; or
 - to consider identifying the site for such a development proposal as a potential constraint upon proposals for other types of development (e.g. housing), by marking it as such within the planning authority's 'constraints maps' so that the potential for a conflict of uses is flagged early for

consideration when the proposals for the other developments are submitted to the planning authority.

- 4.311 While the [Highland Council Wind Turbine Mapping](#) and [Highland Energy Project Mapping](#) offer a baseline of what has occurred until now, it is evident that this scale of change was unforeseen within HwLDP, which at that time could not have anticipated the level of expansion of the sector. HLDP will be expected to demonstrate awareness of what is planned and required for energy infrastructure within its lifespan, encompassing not only the generation proposals but the transmission grid projects required to transport renewable energy around the UK, and consider this along with other outcomes sought for Highland as part of the spatial strategy.
- 4.312 The Proposed Plan will be informed by any amended priority or more information provided by NESO for 'Clean Power 2030' projects, to support the national energy decarbonisation target. Also, the Strategic Spatial Energy Plan (SSEP) for Great Britain and the CSNP, when they are published and if timeously available, will be taken into consideration in preparing the Proposed Plan.
- 4.313 The Proposed Plan will be informed by any strategic planning direction and network analysis provided by SGN. The Council will share indicative site allocations timeously with SGN to support their analysis to determine the implications of future gas demand (including indicative sequencing of anticipated development), to ensure security of supply across all pressure tiers for the Proposed Plan.
- 4.314 The Proposed Plan will have consideration for future green data centre development in Highland, including a definition of 'green data centres', and clarifying how 'green data centre' proposals relate to NPF4 policies 11, 18, 19, 24 and 25, and the NPF4 definition of 'essential infrastructure'.
- 4.315 If timeously available, preparation of the Proposed Plan will be informed by the Highland Hydrogen Strategy.
- 4.316 HLDP will consider whether to define explicit parameters for development *associated* with essential infrastructure that relates to energy development and grid capacity upgrades. The Council has considered planning applications for several developments that seek to interpret the definition of essential infrastructure as defined in NPF4, as extending to ancillary development, such as temporary workers' accommodation and subsequent temporary workers' amenities (e.g. cafés). The remote rural locations of such proposals has in some instances resulted in such developments being sought owing to the lack of suitable housing options and existing amenities. Interpreting associated developments such as temporary workers accommodation as being *essential/ infrastructure* affords a more generous policy support from NPF4 in instances of prime agricultural land, peatland and high carbon soils, and flood risk. The

Council considers that conclusive parameters as what constitutes essential infrastructure on such ancillary may be beneficial within HLDP.

Heat and Cooling

- 4.317 HLDP will be informed by the LHEES and the spatial strategy will take into account any areas of potential, or designated, Heat Network Zones, which will be of significance for site-selection. This will help inform the potential for co-locating developments with a high heat demand together with or alongside sources of heat supply.
- 4.318 HLDP will be informed by spatial concentrations of higher prevalence of fuel poverty, and will require to develop a spatial strategy that facilitates development that can be served as far as possible by efficient systems for heat and power, served by renewable sources or capable of being readily changed to renewable sources at a future date.

Statements of Agreement / Dispute

Agreement on Evidence

- 4.319 Agencies who responded and agreed with the evidence and content presented included:
- SEPA, NatureScot, RSPB Scotland, Highland Adapts, Historic Environment Scotland, SSEN Transmission, SSEN Distribution, Network Rail, Homes for Scotland, Defence Infrastructure Organisation.

Disputes with Stakeholders

- 4.320 Council prepared a response (**THC040**) to consultation feedback from Scottish Renewables (**THC041**) and ScottishPower Renewables (**THC042**) which outlines the areas of dispute and Council's response to each point raised. Scottish Renewables have responded to this to state that their comments still stand (**THC041**). ScottishPower Renewables have not made any response to Council's prepared response on their initial feedback. Council's response (**THC040**) outlines the points of difference and disputes that remain with these two stakeholders, which are summarised in **Summary of Stakeholder Engagement** section above.

Information Gaps

- 4.321 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 in Highland have formally registered Local Place Plans. Any Local Place Plans registered will be considered in the preparation of the LDP if timeously available.

4.322 The summary of evidence section of this chapter presented a wide range of detailed evidence relating to climate and energy matters in Highland. There are, however, some data gaps, these are listed below:

- Area-based emissions: The most up to date 2024-2025 Highland Council Emissions report with data from the Climate Intelligence Service was not available at the time of writing this Evidence Report and so the previous years' report (2023-2024) was used as evidence along with the UK Local Authority and Regional GHG Emissions Statistics for the Highlands published 3 July 2025 for the 2023 calendar year. If timeously available, updated SCIS area-based emissions will be incorporated into the Evidence Report which may require further analysis and disaggregation of data.
- The Highland Climate Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan was not published at the time of writing.
- The fourth Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA4) Evidence Report: Scotland summary report is currently being prepared and is expected to be available in 2026. For this Evidence Report CCRA3 was used.
- To understand landslide potential, the BGS GeoSure 5km HEX grid data set was used. The Council are aware of higher resolution data that we could potentially source, if funding is available to inform the proposed plan.
- To support future-proofed plans and strategic decision making *SNAP3 (Scottish National Adaptation Plan 2024-29)* made a commitment to develop a practical 'climate scenario decision tool' for operational use by public bodies. This tool was not available at the time of writing this Evidence Report.
- Offshore wind data for Highland appears to be under-reported in Regional Renewable Statistics, and seems to be reported in other local authority statistics (e.g. Moray) where the onshore connection is made. Council's development management data is used to report on generation capacity, except where data is incomplete or poor quality in which case Regional Renewable Statistics are presented as evidence.
- The Council have identified that a stronger evidence base on the potential for Carbon Capture technologies in Highland and the associated planning implications would benefit HLDP preparation and will continue to engage with stakeholders on developments on these aspects.
- Baseline assessments of lifecycle emissions relevant to types of development occurring in Highland have not been completed as of yet. This

is considered a present data limitation for future development of carbon guidance and the HLDP response to NPF4 Policy 2a).

- ScottishPower Renewables referred to the RenewableUK EnergyPulse database as a potential source of evidence on the renewables energy sector. After initial inquiries, it was unclear what information the database could provide (or in what format, to support further analysis), in addition full access to data requires a paid membership. A paid membership could be secured, if this data is deemed important to be considered in the proposed plan, however at present the data presented in the Evidence Report is considered sufficient.
- Highland Council Climate Change & Energy Team continue to evaluate opportunities for the development of heat networks. Feasibility studies underway or completed but unpublished at the time of writing this Chapter will be considered in the preparation of the Proposed Plan, if published.

4.323 Any updated plans or data will be considered in the production of HLDP if timeously available.

Chapter 5 : Nature and Environment

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. • the principal purposes for which the land is used
NPF4 LDP Requirements	NPF4 Policy 3: • LDPs should protect, conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity in line with the mitigation hierarchy. • LDPs should also promote nature recovery and nature restoration across the development plan area, including by: • facilitating the creation of nature networks and strengthening connections between them to support improved ecological connectivity. • restoring degraded habitats or creating new habitats; and • incorporating measures to increase biodiversity, including populations of priority species. NPF4 Policy 4 requires: • LDPs will identify and protect locally, regionally, nationally and internationally important natural assets, on land and along coasts. The spatial strategy should safeguard them and take into account the objectives and level of their protected status in allocating land for development. • Spatial strategies should also better connect nature rich areas by establishing and growing nature networks to help protect and restore the biodiversity, ecosystems and natural processes in their area. NPF4 Policy 5: • LDPs should protect locally, regionally, nationally and internationally valued soils, including land of lesser quality that is culturally or locally important for primary use. NPF4 Policy 6: • LDPs should identify and protect existing woodland and the potential for its enhancement or expansion to avoid habitat fragmentation and improve ecological connectivity, helping to support and expand nature networks.

- The spatial strategy should identify and set out proposals for forestry, woodland and trees in the area, including their development, protection and enhancement, resilience to climate change, and the expansion of a range of types to provide multiple benefits. This will be supported and informed by an up-to-date Forestry and Woodland Strategy.

Links to Evidence

(THC003) IMFLDP2
(THC048) NOMIS BRES
(THC049) NOMIS BRES – Data zone Level
(THC050) Nature Network Draft Methodology Paper
(THC051) Nature Networks Mapping Data List
(THC0039) RSPB Response to Evidence
(THC035) HES Response to Evidence
(THC088) NatureScot Response to Evidence
(THC089) SEPA Response to Evidence
(THC090) Homes for Scotland Response to Evidence
(THC040) Council response to ScottishPower Renewables and Scottish Renewables Feedback on Chapters 4 and 5.
(THC041) Scottish Renewables Response to Evidence
(THC042) Scottish Power Response to Evidence

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
	THC350	EUNIS Habitat Map of Scotland (HabMos)	16.12.25
	THC351	Scottish Invasive Species Initiative	16.12.25
	THC352	SEPA Scottish Wetland Inventory	16.12.25
	THC353	Birds of Conservation Concern 5	16.12.25
	THC354	Botanical Society of British Isles Plant Atlas	16.12.25
	THC355	The Breeding Bird Survey 2022	16.12.25
	THC356	2023 State of Nature Report	14.05.26
	THC357	THC Ecology Strategy and Action Plan	14.05.26
	THC358	The Flow Country Planning WHS Planning Position Statement 2	14.05.26
	THC359	The Flow Country World Heritage Site Draft Management Plan	21.10.25
	THC360	Research into Approaches to Measuring Biodiversity in Scotland	21.10.25
	THC361	Highland Biodiversity Enhancement Planning Guidance	14.05.26
	THC362	The risks to Scotland's soils: Scoping Report	21.10.25
	THC363	National Development Plan for Crofting	21.10.25
	THC364	Scottish Government Report to Parliament: Economic Condition of Crofting 2019-2022	21.10.25
	THC365	Reforestation Scotland's New Hutting Developments: Good Practice Guidance	21.10.25
	THC366	The Value of Crofting Report	21.10.25
	THC367	Policy on Control of Woodland Removal	21.10.25
	THC368	THC Trees, Woodland and Development Supplementary Guidance	14.05.26
	THC369	Crofting Commission Annual Report 23/24	21.10.25
	THC370	Scotland Forestry Strategy Implementation	21.10.25
	THC371	Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019-2029	21.10.25
	THC372	Scottish Biodiversity List	21.10.25
	THC373	IPBES The Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services	21.10.25
	THC374	Highland Biodiversity Action Plan 2016-2026	21.10.25
	THC375	Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045	21.10.25
	THC376	Scottish Government Draft Planning Guidance: Biodiversity	21.10.25
	THC377	Highland Natural Heritage Designation Map	15.07.25

	THC378	Highland Soils Map	15.07.25
	THC379	Highland Forestry Woodland & Trees Map	15.07.25
	THC380	THC Tree Management Strategy	14.05.26
	THC381	Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy	14.05.26
	THC382	NatureScot Developing with Nature guide	28.07.25
	THC383	Meeting 30 by 30 biodiversity commitment: Terrestrial & Freshwater sites consultation	18.07.24
	THC384	HabMos EUNIS Land Cover Map	24.06.25
	THC385	Ramsar sites NatureScot	24.06.25
	THC386	Special Protection Areas (SPAs) NatureScot	24.06.25
	THC387	NatureScot Special Areas of Conservation	24.06.25
	THC388	National Nature Reserves NatureScot	24.06.25
	THC389	National Scenic Areas NatureScot	24.06.25
	THC390	NatureScot Sites of Special Scientific Interest	24.06.25
	THC391	Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)	24.06.25
	THC392	Local Landscape Areas NatureScot	24.06.25
	THC393	Discover your Local Nature Reserve	24.06.25
	THC394	Wild Land Area guidance	24.06.25
	THC395	NatureScot Natural Designations Map	07.07.25
	THC396	Highland Statutorily Protected Species Supplementary Guidance	14.05.26
	THC397	Nature Networks Framework	28.07.25
	THC398	Nature Networks Toolkit	28.07.25
	THC399	NW Highlands UNESCO Global Geopark	24.06.25
	THC400	Wester Ross Biosphere	24.06.25
	THC401	The Flow Country WHS Nomination Dossier	28.07.25
	THC402	Scotland's Soils - Carbon and Peatland Map	24.06.25
	THC403	Scottish Government Onshore Wind Policy Statement	14.05.26
	THC404	Scotland Soil Land Capability for Agriculture	24.06.25
	THC405	Landslide Areas on Scotland's Trunk Roads	24.06.25
	THC406	National Landslide Database - BGS	24.06.25
	THC407	UK Forestry Standard	24.06.25
	THC408	Ancient Woodland Inventory	24.06.25
	THC409	Native Woodland Survey of Scotland	24.06.25
	THC410	Scotland's Native Woodlands	24.06.25
	THC411	Economic impact of forestry	02.07.25
	THC412	Protected Sites in Favourable Condition	02.07.25
	THC413	Tree Protection Orders, Conservation Areas	02.07.25
	THC414	Crofters' duties	30.07.25

THC415	Capercaillie Action Plan	19.09.25
THC416	NatureScot - Minor woodland types	22.09.25
THC417	Dumfries & Galloway Dark Skies Friendly Lighting Supplementary Guidance	17.04.26

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 that there are relevant crossovers between Nature and Environment and other topics including:

- **Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy**
- **Chapter 6: Coastal Development and Aquaculture**
- **Chapter 7: Flood Risk Management**
- **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism & Productive Places**
- **Chapter 9: Housing**
- **Chapter 10: Transport**
- **Chapter 12: Historic Assets, Brownfield Land & Empty Buildings**
- **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**

Where apparent, the Council has referenced relevant linkages between policies areas throughout the chapter.

Summary of Evidence

- 5.1 This chapter sets out the evidence the Council has considered in relation to nature and the environment within the Highlands. 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:

- **Biodiversity**
- **Natural Places**
- **Soils**
- **Forestry, Woodland and Trees**

Biodiversity

Habitats and Species

- 5.2 The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy defines biodiversity as the variety of all living things and the ecosystems where they live (on land or in water). It comprises the living organisms in a particular space, whether in a window-box, garden, park, meadow peatland, river, loch, estuary, ocean, beach or mountain top. Biodiversity inspires people and has enormous value in its own right but it is also central to our survival as a species. Globally there is much recognition on the importance of biodiversity [IPBES The Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem](#)

Services presents a critical assessment of the status and trends of the natural world, the social implications of these trends, their direct and indirect causes, and, importantly, the actions that can still be taken to ensure a better future for all. The report concluded that biodiversity loss is happening faster than at any time in human history, with ecosystems deteriorating worldwide. Around 75% of land environments and 66% of marine environments had already been significantly altered by human activity.

- 5.3 The 2023 State of Nature Report identified significant declines in Scotland's biodiversity with Scotland and the UK having some of the poorest biodiversity intactness ratings in the world. It shows that the number of species, and their geographic spread in Scotland, has declined overall with 1 in 9 species threatened with extinction. Headline figures from the report include the following:
- An average 15% decline in species abundance
 - A 49% decline in average abundance of 11 species of Scottish seabirds
 - 11% of species are threatened
 - A 57% decrease in plant and lichen distributions
- 5.4 The report goes on to identify the following key pressures on biodiversity:
- Changing use of sea and land
 - Direct exploitation of organisms
 - Climate Change
 - Pollution
 - Invasive non-native species
 - Indirect drivers – such as people's disconnect and lack of recognition towards the value and importance of nature
- 5.5 There is increasing recognition that the climate and nature crises are intertwined. Climate change driven by greenhouse gas emissions is causing biodiversity loss through habitat destruction and rising temperatures, altering the geographical suitability for many species. Conversely the degradation of natural ecosystems like deforestation, reduces the planet's ability to absorb carbon dioxide, further exacerbating climate change. Addressing both crises requires integrated solutions that protects and restore ecosystems while reducing carbon emissions. Implementation of NPF4 policies as a whole should underpin the response to the intertwined climate and nature crises, and it is important that the plan seeks to minimise greenhouse gas emissions and identify benefits for biodiversity where possible.
- 5.6 The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045 identifies the following six objectives that will aid the delivery of high-end goals, aiming to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2030:
- Accelerate restoration and regeneration

- Protect nature on land and at sea, across and beyond protected areas
- Embed nature-positive farming, fishing and forestry
- Protect and support recovery of vulnerable and important species and habitats
- Invest in nature
- Take action on the indirect drivers of biodiversity loss

5.7 In April 2024, '[Meeting our 30 by 30 biodiversity commitment on Terrestrial and Freshwater sites](#)' consultation was published, which refers to a commitment set out to protect 30% of land and seas for nature by 2030 as reflected in the Global Biodiversity Framework. NatureScot has identified five types of natural heritage designations (outlined in Natural Places) that are currently being considered as contributing to the terrestrial element of 30X30:

- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)
- Special Protection Areas (SPAs)
- Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
- Ramsar Sites
- National Nature Reserves (NNRs)

5.8 [EUNIS Habitat Map of Scotland \(HabMos\)](#) brings together in one place and in one classification system all available habitat and land use data. It is this ability to view a range of data from different sources, making it a powerful tool for analysis, planning and policy development at national and local levels. HabMoS sets a new standard for collaboration within Scotland. Organisations spanning the government; voluntary and private sectors have supplied data in an informal, willing and collaborative partnership. This tool will help The Highland Council to protect and support locally important habitats and land uses from inappropriate development.

Local Priorities

- 5.9 The Highland region supports over 75% of UK priority habitats and from the [Scottish Biodiversity List](#) over 1,500 of 2,000 species.
- 5.10 On the 12 December 2022, Highland Council became signatories of the Edinburgh Declaration to underline the Council's commitment to tackling the joint climate and nature crises.
- 5.11 [Highland Nature: Biodiversity Action Plan 2021-2026](#) brings together 46 partners, including the Council, to identify actions that can be taken locally to conserve and enhance biodiversity in the Highland area. The Action Plan identifies priority species and habitats and sets out nine key actions:
- Planning and development decisions provide biodiversity protection
 - Landscape-scale nature conservation and restoration work

- Identify and conserve priority species
 - Control invasive non-native invasive species
 - Wildlife crime is deterred and prosecuted
 - Participation in green and blue activities to benefit health is increased
 - Public engagement using knowledge, skills sharing and training is continued and expanded
 - Biodiversity data gathering and sharing is improved
 - Long-term research into environmental change continues to expand
- 5.12 The Council's [Ecology Strategy and Action Plan](#), adopted in 2024, is a Council wide programme that sets out a suite of actions to tackle the ecological emergency and contribute to Scotland's target to be nature positive by 2030 and to have restored and regenerated biodiversity by 2045. It aims to deliver on the ambitions sets out in the Council Programme 2022-2027 to accelerate our response to the pressing climate and ecological emergency.
- 5.13 The implementation of the [Ecology Strategy and Action Plan](#) will see Council manage its estate more effectively for biodiversity, influence others through policy and guidance, and work with communities and stakeholders to engage in collective action to tackle the ecological emergency together.
- 5.14 The actions are grouped under six themes and will:
- Demonstrate leadership through the development of joined up and ambitious policy and guidance
 - Create space for nature by taking action across the Council and with partners
 - Ensure that our planning system supports the Council's ambition to protect, restore and enhance nature
 - Reduce pollution through waste management's strategies
 - Improve communication, training and education to communicate the value of biodiversity
 - Improve our data collection and management to ensure data is accessible
- 5.15 As per the [Ecology Strategy and Action Plan](#), the Council are currently in the final stages of drafting a guidance document on the appropriate management of invasive non-native species on Council land. [Scottish Invasive Species Initiative](#) will support actions set out in the Councils Ecology Strategy, as an ambitious partnership project set up to tackle invasive non-native species alongside rivers and watercourses in northern Scotland.
- 5.16 The recently adopted IMFLDP2 (**THC003**) has set out a clear policy framework for all proposed development within the Inner Moray Firth area in response to policy 3 of NPF4.
- 5.17 The Council shall be reviewing and updating the [Highland Statutorily Protected Species Supplementary Guidance](#) in 2026.

Nature Networks

- 5.18 The Council is in the process of identifying and mapping existing and potential nature networks across the region. A nature network mapping methodology is in the process of being finalised and nature networks to link 30x30 sites have been drafted. This work has been informed by the [Nature Networks Framework](#) and [Nature Networks Toolkit](#), alongside a series of workshops with key stakeholders including both national agencies and environmental NGOs. Nature network mapping has incorporated and been cognisant of a wide range of mapping data as detailed in Nature Network Mapping Data List **(THC051)** and Nature Network Draft Methodology Paper **(THC050)**.
- 5.19 Nature Network mapping will be an iterative process and, in an area the size and diversity of Highland, will take time. The HLDP will need to reflect that Nature Networks will change and evolve during the lifetime of the plan in response to changing circumstances and to ensure that connections are strengthened, degraded habitats are restored and/or new habitats created.
- 5.20 An example of how habitats may be supported could be through using data information such as the [Birds of Conservation Concern 5](#), the latest assessment of the status of birds in the UK, Channel Islands and Isle of Man. It is commonly known as the UK 'Red List for birds' presents data on bird species at most concern. In addition, The Breeding Bird Survey 2022, produced by the British Trust for Ornithology with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and RSPB, is the UK's main annual assessment of trends in common breeding birds. These sources combined can support the development of habitats to support these species present in Highland through the development of Nature Networks.
- 5.21 Further data sources to support the development of Nature Networks could include [Botanical Society of the British Isles \(BSBI\) Plant Atlas 2020](#) or [NBN Atlas](#) and more.

Securing Positive Effects for Biodiversity

- 5.22 Planning has an important role in protecting and enhancing biodiversity. The [Scottish Government Draft Planning Guidance: Biodiversity](#) sets out expectations for implementing and delivering NPF4 policies which support the cross-cutting NPF4 outcome 'improving biodiversity'. The importance of following the mitigation hierarchy when considering impacts on biodiversity is noted. The NatureScot Developing with Nature Guidance is aimed at local-scale developments (Policy 3c) and provides guidance on enhancement measures that may be incorporated into development.
- 5.23 The recent [Research into Approaches to Measuring Biodiversity in Scotland](#) commissioned by the Scottish Government recommends the creation of a

biodiversity metric framework as a tool for assessing biodiversity at the site or project scale which enables consistent and comparable assessment of losses or gains in biodiversity across sites. NatureScot has commenced work to develop an adapted biodiversity metric suitable for use in supporting delivery of NPF4 Policy 3b. The latest update came in June 2025 where guidance was published on the use of existing biodiversity metrics in the Scottish planning system. NatureScot expects to be able to consult on a draft metric tool and guidance in 2026. The implementation of a metric tool brings perceived benefit to the planning system, such as providing a consistent and transparent approach to calculating changes in biodiversity with a clear assessment criterion and easy to interpret outputs.

- 5.24 In 2024 the Council published [Biodiversity Enhancement Planning Guidance](#) to further support the delivery of NPF4 Policy 3 at a Highland level. The Council will continue to keep under review the requirement for a minimum 10% biodiversity enhancement and will review our [Biodiversity Enhancement Planning Guidance](#) once the Scottish Metric is available. Our guidance , at paragraph 4.24 , explains the Councils current approach and expectation ahead of the Scottish Metric becoming available .
- 5.25 The Council will consider whether there is a need to develop a policy to secure a range of mandatory high nature value but low maintenance, low-cost biodiversity enhancement measures for all new developments across Highland to ensure positive effects for biodiversity are secured. Measures may include swift bricks, bee bricks, bat boxes, amphibian ladders etc. The measures sought or required should be appropriate to the development and its context and location. The selection in any particular case will be informed by understanding of the site, by national and local guidance and experience.
- 5.26 The Council recognise that not all Habitat Management Plan and enhancement areas have been fully mapped and have started to develop mapping of both historic and new HMP and enhancement areas. This will continue to develop to ensure the protection of areas from harmful development in the future, through the consideration of the effects of development proposals with understanding of the purpose of the particular HMP or enhancement area. Impacting on these could undo, reduce, or set back as of yet undelivered benefits. Where development can be justified in such areas, we will consider the requirement for substantial enhancement measures to off-set impacts.
- 5.27 The Council recognise that not all developments are able to deliver biodiversity enhancements on site and that off-site enhancement is often required. We will consider developing a list of possible enhancement opportunities that developers can deliver in partnership with other stakeholders within Highland. We will also investigate a mechanism for taking a financial payment from developers where off-setting is proven to be unachievable.

- 5.28 The Council will consider how to make best use of nature-based solutions in both urban and rural contexts. The value of policies that encourage increased use of rain gardens, trees to reduce flood risk and urban cooling, green roofs, permeable surfaces and wet sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS) that have high biodiversity value will be considered as outlined in **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**, which considers the subject of blue and green infrastructure. The Council will consider the potential of the Urban Greening Factor (UGF) planning tool to improve the provision of on-site green infrastructure that new developments are expected to provide. Whilst not a tool which is specifically targeting biodiversity, good design of the urban greening created will deliver benefits for biodiversity, including the creation of new habitats; ecologically informed and inspired design can ensure that new urban greening provides functioning habitats where biodiversity can exist alongside development and augment existing nearby habitats.

Natural Places

- 5.29 The Highland region supports over 75% of UK priority habitats with 27.4% of the Highland Council under natural heritage designation. The HLDP area is home to an array of international, national and local natural heritage designations, including the recently established Flow Country World Heritage Site that is of global significance for its blanket bog ecosystem.
- 5.30 The Council's [Highland Natural Heritage Designations Map](#) provides an open data mapping resource where all natural heritage designations mentioned within the Evidence Report can be identified, and illustrates the scale of coverage where NPF4 Policy 4 applies. It is evident that many natural heritage designations overlap, requiring multiple NPF4 and LDP policies to be complied with to ensure that the natural heritage designations are suitably protected from development.
- 5.31 The Highland Council area faces huge development pressure to accommodate major and national energy infrastructure projects, many of which are within or adjacent to designated areas, the proposed population influx required to facilitate the Inverness and Cromarty Green Freeport (ICFGF) Project and expansion of settlements across the highlands. It is therefore of importance that, in accordance with NPF4, natural places and landscapes are safeguarded, restored and managed in a sustainable way that maintains and grows their essential benefits and services.

International Natural Heritage Designations

Ramsar Sites

- 5.32 [Ramsar Wetlands of National Importance](#) are classified under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance. The majority of Ramsar sites in Scotland are linked to the European designations network – either as a Special Protection Area

(SPA) or Special Area of Conservation (SAC). All of Highland's Ramsar sites are underpinned by Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), which are national but not international designations. Further wetland data can be found on [SEPA's Scottish Wetland Inventory](#).

- 5.33 Until July 2025 Ramsar sites were protected via their underlying designations as SSSIs and/or European sites (SPA/SAC). As of July 2025, the Scottish Government's [updated Ramsar Sites policy position](#) considers that all listed Ramsar sites in Scotland should be treated as if they were European designated sites for the purposes of land use change decision making. Compliance with this policy means that any plan or project which could affect a Ramsar site will involve undertaking a Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA) to determine whether the proposal is likely to have a significant effect on the notified natural features of the site.
- 5.34 Scotland currently has 51 Ramsar sites covering a total area of about 313,000 hectares. Highland accommodates 13 Ramsar sites covering an area of 155,933ha as depicted in the [Natural Heritage Designations Mapping](#):

Special Protection Areas

- 5.35 Land designated as a [Special Protection Area \(SPA\)](#) for ornithological significance under the European birds directive is to protect one or more rare, threatened or vulnerable bird species, or certain regularly occurring migratory species. Scotland is internationally important for many species of wild birds due to our location in North-West Europe and the range of wild and semi-natural habitats here. NPF4 identifies protection measures and considerations for SPAs through Policy 4b. In total, there are 162 classified SPA's covering around 2.75 million hectares of Scotland's land and sea. Highland accommodates 53 sites which cover an area of 437,000 ha (approx.) as depicted in the [Natural Heritage Designations Mapping](#).
- 5.36 [Birds of Conservation Concern 5](#) the latest assessment of the status of birds in the UK, Channel Islands and Isle of Man. It is commonly known as the UK 'Red List for birds' presents data on bird species at most concern. In addition [The Breeding Bird Survey 2022](#), produced by the British Trust for Ornithology with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and RSPB, is the UK's main annual assessment of trends in common breeding birds. These sources combined can support the development of habitats to support these species present in highland through the development of Nature Networks.

Special Areas of Conservation

- 5.37 A [Special Area of Conservation \(SAC\)](#) protects one or more special habitats and / or species. The SAC is designated under the Habitats Directive. Scotland has 243 designated SAC's that collectively cover 3.84 million hectares of Scotland's land.

Highland has 92 SAC's that cover an area of 384,700 ha. (15% of Highlands land area) as depicted in the [Natural Heritage Designations Mapping](#).

The Flow Country UNESCO World Heritage Site

- 5.38 The [Flow Country World Heritage Site](#) is an important designation that will require careful management to ensure it is not compromised by development proposals. The Flow Country, located across a large swathe of Caithness and Sutherland, was inscribed by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee on July 26th, 2024. It is the only peatland World Heritage Site, and the first in Scotland to be inscribed purely for natural criteria. The Flow Country was inscribed under criterion ix as the most extensive and diverse example of an actively accumulating blanket bog landscape found globally. It displays a remarkable diversity of blanket bog features not found anywhere else on Earth and is an outstanding example of carbon sequestration and long-term storage on a massive scale. It provides an incredible record of blanket bog formation and is important for helping us understand the functioning of this and blanket bogs globally. The Site also contains an exceptional example of the biodiversity found within a blanket bog landscape, providing a diversity of habitats and home to a distinct combination of bird species. The entire area of blanket bog across Caithness and Sutherland stretches some 400,000 ha of which the Flow Country World Heritage Site covers just under half (190,000 ha) and comprises seven discrete areas, as depicted in the [Natural Heritage Designations Mapping](#).
- 5.39 It is imperative that this asset is protected against development pressures to fully benefit from its environmental qualities and economic potential as a catalyst for increased sustainable tourism and inward investment to The Highlands. There must also be a clear strategy in place to ensure that local people feel the benefit of this highest of heritage accolades. In addition to the applicability of NPF4 Policy 4 a) , and the definition of WHS in Annex F of NPF4 , the Councils position is that the provisions of NPF4 Policy 7 l) are appropriate to and are to be applied to natural WHS (as well as cultural WHS) .
- 5.40 All degraded areas of peatland within the Flow Country WHS should have the potential to be restored to good quality condition. All degraded peatland within the WHS boundary must therefore be considered for restoration in the first instance and not as an opportunity for development. This broadly reflects management priorities for the site with further advice available within the Planning Position Statement and the Management Plan. The updated [Flow Country Planning WHS Planning Position Statement 2](#) was prepared and subsequently published in June 2025 by the Council. It sets out how World Heritage should be factored into the consideration of proposed developments for which effects on the inscribed site are likely to be a consideration. HLDP can consider whether additional policies are required to protect and enhance The Flow Country WHS. The FCWHS is not a barrier to development, and it is not intended to make it so. It is however a site for

which there should be significant weight given to protection and preservation. Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), integrity, and setting are all important. Setting is a consideration, not only for cultural WHS but also for natural ones. A setting study being undertaken will define setting, for the purpose of the FCWHS specifically. This will be influenced by the criterion for which the WHS is inscribed, not by those for which it is not inscribed, noting that the site is not identified for natural beauty under criterion vii.

- 5.41 [The Flow Country World Heritage Site draft Management Plan](#) was submitted to UNESCO as part of the [nomination dossier](#), it explained how the World Heritage Site will be looked after collaboratively upon attaining globally important status. Now that the Flow Country WHS is inscribed, a programme of work is underway to further update and start to deliver the plan

Northwest Highlands UNESCO Global Geopark

- 5.42 [The Northwest Highlands Global Geopark](#) hosts a wide range of rock formations covering two thirds of the Earth's history. Within the Geopark there are mountain landscapes, clean sandy beaches, peatlands, ancient settlements and thriving communities. The Northwest Highlands is one of only ten UNESCO Global Geoparks in the UK, and one of only three in Scotland.

Wester Ross Biosphere

- 5.43 One of the most popular visitor spots in the Wester Ross area, the Beinn Eighe Natural Nature Reserve (NNR) became a Biosphere Reserve in 1976. Whilst initially being a site for solely conducting collaborative scientific research, the NNR began to focus more on sustainability, covering wider areas and given more consideration to human activities. By 2016, the [Wester Ross Biosphere](#) grew to over 100 times its original size and now covers 5,200 sq. km of Wester Ross and Lochalsh as depicted in the [Natural Heritage Designations Mapping](#). Wester Ross itself a very sparsely populated area of the Highlands, with just 1.6 people per km² / 8000 people in 5,200 sq. km. The natural landscape is a huge asset, dominated by spectacular mountains, forests, waterfalls, seascapes and lochs accommodating a wide variety of biodiversity.

National Natural Heritage Designations

National Nature Reserves

- 5.44 In Scotland, a [National Nature Reserve \(NNR\)](#) is an area of land or water designated to protect its unique habitats and species, and managed by NatureScot. Most reserves contain nationally or internationally important habitats and species, so the wildlife is managed very carefully. Scotland has 43 NNR's covering just

under 2% of Scotland's land area. Across Highland, there are 21 NNR designations, covering a collective area of 90,200 ha (approx.) as shown in the [Natural Heritage Designations Mapping](#).

National Scenic Areas

- 5.45 Legislation defines [National Scenic Areas \(NSAs\)](#) as areas "of outstanding scenic value in a national context" for which special protection measures are required. There are 40 NSAs in Scotland, primarily in remote and mountainous areas, covering a total of 13% of Scotland's land. In Highland, there are 16 NSA's covering a total area of 529,100 ha (approx.) equating to 20.6% of the land area of Highland, as shown in the [Natural Heritage Designations Mapping](#).

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

- 5.46 [Sites of Special Scientific Interest \(SSSIs\)](#) are areas of land and water that are considered to best represent natural heritage in terms of their flora, fauna, geology and geomorphology. Some SSSIs are also designated as European protected areas, whether SACs or SPAs. Scotland has 1,422 SSSIs, covering around 1,011,000 hectares (12.6%) of the Scottish land area. There are 357 designed SSSIs in Highland that cover a total area of 520,000 ha (approx.) equating to 20.3% of the total area of Highland as shown in the [Natural Heritage Designations Mapping](#).

Wild Land Areas

- 5.47 [Wild Land Area \(WLAs\)](#) are areas identified as wild land in the NatureScot Wild Land Areas map and are the most extensive areas of high wildness. Scotland contains 42 WLAs, 25 of which are in Highland covering a total area of 1,060,000 ha (approx.) as shown in the [Natural Heritage Designations Mapping](#).

Marine Protected Areas

- 5.48 [Marine Protected Areas \(MPAs\)](#) protect a wide range of habitats, species, geology and undersea landforms in Scottish waters. Scotland's network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) now consists of 247 sites, covering 37% of our seas. Highland has 6 Nature Conservation MPAs and 4 Historic MPAs.

Local Designations

Local Landscape Areas

- 5.49 [Local Landscape Areas \(LLAs\)](#), following Scottish Government policy, is the name used for the local landscape designation. A previous name Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) is the name currently given to those identified in Highland. Highland has 28 LLAs covering a total area of 616,630.41 ha as shown in the [Natural Heritage](#)

Designations Mapping. 2017 data identifies 502 LLAs across Scotland as a whole, covering 27% of the land area and totalling 2,210,832 hectares.

Local Nature Reserves

- 5.50 A Local Nature Reserve (LNR) is an area of natural heritage that is at least locally important. There is one LNR in HLDP area – Merkinch LNR situated at the north end of Inverness and is home to a wide variety of important local species. There are numerous areas of high wildlife value such as the Muirtown Pools, a diverse set of habitats set around a number of pools partially connected to the sea. The total size of the reserve is 54.7 hectares.
- 5.51 The Council is currently considering designating other LNRs across Highland. On 28 May 2026 the Economy and Infrastructure Committee agreed that the legal process be concluded for an area at Ardersier Common and it be declared as a LNR.

Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS)

- 5.52 The Council currently has no LNCS sites but is undergoing a process to identify potential LNCS through community consultation and local expert knowledge. A scientific panel will ratify candidate LNCSs in advance of public consultation through the LDP process. It is anticipated that the first tranche of LNCSs will be prepared by 2026 with additional LNCSs added throughout the lifetime of the plan.

Geological Conservation Review Sites

- 5.53 Geological Conservation Review (GCR) sites contain geological and geomorphological features of national and international importance – selected through a process known as the Geological Conservation Review. There are nearly 900 GCR sites in Scotland, most of which have statutory protection through designation as Earth science features in Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Some GCR sites are 'unnotified' and have no SSSI designation status and are also Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS). Features selected by the Geological Conservation Review include (GCR) include rocks, minerals and fossils, landform features formed during the Ice Age, and modern rivers and coasts. There are 419 GCR sites within the Highlands, covering an area of 138,623ha

Dark Skies

- 5.54 While no NPF4 Policy 4 Natural Places policies relate specifically to dark skies designations, the Council has one currently on the Isle of Rum and is at early stages of scoping further more dark sky areas in Highland for the benefit of wildlife and ecosystems, health, energy, and night sky heritage. Any community wishing to bid for Dark Sky status requires to demonstrate active local authority support for

reducing light pollution. Currently in Scotland under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and Public Health etc (Scotland) Act 2008, there is no legal justification for controlling light pollution that does not constitute a statutory public nuisance.

- 5.55 Existing national and Highland planning policy doesn't address the issue of light pollution in any detail. NPF4 policy 23 health and safety makes no reference to light pollution. The only NPF4 reference to light pollution is Annex D which describes the 6 qualities of successful places one of which is headed "Pleasant" and includes reference to a pleasant place as one protected from light pollution and other adverse effects. The HwLDP Policy 72 Pollution requires that planning applications for significant light polluting developments submit an assessment report on the levels, character and transmission of and receiving environment of the potential pollution to show how the pollution can be avoided and if necessary mitigated. England's NPPF contains a specific encouragement for local policies that "limit the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation. Dumfries and Galloway Council produced relevant guidance in 2020 which references the now designated Galloway Forest Dark Sky Park and also includes model planning conditions. In the absence of a specific policy contained within NPF4, a form of HwLDP Policy 72 may be required for progression in HLDP and this may specifically need to address light pollution and the current dark sky designated, cognisant of future dark sky bids
- 5.56 A summary of Highland's natural heritage designations and the extent of coverage is provided in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Summary of Highland's Natural Designations

Designation	Number of Designations	Area within Highland – land only (ha)	% of Area within Highland – land only	% of Land Area in Scotland
Ramsar Sites	13	155 933	6	2
Special Protection Areas	53	436 926	17	5.5
World Heritage Sites	1	187 023	7.2	2.4
National Nature Reserves	21	90 182	3.5	1.1
National Scenic Areas	16	529 145	20.6	6.7
Sites of Specific Scientific Interest	357	519 522	20.3	6.6

Special Areas of Conservation	92	384 728	15	4.9
Wild Land Areas	25	1 058 925	41.2	13.4
Marine Protected Areas	12	417 970	16.3	5.3
Local Nature Reserves	1	20.9	<1	<1
Geological Conservation Review Sites	419	138 623	5.4	1.8

Soils

5.57 The Highlands has an array of various of soil classifications that benefit from policy protections. Highland is home to globally recognised peatland habitats, which require protection from inappropriate development and are enhanced wherever possible. As we prepare HLDP, we must be able to identify where different soil types are located, as well as the capability of our land for agricultural purposes. The Council's [Highland Soils Map](#) compiles all relevant soil classifications and consideration into one location, including:

- Peat and Carbon Rich Soils,
- Prime Agricultural Land,
- Landslides and Soil Erosion, and
- Crofting Within the Highlands

5.58 NPF4 seeks to minimise disturbance to soils from development, and it is recognised that effective prioritisation of brownfield sites as detailed in **Chapter 12: Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings**, plays a significant role in this regard. Proposed development may be temporary or permanent, which may affect the view of the proposals and nature of any impact. NPF4 has raised the profile of the importance of protecting locally, regionally, nationally and internationally valued soils, including land that is of lesser quality that is culturally or locally important for primary use.

Peat and Carbon Rich Soils

5.59 Organo-mineral and peat soils are known as carbon-rich soils, as defined in NPF4. A peat soil is defined in Scotland as when soil has an organic layer at the surface which is more than 50cm deep. Organo-mineral soil or peaty soil is soil which has an organic layer at the surface less than 50cm thick and overlies mineral layers (e.g. sand, silt and clay particles). There is also a relatively rare group of soils in Scotland

known as humose soils. These have organic rich layers with between 15 and 35% organic matter. These are mineral soils but also considered to be carbon rich.

- 5.60 The Council's [Soils Mapping](#) incorporates the [Carbon and Peatland Map \(2016\)](#) which illustrates the distribution of carbon and peatland across the whole of Scotland. The map legend shows separate soil classifications, whereby Class 1 and Class 2 land is indicative of a nationally important quantity of carbon rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitats. The scale of each individually mapped area is 1:250,000 for most upland areas of Scotland and 1:25,000 elsewhere. Analysis of the map highlights that the highest prevalence of Class 1 and 2 Soils are in Caithness and Sutherland, unsurprisingly in and around the area of land inscribed as a World Heritage Site for its significant peatland properties. The Isle of Skye also contains an abundance of Class 1 soils, while the West Coast is generally Class 2 soil with a greater Class 3, 4 and 5 soils in the Lochaber area. There is also a large area of moorland Southeast of Loch Ness across the Monadhliath Mountains that contains Class 1 soils, whilst almost the entirety of the land categorised as Inner Moray Firth, within IMFLDP2 is Mineral Soil and Class 4 soil.
- 5.61 By altering the layers on [Scotland's Soils](#) mapping tool, the generalised soil type for each area can be identified. This provides a greater overview into the presence of peat across Highland as well as mineral, montane and alluvial soils. Peaty gleys cover the greatest land area, whilst peat and mineral gleys account for the majority of Northeast Highland's land. The majority of the Moray Firth, Cromarty Firth and Dornoch Firth area comprises of mineral podzols.
- 5.62 Highland provides substantial opportunities for peatland restoration as a contribution towards national targets. This will rely on both public and private funding if the full ambitions are to be met. Significant experience has built up in peatland restoration including through Peatland ACTION (the national programme offering funding to improve the condition of degraded peatlands across Scotland). There is also a range of national guidance and good practice examples such as those referred to within [Scottish Governments Onshore Wind Policy Statement](#), specifically Chapter 3 (para 3.37 onwards) together with key corresponding outputs from the Onshore Wind Sector Deal work streams. Renewable energy developments provide one significant route to delivery of peatland restoration. It is important however to differentiate between areas that are not designated for their peatland interests and those that are (such as the FCWHS), with the designated sites requiring protection of the designated interests within the sites themselves, including consideration of site integrity.

Prime Agricultural Land

- 5.63 Prime agricultural land is that identified as being Class 1, 2 or 3.1 in the land capability classification for agriculture developed by Macaulay Land Use Research

Institute (now the James Hutton Institute). The [National scale land capability for agriculture](#) (LCA) provides information on the types of crops that may be grown in different areas dependant on soil and environmental characteristics. The map provides observations at a scale of 1:250 000 and 1:50,000 where the 1:50,000 scale map information is seen as the definitive mapped assessment, albeit coverage of Highland is not complete at this scale.

- 5.64 The extent of prime agricultural land across Highland is shown within the Council's [Soils Mapping](#). The majority of Highland land is classified as '6.3- land capable of use as rough grazing's with low quality plants', whilst large areas across Sutherland are classified as '5.3- land capable of use as improved grassland (pasture deteriorates quickly). There is a very limited area of Highland land classified as '1- land capable of producing a very wide range of groups' which is situated between Cawdor and Ardersier directly South of the A96. The majority of the Black Isle and immediate East and West surroundings of Inverness are classified under '2- land capable of producing a wide range of crops' and '3.1 – land capable of producing consistently high yields of a narrow range of crops and/or moderate yields of a wider range (short grass leys are common).
- 5.65 A large area of Caithness is '3.2-land capable of average production through high yields of barley, oats and grass can be obtained (grass leys are common). Land classified as '7-land of very limited agricultural value' is located in remote upland areas where it can be envisaged that applications will be for the renewables sector.
- 5.66 Protecting agricultural land from development is important in safeguarding the economic assets that agriculture brings. Agriculture-related activities form a key source of employment in the Highlands, with crop and animal production alone estimated to provide 11,000 jobs according to NOMIS Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) data **(THC048)** which equates to 8.6% of the Highland workforce, while the same sector provides for only 2.7% of Scotland's workforce nationally. Ancillary supporting sectors such as veterinary services, and agricultural machinery likely make the total agricultural-related workforce considerably higher.

Landslides and Soil Erosion

- 5.67 Downslope movement of materials, such as a landslide or rockfall may cause damage, such as a loss of support to foundations or services or, in rare cases, impact damage to buildings and infrastructure. The British Geological Survey (BGS) [National Landslide Database](#) (NLD) is the most extensive source of information on previous landslides in Great Britain, holding over 18,000 records which are continuously updated. The data has been derived from geological maps and active surveys, as well as various other commissioned and research studies. The Council's [Soils Mapping](#) indicates the locations of these across Highland clearly demonstrating an abundance of areas susceptible to this natural process. There is

however a greater risk in the Southwest of the region in and around Lochaber, as well as Northwest Skye. Key transport networks such as the A82, the A890, A9 and the A87 are all vulnerable, whilst popular walking routes within Glencoe and Ben Nevis, Knoydart, Glen Affric and Skye, in addition to others are also at risk.

- 5.68 The BGS GeoSure 5km hex grid shows a generalised overview of the future susceptibility to six naturally occurring geohazards in Great Britain, including potential landslides and slope stability, through a vector map of 65km² hexagonal cells. For landslides (slope stability), hex cells are classified as low, moderate or significant. The Council's [Soils Mapping](#) incorporates this resource and shows that extensive areas of Highland are subject to significant landslide and slope stability risks. These includes areas with substantial lengths of transport infrastructure and the energy transmission network, which are potential vulnerable.
- 5.69 Transport Scotland has published information on known [landslide areas alongside trunk roads](#). Areas identified in the Highlands are:
- A82 Glenfintaig, near Glen Goy
 - A835 Tarvie
 - A82 Loch Lochy
 - A82 Glen Righ, near Corrychurrachan Bridge
- 5.70 Transport Scotland defines a landslide as a movement of a mass of rock, earth or debris down a slope. They can be divided in to topples, slides and flows and involve rock, debris or earth.
- 5.71 Soil erosion is a natural process where soil particles become detached and are transported by rivers and streams to the sea, a process often accelerated by modern land management techniques. Soil erosion in Highland is not occurring at the same severity as in some parts of the world, however there are still environmental and financial costs to soil erosion such as the loss of valuable nutrients and pollution of several waterbodies and watercourses.
- 5.72 Mapping provided by Scotland Soils is incorporated within the Council's [Soils Mapping](#) to identify the areas of land most susceptible to soil erosion risk. This mapping only illustrates partial cover, and the majority of the Highlands has not been included. The Black Isle, Easter Ross, a section of Caithness and Nairnshire are included and present a variety of different soil types with differing erosion risk. Moorland areas Southeast of Inverness are at a high risk of soil erosion along with land West of Wick. The majority of land on the Black Isle is moderate risk mineral soils, whilst the land along the A96 from Inverness towards Nairn is predominantly low risk mineral soils. From the areas that have been included on the mapping, there are no high-risk locations, only low to moderate risk areas.
- 5.73 Environmental Standards Scotland's [The Risk to Scotland's Soils: Scoping Report 2024](#) outlines the risks to Scotland's Soils. Degradation of soils has a negative

impact on Scotland's economy. Soil erosion and compaction costs in the region of £75 million per year, in addition to a loss of between £16 million and £49 million per year due to reduced crop yield caused by a loss of water retention. The report features a map that colour codes areas based on their favourability for agricultural production. As observed from the 'landscape capability for agriculture map', there are little areas favourable for agriculture in Highland, primarily on the East Coast around The Black Isle, Easter Ross and Nairnshire.

- 5.74 Scottish Government's Scotland Environment Maps – [Geomorphic Risk Buffer](#) show places at risk of river erosion due to waters flowing faster, or silt deposition from water flowing slower. New development should avoid these 'areas of change', as they could be at risk from being washed away or silted up. **Chapter 7: Flood Risk Management** provides further detail on river flooding and erosion.

Crofting Within the Highlands

- 5.75 While not often equating to prime agricultural land, NPF4 provides that land of lesser quality that is culturally or locally important for primary use (i.e. for example food production, flood management, water catchment management and carbon storage) should be recognised in decision-making. NPF4 Policy 5 b (ii) states that, *Development proposals on prime agricultural land, or land of lesser quality that is culturally or locally important for primary use, as identified by the LDP, will only be supported where it is for: ii. Small-scale development directly linked to a rural business, farm or croft or for essential workers for the rural business to be able to live onsite [...]*. It is in this context that evidence has been considered in relation to crofting as reflective of land that is culturally or locally important for primary use.
- 5.76 Crofting is a land tenure system of small-scale food producers unique to the Scottish Highlands and Islands. It provides tenants with security provided they pay their rent, live on or near their croft and work the land. Crofting provides many benefits (as supported by [the Value of Crofting Report](#)), supporting local food production while protecting cultural heritage and the natural environment within these areas. Crofting has helped to maintain population and economic activity in remote rural areas for over 100 years and crofts are in great demand once listed on the market. For tenancy to take place, the consent of the crofting commission is required to avoid any new owner-occupier becoming liable to scrutiny.
- 5.77 [Scottish Government Report to Parliament: Economic Condition of Crofting 2019-2022](#) highlights this demand, providing a record of crofters survey results which state that there is an increase in the number of crofters who have been crofting for less than five years. The Crofting Commission has reported there are approximately 500 new entrants into crofting each year.
- 5.78 The average size of a croft is usually 5 hectares, but some are only 0.5 ha while a few extend to more than 50 ha of land, often with a share in hill grazing which is

held in common with other crofters in a township. Crofts are often unable to support a family or provide full time employment, and as such crofters have subsequently diversified into small-scale tourism and off-croft employment. The main form of land use is growing cattle for lamb and beef product, whilst some winter keep, and potatoes may be grown across the area as well as horticulture providing a wide range of fruits, vegetables and plants.

- 5.79 The Crofting Commission states that there are around 20,000 crofts across the Highlands & Islands and in designated areas in Scotland. More than 750,000 hectares of land in Scotland is in crofting tenure with approximately 33,000 people living in crofting households, which equates to around 10% of the population of the Highlands and Islands. Highland has 10,197 registered crofts as of their [2023/24 Annual Report](#). The highest extent of crofting land is in Skye where more than 50% of the land is covered by crofting. There are also large pockets of land across Caithness, Sutherland, Wester Ross and Lochaber, whilst the areas with the least crofting land are central parts of the region such as Glen Affric and The Flow Country. Many registered crofts are however, within Inverness-shire, in highly pressurised areas of countryside within commuting distance of Inverness.
- 5.80 Crofting, whilst being integral, is often a poorly understood part of life in the Highlands and Islands. Crofting adds £588 million GVA/year to the Scottish economy and supports around 30,385 jobs. Four fifths of the economic value added by crofting and 88% of the jobs it supports are retained in and around the crofting counties: sparsely populated rural areas – often far removed from Scotland’s main centres of economic activity.
- 5.81 Beyond local benefits, several social and economic priorities are delivered that matter to wider Scottish society; regenerative agriculture is important in society’s battle against climate change and biodiversity loss. Population retention provides an important counterbalance to economic inequality, and rich cultural and environmental landscapes can be enjoyed by everyone.
- 5.82 [Crofters duties](#) to be ordinarily resident on, or within 32 kilometres of their croft has often formed a component of rural housing applications in the Highlands, which has regularly clashed with rural housing planning policies (such as HwLDP Policy 35) which seek to restrict suburbanisation of pressurised areas of countryside such as the Inner Moray Firth Hinterland. While housing and rural homes evidence is detailed within **Chapter 9: Housing**, it is recognised that there is often a tension between rural homes and the fulfilment of crofter’s duties. This has often resulted in proposals being assessed according to the agricultural operational need for a full-time presence on the site to justify a new rural home. As crofting is often a small-scale mix of crop cultivation and livestock rearing, it is common for croft-related housing proposals to fail to meet the operational requirement of one labour unit, relative to traditional agricultural farms. A need to provide clarity on

the policy support that can be afforded to new rural homes and other development on registered croft land is recognised to simplify the policy landscape within HLDP.

Table 5.2 Summary of Highland Soils

Designation	Number of Designations	Area within Highland (ha)	% of Area in Highland	% of Area in Scotland
Land Capable for High Quality Agriculture	86	8134	<1	<1
Class 1 and 2 Peat Soils	6061	1,156,476	45	14

Forestry, Woodland and Trees

- 5.83 [Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019-2029](#) proposes a 2070 vision, where Scotland will have more forests and woodlands, sustainably managed and better integrated with other land uses. These will provide a more resilient, adaptable resource, with greater natural capital value that supports a strong economy, a thriving environment, and healthy and flourishing communities. The [Scotland's Forestry Strategy Implementation 2022-2025](#) is used to help build on existing success since the [Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019-2029](#).
- 5.84 Highland is home to a variety of woodland habitats, including internationally and nationally important Caledonian pinewoods and Atlantic oakwoods. Highland's woodlands deliver significant environmental, social and economic benefits.
- 5.85 Highland has a significant resource with around 350,000 hectares (13.5% of land area) covered by woodland. This is, however, below the national average of 18.5%, which in turn is below the European Union average of 43%.
- 5.86 In Highland there are three broad types of forest and woodland:
- **Commercial Forestry**, which includes growing coniferous trees for timber in areas like the Inner Moray Firth, Strathspey, and the Great Glen, but has expanded to include more native woodland restoration and multi-functional approaches. The industry provides significant employment and economic benefits, with a strong market driven by investor demand and a limited supply of commercial forests.
 - **Native Woodland** (including irreplaceable ancient woodland), which includes forests made up of naturally occurring tree species like Scots pine, birch, and oak, with key habitats including ancient Caledonian pinewoods and western Celtic rainforest. These woodlands are vital for biodiversity, providing homes for wildlife and acting as refuges for native species. Efforts are ongoing to protect and restore these woodlands.

- **Urban Trees and amenity woodland**, which includes areas of woodland situated on low value ground in and next to urban centres, designed for use by a wider range of community interest groups

- 5.87 Creation and management issues and priorities will vary, but there are common themes around supporting expansion of woodland coverage in line with national targets; promoting and supporting the forest industry; and promoting woodland creation and management practice which protects and enhances environmental quality, biodiversity, landscape and historic assets. The [UK Forestry Standard](#) defines the government requirements for forestry in the UK. It provides a basis for regulation and monitoring, including national and international reporting.
- 5.88 There are numerous data sources relating to the existing trees, woodland and forests including the National Forest Inventory, [Native Woodland Survey of Scotland](#) and the [Ancient Woodland Inventory](#). Combining these datasets, the Council's [Forestry, Woodland and Trees Mapping](#) shows the extent of existing woodland cover in Highland, alongside locally important areas protected for trees, including Tree Preservation Orders and Conservation Areas.

Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy

- 5.89 The most recent [Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy](#) (HFWS) was prepared to support the Highland-wide Local Development Plan (2012) and was adopted in November 2018. The HFWS sets out policies for the creation and management of forestry and woodlands. It presents the key issues, challenges and opportunities, together with strategic aims and visions for the future expansion and sustainable management of Highland forests over the next 20 years. The HFWS spatial mapping identifies the main categories for woodland creation: preferred, potential, potential with sensitivities and sensitive. In addition, land over 550m has been identified as potentially suitable for montane woodland creation. The HFWS highlights the role of trees and woodland in climate adaptation, including within Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS), reducing flood risk (stabilising slopes, slowing water flow and forming riparian corridors) and consideration of species selection for enhance woodland adaptability and resilience to climate change.
- 5.90 [HFWS](#) asserts that Highland's forests, woodlands and trees should be regarded as one of its most highly prized natural resources which deliver a wide range of economic, social and environmental benefits. These range from access and recreational facilities, opportunities to promote and encourage health and wellbeing to the protection and enhancement of biodiversity including the restoration of some of Scotland's most iconic ancient native woodland landscapes. In addition, by capturing carbon and helping to protect Highland's infrastructure by stabilising soils and regulating water flows, forests, woodlands and trees also play a vital role in helping Highland adapt to a changing climate, and to meeting

Scotland's climate change targets. It is also appreciated that the role of woodland carbon sequestration can be an effective mechanism for ensuring any proposed development aligns with Policy 2a of NPF4. The subject of carbon sequestration is extensively covered throughout **Chapter 4 (Climate Change and Energy)**.

- 5.91 In response to NPF4, the new Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy will be refreshed. A consultant has been commissioned and has commenced this work. There will be an enhanced focus on opportunities for woodland creation and expansion, increasing canopy cover in urban areas, improving woodland habitat connectivity to support biodiversity, contributing to Nature Networks, riparian corridors to facilitate Natural Flood Management (discussed in **Chapter 7: Flood Risk Management**). Other considerations include woodland removal associated with large-scale energy developments and infrastructure, the increased prevalence of tree pests and diseases and the impacts on trees of a changing climate.

Control of Woodland Removal

- 5.92 The Scottish Government Policy on Control of Woodland Removal includes a strong presumption in favour of protecting woodland resources and identifies only limited circumstances where removal without compensatory planting is acceptable.
- 5.93 The Council strongly seeks to develop a HLDP policy that details how compensatory planting will be delivered in Highland. For example, ensuring that wherever practicable, like-for-like woodland type to ensure an equivalent forestry-related net public is achieved (to protect the viability of the local forestry industry and support remote rural economies); developing a system to calculate an enhanced area of compensatory planting for woodland removal including productive, native and ancient woodland; and as per the Council's Trees, Woodland and Development Supplementary Guidance, require compensatory planting to take place within the HLDP area and as close to the development as possible.
- 5.94 The Council recognise that not all compensatory planting areas have been fully mapped and have started to develop mapping of both historic and new compensatory planting areas and will continue to develop this dataset to ensure the continued protection of areas being managed as compensatory planting.

Commercial and Other Woodlands

- 5.95 Commercial forestry is a significant land use in the Highland region, with woodlands covering approximately 13% of the land area. It is a key source of employment, particularly in woodland management and timber processing, estimated to provide 1,500 jobs according to NOMIS BRES data (**THC048, THC049**) which accounts for 1.2% of the Highland workforce spread throughout the region, helping support employment in remote and often fragile areas.

- 5.96 The availability of timber across the UK is predicted to steadily increase until the late 2030's. However, a sharp decline in timber supply is anticipated thereafter which will have serious implications for future security of softwood timber supplies and with it, the potential for job losses, reduced inward investment and reductions in meeting climate change targets.

Woodland Crofts and Huts

- 5.97 The [National Development Plan for Crofting](#) acknowledges that recent changes to crofting legislation have also encouraged woodland creation and that the Scottish Government will support woodland expansion that helps integrate woodland with traditional crofting activities, otherwise termed agroforestry. A woodland croft is largely or wholly covered with trees. It may be on land that has been wooded for a long time, or where new planting has been designed to create a resilient, productive system. It might also have been created from an existing woodland. Woodland management is likely to be a key part of the croft business and may include income streams from wood fuel or small-scale timber processing.
- 5.98 Previous planning applications have been considered within Highland for housing in relation to woodland crofts, which have been hindered by the lack of an explicit policy framework for them, nor any mention of them in NPF4. Differences are apparent between proposals involving the loss of an area of woodland to accommodate a dwellinghouse and instances where a new woodland would be created in conjunction with the proposed dwellinghouse. As woodland crofts are not explicitly mentioned within NPF4, HLDP may assist decision making by offering a clearer policy interpretation on these aspects.
- 5.99 While tourism matters are more fully detailed in **Chapter 8: Business, Economy, Tourism and Productive Places**, there are crossovers between tourism policy and huts where NPF4 Policy 30d refers to provision of huts where the nature and scale of the development is compatible with the surrounding area and the proposal complies with relevant good practice guidance. The Council has received enquiries and development proposals for huts, often in forest or woodland settings. The Council will consider developing additional policy and guidance to support the development of huts (as per Policy 30d) in or around woodland, with reference to good practice guidance produced by [Reforestation Scotland's New Hutting Developments: Good Practice Guidance](#).

Tree Protection

- 5.100 There are three layers of tree protection – Tree Preservation Orders, Conservation Areas and planning conditions. The Council's [Tree Management Strategy](#) provides further information on the management of these trees. A Tree Preservation Order (TPO) protects individual trees and woodlands that make a significant contribution

to the appearance of an area or are of historical importance. The majority of TPOs within the Highlands are based in the Inner Moray Firth area as shown in the Council's [Forestry, Woodland and Trees Mapping](#), with some other sites through the Cairngorms, Skye and Southern Sutherland. Large pockets of woodland within Inverness such as Loch Ness Golf Club, Lower Drummond and Ness Castle have enforced Tree Protection Orders. Nairn similarly has several areas of land where trees and woodland are protected by this order.

Summary of Stakeholder Engagement

5.101 A full breakdown of all stakeholder engagement undertaken to support the Evidence Report is provided within **Chapter 3: Statement of Engagement**. A summary of the key stakeholder engagement activities undertaken for this chapter include:

Stakeholders and Key Agencies

5.102 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 and other stakeholders on 31 July 2025, which included:

- NatureScot
- SEPA
- Scottish Water
- Crofting Commission
- Historic Environment Scotland
- Scottish Land and Estates
- James Hutton Institute
- Scottish Forestry
- Forestry Land Scotland
- National Trust for Scotland
- RSPB
- Scottish Renewables
- Scottish Power
- Homes for Scotland

5.103 Responses were received from NatureScot **(THC088)**, SEPA **(THC089)**, Historic Environment Scotland **(THC035)**, RSPB **(THC0039)**, ScottishPower Renewables

(THC042), Scottish Renewables **(THC041)** Scottish Forestry **(THC047)**, and Homes for Scotland **(THC090)**. A summary of feedback received includes:

- Historic Environment Scotland **(THC035)** Satisfied with the chapters content and do not wish to seek amendments as a result.

NatureScot (THC088)

Main views raised	Requested the inclusion of Geological Conservation Review (GCR) Sites context within the Chapter. Clarification was sought as to whether the issues of storms and wildfires were being considered. Welcome the approach taken for the nature network methodology.
Council's response	Storms and wildfire context has been covered substantially throughout Chapter 4 and that for the purpose of brevity, this has not been reiterated across multiple chapters. The Council have actioned request for inclusion of GCR context.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of agreement provided in (THC088) .
Proposed plan implications	No implications have arisen from these comments.
Actions for proposed plan stage	The Council actioned the prior request for the inclusion of GCR context, NatureScot later confirm that GCR sites have been included within the updated Chapter. These sites will be included as part of the evidence base during the site selection stage of HLDP.

SEPA (THC089)

Main views raised	SEPA's response (4th Sept 2025) sought clarification as to whether the Nature Networks Mapping Data List (THC051) includes the SEPA water environment evidence sources required. Supports the method of presenting soils information. Requested amendment within the 'HLDP evidence consultation' section where SEPA's comment was conflated with NatureScot's. SEPA's response (15th Oct 2025) support's Highlands decision to adapt AECOM tool. Sought clarification on whether datasets within Appendix 2 of NN Methodology will/have been used to formulate the network. Requested amendment to Appendix 2 of NN methodology by adding missing water environment evidence from Planning Advice Note Achieving Sufficiency of Evidence. Request whole catchments identified

	as part of NN's where water environment habitats are identified as core sites. Suggest benefits of identifying watercourses and waterbodies as opportunities for connectivity. Mapping the water environment as a NN opportunity opens up the potential for discussion of betterments with developers in relation to NPF4 Policy 3.
Council's response	The Council have actioned points raised to make it clear that the NN methodology includes SEPA water environment data sources. Amendments have been made to summary of stakeholder engagement to clarify distinct comments made by NatureScot and SEPA. Awaiting comments of THC Environment Team.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of agreement provided in (THC089) .
Proposed plan implications	The Council will review IMFLDP2 carbon – Nature, Restoration and Enhancement states that all development must enhance biodiversity and where relevant restore degraded habitats and build and strengthen nature networks around them. Specific guidance is provided for development of differing scales – from local to national, major and EIA development. Within this policy reference is given to the mitigation hierarchy and delivering biodiversity enhancement. HLDP will require to develop a policy framework in adherence to the mitigation hierarchy and biodiversity enhancement. HLDP will spatially define Nature Networks, which will continue to expand and improve throughout the development of HLDP and beyond. Nature Network mapping will be an iterative process and HLDP will reflect that Nature Networks will change and evolve in response to changing circumstances during the lifetime of the plan. HLDP will ensure that nature networks will retain the connectivity and integrity between existing habitats. HLDP should facilitate, encourage and support the creation of nature networks and that connections are strengthened.
Actions for proposed plan stage	NN methodology amended to include the SEPA water environment data sources. Continued discussions with THC Environment Team to make requested amendments and address points raised.

RSPB (THC0039)	
Main views raised	Agree with initial evidence and suggest amendments/additions to certain sub-sections within the chapter. Support the approach taken to developing NN, and sections regarding the Flow Country World Heritage Site. Agree with the commitment to support requirements for biodiversity enhancements in the HLDP. Suggest reference to Capercaillie emergency plan. Offer linkages between NN and biodiversity enhancement, account for NatureScot's wader strategy and potentially update on 'hidden data' collected to inform onshore wind and powerlines. Disputed elements of the evidence and did not consider that their comments provided within the earlier HLDP Evidence consultation had been adequately incorporated in relation to the biodiversity value of like-for-like compensatory woodland planting and the detrimental impact of inappropriate plantations in the World Heritage Site.
Council's response	The majority of woodland removal in Highland relates to productive conifers. In order to safeguard the timber industry, it is important that productive timber continues to be part of the Highland economy, delivering the wide range of environmental, economic and social benefits as set out in the Evidence Report (5.83-5.87). The Council therefore strongly supports the principle of like-for-like Compensatory Planting, with scope to take a flexible approach should specific circumstances occur. We fully acknowledge the benefits of native woodland creation, and natural regeneration, but there is an expectation that this will be secured separately through biodiversity enhancement measures rather than through Compensatory Planting, particularly where this involves the loss of good quality productive woodland. We agree with the comments that there will be certain circumstances where Compensatory Planting is not required (as set out in the CoWR policy implementation guidance (February 2019) Annex 3). The Council fully supports forest to bog restoration (without Compensatory Planting) in cases where commercial woodland has been previously planted on deep peat. The refreshed Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy will go into more detail on this issue, especially in light of the recently designated Flow Country WHS. We concur that new woodland has the potential to have adverse impacts on certain species and habitats. It is important to note, therefore, that new Compensatory Planting schemes will go through the same due diligence as any woodland creation scheme, and these

	issues will be picked up as part of this process in accordance with UKFS as well as the right tree in the right place. Noted regarding the Caledonian Pinewood Inventory – this will be included as an online resource
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes.
Proposed plan implications	The Council will consider whether there is a requirement for a policy specifically related to the delivery of compensatory planting. This may, for example, seek to ensure that, wherever practicable, compensatory planting is delivered on a like-for-like basis to ensure that an equivalent net (environmental and economic) public benefit is achieved. It will also consider circumstances where an enhanced level of compensatory planting may be required and how that would be calculated.
Actions for proposed plan stage	Consideration on the need for additional biodiversity enhancement whilst planting like-for-like compensatory planting.
Scottish Power Renewables (THC042)	
Main views raised	Seek further clarification as to the notion of harmful development as outlined in 5.28 / 5.23 regarding the protection of areas from 'harmful developments.' Suggests HLDP is underpinned by the extensive national guidance on appropriateness of development to avoid ambiguity, such as deemed to be displayed within the context of 5.52 regarding the terminology 'inappropriate development.' States that landscape and visual impact do not form part of the designation of the FCWHS and should therefore not be treated as a material consideration. Raises concerns with approach to biodiversity enhancement and the 10% uplift requirement, due to issues of proportionality, evidence-based, and alignment with national guidance. Supports recognition in 5.24 that not all developments can deliver biodiversity enhancements and opens a wider opportunity for enhancements in alternative suitable locations. Suggests that swift and bee bricks as tools for enhancement are constrained by limited ecological evidence and risk being perceived as superficial.

Council's response	Matters noted, clarifications made and additions to the chapter where additional evidence has been identified. A number of matters will be considered at plan preparation stage.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is the agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of agreement provided in (THC042) .
Proposed plan implications	No implications have arisen from these comments.
Actions for proposed plan stage	The Council will consider the appropriateness of 10% biodiversity uplift.
Scottish Renewables (THC041)	
Main views raised	Raises concerns about how the Council is considering onshore wind project proposals in and around the FCWHS – the Council should not use setting as a planning tool to reject onshore wind proposals in the FC on the basis that UNESCO doesn't acknowledge setting as a consideration for natural OUV. States that UNESCO's approach to natural OUV does not support THC working in defining setting and corresponding planning guidance for the FCWHS. Suggests that it is a misuse of the planning system to attempt, after inscription, to make the WHS into a barrier it wasn't meant to be, and that biology is the only consideration for OUV for the FCWHS. States that THC has ignored the financial realities of restoring peat and misses an opportunity to restore peatlands in the FC that is not in line with UNESCO, NPF4 or Scottish Renewables work with the Flow Country Partnership. Requires amended context on Wild Land Areas so as not to state them as a national designation and confirm they are not a planning constraint for renewable energy developments. Cautions against using LNCS as a barrier to renewable energy development as this would conflict with NPF4 and would be missed opportunity to work with renewable energy developers to support local efforts.
Council's response	Matters noted, some clarifications made and additions to the chapter made where additional useful evidence has been identified. There are a

	number of matters raised that are for consideration at plan preparation stage. Full council response can be found in (THC040) .
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes.
Proposed plan implications	No implications have arisen from these comments
Actions for proposed plan stage	No further actions have arisen from these comments
Scottish Forestry (THC047)	
Main views raised	Suggest better linkage between Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 on matters relating to carbon sequestration opportunities.
Council's response	Clearer signposting to Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy has been added, which extensively covers the context relating to carbon sequestration in paragraph 5.82. While we do not repeat this information in Chapter 5, it is recognised that the refreshed Forestry and Woodland Strategy would provide an operational basis to act on areas identified for potential carbon sequestration.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, follow up meeting with Scottish Forestry confirmed sufficiency (THC047) .
Proposed plan implications	No implications have arisen from these comments
Actions for proposed plan stage	No further actions have arisen from these comments. Scottish Forestry are aware of Council's ongoing HFWS in preparation and have fed into this process.
Homes For Scotland (THC090)	
Main views raised	Suggests that the Council refer to a wider variety of evidence sources as listed within their response.

	Suggests an addition of wording under the forestry, woodland and trees section as stated within their response.
Council's response	Suggestions has been noted, evidence sources have been incorporated and comments have been added.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes.
Proposed plan implications	No implications have arisen from these comments.
Actions for proposed plan stage	No further actions have arisen from these comments.

Summary of Local Place Plan Priorities

5.104 Ardgour Local Place Plan (**THC010**) has identified the following priorities relating to Nature and Environment:

- Habitat restoration through tree planting and removing rhododendrons round Clovullin and North Corran
- Conserving the natural environment
- Facilitating environmental and ecological improvement projects like regeneration of Scotland's rainforest, peatland restoration, planting native woodlands, expanding riparian woodlands, rhododendron removal, and stimulating diverse wildlife on Kingairloch Estate.

5.105 Black Isle Local Place Plan (**THC011**) has identified the following priorities relating to Nature and Environment:

- Supporting habitat restoration through the development of farm clusters
- Independent environmental baseline survey and long term monitoring at Green Freeport Sites.
- Create nature networks within river catchments from sources to coastal zones, including the River Conon (a salmon breeding river) on the western edge of the Black Isle.
- Consider opportunities for community woodlands

5.106 Broadford and Strath Local Place Plan (**THC012**) has identified the following priorities relating to Nature and Environment:

- Encourage natural regeneration of native woodlands

- Identify and protect areas of pristine peatlands.
- Restore and protect valued natural environment and landscape from threats including human pressure (inappropriate development and over-tourism) and invasive species.
- Concerns over impacts of renewable energy developments and associated 'work camps' on local environment and community.

5.107 Caol Local Place Plan (**THC024**) has identified the following priorities relating to Nature and Environment:

- Regular maintenance of greenspaces throughout summer months.

5.108 Croy and Tornagrain Local Place Plan (**THC026**) has identified the following priorities relating to Nature and Environment:

- Environmental heritage of the area needs safeguarding

5.109 Dores and Essich Local Place Plan (**THC013**) has identified the following priorities relating to Nature and Environment:

- Potential community woodland, to the south of Dores Hall, between designated house site and the B962.

5.110 Duror and Kentallen Local Place Plan (**THC014**) has identified the following priorities relating to Nature and Environment:

- Rewild river and coastal habitats
- Build education centre to educate people about flora/fauna and natural heritage.
- Reinstate areas of native planting in our area as they fell the existing commercial forests.

5.111 Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Local Place Plan (**THC022**) has identified the following priorities relating to Nature and Environment:

- Encouraging renewable power development to include measures to conserve wildlife, regenerate woodland and enhance biodiversity

5.112 Gairloch Local Place Plan (**THC015**) has identified the following priorities relating to Nature and Environment:

- Protect green spaces from overdevelopment
- Maintain aesthetic appeal of the area
- Maintain safeguarded natural designations

5.113 Garve and District Local Place Plan (**THC016**) has identified the following priorities relating to Nature and Environment:

- Nature preservation in partnership with landowners
- Sustain biodiversity

5.114 Glen Urquhart Local Place Plan (**THC029**) has identified the following priorities relating to Nature and Environment:

- Treatment plant at Drumnadrochit – move current outlet pipe to exit at the loch.
- Designate areas for no new build.

5.115 Golspie Local Place Plan (**THC021**) has identified the following priorities relating to Nature and Environment

- Enhance and promote existing natural assets within the community
- Develop an integrated, diverse and multi-functional shoreline that can unlock the natural heritage
- Forming an integrated land management area which prioritises biodiversity enhancement

5.116 Kinlochleven Local Place Plan (**THC017**) has identified the following priorities relating to Nature and Environment:

- Revitalise Island Park and old pier.
- Restore and enhance natural habitats, potentially including increasing native tree cover to reduce flooding and improve natural habitats.

5.117 Kyle of Sutherland Local Place Plan (**THC028**) has identified the following priorities relating to Nature and Environment:

- Incorporated the Community Action Plan's priority for Environmental – Climate Conscious Communities, actions to sustain and nurture the area's landscape, heritage and climate contributions for locals, visitors and nature itself.
- The natural environment is one of the Kyle of Sutherland's greatest assets; it must be protected, and all developments should be considered in the context of the landscape, wildlife, and the people who live in and rely on it for their existence.
- An identified area to the north of the Gearchoille Community Woodland (at Ardgay & Gledfield) could be incorporated into the community woodland area over time; also, better sign posting and improvement of the access point would benefit the village and encourage greater use.
- Potential location identified (at Ardgay & Gledfield) for a destination woodland with views over kyle.
- Potential location identified (at Ardgay & Gledfield) for a community orchard.
- Opportunity to develop the green area in the centre of Cassley Drive (Rosehall) as a community orchard.
- Opportunity to develop community woodland to the west of Cassley Drive (Rosehall).

- Supporting the Woodland Trust's improvement and enhancement of 700 hectares site of woodland, wildlife and paths (Ledmore and Migdale).

5.118 Lochalsh Local Place Plan (**THC018**) has identified the following priorities relating to Nature and Environment:

- Conserve nationally significant natural habitats
- Protect biodiversity and landscapes for future generations

5.119 Morvern Local Place Plan (**THC027**) has identified the following priorities relating to Nature and Environment:

- Proposal to create a community forest (Lochaline) on land currently owned by Forestry and Land Scotland, which the local community would purchase and own; proposed land uses including crofting use, common woodlots, amenity woodland with new path networks, shared equity housing plots, licensed residential park for Tiny Houses, small-scale renewable energy projects including solar with battery storage, other community-owned developments for community benefit,
- Affirming and expanding the existing Local Landscape Area designations to the north-east and north-west of the peninsula to also cover the main strip of land along the coast between Drimin and Lochaline, and further south.
- Exploring a potential future reassessment of existing and potential on-land SSSI sites relating mainly to hazelwood rainforest on the coast of the peninsula.
- Supporting the development of a network of biodiversity corridors, potentially linked to proposals for new active travel routes across the peninsula.
- Affirming the value of the Sound of Mull and Duart Marine Protected Area (MPA) and also the biodiversity value of the intertidal zone along the coast.
- Developing and protecting accessible local nature reserves at Knock Park (Lochaline) and to the west of the village (as part of the community forest proposal).
- Protecting the biodiversity present in the intertidal zone along the coasts and in the Sound of Mull and Sunart MPA.

5.120 Nairnshire Local Place Plan (**THC023**) has identified the following priorities relating to Nature and Environment:

- Ensuring that design approaches incorporate biodiversity considerations, through creating on-site improvements.
- Ensuring developers make a contribution to an established fund for making biodiversity enhancements throughout Nairn.
- Preserving natural habitats through conservation strategies
- Improving the features of Tradespark Woods and generally safeguarding woodland spaces for appropriate uses such as tree top trails

- Designating the Victoria spa town with conservation area status

5.121 Sleat Local Place Plan (**THC025**) has identified the following priorities relating to Nature and Environment:

- To protect and enhance the natural environment
- Address the need for invasive species management
- Promote wildlife corridor development
- Promote a long-term comprehensive nature restoration programme including woodland regeneration projects
- Environmental education programme and integrated environmental education centre (possibly at Tormore).

5.122 Stratherrick and Foyers Local Place Plan (**THC019**) has identified the following priorities relating to Nature and Environment:

- Conserve key elements of our natural heritage, including Inverfarigaig Site of Special Scientific Interest.
- Wish to acquire a community woodland.
- Restore Boleskine House as heritage and nature hub.
- Develop community-led growing space, outdoor play and nature education, including enabling maintenance access to the communal septic tank in Inverfarigaig.

5.123 Torridon and Kinlochewe Local Place Plan (**THC020**) has identified the following priorities relating to Nature and Environment:

- To protect and restore biodiversity, natural places and carbon rich soils through nature-based solutions
- To protect and expand forests, woodland and trees.

Summary of Implications for the Proposed Plan

5.124 This section sets out the implications for the HLDP Proposed Plan relating to Biodiversity, Natural Places, Soil, and Forestry, Woodland and Trees. These recommendations are in line with NPF4 Policies 3, 4, 5 and 6, and have been informed by the analysis and outputs of evidence in this report.

Biodiversity

5.125 Protecting biodiversity, reversing biodiversity loss and delivering positive effects for biodiversity from development will be a key theme for HLDP and its delivery. HLDP will have an influence on the five key drivers of biodiversity loss listed by NatureScot (land use change, climate change, pollution, invasive species and conservation action). HwLDP Policy 57 – Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage is the core policy at hand for matters relating to the natural, built and cultural heritage. It

states that all development proposals will be assessed taking into account the level of importance and type of heritage features, the form and scale of the development, and any impact on the feature and its setting, in the context of the policy framework. Owing to the range of considerations across these matters which have evolved and expanded considered since HwLDP was adopted, HLDP would benefit from greater alignment with NPF4 and the development of separate policy frameworks for both natural environment features as distinct from historic assets and places.

- 5.126 HLDP will integrate relevant commitments from the Local Biodiversity Action Plan/s, and commitments made in future LBAPs and the Council's Ecology Strategy and Action Plan, taking into account relevant policy and guidance. Action to support habitats and species on the [Scottish Biodiversity List](#) will, where relevant, be prioritised.
- 5.127 HLDP shall detail the requirements for biodiversity enhancement. This will include, for example, considering specifying a minimum threshold for biodiversity enhancement for all new development; developing a policy to secure a range of mandatory low cost but high impact biodiversity enhancement measures in all new development; ensuring nature-based solutions are delivered as appropriate; specifying a biodiversity enhancement level for acceptable development within an HMP area; and considering whether a financial payment or financial contribution to an appropriate projects is acceptable where off-site biodiversity enhancements are unachievable.
- 5.128 The Council will review existing HwLDP policies to identify whether these are still required in light of NPF4. We will for example consider whether a policy is required for species and habitats of conservation concern not afforded protection under relevant legislation, including those listed in the [Scottish Biodiversity List](#) and LBAP.
- 5.129 The Council will review IMFLDP2 carbon – Nature, Restoration and Enhancement states that all development must enhance biodiversity and where relevant restore degraded habitats and build and strengthen nature networks around them. Specific guidance is provided for development of differing scales – from local to national, major and EIA development. Within this policy reference is given to the mitigation hierarchy and delivering biodiversity enhancement. HLDP will require to develop a policy framework in adherence to the mitigation hierarchy and biodiversity enhancement.
- 5.130 HLDP will spatially define Nature Networks, which will continue to expand and improve throughout the development of HLDP and beyond. Nature Network mapping will be an iterative process and HLDP will reflect that Nature Networks will change and evolve in response to changing circumstances during the lifetime of the plan. HLDP will ensure that nature networks will retain the connectivity and

integrity between existing habitats. HLDP should facilitate, encourage and support the creation of nature networks and that connections are strengthened.

Natural Places

- 5.131 HLDP will recognise international, national and local designations so that a policy framework can be applied in conjunction with NPF4 Policy 4. Natural features and designations in Highland will have their characteristics safeguarded and enhanced where possible to maximise their benefits to the region and biodiversity.
- 5.132 HLDP will identify the first tranche of Local Nature Conservation Sites in Highland. HLDP will recognise that the identification and designation of LNCSs is an iterative process and HLDP will reflect that LNCSs will be kept under constant review with new LNCSs designated in accordance with agreed Council processes during the lifetime of the plan.
- 5.133 We will consider whether the Flow Country WHS and its setting requires additional HLDP policy to supplement Policy 71 to ensure its Outstanding Universal Value is protected and preserved.
- 5.134 As Local Nature Reserves are not specifically referenced in NPF4 Policy 4, we will consider including additional policies to protect existing and any new LNRs designated during the lifetime of HLDP.
- 5.135 HLDP will have to consider whether natural heritage designations are already satisfactorily safeguarded by NPF4 policy framework, and whether additional policy provision may be required to further protect and enhance these assets in a Highland context.
- 5.136 The Council shall continue to review LLAs and notes comments from NatureScot and SSE Renewables on this matter. Any update to the assignment of a LLA shall inform HLDP if undertaken timeously within the timescale of the Plan.
- 5.137 The Council will make consideration of the many protected areas that developments associated with the ICFGF are located within and near to.
- 5.138 The Council will consider the retention of a form of HwLDP policy 72 Pollution which may require to be adapted to consider light pollution aspects specifically within current and future dark sky sites.

Soils

- 5.139 HLDP's policy framework will adhere to the mitigation hierarchy in alignment with NPF4 Policy 5a, where development proposals will only be supported if they are designed and constructed by first avoiding and then minimising the amount of

disturbance to soils on undeveloped land; and in a manner that protects soil from damage including from compaction and erosion, and that minimises soil sealing.

- 5.140 HLDP will be informed by evidence on known locations of prime agricultural land so that a policy framework can be applied in conjunction with NPF4 Policy 5b. Where higher resolution data extends to increased areas of coverage, HLDP shall reflect this.
- 5.141 HLDP will consider adopting a formal interpretation of locally and culturally important soils for primary use to include registered croft land and will require to develop a policy framework that provides clarity on these matters without adding undue complication with other policies in the plan. HwLDP has previously contained policies 47 and 48 in relation to protecting croft land. HLDP will require to update the policy position on these matters in a manner that aligns with NPF4.
- 5.142 HLDP will be informed by evidence on known locations of peatland, carbon-rich soils and priority peatland habitat so that a policy framework can be applied in conjunction with NPF4 Policy 5 c and d. For rural development across Highland, Policy 5 c) of NPF4 allows development of these areas where it is for essential infrastructure, generation of renewable energy, small scale development directly linked to a farm or croft or is required to support a fragile community. It will have to be assessed in the preparation of the new plan where housing development is proposed on peat and carbon rich soils to support fragile communities, however development on alternative sites is a preferred where feasible.

Forestry

- 5.143 HLDP will ensure that trees and woodland are identified and protected and wherever possible enhanced and cover expanded. HLDP will identify and set out proposals for forestry, woodland and trees. This will be supported and informed by a refreshed Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy, which will be completed in the next 18 months.
- 5.144 The Council will review existing HwLDP policies to identify whether these are still required in light of NPF4. For example, we will consider whether there is a need to replicate the existing HwLDP Policy 57 to deliver protection for TPOs and Inventory Gardens and Designed Landscapes and whether HwLDP Policy 51 should be replicated in some form to provide protection for non-native trees of amenity value.
- 5.145 The Council will consider whether there is a requirement for a policy specifically related to the delivery of compensatory planting. This may, for example, seek to ensure that, wherever practicable, compensatory planting is delivered on a like-for-like basis to ensure that an equivalent net (environmental and economic) public

benefit is achieved. It will also consider circumstances where an enhanced level of compensatory planting may be required and how that would be calculated.

- 5.146 The Council will consider whether specific policies in relation to woodland crofts and huts to provide a clearer framework on where these would be appropriate, and any criteria that ought to be met to ensure that proposals enhance woodland creation with greater opportunities for on-site management, rather than providing widespread opportunities for cumulative loss of woodland to accommodate housing.

Statements of Agreement / Dispute

Agreement on Evidence

- 5.147 Agencies who responded and agreed with the evidence and content presented include HES **(THC420)**

Disputes with Stakeholders

- 5.148 Disputes raised include those highlighted from RSPB **(THC0039)**, Scottish Renewables **(THC041)** and Scottish Power **(THC042)** to which the Council has provided the above response in **Summary of Stakeholder Engagement**.

Information Gaps

- 5.149 As mentioned, incomplete Nature Network mapping at this stage will be progressed over the remainder of 2025 and 2026, which will inform the proposed plan. Collaboration with the Council's Environment Team will continue in this regard to ensure integration of Nature Network mapping within HLDP.
- 5.150 As mentioned, the Council has commenced the preparation of a new Forestry and Woodland Strategy which shall inform the proposed plan. This is being prepared to be ready for adoption at the Economy and Infrastructure Committee in February 2027 and is therefore progressing in tandem with the preparation of the HLDP.
- 5.151 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 in Highland have formally registered Local Place Plans. Any Local Place Plans registered will be considered in the production of the LDP if timeously available.

Chapter 6 : Coastal Development and Aquaculture

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. Town and Country Planning (Development Planning) (Scotland) Regulations 2023: Regulation 9 requires the LDP to have regard to: - the national marine plan - any regional marine plan - any river basin management plan; - any flood risk management plan; and - any local flood risk management plan
NPF4 LDP Requirements	NPF4 Policy 10: - LDP spatial strategies should consider how to adapt coastlines to the impacts of climate change. This should recognise that rising sea levels and more extreme weather events resulting from climate change will potentially have a significant impact on coastal and islands areas and take a precautionary approach to flood risk including by inundation. - Spatial strategies should reflect the diversity of coastal areas and opportunities to use nature-based solutions to improve the resilience of coastal communities and assets. - LDP spatial strategies should identify areas of developed and undeveloped coast and should align with national, sectoral and regional marine plans. NPF4 Policy 32 requires: - LDPs should guide new aquaculture development in line with National and Regional Marine Planning, and will minimise adverse environmental impacts, including cumulative impacts, that arise from other existing and planned aquaculture developments in the area while also reflecting industry needs.
Links to Evidence	(THC002) Highland Wide Local Development Plan (THC003) Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 (THC004) Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (THC005) West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan (THC052) Draft Updated Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy SMP-OWE (THC053) Highland Regional Coastal Change Adaptation Plan (THC054) Salmon Scotland Highland Statistics

(THC082) Ardersier Port Environmental Research
 (THC083) Finfish Consultation Engagement Overview
 (THC084) Shellfish Consultation Engagement Overview
 (THC085) Seaweed Consultation Engagement Overview
 (THC086) Ports and Harbours Consultation Engagement
 (THC087) NOMIS Business & Employment Register – Coastal Industry

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
THC418	Highland Coastal Zone Mapping	30.07.25
THC419	Active Finfish Sites Map	29.04.25
THC420	Local Coastal Partnership Map	03.06.25
THC421	Planning & Locational Guidelines Aquaculture	01.07.25
THC422	Planning & Development Guidelines	01.07.25
THC423	SEPA Regulatory Framework & Sector Plan	01.07.25
THC424	Skills Review - Aquaculture	17.07.25
THC425	Scottish Shellfish Farm Production Survey 24	17.07.25
THC426	Reducing carbon emissions in aquaculture	04.07.25

	THC427	Vision for sustainable Aquaculture	04.07.25
	THC428	Creating a sustainable Food Future	04.07.25
	THC429	State of the Worlds Fisheries and Aquaculture	04.07.25
	THC430	Scottish Sea Fisheries Statistics 2023	28.07.25
	THC431	Scotland's Marine Economic Statistics 2022	28.07.25
	THC432	Visit Scotland International Tourism Update	14.05.26
	THC434	Harbours and Ports Map	29.07.25
	THC435	Highland Energy Planning Applications Map	30.07.25
	THC436	SEPA's Flood Maps	04.06.25
	THC437	Dynamic Coast Project	04.06.25
	THC438	NatureScot - Coastal Character Assessment	04.06.25
	THC439	Scotland's Aquaculture Map	04.06.25
	THC440	Coastal Zone Mapping	30.07.25
	THC441	THC Coastal Development Strategy	14.05.26
	THC442	Biodiversity: draft planning guidance	14.05.26
	THC443	Highland Biodiversity Action Plan 2016-2026	14.05.26
	THC444	Highland Biodiversity Enhancement Planning Guidance	14.05.26
	THC445	THC Ecology Strategy and Action Plan	14.05.26
	THC446	Scotland's People and Nature Survey	30.07.25
	THC447	Visit Scotland - Highlands	30.07.25
	THC448	Securing a Green Recovery to Net Zero	15.05.26
	THC449	HES - Conserving Underwater Heritage	25.09.25
	THC450	Diadromous Fish ScotMER Receptor Group	07.10.25
	THC451	Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045	29.07.25
	THC452	Draft Planning Guidance: Biodiversity	29.07.25
	THC453	Draft Updated Sectorial Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy	30.07.25
	THC454	Coastal Change Adaptation Plan Guidance	14.07.25
	THC455	Update to the Climate Change Plan 2018-32	25.04.25
	THC456	Blue Economy Vision for Scotland	18.04.25
	THC457	Siting & Design of Aquaculture in Landscape	14.05.26
	THC458	Visualisations for aquaculture - guidance note	14.05.26
	THC459	SEPA's Finfish Aquaculture Sector Plan	14.05.26
	THC460	Vision for Sustainable Aquaculture in Scotland	14.05.26
	THC461	NatureScot Guidance on Landscape/Seascape Capacity for Aquaculture	21.03.25

THC462	NatureScot Siting and Design of Aquaculture in the Landscape	05.03.25
THC463	NatureScot Guidance Note for Visualisation for Aquaculture	05.03.25
THC464	Guidance Note - Coastal Character Assessment	14.07.25
THC465	The River Basin Management Plan for Scotland	04.03.25
THC466	Understanding the Potential Scale of Seaweed-based Industries in Scotland	07.07.25
THC467	SEPA Finfish Aquaculture Guidance	10.06.25
THC468	Vision for Sustainable Aquaculture	08.06.25
THC469	Scotland's National Marine Plan 2015	18.04.25
THC470	Seaweed Harvesting, Cultivation Assessment	08.06.25
THC471	Scot Gov Marine Tourism Assessment	10.07.25
THC472	International Tourist Update	10.07.25

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 that there are relevant crossovers between Coastal Development and Aquaculture and other topics including:

- **Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy**
- **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**
- **Chapter 7: Flood Risk Management**
- **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism & Productive Places**
- **Chapter 9: Housing**
- **Chapter 10: Transport**
- **Chapter 12: Historic Assets, Brownfield Land & Empty Buildings**
- **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living & Placemaking**

Where apparent, the Council has referenced relevant linkages between policies areas throughout the chapter.

Summary of Evidence

- 6.1 This chapter presents the evidence relating to Coastal Development and Aquaculture in Highland. 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:

- **National Context**
- **Coastal Profile**

- **Climate Change and the Implications of Sea Level Rise**
- **Developed and Undeveloped Coast**
- **Local Harbours**
- **Coastal Biodiversity and Environmental Designations**
- **Coastal and Offshore Energy**
- **Coastal Access and Recreation**
- **Aquaculture**

National Context

- 6.2 Coastal development refers to the human activities and infrastructure development that take place in coastal areas. That can include coastlines, beaches, estuaries and adjacent land. Coastal development encompasses a wide range of activities and involves consideration for environmental impact, conservation of coastal ecosystems, and management of coastal resources to sustainably balance development with environmental protection.
- 6.3 In considering what approach the new plan will need to take, the latest national policy position needs to be considered. NPF4 sets out a long-term vision for Scotland's development. It emphasises the importance of sustainable growth for our coast and aquaculture industry to protect coastal communities and their assets and support resilience to the impacts of climate change. Coastal development aims to stimulate rural economic activity which in turn, will encourage development of affordable, quality rural homes whilst protecting and reversing biodiversity loss and strengthening nature networks.

Policies

- 6.4 Policy 10 is one of the key policies for this topic. It intends to protect coastal communities and assets and support resilience to the impacts of climate change. It requires the LDP to:
- To consider how to adapt coastlines to the impacts of climate change and coastal erosion.
 - To recognise that rising sea levels and more extreme weather events resulting from climate change could potentially have a significant impact on coastal and island areas.
 - Take a precautionary approach to flood risk including by inundation.
 - Reflect the diversity of coastal areas and opportunities to use nature-based solutions to improve resilience of coastal communities.
 - Identify areas of developed and undeveloped coast.
- 6.5 In terms of evidence, it requires LDPs to be informed by a Coastal Change Adaptation Plan (CCAP) which identifies areas vulnerable to erosion, sea level rise, and coastal flooding, and outlines appropriate adaptation strategies. This work is

- guided by the [Coastal Change Adaptation Plan Guidance](#), which outlines a consistent approach to assessing vulnerability and identifying adaptation options.
- 6.6 The HwLDP Policy 49 Coastal Development aims to ensure that the special qualities of the Highland's diverse and often fragile coastline are protected. Development proposals must also demonstrate that they are justified, sustainable, and well-integrated and that coastal assets are safeguarded, where possible, for their environmental and recreational values.
- 6.7 Policy 49 shares foundational principals with NPF4 but lacks critical provisions now required by national policy, particularly in relation to climate change, coastal retreat, nature-based solutions, and alignment with wider marine planning. The new plan will address these gaps to ensure it is fit for purpose in a rapidly changing coastal environment.
- 6.8 Policy 32 is the key policy relating to Aquaculture. It intends to, promote and facilitate aquaculture development and minimise any adverse effects on the environment, including cumulative impacts. Planning should support an aquaculture industry that is sustainable, diverse, competitive, economically viable and which contributes to food security, whilst operating with social licence., within environmental limits and which ensures there is a thriving marine ecosystem for future generations. It requires the LDP to;
- Guide new aquaculture development in line with National and Regional Marine plans
 - Minimise adverse environmental impacts, including cumulative impacts, that arise from other existing and planned aquaculture developments in the area
 - Reflect the needs of the industry
- 6.9 In terms of evidence, it requires LDPs to be informed by the Scottish Government Marine Directorate's Planning and Locational Guidelines which aim to balance development needs with environmental protection and community interests. NatureScot's planning and development guidance on marine aquaculture and SEPA's regulatory framework and sector plan that provides advice to support authorities and developers to site aquaculture responsibly.
- 6.10 The HwLDP Policy 50 Aquaculture aims to support sustainable development of fin-fish and shellfish farming subject to no adverse effect, directly, indirectly or cumulatively on the natural and built cultural heritage and any existing activity.
- 6.11 Policy 50 shares foundational principals with NPF4 but is now considered outdated and falls short of the ambitions and requirements set out in Policy 32 of NPF4. It lacks the fundamental national priorities for decarbonisation, climate adaptation, and environmental recovery and does not include climate resilience or emissions reduction. The new plan will address these gaps to ensure it is fit for purpose in a rapidly changing and progressive Aquaculture industry.

National Marine Plan

- 6.12 Scotland's National Marine Plan 2015 (NMP) adopted by Scottish minister in 2015 under the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010, sets out national framework for the sustainable use of marine and coastal resources. It applies to all decisions affecting Scotland's marine area out to 200 nautical miles and is a material consideration for Local Development Plans, particularly in coastal areas where land and sea interactions are most prominent.
- 6.13 The NMP contains a series of General policies and sector specific policies covering areas such as aquaculture, fisheries, energy, tourism, shipping, marine transport, recreation and marine cultural heritage. While the aquaculture and coastal development sections are of particular relevance to the evidence gathering for the HLDP, all aspects of the plan are important and should be reflected where appropriate. The NMP sets out clear expectations for sustainable development and protection of the marine environment, and emphasises the importance of coordinated decision making, protection of natural and cultural heritage, and meaningful stakeholder engagement while also promoting the growth of sustainable marine industries.
- 6.14 The development of National Marine Plan 2 (NMP2) is progressing steadily, with significant milestones achieved and key phases outlined for future completion. The final draft of NMP2 will update the NMP's current planning framework and is expected to be adopted in 2027.

Coastal Profile

- 6.15 The length of the coastline within the Highland Council region at low water is 4,905km which is 21% of the Scottish Total. Almost half of the Scottish population lives 8km from the coast. The Highland region sees 87.9% of the population living within 8km of the coast. This coastline has offered employment across the Highland region since settlement began.
- 6.16 The fishing economy began when the Vikings arrived in the 8th Century and is still a significant part of the Highland economy to this date. Scottish Sea Fisheries Statistics 2023 evidence that landings for Highlands region in 2023 amounted to 46,641 tonnes, valued £105.6 million and the industry directly employs 666 people on Scottish registered vessels. The tonnage landed by district in Highland was highest in Scrabster (16,276) and Ullapool (12,702), with Lochinver, Kinlochbervie, Portree and Mallaig also making considerable contributions.
- 6.17 In 1965, the first marine fish farm was established in Loch Ailort. There are over 200 active fin fish sites in Scotland, and Scotland's Marine Economic Statistics 2022 evidence that Atlantic salmon production value for the North Coast and West Highlands equated to £355 million in 2022, equating to 29% of Scotland's

national production value. While Highland's economy is more comprehensively detailed within **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**, it is recognised that the blue economy plays a significant role within Highland, which has become increasingly diversified.

- 6.18 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. The [Scottish Shellfish Farm Production Survey 2024](#) evidences that the Highland region in 2024 produced approximately 650 tonnes of common mussels destined for the table market in 2024, alongside 314,000 Pacific oyster shells, and 23,000 King Scallop Shells. A small quantity of native oysters was also produced. While 2024 saw the highest level of common mussels produced in Scotland reaching 11,690 tonnes an increase of 13%, the Highland region saw a decline in production from 707 tonnes to 650 tonnes. Employment in the sector remains modest in absolute terms, with about 239 full time, part-time, and casual staff across all shellfish farms in Scotland. At a national level, the shellfish sector was valued at approximately £14 million. While the Highland region has consistently hosted shellfish activity, production trends have fluctuated in response to environmental factors and the operational decisions of a relatively small number of producers. The sector remains a niche but important component of the wider marine economy, contributing to rural livelihoods and supporting biodiversity through growing experience with sustainable shellfish cultivation.
- 6.19 The historical significance and diverse applications of seaweed make it an enduring part of Scotland's coastal economy. Recent resurgence has been driven by interest in sustainable, environmentally friendly products which include food, health supplements, biofuels and biodegradable packaging. Understanding the potential scale for seaweed-based industries in Scotland (**THC466**) estimated that the seaweed sector's turnover was in the region of £4 million a year, with the total volume of consented seaweed harvesting of 15,000 tonnes. However, challenges in the drying process of seaweed have proven to be restrict further growth and development of this industry.
- 6.20 The expansion of the renewable energy sector as detailed in **Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy**, has contributed to the marine sector through the expansion of the offshore wind industry. [Scotland's Marine Economic Statistics 2022](#) evidence that the Scottish offshore wind sector, which is not included in the overall marine economy numbers, had an estimated turnover of £4.2 billion in 2022, which equates to a 3590% increase from 2014. The Marine Directorate has been investigating how to measure offshore wind farm economic activity, which remains in development.
- 6.21 The Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport (which includes the Port of Cromarty Firth (PoCF), Nigg, Inverness and Ardersier plus Highland Deephaven)

brings significant economic and social benefits to communities in the Highlands as detailed in **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**. These ports are set to become hubs for renewable energy and green technology, fostering new industries around offshore wind, hydrogen production, and sustainable logistics. This will boost local employment, particularly in engineering, manufacturing, and marine services. Furthermore, they will support local supply chains, and improve infrastructure in the region, fostering long-term prosperity for Highland communities.

- 6.22 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 (**THC087**) 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.

*Table 6:1 Coastal Industry Employment (NOMIS Business and Employment Register **THC087**)*

	Highland		Scotland	
	Jobs (#)	Industry (%)	Jobs (#)	Industry (%)
Building of ships and boats	50	0.0	7,000	0.3
Repair and maintenance of ships and boats	35	0.0	800	0.0
Sea and coastal passenger water transport	100	0.1	1,250	0.0
Sea and coastal freight water transport	50	0.0	450	0.0
Fishing and Aquaculture (Total)	1,750	1.4	11,000	0.4
Marine fishing	900	0.7	8,000	0.3
Freshwater fishing	40	0.0	250	0.0
Marine aquaculture	600	0.5	2,250	0.1
Freshwater aquaculture	175	0.1	900	0.0
Processing and preserving of fish, crustaceans and molluscs	600	0.5	7,000	0.3
Total	4300	3.3	38,900	1.4

- 6.23 [Scotland's Marine Economic Statistics 2022](#) provide estimates of the marine sector contribution to the Scottish economy, estimating that approximately 71,000 people are directly employed in the marine sector in Scotland, which represents 2.7% of the total Scottish employment.

Climate Change and the Implications of Sea Level Rise

- 6.24 As outlined in **Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy**, the world's climate is changing. Evidence has shown that since the 1800's, that human activity has influenced global warming, resulting in an enhanced warming of the atmosphere and oceans. This has led to a decrease in snow and ice and an increase in sea level globally. The Scottish Government's [Coastal Change Adaptation Plan Guidance](#) indicates that sea level rise due to climate change will result in an almost doubling of the number of properties considered to be at coastal erosion and flood risk in Scotland by 2080s.
- 6.25 Within the Highland Council area, the coastal zone is home to much of the population, and contains significant infrastructure such as roads, railway lines, bridges and harbours. The Council's Regional Coastal Change Adaptation Plan - CCAP (**THC053**) provides an overview of the risks across the Highland Council area, identifying communities and assets that are most likely to be negatively impacted by climate change and provides a flexible framework to address long-term and short-term risks. The CCAP should underpin HLDP and steer future development away from risk, whilst safeguarding locations that could provide opportunities for such things as asset relocation or space for coastal retreat.
- 6.26 In line with the requirements of NPF4, HLDP must address the climate emergency and nature crisis and should consider how coastlines adapt to the impact of climate change. Recognising that rising sea levels and more extreme weather events will potentially have a significant impact on coastal and inland development but must also protect coastal communities and assets and support resilience to the impacts of the two main coastal threats of flood risk and coastal erosion. These two areas are now considered in more detail below and are highlighted within the Council's [Coastal Zone Mapping](#).

Flood Risk

- 6.27 While a full assessment of flood risk is provided in **Chapter 7: Flood Risk Management**, it is important to acknowledge the relevance of coastal flood risk within the context of coastal development planning. Coastal Flooding occurs as a result of high tide, storm surge and wave activity raising the level of the sea above adjoining land. While it is not the primary source of flooding in many

Highland locations, it can have the most severe impact on damage to life and property when it occurs.

- 6.28 SEPA's flood risk maps are key in identifying area at risk of flooding from rivers, the sea, and surface water and provide national scale data indicating the likelihood and extent of flood events under various scenarios. SEPA's flood risk maps identify areas vulnerable to coastal flooding, which in Highland's case, risk is identified on almost all of the coastline of the Highland region.
- 6.29 In planning for sustainable coastal development, it is essential to consider potential impacts of sea level rise and increased storm intensity associated with climate change. Coastal flood risk can affect both existing assets and future land use options. Alignment with national flood risk frameworks the [The River Basin Management Plan for Scotland](#) and engagement with SEPA and other relevant bodies will be vital to assess the sustainability of coastal sites for development.
- 6.30 HLDP will take a precautionary approach by avoiding new development in areas of known coastal flood risk and supporting adaptation measures where appropriate. This includes considering opportunities for natural coastal defences, such as salt marsh restoration or dune reinforcement, and integrating blue-green infrastructure where feasible and adaptation in flood risk areas to promote changes in use of existing land and buildings from higher to lower vulnerability uses, including water compatible uses. The precautionary approach will also identify areas for safeguarding where fallback maybe required for future coastal flood risk. Further detail on flood risk assessment, mapping and mitigation can be found in **Chapter 7: Flood Risk Management**.

Coastal Erosion

- 6.31 The Dynamic Coast project has carried out detailed analysis over the last few years that provides current evidence of how each distinctive part of our coastline is being affected by coastal change. It identifies that Highland has the highest number of buildings at risk of erosion by 2050 (109 buildings) and includes significant lengths of transport infrastructure, such as 4km of rail lines across 27 locations, likely to be affected by coastal erosion by 2050. This strategic evidence base provides an overview of the extent of coastal erosion and the increased risks of coastal flood risk.
- 6.32 The Council's Regional CCAP (**THC053**) identifies coastal erosion and flood risk around the Highland Council area, with twenty nine of the highest risk locations being considered for potential further investigation and possible development of Local Coastal Change Adaptation Plan.

Developed and Undeveloped Coast

- 6.33 HLDP is required to identify and distinguish between areas of developed and undeveloped coast, so that development in future can be directed away from undeveloped coast unless specific circumstances apply. In 2010, the Council prepared a [Coastal Development Strategy](#), which set out a vision for the sustainable development of the coastline. This strategy was intended to inform both marine and terrestrial planning policy in support of the HwLDP **(THC002)** adopted in 2012. The strategy defines the coastal zone and categorises Highland's coastline into three types; developed coast, undeveloped coast, and isolated coast. These do not align with the binary typology adopted within NPF4.
- 6.34 To ensure this baseline is updated and remains relevant to current policy and environmental challenges, the Council have undertaken new analysis to define the coastal zone, identifying the developed and undeveloped coast which is shown within the Council's [Coastal Zone Mapping](#). Whilst it is acknowledged that The Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 establishes the framework for marine planning, marine licensing and management of development and activities within Scotland's inshore marine region, extending from mean high water springs out to 12 nautical miles offshore. For the purposes of this work the coastal zone has been defined as extending to 1 kilometre inland and 3 nautical miles seaward, aligning with the terrestrial-marine interface relevant to planning. Within this area, the Council have identified areas of developed and undeveloped coast using updated land use and infrastructure data, and have additionally incorporated Dynamic Coast data, including projected coastal erosion layers to 2100, to provide a future focused understanding of coastal change and to inform decision making on development suitability and adaptation needs.

Local Harbours

- 6.35 The Highland Council area is served by an extensive and varied network of marine infrastructure that plays a central role in supporting the regions maritime economy. This includes commercial harbours, ferry terminals, leisure marinas, and small piers and jetties. These facilities are essential for a wide range of activities including fishing, aquaculture, marine transport, freight, tourism, and recreation.
- 6.36 Across the region, there are an estimated 135 harbour related sites. Highland Council itself is responsible for 11 principal harbours, including key working ports such as Lochinver, Kinlochbervie, Portree, and Kyle of Lochalsh. In addition, several major ports and ferry terminals are in operation. Inverness and PoCF support the movement of goods, products and people in and out of the region. PoCF is in the top eleven ports in Scotland serving these functions and enabling significant cruise ship passenger numbers to visit the Highlands. [Scotland's Marine Economic Statistics 2022](#) evidence that all freight water transport traffic

through Highland's ports amounted to 6,463 tonnes, which is the third highest local authority value in Scotland. The region is also home to over 120 natural harbours, anchorages, and marinas, with over 120, many of which service leisure boating or private small-scale access for local communities and visiting vessels.

- 6.37 Several ports within Highland continue to support significant volumes of landings, particularly for demersal species and shellfish. [Scottish Sea Fisheries Statistics](#) evidence that Scrabster is the largest landing port in the region, handling a mix of whitefish, shellfish, and pelagic species, and serving as a base for oil and gas vessels as well as cruise tourism. Kinlochbervie remains an important demersal port, receiving regular landings of whitefish. Lochinver is similarly significant, with a modern harbour complex that attracts vessels from across Scotland and Europe, especially demersal species. Ullapool supports both commercial shellfish fisheries and the busy CalMac ferry service to Stornoway. Portree is a multifunctional harbour supporting fishing, aquaculture, passenger transport, and leisure craft. Mallaig also plays a central role as a fishing and transport hub, with extensive landings of shellfish, aquaculture service traffic, and multiple ferry connections to the Small Isles and Skye. A statistical summary of recent landings at these six key ports is provided in the below table.

Table 6:2 Highland Ports by landing tonnage and value

Port/Harbour	Tonnage	Value(£000's)
Scrabster	16,276	33,289
Kinlochbervie	6,156	13,716
Lochinver	8,381	16,155
Ullapool	12,702	25,474
Portree	1,308	9,415
Mallaig	1,818	7,500
Total	46,641	105,549

- 6.38 Some of these facilities are operated as trust ports, which are a longstanding feature of Scotland's coastal economy. Trust ports are locally rooted organisations that manages key harbour facilities and play a vital role in sustaining coastal communities. They are central to the delivery of inclusive economic growth and lifeline services in our region. They are central to the delivery of inclusive economic growth and lifeline services in our region, with surpluses reinvested directly into local priorities. This reinvestment supports essential infrastructure upgrades, creates and sustains employment, and provides wider community benefits, ensuring that the value generated remains within the area. As such, trust ports are not only important transport and logistics hubs, but also key anchors for resilient, sustainable coastal development.

Coastal Biodiversity and Environmental Designations

- 6.39 While biodiversity and natural places are fully detailed within **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**, it is important to note that the Highland coastline supports much of our rich and varied biodiversity, shaped by its extensive length, diverse habitats, and relatively low levels of development pressure compared to other parts of Scotland. Stretching from sheltered firths to exposed western headlands, the coast includes a range of important habitats such as saltmarshes, sand dunes, machair, cliffs, international mudflats, kelp forests and seagrass beds. Natural designations in coastal locations specifically, are also indicated within the Council's [Coastal Zone Mapping](#).
- 6.40 Protecting and enhancing coastal biodiversity is a key consideration in planning, particularly in the context of climate change, which threatens to alter habitat disruption, increase erosion, and affect species behaviour. The [Scottish Government's draft Biodiversity Planning Guidance](#), which sets out expectations for delivering the policies within National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) that support the cross-cutting outcome of "Improving Biodiversity". This guidance works alongside the Council's [Highland Nature: Biodiversity Action Plan 2016-2026](#) and supports the implementation of NPF4 policies 3 and 4, which require all developments to restore and enhance biodiversity, and, where relevant, to restore degraded habitats and strengthen nature networks.
- 6.41 The guidance provides tailored advice for different types of developments – ranging from local to national, major, and EIA developments – and outlines the application of the mitigation hierarchy, which developers are expected to follow to minimise biodiversity loss and achieve measurable net gains. It emphasises the importance of identifying enhancement opportunities at every stage of the development process. In addition, the Highland Council published its own [Highland Biodiversity Enhancement Planning Guidance](#) in 2024, offering further detail on how to integrate biodiversity improvements into local planning proposals.
- 6.42 It should be noted that aquaculture developments are an exception to the requirement for biodiversity enhancement, whereby under Policy 32 (e) of NPF4, applications for open water farmed finfish or shellfish developments are excluded from the requirements of Policy 3 (b) and 3 (c) and will instead apply all relevant provisions from National and Regional Marine Plans. The forthcoming NMP2 is expected to clarify biodiversity enhancement requirements and help shape future policy on the sector's environmental responsibilities.
- 6.43 The Highland Council [Ecology Strategy and Action Plan](#) seeks to address the ecological emergency and contribute to Scotland's goal of being nature positive by 2030 and restoring biodiversity by 2045. The strategy focuses on managing the Council's estate, influencing others through policy and guidance, and

partnering with communities and stakeholders. The Action plan, adopted in November 2024, outlines specific actions to achieve these goals, emphasizing leadership, creating space for nature, and reducing pollution and details how updated planning policy/actions can help deliver outcomes for improving ecology across the Highlands.

Coastal and Offshore Energy

- 6.44 NPF4's Spatial Planning Priorities for the North – which includes the Highlands - outline that land and sea assets will play an internationally significant role in renewable energy generation and carbon sequestration. The Highland Council Area lies adjacent to several key areas identified for offshore renewable energy development. The Moray Firth wind development zones which have seen extensive leasing activity through ScotWind and future cable landfall and grid infrastructure have implications for the Highland region. The Pentland Firth and Orkney Waters Marine Energy Park are home to the MeyGen tidal energy project, the largest operational tidal stream array, with ongoing expansion potential. These marine energy zones are driving demand for new or expanded coastal infrastructure, including ports, energy transmission corridors, and services bases. Where coastal terrestrial infrastructure is required to support these important developments consideration on location and risk of from climate change and coastal erosion will be considered with a presumption against engineered coastal defences.
- 6.45 While **Chapter 4: Climate and Energy** details the scale of Highland's energy and renewables sector, it is important to note the interface between this and the coastline, given the significant presence of offshore wind, which is evidenced within the Draft Updated Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy SMP-OWE (**THC052**) to continue within the West, North and North East regions, which together encompass Highland's vast coastal area, including the entire north coast of mainland Scotland, Lochaber, the Isle of Skye, and the Moray Firth Area. **THC052** highlights that these regions are home to diverse fishing and aquaculture industries, a high level of shipping (with vessels often supporting the offshore wind industry), lifeline ferry services, designated sites, high-tourism areas, and recreational boating. Expansion of the offshore wind sector is therefore subject to the environmental and socio-economic risks for coastal communities and wildlife such as:
- Displacement of marine mammals
 - Displacement of benthic species
 - Collision or displacement of birds
 - Loss and/or damage of reef habitats
 - Loss and/or damage of subtidal sands and gravels

- Negative economic impacts to shipping from increased fuel costs due to diversion around Option Areas;
- Loss of sea area for recreational angling and water sports
- Reduction in recreational boating activity or increased fuel costs due to diversion around arrays
- Potential Reduction in tourism expenditure
- Potential impacts on wild salmonoids as identified by Scottish Marine Energy Research (ScotMER).

- 6.46 Development proposals for onshore wind have in some instances occurred in coastal locations, as evidenced by the [Highland Energy Planning Applications Map](#), albeit the extent of designated NSAs spanning significant coastal areas on the North and West coasts, precludes wind farm developments in these locations. Notwithstanding, offshore wind developments still require significant terrestrial supporting and ancillary infrastructure which often is necessitated within the coastal zone, such as high-capacity pylon routes, subsea cables, offshore and onshore converter stations, grid connection points, and onshore substations, to transport power using a multi-step process from the coast to existing transmission corridors.
- 6.47 The Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport (ICFGF) include the Port of Cromarty Firth, Nigg, Inverness and Ardersier and additionally Highland Deephaven, brings significant economic and social benefits to local communities in the Highlands as identified in **Chapter 8: Business, Economy, Tourism and Productive Places**. These ports are set to become hubs for renewable energy and green technology, fostering new industries around offshore wind, hydrogen production, and sustainable logistics. These are pipelined to create thousands of high-quality jobs and training opportunities, particularly in engineering, manufacturing, and marine services. By attracting international investment, these freeports will stimulate regional economic growth while adhering to strict environmental standards, ensuring sustainable development.
- 6.48 The firth is also home to a number of internationally designated environmental sites, SPA's, SAC's SSSIs, and Ramsar sites. As highlighted in **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**, how these operations can co-exist with highly sensitive and designated sites any development within or adjacent to, must be planned with the utmost environmental sensitivity. The mitigation hierarchy - avoidance, minimisation, mitigation and compensation – must be embedded from the earliest of stages of project design to ensure adverse effects are minimised to an acceptable level.
- 6.49 Examples are emerging from Green Freeport related operational and management practices to better understand and manage potential impacts have been shared by Ardersier port. The port operator has implemented mandatory

annual surveys covering a range of ecological features, including birds, habitats, and invasive species, as well as weekly external Environmental Clerk of Works (ECoW) audits during construction. Engagement has taken place with statutory consultees such as NatureScot, but also with non-statutory bodies such as the Whale and Dolphin conservation and Butterfly conservation. A six-month practical trial was carried out to identify the most environmentally sensitive method for treating and eradicating *Crassula helmsii*, a problematic invasive species on the site. In addition, weekly seal counts have been initiated at the whiteness sands haul out area to build a clearer understanding of local seal populations; data from these surveys is being shared with Sea Mammal Research Unit and the University of Aberdeen Lighthouse Field Station. Further efforts include additional rounds of monthly wading bird survey – carried out beyond what was required under condition – to improve the understanding of avian use of the area. A significant body of work **(THC082)** has also been dedicated to understanding the effects of capital dredging. This includes the installation of two Guidance Acoustic Buoys (GAB) guardians to monitor real time dolphin movements around the dredge and disposal sites, and collaboration with the University of Aberdeen to deploy passive acoustic monitoring (PAM) devices around the port and on barge transit routes. These PAM devices will remain in place for a year, with the resulting data being analysed and published to enhance knowledge of marine mammal movement and behaviour in relation to marine traffic.

- 6.50 Kishorn Port and Dry Dock located on Loch Kishorn in Wester Ross, is a strategically important coastal industrial site supporting Scotland's offshore energy transition as well as a wide range of marine sectors including aquaculture, oil and gas and shipping maintenance and decommissioning. Originally developed for oil platform fabrication, it has been redeveloped by Kishorn Port Ltd as a modern deep-water port and one of Europe's largest dry dock facilities. The site provides extensive laydown and fabrication, decommissioning of oil and gas infrastructure, and assembly of floating offshore wind foundations. [Scottish Government reported](#) that the facility has been backed by up to £24.3 million of public investment from Highland and Islands Enterprise towards a £42 million expansion, the facility is projected to create substantial regional economic benefits and support up to 1,500 jobs. Kishorn contributes to economic diversification in Wester Ross providing year-round employment, supply chain activity, while co-existing with local tourism, aquaculture, and fishing through established environmental and planning controls.

Coastal Access and Recreation

- 6.51 [Scotland's Marine Economic Statistics 2022](#) evidence that marine and coastal tourism contributed £633 million approximate Gross Value Added to the Scottish economy. The regions coastal environment represents a powerful driver of local

recreation and tourism attracting millions of visitors each year. Visit Scotland provide insights on national level tourism statistics in relation to coastal tourism, while Highland specific evidence from [Visit Scotland's International Tourism Update:2024](#). [Visit Scotland Research Insights for the Highlands](#) indicates that in 2023 the Highlands welcomed 1.79 million overnight visitors, who spent £756 million during their stay. With 1,550 tourism related businesses operating locally and tourism supporting approximately 19,000 jobs, making up 16.2% of total employment in the region, coastal tourism plays a significant role in rural economic activity.

- 6.52 Coastal walking and marine based recreation, including water sports, open water swimming, wildlife watching, sailing, diving, and sea angling remain deeply embedded in both visitor experience and community life across the Highlands. While Highland specific data is limited, national trends indicate that around 20% of all outdoor visits in Scotland take place in coastal locations, a pattern that is reflected locally through sustained demand for access paths, viewpoints and related visitor infrastructure.
- 6.53 Popular long distance routes such as the Great Glen Way, the West Highland Way , the Cape Wrath Trail, the John o' Groats Trail, the Affric Kintail Way, the East Highland Way, the Spey Side Way (partly in Highland), and the South Loch Ness Trail draw significant number of visitors and pass through a variety of coastal and in land landscapes. These trails along with informal and community managed access routes, support growing demand for coastal access while contributing to visitor wellbeing and promoting awareness of the marine environment.
- 6.54 Taken together, coastal access and marine relate recreation make a significant contribution to both the economy and the social resilience of Highland communities. This highlights the need to maintain and improve accessible, well managed coastal paths and supporting infrastructure. It also points to the importance of coherent policy integration across tourism, marine planning, and environmental protection. Developing planning and land use policy that accommodates recreational access while safeguarding coastal ecosystems and local wellbeing will be vital to achieving sustainable growth in the Highland coastal tourism sector. The role and value of tourism is examined in greater detail in **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism, and Productive Places**, which presents key evidence on tourism's economic impact and highlights the importance of nationally significant visitor destinations throughout the region.

Aquaculture

- 6.55 Aquaculture refers to the breeding, rearing or keeping of fish or shellfish including any kind of crustacean or mollusc. It includes the breeding, rearing, and harvesting of species in marine and freshwater environments for commercial,

scientific, or conservation purposes. In Scotland, aquaculture is predominantly focused on the production of Atlantic salmon in marine pens, but also includes shellfish farming, and emerging sectors such as seaweed cultivation. It is a key component of the national blue economy, supporting rural communities, food production, and export markets, while also requiring careful spatial planning to manage environmental impacts and ensure sustainability as evidenced in the [Blue Economy Vision for Scotland](#).

Industry Profile

- 6.56 The Highland region hosts a significant share of Scotland's aquaculture industry, particularly in the production of Atlantic salmon, which is Scotland's and the UK's largest food export reaching £844 million in 2024. The Highlands support a network of finfish farms, shellfish farms, hatcheries, shore bases, and processing facilities across the region including locations in Lochaber, Skye, Wester Ross, Sutherland, and Caithness where many of Highlands vulnerable rural communities are located.
- 6.57 The importance of the aquaculture industry as a major private sector employer in these remote and island communities is demonstrated by the employment opportunities for a vast range of professions, from on-site farm/hatchery/processing operatives to vessel crews, research and development, biologists, veterinarians, environmental specialists, communications and human resources, finance and administration, engineering, logistics, marketing and sales. As well as this direct employment, the aquaculture industry also supports a further 10,000 jobs in the wider Scottish supply chain.
- 6.58 Supporting the local economy and small business across the Highland's should also be recognised with an estimated £49 million spent annually **(THC054)** on goods and services from local suppliers. The spend includes a wide range of sectors such as equipment manufacturers, haulage, fuel supply, vehicle and boat services, as well as analytical and veterinary support. Companies are strongly committed to sourcing locally wherever possible, recognising the importance of reinvesting in the communities where they operate. This spending sustains local jobs, supports small and specialist businesses, and brings economic stability to remote, rural, and often vulnerable areas, helping to maintain population levels and community resilience. By embedding themselves within the regional supply chain they contribute to not just to local economies, but to the wider social and economic wellbeing of the Highlands.
- 6.59 The aquaculture industry also plays an important role in supporting socioeconomic wellbeing of many rural and coastal communities across the Highland region. Fuller evidence on Community Wealth Building is detailed within **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism & Productive Places**, but it is evidence

that the aquaculture sector play a vital role in this regard. Many operators regularly financially contribute to local communities through sponsorship and donations. This includes funding for community groups, support for local events, and sponsorship of both adult and youth sports team, helping promote health, wellbeing, and social cohesion in areas where opportunities for organised recreation can be limited. Some companies have also contributed to local mental health initiatives and charities, recognising the particular challenges faced by isolated and rural populations.

- 6.60 In addition to financial support, aquaculture businesses have provided a further community benefit through practical contributions and voluntary efforts. Examples include sponsoring and participating in beech cleans, improving access to defibrillators in remote locations, and supporting the upgrading of local infrastructure such as piers, slipways, and harbours used by the wider community. In some areas, companies have also contributed toward the enhancing of digital connectivity by supporting broadband access in rural settlements. Many companies actively encourage their employees to volunteer for community benefit projects, including retained firefighters, coastguard personnel, or RNLI crew members – roles that are essential to the safety and resilience of remote coastal communities. These contributions, while not formally recognised within the planning process, form a valuable part of the industry's overall impact and help to sustain the long-term viability and liveability of remote coastal areas.
- 6.61 Shellfish aquaculture is long established and environmentally sustainable component of the Highland coastal economy. The region supports a significant share of Scotland's small to medium scale shellfish farming thanks to the regions long, indented coastline, clean waters, and sheltered sea lochs that provide suitable conditions for shellfish farming, particularly along the west coast, Lochaber, Wester Ross, Skye and Sutherland. Mussels and Pacific Oysters remain the dominant species grown with some cultivation of queen scallops and razor clams.
- 6.62 While finfish aquaculture in the Highlands tends to operate at a larger, commercial scale, shellfish farming is predominantly undertaken by smaller, often family run enterprises. These businesses make a meaningful contribution to local employment, rural diversification, and the provision of high quality, locally sourced seafood, aligning closely with national objectives for future nature-positive and community supported blue economy.
- 6.63 There are approximately 76 licensed marine and freshwater finfish sites and 52 active shellfish farming businesses within the Highland region (**THC439**). Future demand for food, particularly sustainable sources of protein, is set to rise sharply as the global population approaches 10 billion by 2050. The Highland region is well placed to contribute to meeting this demand through environmentally

responsible aquaculture. Shellfish and finfish farming in the Highlands offer a lower environmental footprint than many land based protein systems, using less land, freshwater, and producing significantly less greenhouse gas emissions. Shellfish farming, in particular, requires no feed or fertiliser inputs and can enhance water quality and biodiversity. As global markets increasingly favour climate-smart, traceable seafood, Highland aquaculture – especially when aligned with innovation and sustainability standards – has a clear role to play in the future food system and the future of the Highlands.

Environment

- 6.64 The aquaculture industry operates within one of the most environmentally sensitive and heavily designated coastal landscapes in the UK. Much of the regions west coast, where aquaculture is concentrated, overlaps with multiple statutory conservation designations detailed in **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**, including SACs, SPAs, SSSIs, MPAs, and NSAs. These designations, while essential for protecting biodiversity and landscape character; as explained in [NatureScot Guidance on Landscape/Seascape Capacity for Aquaculture](#), create a complex and highly constrained planning environment, requiring detailed assessments of ecological and visual impacts, including cumulative impacts on qualifying features of these designations. All aquaculture proposals in or near designated sites must demonstrate that they will not adversely affect the integrity of protected features; as explained in NatureScot's [Siting and Design of Aquaculture in the Landscape](#) and [Visualisations for aquaculture - guidance note](#). While aquaculture operations can and do operate alongside highly sensitive environmental designations, this inevitably introduces additional complexity, which in turn may lead operators to focus on optimising or expanding their current sites as a means of supporting facility growth and business development.
- 6.65 Finfish Farms are required to undertake routine environmental monitoring as a condition of their regulatory approvals, with a strong emphasis on benthic impact assessments, sea lice monitoring, and evaluations of interactions with wild fish populations and wider ecosystem receptors. Seabed monitoring, governed by SEPA's Controlled Activities Regulations (CAR) permits, and from November 2025 the Environmental Authorisation (Scotland) Regulations 2018 as amended (EAsR), involves sediment grab sampling and analysis of benthic faunal composition, to assess the effects of organic waste deposition on the seabed. Where grab sampling is problematic, due to the presence of hard substrate areas or protected marine features (PMF's), visual surveys can be used to inform the operator and SEPA. Sediment sampling and analysis of residues is also required by SEPA authorisations which include the use of in-feed medicines. In addition, the industry is obliged to monitor sea lice levels on farmed fish and report these to the Marine Directorate on a weekly basis, with thresholds triggering mandatory

mitigation actions or harvesting. Increasingly, environmental data gathering extends to wild fish monitoring and parasite dispersal to understand interactions between farms and migratory species.

- 6.66 The finfish and shellfish industries are among the most tightly regulated food sectors in Scotland. From early stage of production, shellfish operators must comply with rigorous public health and environmental standards. Before shellfish sites can become operational, they must be classified by Food Standards Scotland, which involves extensive monitoring of water quality to ensure it meets microbiological standards. Only sites classified as A or B are permitted for harvesting, with Class A sites allowing direct sale and Class B sites requiring purification before market. Once in production, operators must comply with a programme of official control monitoring, including routine sampling for biotoxins, *E. coli*, and harmful phytoplankton. The shellfish industry is also subject to wider regulatory controls: The Marine Directorate issues licences for farm developments, SEPA regulates activities under Controlled Activities Regulations, and where relevant Local Authorities may have roles in planning and environmental health. From spat collection to market ready product, the industry must also comply with traceability and hygiene rules under food safety legislation. Collectively these frameworks ensure that shellfish products are safe for consumers and that the industry remains environmentally sustainable despite growing external pressures.
- 6.67 The industry also plays a direct and proactive role in marine environmental research and collaborative monitoring, often working with regulatory bodies, local authorities, academic institutes and NGO's. For finfish, examples include participation adaptive management frameworks for MPA's, regional sea lice risk of long-term environmental evidence, seabed image and mapping, regional sea lice risk modelling, and multi stakeholder data sharing. For shellfish, this includes oyster restoration projects, research into biotoxin testing and mussel spat settlement. These initiatives contribute to a growing body of environmental evidence, which is increasingly being used to improve regulatory practices and better understand long-term impacts.
- 6.68 Given this evolving and evidence rich context, it is important to recognise that Policy 50 (Aquaculture) of the HwLDP, adopted in 2012, is now 13 years of age. It was developed prior to significant advancement in aquaculture science, regulatory reform, and industry led monitoring, and lacks alignment with more ambitious and sustainability-focused requirements of NPF4 Policy 32. As such, the new LDP presents an important opportunity to acknowledge and integrate the environmental evidence base generated by sector in recent years. This includes both regulatory compliance data and collaborative monitoring, which can support more informed and spatially nuanced policy, improve community understanding,

and ensure that planning decisions reflect the current state of knowledge and practice within the Aquaculture industry.

Biodiversity

- 6.69 While shellfish farming is widely recognised as environmentally beneficial, improving water quality, enhancing biodiversity, while supporting healthy ecosystem functioning without the need for feed additives, or chemical inputs. The finfish aquaculture sector has also expressed a strong and growing desire to contribute meaningfully to biodiversity enhancement **(THC083)** and have contacted both Local Authorities, NatureScot and engaged with local communities for guidance and suggestions on biodiversity net gain projects that would most benefit the local area where the farms are located. Industry stakeholders have acknowledged the importance of nature restoration and climate resilience and are increasingly seeking guidance on how to align operations with biodiversity goals – not only to meet regulatory expectations but to actively support ecosystems health and encourage public trust.
- 6.70 Although as previously mentioned, NPF4 Policy 32 (e) exempts open-water aquaculture developments from the requirements of Policy 3(b) and 3(c) which apply to biodiversity enhancement and the restoration of degraded habitats in terrestrial and coastal planning context. Instead, aquaculture is expected to align with relevant policy provisions in the upcoming NMP2, which is anticipated to set out clearer expectations for biodiversity, ecosystem health, and climate resilience in the marine environment.
- 6.71 Despite this exemption, many finfish aquaculture operators across the Highlands are already engaging in voluntary biodiversity, often going beyond statutory requirements. Some projects include the creation of native woodland in collaboration with Scottish Forestry and the Scottish Government where 112,000 native broadleaved trees have been planted across 102 hectares near Loch Ainort in Skye. The wild fisheries fund is a 5-year initiative through which the aquaculture industry body invests £1.5 million to support Scotland's wild fisheries. The fund has provided significant backing to major programmes such as the West Coast Tracking Project, alongside a diverse range of local projects focused on habitat restoration, addressing interactions between wild and farmed fish, and delivering targeted infrastructure improvements. Some producers have committed to conduct salmonoid riparian habitat improvement projects whereby improvements are focussed upon increasing the carrying capacity of nearby rivers as breeding habitat for salmonoids. There is a growing desire from the sector for guidance on what meaningful contributions to biodiversity look like in practice, and how best to align their operations with the wider agenda for nature restoration and climate adaptation.

- 6.72 To support this positive direction, HLDP should set out a clear, locally tailored policy framework for biodiversity in aquaculture. While national marine policy will provide overarching guidance, local policy can guide enhancements to areas where they are most needed, offer practical expectations and facilitate collaborative working with regulators, communities and environmental bodies. By recognising and encouraging industry leadership in biodiversity can ensure these efforts are supported and aligned with broader planning objectives.
- 6.73 A well-structured local policy will give confidence to developers and transparency to communities, enabling aquaculture to continue its role in the regional economy while contributing meaningfully to Scotland's biodiversity and climate goals.

Innovation

- 6.74 The Aquaculture sector in the Highlands is increasingly focused on innovation, particularly in relation to environmental monitoring and operational sustainability. Industry representatives have indicated that future technological development is likely to prioritise systems that improve understanding and management of environmental risks.
- 6.75 In recent years, production has been affected by events such as harmful algae blooms and micro-jellyfish swarms, both of which can have serious impacts on fish health and survival. As a result, there will be an operational requirement for exploring the use of early warning systems and continuous water quality monitoring technologies to detect the presence of harmful species and changes in environmental conditions.
- 6.76 There is also consideration surrounding the use of semi-closed containment pen systems as part of combating these environmental challenges. These advancing technologies offer a range of potential benefits, including reducing interactions between farmed and wild fish, improving control over water quality, and minimising the discharge of organic waste and sea lice into the wider marine environment. By providing a greater degree of separation from the surrounding ecosystem, semi closed systems can enhance environmental performance while also supporting fish health and operational efficiency. Although still an emerging approach, their wider use could play an important role in enabling sustainable expansion of the industry, helping balance economic development with the protection of sensitive marine environments.
- 6.77 There is also a growing interest in the application of AI powered systems that monitor fish behaviour and environmental parameters to support fish health management. In parallel, companies are trialling renewable energy technologies,

including tidal and off grid power solutions, to reduce reliance on diesel generators and improve the sustainability of remote operations.

6.78 While these developments are largely being led by industry, there is a clear role for policy in supporting innovation. This includes ensuring that planning policy is flexible enough to accommodate the temporary or pilot infrastructure often required for research and development purposes. Planning policy can also support the integration of new technology by facilitating cooperation with other regulators and by recognising the need for space and conditions that allow for environmental monitoring, trialling of new systems, and infrastructure upgrades.

6.79 A supportive policy environment can help reduce barriers to testing and adopting new technologies, while also guiding innovation toward areas of strategic importance such as climate resilience, biodiversity improvement, and fish health.

Future Growth

6.80 SEPA's Finfish Aquaculture Sector Plan and the Scottish Government's Vision for Sustainable Aquaculture in Scotland set out a vision for sustainable aquaculture nationally. Consultation with industry representatives has indicated a range of anticipated future development needs to support sustainable growth of aquaculture in the Highland region. Finfish Aquaculture will see a number of new farm sites being proposed, the primary focus is expected to be on the expansion of existing farms, and consolidation of operations – typically resulting in fewer but larger and more efficient pen systems.

6.81 Some operators have also identified the potential for relocating farms to more exposed, higher energy, open water sites which may offer environmental benefits such as improved water exchange and resilience to rising temperatures. In addition, the sector is attracting newer business operators, that are trialling semi-closed containment systems within the Highland region. These shifts are being considered in response to environmental pressures and the need for greater operational efficiency.

6.82 In parallel, there is a requirement in some areas for the expansion of onshore support infrastructure including processing facilities in order to meet projected demand and maintain supply chain efficiency. The siting and upgrading of these facilities may require policy recognition of their operational links to coastal farm sites and their wider role in supporting rural economies and ensuring future food security.

6.83 Shellfish Aquaculture anticipates a shift in farm locations and operational practices driven by the impact of climate change. With sea level rise and rising water temperature, increased storm frequency, and changing coastal dynamics, there is a growing expectation that sites will move into more sheltered, inshore

areas or that existing farms will require reorientation to maintain viability. To support this evolving operational model, the industry has identified a need for improved cold chain infrastructure. This includes ensuring that harbours, some of which are used by shellfish operators, are equipped with ice production and storage facilities as well as suitable landing and handling infrastructure. Additionally, future infrastructure will require support from well-located shore bases that accommodate grading, packaging and dispatch activities. These facilities must also be supported by reliable and appropriate access routes to facilitate efficient transport and logistics. Such infrastructure will be essential to ensure the long-term resilience and growth of the sector while ensuring this form of development has an adaptive approach to ensure that adequate land is available to enable fallback should this be required.

- 6.84 The aquaculture industry has expressed a clear ambition for sustainable future growth. Planning policy has a role in managing this growth responsibly by supporting well designed development that aligns with national climate and nature recovery goals. This requires meaningful engagement with industry, regulators, communities, and environmental stakeholders to ensure that planning frameworks not only protect the environment but also enable a vital rural industry to thrive alongside the communities it supports.

Summary of Stakeholder Engagement

- 6.85 A full breakdown of all stakeholder engagement undertaken to support the Evidence Report is provided within the **Statement of Engagement**. A summary of the key stakeholder engagement activities undertaken for this chapter include:

Stakeholders and Key Agencies

- 6.86 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 and other stakeholders on 31 August 2025, which included:
- NatureScot
 - SEPA
 - Marine Directorate
 - Fishery Management Scotland
 - Harbour representatives
 - Moray Firth Coastal Partnership
 - Historic Environment Scotland
 - Crown Estate

- Scottish Association of Marine Science
- Salmon Scotland
- Aquaculture Operatives
- Association of Scottish Shellfish Growers
- Scottish Seaweed Association
- Visit Scotland
- Inverness and Cromarty Green Freeport
- Highlands and Islands Enterprise

6.87 A summary of feedback received includes:

- **SEPA:** No further comments to make on Chapter 6. **Council Response:** Noted. **(THC089)**
- **Fisheries Management Scotland:** Would like included in section 6.45 wild salmonoids as an example. **Council Response:** Noted and included "Diadromous Fish ScotMER Receptor Group" included in evidence. **(THC036)**
- **Marine Directorate:** No further comments to make. **Council Response:** Noted **(THC038)**

Bakkafrost Scotland (THC075)

Main views raised	Confirms overall the chapter reflects comments made during the engagement sessions held at the evidence gathering stage. Note in section 6.70 that the Highland LDP should set out a clear, locally tailored policy framework for biodiversity in aquaculture aligned with national guidance (noting that there are now expected to be delays in progress of implementation of NMP2) and must be informed by science. There appears to be an imbalance throughout the chapter, with very detailed information provided for aquaculture/ fisheries, but less detailed information provided for other coastal industries. It is encouraging that a high level of topical information is provided on aquaculture, however caution needs to be exercised, as information can quickly become outdated, and other mechanisms for HC staff to keep up to date with aquaculture industry developments should be supported. We note that the Lochalsh Local Place Plan is referenced, including the following priority 'fish farming on Loch Carron should avoid/ reduce pollution, conserve nationally significant natural habitats and preserve residential amenity'. It is noted that interactions with nationally

	significant natural habitats are already covered by existing regulations, which should inform HC decisions in this respect.
Council's response	All points noted. This chapter presents evidence relevant to both Policy 10 – Coastal Development and Policy 32 – Aquaculture. It addresses finfish aquaculture, shellfish aquaculture, seaweed cultivation, ports and local harbours, coastal and offshore energy, ICFGF, and coastal tourism. For each sector, the chapter provides an overview of the industry, outlines its contribution to both the local and national economy, and considers how the Local Development Plan can best support them through a robust, evidence-based policy framework. Stakeholder engagement has been carried out consistently across all the industries covered in this chapter. This has included meetings, questionnaires, and surveys, with the data gathered forming a key part of the evidence base that has informed the analysis and conclusions presented here. While the scope encompasses a wide range of coastal industries and activities, the primary focus remains on coastal development and aquaculture. As highlighted at the outset and reiterated throughout, the chapter also touches on activities that take place on, or have an effect on, the coast. It should therefore be read in conjunction with other chapters of the full evidence report—such as Chapter 8: Business, Economy, Tourism & Productive Places and Chapter 4: Climate Change & Energy—for a comprehensive understanding. Whilst it is acknowledged and agreed that interactions with nationally significant habitats are covered by existing regulations, it does not automatically negate the relevance of local plan priorities or override the planning authority's duty to assess planning merits, including impacts on amenity, habitats, and cumulative effects as part of the planning balance.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of agreement has been provided (THC075).
Proposed plan implications	None.
Actions for proposed plan stage	None.

Cromarty Harbour (THC076)	
Main views raised	1. Confusion could arise from our reference to the Port of Cromarty Firth throughout the chapter and suggested that this be defined as Port of Cromarty Firth (PoCF). 2. Would like to see reference of the struggle historic harbours have in maintaining depth by regular dredging due to costs and licences.
Council's response	1. Noted and agreed. 2. We note concern raised regarding the costs associated with regular dredging and maintenance licensing, particularly for smaller harbours. While we recognise the importance of these activities for safe and effective harbour operations, this matter sits out with the scope of the Local Development Plan. Responsibility for dredging and associated marine licensing lies with the Marine Directorate.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of agreement has been provided (THC076).
Proposed plan implications	None.
Actions for proposed plan stage	None.
Historic Environment Scotland (THC035)	
Main views raised	Recommend that we include their Guidance note on Managing Change in the historic environment conserving underwater heritage in this chapter or to Historic Assets, Brownfield Land, and Empty Buildings Chapter.
Council's response	Noted and agreed. The Council agrees to include their Guidance Note on Managing Change in the historic environment conserving underwater heritage within chapter 6.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of agreement has been provided (THC035).

Proposed plan implications	None.
Actions for proposed plan stage	None.
Highlands and Islands Enterprise (THC080)	
Main views raised	1. Would like us to include an acknowledgement that activities at sea require support from land based infrastructure and services. 2. Would like to see within the developed and undeveloped coast paragraph acknowledgement that development activity and potential development extends out to 12 nautical miles, ensuring alignment with marine planning. 3. When discussing local harbours, they would like to see the development challenges addressed highlighting industries they serve, capacity constraints as well as opportunities for future investment and expansion. 4. The environment paragraph should also recognise emerging business models such as semi-closed containment systems as these systems are increasingly being considered as within the sector and have a potential to address some of the environmental and spatial pressures. 5. Supportive of biodiversity section and confirm that developers need to encourage investment is surety and clarity on policy. 6. In the future growth section should include semi-closed containment should be noted as important innovation. 7. The future growth section should include semi-closed containment as important innovation. 8. Under stakeholder and key agencies section HIE would like the list expanded to include HIE, Scottish Seaweed Industry Association, crown estate Scotland and British Trout Association.
Council's response	1. Referenced throughout this chapter is acknowledgement that activities at sea require support from land base infrastructure. (6.37, 6.44, 6.81, 6.82). 2. The "Developed and Undeveloped Coast" section is intended to focus on planning on the coastal frontage and land-based development, however we have included reference to development activities extending out to 12nm. 3. Challenges facing harbours and ports are discussed in the 6.89. 4. Noted and have included in section 6.75. 5. Noted. 6. Noted and we have included this within section 6.75.

	7. Noted and now included in section 6.80. 8. The Scottish Seaweed Association is already included, HIE now added. Fishery Management Scotland, who's remit includes trout, were consulted. The council agrees with points 4, 6 and 7 and the chapter has been updated to reflect these changes.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of agreement has been provided (THC080) .
Proposed plan implications	None.
Actions for proposed plan stage	None.
Scrabster Harbour (THC078)	
Main views raised	1. Confirms the chapter accurately reflects the role of Scrabster harbour. 2. Would like the chapter to recognise this role, protect and allocate suitable quayside and laydown areas, and support infrastructure such as heavy lift capacity, deep water berths, and expanded grid connectivity. 3. Would like the plan to include anticipated visitor infrastructure needs; transport interchange, coach parking, and enhanced passenger welcome facilities in coordination with the tourism strategy in Chapter 8. 4. Current marine licencing and dredge spoil disposal are costly and slow and would like to see the plan have policy support for streamlined marine works planning and disposal licensing for trust ports that service national supply chains. 5. Would like to include safeguarding of both economic activity and lifeline services by prioritising Scrabster in the Coastal Change Adaptation Plan actions, including infrastructure hardening, coastal defences, and flood mitigation, with particular focus on protecting the route to the harbour via the A9. 6. Would like to include recognition that trust ports deliver inclusive economic growth and lifeline services by reinvesting surpluses back into local infrastructure, jobs, and services.
Council's response	1. Noted.

	2. Noted. However, the forthcoming Call for Ideas will provide an opportunity to identify and reserve specific sites for potential development. 3. The link that tourism has with pressure on infrastructures is detailed within Chapter 8. 4. While we recognise the importance of these activities for safe and effective harbour operations, this matter sits out with the scope of the Local Development Plan. Responsibility for dredging and associated marine licensing lies with the Marine Directorate. 5. As outlined in the RCCAP, a local CCAP will be prepared to provide a framework for examining the highest risk areas in greater detail. It will include updated information on the types of risks, assets at risks, potential short-term mitigation measures, and a plan for long term adaptation and community resilience. The comments from Scrabster harbour have been forwarded to the FRMT, who are responsible for preparing these local CCAP's. 6. Noted and now included in section 6.38.
Outstanding issues	None.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of agreement has been provided (THC078) .
Proposed plan implications	None.
Actions for proposed plan stage	None.
Scottish Seafarms (THC079)	
Main views raised	1. Agree that the HwLDP Policy 50 should be updated to align with NPF4 Policy 32 but observed that priorities for climate change mitigation, adaptation, and nature recovery are contained within separate policies rather than within the aquaculture policy. 2. The sentence "terrestrial marine interface relevant to planning" should be updated to include a reference to this now extended to 12nm. 3. Would like the phrase in section 6.54 "aquaculture refers to the farming of aquatic organisms" align with the definition of development in the Planning (Scotland) act. Seaweed is not included in this definition

and should not be covered in the same context as other aquaculture within the planning process.

4. In section 6.58 the phrase “while not formally recognised with the planning process” could be perceived negatively. Acknowledge that and agree that the examples given are not material planning considerations but suggest rewording the statement for clarity.

5. In section 6.61 when discussing shellfish, it is unclear if the number quoted refers to active shellfish businesses or licenced sites.

6. Would like the statement in 6.62 “the spatial footprint for new finfish or shellfish farms is increasingly limited” be removed. Many farms currently co exists within designated sites following the HRA process and do not adversely affect site integrity. Therefore, the presence of conservation designations does not inherently limit the spatial footprint for development.

7. Would like finfish aquaculture acknowledged within section 6.64 where it has been said that the shellfish industry is the most tightly regulated food sector in Scotland, that the same is true for finfish aquaculture.

8. Agree with the principal of biodiversity enhancement in the local context but highlighted the following points

1. lack of policy guidance tailored to the marine environment and no clear framework for evaluating enhancement success, nor for determining the acceptability of measures in decision making.
2. Currently there is a lack of monitoring and spatial mapping to guide where biodiversity enhancement efforts should be prioritised which presents a challenge when trying to ensure that are ecologically appropriate and targeted to areas with the highest potential for success.
3. For developer led enhancement projects the regulatory process is complex with different permissions, licences and permits required. Onsite projects could impact site operations and infrastructure such as moorings and anchors, depositional footprints and benthic compliance monitoring transects for grab sampling and would require appropriate environmental conditions such as habitat, depth and hydrodynamic forces to support the target species for enhancement.
4. Off-site enhancement or financial contributions to third party enhancement funds is likely to be more practical. Discuss community preferences often favour hyper local initiatives, that may not always align with the ecological requirements of target species or the practical realities of restoration. They note that marine restoration success is highly dependent on-site specific conditions, and hyper local projects may struggle to secure adequate funding or achieve ecological viability.

Strategic, regionally scaled initiatives that are ecologically appropriate

	are more likely to deliver meaningful biodiversity outcomes and offer greater feasibility. 9. Clarification in section 6.74 where there is mention of a requirement for early warning systems as to whether this is a policy or operational requirement. 10. Concerns with regards to wording in section 6.104. The provisions of community benefit are voluntary, is not a material planning consideration, and has no bearing in the planning process. Planning obligations may be used under S75 of the TCPA 1997 (as amended) to mitigate negative impacts of development by providing necessary infrastructure or facilities, however there are strict policy tests around their use. 11. General comment was made around Local place plans and SSF willingness to be involved in the preparation of the plans and requested that their contact details be passed onto any CC currently preparing these plans within the areas they currently operate.
Council's response	1. Priorities for the climate and nature crisis whilst fully addressed within their own policies and chapters, should also be reflected and acknowledged in all chapters and topics of the evidence report. 2. This sentence is within the developed and undeveloped coast section and refers how we have defined the coastal zone within our coastal zone mapping, we have added a sentence to define wider marine development. 3. Noted and agreed. 4. Noted. 5. The sentence begins by giving the number of licenses before the number of shellfish businesses. 6. Noted and updated. 7. Noted and updated. 8. Noted. 9. Noted and updated. 10. This section is intended to acknowledge the feedback given by industry and communities on wider pressures, particularly the limited availability of housing and the need for supporting infrastructure and services. The purpose of this reference is to acknowledge the opportunity for further dialogue on how the planning system, working in partnership with operators and stakeholders, might help to address these shared challenges. This includes exploring ways in which improvements to housing, infrastructure and services could provide mutual benefits for both operators and the communities in which they are located. Continued engagement with industry will be central to ensuring any future approach is supportive and proportionate.

	11. We would encourage SSF to approach and engage with the local CC's at an early stage to assist in the preparation of any LPP are being prepared.
Outstanding issues	None.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of agreement has been provided (THC079) .
Proposed plan implications	None.
Actions for proposed plan stage	None.
NatureScot (THC088)	
Main views raised	Confirmed that they are satisfied with the approach taken for the evidence report. Confirmed that their comments previously given under the emerging evidence have been summarised within this chapter and are content that their comments have been addressed and agree that the evidence presented in Chapter 6 will be sufficient in matters relevant to NatureScot.
Council's response	Noted and agree with points made.
Outstanding issues	None.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of agreement has been provided (THC088) .
Proposed plan implications	None.
Actions for proposed plan stage	None.
THC Flood Risk Management Team (THC037)	
Main views raised	Requested that NPF4 policy requirements should refer to coastal erosion as well as flooding. Ensure consistency in the title of THC RCCAP throughout the chapter.

	Under policy requirements, section 6.4, should include the impacts of coastal erosion and consideration should be given to provide support for future retreat. In section 6.6 concern over terminology used and question over the scenario if we can not safeguard due to erosion. Section 6.30 should also mention adaptation in flood risk areas to promote changes in use of existing land/buildings from higher vulnerability including water compatible uses. The precautionary approach should also identify areas for safeguarding where fallback/retreat may be required to respond to future coastal flood risk. Would like to see reference in section 6.31, 6.32 or 6.34 to the precautionary approach and avoidance. Section 6.44 should reference the adaptation and resilience seen in other sections, such as the presumption against engineered coastal defences to enable development. Consideration should also be given to how we promote this development with sustainability and climate change impacts in mind. Question over how we would build in resilience and adaptation in relation to the shellfish industry's need for shore bases and infrastructure in light of future climate change, increased flood risk and coastal erosion. Section 6.99 This section should also refer to ensuring an adaptive approach to help increase resilience and ensure that land is available to enable landward retreat.
Council's response	All points noted, additions and changes made where required.
Outstanding issues	None.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of agreement has been provided (THC037) .
Proposed plan implications	None.
Actions for proposed plan stage	None.

Summary of Local Place Plan Priorities

- 6.88 Black Isle Local Place Plan (**THC011**) has identified the following priorities relating to Coastal Development and Aquaculture:
- Need for coastal management/protection, marine habitat restoration/recovery, flood/erosion protection for coastal and other settlements, nature networks creating from river catchment sources to coastal zones, including the River Conon (a salmon breeding river).
 - Aim of net zero, resilient & sustainable community, regenerate biodiversity.
 - Green Freeport should protect & restore of marine/terrestrial habitats & mitigation of predicted impacts of sea level rise.
 - Independent environmental baseline survey & long-term monitoring should be in place before work starts so positive impacts of Green Freeport can be demonstrated & any potential adverse impacts in terms of noise (including low frequency noise), water, light and air quality can be mitigated.
 - Green Freeport will have to deliver projects creating positive biodiversity
 - Conservation & restoration of Black Isle's environment, including marine areas, is central element of Plan, including ongoing seagrass/oyster project.
- 6.89 Broadford and Strath Local Place Plan (**THC012**) has identified the following priorities relating to Coastal Development and Aquaculture:
- Coastal landscape & rich marine ecosystem underpins a blue economy including fishing, aquaculture and marine tourism here.
 - Challenge includes climate change adaptation (increasing sea level rise & flood risk). Vital that build up resilience to withstand future shocks, including future pandemics, extreme weather events and rising sea levels.
- 6.90 Dores and Essich Local Place Plan (**THC013**) has identified the following priorities relating to Coastal Development and Aquaculture:
- The beach at Dores enables access to loch for amenity purposes and is a popular spot for general amenity and water sports activities.
 - Higher proportion of individuals that work in agriculture forestry/fishing sector (6.9%) and construction (11.2%) compared to Highland and Scotland.
- 6.91 Duror and Kentallen Local Place Plan (**THC014**) has identified the following priorities relating to Coastal Development and Aquaculture:
- Historically farming & fishing community, still an active farming community.
 - New marine conservation group (MaCCOLL) actively working to promote and preserve local coast and marine habitats.
 - Opportunities to preserve & protect marine environment of Loch Linnhe.
 - Lack of marine and other environmental protections in the area.
 - Concerns over water & air quality especially with possibility of new fish farm.

- Proposal to rewild river & coastal habitats, discourage further industrial development (e.g. fish farms) in the area.

6.92 Gairloch Local Place Plan (**THC015**) has identified the following priorities relating to Coastal Development and Aquaculture:

- Traditional industries (fishing) continue alongside new aquaculture ventures.
- Protect green spaces from overdevelopment including preserving unique marine habitats and enhance environmental protection.

6.93 Lochalsh Local Place Plan (**THC018**) has identified the following priorities relating to Coastal Development and Aquaculture:

- Fish farms on Loch Carron/Carrann should avoid/reduce pollution, conserve nationally significant natural habitat, & preserve residential amenity.
- Many settlements positioned on coastline & main arterial roads run along coast. Coupled with fragile land & marine ecosystems, aware biodiversity & communities will be impacted by climate change & rising sea levels.

6.94 Torridon and Kinlochewe Local Place Plan (**THC020**) has identified the following priorities relating to Coastal Development and Aquaculture:

- Consider what needs to be done to preserve or regenerate the local seabed.
- Flood risk impact needs to be considered in future developments, actions may be required to reduce impact on settlements. Roads covered by sea during high tides, heavy rains & storms e.g. in Inveralligin, Fasaig & Diabaig.
- Plans for Loch Torridon will be developed jointly with communities in the SCC area. Loch is part of Wester Ross Biosphere marine transition zone & restoring seabed, reversing loss of marine life & improving fish farms so they are not so damaging to environment are critical protection issues.
- cross area community project to survey, monitor & share knowledge of loch's marine habitats, in particular, Maerl beds need protecting as an endangered keystone species on which many other species depend.
- Fish farm development and management on Loch Torridon and Loch Diabaig should require strong community engagement and partnership.
- Aspiration that Loch Diabaig could be community owned or managed. Long-term aspiration to use Loch Diabaig as working 'seacraft'.
- Consider flood risk prevention through natural flood risk management and adaptation. To protect coastal assets and strengthen resilience to flood risk.

6.95 Nairnshire Local Place Plan (**THC023**) has identified the following priorities relating to Coastal Development:

- Requirement for effective flood defences, natural & affordable solutions required to mitigate against coastal and river flooding.
- Comprehensive flood management techniques & emergency planning.

- Investments in infrastructure inc. upgrading drainage systems, reinforcing riverbanks, reinforcing & supplementing dunes, implementing SuDS that can withstand extreme weather events are essential.
- 6.96 Caol Local Place Plan (**THC024**) has identified the following priorities relating to coastal development:
- Maintaining a clean and enjoyable shore and beach.
 - Continuation of new flood defence path.
- 6.97 Golspie Local Place Plan (**THC021**) has identified the following priorities relating to coastal development:
- Address the immediate risk from coastal flooding by incorporating nature based solutions.
 - Improve the quality of public and recreational spaces along the shoreline creating a multifunctional shoreline.
 - Repair, maintain and expand the coastal path and seafront walkway networks.
 - Explore the potential for a tidal energy scheme in any future Regional Coastal Change Adaptation Plan and the potential for off shore breakwaters.
- 6.98 Kyle of Sutherland Local Place Plan (**THC028**) has identified the following priorities relating to coastal development:
- Planting of trees as a natural coastal flood defence.
- 6.99 Morvern Local Place Plan (**THC027**) has identified the following priorities relating to coastal development:
- Exploring options to adapt to erosion caused by rising sea level.
 - Explore nature-based solutions to guard against coastal flooding.
 - Encourage development at the marina and support development by upgrading water infrastructure.
- 6.100 Sleat Local Place Plan (**THC025**) has identified the following priorities relating to coastal development and aquaculture:
- Improving infrastructure for small boats and vessels.
 - Produce an Aquaculture development framework
 - Advocate for marine environment protection measures that balance
- 6.101 The following Local Place Plans have not identified priorities relating to Coastal Development and Aquaculture: Ardgour Local Place Plan (**THC010**), Croy and Tornagrain Local Place Plan (**THC026**), Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Local Place Plan (**THC022**), Garve and District Local Place Plan (**THC016**), Glen Urquhart Local Place Plan (**THC029**), Kinlochleven Local Place Plan (**THC017**) and Stratherrick and Foyers Local Place Plan (**THC019**).

Summary of Implications for the Proposed Plan

- 6.102 The HLDP must adopt a proactive approach to coastal change, ensuring that new development is directed away from vulnerable areas of flood risk and coastal erosion to help increase resilience and ensure land is available to allow for coastal retreat. These vulnerable areas will be informed by the Regional Coastal Change Adaptation Plan (CCAP) **THC053**.
- 6.103 HLDP will integrate flood risk mapping and climate projections into proposed policy. New development will be directed to lower-risk areas and required to include flood resilience measures. The HLDP will take a precautionary approach, should this be required, by avoiding new development in areas of known coastal flood risk and supporting adaptation measures where appropriate. This includes considering opportunities for natural coastal defences, such as salt marsh restoration or dune reinforcement, and integrating blue-green infrastructure into coastal communities where feasible.
- 6.104 The HLDP will be informed by the recent mapping work undertaken by the Council in identifying developed and undeveloped coast and will continue to apply a strong presumption against development in the undeveloped coast, ensuring coastal character and natural processes are preserved.
- 6.105 The HLDP will ensure strong protection for designated coastal habitats and species. This includes requiring robust assessments for nearby developments, promoting biodiversity net gain with opportunities for ecological restoration and blue/green infrastructure being explored.
- 6.106 The HLDP should support coastal and offshore renewable energy infrastructure where appropriate, while embedding the principle of environmental design. HLDP must ensure that development proposals demonstrate use of the mitigation hierarchy from the outset, avoiding impacts on designated sites and sensitive receptors wherever possible. Policy will set out clear expectations for project siting, early-stage environmental assessment, and coordination with marine planning frameworks to manage cumulative impacts.
- 6.107 The HLDP should provide clear and spatially informed policy framework to guide the sustainable development of aquaculture. This includes supporting the growth of both finfish and shellfish farming.
- 6.108 The HLDP must ensure that aquaculture continues to support the long-term ecological health and resilience of Highland's marine and coastal environments and incorporate the evolving position for the requirement of industry to conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity, with guidance from the forthcoming NMP2. The HLDP will therefore anticipate this policy shift and lay the foundations for local biodiversity enhancement in aquaculture policy.

- 6.109 This will require collaboratively working with The Marine Directorate, SEPA, NatureScot and the industry to define practical and proportionate approaches to biodiversity enhancement.
- 6.110 The aquaculture industry is recognised as a significant employment sector in the Highlands and makes a tangible contribution to employment and prosperity in many communities, yet has until now done so without explicit policy requirements or a formal mechanism for securing community benefits in place. HLDP will require to consider whether a framework for contributions to community assets such as housing are appropriate and will continue engagement with the industry on these aspects.
- 6.111 The HLDP should recognise and support the role aquaculture development that supports community wealth-building and encourage community benefit where appropriate and facilitate early engagement with local communities.
- 6.112 All Highland ports and harbours, alongside ICFGF tax sites have been identified as developed coast within the Council's [Coastal Zone Mapping](#).

Statements of Agreement / Dispute

Agreement on Evidence

- 6.113 Agencies who responded and agreed with the evidence and content presented included SEPA, Bakkafrost Scotland, NatureScot, and Marine Directorate.

Disputes with Stakeholders

- 6.114 None at the time of submission to Gate check.

Information Gaps

- 6.115 As mentioned, the updated NMP2 is awaited which if available during the course of the HLDP preparation, will be considered in guiding the Council's marine planning framework as NPF4 clearly states that LDPs should align with national and regional marine planning.
- 6.116 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 in Highland have formally registered Local Place Plans. Any Local Place Plans registered will be considered in the production of the LDP if timeously available.

Chapter 7 : Flood Risk Management

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. Town and Country Planning (Development Planning) (Scotland) Regulations 2023: Regulation 9 requires the LDP to have regard to: - the national marine plan - any regional marine plan - any river basin management plan; - any flood risk management plan; and - any local flood risk management plan												
NPF4 LDP Requirements	NPF4 Policy 22: - LDPs should strengthen community resilience to the current and future impacts of climate change by avoiding development in areas at risk as a first principle. Resilience should also be supported by managing the need to bring previously used sites in built up areas into positive use; planning for adaptation measures; and identifying opportunities to implement improvements to the water environment through natural flood risk management and blue green infrastructure. - Plans should take into account the probability of flooding from all sources and make use of relevant flood risk and river basin management plans for the area. A precautionary approach should be taken, regarding the calculated probability of flooding as a best estimate, not a precise forecast. For areas where climate change is likely to result in increased flood exposure that becomes unmanageable, consideration should be given to alternative sustainable land use.												
Links to Evidence	(THC055) Highland SFRA Report (THC053) Highlands Regional Coastal Change Adaptation Plan (THC088) NatureScot Response to Evidence (THC089) SEPA Response to Evidence <table><tr><th>Ref no.</th><th>Online Resources</th><th>Date Accessed</th></tr><tr><td>THC010</td><td>Ardgour Local Place Plan</td><td>29.06.26</td></tr><tr><td>THC011</td><td>Black Isle Local Place Plan</td><td>29.06.26</td></tr><tr><td>THC012</td><td>Broadford and Strath Local Place Plan</td><td>29.06.26</td></tr></table>	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
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	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
	THC473	Highland SFRA Map	18.08.25
	THC474	Local Development Planning Guidance	18.08.25
	THC475	SEPA National Flood Risk Assessment	18.08.25
	THC476	Scotland River Basin Management Plan21-27	20.10.25
	THC477	SEPA's Flood Maps	18.08.25
	THC478	Blue and Green Infrastructure Mapping	18.08.25
	THC479	Highland and Argyll Local Flood Risk Management Plan	20.10.25
	THC480	Findhorn, Nairn and Strathspey Local Flood Risk Management Plan	20.10.25
	THC481	Dynamic Coast Future Erosion Maps	18.08.25
	THC482	Geomorphic Risk Buffer	18.08.25
	THC483	Coastal Zone Mapping	18.08.25
	THC484	Riparian Woodland Scotland Data	20.10.25
	THC485	Recommended Riparian Corridor	18.08.25
	THC486	The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045	20.10.25
	THC487	The National Flood Resilience Strategy	20.10.25
	THC488	ClimateJust Map Tool	18.08.25
	THC489	Social Flood Risk Index	20.10.25
	THC490	NPF4 Policy 22 Chief Planner Letter - Oct 25	20.10.25

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 that there are relevant crossovers between Flood Risk Management and other topics including:

- **Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy**
- **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**
- **Chapter 6: Coastal Development and Aquaculture**
- **Chapter 9: Housing**
- **Chapter 11: Infrastructure**
- **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**

Where apparent, the Council has referenced relevant linkages between policies areas throughout the chapter.

Summary of Evidence

- 7.1 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.
- 7.2 This Chapter had been produced following the Council's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) and should be read alongside the Highland SFRA Report **(THC055)** and the [Highland SFRA Map](#).
- 7.3 This Summary of Evidence focuses on information relating to:
- **Highland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment**
 - **River Flooding and Erosion**
 - **Coastal Flooding and Erosion**
 - **Blue and Green Infrastructure**
 - **Natural Flood Management**
 - **Climate Change**
 - **Essential Infrastructure and Development within Flood Risk Areas**
 - **NPF4 Policy 22 Chief Planner Letter**

Highland Strategic Flood Risk Assessment

- 7.4 The Highland SFRA takes the form of a two-stage process. The completed Stage 1, is high-level strategic assessment designed to be included as part of the Evidence Report includes the Highland SFRA Report **(THC055)** together with the [Highland SFRA Map](#).
- 7.5 Stage 2 will be undertaken alongside the Proposed Local Development Plan. involve a detailed site-by-site assessment of risk. Including an assessment of

flood risk on specific HLDP sites, and a consideration of cumulative flood risk prepared to support the Proposed Plan.

7.6 Both stages of the SFRA will be prepared in line with the following guidance and best practice documents:

- Policy 10 and Policy 22 of NPF4 (Feb 2023).
- [Local Development Planning Guidance](#) (May 2023).
- [National Flood Risk Assessment](#) (Dec 2025).
- All other guidance that will be used to support the SFRA production and this chapter of this Evidence Report can be found within the Highland SFRA Report (Planning policy, flood risk guidance, plans, and strategies section) **(THC055)**.

The SFRA considers various sources which are further explained in the Highland SFRA Report **(THC055)**, these include: [Scotland River Basin Management Plan \(2021-27\)](#), [SEPA's Flood Maps](#), Highland Council's [Blue and Green Infrastructure Mapping](#), Highlands two Local Flood Risk Management Plans (LFRMP); [Highland and Argyll Local Flood Risk Management Plan & Findhorn, Nairn and Strathspey Local Flood Risk Management Plan](#), [Dynamic Coast Future Erosion Maps](#), flood history, Highland Council's Flood Incident Reports, and further flood risk policy and guidance provided by SEPA.

7.7 The Highland SFRA Report **(THC055)**, reviewed by SEPA, offers a strategic and spatial overview of flood risk in Highland. The Highland SFRA will inform the development planning processes; ensure that flood risk is considered in the formulation of the Council's spatial strategy; the identification of development allocations; and the review of land use policies, whilst contributing towards satisfying the statutory duties the Council has under the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009.

7.8 The following list provides the information which further details of can be found within the Highland SFRA Report **(THC055)** and details the following:

- Planning policy and flood risk documents, ranging from Government guidance to national and local strategies and plans that may influence planning and flood risk in Highland.
- Relevant information on the importance of acknowledging the impacts of cumulative development on flood risk.
- Highland area in relation to flood risk, including flood protection schemes and flood study areas.
- The data and information the Council hold and the data and information not available to the Council for the Highland SFRA.
- Information on flood risk and flood risk management (FRM) including the two flood risk management plans which cover the Highland area; [Highland and Argyll Local Flood Risk Management Plan](#) and [Findhorn, Nairn and Strathspey Local Flood Risk Management Plan](#) (LFRMP).

- Highlands Potentially Vulnerable Areas (PVA's) and Target Areas (TA's).
- Highland flood hazards, including past flood events, sources of flooding and its management.
- Climate change in relation to flood risk.
- Information on the Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) procedures which will be carried out as part of Stage 2 of the Highland SFRA.
- Flood mitigation measures.

River Flooding and Erosion

- 7.9 In addition to the detail recorded in the Highland SFRA, Scottish Government's Scotland Environment Maps – [Geomorphic Risk Buffer](#) show where places are at risk of river erosion due to waters flowing faster, or silt deposition from water flowing slower. New development should avoid these 'areas of change', as they could be at risk from being washed away or silted up.

Coastal Flooding and Erosion

- 7.10 As referred to in **Chapter 6: Coastal Development and Aquaculture**, Highland's extensive coastline has numerous instances of known locations at risk of coastal flooding and coastal erosion. Coastal erosion exacerbates flood risks by weakening natural defences and altering water quality. Issues on coastal development and coastal defences are detailed in **Chapter 6: Coastal Development and Aquaculture** and further spatial data on HLDP area coastal zone can be found on the Councils [Coastal Zone Mapping](#).
- 7.11 Coastal flooding poses the greatest danger to life and property, despite fewer properties being at risk compared to river or surface water flooding. The Highland SFRA Report (**THC055**) uses data from Dynamic Coast Maps and [SEPA's Flood Maps](#) to identify areas in Highland most at risk from coastal flooding, considering climate change impacts. Future actions to manage coastal erosion risks will be outlined in Highlands Regional Coastal Change Adaptation Plan (Regional CCAP) (**THC053**), with collaboration from key agencies. Further information on the Highland Regional CCAP can be found in **Chapter 6: Coastal Development and Aquaculture**.

Blue and Green Infrastructure

- 7.12 Opportunities to reduce run-off in urban areas by installation of blue and green infrastructure and enhance the blue and green network are recognised in **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking** which outlines the co-benefits of blue and green infrastructure as part of broader drainage solutions, which offer access to blue and green spaces and biodiversity benefits.

- 7.13 NPF4 Policy 22 requires that development proposals must not increase surface water flood risk and should use sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS), integrated with blue and green infrastructure. NPF4 Policy 20 further protects blue and green infrastructure for multiple functions, such as climate mitigation, flood prevention, and nature restoration. The Highland SFRA Report and [Highland SFRA Map](#) will also be used to inform other aspects of HLDP preparation, including sections on Infrastructure First and Blue and Green Infrastructure. Further details on Highland Blue and Green Infrastructure can be found in **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**.
- 7.14 NPF4 emphasises surface water management as a key part of climate adaptation and flood resilience, including a requirement to manage surface water. There are forthcoming commitments under the LFRMP 2022-28 to carry out surface water management plans. The Council's Flood Risk Management Team is currently developing a Highland wide Surface Water Management Plan (SWMP). It is at a strategic level but will identify hotspots where restriction on further development or opportunities to address existing surface water opportunities through development will be sought. When finalised, the plan will be available on the Highland Council website. Hotspots can be found in the [Highland SFRA Map](#). The SWMP will be used to support the Stage 2 of the Highland SFRA, throughout the site-selection process of HLDP, in supporting not just the site itself but also the surrounding infrastructure relevant to each development site.

Natural Flood Management

- 7.15 SEPA has explored Natural Flood Management (NFM) techniques, which use natural features to manage flood risk. A key element of NFM involves managing the source and pathway of floodwaters, rather than relying solely on traditional hard engineering.
- 7.16 NFM techniques include planting woodlands, creating wetlands, restoring rivers, and creating intertidal habitats. The importance of Riparian Woodland as a tool for NFM is recognised, [Riparian Woodland Scotland Data](#) is an important tool in understanding its extent across Highland and where could benefit in improvements. In support of this Scotland Environment Maps - [Recommended Riparian Corridor](#) as incorporated into the Council's Nature Networks methodology (**THC056**) (discussed in **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**) identifies opportunities for new woodland planting along watercourses, with buffers of 10, 15, and 30 meters depending on the watercourse size.
- 7.17 Spatially identifying a nature network with opportunities which included consideration of blue and green infrastructure will help embed flood risk management into HLDP. To identify these opportunities, a range of evidence

including relevant water environment data, open space data, natural environment data, outdoor access and active travel data will be used.

Climate Change

- 7.18 The Stage 1 SFRA is the starting point for the Council to assess the effects of climate change on flood risk across the HLDP area. This section further explains how climate change and flooding are connected, with further details on climate change discussed in **Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy**.
- 7.19 With predicted increases in the frequency and severity of flooding events in Highland as a result of climate change, existing policies in HwLDP will require strengthening and adaptation to avoid and mitigate the associated impacts of flooding. These considerations will form a key part of the review of potential development sites.
- 7.20 The Council recognise the links between climate change, coastal erosion and all flooding sources including coastal, pluvial and fluvial flooding. This connection can be found within the [Highland SFRA Map](#). In addition, the connection between biodiversity as detailed in **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**, and flooding are recognised. [The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045](#) supports this stating that 'Healthy biodiversity protects soil from eroding, purifies water and helps prevent and mitigate flooding'. The Council will consider necessary actions to support the mitigation of flooding, this may be possible to do so using NFM, further discussed in **Natural Flood Management**.
- 7.21 [The National Flood Resilience Strategy](#) sets out a vision for a flood resilient Scotland through to 2045 and beyond and the long-term policy direction and framework for improving flood resilience, guiding principles and priority areas for action. [The National Flood Resilience Strategy](#) will therefore be closely considered within Stage 2 of the Highland SFRA site selection process, and will work in line with NPF4 Policy 22, recognising that Essential infrastructure will be an exception to development within flood risk areas if the bullet points in Policy 22a can be adequately addressed.
- 7.22 The [ClimateJust Map Tool](#) shows several indices that assist with understanding climate vulnerability to flooding in Highland:
- Neighbourhood Flood Vulnerability Index - combines five characteristics of vulnerability: susceptibility, ability to prepare, ability to respond, ability to recover, community support.
 - [Social Flood Risk Index](#)- a measure of geographic flood disadvantage (i.e. where social vulnerability and exposure to flooding coincide).
- 7.23 The Social Flood Risk Index for River and Coastal (group measure) identifies neighbourhoods where large numbers of the most vulnerable people are

exposed to river and coastal flooding. In Highland, coastal settlements communities are the most socially vulnerable to River and Coastal flooding:

- In the 2050, 2°C warming scenario, areas of Merkinch and Muirtown in Inverness are at very high to extreme risk. All other areas are at low risk, below the UK mean or not exposed (i.e. very low population density).
- Under the 4°C scenario additional areas are estimated to experience high to extreme social flood risk of river and coastal flooding; clusters in Fort William, Ross and Cromarty North West (northwest of Laide and the A832), Alness, Ardersier, Nairn East, and Inverness risk areas expand to coastal data zones around Inverness Central, Raigmore and Longman.

7.24 The Social Flood Risk Index for Surface Water (group measure) identifies neighbourhoods where large numbers of vulnerable people are exposed to surface flooding. Most Highland communities, in settlements, towns and Inverness city are already at high, very high, acute or extreme risk of surface flooding, which intensifies in future climate change scenarios (2°C or 4°C) to 2050. This includes: Ullapool, Portree, Kyle of Lochalsh, Ballachulish and Glencoe, Kinlochleven, Fort William, Grantown-on-Spey, Nairn, Ardersier, Muir of Ord, Beauly, Dingwall, Connon Bridge, Alness, Invergordon, Tain, Balintore, Dornoch, Golspie, Brora, Wick and Thurso, and Inverness in clusters concentrated around central Inverness, Merkinch, Muirtown, Dalneigh, Hilton, Raigmore, Ballifeary.

7.25 HLDP will use the Councils Surface Water Management Plan and other sources to reduce communities' vulnerability to surface water flooding.

Essential Infrastructure and Development within Flood Risk Areas

7.26 Essential infrastructure as defined in NPF4 is only an exception to development within an area of flood risk, as explained in NPF4 Policy 22 (a)i.) *where the location is required for operational reasons*. Therefore, any essential infrastructure including: digital communications infrastructure; telecommunications infrastructure; all forms of renewable, low-carbon and zero emission technologies for electricity generation and distribution and transmission electricity grid networks and primary sub stations; water and waste water infrastructure; and transport proposals and travel networks will be exempt from these development restrictions if the bullet points in Policy 22a can be adequately addressed. Additionally, even although an exception to Policy 22 may apply, the first principle should still be to avoid areas at risk of flooding.

7.27 Owing to the scale of national and strategic projects underway in Highland, there are many instances where such exemptions apply. In all other instances development will be determined in accordance with SEPA's Vulnerable Use Hierarchy within its [SEPA Flood Risk and Land Use Vulnerability Guidance](#). This applies to the building and requirements for safe access and egress.

- 7.28 In recognition of the Highland housing challenge further discussed in **Chapter 9: Housing**, pressure to deliver substantial numbers of homes may prove challenging when delivering out with flood risk areas.

NPF4 Policy 22 Chief Planner Letter

- 7.29 NPF4 Flooding Policy 22 Chief Planner Letter - October 2025 replaces the letter previously published on 11 June 2025 to accommodate changes that have been made to improve clarity around NPF4 Policy 22. This letter clarifies the differing roles and responsibilities of SEPA and planning authorities in the application of NPF4 Policy 22, as well as the responsibilities of the Scottish Government where applications are notified to Ministers on flood risk grounds and clarifies certain procedural matters and to highlight a range of new and updated advice on flooding matters published by SEPA.
- 7.30 Where SEPA is consulted through planning application processes, it will provide advice accordingly to the planning authority in its role as a statutory consultee. The Planning Authority must consider SEPA's advice, alongside all other relevant NPF4 and local development plan policies and material considerations.
- 7.31 The Development Management Regulations ('the DMR') set out the circumstances in which consultation with SEPA is required on planning applications. For flooding, this is where the development 'is likely to result in a material increase in the number of buildings at risk of being damaged by flooding.'
- 7.32 For developments where the only potential source of flood risk is from a small watercourse, SEPA requests that the local authority first assess the proposal against any information it holds, wherever possible, to determine whether it may be at risk and therefore whether consultation with SEPA is required.

Summary of Stakeholder Engagement

- 7.33 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 include:

Key Agencies and Stakeholders

- 7.34 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 and other stakeholders on 21 August 2025, which included:

- SEPA
- NatureScot
- Scottish Water
- Transport Scotland
- Historic Environment Scotland
- HITRANS
- NHS Highland
- HIE
- Crofting Commission
- Wider Council Services: Environmental Health, Transport, Community Development, Climate Change and Energy.
- Chamber of Commerce, inc; Caithness, Lochaber, Inverness.
- BID, inc; Fort William, Dornoch, Visit Inverness Loch Ness – Tourist, VisitNairn - Nairn, Inverness.

7.35 A summary of feedback received is shown below:

7.36 Homes for Scotland (**THC090**) suggested minor changes to the HLDP Consultation Responses section which has now been moved to its own separate document (**THC006**), amendments to this text have been made and can be seen in (**THC006**). More in depth responses were received from NatureScot (**THC088**) and SEPA (**THC089**), summaries of which can be found below.

Key Agency: NatureScot (THC088)

Main views raised	Confirm satisfaction with the approach taken, demonstrated in this chapter. Suggested data links to be included in chapter and between chapters. Suggested implications for development in the coastal area. Welcome that comments made in the evidence consultation have been reflected in this chapter, however, unclear how all comments have been addressed. Suggest a record of all exact comments and how these have been addressed are provided in this chapter, not just a summary. Suggest that if comments are addressed in other chapters that this is noted within this chapter.
Council's response	Noted, actions taken forward. However, an itemised table of exact comments will not be provided in the body of the Evidence Report due to the length of this kind of addition for all respondents. The Council notes that previous Gate Check outcomes have expressed a need to summarise engagement within the body of the Evidence Report and has sought to do this in the interests of brevity and consistency.

Outstanding issues	No, NatureScot accept the Council's reasoning for only including a summary of comments.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, a statement of agreement has been provided (THC088) .
Proposed plan implications	No implications resulted from these comments.
Actions for proposed plan stage	Data links have been included in chapter and between chapters. Suggested coastal areas implication has been considered in Chapter 6 – Coastal Development and Aquaculture .
Key Agency: SEPA (THC089)	
Main views raised	Comments on SFRA: Note that reference in NPF4 is made to "flood protection schemes" rather than "flood defence and schemes". The "Data and information requested and received" section starting on page 14 would benefit from slight rearranging or reclarifying so it's clearer what information is available and of that what is discounted as not useable/helpful for whatever reason. Suggest separation of flood protection scheme and flood study output sections with additional rewording. Suggest rewording of how/where information is presented spatially, to where possible the Highland SFRA will present information spatially. Suggest rewording of second sentence in Past Flood Events section. Suggest additional detail on purpose of flood protection schemes Comments on Chapter 7: Suggest rewording of essential infrastructure description in relation to NPF4 Policy 22a(i). Found duplicate paragraph to be removed. Rewording of sentence.
Council's response	Noted, actions taken forward.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, a statement of agreement has been provided (THC089) .
Proposed plan implications	The <u>Highland SFRA map</u> will be used in determining suitable sites during the site selection process.

Actions for proposed plan stage	Use SFRA during the site selection process.
Summary of Local Place Plan Priorities	
7.37	Ardgour Local Place Plan (THC010) has not identified any priorities relating to Flood Risk Management.
7.38	Black Isle Local Place Plan (THC011) has identified the following priorities relating to Flood Risk Management: • Flood/erosion protection for coastal and other settlements as appropriate by carrying out coastal flood risk assessments around the Black Isle • The Green Freeport should take every opportunity to deliver community benefits including mitigation of predicted impacts of sea level rise.
7.39	Broadford and Strath Local Place Plan (THC012) has identified the following priorities relating to Flood Risk Management: • Challenge for Broadford is adapting to sea level rise & flood risk.
7.40	Caol Local Place Plan (THC024) has identified the following priorities relating to Flood Risk Management: • Residents noted improvements made by Caol and Lochyside Flood Scheme pathway – yet there are small sections that are currently unfinished. • New flood defence path ends at Mossfield and starts on shore front. This should be a complete path to ensure safety.
7.41	Croy and Tornagrain Local Place Plan (THC026) has not identified any priorities relating to Flood Risk Management.
7.42	Dores and Essich Local Place Plan (THC013) has identified the following priorities relating to Flood Risk Management: • Bridge over the burn in Dores not high enough to handle potential serious flood risk. Proposals of flood management measures need reviewed.
7.43	Duror and Kentallen Local Place Plan (THC014) has identified the following priorities relating to Flood Risk Management: • Location of future housing development is a challenge. Must consider flood risk & peat on low-lying areas, access off the A828 and the junction with Achindarroch Road and the A828 for developments on higher ground.
7.44	Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Local Place Plan (THC022) has not identified any priorities relating to Flood Risk Management.
7.45	Gairloch Local Place Plan (THC015) has not identified any priorities relating to Flood Risk Management.

7.46 Garve and District Local Place Plan (**THC016**) has identified the following priorities relating to Flood Risk Management:

- Flood mitigation for economic resilience to climate change and to improve critical infrastructure and support development of community land.
- Blackwater River creates potential for flooding and flood risk assessments.

7.47 Glen Urquhart Local Place Plan (**THC029**) has identified the following priorities relating to Flood Risk Management:

- Drumnadrochit is considered a PVA. 200 year plus climate change return shows 31 properties at flood risk.
- A831 at Kilmichael frequently experiences nuisance flooding, causing traffic disruptions and hindering access to properties.
- Reports that recent flood control measures caused flooding below Milton and A82 blocked at the Clansman Hotel.
- Better protect and enhance local greenspaces for flood waters particularly along and across watercourses and woodland areas.

7.48 Golspie Local Place Plan (**THC021**) has identified the following priorities relating to Flood Risk Management:

- Agree an area-wide, multi-agency strategic flood management plan with all stakeholders by June 2025, to be implemented over 10 years.
- 'Greening the grey' hard flood defence and other structures.
- Flood protection measures, particularly through blue-green nature-based solutions to both mitigate flood risk and improve the quality and accessibility of public and recreational spaces along the shoreline.
- Add better drainage system to combat flooding behind the train line.
- Improve attenuation pond above stackyard at Golspie tower. Review drains and balancing ponds to deal with surface water drainage problems (flooding from agricultural fields on Argo Terrace & Queen Drive).
- Resolve major flooding issue at the bridge.
- Improve Lady's Walk track to prevent damage from hill flooding/ run off.
- Consider relocation of critical facilities to higher ground to combat coastal flood and erosion risks.
- Explore 'living marine streets' retrofitting streets with sustainable urban drainage infrastructure to handle marine floodwater.
- Relocate care home as long-term plan if Seaforth site becomes at flood risk
- Strengthen ecological corridor along section of the Big Burn & add path. Consider rescuing access during extreme flood events.

7.49 Kinlochleven Local Place Plan (**THC017**) has identified the following priorities relating to Flood Risk Management:

- Increase native tree cover to reduce flooding and improve natural habitats.

- Develop community resilience plan to allow community to sustain themselves in events like the flood damage on the B863 'high road'.
- More rain and storms bringing trees down and increasing flooding, causing erosion and damage to property & infrastructure.

7.50 Kyle of Sutherland Local Place Plan (**THC028**) has identified the following priorities relating to Flood Risk Management:

- Further consideration needed towards erosion and flooding.
- Communities conscious coastal and fluvial flooding affecting the locality .
- Undevelopable land due to flooding brings economic challenges.
- Impact of flood risk seen at South Bonar carpark, motorhome facilities development considered unviable by SEPA, due to the perceived flood risk.
- Plant trees and shrubs in flood risk area around the industrial estate.

7.51 Lochalsh Local Place Plan (**THC018**) has identified the following priorities relating to Flood Risk Management:

- Drain Pladaig path to resolve flooding which makes the path impassable.
- Engage with relevant local public authorities on regional and national marine planning and coastal change adaptation initiatives.
- Connect with communities who have begun tackling flood mitigation.

7.52 Morvern Local Place Plan (**THC027**) has identified the following priorities relating to Flood Risk Management:

- Ensure the resilience of Morvern against flooding impacts.
- Areas identified as high risk; River Aline and Claggan Bridge, Kinlochteachuis Road, Killundine Bridge.
- Support exploration of native erosion resistant planting, NBS, wetlands, bioswales, upgrading and maintaining drainage systems.
- Suggested mitigation through research and infrastructure investments, contingency planning through alternative routes, flood protection schemes.

7.53 Nairnshire Local Place Plan (**THC023**) has identified the following priorities relating to Flood Risk Management:

- Coastal & river flooding poses significant risks including to: The Links, the Maggot, Nairn & Nairn Dunbar Golf Courses, Davidson Park, the Riverside. Need to develop strategies to protect areas using balanced approach that combines infrastructure with natural solutions. Affordable solutions are needed, inc. improved flood defences, NFM, & emergency planning.
- Needs for Flood Risk Management studies carried out, to be used as evidence to lever in national funding.
- New development must improve flood map position, using the protect, mitigate, adapt system approach.

7.54 Sleat Local Place Plan (**THC025**) has identified the following priorities relating to Flood Risk Management:

- Develop a community resilience plan to deal with outages, natural weather-related incidents and other emergencies/critical events, which describes potential risks, actions to take and key people/agencies.
- Development of a water management strategy for new builds

7.55 Stratherrick and Foyers Local Place Plan (**THC019**) has not identified any priorities relating to Flood Risk Management.

7.56 Torridon and Kinlochewe Local Place Plan (**THC020**) has identified the following priorities relating to Flood Risk Management.

- Recognise challenges flood risk presents for development, implement flood prevention measures in Kinlochewe and along the coastline.
- Some potential housing development sites in Kinlochewe are constrained by flood risk. Combat with small scale developments in LDP.
- Commitment to linking planning policy to a detailed study of climate change impacts on coastal and river areas to strengthen flood resilience.

Summary of Implications for the Proposed Plan

7.57 This chapter, the [Highland SFRA Map](#) and Highland SFRA Report (**THC055**) have identified the issues with flooding, flood risk and flood risk management within the HLDP area, that it aims to manage and reduce. HLDP, through its spatial strategies, will support Flood Risk and Flood Risk Management.

7.58 HLDP will consider the impact of the climate emergency and the most appropriate means, including the consideration of Nature-Based Solutions to protect and enhance community resilience to flood risk in the face of climate change and whether evidence on the need to develop further policy and advice is required.

7.59 The current HwLDP Policy 64 – Flood Risk is the core LDP policy at hand for matters relating to flood risk in Highland. It states that development proposals should avoid areas susceptible to flooding and promote sustainable flood management in compliance with SPP which has since been superseded. It also outlines the instances where an FRA will be required.

7.60 The current HwLDP Policy 66 – Surface Water Drainage is the core LDP policy at hand for matters relating to surface water drainage in Highland. It states that all proposed development must be drained by Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) designed in accordance with The SuDS Manual (CIRIA C697) and, where appropriate, the Sewers for Scotland Manual 2nd Edition.

- 7.61 HwLDP Policy 64 and Policy 66 will require to be reviewed in preparation of HLDP, and assessment of flood risk will be a key component in subsequent site selection. It should be noted that the implications for the Proposed Plan with regards to Flood Risk and Flood Risk Management are general principles, therefore, site-specific assessments will be required with consideration given to potential for mitigation strategies such as design and layout throughout the site assessment process.
- 7.62 With predicted increases in the frequency and severity of flooding events in Highland as a result of climate change, existing policies in HwLDP will require strengthening and adaptation to avoid and mitigate the associated impacts of flooding. These considerations will form a key part of the review of potential development sites.
- 7.63 HLDP will consider the probability of flooding from all sources and make use of relevant flood risk management plans, river basin management plans, surface water management plans, regional coastal change adaptation plan, flood protection schemes and flood studies for the area to inform land use designations using a precautionary approach.
- 7.64 There are forthcoming commitments under the LFRMP 2022-28 to carry out surface water management plans. These management plans, once finalised will support the Council in identifying a blue green network to be retained, protected and enhanced in HLDP. HLDP will, once finalised, use the Councils Surface Water Management Plan and other sources to reduce communities' vulnerability to surface water flooding.
- 7.65 Spatially identifying a nature network with opportunities which include consideration of blue and green infrastructure will help embed flood risk management into HLDP. To identify these opportunities, a range of evidence including relevant water environment data, open space data, natural environment data, outdoor access and active travel data will be used.
- 7.66 Where allocated sites have yet to commence development or are not consented, the latest flood risk information will be used to indicate whether any sites should be deallocated on flood risk grounds. This will take place at a later site-specific phase, after the Evidence Report. As HLDP is prepared, the SFRA process will be expanded to consider and report on new candidate sites for development, and any post NPF4 flood risk studies that are carried out.
- 7.67 HLDP will consider whether there are particularly vulnerable users or functions located in the future flood risk area. Where there are previously used derelict or vacant site, HLDP will need to consider whether it is desirable to bring such sites into positive use.

- 7.68 Due to the cross-boundary nature of flooding, the council will work at a catchment level to best manage flood risk for HLDP communities, working with other local authorities and stakeholders where necessary.
- 7.69 The SFRA will be used to inform the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of HLDP. The SFRA also will be used to inform other aspects of HLDP preparation, including sections on Infrastructure First and Blue and Green Infrastructure.
- 7.70 There is no comprehensive record of SuDS within the HLDP area, the Council will consider if there is a need and benefit for this spatial data to be recorded.
- 7.71 Further explained in the Highland SFRA Report, an FRA will be undertaken where, for HLDP sites, the SFRA shows flood risk to the site or where development may increase flood risk elsewhere. HLDP will set out any requirements for an FRA to be undertaken. However, the primary aim in the first instance is to avoid development in flood risk areas, using the most up to date SEPA maps available.

Statements of Agreement / Dispute

Agreement on Evidence

- 7.72 Agencies who responded and agreed with the evidence and content presented included:
- NatureScot (THC088).
 - SEPA (THC089).

Disputes with Stakeholders

- 7.73 No disputes were raised by respondents, small amendments that were made have been updated in this chapter and statement of agreements were provided by these agencies.

Information Gaps

- 7.74 It is considered that community-led Local Place Plans would be informative evidence sources of relevance, and several are understood to remain in production at the time of writing. To 30 April 2026, 20 communities in Highland have formally registered Local Place Plans. Any Local Place Plans registered will be considered in the production of the LDP if timeously available.
- 7.75 One limitation that will be common to all SFRAs is that flood risk information is ever evolving, and therefore a snapshot in time used for an SFRA will in time become out of date. However, all spatial information is provided in a dynamic

GIS map, therefore ensuring the SFRA is able to be updated as new information emerges.

7.76 One example of flood risk information changing is that of the Potentially Vulnerable Areas and Target Areas terminology. These names will be adjusted by SEPA in 2028 following the new cycle of flood risk management guidance. Therefore, the Council will make sure to be aware of this change and how this impacts the SFRA for future developments across HLDP area in relation to flood risk.

7.77 There is no current record of SuDS within the HLDP area, the council will consider if there is a need and benefit for this spatial data to be recorded.

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

Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places

	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	27.01.26
	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)	27.01.26
	THC517	Draft Energy Strategy & Just Transition Plan	27.08.25

Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places

	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	27.01.26
	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

Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places

	THC550	SSEN Transmission Community Benefit Fund	11.08.25
	THC551	Scotland Outlook 2030	27.01.26
	THC552	Covid-19 Tourism Recovery Programme	27.01.26
	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	27.01.26
	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**

Economic Profile and Rural Development

- 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 qualify 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. Ardersier 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.
- SSN 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 pursuing 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.*

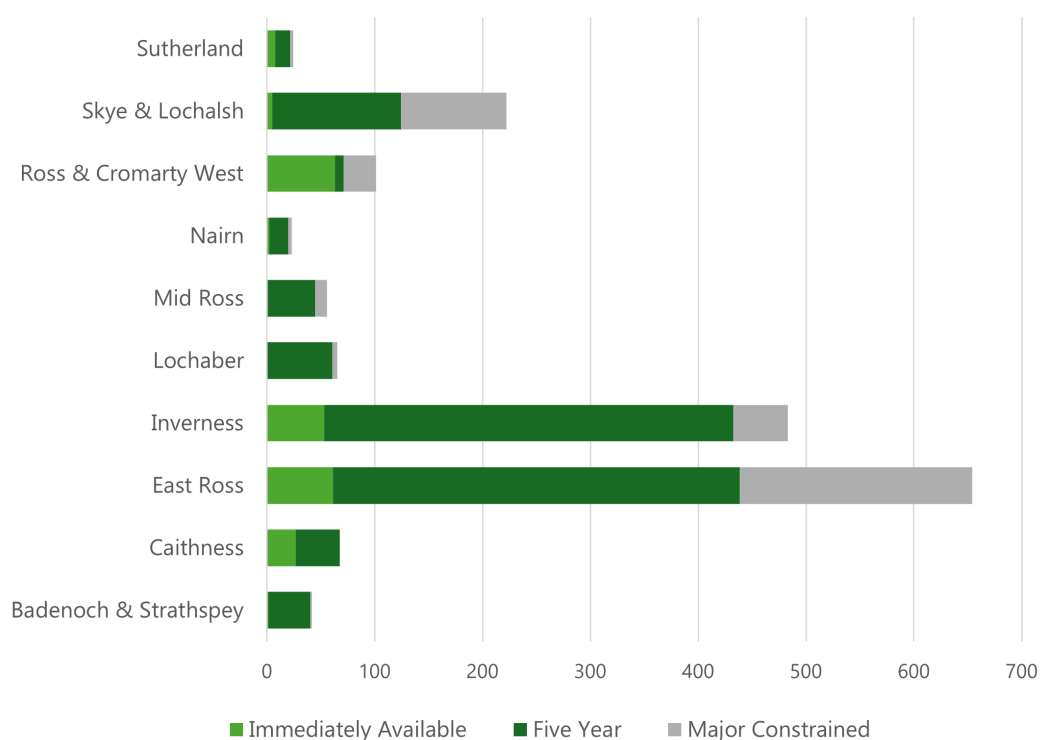


Figure 8:1 Business and Industrial Land by Housing Market Area, and availability category (Source: 2018 BILA)

- 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 leveraging 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 Etvie 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 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, caravanning, 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.

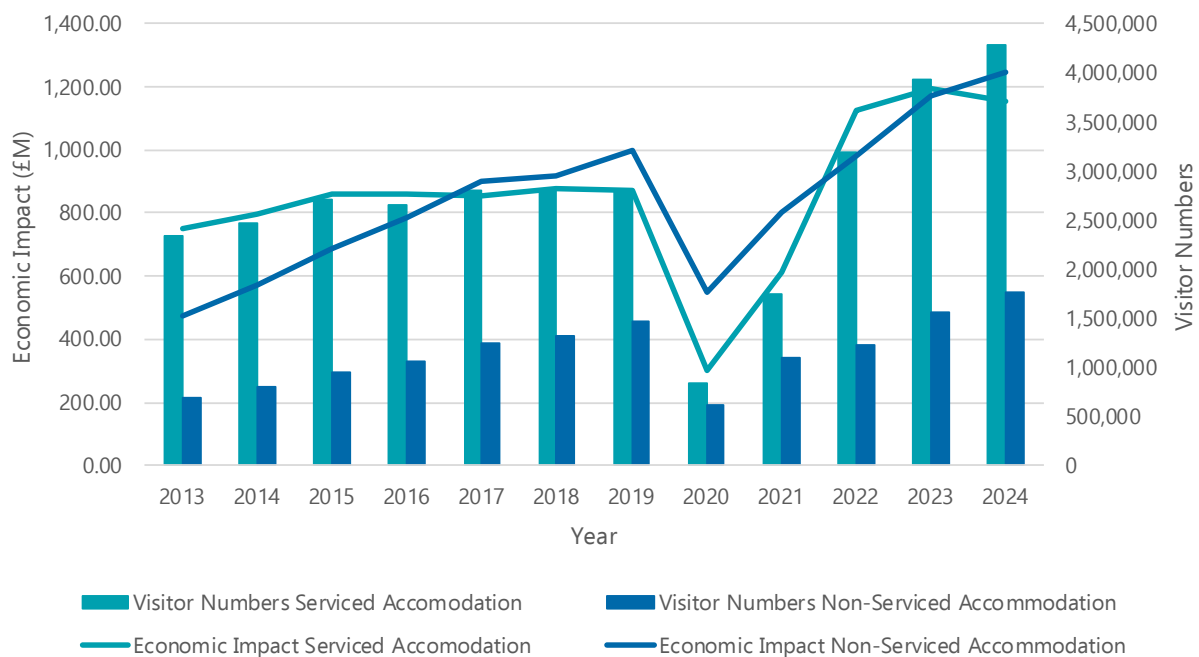


Figure 8:2 Highland Visitor Numbers and Economic Impact by Accommodation type 2012-2024 (THC069)

- 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' Chèò (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 or 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 STLCA's 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 STLCA's. 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 STLCA's, 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

Sector	Economic Impact (£Bn)		Employment (FTEs)	
	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 access 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.

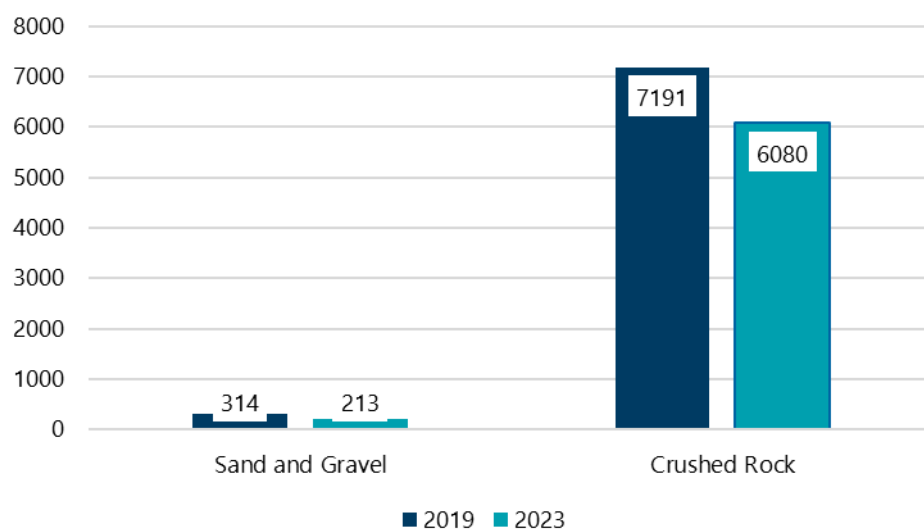


Figure 8:3 Comparison of sales of primary aggregates in 2019 and 2023 - Highland (Thousand tonnes) Sourced from [AMS 2023](#)

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 contributory 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.

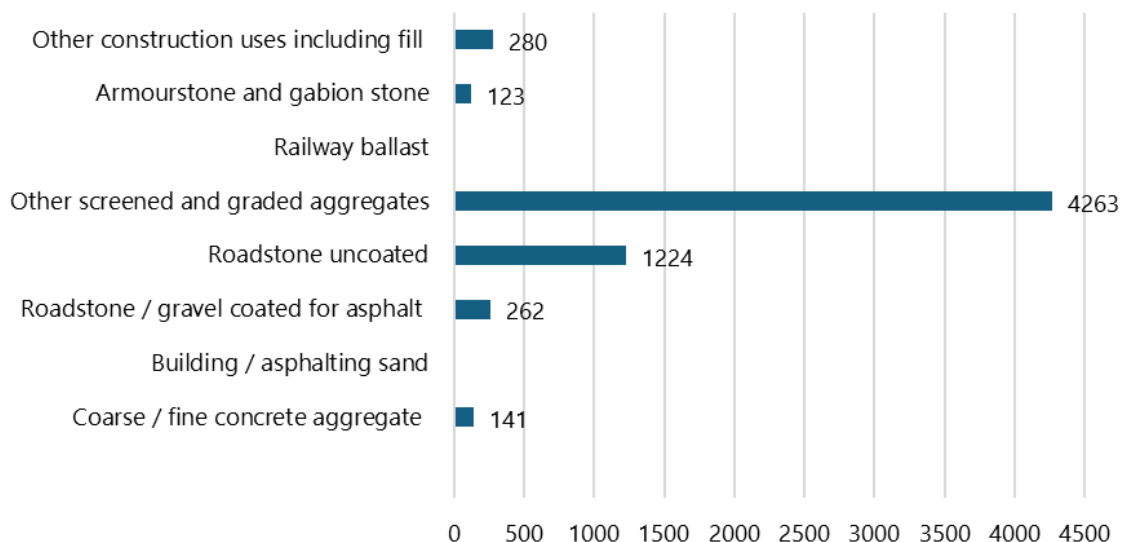


Figure 8:4 Summary of sales of primary aggregates (sand and gravel and crushed rock) by major end use in Highland (thousand tonnes) [AMS 2023](#)

- 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	<i>Resettlement Opportunities</i> 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. <i>Fragile Areas</i> 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 Urquhart 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.

Chapter 9 : Housing

Information required by the Act regarding the issue addressed in this section	Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 as amended: Section 15(1)(1A): • targets for meeting the housing needs of the population of the area Section 15(5)(a): • the housing needs of the population of the area, including, in particular, the needs of persons undertaking further and higher education, older people and disabled people; • the availability of land in the district for housing, including for older people and disabled people; • the desirability of allocating land for the purposes of resettlement. Section 15(5)(cf): • The extent to which there are rural areas within the district in relation to which there has been a substantial decline in population Section 16(2) (ab) • have regard to the list published under section 16E of persons seeking to acquire land in the authority's area for self-build housing Town and Country Planning (Development Planning) (Scotland) Regulations 2023: Regulation 9 • the availability of land in the district for housing, including for older people and disabled people
NPF4 LDP Requirements	NPF4 Policy 16: • LDPs are expected to identify a Local Housing Land Requirement (LHLR) for the area they cover. This is to meet the duty for a housing target and to represent how much land is required. To promote an ambitious and plan-led approach, the Local Housing Land Requirement is expected to exceed the 10-year Minimum All-Tenure Housing Land Requirement (MATHLR) set out in Annex E (of NPF4). • Deliverable land should be allocated to meet the 10-year Local Housing Land Requirement in locations that create quality places for people to live. Areas that may be suitable for new homes beyond 10 years are also to be identified. The location of where new homes are allocated should be consistent with local living

	including, where relevant, 20-minute neighbourhoods and an infrastructure first approach. - Diverse needs and delivery models should be taken into account across all areas, as well as allocating land to ensure provision of accommodation for Gypsy/Travellers and Travelling Showpeople where need is identified. NPF4 Policy 17: - LDPs should be informed by an understanding of population change over time, locally specific needs and market circumstances in rural and island areas. - LDPs should set out tailored approaches to rural housing and where relevant include proposals for future population growth – including provision for small-scale housing and the appropriate resettlement of previously inhabited areas. Plans should reflect locally appropriate delivery approached. Previously inhabited areas that are suitable for resettlement should be identified in the spatial strategy. NPF4 Policy 8: - LDPs should consider using green belts to support their spatial strategy as a settlement management tool to restrict development around towns and cities. Green belts will not be necessary for most settlements but may be zoned around settlements where there is a significant danger of unsustainable growth in car-based commuting or suburbanisation of the countryside. - Green belts should be identified or reviewed as part of the preparation of LDPs. Boundary changes may be made to accommodate planned growth, or to extend, or to alter the area covered as green belt.												
Links to Evidence	(THC033) HNDA Specialist Housing Stakeholder Engagement Report (THC070) Draft Housing Need & Demand Assessment 2026 Calculation (THC071) Local Housing Strategy HST Methodology Report (THC072) Inverness & Cromarty Firth Green Freeport HST (THC073) Existing Housing Need in Highland: Diffley Partnership & Rettie Report (for Homes for Scotland) (THC175) Call for Development Sites: Template for Submissions <table><tr><th>Ref no.</th><th>Online Resources</th><th>Date Accessed</th></tr><tr><td>THC010</td><td>Ardgour Local Place Plan</td><td>29.06.26</td></tr><tr><td>THC011</td><td>Black Isle Local Place Plan</td><td>29.06.26</td></tr><tr><td>THC012</td><td>Broadford and Strath Local Place Plan</td><td>29.06.26</td></tr></table>	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
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	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
	THC585	Highland 2022 Census Overview	14.11.25
	THC586	NRS Migration Flows mid-2024	14.11.25
	THC587	NRS Births Time Series	14.11.25
	THC588	NRS Deaths Time Series	14.11.25
	THC589	NRS Subnational Population Projections: 2022	14.11.25
	THC590	NRS Subnational Population Projections: 2018	14.11.25
	THC591	NRS Subnational Household Projections: 2022	14.11.25
	THC592	NRS Subnational Household Projections: 2018	14.11.25
	THC593	Place-based Policy Approaches to Population Challenges	14.11.25
	THC594	Draft NPF4 Housing Land Requirement Explanatory Report	14.11.25
	THC595	Scotland wide Existing Housing Need	14.11.25
	THC596	Falkirk LDP Gate Check report	14.11.25
	THC597	Highland Local Housing Strategy 2023-2028	14.11.25
	THC598	Housing to 2040	14.11.25
	THC599	Deliverable Housing Land Pipeline for Highland	14.11.25
	THC600	Highland Council 2024 Housing Land Audit	14.11.25
	THC601	Chief planner letter, notification direction 2025	14.11.25
	THC602	Data on Social Sector House Completions	14.11.25
	THC603	Strategic Housing Investment Plan 2026-2031	14.11.25
	THC604	Affordable Housing Investment Benchmarks	14.11.25

THC605	Highland Housing Register	14.11.25
THC606	Highland Housing Register Report 2024-25	14.11.25
THC607	Assessment of the accommodation needs of gypsy travellers in Highland	14.11.25
THC608	Permanent gypsy traveller sites in Highland	14.11.25
THC609	Policy on supporting cooperation and managing unauthorised gypsy traveller camps	14.11.25
THC610	Bingin Noggins Tobar Taking our Journey Project Impact Report	14.11.25
THC611	Scottish Homes Housing for Varying Needs	14.11.25
THC612	Consultation better Accessible Homes Standard	14.11.25
THC613	Housing for Varying Needs design guide	14.11.25
THC614	NRS households and dwellings data	14.11.25
THC615	THC Short Term Let Public Register licence data	14.11.25
THC616	Developable Land Mapping	14.11.25
THC617	West Lothian LDP Gate Check decision	01.04.26
THC618	Urban Rural Classification 2022 8 Fold Map	14.11.25
THC619	2022 Census journey to work data	14.11.25
THC620	Fragile Areas Mapping	14.11.25
THC621	Potential Areas for Resettlement Mapping	14.11.25
THC622	Rural Housing Supplementary Guidance and explanatory note	14.11.25
THC623	HLDP Call for Development Sites	14.11.25

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 that there are crossovers between Housing and other topic chapters including:

- **Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy**
- **Chapter 5 Nature and Environment**
- **Chapter 6: Coastal Development and Aquaculture**
- **Chapter 7: Flood Risk Management**
- **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**
- **Chapter 10: Transport**
- **Chapter 11: Infrastructure**
- **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

9.1 This chapter explains the implications of housing topic evidence including the Minimum All-Tenure Housing Land Requirement (MATHLR), housing need and demand, specialist provision and the indicative Local Housing Land Requirement (iLHLR). The Council considers it has undertaken thorough engagement with stakeholders to compile this chapter and collated sufficient evidence from that currently available on the topic to prepare the Proposed Plan. This Summary of Evidence focuses on information relating to:

- **MATHLR and Housing Need**
- **Demographic Overview and Updated Projections**
- **Setting Highland's LHLR**
- **Housing Completions** and Demolitions
- **Housing Land Supply**
- **Affordable Housing**
- **Specialist Provision**
- **Rural Homes**

MATHLR and Housing Need

9.2 The Minimum All-Tenure Housing Land Requirement (MATHLR) for Highland is set within NPF4's Annex E as 9,500 units. The MATHLR is the minimum amount of land, by reference to the number of housing units, that is to be provided for a 10-year period. The MATHLR is established in policy as a minimum requirement and is expected to be exceeded in each LDP's Local Housing Land Requirement (LHLR). The [Draft NPF4 Housing Land Requirement Explanatory Report](#) sets out an explanation for the final MATHLR figures for Highland, shown in Table 9:1.

Table 9:1 Composition of Highland's MATHLR as per NPF4

Existing Highland Housing Need	2,100
New Households to form over 10 years*	5,200
Total Need over 10 years	7,300
Flexibility allowance (30%)	2,190
Need plus Flexibility Allowance	9,490
Final MATHLR for Highland	9,500

9.1 The MATHLR is based on [NRS Subnational Household Projections: 2018-based](#), existing housing need and a flexibility percentage (25% urban areas or 30% rural areas) for contingency. The focus of the Evidence Report should be to highlight

more up-to-date information or evidence and explain how it leads to an ILHLR that is higher than the MATHLR.

- 9.2 The initial default estimate MATHLR figure for Highland (minus the CNP area that falls within the Council's boundary) suggested to the Council in February 2021 was 4,325 units. This included a forecast of net additional households, an assumption that the backlog of affordable housing need would be met, and a 30% inflation for generosity/flexibility. After representations by the Council, Scottish Government officials increased this figure to 9,500. The Council's assertions were focussed on both future net additional households and the affordable housing backlog and that the annual, point-in-time definition of housing need missed additional in-year arising need. These elements were included in the finalised 9,500 total. An additional, inflationary adjustment for the proportion of future house completions that will be lost from the mainstream housing market (largely to second home, holiday home and/or short-term rental use) was proposed by the Council but not included by Scottish Government in the 9,500 total. However, Scottish Government guidance now supports such an adjustment.
- 9.3 Highland's MATHLR was set through the adoption of NPF4 in February 2023. More recent information is now available. Scottish Government [LDP Guidance](#) states that the MATHLR figure for the area must be taken into account and if more recent information is available, it should be used.

Demographic Overview and Updated Projections

Timing of release and incorporation of key datasets

- 9.4 [2022 Census data for Highland](#) is still being analysed as [NRS Subnational Population Projections: 2022-based](#) have been produced (end of Sept 2025), with [NRS Subnational Household Projections: 2022-based](#) released in Dec 2025. The Centre for Housing Market Analysis (CHMA) aims to publish the updated HNDA Tool and Guidance at the end of June 2026 which will incorporate these updated population and household forecasts within the HNDA toolkit.
- 9.5 The belated release of these projections has significant knock-on implications for the accuracy of each council's MATHLR, Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA) and therefore each related indicative LHLR. HNDAs produced to date (including Highland's most recent 2021 one) use [NRS Subnational Household Projections: 2018-based](#) which in turn are extrapolations from 2011 Census data. Highland Council has commissioned a HNDA which will incorporate the [NRS Subnational Household Projections: 2022-based](#) when they are incorporated within the HNDA toolkit by the CHMA. This may delay the production of the finalised HNDA but the Council believes that such a delay is justifiable given the likely inaccuracy of an HNDA (and related LHLR) using 2018 based data. The

Council had originally intended to complete the HNDA process before submitting the Evidence Report to Gate Check. Continued delays to the release of key information and the refreshed HNDA Tool have meant that this timetable has had to be revised. The Council does not wish to delay the Plan process any longer than necessary so is submitting the completed Evidence Report to Gate Check prior to the completion of the HNDA and the subsequent CHMA assessment of whether it is robust and credible. For Highland's last and current HNDA (2021) the CHMA took 5 months to endorse the Assessment as robust and credible. The Council believes that this approach is a reasonable compromise between awaiting better evidence and not unduly delaying future plan production.

Recent demographic trends

- 9.6 Despite these delays to statistical releases, what can be derived is that the [Highland 2022 Census Overview](#) dashboard indicates a total Highland Council area population of 235,351, which equates to a 1.4% increase from 2011. Table 9:2 demonstrates that while Scotland's national population percentage increase was higher than Highlands, the percentage growth in households was higher in Highland than in Scotland between 2011 to 2022.

Table 9:2 Population and Household Change 2011-2022

	Population			Households		
	2022	2011	% Change	2022	2011	% Change
Highland	235,351	232,132	+1.4%	111,727	102,091	+9.4%
Scotland	5,439,842	5,295,403	+2.7%	2,509,269	2,372,777	+5.8%

- 9.7 Over a third (37.4%) of Highland's 2022 households are single person households (an increase from a proportion of 31.7% in 2011). This proportion of single households is similar to the equivalent for Scotland nationally (37.1%). Just under 15.5% of Highland's 2022 households are one person households aged 66 or over, which is again higher than the 13.5% share in 2011.
- 9.8 Between 2006-2016 there was no marked difference between the total number of Highland births and deaths with population change largely being driven by the level of net migration. However, from 2017 onwards Highland's population has shown a natural decrease with deaths exceeding births most recently by just over 1,000 per annum as shown in Figure 9:1. In crude terms, if this natural decrease continues (and perhaps increases if the majority of the resident population is the older age groups) then in future it will cancel out or at least reduce overall population growth, which previously was founded upon natural change close to zero and a reasonably predictable level of net (in) migration.

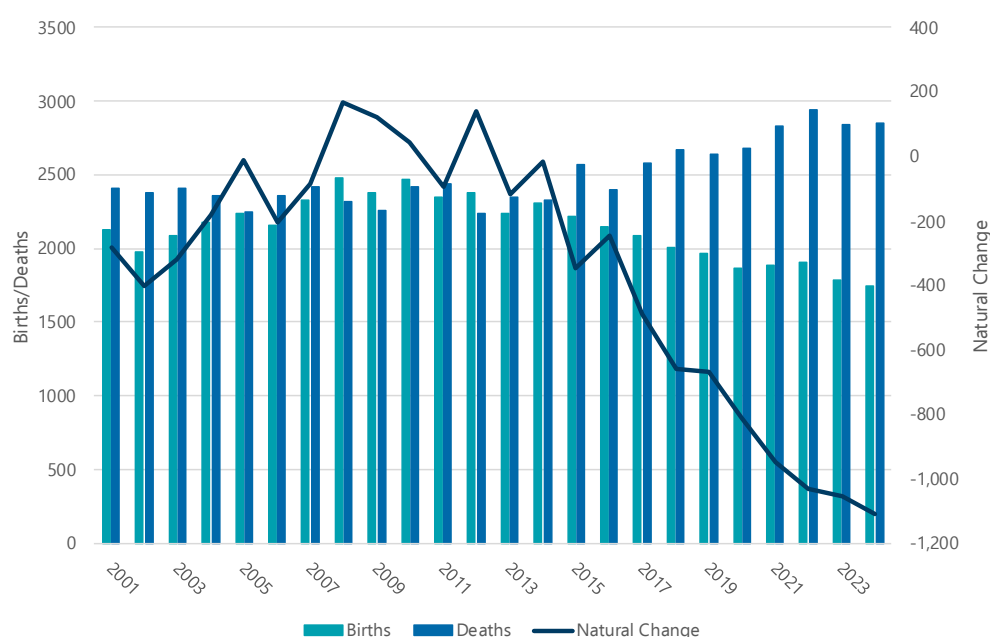


Figure 9.1 Highland Births and Deaths 2001-2024 (NRS *Births and Deaths Times Series Data 2024*)

- 9.9 Offsetting the negative natural change, [NRS Migration Flows mid-2024](#) evidence that movements into Highland exceed those leaving (by an average of 1,428 over the period mid-2003 to mid-2023) although past annual net flows have varied with events such as European Union expansion, Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic. This is demonstrated in Figure 9.2. Table 5 from [NRS Migration Flows mid-2024](#) sets out the latest NRS mid-2024 migration flows by local authority area which indicate net (in) migration to Highland of 1,060, 2,000 and 1,790 respectively for the 2022, 2023 and 2024 years.

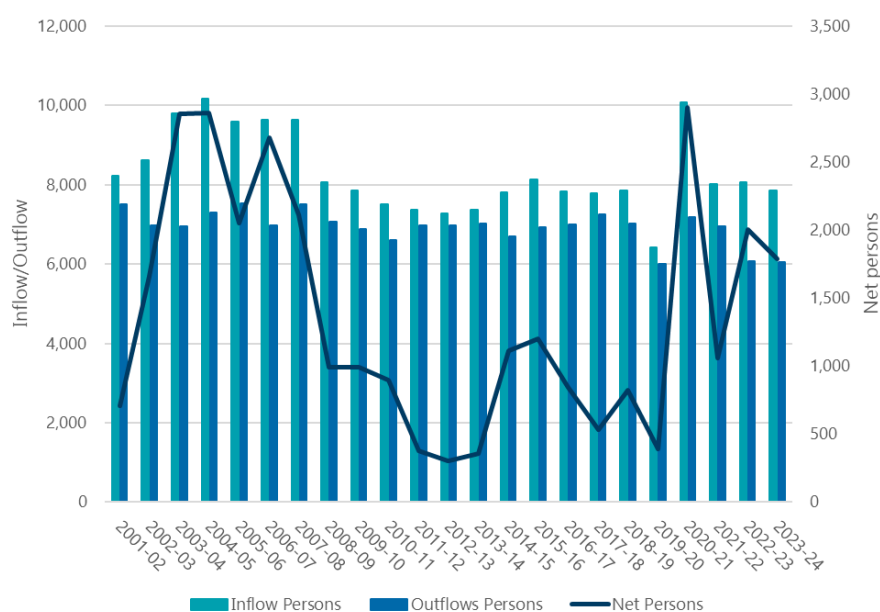


Figure 9.2 Highland Migration Flows 2001-2024 (NRS *Migration Flows 2024 – Table 5*)

- 9.10 Other data supports this apparent continued net (in) migration trend. Homes for Scotland have supplied data on the origin of recent (mid-2024 to mid-2025) purchasers of new build properties within Highland. Although the number of supplied transactions is relatively low, 39% of new build properties were sold to purchasers from outwith Highland. However, more locally the inter-census small overall increase in population masks significant intra-Highland differences. In general, the remoter parts of Highland have shown population decreases 2011-2022 and more accessible areas have shown gains.
- 9.11 The age profile of the existing and projected future Highland population has implications for the future HLDP. Highland, relative to Scotland, has a higher proportion of existing and projected future population in the older age groups. The age profile of net migrants is one cause of this. Many younger people particularly aged 15-19 leave Highland to access higher and further education and employment opportunities as shown in Figure 9:3. Conversely, Highland is still viewed as a desirable location for retirement, bringing up young children and, with improved digital connectivity, working from home in an attractive rural location. Figure 9:3 confirms a continuation of these trends. The large numbers of in-migrants are in their 30s, in the under 10s and in their 50s suggesting that relatively young couples some already with existing young children and the early retired are driving population growth in parts of Highland. Figure 9:4 highlights that the age profile of net migrants to Highland is beginning to change, and that in contrast with 2011, fewer persons aged 15-19 left in 2024, and the numbers of incoming children and those in their 30s, 40s and 50s were higher.

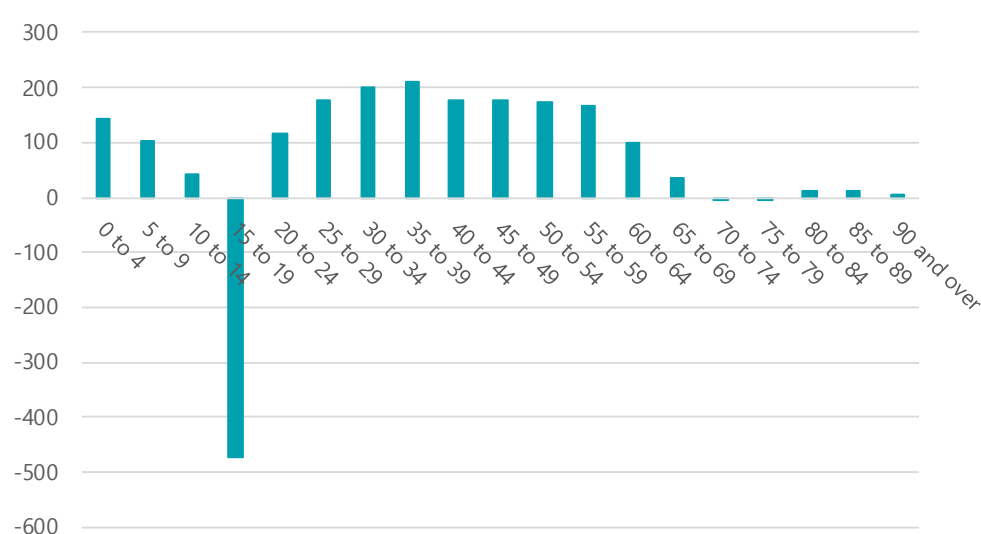


Figure 9:3 Age Profile of Highland Net Migration Average of 2002-2024 (*NRS Migration Flows 2024 – Table 8*)

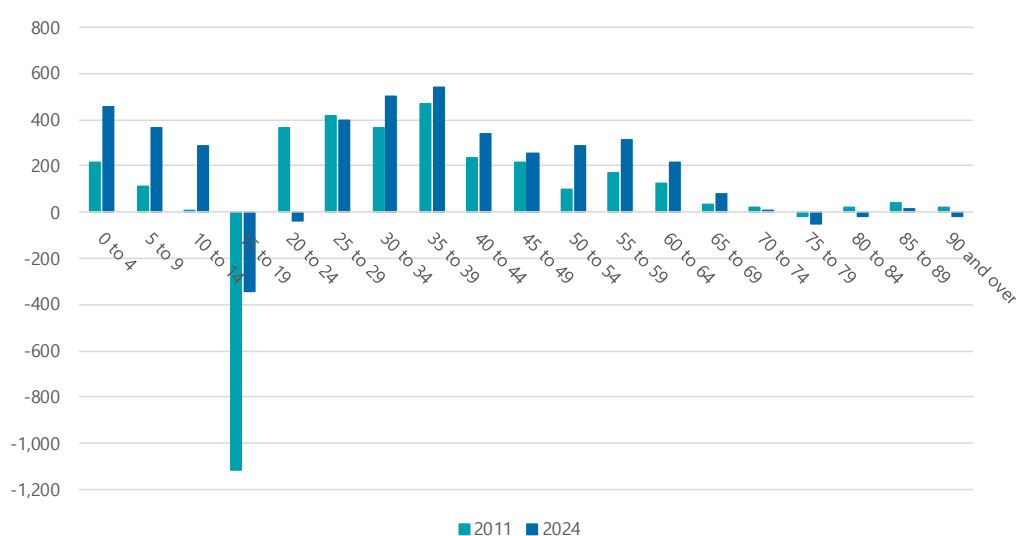


Figure 9:4 Highland Net Migration Age Profile 2011 and 2024 (*NRS Migration Flows 2024– Table 8*)

9.12 Examining those aged 15-19 more closely in Figure 9:5, it is evident that the net out-migration has declined among this age cohort, potentially coinciding with the establishment of the University of the Highlands and Islands, which has provided education and training opportunities for young people locally.

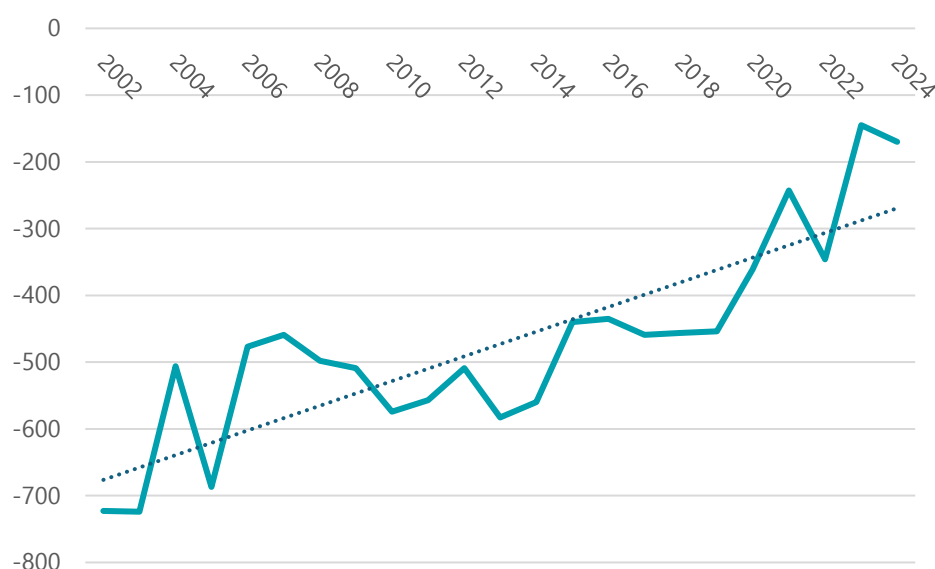


Figure 9:5 Highland Net Migration Aged 15-19, 2002-2024 (*NRS Migration Flows 2024– Table 8*)

9.13 Retaining more of those aged 15-19 within the Highlands has implications for new household formation of families with children in subsequent periods were these trends to continue along the linear trajectory shown in Figure 9:5. Incorporating the linear trajectory of retaining those aged 15-19 in addition to continued net in-

migration of those in their 30s with young children, and those in their 50's and 60's, supports an evidence base to justify an ambitious iLHLR to provide adequate housing for Highland's projected households throughout the lifespan of HLDP.

Projected trends into the lifespan of HLDP

- 9.14 The NRS Subnational Population Projections: 2022-based provide Council-area future projected population levels, which for Highland are markedly different than the previous 2018-based iteration as shown in Figure 9:6, which likely reflects the changing migration patterns aforementioned. In contrast with the population decline forecast in 2018-based projections, 2022-based projections demonstrate considerable population growth in Highland until 2038 before levelling off.

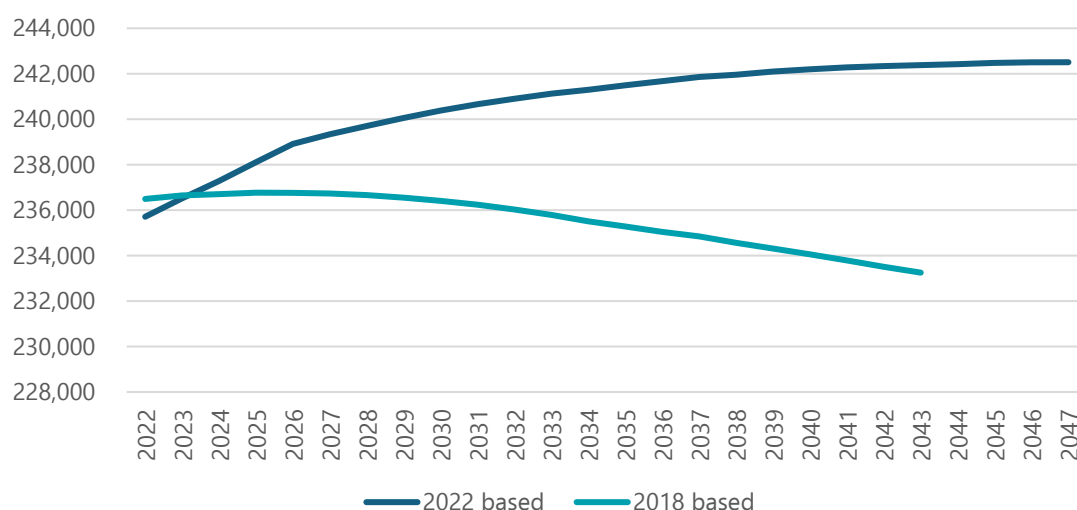


Figure 9:6 Highland Population Projections (NRS Subnational Population Projections 2022-based and 2018-based)

- 9.15 The age ranges of the NRS Subnational Population Projections: 2022-based highlight that this large increase in Highland's projected population will be increasingly comprised of persons in their 30s, 40's and those of retirement age by 2042 than in the base 2022 year as shown in Figure 9:7. Importantly, even the net in-migration of children aged 0-9 shown in Figure 9:4 and the reduced out-migration of those aged 15-19 shown in Figure 9:5 will potentially not offset the natural change owing to falling birth rates shown in Figure 9:1, meaning that the number of children and those aged 15-19 projected in 2032 and 2042 will potentially be lower than at present. The implications of this for infrastructure are discussed in **Chapter 11: Infrastructure**, but in broad terms it is evident that the demographic trends anticipated could place less pressure on school capacities, but increased pressure on health and social care.

- 9.16 One key issue is also that the projections indicate that some age groups are not expected to continually decrease or increase over the projected lifespan, but instead are more dynamic, meaning that those aged 20-24, and those in their 50's and 60's will be proportionately different in 2032 than in 2022, but then display the reverse trend by 2042. The key implication of this is that planning for Highland's various population needs will continue to evolve over the lifespan of the plan.

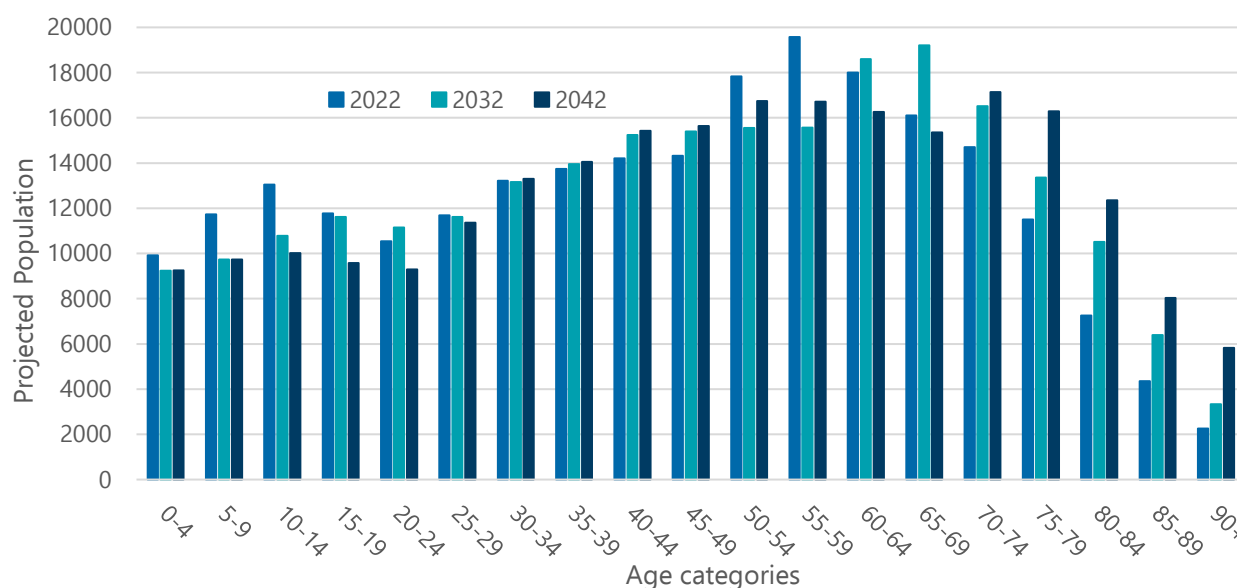


Figure 9:7 Highland Population Projections by Age Category (*NRS 2022-based*)

- 9.17 NRS Subnational Household Projections: 2022-based convert population projections to households. These evidence that the number of Highland households is anticipated to grow by 6.59% from 2022-2032, in contrast to Scotland's rate of 6.7%. This presents a considerable change from the previous NRS 2018-based Household Projections as evidenced in Figure 9:8. It is the Council's preference to utilise the 2022-based projections once incorporated into the HNDA Tool.
- 9.18 The NRS Subnational Household Projections: 2022-based principal scenario equates to an additional 6,570 Highland households in 2040 (the end of the HLDP intended adoption period), compared with that forecast by the 2018-based principal scenario, and even the most conservative low-growth scenario for 2022-based projections now exceeds the most ambitious high-growth scenario from the 2018-based projections. The NRS 2018-based Household Projections are therefore considered significantly out of step with more recently available information owing to the considerable changes that have occurred in the wider Highland, Scottish and UK economy since the time at which they were produced.

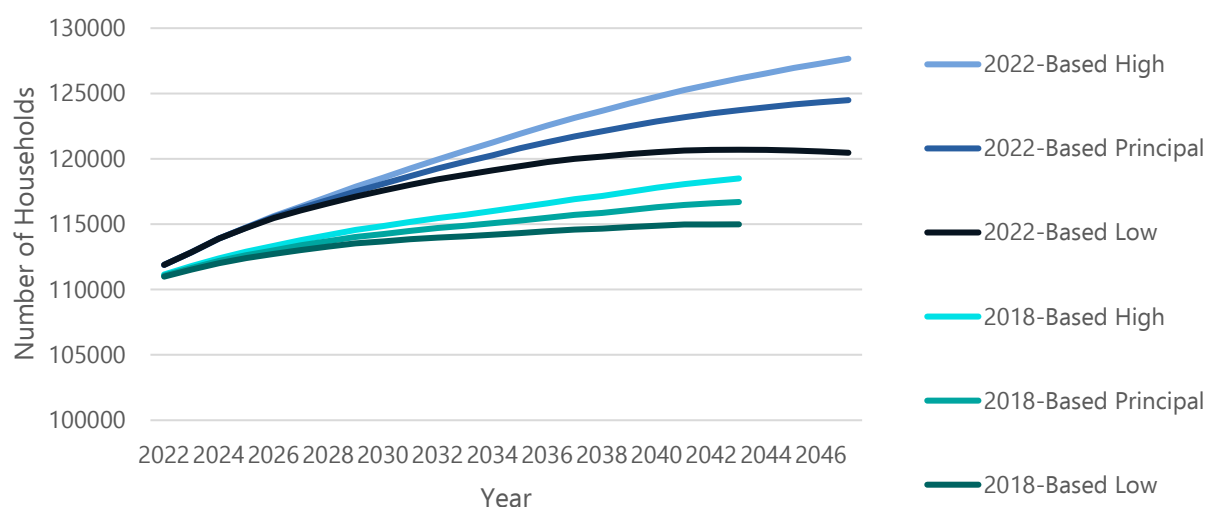


Figure 9:8 Difference between NRS 2018-based and 2022-based Household Projections for the Highland Council Area

- 9.19 Highland's anticipated household growth also signals changes in the compositions of the Household Reference Person (HRP). The HRP is a person chosen for statistical reasons by virtue of economic activity, age and/ or sex as the representative of a household. NRS Subnational Household Projections: 2022-based define the HRP as the eldest economically active person in the household, then the eldest inactive person if there was no economically active person. Between 2022-2032, most council areas are projected to see increases of 20% or more in the number of households where the HRP is aged 75 years or over, but for Highland, the equivalent rate is 35.46%, which is the third highest in Scotland. These age patterns reflect the projected ageing population in the 2022-based subnational population projections and are recognised as having significant implications for informing council decisions about future housing need and service provision (such as waste collection and community care). The projections feed into development plans, including assessments of housing need and demand for the future.
- 9.20 One key implication from the NRS Subnational Household Projections: 2022-based are that Highland's households are increasingly smaller in size, consisting of 2.2 persons in 2022, 2.15 persons in 2030, and 2.07 by 2040. This equates to a 9% decline in household size by 2047, while the equivalent decline in household sizes for Scotland is 6%.
- 9.21 The NRS Subnational Household Projections: 2022-based indicate that household type projections for Highland will influence the composition of household types. The key household types are:

- One Adult Households:** Households consisting of just one adult are projected to account for 38.0% of all Scotland's households by 2032. This proportion of people living alone varies according to age and sex. People are more likely to live alone as they become older. Over a third (34.8%) of people in Scotland aged 65 years or over are projected to live alone by 2032. More than half (54.2%) of people aged 85 years or over are projected to live alone in 2032. Men are more likely to be living alone than women in all age groups up to 64 years old. However, from 65 years old onwards women are more likely to be living alone, and this likelihood increases with age.
- Two or more Adult Households:** The number of households consisting of just two or more adults is projected to rise by 5.6% in Scotland between 2022 and 2032 (to 1,046,900 households). They are projected to account for 39.0% of all Scottish households in 2032, slightly lower than the 39.4% share in 2022. The increase in the number of households consisting of just two or more adults is mainly driven by a large increase in those where the household reference person (HRP) is aged 65 years or over.
- Adult(s) with dependent children Households:** The total number of Scottish households containing one or more dependent children is projected to grow from 590,000 in 2022 to 618,100 in 2032, an increase of 4.7%. Around half of council areas are projected to see an increase between 2022 and 2032 in the number of households containing dependent children. In general, it is the council areas which are reasonably close to the main cities which have the highest projected percentages of households with dependent children, while rates of growth are lower in the cities themselves, and in remote rural and island council areas.

Table 9:3 Projected distribution of households by type in council areas in 2032 and Percentage Change from 2022 (NRS Subnational Household Projections: 2022-based)

	1 Adult		2+ Adults		Adult(s) with Children	
	Composition	% Δ	Composition	% Δ	Composition	% Δ
Highland	38.6%	3.2%	40.7%	6.2%	20.7%	1.4%
Scotland	38.0%	0.9%	39.0%	5.6%	23.0%	4.7%

- 9.22 Table 9:3 indicates that the change in household composition is occurring differently in Highland than in Scotland. While there will be growth in all household types, Highland should anticipate a greater relative increase in childless households, compared to Scotland.
- 9.23 It is vital to stress that the Highlands is a large and diverse authority with disparate demographic trends occurring throughout the authority. While the Local Development Planning Guidance is primarily concerned with translating housing

need and demand into a single authority-wide indicative housing land requirement, it is reasonable to highlight within the Evidence Report, that the aforementioned trends in household growth, household type and size are highly unlikely to be uniform across the Council's ten distinct Housing Market Areas, which are all starting from a different demographic composition and likely to experience different trends within the lifetime of HLDP. As such a large authority, the Highland Council contains both areas that import and export residents, providing both an urban employment centre that attracts incoming residents, while also containing fragile rural areas that are drawn to it. What is highly apparent however, is that a significantly higher number of homes is anticipated to be required to accommodate demographic change in Highland, however those homes will increasingly require to be smaller and suitable for older populations.

- 9.24 Highland's remote areas have a low population density due to many factors such as the physical, environmental and landownership constraints to further development, and the lack of employment and other opportunities. However, **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places** reveals that, compared to Scotland as a whole, Highland's population has a wider geographic distribution across both urban and rural areas. This reflects the size, shape and pattern of developable land in Highland; i.e, previous and future settlement are and will be concentrated on the coastal margins of the region and their accessible rural hinterlands. These developable coastal margins are separated from each other by large distances and problematic transport connectivity which is why so many smaller settlements (including crofting townships) exist in Highland.
- 9.25 **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places** section **Economic Profile and Rural Development** details the geographic distribution of the Highland population, noting the 2022 research report [Place-based Policy Approaches to Population Challenges](#), which evidences that in line with national trends, Highland's population within accessible rural areas has continued to grow at rates above the Scottish average, while remote rural areas have experienced declining populations since the early 2000's. The most remote and sparsely populated areas have seen the most substantial decline. The populations of accessible, remote and very remote small towns have shown very similar trends to their rural counterparts, though less extreme, i.e. closer to the Scottish average. Thus, both remoteness and settlement structure and pattern seem to play a role in determining recent population trends. Analysis of the components of population change suggests that the process by which the remote rural areas have "lost" population in recent years is predominantly through natural decrease (more deaths than births) rather than through net (out) migration. However, this natural decrease is partly a consequence of the previous age profile of migrants.

- 9.26 As a consequence of these complex age structure and migration dynamics, Highland's remote rural areas have acquired an increasingly unbalanced age structure, with proportions of children and working age adults below the Scottish average, and an expanding pensioner population. By comparison, the situation in accessible rural areas is mixed: the share of population who are children is above the Scottish average, but so is that of the over-65s, whilst the share in the economically active age groups is below the Scottish average. The implications of Highland's population structure and geographic distribution on the regional economy are detailed further in **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**, while the implications of the ageing population on the health and social care needs of the region are detailed in **Chapter 11: Infrastructure**.
- 9.27 Homes for Scotland (HfS) commissioned a survey of 839 people in Highland (Highland Council area not HLDP area) households in August 2023 as new primary evidence of existing and likely future housing need. The associated report *Existing Housing Need in Highland (THC073)* estimated that there were 4,000 existing overcrowded households, 15,000 concealed households, 2,000 unfit property households, 4,000 households requiring adaptations of their existing properties, 9,000 households struggling with high housing costs (where more than 50% of their gross income was being spent on housing costs), and 500 households in temporary accommodation. In total, 30,500 have at least one form of need. The report concluded that of these households, 15,500 need an affordable solution and 10,000 can afford a market solution.
- 9.28 HfS commissioned similar [Scotland wide Existing Housing Need](#), with individual local reports across Scotland. The relevance and significance of these reports have been considered at Gate Check. The [Falkirk Local Development Plan Gate Check report](#) commented that HfS' documents may prompt a national review of how the number of concealed households is estimated. It also discusses that the MATHLR may be regarded as a minimum housing need total and that the relevant HfS report figure as a maximum.

Housing Need and Demand Assessment 2021

- 9.29 The Council's [2021 HNDA](#) is a robust and credible source of data to be relied upon, with a 5-year housing estimate of 4,998 (2019/20-2023/24). However, the HNDA is not in itself a land requirement – it is one of a number of inputs. However, in undertaking the [HNDA 2021](#), the Council raised several key issues with the prescribed methodology and how this impacted the results in a Highland context, which are summarised in section 4 of the [HNDA](#), namely:
- Household projections are not created at a Housing Market Area level – the CHMA tool uses a simple methodology (based upon Council tax based residential property counts) to apportion the projected housing need (both

existing need and arising need) to individual HMAs. For the Highland Council area this approach is not considered by the Housing Market Partnership (HMP) to deliver appropriate splits of Highland-wide Household projections between HMA's. Sub council area population projections for the Highland Council area demonstrate very wide differences in the projected future population counts and specifically the population make-up by age. These variances are highly likely to drive significantly different needs across different Housing Market Areas. HMP agreed to depart from the HNDA Tool method and utilise a 10-year average of delivery (using completions data by HMA) to better proportionately allocate Arising Need, as these correspond better to the proportion of those aged 16-64 and the projected change in the proportion of the total Highland 16-64 age group to 2040, which was considered most useful in understanding the proportion of home makers.

- The HMP agreed to use an in-house developed method to estimate existing need (sometimes referred to as the backlog of need). This is based on an assessment of the current living arrangements of each applicant on the [Highland Housing Register](#) (HHR). The Partnership considered this approach more robust than the defaults suggested in the HNDA Guidance in incorporated as default in the CHMA Tool (which provides a figure of 840 for the Highland Council Area from significantly outdated sources). The accompanying [HNDA Background Paper 1 - Estimating Existing Need – Approach to Backlog Definition](#) describes this approach fully.
- The [HNDA 2021](#) states that the High Migration projection is used, due to the continuing recent evidence of a net inward migration of 1000+ per year into the Highland Council area, and that the HMP considered that, of the three, the high migration scenario was the closest to the likely future growth of Highland, but even this equated HNDA Housing estimates being 24% lower than historic completion levels. However, since the publication of the Highland [HNDA 2021](#), the Housing Market Partnership continued to raise concerns regarding these matters in the production of the subsequent Local Housing Strategy.

Local Housing Strategy

- 9.30 The [Highland Council Local Housing Strategy 2023-2028](#) (LHS) was approved in April 2023. The Council must have regard, in preparing the new HLDP (section 9 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Planning) (Scotland) Regulations 2023) to the LHS. It sets a far higher housing (supply) target for Highland than the MATHLR because of the expected effects of major economic projects such as the Inverness and Highland City Region Growth Deal and the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport in stimulating the need and demand for housing. The LHS is founded partly upon expectation and partly upon aspiration. The LHS reports a

consensus across the stakeholders that collaborated to prepare the LHS of the need to encourage a step change in housing delivery required to support and drive economic growth in the Highlands. **Although the LHS only covers a 5-year period it sets an annual Highland Council boundary Housing Supply Target (HST) of 1,840 dwellings** (see Table 1.10 within **THC071**) **which would equate to 18,400 over 10 years**. Subtracting the Badenoch and Strathspey Housing Market Area (the populous part of which almost exclusively lies within the Cairngorms National Park Authority area), the **10 year HST for the HLDP area equates to 17,100 units**. It is for the Cairngorms National Park Authority to make its own conclusions from the Council's LHS 2023-2028 and other available evidence to inform the Local Housing Land Requirement for their next local development plan.

9.31 The methodology used to derive the LHS housing targets is different to that used for the MATHLR, and the statement within the LHS on pg 35 that “the HST has been derived from HNDA housing estimates” is partially correct. Appendix 2 (**THC071**) serves as the Housing Supply Target Methodology Paper for the LHS 2023-2028 details the steps in that methodology and the evidence to justify its choice. In summary, the LHS is committed to achieving a ‘step change in housing supply’ to enable the delivery of an ambitious economic development strategy for the Highland region and to relieve evidenced pressures on affordable and key worker housing. As such, Housing Market Partners were not satisfied that HNDA housing estimates offered a reasonable starting point for setting the HST. The key reasons are detailed in **THC071** but in summary:

- **Tenure split of HNDA Housing Estimates** which reverse the tenure delivery profile of future housing supply in Highland. Whilst increases in the scale of affordable housing delivery are welcomed in the context of affordability pressures, housing estimates account for just 35% of historic market housing delivery rates. The HNDA toolkit calculates housing tenure estimates based on a historic income profile of the existing household population in Highland. This methodology will therefore drive a significant need for affordable housing and will not reflect the future need for market housing associated with economic growth projects, which are aimed at attracting skilled workers with higher income levels into Highland.
- **Reducing market delivery targets could have a negative impact on future delivery of affordable housing.** The Highland Affordable Housing Policy requires 25% of all completions to be developed for affordable housing on all sites greater than four units. Based on the last 5 years of market activity and adjusting for windfall delivery from small sites (up to 15% of all completions); results in approximately 960 units of affordable housing delivery. If Housing Supply Targets are based on unadjusted HNDA housing estimates, the affordable housing contribution from market delivery

will reach just 340 units, just 35% of historic Affordable Housing Policy completions. On this basis, it was agreed that Housing Supply Targets should not assume market supply targets below the rate of historic completions as a baseline, whilst the estimated need for affordable housing should be projected and maintained in an attempt to address the backlog of housing need in Highland communities.

- 9.32 The LHS therefore replaces the HNDA methodology (and therefore does not utilise any of the HNDA scenarios in their entirety) because it generates annual market housing totals that account for just 35% of past trend private completions and uses existing household income profile data that will not reflect the aspiration for future economic growth that will attract skilled workers with higher income levels into Highland.
- 9.33 The key difference therefore is that the LHS 2023-2028 uses the HNDA *affordable* housing estimates (3,396) which are then benchmarked to past average affordable sector completions as a base for future forecasting rather than a full 2021 HNDA scenario estimate. Also, inflations to the totals factor in ambitious levels of employment-led housing growth and an allowance for a proportion of the future housing stock to be lost from mainstream use to second home / holiday home / short-term letting use.
- 9.34 The LHS 2023-2028 was undertaken when the understanding of the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport was still evolving at early stages. After it was approved, the Council commissioned Arneil Johnston in 2024 to produce a report **(THC072)** to recalibrate the Housing Supply Targets within the Local Housing Strategy 2023-2028 to take into the account the subsequent economic impact assessment within the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport Business Case discussed in **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places** as there were doubts as to whether the LHS had adequately incorporated this.
- 9.35 This report **(THC072)** explains the methodology followed which can be summarised as:
 - estimating the gross direct Full Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs arising from the economic impact analysis of the Green Freeport project by area; adjusting for additional impacts i.e. deadweight (existing jobs lost) or displacement (proposal taking jobs from existing economy) to establish net additional FTE jobs;
 - assessing where the workforce is likely to originate from by area to assess net housing requirements (i.e. the number of new additional units required to accommodate the in-migrant portion of the required workforce); and,
 - assessing the extent to which job estimates are already reflected in the current HNDA / LHS processes to avoid double counting. Specifically, an

assumption of 10,192 Green Freeport direct FTE jobs over 10 years was input. Table 1.11 within the report **(THC072)** summarises the results.

- Converting to HST into a 10-year as opposed to a 5-year target.

- 9.36 The Green Freeport project **(THC072)** adjusted Housing Supply Targets for the next 10 years for all of Highland are 24,235 units split 71% (17,157) market and 29% (7,078) affordable. For the smaller HLDP area (subtracting Badenoch and Strathspey), this equates to a total of 23,045 units split 16,568 market and 6,477 affordable. The report doesn't include indirect, multiplier and related renewables industry employment. Major energy grid reinforcement construction projects are ongoing within Highland and will continue until at least 2031 and therefore it is reasonable to assume that there will be additional, albeit part temporary, employment-led housing growth resulting from that construction activity. For example, SSE have confirmed that they intend to purchase 200-300 new build residential units for their workers between 2025 and 2030. In September 2025, the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport Memorandum of Understanding revised the additional jobs estimate to 11,000 over 25 years, highlighting the continued challenge of estimating projecting housing need, demand and supply in Highland within a dynamic socio-economic context. While the revised 24,235 HST figure was widely known and shared locally, the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport Housing Supply Targets **(THC072)** had been progressed outwith and subsequent to the formal LHS and have therefore not been approved by Scottish Government.
- 9.37 The Council has since commissioned Arneil Johnston to produce a new Highland HNDA with completion expected in 2026. It will then be sent to the Centre for Housing Market Analysis (CHMA) to seek its endorsement as robust and credible. That endorsement will hopefully be forthcoming during the Gate Check process. This new HNDA will incorporate latest [2022-based Subnational population projections](#) and the 2022-based household projections for Highland. It will also include further primary research on local housing need and demand and stakeholder input on the known or likely effects of employment-led growth and workforce estimates on that need and demand, which has been detailed in **THC070** and referred to in **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**. The final HNDA anticipated for completion in 2026 after the Evidence Report Gate check submission will more fully inform the proposed plan as will reflect the most recent inputs available.

Setting Highland's LHLR

- 9.38 Until the new HNDA is completed, The Council is setting an interim, indicative LHLR based on the methodology within the [LHS 2023-2028](#), since this reflects the most recent accepted figure that has been subject to Scottish Government

oversight unlike **THC072**. This methodology is summarised above and set out in detail within Appendix 2 of the LHS (**THC071**). **For the HLDP area over 10 years this equates to an iLHLR of 17,100 units** as shown in Table 9:4.

Table 9:4 Highland Indicative Local Housing Land Requirement (iLHLR)

Housing Supply Target - 10 year (LHS 2023-2028)	
Highland Annual HST (A)	1,840
Badenoch and Strathspey Annual HST (B)	130
HLDP Area Annual HST (A-B)	1,710
Adjusted to 10 years (A-B) *10	17,100
Indicative Local Housing Land Requirement (iLHLR)	17,100

- 9.39 The Council's LHLR is proposed as the HST for the Highland area that falls within the LDP boundary, only making an adjustment to remove Badenoch and Strathspey within the CNPA LDP. As explained above, the LHS 2023-2028 follows a different methodology to that promoted by the CHMA through the HNDA Toolkit. The two methodologies highlight the quandary of whether setting housing targets should be a technical, past data-driven process or one overtly influenced by policy objectives. Current practice in Scotland reflects a compromise between the two.
- 9.40 As explained above, previous natural decrease population trends and 2018-based projections in Highland suggests that the current HNDA Toolkit based forecast will set a low base for estimating the LHLR in contrast with 2022-based projections. The Council does not wish to plan for the decline of Highland. Instead, it wishes to incorporate a policy assumption that future economic growth will stimulate an increase in future housing need and demand. The HNDA in progress collects and assesses evidence and stakeholder input to justify such an assumption. **THC072** referencing how the Green Freeport may impact Highland's Housing Supply Targets is part of that justification, but has since been further qualified with further engagement with wider economic development partners and major employers in the region. **THC070** sets out the progress of the current HNDA and the agreed employment-led housing growth that has been agreed within this engagement and will be subject to assessment as part of the HNDA once complete.
- 9.41 Similarly positive policy assumptions have been made at national level. Housing to 2040 includes the Scottish Government's overarching objective for the housing sector which sets a target for Scotland of 10,000 affordable homes per year up to 2032 with 70% of these for social rent. However, the combined MATHLR figures set out in Annex E of NPF4 total 204,292 units over 10 years or 20,429 units per year which implies that the Scottish Government's market sector target for Scotland is only 10,429 units per year. Scotland's long term (1997 to 2024 inclusive) actual private sector completions averaged a far higher 15,932 units per

year. At the very least there is a disconnect between the NPF4 MATHLR figures and their underlying HNDA methodology, and the Scottish Government's housing policy objectives set out in [Housing to 2040](#).

Housing Completions and Demolitions

Completions

- 9.42 Completions data provides evidence of past trends in delivery of new housing units and are a helpful reference point. They are not necessarily an indicator of future demand or the potential for future delivery. The information is therefore helpful to use as a comparative benchmark. Past trends in housing completions give an indication of average development industry capacity, affordable housing grant levels, and proven market demand within Highland. However, they don't help predict any future changes in these factors. Factually, over the period 2008 to 2024 inclusive, HLDP area house completions averaged 1,031 units per annum.

Table 9:5 Completions by Highland Housing Market Areas by Calendar Year 2008-2024

Housing Market Area	Total	Annual Average
Caithness	992	58
East Ross	1,292	76
Inverness	7,840	461
Lochaber	1,473	87
Mid Ross	1,960	115
Nairn	733	43
Ross and Cromarty West	720	42
Skye and Lochalsh	1,593	94
Sutherland	917	54
HLDP Total	17,520	1,031

- 9.43 Table 9:5 demonstrates the concentration of most completions within the Inner Moray Firth (a combination of the East Ross, Inverness, Mid Ross and Nairn Housing Market Areas) with two-thirds (67%) of recent housing development in this area and 45% solely within the Inverness Housing Market Area.

Demolitions

- 9.44 [Scottish Government Housing \(Demolitions\) Statistics](#) notes only a limited number of demolitions in Highland over the last five years for which information has been published as shown in Table 9:6. Only local authority demolitions are indicated within the Highland returns that inform these statistics within the last 15 years.

Table 9:6 Highland Demolitions from 2009-2024 (*Scottish Government Housing Statistics*)

Period	Non-local authority demolitions	Local authority demolitions	Total Demolitions
2019-20 to 2023-24	0	33	33
2014-15 to 2018-19	0	21	21
2009-10 to 2013-14	0	122	122

9.45 Extracted demolition records from Uniform data (**THC091**) shed light on potential local authority and non-local authority demolitions, albeit planning applications do not mean that these demolitions inevitably occur, and multiple applications may be received for an renewed proposal. Table 9:7 indicates that between 2020/21 until 2025/26, there were 59 applications for demolitions of a non-residential unit replaced with a residential unit, and 147 applications for demolitions of a residential unit replaced with a residential unit. However, a far smaller number subsequently submitted notices of initiation or completion.

Table 9:7 Highland Planning Applications for Demolitions (**THC091**)

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Demolition of Non-Residential Unit & Replacement Non-Residential Unit	88	98	79	89	41
Demolition of Non-Residential Unit & Replacement Residential Unit	15	8	10	4	10
Demolition of Non-Residential Unit Only	7	4	6	6	9
Demolition of Residential Unit & Replacement Non-Residential Unit	2		3	1	1
Demolition of Residential Unit & Replacement Residential Unit	26	22	12	19	24
Demolition of Residential Unit Only	6	9	4	13	7
Total Residential Unit Demolished	34	31	19	33	32
*where NOI/NOC received	12	6	4	2	3
Total Demolitions with Replacement Residential units	41	30	22	23	34
*where NOI/NOC received	15	8	4	2	3

- 9.46 From the information in Table 9:6 and Table 9:7 in tandem, the Council considers that demolitions are not a substantial feature of development in the Highlands, and once total residential demolitions are compared with demolitions involving new residential units, there is little difference in the numbers, indicating little consequential contribution to the overall balance of stock. No adjustment has therefore been made to the LHLR to account for any dependable number of stock lost through demolitions or new housing units being completed on sites with former demolitions

Housing Land Supply

- 9.47 Scottish Ministers now require each planning authority to better demonstrate that it is meeting its housing target. This evidence is to be a published pipeline, which is to include the sequencing of, and timescale for, the delivery of all housing component sites allocated in the authority's local development plan(s) and/or with an extant planning permission. The Council first published its Deliverable Housing Land Pipeline for Highland in May 2025. This includes only those sites with an extant housing capacity of 25 or more units as of a base date of 1 June 2024. The other components of the housing land supply comprise those sites expected to be delivered by sites between 4 and 24 units as set out within the Council's 2024 Housing Land Audit and the yield from smaller 1-3 unit developments.
- 9.48 Currently, these 3 components of the housing land supply are expected to deliver 12,360 units over 10 years. In more detail, the 25+ unit sites are expected to deliver 2,513 units over the next 3 years and 6,147 over years 1-6. Thereafter, only another 2,777 units are expected in years 7-10 inclusive. At least 4,700 potential housing units are tied to allocated housing sites which are not expected to deliver in the next 10 years. From the wider 2024 Housing Land Audit, 4-24 sites are expected to deliver 266 over years 1-3, 719 over years 1-6, and only a further 137 units over years 7-10 inclusive. From past trends (April 2012 to July 2025 inclusive) small scale windfall development (1-3 unit developments on non-allocated land) delivered an average of 258 units per year, which if continued would generate an additional 2,580 units over 10 years. In summary, there is a current estimated shortfall of just under 5,000 units in sites that are likely to deliverable within the next 10 years relative to the LHS 2023-2028 based HST of 17,100 units.
- 9.49 Estimating future windfall development (most commonly defined as housing completions outwith specifically allocated sites) is uncertain but past trend evidence provides an indication of what might happen. Unsurprisingly, in a predominantly rural area such as Highland, a large part of the housing land supply is accommodated on land not specifically allocated for that purpose within one of the Council's three area LDPs.

- 9.50 Over the period 4 April 2012 to 31 July 2025, there were 13,006 completions across the HLDP area. Of these, 4,833 (37%) were on land outwith any specific LDP allocation at the time of decision. There has been considerable recent debate as to whether windfall development within settlements is stymied by Policy 16 f) of NPF4. In September 2025, the Scottish Government issued a [Chief Planner Letter and Notification Direction - September 2025](#) to require better monitoring by local planning authorities of this issue. Highland's existing policy on this issue is HwLDP Policy 34 Settlement Development Areas which establishes a general presumption in favour of infill development on unallocated land within settlements unless there are proposal and/or site-specifics which dictate otherwise.
- 9.51 Since the 1990s, the Council has applied a positive presumption in favour of development, subject to the proposal and site-specifics, within various Highland settlements the outer edge of which is defined by a Settlement Development Area boundary. This presumption is detailed within a Settlement Development Areas policy (Policy 34 of HwLDP **(THC002)**). The intention of this policy is to be supportive of the principle of "infill" development within settlements. In part, the policy is also founded upon the impracticability of specifically identifying every suitable development site within every Highland settlement. For house completions outwith LDP defined settlement boundaries, as shown in Table 9:8 there were 2,769 units or 21.3% of all completions over the period 2012-2025. This is a truer indication of windfall development. Even then, many of these completions were not in the open countryside but within smaller crofting townships and other smaller parish based rural settlements or housing groups that are not defined by boundary within an LDP.

Table 9:8 Highland Completions 2012-2025

Location	Number	Percentage of Total
Within LDP Allocation	8,173	62.8%
Outwith Allocation but Within Settlement Boundary	2,064	15.9%
Outwith any LDP Allocation or Settlement Boundary	2,769	21.3%
Totals	13,006	100%

- 9.52 Future Scottish Government and Council policy and application on rural housing will most affect whether this percentage increases or decreases but a continuation of past trend data would be a sensible and neutral assumption for now.
- 9.53 As outlined in previously in the Evidence Report, the Council is progressing 3 Masterplan Consent Areas and once the details of these are sufficiently advanced with numbers of housing units better known, the Council expects to factor this into the deliverable housing land pipeline.

Affordable Housing

- 9.54 According to [Scottish Government Data on Social Sector House Completions](#) across the Council area averaged 290 units per annum over the period 2016/17 to 2024/25 inclusive. The Council believes this to be a significant under-estimate due to definitional differences and, instead, as stated in its [Strategic Housing Investment Plan \(SHIP\) 2026-2031](#) that an average of 500 units per annum have been delivered over the last 10 years (2015-2024 inclusive) and that annual completions over the current financial year and next most recent two years will average 416 units per annum. The Scottish Government average figure equates to an average of 26% of all completions across the same period and area. The latest SHIP aims to build 700 affordable units per annum over the period 2026-2031, rather than the 500 which had originally been forecast. With listed schemes for 3,272 new approval units at an annual rate of 654 units but ideally 700 per annum with 35.3% of the proposed investment within the Inverness Housing Market Area.
- 9.55 The viability of social housing providers delivering affordable housing in Highland is largely dictated by the availability and level of Scottish Government subsidy. This level of subsidy is established through published [Scottish Government Affordable Housing Investment Benchmarks](#), which are subject to occasional review. The current (October 2024 set) maximum level of subsidy for a standard 3-person residential unit for social rent in West Highland is £117,222. The lowest level of subsidy for a standard 3-person residential unit for Council mid-market rent in Inverness is £60,145. An August 2025 review of affordable housing scheme tender prices estimated that the current (prices indexed to August 2025) total, traditional procurement, benchmark cost of provision of a standard 3 bedspace residential unit in South Highland (Lochaber and Skye and Lochalsh) is £277,622 and £210,789.68 in the rest of Highland. The same assessment revealed that a design and build procurement via a section 75 agreement with a private housebuilder reduces this average cost of a 3-bedspace unit by between 11 and 19%. The marked difference between the actual cost of completing an affordable unit in Highland relative to the public subsidy available to do so inhibits affordable housing delivery. The financial risk of borrowing the difference between the level of subsidy and the actual cost of completing units is challenging for the smaller social housing providers that operate in Highland. The current subsidy regime encourages working with private housebuilders via section 75 agreements and a preference for mid-market rent units which offer a lower level of subsidy but a greater future income stream. Therefore, it is particularly problematic to deliver smaller groups of social rented units in the remoter parts of Highland, which have no volume private housebuilder interest and generally higher development costs and tender prices.

- 9.56 The Council's [SHIP 2026-2031](#) references the other barriers to affordable housing delivery in Highland as: a lack of economically deliverable development sites; higher national interest rates that depress private market demand and activity therefore reducing the number of private sites that can deliver 25% affordable units; insufficient school capacity in the most pressured parts of Highland which drive up developer contribution costs; delays in obtaining all consents; construction cost inflation; a national tax regime that disincentivises landowner land release; the lack of contractors competing for tenders; high abnormal site development costs for brownfield and remoter sites; and, higher national energy-efficiency standards and the costs of funding such.

Affordable Housing Need

- 9.57 There are several estimates and sources of evidence on housing need. The official combined waiting list for all social housing providers in Highland, known as the [Highland Housing Register](#), as of 31 March 2026, had a total of 8,826 applications on the housing list, equating to 16,451 people as applications can be for single individuals, couples or families. An annual [Highland Housing Register Analysis Report](#) each August illustrates the register data, with the most recent available report referring to 31st March 2025, where 8,767 applications were on the housing list. Of all 8,767 applications held on 31 March 2025, 70.16% were not currently a tenant of a Highland Housing Register landlord. 50% of applications were for single individuals (highlighting a growing need for smaller properties), 10% were couples and 40% were families. An [Highland Housing Register Analysis Report](#) provides a fuller review of the Register data and how properties are allocated. 10% of these households were defined as homeless under national homelessness legislation. The tenure split within the ongoing HNDA once complete will give a more informed picture of the current level of affordable housing need by HMA.
- 9.58 The highest first choice area for accommodation is Inverness (chosen by 41% of all applicants). The Register also highlights that the prospects of obtaining an existing affordable unit by comparing the number of applicants to the number of units in each lettings area. The prospects of being let a unit in Caithness are far better than in Inverness because there is much more favourable ratio of available lets relative to the need for them in Caithness than in Inverness. 1,620 households were housed over the 2024/25 financial year (including transfers). Even though new affordable units became available over the course of that year, there were fewer properties available for re-let relative to the previous year because existing tenants are increasingly staying for longer. This evidence highlights the issue that building more affordable housing doesn't necessarily clear a waiting list on a one-for-one basis in an area.

9.59 The affordability of home purchase is related to average house prices. Using the CHMA datapacks and CACI 2024 income profiles, the containment and affordability analysis has been undertaken for the HNDA. The average house price, for the financial year 2023/24 across the Council area was £209,125, a 22% increase from 2019/20. There are marked intra-Highland differences as shown in Table 9:9 ranging from £295,229 in Badenoch and Strathspey to £132,945 in Caithness.

Table 9:9 Housing Affordability in Highland Housing Market Areas

HMA	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	Change	Average
Badenoch & Strathspey	£232,671	£219,168	£262,344	£291,739	£295,229	27%	£262,460
Caithness	£116,986	£121,770	£130,094	£146,301	£155,016	33%	£132,945
East Ross	£159,234	£168,485	£176,642	£184,868	£176,642	11%	£174,190
Inverness	£194,039	£208,377	£212,432	£223,269	£225,254	16%	£212,077
Lochaber	£199,678	£211,282	£234,802	£262,537	£236,876	19%	£227,668
Mid Ross	£192,859	£212,112	£224,068	£237,432	£239,429	24%	£219,097
Nairn	£202,718	£217,278	£233,805	£242,297	£248,260	22%	£227,125
Ross & Cromarty West	£189,104	£225,849	£242,615	£272,194	£247,709	31%	£234,242
Skye & Lochalsh	£209,194	£214,999	£245,440	£272,727	£260,395	24%	£239,637
Sutherland	£166,935	£176,647	£201,841	£220,597	£223,688	34%	£196,483
Highland	£186,310	£198,830	£210,185	£227,463	£227,375	22%	£209,125

9.60 Relative to the average Highland household income in 2024 of £50,527, only 36% of households could afford (spending 30% of their household income on housing costs) the average Highland house price and only 59% the cheapest form of owner-occupation. The least affordable part of the Council area is Skye and Lochalsh where only 29% of households can afford the average house price and only 50% the cheapest form of owner-occupation as shown in Table 9:10. The most affordable part of Highland is Caithness where 48% of households can afford the average house price and 72% the cheapest form of owner-occupation.

Table 9:10 Income required for average house prices in Highland Housing Market Areas (2019-2024)

HMA	Avg House Price	Avg Household Income	Income required for Avg House Price	% Cannot Afford Avg House Price	% Cannot Afford Market Entry Price
Badenoch & Strathspey	£295,229	£55,991	£69,716	69%	44%
Caithness	£155,016	£42,293	£35,314	52%	28%
East Ross	£176,642	£45,413	£46,269	61%	38%
Inverness	£225,254	£53,219	£56,333	62%	41%
Lochaber	£236,876	£48,929	£60,474	70%	46%
Mid Ross	£239,429	£53,899	£58,198	63%	40%
Nairn	£248,260	£51,724	£60,330	66%	45%
Ross & Cromarty West	£247,709	£50,099	£62,220	71%	47%
Skye & Lochalsh	£260,395	£50,263	£63,654	71%	50%
Sutherland	£223,688	£45,069	£52,191	68%	41%
Highland	£227,375	£50,527	£55,549	64%	41%

Private Rental Properties

- 9.61 The Private Rented Sector (PRS) is an important transitional and flexible housing tenure which offers accessible housing options to those in housing need. Improving the operation and supporting the growth of the PRS is an action attributed to addressing Outcome 3 within the [LHS 2023-2028](#), where People in Highland have access to a wider range of housing options and choices and the support they need. There is evidence that the cost of private renting is out of reach for low-income households in Highland. An assessment of the CACI Banded Income Profiles used within the ongoing HNDA indicates that 48% households in Highland are unable to afford market rents, more than those who cannot afford the monthly costs of market entry housing (41% - see Table 9:10).
- 9.62 The [LHS 2023-2028](#) indicates that at the time of production the PRS in Highland was slightly smaller (12%) than for Scotland (14%). Other research undertaken by the Scottish Government regarding the [Impacts of Short Term Lets on Communities](#) indicated that some areas of Highland such as Skye are characterised by a near absence of PRS accommodation options entirely. This places additional strain on the affordable housing sector, where 20% of applicants on the Highland Housing Register were interested in private renting as reported in the [LHS 2023-2028](#).

- 9.63 Rent Service Scotland (RSS) do not have a complete list of all the private rented properties in the Highland Council area as landlords/letting agents are not required by legislation to provide that information to them. RSS are required to collect a minimum of 10% of the private rental market for all Broad Rental Market Areas (BRMAS). RSS therefore use a combination of the Census and landlord register data or information voluntarily provided to collect a representative sample and devise targets to meet this 10% minimum requirement.
- 9.64 The sample of PRS listings collated and supplied by RSS evidence a highly pressurised rental market in Highland in most recent years from 2019-2024, albeit there are signs of this growing again in the most recent available year. Temporary legislation was introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic, with a moratorium on evictions from 06/09/2022 until 31/03/2024, alongside a cap in private rents in place for the same period. This is recognised as having added to the challenges of those who do not meet the criteria for affordable housing but who cannot afford to buy at market entry or average house prices in the Highlands given the lack of an effective PRS to house them. This coincides with UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence on the PRS ([Scotland's Private Rented Sector: The Next 30 Years](#)), where active landlord registrations dropped by 5% between December 2020 and December 2025.
- 9.65 Moving forward it is considered that a healthy, sustained PRS is essential to meet the needs of Highland communities, including key workers moving to Highland who initially seek rental accommodation as a short or medium-term solution.

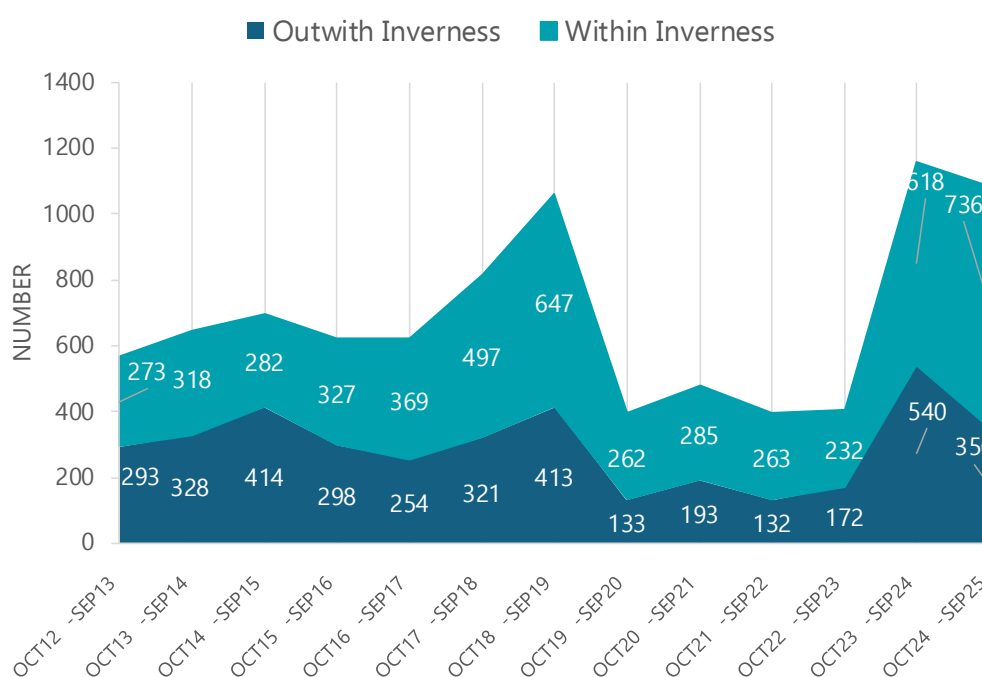


Figure 9:9 Highland Private Rental Sector Listings from 2012-2024

Specialist Provision

- 9.66 Legislation and guidance requires assessment of different types of housing need and demand. The following section assesses evidence in respect of: the homeless; the gypsy traveller community; older and disabled people requiring accessible and adapted housing; self and custom build; key workers; students; poor energy efficiency housing; and, losses of housing stock from the mainstream market to other forms of occupation such as short term let accommodation.

Homelessness

- 9.67 Social rented housing providers have a legal duty to give a reasonable preference to priority groups when allocating housing; this includes households who have nowhere safe and secure that they can reasonably stay and so are homeless and households who are living under unsatisfactory conditions and have unmet housing needs. [Highland Housing Register Analysis Report](#) shows that across Highland for 2024-2025, 53% of all lets (855) went to households with points which reflect their homelessness status; a 3% increase from 2023/24. In areas where there is a greater demand for housing, homeless points play a significant role in leading to a let; for example, the Highland Council across five housing areas allocated more than 53% of stock to homeless households: in Inverness (72%); Dingwall (73%); Badenoch and Strathspey (65%); Nairn (72%) and Portree (71%). The Scottish Government extended the rights of homeless households to obtain a social rented unit, but this increased priority, without an increase in the stock available, reduces the stock available to meet other types of housing need in Highland. More positively, this greater priority has taken households out of temporary accommodation. Within Highland, there were 526 households in temporary accommodation as of 30 September 2024, compared to a high of 785 households on 30 June 2021. A high proportion of homeless applicants are single people and/or aged 25 or under who need one-bedroom properties.

HNDA Specialist Provision Preliminary Work

- 9.68 As part of preparing the ongoing HNDA, A Specialist Housing Conference took place with a wide range of stakeholders to inform the inputs for the HNDA Core Output 3 and Existing Need. The aim of the specialist housing conference was to provide an opportunity for stakeholders involved in the planning, commissioning, and delivery of specialist housing in the Highland region to scrutinise emerging evidence and discuss the approach to meeting identified housing requirements. This includes the setting of wheelchair and accessible housing targets (across tenure), as well as the planning and commissioning of services to meet particular housing needs. The conference provided an important opportunity for the HNDA partners to obtain feedback on the process and draft outputs of the 2026

Highland HNDA and to influence the final draft document to be submitted to the Scottish Government in June 2026. In total, 31 partners and stakeholders attended the conference programme in February 2026. **THC033** provides the engagement report from this conference. In summary, the views raised (detailed in **THC033**) include:

- Partners agreed HNDA evidence on unmet specialist housing need reflects frontline pressures and is widely recognised.
- Rapid growth in the older population is a major challenge, worsening pressures in Care at Home and Care Home sectors, especially around viability and workforce shortages.
- Social housing plays a key role, with the Highland Housing Register helping meet urgent needs; better use of existing specialist stock is needed.
- Increasing the supply of specialist housing is a strategic priority, with HNDA evidence supporting stronger investment cases and funding bids.
- Lack of national definitions and data on specialist housing was noted; establishing shared local definitions and better data should be a priority.
- Greater delivery of wheelchair-accessible housing is needed, including stronger involvement from private developers through planning policy and design guidance.
- Developers are supportive but face viability challenges from rising costs and planning requirements; balanced approaches are needed.
- Workforce shortages are a growing risk to service delivery, requiring a more strategic, coordinated response.

9.69 This will therefore be taken forward within the HNDA once the new tool is available so that the HNDA can be finalised and the next LHS and HLDP will be informed better regarding specialist provision.

Gypsy Travellers

9.70 There is ongoing need and demand in Highland for culturally appropriate accommodation/facilities to meet the needs of the Gypsy/Traveller community. Gypsy/Travellers are comprised of many different individuals, families and groups, each defined by its own history, culture and lifestyle and their right to self-identify is central to each. Gypsy/Traveller communities in Highland are part of Scotland's rich cultural fabric but remain one of its most marginalised populations. In Highland, Gypsy/Travellers tends to include Scottish Gypsy/Travellers, Irish Travellers; Romany Gypsies - all recognised as ethnic minorities in law and protected under the race characteristic in the Equality Act (2010).

9.71 Although there have been subsequent consultative and statistical exercises, the last comprehensive [assessment of the accommodation needs of gypsy travellers in Highland](#) was made in 2014. In the 2022 Census, 3,343 people in Scotland

identified as belonging to the Gypsy/Traveller ethnic group, representing 0.06% of Scotland's population. However, organisations working with these communities estimate that the true Gypsy/Traveller population size could be as high as 15,000 to 20,000. This indicates that Gypsy/Travellers can be more difficult to count in the census and other surveys. Owing to these factors, there is considerable doubt regarding the accuracy of the figure of 263 permanently resident persons within Highland that classed themselves as gypsy travellers within the 2022 Census.

- 9.72 There are 4 permanent gypsy traveller sites in Highland. Numbers of applicants on the waiting lists are known to be poor indicators of unmet need as households are known to apply only at the point they become aware that there is potential availability. In Highland, community members often live in remote rural areas or roadside locations, where access to stable housing, education, healthcare, and mental health services is frequently compromised. Many of the community also live in housing or on Gypsy/Traveller sites. Nonetheless, most continue to experience barriers around digital exclusion, discrimination, and lack of cultural competency within services. Gypsy/traveller site waiting lists and site occupancy in addition to temporary encampments have been provided to Arneil Johnston for the purposes of identifying required specialist provision for the community. The Improving the Lives of Gypsy Travellers Working Group is a multi-agency group facilitated by the Council, committed to improving outcomes for the community and has a number of actions relating to health, digital access, education, tenant engagement and financial advice.
- 9.73 Recent records of temporary encampments in Highland found that there were 59 locations used over the period with the annual use of these averaging 0.9 uses per annum. The average encampment was small at 3 caravans.

Table 9:11 Highland Recorded Temporary Gypsy/Traveller Encampments

Area	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
Badenoch & Strathspey	1		1	1	3
Caithness		2			2
Inverness	7	8	4	4	23
Ross & Cromarty	8	19	4		31
Total	16	29	9	5	59

- 9.74 The choice of temporary locations is driven by proximity to employment opportunities, amenities, family relations and holiday destinations. Improvements are being made to the quality of the permanent sites such as at Longman Park, Inverness where £7.14M has being invested in future-proofing site accommodation and facilities. This reflects local liaison with the gypsy traveller community as to its preferences and aspirations, changes in fire safety standards

and a desire to follow the Scottish Government's Interim Site Design Guide. At Longman Park, this is achieved via the delivery of timber framed modular 'park home' style units which have now been completed and provided to the community. Work is ongoing to finalise the communal facilities, including a new play area and community meeting space added.

- 9.75 However, most gypsy travellers only visit Highland between spring and autumn when the weather is kinder for mobile home living and when it is more traditional to visit Highland relations. This seasonal and transient need and demand is usually accommodated in roadside laybys. The Council and other agencies manage the effects of this need and demand via an agreed [policy on supporting cooperation and managing unauthorised gypsy traveller camps](#). Assistance is offered by liaison officers who coordinate the provision of refuse collection, temporary toilets, and if required, education and health services.
- 9.76 Most of the permanent sites in Highland are permanently occupied by a few extended families. An increase in national pitch spacing standards will reduce the capacity of the permanent sites. However, all 4 permanent sites suffer from physical and ownership constraints to their expansion. Council Tenant Participation Officers explain how to join the Highland Housing Register and seek permanent accommodation options. There is one privately owned and managed Showpeople site in Highland at Invergordon which adequately caters for the needs of that community. The Council have a commitment to work with COSLA, Scot Gov and the new government housing agency More Homes Scotland in regard to gypsy traveller engagement, guidance on negotiated stopping and the inclusion of sites in the affordable housing supply programme.
- 9.77 The [Bingin Noggins Tobar Taking our Journey Project Impact Report](#) led by Progress in Dialogue highlights some key research findings largely focussing on national issues regarding cultural erosion of traditional ways of life, due to limited access to stopping places, site closures, and culturally inappropriate developments have fractured social bonds and disrupted identity:
- Participants described isolation and cultural disconnection, particularly among those placed in housing far from extended family networks.
 - Upgrades to sites often feel imposed, rather than co-designed, and fail to reflect cultural values/community-led planning. Lack of sites also meant that some feel they cannot speak out about struggles for fear of losing a place.
 - Displacement from traditional spaces contributes to loneliness/mental strain.
 - Sites do not tend to have a community building or the facilities to host community gatherings.

Accessible and Adapted Housing

- 9.78 As the **Recent demographic trends** section above established, future Highland will have a higher proportion of its population in the older age groups than many other authorities. Property requirements will change with that shift and there will be a need for more existing and new properties to be accessible and adapted to the needs of the occupants. The Council committed to developing an accessible housing strategy in 2026/2027. The Council's IMFLDP2 (**THC003**) contains a Policy 13, Accessible and Adaptable Homes, which has already established a requirement of 5% of dwellings to have a "wheelchair liveable" ground floor on sites of 50 or more residential units within that part of Highland. The policy utilises the [Scottish Homes Housing for Varying Needs](#) document to outline the precise requirements to make homes wheelchair liveable on the ground floor. Other non-planning policy options include the use of assistive technology that enables people with particular housing needs to live independently and well at home.
- 9.79 A 2023 [Scottish Government consultation on better Accessible Homes Standard](#) through the review of Part 1 of the [Housing for Varying Needs design guide](#) considered a Standard through updates to building standards and guidance. However, this Standard has not been progressed to date. Availability of public and private funding for accessible and adapted housing is very limited and capital investment in care service housing projects requires a partnership approach and a commitment to essential revenue funding from Health and Social Care budgets.
- 9.80 The [Highland 2022 Census Overview](#) provides output area data on those persons classifying themselves as having a long-term physical disability (a condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities such as walking, climbing stairs, lifting or carrying). 21,799 persons within Highland consider themselves to have a long-term physical disability - 9.3% of the normally resident population. 8 Council Wards have over 10% of their populations that describe themselves as having a long-term physical disability. 4 of these comprise Caithness and Sutherland. Other Wards with a similarly high proportion are Nairnshire, Inverness Central, and two Wards that make up Easter Ross.

Self and Custom Build

- 9.81 Self and custom build housing is defined as homes built or commissioned by individuals or groups of individuals for their own use. Highland's rural areas have historically seen the greatest demand for, and the delivery of self and custom build plots. Conversely, Inverness City and Highland towns and villages have seen few self and custom build plots become available and those that do, are often sold quickly and at a high price. Each planning authority is to prepare and maintain a list of people interested in self-build across its area.

- 9.82 Highland Council opened a Self-Build Register in 2021 and as of September 2025 there were 126 registered people or groups seeking self or custom build house sites. The Register total includes all entries regardless of how viable it is for the applicant to pursue a self-build project. The Council's IMFLDP2 (**THC003**) contains Policy 11 Self and Custom Build Housing brought in a requirement within urban areas, that at least 5% of the total residential units, on sites delivering 100 or more housing units be delivered as self or custom build plots.

Key Workers

- 9.83 The Council has defined a Key Worker as "*a worker who fulfils a role regarded as vital for the community, especially in the health, education, security, and infrastructure sectors.*" There is a shortage of housing options for a variety of key workers within Highland especially in rural areas but this can partially be addressed by increasing the supply of mid-market rent and low-cost home ownership units. Current housing legislation and national guidance makes it difficult to favour housing waiting list applicants solely because of a longstanding local or employment connection with an area. However, for the 2024/25 financial year, over 8 out of 10 applicants housed had additional points which recognised they had a particular "Need to Reside" in a community either because they work or are already established there. This "Need to Reside" category is specific to Highland and is not widely used by most local authorities. The Council's update to the housing challenge introduces a new mid-market rent model will help facilitate affordable housing options for key workers.

Energy Efficient Housing

- 9.84 **Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy** considers the evidence on this topic and its implications for policy.

Student Accommodation

- 9.85 On-campus University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) accommodation in Highland is limited and a residential place cannot be guaranteed to prospective students but there has been investment in the last 10 years. A £2.4M, 40-bed facility in Fort William, and two 150-bed facilities in Inverness have been delivered at a combined cost of £12.5M. Student need and demand is lessened by the fact that many students study locally or online but the 300 beds at Inverness Campus compare to a total student population of 5,000 at that Campus. Pressure may reduce slightly if the total of UHI students declines in line with projected demographic changes. However, it is too early to confirm any trend in this data. In 2018/19 there was a total of 43,686 students and in 2023/24 this was reduced to

36,142 but the 2022/23 figure was 42,255. Other factors may play more of a part like the availability of public funding for the university sector. If bespoke on-campus accommodation isn't available then UHI directs prospective students to the local private rented housing market which is pressured in Inverness, Fort William, Skye and Lochalsh and Wester Ross as shown in Figure 9.9.

Losses of Housing Stock from the Mainstream Housing Market

- 9.86 Many existing and new build houses are lost either temporarily or permanently from the mainstream housing market in Highland. The Council's forthcoming HNDA provides further detail on these matters. This has implications for setting the iLHLR, which needs to factor in that a proportion of future house completions will be lost from the mainstream affordable and market sectors and become ineffective housing stock, namely second homes, long term empty (LTE) or short term lets (STLs).
- 9.87 STLs are evidenced in detail within **Chapter 8 Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places** which illustrates the 4.7% Highland-wide share of newbuild completions transferred to STLs over the past 5 years (**THC064**), but which far exceeds this in some areas. Similarly, the Council has undertaken a detailed audit of property sales transactions provided by the CHMA HNDA data pack from Registers of Scotland and tracked sales where the properties subsequently appeared within the Council's Short Term Let License Register where owners applied for and were issued secondary letting licenses. This audit found that in some areas of over 10% and as many as 15% of properties sold were subsequently used within STL License applications. Areas such as Skye and Lochalsh HMA and Ross and Cromarty West HMA demonstrate the highest rates.
- 9.88 NRS Household and Dwelling Estimates - Other Geographies, 2024 provide Ward level estimates of total dwellings, LTE and second homes, while Council Short Term Let Public Register licence data provides estimates for the numbers of STLs. In tandem it is evident from Table 9:12 that these three categories remove significant shares of stock from the Highland housing market. By using the final HNDA completed in 2026, the LHLR will be best placed to proceed taking this information into account in tandem with other aspects, in a comprehensive manner.

Table 9:12 Share of Highland total dwellings recorded as Long Term Empty, Second Homes and Short Term Lets as of 2024 (*NRS, STL Register and Council Tax Register for Ward 19*)

Ward	Total (2024)	Long Term Empty		Second Homes		Short Term Lets*	
		#	%	#	%	#	%
Eilean a' Cheò (Skye & Raasay)	6171	273	4%	359	6%	932	15.1%
W. Ross, Strathpeffer & Lochalsh	7449	378	5%	605	8%	699	9.4%
North, West and Central Sutherland	3702	208	6%	321	9%	322	8.7%
Fort William and Ardnamurchan	6542	247	4%	285	4%	581	8.9%
Badenoch and Strathspey	7661	290	4%	659	9%	635	8.3%
Caol and Mallaig	4386	156	4%	135	3%	352	8.0%
Aird and Loch Ness	6224	205	3%	163	3%	435	7.0%
East Sutherland and Edderton	4606	198	4%	228	5%	252	5.5%
Inverness Central	7278	223	3%	52	1%	9383	5.3%
Inverness South (Rural Portion)	760	26	3%	24	3%	40	5.3%
Highland Overall	124812	3907	3%	3423	3%	5769	4.6%
Inverness West	5176	102	2%	29	1%	164	3.2%
Black Isle	5126	130	3%	70	1%	130	2.5%
Wick and East Caithness	7213	299	4%	98	1%	143	2.0%
Tain and Easter Ross	4595	151	3%	77	2%	93	2.0%
Nairn and Cawdor	6558	140	2%	106	2%	127	1.9%
Inverness Millburn	4942	115	2%	20	0%	75	1.5%
Thurso and Northwest Caithness	6450	193	3%	61	1%	99	1.5%
Cromarty Firth	6125	118	2%	24	0%	74	1.2%
Inverness South (Urban Portion)	6762	98	1%	26	0%	81	1.2%
Dingwall and Seaforth	6283	176	3%	19	0%	64	1.0%
Culloden and Ardersier	5674	92	2%	36	1%	60	1.0%
Inverness Ness-side	5417	89	2%	26	0%	44	0.8%

*STLs used for secondary letting with unconventional accommodation (pods etc) excluded

9.89 While Long Term Empty and Second Homes exist throughout Highland, the Council is currently using other policy mechanisms to address these which include premiums on Council Tax and the introduction of funds to bring LTE properties back into use. **Chapter 12: Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings** discusses empty properties in greater detail. The loss of existing and new build housing stock to second homes and short term let accommodation can be influenced by planning policy. Again, there are significant intra-Highland differences as, unsurprisingly, the more attractive and popular holiday destinations have higher rates of stock lost from the mainstream housing market.

9.90 It is vital to stress that the total rate of ineffective stock is not easily derived from these totals. While LTE and Second Homes are distinct exclusive categories within the Council Tax Register, some STLs are also recorded on the Council Tax Register as Second Homes, while others are removed from the Council Tax Register and placed on the non-domestic rates (NDR) register provided they can evidence that the unit was let for 70 nights and available to let for 140 nights in the previous tax year. Table 9:12 therefore does not claim that a sum of these columns equates to the total ineffective stock owing to the likelihood of double counting between Second Homes and STLs. In 2024 within the HLDP area, combining [NRS households and dwellings data](#), 8,570 or 7.3% of all dwellings were either second homes or short term let properties.

Rural Homes

9.91 Owing to Highland's **Demographic Overview** detailed above, a significant proportion of planning applications for housing and subsequent **Housing Completions** and Demolitions, are smaller windfall developments, located outwith allocated sites or settlements entirely. While the extent of Highland's rurality varies, demand for rural homes is not limited to remote areas, but is also evident short distances from Inverness and other towns in the IMF Area. The absence of private, volume house builder interest in much of Caithness, Sutherland, Wester Ross, Skye and Lochaber, means that single, rural, private houses built on unallocated sites often equate to a high proportion of housing completions in those areas. As part of preparing the WestPlan (**THC005**), it was evident that of the 3,720 house completions from 2000 to 2017 inclusive within the plan area, 3,150 of those completions were outwith those allocations, which equates to an 85% windfall level.

9.92 As partly explained in the **Demographic Overview** section above, Highland's rural area is not as homogeneous as that of many other authorities. It has marked variations demographically, physically, economically, in development pressure, in pattern of landownership and existing settlement, and in accessibility to infrastructure and facility networks. This variety has prompted the Council in previous and existing development plans to pursue a far more nuanced policy response to rural housing development than other authorities and that taken within NPF4. The Council, in existing approved development plan policy terms defines Highland's rural areas as all land outwith both an LDP delineated settlement boundary or an Economic Development Area. This land is divided into 4 separate policy application areas;

- Growing Settlements,
- Hinterland countryside (see **Hinterland** below),
- Housing groups (not otherwise classified as part of a settlement), and

- Wider countryside.

- 9.93 In contrast, NPF4 Policy 17 only recognises 2 types of rural area, accessible rural and remote rural. Previously inhabited and green belt areas referenced in NPF4 are not defined rural area types within the 6 Fold Urban Rural Classification 2020.
- 9.94 The Council's Growing Settlements policy in HwLDP provides policy text for these crofting and other similar smaller settlements but does not specifically allocate sites within them and does not delineate their outer edge with a boundary.
- 9.95 As evidenced in **Housing Completions** and Demolitions, just over a fifth of recent house completions have been built both outwith any LDP allocated site or delineated settlement. This reflects circumstances that are common to only a few authorities. Highland contains many crofting settlements whose original pattern was of single houses usually dispersed across a linear series of land strips of inbye crofts surrounded by communal common grazings. These communities rarely had a nucleated centre and instead community and commercial facilities were also dispersed across the wider parish to the agriculturally poorer common grazings land or to land in other ownership such as that owned by the church or a public authority. Similarly dispersed settlement patterns were also established where other agricultural smallholdings were created.
- 9.96 Another peculiarity of Highland is the high proportion of its rural area that is difficult, expensive and/or inappropriate to develop in terms of physical, servicing and heritage constraints. The Council's [Developable Land Mapping](#) shows that 85% of the HLDP area has at least one significant development constraint in terms of altitude, flood risk, heritage designation, slope or distance from the adopted road network. The mapping illustrates how many settled and potential areas for future settlement areas are separated and fragmented across Highland, generally drawn to the flatter and more agriculturally productive, long and indented, coastal or loch-side margins. These factors help explain the many established, smaller, dispersed house pattern, scattered rural communities across Highland.
- 9.97 The Council is also conscious of the Gaelic and wider Highland cultural significance of these communities. The concentrated pattern of large country estate ownership and the current UK tax system also causes differences in land availability for housing development and therefore settlement pattern. In simplistic terms, there are more financial incentives for larger estates to lease land for fishing, shooting, minerals, renewables and tourism uses than to sell land for housing. Another Highland factor is the number and type of housing groups in the rural area. Most other authorities have traditional larger farm building groupings and support conversion, diversification and rounding-off development of such. Highland has a much wider variety of housing groups because of the

number of crofts, small holdings and other dispersed rather than nucleated, settlement-based development.

- 9.98 Marked variations in local development pressure also suggest the need for a more nuanced policy approach. Like other authorities, Highland experiences high pressure within an acceptable commuting time of Fort William and the Inner Moray Firth major work centre settlements. Although working from home and improvements in rural digital connectivity have reduced this pressure the largest centres still have a draw for journey to school and other higher order facilities. Conversely, rural areas outwith this Hinterland area have experienced much lower development pressure except where tourism plays a part. As evidenced in the Specialist Provision section above, rural land with an attractive outlook (often to the sea, loch or mountains) stimulates development aimed at the second home, short term let and wider tourism market. Within the WestPlan (**THC005**) area, over the period 2000-2017, 85% (3,150) of a total of 3,720 house completions were outwith specific allocations identified within that LDP. This plan area covers 3 areas, Lochaber, Skye and Lochalsh and Wester Ross, notable for their scenic quality and tourism demand. However, local variation can be significant. Small, inland rural settlements with a more typical landscape and outlook can be far less attractive to tourism-led housing demand. For example, the remoter, landward straths of Sutherland and Caithness contain many fragile communities experiencing depopulation and very low private demand for rural housing.

Hinterland

- 9.99 The Council has identified, in its current LDPs, a Hinterland covering the rural area around its major work centres. The accompanying policy and guidance aim better to manage pressure for new housebuilding within this Hinterland because of its adverse environmental and economic effects. Specifically, uncontrolled, sporadic housing development in this part of the rural area: increases car-based trips to work and most other activities resulting in higher carbon and other harmful emissions than otherwise need occur; suburbanises the open (or dispersed pattern of settlement) landscape character of the existing countryside; increases the cost of public (and private) service provision such as a wired internet connection, a water main connection, waste collection, a public sewer connection, or a school transport service; and, can result in adverse impacts on the natural environment, including breaking up ecological connectivity and fragmenting habitats.
- 9.100 Currently, as depicted on Figure 9:10, there are two Hinterland areas within Highland, one for the Inner Moray Firth and one for Fort William. The base policy applicable within this Hinterland area is Policy 35 of the HwLDP (**THC002**) however it should be noted that the boundaries of the two current Hinterland areas have been fine-tuned through local development plan reviews since 2012

and that the base policy has been supplemented by the [Rural Housing Supplementary Guidance and its explanatory note](#).

- 9.101 While the Hinterland has never been explicitly classed as a green belt, it is recognised that the Hinterland is a form of settlement management tool. Key differences between the policy framework of the Hinterland and Green Belts are summarised in Table 9:13.
- 9.102 Therefore, Highland's current approach and circumstances that pertain to rural housing are different to those within NPF4. Perhaps the most significant challenge to compatibility is NPF4 Policy 17's suggested use of the [Scottish Government's 6-Fold Urban Rural Classification 2020](#) (See Figure 9:10) to identify accessible and remote rural areas and the corresponding two-tier, differing policy presumption within each area.
- 9.103 The 6-fold Classification follows a consistent methodology but uses an arbitrary 10,000 population threshold for urban areas for which an associated accessible rural area is identified. In Highland, only Inverness, Fort William and Nairn meet that threshold. The Hinterland by contrast is based on drive times from the major employment centres, many of which have smaller populations than 10,000. This results in the Hinterland boundary often extending further North and West than accessible rural areas. Consequently, many Highland towns and major work centres have no accessible rural area surrounding them and instead the 6-fold Classification suggests that land just outwith these towns is remote and by implication should carry a more supportive approach to rural houses.
- 9.104 Moreover, the precise dividing line between accessible and remote rural in the Classification appears to be determined by an urban area drive time and/or distance from an assumed adopted road network analysis. This analysis generates a boundary that is unworkable in policy terms as it follows no sensible physical boundaries and contains several factual errors such as a large part of the rough track section of the West Highland Way being assumed as an adopted road that could service rural housing development.
- 9.105 The differing boundaries that result from the Council's Hinterland methodology and the Urban Rural Classification are highlighted in Figure 9:10. Having two mis-aligned areas with similar policy aspirations but also with differing housing criteria forming part of the statutory development plan has created a complex policy landscape that requires to be rectified in HLDP. Despite the urban rural classification generally being relatively 'tighter' around the proposed Inner Moray Firth and Fort William areas, the policy criteria specified under NPF4 Policy 17 are more restrictive than HwLDP Policy 35, in that infill sites and housing groups are not included.

Table 9:13 Comparison of Hinterland and Green Belt Provisions

	Highland Hinterland (HwLDP)	Green Belts (NPF4)
Policy Intent	Based on commuting patterns to and from employment centres to manage growth, self-sustaining communities and protect the countryside.	To encourage, promote and facilitate compact urban growth and use the land around our towns and cities sustainably.
Justification	More managed approach to housing development to prevent suburbanisation of the countryside and breaching of service network capacities.	Green belts may be zoned around settlements where there is a significant danger of unsustainable growth in car-based commuting or suburbanisation of the countryside
Application	Housing only (Policy 35)	All development (Policy 8)
Housing only supported where proposal:	• Is essential for land management or family purposes related to the management of land; • Is for retiring farmer; or a person retiring from other rural businesses [...] where previous accommodation is required for the new operator; • Is affordable housing required to meet demonstrable local affordable housing need; • Is essential in association with existing or new rural business; • Replaces existing dwelling which does not meet the requirements for modern living and costs of upgrading are not justified; • Involves conversion or reuse of traditional buildings or the redevelopment of derelict land; • Meets criteria for expansion of a housing group or development within garden ground (as detailed in the relevant RHSG).	• Residential accommodation required and designed for a key worker in a primary industry within the immediate vicinity of their place of employment where the presence of a worker is essential to the operation of the enterprise, or retired workers where there is no suitable alternative accommodation available • Intensification of established uses, including extensions to an existing building where that is ancillary to the main use • the reuse, rehabilitation and conversion of historic environment assets; or • one-for-one replacements of existing permanent homes

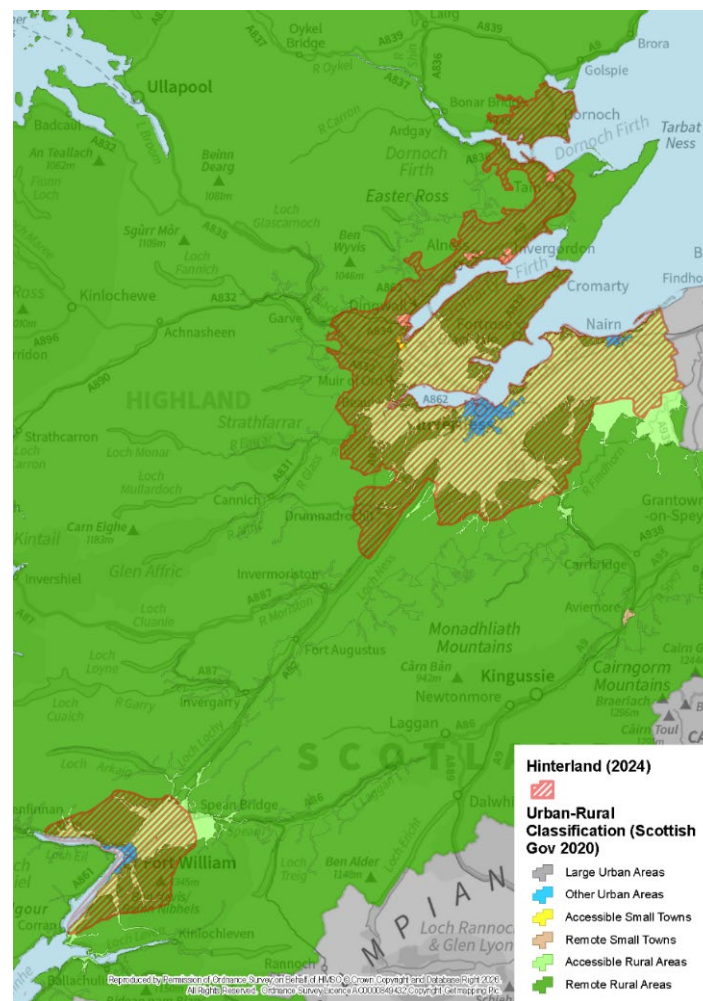


Figure 9:10 *Scottish Government's 6-Fold Urban Rural Classification 2020 Accessible and Remote Rural Areas in Highland*

9.106 Table 9:14 compares the density of rural area house completions over the period since the adoption of the HwLDP (April 2012 to August 2025). This indicates that realised rural housing development pressure is most concentrated close to Highland's largest settlements. In policy boundary terms, it is interesting to note that there is little difference in this geographic concentration of pressure for the Council's Wider Countryside (non-Hinterland) area relative to the Classification defined remote rural area. However, the data suggests that this geographic concentration of pressure is higher closer to Inverness and Nairn than it is across the Council's wider Inner Moray Firth Hinterland and the Fort William Hinterland or the similar Fort William accessible rural area. In future policy terms, the data suggests that there are at least 3 subdivisions that should be delineated of the HLDLP rural area if the policy presumption to encourage or discourage development in each is to be tailored to the development pressure likely to be experienced in that part of Highland.

Table 9:14 Rural House Completion Density for HLDP Area (April 2012 to August 2025)

Rural Area	Area (km2)	Number of Completions	Density of Completions (units/km2)
Inner Moray Firth Hinterland	1,478	785	0.53
Fort William Hinterland	264	89	0.34
Wider Countryside	22,643	2,128	0.09
Accessible Rural	827	586	0.71
Remote Rural	23,523	2,397	0.10

- 9.107 [2022 Census data zone origin and destination journey to work data](#) was released in late 2025 which provides comprehensive information on commuting patterns within Highland albeit at the time of the Census in March 2022. The results depicted in Figure 9:11 which show the percentage of those working in each origin zone that commute to a workplace within any Inverness City data zone suggest that the Inverness City commuter area extends beyond the 30 minute accessible rural area identified by the 6-Fold Classification.
- 9.108 The increase in hybrid and remote working has coincided with an increase in the distances commuters consider travelling to on the days that they travel to a physical workplace. Travel patterns are discussed in greater detail in **Chapter 10: Transport**. The Council intends to use this data in the formulation of an appropriate boundary for the area of countryside within which commuter housing pressure should be discouraged. The Council does not consider at this stage that this would likely be a reclassification of the Hinterland as a formal Green Belt.
- 9.109 When NPF4 was published, there was uncertainty as to whether NPF4 Policy 8 was the corresponding policy to be read alongside the HwLDP Policy 35 (Hinterland), and whether it was the Scottish Government's intention to require future LDPs to link these concepts. Our understanding of this has continued to evolve most recently in light of the [West Lothian Evidence Report Gate Check decision](#) where it was decided that such a proposal to establish a countryside belt as a green belt would be a significant change, and that, "in order to inform the establishment of any new green belt, a review of existing countryside belts and potentially a green belt study, would be required [...] Without this information, we do not consider that a clear basis to assess the impact of potential future changes from countryside belt to green belt has been demonstrated." A recent [appeal decision PPA-300-2077 within Moray Council](#) also reached the view that NPF4 Policy 8 was not engaged as Countryside Around Towns and Green Belt were not the same.

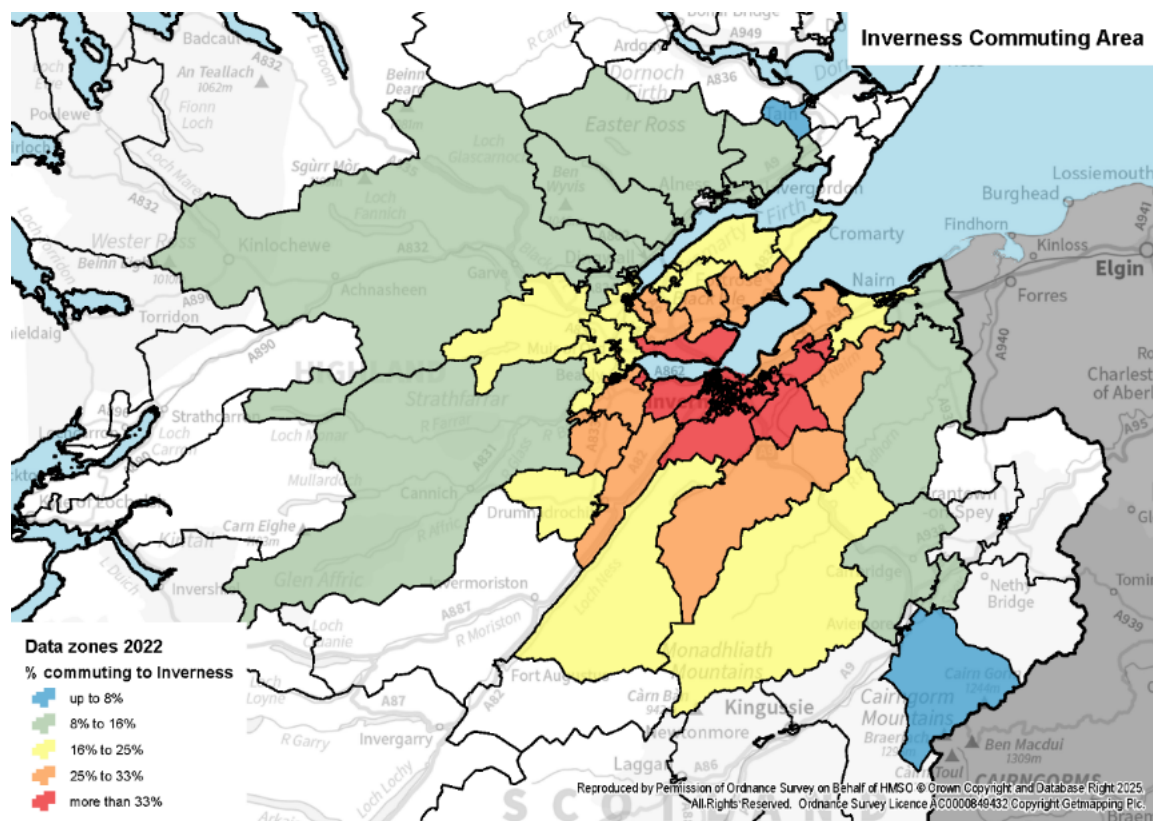


Figure 9:11 Inverness Commuter Area (2022 Census Journeys to Work By 2022 Census Data Zone)

9.110 The Council interprets that the understood Scottish Government position is therefore that Countryside Belts are not the same as Green Belts (despite both being settlement management tools) and that significant work would be required to formally establish or convert the Hinterland as Green Belt. The Hinterland boundary has been traditionally based on local understanding of development pressure and commuting behaviour, and not been subject to landscape character assessments. The Council would not seek to undertake an impractical scale of landscape character work to assess parcels of land in this regard. Therefore HLDP will aim to simplify the rural housing policy framework using the Hinterland as an example of a tailored housing approach to reflect local circumstances, which is referred to within NPF4 and the [Local Development Planning Guidance](#).

Fragile Areas

9.111 As discussed in **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**, NPF4 has supportive policy provisions for rural development and rural homes in fragile communities and areas suitable for potential resettlement, and the Council has accordingly undertaken analysis to identify such locations as denoted in the [Fragile Areas Mapping](#) and [Potential Areas for Resettlement Mapping](#), which

would benefit from further engagement with communities before being taken forward as formal proposals in HLDP. It is noted that substantial areas within Highland meet the definition of fragile using the Council's methodology, which is underpinned by housing, socio-demographic and economic indicators, some of which have been used within the Council's forthcoming HNDA.

- 9.112 NPF4 Policy 17 also states that LDPs should set out tailored approaches to rural housing and where relevant include proposals for future population growth – including provision for small-scale housing such as crofts and woodland crofts and the appropriate resettlement of previously inhabited areas. Owing to the remoteness of such likely locations and the need to adhere to an infrastructure first approach, such designations are likely to set a policy framework for small scale housing, rather than indicate large site allocations.
- 9.113 **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment** outlines that greater alignment between crofts (including woodland crofts) and rural housing policy would be beneficial, and that clearer guidance for would be a priority for HLDP, to ensure that woodland crofts are used as a mechanism to create new, expanded woodland.

Resettlement of Previously Inhabited Areas

- 9.114 Related to fragile areas, the HLDP and this Evidence Report must consider the desirability of allocating land for the purposes of resettlement as discussed in **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**. The North West Sutherland area as highlighted is a known area with coordinated efforts to encourage repopulation that the HLDP should recognise. The implications of resettlement for housing are discussed specifically in this section. The population of Highland was higher and more dispersed in the 1700s and early 1800s than it is today. However, present day houses and their occupants require far quicker, cheaper and more convenient access to a range of infrastructure networks and other services and facilities than 250 years ago. Present day houses and occupants also have a less sympathetic relationship with the natural environment. Understandably therefore, national planning policy has centred on the public and private sector service provision cost and environmental reasons to direct most future development to within established or newly planned settlements.
- 9.115 The Council is acutely aware of the cultural history of the Highlands and the tradition of dispersed, parish based rural settlement and facilities. We wish to respect this history by continuing to support development within Highland's rural communities. However, as explained in the **Affordable Housing** section, the unit cost of building houses in the remoter parts of Highland is far higher than in urban and other accessible areas, land availability can be more limited, and environmental challenges can be greater.

- 9.116 In its recent LDPs, the Council has preferred an approach of bolstering the main village(s) closest to areas of depopulation. This approach maximises environmentally sustainability and economic viability. For example, Dunvegan in northwest Skye is seeing coordinated public agency investment in education and affordable housing provision. It may mean that population moves from the outlying crofting communities of northwest Skye but more likely that it is retained in the wider area not lost to Portree, the mainland or further afield.
- 9.117 The Council's HLDP Call for Development Sites between January and May 2025 did not attract any resettlement proposals but instead proposals to expand housing within remote small villages such as Lochaline and Tongue. Further evidence will be collated and representations considered as the Plan preparation progresses, including ongoing reviews of Local Place Plans in case they include requests for resettlement of any area. As stated in **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**, the Council is supportive of the designations of Fragile Areas and Areas for potential resettlement to mean broader spatial areas where the principle of rural housing and rural development are supported, rather than implying that these designations signal direct Council-led creation of new communities.

Masterplan Consent Areas

- 9.118 As discussed in **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**, 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. The Scottish Government has endorsed the use of MCAs to support large scale projects such as Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport (ICFGF). The Council is pursuing 3 potential MCA sites identified to support the ICFGF, at Ardersier East, Embo and Essich Road Inverness, cognisant of several criteria and predicated on proximity to ICFGF jobs.
- 9.119 In the first instance, the identification of the 3 MCAs derived from the HLDP Call for Development Sites. Any progression of the 3 sites will be subject to a more inclusive and detailed appraisal of their suitability through an environmental impact assessment process and initial community, agency and landowner consultation. The Council will also have to consider subsequent approval stages that may be necessary in due course, to accommodate the internal governance of MCAs, including amendments to the Council's Scheme of Delegation.

Community-led Housing

9.120 The Council has already undertaken a Call for Sites exercise between January and May 2025, and appreciates that it can be challenging for community-led housing development to be proposed through this process as ongoing negotiations with landowners and estates, coupled often with natural designations requiring specialist planning advice and assessments, mean that it is often not practicable for community organisations to submit conventional and informed bids for housing development. While sites proposed through LPPs offer one route of considering these sites up front without the requirement to propose them again, The Council considers that the nature of how community-led proposals progress in Highland would benefit from having a tailored community-led housing policy to determine applications that are not proposed through the plan-making process but instead are proposed through the lifespan of the plan. The Council notes HIE's consideration of specific policy support for community led housing projects which is not explicitly contained within existing LDP policies or NPF4. Rather than leaving interpretation as to whether community-led housing contributes towards local living as per Policy 17b, or supports identified local housing incomes as per Policy 17c, it would be helpful for HLDP to take an explicit approach to this.

Summary of Stakeholder Engagement

9.121 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 presented below:

- A public consultation on the Call for Development Sites Draft Submission Template between 28 November 2024 and 3 January 2025 which prompted 25 responses principally from the development industry and was amended in light of these comments and made available as part of the Call for Development Sites between January and May 2025 (the amended Call for Development Sites Appraisal Template from **(THC175)** constitutes the "site appraisal template" referenced in the LDP Guidance).
- Meetings with Homes for Scotland: 11 March 2025 (Housing Land Audit); 12 March 2025 (HLDP, Deliverable Housing Land Pipeline, Call for Development Sites); 29 July 2025 (HLDP Evidence).
- Wider development industry briefing: 20 March 2025 ((HLDP, Deliverable Housing Land Pipeline, Call for Development Sites).
- 2025/26 HNDA stakeholder meetings: 28 August 2025 (partner launch meeting).
- Meeting with the Council's Housing Teams: 8 May 2025 (gypsy traveller accommodation needs).

Stakeholders and Key Agencies

9.122 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:

- NatureScot
- Scottish Water
- SEPA
- Historic Environment Scotland
- NHS Highland
- HIE
- HiTrans
- Transport Scotland
- Crofting Commission
- Homes for Scotland
- Scottish Land and Estates
- HNDA Housing Market Partnership Stakeholders
- CNPA
- UHI
- Highlife Highland
- SSEN-T
- SSEN-D

9.123 A summary of feedback received is presented below:

9.124 SEPA (**THC089**) responded to confirm that this chapter does not cover a topic on which SEPA would provide site specific advice. It makes suitable reference to other relevant topics chapters, such as flood risk, and confirm that from SEPA's perspective the evidence is sufficient. Historic Environment Scotland (**THC066**) Recognise cross over from housing and the historic environment, and consider this chapter to be sufficient for HES interests.

9.125 The Council are still awaiting a response from HIE and will update this section once this is provided.

Homes for Scotland (THC090)

Main views raised	Welcome inclusion of National Records of Scotland 2022 based population and household projections and 2022 Census. The Council have justified layers of existing and new data that will set LHLR substantially above MATHLR, whilst recognising the varying

	pressures and housing trends different housing market areas are and will experience. Given varying challenges set out, it is important that the future LDP recognises that over 20% of housing supply since 2012 has been on sites out with LDP boundary or settlement boundary. HFS would support recognition of this in future policy and potential criteria detailing when this would be acceptable in principle. It is noted that the boundaries of this allocation around Fort William and Inverness have been reviewed in previous LDPs. It is suggested that in light of the development of ICFGF further review is required to allow additional housing sites to be brought forward in a planned manner. Adjust figure number 9.10 to 9.11. Within 9.100 please add reference to the Housing Land audit meeting that took place on 6 March 2026. Content that the summary of our previous points within 9.101 reflects our previous submissions. In recognising the significant intra-Highland differences on housing matters, welcome proposals to split the LHLR at a sub-Highland level and by tenure. Support retention of existing approach to deliver affordable housing. Support the principle of including a settlement infill policy within the Proposed LDP. Recognise work undertaken to identify Fragile Areas and Areas for Resettlement and potential 'Repopulation Zones' such as North West Sutherland. Any repopulation requires both public buy-in and a range of local jobs to make any area attractive to live in. Whilst the focus for new housing in Highland will be around the ICFGF there will be a need for the 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. HFS welcomes the council's proposals to develop a framework for remote and rural areas. Welcome pro-active approach to engagement and clarity that has been added to the draft Chapter to address previous issues raised by HFS.
Council's response	Agree with the comments, required amendments have been made.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, Homes for Scotland are content with this chapter.

Proposed plan implications	No implications have arisen from these comments.
Actions for proposed plan stage	Recognise future LDP recognises that over 20% of housing supply since 2012 has been on sites out with LDP boundary or settlement boundary. In light of ICFGF, review of settlement boundaries will be considered.
NatureScot (THC088)	
Main views raised	We provided comments to your formal consultation on your emerging evidence which included Unique Challenge 1: Housing and Economy, and it is unclear if all our comments have been addressed within this chapter. Specifically, our comments relating to ICFGF where we advised that the implications for the proposed plan would need to include the consideration of the many protected areas that developments associated with the ICFGF are located within and near to. It may be that these comments have been reflected in other chapters, and it would be helpful to note that within this chapter.
Council's response	A full summary of how HLDP consultation responses were addressed can be found in (THC006) , due to the need for brevity, exact records of how all comments have been addressed will not be individually recorded. Considerations of ICFGF impacts on protected areas are addressed within Chapter 5 . The Council agree with the comments made and have made adjustments where requested, however, these have been addressed in the most appropriate chapters.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, NatureScot is content with the evidence provided within this chapter.
Proposed plan implications	As found in Chapter 5: Nature and Environment , the Council will make consideration of the many protected areas that developments associated with the ICFGF are located within and near to.
Actions for proposed plan stage	No further actions have arisen from these comments.
Highlands and Islands Enterprise (THC080)	
Main views raised	The new HLDP must prioritise rural housing delivery to prevent further loss of the critical mass of communities in Highland.

HIE welcomes the fragile areas mapping in the Evidence Report and strongly agrees with the process in the HLDP to identify conclusive fragile communities, suggest this should be a HLDP priority. A formal definition of fragile communities is necessary in the emerging HLDP. Concerned that there has been some uncertainty in the application and interpretation of NPF4 policies in the decision-making process of rural housing, HLDP should provide clarity on how NPF4 policies should be applied so that they can be utilised to encourage house building across planning cases.

HIE welcomes the opportunity to reassess how remote rural communities are delineated in the Highlands and across Scotland. A conclusive and accurate remote rural classification is important in the HLDP. It will fix two core problems: A) The current classification does not reflect lived patterns of work, travel and housing pressure in the Highland. B) Poor definition skew how rural housing delivery is measured and prioritised nationally.

Rising construction costs and community-led housing projects need support. Council support will be critical to the success of community-led housing and HIE recommends that the HLDP seeks to better embed community-led housing into the policies of the emerging Plan.

(Following further iteration)

Include reference to **THC511** [The Regional Transformational Opportunities \(RTOs\) in the Highlands and Islands Report 2025](#) and **THC985** [Back Scotland's Communities to Provide More Homes](#)

Support for Rural Housing

HIE welcomes the supportive approach for rural housing which supports fragile communities and once identified, areas suitable for resettlement. This support needs to flow through into the implementation of other policies to make sure such housing is delivered and not resisted by encountering issues on infrastructure, design, soils and accessibility. To be successful, such a supportive housing policy approach needs to be reconciled across the whole policy landscape.

Affordable Housing

Policy support for affordable housing is recognised and welcomed. However, there should be recognition that rural highland communities are currently being "hollowed out", not only by holiday homes, but by a deficiency in appropriate types of affordable housing,

	such a Mid-Market Rent in more attractive housing market areas. Mid-Market Rent is a form of affordable housing which provides homes at rents set between social housing and private market levels, offering an option for those who cannot access social housing but still require an affordable alternative to the private sector. Key Workers HIE welcomes the draft Chapter's definition of a Key Worker as "<i>a worker who fulfils a role regarded as vital for the community, especially in the health, education, security, and infrastructure sectors</i>" (9.74). While the focus on particular sectors is helpful, it should not exclude other roles that are essential to rural Highland communities, such as people working in local shops, post offices or vehicle repair services. Clarifying this would strengthen the definition. 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 the comments made and have made amendments to text where necessary, with additional actions for the proposed plan suggested. THC511 referenced and detailed in Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places and has since been updated with and further qualified with ongoing engagement with wider employment sector in the Highland region. Links between housing and the RTOs are made clear in the Chapter. THC985 noted and further qualifies Council's intention to support community housing solutions.

Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, HIE are content with the evidence presented within this chapter.
Proposed plan implications	The Council will consider a HLDP definition of Fragile areas and will require to outline the policy weight that applies to this reflecting that many Fragile Areas could be in sensitive landscapes or locations. The Council will consider a policy on community-led housing in Highland.
Actions for proposed plan stage	If the Council writes a definition of Fragile areas, this will be included within the proposed plan. If the Council agree on the need for a community-led housing policy then this will also be included.
Cairngorm National Park Authority (THC187)	
Main views raised	Agree that housing need, demand and viability varies significantly across Highland and a more nuanced approach than a single all-tenure local housing land requirement is necessary, suggest THC look at CNPA for example. Ask that the Council consider revising the sections that refer to the National Park. Provide further comparison notes to CNPA calculations. Happy to discuss these comments and would welcome greater involvement in HNDA process to ensure that we work collaboratively on housing delivery across The Highland Council area.
Council's response	The Council welcome the collaborative approach and have made amendments to text where necessary.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, CNPA are content with the evidence presented within this chapter.
Proposed plan implications	No implications have arisen from these comments.
Actions for proposed plan stage	The Council will continue discussions with CNPA on the HNDA process.

Summary of Local Place Plan Priorities

9.126 Ardgour Local Place Plan (**THC010**) has identified the following priorities relating to Housing:

- Affordable housing for all so young people, workers and families can afford to live in the area and everyone has a home fit for purpose. Achieved via: more housing investment; fit-for-purpose homes for all ages; care for elderly; community-run assets to generate income; more affordable homes in villages; better advice and finance; management of second homes/STL.
- Opportunity for home-based care & respite/residential care at Dail Mhor in Strontian; homes for people who are economically active or have a local connection; affordable new homes and remain so in perpetuity (*excluding self-build by existing residents*); range of tenures and house sizes (focused on younger people, workers & families) progressed once the current Urram/CHT housing needs survey is complete; designate more land for new affordable homes including self-build (Clovullin, North Corran); new planning policy that a percentage of homes (1 in 3) be sold to a local person at an affordable price; upgrade homes on lower council tax bands to higher EPC ratings with grants/low interest loans and streamlined consents; new homes should enhance local character, community and zero-carbon by updating planning requirements around building design, siting, layout, space standards, accessibility, supporting facilities & construction procurement; guaranteed low-interest mortgages for workers and young people to buy and upgrade homes; information and advice for young people on available housing options including finance, how and where to buy; encouragement of downsizing and sale to locals e.g. a voluntary Fair Chance scheme as in Wales / Rural Housing Burden, adding tax relief to cover reduction in sale value; prevent change of use of existing homes to full-time holiday lets through implementation of Short Term Let Control Area; increase tax on second homes sufficient to stem proliferation, including closing tax relief loopholes; more local authority buyback of homes from the open market, to let to [Highland Housing Register](#) ('Open Market Purchase Scheme'); prioritise local need/employment and key workers on housing waiting list criteria; encourage re-use of empty property by making more use of CPO & 'forced sales'; and, smart clachans / cohousing Rural housing clusters with shared heating, power, growing space, guest rooms; new registered crofts with woodland.

9.127 Black Isle Local Place Plan (**THC011**) has identified the following priorities relating to Housing:

- Affordable homes for all: so young people, workers and families can afford to live in environment-friendly homes that are fit for purpose.

- Local residents & workers, particularly younger people & working families, need to be able to afford to live on the Black Isle.
- Small numbers of affordable homes in and around our existing settlements to sustain those communities - combined with the necessary investment in schools, health and social care, roads and infrastructure. Also with a more streamlined process for that kind of development in those locations.
- Build more affordable homes across different tenures & types: e.g. mid-market rent, starter homes, community owned, shared equity, co-housing, self-build, woodland crofts.
- All new homes should be affordable and remain so in perpetuity (Rural Housing Burden & changes in national/local planning policy as in Wales (e.g. Gwynedd & Anglesey).
- Encourage re-use of empty homes & conversion of other empty buildings such as disused churches, through more use of CPO and 'forced sales'.
- Upgrade homes on lower Council Tax bands to higher EPC ratings with grants/loans and streamlined consents.
- Detailed projects and ideas: easier access to low cost finance for workers and young people to buy and upgrade homes; more information for young people on housing options; encourage downsizing and local sale, like Welsh 'Fair Chance' scheme with tax relief to cover reduction in sale value; prevent existing homes becoming full-time holiday lets (using Short Term Let Control Area); control growth of second homes, e.g. by increasing tax & closing tax loopholes; increase stock by local authority buyback of homes (Open Market Purchase Scheme); and, more emphasis on local residency & employment in social housing criteria.

9.128 Broadford and Strath Local Place Plan (**THC012**) has identified the following priorities relating to Housing:

- Promote the delivery of affordable housing for young people, families and key workers to address a wider concern about demographic imbalance and ageing communities via a range of housing options in all communities (not just Broadford).
- Age-appropriate housing: Concern about provision of social care services. More appropriate housing options for older
- Residents required and could help address social isolation.
- Renovation: Upgrading of existing housing stock to make sure homes are fit for purpose, lower energy and adapted to our changing climate.
- Housing allocations at: Broadford old primary school site for supported housing or other adapted housing aimed at older residents and last-time buyers; areas zoned for housing in WestPlan BF02 - land south of Caberfeidh and BF03 - Glen Road West (long term); Elgol and wider rural area - small-scale development of affordable new homes on appropriate sites within the

village or on common grazings in the wider area prioritising occupancy by local people, workers and families.

- More opportunities for alternative housing models (e.g. collective self-build, last-time homes, supported housing units, outlying townships) and achieving a balance between year-round resident and visitor accommodation. The Elgol area in particular is experiencing the impact of an imbalance in second home ownership. Research undertaken in 2024 identified that 56% of homes in Elgol are not lived in on a full-time basis.
- In the rural area - housing renovation of old housing stock to bring up to standard.

9.129 Caol Local Place Plan (**THC024**) has identified the following priorities relating to Housing:

- The general lack of affordable housing is noted as a local priority.
- Need for improved social care at home and desire for new care home.
- Specific housing site / opportunity at St John's Road / Broom Drive, Caol (if not needed for Caol Link Road transport scheme).

9.130 Croy and Tornagrain Local Place Plan (**THC026**) has identified the following priorities relating to Housing:

- Lack of housing for elderly and those requiring additional support.
- Any further housing development at Croy must include provision for a community hub.

9.131 Dores and Essich Local Place Plan (**THC013**) has identified the following priorities relating to Housing:

- High demand for affordable housing and general housing provisions for all tenures, with a mix of sizes.
- Concerns about delayed housing projects and suggestions for prioritising local residents in new developments and provision of housing suitable to young families that in return will support the local primary school roll.
- 6 specific housing opportunity sites identified at Glebe land at Dores, plot above Torr Gardens, land south and east of village hall, Torbreck and Scaniport.
- Need for additional mixed tenure housing (social and private);
- Development of care home, sheltered housing and assisted living facility;
- Lack of affordable housing;
- Ensuring Developer Contributions goes towards affordable housing

9.132 Duror and Kentallen Local Place Plan (**THC014**) has identified the following priorities relating to Housing:

- A local residents' survey in 2023/24 estimated there were 244 homes of which 157 (64%) were available to the mainstream market; 80 (33%) were in

second home or short term rental use and 7 (3%) were presently empty. Second homes have pushed up the price of houses so they are no longer affordable for locals. The housing shortage is leading to fewer families and young children in the area.

- Kentallen is home to one of HC's three Traveller Sites which has 7 pitches available to rent. The population of the site varies.
- There is little spare housing capacity; properties coming to the market in recent years tend to sell very quickly.
- Demand in the area for small developments of quality built homes to suit a range of needs, including small homes for young singles and couples, or retired people looking to downsize, and larger family-sized homes.
- Local businesses struggle to recruit employees due to a shortage of accommodation in the area.
- A lack of local housing, and housing suitable for the older residents, means that many people are faced with having to move out of the area if their circumstances change.
- Need for a small retirement complex, starter homes, shared equity homes, and more long-term rental properties.
- There is very little developable land It must take into account the flood risk and peat on the low lying areas, access off the A828 and the junction with Achindarroch Road and the A828 for developments on higher ground plus landowners not always willing to release land for development.
- More homes for people to rent long-term or buy as permanent residence.

9.133 Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Local Place Plan (**THC022**) has identified the following priorities relating to Housing:

- Developing new affordable houses for locals and local employees (particularly for younger people and families with a range of tenures).
- Detailed projects and ideas: encourage downsizing and local sale, like Welsh 'Fair Chance' scheme with tax relief to cover reduction in sale value; prevent existing homes becoming full-time holiday lets (using Short Term Let Control Area); increase stock by local authority buyback of homes (Open Market Purchase Scheme); and, more emphasis on local residency & employment in social housing criteria; every resident looking for a house should join the waiting list to get a true indication of need; undertake a housing needs survey to establish exact demand; and, upgrade existing homes especially their energy efficiency rating.
- New housing sites should be within settlements, targeted at local needs and local workers, be non-suburban in design and layout, have slow phasing, and good services and amenities (no specific sites identified).

9.134 Gairloch Local Place Plan (**THC015**) has identified the following priorities relating to Housing:

- To provide affordable housing alongside a mix of housing provision, particularly for young people and families
- To support mixed development compatible with small business development
- To improve the management of short-term lets and holiday accommodation
- Specific housing sites at: waste land behind BT Exchange and Chinese Takeaway (extension of Macintyre Rd); Former Les Buchan builder's yard (Flowerdale); Former fish processing factory site (Pier Road, above the harbour); Former Farm and Garden store site (Mihol Road); Mihol, field immediately north of Fire Station; Mihol, field between Stratford House and Mihol Road; Badachro, south of Coille Dhorch development; Charleston, south of Glen Lodge (above existing housing).
- Return empty homes to housing stock particularly in central areas of the village. Providing additional support for landlords and absentee owners could encourage the occupation of existing properties.

9.135 Garve and District Local Place Plan (**THC016**) has identified the following priorities relating to Housing:

- Affordable housing to attract new, younger residents to the area.
- Local sheltered housing.
- Well-insulated, energy efficient buildings and homes.

9.136 Glen Urquhart Local Place Plan (**THC029**) has identified the following priorities relating to Housing:

- Several locations identified as not suitable for any more housing.
- A community-led (to ensure new housing is reserved for local people) housing project at Drumnadrochit (no site defined).
- The general lack of affordable housing means outmigration of young people and staff shortages for local businesses.
- New build housing should be sensitively considered and numbers should be kept minimal to preserve the rural feel of the area.
- New housing should follow a local vernacular and reflect the rural character.
- New housing should be affordable and prioritise housing locals.
- Limit holiday properties in the area to keep the number of locals as high as possible.
- A retrofitting scheme, resources and guidance for retrofitting existing homes.

9.137 Golspie Local Place Plan (**THC021**) has identified the following priorities relating to Housing:

- More affordable housing. All new housing to adhere to sustainable construction principles, biodiversity net gain principles, avoid soil sealing, incorporate sustainable sewage and drainage systems.
- Specific housing sites at: The Field (21 units), Plot at junction Rhives Road and Back Road, self-build/renovation opportunities within existing housing area between Main St and Back Road, Drummie for staff/trainees, and Fields adjacent to Rhives.

9.138 Kinlochleven Local Place Plan (**THC017**) has identified the following priorities relating to Housing:

- Homes are cheaper to buy or rent in Kinlochleven than in Ballachulish or Glencoe but still prohibitively expensive for young people starting out or people in less well-paid jobs.
- Many available homes are bought for holiday rentals and lie empty through the winter.
- The lack of housing makes it difficult for people to stay in the village and to fill job vacancies.
- New affordable houses for younger people, workers and families (private and social rented, shared equity, community owned etc).
- More Council buyback of homes from the open market, to let to the Highland Housing Register ('Open Market Purchase Scheme').
- Short Term Let Control Area for holiday lets etc.
- Prioritise local need/work on the housing waiting list, and new social rented homes to be for Local Letting (as in Upper Achintore).
- Encourage downsizing and sale to locals such as something similar to the Welsh Government's voluntary Fair Chance scheme.
- Explore conversion of existing underused property as temporary staff accommodation, for example for teachers and care staff.
- Every resident looking for a house should join the waiting list.
- Undertake a housing needs survey to establish exact demand: how many homes; what sizes, tenures and price points; and mechanisms for building new homes especially on the old smelter site. The aim should be to reverse depopulation and attract more working families.
- Specific proposals for affordable housing on old, demolished smelter site and to upgrade older homes.

9.139 Kyle of Sutherland Local Place Plan (**THC028**) has identified the following priorities relating to Housing:

- Improve access to good quality affordable housing and social care.

- To keep and attract young people and families to the area and support our elderly to live independently through the delivery of a mix of social and private housing developments.
- To ensure that second home ownership and short term lets don't continue to take over large portions of the area's housing stock, consideration could be given to introducing a rural housing burden for all new affordable housing stock.
- Encouraging new and existing housing to be (re)designed and (re)constructed to a high standard with an emphasis on low carbon and ecologically sound buildings.
- Supporting the creation of new crofts and croft houses to allow young people to live in more traditional ways.
- Specific housing sites / opportunities at Ardgay; land east of primary school, land surrounding Kincardine Church, land around Manse street and old farm house, land behind Drovers Square, land at Ardgay Hill, land at current LDP business allocation.
- Specific housing sites / opportunities at Bonar Bridge; land east of Migdale Hospital, brownfield land at Tulloch Road, land behind Glimour Crescent.
- Specific housing sites / opportunities at Culrain; land to north of village hall.
- Specific housing sites / opportunities at Rosehall; land at north and south end of Cassley Drive, land north of Invercassley House.

9.140 Lochalsh Local Place Plan (**THC018**) has identified the following priorities relating to Housing:

- Tenure diverse, energy efficient, affordable homes for people to live and work locally in or near every settlement.
- Planning policy should support principle of 1 or 2 affordable houses in every settlement.
- Introduce Short Term Let Control Area and control second homes.
- Information and advice for young people on available housing options including finance, how and where to buy.
- Prioritise local need/employment and key workers on housing waiting list criteria.
- Specific housing sites at: the previously consented land at Auchtertyre, Balmacara (no specific sites identified), possibly by redeveloping Graham House at Dornie, currently and previously allocated land at Glenelg, Kyle of Lochalsh, Ratagan, Saraig, Inverinate, Plockton and Achmore.

9.141 Morvern Local Place Plan (**THC027**) has identified the following priorities relating to Housing:

- More housing needed for key workers, to attract / retain young local people and help the elderly stay locally for longer.

- Controls required to control holiday, second and short term let homes (perhaps via a separate housing use class, primary residency requirement or duty of occupation).
- Want Local HNDA and LDP allocations made in accordance with its findings.
- More housing on new crofts and other self-build opportunities.
- Sustainable housing – low carbon for new build and retrofitting grant and advice for existing homes.
- Many specific housing sites / opportunities at Ardtornish/Lochaline and Killundie.

9.142 Nairnshire Local Place Plan (**THC023**) has identified the following priorities relating to Housing:

- A variety of housing options that cater to different life stages and economic situations.
- No significant housing development before the Nairn bypass and other infrastructure upgrades are completed.
- Local preference for regeneration and consolidation of existing buildings particularly within town and village centres for 1 and 2 bedroom flats not further major new build.
- Further research on the impacts of short term lets before a decision on any control area is made.
- Specific housing site opportunities; conversions within Nairn town centre, Albert Street bowls club, east of Retail Park, and Highland Council depot site.

9.143 Sleat Local Place Plan (**THC025**) has identified the following priorities relating to Housing:

- Young people, key workers and families will be able to build their futures through suitable housing.
- Older residents will be able to live well within their community supported by appropriate housing and care.
- Rural Housing Burden restricting availability of mortgage finance for self-build plots.
- Specific housing sites; major housing development should be limited to Kilbeg, not extending south beyond the Tarskavaig road and, if demand exists, to a single location around Camuscross/Duisdale.
- Specific housing suggestions; creation of centralised rental property register, streamlined planning for staff and season worker accommodation, local buyer shared equity scheme, review of social housing allocation policy to better reflect local needs, detailed needs assessment for current and future provision, site identification for supported-housing development, investigation of intergenerational housing models, integration of housing with care provision, reform of holiday let regulations, primary residence

requirement for new developments, tourism levy scheme with bulk of revenue kept in the community, strategy for vacant property utilisation, mixed-tenure housing developments, purpose-built sheltered housing complex, innovative multi-generational housing schemes, local occupancy conditions, such as rural burden, defined affordable housing quotas, sustainable community planning framework, strategic population management plan.

9.144 Stratherrick and Foyers Local Place Plan (**THC019**) has identified the following priorities relating to Housing:

- Develop affordable homes for local people who need them,
- Ensure new developments are appropriately designed for rural communities and the landscape context,
- Locate new developments within existing villages, including sites identified on village maps for Foyers, Gorthleck, Inverfarigaig and Whitebridge,
- Explore potential for woodland crofting in appropriate forestry and woodland locations outwith the villages,
- Explore potential for specialist accommodation: elderly | care | respite,
- Zero-carbon homes for all: including making it easier for homes to be upgraded, adapted or extended.

9.145 Torridon and Kinlochewe Local Place Plan (**THC020**) has identified the following priorities relating to Housing:

- The area has a far higher proportion of second residences/holiday homes than the regional or national average and desirability pushes up prices beyond what the local economy will support.
- More affordable housing.
- Specific housing site opportunities; 6-8 houses at Fasaig (behind Darroch Park), 2 units in refurbishment of former Torridon primary school and unit at Kinlochewe village shop.

Summary of Implications for the Proposed Plan

9.146 Demographic trends and projections indicate that the Highland Council should anticipate a significant increase in newly forming households, in excess (by circa 6,000 households) of what was anticipated in 2018-based statistics. These households will likely require to be smaller and comprise older adults living alone.

9.147 Given that 2018-based population and household projections formed the basis of the MATHLR, and the Council's previous HNDA in 2021, the Council considers that both of these have been superseded by more appropriate and recently available information, which will be taken forward within the Council's latest HNDA

currently in production. The Council appreciates that the LDP Guidance states that the MATHLR should be used as a starting point, but given the considerable difference between the contributory data (2018-based) and more recently available 2022-based data, and the MATHLR equating to a lower annual target than previous annual average completions in Highland for the past 10 years, the Council does not consider it credible to use the MATHLR to take forward into setting the iLHLR.

- 9.148 Similarly, the Council does not consider it credible to use the current HNDA Tool available by the CHMA as this has not yet been updated to reflect the 2022-based household projections, and remains a prepopulated Excel model with the 2018-based household projections locked within. The Council's HNDA process is therefore contingent on the CHMA updating the HNDA Tool as promptly as is practical. Given that the Gate Check process for Evidence Reports seeks that only formally agreed figures from either a HNDA or LHS are used for taking forward to an iLHLR, the Council has used the Housing Supply Target from the LHS as an interim iLHLR until the HNDA is complete. The Council intends to submit the Evidence Report for Gate Check once the HNDA is complete and will likely send the HNDA for review by the CHMA concurrently if required to expediate the plan-making process.
- 9.149 The evidence outlined above demonstrates significant intra-Highland differences on housing issues. Housing circumstances in Highland don't mirror those across Scotland. Housing need, demand and viability vary markedly across the largest geographic local planning authority in Scotland. Therefore, the Council believes that a more nuanced, than set out in NPF4, approach to many housing issues will be appropriate within the future HLDP.
- 9.150 For example, a single all-tenure local housing land requirement for all the HLDP area will be stated but requires to be subdivided at sub-Highland level and tenure to be meaningful and not to have adverse, unintended consequences. Including only a single all-tenure target may undermine pursuit of the aim of meeting the Scottish Government's affordable housing delivery target as set out in [Housing to 2040](#) and the Council's LHS and SHIP by not setting a separate, measurable figure against which to compare delivery. Similarly, a single all-Highland figure will not allow a more local prioritisation of housing delivery. Volume housebuilder activity and most affordable housing need is concentrated in the Inner Moray Firth area. A single all-Highland figure runs the risk of not monitoring and assessing the impacts of that concentration, and in housing land supply terms, not tailoring the number and capacity of allocations to sub-Highland circumstances. For example, housebuilders are unlikely to support a single all-Highland target if the capacity of housing land allocations in locations they regard as less viable unduly reduces the target available for areas where they wish to build. Moreover, section 15 (1A) of

the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 as amended requires each LDP to “include targets for meeting the housing needs of people living in the part of the district to which it relates.” The word “targets” is pluralised and therefore a single Local Housing Land Requirement figure is insufficient.

- 9.151 Unlike some other authorities, the Council is not wholly dependent upon the private sector to deliver affordable units via section 75 agreements. The Council and other affordable unit providers lead the delivery of many LDP allocations from land acquisition to housing completion particularly in the less commercially viable parts of Highland. As such, only including a single LHLR figure and assuming that 25% of those units will be delivered as affordable oversimplifies circumstances in Highland. In short, sub-Highland market and affordable sector targets will better reflect the markedly different housing need and demand across Highland, better attract funding to address them, and better measure the HLDP’s future performance in meeting those targets. Another policy workaround solution if a local planning authority must rely upon a single, all-tenure, plan-wide LHLR figure is to increase the percentage of affordable housing required from private sector led developments. The Council does not intend to progress such an approach within the HLDP because we believe that a higher percentage will harm the commercial viability of many sites in Highland, increase disputes with developers and may even stymie the delivery of both affordable and market units on otherwise suitable allocations.
- 9.152 Many councils including Highland and other parties believe that NPF4 Policy 16 f) requires review. The Council wishes and still believes it to be appropriate to continue to support infill development on unallocated land within its settlements subject to the land not being afforded a safeguarding notation (such as protected greenspace) and the proposal and/or site specifics not suggesting significant adverse impacts. There is no current prospect of NPF4 Policy 16 f) being reviewed or reinterpreted and therefore the Council is considering the inclusion within the Highland Proposed LDP of a settlement infill policy similar to Policy 34 in the HwLDP.
- 9.153 NPF4 takes a two-tier approach to rural homes, using the urban rural classification to indicate accessible rural and remote rural locations. Despite also being based on drive times from major settlements, the boundaries and policy provisions of accessible and remote rural areas do not align with the Highland Hinterland and this has resulted in a complex policy landscape which requires considerable resource to communicate, and is identified as an action for HLDP to simplify moving forward. The Council understands that the Scottish Government interpretation is that the Hinterland is likely an example of a local tailored approach and does not therefore seek to establish or convert this to a formal Green Belt.

- 9.154 Because fragile communities are referenced within several NPF4 policies but not defined in its Glossary, HLDP will require to identify conclusive fragile communities in remote rural areas which will ideally be geospatial proposals in order to aid efficient decision making for rural housing. This will likely be underpinned by the Fragile Areas methodology developed in **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**. A framework for defined fragile communities may require to be dynamic and updated annually over the lifespan of the plan as the underpinning indicators are updated.
- 9.155 HLDP will require to identify conclusive areas for population resettlement in remote rural areas, which will ideally be geospatial proposals in order to aid efficient decision making for rural housing. Any identified areas suitable for population resettlement will require a clear framework for planned/allocated development alongside self-build and windfall developments.
- 9.156 The Council believes that demographic, economic and geographic factors affect the socio-economic fragility of a community. The evidence considered in this chapter and **Chapter 8: Business, Economy, Tourism and Productive Places** suggests, in terms of future rural housing policy, that a three-tier approach may be appropriate. The rural areas closest to Highland's largest settlements are likely to continue to experience levels of housing in the countryside pressure that may breach visual and infrastructure capacities and promote environmentally unsustainable travel patterns and therefore controls on further development are sensible in line with a hinterland/accessible rural policy approach. Conversely, rural housing development within or close to fragile communities will likely help underpin facilities within those communities and therefore there should be a more supportive policy presumption in such areas. HLDP will require to develop an appropriate framework for remote rural areas that are not distinctly fragile or identified for potential resettlement, as NPF4 provides no specific direction for such cases. For those communities which are neither pressured nor fragile then a more neutral policy presumption may be taken forward.
- 9.157 Stakeholder and LPP inputs have provided useful suggestions for new evidence that have been followed up and incorporated within this chapter if appropriate and relevant. All site-specific and practicable policy suggestions will be considered in preparing the HLDP Proposed Plan. Some matters raised are outwith the scope of an LDP most commonly requiring national legislative or financial intervention.
- 9.158 The Council has already conducted the Call for Development Sites using the Call for Development Sites site appraisal template (**THC175**). This template was based on the IMFLDP2 SEA template so that all primary SEA considerations were covered. While candidate MCAs have progressed from this, the Council's main implication is now to fully apprise the proposed sites received and allocate a sufficient housing land requirement fully informed by the completed HNDA.

Statements of Agreement / Dispute

Agreement on Evidence

- 9.159 This Chapter had been initially circulated to Homes for Scotland and Key Agencies, with the caveat that it would not be submitted for Gatecheck until the HNDA had concluded and the iLHLR updated to reflect this. As delays to the updated HNDA Tool became evident, the Council therefore has required to submit the Evidence Report in advance of the HNDA concluding. Agencies who responded and agreed with the evidence and content presented include Homes for Scotland (**THC090**), while agreement has been inferred from other responses of agencies listed above.
- 9.160 Cairngorms National Park Authority's (CNPA) response (**THC187**) requested amendments to clarify the CNPA's position on the interpretation and application of the Council's 2023-2028 LHS within the Badenoch and Strathspey portion of the CNPA LDP area and the CNPA approach to a percentage for affordable housing provision in its new-style LDP policy. The Council agrees with these requested amendments and has incorporated them in this final version of this chapter.

Disputes with Stakeholders

- 9.161 The issues raised in Homes for Scotland's (HfS) response of December 2025 (**THC090**) have now been addressed within this chapter. The Council has revised the summary of HfS's initial response to the Council's Housing and Economy Evidence Paper as requested albeit clarifying that the Scottish Accessible Homes Standard has not, to date, been implemented within operative Building Standards Regulations. Also, the word "landbanking" has been amended to "land acquisition" to avoid any negative implication. The substantive HfS concern is that it believes the Council wishes to justify a higher percentage affordable housing requirement within the future LDP. The relevant chapter section has been amended to clarify that the Council has no intention to increase the current 25% figure (and current 35% within the suburban part of Inverness City) in the new HLDP. The Council recognises that many Highland housing sites are marginal in economic terms and wishes to encourage development on allocated land.

Information Gaps

- 9.162 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 in Highland have formally registered Local Place Plans. Any Local Place Plans registered will be considered in the production of the LDP if timeously available.
- 9.163 The most obvious and crucial evidence gap is the completion of the ongoing HNDA, which in turn is based upon the belated release of national population and

household forecasts and their incorporation within the HNDA Tool by the CHMA. The HNDA will also provide better evidence on affordable tenure split and specialist housing need and demand. The Council has raised concerns over the delay to the HNDA Tool and Guidance with Scottish Government and understands that this is to now be published at the end of June 2026. The Evidence Report therefore submitted to Gate Check reflects the interim iLHLR which will require to be updated in preparing the proposed plan following the completion of the ongoing HNDA once robust and credible status is acquired.

- 9.164 The development of Masterplan Consent Areas remains ongoing, and should any of the three sites being taken forward not ultimately progress, then the deliverable land supply needed to meet the iLHLR will need to be updated to reflect this.

Chapter 10 : Transport

Information required by the Act regarding the issue addressed in this section	Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 as amended: Section 15(5)(d): - the infrastructure of the district. Section 15(5)(e): - how that infrastructure is used. Town and Country Planning (Development Planning) (Scotland) Regulations 2023: Regulation 9 (e) (vii) any regional transport strategy, (e) (viii) any local transport strategy.
NPF4 LDP Requirements	NPF4 Policy 13: - LDPs should prioritise locations for future development that can be accessed by sustainable modes. The spatial strategy should reflect the sustainable travel hierarchy and sustainable investment hierarchy by making best use of existing infrastructure and services. - LDPs should promote a place-based approach to consider how to reduce car-dominance. This could include low traffic schemes, shared transport options, designing-in speed controls, bus/cycle priority, pedestrianisation and minimising space dedicated to car parking. Consideration should be given to the type, mix and use of development; local living and 20-minute neighbourhoods; car ownership levels; the accessibility of proposals and allocations by sustainable modes; and the accessibility for users of all abilities. - LDPs should be informed by an appropriate and effective transport appraisal undertaken in line with relevant transport appraisal guidance. Plans should be informed by evidence of the area's transport infrastructure capacity, and an appraisal of the spatial strategy on the transport network. This should identify any potential cumulative transport impacts and deliverable mitigation proposed to inform the plan's infrastructure first approach. Where there is likely to be an impact on the trunk road or rail network, early engagement with Transport Scotland is required. NPF4 Policy 18: - LDPs and delivery programmes should be based on an integrated infrastructure first approach. Plans should:

	○ set out the infrastructure requirements to deliver the spatial strategy, informed by the evidence base, identifying the infrastructure priorities, and where, how, when and by whom they will be delivered; and ○ indicate the type, level (or method of calculation) and location of the financial or in-kind contributions, and the types of development from which they will be required. • Plans should align with relevant national, regional, and local infrastructure plans and policies and take account of the Scottish Government infrastructure investment hierarchy and sustainable travel and investment hierarchies in developing the spatial strategy. • Consistent early engagement and collaboration between relevant stakeholders will better inform decisions on land use and investment.
Links to Evidence	(THC092) Connecting Inverness STAG Report (THC093) Transport Appraisal - Agreed Levels of Appraisal (THC094) Agreed Levels of Transport Appraisal - Transport Scotland Response (THC095) Fort Transit Appraisal Study (THC096) Evanton Station Technical Feasibility Study (THC097) Inverness Rail East - New Station Feasibility Study (THC098) Bus passenger numbers on THC Contract Services (THC099) Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategic Control Plan (THC100) Parking Penalty Charge Notices (THC101) Regional Transport Strategy Case for Change (THC102) Information from Moray Council (THC103) Information from ScotRail (THC104) Active Travel Counter Data for Inverness (THC105) Capacity of Highland Rail Station Car Parks (THC106) Sustainable Transport Team Update Paper (THC107) Inner Moray Firth Modal Shift Strategy (THC108) Inshes Junction Improvements Phase 2 Summary Report (THC109) A9/A82 Longman Junction Improvement DMRB Stage 2 Scheme Assessment Report (THC114) Census 2022 Highland Origin Destination Data (THC115) Rail Station Car Parks Occupancy Surveys (THC116) Transport - Draft Chapter Key Agency and Stakeholder Consultation Report (THC117) Rail Station Entries and Exits (THC118) Railway Workstreams relevant to Planning in Highland (THC119) STPR2 Highlands and Islands Appraisal Summary Table

(THC120) Bottlenecks – Whisky Logistics Study
(THC121) Highland Trunk Road Baseline Traffic Counts and Journey Times by Corridor
(THC122) Local Traffic Count Data Inverness
(THC123) Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey Factsheet
(THC124) Local Authority Road Network Condition
(THC125) Road Asset Management Plan
(THC126) Road Capacity, Needs and Deliverability
(THC127) IMFLDP2 Transport Appraisal
(THC128) IMFLDP1 Transport Appraisal
(THC129) Caithness and Sutherland Monitoring Statement
(THC130) WestPlan LDP Transport Background Paper
(THC131) Fort William Strategic Transport Study (pre-appraisal)
(THC144) Lorry Parking Strategy
(THC145) Inverness Strategic Traffic Plan (ISTP) Data Collation and Gap Analysis Summary Report
(THC146) ISTP City-wide Traffic Analysis
(THC147) ISTP Parking Best Practice Review
(THC148) ISTP Development and Modal Shift Report
(THC159) Skyfall Shared Road/Rail Clearway Proposal
(THC160) Rail Freight Capability Study
(THC161) Local Transport Strategy Case for Change
(THC035) Response from Historic Environment Scotland
(THC088) Response from NatureScot
(THC089) Response from SEPA
(THC149) Responses from HITRANS
(THC150) Response from Transport Scotland
(THC151) Response from Moray Council
(THC152) Responses from Network Rail
(THC153) Response from Scotrail
(THC154) Response from CalMac
(THC155) Responses from Walk Wheel Cycle Trust (Sustrans)
(THC157) Response from HC Ferries
(THC158) Response from HC Access Officer
(THC156) Responses from HC Transport Planning
(THC200) Responses from HC Sustainable Travel Team

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
	THC624	Highland Local Transport Strategy	10.06.25
	THC625	LTS Delivery Plan	15.05.26
	THC626	National Transport Strategy 2	10.06.25
	THC627	Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP) for Scotland	10.06.25
	THC628	Infrastructure Delivery Pipeline 2026	17.03.26
	THC629	Programme for Government	10.06.25
	THC630	Strategic Transport Projects Review 2	10.06.25
	THC631	STPR2 Highland and Islands Regional Page	10.06.25
	THC632	Transport Poverty A Public Health Issue	29.08.25
	THC633	Long Term Active Travel Vision in Scotland 2030	10.06.25
	THC634	Active Travel Framework	10.06.25
	THC635	National Walking Strategy	10.06.25
	THC636	Cycling Framework for Active Travel	10.06.25
	THC637	Cycling Action Plan	10.06.25
	THC638	Cycling by Design	10.06.25
	THC639	Rail Service Decarbonisation Action Plan	29.08.25
	THC640	Rail Recharged: Scotland's Fleet Transition Strategy	25.03.26
	THC641	Scotland's Railway Delivery Plan	29.08.25
	THC642	Our Principles of Good Design	29.08.25

	THC643	Sustainable Travel to Stations	29.08.25
	THC644	Islands Connectivity Plan - A Strategic Approach	10.06.25
	THC645	Climate Change Plan Update	10.06.25
	THC646	Route Map to achieve a 20 per cent reduction in car kilometres by 2030	10.06.25
	THC647	Renewed Policy Statement for Achieving Car Use Reduction in Scotland	29.08.25
	THC648	Scotland's Road Safety Framework 2030	10.06.25
	THC649	Road Safety Plan to 2030	10.06.25
	THC650	Hydrogen Action Plan	29.08.25
	THC651	Switched on Scotland Roadmap	29.08.25
	THC652	Switched on Scotland Phase 2: Action Plan for Growth	29.08.25
	THC653	A Network Fit For The Future: Scotland's Public Electric Vehicle Charging Network	29.08.25
	THC654	National Road Development Guide	15.05.26
	THC655	Local Transport Strategy	30.06.25
	THC656	Active Travel Strategy	30.06.25
	THC657	Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy	30.06.25
	THC002	Highland-wide Local Development Plan	30.06.25
	THC003	Inner Moray Firth LDP2	30.06.25
	THC660	Scotland's Census 2022	30.06.25
	THC661	Census 2022 Journey to Work Map	30.08.25
	THC662	Method of Travel to Work in Scotland and Highland 2011 and 2022	30.08.25
	THC663	Travel Mode to School in Scotland and Highland	30.08.25
	THC664	Distance Travelled to Work in Highland 2022	30.08.25
	THC665	Highland Council Core Paths	30.06.25
	THC666	Long Distance Routes	30.06.25
	THC667	Highland LDP Evidence Map	30.06.25
	THC668	Inverness Walking and Cycling Index 2023	30.06.25
	THC669	Usmart Open Cycling Data	10.06.25
	THC670	Network Development Plan	30.08.25
	THC671	North Coast Trail	30.08.25
	THC673	Office of Road and Rail Data	30.08.25
	THC674	Scotrail's Route by Route Key Metric Assessment	15.05.26
	THC675	ScotRail Economic Impact Report 2024	15.05.26

	THC676	Railway for Everyone Strategy	30.08.25
	THC677	Inverness Interchange Bus Station & Car Park Feasibility Study	22.04.26
	THC678	Inverness East Development Brief	30.08.25
	THC679	Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance	30.08.25
	THC680	Scotland's Railway Climate Action Plan	30.08.25
	THC681	Transport and Travel in Scotland 2023	25.06.25
	THC682	Bus Infrastructure Fund	25.03.26
	THC683	£2 Bus Fare Cap Pilot	21.04.26
	THC684	Passenger Traffic on Ferry Services in Highland	25.06.25
	THC685	Terminal Passengers in Highland Airports	25.06.25
	THC686	Delivering Scotland's Air Departure Tax	21.04.26
	THC687	Scottish Transport Statistics 2024 – Road Lengths	25.06.25
	THC688	Scottish Transport Statistics 2024 – Road Traffic	25.06.25
	THC689	Drakewell	25.06.25
	THC690	INRIX Roadway Analytics	25.06.25
	THC691	Western Isles HVDC Link project	30.08.25
	THC692	Highland Delivery Programme	30.08.25
	THC693	Timber Transport Forum Agreed Route Map	30.08.25
	THC694	Licensed ULEVs	30.08.25
	THC695	EV Public Charging Infrastructure Statistics	30.08.25
	THC696	THC News Centre	30.08.25
	THC697	Reported Road Casualties Scotland 2023	30.08.25
	THC698	Local Development Plan Guidance	30.08.25
	THC699	Roads and Transport Guidelines for New Development	30.08.25
	THC700	Developer Contributions Supplementary Guidance	30.08.25
	THC701	Planning circular 4/2025: Planning obligations and good neighbour agreements	13.12.25
	THC702	Torvean and Ness-side Development Brief	13.12.25
	THC703	Local Development Plans – Evidence Reports and Gate Checks Action Plan and Advice	18.03.26
	THC704	Wick Active Travel Masterplan	18.03.26
	THC705	Fort William Active Travel Masterplan	18.03.26

THC706	Alness and Invergordon Active Travel Masterplan	18.03.26
THC707	Dingwall Active Travel Masterplan	18.03.26
THC708	Inverness Active Travel Masterplan	18.03.26
THC709	Nairn Active Travel Masterplan	18.03.26
THC710	Portree Active Travel Masterplan	18.03.26
THC711	Tain Active Travel Masterplan	18.03.26
THC712	Thurso Active Travel Masterplan	18.03.26

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 that there are relevant crossovers between Transport and other topics including:

- **Chapter 4: Climate and Energy**
- **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**
- **Chapter 6: Coastal Development and Aquaculture**
- **Chapter 7: Flood Risk Management**
- **Chapter 8: Business, Economy, Tourism and Productive Places**
- **Chapter 9: Housing**
- **Chapter 11: Infrastructure**
- **Chapter 12: Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings**
- **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**

Where apparent, the Council has referenced relevant linkages between policies areas throughout the chapter.

Summary of Evidence

- 10.1 The Council's vision for transport in Highland is that communities, business and visitors will be served by a low carbon transport system that is sustainable, inclusive, safe, resilient and accessible ([Highland Local Transport Strategy](#)). The Council, alongside other key transport stakeholders, and based on evidence, need to 'decide and provide': decide what our transport system should look like and provide infrastructure and services accordingly.
- 10.2 Given the critical relationship between land use and transport, the LDP has an important role to play in helping to achieving this vision. It is important that these documents provide a framework for decisions to be made that ensure appropriate infrastructure and services are provided for new development.
- 10.3 Given that transport-derived carbon emissions comprise such a large share of Highland's overall carbon emissions (as highlighted in **Chapter 4: Climate**

Change and Energy), transport policy will continue to play a vital role in responding to the climate crisis through mitigation measures. This chapter of the Evidence Report allows the integration of land use and transport to be considered from the earliest stage of LDP preparation and provides a baseline that will inform the transport appraisal and the HLDP.

10.4 The Council considers it has undertaken thorough engagement with stakeholders for this chapter and collected sufficient evidence on transport, including the transport elements of infrastructure first, to inform the content of the HLDP. This Summary of Evidence focuses on information relating to:

- **Policy Context**
- **Travel Patterns and Methods**
- **Active Travel**
- **Rail Based Transport**
- **Bus Based Transport**
- **Water Based Transport**
- **Aviation**
- **Road-based Transport**
- **Cross Boundary Transport Considerations**
- **Current Approach to Transport Related Developer Contributions**

Policy Context

10.5 This section provides an overview of national, regional and local policy and strategies relevant to transport that will help to inform the approach the HLDP will take to contribute towards the delivery of a low carbon transport system.

National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)

Policies

10.6 Policy 13 – Sustainable Transport and Policy 18 – Infrastructure First are both the key policies in focus and the LDP requirements of these policies have been outlined at the outset of this chapter. Other policies with a relevance to transport include Policy 1 – Tackling Climate and Nature crises, Policy 2 – Climate mitigation and adaptation, Policy 15 – Local Living and 20-minute neighbourhoods and Policy 16 – Quality Homes.

10.7 These policies reinforce the Climate Emergency and the need for a fundamental shift in the way people travel, promoting the [National Transport Strategy 2](#) (NTS2) sustainable travel and investment hierarchies (see Figure 10:1 and Figure 10:2) and the need to reduce the dominance and reliance of the private car to reduce emissions and seek modal shift. They promote place-based planning, ensuring places are well connected to each other and to local amenities and services by sustainable travel modes. There is a greater focus on the delivery of

infrastructure, ensuring the spatial strategy can be facilitated with appropriate and deliverable infrastructure.

National Developments

- 10.8 NPF4 contains eighteen national developments that will help to deliver NPF4's spatial strategy.
- 10.9 A number of these apply to the whole of Scotland and are relevant to Highland and its transport network, such as number 8 – 'National Walking, Wheeling and Cycling Network.' This facilitates the shift from vehicles to walking, cycling and wheeling for everyday journeys contributing to reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transport and it is highly beneficial for health and wellbeing. It will significantly support modal shift and deliver multiple outcomes including the Scottish Government's commitment reducing car kilometres, associated emissions reduction, health and air quality improvement.
- 10.10 In particular, national development (3) 'Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure' has implications for demand and maintaining the integrity and safety of the transport network in Highland.

Spatial Strategy

- 10.11 NPF4's Spatial Priorities for both 'North and West Coast and Islands' and 'North' are relevant to Highland. Important transport related extracts of these areas spatial planning priorities are:

North and West Coast and Islands

- Identifies key centres that provide access to islands, including Wick, Thurso, Ullapool and Mallaig.
- Recognises significant challenges that will continue in the area, including fuel and transport poverty.
- Continued expansion of electric vehicle charging facilities will support further decarbonisation.
- Communities in this area will continue to rely to an extent on the private car, and low carbon solutions to the provision of services will need to be practical and affordable.
- Key strategic sites for industrial investment and associated port infrastructure and facilities include plans for: Wick; Scrabster; Gills Bay and Kishorn. Other key nodes on the ferries network, including Ullapool, Uig and Mallaig, will continue to act as important hubs to support communities, investors and visitors.

North

- Key centres listed in this section are Inverness, Fort William, Ullapool and Dingwall.
- Recognises car dependence in this area and that more limited access to services creates disadvantage.
- Improvements to the Highland Main Line through electrification and delivery of new stations including at Inverness Airport, will help to create a sustainable commuter network for Inverness and open up more rural areas to lower carbon development.
- A continued modal shift to rail for both passengers and freight will bring significant environmental benefits over time.
- Roads will continue to be arteries upon which local communities and businesses depend.
- There will be a need to adapt key routes due to the impacts of climate change alongside creating a strong network of charging points, including improvements to the A96 to improve safety and to the A9 to maintain a resilient road link from Thurso and Inverness to the central belt. There are also resilience challenges for other key routes such as the A82.
- Continued investment in the national long distance walking and cycling network provides an opportunity to assist in decarbonising tourism and recreation across the area, whilst also providing, and acting as a spine for, sustainable active travel connections for everyday travel in the vicinity of towns and villages.
- Inverness and Oban airports are hubs for air connections to dispersed communities and Wick John O’Groats Airport and Broadford Airstrip on Skye are key connections.
- Key ports include the Cromarty Firth (including Port of Cromarty, Nigg and Highland Deephaven), Corpach, Ardersier, Gills Bay, Inverness and Kishorn.

National Transport Strategy 2 (NTS2)

- 10.12 NTS2 sets out an ambitious vision for Scotland’s transport system for the next 20 years. The vision is underpinned by four interconnected priorities: Reduces Inequalities, Takes Climate Action, Helps Deliver Inclusive Economic Growth and Improves Health and Wellbeing.
- 10.13 To achieve these priorities, NTS2 embeds the Sustainable Travel Hierarchy (shown in Figure 10:1) by promoting walking, wheeling, cycling, public transport and shared transport options in preference to single occupancy private car use for the movement of people.

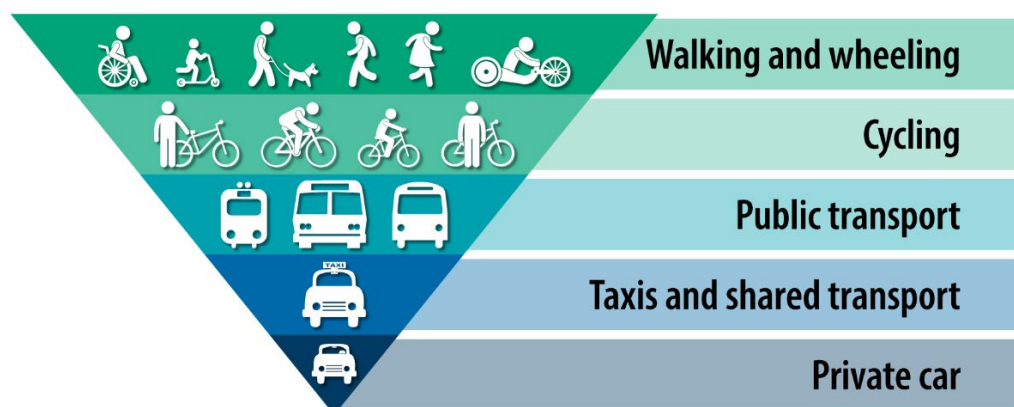


Figure 10:1 NTS2 Sustainable Travel Hierarchy

- 10.14 NTS2 recognises that planning and development have a major influence on our transport system and emphasises that planning decisions should give consider the impacts on transport. In addition, the Sustainable Investment Hierarchy shown in Figure 10:2 will be used to inform future investment decisions and ensure transport options that focus on reducing inequalities and the need to travel unsustainably are prioritised.

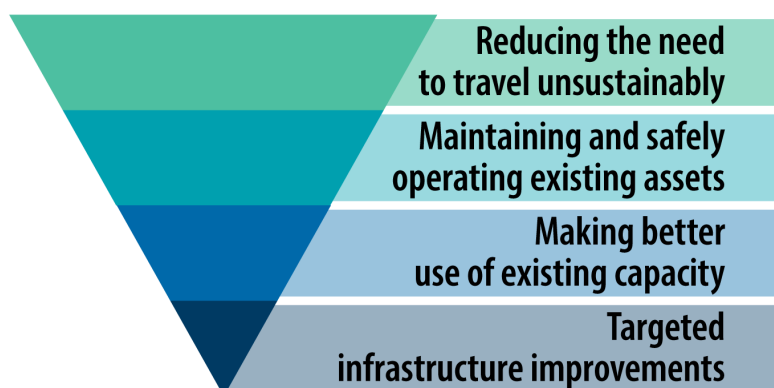


Figure 10:2 NTS2 Sustainable Investment Hierarchy

Infrastructure Investment Plan for Scotland 2021-22 to 2025-26 (IIP)

- 10.15 The IIP sets out the context for future investment in transport. The vision of the IIP is to ensure Scotland's infrastructure supports resilience and enables inclusive, net zero and sustainable growth.
- 10.16 Transport related investment projects relevant to Highland are listed in IIP:
- Support for Sustainable and Active Travel, including active freeways.
 - Future Transport Fund – capital to support low / zero carbon investments.
 - Future Transport Fund – Bus Priority Investment.

- Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal, supplemented by complementary and additional investment in key road sections and links: Longman junction with the A82; and the A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton connection.
- A9 Dualling Programme – phased improvements to A9 Perth to Inverness.
- A96 Dual carriageway – phased improvements to A96 Inverness to Aberdeen (including the Nairn Bypass).
- Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL) – Two new 100 metre ferries to provide a year round service to the Isle of Arran and the Uig Triangle.
- CMAL – Voted Loans – For procurement of vessels. Proposals include, Small Vessel Replacement Programme and Mallaig-Lochboisdale.
- Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd Air Traffic Control Services - modernising air traffic control, improving service resilience and air traffic provision through the introduction of surveillance at six HIAL airfields.

Infrastructure Delivery Pipeline 2026 (IDP)

10.17 The IDP was published in January 2026, alongside a consultation on the Scottish Governments 10-year Infrastructure Strategy. The IDP is a continuation of the pipeline set out in the 2021 IIP.

10.18 The Infrastructure Pipeline contains projects over £5 million and programmes over £20 million with agreed business cases and agreed funding. The following transport projects relevant to Highland are listed:

- A9 Dualling Programme - Tomatin to Moy.
- Low Carbon and Sustainable Travel Programme - Including active travel and bus infrastructure, zero emission buses and fleets, smartcard programme and electric vehicle charging infrastructure.
- Vessels, Ports and Harbours - including Freight flex vessels – Northern Isles and Lord of the Isles replacement.
- Green Freeports (co-investment with UK Government).
- Cities Investment and Strategy (core deal) – co-investment with UK Government and Local Government.
- Cities Investment and Strategy (Corran Ferry) – co-investment with UK Government and Highland Council.

10.19 The IDP also sets out projects in the Development Pipeline. These are projects and programmes where a strategic outline case has been made and are Government commitments. Outline business cases are in development, programme/project is being further defined. The following transport projects relevant Highland are listed:

- A96 programme – A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass), A96/A9 Inshes to Smithton and A96 Corridor.

- Major road investment programme – A9/A82 Longman Improvement Scheme.
- Rail services improvement and decarbonisation programme – Rural rail renewal project (incl. Highland Mainline).
- Vessels, ports and harbours investment programme – Mallaig Port Improvements.

10.20 A Future Pipeline is also included, the IDP explains these are interventions being explored to determine if there is a case for investment. Transport examples listed include the Fort William Integrated Transport Plan and local road/rail improvements to support the renewables energy sector.

Programme for Government 2025 to 2026 (PfG)

10.21 The PfG outlines the Government's priorities for 2025-2026. PfG includes priorities on decarbonising transport and a safe, sustainable transport system, including measures to support people and businesses to reduce their emissions and support the transport network becoming more available, affordable and accessible. Spatial priorities relevant to sustainable transport in Highland are summarised below:

- Supporting three Masterplan Consent Areas including for development associated with the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport (ICFGF).
- Continuing to deliver the major vessels programme.
- Making it easier for people to walk, wheel, and cycle on everyday journeys by delivering projects through our 2025-26 sustainable travel programmes, including the new Bus Infrastructure Fund.
- Continue to dual the A9 as set out in its delivery plan.
- Progressing work to determine the most suitable procurement option for delivering the A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass).

Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 (STPR2)

10.22 STPR2 details how it will help to deliver the vision, priorities and outcomes set out in NTS2 and aligns with other national plans including the Climate Change Plan and NPF4. It sets out 45 recommendations which will help inform potential transport investment opportunities for the period 2022-2042.

10.23 Recommendations 1 and 3 – 10 are applicable across the whole of Scotland with the aim to encourage a behaviour change to more sustainable modes of travel. Recommendations 21 – 23, 25 – 28 and 30 – 38 are also relevant to decarbonise transport, improve public transport and increase safety and resilience on the network. Recommendations specific that have particular benefits to the Highland and Islands region are shown in Table 10:1.

Table 10:1 STPR2 recommendations related to the Highlands and Islands Region (STPR2 Highland and Islands Regional Page)

Specific to the Highland and Islands Region	
15	Highland Mainline Rail Corridor Enhancements
32	Trunk Road & Motorway Renewal for Reliability, Resilience and Safety includes reference to the development of an integrated transport plan for Fort William.
41	Potential Sound of Harris, Sound of Barra Fixed Links and Fixed Link Between Mull and Scottish Mainland
Applicable to multiple regions but have particular benefit to the Highlands and Islands	
2	Active freeways and cycle parking hubs
18	Supporting integrated journeys at ferry terminals
24	Ferry vessel renewal and replacement, and progressive decarbonisation
42	Investment in port infrastructure to support vessel renewal and replacement, and progressive decarbonisation
43	Major station masterplans, including Inverness
44	Rail Freight Terminals and Facilities

- 10.24 The STPR2 package outlined in the STPR2 Highlands and Islands Appraisal Summary Table **(THC119)** is expected to boost active travel in the Highlands, raising the share of walking journeys from 17% to 20% and cycling from 1.6% to 15%. This aims to make walking and cycling more convenient, encouraging people to choose these modes over driving.
- 10.25 It also explains that STPR2 promotes health by encouraging more walking and cycling. The WHO Health Economic Assessment Tool was used to measure these benefits, including reduced premature deaths and improved air quality. In the Highland region, increased active travel from STPR2 is estimated to prevent 10.6 premature deaths per year by reducing lifestyle-related health risks.
- 10.26 Transport and health share an important relationship, encompassing health impacts such as air quality, noise pollution, active lifestyles, road safety and transport poverty. [Public Health Scotland's Transport Poverty A Public Health Issue](#) states, "addressing transport poverty is particularly important for Scotland

at a time when life expectancy and healthy life expectancy are falling, [and] health and social inequalities are widening...". The evidence in relation to these is fully detailed separately in **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**.

Long Term Active Travel Vision for Scotland 2030

- 10.27 The Long Term Active Travel Vision for Scotland sets out how Scotland will look in 2030 if more people are walking and cycling for short, everyday journeys. This vision is supported by the Active Travel Framework and the Cycling Framework for Active Travel, which work together to shape communities around people and place, prioritising active travel.
- 10.28 This document is relevant to both urban and rural areas of Highland. For more urban areas it highlights the importance of a planning focus on the concept of walkable neighbourhoods and viable public transport services. In rural areas it recognises the potential for rural roads to have low speed limits, linking with nearby communities and services so opening up new travel opportunities and choices. It also explains national walking and cycling networks, core paths and local cycle networks will link settlements, places of interest and public transport hubs.

Active Travel Framework

- 10.29 The Active Travel Framework brings together key policy approaches to improving the uptake of walking and cycling in Scotland. Drawing on the long-term shared vision and strategic objectives for active travel, its ambition is that by 2030, Scotland's communities are shaped around people and place, enabling walking and cycling to be the most popular mode of travel for short, everyday journeys.
- 10.30 It contains five high level outcomes relevant to the whole of Scotland and capable of being delivered in large parts of Highland.

National Walking Strategy

- 10.31 The National Walking Strategy outlines the Scottish Government's vision for a Scotland where everyone benefits from walking as part of their everyday journeys, enjoys walking in the outdoors and where places are well designed to encourage walking.

Cycling Framework for Active Travel – A Plan for Everyday Cycling

- 10.32 The [Cycling Framework](#) builds upon previous iterations of the [Cycling Action Plan](#) and sets out strategic priorities and shared actions to maximise cycling's contribution to realising the Scottish Government's [Long Term Vision for Active Travel in Scotland](#). The top priority for the vision is for the delivery of more dedicated, high quality, safe cycling infrastructure, effectively resourced, where fair access is ensured and uptake is supported with training and education. It recognises that the provision of a high-quality network in both urban and rural areas is key to increasing rates of cycling for transport.
- 10.33 It contains a delivery plan with actions relevant to the whole of Scotland that are intended to be delivered by a series of partners, including Local Authorities.

Cycling by Design

- 10.34 [Cycling by Design](#) is a comprehensive guide for planning and designing cycling infrastructure in Scotland. It intends to make cycling a practical and attractive option for all users and provides detailed guidance on various aspects of cycling infrastructure, including cycle links, crossings, junctions, and trip end facilities in existing and new developments.

Rail Service Decarbonisation Action Plan

- 10.35 This [action plan](#) focusses on decarbonising transport through modal shift to rail, and decarbonising rail traction energy through the removal of diesel passenger trains from the Scottish network by 2035.
- 10.36 For lines that lie either wholly or partially in Highland the following timescales and actions are outlined:
- Scotland's rural network - based on fleet expiry dates, and rolling stock interworking, the Far North Line, West Highland Lines and Kyle Line are considered appropriate for the early introduction of an alternative traction technology as a permanent solution. This workstream will be expedited and routes considered together as a package whilst taking account of the distinct requirements of each of the lines.
 - Connecting Inverness to the Central Belt - By 2035 plan to have fully electrified routes from the central belt to Inverness. This is a complex project that requires significant planning and development before passenger trains could enter into service.
 - Inverness to Aberdeen - Plans to electrify the entire route, but only limited part (Aberdeen to Inverurie) may be complete by 2035 due to complexities. However, as innovative approaches develop, the pace of

implementation and may increase and allow for full electrification by 2035. As that increased pace is currently unknown the planning assumption is that alternative bi-mode traction, will be required to operate as an interim measure with an expectation that the route, with an extension to Tain, will be fully electrified in the years shortly after 2035.

- 10.37 It is understood that a refresh of this plan is underway. Within it will be an extended timescale that is expected to delay full decarbonisation to 2045.

Rail Recharged: Scotland's Fleet Transition Strategy

- 10.38 This [publication](#) updates the Rail Service Decarbonisation Action Plan by setting out the steps the Scottish Government are taking to replace trains that are reaching the end of their useable-life. This will sustain the long-term resilience and reliability of passenger services to encourage more people to make sustainable travel choices.

Scotland's Railway Delivery Plan

- 10.39 This is [document](#) outlines projects and investments to improve Scotland's rail network, focusing on enhanced, reliable, and sustainable passenger and freight services, increased resilience to weather, and decarbonisation.

Our Principles of Good Design

- 10.40 Network Rail's [Principles of Good Design](#) is a strategic framework for developing railway assets that are sustainable, community-focused, and deliver long-term value, based on nine design principles: Identity, Passengers, Community-focused, Collaborative, Inclusive, Connected, Contextual, Enhancing heritage, and Innovative. The principles ensure projects are holistically planned to benefit users, the environment, and the wider community while integrating with national design goals and addressing the needs of a diverse and aging population.

Sustainable Travel to Stations

- 10.41 The vision of the [Sustainable Travel to Stations](#) strategy is to grow the number of journeys passengers make to, and from, local neighbourhoods to the railway station by healthy and sustainable modes of transport: walking, wheeling, cycling, on-demand transport and the bus. Integrating stations into the communities by improving access to public transport, increasing opportunity to travel sustainably and delivering improved safety and social justice are key elements of the strategy.

Islands Connectivity Plan - A Strategic Approach

- 10.42 The Strategic Approach is part of the [Islands Connectivity Plan](#) and provides a strategic context to Transport Scotland's approach to islands connectivity including ferries, aviation and fixed links. It also sets a vision and four priorities, supported by outcomes for the future of ferry services.

Route Map to achieve a 20 per cent reduction in car kilometres by 2030

- 10.43 Scotland's target of reducing car Km by 20 per cent by 2030 was set out in the [Climate Change Plan Update \(CCPu\)](#). The [Route Map to achieve a 20 per cent reduction in car Km by 2030](#) outlines that reducing car use is essential for the transport system to be decarbonised at a pace.
- 10.44 The four key desired behaviours identified are: reducing the need to travel, living well locally, switching modes and combining / sharing car trips. It acknowledges the role of planning system, particularly with the delivery of development that embeds the principles of local living.
- 10.45 In June 2025 a [Renewed Policy Statement for Achieving Car Use Reduction in Scotland](#) reaffirms the commitment to reducing car use, shifting from the previous 2030 target to a longer-term approach focused on wider benefits, including public health and reduced inequality. Key next steps include revising targets, reviewing regulations for potential road user charging, developing regional delivery plans, and launching a national engagement campaign.

Scotland's Road Safety Framework 2030

- 10.46 The [framework](#) sets out a vision for Scotland to have the best road safety performance in the world by 2030 and a compelling long-term vision for road safety, Vision Zero, where there are zero fatalities and serious injuries on Scotland's roads by 2050. In Highland, this national vision has been embedded in the Council's [Road Safety Plan to 2030](#). Its focus is on the 'Safe System' approach and meeting national targets.

Hydrogen Action Plan

- 10.47 The Scottish Government's [Hydrogen Action Plan](#) referred to in **Chapter 4: Climate and Energy** aims to establish Scotland as a leading nation in hydrogen production and use, with a goal of 5 GW of renewable and low-carbon hydrogen by 2030 and 25 GW by 2045. It has a significant focus on decarbonising transport, recognising the potential of hydrogen and its derivatives to reduce emissions in various transport sectors, including road freight, hydrogen trains, buses, and shipping. It outlines specific actions to

facilitate the development of a hydrogen transport infrastructure and encourage the uptake of both hydrogen and battery-electric vehicles.

Switched on Scotland Roadmap

- 10.48 The Scottish Government's [Switched On Scotland Plug-In Vehicle Roadmap](#), establishes a vision that by 2050, Scotland's towns, cities and communities will have been freed from the damaging emissions of petrol and diesel fuelled vehicles. [Switched on Scotland Phase 2: An Action Plan for Growth](#) contains a set of 10 outcome-focussed actions, which will collectively help deliver three important impacts: reducing the cost of owning and driving an EV; making EVs a convenient fit with the needs and lifestyles of drivers; and promoting a change in culture where by EVs are widely recognised as a preferred alternative to fossil fuelled vehicles.

A Network Fit for the Future: Vision for Scotland's Public Electric Vehicle Charging Network

- 10.49 Transport Scotland published [A Network Fit for the Future: Vision for Scotland's Public Electric Vehicle Charging Network](#) in 2023. Its vision is for local communities, businesses and visitors to have access to a well-designed, comprehensive and convenient network of public charge points, where these are needed.

National Road Development Guide

- 10.50 The [National Road Development Guide](#) was published in 2014. It provides guidance on the design and construction of roads, supporting the Scottish Government's Designing Streets policy. It assists developers to design effective development layouts that reduce vehicle speeds and are not vehicle dependent.

Regional Transport Strategy (RTS)

- 10.51 Ministerial approval was given for the Highland and Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS) [Regional Transport Strategy \(RTS\)](#) on 13 May 2025. The [RTS](#) sets the strategic framework for the development of transport in the HITRANS area over the next 20 years.
- 10.52 The vision of the RTS is as follows: "Our transport networks and services will act to realise the economic potential of our region through reducing the actual and perceived impacts of distance, poor resilience and low population density. By doing this, they will facilitate economically and socially valuable activities for all, provide equality of opportunity, enable people to live active and healthy lives

and allow our region to contribute fully to the national net zero emissions target.”

10.53 The RTS also contains a series of strategy objectives that define the outcomes that the RTS is trying to achieve. These are:

- Strategy Objective 1: To make a just transition to a post-carbon and more environmentally sustainable transport network.
- Strategy Objective 2: To transform and provide safe and accessible connections between and within our city, towns and villages, to enable walking, wheeling and cycling for all. A key policy within this objective is to reduce road-based severance in our communities.
- Strategy Objective 3: To widen access to public and shared transport and improve connectivity within and from / to the region.
- Strategy Objective 4: To improve the quality and integration of public and shared transport within and from / to the region.
- Strategy Objective 5: To ensure reliable, resilient, affordable and sustainable connectivity for all from / to our island, peninsular and remote communities.
- Strategy Objective 6: To improve the efficiency, safety and resilience of our transport networks for people and freight and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

10.54 To guide implementation of the RTS, its [Delivery Plan](#) sets a series of actions including an ongoing programme of physical and non-physical interventions which will help deliver the objectives. Elements of the [Delivery Plan](#), with relevance to the Evidence Report are referenced elsewhere in this Chapter.

Local Transport Strategy (LTS)

10.55 The Council published a new 10-year [LTS](#) in early 2025. It plays a key role in setting out the future direction and policy focus for transport in Highland. The [LTS](#) was informed by a Case for Change (**THC161**) published in 2023 as well as early drafts of this Evidence Report chapter. The [LTS](#) objectives are:

- invest in the safety, maintenance and resilience of the transport system to support the future prosperity of communities and businesses;
- improve public or shared transport options that meet different user needs;
- improve walking, wheeling and cycling choices for everyone to encourage active and healthy journeys; and
- reduce emissions from the transport system.

10.56 The [LTS](#) is an important consideration for the LDP. Figure 10:3 illustrates how the LTS and HLDP (including its cumulative transport appraisal) are intended to complement each other.

- 10.57 The LTS Delivery Plan was published in early 2026 and is a key document that will help to enable important infrastructure provision, consistent with infrastructure first principles, as well as informing the HLDP Delivery Programme and aiding the delivery of its strategy and policies.

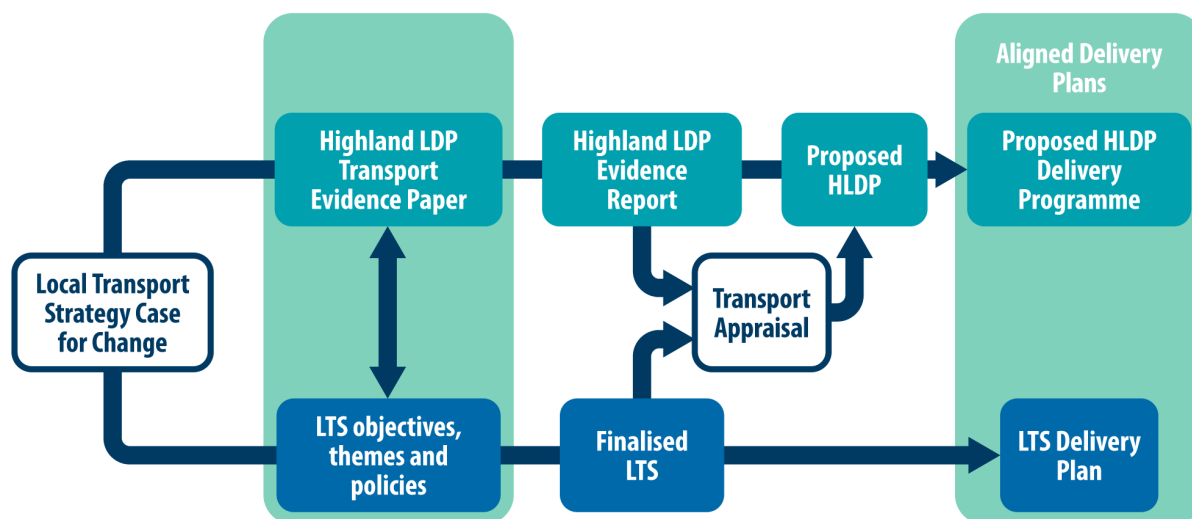


Figure 10.3 Relationship between HLDP and LTS

Active Travel Strategy and Active Travel Masterplans

- 10.58 The Active Travel Strategy was published in 2024 and outlines the Council's vision to make active travel an attractive and realistic choice for more people, more often, for more their everyday journeys.
- 10.59 Active Travel Masterplans, that identify a series of actions that intend to contribute towards the transition to low carbon transport locally, have been published for nine of Highland's largest settlements. In addition, the Inner Moray Firth Active Travel Network Planning identifies a future active travel network connecting the main settlements within that area of Highland. Further detail on Active Travel Masterplans is provided in the **Active Travel Projects** section of this chapter.

Road Safety Plan 2024-2030

- 10.60 The Council's Road Safety Plan seeks to improve Road Safety activity in Highland, alongside creating and maintaining partnerships which will help to develop prevention and intervention activities and initiatives. It sits within the Scottish Government publication Scotland's Road Safety Framework to 2030.

Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy (IRSS)

- 10.61 The Council developed an [IRSS](#) as part of its response to NPF4 preparation. This IRSS showcased the unique set of assets and resources that the Highlands will contribute to the national setting and how the Council will collaborate with the Scottish Government and partner agencies to deliver on strategic national development priorities, national outcomes and delivery mechanisms to achieve a long-term sustainable vision for Highland in the period to 2050. It identified key transport improvements essential to facilitating growth in Highland, including major and other trunk and strategic road improvements, rail corridor improvements and important ferry routes.

Local Development Plans

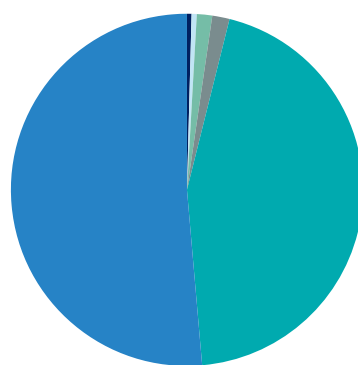
- 10.62 An integral component of the Council's current [HwLDP](#) and three adopted area LDPs is the desire to integrate transport and land use planning. The most recently published area LDP, the [IMFLDP2](#), is supported by an ambitious transport strategy that aims to ensure the creation of a modern, sustainable transport network through robust policy and the delivery of spatially defined transport interventions.
- 10.63 Different levels of information relating to transport were prepared to support the area LDPs, reflective of the different natural, demographic and development pressures faced in each area.

Travel Patterns and Methods

- 10.64 [Scotland's Census 2022](#), specifically its education, labour market and travel to work topic provides valuable up to date information on several transport related topics. A summary of this data relevant to Highland is provided below.

Travel Patterns

- 10.65 High level origin-destination data for Highland from [Scotland's Census 2022](#) is shown in Figure 10:4. This shows a high proportion of people (44.7%) either work from home or at no fixed place. A significant proportion (51.4%) travel within Highland to their place of work, only a very small proportion travel to another local authority (1.6%). Excluding those who either work from home or at no fixed place, 93% of people (58,914 people) travel within Highland to work.



■ Travels to rest of UK ■ Travels outside the UK ■ Offshore installation
 ■ Travels to another LA ■ WFH/No fixed place ■ Travels within LA

Figure 10:4 Location of usual residence and place of work (all Highland people) (Scotland's Census 2022)

- 10.66 Some analysis of Census 2022 data has been undertaken to help understand the origins and destinations of usual residence to place to work in Highland. The findings are presented in an online [Census 2022 Journey to Work Map](#). This map uses symbology to show the number of journeys where residents travel within the data zone they reside in. It also illustrates a detailed spatial breakdown of the number of journeys between different data zones from residents usual place of residence and place of work. This data is shown at both Highland and settlement level. **Chapter 9 Housing** presents more detailed travel to work data for the Inner Moray Firth area, focussing on evidence relating that areas Hinterland.
- 10.67 At a high level, the map shows that the majority of people in Highland tended to travel shorter distances from where they live to where they work, but also that there are people making trips to the larger settlements from all parts of Highland.
- 10.68 More detailed key findings are summarised below and presented in **THC114**.
- The highest journey volumes within the same Inverness data zones occur in Central, Raigmore and Longman (1,497), followed closely by Inshes (1,494), Westhill (1,446), and Lochardil and Holm Mains (1,347), indicating these areas have high concentrations of homes and employment opportunities.
 - Central, Raigmore and Longman is the most popular destination from the five top origins where travel is between different data zones within Inverness (Inshes 930, Westhill 902, Lochardil and Holm Mains, East Rural

602, Slackbuie 575). This indicates key residential commuter areas within Inverness.

- The highest number of journeys between different data zones are concentrated in north Highland, with the highest number of movements being between Thurso East (866), Thurso West (638) and Caithness North East (438) to Caithness North West. This is likely owing to the presence of a significant employer, Nuclear Restoration Services Dounreay within that data zones, alongside other associated organisations.

10.69 A Travel to Work Area (TTWA) is an area where a large proportion of workers both live and work. This is a national dataset prepared by the ONS. It is understood that the ONS are considering whether to update the 2011 TTWA using 2022 census data, and therefore only Census 2011 TTWA map is available at this time.

10.70 The LTS Case for Change (**THC161**) presented Highland Travel to Work areas based on 2011 census data. Whilst now 14 years old, this data provides a consistent indication of people's travel behaviour between home and work at that time. Figure 10:5 illustrates that there are discrete sub-areas of Highland for travel between home and work. An obvious consideration to this data, given its age, is a greater proportion of home working, and how this may influence current and future work patterns.

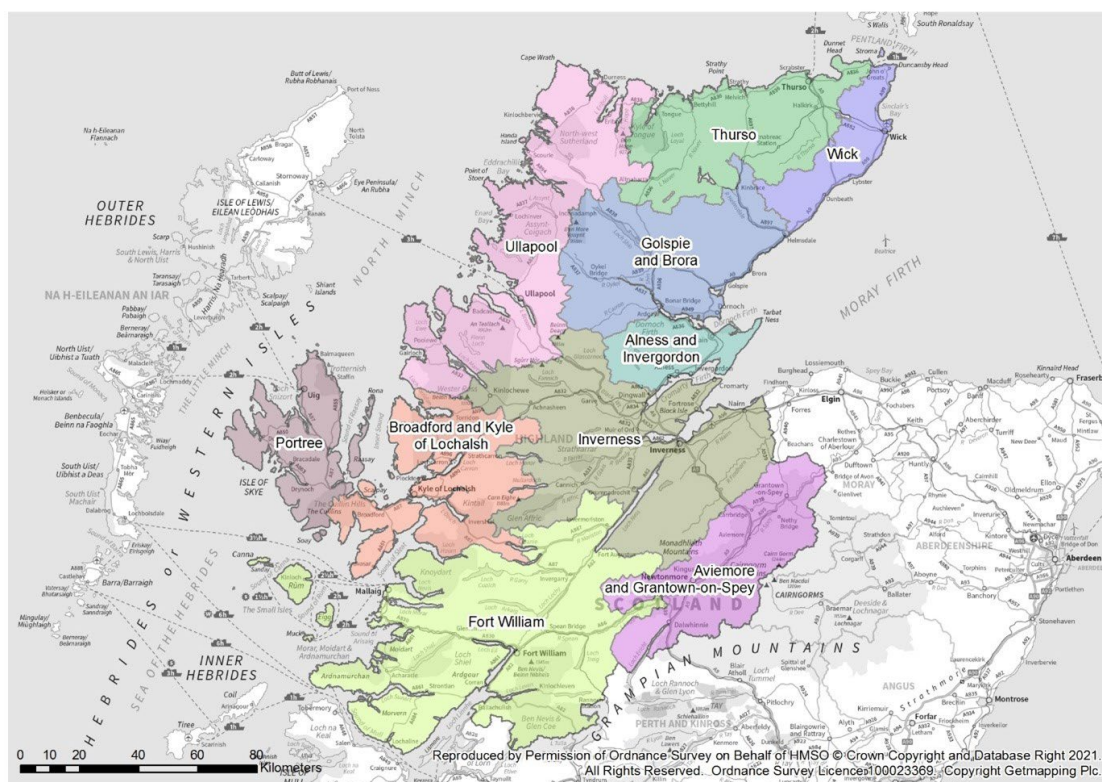


Figure 10:5 Highland Travel to Work Areas (THC161)

Method of Travel

- 10.71 Method of travel data from Scotland's Census 2022 provides data for all people aged 16 and over in employment including full-time students and those who work from home. The proportion of people working mainly from home in Highland in 2022 was 31%, this is a significant increase since the [2011 Census](#) which reported 16%. [Scotland's Census 2022](#) explains that a marked increase in working from home was largely driven by changes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It notes that some changes in response to the pandemic were temporary whilst others are likely to be longer lasting.
- 10.72 Figure 10:6 shows the dominance of car-based travel in Highland, with the 2022 results showing an increase of around 8% since 2011. Also notable is that those travelling on foot and by bus have decreased since 2011.

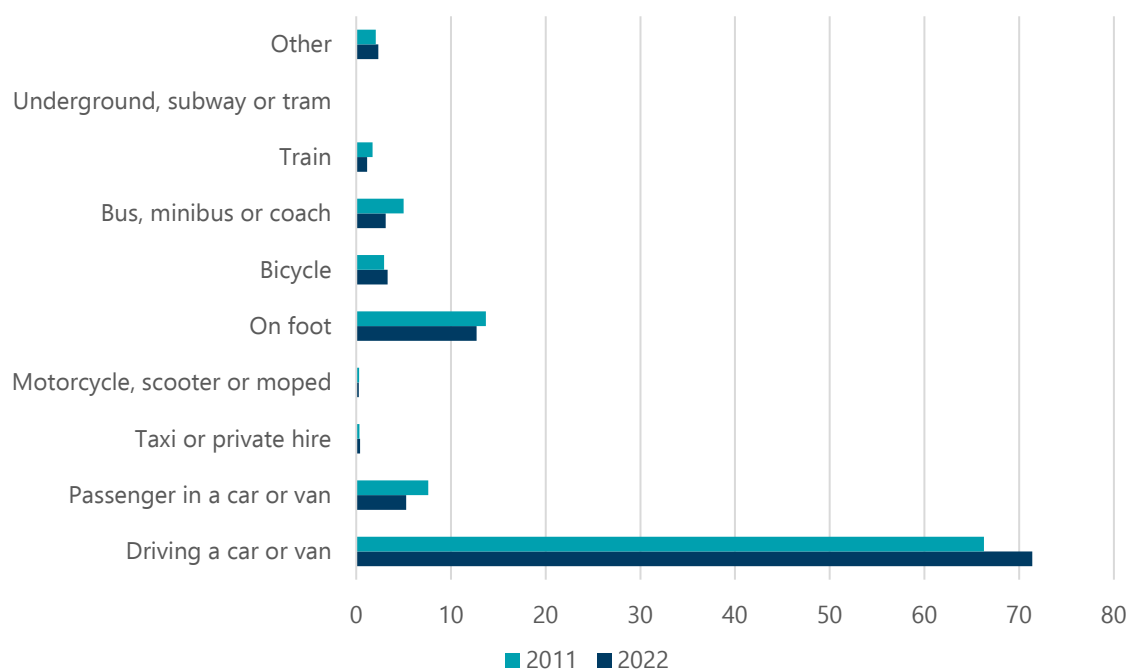


Figure 10:6 Method of Travel to Work 2011 and 2022 in Highland (%) ([Scotland's Census 2022](#))

- 10.73 Figure 10:7 also shows the dominance of car-based travel, as Highland has a higher share of people driving to work in comparison to Scotland.

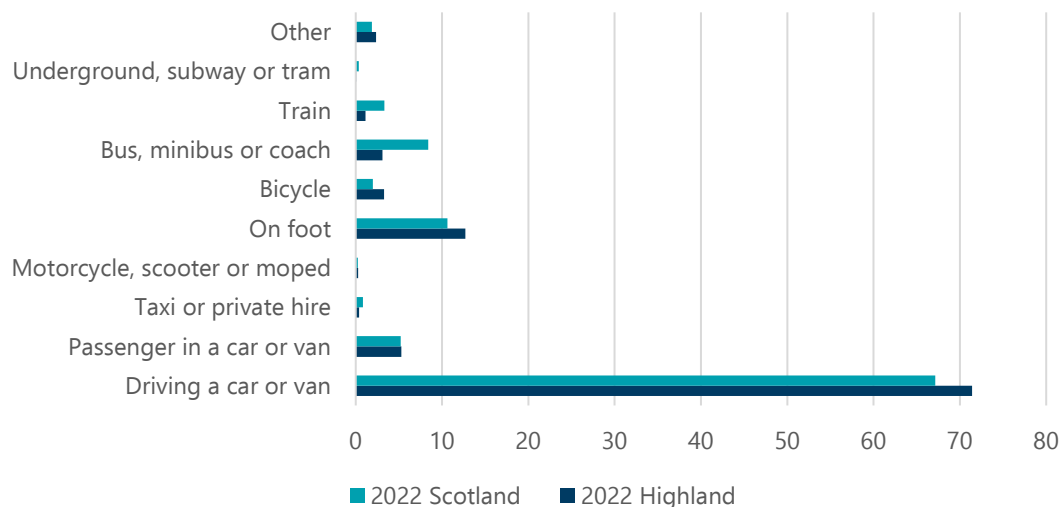


Figure 10:7 Method Travel to Work in Scotland and Highland 2022 (%) (*Scotland's Census 2022*)

10.74 Walk Wheel Cycle Trust (formerly Sustrans) undertakes annual surveys that look at how pupils across Scotland travel to school, entitled the [Hands Up Scotland Survey](#). Figure 10:7 shows proportions of active travel and motorised travel to school in Scotland and Highland. Whilst trends have not changed significantly during the survey period, it is evident that those travelling actively in Highland has decreased slightly and the proportion using private motorised travel has increased slightly. When comparing Highland to Scotland as a whole, a lower proportion of Highland pupils travel by active modes and a higher proportion use private motorised transport.

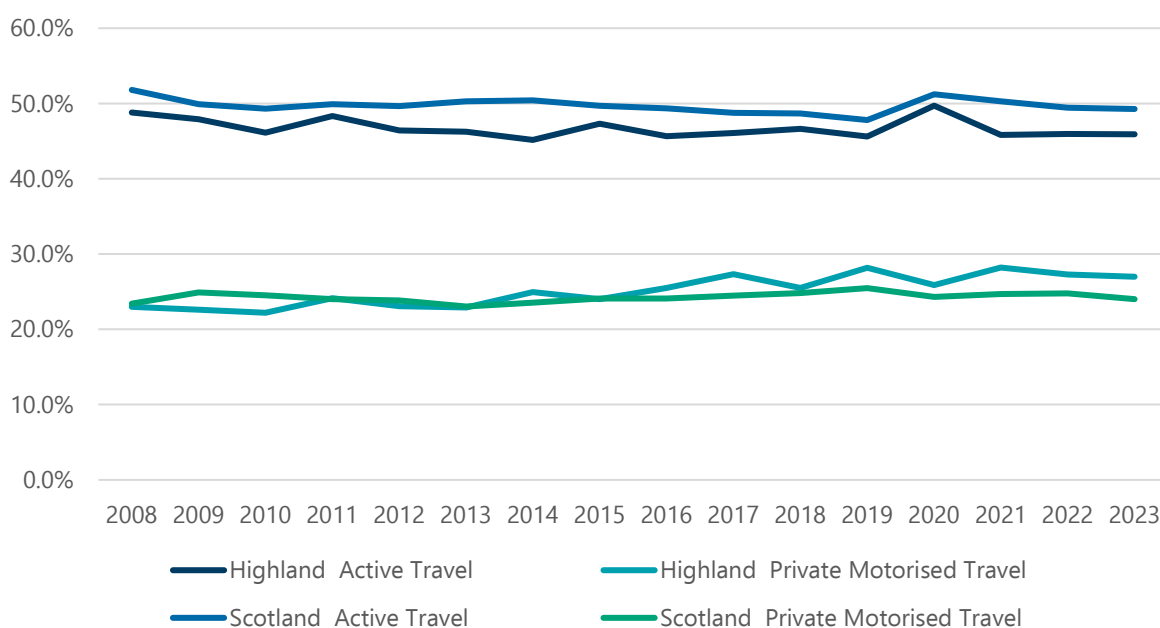


Figure 10:8 Travel Mode to School in Scotland and Highland (*Walk, Wheel, Cycle Trust*)

Distance Travelled

10.75 Figure 10:9 shows that almost half of (46.6%) Highland residents either work from home or have no fixed place or are working abroad. Of those who do travel to work, a significant proportion (32%) travel less than 10km to reach their place of work.

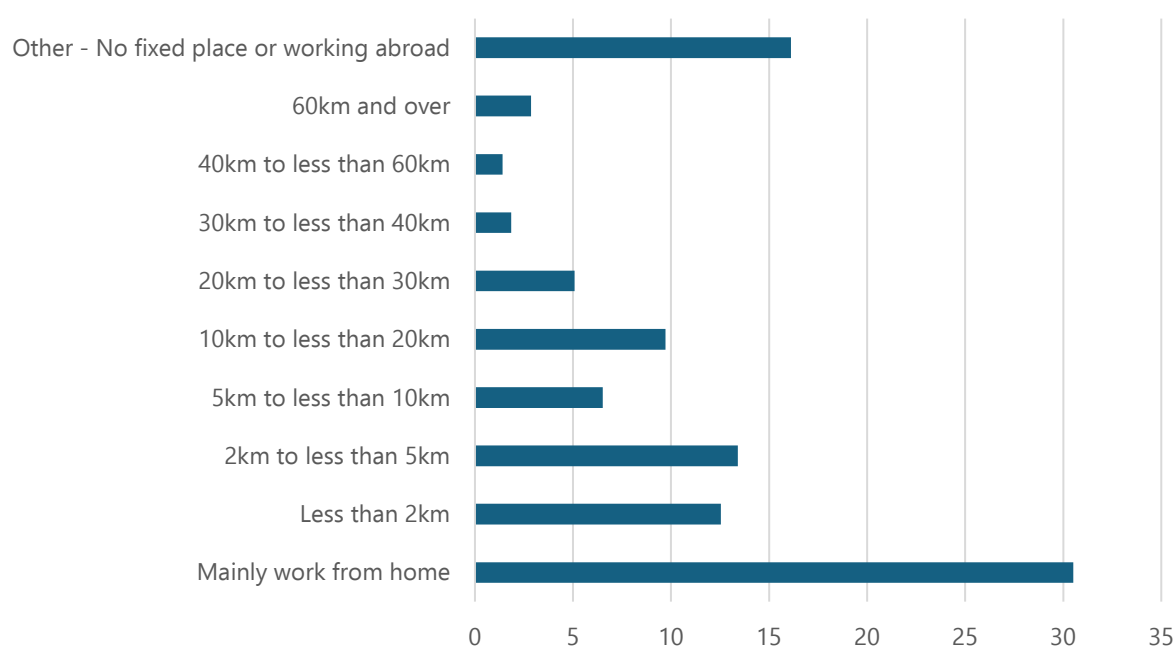


Figure 10:9 Distance Travelled to Work in Highland 2022 (%) (*Scotland's Census 2022*)

Active Travel

10.76 Active travel refers to any mode of travel which is all or mostly people-powered, including walking, wheeling, using a mobility aid, and cycling, including e-bikes. The focus of this section is on active travel for everyday journeys, on paths that provide some level of accessibility for all users. Whilst reference to longer distance paths is made, many of these serve different markets, including tourism, and do not provide a minimum level of accessibility.

Infrastructure

10.77 Highland has an extensive network of active travel routes. The Council manages almost 1,700km of footways and many more are maintained and managed privately. These routes are in a number of forms, including shared use paths, rights of way, core paths and national cycle network routes within urban and rural areas.

- 10.78 Core paths can be paths, waterways or any other means of crossing land to facilitate, promote and manage the exercise of access rights under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, and are identified as such in access authority core paths plans. A Core Path Plan provides a basic framework of routes for the purpose of giving the public reasonable access throughout a particular area for walking, cycling, horse riding and other non-motorised activities. Records of [Highland Council Core Paths](#) are available publicly.
- 10.79 There is no definitive map of public rights of way in Highland but a Catalogue of Rights of Way is maintained by the Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society (Scotways).
- 10.80 There are three designated [Long Distance Routes](#) wholly or partially within Highland which promote multi day recreational routes, they are:
- The Great Glen Way (79 miles)
 - The Speyside Way (84 miles)
 - The West Highland Way (96 miles)
- 10.81 These routes are also promoted as three of Scotland's Great Trails, as well as the Great Glen Canoe Trail and the Dava Way (partially within Highland). There are other popular, unmarked, long distance routes in Highland, including the Cape Wrath Trail.
- 10.82 The following National Cycle Network (NCN) routes are partially within Highland:
- National Route 1 – Dover to north of Scotland (in HLDP area passes through Nairn, east and central Inverness, North Kessock, Tore, Conon Bridge, Maryburgh, Munlochy, Cromarty, Dingwall, Evanton, Alness, Tain and Seaboard Villages.)
 - National Route 7 – Sunderland to Inverness (rural route that does not pass through any larger settlements in HLDP area.)
 - National Route 78 – Campbeltown to Inverness (in HLDP area passes through south Inverness, Dores, Fort William, North and South Ballachulish.)
- 10.83 These routes are shown in [Highland Local Development Plan Evidence Map](#).
- 10.84 In recent years, funding for active travel in Scotland has been at record levels. Places for Everyone, Active Travel Infrastructure Funding, United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Funding, Network Development Funding for National Cycle Network development, Highland Council Active Travel Capital Budget and other funding streams allowed current, new and emerging projects to be developed whilst prioritising future workflow linked to the priorities of Active Travel Masterplans. A number of projects have been completed in recent years, including new and improved paths in Nairn, Fort William, Thurso and several in

Inverness, for example at Riverside Way. Significant sections of active travel routes linking settlements have also been delivered between Dingwall and Strathpeffer (Peffer Way) and Beaully and Inverness.

Capacity

10.85 The **Travel Patterns and Methods** of this chapter illustrates key statistics relevant to active travel:

- Figure 10:6 Method of Travel to Work 2011 and 2022 in Highland shows:
 - the proportion of those travelling by foot to work dropped slightly from 13.7% in 2011 to 12.7% in 2022.
 - the proportion of those travelling by bicycle rose slightly from 12.7% in 2011 to 13.7% in 2022.
- Figure 10:7 Method Travel to Work in Scotland and Highland 2022 shows:
 - the proportion of those travelling by foot to work in Scotland was 10.6%, this is lower than the Highland figure of 12.7%.
 - the proportion of those travelling by bicycle to work in Scotland was 2%, this is lower than the Highland figure of 3.3%.

10.86 The Inverness Walking and Cycling Index 2023 found that 49% of residents walk or wheel, and 9% cycle, on five or more days a week. These results are broadly similar to 2019 and 2021 findings.

10.87 There are numerous travel counters in Highland that monitor pedestrian and cycle movements. Currently the counters are mostly concentrated in Inverness, with a small number elsewhere including on Skye, Lochaber and Nairn. The counters are operated and maintained by several different organisations including the Council and Walk Wheel Cycle Trust (formerly Sustrans). Data from the counters has been obtained from a number of sources, including Chambers, Usmart and VivaCity. Many counters have been installed in recent years and include likely invalid data (for example when a counter may be out of use), these factors limit the usefulness of the data available for analysing trends. Despite this, the counters do provide a useful baseline and insight to early trends:

- Data for certain counters in Inverness is available from 2015 to 2024 (**THC104**). These counters show that, whilst there are fluctuations between individual years, the number of active travel trips has remained fairly constant at count locations.
- Some data is available from count locations in Fort William from 2021 to 2024 from Usmart Open Cycling Data, these show the number of active travel trips are broadly similar each year.

Projects

- 10.88 Active Travel Masterplans, that identify a series of actions that intend to contribute towards the transition to low carbon transport locally, have been published for the settlements listed below.
- [Alness and Invergordon](#)
 - [Dingwall](#)
 - [Fort William](#)
 - [Inverness](#)
 - [Nairn](#)
 - [Portree](#)
 - [Tain](#)
 - [Thurso](#)
 - [Wick](#)
- 10.89 In addition, the [Inner Moray Firth Active Travel Network Planning](#) identifies a future active travel network connecting the main settlements within that area of Highland. The delivery of masterplan actions is prioritised by the Council's Sustainable Transport Team, referenced with existing LDPs and actions in the Inner Moray Firth area are also included within the Highland Delivery Programme. There is potential for such improvements to be delivered directly by developers or part or fully funded by means of developer contributions.
- 10.90 The Sustainable Transport Team Update Paper (**THC106**) provides an overview of a range of planned active travel projects throughout Highland, including funding sources. Key projects, included in **THC106** and other sources, including development plans, expected to make a significant contribution towards a transition to a higher proportion of journeys being made by sustainable transport are listed below:
- Alness to Invergordon shared use path extension.
 - Culbokie Active Travel Village.
 - Wick High Street.
 - Raigmore Interchange improvements.
 - Inverness East - West Active Travel Corridor.
- 10.91 As part of a [Network Development Plan](#), the Walk, Wheel, Cycle Trust are improving and developing a number of routes, these are outlined below.
- 10.92 In 2020 parts of National Cycle Network (NCN) routes were declassified to remove busy, high speed on road sections, including several routes in Highland. Whilst these routes are no longer part of the NCN, some do continue to form part of valued named routes and are still shown on relevant maps as dashed lines and intended for experienced users. This includes the Loch and Glens Way from Aviemore to Inverness and the Far North Way north of Inverness. Two

routes that are planned for reinstatement to NCN standards are Route 1 north of Tain along the A9 corridor and Route 78 alongside Loch Ness.

10.93 Other NCN projects currently in progress include:

- Realignment of Route 78 in Inverness via Ness Walk and Ness Bridge.
- Realignment of Route 1 between Balloch and Nairn via Tornagrain, via Millburn Road (Inverness) and via Invergordon and upgrade on Longman Drive (Inverness).
- Realignment of Route 7 and upgrades as part of A9 Dualling Project.

10.94 There are also aspirational plans to upgrade NCN1 in Dingwall and to realign NCN7 south of Daviot via Bridgend.

10.95 Three new NCN routes are proposed for future long-term development in Highland, these are:

- Route to the Isles via Mallaig.
- Route to the Isles via Ullapool.
- Glencoe Way from Ballachulish to Tyndrum.

10.96 Other active travel projects are being pursued by a range of organisations, these include: the [North Coast Trail](#), Skye Cycle Network, Ullapool to Braemore, Roy Bridge to Spean Bridge, Spean Bridge to Fort William via the Nevis Range.

10.97 An Inner Moray Firth Modal Shift Strategy (**THC107**) was commissioned by the Council and HITRANS in 2019 to understand the travel mode share in the IMF plan area and investigate the most viable, effective options for achieving a shift towards sustainable travel. The aim of this work was to provide evidence to root the [IMFLDP2](#) in the sustainable travel hierarchy reflected in [NTS2](#).

10.98 Part of this study calculated ratios of walk/public transport journey times between key towns and main employment centres, using Google journey planner. Figure 10:10 shows that that some local centres, such as Beauly had ratios below 1.5 for travel to central Inverness. At ratios below four, walk/public transport starts to become attractive and at ratios below 2.5 walk/public transport starts to become highly competitive. However, it also found that ratios of travel times by bus or rail from most central locations such as the Retail Park in the east of Inverness, are more commonly over 10. At ratios over 10 public transport is rarely used.

10.99 The study concluded that, due to the combined effects of an increase in average age and a decrease in car ownership because of a shift to demand responsive transport services, there was potential for 42% of all trips in Inverness to be by non-car modes by 2030. This represents a significant increase in comparison to current trends and provides a robust analysis of the potential for modal shift in the IMF area.

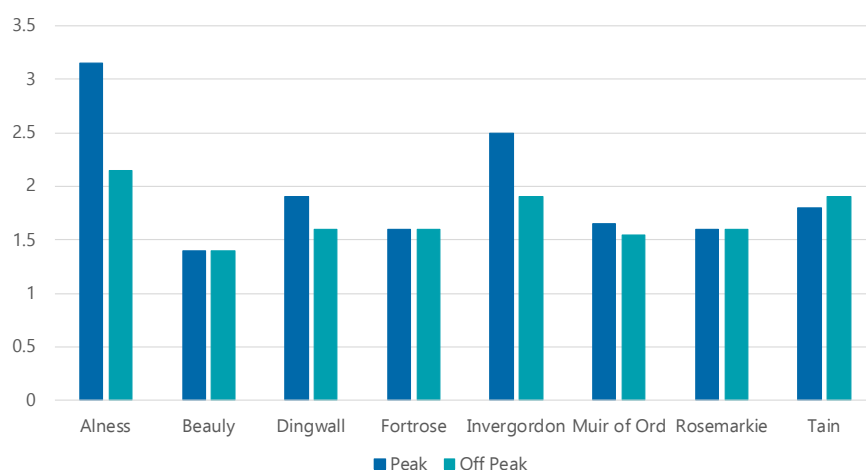


Figure 10:10 Ratio of travel times by walk/public transport from towns to Inverness City Centre (THC107)

Rail Based Transport

Infrastructure

10.100 The rail network connects many settlements in the HLDP area and beyond, across five different railway lines with 53 passenger stations in the Plan area. These can be viewed on the [Highland Local Development Plan Evidence Map](#). The rail network moves goods and people for both long-distances with ScotRail, LNER and Caledonian Sleeper Services providing UK-wide connectivity from Highland as far as London, as well as shorter-distance commuter services within Highland.

Capacity

10.101 Rail travel was profoundly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with restrictions on travel and daily activity in place for large parts of 2020. While passenger journeys have been recovering, for many parts of Highland they remain less than 2019 (pre-pandemic) ([Office of Road and Rail Data](#)).

10.102 **THC117** taken from [Office of Road and Rail Data](#) shows passenger entries and exits in Highland stations between 2021-22 to 2023-24. It shows that during this period entries and exits increased by approximately 54%. All stations in Highland saw increases in passengers during that period, with the highest percentage increases seen mostly in popular rural tourist destinations. Scotrail (**THC103**) explained however that external factors may have influenced these figures, for example rail industrial action and for Glenfinnan and Fort William due to the Jacobite Train not running during summer 2023 and 2024. A number of commuter stations, particularly those in the Inner Moray Firth area also saw

significant increases in entries and exits, including Invergordon (115%) and Inverness (55%).

- 10.103 Two new stations have opened in Highland since the HwLDP was adopted in 2012. Conon Bridge Station re-opened in 2013 and until the COVID-19 pandemic saw a steady increase in passengers ([Office for Road and Rail Data](#)). Inverness Airport Station opened in February 2023, and most recently available data (2023-24) shows that during that period it had the seventh highest number of entries and exits of all stations in Highland (53,920) ([Office for Road and Rail Data](#)).
- 10.104 To support regional rail connectivity, Network Rail has undertaken a £1.7 million platform extension project in 2024 for the West Highland Line, increasing capacity at two stations within the Highland Council area—Tulloch and Roy Bridge. These extensions aim to enhance service quality and capacity in the region. The Spean Bridge platform has also recently been extended to allow ScotRail to be more flexible in what trains the active travel carriage is used on.
- 10.105 [Scotrail's Route by Route Key Metric Assessment](#) presents information on seat utilisation. Table 10:2 shows that on all rail lines in Highland seat utilisation was significantly below capacity throughout the length of each line in 2019/20. Whilst this information was only available for 2019/20 it is expected that given many station entries and exits in Highland remain below pre-pandemic levels seat utilisation may have become lower in recent years. Despite this, it is understood there may be some localised seasonal fluctuations, for example seat utilisation is understood at or close to capacity between Invergordon and Inverness on days cruise ships dock in Invergordon.

Table 10:2 Route Capacity by Seat and Miles 2019/2020

Route	Weekday Seat Utilisation	Weekday Seat Miles Utilisation
Far North Line (Wick/Thurso – Inverness)	30%	17%
Kyle Line (Kyle of Lochalsh to Inverness)	38%	23%
Inverness to Aberdeen Line	36%	18%
West Highland Line	36%	26%
Central Belt to Perth and Inverness	58%	38%

- 10.106 In terms of future commercial viability, [Scotrail's Route by Route Key Metric Assessment](#) found that the only route where the revenue covered the costs,

excluding Network Rail's Fixed Track Access Charges, was a route between Edinburgh and Glasgow. However, the continued operation of the network is due to the wider economic benefits, these are outlined in [ScotRail Economic Impact Report 2024](#).

10.107 [ScotRail Economic Impact Report 2024](#) explains that:

- Kyle is Scotrail's most seasonal route but the same service level is operated all year round, it anticipates that the summer market could support additional services if resources were available;
- Invergordon is the northern limit of where rail is competitive with road for travel to Inverness;
- Journey time to Wick and Thurso means day trips are not practicable, and it is challenging to explore Caithness by public transport during longer stays.

10.108 The Local Transport Strategy Case for Change **(THC161)** similarly found that journey times outwith sub-regions in Highland tend to be longer than the equivalent time required to travel by private car.

10.109 Network Rail provided information on travel markets on rail corridors in Highland and where opportunities for modal shift might be likely **(THC118)**. This is provided in Table 10:3.

Table 10:3 Travel Markets and Opportunities for Modal Shift on Highland Rail Corridors (THC118)

Route	Overview and Opportunities
Far North Line	Offers tourism connections and an essential lifeline service to those who live on the route. The markets on these routes include commuter markets to Inverness, which link areas to the north, up to Alness and with the longest distance leisure markets between Tain and the city. There is also an end-to-end market, linking Inverness to the North, but this is a smaller market with less clear opportunities.
Kyle Line	End-to-end market linking Inverness with Kyle and beyond to Isle of Skye, as well as some lifeline connections at the intermediate stations.
Inverness to Aberdeen Line	Line provides a mix of longer and shorter distance markets to the Highlands. The key travel markets are the intercity Inverness to Aberdeen market, and the Keith to Inverness commuter market. The Intercity travel market is relatively small, reflecting a limited number of end-to-end journeys on the route between the two cities, although the share of those using rail for the journey is

	relatively high. The Keith to Inverness travel market is larger and reflects commuting and leisure travel into the city. There are likely opportunities for modal shift through better aligning the needs of the market with rail services, but it currently offers a competitive journey time. Potential improvements to the A96, may impact on the use of rail in the future, and may encourage more passenger and freight traffic to road.
West Highland Line	Scenic railway that is very well used for tourism and leisure in the summer, but also provides lifeline services to those living on the route throughout the year. The markets specifically serving Highland include the large market which links Fort William to Glasgow, serving tourist traffic, in addition to smaller routes linking Fort William to the surrounding areas. The seasonal nature of the route means that capacity challenges exist in the summer months, although recent platform extensions on the route will support longer trains and thus passenger capacity. The seasonal focus includes the Jacobite, which is a major rail tourist attraction and brings people to Highland, as well as the significant number of charter trains which operate on the route. Peak percentage growth in users during the summer was 194% compared to winter. Line has challenges from issues such as rockfall and vegetation, impacting on the reliability of the line and potentially impacting on whether people choose to travel by rail.
Highland Main Line	Key route connecting Inverness to the central belt and beyond. The key market for consideration on this route is therefore the Intercity market, connecting Inverness to Glasgow and Edinburgh. This is a large travel market, and rail modal share on both the Inverness to Glasgow and Inverness to Edinburgh is high. The other potential travel market is the shorter distance commuter and leisure market into Inverness. This market links Kingussie, Aviemore and Carrbridge to Inverness.

10.110 Network Rail have also looked at travel markets that exist between corridors. Having reviewed the cross-Inverness markets (i.e. from Far North Line to Aberdeen to Inverness line), it was found that these markets are relatively small and drop off quickly. For example, between Alness and Elgin where the overall

appetite to travel between these two areas is very small and modal shift to rail is unlikely, should the opportunity be provided.

Condition

Stations

10.111 The [Railway for Everyone Strategy](#) provides a holistic view of the passenger experience as an end-to-end journey. The strategy identifies four pillars of accessibility to illustrate where potential passengers might face barriers using the railway, these are: (1) reaching the station; (2) getting to your platform; (3) moving around the station; (4) boarding and finding your space.

10.112 Stations in Scotland have been assessed against each of the pillars to identify whether they are accessible and meet the needs of all passengers who would use them. Key stations on each of the routes in Highland, and how much they meet the accessibility requirements laid out is provided in **THC118**. In summary, it found that Fort William, Inverness, Kyle of Lochalsh, Thurso and Wick stations all scored amber for pillar 2 (moving around the station) and pillar 4 (boarding and finding your space) and green for pillar 3 (getting to your platform). A pillar one overview is not yet available.

Projects

10.113 Planned strategic rail improvement projects are summarised below:

- Redevelopment of Inverness Railway Station – aims to improve regional access, enhance the travel experience for passengers, and strengthen connections within the Highland area as part of Scotland’s broader station improvement efforts. The Inverness Station Masterplan is a transformational initiative with a 30-year outlook that prioritises the needs of both passengers and freight. The plan aims to improve operational functionality and integrate various transport offerings, enhancing the station's role as a key regional hub. It also emphasises placemaking opportunities to engage and involve the local community, fostering a sense of ownership and connection. Additionally, there is a focus on identifying economic and commercial opportunities to support growth and development. (STPR2 recommendation 43 Major Station Masterplans) Further information has been provided from Network Rail that is outlined within **THC118**. To inform this HITRANS commissioned a [feasibility study](#) into the creation of a strategic multi-modal transport interchange that considers bus, rail, active travel and parking. This was consulted upon in spring 2026 and outcomes are expected to be published in due course.

- Highland Mainline Rail Corridor Enhancements - focuses on upgrading this line between Perth and Inverness to improve train speed, service frequency, and reliability for both passenger and freight transport. These upgrades aim to enhance connectivity, making travel to and from Inverness more efficient and accessible. Improved rail services will offer a better travel option for residents and visitors, supporting economic and tourism growth in the Highland region while reducing reliance on road travel. (STPR2 recommendation 15). Currently it is understood that there are no funding commitments in the Scottish Governments Programme for Government for further phases of this project. Replacement trains are currently being procured for trains on this line, as well as the Inverness to Aberdeen Line.
- Far North Line Review Team - remit to identify potential opportunities to improve connectivity, operational performance and journey time on the line. Have implemented a number of improvements and further improvements are planned.

10.114 The only Highland area LDP that references the potential for new rail stations is the [IMFLDP2](#). It identifies opportunities at the following locations:

- East Inverness (referenced in with [Inverness East Development Brief](#)).
- Evanton – passenger station and siding to serve industrial operations at Highland Deephaven.
- Tomatin.

10.115 The [IMFLDP2](#) acknowledges that a [Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance](#) (STAG) study would be required to explore potential for reinstating/creating these stations.

10.116 HITRANS have and continue to commission a number of studies that explore the potential for improved provision of rail services across the HITRANS area. Brief details of relevant studies are listed below:

- Fort Transit Appraisal Study (2023) **(THC095)** – explores potential options for local rail services in the Fort William area.
- Evanton Station Technical Feasibility Study (2024) **(THC096)** – investigation of the technical and operational feasibility of introducing a new rail station at Evanton on the Far North Line.
- Inverness Rail East (2020) **(THC097)** – New station initial feasibility study.
- Route and Branch: HITRANS Rail Strategy is expected to be completed in summer 2026. The study will identify shortcomings in the rail network and areas for development so that the railway plays its role in the move to Net Zero. Key to this will be decarbonised rolling stock and efficient freight on rail. To include review of West Highland Line to consider timetable

improvements, infrastructure options and potentially promote appropriate projects for future investment for passengers and freight.

10.117 Rail also serves a wider public transport integration function in the network, where multi-modal journeys often involve rail travel. This means Highland could further benefit from supporting infrastructure to integrate rail more with other modes, including active travel, bus, demand-responsive transport, ferries at Mallaig and Scrabster, and private car, where appropriate.

10.118 Scotland's Railway [Climate Action Plan](#) outlines actions planned for the railway network to help address the climate crisis. This includes five priority areas - Climate Ready, Net Zero, Environmental Management, Biodiversity and Social Value, some of which may have spatial implications.

Rail Freight

10.119 Rail freight contributes to removing heavy goods vehicles from the road and creating efficiencies in the distribution network. Rail freight is an important aspect of decarbonising the network, particularly in light of the Scottish Government's [Rail Services Decarbonisation Plan](#). It also offers the opportunity to reduce the impacts of road-based freight for maintenance and congestion, which are particularly important, given the length of roads that require to be maintained in Highland and the extent that do not facilitate safe over-taking of slower vehicles such as HGVs. It is a successful mode of transport for freight for the Highland region and has further potential, despite limitations in the existing rail network.

10.120 The HITRANS Rail Freight Capability Study (**THC160**) whilst now significantly dated due to being published in 2010, continues to provide useful information to aid understanding of the freight related capacity of the rail network in the HITRANS area.

10.121 A brief description of existing and potential freight locations is provided below and shown on the [Highland Local Development Plan Evidence Map](#).

10.122 Existing Freight Locations:

- Needlefield Rail Yard, Inverness – used by organisations including Tesco freight service and Tarmac to transport cement to Inverness from Dunbar, potential for further integration.
- Georgemas Junction strategic rail freight and transport hub, Caithness – used to support the movement of materials from the former Dounreay Nuclear Power Station and Vulcan Naval Reactor Test Establishment. The Caithness and Sutherland LDP recognises potential for growth as a rail freight and transport hub.

- Fort William Alumina Freight – used for transportation of alumina powder from Blyth to Fort William for processing.

10.123 Potential Freight Locations:

- Altnabreac Lineside Freight Facility, Caithness – potential for development of loading area for timber haulage, received planning consent in 2021.
- West Fraser, Dalcross – rail link to timber processing facility completed in 2023, rail sidings and other additional infrastructure currently under construction and expected to become operational in mid-2026.
- Evanton – the IMFLDP2 explains there is potential for a spur off the Far North Railway Line and rail halt to be created to serve industrial operations at Highland Deephaven.
- Lairg – previously used for oil transport, connection to sidings remains operational. Potential destination for electricity upgrade and renewable energy materials to reduce pressure on road network.
- Invergordon – potential for connection to former smelter site associated with ICFGF.
- Kinbrace – potential for timber.
- Corpach – potential for timber and aquaculture materials.

10.124 There are also potential future opportunities for lineside loading of timber at a number of other locations in Highland.

Potential for Disused Railway Infrastructure

10.125 As part of the LDP planning authorities should have regard to the desirability of preserving disused railway infrastructure for the purpose of ensuring its availability for possible future public transport or active travel requirements.

10.126 There are several disused railway lines across Highland. It is understood it would be significantly challenging for disused railway infrastructure in Highland to be reused for public transport purposes due to locations being largely out with large centres of population, fragmented landownership and level of investment required. However, some routes are already being used for the purposes of active travel and potential remains for improvements to many of these routes.

10.127 A brief description of how existing routes are used and where relevant opportunities and constraints to improvement is provided in Table 10:4.

Table 10:4 Disused Railway Lines in Highland

Route	Description
Speyside Way	Uses sections of the old Strathspey Railway. Currently used sections are Tormore to Cragganmore, Nethy Bridge to Spey Bridge and Cromdale to Easter Pollowick. Challenges to using other sections. A small section of this route is within the HLDP area.
Dava Way	Complete active travel route on the former Highland Railway between Grantown and Forres. A small section of this route is within the HLDP area.
Dornoch Branch Line	Former Mound (north side of Loch Fleet) to Dornoch branch line. Northern half from the Mound is useable in places but some sections are missing or been subsumed by the road or for agricultural use. Southern half is used for recreation and is a core path. The John O'Groats Trails is promoting a section near Cambusavie which has opportunities for improvement.
Great Glen Way	Uses sections of the old Invergarry and Fort Augustus Railway between Fort Augustus and Spean Bridge. Currently used section Laggan to Aberchalder. Other sections are interrupted by development, missing bridges and other constraints.
Lybster Branch line	Former Wick to Lybster branch line. Some clear sections but mostly lost. No known recreational use.
Black Isle Railway	Former Muir of Ord to Fortrose Railway. Used in parts, other sections are interrupted by various constraints. There is potential for improvements to the link between Avoch and Fortrose. There is also potential for development of the section from Muir of Ord to Blairdhu for active travel, crossing the A832 to connect to the popular Redcastle – North Kessock minor road and onwards to Inverness.
Peffer Way	Former Dingwall to Strathpeffer Railway. Opportunities for reopening this branch line were explored in the past. In recent years it has become a high-quality active travel route that, with the exception of a small section, is complete. In early 2026 the Highland Council successfully obtained a Public Path Order to enable that section of the path to be completed. Timescales for this work are dependent upon funding.
Puggy Line	Old Lochaber Narrow Gauge Railway from the Fort William Aluminium Smelter to the River Cour south of Spean Bridge. Limited sections currently in use for active travel, other sections are interrupted by broken bridges and other constraints.

Bus Based Transport

Infrastructure

- 10.128 Bus services across Highland and beyond are provided by several operators. Some operators provide longer distance services to other Scottish cities and towns, including Citylink and more recently FlixBus and Ember. Stagecoach operates local and medium-distance bus services commercially, and several companies, including Stagecoach, operate other services under contract to the Council. Notably, the Council has also operated a growing number of local services since 2023, saving costs compared to external contracts. Several bus operators provide a significant number of buses to service cruise ship passenger ships arriving into Invergordon, this can have implications for the availability of buses for the purposes of public transport.
- 10.129 Bus routes cover almost all the strategic routes and significant settlements in Highland. On main inter-urban routes around the Inner Moray Firth, services tend to be hourly (or more frequent within Inverness), but many in the remoter areas have limited timetables which can make travelling to work impractical. In certain areas the timetabled network is supplemented by demand responsive transport for example dial-a-bus services.
- 10.130 Stagecoach's Inverness City services are entirely operated by electric buses, with charging facilities at Stagecoach's depot in the city. Long distance operator Ember also operates only electric vehicles.
- 10.131 The Council currently supports 28 community transport projects with grant funding; each project uniquely serves the needs of their communities, through for example, the delivery of community car schemes, minibus hire, minibus projects or a combination of these. Increasingly, the Council are looking to Community Transport to provide transport contracts on behalf of the Council; typically, these are home-to-school transport contracts, though a small number of groups are operating dial-a-bus contracts in addition to their other work. Community Transport provides a valuable service to many members of the community who might otherwise experience isolation and the consequences of transport poverty. Although the perception of Community Transport is that it focusses mainly on the needs of older people, the Council is encouraged by the broad range and diversity of community needs that are served by the sector. There have been challenges with implementing on-line booking of journeys, though this has been successfully introduced on some schemes and there are encouraging signs elsewhere.
- 10.132 There is one mobility hub in Highland located at Torvean in west Inverness, it opened in May 2024. It includes a bus stop, cycle parking (to support park and ride), electric vehicle charging points and a HI Bike dock.

Capacity

10.133 **THC161** explained that bus patronage was declining and trends show that this pattern of decline is also true for the extent of services available. Long before the negative impacts of Covid-19 on public transport were experienced, decline was evident, although there were some local exceptions. This is particularly problematic for Highland because lower patronage results in a negative pattern of further decline. However, after a severe drop during the pandemic, patronage has typically returned to the level of the pre-Covid trend line.

10.134 The size of the network is constrained by financial pressures, affecting both the level of service which can be provided by operators commercially and the extent of contracts which can be funded from Council budgets. Most Council bus contracts are built around home to school transport provision as the peak use, with additional journeys provided by the same vehicles in the off-peak.

10.135 The **Travel Patterns and Methods** section of this chapter illustrates key statistics relevant to bus use:

- Figure 10:6 Method of Travel to Work 2011 and 2022 in Highland shows the proportion of those using bus, minibuss or coach as a method of travel to work dropped from 5% in 2011 to 3.1% in 2022.
- Figure 10:7 Method Travel to Work in Scotland and Highland 2022 shows that in 2022 the proportion of those using bus, minibuss or coach in Highland as a method of travel to work in Scotland was 8.4%, this is significantly higher than the Highland figure of 3.1%.

10.136 The Council collects data on passenger numbers for bus services that are contracted by the Council. A summary of this information provided in **THC098** indicates rising passenger numbers between 2021/22 and 2023/24 on the majority of routes. Data on the utilisation of Council run commercial services and Council in Highland has been sought but not yet provided by operators. Efforts to obtain insights of this data will continue to be pursued.

10.137 Transport and Travel in Scotland 2023 shows that 80% of Highland respondents had not used a local bus service in the past month. This is significantly higher than the national rate of 62%. This is reflective of Transport and Travel in Scotland 2023 findings that bus use is higher in urban areas and lower in rural areas.

10.138 The Inverness Walking and Cycling Index 2023 showed over a third of residents would like to use public transport more, and almost a third would like to drive less.

Projects

- 10.139 A number of projects have been completed and are planned to improve bus services and infrastructure in Highland. The Council secured Bus Partnership Funding (BPF) for a number of projects and subsequently delivered a new bus gate connecting Raigmore Hospital and Raigmore Housing Estate, installation of enforcement cameras at Rose Street and city centre traffic light priority in Inverness. The BPF was then paused for financial year 2024/25.
- 10.140 The Scottish Government introduced a new Bus Infrastructure Fund (BIF) in 2025 to replace the BPF. The Council secured BIF funding towards a range of projects, including those listed below:
- Inverness - Millburn Road Corridor
 - Inverness - Bus Station Relocation/integration
 - Fort William – Blar Mhor Bus Only Link
 - Fort William – Upper Achintore Bus Only Link
 - Fort William – A82/ Nevis Terrace / Middle Street Junction Reconfiguration
 - Fort William - Relocation/Reimagination of the Bus Station
 - Mobility Hub Implementation Plan
- 10.141 The Mobility Hubs project explored opportunities to develop locations that support easier interchange between different modes of travel. The work identified a number of potential sites for further exploration. In addition, further work was commissioned to examine an additional long-distance park and ride opportunity around Inverness, alongside sites in Lochaber that may help ease tourist traffic and support better visitor travel management.
- 10.142 The Scottish Government introduced a £2 Bus Fare Cap Pilot for a period of 12 months in the HITRANS area in March 2026. The pilot aims to make bus travel more affordable, easier to use, more appealing and more resilient.
- 10.143 A partnership project between operators, the Council and HITRANS commenced in December 2024 to improve the maintenance of bus stop information. It is also intended to introduce a multi-operator ticketing scheme.
- 10.144 A survey of passenger needs was undertaken in Caithness in early 2025, assisted by Caithness Chamber of Commerce. The results are intended to help inform redesigning the bus network in the county, taking account of both local needs and connections with ferries.
- 10.145 The Council's Sustainable Transport Team commissioned a 'Connecting Inverness STAG Report' in 2023 **(THC092)**. This report is an appraisal of bus focussed options in Inverness and its immediate surrounds and will inform the location of any future mobility hubs in the area.

10.146 The [IMFLDP2](#) Transport Strategy identifies park and ride/share opportunity east and southwest of Inverness and north and west of Tore, and planning permission in principle is in place for a park and ride facility, as part of a larger mixed-use development, in East Inverness. With the exception of East Inverness, no specific sites for these facilities are identified in the Council's existing area LDPs.

10.147 The HITRANS RTS [Delivery Plan](#), includes actions to develop a regional mobility hubs hierarchy and to undertake a number of mobility hubs pilots across the HITRANS region. Highland [LTS](#), Policy 2.17 outlines that opportunities and funding options for mobility hubs in Highland will continue to be explored to support connectivity between different public, community and shared transport options as well as with active travel modes.

Water Based Transport

Infrastructure

10.148 Water based transport is a key part of the transport network in Highland.

Chapter 6: Coastal Development and Aquaculture outlines the significance of the Highland coast, including its expansive network of marine infrastructure. An overview of water-based transport is provided below.

10.149 The principal ferry services that operate in Highland are:

- Caledonian MacBrayne (CalMac) operate ferries from the Highland mainland and Skye to the Western Isles, Mull, the Small Isles and Raasay, and from Mallaig to Skye.
- Highland Council operates the Corran Ferry and has contracts for ferries on the following routes Cromarty – Nigg (seasonal), Camusnagaul – Fort William and Mallaig – Inverie – Tarbet.
- Northlink operate the Scrabster – Stromness (Orkney) route.
- Pentland Ferries operate Gills Bay – St Margaret's Hope (Orkney) route.
- John O'Groats Ferries operate a seasonal passenger ferry to Orkney.

10.150 Other services also operate, some on a seasonal basis.

10.151 There is one navigable Canal in Highland – the circa 65-mile Caledonian Canal, which connects the Fort William area (Banavie) with Inverness (Clachnaharry and Muirtown Basin). The canal is predominantly used for leisure purposes. The HITRANS RTS Case for Change (**THC101**) identifies there could be a future role for the Caledonian Canal in the handling of freight associated with the development of pumped hydro storage schemes.

Capacity

10.152 **THC161** explains that ferry services provide for a mix of day-to-day travel and the movement of goods focussed on island residents and businesses, and seasonal tourist travel, both by island residents themselves travelling more in the summer and visitors to the islands. This leads to a highly seasonal demand profile on many routes in the region.

10.153 Summer demand can cause capacity problems on many routes with summer carryings five to seven times that of winter. Ferry services are not easily 'scalable' to this extent which means that it is challenging to meet this summer demand without providing substantial excess capacity in the winter months. Capacity constraints on the ferry network are overwhelmingly associated with the carriage of vehicles. Increasing numbers of campervans often compete for deck space with commercial vehicles. Passenger capacity is very rarely a problem.

10.154 On many routes however, capacity is inadequate at peak times. Whilst emergency short notice travel by island residents is almost always accommodated by operators, island residents on occasions find that they are unable to secure a booking as, for example, tourists can often book much further in advance. This can limit access to mainland services.

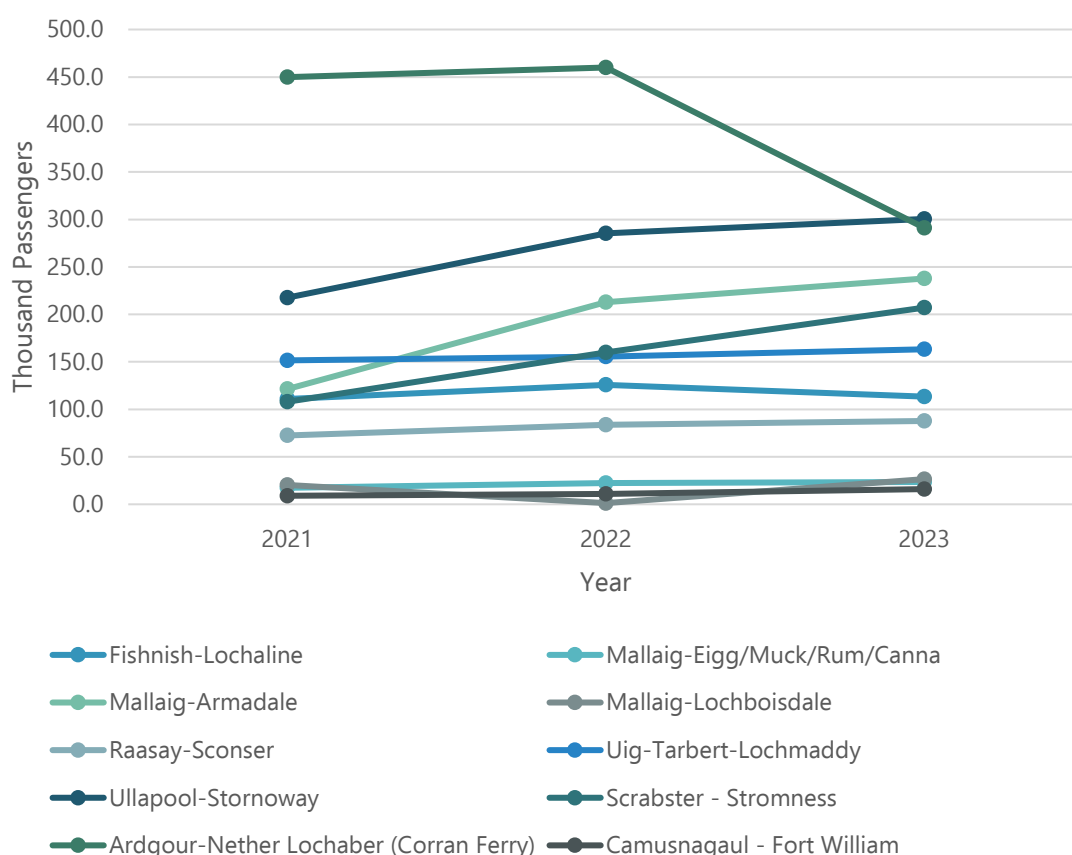


Figure 10:11 Passenger Traffic on Ferry Services in Highland (*Scottish Transport Statistics 2024*)

10.155 Scottish Transport Statistics 2024 provides data on passengers and vehicles carried on ferry routes operating in Scotland. An overview of several major routes is provided in Figure 10:11. It shows that the Corran Ferry (with the exception of 2023 when the vessel was out of service for significant periods) has the highest passenger traffic of any ferry service in Highland. More widely it shows an increase in passenger numbers on most services.

Projects

10.156 A number port and harbour and ferry service improvements are underway and planned. These are described in the paragraphs below.

10.157 [STPR2](#) recommendation 18 'Supporting Integrated Journeys at Ferry Terminals' by improving connectivity and integration at ferry terminals and enhancing travel experiences for passengers aligns with the [Islands Connectivity Plan](#) (ICP). The themes of Onward and Connecting Travel / Integration set out in the Strategic Approach paper and in the ICP Vessels and Ports Plan are of relevance which notes amongst the live projects underway the Council's major port upgrades project at Uig to enhance capacity for the Little Minch routes (Uig-Tarbert and Uig-Lochmaddy), reducing congestion, including the addition of a second summer vessel to improve network reliability during busy periods. Local authorities have a key role to play in achieving a well-integrated onward and connecting travel for local communities.

10.158 Ferry Vessel Renewal, Replacement, and Progressive Decarbonisation - focuses on upgrading Scotland's ferry fleet with modern, low-emission vessels to improve service reliability and sustainability ([STPR](#) recommendation 24). Key new vessel initiatives with relevance for ports in Highland as per [Islands Connectivity Plan](#) - Vessels and Ports Plan include:

- "Islay Class" Vessels for Little Minch Routes: Two new vessels are being built to serve these routes (Uig-Tarbert and Uig-Lochmaddy), increasing capacity and improving connectivity to Highland for Western Isles communities. These are 2 of 6 new major vessels being delivered during the next 2 years, with the first being the MV Glen Sannox delivered November 2024.
- Mallaig-Armadale Route: The Vessels and Ports Plan highlights capacity challenges on this route, especially during peak travel seasons, and notes recent increased service frequency as a measure to accommodate higher passenger demand. Future vessel replacements are also planned (currently under phase 2 of the Small Vessel Replacement Programme) to maintain a reliable and resilient service, particularly during busy summer months.
- Mallaig-Lochboisdale Route: This route was introduced as part of the government's expansion of ferry services to improve connectivity for the

Highlands and accessibility to South Uist. A replacement vessel is currently in development for this route, though not yet funded, aiming to improve service reliability for the communities that depend on it.

- Small Vessel Replacement Programme port upgrades, including shore power connections.
- To further enhance network resilience, when new vessels are delivered, one of the current major vessels will be retained as a resilience vessel to provide support across the network during disruptions, benefiting island routes linking the Highland region to the Western Isles.

10.159 STPR recommendation 42 'Investment in Port Infrastructure to Support Vessel Renewal and Replacement' - focuses on upgrading port facilities to accommodate new vessel technologies and ensure service resilience and reliability. Key upgrades in the Highland Council area are listed below.

- Uig Port (Isle of Skye) – upgrade of port facilities, including new terminal buildings, to accommodate a new ferry vessel to support the Little Minch routes (Uig-Tarbert and Uig-Lochmaddy) by enhancing port capacity and improving connectivity, reducing congestion during peak travel periods. Planned completion spring 2025.
- Mallaig Port: Mallaig Harbour Authority (MHA) has indicated that significant works will be required to the port assets supporting current ferry services.
- Armadale Port on Skye: Redevelopment by CMAL is aimed at supporting reliable ferry services for the Mallaig-Armadale route, addressing high travel demand, particularly during the summer season.
- Scrabster Port: Recognised as an important link for ferry services to Orkney (Stromness) to ensure service continuity, reliability and resilience.
- Corran Narrows Crossing – construction of new infrastructure on the Ardgour and Nether Lochaber sides of the Corran Narrows to improve the Corran Ferry service and support the operation of a new electric vessel. New infrastructure was granted planning permission in September 2025 and completion is expected by 2027. The new vessel is scheduled for delivery in late 2028 or early 2029.
- Islands Programme funding was awarded to Staffin Harbour in October 2024 for the construction of a 3,000sq onshore hardstanding area, new onshore facilities, an upgraded access road and provision of electricity.

10.160 Ports associated with the ICFGF are likely to be required to be upgraded to facilitate growth. Proposals are at various stages, including Ardersier Port where construction is underway of a quay wall and quayside and Port of Nigg and Port of Cromarty Firth where further significant upgrades are at planning stages.

Aviation

Infrastructure

- 10.161 Aviation in Highland provides both international connectivity to the region and lifeline regional connectivity between more remote and rural parts of Highland and the rest of Scotland. There are two airports from which commercial flights operate in Highland: Inverness and Wick John O'Groats.
- 10.162 Inverness Airport acts as a vital link to many Scottish communities and visitors to the region. It provides a route network to the Scottish islands, a number of major cities in the UK and to Amsterdam. It also provides seasonal flights to Majorca and Gran Canaria.
- 10.163 Wick John O'Groats Airport is supported by a Public Service Obligation, similar to those in place for island communities; this supports lifeline connectivity to a region which would otherwise not be served by commercial air services, enabling those living and working in the region to access employment, education, healthcare and social opportunities which would not otherwise be available to them. The airport has previously had substantial investment made in its infrastructure, including reinforcement of runways and aprons, and supporting infrastructure for sustainable aviation pilot projects. This means it is well placed to service a substantial additional volume of traffic (including large aircraft which cannot be handled by other regional airports), and to support future development of sustainable aviation within the region.
- 10.164 Wick John O'Groats currently operates flights to Aberdeen and recent work by the Wick John O'Groats Airport Working Group has identified significant opportunities for delivery of additional services to the region, most notably to support offshore wind projects through the ScotWind Leasing Round, and to enable significant onshore transmission works in the region.
- 10.165 Other airfields operate within Highland, including at Ashaig, Dornoch and Plockton that are owned and operated by the Highland Council. These operate as unlicensed, unmanned aerodromes and have no Air Traffic Control/Flight Information Service or Rescue / Fire Fighting services available.
- 10.166 Further information on aviation in Highland can be found in **Chapter 8 Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**.

Capacity

- 10.167 Figure 10:12 Terminal Passengers in Highland Airports shows changing passenger numbers between 2021 and 2023 at Inverness and Wick John O'Groats Airports. Inverness Airport experienced a 124% increase in passenger numbers between 2021 and 2023 ([Scottish Transport Statistics 2024](#)), this is likely to be accountable to continuing recovery from COVID restrictions as

passenger numbers begin to reach pre COVID levels. Wick John O’Groats Airport saw the relaunch of scheduled services in 2022 through the provision of a Public Service Obligation to Aberdeen. Passenger numbers increased from 7,000 to 11,000 during its first two years of reopening ([Scottish Transport Statistics 2024](#)).

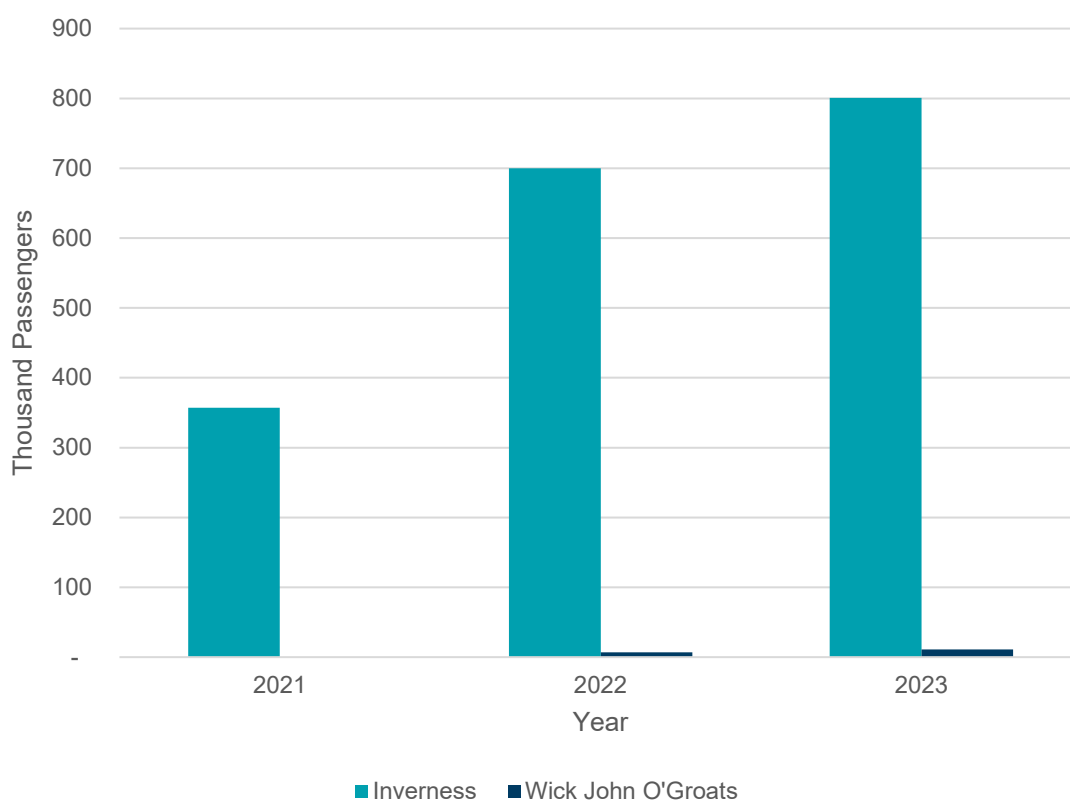


Figure 10:12 Terminal Passengers in Highland Airports ([Scottish Transport Statistics 2024](#))

10.168 A number of flights that operate in Highlands and Islands are currently exempt from Air Departure Tax. A Scottish Government consultation on [Delivering Scotland’s Air Departure Tax](#) closed in March 2026. The consultation proposed removing the exemption from direct and connecting flights. There are concerns that if implemented, this may impact negatively on key routes including from Inverness to Heathrow and Amsterdam. Any loss of frequency or such routes could have major detrimental impact on competitiveness of region and its ability to attract inward investment.

Projects

10.169 The following aviation projects are currently planned in Highland:

- Inverness Airport Masterplan – expansion of airport facilities including passenger terminal, land-side and surface access and airfield infrastructure.

- Ashaig Airport, Skye - Airstrip improvements to accommodate reintroduction of scheduled air services.
- Low Carbon Aviation - investigation of the feasibility of deploying six hybrid airships on Highland and Islands services.

Sustainable Aviation Test Environment (SATE)

10.170 SATE supported by the UKRI Future Flight Challenge, is the UK's first low-carbon aviation test centre based at Kirkwall Airport on Orkney. Led by the Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS), SATE brings together a national consortium of industry partners, public sector bodies and academia which work with a range of regional businesses and stakeholders to apply state-of-the-art aviation technology to deliver targeted economic growth.

10.171 While SATE facilities are based at Kirkwall Airport, the current phase of SATE is working across several Highlands and Islands communities and matching the new technology with practical use cases to benefit the region.

10.172 Other relevant aspects include Windracers test flights across different parts of the Highlands & Islands, trialling their self-flying cargo aircraft to develop faster, more convenient and more reliable delivery services to residents and businesses in remote and rural locations.

10.173 HITRANS is also working closely with Cranfield Aerospace, Loganair, HIAL, EMEC and OIC to bring operational flight trials of a hydrogen powered Islander aircraft to the region.

10.174 In addition, Hybrid Air Vehicles has reserved early production slots for six Airlander 10 aircraft for HITRANS to improve regional passenger and freight transport by air. A full business case is being developed to understand the commercial operation and deployment potential.

10.175 SATE is focusing on a range of emerging sustainable aviation solutions that will benefit the Highland region, providing improved connectivity and services whilst also working towards net zero ambitions. Technologies being focused on include:

- Sub-regional low or zero emission passenger aircraft (hydrogen electric & hybrid electric)
- Hybrid air vehicles
- Amphibious aircraft (hydrogen electric & hybrid electric)
- Advanced air mobility (electric vertical or short take-off and landing)
- Heavy lift drones (conventional and vertical take-off and landing)

Road-based Transport

Infrastructure

10.176 The Council area has an extensive road network with a core trunk road network spanning 961km ([Scottish Transport Statistics 2024](#)) which equates to over a quarter of the total trunk road network in Scotland, linking main settlements and providing connections to major towns and cities outwith Highland. Trunk roads wholly or partially within Highland are shown in [Highland Local Development Plan Evidence Map](#) and listed below:

- A9 Perth to Thurso
- A835/A893 Tore to Ullapool
- A96 Inverness to Aberdeen
- A86 Kingussie to Spean Bridge
- A889 Dalwhinnie to Laggan
- A82 Dumbarton to Inverness
- A828 Oban to Ballachulish
- A830 Fort William to Mallaig
- A95 Aviemore to Keith
- A99 Latheron to Wick
- A87 Invergarry to Uig
- A887 Invermoriston to A87

10.177 [Scottish Transport Statistics 2024 – Road Lengths](#) shows that there are almost 7,000 kilometres of local road network in Highland that is managed by the Council. This is alongside an extensive network of other transport infrastructure including traffic management systems, various signage, footways and cycleways alongside adopted roads, drainage, road markings, road restraint systems and a range of street furniture.

Capacity

10.178 Various sources of data provide an indication of the 127 in Highland. **THC126** provides an overview of road capacity within different areas of Highland in terms of traffic volumes, journey times and other known issues. A high-level summary of known areas of concern on the road network are:

- Inverness City experiences the most road congestion in Highland with particular issues at the Raigmore interchange, A9/A82, A82/Harbour Road, Inshes corridor and the A862 Telford Street.
- Safety concerns concerning turning movements at most A835 and A9 trunk road junctions particularly at Munloch (B9161) junction.
- Capacity and safety of the A832 and B9161 as it passes through narrow main streets of Cromarty, Fortrose & Rosemarkie, Avoch and Munloch.

- Local safety concerns about Conon Bridge A835 junction and Muir of Ord village centre junctions.
- Most A9 junctions in Easter Ross, particularly those at Evanton, Alness, Invergordon and Tain have safety and capacity issues.
- In Skye there is significant congestion within parts of the road network, particularly in summer months due largely due to increases in tourist traffic.
- Fort William suffers from significant congestion for most of the year along and connecting to the A830 and A82 trunk roads.
- Nairn town centre suffers from localised congestion at key time periods.
- In Wester Ross, Lochalsh and Lochaber many roads are lifeline facilities to remote rural communities with no practicable alternative route. The South Strorne to Lochcarron section of the A890 which has a history of closing due to rockfall, with highly disruptive impacts for local communities.

10.179 [Scottish Transport Statistics 2024 on Road Traffic](#) provides data for local authority areas of traffic volumes on trunk and local authority roads, this is shown in Table 10:5 and illustrates that the number of vehicle Km travelled in Highland has increased between 2021 and 2023.

Table 10:5 Traffic on trunk roads and on local authority roads in Highland ([Scottish Transport Statistics 2024 on Road Traffic](#))

2021	2022	2023
Trunk Roads (million vehicle km)		
1,561	1,740	1,845
Local authority roads (million vehicle km)		
1,163	1,244	1,274
All roads (million vehicle km)		
2,723	2,984	3,119

Traffic Volumes

10.180 Data on traffic volumes was extracted from Transport Scotland's Traffic Data database ([Drakewell](#)). Average annual daily traffic (AADT) from 137 count sites on or in proximity to trunk road corridors in Highland were extracted for years 2022/2023, 2023/2024 and 2024/2025. The percentage change during this period was calculated where sufficient data was available for each count site. This data is presented in full in **THC121**, summarised by area in **THC126** and a high-level overview is shown in Table 10:6. Full AADT data is not available for some traffic counters, in these instances the data has either been discounted or the percentage change calculated between the two most recent available years.

Table 10:6 Average Change in traffic volumes on selected road corridors in Highland (THC121)

Corridor	Average % Δ 2022/23 – 2024/25
1: A96 Inverness $\rightleftharpoons$ Nairn	2.8%
2: A82 Inverness $\rightleftharpoons$ Fort Augustus	3.3%
3: A830 Fort William $\rightleftharpoons$ Mallaig	-1.2%
4: A835 Inverness $\rightleftharpoons$ Ullapool	5.7%
5: A862 Inverness $\rightleftharpoons$ Beaulieu	No count data available
6: A87: Inverness $\rightleftharpoons$ Portree	15.2%
6: A9N Inverness $\rightleftharpoons$ Wick	5.8%
7: A9S Inverness $\rightleftharpoons$ Perth	6.8%
8: Inverness City	1.5%

10.181 Average growth in traffic volumes on trunk corridors in Highland is 5%, this represents a significant increase between 2022/2023 and 2024/2025. Most corridors saw traffic volumes increase, the highest being the A87 at 15.2%.

10.182 Significant increases were also seen on the A835 and the A9 between Inverness and Wick and Inverness and Perth. Traffic volumes tend to be highest in the summer tourist season, and this is thought to be a driver of many increases observed (see **Chapter 8 Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**). The only corridor where traffic volumes fell is on the A830, albeit this reduction was marginal.

10.183 The format and coverage of traffic count sites on the local road network differs from the trunk network. Count sites are very limited in terms of distribution across Highland, and often collect data for only specified periods. Very little meaningful data was obtained from local road counters that illustrate recent trends. Data was available from two counters in Inverness, one on Sir Walter Scott Drive close to Inshes and the other on the Southern Distributor Road at Ness-side. Both these counters showed increases AADT during the period data was available (**THC122**). Further information on the local road network, will be considered as part of the transport appraisal to inform the HLDP.

Journey Times

10.184 Journey time data was extracted for a series of road corridors from [INRIX Roadway Analytics](#). Average journey times and variation on each corridor to selected destinations data is presented in full in **THC121**, summarised by area in **THC126** and a high level overview is shown in Table 10:7. For most routes the average journey time for a year is provided, for longer routes average journey for six alternate months is presented due to the volume of data. Where six months alternate data is associated charts are not presented in **THC121** due to

clarity issues. Data for some longer corridors, specifically Inverness to Wick, Inverness to Perth and Inverness to Kyleakin, is not provided as it remains subject to review.

10.185 The data presented in Table 10:7 shows that the average journey time variation on most corridors in Highland is below five minutes over a 24 hour period. Whilst this data suggests there are limited congestion issues across Highland, it is known that there are localised issues during peak periods, and times of disruption (for example due to road traffic accidents or road works) certain locations within the corridors do experience more significant congestion. It is also known that more lengthy delays to journey times are likely for those travelling short distances within settlements.

10.186 Due to the limited delay in journey times often much of the day, or much of the morning, for all corridors is showing as the peak period.

Table 10:7 Journey Times on Strategic Trunk Road Corridors in Highland (THC121)

Corridor	Daily Average (mins)	Variation Daily Av (mins)	Peak Period
1: A96 Inverness ⇌ Nairn (weekdays)			
Inverness to Nairn	22.34	2.23	15:00 – 17:00
Nairn to Inverness	18.66	2.27	15:00 – 17:00
Inverness to Inverness Airport	11.82	0.94	15:00 – 16:00
Inverness to Inverness Airport	13.92	1.91	15:00 – 16:00
2: A82 Inverness ⇌ Fort Augustus			
Weekdays			
Inverness to Fort Augustus	55.48	3.93	09:00 – 12:00
Fort Augustus to Inverness	56.79	4.2	13:00 – 16:00
Inverness to Drumnadrochit	28.37	2.15	08:00 – 11:00
Drumnadrochit to Inverness	29.55	2.3	13:00 – 16:00
Weekends			
Inverness to Fort Augustus	53.28	3.38	09:00 – 14:00
Fort Augustus to Inverness	54.63	3.54	11:00 – 16:00
Inverness to Drumnadrochit	27.1	1.86	08:00 – 14:00
Drumnadrochit to Inverness	28.1	2.04	12:00 – 16:00
3: A830 Fort William ⇌ Mallaig (all days)			
Fort William to Mallaig	63.92	4.91	08:00 – 10:00
Mallaig to Fort William	66.75	4.88	13:00 – 15:00
4: A835 Inverness ⇌ Ullapool			
Weekdays			
Inverness to Ullapool	73.64	6.07	10:00 – 12:00
Ullapool to Inverness	71.70	5.67	03:00 – 04:00*

Weekends			
Inverness to Ullapool	71.56	4.71	09:00 – 12:00
Ullapool to Inverness	69.1	4.33	00:00 – 01:00*
5: A862 Inverness ⇌ Beaulieu (all days)			
Inverness to Beaulieu	24.22	1.92	07:00 – 16:00
Beaulieu to Inverness	23.93	1.86	08:00 – 16:00
6: A87 Inverness ⇌ Portree (all days)			
Broadford to Portree	37.39	2.89	10:00 – 16:00
Portree to Broadford	38.49	3.27	09:00 – 12:00 13:00 – 18:00

Corridor	Daily Average (mins)	Variation Daily Av (mins)	Peak Period
7: A9 Inverness ⇌ Wick (all days)			
Inverness to Alness	25.9	2.65	07:00 – 14:00
Alness to Inverness	23.1	2.3	08:00 – 14:00
Inverness to Dingwall	17.25	1.97	07:00 – 17:00
Dingwall to Inverness	16.98	1.63	07:00 – 16:00
Inverness to Invergordon	30.53	2.94	06:00 – 12:00
Invergordon to Inverness	29.68	2.67	10:00 – 15:00
Inverness to Tain	43.82	3.67	06:00 – 15:00
Tain to Inverness	44.14	3.52	09:00 – 16:00
8: A95 Inverness ⇌ Perth			
Weekdays			
Inverness to Aviemore	38.28	3.63	22:00 – 01:00*
Aviemore to Inverness	37.90	4.06	14:00 – 17:00
Weekends			
Inverness to Aviemore	36.69	3.18	04:00 – 06:00*
Aviemore to Inverness	36.40	3.12	02:00 – 08:00* 13:00 – 16:00
9. Inverness City (weekdays)			
Longman RB to Culloden	6.67	1.2	16:00 – 17:00
Culloden to Longman RB	8.45	1.56	16:00 – 17:00
Longman RB to Torvean	9.88	0.76	15:00 – 17:00
Torvean to Longman RB	9.59	0.89	13:00 – 17:00
Longman RB To Clachnaharry	7.49	0.62	12:00 – 17:00
Clachnaharry to Longman RB	7.52	0.69	10:00 – 17:00
Inshes to Queens Park	11.46	0.81	16:00 – 17:00
Queens Park to Inshes	11.46	0.94	07:00 – 09:00 12:00 – 17:00

* To be reviewed

10.187 Journey time variation provides an indicator of journey time reliability along the corridors. The daily average delays along most corridors are relatively small, but it is accepted that during peak periods, tourist season and during periods of construction, journey times along some corridors can be heavily impacted beyond these annual daily averages.

10.188 Many roads in Highland are lifeline facilities to remote rural communities. Road closures can occur on these routes for a number of reasons, most commonly due to accidents, severe weather or rockfall. During closures journey times can be significantly impacted due to lengthy diversion routes. Key roads that have been subject to closures include the A890 Strome ferry Bypass due to rockfall and A835 and A9 due to accidents. Other closures that can affect journey times include the A9 Kessock Bridge where traffic is diverted via the A862 and closures as part of electricity upgrade schemes, for example on the A832 as part of the [Western Isles HVDC Link project](#) where disruption is envisaged to last for a number of months. Journey times for HGVs can be acutely affected as many diversion routes are not suitable for these types of vehicles.

10.189 For the A890 Strome ferry Bypass, rock falls have been an issue since the road opened in 1970 resulting in lengthy diversions and disruption to road users. An extensive appraisal process was carried out to identify a solution, and a preferred option recommended to provide a new section of road to the south of the existing Bypass. However, it is understood further transport appraisal work would be required and no funding is currently identified. Currently, the road is frequently inspected, and other longer term options are being considered, including the HITRANS and Network Rail 'Skyfall' project which involves a road/rail sharing arrangement. The technical challenges and next steps of this work are outlined in Skyfall Shared Road/Rail Clearway Proposal **(THC159)**.

Condition

10.190 The Council's Roads Factsheet January 2024 **(THC123)** uses the annual Scottish Road Maintenance Condition Survey which assesses the condition of the adopted road network. It is used to calculate a Road Condition Indicator (RCI) that is used by Audit Scotland. Highland's results are shown in Table 10:8. It should be noted that the condition indicator is limited to the carriageway; no data is available on the condition of any adjacent active travel infrastructure.

Table 10:8 RCI Highland 2011 – 2022 (THC123)

Year	2011	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
RCI	32.0%	38.6%	37.8%	39.1%	36.7%	36.5%

10.191 **THC123** outlines a significant deterioration in Highland's RCI over the last 11 years, but there has been improvements from the 2021 result. In 2011 Highland had an RCI of 32.0% and was ranked 9th best Council. In 2022 the Highland RCI was 36.5%, ranking 25th in Scotland. During this period, the overall Scottish RCI has improved from 36.1% to 33.6%.

10.192 Scotland's Transport Statistics 2024 on Road Lengths provides data on the condition of existing public roads. Table 10:9 shows the condition of existing public roads in Highland in the period 2023/2024.

*Table 10:9 Road Network Condition in Highland 2023/24 ((**THC124**) Scotland's Transport Statistics 2024 on Road Lengths)*

A Roads Condition		B Roads Condition		C Roads Condition		Unclassified Condition		All Roads Condition	
Red	Amber	Red	Amber	Red	Amber	Red	Amber	Red	Amber
4%	25%	8%	30%	11%	32%	11%	31%	9%	30%

10.193 The Council's last published Road Asset Management Plan ran for the years 2016-2019 (**THC125**). It is understood, that due to resourcing issues, it is unlikely to be updated in shorter term.

Existing Studies

10.194 The Council and other organisations have prepared and commissioned a number of transport related studies in the past to inform LDPs, and other documents, including the LTS. These are listed below and their continued relevance will be reviewed during the plan preparation process, including its transport appraisal.

- Inverness Strategic Traffic Plan (2023) (findings subject to review) - series of workstreams specifically:
 - Data Collation and Gap Analysis Summary Report (**THC145**)
 - City-wide Traffic Analysis (**THC146**)
 - Parking Best Practice Review (**THC147**)
 - Development and Modal Shift Report (**THC148**)
- IMFLDP2 Transport Appraisal (2022) (**THC127**) - appraisal of the cumulative impacts of the spatial strategy on the transport network. This appraisal was based primarily on qualitative information and informed by the Transport Appraisal undertaken for the IMFLDP1 Transport Appraisal (**THC128**).

- IMFLDP1 Transport Appraisal (2013) **(THC128)** - as above but with the addition of transport modelling work (using the Moray Firth Transport Model) to assess the quantitative impact of the spatial strategy.
- Moray Firth Transport Model - regional multi-modal transport Visum model that covers the main road and public transport network of the Inner Moray Firth area around Inverness but does not consider active travel. Originally developed for the Council by AECOM with a base year of 2009 to cover a period from 2010-2030, it has subsequently been re-based to 2018 for further studies including the modelling for Inshes Junction design undertaken by JACOBS for the period 2024-2037 **(THC108)**, and A9/A82 Longman Junction Improvements **(THC109)**, undertaken by JACOBS for Transport Scotland.
- Caithness and Sutherland Monitoring Statement (2014) **(THC129)** - includes the outcome of a study commissioned by the HITRANS on Internal Transport Connectivity in Caithness.
- West Highland and Islands LDP Transport Background Paper (2016) **(THC130)** - highlights transport issues in the plan area and provides an overview of potential transport improvements.
- Fort William Strategic Transport Study (pre-appraisal) (2018) **(THC131)** - established evidence for problems and issues linked to transport, developed initial transport planning objectives and possible options to tackle identified problems.

Projects

10.195 Numerous road improvement projects are planned throughout Highland to help address existing congestion, road safety and condition issues and provide to additional future capacity. An overview of these projects by area, including deliverability, is provided in **THC126** and further details for several projects are provided in the Highland Delivery Programme. Key projects include:

- A9 Dualling.
- A96 Dualling (including Nairn Bypass).
- A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton and Inshes Junction Upgrades.
- A9/A82 Longman Junction Improvement Scheme.
- A9 Junction upgrades/improvements, including A9 Tomich Junction;
- South Loch Ness Road Improvement Strategy.
- Culbokie Active Travel Village project.
- Wick High Street Improvements.
- Integrated Transport Plan (ITP) for Fort William.
- Portree Link Road.

10.196 The above projects represent substantial investment in Highland infrastructure and have the potential to facilitate significant economic growth. As outlined in

THC126 however, there is uncertainty regarding the delivery of a number of these projects, in particular the timescales for completion of nationally led infrastructure projects including the A96 Dualling and A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton.

10.197 Other, planned large scale developments also require significant investment in transport infrastructure to suitably mitigate impacts and provide sustainable connections. Whilst existing LDPs, the Highland Delivery Programme, Supplementary Guidance and Development Briefs set out infrastructure and in some instances costs required to support development often funding gaps remain that can result in development being delayed or ultimately becoming unviable.

Road Freight

10.198 There has been increasing pressure on Highland roads due to freight movements by heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) and abnormal loads from a number of different industries. These include the movement of timber, minerals and whisky as well as components of large scale energy projects detailed in **Chapter 4 Climate Change and Energy** and **Chapter 8 Business, Economy, Tourism and Productive Places**.

Heavy Good Vehicles and Abnormal Load Traffic Volumes

10.199 Table 10:10 shows that HGV traffic volumes on trunk roads extracted from Transport Scotland's Traffic Data database ([Drakewell](#)) have risen between 2022 and 2024 have risen with the exception of the A830 where volumes have reduced slightly. The most significant increases are on the A87 and the northern section of the A9 between Inverness and Wick.

Table 10:10 Change in HGV traffic volumes on selected road corridors in Highland ([Drakewell](#))

Trunk Road Corridor	% Change 2022 – 2024
A96 Inverness ⇌ Nairn	7.1
A82 Inverness ⇌ Fort William	5.5
A830 Fort William ⇌ Mallaig	-3.2
A835 Inverness ⇌ Ullapool	9.1
A87: Invergarry ⇌ Portree	47.7
A9N: Inverness ⇌ Wick	19.4
A9S: Inverness ⇌ Perth	5.9

10.200 The Council receives between 3,000-4,000 abnormal load notifications per year. It is important to note that these figures will differ from the actual number of movements as some notifications do not take place, and others may involve multiple movements using the same route and load. Data was not available on specific routes, however a number of ports in Highland had the highest number of movements in 2024, including Ardersier, Invergordon, Kishorn and Nigg.

10.201 Many rural roads in Highland have evolved incrementally in response to changes in traffic with a range of low cost improvements, often relying on natural subgrade support. These roads typically handle low HGV volumes and have limited structural capacity. They may also have restricted alignments which makes them vulnerable to extraordinary wear and damage from sudden increases in heavy vehicle traffic.

Timber

10.202 The rise in timber extraction during the 1990s highlighted the fragility of rural roads, and led to the creation of the Timber Transport Forum. The Forum's Agreed Route Map (ARM) is an arrangement between the forestry industry and local authorities that helps to identify roads which are suitable for heavy good vehicles (HGVs) traffic used for timber haulage. The ARM also highlights roads which are unsuitable in their current form for any increase in HGV traffic and these are spread throughout Highland. The map shows fragile the Council's network is.

10.203 Currently the ARM is the only spatial data available to help assess the suitability of the Highland road network to accommodate additional HGVs. This lack of information, coupled with the poor structural integrity of many roads, has been highlighted when reviewing energy related planning applications. This has resulted in challenges, during the planning process and/or at construction stage.

Energy Projects

10.204 Rapid expansion of large-scale energy projects in Highland poses a significant risk to rural transport infrastructure that was not designed to accommodate high volumes of HGV traffic. This disruption has potential to seriously adversely impact rural communities who already experience a lower level of transport service and high transport costs. Certain large scale projects have already resulted in substantial road damage from increased HGV traffic. In some cases this has necessitated extensive and lengthy repairs causing delay to projects and prolonged disruption to local communities, including road closures.

10.205 In particular the ICFGF is anticipated to bring significant benefits and economic opportunities, as well as increasing the number and diversity of jobs in

Highland. With some 520 hectares of land for development the proposals are estimated to deliver over £6.5bn of investment over the next 25 years and create 11,300 long-term jobs in Highland.

10.206 This level of investment will clearly have implications for the transport network, both freight and workforce travel. Nationally led infrastructure projects – particularly the Tomich junction, the A9/A96 'East Link' project and the A9 and A96 dualling projects themselves – are critical to enabling infrastructure important for the delivery of the Green Freeport.

10.207 During 2026 HITRANS intend to commission work in partnership with Transport Scotland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and other partners to help understand cumulative impacts on the transport network from proposed energy projects and infrastructure upgrade requirements.

Whisky

10.208 Bottlenecks (**THC120**) is a whisky logistics study published in 2024 that identified barriers to growth in the Highland and Islands. A key constraint identified within the plan area is on the A9 between Invergordon and Tore. It also identified a number of schemes that would improve resilience of the transport network, within the plan area, including improving the A9, A96 and A82.

HGV Parking

10.209 A Lorry Parking Strategy (**THC144**) commissioned by HITRANS in 2011 found that in Highland, Inverness and Fort William, plus lifeline ferry routes all generate a significant number of HGV trips. It identifies opportunities for lorry parking facilities and infrastructure, including new lorry parks on the A9 and A96 and the upgrading of existing lorry parks. The RTS supports increased HGV-specific and general motorist rest areas / services, particularly on strategic long-distance routes such as the A9, A96 and A82.

Ultra Low Emissions Vehicles

10.210 Scotland seeks a leading role in promoting electric and other low-emission vehicles, with a commitment to phase out the need for new petrol and diesel cars and vans within by 2035. However, it is recognised that these vehicles will continue to generate congestion and private cars sit at the bottom of the NTS2 Sustainable Travel Hierarchy (see Figure 10:3).

10.211 The number of licensed ultra-low emission vehicles (ULEVs) has rapidly increased in Highland in recent years as shown in Figure 10:13 ([Vehicle licensing statistics data table VEH0132](#)).

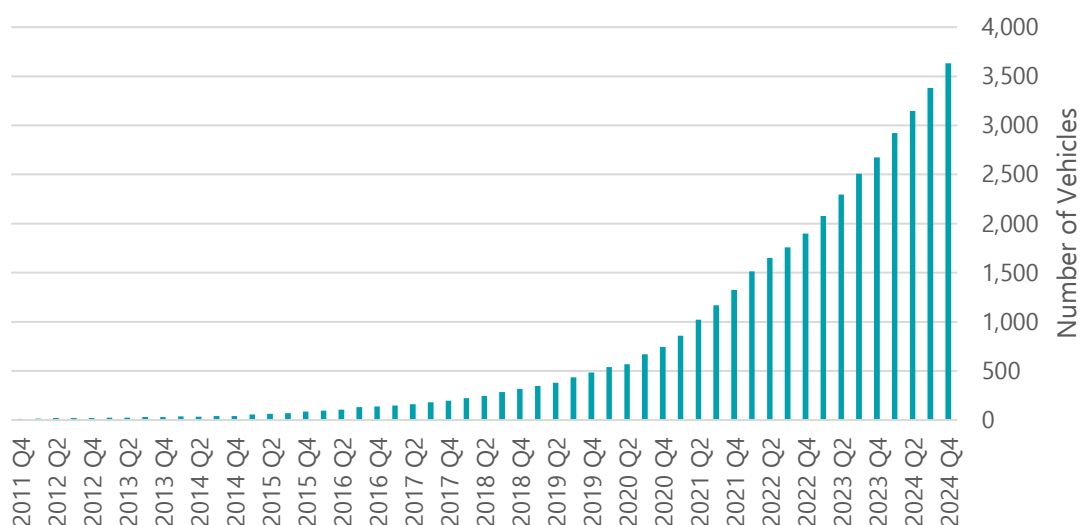


Figure 10:13 Licensed ULEVs in Highland ([Vehicle licensing statistics data table VEH0132](#))

10.212 In April 2025 Highland had a total of 439 publicly available electric vehicle charging devices at all speeds ([EV Public Charging Infrastructure Statistics](#)) or 186.2 per 100,000 population, higher than the Scotland wide level of 123 per 100,000 population. Figure 10:14 shows that the number of devices in Highland almost doubled since January 2022. Locations of publicly available chargers can be viewed on the [Zapmap](#) website.

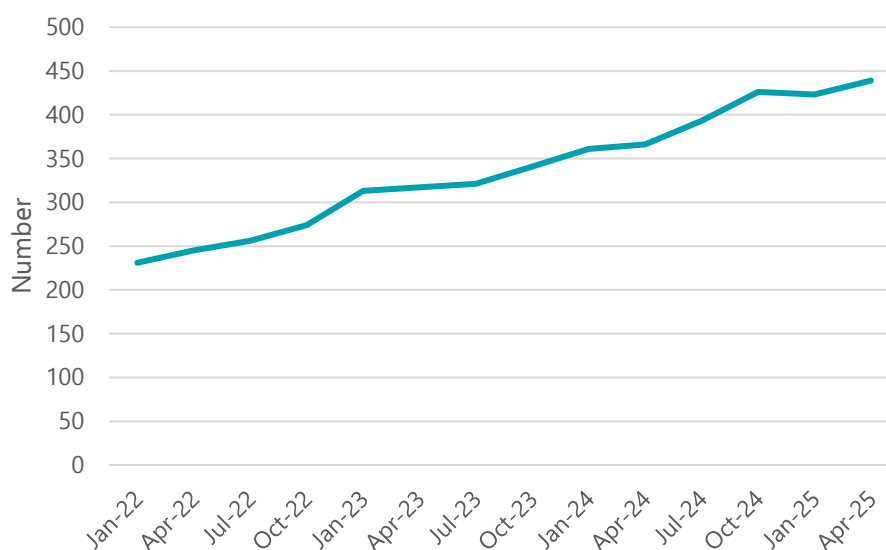


Figure 10:14 Public electric vehicle charging devices at all speeds in Highland ([EV Public Charging Infrastructure Statistics](#))

- 10.213 Infrastructure needs for most electric vehicle charging can be met at home, where vehicles are parked in driveways for most of the time and where access to private chargers is easier. For those without off street parking, and where there will be need to charge in public places, including visitors to the region, further investment will be required. There is potential to increase the charging network through co-charging, where homes or work places could charge to provide their devices to others.
- 10.214 It is appreciated that in some rural areas of Highland reliance on private cars will continue. In such areas, there is potential for an increased number of electric taxis, and the provision of electric car clubs to help reduce emissions and help communities travel more sustainably.
- 10.215 The Council published its Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategic Control Plan **(THC099)** in 2021. The expansion of the EV charging network in Highland will help facilitate the switch to electric vehicles and support progress towards national Net Zero commitments as well as interim targets of the Council.
- 10.216 The Council announced in May 2025 that Highland, Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray Councils awarded 'EasyGo' a 20-year contract to provide EV charging infrastructure for the north of Scotland ([THC News Centre](#)). The contract is estimated to be worth £300 million. The large-scale EV infrastructure project will accelerate the region's transition to Net Zero and see 570 new charging points installed across the north of Scotland by 2028, more than doubling the existing EV infrastructure and further enhancing the region's charging network.
- 10.217 Technology for the development of other electric vehicles is evolving, including trains, planes, vessels and HGV and passenger road vehicles. There is understood to currently be very limited infrastructure to support different forms of electric vehicles in Highland, in particular an absence of dedicated charging points for HGVs. It is understood that options are being explored for the provision of depot charging sites for larger road vehicles at key development locations in Highland, including at major ports.

Road Safety

- 10.218 The Council's [Road Safety Plan](#) sets out an action plan to improve Road Safety activity in Highland to the year 2030, alongside creating and maintaining partnerships which will help to develop prevention and intervention activities and initiatives. It sits within the Scottish Government publication [Scotland's Road Safety Framework to 2030](#).
- 10.219 The [RSP](#) explains that significant progress was made over the lifetime of the previous Scottish Government Framework which ran from 2010 to 2020. Figure

10:15 highlights this steady reduction in all injury severities in Highland which is line with the Scottish trend.

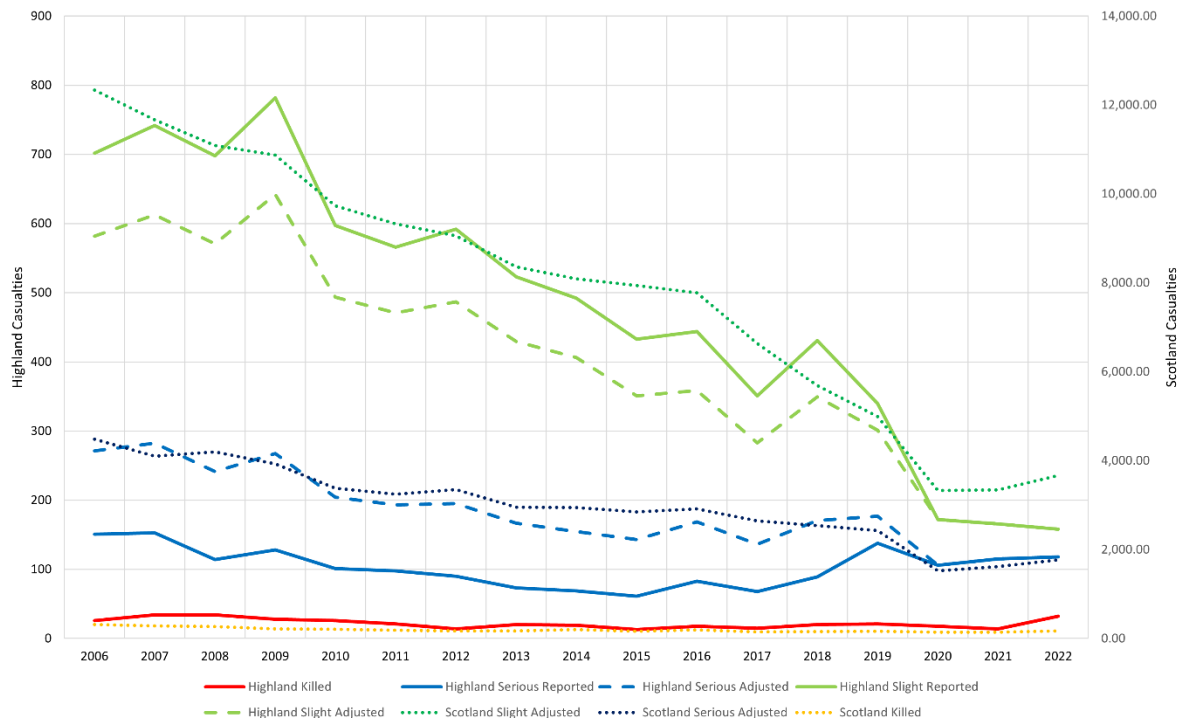


Figure 10:15 All Highland Casualties by Severity (*Road Safety Plan 2024-2030*)

10.220 Figure 10:16 shows that as the population of Highland has increased there has been a continued reduction in the recorded injury collisions.

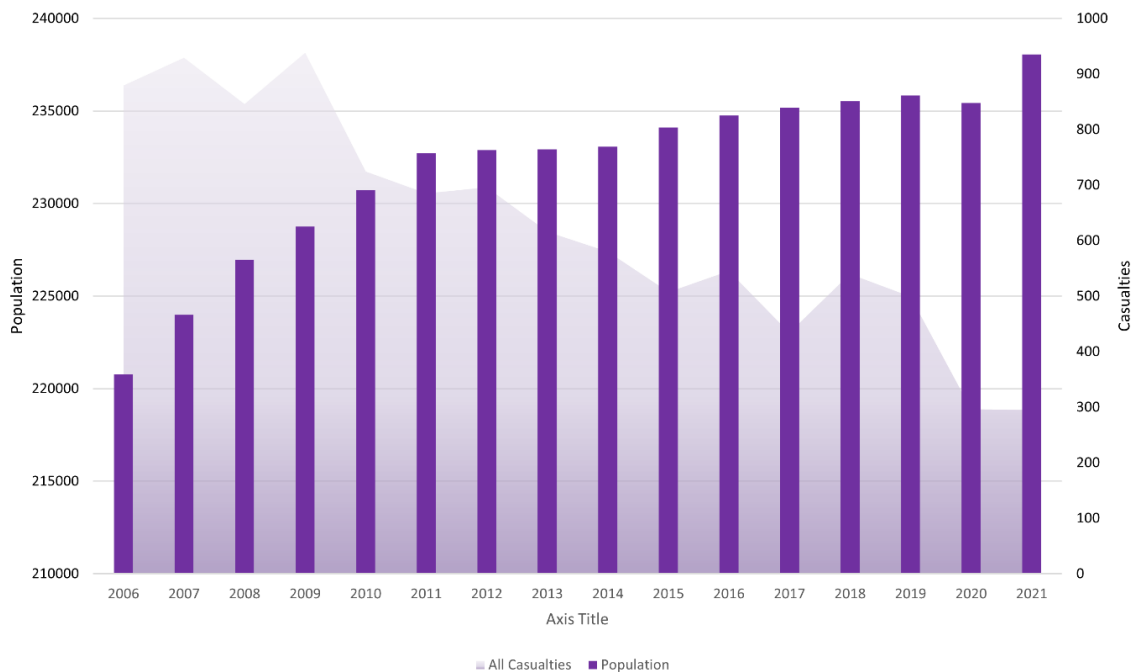


Figure 10:16 All Highland Casualties Against Population Growth (*Road Safety Plan 2024-2030*)

10.221 Transport Scotland monitors road safety initiatives undertaken by partners which contribute to the delivery of the [Road Safety Framework to 2030](#). Its [Reported Road Casualties Scotland 2023](#) report found that inexperience of driving on the left is a notable contributing factor of a number of collisions in Scotland and Highland.

10.222 The Road Safety Improvement Fund (RSIF) is an initiative by the Scottish Government to enhance safety across the local road network, with funding specifically for targeted casualty reduction schemes. The Council's RSIF 2025/26 programme is provided within **THC106** and includes safety measures for settlements on the NC500 and rural routes in Nairnshire, Inverness and Lochaber.

Parking

10.223 Provision of appropriate and well-managed parking is crucial to the transport network. The Council regulates 230 off-street car parks and approximately 10,000 parking bays. There are also numerous privately operated car parks throughout Highland.

10.224 With regards to car park occupancy rates, data was not available for Council or privately operated car parks. Other indicators of parking pressures are described below, including decriminalised parking enforcement and occupancy rates at selected rail station car parks.

Decriminalised Parking Enforcement

10.225 The responsibility for enforcing parking, waiting and loading restrictions was transferred from Police Scotland to the Council in 2016. The Council publishes data on Penalty Charge Notices (PCN) (**THC100**) issued. A summary of this data is provided in Table 10:11.

Table 10:11 Number of Penalty Charge Notices Issued in Highland (THC100)

Area	2022	2023	2024	% Δ
Inverness	6553	7304	8056	23%
Lochaber	2720	2990	1925	-29%
Skye	3545	5563	7011	98%
Wick	62	76	207	234%
Thurso	176	171	528	200%
Dingwall	280	274	283	1%
Nairn	137	264	196	43%
Other	896	730	1459	63%
Total	14369	17372	19665	37%

10.226 In many areas of Highland the number of PCNs issued have risen significantly between 2022 and 2024. The volume of PCNs issued and the increase in Skye of 98% is particularly notable. More detailed data in **THC100** shows the number of PCNs issued in Skye was particularly pronounced during the summer months. This suggests there is a unique issue in Skye likely associated with tourism. The increase in Caithness towns of Wick and Thurso is also significant but appears to be spread throughout the year, suggesting more localised issues.

10.227 **THC100** provides a list of the top five contraventions in 2022. The number of parking without payment contraventions (1,173) is significantly higher than other contraventions. Other contraventions in the top five include wrong class of vehicle on Street, wrong class of vehicle off street, not parked correctly and parked in a restricted zone, these range from between 734 and 540 contraventions. Other than parking without payment, the other top contraventions may suggest pressure for parking at certain locations.

Rail Station Car Parks

10.228 The number of parking spaces at each rail station in Highland is provided in **THC105**. Scotrail periodically undertake rail station car park snapshot occupancy surveys. In 2024 up to four surveys undertaken in different months of the year and times of day at 26 Highland stations found (**THC115**):

- Car parks at Glenfinnan, Inverness, Inverness Airport, Nairn and Tain were consistently to or close to capacity;
- The car parks at the following stations were over 70% capacity on at least one occasion: Ardgay, Beaulay, Carrbridge, Dingwall, Georgemas Junction, Glenfinnan, Inverness Airport, Inverness Car Park 1, Inverness Car Park 2, Kingussie, Kyle of Lochalash, Mallaig, Nairn, Newtonmore, Tain, Wick;
- Some stations do not appear to experience any capacity issues, including Fearn, Invergordon and Thurso.

10.229 As parking in many Highland rail stations is unrestricted and free, and given the nature of snapshot surveys, this would benefit from a stronger evidence base.

National and Council Parking Policy and Guidance

10.230 NPF4 Policy 13 requires LDPs to promote a place-based approach to consider how to reduce car-dominance. The [LDP Guidance](#) encourages the lowest level of car parking appropriate in each location to be provided, with the aim of reducing reliance on the private car and minimising space dedicated to car parking, recognising what is appropriate will vary from place to place.

- 10.231 This includes Part (e) of the policy that supports development proposals that are ambitious in terms of low/no car parking, particularly in urban locations that are well-served by sustainable transport modes and where they do not create barriers to access by disabled people.
- 10.232 The Council's Roads and Transport Guidelines for New Development was published in 2013. Chapter 6 of this document provides information on car parking, including parking standards for different types of development. It recognises that where an area is well served by sustainable moves of travel, reduced parking standards may be appropriate but that in rural areas, where public transport is scarce, less restrictive standards are acceptable.
- 10.233 The parking standards set out are generally expressed as minimum standards for residential developments and maximum standards for other types of developments. It explains that for most new development the Council will usually require parking to be provided at or close to the maximum standards.
- 10.234 The Council's Developer Contributions Supplementary Guidance explains that in certain circumstances where the Council's parking standards cannot be achieved, a reduced level of parking may be acceptable for development located centrally within the Settlement Development Areas set out in the guidance. In such cases the developer may be required to provide developer contributions towards mitigating the transport impacts of the development.
- 10.235 NPF4 and IMFLDP2 policies do not place a quantitative limit on car parking provision only that such parking should be minimised, located in a less convenient place than cycle parking, and provide for disabled users. Instead, the management of that parking should promote modal shift to more sustainable modes and therefore minimise harmful emissions. The number, type, location, cost, and enforcement of parking provision and surrounding traffic management measures should all be coordinated to achieve a shift to more sustainable modes where these are (or can be made) an economically viable alternative by the public/private sector. Accordingly, the Council's quantitative parking standards as set out in Roads and Transport Guidelines for New Development can still be applied but only as a prompt for the developer and Council to agree a holistic approach to achieve modal shift.
- 10.236 To contribute towards meeting LTS Objective 4: To reduce emission from the transport system within Highland, Policy 4.9 explains that the Council will continue to keep under review the approach to parking to support the efficient operation of the road network within Highland, including in both urban and more rural areas, as well as contribute to wider policies to support sustainable travel by all users of the transport network in Highland including visitors and to reduce emission from the transport sector.

Cross Boundary Transport Considerations

10.237 Neighbouring road authorities include Moray, Aberdeenshire, Perth and Kinross and Argyll and Bute Councils. The Highland Council remains the roads authority for the parts of the CNPA that are within its boundary. Neighbouring authorities by sea are Orkney and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. Considerations relevant to the strategic and local network, including on active travel, public transport and roads and potential cross boundary issues are identified below.

Travel Patterns

10.238 Figure 10:4 Location of usual residence and place of work (all Highland people) (Scotland's Census 2022) shows that only 1.6% (1,820 people) of Highland residents travel to another local authority to their place of work. This small proportion can be understood due to the large land mass of Highland and its predominantly rural boundaries with other authorities. It is anticipated that the majority of Highland residents travelling to another authority is likely to be to Moray, given the relatively close proximity of larger Highland settlements to larger Moray settlements including Forres and Elgin.

Active Travel

10.239 Several long-distance active travel routes cross boundaries into other authority areas, including NCN1, NCN87, NCN7, Speyside Way and the Dava Way.

Rail Based Transport

10.240 The Inverness to Aberdeen, Highland Main Line and West Highland rail routes cross boundaries into other authorities. Moray Council is of the understanding that some west Moray residents use rail to access employment opportunities in Inverness (**THC102**). Network Rail identifies Keith to Inverness as a travel market for commuting and leisure purposes due to competitive journey times.

Bus Based Transport

10.241 Several longer distance bus services pass through local authority boundaries, including routes to Aberdeen, Oban, Perth and central belt.

Water Based Transport

10.242 Important ferry connections to other local authority areas include Orkney and nan Eilean Siar. There are understood to be challenges to the provision of electric vehicle infrastructure on the northern and western isles.

Road Based Transport

10.243 Key roads that cross local authority boundaries are the A96, A9, A82, A95, and the A828 as well as a number of local roads. The A96 and A9 dualling projects have potential cross boundary considerations for Highland with Moray and Perth and Kinross authorities. Moray Council has previously lobbied for improvements to the A95 due to the volume of HGVs accessing southern Scotland to/from Moray (**THC102**).

Current Approach to Transport Related Developer Contributions

10.244 The Council's approach to transport related developer contributions at a national level is underpinned by NPF4 Policy 18 Infrastructure First and [Planning circular 4/2025: Planning obligations and good neighbour agreements](#). At the Highland level, the developer contributions framework includes HwLDP Policy 31 and its [Developer Contributions Supplementary Guidance](#), as well as area LDPs, the [Highland Delivery Programme](#) and a number of development briefs.

10.245 The Council's [DCSG](#) contains a chapter on transport contributions. It explains that all development is assessed in terms of its impact on the transport network. Contributions may be sought for standard transport requirements, including towards walking/cycling provision and paths, public transport services and facilities and road improvements. Cumulative transport contributions may be also sought towards strategic transport projects. An overview of significant projects in the context of developer contributions is provided in Table 10:12, further detail on the projects listed is provided within **THC126**. The Council maintains and monitors developer contributions that have been collected.

Table 10:12 Significant Cumulative Transport Contribution Projects

Scheme	Developments required to contribute	Progress to date
Dingwall road and active travel improvements to relieve congestion and facilitate development in	Developments within Dingwall Primary catchment area may be liable. Rate set out in Highland Delivery Programme .	Early phases complete, cost and timing of future phases dependent upon a number of factors. Contributions continue to be collected.
East Link and Inshes Corridor (Inverness)	Developments within the Inverness East Development Brief area and any other site that brings impacts. Rate set out	Schemes at planning stages, some developer contributions committed.

	in Inverness East Development Brief .	
Inverness West Link Road Scheme	Developments in Torvean and Ness-side Development Brief or Southern Distributor Road Agreement Area. Rate set out in Torvean and Ness-side Development Brief .	Completed in 2021. Partly forward funded by the Council, contributions continue to be sought from relevant developments.
Inverness Retail and Business Park road improvements and sustainable transport	Developments within Inverness Retail and Business Park. Contribution rate dependent upon nature of development.	Scheme at planning stages, some developer contributions committed and continue to be collected.
Portree Link Road	Contributions may be required from any new development in Portree Settlement Development Area as shown in WestPlan . Rate set out in Highland Delivery Programme .	Scheme underway, forward funded by the Scottish Government Infrastructure Loan Funding, contributions to be sought from relevant developments.
South Loch Ness Road Improvements	All developments which put significant pressure on either B851, B862, B861 or B852 roads. Contribution rate dependent upon nature of development.	Incremental approach to improvements, some direct improvements provided and developer contributions collected.
Tomich Junction (A9 Trunk Road, Invergordon)	All allocations within Invergordon as shown in IMFLDP2 and any other developments which brings impacts. Any contribution rate yet to be determined.	Design and funding options being progressed by THC. No developer contributions secured at time of writing.

10.246 Table 10:12 demonstrates that developer contributions have and are likely to continue to make an important contribution towards the funding of transport projects. For example, the completion of the West Link Road in Inverness in 2021 enabled the continued delivery of large-scale housing sites at Ness-side and Westercraigs. The delivery of many of these projects continues to be essential to the delivery of homes and commercial development in Highland.

Summary of Stakeholder Engagement

10.247 A full breakdown of all stakeholder engagement undertaken to support the Evidence Report is provided within **Chapter 3: Statement of Engagement**. A summary of the key stakeholder engagement activities undertaken for this chapter are presented below.

Stakeholders and Key Agencies

10.248 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 January – 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 and other stakeholders on 30 June 2025, which included:

- NatureScot
- Scottish Water
- SEPA
- NHS Highland
- HIE
- HITRANS
- Transport Scotland
- Crofting Commission
- Sport Scotland
- Historic Environment Scotland
- Architecture and Design Scotland
- Walk Wheel Cycle Trust (formerly Sustrans)
- Highland Community Planning Partnership
- Wider Council Services: Environmental Health, Transport, Community Development, Climate Change and Energy.
- Chamber of Commerce, inc; Caithness, Lochaber, Inverness.
- BID, inc; Fort William, Dornoch, Visit Inverness Loch Ness – Tourist, VisitNairn - Nairn, Inverness.
- Neighbouring Authorities – Moray, Aberdeenshire, Perth and Kinross, Argyll and Bute, Orkney, Western Isles, CNPA.
- Public transport operators and infrastructure providers: Calmac, Network Rail, Scotrail, Stagecoach.

10.249 Comments were received from 14 key agencies and other stakeholders, including Transport Scotland (**THC150**), HITRANS (**THC149**), Moray Council (**THC151**), Network Rail (**THC152**) and other Highland Council Services, including Transport Planning (**THC156**) and Active and Sustainable Transport (**THC200**).

- 10.250 A second draft of this chapter that took into account comments received was distributed to key agencies and other stakeholders on 24 September 2025. A small number of comments were received on this draft from the HC Active and Sustainable Transport Team **(THC200)** as well as statements of agreement as outlined in paragraph 10.317. Further minor changes and updates were made, and following this, a statement of agreement was received from the HC Active and Sustainable Transport Team **(THC200)**.
- 10.251 Following this, a further draft of the chapter was prepared to take into account newly available information, including detailed Census 2022 data releases. Consideration was also given to [Local Development Plans – Evidence Reports and Gate Checks Action Plan and Advice](#) published in February 2026, and as a result additional information was presented on developer contributions, intentions to prepare a transport appraisal and spatial implications of the evidence for the plan. This draft was shared with Transport Scotland and HITRANS in March 2026, and statements of agreement were subsequently received **(THC150 and THC149)**.
- 10.252 A summary of feedback from those who provided substantive comments on drafts of the chapter is presented in the tables below. Given the extensive nature of some comments that covered multiple aspects, a detailed Consultation Report has also been prepared for this chapter and is provided as supporting document **THC116**. All responses are listed within **THC###** Evidence Report Reference List and full responses are provided as supporting documents to the Evidence Report.
- 10.253 Responses from those stakeholders who simply provided statements of agreement, minor factual corrections or provided comments that are not directly relevant the content of the chapter are not contained in the tables below. A high level summary of these responses is provided in the paragraph below.
- 10.254 SEPA **(THC089)**, Moray Council **(THC151)** and the Highland Council’s Access Officer **(THC158)** confirmed they were content with the evidence provided within this Chapter. The Council’s Corran Ferry Project Manager **(THC157)** provided updated timescales for new Corran Ferry infrastructure that were incorporated into relevant parts of the Chapter. The CalMac Area Manager for North Hebrides **(THC154)** requested further information on projects listed in the Chapter for operational reasons, relevant contact information was provided in response.

Key Agency: Transport Scotland (THC150)	
Main views raised	Consider the chapter sufficient and in accordance with relevant policies. The chapter provides sufficient baseline data on strategic transport

	networks and identifies any constraints. As a result of welcomed engagement with Transport Scotland, the Council has addressed recommendations in earlier HLDP Evidence Consultation, including strengthening baseline data, details of transport trends and further information to how strategic infrastructure is used. Recognise the Council's key commitment to a transport appraisal.
Council's response	Following feedback on the earlier Evidence Consultation, the Council presented additional information requested within the Evidence Report and supporting documents.
Areas of agreement	The Council agree with the comments made during the earlier Evidence Consultation, as such Transport Scotland were content with this chapter, in terms of Transport and the transport elements of Infrastructure First.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is the agency content with the evidence?	Yes, Transport Scotland provided a statement of agreement provided in (THC150) .
Implications for proposed plan	To ensure that the HLDP is informed by an appropriate and effective transport appraisal that is informed by continuous engagement with Transport Scotland.
Actions for proposed plan stage	Preparation of transport appraisal to inform the proposed plan.

Key Agency: HITRANS (THC149)

Main views raised	Draft 1: 1. Considered the chapter was too roads focussed and that there were opportunities to present a more balanced chapter by presenting it in a different order and providing additional active travel data. 2. Requested that additional information should be added regarding the impact of HGV and abnormal loads on the roads network. 3. Suggested a range of additional information was added to the summary of evidence including, passenger and freight rail and ferry networks, potential impacts of the ICFGF, ferry freight and electric vehicles. Draft 2: Satisfied that changes incorporated into the second draft of the chapter address issues previously raised.

	Draft 3: Provided Statement of Agreement and suggested the inclusion of additional evidence including reference to the £2 Bus Fare Cap, a long distance coach company that has an electric fleet, Delivering Scotland's Air Departure Tax consultation and a forthcoming study on the transport network and renewables projects.
Council's response	Draft 1: 1. The Council agreed and re-ordered the chapter to reflect the NTS2 Sustainable Travel Hierarchy and provided additional data on Active Travel, including increased emphasis on Active Travel Masterplans and NCN routes. 2. The Council agreed and a section was added on Road Freight that includes data on HGV traffic volumes and abnormal loads and a summary of industries that are putting pressure on the road network, including energy projects and timber transport. 3. The Council agreed and provided additional data was presented. Draft 2: Noted. Draft 3: Noted, suggested changes incorporated into relevant parts of the chapter.
Areas of agreement	The Council agree with the comments made.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is the agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of sufficiency provided within (THC149) .
Implications for proposed plan	• The HITRANS response reinforced the requirement for HLDP to embed the principles of the NTS2 Sustainable Travel Hierarchy and Sustainable Investment Hierarchy. • Consider in greater detail Active Travel Masterplan actions and future plans for the National Cycle Network to allow the HLDP to assist with their delivery. • The HLDP will consider the implications of a range of likely future pressures on the transport network.
Actions for proposed plan stage	Ensure HITRANS are involved with the preparation of the transport appraisal that will inform the HDLP.

Key Agency: NatureScot (THC088)	
Main views raised	Draft 1: Request table noting all exact comments on the earlier HLDP Evidence Consultation and how these have been addressed within this chapter or within other chapters. Once comments have been addressed in a revised chapter then we can agree that the evidence will be sufficient on matters related to NatureScot. Draft 2: Confirm satisfied with the approach taken, content that comments have been addressed and agree sufficiency of Chapter 10.
Council's response	Draft 1: Comments received through the earlier HLDP Evidence Consultation have been used to inform this chapters and all other chapter's evidence. It was considered most appropriate to present and respond to comments from the earlier Evidence Consultation as a summary following the suggested Evidence Report Template, we considered it was clear from the Summary of Engagement section content of comments received and the council's response to them. (HLDP Evidence Consultations for all chapters were subsequently collated and can be found in THC006). Draft 2: Noted and agreed.
Areas of agreement	N/A, no material issues raised.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is the agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of sufficiency provided within (THC088) .
Implications for proposed plan	No additional implications.
Actions for proposed plan stage	No actions required.

Network Rail (THC152)	
Main views raised	Draft 1: 1. Important to consider information provided on travel markets on rail corridors in Highland and where opportunities for modal shift might be likely. 2. Suggest reference to additional Network Rail publications, including The Sustainable Travel to Stations strategy and Scotland's Railway's Climate Action Plan. Draft 2: Confirm comments have been addressed and statement of agreement that evidence in this chapter is sufficient on matters relating to Network Rail.
Council's response	1. The Council considered this information to be important to informing the HLDP, it has therefore been summarised and included within the Rail Based Transport section of this chapter. 2. A summary of these documents are now included within this chapter. Draft 2: Agree and noted comments.
Areas of agreement	The Council agree with the comments made.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is the agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of agreement provided in (THC152) .
Implications for proposed plan	Greater understanding of where opportunities for modal shift might be likely to inform spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy, including travel to stations.
Actions for proposed plan stage	Consider information provided on travel markets on rail corridors when preparing spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy.
ScotRail (THC153)	
Main views raised	Notes that evidence presented shows on all rail lines in Highland, seat utilisation is significantly below capacity. Explains that given station

	entry and exit statistics remain below pre-pandemic levels, it is likely that seat utilisation has below lower in recent years. Provides most recent ScotRail statistics for the Highland Mainline that shows station usage increasing on most stations north of Perth with the exception of Inverness and Aviemore. Notes that ScotRail data will be different from the ORR's estimates.
Council's response	Noted ScotRail data differs from ORR, but ORR used as publicly available and as ScotRail data only shows one Highland rail station, it was considered insufficient in providing the best baseline data. However, some text has been diluted to suggest seat utilisation 'may' have become lower, rather than 'likely'.
Areas of agreement	The Council acknowledge the comments made.
Outstanding issues	The Council does not consider there are any outstanding issues.
Is the agency content with the evidence?	A request for a statement of sufficiency or dispute to be provided was issued following the distribution of the second draft of the chapter. None was provided.
Implications for proposed plan	Understanding there is likely to be sufficient seat capacity on train services in the HLDP area to accommodate any additional passengers as a result of development.
Actions for proposed plan stage	In the interests of helping to deliver modal shift, consider the role of settlements with train stations in the spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy.
Walk Wheel Cycle Trust (THC155)	
Main views raised	Draft 1: Suggest adjustment of AT definition. Pleased with inclusion of National Cycle Network, suggest discussions with NCN Planning Manager. Encourage reference to Network Development Plan for NCN rather than published routes in mapping, Walk Wheel Cycle Trust use collaborative GIS tool. Can provide narrative for future NCN projects. Suggest text relating to future NCN routes and funding of NCN developments be added. Draft 2: Happy to agree with the proposals in second draft.
Council's response	Draft 1:

	Amended AT text. NCN Planning Manager added to Transport circulation list. Added NCN data to Highland Local Development Plan Evidence Report Map . No additional narrative required for future NCN projects as evidence report has sufficient data however, will be considered in future stages of HLDP. Additional narrative on NCN projects and funding added. Draft 2: Agree with comments.
Areas of agreement	The Council agree with the comments made.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is the agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of agreement provided in (THC155) .
Implications for proposed plan	Consider in greater detail future plans for the National Cycle Network to allow the HLDP to assist with its delivery.
Actions for proposed plan stage	Consider potential for identification of existing/improved National Cycle Network Routes, and any appropriate land safeguards/developer contributions required towards delivery.
THC Transport Planning (THC156)	
Main views raised	1. Suggest include National Road Development Guide (NRDG) and Timber Transport Forum Agreed Route Map. 2. Concerns with availability of shared information internally suggest better cross service information sharing. 3. Lack of accessible data on existing trip rate data, development trip relates and peak traffic flow meaning some development sites have not mitigated impacts on sensitive traffic routes. 4. Suggest additions related to impact on rural transport infrastructure from major energy and industrial Developments.
Council's response	1. Added both documents 2. Noted and explained sources and availability of data presented. 3. Agree that Road Capacity Needs and Deliverability document doesn't include all localised issues, individual site developer requirements will be identified later in HLDP process.

	5. Added new section on Road Freight within Road based transport section, that includes information about information about major energy development transport considerations.
Areas of agreement	Agree with the comments made.
Outstanding issues	There are not considered to be any outstanding issues.
Is the agency content with the evidence?	A request for a statement of sufficiency or dispute to be provided was issued following the distribution of the second draft of the chapter. None was provided.
Implications for proposed plan	The HLDP will consider the implications of a range of likely future pressures on the transport network.
Actions for proposed plan stage	Consider role of LDP in addressing anticipated pressures, for example developer contributions towards network improvements.

THC Active and Sustainable Transport (THC200)

Main views raised	Draft 1: Considered the chapter was too roads focussed and that there were opportunities to present a more balanced chapter. Suggest a number of additional data sources throughout the document and mention areas for text to be amended. Draft 2: Suggest consideration of how trunk roads/local roads can split areas of communities and what is being done about this. Draft 3: This is all satisfactory.
Council's response	Draft 1: The Council agreed and re-ordered the chapter to reflect the NTS2 Sustainable Travel Hierarchy and provided additional data on Active Travel, including increased emphasis on Active Travel Masterplans and NCN routes. All suggested amendments and additional data sources have been included. Draft 2: Added reference to this within chapter. Draft 3: Agree, comment noted.
Areas of agreement	Agree with the comments made.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is the agency content	Yes, statement of sufficiency provided in (THC200) .

with the evidence?	
Implications for proposed plan	• The response reinforced the requirement for HLDP to embed the principles of the NTS2 Sustainable Travel Hierarchy and Sustainable Investment Hierarchy. • Consider in greater detail Active Travel Masterplan actions and future plans for the National Cycle Network to allow the HLDP to assist with their delivery.
Actions for proposed plan stage	HLDP will require to include an updated network of active travel route proposals which will support the implementation of the Active Travel Strategy and associated Active Travel Masterplans and Inner Moray Firth Active Travel Network as well other identified routes. Safeguarding land required for the delivery of projects, and seeking developer contribution towards their delivery will be considered.

Summary of Local Place Plan Priorities

10.255 Ardgour Local Place Plan (**THC010**) has identified the following priorities relating to Transport:

- Need flexible GP catchments and primary/ secondary school transport.
- Need reliable and extended ferry services integrated with public/community transport that is safe for people to walk & cycle from their door.
- New fit-for-purpose Corran ferries, upgrade Camusnagaul ferry service and associated infrastructure.
- Improve active travel networks across the area
- Reduce/reassess speed limits within and between villages and improve maintenance & passing places for HGVs/buses, formalise the lay-by with postbox, bus stop and community noticeboard at Achaphubuil.
- Community filling station as in Morvern and Luss, include shop or vending machine.
- Provide public parking adjacent to school parking and seating/more pleasant shelter at the bus stops at Clovullin community hub.
- Add e-bikes & car charging at both ferry landings for locals & visitors and enhance road edges with traditional walking/verges/hedging characteristic of the area at North Corran.

10.256 Black Isle Local Place Plan (**THC011**) has identified the following priorities relating to Transport:

- Update/implement Black Isle Sustainable Tourism Plan & Chanonry Point Action Plan.

- Create fit-for-purpose Black Isle network of community/public transport, including community transport, buses, ferries, e-bikes, electric car club that are integrated with one another to encourage sustainable, safe travel within and between villages.
- Improved maintenance of roads & footways as the infrastructure for all modes of transport.
- The Green Freeport should take opportunity to deliver community aspirations, including public transport and active travel links to access work & training opportunities, including upgrading the Nigg ferry.
- Support for tackling visitor management pressures in Fortrose and Rosemarkie (including traffic, parking, improved public transport, disabled access and 'slow tourism').
- Ensure safe active travel within villages for all users especially at busy locations such as Tore Roundabout and Fortrose High Street.
- Improve footpath networks linked to natural & coastal features and including increasing awareness of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.
- Routes for priority action should include Rosemarkie, Avoch, Munlochy & between Culbokie & A9 bus stops.

10.257 Broadford and Strath Local Place Plan (**THC012**) has identified the following priorities relating to Transport:

- Skye Cycle Way: Active travel path from Skye Bridge to Broadford by BSCC and Sustrans / Transport Scotland.
- Encourage development of community transport service to improve access from outlying settlements to Broadford facilities. Coordinate with onward transport services. Investigate low emission community transport options for outlying settlements.
- Encourage development of safe active travel routes to the new Broadford primary school from Lime Park, Black Park, Scullamus and surrounding residential areas.
- Create path to link new hospital site to existing Pier Path into Broadford.
- Accessibility improvements for pedestrians including crossing on A87 and improved signage.
- Increase number of bus stops along A87 including hail and stop system.
- Encourage development of off-road active travel link between Broadford, Strollamus and Luib.

10.258 Caol Local Place Plan (**THC024**) has identified the following priorities relating to Transport:

- Addressing traffic congestion through potential changes to the Caol Link Road corridor.
- New roundabout at the A830 (Banavie) exit.

- Enhanced bus routes.
- Hi-bike stations in Riverside/Old School Court.
- Improved walking/cycling paths, including: Canal Path and Mossfield connections; between back of houses to high school along Blar Mhor Industrial Estate; Caol Spit to provide direct link to Inverlochy/Fort William; entrance to St Johns Road, improved dropped kerbs throughout.
- Investigate options for summer water taxi from Corpach Marina to Fort William.
- Additional traffic calming.
- Campervan infrastructure.

10.259 Croy and Tornagrain Local Place Plan (**THC026**) has identified the following priorities relating to Transport:

- Improve public transport services connecting communities along the B9006 with the airport and railway station. Consider extending services to connect to West Nairnshire communities and Nairn.
- Improve access to strategic bus services using the A96 corridor including provision of bus stops near Mid Coul roundabout, and increase the number of services calling within communities.
- Upgrade road connecting Croy and Tornagrain to twin-track road.
- Upgrade B9006 at Sunnyside, install traffic calming measures and improve pavements.
- Encourage better integration of bus and rail services.
- Promote more affordable bus fares and expansion of the Highland Railcard scheme.
- Support the delivery of the short section of path from Croy towards Clephanton to link to the wider network.
- Support the delivery of the diversion and improvement of the Inverness and Nairn National Cycle Network through Tornagrain and Croy with connections to other settlements.
- Address missing links in routes and improve connections between local communities, services and facilities, including Cantraybridge College, the Highland Cycle Ability Centre, Tornagrain Church and the original Tornagrain village.
- Protect and enhance off-road networks through estates and woodlands.
- Seek improved maintenance and safety improvements of the A96 road crossing connecting communities to the station, airport and business park.
- Promote the preparation of an Active Travel Masterplan for Croy and Tornagrain.

10.260 Dores and Essich Local Place Plan (**THC013**) has identified the following priorities relating to Transport:

- Develop community 'Dial-a-Bus' service.
- Provide safe and viable bus stops with clear signages;
- Car parking opportunities: Development of car park at former church, provision of Dores beach parking.
- Introduction of speed limits and pedestrian crossings and footpaths;
- Improvement of Dores Inn's junction.
- Development of cycle route and provision of bike shelter.
- Provision of better signage.

10.261 Duror and Kentallen Local Place Plan (**THC014**) has identified the following priorities relating to Transport:

- Better transport links, in particular more frequent bus service with better timings of public buses through the village, including evening buses, signage and additional bus shelters.
- Join neighbouring village community car scheme – or create own scheme.
- Create car parking areas to support tourism pressures.
- Add electric car and e-bike charging points at community centre.
- More walking trails through ancient woodland with reinstated/extended tracks and more route maps.
- Address traffic speeds, poorly sited junctions, poor road/pathway/cycle path conditions and lack of safe crossing points for active travel and road users.
- Create a more cohesive village centre close to the principal village junction, subject to improvement of road access from the trunk road.
- Improve the internal connectivity of the village through improved active travel and green network links.
- Investigate opportunity for new/enhanced tourist facilities taking advantage of trunk road and national cycle network tourist routes.
- Create pathways behind the school.
- Create public parking at Dalnatrat.

10.262 Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Local Place Plan (**THC022**) has identified the following priorities relating to Transport:

- Improve public transport: better reliability and space on Citylink buses, local services to Whitebridge & Foyers.
- Agree & deliver a public sector-led plan for pedestrian/vehicle movement, parking & visitor management in Fort Augustus, initially via HITRANS
- The recently expanded car park often has 15 coaches plus cars and smaller buses, equating to an influx of around 1,000 people at any one time. Meagre toilet facilities cannot cope.
- Only access to the village's attractions is along the A82, with numerous conflict points between pedestrians and vehicles: narrow footways and

carriageways, river and canal bridges, the Penny Petroleum forecourt, and a lack of safe crossing points.

- Agree and deliver a plan with external partners for pedestrian/vehicle management on A82 in Fort Augustus and Invermoriston.
- Approach HITRANS, Highland Council and bus operators about bus timetabling, bus stops in Glenmoriston and community transport.
- Explore community transport with 3 Glens Community Care and neighbouring communities.
- There are no local buses to nearby settlements such as Stratherrick and Foyers. Difficult to get to work, study or hospital before 9am & return in the evening. Reduced bus frequency in the winter is also an issue.
- Free parking for local residents at local Forestry and Land Scotland car parks, similar to that at the main Fort Augustus car park.
- Maintenance of rural path network as and when required.
- Reinstate public access to Loch Ness along the existing path on the north bank of the River Moriston from Invermoriston public car park.
- Create a local path network at Convent Wood in Fort Augustus.

10.263 Gairloch Local Place Plan (**THC015**) has identified the following priorities relating to Transport:

- Provide safe pedestrian and cycle paths.
- Extend car parking facilities particularly for key leisure and recreation sites.
- Increase local bike hire provision.
- Improve road conditions and resurface pavements.
- Improve and maintain a variety of core paths.
- Extend network of cycling/walking routes.
- Improve public transport, including local connections to get to settlements.
- Support local car share initiatives.
- Improve signposting of bus stops.

10.264 Garve and District Local Place Plan (**THC016**) has identified the following priorities relating to Transport:

- Traffic calming measures needed in key locations,
- Support and enhance active travel in line with Active Travel Plan,
- New and enhanced path network, specifically to Garve War Memorial, Contin and Gorstan,
- Improved bus and rail services,
- Improved parking facilities and EV chargers.
- Welcome the proposed new community transport service.
- Suggest bike hire at the GD CORE.

10.265 Glen Urquhart Local Place Plan (**THC029**) has identified the following priorities relating to Transport:

- More reliable and accessible bus services, particularly between Drumnadrochit and Inverness.
- New electric bus routes that better serve the wider Glen Urquhart area, Balnain, East and West Glen Urquhart, school and community travel needs.
- Create safe, continuous walking and cycling routes within and between settlements.
- Move key active travel routes off busy routes, especially the Great Glen Way and between Drumnadrochit and Urquhart Castle.
- Development of new and reinstated paths, including a cycle path linking East Glen Urquhart to the A82.
- Improve road safety, including speed management in particular sections of the A82, improved signage and upgrading pavements and footways within settlements.
- Support community based and low carbon transport by expanding electric vehicle infrastructure and exploring community transport schemes, car sharing and e-bike hire.
- Reduce congestion from visitor traffic, especially related to Urquhart Castle, by improving active travel links, providing additional parking in Drumnadrochit with electric shuttle buses to Urquhart Castle and better management of bus stops and coach movements in Drumnadrochit.

10.266 Golspie Local Place Plan (**THC021**) has identified the following priorities relating to Transport:

- Need affordable and reliable transport (rail, bus, car, bike, walking (active travel)) and associated infrastructure (roads, safe pathways, cycle tracks and availability of fuel).
- The village hub could include provision and space for sustainable transportation (cycle hire for example).
- From Housing to Big Burn add active travel connection to Big Burn.
- Potential to add Green Gateway car park. Needs to be discreet, integrated green car park with a small footprint to keep the Glebe as a park. The positioning of the car park is intended to give people good access to recreational opportunities of walking and cycling in and around Golspie by locking into active travel connections and reducing congestion around the village hub.
- Add/improve path networks throughout the area making more accessible for all users.
- Add new crossings on Golspie's Main Street. Explore best crossing option allowing access and timing for all.

10.267 Kinlochleven Local Place Plan (**THC017**) has identified the following priorities relating to Transport:

- Improve public/community transport, including replacement of old community minibus.
- Improve and upgrade path routes making them safe for all users.
- Improve cycling connections and introduce a community e-bike scheme and initiatives like bike maintenance.
- Manage visitor parking.

10.268 Kyle of Sutherland Local Place Plan (**THC029**) has identified the following priorities relating to Transport:

- Protecting, upgrading and extending paths, cycle routes and trails within and between settlements, including Ardgay, Bonar Bridge, Culrain, Invershin and Rosehall.
- Maximising use of national routes (Far North Way / NCN1) by improving local connections to them.
- Supporting safe circular routes linking villages to schools, services, jobs and recreational facilities.
- Addressing roads where homes are located along high-speed routes with no pavements
- Introducing traffic calming and physical safety measures at appropriate locations.
- Improved rail service frequency and connectivity on the Far North Line, including better timetable coordination for onward travel.
- Better bus services, including supporting existing community transport schemes and improving bus stop locations, safety and accessibility
- Exploring new or expanded community-run transport services.
- Expanding electric vehicle charging in villages

10.269 Lochalsh Local Place Plan (**THC018**) has identified the following priorities relating to Transport:

- Implement traffic management and extend car park in Plockton.
- Improve public transport facilities and active travel link between and within villages.
- Extend 20mph speed limit in Dornie.

10.270 Morvern Local Place Plan (**THC027**) has identified the following priorities relating to Transport:

- Delivering an improved network of dedicated bike paths and walking routes;
- Developing better walking, wheeling, cycling and bridle connections between key destinations, and looped walks for leisure purposes.

- Strengthening links between Lochaline, Drimnin and surrounding areas, including a long-term aspiration for an off-road coastal link.
- Supporting intra-village connectivity, particularly within Lochaline, through pavements, paths and safer street design.
- Reducing severance caused by roads where possible through path upgrades and traffic management.
- New housing should be located within walking distance of services.
- Pavement extensions, safe walking routes and appropriate speed limits should accompany settlement expansion.
- Provision of electric vehicle charging infrastructure in Lochaline and Drimnin.
- Enhancing sustainable tourism, allowing visitors to move around more easily without cars.

10.271 Nairnshire Local Place Plan (**THC023**) has identified the following priorities relating to Transport:

- Improving transportation infrastructure and connectivity for all modes of travel.
- Insufficient infrastructure, including transportation networks poses a barrier to business efficiency and growth.
- Address Nairn's challenges with the A96 running directly through its centre; including congestion, poor air quality, limited connectivity for active travel across the A96, and obstacles to high-quality placemaking along King St.
- Reduce reliance on private cars by promoting improving public transport to all parts of Nairnshire and nearby towns, carpooling, providing ample parking for bicycles, and developing park-and-ride facilities.
- The Ardersier Port site, part of the wider Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport has the potential for over-capacity of transport network.
- Accessibility and connection between key assets to be considered including transport hubs, to town centre, to beach.
- Nairn Harbour requires real solutions to manage parking and meet demand from campervan-based visitors.
- Require second access road to Lochloy, linking residents to nearby facilities and to reduce the traffic bottleneck at Merryton A96 Junction.
- Consider future development of Riverside Park, including strengthening its use as for motorhome overnight parking.
- Assessment for development of Tradespark Woods and Culbin Forest should consider access, parking, capacity and impact on the neighbouring housing.
- Privately owned Library car park should be part of a community-led Town Centre Plan and buildings audit to safeguard established needs in the town

centre. This must include protecting existing 82 parking spaces, part of the library building ownership structure, that support Nairn High Street viability.

10.272 Plana Àite Ionadail Shlèite/Local Place Plan for Sleat (**THC025**) has identified the following priorities relating to Transport:

Short-term Proposals (1-3 years)

- Public transport – enhanced bus service frequency; improved ferry service reliability; community transport expansion; integrated transport timetabling; better transport information systems.
- Active travel – extended walking path network; dedicated cycle routes; path maintenance programme; safe routes to school; promotion and encouragement of active travel.
- Infrastructure improvements – improved road maintenance programme; enhanced parking facilities; electric vehicle charging points; public transport infrastructure; traffic management measures.

Medium/Long-term Proposals (3-10 years)

- Comprehensive sustainable transport network.
- Enhanced ferry service capacity and short-notice access for residents.
- Integrated mobility solutions.
- Complete active travel network.
- Green transport infrastructure.

10.273 Stratherrick and Foyers Local Place Plan (**THC019**) has identified the following priorities relating to Transport:

- Safe walking and cycling: within villages (particularly linking schools, community facilities and bus stops) between villages (along minor roads and forest roads),
- Create mobility hub in Foyers at shop / car park / bus stops / public toilets,
- Potential ferry links from Inverfarigaig and Foyers piers.
- Exploring community transport possibility.

10.274 Torridon and Kinlochewe Local Place Plan (**THC020**) has identified the following priorities relating to Transport:

- Wester Ross Community Transport Scheme provides shared transport option to supplement the very limited public transport system in the area.
- New mountain bike tracks developed as part of hydro scheme tracks in Kinlochewe.
- Safe walking and cycle routes needed across the area and existing pavements are patchy and should be extended, or other safe routes signposted.

Summary of Implications for the Proposed Plan

Transport Appraisal

10.275 Discussions have taken place with Transport Scotland, where it was agreed that the HLDP has potential to impact the strategic transport network in certain areas of Highland. A transport appraisal that builds upon the data presented this chapter, and consistent with the requirements [Development Planning Transport Appraisal Guidance](#) (DPTAG), will be prepared to inform the content of the HLDP.

10.276 The scope of the transport appraisal was agreed with Transport Scotland in March 2026 (**THC094**). The Council's Agreed Levels of Appraisal Paper (**THC093**) illustrates, and explains that the following levels of appraisal will be undertaken in Highland:

- High/medium level in the Inner Moray Firth and Fort William areas.
- No appraisal elsewhere (Caithness, Sutherland, Wester Ross, Lochalsh, Skye and wider Lochaber).

10.277 The Agreed Levels of Appraisal Paper (**THC093**) also provides an overview of the tools that will be used to undertake appraisal, specifically regional and local transport models, and dependant on outputs additional localised modelling may be also required, alongside accessibility analysis and initial design and feasibility work.

10.278 Other key elements of the transport appraisal preparation process are set out in **THC093**, including:

- The approach to the consideration of the strategic rail and ferry network.
- The formation of a Project Working Group that will include officers from the Council's Development Plans and Transport Planning and HITRANS.
- That regular contact will be maintained with Transport Scotland, consistent with DPTAG figure 6 LDP Stages and engagement timeline.
- That the transport appraisal is intended to be published as a separate report alongside the HLDP, and relevant outcomes will be incorporated into HLDP and its Delivery Programme.

10.279 The Council intends to commission a suitably experienced transport consultant to undertake the transport appraisal in summer 2026. It is anticipated to take at least six months to complete the appraisal. The appraisal will be completed in time to allow it to inform the content of the HLDP.

Policy Context

10.280 HLDP will have regard to the extensive range of national, regional and local plans, strategies and guidance set out in the **Summary of Evidence**.

10.281 HLDP will embed key principles, in particular: NPF4 LDP requirements; NTS2 Sustainable Travel Hierarchy and Sustainable Investment Hierarchy; The Route Map to achieve a 20 per cent reduction in car kilometres by 2030, including its Renewed Policy Statement; active travel publications; road safety targets; support for EV infrastructure and RTS and LTS visions and objectives. Existing approaches to transport in area LDPs will be reviewed, in particular potential for further development of the transport strategy in the recently adopted IMFLDP2.

10.282 In preparing the HLDP spatial strategy, key documents will be reviewed, and where appropriate spatial elements embedded, including relevant:

- NPF4 national developments.
- IIP and IDP investment projects.
- PfG priorities.
- STPR2 recommendations.
- Rail Service Decarbonisation Action Plan actions.
- RTS and LTS Delivery Plan physical interventions.
- Active Travel Masterplan actions.
- IRSS transport improvements.
- Existing area LDP transport interventions.

Travel Patterns and Modes

10.283 The HLDP will recognise the persistent dominance of car-based travel in Highland. Given large parts of Highland are rural and sparsely populated, the plan will accept that vehicles will always be needed, including private cars, in some capacity to enable movement of people, goods and services. Despite this, the plan, consistent with the LTS, will recognise the real potential for modal shift in certain parts of Highland. This potential has been demonstrated by certain evidence presented, including Figure 10:9 that showed a significant proportion of Highland residents travel less than 10km to reach their place of work and the findings of the Inner Moray Firth Modal Shift Strategy.

10.284 Areas such as Inverness and main settlements that benefit from better public transport and active travel links have the greatest propensity to achieve modal shift away from car-dependency. The HLDP will consider the potential of promoting active and sustainable travel measures particularly within these settlements.

10.285 The HLDP will also need to consider a wider approach to help meet the needs of all current and future residents, particularly those with no access to private motorised transport, to be able to live a full life in all areas of Highland. This will require new and improved safe walking, wheeling, cycling, community transport and public transport options to access goods, services and leisure and social opportunities. Any improvements would also benefit visitors to Highland.

10.286 HLDP will require to consider appropriate locations for low/no car developments where mode shift to sustainable modes can be supported by good public transport and active travel connections and therefore have greater chance of success. A stronger evidence base is required to identify settlements that are currently over-provided for in terms of parking provision, in particular freely available parking. The Council aims to undertake this work in collaboration with wider Council services to inform HLDP.

10.287 A review of existing parking guidance may be required, reducing parking provision in areas where other options are available and any potential to reallocate under used car parks for another use.

Active Travel

10.288 Highland is characterised by significant areas of natural beauty which fuels leisure, recreational and tourist related active travel. However, lower proportions of Highland's communities use active travel modes for their immediate needs beyond the home such as work and education. HLDP will require to consider how development supports the sustainable transport hierarchy in making active travel the most convenient and attractive choice for daily needs. HLDP will recognise that high quality active travel infrastructure has significant potential to contribute towards modal shift. It will also recognise the importance of segregated cycling infrastructure, including in rural areas, to enable more people to cycle safely and comfortably between settlements.

10.289 HLDP will require to include an updated network of active travel route proposals which will support the implementation of the Active Travel Strategy and associated Active Travel Masterplans and Inner Moray Firth Active Travel Network as well other identified routes. Safeguarding land required for the delivery of projects, and seeking developer contribution towards their delivery will be considered.

10.290 HLDP is likely to involve a more strategic approach to where development is situated in the first instance, but will also require considering planned improvements to active travel within and between settlements as noted within the Delivery Plan. Given that a significant proportion of trips undertaken within Highland are between adjacent settlements, the development of strategic active travel networks will be important to enabling active travel connections. To support their use, these will likely require to be designed for a range of users.

10.291 Ongoing work to promote more consistent high-quality design within developments to support active travel connections that are not fragmented, will be required in collaboration with Council colleagues in Transport Planning to progress a suitable framework for HLDP.

10.292 Provision for measures that support active travel such as designated active travel routes will need to be accommodated within HLDP to ensure a clear framework for when such infrastructure will be required and how it ought to be funded. A safer, more coherent, more comfortable, more accessible network of active travel routes would also help unlock the significant potential for tourists to travel by active travel and public transport.

Public Transport

10.293 HLDP shall be informed by the evidence presented in relation to public transport patronage and frequency of services. IMFLDP2 has previously identified a settlement hierarchy based on sustainable transport links which has directed the spatial strategy and the distribution of development across the Inner Moray Firth Area. HLDP will require to review the settlement hierarchy considering planned infrastructure improvements to public transport infrastructure, particularly where this has the ability to provide significant improvements to locations for new stations, or service frequency.

10.294 HLDP will also require to direct development to the most sustainable locations, recognising opportunities to support the patronage of public transport services. Facilitating mixed-uses in close proximity to existing mobility hubs and rail stations, offers the best mechanism to ensure that public transport services are supported throughout the day for a broad range of journey purposes beyond a traditional commuting pattern in the morning and afternoon periods. The HLDP will also consider those train lines and stations with the most potential for increasing passengers in commuter markets. Undeveloped land in close proximity to existing public transport connections, in particular rail stations will be favourably considered against other factors in site selection for HLDP.

10.295 The HLDP will consider the impact of non-spatial public transport interventions, for example the introduction of the [£2 Bus Fare Cap Pilot](#) on bus passenger numbers and any requirements this may introduce for additional public transport infrastructure.

10.296 Provision for measures that support public transport such as designated bus lanes and bus gates will need to be accommodated within HLDP to ensure a clear framework for when such infrastructure will be required and how it ought to be funded.

10.297 The HLDP will also consider if land is required for additional public transport infrastructure, for example a growing number of bus companies are now providing longer distance services from Highland, this may have implications for the number of buses using the road network, as well as infrastructure required to support services, for example suitable stopping points and depots.

10.298 It is important for the plan to recognise that integrated, affordable, accessible public transport offers an alternative to car-based tourism and leisure trips both within and between settlements, as well as offering alternatives to the car for everyday journeys.

Road Based Transport

10.299 Capacity data presented in the road-based transport section of the chapter illustrates that traffic volumes have increased throughout much of Highland. It is thought that a significant contributor to this is traffic associated with tourism. The HLDP will recognise the adverse impact of increased traffic on achieving increases in the proportion share of active travel, particularly in terms of perceived safety where there is no segregated infrastructure. It will also support measures to reduce road-based severance in communities, acknowledging the potential this could bring to the urban environment as well as human health. Fuller evidence in relation to transport and health is detailed separately in **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**.

10.300 The timing of the delivery of major infrastructure upgrades will fundamentally determine whether development can progress in certain parts of Highland, particularly in Inverness, the A9 and A96 corridors, including Easter Ross. There is concern about the inter-relationship between major employment developments such as the ICFGF, electricity grid upgrades and the ability to support the major infrastructure and housing need to keep pace. With such uncertainty in some areas different scenarios may need to be considered for future development. The HLDP will review this issue and aim to take an informed, balanced and proportionate approach.

10.301 With input from the Council's Road Safety Team, any implications directly related to land use planning will be identified and be considered during the site selection process, including any mitigation to reduce the risk of collisions occurring.

10.302 A number of other considerations will inform the assessment of options within settlements – for example how well a direction for growth or site fits with the current active travel masterplan, public transport network, and proposed improvements to such facilities and services. There is also a significant role for prospective developers to carry out work to demonstrate how they will align with transport policies, including the LTS. The Call for Sites required such information to be provided to demonstrate the suitability of sites for development. Consideration will also need to be given to any identification of land for transport proposals and travel networks.

10.303 HLDP will consider the implications of increased HGV vehicles and abnormal loads particularly during construction of major developments. Mitigation is likely to be required such as traffic management and planned road

improvements. Assessment together with identification, management and co-ordination of mitigation requires resource. There is potential for cumulative developer contributions to be collected towards required named road upgrades.

10.304 HLDP will consider identifying sites for HGV-specific and general motorist rest areas / services, particularly on strategic long-distance routes such as the A9, A96 and A82. Related to this, it will also consider implications for the plan with regard electric vehicle charging facilities, both for cars and commercial vehicles as well as considering retention of legacy fuel supply.

Cross Boundary Considerations

10.305 Key transport network infrastructure crosses HLDP boundaries into several other authorities, including paths, rail lines and roads. There are improvements planned to a number of these assets and other requirements may be identified as a result of planned development. It will be important for the HLDP to collaborate with neighbouring authorities to identify any spatial implications of cross boundary infrastructure, including ports linking to other authorities by sea. The HLDP will consider if additional electric vehicle charging sites are required at selected Highland ports that would help with charging challenges on the northern and western isles.

Spatial Implications

10.306 **Chapter 9: Housing** outlines that the Highland indicative Local Housing Land Requirement (iLHLR) is 17,100 homes. This figure is based on the methodology within the [LHS 2023-2028](#) and is being used until the new HNDA is completed in the interests of allowing a draft to be circulated among key stakeholders.

10.307 This iLHLR represents a marked increase in comparison to adopted Highland LDPs. **Chapter 9: Housing** explains the methodology behind this increase in further detail. It outlines that there is a current estimated shortfall of just under 5,000 units in sites that are likely to be deliverable within the next 10 years relative to the iLHLR. The final LHLR for Highland once informed by a completed HNDA will potentially exceed 17,100 units.

10.308 The HLDP spatial strategy will seek to allocate land to deliver the iLHLR. Baseline information presented in this chapter's Summary of Evidence assists with understanding from a transport perspective potentially suitable settlements/locations for allocations. It is important that these are in line with the infrastructure investment hierarchies and sustainable travel hierarchies, and based on an understanding of where intervention will be required to support future development. A summary of the implications of this information for different areas of Highland is presented below.

Inner Moray Firth Area

10.309 The Inner Moray Firth area is the most densely populated and accessible part of Highland and contains the majority of its largest settlements. **Chapter 8 Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places** and **Chapter 9 Housing** have outlined that this area has delivered many of Highland's housing completions, and anticipate this is likely to continue, alongside the creation of significant numbers of additional jobs.

10.310 For these reasons it is anticipated that much of the deliverable housing land supply will continue to be directed to this area in the HLDP. Key implications for the plan of this that will be explored further as part of the transport appraisal include:

- Potential for a greater proportion of journeys to be made by active travel due to existing networks and planned improvements, for example the realisation of Active Travel Masterplan actions and Inner Moray Firth Active Travel Network Planning; National Cycle Network projects and further potential for disused railway lines.
- Focusing development within settlements that benefit from the presence of train stations and/or are located on key bus corridors, including Nairn, Inverness, Beauly, Muir of Ord, Conon Bridge, Dingwall, Alness, Invergordon and Tain. Existing infrastructure and planned improvements present significant opportunities for modal shift.
- Ensuring that the impact of any increased pressure on known areas of constraint are fully understood, including the following key areas:
 - Inverness - Raigmore Interchange, A9/A82, A82/Harbour Road, Inshes corridor and the A862 Telford Street between the A82 Telford Roundabout and King Brude Road.
 - Black Isle and Easter Ross – safety and capacity issues on A9 junctions at Munlochy, Evanton, Alness, Invergordon and Tain, as well as the A832 and B9161 as it passes through narrow main streets of Black Isle villages.
 - Dingwall and Seaforth - Safety concerns about Conon Bridge A835 junction and Muir of Ord village centre junctions, as well congestion with Dingwall.
 - Nairnshire - within Nairn localised congestion at peak periods.

10.311 It will be important for the transport appraisal to take into account several significant improvement projects, including A96 Dualling (including Nairn Bypass), A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton and Inshes Junction Upgrades, A9/A82 Longman Junction Improvement Scheme and A9 Junction upgrades/improvements, including A9 Tomich Junction, that will provide additional capacity and/or safety improvements within Inverness and selected Inner Moray Firth settlements. However, the delivery pathway of many key improvement projects, particularly in terms of timescales, remains uncertain. The

transport appraisal will test scenarios that reflect this uncertainty and where required identify additional mitigation measures.

Fort William

10.312 Fort William is located within south west Highland and is its second largest settlement. It suffers from long standing transport issues, such as trunk road resilience, journey time reliability and accessibility, particularly during the tourism season. It does however benefit from the presence of rail stations and is on a key bus corridor.

10.313 Currently, limited mitigation is planned to overcome existing transport issues, and, as such this may present constraints to development in Fort William. It will be important for the HLDP to be considered as part of the current ITP for Fort William. Dependent on the alignment of timescales for the ITP, relevant parts of its prioritised action plan maybe incorporated in the HLDP transport appraisal, the HLDP and within its Delivery Programme. The HLDP may have a role to play in establishing delivery pathways for selected ITP action plan priorities.

Elsewhere

10.314 Elsewhere in Highland, specifically Caithness, Sutherland, Wester Ross, Lochalsh, Skye and wider Lochaber are largely remote, rural areas. **Chapter 9 Housing** evidences relatively low levels of past and future programmed housing completions in these areas. This demonstrates limited pressure for growth in these areas of Highland.

10.315 The Summary of Evidence found that many of these areas do not suffer from development related transport issues. Often issues are that are experienced is a result seasonal traffic associated with tourism, or potentially in the future, as a result of construction traffic associated with energy projects. For these reasons, the transport appraisal will not assess the impact of the HLDP on the strategic road network in this part of Highland. Despite this, the spatial strategy for these areas will focus on the sustainable travel hierarchy and sustainable investment hierarchy. Additionally, local transport matters will be considered in the distribution of the iLHLR across settlements, and requirements specified in settlement and site statements in the HLDP and where appropriate within its Delivery Programme.

Transport Related Developer Contributions

10.316 The HLDP will continue to seek developer contributions towards transport improvements. It will seek to update the policy framework in a number of ways. This includes:

- Reviewing existing transport related developer contributions required by adopted LDPs, the Delivery Programme and summarised in Table 10:12.

- Incorporate relevant findings of the transport appraisal as part of its transport section and within settlement statements and its Delivery Programme.
- Ensure that any intentions to seek developer contributions are supported by robust evidence, including within the transport appraisal, in line with the requirements of Planning Circular 4/2025 Planning Obligations and Good Neighbour Agreements.
- Establishing the role of the HLDP and its Delivery Programme as part of delivery pathways for required mitigation.

Local Place Plans

10.317 It is clear from the validated and emerging Local Place Plans that transport is a fundamental issue for local communities. Many identify current transport issues and priorities for improvement, with common themes emerging on prioritising public and active transport enhancements. The HLDP will have regard to the content of Local Place Plans.

Statements of Agreement / Dispute

Agreement on Evidence

10.318 Key Agencies and stakeholders who responded and agreed with the evidence and content presented are Transport Scotland (**THC150**), Historic Environment Scotland (**THC035**), NatureScot (**THC088**), HITRANS (**THC149**), Network Rail (**THC152**), Moray Council (**THC151**), Walk, Wheel, Cycle Trust (formerly Sustrans) (**THC155**) and HC Active and Sustainable Travel Team (**THC200**).

10.319 SEPA (**THC089**) responded with no specific comments to make on this chapter as it only peripherally relates to their interests.

Disputes with Stakeholders

10.320 No disputes remain unresolved at the time of submission to Gate Check.

Information Gaps

10.321 At 30 April 2026, 20 communities in Highland have registered Local Place Plans. A summary of their content relevant to transport has been provided within this chapter. For those communities without Local Place Plans, it is understood that a number are currently being prepared and these would also be informative evidence sources relevant to this chapter of the Evidence Report. Any additional Local Place Plans registered will be considered in the production of the LDP if timeously available.

10.322 The summary of evidence section of this chapter presented a wide range of detailed evidence relating to transport matters in Highland. There are, however, some data gaps, these are listed below:

Active Travel

- Limited data is available on people walking, wheeling and cycling both within and between settlements, for both residents and visitors;
- Data on the extent and condition of active infrastructure across Highland, both adjacent to and remote from adopted roads;

Public Transport

- Passenger numbers for commercial and Council-operated bus services.
- Community Transport data including passenger numbers, co-ordination, technology solutions and utilising underused vehicles.

Road Based Transport

- Coverage of trunk road traffic counters – full data is not available from many counters due to technical issues collecting data or the timing of their installation.
- AADT for much of the local road network due to limited traffic counters and technical issues.
- Journey time data for long distance road travel in Highland due to technical issues with the volume of data that is able to be downloaded from INRIX.
- HGV Journey time data.
- Spatial data available to help assess the suitability of Highland road network to accommodate additional HGVs, currently the ARM for timber haulage is the only source available.
- No up-to-date Highland Council Road Asset Management Plan.
- Timing of delivery of nationally led infrastructure projects including the A96 Dualling and A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton.
- Council and private car park occupancy rates.
- Data on uptake of shared car schemes and lift sharing.

These information gaps can have consequences for effective spatial planning as well as wider planning of transport services and infrastructure. The limited data available means there is a risk of making decisions based on a partial picture of the movements of people and goods to, from and within the area.

Chapter 11 : Infrastructure

Information required by the Act regarding the issue addressed in this section	Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 as amended: Section 15(5)(d): - the infrastructure of the district. Section 15(5)(e): - how that infrastructure is used. Town and Country Planning (Development Planning) (Scotland) Regulations 2023: Regulation 9 - Have regard to the national waste management plan
NPF4 LDP Requirements	NPF4 Policy 18: - LDPs and delivery programmes should be based on an integrated infrastructure first approach. Plans should: - set out the infrastructure requirements to deliver the spatial strategy, informed by the evidence base, identifying the infrastructure priorities, and where, how, when and by whom they will be delivered; and - indicate the type, level (or method of calculation) and location of the financial or in-kind contributions, and the types of development from which they will be required. - Plans should align with relevant national, regional, and local infrastructure plans and policies and take account of the Scottish Government infrastructure investment hierarchy and sustainable travel and investment hierarchies in developing the spatial strategy. - Consistent early engagement and collaboration between relevant stakeholders will better inform decisions on land use and investment. NPF4 Policy 12: - LDPs should identify appropriate locations for new waste management infrastructure to support the circular economy and meet identified needs in a way that moves waste as high up the waste hierarchy as possible. NPF4 Policy 24 - LDPs should support the delivery of digital infrastructure, including fixed line and mobile connectivity, particularly in areas with gaps in connectivity and barriers to digital access

Links to Evidence

(**THC160**) Highland Council School Roll Forecasts
 (**THC133**) Highland Community Facilities
 (**THC132**) Highland Community Facilities Improvement Funding
 (**CONFIDENTIAL**)
 (**THC179**) Community Facilities with Identified Deficiencies in the Highland Delivery Programme
 (**THC142**) High Life Highland Feedback Delivery Programme 2026
 (**CONFIDENTIAL**)
 (**THC184**) Waste Service Evidence Submission on Site Capacity
 (**THC179**) Communities & Place Committee Report: Long-Term Waste Management, November 2024
 (**THC374**) Broadband infrastructure in Scotland: public review
 (**THC180**) Openreach Broadband Full Fibre Build Plan 2024
 (**THC181**) Highland GP Practice List Sizes
 (**THC182**) Highland Health Facilities
 (**THC134**) Collation of Highland GP Responses
 (**THC136**) Accessible Amendments to Houses Analysis
 (**THC137**) Residential Annex for Elderly Family Analysis
 (**THC183**) Highland Burial Ground Capacity

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
	THC713	Commission's Key Findings Report	19.03.26
	THC714	Planning Circular 4/2025 Planning Obligations and Good Neighbour Agreements	19.03.26
	THC715	Infrastructure Strategy 2027-2037	19.03.26
	THC716	Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP) 2021-22 to 2025-26	19.03.26
	THC717	Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal	19.03.26
	THC718	Highland Delivery Programme	19.03.26
	THC719	Highland Housing Land Audit (HLA)	19.03.26
	THC720	Highland School Roll Forecasts	19.03.26
	THC721	Highland Investment Plan	19.03.26
	THC722	HOIP 2024-2027	19.03.26
	THC723	Developer Contributions Supplementary Guidance	19.03.26
	THC724	Highland Learning Estate Strategy (LES)	19.03.26
	THC725	School Core Facts Summary	19.03.26
	THC726	HIP Progress Update - Full Council Mar 2025	19.03.26
	THC727	Highland School Roll Forecasts	19.03.26
	THC728	SRF methodology	19.03.26
	THC729	Gaelic Language Plan 2024-2029	19.03.26
	THC730	GME catchment areas	19.03.26
	THC731	High Life Highland	19.03.26
	THC732	Developer Contributions report to E&I Committee May 2023	19.03.26
	THC733	Inverness East Development Brief	19.03.26
	THC734	Highland Council Protocol for Identifying Developer Contributions	19.03.26
	THC735	Local Living Mapping	19.03.26
	THC736	Scottish Water Site Readiness Indicator	19.03.26
	THC737	Charter for Household Recycling	19.03.26
	THC738	Waste Management (Scotland) Regulations 2012	19.03.26
	THC739	Long-term Waste Management Communities & Place Committee Report	16.05.26v
	THC740	long term solutions for waste management	19.03.26
	THC741	Scottish Government Strategic Aim - Decarbonise Disposal	19.03.26
	THC742	Scotland's circular economy and waste route map to 2030	19.03.26

	THC743	Waste data by SEPA	19.03.26
	THC744	economic assessments of climate change impacts in the Highland Region	19.03.26
	THC745	Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Plan 2022	19.03.26
	THC746	Campervan and motorhome waste disposal guidance for independent developments	19.03.26
	THC747	Scottish Waste Environmental Footprint tool (SWEFT)	19.03.26
	THC748	2022 Household Waste Results Summary	19.03.26
	THC749	Making Things Last	19.03.26
	THC750	Environment Strategy: initial monitoring framework	19.03.26
	THC751	SEPA Household Waste Management 2024	19.03.26
	THC752	SEPA Waste Site Capacity 2024	19.03.26
	THC753	Scottish Government 2021 Digital Strategy	19.03.26
	THC754	Scottish Government Forging our Digital Future with 5G: A Strategy for Scotland	19.03.26
	THC755	2025 Digital strategy for Scotland	19.03.26
	THC756	Sustainable Digital Public Services Delivery Plan 2025-28	19.03.26
	THC757	Digital telecommunications: planning guidance	19.03.26
	THC758	Local Broadband Information	19.03.26
	THC759	Connected Nations update: Spring 2025	19.03.26
	THC760	Scottish Government R100 Data Insights	19.03.26
	THC761	Project Gigabit	19.03.26
	THC762	Broadband Infrastructure in Scotland: Public Review	19.03.26
	THC763	Gigabit Capable Broadband Connectivity Indicator	19.03.26
	THC764	Gigabit Infrastructure Subsidy Scheme	19.03.26
	THC765	Gigabit in Scotland Premises Subsidy Control - Highland	19.03.26
	THC766	Gigabit Scotland Public Review Report Revision 3	19.03.26
	THC767	Digital Connectivity Report to Full Council May 2025	19.03.26
	THC768	COHI Meeting in May 2025	19.03.26
	THC769	Health & Social Care Service Renewal Framework	19.03.26
	THC770	NHS Highland Strategy 2022-2027	19.03.26

THC771	NHS Hospitals	19.03.26
THC772	GP Practices	19.03.26
THC773	Pharmacies	19.03.26
THC774	GP Workforce and Practice List Sizes	19.03.26
THC775	UK best practice	19.03.26
THC776	NHS Highland GP Practice Boundaries	19.03.26
THC777	GP list size and demographics information	19.03.26
THC778	Culloden Medical Practice & Culloden Surgery	19.03.26
THC779	NHS Highland Workforce statistics June 2025	19.03.26
THC780	NHS Highland List of Dental Practitioners	19.03.26
THC781	NHS Highland consultant workforce data	19.03.26
THC782	Care homes across the Highland HSCP area	19.03.26
THC783	Care Homes for the Elderly	19.03.26
THC784	Independent Care Sector Home Overview and Collaborative Support Update 7 May 2025	19.03.26
THC785	Social Care Insights Dashboard 2022/23	19.03.26
THC623	Call for Development Sites	19.03.26
THC787	Highland Council Burial Grounds Map	19.03.26
THC788	Bereavement Service Update Report 2025	19.03.26
THC789	Public Health Scotland Death Rates by Council Area	19.03.26

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 that there are relevant crossovers between Infrastructure and other topics including:

- **Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy**
- **Chapter 5 Nature and Environment**
- **Chapter 6: Coastal Development and Aquaculture**
- **Chapter 7: Flood Risk Management**
- **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**
- **Chapter 9: Housing**
- **Chapter 10: Transport**
- **Chapter 12: Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings**
- **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**

Where apparent, the Council has referenced relevant linkages between policies areas throughout the chapter.

Summary of Evidence

11.1 This chapter presents the Council's evidence in relation to infrastructure capacity, other than transport which has been detailed separately in **Chapter 10: Transport**. 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:

- **Context and Approach**
- **Education**
- **Community Facilities**
- **Water and Waste Water**
- **Waste Management**
- **Digital Infrastructure**
- **Health and Social Care Needs**

Context and Approach

- 11.2 NPF4 Policy 18 Infrastructure First seeks to ensure that infrastructure considerations are integral to development planning and decision making, and potential impacts on infrastructure and infrastructure needs are understood early in the development planning processes as part of an evidence-based approach.
- 11.3 Policy 18 of NPF4 stemmed from work commissioned by the Scottish Government and completed by the Infrastructure Commission for Scotland in July 2020. The [Commission's Key Findings Report](#) set out a new, logical, coordinated and comprehensive approach to future infrastructure planning and investment across Scotland. Unfortunately, the Report's laudable recommendations have only been partially implemented and the principle of the approach has slowly been eroded by decisions taken by all infrastructure providers since. This section explains why the erosion of the principle of a coordinated approach to infrastructure investment makes it very challenging for any local planning authority and particularly Highland to implement Policy 18 through its LDP.
- 11.4 Moreover, this NPF4 Policy 18 approach has not, to date, been translated into development management decision making, court decisions or most importantly the capital programmes of infrastructure providers. This is perhaps unsurprising because the wording of NPF4 Policy 18, despite its title, doesn't justify the refusal of a planning application in a case where there is insufficient capacity in all relevant infrastructure and local facility networks to support that proposal. Sufficient capacity does not need to be created first for an application to be supported. It should however be stressed that there is case law based on previous planning decisions within Scotland and the UK that have informed the criteria with both Policy 18 and the updated [Planning Circular 4/2025 Planning](#)

Obligations and Good Neighbour Agreements. The Circular also provides more information on the criteria for a developer obligation to meet. Making reference to this will assist in ensuring that all stakeholders understand where developer contributions can reasonably be sought. At best, the policy requires proposals to “contribute to” and “address the impacts on” infrastructure capacity issues. “Contributing to” and mitigation to “address” are limited by the 5 planning obligation tests listed in part b) of Policy 18. It is sufficient for a developer to mitigate an infrastructure capacity issue as far as it is proportionate to do so relative to the impact of that developer’s proposal. Policy 18 does not require a comprehensive and effective solution to every infrastructure capacity issue prior to a permission being issued or development commencing. Put simply, all necessary infrastructure capacity does not have to come first.

- 11.5 This national planning policy context suggests that a new-style LDP that promoted a different, “embargo on development unless all infrastructure capacity is provided first” approach would be deemed incompatible with NPF4 and therefore be amended/rejected by a DPEA Reporter at Examination and/or by Scottish Ministers. Instead, this NPF4 context implies that at Gate Check stage, an LPA should gather evidence on infrastructure capacity, how that may change over time, and how future development can best be matched to where spare capacity exists or can most effectively be added by new investment whether that is by the public or private sector. This chapter explains how the Council has done this. It does not pretend that all future development in Highland will be supported by sufficient infrastructure capacity from day one of its completion. Such an approach would also be impracticable because of how infrastructure providers now operate in Scotland (and the wider UK).
- 11.6 Decisions on infrastructure capacity investment in Highland are made by a myriad of public and private organisations. There is very little spatial and temporal coordination of these decisions and investment. Like different statutory undertakers digging up the same street for different purposes over a short time period without coordinating those works then so too the UK Government, Scottish Government, Highland Council, Scottish Water, other public agencies and the private sector, for the most part, don’t coordinate their capital investment. This is understandable to a degree because each organisation has a separate capital programme, different political priorities, different investment drivers, different legacy problems, a different need and demand profile, and different legislative imperatives. For example, 95% of Scottish Water’s capital programme is about maintenance of ageing pipe networks and maintaining water quality standards rather than supporting new development proposals. The electricity local distribution network providers and Scottish Water provide local network improvements on a “first-developer-in-pays-first” principle rather than via a comprehensive assessment of need and demand for their networks from

new development sites. Similarly, Transport Scotland, NHS Highland and the Highland Council's Education Team concentrate on addressing the legacy of existing physical assets in less than optimum physical condition rather than strategically, adding new, future-proofed assets to support a coordinated spatial growth strategy. In many cases, because of expenditure constraints, adding infrastructure capacity to support new development is made on a "just-in-time" principle or in a reactive way as existing assets become unacceptably overloaded. Given this context, very few if any settlements in Highland have spare existing or programmed future capacity in all existing infrastructure and facility networks. There may be capacity for new development in the sewage works but not in the primary school. There may be capacity in the local road network but not in the local electricity distribution network.

- 11.7 Moreover, where spare capacity does exist it is not always in places where people want to live, work, be educated or enjoy recreation. Any comprehensive infrastructure and/or facility planning model should look at both supply and demand for that provision. In Highland, there are marked geographic differences in development pressure. Therefore, it is no surprise that there is a geographic mismatch between the supply and demand for most networks. For example, most Inverness City schools are close to or over capacity whereas most remoter area schools are threatened with closure. A "social engineering" spatial strategy to disperse economic opportunity and population to the remoter parts of Highland has been tried for the last 60 years but has been mostly unsuccessful. Put simply, moving people to where existing spare network capacity exists solely due to the fact that it exists, isn't a practicable spatial strategy.
- 11.8 Given the context explained above, the Council believes that the only logical way to approach the issue of infrastructure is to gather and assess all available and relevant evidence on the supply and demand for each infrastructure and facility network and then evolve a practicable spatial strategy that best matches new development locations to where spare capacity exists, is committed in short-term capital programmes or can be added at least cost to the public and private sector. This Chapter follows such an approach.
- 11.9 Infrastructure investment in Highland is allocated and delivered through various mechanisms, from Scottish Government, UK Government, local authorities and private sector. The Council are aware that a recent consultation has been launched on the [Infrastructure Strategy 2027-2037](#) and will require to develop a policy framework for infrastructure provision cognisant of how this strategy is implemented in practice if progressed during the lifespan of the HLDP.

National Infrastructure Investment

- 11.10 NPF4 defines a set of National Developments which will support the delivery of the spatial strategy. LDPs are required to identify and support National Developments relevant to their areas. National Developments within Highland include:
- Energy Innovation Development on the Islands
 - Pumped Hydro Storage
 - Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure
 - Circular Economy Materials Management Facilities
 - National Walking, Cycling and Wheeling Network
 - A Digital Fibre Network
- 11.11 However, many of these are not focused on providing additional infrastructure capacity directly to support housing and economic growth in Highland. For example, improvements to strategic renewable electricity generation and transmission infrastructure including pumped storage hydro are driven by Scottish and UK national aims of energy security, carbon emissions reductions and moving generated energy to areas of higher demand not about creating energy network capacity for new Highland homes and businesses. More positively, NPF4 referenced investment in the national walking, cycling, wheeling and digital fibre networks has had a direct benefit to Highland in enhancing local development potential.
- 11.12 Scottish Government's [Infrastructure Investment Plan \(IIP\) 2021-22 to 2025-26](#) set out the national infrastructure pipeline for capital investment and delivery within the timeframe (now extended to 2026-27). Specific major projects included in the 2021 IIP for Highland include A-road transport improvements (see **Chapter 10: Transport**), Highland Elective Care Centre, HMP Highland (replacement facility), Inverness and Highland City Region Deal (IHCRD) and capital grant funding available to local authorities for infrastructure across numerous workstreams and programmes. The Scottish Government draft national [Infrastructure Strategy for consultation](#) from January 2026, asserts that "affordable housing is critical infrastructure" which contrasts somewhat with the definition of essential infrastructure within NPF4 which indicates that housing is something separate, and that infrastructure is required to serve. The Council considers that in rural areas, the perceived distinction between the two is blurred. Access to housing in rural areas provides access to community life within the Highlands, and sustains communities, and supports them from the risks of depopulation.
- 11.13 The [Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal](#) sets out a 10 year joint investment agreement between the Highland Council, UK Government and Scottish Government. It was signed in January 2017 and projects were intended for

completion by end of January 2027. Many projects have been implemented but key ones remain to be taken forward, notably improvements to strategic road infrastructure at Inverness crucial to the expansion of the City of Inverness.

Highland Infrastructure Investment – LDP Delivery Programme

- 11.14 Like other local planning authorities, Highland's list of infrastructure deemed necessary to underpin the implementation of its existing LDPs is set out in its [Highland Delivery Programme](#). The Council's previous three Delivery Programmes for each of its LDPs have now been consolidated into a single Highland Delivery Programme. It is structured into three sections corresponding to the existing area LDPs. The Programme signposts for developers and communities the infrastructure commitments and requirements for each main settlement and those relevant to the wider spatial strategy. Where known, timescales, financial amounts, locations and funding partners are specified.
- 11.15 The [Highland Delivery Programme](#) is also aligned with the latest [Highland Housing Land Audit \(HLA\)](#) which predicts the phasing of new housing and therefore the likely level of future developer contributions for each main settlement. The Programme also takes account of the latest [Highland School Roll Forecasts](#), which outline the anticipated changes to pupil rolls in primary and secondary schools in Highland which in turn affect where education developer contributions are triggered.
- 11.16 One of the most critical aspects of infrastructure investment to stress is that in Highland, a wider package of investment mechanisms is required to provide adequate investment into diverse communities. With substantial areas having no presence from major volume-housebuilders, the Council has long recognised that alternate plans are therefore required, beyond the Delivery Programme alone. The following sections therefore set out a range of measures underway.

Highland Investment Plan

- 11.17 The Highland Council's own capital programme has recently been rebranded as the [Highland Investment Plan](#) (HIP). The HIP is subject to regular review with any significant amendments in turn being reflected within the Highland Delivery Programme and is also intended to align and support the three strategic priorities of the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan ([HOIP 2024–2027](#)). The HIP does reference partner funding such as Scottish Government grant for new schools and there is a stated desire for asset reconfiguration and co-location with other public sector partners in the new buildings created by the Plan's investment. The Plan commits £2.1 billion of capital funding over a twenty-year period, based on the ring fencing of 2% council tax per annum, or an equivalent

revenue stream. These funds will be capitalised to create an investment fund that will be used to tackle the major capital challenges that Highland Council faces: transport and roads; schools and community facilities; depots and offices – as part of work towards a single public estate and integrated community operating model. One of the key objectives is to initiate a programme of improvements to the school estate recognising that 92 of the 196 Highland operational schools currently rated as “C – Poor” for condition and/or suitability, which is discussed in **Education** below.

Developer Contributions

- 11.18 The Highland Council [Developer Contributions Supplementary Guidance](#) (DCSG) sets out Highland Council's approach to mitigating the impacts of development on services and infrastructure by seeking fair and realistic developer contributions to the delivery of such facilities. This guidance forms part of the Council's approved development plan in terms of sections 24 and 25 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 as amended.
- 11.19 The [DCSG](#) is applicable across the HwLDP area and still has some relevance within the Highland Council part of the Cairngorms National Park Authority area because the Council provides education, waste and transport services within that area.
- 11.20 The Council recognises that the [DCSG](#) will fall on the adoption of the new HLDP and therefore wishes to embody the principles if not all of the detail of its future approach to infrastructure developer contributions within the new HLDP. Table 11:1 summarises existing developer contribution requirements by development type, scale and type of infrastructure.

Table 11:1 Development Types that require Developer Contributions in Highland

Development Type	Schools	Community Facilities	Affordable Housing	Transport	Green Infrastructure	Water and Waste *1	Public Art
Residential *2	Yes	Yes (4 or more homes) *3	Yes (4 or more homes) *4	Yes	Yes (4 or more homes)	Yes	Yes
Business	No			Yes			
Industrial (inc. energy)							
Retail							
*1 - For all scales of projects, water/waste connections are required and these utility costs are not usually covered by developer contributions. These should be budgeted for separately, forming part of the developer's project costs. Scottish Water recommends that the developer submits a Pre Development Enquiry Form so that these network costs can be budget for. *2 - Including affordable housing and any tourist accommodation suitable for permanent residential occupancy. *3 - Developments of less than 4 homes which form part if a wider site are required to contribute towards community facilities. *4 - Developments of less than 4 homes which form part of a wider site, and all homes in the Cairnrooms National Park, are required to contribute.							

Education

- 11.21 Table 11:2 illustrates the number of schooling facilities across Highland regions and divides the education estate into a number of categories; High Schools, Primary Schools, Nurseries, Additional Support Needs (ASN) and Gaelic Medium Education (GME) which will be explored in detail.

Table 11:2 School distribution across Highland

Highland Region	High Schools	Primary Schools	Nurseries	ASN	GME
Badenoch & Strathspey	2	8	7		
Caithness	2	16	12	1	
Inverness	6	36	34	1	1
Lochaber	4	23	15		1
Nairn	1	4	4		
Ross & Cromarty	7	45	35	1	
Skye & Lochalsh	2	20	16		1
Sutherland	4	14	10		
Total	30	166	133	3	3

Highland's Current Learning Estate Strategy (LES)

- 11.22 In common with other authorities, the Council is directing its education facility capacity investment into new, integrated (often ages 3-18 campus) provision and/or where it is most needed to improve the physical condition and/or suitability of older school buildings. As described in **Context and Approach**, future-proofing for education needs triggered by future housing development is a less important factor. Indeed, Scottish Government grant levels for new high schools in Highland have been limited to like-for-like replacements in capacity terms not for future-proofing. Any additional "headroom" is to be funded from additional Council capital allocations or more commonly Council borrowing the loan charges for which are met by "income" from future developer contributions. One exception to this approach is the new primary school envisaged for the Tornagrain but this has been necessitated by a significant breach of the capacity of the existing primary school at nearby Croy not provided in advance on an "infrastructure first" basis. More prudently, many Highland primary schools are now constructed in a phased, modular way so additional wings can be added off a general/common purpose rooms core. From the outset, a large enough site is purchased and serviced to allow for such phased expansion. This is a principle that the Council encourages other infrastructure providers to adopt and the HLDP will include sufficiently sized allocations to support this approach.

- 11.23 The geographic mismatch between the supply and demand for Highland education infrastructure is very challenging when combined with the condition/suitability issue. Some of the oldest school properties in the remoter parts of Highland have declining rolls. Physical condition issues justify investment but growth issues do not. A lack of development pressure also means little or no prospect of education developer contributions. Despite this, the Council wishes to invest in all its communities partly in the hope that new public investment will help revitalise more fragile settlements. Accordingly, capital funding has been allocated for 11 schools at Beaulay, Charleston, Dingwall, Dunvegan, Fortrose, Inverness High, and Thurso in March 2025. The previous capital programme approved in 2023 included projects at Broadford Primary, Nairn Academy, Tain Campus, and a new primary school at Tornagrain. Construction work is underway on the Nairn and Tain projects. Only the Tornagrain Primary and Charleston Academy investments are required as a direct result of new housing growth.
- 11.24 The Highland Learning Estate Strategy (LES) sets out the principles and priorities to drive the development of the learning estate across Highland. One of the key objectives of the LES is a programme of improvements to the Council's school estate that seeks to bring all schools to, or sustain them at, B/B ratings or better for condition/suitability, as 92 of the Council's 197 operational schools currently rated as "C – Poor" for condition and/or suitability.
- 11.25 LDP Guidance for NPF4 Policy 18, requires LDPs and Delivery Programmes to be integrated infrastructure first. This includes capacity, condition, needs and deliverability. The condition of Highland's education estate is an important evidence consideration which will be required alongside capacity. Despite whether these schools will be eligible for developer contributions or not.
- 11.26 Table 11:3 highlights the condition and suitability of both primary and secondary schools across Highland. With the most common condition and suitability score for primary schools being categorised as B. For secondary schools there is a much broader mix of categories.

Table 11:3 Education condition, suitability by category (School Core Facts Summary)

	Condition				Suitability			
	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
Primary Schools	28	85	52	0	27	82	56	0
% of total	17%	51.5%	31.5%	0%	16%	50%	34%	0%
Secondary Schools	10	7	11	2	11	7	12	0
% of total	33%	23%	37%	7%	37%	23%	40%	0%

- 11.27 The LES also aligns with the local priorities set out within the HIP vision for developing its learning estate. This means that HIP school investments are generally in locations where improved school estates are needed that would have been unlikely to have been provided by developer contributions owing to the occupancy of the schools remaining below the qualifying threshold of 90%.
- 11.28 The methodology and rationale for selecting the schools for investment under HIP are:
- those with the poorest condition and suitability ratings as shown in the [School Core Facts Summary](#).
 - instances where multiple schools with poorest condition and suitability ratings in one town can be improved in tandem under a joint programme.
 - Instances where joint use of assets and community facilities can be provided with other agencies through Points of Delivery (PODs).
- 11.29 The HIP schools committed for initial investment, as agreed by a [Committee of the Full Council on 27 March 2025](#) are therefore:
- Dingwall: 1 Primary (over 400 pupils) and 1 Special School (over 50 pupils); cost range £40M to £50M
 - Thurso: 1 Secondary School (around 750 pupil) and 3 Primary Schools (over 600 pupils); cost range £80M to £100M
- 11.30 A new generation of community facilities is envisioned for the Highlands, with Points of Delivery (PODs) seeing a range of public services brought together in a single location. Works will range from relatively minor improvements to fabric and retrofitting, to major renovations and new build schools, linked to our Community Points of Service Delivery (POD) approach to future delivery of Council and partner services across all of our Highland Communities.

School Roll Forecasts (SRF)

- 11.31 Quantifying the supply and demand for Highland's existing and future education infrastructure is done through [Highland School Roll Forecasts](#) (SRF). These are re-run on an annual basis using the latest school intake figures the latest Housing Land Audit site programming assumptions and taking account of population, household, GP registrations, house completions, school capacity and pupil product data. The 15-year forecasts for each school are published on the Council's website. Each forecast contains a Red-Amber-Green analysis of how close the forecasted roll is to the 90% physical capacity of the school's building(s). 90% is chosen to allow sufficient lead time for a new capital programme project to be worked up. Also, many schools find it difficult to function without at least 10% spare physical capacity. Additional space is required for unforeseen or regular operational issues such as the need to divide classes or groups of pupils

for short periods of time. The [SRF methodology](#) provides a simplified approach to determining the effect of residential development on the school estate. A baseline forecast is updated and published annually, which also acts as a template that can now be used for modelling future school rolls based on testing various potential development and school estate management scenarios.

Table 11:4 Highland Schools already operating above 90% of capacity (SRF)

School Name	Type	Current Capacity
Charleston Academy	Secondary	94%
Beaully Primary	Primary	95%
Kinmylies Primary	Primary	110%
Kirkhill Primary	Primary	90%
Tomnacross Primary	Primary	95%
Kirkhill Primary (Nursery)	Nursery	110%
Croy Primary	Primary	119%
Croy Primary (Nursery)	Nursery	90%
Dingwall Primary	Primary	94%
Avoch Primary	Primary	96%
Avoch Primary (Nursery)	Nursery	166%
Glenurquhart Primary	Primary	99%
Carrbridge Primary	Primary	100%
South Lodge Primary (Nursery)	Nursery	91%
Inverness Royal Academy	Secondary	90%
Lochardil Primary	Primary	103%
Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis (Nursery)	Nursery	148%
Hilton Primary (Nursery)	Nursery	94%
Holm Primary (Nursery)	Nursery	105%
Lochardil Primary (Nursery)	Nursery	106%
Millburn Academy	Secondary	105%
Raigmore Primary (Nursery)	Nursery	220%
Auldearn Primary (Nursery)	Nursery	100%
Cawdor Primary (Nursery)	Nursery	90%
Millbank Primary (Nursery)	Nursery	95%
Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh	Primary	91%
Craighill Primary	Primary	132%
Knockbreck Primary (Tain)	Primary	104%
Miller Academy Primary (Nursery)	Nursery	115%
Wick High School	Secondary	96%

- 11.32 The annual [Housing Land Audit \(HLA\)](#), further detailed in **Chapter 9: Housing**, provides the base information for annual SRF's. Since 2016, the HLA has been prepared in parallel with the creation of the annual SRF's. In addition to programmed build out rates for LDP site allocations, allowance for smaller windfall development sites is also applied to the forecasts. Using the residential development information, estimated build out rates are aggregated by primary catchment and an updated windfall contribution is added to give a year-by-year additional housing count for each. These values are combined with the Pupil Product Ratios to predict the number of additional pupils expected per school for each year forecast. Total school rolls forecasted are reported against school capacities to highlight current and future school's capacity constraints or where schools have excess capacity.
- 11.33 The [latest 2024/2025 SRF](#) for each Highland school is supplied and owing to the number of over 300 schools and nurseries, these are not included in the body of the evidence report, although 53 are forecast to breach 90% physical capacity for at least one year of the 15 year forecasting period and 30 are currently operating at above 90% capacity, with some in fact operating well above 100% of their intended capacity as highlighted in Table 11:4. By contrast, 279 schools/nurseries are not anticipated to breach 90% within the next 15 years, and 176 are forecast to see their school roll decline which are spread throughout much of the remote rural and fragile areas discussed in **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**. Unsurprisingly, physical capacity issues are most prevalent in the Inner Moray Firth area where development pressure is higher than elsewhere in Highland.

Gaelic Medium Education (GME)

- 11.34 The Council has a focus on increasing Gaelic usage and the number of Gaelic speakers in its [Gaelic Language Plan 2024–2029](#). The Council continues to be committed to providing and enhancing GME, recognising this as one of the key drivers in sustaining and developing Gaelic. Education is one of the four themes of the [Gaelic Language Plan 2024–2029](#) where the Council seeks to:
- Deliver continued promotion and growth in GME and GLE at all levels including delivery of Gaelic as a modern language, with 70% of primary schools providing Gaelic as an L2 and L3 to increase the provision of Gaelic across the authority.
 - Expand the delivery of GME with increased secondary subject delivery, creation of new standalone schools and new early years, primary and secondary provision.
- 11.35 The growth of GME has been rapid and successful nationally, and the Council is currently the largest provider of GME, using both units within mainstream schools

and standalone GME schools. Despite this however, GME schools/units have not until now been included within the formal developer contributions process, as GME schools/units previously had no formally defined catchment areas that could be used in operational terms, and it was previously considered challenging to predict how increased development could be modelled to forecast the impact on GME schools/units specifically. The current SRF assumption is that 100% of projected pupils from new housing go to the mainstream school for that catchment. A new process would be needed to more accurately reflect pupil behaviour and that may open up the possibility of taking contributions for GME.

Table 11:5 Gaelic Education Data Summary and Capacity 2024

School Name	Total P1–7	GME P1–7	% GME	% Δ 23–24	Planning Capacity	% Occupancy
Acharacle Primary	51	39	76%	-1%	75	68%
Broadford Primary	62	34	55%	+3%	125	49%
Bun-Sgoil Shlèite	53	41	77%	-4%	100	51%
Bun-Sgoil Stafainn	33	22	67%	-11%	50	70%
Craighill Primary	202	49	24%	—	150	131%
Dingwall Primary	420	70	17%	+2%	442	94%
Dunvegan Primary	50	23	46%	+4%	100	50%
Gairloch Primary	48	14	29%	+7%	124	40%
Glenurquhart Primary	151	16	11%	—	150	98%
Kilmuir Primary	16	13	81%	+12%	74	22%
Lochcarron Primary	44	14	32%	—	100	44%
Mallaig Primary	61	25	41%	—	99	66%
Millbank Primary	254	33	13%	—	332	76%
Mount Pleasant Primary	166	8	5%	—	243	69%
Newtomore Primary	107	37	35%	—	50	88%
Plockton Primary	52	37	71%	—	75	69%
Ullapool Primary	118	70	59%	—	172	68%
Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar*	151	151	100%	—	150	101%
Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh*	172	172	100%	—	188	91%
Bun-sgoil Ghaidhlig Inbhir Nis*	220	220	100%	—	281	78%
* Standalone GME school						

11.36 There is anecdotal evidence of parents wishing to place their child(ren) within a GME school/unit not only for the benefits of a bilingual early education but also because, often, class sizes and therefore pupil/teacher ratios are lower relative to

the adjoining mainstream school. Such parent placement requests are very difficult to predict because these comparative pupil/teacher ratios are very fluid. In some instances, parents simply wish to use GME because the primary school is newer or closer than the mainstream alternative

11.37 In 2023, the Council completed statutory consultations to create GME catchment areas for 15 of the 20 primary schools in the Highland area that offer GME. Table 11:5 illustrates that GME enrolment is growing in numerous schools and represents a significant share of total school occupancy, in both the three standalone schools and in the GME units.

11.38 In reviewing HLDP policy on developer contributions, it is considered that with formal catchment areas in place and with evidence of GME occupancy and growth, it would be possible to develop a framework for including GME schools within developer contributions. However, the overall level of contributions per pupil should not be increased. The catchment pupil population both existing and projected should be compared to the education facility capacity (both mainstream and GME) available to serve it. Contributions would be sought for any necessary additional capacity directly attributable to new development whether that additional capacity was required via “mainstream” or GME accommodation. This may be linked to the formal designation of Gaelic Areas of Significance as discussed in **Chapter 8: Business, Economy, Tourism and Productive Places**.

11.39 The capacity, condition and suitability of standalone GME schools is illustrated in Table 11:6.

Table 11:6 GME school condition suitability and capacity (School Core Facts Summary)

School	Condition	Suitability	Pupil roll	Planning capacity	% Occupancy
Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar	A	A	156	221	71
Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh	A	A	169	188	90
Bun-sgoil Ghaidhlig Inbhir Nis	A	A	230	281	82
Bun-Sgoil Shleite	B	B	53	100	53

ASN

11.40 The capacity, condition and suitability of standalone ASN schools across Highland are illustrated in Table 11:7.

Table 11:7 ASN school condition suitability and capacity (*School Core Facts Summary*)

School	Condition	Suitability	Pupil roll	Planning capacity	% Occupancy
Drummond	A	A	116	N/A	N/A
St Clement's	C	C	54	N/A	N/A
St Duthus	A	B	26	N/A	N/A
The Bridge	B	B	0	N/A	N/A

Nurseries

- 11.41 There is increasing pressure on Highland's nursery estate. This results not just from increasing numbers of children but additionally when there are increased Care Inspectorate requirements for space and capacity which results in some nurseries emerging as overcapacity. The Council does not currently take consistent developer contributions directly for nursery accommodation even though new development impacts upon its capacity. However, there is Scottish Government grant assistance to provide for the expansion of nursery accommodation that in Highland was and still is often within primary schools. Several Highland primary schools have capacity issues because of the lack of a separate building within which to accommodate nursery pupils.
- 11.42 The Council intends to continue to provide separate nursery accommodation as grant assistance and developer contributions allow. Such provision usually frees up spare capacity within the associated primary school which can support new development. Predicting the number and location of nursery accommodation demand is another reason not to formalise developer contributions towards its provision as there is conflicting data on this issue. As demonstrated in **Chapter 9: Housing**, Highland birth numbers are on a downward trend but the age profile of net (in-)migration has seen an increase in the 0-5 age cohort. Potential changes to preschool hours entitlement through national expansions also result in this being an evolving area that is difficult to plan for in current circumstances.

Home Schooling

- 11.43 Highland records of home schooling are not stored centrally in SEEMiS, the Council's formal education records management tool, however, each area retains their own list of home-schooled students. Families that move into Highland do not have to inform the authority that their children are home-schooled. This may result in a less accurate figure of home schooling known and understood by the Council, and for that reason no adjustments are made to the Council's SRF modelling to account for trends in home schooling.

Developer contributions towards education

- 11.44 Through the [DCSG](#), all residential development, including affordable homes is currently required to contribute to school estate infrastructure where capacity constraints are identified, with the exception of one-bedroom homes, tourist accommodation and some other types of shared or institutional accommodation. School contributions are typically ringfenced to the individual institution. Contributions are taken according to three levels of contribution; 1 and two classroom extensions and major extension new school / costs. Land costs to support major extensions or new school provision are collected on an area specific basis.

Highland Investment Plan (HIP)

- 11.45 The [HIP](#) is a long-term investment programme, which incorporates the commitments contained in the existing, approved, core five-year capital programme and adds to new investment commitments in roads and transport, as well as a longer-term strategy for the school, depot and office estate. The HIP is part of the wider drive towards Council asset reconfiguration, and one of the key drivers of the delivery plan. This is in recognition of the number of assets that are in poor condition or no longer retain their prior functionality.
- 11.46 The HIP requires that we relinquish assets as required, refurbish those we are committed to, and create new builds as part of a place making plan. One of the key objectives of HIP is to initiate a programme of improvements to Highland's school estate, with 92 of Highlands 196 operational schools currently rated as "C – Poor" for condition and/or suitability.

Tertiary education

- 11.47 **Chapter 9: Housing** which includes some early results of the 2026 HNDA, provides an assessment of student accommodation needs connected with the University of the Highlands and Islands. Highland is well served in terms of the size and location of those facilities as shown in Table 11:8. Most are within modern purpose-built accommodation. With student numbers not expected to increase significantly then there is unlikely to be any significant lack of tertiary education infrastructure capacity requiring to be addressed through the new HLDP.
- 11.48 The Highland HNDA includes assessment of student accommodation needs from UHI and other facilities across Highland. Once complete, the HNDA will inform capacity numbers of student accommodation across Highland. Further details of which can be found in **Chapter 9: Housing**.

Table 11:8 Tertiary Education Settings in Highland

Tertiary Education Facilities	Location
Alness Campus (UHI)	Alness
Auchtertyre Campus (UHI)	Auchtertyre
Scottish School of Forestry	Balloch
Broadford Campus (UHI)	Broadford
Dornoch Campus (UHI)	Dornoch
Fort William Campus (UHI)	Fort William
Gairloch Campus (UHI)	Gairloch
Halkirk Campus (UHI)	Halkirk
Inverness Campus (UHI)	Inverness
Highland Theological Collage (UHI)	Dingwall
Kilchoan Campus (UHI)	Kilchoan, Lochaber
Kinlochleven Campus (UHI)	Kinlochleven
Mallaig Campus (UHI)	Mallaig
Portree Campus (UHI)	Portree
Sabhal Mòr Ostaig (UHI)	Sleat, Isle of Skye
Strontian Campus (UHI)	Strontian, Lochaber
Thurso Campus (UHI)	Thurso
Ullapool Campus (UHI)	Ullapool

Community Facilities

Infrastructure

- 11.49 Highland has over 800 facilities that can be broadly defined as community facilities, those we are aware of are listed in **THC133**. These range from libraries and leisure centres operated by [High Life Highland](#), to town, village and church halls and other privately operated clubs, recreation and sports facilities. A number of community facilities also serve a dual purpose as cultural and creative facilities, for example museums and galleries, these are explained further in **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**.

Condition

- 11.50 Due to the vast number of facilities throughout Highland and that are owned and operated by numerous different organisations, comprehensive data was not available on their condition. It is known however that the condition of community facilities varies throughout Highland. The Council are aware that some facilities operated by [High Life Highland](#) are likely to require investment for maintenance and/or expansion purposes, these are highlighted in **THC133**. Some information

on condition is also provided in registered LPPs, a summary is provided below within the **Summary of Local Place Plan Priorities** section of this chapter.

- 11.51 A number of community facilities in Highland have benefitted from funding from a range of sources, including Community Regeneration Funding, developer contributions and Ward Discretionary Funding, a summary is provided within **THC132**. Funding has been used for various purposes, for example towards increased capacity, condition, energy efficiency and accessibility improvements.

Current Approach to Developer Contributions

- 11.52 The Highland policy framework currently requires developments of four or more homes to contribute towards the enhancement or creation of new community facilities in areas where a deficiency has been identified.
- 11.53 The [DCSG](#) explains that contributions for indoor community facilities may be required for leisure/community centres, community halls or libraries. The catchment area for these contributions is usually based on secondary school catchment areas, however in some instances it is based on development brief boundaries. The rate per home for indoor community facilities is specified in the [DCSG](#) at £1,019 per home. This rate is based upon the costs for delivery of a typical community hall. This rate was increased in line with the Building Construction Information Service (BCIS) Index to £1,568 per home, following a report on Developer Contributions that was presented to the [Council's Economy and Infrastructure Committee on 4 May 2023](#).
- 11.54 The [DCSG](#) explains that contributions towards outdoor facilities may be required for a district park or any specially designed playing surface, including: pitches for football; cricket; rugby; shinty; hockey; bowling greens; tennis courts; multi-sports courts; skate parks; cycle / athletics tracks; and associated land acquisition, ground enabling works, changing facilities, lighting, fencing, spectator areas and parking. Contributions are calculated on a case-by-case basis and the indoor facility contribution rate should be used as a guide.
- 11.55 The [DCSG](#) outlines that community facility contributions will either be required for indoor or outdoor facilities, but not typically for both. Where the need for both occurs, the higher of the two contribution rates applies. A number of development briefs for strategic expansion areas in Highland specify other contribution levels for new community facilities, both indoor and outdoor, for example the [Inverness East Development Brief](#).
- 11.56 The use of developer contributions funds is limited to helping address known deficiencies in community facility provision in terms of capacity that require to be mitigated to serve future development, rather than condition or other improvements.

Needs

- 11.57 Community facilities in Highland that are known to have capacity deficiencies are contained within the [Highland Delivery Programme](#). It identifies 35 community facilities where developer contributions may be sought, specifies the nature of expansion required and the catchment area liable for contributions. This is summarised in **THC179**. For a number of these facilities, developer contributions are committed from relevant developments and continue to be sought, these are shown in **THC132**. In June 2026 [High Life Highland](#) provided information to inform an update of the current [Highland Delivery Programme](#). This is provided in **THC142**, and provides an updated overview of infrastructure requirements, timescales and costs related to improvements for a range of [High Life Highland](#) facilities.
- 11.58 Community facilities that are identified are currently largely limited to [High Life Highland](#) operated facilities. This is due to [High Life Highland](#) being a key operator of community facilities throughout Highland and delivering services on behalf of the Council. There is currently some scope for contributions to be distributed to other community facilities, as contained in the [Highland Delivery Programme](#) and **THC179** or in line with the [Council's Protocol for Identifying Developer Contributions](#). By taking into account evidence currently available, as well as new evidence as part of a future "Call for Ideas" there is scope for contributions to be sought towards a range of additional community facilities, and as part of this review potentially applying more 'local' catchment areas than secondary school catchment areas where appropriate.
- 11.59 Reviewing the evidence referenced above makes it clear that challenges remain to delivering new and improved community facilities. There is potential for faster delivery pathways by, for example the new plan introducing a requirement for all new homes to provide developer contributions towards community facilities where a deficiency has been identified and by reviewing the level of developer contributions sought. **Chapter 9 Housing** explains that small scale windfall development (1-3 homes) delivered an average of 258 units per year since 2012, this represents roughly one quarter of annual average annual completions in Highland. If these homes were required to contribute towards community facilities in appropriate circumstances, this would result in a significant uplift in the level of contributions received towards facilities.
- 11.60 As outlined above, the current developer contribution rate applied for community facility contributions is based upon the costs for delivery of a typical community hall. This rate may not always be reflective of actual costs of improvements to new and improved community facilities throughout Highland. It is important that this rate is reviewed and potential explored for a different range of rates that are tailored to specific named improvements.

- 11.61 [LDP Guidance](#) for Proposed Plans explains that provision for community facilities should be considered according to local need as evidenced through community engagement and assessed against existing provision in areas where there is no, limited or inaccessible provision. The Council will undertake a public Call for Ideas during 2026. A key element of the Call for Ideas will focus on seeking views on the adequacy of existing community facilities within settlements. This will help to inform the approach taken in the Proposed Plan.
- 11.62 Some data on existing provision and needs is currently available for many areas of Highland from validated LPPs and Area Place Plans (APPs). A summary of community facility needs from each Highland LPP is provided below within the **Summary of Local Place Plan Priorities** section of this chapter. It is clear from this review of LPPs that improved community facilities are a key priority for many Highland communities. This includes a desire for new and improved indoor and outdoor facilities to facilitate a range of services and activities. LPPs are not being prepared by all communities across Highland and therefore are an incomplete solution to identifying needs for community facilities across all of Highland that the Call for Ideas is anticipated to mitigate.
- 11.63 The Council's [Local Living Mapping](#) also helps to inform an assessment of existing community facilities provision. Figure 11:1 shows, in blue, areas that can be reached within a 10 minute (800m) walking distance from community facilities in Dingwall. This mapping can be amended and analysed for the HLDP area to help understand where those areas are that have no, limited or inaccessible provision. For Highland, it may be appropriate for varying accessibility thresholds to be applied based upon the nature of different geographical areas. [Local Living Mapping](#) is explained fully in **Chapter 13 Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**.

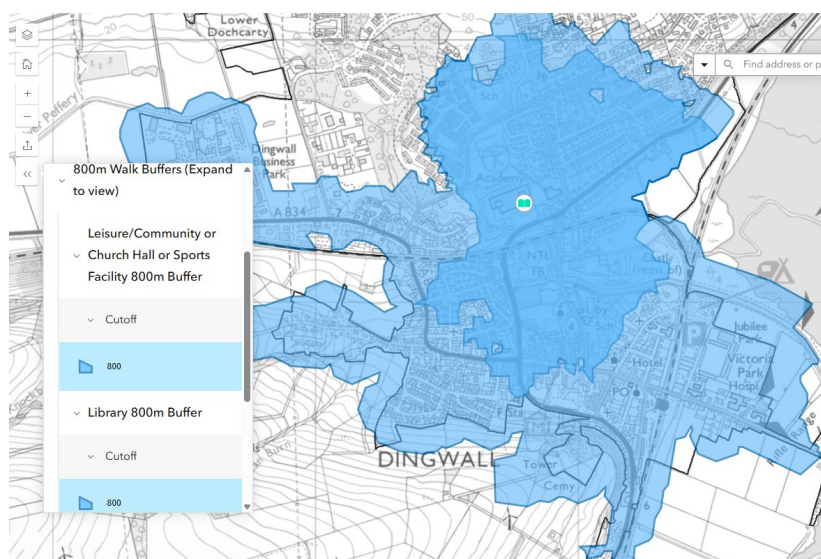


Figure 11:1 Highland Local Living Mapping - Walkable Community Facilities Extract

Water and Waste Water

Public Infrastructure

- 11.64 NPF4 Policy 22 seeks to support community resilience to climate change by avoiding development in areas of flood risk or locations which cannot be readily connected to the public water and sewerage network. Highland's water and sewerage network covers a vast geographic area and for the most part is dated and in need of refurbishment to maintain the resilience of water supply and to avoid adverse impacts on the water environment. Unsurprisingly therefore, Scottish Water has concentrated its past and is expected to focus its future capital investment programme on leakage reduction, replacing existing assets, improving the quality of discharged water and combining smaller individual watered and sewered network areas to improve resilience in the event of any "outage" in any individual network. As discussed in the context section, expanding the capacity of assets to support uncommitted (even though LDP allocated) housing and economic growth opportunities is not a priority.
- 11.65 Scottish Water is required by Scottish Government to support growth projects but only where these are committed to happen. For example, if the project has planning permission is controlled by a developer with a proven track record of delivery and there is an annual specified build programme then there is sufficient certainty for Scottish Water to amend its capital programme to create or add the necessary water and/or sewerage capacity. Even then there can be a significant lead-time. A first-time supply sewerage scheme typically takes 7 years from inception to completion. The public are often confused by the lack of Scottish Water objection as a consultee on a planning application where there is a capacity issue but Scottish Water do not object unless there's a likely direct physical impact on its underground plant.
- 11.66 Scottish Water has shared a separate evidence submission (**THC186**) detailing a Red Amber Green status of treatment works within sewered and watered areas. No works are categorised as red, the reason for this being that Scottish Water is publicly funded to provide growth capacity for future development just ahead of need. Scottish Water is not providing capacity data by housing unit equivalent due to the extremely dynamic nature of their network which often requires site specific modelling. The Council notes that this submission indicates that amber status indicating potential future investment may be required for wastewater capacity at 155 wastewater treatment works (out of a total of 301) which are mapped and listed in full in **THC186** and include Allanfean in Inverness City, Dingwall, Kirkhill and Kiltarlity among others.
- 11.67 For water treatment works, amber status indicating potential investment in water capacity may be required in 35 water treatment works (out of a total of 67) which are concentrated in Badenoch and Strathspey, Southeastern Sutherland around

Dornoch, and various parts of Skye including Portree and Broadford. Again, these are mapped and listed in full in **THC186**.

- 11.68 **THC186** provides an indication of how close a water main or sewer connection is to a potential development site if not whether the associated pipe network or connected works has spare capacity. It provides a high-level indicative guide as to which sites may be most easily and cheaply connected to the water and sewerage networks. Where potential investment may be required, this doesn't mean development cannot be accommodated, it merely indicates that further work alongside close and early dialogue is required to identify solutions.
- 11.69 A lack of comprehensive site-specific evidence on Scottish Water's water and sewerage capacity does not significantly hinder LDP preparation because of Scottish Government's instruction to Scottish Water to supply all committed housing and economic growth projects. Similarly, Scottish Water is very unlikely to object to an LDP allocation or planning application based on a lack of capacity in its works or network. Accordingly, the Council intends in preparing the Proposed Plan to use the available evidence on the location of the water and sewerage network and its indicative capacity as a guide in preparing its spatial strategy and in making site selection decisions and to continue to liaise with Scottish Water throughout the LDP process to assess more detailed capacity issues as proposals become more certain and detailed local network modelling results may become available.

Private Drainage

- 11.70 HLDP will need to provide direction to all development, including the many sites that will come forward that are not within an allocation. Many of these will have private foul drainage and some may also have private water supplies (PWS). NPF4 Policy 22 seeks to support community resilience to climate change by avoiding development in areas of flood risk or locations which cannot be readily connected to the public water and sewerage network. **Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy** outlines that there are over 2,500 PWS in Highland, serving a population of over 30,000 people located in rural areas where treated mains water connections are not available. Areas of climate-related risk and more vulnerable PWS reliant on surface water are mapped within the [Highland Climate Change and Energy Map](#). NPF4 Policy 22 d has provisions for development proposals to be connected to the public water mains, or sustainable water sources resilient to scarcity should this not be feasible.
- 11.71 For private foul drainage, generally the impacts from these will be controlled by regulations enforced by SEPA but within Highland, specific concerns have been identified for the Loch Flemington catchment near Inverness and Nairn. This is acknowledged and addressed in Policy 3 of the existing IMFLDP2 and the Council

considers that this also needs to be considered within HLDP. In line with Policy 65 of the HwLDP, all allocated developments in the Nairn and Inverness areas are required to connect to the public sewer (as defined in the Sewerage (Scotland) Act 1986). All development within the water catchment of Loch Flemington SPA must facilitate the ecological recovery of the loch by using appropriate foul drainage arrangements. It must be ensured that there is no overall increase in phosphorous discharge to the catchment. Appropriate solutions include connection to public sewer, diversion of wastewater outwith of treatment. the catchment or upgrading an existing septic tank within the catchment to a higher standard. The Council notes SEPA's comments welcoming further engagement in the future to understand whether the HLDP shall cover wastewater via local polices in view of the fact it is not an issue explicitly covered by NFP4. The Council considers that retention of a form of IMFLDP2 Policy 3 would be beneficial and notes that no national equivalent site-specific development management mechanism to calculate or offset nutrient increases is currently in place in Scotland. The Council therefore agrees that engagement will be required with SEPA to retain this moving forward.

Waste Management

- 11.72 Presently the Council's Developer Contributions Supplementary Guidance does not seek contributions towards waste transfer stations or recycling centres but instead seeks that sufficient space is preserved within developments for refuse bins and that a recycling point be provided at the developer's cost for larger scale developments. Since this guidance was adopted however, the Council has changed service provision so that residential properties now receive:
- Non-recyclable waste bin
 - Containers (plastics, cans) bin
 - Fibres (paper, card) bin
- 11.73 Urban areas also receive food waste bins and green waste bins (optional, chargeable service). The preparation of HLDP offers an opportunity to revise and reflect this so that provision should be provided to ensure space is provided for all of these bins where applicable. The preparation of HLDP offers an opportunity to additionally, consider the impact of development on waste facilities, and consider whether a suitable framework for developer contributions towards waste infrastructure is warranted.
- 11.74 The Council's Waste Management Service operates in a highly regulated environment. This regulatory regime covers the type of collection services that must be provided to households and businesses, the national Charter for Household Recycling currently subject to ongoing consultation which will become a statutory code of practice on Councils, the operation of landfill sites

and other facilities, and how material can be processed. There is an evolving, ever-changing operating environment for waste management, the pace of change accelerating in recent years, reflecting the climate and environmental requirements of Scottish and UK Governments.

- 11.75 Prominent changes in waste management operations are fully detailed in [Long-term Waste Management Communities & Place Committee Report](#) - but are primarily underpinned by the impending ban on landfilling biodegradable municipal waste from 31 December 2027 (following a two-year delay to the ban) as introduced through the [Waste Management \(Scotland\) Regulations 2012](#). The ban on landfilling waste seeks to reduce emissions of managing such waste. All kerbside non-recyclable waste has now been diverted from landfill to an Energy from Waste (EfW) facility.
- 11.76 The Council has a medium-term solution in place through its contract with Viridor, which began in January 2023 and runs until 2027, with the potential to extend to the end of December 2030. This ensures that the biodegradable municipal waste – residual waste – collected by the Council will not go to landfill, but instead will be processed at a licensed energy-from-waste (EfW) facility in Dunbar and will comply with the Waste (Scotland) Regulations prohibiting landfilling of such waste.
- 11.77 The Council Communities & Place Committee considered [long term solutions for waste management](#) in November 2024 which were either to:
- Send the residual waste, that which won't be recycled, to an EfW facility (akin to current practice through the Council's contract with Viridor).
 - Or process waste collected by The Highland Council at a dedicated EfW facility located at the Longman closed landfill site, Inverness.
- 11.78 The Council considered that the most appropriate long-term strategic direction for residual waste management was to tender for a merchant provider solution to succeed the current medium-term contract.
- 11.79 The Longman Closed Landfill Site consists of two parts:
- A SEPA licenced facility that includes a large Waste Transfer Station and a closed Landfill Site, that restricts the site to waste operations and associated activities.
 - A section that was de-licenced in February 2022 that is no longer under the permitting limitations and may be utilised for other purposes (subject to appropriate permissions).
- 11.80 The Scottish Government has undertaken to develop and deliver a Residual Waste Plan and a revised Code of Practice to ensure the best environmental outcome for unavoidable and unrecyclable waste and set strategic direction for management of residual waste to 2045 ([Strategic Aim - Decarbonise Disposal](#)).

Furthermore, the Scottish Government has undertaken to facilitate the development of a Sector-Led Plan to minimise the carbon impacts of the Energy from Waste Sector. Although the general aspiration is to minimise waste to landfill, it is expected to continue to be required to a lesser extent.

- 11.81 These plans are expected in 2027. It is intended that the Residual Waste Plan and Code of Practice will set the long-term vision for future disposal practices in Scotland to minimise the environmental and climate impacts of waste whilst ensuring that Scotland has appropriate capacity in place to manage the expected, volumes of waste in the future. The Sector-Led Plan will form a specific strand of the Residual Waste Plan. It will set out how the sector will minimise climate impacts of energy from waste specifically and ensure that actions across the energy from waste sector are aligned with net zero ambitions.
- 11.82 The Highland Council remains focused on reducing the tonnage of residual waste through moving the waste up the Waste Hierarchy to prioritise reuse and recycling over thermal treatment and landfill. The Highland Council has recently undertaken a service change across the Highlands to increase the quantity of high quality recycling. The aim of the new collection services is to reduce the annual residual waste tonnage within Highland by nearly 9,000 tonnes, which would save 368 return transport journeys per year – as agreed on 27th November 2024 Committee.

Zero Waste Policy

- 11.83 Scotland's circular economy and waste route map to 2030 sets out a plan to deliver 11 priority actions that will help progress towards a circular economy, accelerate more sustainable use of our resources across the waste hierarchy: waste prevention, reuse, recycling and recovery. informed by improved understanding of the environmental consequences of how we use and dispose of resources, and by the requirements of European legislation. The Zero Waste Plan is underpinned by a determination to achieve the best overall outcomes for Scotland's environment, by making best practical use of the approach in the waste management hierarchy. It aims at increasing levels of recycling, recovery and is seeking to avoid waste generation and to use waste as a resource.
- 11.84 Regulations require all business and organisations to separate key materials including food waste (with the exception of where rural exemptions exist). They also have carrier bag charge regulations and single use plastic products regulations.
- 11.85 Waste data by SEPA aims to conserve and protect world's natural resource by reducing waste production, circulate materials, prevent waste management harms and tackle waste crime.

- 11.86 NPF4 Policy 12 requires Local Development Plans to identify appropriate locations for new waste management infrastructure to support the circular economy and meet identified needs in a way that moves waste as high up the waste hierarchy as possible. It sets out policies to seek reduction, reusing and recycling materials in line with the waste hierarchy. Circular Economy Materials Management Facilities are also listed as a National Development in NPF4.
- 11.87 Circular economic activity and climate adaptation outcomes are linked. Highland Adapts commissioned [economic assessments of climate change impacts in the Highland Region](#), in partnership with Zero Waste Scotland, for the region and key sectors (energy, food and drink, and forest and timber). The assessments highlight how circular economy practices can strengthen climate adaptation by improving local resource security and reducing supply chain risks, building resilience in climate-sensitive industries. Climate adaptation evidence is further considered in **Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy**.

Motorhome waste facilities

- 11.88 There is an increasing number of people visiting the Highlands and Islands in campervans and motor homes. Waste disposal facilities for motorhomes are provided on commercial sites throughout Highland, as part of the tourism infrastructure. Waste disposal for motorhomes includes chemical waste disposal (black water) and grey water waste disposal. [The Strategic Tourism Infrastructure Plan \(STIDP\) 2022](#) identified 44 motorhome waste disposal facilities in Highland. Tourism infrastructure is considered in **Chapter 8: Economy, Business and Productive Places** as part of the Tourism evidence.
- 11.89 SEPA, Scottish Water and Highland Council developed [Campervan and motorhome waste disposal guidance for independent developments](#). It sets out the considerations for providing appropriate motorhome waste disposal facilities. The guidance recognises that when there are inadequate motorhome waste facilities provided the result is inappropriate use of public toilets, with potential for blockages or spills, risk of serious environmental pollution, and health and safety risks. The guidance highlights the demand for the provision of more facilities which can be delivered and maintained by local communities, charities, businesses or other interested parties.

Relevant sources of information

- 11.90 [Scottish Waste Environmental Footprint tool \(SWEFT\)](#) – has been developed to provide a holistic understanding of the life cycle impacts of household waste and the environmental damage it can cause. It is an evolution of the Carbon Metric, a

pioneering development in the monitoring of waste impacts. More recent and detailed report can be found here – [2022 Household Waste Results Summary](#)

- 11.91 [Scotland's circular economy and waste route map to 2030](#) sets out 11 priority actions for households, business, the public and third sectors to make changes, support and invest in a circular economy. This allows priority measures to take a targeted, coordinated approach to specific materials across the waste hierarchy, recognising the variation in emissions or environmental impact of production, consumption or waste management of different materials and products.
- 11.92 [Making Things Last: a circular economy strategy for Scotland](#) stresses the importance of reducing waste and using resources more efficiently in Scotland, delivering economic and environmental benefits.
- 11.93 [Environment Strategy: initial monitoring framework](#) focuses on transitioning to a circular economy, where resources are used sustainably and kept in high value use for as long as possible, minimising waste.

Local Data

- 11.94 The Council has a [Strategy for Waste Management](#) which focuses on reducing waste, increasing recycling and treating residual waste biologically or thermally. On 27th November 2024, The Council agreed for a [long term strategic direction for residual waste management](#) by reducing residual waste by 9000 tonnes which would save 368 transport journeys per year.

Highland's Waste Statistics

- 11.95 Highland recycles less and sends more waste to landfill than the national average as shown in Table 11:9, and Other diversion is also lower in Highland, suggesting fewer alternative treatments are used compared to the rest of Scotland.

Table 11:9 Household waste Overview (SEPA's [Household Management 2024](#))

Waste	Scotland	Highland
Generated	2,315,147	112,445
Recycled	44.3%	42.5%
Landfilled	11.0%	17.9%
Other Diversion	44.7%	39.6%

- 11.96 As recorded in SEPA's 2024 Data set, there are 4 Operational Landfill sites, 21 non-operational Landfill sites and 4 non-authorised SEPA sites in the Highland Council Area. Two of the four operational landfill sites are operated by the

Council which have significantly less engineered cell capacity than the two remaining private sites. Table 11:10 shows summary of total waste to landfill and remaining capacity from 2015-2024.

Table 11:10 Landfill data_Highland (SEPA's Waste Site Capacity 2024)

Year	Total waste landfilled	Remaining capacity	Remaining Capacity at Council Sites
2015	56,400	873,418	320,000
2016	92,754	855,342	318,000
2017	90,534	788,497	252,000
2018	75,575	700,395	200,000
2019	66,798	653,929	166,000
2020	59,201	607,436	130,000
2021	69,017	550,043	86,000
2022	60,689	478,823	30,000
2023	54,945	491,938	60,000
2024	46,723	454,126	44,000

11.97 Highland's household waste per household is shown in Table 11:11 which illustrates a declining amount of annual waste per household since 2015.

Table 11:11 Household Waste collected by Highland Council (tonnes)

Year	Total waste generated	No. of households	Waste per household
2015	130,780	106,917	1.22
2016	130,959	107,680	1.22
2017	130,190	108,450	1.20
2018	127,880	109,034	1.17
2019	124,689	109,695	1.14
2020	109,109	110,289	0.99
2021	116,066	110,974	1.05
2022	111,118	111,890	0.99
2023	111,532	112,857	0.99
2024	112,445	113,906	0.99

- 11.98 Increased numbers of households projected but coupled with smaller projected household sizes as detailed in **Chapter 9: Housing** is anticipated to result in differing impacts on waste generated. Smaller household sizes may reduce the volume of kerbside waste collected at a premise, but due to less available storage, smaller houses can contribute disproportionately to the volume of waste processed at household waste recycling centres. Regardless of house or household size, the volume of anticipated housing demonstrated through the iLHLR in **Chapter 9: Housing** indicates that the provision of waste collection services will remain challenging to provide with regards to implications for waste handling infrastructure, fleet and routing.

Highland's Waste Handling Infrastructure

- 11.99 A detailed evidence submission from the Council's Waste Service (**THC184**) provides greater detail on the operational capacity within existing waste transfer stations (WTS) and household waste recycling centres (HWRC). The Highland Council manages household waste across a vast and predominantly rural geography, which presents distinct challenges for waste handling infrastructure and service delivery. The Highland Council currently collects and disposes of around 125,000 tonnes of waste produced by households and business waste customers each year.
- 11.100 The relatively high proportion of waste going to landfill compared to the national average shown in Table 11:9 suggests constraints within the region's waste management system but has been declining considerably in recent years in advance of the landfill ban of Biodegradable Municipal Waste. These include a limited number of local recycling and treatment facilities, higher transportation costs, and logistical challenges associated with serving remote communities. Additionally, the recycling rate in Highland slightly remains below the national average due to the rural nature of the area and limitation in infrastructure, indicating room for performance improvement in the capture and processing of recyclable materials.
- 11.101 The Highland Council undertook a significant service change throughout the Highland area during 2023 to 2025. The lower, but increasing percentage, of waste managed through other diversion methods (compared to landfill) in 2024 represent that only some areas of the Highlands had been transitioned to the new service provision, but further improvements would be expected in the following years. There continues to be limited infrastructure for food, garden waste and thermal treatment capacity in the region, however such infrastructure tends to require consolidated quantities of waste from several

regions. Nevertheless, the infrastructure to bulk up such wastes in the Highlands for onwards transport is also limited.

11.102 To improve outcomes and support national circular economy targets, investment in Highland's waste infrastructure could focus on:

- Expanding material recovery and sorting capacity
- Enhancing kerbside collection coverage, particularly in remote areas and where practical
- Developing decentralised composting or anaerobic digestion facilities
- Supporting community recycling hubs or reuse schemes
- Strategic infrastructure development, coupled with behaviour change initiatives and service optimisation, could significantly reduce the region's reliance on landfill and enable Highland to align more closely with Scotland's waste reduction ambitions.

11.103 The latest figures from the Council's Waste Service, show a reduction of approximately 7,500 tonnes of waste collected at the kerbside and sent for disposal in the last 12 months compared to the previous period. Currently the Council has 22 recycling centres, operates two landfill sites and over the years, there has been a reduction in capacity left at those sites as shown in Table 11:10.

11.104 Reviewing evidence submission from the Council's Waste Service (**THC184**), the following conclusions are reached:

- HWRC's that would require additional capacity to serve future development that could be accommodated on their existing sites include: Aviemore, Nairn, Fort William, Alness, Dingwall, Tain & Dornoch, and Brora.
- HWRCs that would require additional capacity to serve future development that cannot be accommodated on their existing site include Inverness. The Inverness HWRC is the largest Highland facility, is at capacity and has no ability to accommodate additional traffic or tonnage on the existing site. Future development would require additional capacity at an additional Inverness facility or full relocation to a larger, more accessible and appropriate site.
- Other HWRCs serving disperse rural populations would likely only require additional capacity in the event that major developments were to arise which would often be uncharacteristic of the area.
- WTS's that would require additional capacity to serve future development that could be accommodated on the existing site include Aviemore Granish, Bower Seater, Inverness Longman, Portree, and Brora Ardachu.
- WTS's that would require additional capacity to serve future development that cannot be accommodated on their existing site include Invergordon. The building has limited suitability for any further expansion as it neither has the space, capacity or design to accommodate further waste increases

to meet future statutory needs. Future development would require additional capacity at a replacement facility at an alternative location.

- Other WTS's serving disperse rural populations would likely only require additional capacity in the event that major developments were to arise which would often be uncharacteristic of the area.

Digital Infrastructure

11.105 NPF4 seeks to encourage, promote and facilitate an infrastructure first approach to land use planning, which puts infrastructure considerations at the heart of placemaking. For the purpose of applying the Infrastructure First policy the meaning of infrastructure applies to communications – including digital and telecommunications networks and connections. The [Scottish Government 2021 Digital Strategy](#) sets out ambition for high quality connectivity across all of Scotland. This includes closing the gaps in mobile provision and facilitating the grown investment in and deployment of 5G networks, as set out in the [Scottish Government Forging our Digital Future with 5G: A Strategy for Scotland](#). The 2025 refreshed [2025 Digital strategy for Scotland](#) focuses more on public service provision but includes provisions within the corresponding [Sustainable Digital Public Services Delivery Plan 2025-28](#) to deliver a transformed digital service to apply for planning and building consents, operating across all local and planning authorities through a phased development and delivery. Phase 1 is expected to be rolled out in Autumn 2026, with Phase 2 in 2027, and Phase 3 in 2028.

11.106 Modern telecommunications that enhance digital connectivity is a fundamentally important utility which allows people to be connected for business and social purposes at work, home or remotely, and enables people to have immediate access to emergency services, healthcare, education, shopping, leisure etc. It supports living locally and helps to sustain and grow rural and island communities. [Digital telecommunications: planning guidance](#) notes the planning system can assist in addressing the gaps in connectivity and barriers to digital access by supporting the delivery of new digital services and technological improvements, particularly in areas with no or low connectivity capacity. These factors are critical to NPF4 aspirations which seek to:

- tackle climate change and protect local environments from its damaging impacts by reducing the need to travel and contribute to a net zero society.
- unlock opportunities for businesses, employment and remote working.
- support investment and population growth in rural areas.
- create better places by influencing the pattern and location of development and ensure connectivity is where it is needed.
- build 'smart' communities to facilitate more sustainable ways of living.

11.107 A 'Digital Fibre Network' is designated as a national development by NPF4.

This NPF4 designation supports the continued roll-out of world class broadband across Scotland. This means works to deliver it could occur in any planning authority area and where the classes of national developments are met, planning applications should be processed as national developments rather than as a major application. NPF4 spatial strategy refers to this national development as a: fundamentally important utility, required to support development, community wellbeing, equal access to goods and services, and emissions reduction from reduced demand for travel.

11.108 There are a number of national digital infrastructure and related initiatives which are being rolled out which have significant consequences for the Highland area. Most recent figures suggest that 16% of people in the Highlands do not have access to digital broadband. This is estimated to be over 40,000 Highland residents, mainly in rural areas furthest from urban connectivity. The issue for Highland communities is that they are harder for the national programmes to reach. Think Broadband's [Local Broadband Information](#) as presented in Table 11:12 illustrates the availability of superfast and fibre broadband coverage in Highland relative to Scotland.

Table 11:12 Availability: Broadband – Superfast and Fibre Coverage (April 2025)

	Highland	Scotland
Premises	131,664	2,901,631
Superfast (30 Mbps and faster)	87%	97%
Gigabit	54%	81%
Full Fibre (Fibre to the Premises FTTP)	54%	69%
Alt Net FTTP (FTTP excl Openreach KCOM)	41%	33%
Openreach FTTP	24%	51%
Fibre partial/full at any speed	95%	99%
Below 2 Mbps down	4%	0.7%
Below 10 Mbps down	9%	2%
Below 10 Mbps down, 1.2 Mbps up	10%	2%
Below 15 Mbps (High Speed Broadband)	11%	2%
Ultrafast (> 100 Mbps)	54%	82%
Virgin Media Cable	0%	51%
Openreach (> 30 Mbps)	85%	94%
Openreach G.fast	0%	5%

11.109 Given the expanse of Highland, aggregated averages obscure significant variations between the more connected urban area of Inverness and the remote rural regions. This data is visualised within Think Broadbands Broadband

Coverage & Speedtest Result Maps, which demonstrates the distribution of properties by their [Project Gigabit Status](#), [Full Fibre to Property Status](#), and postcodes [Without Superfast Broadband speeds](#) (<30 Mbps).

Table 11:13 Mobile 4G and 5G Coverage (Connected Nations update: Spring 2025)

	Highland		Scotland	
Geographic Coverage	4G	5G	4G	5G
No Providers	18.1%	80.1%	4.1%	40.3%
1 Provider	8.0%	16.5%	3.0%	19.2%
2 Providers	7.3%	2.5%	4.4%	17.5%
3 Providers	13.0%	0.8%	7.5%	13.1%
4 Providers	53.6%	0.2%	81.7%	17.2%
Premises (%) Coverage	4G	5G	4G	5G
No Coverage Outside	0.3%	29.6%	0.1%	14.4%
1 Provider Outside	0.6%	19.4%	0.2%	16.5%
2 Providers Outside	0.8%	15.3%	0.6%	26.5%
3 Providers Outside	4.4%	16.6%	2.4%	24.6%
4 Providers Outside	93.9%	19.1%	97.1%	29.3%
No Providers Inside	1.5%	*	15.4%	*
1 Providers Inside	2.9%	*	1.4%	*
2 Providers Inside	5.2%	*	3.5%	*
3 Providers Inside	12.7%	*	10.3%	*
4 Providers Inside	77.7%	*	84.4%	*

**For 5G services, only outdoor coverage information is provided*

11.110 Mobile Connectivity data extracted from the [Connected Nations update: Spring 2025](#) indicates similar trends as summarised in Table 11:13, with greater geographic areas covered by no 4G and 5G providers in Highland, and with lower shares of premises served by 4G and 5G providers for both indoor and outdoor coverage compared to Scotland nationally.

Scottish Government Led Connectivity Programmes

11.111 The Scottish Government is running several projects aimed at improving digital connectivity, specifically faster broadband access for homes and businesses, and improved mobile services. Projects include:

11.112 **Reaching 100% Programme – R100** – aiming to provide every home and business in Scotland with access to broadband speeds of at least 30Mbps.

11.113 **Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme – SBVS** – providing subsidies up to £5,000 to help eligible properties install faster broadband, covering installation

costs from registered suppliers. SBVS provides subsidies of up to £5,000 per property for direct install costs with registered broadband suppliers. Eligible properties will have a current broadband speed less than 30Mbps and will not be included in R100 plans. Householders and business owners have to apply for a voucher. When the voucher is approved, they then have to identify a suitable supplier, of which there are 19 covering Highland out of a total of 40 in Scotland and arrange for an install.

- 11.114 **Scottish 4G Infill Programme – S4GI** – improving access to mobile services, particularly in areas with poor coverage. S4GI is a £28m project delivering 4G mobile coverage to 55 mobile “notspots” in rural and island parts of Scotland. Activity in the Highlands and Islands was part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund. All the 55 planned mobile masts have now been delivered and are live, and 17 of these are in Highland.
- 11.115 **Connecting Scotland** – providing internet-enabled devices, connectivity and digital skills support to those who are digitally excluded, delivered in partnership with the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO). It aims to provide devices, connectivity and support for people who are digitally excluded. Over 61,000 devices have been issued since May 2020. Although not directly providing any new connectivity infrastructure, the programme is supporting those people who have access to broadband but need assistance to make use of it.
- 11.116 R100 is a £600+ million programme that has been bringing faster broadband to thousands of homes and businesses across Scotland with the aim of providing “superfast” broadband to every home and business in Scotland by the end of 2021. “Superfast” was defined in 2016 as speeds higher than 30Mbps, noting that this is probably no longer seen as a particularly fast speed, particularly for larger households and businesses. It was estimated that 113,000 properties would be connected through R100, split across 3 geographical areas – North, Central and South, defined by postcode areas, with Highland falling entirely within North.
- R100 is being delivered via 3 routes:
 - Scottish Government contracts with Openreach.
 - Planned commercial investment by a variety of broadband providers.
- 11.117 Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme (SBVS) providing funding for properties not covered by the above, up to £5,000 to help eligible properties install faster broadband, covering installation costs from registered suppliers.
- 11.118 By March 2025, 78,000 premises had been connected (69% of the total). Approximately 23,000 of these are in the North area. Table 11:14 shows a detailed progress update dating from January 2025, which shows that progress in the North has been significantly less than the other areas.

Table 11:14 R100 Rollout Progress – Jan 2025 (*Scottish Government R100 Data Insights*)

Contract Area	Total Premises for Delivery in R100 Contracts	R100 Contract Premises Delivered	R100 SBVS Premises Delivered
Central	30,286	32,204	1,835
North	60,764	31,237	3,576
South	21,889	26,841	654
Total	112,939	90,282	6,065

UK Government Led Connectivity Programmes

11.119 The two key UK Government initiatives are:

- **Project Gigabit** – is a £5bn investment across UK managed by Broadband UK (BDUK). In Scotland this runs in conjunction with R100, providing additional funding on top of Scottish Government funding. Whereas R100 aims to provide broadband coverage of at least 30Mbps to properties where it is not yet available, Project Gigabit aims to provide increased speeds (1,000Mbps+) in areas where such developments are not commercially viable. There are areas of overlap where the combined funding will bring additional benefit to the Highlands.
- **Shared Rural Network - SRN** was announced in 2020 with the aim to provide 4G mobile coverage to 95% of the UK landmass by the end of 2025, with a £1b investment. The biggest improvements were expected to be in rural parts of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In September 2024, it was announced that 94.9% of the UK landmass had mobile coverage from at least 1 operator. Areas with coverage from all 4 operators had increased from 66% to 84%.

11.120 In March 2021, the UK Government announced an ambition to deliver nationwide gigabit-capable broadband as soon as possible, recognising that there is a need for government intervention in the parts of the country that are not commercially viable. This will be spent through a package of coordinated and mutually supportive interventions, collectively known as [Project Gigabit](#), with an initial intervention of £1.2bn targeting at least 85% gigabit coverage of the UK by 2025.

11.121 Under the UK Government's Gigabit Infrastructure Subsidy Scheme guidelines, public sector intervention in broadband infrastructure investment is limited to those areas where there is no current or planned (within the next 3 years) commercial deployments, to avoid distorting what might otherwise be/become a competitive market.

11.122 The Scottish Government's issued a [Broadband Infrastructure in Scotland: Public Review](#) to determine the eligible intervention area for investment of public funds

into gigabit-capable broadband infrastructure. In line with the Gigabit Infrastructure Subsidy Scheme guidelines, the Scottish Government has classified premises as White, Grey, Under Review or Black. Project Gigabit will only subsidise build to premises which have been designated as White.

- 11.123 **White:** Indicates premises with no gigabit network infrastructure and none is likely to be developed within 3 years,
- 11.124 **Black:** indicates premises with two or more qualifying gigabit infrastructures from different suppliers being available, or will be deployed within the coming 3 years,
- 11.125 **Grey:** indicates premises with a single qualifying gigabit infrastructure from a single supplier is available, or is to be deployed within the coming 3 years,
- 11.126 **Under Review:** indicates premises where suppliers have reported current or planned commercial broadband coverage, but where claimed current gigabit coverage has not been verified, or, in respect of planned build, where evaluators are confident that gigabit infrastructure will be delivered, but some risks to delivery remain, or there are some gaps in evidence.
- 11.127 The Office for National Statistics publishes the [Gigabit Capable Broadband Connectivity Indicator](#); a map showing the coverage of premises able to connect to a gigabit capable service. The Scottish Government has used this information to define the eligible Intervention Area for potential future procurements under the [Gigabit Infrastructure Subsidy Scheme](#) and is in the process of finalising the design of procurement areas as a subset of the intervention area. One of these procurement areas – Lot 5 Dundee, Aberdeenshire, Angus and Moray, encompasses a small area of Highland in Nairnshire and is a regional procurement with an initial 48,914 in-scope premises of which 2,960 are within Highland. The estimated contract award date is envisaged as May 2025. The majority of Highland's area and premises fall outwith any of the identified procurement areas, and are classed as Rest of Scotland, where the UK Government plans further interventions beyond those described above as part of Project Gigabit.
- 11.128 Data released by the Scottish Government through the [Gigabit in Scotland Premises Subsidy Control - Highland](#) provides the status of properties in Highland which is shown in Table 11:15, alongside comparable figures for Scotland nationally, as derived from the [Gigabit Scotland Public Review Report Revision 3](#). Highland evidently has a greater proportion of properties classed as white, and therefore within the scope of Project Gigabit upgrades, owing to the unlikelihood of market provision.
- 11.129 Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) were carrying out a Project Gigabit procurement on behalf of the Inverness and Highland City Region Deal (IHCRD). HIE has since confirmed that it will not proceed with the procurement.

Table 11:15 Properties by Project Gigabit Status

	Highland		Scotland	
	#	%	#	%
White	53,018	37%	380,073	13%
Black	9,855	7%	1,009,899	34%
Grey	53,924	38%	1,176,460	39%
Under Review	25,907	18%	413,436	14%

Resilience and Digital Connectivity

11.130 There is an interdependency between projects relating to the rollout of digital infrastructure and the parallel switch-off of legacy analogue infrastructure which has cumulative effects upon Highland communities, as detailed in a report to the [Digital Connectivity Report to Full Council Committee on 29 May 2025](#), namely through:

- The Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) which is being retired within the UK in January 2027 and will be replaced by phone services relying on the Internet, which will result in concerns about resilient communications for residents and businesses in areas more prone to power cuts;
- Radio Teleswitch Service (RTS) switch-off, affecting certain older electricity supply meters, on June 30 2025. Smart meters to replace RTS require a mobile signal to operate. This transition is expected to disproportionately affect around 30,000 households across the Highlands and Islands, where reliance on electric heating is more prevalent due to limited access to the gas grid.

11.131 Scottish and UK Government initiatives are helping to address connectivity challenges but are running slower in the Highlands than other parts of Scotland. There are also likely to be a higher proportion of properties that will be reliant on satellite broadband as the only possible option.

11.132 Both individually and in combination, these projects are likely to be having a proportionally greater negative impact on those people who are more vulnerable, less well off, living in more rural areas and less digitally aware. These people could be in a situation where they will struggle to maintain telephone access, face difficulties with heating, incur additional costs for heating and be disproportionately affected by a reliance on more expensive and less resilient broadband options. NPF4 sets out that LDPs should support the roll out of digital infrastructure and in Highland it is recognised that some of the more difficult remaining areas as of yet unconnected by any of the initiatives are in remote rural areas of the Highlands, potential resilience issues if the programmes do not complete timeously.

- 11.133 Engagement with the UK and Scottish Government alongside Ofgem, BT, HIE and other stakeholders as part of COHI Meeting in May 2025, where progress on the digital connectivity initiatives was discussed, alongside the disproportionate impact on communities that remain unconnected, and the costs of connecting the remaining 1% that are currently out with the scope of Project Gigabit.
- 11.134 Initiatives seeking to achieve geographic coverage targets such as SRN have been challenging to support through the planning process, in locations that are subject to natural heritage designations as discussed in **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**. While NPF4 contains strong policy support for digital infrastructure, NPF4 Policy 24 states that development proposals will only be supported: where the visual and amenity impacts have been minimised through careful siting, design, height, materials and landscaping, taking into account cumulative impacts and relevant technical constraints; where it has been demonstrated that before erecting a new ground based mast the possibility of erecting antennas on an existing building, mast or other structure, replacing an existing mast and/or site sharing has been explored and where there is no physical obstruction to aerodrome operations, technical sites or existing transmitter/receiver facilities.

Table 11:16 Highland Planning Records for Telecommunications Masts – as of 05/09/2025*

		No. of Applications	% of Valid Applications Received
Valid Applications Received		485	
Withdrawn		78	16.1%
In Planning		3	0.6%
Approved	Delegated	327	67.4%
	Committee	56	11.5%
	CNPA	5	1.0%
Refused	Delegated	4	0.8%
	Committee	12	2.5%
	CNPA	0	0.0%
Enquiries/Pre-Apps		429	

** Includes erection of new/replacement Mobile Network Masts, Emergency Services Network Masts, Radio Masts and Smart Meter Masts, and additional equipment to existing masts. Does not include anemometer/meteorological masts and amateur radio masts.*

- 11.135 Demonstrating the visual and amenity impacts have been minimised has formed a crucial component of several mast applications taking considerable time in the planning process. Submission of planning applications for telecommunications masts from various operators has also hampered the ability to gauge the

cumulative impacts. In such instances following engagement with the applicant operators, applications are generally withdrawn, resubmitted in alternate locations and then supported, rather than refused outright, as indicated in Table 11:15.

Health and Social Care Needs

Overview

- 11.136 LDPs should identify the health and social care services and infrastructure needed in the area, including potential for co-location of complementary services, in partnership with Health Boards and Health and Social Care Partnerships.
- 11.137 Scotland's [Health and Social Care Service Renewal Framework](#) provides a high-level guide for change, to ensure the sustainability, efficiency, quality, and accessibility of health and social care services in Scotland. The framework's 'Community Principle: More care in the community rather than a hospital focused model' seeks to support people to live well locally, in line with the 'Local Living' principle of NPF4. Future planning and delivery of community hubs seek to ensure that opportunities for infrastructure co-location are considered to further develop person-led approaches for access to seamless and coordinated care.
- 11.138 NHS Highland (NHS) services cover the entirety of Highland and Argyll and Bute Councils, spanning an area that equates to 42% of Scotland's landmass. The Highland Health and Social Care Partnership (HHSCP) covers the Highland Council area. NHS Highland is the Lead Agency for Integrated Health and Social Care for Adults, while The Highland Council is the lead agency for Integrated Health and Social Care for Children - [NHS Highland Strategy 2022-227: Together we care with you, for you](#).
- 11.139 As Highland's population is broadly equally divided across urban areas, small towns, rural areas and very rural areas, delivery of health and social care services to large populations living out with settlements places significant challenges on NHS Highland's operational delivery relative to other Health Boards with more compact population distributions.
- 11.140 Outside Inverness and the Inner Moray Firth, a number of key settlements including Wick and Thurso, Fort William, Aviemore, and Nairn act as local service centres for the extensive rural areas which make up the majority of the region

Primary & Secondary Care Facilities

- 11.141 Information on known health facilities within Highland was accessed from the Improvement Service Spatial Hub, which provides records of [NHS Hospitals](#), [GP Practices](#), and [Pharmacies](#). Summarised in Table 11:16, there are currently 11

Community Hospitals across Highland, two Rural General Hospitals in Wick and Fort William, one mental Health Unit in Inverness and one District General (Acute) Hospital (Raigmore) in Inverness.

Table 11:17 Hospital Provision in Highland

Site Name	Location	Type of Facility	Tenure
Raigmore Hospital	Inverness	District General Hospital	Owned
Belford Hospital	Fort William	Rural General Hospital	Owned
Caithness General Hospital	Wick	Rural General Hospital	Owned
New Craigs	Inverness	Mental Health Hospital	PFI/NPD
Badenoch & Strathspey Community Hospital	Aviemore	Community Hospital	Owned
Broadford Hospital	Broadford	Community Hospital	Owned
Town & County Hospital	Wick	Community Hospital	Owned
Dunbar Hospital Thurso	Thurso	Community Hospital	Owned
Ian Charles Hospital	Grantown on Spey	-	<i>Closed</i>
Invergordon County Community Hospital	Invergordon	Community Hospital	PFI/NPD
Lawson Memorial Hospital	Golspie	Community Hospital	Owned
Migdale Hospital 2011	Bonar Bridge	Community Hospital	Owned
Portree Hospital	Portree	Community Hospital	Owned
Ross Memorial Hospital	Dingwall	Community Hospital	Owned
Royal Northern Infirmary	Inverness	Community Hospital	Owned
Town & County Hospital Nairn	Nairn	Community Hospital	PFI/NPD
Abban Street Chiropody Clinic	Inverness	Clinic*	Owned
Bruce Gardens Day Centre	Inverness	Clinic*	Leased
Culloden Health Centre	Inverness	Clinic*	Owned
Dunbeath Health Clinic	Dunbeath	Clinic*	Owned
Dundonnell Clinic	Badcaul	Clinic*	Owned
Harm Reduction	Inverness	Clinic*	Leased
Kilchoan Nurses Base	Acharacle	Clinic*	Leased
Raasay Clinic	Isle of Raasay	Clinic*	Owned
Staffin Nurse's Base	Staffin	Clinic*	Owned
Unit 67 Eastgate Centre	Inverness	Clinic*	Leased

** Clinics include Day Hospitals and Resource Centres*

- 11.142 Information on General Practice provision was accessed via Public Health Scotland. Specifically, the number of practices and the average practice list size was accessed via the PHS [GP Workforce and Practice List Sizes](#) datasets and is shown in Table 11:19, which is supported by individual responses from Highland GP Practices provided in **(THC134)**
- 11.143 There is a widespread public perception that new development adversely affects the capacity of primary healthcare facilities in Highland. Two Inverness City GP practices have recently been closed to new patients which has raised the profile of the issue. The HLDP will consider whether its developer contributions policy should require developer payments to offset these impacts. The first step is to consider whether there is sufficient evidence of a direct causal connection between new development and the need for additional primary healthcare facility accommodation in Highland.
- 11.144 There is published evidence available via Public Health Scotland of GP practices, their locations, GP numbers, together with registered patient totals, their ages and how these figures have changed over time. Table 11:17 indicates the 20 practices that have seen the greatest change in their roles between 2019-2025. However, there isn't published data on the existing and potential future capacity of GP practice land and buildings in Highland.
- 11.145 There is no Scottish standard on the GP practice floorspace required per patient. There also isn't any published data on future primary care need and demand to forecast whether these physical capacities will be breached. [UK best practice](#) on this issue is found in London where local councils and health authorities work together in estimating future needs and required developer contributions. This is a need and demand led infrastructure planning model which predicts a future population, its age profile and therefore (based on comprehensive existing data) its forecast annual GP visits. This need and demand are then compared to existing primary care floorspace and the predicted shortfall identified and costed with proportionate developer contributions calculated accordingly. Although several meetings have taken place with NHS Highland it hasn't been possible to acquire the information to replicate the London model within Highland.
- 11.146 Similar evidence issues may be behind why the Scottish Government has not progressed the Health Impact Assessments for major developments provision within the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 as amended. Facing these evidence gaps, the Council, in October 2025, contacted the 62 lead GP practices in Highland to seek better evidence on the premises capacity issues each faced. Responses (summarised in the following paragraphs) were anecdotal rather than quantitative but demonstrate how there is not a simple direct causal connection between new development and GP practice accommodation impact.

Table 11:18 GP Practice Roll Changes 2019-2025

Site Name	Location	% Change in Registered Patients 2019 – 2025
Burnfield Medical Practice	Inverness	29.2
The Pearson Practice	Wick	20.0
Kinmylies Medical practice	Inverness	14.0
Dunbeath Surgery	Dunbeath	11.9
Tain and District Med Group	Tain	11.5
Dornoch medical Practice	Dornoch	11.3
Drumnadrochit Medical Practice	Drumnadrochit	10.1
Applecross Surgery	Applecross	10.0
Cill Chuimein Medical Centre	Fort Augustus	9.2
Cromarty Medical Practice	Cromarty	8.7
Lairg Health Centre	Lairg	8.2
Armada Medical Practice	Thurso	7.4
Tongue Medical Practice	Tongue	6.9
Fairfield Medical Practice	Inverness	6.8
Aird Medical Practice	Beaully	6.6
Kingussie Medical Practice	Kingussie	6.5
Dunedin Medical Practice	Inverness	6.5
Munlochy Surgery	Munlochy	6.5
Torridon Medical Practice	Torridon	5.9
Croyard Surgery	Beaully	5.7

11.147 As with other infrastructure such as schools, staffing numbers or more accurately Whole Time Equivalent GP numbers are more a driver of the capacity of the practice to deliver health services than the physical capacity of the accommodation. This is particularly true in remote rural practices where recruitment and retention of staff is a particular problem. However, it is widely accepted that general taxation rather than developer contributions fund staffing impacts. While [NHS Highland GP Practice Boundaries](#) have defined geographic catchments which could facilitate contribution catchments, these sometimes overlap where an area could conceivably be covered by multiple catchments, and there is no requirement to register with your nearest GP so estimating need and demand and the ringfencing of any developer contributions becomes more problematic.

- 11.148 Many householders of new houses will already be registered with a local GP and therefore identifying the proportion that are net additional to those existing is not straightforward. Also, GP List Sizes are slight over-estimates of true populations because there is a lag in the patient's new practice informing the old practice that they've moved (people rarely de-register with a practice) or they move away and don't register with another UK GP practice. The physical condition/suitability of GP premises is often more of a factor than total floorspace. NHS Highland like other infrastructure providers directs the majority of its capital programme into addressing legacy issues rather than strategic future-proofing to accommodate new development.
- 11.149 The mixed tenure of Highland GP premises is another complicating factor. Roughly, one third of Highland premises are owned by NHS Highland and leased to the practice, one third are leased privately and one third are GP owned. If developer contributions were sought and received then the apportionment of those monies is not straightforward. Privately owned or leased practices have a financial incentive to make do with cramped or otherwise substandard accommodation. If the Council were to make the contributions available to NHS Highland then their distribution to practices may not be equitable and/or on the basis of where the need/demand and contributions arose. Yet another complication in proving a direct causal connection is that many demands on GP practice accommodation come from Scottish Government initiatives to change the point of delivery of care (for example physiotherapy and mental health), training and pharmacy dispensing to practices rather than in hospitals or other specialist units.
- 11.150 Other accommodation capacity issues raised by practice managers were the need for additional consulting rooms that had a window, sufficient privacy and/or disabled patient access. Again, these are about the suitability of premises not their physical capacity.
- 11.151 All of these complications suggest that seeking developer contributions for primary healthcare would be challengeable and therefore it is the intention of the Council not to proceed with such a policy unless better evidence can be provided by NHS Highland, nationally by Scottish Government and/or direct from GP practices. The Council will also continue to monitor the effectiveness of other authorities' LDPs in seeking such contributions and the DPEA's position on this issue as expressed through other Gate Check reports. If pursued then a health facility developer contributions policy would be most defensible if applied to the City of Inverness, where there has been a large percentage increase in patient list sizes as a result of new development and where moves between "catchments" are generally within the wider City settlement boundary, and contributions could be pooled for NHS Highland to distribute in a fairer way rather than to one practice that may be privately owned. It is accepted that contributions should only be

used for the provision of additional clinical space within a practice because this type of space is most directly attributable to an increased list size which is most directly attributable to an increase in housing or other development.

- 11.152 While Highland has lower average practice list sizes than Scotland as a whole, 23% of Highland's registered patients are aged 65+ in contrast with Scotland's 19%. Detailed indications of demand at individual practices was accessed via PHS [General practice list size and demographics information](#) which are correct as of April 2025.
- 11.153 In general, GP Practices in the Inverness Area have a greater share of registered young patients aged 0-14, often equating to between 13-18% of total patients registered. By contrast, GP Practices in Wester Ross, Skye and Sutherland have a greater share of registered patients aged 65+ which often exceed 30% of total patients registered. A full dataset (**THC181**) of registered patients at individual practices is provided detailing this information further.
- 11.154 Practices that have experienced the greatest increase in registered patients from October 2023 to April 2025 include Kinmylies Medical Practice (9.4%), Dunedin Medical Practice (6.7%), and Burnfield Medical Practice (5.4%), which are all located within Inverness. Several other practices with significant increases in registered patients include The Pearson Practice in Wick, Dornoch Medical Practice in Sutherland, Drumnadrochit Medical Practice South of Inverness, and Cromarty Medical Practice in the Black Isle.

Table 11:19 GP Patients registered in Highland and Scotland by Age Group (April 2025)

		Highland	Scotland
No. of Practices		62	897
No. of GPs (whole time equivalent)		307	5,209
Patients Age Group	0-4	9,466	237,880
	5-14	24,669	607,758
	15-24	23,804	685,493
	25-44	59,947	1,744,497
	45-64	71,347	1,589,398
	65-74	31,664	633,541
	75-84	20,863	400,840
	85+	6,928	135,160

- 11.155 List Closure Notices were received from [Culloden Medical Practice and Culloden Surgery](#) in July 2024 and for a one year period since August 2024, both practices did not registered new patients, although this has since lapsed and the practices

are again registering patients. The Practices have highlighted concerns about their increasing list size for a number of years, and this has been accelerated by the high volume of new homes being built in the area.

- 11.156 The Practices have been in discussions with NHS Highland about expanding the size of their premises. However, as there is a pause of capital spending across NHS Scotland, no premises work can progress at this time. The Council seeks to continue engagement with NHS Highland on the issue of rising list sizes as detailed in this chapter.
- 11.157 NHS Highland, as with other health boards, is increasing the placement of primary care staff in general practices and in the community, where they can work alongside GPs and practice teams to deliver an increased range of services. Provision of GP Practices and Pharmacies is summarised at area level within Table 11:20, using 2022 Census population estimates to illustrate the provision per 10,000 population. A full dataset (**THC182**) of this information at settlement level is available, evidencing that most settlements tend to have one of each facility.
- 11.158 [NHS Highland Workforce statistics to 30 June 2025](#) reported 426 total GPs, an increase in 11.2% over the last 10 years and a 3.9% annual change. NHS Highland reports 14.3% of GP practices had vacancies (total 16) and around 80 vacant sessions per week (3.2%), which are both lower than the Scottish average of 22.1% of practices with vacancies and 7.6% vacant sessions per week. Over 80% of general practices in NHS Highland use locums (temporary or short-term staff), with 29.2 WTE locums required (26.5 WTE are filled locums). Highland had 87% percent regular locum sessions which is comparable to the Scotland-wide figure of 88%.
- 11.159 There were a total of 208 dentists (including primary care) employed in NHS Highland as of 31 March 2025 ([NHS Scotland Workforce statistics to 30 June 2025](#)). There are 60.8 primary care dentists per 100,000 population (compared to 59.2 per 100,000 in Scotland). NHS Highland maintains a list of dental practices and their practitioners in Highland ([NHS Highland List of Dental Practitioners](#)) which is summarised in Table 11:20. It is noted that dentists are listed as providing services at multiple practices and evidence on dental clinic hours, or dentist FTE hours was not available. Also, any dental practices not contracted to NHS are not included in this list.

Table 11:20 Provision of Primary Care Facilities (GP and Pharmacy) in Highland Administrative Areas

Admin Area	GP Practice		Pharmacy	
	No.	Per 10,000 Population	No.	Per 10,000 Population
Badenoch and Strathspey	4	2.8	3	2.1
Black Isle	3	2.9	1	1.0
Caithness	7	2.8	6	2.4
Dingwall and Seaforth	1	0.8	4	3.1
Easter Ross	3	1.3	7	3.1
Inverness and Area	14	1.7	16	1.9
Lochaber	7	3.5	3	1.5
Nairnshire	1	0.7	2	1.5
Skye	5	5.0	1	1.0
Sutherland	8	6.1	4	3.0
Wester Ross Strathpeffer and Lochalsh	9	7.4	4	3.3
Total	62	2.6	51	2.2

Table 11:21 HHSCP North and West Highland Operational Unit Dental Practices and Practitioners contracted to provide NHS Dentistry, September 2025 (Source: [NHS Highland List of Dental Practitioners](#))

Admin District	Dental	
	Dentists	Practices
Caithness	16	7
Sutherland	9	6
Skye, Lochalsh and West Ross	7	5
Lochaber	22	4
East Ross	21	5
Mid Ross	14	6
Inverness East	56	14
Inverness West	26	8
Nairn, Ardersier, Badenoch & Strathspey	23	9
Total	*	64

**A figure of total number of dentists is not reported as some dentists in each district serve multiple practices or districts.*

11.160 NHS Scotland Workforce statistics to 30 June 2025 report 9,459.6 WTE employees of NHS Highland, total of 11,420 headcount staff. The medical workforce is 723 WTE, and the non-medical workforce is 8,736.5 WTE (including 3, 578.8 nurses and midwives WTE). The headcount workforce is 81.9% female (compared to 77.1% females across for NHS Scotland), with a median age of 47 (older than for NHS Scotland at 44 median age), and 30.6% over 55 years (23.2% NHS Scotland).

11.161 In nursing and midwifery there are 328.5 total vacancies, predominantly within adult nursing (200+). Medical and dental consultants have 12 WTE vacancies which is well below previous vacancy rates ranging from 20-40 WTE post-Covid. Allied health professions had 38.4 WTE vacancies (including physiotherapy, occupational therapy, podiatry, speech and language therapy and diagnostic radiography).

11.162 NHS Highland consultant workforce data reports 167.7FTE consultants, across a range of specialties which includes:

- Emergency medicine – 11.1 FTE
- Anaesthetics – 38.6 FTE
- Intensive care – *nil reported*
- Clinical laboratory -17.7 FTE
- Medical – 11.4 FTE
- Psychiatric – 20.2 FTE
- Surgical – 45.6 FTE
- Paediatrics – 8.5 FTE (plus 6.4 FTE community paediatric consultants)
- All dental – *nil reported*

Social Care Facilities

11.163 Information on Social Care facilities and capacity are provided by NHS Highland **(THC135)**, outlined in Table 11:21. Capacity figures are up to date as of September 2025. There are 66 Care Home and Day Care service facilities in Highland. Any facility with 90% or more capacity filled is highlighted in blue in Table 11:21.

Table 11:22 Capacity of Care Homes and Day Care services in Highland, by sector (Source: THC135)

Care Home, by location	Total capacity (Number of beds)	Capacity filled (%) Sept 2025	Sector
Easter Ross			
Catalina House Nursing Home	28	54%	Private
Innis Mhor Care Home	40	95%	Private
Kintyre House	41	85%	Private

Mull Hall Care Home	42	100%	Private
Redwoods Nursing Home	42	93%	Private
Mid Ross			
Eilean Dubh Care Home	40	93%	Private
Fairburn House Nursing Home	40	78%	Private
Fodderty House Care Home	16	94%	Private
Nansen - Tigh Na Cloich	4	75%	Third Sector
Seaforth House Respite and Care Centre	22	86%	Private
Strathallan House	32	94%	Private
Urray House Care Home	40	85%	Private
Wyvis House Care Home	50	88%	Private
Caithness			
Bayview House	23	83%	NHS
Pentland View Care Home	50	80%	Private
Pulteney House Resource Centre	18	100%	NHS
Riverside House Nursing Home	44	84%	Private
Seaview House Nursing Home	42	90%	Private
Sutherland			
Meadows Nursing Home	40	90%	Private
Melvich Centre	6	67%	NHS
Oversteps Eventide Home	24	92%	Third Sector
Seaforth House Resource Centre	15	93%	NHS
Inverness			
Ach-An-Eas	24	67%	NHS
Aden House	24	92%	Private
Ballifeary House	24	92%	Third Sector
Birchwood Highland Recovery Centre	23	9%	Third Sector
Cameron House Eventide Home	-	-	-
Castlehill Care Home	88	57%	Private
Centred Recovery Centre - Block	23	26%	Third Sector
Centred Recovery Centre - Spot	23	70%	Third Sector
Cheshire House For The Highlands	16	25%	Third Sector
Culduthel Care Home	65	83%	Private
Daviot Care Home	74	76%	Private
Highview House Nursing Home	83	87%	Private
Isobel Fraser Residential Home	30	73%	Third Sector
Kingsmills Nursing Home	60	87%	Private
Kinmylies Lodge Nursing Home	18	94%	Private
Maple Ridge	13	69%	Private
Maple Ridge - High Dependency Unit	5	80%	Private
Mayfield Lodge Residential Home	12	100%	Private
Meallmore Lodge - Drumboe Unit	74	22%	Private
Nansen - Fram House (Residential)	5	80%	Third Sector
Pittyvaich Care Home	58	59%	Private

Southside Nursing Home	33	70%	Private
Nairn			
Bruach House	22	86%	Private
Carolton Care Ltd	20	95%	Private
Hebron House Nursing Home	22	91%	Private
Hillcrest House Nursing Home	23	65%	Private
St Olaf Nursing Home	-	-	-
The Manor Care Centre	43	58%	Private
Whinnieknowe Residential Home	24	79%	Third Sector
Badenoch & Strathspey			
Grant House Resource Centre	20	50%	NHS
Lynemore Care Home	40	83%	Private
Mains House Care Home	31	77%	NHS
Wade Centre Community Care Unit	22	36%	NHS
Lochaber			
Abbeyfield House	30	110%	Third Sector
Invernevis House Resource Centre	32	100%	NHS
Mackintosh Centre	8	88%	NHS
Moss Park Nursing Home	40	55%	Private
Telford Centre Community Care Unit	10	90%	NHS
Skye and Lochalsh			
An Acarsaid	10	90%	NHS
Home Farm Care Centre	35	71%	NHS
Wester Ross			
Howard Doris Centre	n/a		Third Sector
Isle View Nursing Home	25	88%	Private
Lochbroom House Community Care Unit	11	91%	NHS
Strathburn House Resource Centre	14	43%	NHS

11.164 [Care homes across the Highland HSCP area](#) are mapped by NHS Highland, demonstrating the spatial distribution of care homes provided by the public sector, private sector and third sector. This data is also available on the Improvement Service Spatial Hub [Care Homes for the Elderly](#).

11.165 As of May 2025, there are 62 total care homes across north Highland, 45 which are operated by independent sector care home providers and 17 of which are in-house care homes operated by NHS Highland ([Independent Care Sector Home Overview and Collaborative Support Update 7 May 2025](#)). As reported in Table 11:22, as of September 2025 there were 1675 care home beds available in Highland, with around 1463 provided by private or third sector care homes. In terms of size of care homes, within Highland, there are 9 private sector care homes have 50 beds or over, with 2 of these being over 80 beds. The majority of care homes are under 50 beds, with 28 care homes operating with 20 beds or less.

11.166 For Highland, figures from the Public Health Scotland [Social Care Insights Dashboard 2022/23](#) show that 36 per 1,000 people are supported by Social Care Services, which include: care at home, care home, meals, community alarm/telecare, housing support, social worker and day care. This rate is lower than the Scottish equivalent of 42.8 per 1,000 people but represents a slight increase relative to figures for 2017/2018, and the rates of increase are slightly higher in Highland than Scotland as a whole. From recent data it is estimated that there are 26,179 unpaid adult carers in the North Highland area, this information is obtained from the Carers Census 23/24 which is currently the most up to date published figure. However, it is recognised and estimated that in reality this figure is likely to be 30% higher as it is known that unpaid carers do not self-identify as an unpaid carer especially in the older adult population.

11.167 Care at Home provision in Highland, by provider type is presented in Figure 11:2. External care home provision is most prevalent, especially in Inverness, Nairn, Easter Ross and Mid-Ross. However, in Sutherland, Skye and Lochalsh, Lochaber, Caithness and Badenoch and Strathspey in-house care at home provision is more prevalent. Reablement, short term provision of care at home up to 6 weeks, to support recovery from illness or injury, has limited provision in Highland.

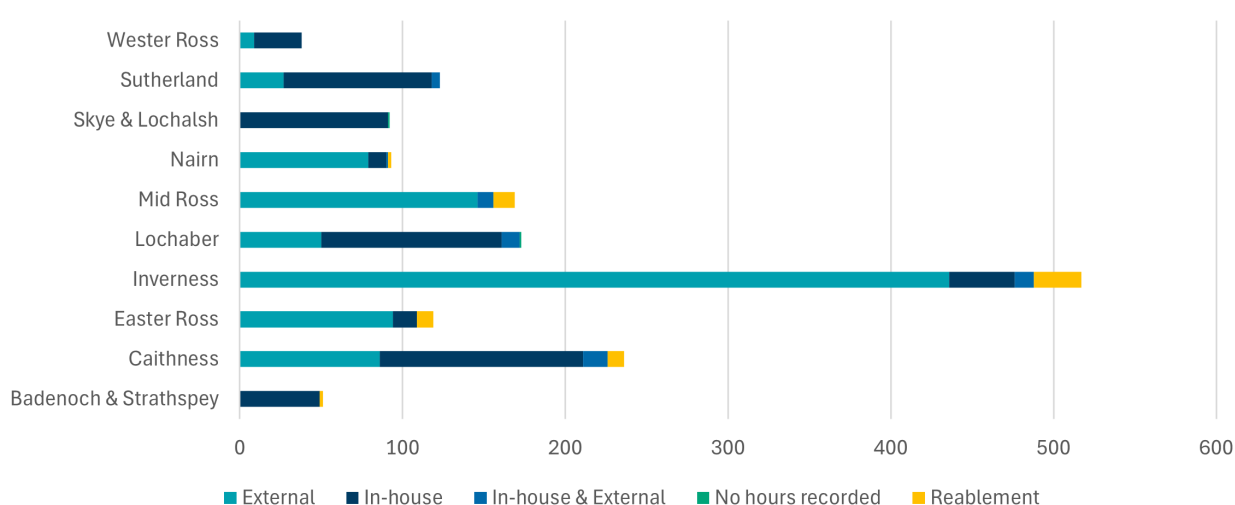


Figure 11:2 Provision of Care at Home services in Highland by area, at 26 October 2025. (Source: NHS Highland)

11.168 The Care at Home waiting list by level of need varies by area in Highland, as shown in Figure 11:3. Lochaber and Inverness have both the largest waiting lists and highest level of Critical and Substantial need, and Caithness also has a comparably similar waitlist for Critical need.

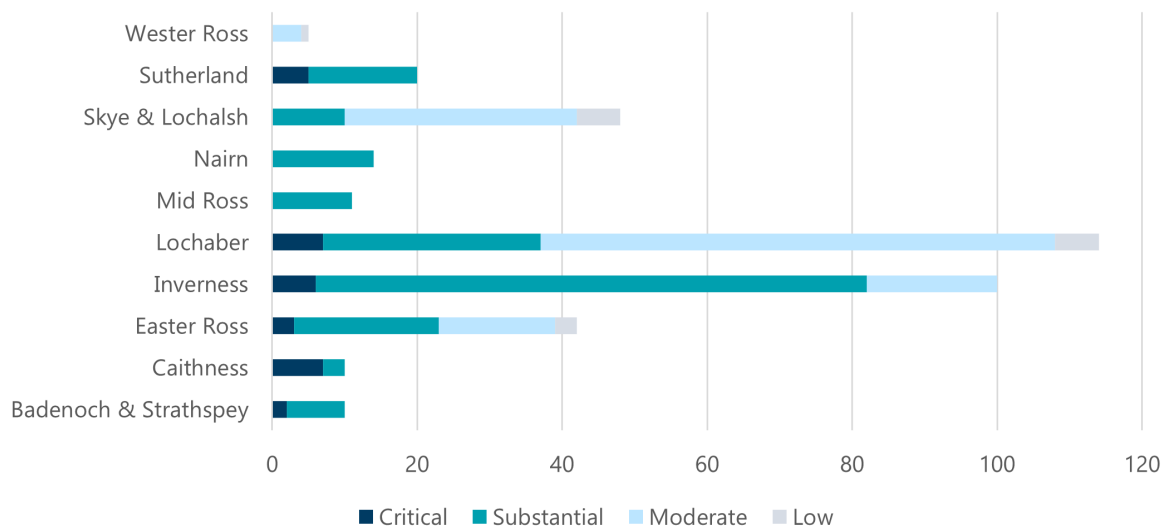


*Figure 11:3 Care at Home waiting list by level of need, by area of Highland, at 26 October 2025
(Source: NHS Highland)*

11.169 The Independent Care Sector Home Overview and Collaborative Support Update details that over the course of 2024/2025 there have been continued sustainability concerns and arising quality issues within the independent sector care home market within Highland. There is a higher proportion of smaller size of operator and smaller scale of provision within north Highland. Whilst this smaller scale provision reflects Highland geography and population, it presents increased financial sustainability and vulnerability risks, particularly given that the National Care Home Contract (NCHC) rate is calculated on the basis of a 50 bed care home, operating at 100% occupancy.

11.170 Independent providers and NHS Highland care homes continue to experience difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff and this represents a very high risk across the sector. The most significant difficulties are with recruiting nurses to work in care homes. Staffing difficulties are further exacerbated in homes in rural locations away from the larger population centres but are not limited to these locations. Further, smaller care homes in rural communities are very vulnerable to availability of workforce and housing availability is a key factor in being able to recruit and retain workforce. Some care homes are in older buildings and the Care Inspectorate environmental requirements on the buildings are becoming increasingly difficult to comply with - making those services increasingly vulnerable to closure.

11.171 Since March 2022, there have been 6 independent sector care home closures and 4 NHS Highland in-house care home closures with a total loss of 204 registered beds (Independent Care Sector Home Overview and Collaborative Support Update 7 May 2025). Strathburn, Gairloch has since re-opened in spring 2025.

There have also been three care home acquisitions by NHS Highland / The Highland Council since November 2020 (Home Farm, Main's House and Moss Park). A common theme across many of these closure situations relates to staff recruitment and retention, the cost of securing agency cover and financial viability. This has coincided with increasing rates of delayed discharges from hospitals which remain a concern both nationally and within NHS Highland and more care-at-home capacity needs to be generated to alleviate this issue ([Independent Care Sector Home Overview and Collaborative Support Update 7 May 2025](#)).

- 11.172 Additional capacity has been added with the opening of Pittyvaigh, a 58 bed care home in Milton of Leys in Inverness, in June 2025. Planning applications for two further care homes, which if granted would provide a further 22 beds. The [Call for Development Sites](#) for the HLDP, which received suggestions from landowners, developers and others from 31 January to 2 May 2025, included one suggested site for a care home in the Black Isle.
- 11.173 NHS Highland is developing a locality model as a preferred and intended direction of travel for the provision of health and social care services, the key objectives of which are safe, sustainable and affordable locality provision. This is the direction as set out in the Joint Strategic Plan. However, there has been and continues to be, immediate and operational challenges from arising and anticipated care home closures, which require to be addressed. Given the evolving nature of the developing situation, the available courses of action to prevent a significant scale of lost provision may not entirely align with the intended strategic direction but these actions are being taken or considered out of necessity ([Independent Care Sector Home Overview and Collaborative Support Update 7 May 2025](#)). Work to progress a care home strategy, commissioning plan and market facilitation plan has been delayed due to operational pressures. Capacity has now been created within the Partnership's joint Transformational Programme, which will now see some much-needed progress in these areas. This transformational activity will consider sustainable forward care models.
- 11.174 However, there has been and continues to be immediate operational challenges arising from care home closures which require to be addressed in the short term, diverting resources away from fully progressing the locality model. There is insufficient capacity within the health and social care system to cope with the ongoing scale of lost provision. Mitigating actions are therefore required to avoid whole system destabilisation, whilst ideally at the same time, moving toward the locality model in development. Given the evolving nature of the developing situation, and the unpredictability of the future of independent sector care homes, more precise forecasting of care home needs in Highland are being developed through the forthcoming draft Commissioning Plan (expected late November 2025), for approval end of December 2025. The Highland Health and

Social Care Partnership Commissioning Plan for Adult Care will evaluate future demand and capacity for Adult Care services across all of Highland, including considerations for a changing model of care for Adult Social Care.

11.175 In Highland, many care homes are at capacity (Figure 11:3) and have waitlists. Care homes are increasingly being used only for people with the highest level of need due to the limited number of spaces. A consequence is that delayed discharges from hospital are common. For example, as shown in Figure 11:4, in October 2025 over 20 people were waiting in hospitals in Sutherland, Easter Ross, Caithness and Inverness to enter care homes. NHS Highland has noted there is a recognised deficit of up to 3,000 care-at-home hours per week.

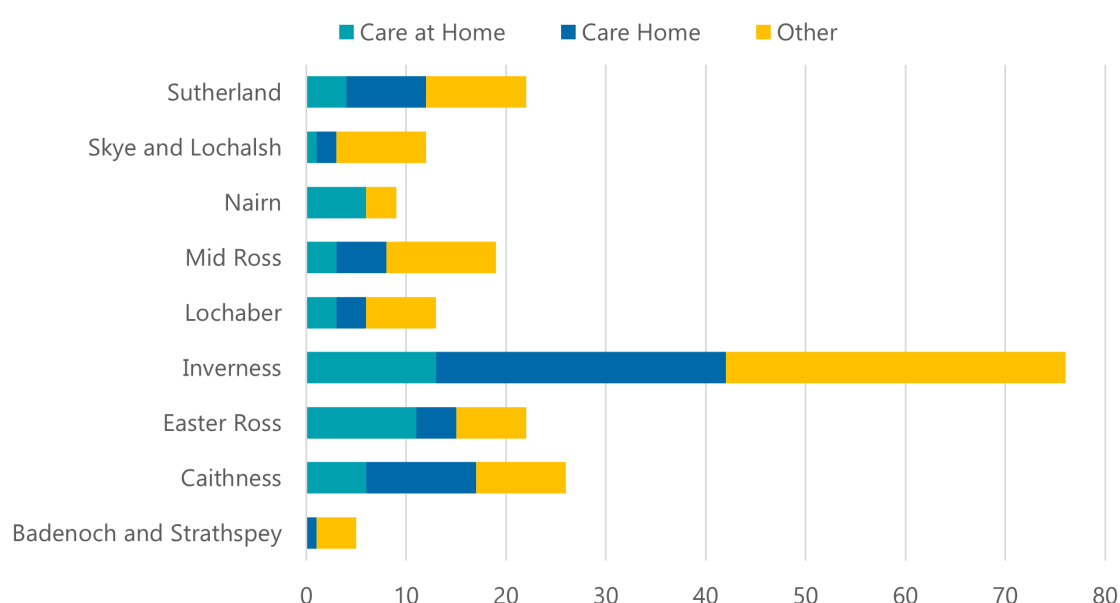


Figure 11:4 Number of delayed discharges from hospital, by destination care type at 27 October 2025 (Source: NHS Highland)

11.176 NHS Highland recognises the limitations of the current locality model for social care. The Commissioning Plan being developed is charting a path toward a changing model of care with more of a localised care service, working in partnership with local organisations and agencies to deliver care-at-home services and to support people to live in their homes for longer. Projected population and household estimates may enable the Council and HSCP to identify how Adult Social Care services could be impacted by future development and could therefore inform future Developer Contributions.

11.177 The prevalence of residential annexes or accessible amendments to homes may indicate unmet demand for adult care or reflects that people do not want to be in residential care. Whatever the driver, some families are taking it on themselves to prepare for or provide accommodation (with unpaid care or in-home care

services) for elderly or disabled family members. Analysis of Council development management data from 2012-2025 identified 195 planning applications for residential annexes, of which 45 were specified for Elderly Parents, 15 for Other Family members and the remainder unspecified (**THC137**). Of the 195 annexes, 38 were licensed and converted to short term lets. There were 121 planning applications approved for accessible amendments to homes from 2012-2025 (excluding Highland Council HRA funded portfolio) (**THC136**). Addition of access ramps were the most common amendment (96 applications), and more than 10 applications were received in the following areas: Badenoch and Strathspey, Culloden and Ardersier, Inverness Ness-side and Nairn. Between 2013-2017, 96 accessible amendment planning applications were approved. Further consideration as relates to housing is discussed in **Chapter 9: Housing**.

Burial Grounds

- 11.178 Section 3 of the Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act 2016 requires each local authority to provide at least one burial ground within its area. The Council has 245 burial grounds as shown on the [Highland Council Burial Grounds Map](#). The Council also operates Inverness Crematorium, located at Kilvean, Inverness. The [Bereavement Service Update Report 2025](#) confirms that the service undertakes around 1300 cremations and 1700 burials per year as detailed in Table 11:23. Annual rates of burials and cremations in Highland evidence a 43% rate of cremation in contrast with the Scottish average of 70%.
- 11.179 Capacity within Highland Burial Grounds is detailed separately (**THC183**), owing to the large number of burial grounds and settlements, which shows an approximate average 57-year supply of burial ground, based on previous burial rates and annual rates of lairs sold. This is summarised in Table 11:24.

Table 11:23 Burials and Cremations in Highland

Year	Cremations	Burials	Total	% Cremation
2016	1100	1647	2747	45.55
2017	1127	1690	2817	44.21
2018	1240	1771	3011	45.00
2019	1237	1594	2831	43.70
2020	1239	1445	2684	46.16
2021	1264	1713	2977	42.46
2022	1403	1677	3080	45.55
2023	1360	1716	3076	44.21
2024	1270	1552	2822	45.00
2025	1359	1530	2889	47.04
Total	12599	16355	28934	43.54

11.180 While the 57-year burial ground supply represents an average number of years supply across all burial grounds, it is recognised that capacity at individual burial grounds varies and there are 19 identified burial grounds with a supply of less than 6 projected years until all lairs are sold (**THC183**). The Highland death rate as specified within [Public Health Scotland Death Rates by Council Area](#) statistics is currently 1% of the population per annum. The matter of need for burial space in Highland will be considered in the proposed HLDP.

Table 11:24 Burial Ground Capacity in Highland's Administrative Areas (THC184)

Admin Area	Av. Burials per Annum	Av. # Lairs Sold per Annum	Unsold # Lairs	Projected # Years until all Lairs Sold
Alness	77	38.4	643	27.5
Badenoch & Strathspey	85.3	44	1538	51.4
Dingwall & Black Isle	185.9	67.8	3820	80.6
Drummuie	96.3	61.8	3455	103.7
Gairloch	21	11.4	339	53.8
Inverness	370.5	166.9	2237	67.9
Kyle	14.9	11.5	239	17.2
Lochaber	138.9	74.6	788	46.0
Nairn	99	30.2	416	30.4
Skye & Lochalsh	122.9	98.7	2283	43.3
Tain	45	27.8	541	25.9
Caithness & NW Sutherland	257.9	138.8	2199	40.2
Ullapool	15.4	5.4	570	88.2
Total	1,530	777.3	19,068	57.4

Summary of Stakeholder Engagement

11.181 A full breakdown of all stakeholder engagement undertaken to support the Evidence Report is provided within the Log of Engagement (**THC001**). Drafts of the evidence presented in this chapter were circulated to key agencies and other stakeholders on 30 January 2026. A summary of feedback received will be presented once received.

11.182 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:

- NatureScot
- Scottish Water
- SEPA
- Historic Environment Scotland
- NHS Highland
- HIE
- HiTrans
- Transport Scotland
- Crofting Commission
- Homes for Scotland
- Scottish Land and Estates
- HNDA Housing Market Partnership Stakeholders
- CNPA
- UHI
- Highlife Highland
- SSEN-T
- SSEN-D

11.183 A summary of feedback received is presented below:

11.184 The Council is still awaiting response from HIE, which once presented, will be included within this section.

Homes for Scotland (THC090)

Main views raised	Reference should be made to Planning Circular 4/2025 Planning Obligations and Good Neighbour Agreements and NPF4 Policy 18 Infrastructure First. Minor point: section 11.44 repeats what is in the two paragraphs above. Education: Add research undertaken by the Scottish Futures Trust to maximise the use of space within existing schools to the evidence base as an option to maximise use of existing facilities and potentially negate the need for developer contributions. Health: support intention not to seek contributions towards healthcare given that private sector healthcare providers could benefit from these contributions. Suggest additional evidence to justify this.
Council's response	Agree with the points made and additions to the evidence base have been included.
Areas of agreement	Agree with the need to add additional evidence to this chapter.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.

Is the agency content with the evidence?	Yes, Homes for Scotland are content with the evidence presented in this chapter.
Implications for proposed plan	No implications have arisen from these comments.
Actions for proposed plan stage	No actions have arisen from these comments.
NatureScot (THC088)	
Main views raised	In previous HLDP consultation highlighted NPF4's definition of Infrastructure First includes green and blue infrastructure, and highlighted link to NPF4's policy 20 Blue and green infrastructure, however NatureScot unable to find these highlighted within this chapter. Also looking for clarification on whether information from Open Space Audits and Greenspace Audits that can help to plan for the protection and enhancement of blue and green networks, and which could help to form nature networks and active travel options would be considered within the summary of implications for the proposed plan. Unable to find reference to these comments, but if reflected in other chapters such as Chapter 10: Transport, suggest helpful to cross reference. Once comments have been addressed in revised Chapters 8, 9 and 11, can agree that the evidence within them will be sufficient on matters relevant to NatureScot.
Council's response	Blue and Green Infrastructure are discussed in Chapter 13: Design Wellbeing Local Living and Placemaking . Transport is discussed in Chapter 10: Transport . In the interests of brevity, we have focused Chapter 11 on other infrastructure matters. Cross-overs between this chapter and others are denoted at the beginning of the chapter.
Areas of agreement	Not discernible as submission does not address matters of infrastructure that are contained within this chapter.
Outstanding issues	Not discernible as submission does not address matters of infrastructure that are contained within this chapter.
Is the agency content with the evidence?	Not discernible as submission does not address matters of infrastructure that are contained within this chapter.

Implications for proposed plan	Not discernible as submission does not address matters of infrastructure that are contained within this chapter.
Actions for proposed plan stage	Not discernible as submission does not address matters of infrastructure that are contained within this chapter.

Summary of Local Place Plan Priorities

11.185 Ardgour Local Place Plan (**THC010**) has identified the following priorities relating to Infrastructure:

- Childcare across the area supplementing Clovullin nursery.
- Enhanced community facilities around the school and hall in Clovullin such as new community centre, community garden / greenspace, all-weather pitch & better play facilities.
- Provide infrastructure, simplify consents; commuted sums paid by developers in relation to affordable housing developer contributions should be invested in the Community Council area;
- Our community needs people. Younger people, workers and families in particular need to be able to stay here or to move here. If not addressed, the school roll will continue to fall, population will continue to age, job vacancies will continue to remain unfilled, and providing vital services and activities will get even harder.
- Treslaig Village Hall improvements, including potential extension and terrace area, car park enlargement and outdoor space.
- Ardgour (Clovullin) Village Hall improvements, for example roof & other repairs, heating, insulation, solar panels, kitchen, parking.
- Clovullin Community Hub:
 - New Ardgour Hall (Clovullin) - opportunities for a youth space, cafe, heritage centre, cafe, shop/vending, public toilets, workspace, heritage centre etc.
 - Creation of central village green.
 - Upgrade existing community field - All-weather pitch and better play facilities - Install all-weather pitch, Multi Use Games Area, better play facilities, pumptrack, sports equipment, lighting etc.
- Community garden(s) - with polytunnels, orchard, events, rhododendron removal etc.
- Achaphubuil - add play, paths and seating to existing greenspace.
- Enhanced community facilities around the school and hall in Clovullin such as new community centre, community garden / greenspace, all-weather pitch & better play facilities

- Improvements and extensions to existing community paths at Camusnagaul/Achaphubuil and Clovullin/North Corran in particular
- Support for community-led renewable power generation & micro-grid options in principle.
- Improve broadband
- Care for older people – home-based care and respite/residential care at Dail Mhor in Strontian.
- Flexible GP catchments and transport

11.186 Black Isle Local Place Plan (**THC011**) has identified the following priorities relating to Infrastructure:

- Fit-for-purpose school buildings, facilities and education.
- Review and upgrade school facilities and education in Fortrose, Avoch, Munlochy and Conon Bridge.
- Consider need for 3-18 Campus in Fortrose/Rosemarkie.
- Access to all-weather sports pitches and swimming opportunities.
- Network of local play facilities for children and teens across the Black Isle (play parks, pump track etc.)
- Better facilities & services for disabled people.
- Develop new / strengthen existing community hubs in Culbokie, Fortrose, Munlochy and Tore.
- Make more of hubs for social activities (in partnership with Black Isle Leisure Centre and Leanaig Centre), public services (e.g. health and police) and other opportunities like home working, training and lifelong learning.
- Support use of halls and schools for additional activities such as youth clubs, training and adult education.
- Build up community assets to generate income and run services, for example re-use of former churches in Cromarty / Munlochy and community energy generation.
- Visitor facilities including motorhome waste disposal.
- Sewerage upgrades and public toilets.
- Good quality broadband across the Black Isle.
- Care for older people (in their own homes & residential care)

11.187 Broadford and Strath Local Place Plan (**THC012**) has identified the following priorities relating to Infrastructure:

- Welcome prospect of new primary school and community facilities at Broadford new and existing infrastructure should tie into this development.
- Elgol School – community aspiration for this mothballed primary school to be reopened. Encourage options for 'meantime use' include community learning hub, visitor or heritage centre, workspaces etc. to maintain building

- New Broadford Primary School – to include nursery and community facilities.
- Childcare and education facilities to be available across Broadford and Strath to encourage families to stay and work in the area. Explore the potential for mobile outdoor learning and play facility.
- Broadford West:
 - South Skye Community Campus – phased development of leisure and recreation facilities, could include swimming pool, climbing wall and soft-play area.
 - Old toilet block – mixed-use facility including business and community space.
 - Land opposite Broadford Village Hall - potential for community purchase for amenity use.
 - Protect and enhance community green and amenity spaces - including the Community Garden, the 'arboretum' strip at Old Corrie Industrial Estate, the garden at the current (2024) primary school and the 'Clay Pools' natural swimming spot.
- Elgol:
 - Elgol School - options for 'meantime use' of mothballed primary school, including community learning hub, visitor or heritage centre, workspaces etc.
 - Elgol Village Hall - support future development of sport and leisure facilities in and beside hall site, including play park and community garden.
- Broadford West industrial estates - consider provision of waste/recycling facilities.
- Widespread concern over litter, anti-social behaviour and general neglect and untidiness. This needs to be managed through better communication, education and improved waste/recycling facilities, potentially in Broadford industrial estate.
- Support key services and drivers of economic activity. Continued support for business to be encouraged as appropriate, in particular for start-up businesses. Priority to be given to waste and recycling facilities.
- Upgrade broadband and electricity supply in outlying areas including Elgol/Torrin.
- Old hospital site and helipad – should be used to further health and social care provision for the wider area.
- Consider last-time housing options of various types in the right locations – generally close to services and facilities, especially health care.

11.188 Caol Local Place Plan (**THC024**) has identified the following priorities relating to Infrastructure:

- Promote adult learning
- More local tuition
- Introduce community garden, produce to be shared in community cupboard.
- A general feeling that facilities at the community centre and school/pitches are not being utilised to the best of their ability. Janitorial type keyholder, Access to school/ YC also to ensure spaces can be booked for clubs etc, options for events, such as mother & baby group, School campus accessible by all, improved coordination
- Option to have a community gym facility in the centre, corner shop on Castle Drive/Riverside
- Request for post office in village again
- Concerns for mental health, need opportunities to improve support.
- Importance of ensuring long -term needs of our elderly residents are respected and considered including nursing care, residential medical care and care at home needs.
- Manage campervan infrastructure including the need for waste disposal facilities in the village.
- Identify opportunities for kerb side food waste collection, circular waste and reduce food waste through community cupboard.

11.189 Dores and Essich Local Place Plan (**THC013**) has identified the following priorities relating to Infrastructure:

- Community concerns over Primary School roll decline.
- Dores - current site of public toilet under the Comfort Scheme is inadequate, preference for standalone provision elsewhere.
- Dores – upgrade Parish Hall including additional toilet block and extension.
- Dores – new hall or community hub, however preference for developing and upgrading existing Parish Hall.
- Dores – allocate land to north of Dores Inn for community use as per IMFLDP1
- Lack of waste disposal and parking area for campervans.
- Dores – lack of waste water provision for black water disposal, potential site south west of Dores Hall
- Dores - expand existing cemetery site (proposal already developed)
- Dores – use site C1/H4 (east of Torr Gardens) to develop a care home, sheltered housing or assisted living facility.

11.190 Duror and Kentallen Local Place Plan (**THC014**) has identified the following priorities relating to Infrastructure:

- Suggestion for education facilities and education centre for local heritage/ecology/outdoor pursuits at Cuil Bay.

- The potential loss of the village school is causing stress to many in the area, who see it as a valuable local resource.
- Opportunity for adult evening classes.
- Requirement for nursery services and wrap around child care.
- Cuil Bay struggles with the influx of camper vans during the summer, and there were suggestions for the installation of public toilets there,
- Explore extension of community centre including full time café, public toilets, office space and small community shop.
- Need people to establish and run services – such as a permanent café, activities for school-age children.
- Need reliable broadband and mobile phone service across the region.
- Opportunity for drop in surgery in community centre at Ballachulish.
- Wastewater and fresh water provision needed for campervans.

11.191 Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Local Place Plan (**THC022**) has identified the following priorities relating to Infrastructure:

- Suggestion for education facilities and education centre for local heritage/ecology/outdoor pursuits at Cuil Bay.
- The potential loss of the village school is causing stress to many in the area, who see it as a valuable local resource.
- Opportunity for adult evening classes.
- Requirement for nursery services and wrap around child care.
- Upgrade Fort Augustus play areas and tennis court, create outdoor shelter for young people.
- Acquire Fort Augustus Memorial Hall for community space.
- Community resilience facilities in halls.
- Open up campus outdoor recreation facilities outwith school hours.
- More activities for school-age children after school time inc. local swimming lessons.
- Upgrade public toilets in Fort Augustus & Invermoriston.
- Upgrading and/or increased use of access to healthcare (especially dentistry).

11.192 Gairloch Local Place Plan (**THC015**) has identified the following priorities relating to Infrastructure:

- Improve and maintain roads and pathways
- Improve sports facilities and access to changing rooms and toilet facilities.
- Improve infrastructure to support tourism
- Develop sports and recreation facilities on the Glebe.
- Create a better outdoor play facility for children.
- Create a shared working space/ business hub.
- Develop improved facilities for tourists.

- Improvement of health care support and provision, including dental and eye care
- Develop infrastructure for internet and phone connection.

11.193 Garve and District Local Place Plan (**THC016**) has identified the following priorities relating to Infrastructure:

- Retain education provision at Strathgarve Primary School, and improve facilities
- Fear of Strathgarve Primary School under threat of closure due to the state of the building and potential reducing school roll. Want children to continue to attend school in Garve with improved learning environment including more indoor space.
- Improved rail and bus services and road maintenance.
- Improve infrastructure to support tourism such as public toilets, parking, and waste disposal for campervans.
- Concerns over Kinlochluichart Church – Currently we are seeing a general trend towards the closure. Important to its current congregation but is also an important historical feature within the community which we would hope to preserve.
- Garve Hotel building is in disrepair and causing concerns for local residents. Attempting to engage with owners has proved unsuccessful, desire to see this building and land developed quickly.
- Better infrastructure to support tourism is essential - public toilets, parking, and waste disposal for campervans.
- Parking is an issue, especially at playpark.
- An improved Fire Service is essential for our remote community
- Improvement of health care support and provision, including easy access to NHS services dental and eye care and sheltered housing that is local.
- Develop infrastructure for internet and phone connection.
- Reliance on private water supplies and a desire to upgrade them

11.194 Golspie Local Place Plan (**THC021**) has identified the following priorities relating to Infrastructure:

- Consider options to build a new 3-18 yo school campus.
- Long term plans for the Village Hub depend on the potential relocation of key facilities (High School, Primary School and Care Home).
- Improve local green networks, walking and cycle routes.
- Add self-service petrol station with parking and electric charging points.
- Use Drummie site as an outdoor training centre (similar to Glenmore lodge).
- Add supermarket/food shop at business park and add more affordable food shop units on the Main St.

- Retain playing field and add/improve changing facilities. Access to playing fields should also be made free if possible.
- Retain allotments and add collective composting areas. Other potential small community garden sites.
- Golspie Town Cycle Centre/Facility. Add new facility Provide Village Centre changing and bike servicing facilities to encourage the Wildcat Trail users to stay in the town. Bike washing and maintenance facilities will also be provided at the Caravan site.
- Health centre to be retained
- Need affordable and reliable digital infrastructure

11.195 Kinlochleven Local Place Plan (**THC017**) has identified the following priorities relating to Infrastructure:

- Reboot the school campus and Leven Centre.
- Improve public services - including education, health, transport, employability and planning (and to complement the forthcoming Kinlochleven Locality Plan that will address inequalities).
- Improve/create playparks.
- Reinvigorate the village centre including renovation of derelict buildings such as the Aluminium Story Visitor Centre, Ice Factory and business park.
- Grow the community garden, re-open post office and open community cafe.
- Upgrade path network, and improve public/community transport.
- Restore Mamore Lodge as hotel.
- Create village maintenance squad.
- Manage visitor parking, camping and motorhomes including waste disposal.
- Retain GP surgery & pharmacy.
- Fix community composting site.

11.196 Lochalsh Local Place Plan (**THC018**) has identified the following priorities relating to Infrastructure:

- Affordable/easier community access to school facilities, indoor and outdoor.
- Improve safer routes to school
- More training, apprenticeships & work premises.
- Community acquisition of old Post Office for community use in Plockton
- Retain airstrip and extend car park to provide more spaces and include seating, ev charging, upgraded toilets/showers, jetty, workshop in Plockton.
- Desire for more community facilities in Stromeferry, and redevelop former hotel and Macaroni Yard.
- Visitor facilities to increase benefit & reduce harm from tourism.
- More cultural, sporting & social facilities & activities for all ages, especially <30s.
- Land for growing & promotion of local produce.

- Mental health support services for all ages, particularly
- Recycling options locally

11.197 Nairnshire Local Place Plan (**THC023**) has identified the following priorities relating to Infrastructure:

- Supports the development of education/ training/ further education facilities alongside commercial development and business start-up opportunities, including a physical centre (innovation hub) designed and operated around commercial and industrial innovation.
- Suggestion for development of common good land at Sandown for A Wetlands Education Centre Community Greenspace, Sustainable energy generation, and some community-led development and Sports facilities.
- Option for vacated Nairn Academy used as adult further learning centre.
- Suggested options for the future use of the St Ninian's church include a recycling and re-use centre, a climbing centre or relocation of Nairn library.
- Request that all new development and regeneration should improve the utility infrastructure position and not burden or create a deficit.
- Support the audit and consolidation of the public use of community buildings to support the viability of key community assets.
- Support for applications for community district heating schemes and community-led energy generation schemes should be supported.
- Scope to modernise the swimming pool using renewables with surplus used for district heating.
- Support the previously included commercial land to the Nairn East (NA05) North site as a sustainable location for expansion for business to locate.
- Town centre growth and any community hub developments should encourage small businesses and sole traders, including co-working spaces.
- Support business use of office space/ co-work uses including developing the harbour as a place for business associated with harbour/water uses including tourism.
- A Nairnshire focussed tourism strategy is needed.
- Nairnshire LPP adopts the proposed expansion space for the Gordon & Son Sawmill.
- Safeguarding and promoting key tourist and resident Links and beach front, including the re-development of the old paddling pool into the Team Hamish Splash Pad and proposal for the existing mini and crazy-golf courses, outdoor board games.
- The Former 'Morganti Land' site is promoted by the NRCC for a Community Right to Buy application.
- Development of a pump track to replace the BMX track at Riverside.
- Concerns of Green Free Port putting pressure on healthcare services.
- Retain greenspaces to boost health and wellbeing.

- Ensure high-speed broadband and mobile data connectivity available to all residents.

11.198 Sleat Local Place Plan (**THC025**) has identified the following priorities relating to Infrastructure:

- Local water supply approaching capacity limits.
- Recognise Sleat's unique economic and cultural position as a Gaelic education hub and its strong tourism potential.
- Digital skills development programme.
- Creation of traditional and digital skills training programmes, in partnership with educational providers such as SMO and the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI).
- Development of environmental education centre (Tormore) and agricultural education centre.
- Limited sport and leisure facilities.
- Desire for creation of flexible workspace hub and trades-focused business units, ideally at existing sites, such as Ardvasar old sheds, around Armadale or within the Kilbeg development.
- Recognise and support key businesses in Sleat including retail, food, hospitality and services including enhanced support to encourage seasonal businesses to open for longer.
- Development of sustainable tourism infrastructure including establishing a ranger service.
- Enhanced path network management.
- Develop purpose-built business centre, year-round tourism economy, integrated traditional and modern business hub, and comprehensive local food system.
- Enhance parking facilities and ev charging points.
- Gaps in healthcare services, particularly dentistry, concerns over social isolation, suggestion for integrated health care facilities, expanded local health care especially for elderly residents
- Suggestion for mental health and community wellbeing support programmes and community care coordination.
- Systematic mapping of connectivity gaps, support programmes for digital inclusion and enhanced mobile coverage in black spots with medium/long-term goal of universal full fibre broadband coverage.
- Acknowledge waste management infrastructure gaps, request for enhanced public waste facilities, seasonal waste management solutions, local recycling facilities and community composting scheme.
- Negative impact on water quality in the Sound of Sleat from dredge sand dumping, cruise ships and poor-quality wastewater discharges, suggestion for Marine litter reduction programme.

11.199 Stratherrick and Foyers Local Place Plan (**THC019**) has identified the following priorities relating to Infrastructure:

- Explore the future of local schools.
- Create sports and recreational facilities in Foyers: Riverside Field and Foyers Bay.
- Retain Foyers Post Office and shop.
- Create, maintain and upgrade local community hubs including The Hub in Foyers, Foyers Medical Centre, Foyers Shop, Camerons Tearoom, Boleskine House, Stratherrick Village Hall (Gorthleck), Whitebridge Hotel, Wildside Centre (Whitebridge), Errogie Kirk, Torness field sports club and Inverfarigaig forest school.

11.200 Torridon and Kinlochewe Local Place Plan (**THC020**) has identified the following priorities relating to Infrastructure:

- Re-purposing Torridon and Kinlochewe schools.
- Expand and enhance play facilities.
- Improved infrastructure to connect all properties to the grid.
- A requirement that fish farm development and management should require strong community engagement and partnership working.
- An aspiration that Loch Diabaig could be community owned or managed.
- Development of new National Trust visitor centre in Torridon with options for grey waste disposal.
- Retention of post office and shop in Kinlochewe.
- New mountain bike tracks developed as part of hydro scheme tracks in Kinlochewe.

11.201 Croy and Tornagrain Local Place Plan (**THC026**) has identified the following priorities relating to Infrastructure:

- Infrastructure issues arise from recent and ongoing housing growth and infrastructure needs have not been adequately addressed alongside development;
- Plan is structured around themes (e.g. movement, economy, community life) that all depend on improved infrastructure capacity;
- Lack of social/community infrastructure in existing development including shops and services, alongside lack of recreation and social space, particularly for young people;
- Tornagrain perceived as better planned with phased service delivery
- View held that no further housing development should proceed until infrastructure and service needs are addressed;
- Existing school in Croy serves Croy and Tornagrain currently and new primary school for Tornagrain intended to serve the expanding settlement.

11.202 Morvern Local Place Plan (**THC027**) has identified the following priorities relating to:

- Digital connectivity is a key tool for resilience and repopulation, reducing rural disadvantage;
- Economic growth is dependent on physical infrastructure provision for business activity, not just land allocation;
- Infrastructure includes marine systems and coastal connectivity such as ferry links and ports;
- Social infrastructure is essential for retaining population and supporting rural living;
- Recognition that development is constrained by water/servicing capacity;
- Basic servicing infrastructure is a critical enabling condition for development delivery.

11.203 Kyle of Sutherland Local Place Plan (**THC028**) has identified the following priorities relating to:

- Legacy issues of declining services and infrastructure loss (e.g. banks, petrol stations, hotels) impacting settlements.
- Infrastructure is fragmented and declining, contributing directly to economic fragility and depopulation.
- Very limited and unreliable public transport provision, restricting access to jobs, education and services.
- Lack of high-quality broadband and mobile coverage is a major constraint.
- Economic development is dependent on physical and service infrastructure availability.
- Community buildings and facilities anchors for community life and necessary to sustain population and social cohesion.
- Supports an infrastructure first approach to repopulation in rural areas.

11.204 Glen Urquhart Local Place Plan (**THC029**) has identified the following priorities relating to Infrastructure:

- Infrastructure is currently inadequate and unevenly distributed, constraining both housing delivery and economic growth, due to poor access to basic services, inconsistent broadband and limited public transport, and capacity issues in Drumnadrochit.
- Digital infrastructure is positioned as foundational to rural sustainability, equivalent to transport.
- Priority is the maintenance and upgrading of schools and community buildings.
- Tourism growth must be supported by appropriate infrastructure investment, not allowed to outpace it.

Summary of Implications for the Proposed Plan

Education

11.205 HLDP will continue to seek developer contributions towards schools and the delivery programme shall require to be maintained to identify schools where capacity will be needed to accommodate future development.

11.206 GME schools have not been included in developer contributions towards education, but GME is growing with many schools reporting increasing GME enrolment, which in some schools outnumbers English Median enrolment. In reviewing HLDP policy on developer contributions, it is considered that with formal catchment areas in place and with evidence of GME occupancy and growth, it would be possible to develop a framework for including GME schools within developer contributions.

11.207 The completed HNDA will provide housing need and demand estimates by sub-Highland housing market area and inform how regions within Highland will likely experience different pressures on school capacity. While current SRF's cannot yet utilise this information and make adjustments it is anticipated that the final HNDA will enable the Council to estimate impacts on capacity and for the LDP to plan accordingly.

Community Facilities

11.208 The HLDP will recognise the important role of the vast range of community facilities throughout Highland. Based on various sources of evidence previously described, including reviewing the existing Highland Delivery Programme, a future 'Call for Ideas', LPPs and APPs, analysis of Local Living Mapping it will identify the need for any new or improved community facilities in areas of no, limited or inaccessible provision in the Proposed Plan.

11.209 The HLDP will continue to seek developer contributions towards community facilities. It will seek to update the policy framework in a number of ways. This includes:

- A review of the level of contributions currently charged.
- The potential to be more reflective of smaller scale and/or rural development by requiring developments for 1-3 houses also make proportionate contributions.
- A review of facilities contributions are taken towards with a view to the inclusion of a wider range of facilities where a need is identified.
- A review of catchment areas for seeking contributions, potentially applying more 'local' catchment areas than secondary school catchment areas where appropriate.

11.210 The completed HNDA will provide housing need and demand estimates by sub-Highland housing market area and inform how regions within Highland will likely experience different pressures on community facilities. While seeking community facilities developer contributions cannot yet utilise this information and make adjustments it is anticipated that the final HNDA will enable the Council to estimate impacts on capacity and for the LDP to plan accordingly.

Water and Wastewater

11.211 The HLDP will recognise constraints in the capacity of water and wastewater infrastructure.

11.212 A lack of comprehensive evidence on water and sewerage capacity does not significantly hinder LDP preparation because of Scottish Government's instruction to Scottish Water to supply all committed housing and economic growth projects.

11.213 HLDP will need to provide direction to all development, including sites that come forward that are not within an allocation. While NPF4 Policy 22d has provisions for connecting to water supplies, connection to wastewater is not covered to the same degree as existing local policies. HLDP will aim to retain existing policy direction on this issue and will require ongoing engagement with SEPA as to whether further European sites are evidenced to be in unfavourable condition to the extent that would warrant similar policies to those used for the Loch Flemington SPA catchment.

11.214 The completed HNDA will provide housing need and demand estimates by sub-Highland housing market area and inform how regions within Highland will likely experience different pressures on waste and wastewater capacity. While current water and wastewater capacity cannot yet utilise this information and make adjustments it is anticipated that the final HNDA will enable the Council to estimate impacts on capacity and for the LDP to plan accordingly.

Waste Management

11.215 The HLDP will need to recognise future capacity needs in Household Waste Recycling Centres and Domestic Waste Transfer Stations and develop a policy framework to support planning proposals for these and secure developer contributions, where necessary if further capacity is required to serve future development, to support national circular economy targets.

11.216 The Highland Council currently collect the following waste streams from all householders; paper and card; plastic and metal containers; non-recyclable waste. Urban and some semi-urban areas will also have food and green waste collections. New properties should be provided sufficient space to accommodate

all such waste containers (which may be combined areas for communal residential buildings, e.g. flats) that aligns with current statutory requirements or national guidance. Glass is currently collected through a network of 'bring sites' and any major developments should include a suitable area for additional glass bring banks. Should statutory or service requirements change requiring kerbside glass collections of glass then developers would be required to ensure the development of future properties include the space for an extra recycling bin, but the need for major developments to provide a location for a 'bring site' is likely to be no longer required.

- 11.217 The completed HNDA will provide housing need and demand estimates by sub-Highland housing market area and inform how regions within Highland will likely experience different pressures on waste capacity. While current waste capacity cannot yet utilise this information and make adjustments it is anticipated that the final HNDA will enable the Council to estimate impacts on capacity and for the LDP to plan accordingly.

Digital Connectivity

- 11.218 HLDP should take account of the overall policy approach, as set out in Policy 24 of NPF4, to support the delivery of digital infrastructure, particularly in areas with gaps in connectivity and barriers to digital access as outlined in the [Digital Telecommunications Planning Guidance](#). Digital connectivity improvements are fundamental to facilitating rural business and remote working across the Highlands. HLDP should identify and support national developments which are located in the Highlands.
- 11.219 The impact of digital infrastructure developments on the built and natural environment, historic assets and designated sites must be considered and demonstrated to be minimised, taking cumulative impacts into account.
- 11.220 The spatial strategy for HLDP should have cognisance of the current availability of ultrafast and gigabit connectivity for new properties. HLDP must have regard to Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) once statutory guidance on RSS has been prepared and adopted, at which stage the duty to prepare RSS will come into force. RSS will provide a long-term spatial strategy which specify the area/s to which they relate, and identify:
- the need for strategic development.
 - the outcomes to which strategic development will contribute.
 - priorities for the delivery of strategic development.
 - proposed locations, shown in the form of a map or diagram
- 11.221 The completed HNDA will provide housing need and demand estimates by sub-Highland housing market area and inform how regions within Highland will likely

experience different pressures on digital connectivity. While current digital connectivity capacity cannot yet utilise this information and make adjustments it is anticipated that the final HNDA will enable the Council to estimate impacts on capacity and for the LDP to plan accordingly.

Health

- 11.222 HLDP will require to consider how bespoke housing solutions can support NHS's developing locality model to increase future adult health and social care provision at home, owing to the fragility of the care home sector in Highland. Ongoing engagement with Council officers liaising with NHS on this work will be required as part of this. The impacts of factors related to Highland's housing challenge and their implications for the staffing and subsequent operations of care homes are noted. As discussed in **Chapter 9: Housing**, HLDP will require to consider developing a policy framework that responds to the needs of Highland's key workers.
- 11.223 The Council has an established mechanism in place for securing developer contributions, but this has not previously included contributions towards primary care settings or health and social care settings. As part of preparing HLDP, the Council will require to work with NHS to consider whether a policy framework for these would support and respond to the pressures faced by NHS, and seeks to collaborate in doing so, learning from other authorities which have established developer contributions policies towards healthcare facilities. The Council notes that building capacity has been directly attributed to GP Practice list closures in two locations in the East of Inverness and that rising numbers of registered patients has been observed in other locations which witnessed housing developments, such as Dornoch and Drumnadrochit. The Council considers that continued engagement with NHS will be required to consider the role of developer contributions further.
- 11.224 The completed HNDA will provide housing need and demand estimates by sub-Highland housing market area and inform how regions within Highland will likely experience different pressures on healthcare capacity. While current healthcare capacity cannot yet utilise this information and make adjustments it is anticipated that the final HNDA will enable the Council to estimate impacts on capacity and for the LDP to plan accordingly.
- 11.225 Most evidence reviewed relating to pressures within NHS signals that pressures for Care Homes are primarily caused by financial viability of small care homes alongside staffing and recruitment challenges, rather than capacity limits within existing buildings. These staffing challenges are exacerbated by a lower pool to recruit from in Highland and context-specific challenges of a highly seasonal economy in some areas. As developer contributions are principally concerned

with funding required expansions of services, there is uncertainty as to whether this model would respond to the needs and priorities of NHH in the short to medium term.

11.226 Future need for care homes in Highland is not yet fully understood. The Proposed Plan will have consideration for the future HHSCP Commissioning Plan – Adult Care which will provide Evidence on future needs.

11.227 The matter of need for burial space in Highland will be considered in the proposed HLDP and shall be informed by evidence where burial capacity is known to be constrained.

Statements of Agreement / Dispute

Agreement on Evidence

11.228 Statements of agreement will be sought once this Chapter has been circulated to key agencies.

Disputes with Stakeholders

11.229 None.

Information Gaps

11.230 The Council does not consider that current evidence on primary health care facilities is sufficient to seek developer contributions and would likely be unable to pursue such a policy unless robust evidence were to come forward in preparing the proposed plan.

11.231 The condition and capacity of a number of community facilities in Highland remains unknown. This is due to the vast range and nature of facilities throughout Highland that are owned and operated numerous different organisations. Where this information is not available, qualitative information sources will be used to help inform the approach in the HLDP, including from validated Local Place Plans and the Call for Ideas in 2026.

11.232 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 in Highland have formally registered Local Place Plans. Any Local Place Plans registered will be considered in the production of the LDP if timeously available.

Chapter 12 : Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings

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. - the principal purposes for which the land is used																																				
NPF4 LDP Requirements	NPF4 Policy 7: - LDPs, including through their spatial strategies, should support the sustainable management of the historic environment. - LDPs should identify, protect, and enhance valued historic assets and places. NPF4 Policy 9: - LDPs should set out opportunities for the sustainable reuse of brownfield land including vacant and derelict land and empty buildings.																																				
Links to Evidence	(THC035) Response from Historic Environment Scotland (THC088) NatureScot Consultation Response (THC201) Response from THC Environmental Health Team (THC112) HLDP Listed Buildings by Ward (THC113) Brown-Green House Completions Tables (THC210) HSE Consultation Zones and Hazardous Sites <table><tr><th>Ref no.</th><th>Online Resources</th><th>Date Accessed</th></tr><tr><td>THC010</td><td>Ardgour Local Place Plan</td><td>29.06.26</td></tr><tr><td>THC011</td><td>Black Isle Local Place Plan</td><td>29.06.26</td></tr><tr><td>THC012</td><td>Broadford and Strath Local Place Plan</td><td>29.06.26</td></tr><tr><td>THC024</td><td>Caol Local Place Plan</td><td>29.06.26</td></tr><tr><td>THC026</td><td>Croy and Tornagrain Local Place Plan</td><td>29.06.26</td></tr><tr><td>THC013</td><td>Dores and Essich Community Local Place Plan</td><td>29.06.26</td></tr><tr><td>THC014</td><td>Dunrobin and Kentallen Local Place Plan</td><td>29.06.26</td></tr><tr><td>THC022</td><td>Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Local Place Plan</td><td>29.06.26</td></tr><tr><td>THC015</td><td>Gairloch Local Place Plan</td><td>29.06.26</td></tr><tr><td>THC016</td><td>Garve and District Local Place Plan</td><td>29.06.26</td></tr><tr><td>THC029</td><td>Glen Urquhart Local Place Plan</td><td>29.06.26</td></tr></table>	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	Dunrobin 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
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	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
	THC790	Our Past, Our Future: The Strategy for Scotland's Historic Environment	22.10.25
	THC791	Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS)	22.10.25
	THC792	Managing Change in the Historic Environment guidance notes	22.10.25
	THC793	Sustainable Investment Tool	22.10.25
	THC794	The Skills Investment Plan for Scotland's Historic Environment	22.10.25
	THC795	HES Designations Portal	22.10.25
	THC796	Highland Historic Environment Record (HER)	22.10.25
	THC797	Trove.scot	22.10.25
	THC798	National Library of Scotland	22.10.25
	THC799	Am Baile	22.10.25
	THC800	Highland Archaeological Research Framework	22.10.25
	THC801	Flow Country World Heritage Site Map	22.10.25
	THC802	Flow Country World Heritage Site UNESCO Factsheet	22.10.25
	THC803	Flow Country WHS Development Guidance	22.10.25
	THC804	Flow Country WHS Planning Position Statement 2	22.10.25
	THC805	Wester Ross Biosphere Reserve UNESCO Factsheet	22.10.25
	THC806	NW Highlands Global Geopark UNESCO Factsheet	22.10.25
	THC807	Highland Conservation Areas	22.10.25
	THC808	Highland HER Map	22.10.25
	THC809	Tain Conservation Area Appraisal/Management Plan	22.10.25

	THC810	<u>Thurso Conservation Area Appraisal & Management Plan</u>	22.10.25
	THC811	<u>Wick Pulteneytown Conservation Area Appraisal & Management Plan</u>	22.10.25
	THC812	<u>Strathpeffer Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan</u>	22.10.25
	THC813	<u>Culloden Muir Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan</u>	22.10.25
	THC814	<u>Inverness Conservation Area Character Appraisal</u>	22.10.25
	THC815	<u>Inverness Conservation Area Management Plan</u>	22.10.25
	THC816	<u>The Highland Council's Shopfront Design Guidance</u>	22.10.25
	THC817	<u>Interim Guidance on the designation of conservation areas and conservation area consent</u>	22.10.25
	THC818	<u>THC Windows in Conservation Areas Interim Planning Guidance</u>	22.10.25
	THC819	<u>HES Designations Application Form</u>	22.10.25
	THC820	<u>THC Listed Buildings Guidance and Advice</u>	22.10.25
	THC821	<u>HES Introductory Report of Scotland's Thatched Listed Buildings</u>	22.10.25
	THC822	<u>Highland Historic Marine Protected Areas</u>	22.10.25
	THC823	<u>Managing Change in the Historic Environment: Conserving Underwater Heritage</u>	22.10.25
	THC824	<u>Highland Gardens & Designed Landscapes Inventory</u>	22.10.25
	THC825	<u>Highland Inventory of Historic Battlefields</u>	22.10.25
	THC826	<u>Inventory of Historic Battlefields: Best Practice Report</u>	22.10.25
	THC827	<u>THC Historic Environment Strategy SG</u>	22.10.25
	THC828	<u>ALGAO Guidance for Peatland Restoration and the Historic Environment</u>	22.10.25
	THC829	<u>ALGAO Delivery of Public Benefit and Social Value</u>	22.10.25
	THC830	<u>Pointing the Way to the Future</u>	22.10.25
	THC831	<u>HES Green Recovery Statement</u>	22.10.25
	THC832	<u>HES Guide to Climate Change Impacts</u>	22.10.25

	THC833	HES Your Historic Place: A Lens for the Place Standard Tool	22.10.25
	THC834	Scotland's Improvement Districts	22.10.25
	THC835	BARR Review	22.10.25
	THC836	The Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land Survey	22.10.25
	THC837	SVDLS Statistics Tables	22.10.25
	THC838	Scottish Land Commission Transform Scotland's Approach to Tackling Vacant and Derelict Land	22.10.25
	THC839	DUSTE sites	22.10.25
	THC840	SVDLS Site Register	22.10.25
	THC841	PAN33	22.10.25
	THC842	UK Government's Land Contamination and Risk Management Guidance Note	22.10.25
	THC843	THC Local Housing Strategy (LHS) 2023–2028	22.10.25
	THC844	THC Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP)	22.10.25
	THC845	Household Estimates	22.10.25
	THC846	Small Area Household Estimates by 2011 Data Zone	22.10.25
	THC847	Housing Land Audit	22.10.25
	THC848	Planning Circular 6/2011	22.10.25
	THC849	Compulsory Purchase Reform: Progress Report 2024	22.10.25
	THC850	Scottish Government Compulsory Purchase Order Reform in Scotland Consultation	22.10.25
	THC851	The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045	22.10.25
	THC852	Scottish Government Climate Change Plan 2018-2032 – Update	22.10.25
	THC853	Buglife Introduction to Brownfields Document	22.10.25
	THC854	Buglife Identifying Open Mosaic Habitat Document	22.10.25
	THC855	Wildlife and Countryside Link Open Mosaic Habitats High Value Guidance Document	22.10.25

	THC856	NatureScot Commissioned Report 606: Open mosaic habitats on previously developed land, Scotland	22.10.25
	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 that there are relevant crossovers between Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings and other topics including: • Chapter 4: Climate and Energy • Chapter 5: Nature and Environment • Chapter 6: Coastal Development and Aquaculture • Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places • Chapter 9: Housing • Chapter 11: Infrastructure • Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking Where apparent, the Council has referenced relevant linkages between policies areas throughout the chapter.		
	Summary of Evidence 12.1 This chapter presents the Council’s evidence in relation to historic assets and brownfield land, including empty buildings. 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: • Historic Assets and Places • Brownfield, Vacant and Derelict Land <u>Historic Assets and Places</u> 12.2 The Council's ambition is to reinforce our existing communities across the entire Highland region to ensure they are modern, resilient and fit for the future, whilst identifying, protecting and enhancing our valued heritage assets, which contribute to the character, culture and sense of place across Highland. <i>Policy Context</i> 12.3 Our Past, Our Future: The Strategy for Scotland's Historic Environment is Scotland’s five-year strategy for the historic environment. Developed		

collaboratively and collectively owned, it sets out a national mission to sustain and enhance the benefits of Scotland's historic environment, for people and communities now and into the future. In addition, [Historic Environment Policy for Scotland \(HEPS\)](#) includes six policies to define how the historic environment should be managed, and supporting [Managing Change in the Historic Environment Guidance Notes](#) can help to assess the impact of a proposed change in given instances. In support of this, the new [Sustainable Investment Tool](#) (SIT) enables visualisation around decision-making for projects and investment in built heritage and will help organisations as well as community and interest groups with heritage assets to explore sustainability, enabling greater resilience for Scotland's places.

- 12.4 [The Skills Investment Plan for Scotland's Historic Environment](#) has also recently been refreshed and ensures it can support both the delivery of [Our Past, Our Future](#) and NPF4 and to grow the skills needed to deliver on their priorities, particularly in emerging areas such as retrofit and energy efficiency. These policy documents along with data sources will support the Council's decision-making in preparing its new HLDP.
- 12.5 The primary sources of historic environment data for Highland are Historic Environment Scotland's [HES Designations Portal](#) and the [Highland Historic Environment Record \(HER\)](#). The HER is maintained by the Council and contains information on c.70,000 recorded archaeological sites, monuments, cultural landscapes and historic buildings and heritage areas, information on c.5,500 surveys and investigations as well as management reports, including Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans. Other important sources of historic environment information include [Trove.scot](#), which has now combined records from [HES Designations Portal](#) and previously known Canmore into a single system. Historic maps are available through [National Library of Scotland](#). There are many other sources of online information and digital archives available to review, including those held by local and national museums and Highlife Highland's [Am Baile](#). The [Highland Archaeological Research Framework](#) (HighARF) provides a useful overview of the current state of knowledge about the area's cultural heritage and highlights key research questions and recommendations to inform future work.
- 12.6 Across the Highland Council region, we have a range of historic environment assets that are summarised as follows.
- UNESCO World Heritage Designations
 - Conservation Areas
 - Listed Buildings
 - Scheduled Monuments
 - Historic Marine Protected Areas

- Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes
- Inventory of Historic Battlefields
- Non-designated Historic Assets and Places
- Climate Change and Historic Assets
- Scotland's Improvement Districts
- Church Estates
- Buildings at Risk
- Grants supporting restoration of Highland historic assets

UNESCO World Heritage Designations

- 12.7 The [Flow Country World Heritage Site](https://map-highland.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/04749b8d2c5b49a89cd9f9d0d36ea35a_0/explorer?location=58.319317,-3.971254,9.89) is an important designation that will be considered as part of HLDP. Further information of which can be found in this https://map-highland.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/04749b8d2c5b49a89cd9f9d0d36ea35a_0/explorer?location=58.319317,-3.971254,9.89 [Flow Country World Heritage Site UNESCO Factsheet](#). While other World Heritage Sites contain peatlands, The Flow Country is the only World Heritage Site inscribed purely for its qualities as a peatland ecosystem. Inscribed in July 2024, it is Scotland's seventh World Heritage Site and the first inscribed only under natural criteria. The Site was nominated under both 'natural' and 'cultural' criteria ix) and x) of the World Heritage Convention but has since been inscribed under criterion ix) only and is therefore the first World Heritage Site in Highland and Scotland to be inscribed only under 'natural' criteria. Therefore, the Flow Country World Heritage Site, and the Council's supporting [Development Guidance](#) and [Planning Position Statement 2](#) specific to it, are further detailed in **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**. Although not considered a historic asset, this is an important consideration included within Policy 7I and so mentioned within this chapter.
- 12.8 Other UNESCO designated sites include the [Wester Ross Biosphere Reserve](#) and the [North West Highlands Global Geopark](#). These do not have any specific supporting guidance but will still have material consideration in development proposals. These are also discussed in more detail in **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**.

Conservation Areas

- 12.9 Highland has 30 [Conservation Areas](#), of which 29 are within the area covered by the HLDP, and one additional within the CNPA portion of Highland. Each conservation area is of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. These conservation areas can be viewed on the Highland Historic Environment Record - [Highland HER Map](#).

- 12.10 Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans have been completed for [Tain](#), [Thurso](#), [Wick Pulteneytown](#), [Strathpeffer](#) and [Culloden Muir](#). A character appraisal has also been undertaken for [Inverness](#) and a Management Plan for [Inverness Old Town](#).
- 12.11 The Council will continue to review existing Conservation Areas, including producing guidance in the form of Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans. [The Highland Council's Shopfront Design Guidance](#) will remain relevant in relation to ensuring alterations to shopfronts in Conservation Areas are appropriate. The Council will prepare additional Conservation Area Planning Guidance to provide applicants with clear advice on the management of change within Conservation Areas and will consider whether the removal of permitted development rights (Article 4 Directions) may be required to ensure an appropriate level of control. Furthermore, the Council will consider whether further areas warrant Conservation Area designation (in line with [Interim Guidance on the designation of conservation areas and conservation area consent](#)).
- 12.12 The Council's Windows and Doors in Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Planning Guidance has been withdrawn following the most recent amendment to the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992. The Council will revisit this guidance in due course with [Windows in Conservation Areas Interim Planning Guidance](#) on Class 7A development provided.

Listed Buildings

- 12.13 Highland has 3003 Listed Buildings as found on the [HES Designations Portal](#), which includes buildings within the Highland portion of the CNPA. Listed buildings are buildings of special architectural or historic interest and are designated by Historic Environment Scotland under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997. Listed building distribution by ward can be found in **(THC112)** with all Listed Buildings across Highland shown on the [Highland HER](#). The first lists for Highland Council were made statutory in the early 1970s. All the burghs and parishes were resurveyed from 1982 to 1996 and therefore most of the listed building records will date to this period. These descriptions are brief and may not explain why the building is of interest for listing. Currently, a fuller description of the building is listed, with photographs and indicative polygon maps for new and recently reviewed records can be found through HES.
- 12.14 The Council will consider listings dating to before 1 April 2015. Under the terms of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act (Scotland) 1997,

any object or structure within the curtilage of a listed building which, though not fixed to the building, forms part of the land and has done so since before 1st July 1948 shall be treated as part of the building. In addition, it must be noted that earlier listed building records may use the word 'excluding' or 'not included', but if the Act is not quoted, the record has not been revised to reflect current legislation, and the exclusions carry no legal weight.

- 12.15 Any requests to review listings and proposals are made to HES by completing its [Designations Application Form](#). This process involves research and evidence gathering and takes a number of months to complete.
- 12.16 The Council also supply its own [Listed Buildings Guidance and Advice](#) that will continue to support the protection and enhancement of Listed Buildings in Highland. In cases where Listed Buildings in Highland are at risk they may be protected using Compulsory Purchase Orders, further detailed in Compulsory Purchase Orders. Table 12:1 Highland Listed Building categories represented by percentage of total.

Table 12:1 Highland Listed Building categories represented by percentage of total (THC035)

Listed Building Category	Number of Buildings	Percentage across Highland
Category A	183	6.1%
Category B	1625	54.1%
Category C	1195	39.8%
All Listed Buildings	3003	100%

- 12.17 [The Highland Council's Shopfront Design Guidance](#) will remain relevant to ensure alterations to Listed Buildings containing shopfronts are appropriate. Further policy and advice on how historic built heritage can be adapted for climate change would inform HLDP once available.
- 12.18 HES also provide an [Introductory Report of Scotland's Thatched Listed Buildings](#). HES are in the process of reviewing existing listings where there is a thatched roof. HES have completed a review of this building type in all council areas apart from Highland and Argyll and Bute. In Highland, HES have already prioritised the removal of thatched buildings which were found to no longer meet the criteria for listing and have amended existing listings to provide a bilingual statutory address in Gaelic and English. There are still a number of thatched sites in Highland under review and HES are progressing this work. Table 12:2 shows the current state of Thatched buildings in Highland and Scotland. Highland currently present 13.6% of Scotland's total number of listed thatched buildings.

Table 12:2 Listed Thatched Buildings Numbers

Location	Listed Thatched Buildings	% of Listed Thatched Buildings
Highland	32	13.6%
Scotland	236	100%

- 12.19 The exposed location and harsher weather conditions of Highland have also had an impact on the way the thatched tradition developed. This can be seen in the building profiles and thatch fixing mechanisms developed for the buildings. Therefore, highlighting its importance of protection and enhancement of these buildings and the communities they once provided for. A number are thatched buildings, including A-listed Groam Cottage, The Corr, Laidhay Barn and B-listed 11 Melvaig are recorded as Buildings at Risk concentrations of which are found in Wick (16) Tain (6) and Cromarty (4). Further details of all Highland buildings at risk which can be found in **Buildings at Risk**.
- 12.20 HES note that over 40 years have passed since the last resurvey of Highland. The understanding and appreciation of buildings of all types and period has evolved and younger buildings are now eligible for listing. While buildings which are less than 30 years old are not normally considered for listing, there will be a significant number of sites and places within the city constructed between the 1960s and 1990s which contribute to the historic environment and meet the criteria for listing.

Scheduled Monuments

- 12.21 There are 1280 Scheduled Monuments (SMs) within the HLDP area. These are archaeological sites and monuments of national importance. Any work that directly impacts a SM requires Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) which is granted by HES on behalf of Scottish Ministers. Impacts on setting do not require SMC but setting is a material consideration in the planning process. Therefore, SMC is required for direct impacts on scheduled monuments but not for impacts on the setting of a scheduled monument. These SMs can be viewed and details found on the [Highland HER](#).
- 12.22 It must be noted that some records that are old and have not been subsequently amended, with the earliest unamended records dating to 1930s. Earlier scheduling's (generally before the 1980s) often have very brief descriptions (simply a name in many cases) and will not explain why the monument is of national importance. Any requests to review scheduling's are made to HES by completing its [Designations Application Form](#). This process involves research and evidence gathering and takes a number of months to complete.

- 12.23 Both an A-Listed Building and Scheduled Monument Fort George is a key historic environment consideration. The proposed status of Fort George in IMFLDP2 allocated the site as an Economic Development Area covered by a wide range of uses including tourism, housing, industry and business. The Council will work closely with its Historic Environment Team and external key agencies to ensure a sustainable future for this important historic environment asset.

Historic Marine Protected Areas

- 12.24 Highland contains 4 of Scotland's 8 [Historic Marine Protected Areas](#) which are designated under the Marine Scotland Act (2010) and visible on the [Highland HER](#). Historic Marine Protected Areas aim to preserve historic assets of national importance and are considered alongside other marine designations as discussed in **Chapter 6: Coastal Development and Aquaculture**. HES [Managing Change in the Historic Environment: Conserving Underwater Heritage](#) provides guidance on conserving underwater heritage around the coasts of Scotland and in freshwater environments such as lochs and rivers. It is practical guide, primarily for practitioners and decision-makers who encounter underwater heritage in the course of their duties, as well as those who want to understand the impacts of a proposed change, on how to assess and manage the impacts of change while respecting the cultural significance of underwater heritage sites. This guide will be considered as part of HLDP alongside other marine designations.

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes

- 12.25 There are 46 Highland sites included in the [Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes](#), which are visible on the [Highland HER](#). Many of these sites have been assessed as outstanding. Whilst sites included in the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes do not have the statutory protection that listed buildings and scheduled monuments do, Inventory status does, however, mean that a site's cultural significance can be considered in the planning process. Planning authorities consult Historic Environment Scotland about developments they believe might impact an Inventory site. Like other parts of the historic environment, gardens and designed landscapes are a fragile and finite resource, vulnerable to a range of impacts that can diminish their value and potential.
- 12.26 The Council will consider whether further policies are required to protect these historic assets, as well as considering whether there is sufficient need and evidence to develop a local list of 'locally and regionally important Gardens and Designed Landscapes'. The Council is additionally considering whether there is a need to serve Tree Protection Orders in sites included in the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes, recognising the links between these historic assets and **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**.

Inventory of Historic Battlefields

- 12.27 Highland has 9 battlefields, included in the [Inventory of Historic Battlefields](#) and viewable on the [Highland HER](#). Like Gardens and Designed Landscapes, inventory Battlefields are a non-statutory designation. The Planning Authority consults HES to ensure that Inventory sites are considered in plans, policies and decision-making processes. The Council ensures that: Inventory battlefields are recognised in the development planning process, that any impacts upon battlefields are considered and that development plans include policies that identify battlefields in our area and outline criteria for their protection, conservation and management within the planning system.
- 12.28 HES commissioned Lichfields UK to produce [The Inventory of Historic Battlefields: Battlefields Planning Best Practice Report](#) in the context of petition PE1852 introduced to the Scottish Parliament on 3 February 2021 calling for increased planning protection for Scotland's battlefields. The purpose of the document is to provide evidence-based recommendations that inform best practice in the designation and management of Inventory battlefields in the planning system. The report concludes that while policy protections which exist are functioning as intended, a number of changes could improve its working.
- 12.29 The Council will consider the need for preparation of bespoke policy for individual Inventory historic battlefields to aid in their management. In particular, a consideration is needed for whether the Inventory historic battlefield of Culloden would benefit from a spatial plan that outlined expectations and aspirations as understanding of this significant site evolves. In addition, the Council will consider updating existing guidance for the area such as the Culloden Muir Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan. In doing so the Council will use this opportunity to work with all stakeholders on this, including HES.
- 12.30 The Council will consider whether further policies and/or Battlefield Management Plans are required to protect these important assets. Development proposals impacting nationally important Historic Battlefields will only be supported where they protect and, where appropriate, enhance their cultural significance, key landscape characteristics, physical remains and special qualities.

Non-designated Historic Assets and Places

- 12.31 Many historic assets and places are non-designated, otherwise termed undesignated. NPF4 prescribes that non-designated historic environment assets, places and their setting should be protected and preserved in situ wherever feasible. Where there is potential for non-designated buried archaeological remains to exist below a site, developers will provide an evaluation of the archaeological resource at an early stage so that planning authorities can assess

impacts. Historic buildings may also have archaeological significance which is not understood and may require assessment.

- 12.32 Where impacts cannot be avoided, they should be minimised. Where it has been demonstrated that avoidance or retention is not possible, excavation, recording, analysis, archiving, publication and activities to provide public benefit may be required through the use of conditions or legal/planning obligations.
- 12.33 At least 95% of Highland's heritage is not designated. The [Highland HER](#) includes records of thousands of other archaeological sites, monuments and landscapes and historic buildings that span all periods of human activity across the area. It is known that additional historic assets and places are not yet recorded on the HER or remain to be discovered and identified; the potential for unrecorded historic assets to survive is also relevant. Through archaeological research and survey, much of which is developer led, more sites continue to be discovered above and below ground, adding to our cultural identity and contributing further understanding and knowledge of our past. The undesignated historic environment is managed through the development process, with any new discoveries added to the HER.
- 12.34 The Council is aware that there are locally important buildings that are not included on the statutory list and will consider if there is sufficient need and evidence to develop a 'local list' and any policy protection this list could require.
- 12.35 Across Highland, there are a significant number of derelict or underused undesignated historic buildings, and the Council is keen for a variety of reasons to ensure these are brought back into regular and sustainable use. While the Council does not hold a conclusive log of these buildings, HLDP will remain cognisant of any developments to consolidate these records to ensure these buildings can be appropriately reused.
- 12.36 The Council's existing [Historic Environment Strategy Supplementary Guidance](#) will also be reviewed, alongside guidance that details required Standards for Archaeological Work conducted through the development process, with content to be retained (subject to review and updates) included in the HLDP or otherwise forming non-statutory guidance. We will also consider how publications by the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO Scotland)), including [Guidance for Peatland Restoration and the Historic Environment](#) and [Delivery of Public Benefit and Social Value](#) can inform decision making.

Climate Change and Historic Assets

- 12.37 Climate change is an important consideration in how historic assets can be protected throughout the lifetime of this plan. Matters relating to climate change and the HLDP area as a whole are further detailed in **Chapter 4: Climate Change**

and Energy. However, matters specifically relating to how climate change will impact historic assets will be discussed here.

- 12.38 Pointing the Way to the Future is HES' climate and nature crisis position statement that recognises that the historic environment is part of a just transition to net zero. It contributes to our places, communities and identities and the reuse of historic assets is central to sustainable development. This position statement refers to HES role in the planning system and other decision-making processes for land management and explains how HES undertake their regulatory functions in a way that responds to their wider environmental responsibilities.
- 12.39 Further information and examples of the role that the historic environment can play in the transition to a low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive economy are set out in HES Green Recovery Statement. This statement can be used to articulate how the historic environment contributes to the national transition to a low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive economy.
- 12.40 In addition, HES Guide to Climate Change Impacts sets out many of the risks and hazards of climate change that are facing Scotland's historic environment and offers routes to take action, to implement adaptation measures and enhance resilience to climate change. This document can be used to identify and share climate change adaptation solutions, demonstrating the resilience and adaptability of Scotland's historic environment.
- 12.41 The HES Your Historic Place: A Lens for the Place Standard Tool has also been designed to be used alongside the Place Standard Tool to support conversations which explore the connections between people, place, and our historic environment. The lens has been developed by Historic Environment Scotland, supported by the Place Standard Implementation Group. It follows the successful launch of other Place Standard Tool lenses which focus on climate change and air quality. It must be recognised however that this lens is currently available as a pilot version. Once this pilot phase is completed within 6-9 months, HES will develop a final version to be used to support place making projects.

Scotland's Improvement Districts

- 12.42 Highland Council has 3 of Scotland's Improvement Districts: Inverness City Centre, Visit Inverness Loch Ness, and Nairn. The Improvement Districts seek to improve local economies and help communities grow – this is through working with communities, businesses, tourism/visitor providers. The Council will welcome exploration of the potential for historic assets to play a positive role in this process. Further details on Scotland's Improvement Districts and Business Improvement Districts can be found in **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking.**

Church Estates

- 12.43 HES Evidence Submission (**THC035**) confirms that the Church of Scotland are currently undergoing an estate review that will likely lead to a number of buildings to be disposed of. For example, HES are aware that up to 66 places of worship are being considered for disposal within Highland Council Area by 2027. Sixteen of these proposed disposals are listed (4 of which are Category A listed) and some may have already closed. HES are currently awaiting more precise data from emerging presbytery plans and encourage the Highland Council to contact the presbytery directly for more information. In addition, it is recognised that of all Highland Buildings at Risk, 13% (19) are churches. Further details can be found in **Buildings at Risk**. The Council will consider a proactive approach to considering the long-term options for such buildings falling out of use and look to the challenges and opportunities that these sites may offer in terms of the communities in which they are situated and the services that they require.

Buildings at Risk

- 12.44 The Buildings at Risk Register (BARR) has been in operation since 1990, is maintained by Historic Environment Scotland and highlights properties of architectural or historic merit that are considered to be at risk. Buildings at risk are not necessarily in poor condition, they may be empty with no clear future use or be threatened with demolition. There are 159 buildings at risk in Highland, 7% of Scotland's total 2214 buildings at risk. The BARR is currently paused and under review of its benefit and use. The BARR therefore is acknowledged however, not used as the main source of data for Highland. Instead, the Council will continue to review how buildings at risk in Highland are dealt with.
- 12.45 Historic Environment Scotland (HES) commissioned a BARR Review. Its main conclusions state that there is no clear evidence that the BARR is currently fulfilling any of its identified key purposes effectively and the report identifies options for consideration by HES will follow in due course.
- 12.46 HES Evidence Submission (**THC035**) provide statistics on Highlands Buildings at risk, further details of which are further illustrated in Table 12:2, Table 12:3, Table 12:4 which also echo results presented by the BARR. This information is broken down by the number of buildings in Highland (including the Highland portion of the CNPA), by the division within Highland that they are located, their location in relation to settlement type, their condition, how at risk they are, and finally their listed building status.
- 12.47 82 buildings (52%) within Highland are located rurally, with Caithness (27%) being the area in Highland with the highest number of buildings at risk. Of all buildings at risk in Highland, 38% are in very poor or ruinous condition. 70% are of listed

status and to protect these, a focus on enhancing these buildings should be considered. This is in line with details in **Listed Buildings**.

Table 12:3 Buildings at risk by Highland area and category at risk and under restoration (THC035)

Divisional area	No. of buildings	% of total	Category	No. of buildings	% of total
Caithness	42	28% 27%	At risk	154 143	91%
Ross and Cromarty	31	20%			
Sutherland	24	16% 15%			
Skye and Lochalsh	22	14%			
Inverness	18	12% 11%	Restoration in progress	16 15	9%
Lochaber	17	11%			
Badenoch and Strathspey	13 1	8% 1%			
Nairn	3	2%			

12.48 With just 9% of buildings at risk in restoration progress, a focus on restoring and enhancing more buildings at risk should be considered, this links to details in **Correlation Between Vacant Dwellings and Vacant Land**, as there may be an overlap between these sites/dwellings and buildings at risk.

Table 12:4 Condition of buildings at risk in highland and their locations (THC035)

Building condition	No. of buildings	% of total	Building location type	No. of buildings	% of total
Good	1	0.5%	Urban	30	19%
Fair	42	27%	Small town	23	15%
Poor	56	35%	Rural settlement	18	11%
Very poor	28	18%	Rural	82	52%
Ruinous	31	19.5%	Remote	5	3%

Table 12:5 Listed building status of buildings at risk and by how critical their condition (THC035)

Category of building	No. of buildings	% of total	Category of risk	No. of buildings	% of total
A	20	13%	Critical	4	3%
B	62	39%	High	45	28%
C	28	18%	Moderate	49	31%
Unlisted	48	30%	Low	60	38%

- 12.49 HES have had a number of LBC and correspondence cases in recent years for conversion/restoration of Buildings at Risk – many of these are churches, thatched buildings in rural areas or buildings (formerly) on large estates like steadings and ice houses.
- 12.50 HES Evidence Submission **(THC035)** provide statistics on Highlands Buildings at risk, further details of which are further illustrated in Table 12:2, Table 12:3, Table 12:4. Over half (81) are located outside settlements, a unique challenge faced by Highlands rural geography. 44% (63) are classified as residential buildings, 80% (51) of which are empty homes ranging in size from cottages to terraced houses and country houses. The residential category includes estate buildings (12) such as stables, doocots or walled gardens, collectively representing country house heritage.
- 12.51 13 of Highland's conservation areas have at least one At-Risk building. Further details of which have been read in **Conservation Areas**. There are clusters in Wick – Pulteneytown (9) Tain (6) and Cromarty (4). Poor is the most frequent condition assessment (51). Across BARR rural buildings are more likely to be in poorer condition than those in settlements. This pattern is broadly evident across Highland. 45% (37) of all rural buildings (81) are at Very Poor or Ruinous condition, in settlements (62) this reduces to 30% (19).
- 12.52 Across BARR the percentage of At-Risk buildings in areas of comparatively more deprivation (SIMD Deciles 1-3) is around 17%, in Highland it is 15% (21). There also concentrations in SIMD datazones Wick South – 06 (7) Lochaber West 01 (4) Black Isle North 05 (4) Sutherland South – 01(4) Sutherland East - 06 (4) and Wick South -01 (4). A number are also recorded on the Vacant and Derelict Land Register such as Brora Railway Station, Bruan Free Church, Dunvegan Castle Stables, Rogart.

Grants supporting restoration of Highland historic assets

- 12.53 HES evidence submission **(THC035)** states that since 2019 HES have received approximately 125 Expressions of Interest from projects within Highland. These have included repair projects to churches, a school, a harbour, mills, a viaduct, an airport control tower, a town hall, a footbridge, a courthouse, castles, a harbour quay, a power station, a visitor centre, a hotel, a museum, thatched cottages, a barn, as well as archaeology projects, Conservation Area Regeneration Schemes (CARS), funding to the Inverness City Heritage Trust, support funding for interpretation boards, publications, training and heritage events. There have also been recovery funding streams for different organisations.
- 12.54 There are currently 17 live projects, totalling £2,363,569. The Council will continue to support the redevelopment and restoration of its historic assets, where

possible being supported by grant funds to allow this redevelopment to continue. Albeit that this redevelopment must be in line with Historic Environment Policy and Guidance documents mentioned in **Policy Context**. Further details on the redevelopment of brownfield, vacant and derelict land and empty buildings in relation to historic assets, and more generally how this will be considered in HLDP can be found in **Brownfield, Vacant and Derelict Land and Empty Buildings**.

Brownfield, Vacant and Derelict Land and Empty Buildings

- 12.55 Effective redevelopment of brownfield, vacant and derelict land is recognised as delivering multiple benefits across many policy areas, from revitalising town centres, improving local living, delivering quality homes, making use of existing infrastructure, and to a modest extent, reducing the need for further greenfield development, with associated benefits for biodiversity.
- 12.56 [Scottish Land Commission Transform Scotland's Approach to Tackling Vacant and Derelict Land](#) document, suggests the conditions necessary for eradicating persistent dereliction in urban communities to realise the social, economic and environmental benefits of returning derelict urban land back to productive use. NPF4 Policy 9 requires LDP's to set out opportunities for the sustainable reuse of brownfield land including vacant and derelict land and empty buildings, and in determining whether the reuse is sustainable, the biodiversity value of brownfield land which has naturalised should be considered.
- 12.57 Across the Highland Council, a range of factors considered for Brownfield, Vacant and Derelict Land and Empty Buildings are summarised as follows.
- Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land Survey
 - Contaminated Land
 - Empty Homes
 - Correlation Between Vacant Dwellings and Vacant Land
 - Brownfield House Completions
 - Compulsory Purchase Orders
 - Biodiversity Considerations for Brownfield Development

Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land Survey

- 12.58 [The Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land Survey \(SVDLS\)](#) is a register of each urban vacant and derelict site surveyed by local authorities collected by SVDLS, updated annually. These sites can be defined by two categories
- Vacant Land – brownfield sites which are ready for new development, and which must be within settlements; or

- Derelict – brownfield sites which can either be inside or outside settlements but are not ready for new development, for example due to the presence of unusable buildings.

- 12.59 The [SVDLS Statistics Tables](#) - Table 5 shows that between 2017 and 2023 the total urban derelict and vacant land area in Highland has decreased by 56.2%, whereas Scotland as a whole, has decreased by 24.7%. This suggests Highland has demonstrated some degree of success in reusing brownfield sites for development in comparison to Scotland.
- 12.60 The SVDLS statistics - Table 9 shows the estimated percentage of the population living within various distances of Derelict Land, 2023. Table 12:5 illustrates that those living within 500m of derelict land in Highland is presently 9.7% in comparison to Scotland (26.5%). In contrast, 78.1% of Highlands' population live 1,000m or further from derelict land in comparison to 49.3% of Scotland as a whole. It is acknowledged in [Scottish Land Commission Transform Scotland's Approach to Tackling Vacant and Derelict Land](#) Report that closer proximity to derelict brownfield sites is correlated with deprivation and poorer health outcomes, which highlights a need for place-based intervention, as discussed in **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**.
- 12.61 Further highlighted in **Buildings at Risk** the percentage of At-Risk buildings in areas of comparatively more deprivation (SIMD Deciles 1-3) is around 17%, in Highland it is 15% (21). There also concentrations in SIMD datazones Wick South – 06 (7) Lochaber West 01 (4) Black Isle North 05 (4) Sutherland South – 01(4) Sutherland East - 06 (4) and Wick South -01 (4). A number are also recorded on the Vacant and Derelict Land Register such as Brora Railway Station, Bruan Free Church, Dunvegan Castle Stables, Rogart.

Table 12:6 Population and Distance from Derelict Land 2023 (SVDLS Statistics Tables)

	Total Population	Distance from Derelict Land (% of population)		
		Less than 500m	500m to less than 1,000m	1,000m or further
Highland	238,060	9.7	12.2	78.1
Scotland	5,479,900	26.5	23.7	49.3

- 12.62 [SVDLS Statistics Tables](#) – Table 19 also highlight that in 2023 In Highland there were 7 sites of derelict land reclaimed, and urban vacant land brought back into use since the previous survey. [SVDLS Statistics Tables](#) – Table 25 estimates the number of properties within 500 meters of at least 1 site reclaimed using the Vacant and Derelict Land Fund (VDLF), through which place-making priorities can be improved. Results shown in Table 12:6 and further detailed in **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**.

*Table 12:7 Number of Properties Within 500 Meters of a Site Reclaimed Using VDLF in Highland
(SVDLS Statistics Tables – Table 25)*

	Number of Properties Within 500 Meters of a Site Reclaimed Using VDLF		
	1 Site	2 Sites	3 Sites Plus
Highland	14,800	2,000	100

12.63 In Highland, there are currently 132 sites recorded through the SVDLS, totalling 603.61Ha. Of these, 56 are categorised as vacant land while 76 are categorised as derelict land. Of the total 132 sites, 55 sites were last in use in 1980 or earlier, which equates to 41%. This is a high proportion in comparison to Scotland's average of 9.3% and signals a continued difficulty in bringing many of these sites back into regular use over a sustained period. However, 12 of these 55 sites are recognised as developable in the short term.

12.64 Further analysis in [Scottish Land Commission Transform Scotland's Approach to Tackling Vacant and Derelict Land](#) report was undertaken to identify and characterise Scotland's *stuck sites*. These are known as Scotland's DUSTE sites, defined by:

- **Derelict** – sites with identified barriers to re-use, such as leftover buildings and materials, are likely to be more challenging to bring back into use than sites that are simply vacant – and therefore in greater need of public support.
- **Urban Sites** – sites located within communities are more likely to be causing harm to people nearby – and therefore a higher priority for action than sites located out in the countryside.
- **Unused since Two thousand or Earlier** – sites that have been on the Register since at least 2000 were not a result of the 2008 financial crash and have persisted for 18 years through market growth, crash and recovery and can therefore genuinely be regarded as 'stuck'.

12.65 Highland presents a more balanced distribution of vacant and derelict sites in comparison to Scotland whereby over half (63%) of Highland sites are located within Settlements with populations ≤ 2000 however, in comparison to Scotland's 79% in settlements with populations ≤ 2000 . Highland presents higher results of sites in the countryside (20%) compared to Scotland's 12%, and again Highland has a higher proportion of sites in settlements with populations > 2000 in comparison to Scotland's 9%. These results can be found in Table 12:7. As further explained in **Chapter 9: Housing**, Table 12:7 highlights that Highland has a high proportion of DUSTE sites at 95 sites (80% of Highlands total number of sites) meeting its criteria of being last in use 2000 or earlier.

Table 12:8 Vacant and Derelict Land Distribution (*SVDLS Site Register*)

Location	Highland		Scotland	
	No. of sites	% of total	No. of sites	% of total
Countryside	26	20%	381	12%
Settlement with pop <= 2000	83	63%	2543	78%
Settlement with pop > 2000	23	17%	277	8%
Vacant/derelict 1980 or before	55	42%	296	9%
Vacant before 2000	95	80%	1149	35%
Total	132	100%	3277	100%
Land cover in Ha	603.61	6.4%	9382.67	100%

- 12.66 Table 12:8 presents the vacant and derelict sites in Highland by settlement type and by its previous land use before becoming derelict. The most common previously used site type is *Other General Use*, totalling 313.94ha. This site type is often associated with agricultural land, and results show most of this site type (304.58ha) is located within rural locations. The second highest previous site type for vacant and derelict sites in Highland is *Defence* totalling 115.78ha. Again, these sites have often been located out with or on the edge of settlements, with the majority (104.17ha) located in rural locations.
- 12.67 Together, *Other General Use* and *Defence* contribute to 429.72ha (71.2%) of Highlands total area of vacant and derelict sites (603.61ha). With these site types of previous use, a consideration for their possibility of being contaminated land should be acknowledged, as detailed within **Contaminated Land**. All proposed sites for redevelopment are checked by the Council's Contaminated Land Team and flagged for contamination if required, whereby the developer is required to fund any site assessments and possible remediation necessary.
- 12.68 It must be noted however, that the SVDLS only includes land within settlement boundaries. With Highland covering a vast expanse, with much of its land area sits out with settlements, therefore, Table 12:8 does not provide a complete record of all existing vacant and derelict land within the area covered by HLDP.
- 12.69 When a site is deemed *naturalised* it is removed from SVDLS and so further information is required to understand the number of naturalised sites are in Highland. [SVDLS Statistics Tables](#) – Table 21 indicate that 4 sites spanning 4 ha have been naturalised in Highland in 2023. Further assessments of biodiversity value and potential on vacant and derelict sites would be beneficial, recognising that brownfield, vacant and derelict land and empty buildings can contribute to nature recovery, further details of which can be found in NPF4 Policy 9; whereby 'the contribution of brownfield land to nature recovery is recognised and

opportunities for use as productive greenspace are realised where appropriate'. Further assessments of biodiversity value and potential on vacant and derelict sites would be also beneficial in recognising the opportunities to contribute to Blue and Green Infrastructure as detailed in **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**, connections can also be found within **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**.

Table 12:9 Vacant and Derelict Sites by Previous Use and Location (SVDLS Site Register)

	Countryside		Settlement with pop. <= 2000		Settlement with pop. > 2000		Total Highland	
	Sites (#)	Area (ha)	Sites (#)	Area (ha)	Sites (#)	Area (ha)	Sites (#)	Area (ha)
Agriculture	2	0.67	10	6.77	2	0.98	14	8.42
Community & Health	1	0.38	5	62.08	0	0	6	62.46
Defence	11	104.17	9	10.41	1	1.2	21	115.78
Education	1	0.22	2	3.18	0	0	3	3.4
Forestry/Woodland	1	1.32			0	0	1	1.32
Manufacturing			5	2.79	3	13.11	8	15.9
Mineral Activity	3	13.06			2	3.44	5	16.5
Other	1	1.22	18	11.03	1	0.22	20	12.47
Other General Industry	2	304.58	5	6.45	2	2.91	9	313.94
Passive Open Space	0	0	4	3.24	0	0	4	3.24
Recreation & Leisure	1	1.16	1	1.58	0	0	2	2.74
Residential - Housing	0	0	2	0.23	2	0.66	4	0.89
Retailing	1	0.16	1	0.18	2	1.44	4	1.78
Storage	2	1.69	1	0.18	4	2.61	7	4.48
Transport	0	0	2	2.68	3	2	5	4.68
Unknown	0	0	16	34.55	1	0.19	17	34.74
Utility Services	0	0	1	0.55	0	0	1	0.55
Wholesale Distribution	0	0	1	0.32	0	0	1	0.32
Total	26	428.63	83	146.22	23	28.76	132	603.61

12.70 It recognised that there is size threshold of 0.1 ha for inclusion in the SVDLS Register. This means that smaller micro-sites are generally overlooked as

highlighted by [Scottish Land Commission Transform Scotland's Approach to Tackling Vacant and Derelict Land](#), even though these may be clustered, have cumulative detrimental impacts and be comparatively deliverable. Research has understood that often smaller sites, such as gap sites or buildings, can have a particularly harmful effect on the surrounding area.

- 12.71 [Scottish Land Commission Transform Scotland's Approach to Tackling Vacant and Derelict Land](#) recognise that reviewing the Register, associated Survey, and guidance would elevate it to provide a more complete picture of vacant and derelict land and lead to improved place-making outcomes. **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking** further details the impact that vacant and derelict land has on place-making and regeneration of brownfield sites can provide good opportunities for placemaking. Development of brownfield land is anticipated to accelerate in Highland owing to the ICFGF discussed in **Chapter 8: Business, Economy, Tourism and Productive Places**, which contains several brownfield sites within the designated ICFGF Tax Sites.
- 12.72 The lack of knowledge of Micro-sites in Highland are a recognised information gap and HLDP will be informed by any new developments in the creation of this data and welcome any review of SVDLS to provide a more complete picture of vacant and derelict land in Highland.

Contaminated Land

- 12.73 Land is defined in the Environmental Protection Act 1990 as *contaminated land* if there is 'significant possibility of significant harm' to human health or 'significant possibility of significant pollution' of the water environment. To be able to legally designate land as *contaminated land* is a lengthy process. There are only two sites in Highland which have met these criteria, both have since been remediated. Contaminated Land differs from HSE Consultation Zones and Hazardous Sites (**THC210**) which are separately detailed in **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking**.
- 12.74 There are many sites within Highland which could possibly have contamination although these have not been currently deemed 'significant possibility of significant harm' (i.e. death, cancer, birth abnormalities etc). Regardless, the Contaminated Land team hold records of all sites which have been previously used for activities that may have resulted in some form of contamination, using historical Ordnance Survey maps which show old gasworks, tanneries, smithies, pits, coal yards, refuse tips, fuel storage etc. Planning applications where such instances arise are determined in accordance with [PAN33](#).
- 12.75 [Scottish Land Commission Transform Scotland's Approach to Tackling Vacant and Derelict Land](#) reinforce that SVDLS should be reformed to provide a clearer focus on sites that have significant barriers to reuse, incorporating accurate and up to

date information about barriers to reuse including contamination. HLDP will support and consider any documentation of this as and when it emerges.

- 12.76 In addition, HLDP will consider [UK Government's Land Contamination and Risk Management \(LCRM\) Guidance Note](#). The Scottish Government, SEPA and Scottish Local Authority representatives have recently (June 2025) reviewed and agreed the guidance, providing an additional link to advice for developers in Scotland where some legislation, statutory and non-statutory guidance relating to contaminated land diverge between the constituent nations (previously the LCRM guidance only applied to England and Wales and replaced earlier withdrawn guidance).
- 12.77 The LCRM guidance provides developers with an overview of how to assess and manage the risks from historic land contamination, including the process of information gathering, site investigation, risk assessment, remediation options, and verification reporting. SEPA and Scottish Local Authorities expect developers to follow the guidance contained within LCRM when redeveloping land which may be contaminated and when providing supporting documents for planning applications. While the LCRM guidance is not specific for Highland, it provides all developers with guidance on how to approach redevelopment of sites, thus ensuring consistency.
- 12.78 HLDP will consult the Council's Contaminated Land team within the site selection process of the HLDP to understand any constraints, or need for further investigation.

Empty Homes

- 12.79 The Council is currently developing its Highland Empty Homes Strategic Framework (2025-2028). With the aim to bring long-term empty and unproductive houses back into use, so that they provide homes for people living in Highland's communities. This framework outlines the Council's strategic approach to doing so by engaging with empty homes owners; working with communities experiencing challenges arising from empty and unproductive homes and, targeting resources at approaches which deliver homes. The Planning Service is actively participating in this work in collaboration with other Council services.
- 12.80 **Chapter 9: Housing** outlines the acute housing needs arising across Highland, where in many areas, there is an insufficient supply of housing which people can afford to buy or rent. This can have negative impacts including on people's health, educational outcomes, ability to secure sustained employment and sustainability of services and local economies. A lack of housing can influence the depopulation in some areas and impact rural economics as outlined in **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**, by impacting on

business' abilities to fill job vacancies, operate and expand as potential applicants cannot find suitable housing.

- 12.81 The Council's [Local Housing Strategy \(LHS\) 2023–2028](#) sets a commitment to: 'Tackle empty homes - prioritise targeted and preventative investment in areas where local housing pressure is evidenced.' It highlights that this is alongside a priority focus on delivering new build housing– noting that, due to locational and housing condition issues, the economics of empty homes activity in Highland has proven to raise value for money questions when benchmarked to new build activity. The Council's [Strategic Housing Investment Plan \(SHIP\)](#) sets out how the Council will use resources available to deliver its priorities, by considering opportunities to bring empty homes and other properties back into use as quality affordable accommodation.
- 12.82 [Household Estimates](#) from the NRS - [Small Area Household Estimates Data by 2011 Data Zone](#) provides annual data on the number and percentage of dwellings which are vacant and long term empty (LTE), alongside those that are occupied, second homes, or subject to other exemptions.
- 12.83 Although housing stock is fully detailed in **Chapter 9: Housing**, the understanding of ineffective stock does have an impact on brownfield land-use. There are many variants on ineffective stock in Highland, where vacant dwellings, long-term empty dwellings and second homes are a key factor in housing stock and needs. Figure 12:1 shows that from 2014 to 2024 the total number of dwellings in Highland have increased by 8.2%, however, during this same period, the number of vacant dwellings in Highland has also increased from 2.62% to 4.82%. Therefore, how we manage these dwellings is highly important to managing our housing need.

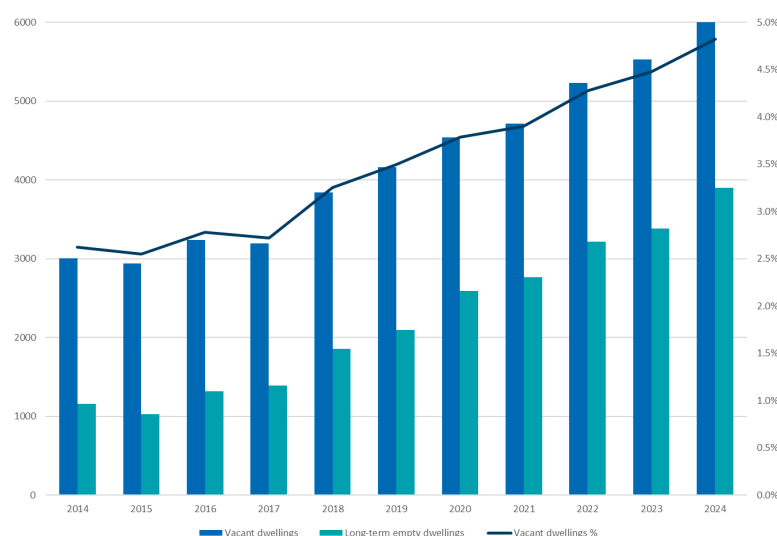


*Figure 12:1 Vacant and long-term empty dwellings by percentage of total Highland dwellings
(NRS Small Area Household Estimates Data by 2011 Data Zone)*

Correlation Between Vacant Dwellings and Vacant Land

12.84 Within Table 12:9 it can be noted that there is a correlation between the number of vacant sites in a data zone and number of vacant or long-term empty dwellings. The below table represents statistics taken from the Household Estimates Dataset provided by National Records of Scotland and [SVDLS Site Register](#). Highland has 316 data zones each of which can be found in the [SVDLS Site Register](#) datasets, Table 12:9 shows the top five data zones with the highest number of vacant/derelict sites, vacant dwellings (by percentage) and long-term empty dwellings (by percentage) in 2023. This highlights some correlations between vacant land and buildings within various areas of Highland. Standout areas include Wick South, Inverness Central, Raigmore and Longman, Caithness North and so considerations on how these issues are dealt with in these standout areas, as well as tackling vacant and long-term empty dwellings across Highland will be considered within HLDP.

Table 12:10 Top 5 Highland data zone vacant/derelict land and vacant and long-term empty dwellings (SVDLS Site Register/Household Estimates)

Vacant site data zones	No. of sites
Caithness North East - 02	16
Lochaber West – 06	8
Inverness Central, Raigmore and Longman – 01	7
Seaboard – 01	7
Wick South - 06	7
Vacant dwellings data zones	% vacant
Wick South - 02	19
Caithness North East – 04	18
Dingwall – 03	12
Caithness North West - 05	12
Caithness South – 01	12
Long-term empty dwellings data zones	% empty
Wick South – 02	15
Dingwall – 03	11
Badenoch and Strathspey South – 02	9
Badenoch and Strathspey Central - 02	8
Inverness Central, Raigmore and Longman - 02	8

12.85 Detailed in **Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land Survey** was the percentage of the population living within 500m of derelict land, this does not include vacant and long-term empty dwellings. Although only 9.7% of Highlands population are expected to live within 500m of derelict land, with some areas having over 15%

vacant/long-term empty dwellings, a much higher proportion of the population likely live in proximity to vacant or long-term empty dwellings. HLDP will consider issues of vacant/derelict land, vacant and long-term empty dwellings in relation to one another, and aim to tackle standout areas across Highland where these issues are most prominent.

- 12.86 Further detailed in **Chapter 9: Housing**, The Councils states that the Council will continue to respond to opportunities presented through any future rounds of funding which would potentially assist in developing longer term vacant and derelict land and buildings. HLDP will also consider the opportunity of funding to provide potential development of long term vacant and derelict land and buildings and will support the use of funding in development.

Brownfield House Completions

- 12.87 Highland Council data on house completions is discussed in more detail in **Chapter 9: Housing** however, the [Housing Land Audit](#) details those houses which have been completed on brownfield sites.
- 12.88 Figure 12:2 shows the downward trend in total house completions on brownfield land from 2022-2025, in Highland (correct as of June 2025). Between 2022-2025, in Highland, there were 3429 house completions, 499 (14.6%) of those were on brownfield sites. This downward trend should be taken into consideration and HLDP should encourage the future reuse of brownfield land where possible. Market housing or non-affordable tenures have contributed to a considerable portion of Highland's brownfield completions.

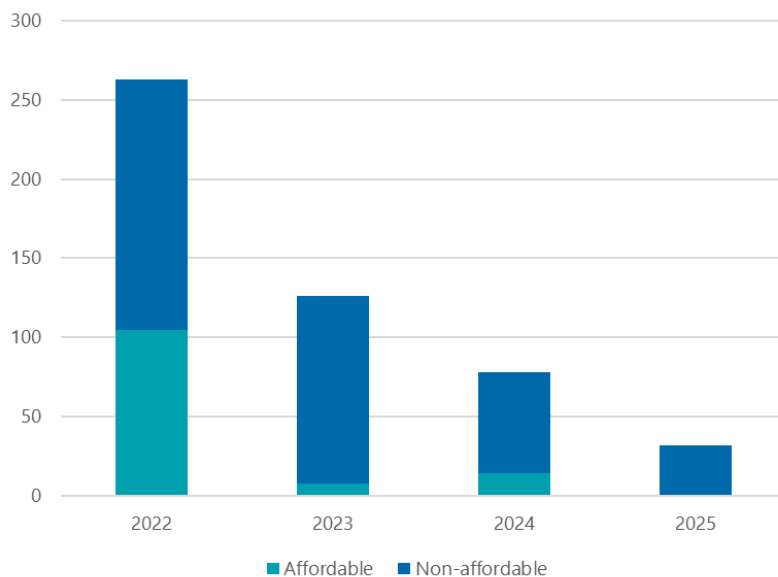


Figure 12:2 Highland house completions on brownfield sites and the proportion of which are affordable 2022-2025 (THC113)

12.89 Table 12:10 shows the top 10 settlements in Highland with the highest usage of brownfield sites for house completions from 2022-2025, and the proportion of which have been affordable homes.

Table 12:11 Top 10 settlements using brownfield sites for house completions (THC113)

	2022		2023		2024		2025		Grand Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
West Inverness	53	50%	21	20%	15	14%	17	16%	106	21%
Affordable	36	68%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	36	34%
Central Inverness	62	90%	1	1%	6	9%	0	0%	69	14%
Affordable	8	13%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	8	12%
South Inverness	30	58%	18	34%	1	2%	3	6%	52	10%
Affordable	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Dingwall	15	43%	20	57%	0	0%	0	0%	35	7%
Affordable	14	93%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	14	
Spean Bridge	20	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	20	4%
Affordable	20	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	20	100%
Nairn	18	90%	1	5%	1	5%	0	0%	20	4%
Affordable	12	67%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	12	60%
Fort William	16	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	16	3%
Affordable	15	94%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	15	94%
Kingussie	1	10%	6	60%	3	30%	0	0%	10	2%
Affordable	0	0%	5	83%	0	0%	0	0%	5	50%
Portree	0	0%	3	30%	7	70%	0	0%	10	2%
Affordable	0	0%	3	100%	6	86%	0	0%	9	90%
Lairg	0	0%	0	0%	8	100%	0	0%	8	2%
Affordable	0	0%	0	0%	8	100%	0	0%	8	100%
All other sites	48	31%	56	37%	37	24%	12	8%	153	31%
Affordable	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Highland	263	53%	126	25%	78	16%	32	6%	499	100%
Affordable	105	83%	8	6%	14	11%	0	0%	127	25.5%

- 12.90 Overall, between 2022-2025, in the top 10 settlements using brownfield land for new house completions, 25% of homes were affordable. This matches the developer contributions expectation whereby of the number of homes built by a developer, 25% of these should be affordable (for any development of 4 homes or more). 83% of affordable homes built in these settlements were built in 2022 which highlights a great decrease in affordable built homes from 2023-2025.
- 12.91 Of the Highland total, the settlement with the highest portion of brownfield house completions was West Inverness at 21%, of which 34% were affordable. The settlements with the highest proportion of affordable homes of the total homes built on brownfield land between 2022-2025 are Lairg and Spean Bridge, with 100% of brownfield house completion being affordable, Portree also scores highly at 90%.
- 12.92 HLDP will consider creating a brownfield house completion target for Highland, however, there will be a need for this to be a place-based approach rather than Highland-wide target due to some settlements already well exceeding brownfield completions of between 90-100% of their house completions being on brownfield land.

Compulsory Purchase Orders

- 12.93 Although used in rarity, Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) are an important process that will be considered as part of HLDP. The Scottish government provides guidance on using Compulsory Purchase Orders through [Planning Circular 6/2011](#) used for public benefit, such as housing, development, and infrastructure projects to acquire land, emphasizing efficiency, fairness, and minimizing uncertainty for landowners. CPOs are used when it has proven impossible or impractical to acquire land by agreement, and the public interest outweighs the rights of those affected. The process involves an acquiring authority (like a council or utility company) preparing a CPO and submitting it to the Scottish Ministers for confirmation.
- 12.94 As part of wider planning reforms, the Scottish Government has committed to improve and modernise the CPO system details of which can be found in [Compulsory Purchase Reform: Progress Report December 2024](#) in order to help support the delivery of development, infrastructure and regeneration projects that are in the public interest. By helping to unlock projects in the public interest, the use of compulsory purchase can contribute to many of the Scottish Government's wider plans, policies, and strategies – such as the NPF4.
- 12.95 The Scottish Government have now opened a [Compulsory Purchase Order Reform in Scotland Consultation](#) (19 Sept 2025 – 19 Dec 2025). Whereby the Scottish Government are seeking views on how to make the compulsory

purchase system simpler, more streamlined, and fairer for all, to help deliver development and new homes. This consultation also includes questions on the possible benefits of introducing compulsory sale orders and compulsory lease orders. This consultation is a significant step towards putting in place a fairer, faster and simpler compulsory purchase system for Scotland.

- 12.96 While HLDP will progress, cognisant of these evolving reforms, at present clear policies and a spatial strategy in the LDP can help determine CPO's – providing robust justification for the issuing of nil certificates. A Planning Authority has the option to issue a nil' certificate indicating that no development would have been permitted. In such circumstances, the authority must set out the reasons why it believes that no alternative types of development would be suitable for the land in question in the foreseeable future. As noted previously, either a landowner or the relevant Acquiring Authority may apply for a Certificate of Appropriate Alternative Development (CAAD) (a tool used by any party involved in a compulsory purchase scheme to help assess the market value of land or property acquired) – including seeking a nil certificate.
- 12.97 One way in which the Council could consider tackling the reuse of derelict land may be compulsory purchase orders, whereby the Council can force a sale of land that has been impossible using other methods of sale with landowners. This process may allow the sustainable reuse of derelict sites that would in other cases fall into a state of disrepair. This also could help to support the reuse of buildings at risk, and vacant or long-term empty dwellings.
- 12.98 Information provided by the Council's Legal team confirms that CPOs haven't been used in Highland for many years, except for the Inverness Southern Distributor Road in 2014. CPOs were at their peak in the 1980s but there is no formal list of these recorded as they were classed as just land purchases, albeit via a compulsory route.
- 12.99 The Council has also not often used CPO powers conferred under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997, the last CPO being made by the Council under this Act taking place in 2009 at 30 Princes Street and 7 Sir John's Square, Thurso. Nonetheless, the Council will keep this option under constant review to ensure that Listed Buildings that may be at risk of falling into a state of disrepair are preserved.
- 12.100 The Council's [Strategic Housing Investment Plan \(SHIP\)](#) sets out how the Council will use resources available to deliver its priorities. Within which it discusses the use of Compulsory Purchase Orders. This Plan states that the Council will promote and apply their CPO powers for housing purposes, to deliver new affordable housing in areas of unmet housing demand where other negotiations have failed. HLDP will consider the use of CPOs for this matter, including in the

use of CPOs to obtain vacant and derelict land and buildings across Highland where necessary.

- 12.101 In addition, through the current development of the Councils Highland Empty Homes Strategic Framework (2025-2028) considerations are being made that while the Councils main approach is to engage and support property owners, enforcement may be necessary where voluntary efforts fail or where there is a risk to the community. This may be done through the use of CPOs in circumstances whereby a property has been empty long-term (typically 2+ years), the owner is unresponsive or unwilling to act, there is a clear plan for reuse (e.g. resale, social housing). This will be done following statutory procedures - Acquisition of Land (Authorisation Procedure) (Scotland) Act 1947.
- 12.102 An understanding of how CPOs could support development in Highland is an important consideration. Additionally, HLDP must outline the role of planning obligations and CPO's in obtaining the land required to facilitate the delivery of development. Therefore, although used in rarity, CPO's will be considered in the HLDP.

Biodiversity Considerations for Brownfield Development

- 12.103 NPF4 Policy 9 requires that determining whether the reuse of brownfield land is sustainable, LDP's should consider the biodiversity value of brownfield land which has naturalised. [The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045](#); which sets out a clear ambition: for Scotland to be Nature Positive by 2030, and to have restored and regenerated biodiversity across the country by 2045 and the [Scottish Government Climate Change Plan 2018-2032 – Update](#); which sets out the Scottish Government's pathway to our new and ambitious targets set by the Climate Change Act 2019. It is a key strategic document on our green recovery from COVID-19. Both highlight important suggestions in tackling climate change and nature recovery, that can be worked into Highland context, further discussion on this topic can be found in **Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy** and **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**.
- 12.104 The Highland Council recognise and will consider records that provide information on the biodiversity value of brownfield sites. Some brownfield sites become naturalised over years of abandonment and provide havens for wildlife, in otherwise built-up areas. With 41% of brownfield land in Highland last in use prior to 1980s, the likelihood of nature establishing on these sites is high, and this will be considered in the site selection process of HLDP.
- 12.105 [Buglife Introduction to Brownfields Document](#) discusses how brownfield sites are now listed as a Priority habitat on Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, as 'Open mosaic habitat on previously developed land'. These are unique habitats that often support rare species that struggle to

survive elsewhere. [Buglife Identifying Open Mosaic Habitat Document](#) shares how open mosaic habitats can be identified. This therefore provides an important consideration to be made on the suitability of brownfield sites for development and Buglife suggests that full invertebrate surveys are essential on high quality brownfield sites, with this information used to identify key habitat features to be retained, as part of a suite of mitigation and compensation options to protect biodiversity.

12.106 NatureScot support [Wildlife and Countryside Link Open Mosaic Habitats High Value Guidance Document](#) that reinforce this by acknowledging that brownfield sites are a sustainable use of land which reduces the impact on greenbelts, and previously undeveloped land but that the high environmental value of these sites is often overlooked due to a lack of guidance on how these sites should be dealt with in practice.

12.107 In addition, [NatureScot Commissioned Report 606: Open mosaic habitats on previously developed land; survey and recommendations for habitat planning and management in Scotland](#) provides a remote assessment methodology that was used to assess sites listed on the Vacant and Derelict Land Register in 2009 in Scotland. This report states that Open Mosaic Habitats on Previously Developed Land (OMHPDL), also known as brownfield land, contributes valuable wildlife habitat within urban green networks. Of the 382 sites identified within this assessment, 67 qualified as OMHPDL.

Summary of Stakeholder Engagement

12.108 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 include:

Stakeholders and Key Agencies

12.109 All meetings and engagement exercises with stakeholders and key agencies are detailed within the *Log of Engagement (THC001)*. Drafts of the evidence presented in this chapter were circulated to key agencies and other stakeholders on 26 June 2025, which included:

- NatureScot
- Scottish Water
- SEPA
- NHS Highland
- HIE
- HiTrans
- Transport Scotland
- Crofting Commission

- Sport Scotland
- Historic Environment Scotland
- National Trust For Scotland
- Architecture and Design Scotland
- Wider Council Services: Amenities, Environment Team, Contaminated Land, Legal, Sustainable Transport, Community Development, Empty Homes.
- Chamber of Commerce: Caithness, Lochaber, Inverness.
- BID: Fort William, Dornoch, Visit Inverness Loch Ness – Tourist, VisitNairn - Nairn, Inverness.

12.110 A summary of feedback received includes:

Key Agency: Historic Environment Scotland (THC035)	
Main views raised	Provided an Evidence Submission which provides specific historic environment records data for Highland. In addition, HES provided a Consultation Response with suggested amendments including rewording of sentences, adjustment of historic asset numbers to provide most up to date figures, additional sources. Historic Environment Scotland's final response provides a statement of agreement that can also be found within their Consultation response.
Council's response	The Council have agreed to suggested amendments with adjustments to the evidence report having been made.
Areas of agreement	The Council agree with the comments made.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is the agency content with the evidence?	Yes, HES provide a statement of agreement provided in (THC035) .
Implications for proposed plan	HLDP will consider a holistic approach in dealing with historic assets which recognises and optimises the role that the historic environment plays in delivering multiple benefits across numerous policy areas.
Actions for proposed plan stage	A holistic approach to dealing with the historic environment will be taken.
Key Agency: NatureScot (THC088)	
Main views raised	Suggested amendments including additional connections to further NPF4 Policies, further evidence sources, reorganise sentence structure

	in summary of evidence, additional sentence within summary of implications.
Council's response	Noted, the Council agrees with these amendments and amendments therefore have been made in chapter.
Areas of agreement	The Council agree with the comments made.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is the agency content with the evidence?	Yes, NatureScot provide a statement of sufficiency in (THC088) .
Implications for proposed plan	The Council recognise and will consider records that provide information on the biodiversity value of brownfield sites, the Council will also consider opportunities for nature recovery and recognise brownfield sites as productive greenspace where appropriate, this knowledge will inform HLDP.
Actions for proposed plan stage	The Council will consider the opportunities for nature recovery and recognise the biodiversity value of brownfield sites during the site selection process.
THC Environmental Health Team (THC201)	
Main views raised	Please note that I have reviewed this on behalf of the Environmental Health - Contaminated Land Team in the context of discussion of contaminated land, brownfield land and vacant/derelict land – and not historic assets, listed buildings, archaeology etc. Agree with the evidence base for producing the HLDP. Recommend you also include the UK Government's Land Contamination and Risk Management Guidance note.
Council's response	The Council agree with the suggestions made and have made these amendments.
Areas of agreement	The Council agree with the comments made.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is the agency content with the evidence?	Yes, THC Contaminated Land Team state that they agree with the evidence, provided in (THC201) .

Implications for proposed plan	No implications have arisen from these comments.
Actions for proposed plan stage	No further actions are required following these comments.

Summary of Local Place Plan Priorities

12.111 Ardgour Local Place Plan (**THC010**) has identified the following priorities relating to Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings:

- Create website to showcase heritage & culture.
- Opportunity for heritage centre in rebuilt Ardgour Hall.
- New homes should be sensitive, small-scale and enhance local character, and conserve special landscape and character of the community.
- Enhance road edges with traditional walking/ verges/hedging.
- Kingairloch Estate wishes to repurpose old buildings, adding functional boat house, rebuild stone pier, remodel concrete jetty, repair slipway, restore walled garden as a vegetable garden and convening place, strengthen sense of place with uniform architectural language, signage, roadsides, tracks and maintain and repair drystone walls.

12.112 Black Isle Local Place Plan (**THC011**) has identified the following priorities relating to Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings:

- Priority for more affordable homes by encouraging re-use of empty homes and conversion of other empty buildings, through CPO and 'forced sales'.

12.113 Broadford and Strath Local Place Plan (**THC012**) has identified the following priorities relating to Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings:

- Development of new toilets and redevelopment of old buildings
- Preference for new housing within settlements and/or on brownfield sites.
- Protect and interpret significant historic sites and built heritage including Broadford Lime Kilns, War Memorial & Bunker, Chambered Cairn, Old Pier, New (Mackinnon's) Pier, Corry Lodge outbuildings, Ashaig Chapel & Well.
- Explore potential for heritage trail or 'Eco-Museum'.
- Safeguard sites not currently Designated by HES: War Memorial & Bunker, Marble Line & Quarry site, Cleared villages of Boreraig & Suisnish.

12.114 Caol Local Place Plan (**THC024**) has identified the following priorities relating to Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings:

- Welcome suggestions for restoration of the Post Office.
- Suggestion to add notice boards around the village walkways explaining about the history e.g. Shorefront/ Canal.

12.115 Croy and Tornagrain Local Place Plan (**THC026**) has identified the following priorities relating to Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings:

- Safeguarding main historical sites. Culloden battlefield, Clach Na Sanaid Stone and many other less well-known sites.
- All new developments need to have no detrimental impact on Loch Flemington and/or Culloden Battlefield.

12.116 Dores and Essich Local Place Plan (**THC013**) has identified the following priorities relating to Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings:

- Aldourie Castle Estate and former Dores Parish Church Cemetery & War Memorial, important architectural heritage.

12.117 Duror and Kentallen Local Place Plan (**THC014**) has identified the following priorities relating to Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings:

- Opportunities to create heritage centre and celebrate heritage; repair old Seton Bridge at Cuil by Duror School and add more historical plaques.

12.118 Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Local Place Plan (**THC022**) has identified the following priorities relating to Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings:

- Conserve natural and built heritage is vital for wellbeing, economy & identity and to tackle climate change.
- Review of visitor management is needed; including better visitor signage, information and heritage interpretation. Conservation and interpretation of heritage should be key part of improving tourism's positive impact on the local community. Canal should be the focal point, but many more others: history, culture, leisure activities, scenery and nature.

12.119 Gairloch Local Place Plan (**THC015**) has identified the following priorities relating to Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings:

- Develop housing on various brownfield locations.
- Return empty buildings to housing stock in central areas of Gairloch.

12.120 Garve and District Local Place Plan (**THC016**) has identified the following priorities relating to Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings:

- Development of former Garve Hotel site and redevelop former accommodation block by either retrofitting or new buildings.
- Preserve Kinlochluichart church as an important historical feature.

12.121 Glen Urquhart Local Place Plan (**THC029**) has identified the following priorities relating to Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings:

- Restore the Benleiva Hotel & reopen as hotel.

12.122 Golspie Local Place Plan (**THC021**) has identified the following priorities relating to Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings:

- Vacant properties/second homes don't contribute to community. Aspiration for good quality, energy efficient, affordable homes to reverse depopulation and safeguard the future of Golspie.
- Surveys highlighted potential resources and underutilised assets. Opportunity to survey vacant plots for self-build/ renovation potential.
- Potential designation of historic core of Golspie as Conservation area.
- Improve Main St streetscape material in line with conservation area status.
- Want to preserve and enhance the unique built and natural heritage.
- Add Heritage interpretation along paths and new paths to connect all heritage sites together. Including from Golspie to Dunrobin Castle, Dornoch Firth, Loch Fleet SPA, and UNESCO Flow Country WHS.
- Add new key seaside parkland to contribute to Northern Green Gateway.
- Opportunity to refurbish mill as Heritage Centre, with links to the Big Burn. Other potential locations inc. Sutherland Estates Office/St Andrews church.

12.123 Kinlochleven Local Place Plan (**THC017**) has identified the following priorities relating to Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings:

- Redevelop derelict former aluminium smelter.
- Reopen B-Listed Ice Factor or bring the building back into reuse
- Bring many vacant and derelict premises in the village back into active use.
- Restore Manmore Lodge.

12.124 Kyle of Sutherland Local Place Plan (**THC028**) has identified the following priorities relating to Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings:

- Restore Rosehall Mansion House, privately owned listed building.
- Empty, older homes could also be restored.
- Brownfield land on Tulloch Road highlighted for mixed use development.
- Opportunity to capitalise on rich local history, through accessible interpretation, important for both locals and visitors.

12.125 Lochalsh Local Place Plan (**THC018**) has identified the following priorities relating to Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings:

- Conserve Bernera/Bearnaraigh Barracks.
- Redevelop Graham House to tackle depopulation.
- Restore B-listed Old Mill Hall and Icehouse for use as heritage and community facilities, part of larger historic steading/visitor centre.

12.126 Morvern Local Place Plan (**THC027**) has identified the following priorities relating to Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings:

- Want to maximise potential of built heritage and brownfield sites.

- Submitting key heritage properties to be assessed for listed status by HES, while retaining those already listed.
- Encourage vacant and brownfield sites (Lochaline) for productive use.
- Mapping and monitoring all sites of historic heritage on the peninsula.
- Establish a museum for Morvern.
- Retain Kiel Church in community ownership.

12.127 Nairnshire Local Place Plan (**THC023**) has identified the following priorities relating to Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings.

- Want to see repurposed, conserved, rejuvenated town/shire architecture.
- Need collaborative approach to regenerate privately owned Ballerina Ballroom. Included in Town Centre Building Audit to consider options.
- Possible harbour commercialisation needs review of damaged buildings.
- Cawdor Castle estate should be considered in future tourism plan.
- Maximise value of Nairn town centre listed buildings; preserve, restore, repurpose for modern uses to attract visitors/businesses. Could convert historical buildings into boutique hotels, galleries, cafes, coworking spaces. Changes of use to be supported that aims of regenerated and vibrant town centre. Empty buildings identified for rejuvenation/conversion considered in Strategically Important Sites.
- Ensure Victorian bridge is retained alongside proposed accessible bridge.
- Conservation area impact assessment should be considered for Nairn West End, as extension to Fishertown conservation area.
- High St included in proposed Conservation Area. Cost/benefit analysis on redevelopment of buildings impact on High St needed, and engagement.
- Appraisal and management plan for Fishertown Conservation Area overdue.
- Viewfield House to be considered in built heritage conservation assessment.
- Potential for expansion of golf to support Nairn's heritage.
- Nairn Museum's position as custodian of Nairnshire's heritage and history should be strengthened and integrated with wider cultural activity.
- THC Depot site is potentially a highly sustainable town-centre brownfield location. Opportunity for mix tenure housing, delivering demand for social housing, or development of all-weather sports facility, supportive of the neighbouring Nairn County FC Station Park.
- Collaborative planning approach to regenerate vacant, privately owned, buildings on Church St. To be included in Town Centre Building Audit to consider options/viability. Privately owned but consider redevelopment to provide small units of accessible social rented housing or sheltered housing.
- Explore options of Community Right to Buy, to bring vacant buildings back into use, with no progress leading to compulsory purchase being sought.

- Priority housing must be given to town and village centre regeneration of existing empty or neglected buildings, including bringing to market for social housing, open market rent, or open market sale of refurbished flats.

12.128 Sleat Local Place Plan (**THC025**) has identified the following priorities relating to Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings:

- Protect and interpret significant historic sites and built heritage, such as Knock Castle, Dunscaith and Capisdal.
- Need strategy for vacant property utilisation.

12.129 Stratherrick and Foyers Local Place Plan (**THC019**) has identified the following priorities relating to Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings:

- Conserve key elements of built heritage, inc. Wade bridges in Foyers & Inverfarigaig, Lower Foyers Bridge, Foyers aluminium factory, Foyers Cemetery, Fraser Monument, Boleskine House, Old Church and Graveyard, Foyers and Inverfarigaig piers, Erroglie kirk, Bryce Memorial at Inverfarigaig.
- Preference for new housing in existing settlements and/or brownfield sites.

12.130 Torridon and Kinlochewe Local Place Plan (**THC020**) has identified the following priorities relating to Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings:

- Torridon Primary School closed, discussions underway re possible Community Asset Transfer including the former playpark.

Summary of Implications for the Proposed Plan

12.131 This section sets out the implications for the HLDP Proposed Plan including the sustainable management of Historic Assets and Places and the sustainable management and use of Brownfield, vacant and derelict land and empty buildings. These recommendations are in line with NPF4 Policy 7 and Policy 9, the HwLDP, and have been informed by the analysis and outputs of evidence in this report.

Historic Assets and Places

12.132 The Council considers implications for HLDP to be in line with NPF4 Policy 7. HLDP, through its spatial strategies, will support the sustainable management of the historic environment. This evidence report has identified valued historic assets and places within the HLDP area, that it will protect and enhance.

12.133 HLDP will be informed by HES and HER records on conservation areas, listed buildings, scheduled monuments, world heritage sites, historic marine protected areas, historic battlefields, gardens and designed landscapes and undesignated heritage assets. HLDP will consider the extent to which general (all encompassing) historic asset policy can rely on NPF4 policy 7a, 7m-7n.

- 12.134 Current HwLDP Policy 57 – Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage is the core policy at hand for matters relating to the natural, built and cultural heritage. It states that all development proposals will be assessed considering the level of importance and type of heritage features, the form and scale of development, and any impact on the feature and its setting, in the context of the policy framework. Owing to the range of considerations across these matters, HLDP would benefit from greater alignment to NPF4 and development of separate policy frameworks for natural environment features, distinct from historic assets and places. Current HwLDP states that in each proposed development policy, consideration should be given to the treatment of historic assets identified in the HER. Policy 28 – Sustainable Design states that proposed developments will be assessed on the extent to which they demonstrate sensitive siting and high-quality design in keeping with local character, historic and natural environment and in making use of appropriate materials.
- 12.135 Current HwLDP Policy 29 – Design Quality and Place-Making states that where relevant, the Council will assess proposals in terms of their contribution to place-making. Proposals should have regard to the historic pattern of development and landscape in the locality and should, where relevant, be an integral part of the settlement.
- 12.136 It should be noted that implications for the Proposed Plan with regards to Historic Assets and Places are general principles, and possible allocations will be considered on a site-specific basis against NPF4 policy and current HwLDP policies will be reviewed with consideration given to potential for mitigation strategies such as design and layout throughout the site assessment process.
- 12.137 HLDP will consider the impact of the climate emergency and most appropriate means to improve the resilience of all historic assets and places in the face of climate change.
- 12.138 HLDP will consider evidence on the need to develop further policy and advice on how heritage buildings can be adapted for climate change once available; including ensuring the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) process is fit for purpose in relation to historic buildings.
- 12.139 HLDP will consider a holistic approach in dealing with historic assets which recognises and optimises the role that the historic environment plays in delivering multiple benefits across numerous policy areas.
- 12.140 The Council will welcome exploration of the potential for historic assets to play a positive role in Scotland's Improvement Districts process. ▴
- 12.141 HLDP will continue to support the redevelopment and restoration of its historic assets, where possible being supported by grant funds to allow this

redevelopment to continue. Albeit that this redevelopment must be in line with Historic Environment Policy and Guidance documents.

World Heritage Sites

- 12.142 The HLDP will continue to support the protection of the Flow Country World Heritage Site. The Council will make itself aware of ongoing guidance emerging that will support the protection of this site during the development of HLDP.
- 12.143 HLDP will consider how to integrate the adopted supplementary planning guidance into the proposed plan.
- 12.144 HLDP will rely on the NPF4 policy 7l framework to protect its World Heritage Site.
- 12.145 Supported by HwLDP Policy 57 (3) the Council will consider the creation of its own policy in HLDP to strengthen this; however, this will more appropriately fall within **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**.

Conservation Areas

- 12.146 HLDP will continue to protect and enhance conservation areas from the adverse impacts of development. HLDP will also consider the extent to which conservation area policy can rely on the NPF4 policy 7e-7g framework.
- 12.147 HLDP will continue to review existing Conservation Areas, including undertaking Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans, and considering whether further areas warrant Conservation Area status. The Council will also be preparing Conservation Area Planning Guidance that will provide applicants with clear advice on the management of change across our conservation areas.
- 12.148 Following the most recent amendment to the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992, the Council will update their Windows and Doors in Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Planning Guidance and consider whether the removal of permitted development rights may be required to ensure an appropriate level of control within Highland most important conservation areas.

Listed Buildings

- 12.149 HLDP will continue to protect and enhance listed buildings and their settings from adverse impacts of development. HLDP will also consider the extent to which listed buildings policy can rely on the NPF4 policy 7b-7c framework.

12.150 HLDP will consider the progression of a favourable policy framework for enabling development, where the restoration of vacant, derelict and redundant Listed Buildings is supported.

12.151 HLDP will consider the need to preserve and protect thatched buildings in Highland and will also consider any emerging evidence provided by HES on the review and removal of any thatched listed buildings which were found to no longer meet the criteria for listing

Scheduled Monuments

12.152 HLDP will continue to protect scheduled monuments and their settings from adverse impacts of development. HLDP will also consider the extent to which scheduled monuments policy can rely on the NPF4 policy 7h framework.

12.153 HLDP will continue to protect the A-Listed Building and Scheduled Monument of Fort George as a key historic environment consideration. The Council will work closely with its Historic Environment Team and external key agencies to ensure a sustainable future for this important historic environment asset.

Inventory Gardens and Designed Landscapes

12.154 HLDP will continue to protect and enhance all inventory gardens and designed landscapes and their setting from any adverse impacts of development. HLDP will also consider the extent to which garden and designed landscapes policies can rely on the NPF4 policy 7i framework.

12.155 Inventory gardens and designed landscapes are a material consideration in the planning process. The Council will consider whether further policies, and a list of locally important gardens and designed landscapes, are required to protect these sites.

Inventory Historic Battlefields

12.156 HLDP will continue to protect and enhance inventory historic battlefields and their setting from adverse impacts of development. HLDP will also consider the extent to which historic battlefield policies can rely on the NPF4 policy 7j framework.

12.157 Historic Battlefields site's significance is a material consideration in the planning process. The Council will consider whether further policies, including Battlefield specific management plans, are required to protect these sites.

12.158 The Council will consider the need for preparation of bespoke policy for individual Inventory historic battlefields to aid in their management.

Historic Marine Protected Areas

- 12.159 HLDP will continue to protect historic marine protected areas in Highland from adverse impacts of development. HLDP will also consider the extent to which historic marine protected areas policy can rely on the NPF4 policy 7k framework.

Non-designated Assets

- 12.160 HLDP will provide a policy framework that supports the identification, protection and enhancement of undesignated historic assets. HLDP will also consider the extent to which undesignated historic assets policy can depend solely on the NPF4 policy 7o framework.
- 12.161 HLDP will consider if there is sufficient need and evidence to develop a 'local list' and any policy protection for locally important undesignated sites and/or buildings.
- 12.162 The Council's existing Historic Environment Strategy Supplementary Guidance will be reviewed, as will Council guidance that details required Standards for Archaeological Work conducted through the development process. The Council will also consider how publications by the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO Scotland)), including Guidance for Peatland Restoration and the Historic Environment in Scotland (**THC192**) and Delivery of Public Benefit and Social Value Guidance for Archaeology in the Planning Process (**THC193**) and other ALGAO Scotland guidance as appropriate impact HLDP.
- 12.163 The Council will consider a proactive approach to considering the long-term options for church buildings falling out of use and look to the challenges and opportunities that these sites may offer in terms of the communities in which they are situated and the services that they require.

Buildings at Risk

- 12.164 HLDP will continue to protect and enhance buildings at risk in highland from adverse impacts of development and will encourage development that would bring these buildings back into use, sympathetic to their original character. HLDP will also consider the extent to which buildings at risk policy can rely on the NPF4 policy 7m framework.
- 12.165 A focus on listed buildings at risk will be a priority and working internally with the historic environment team to identify appropriate sites for the HLDP proposed plan.

Brownfield, vacant and derelict land and empty buildings

- 12.166 The Highland Council considers the implications for HLDP to be in line with NPF4 Policy 9. HLDP will set out opportunities for the sustainable reuse of brownfield land including vacant and derelict land and empty buildings. In determining whether the reuse is sustainable, HLDP will consider the biodiversity values of brownfield land which has naturalised.
- 12.167 The current HwLDP Policy 28 – Sustainable Design, states that The Council will support developments which promote and enhance the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the people of Highland and that proposed developments will be assessed on the extent to which they meet a number of factors including whether they make use of brownfield sites, existing buildings and recycled materials.
- 12.168 The current HwLDP Policy 35 – Housing in the Countryside (Hinterland areas) considers the proposal involves conversion or reuse of traditional buildings or the redevelopment of derelict land; development of “brownfield” sites will be supported where a return to a natural state is not readily achievable and where a wider environmental benefit can be achieved through development.
- 12.169 The current HwLDP Policy 42 – Previously Used Land states that The Council will support development proposals that bring previously-used land back into beneficial use provided: 1. the site investigation and risk assessment are undertaken and demonstrate that the site is in, or is capable of being brought into, a condition suitable for the proposed development; and 2. The proposed development accords with all other relevant policies of this plan.
- 12.170 While brownfield land and empty buildings policies have been established within the current HwLDP, and Area LDP’s, HLDP will require to progress the sustainable reuse of brownfield land and empty buildings in a way that embeds the continued assessment of the suitability of brownfield land for reuse, in doing so its biodiversity value must be considered.
- 12.171 HLDP will prioritise the redevelopment of brownfield sites that demonstrate clear commercial viability and potential for sustainable reuse. Ensuring significant uplift in land value to address remediation challenges. However, due to significant data gaps regarding the extent and redevelopment potential of many sites, brownfield land is recommended to play an opportunistic rather than central role in the spatial strategy for development in Highland.
- 12.172 Allocations of housing sites on areas of brownfield land have traditionally been a policy preference and Housing Land Audits undertaken by The Council have recorded completion rates of homes delivered on brownfield sites to monitor this policy.

- 12.173 For rural areas, current policies supporting brownfield redevelopment remain valid and align with NPF4 Policies 17 a (ii) and 29 a (iv). These policies promote rural brownfield development as a national priority, ensuring such opportunities are leveraged to contribute to sustainable growth in the region.
- 12.174 HLDP will consider a place-based approach to tackling vacant, derelict land, vacant and long-term empty buildings across Highland, with the opportunity to deal with these areas where the issue is most prevalent.
- 12.175 The Council will continue use its Housing Land Audits to record completion rates of homes delivered on brownfield sites to monitor its policy preference of allocating housing sites on areas of brownfield land.
- 12.176 HLDP will consider creating a brownfield house completion target for Highland, however, there will be a need for this to be a place-based approach rather than Highland-wide target due to some settlements already well exceeding brownfield completions of between 90-100% of their house completions being on brownfield land.
- 12.177 HLDP will consult the Councils Contaminated Land team within the site selection process of the HLDP to understand any constraints, or need for further investigation.
- 12.178 HLDP will be informed by any developments in the creation of the Council's Highland Empty Homes Strategic Framework (2025-2028).
- 12.179 The Council will consider the use of CPOs in supporting the sustainable reuse of vacant and derelict land and buildings including listed buildings through HLDP whereby all other efforts have been exhausted.
- 12.180 The Council recognise and will consider records that provide information on the biodiversity value of brownfield sites, the Council will also consider opportunities for nature recovery and recognise brownfield sites as productive greenspace where appropriate, this knowledge will inform HLDP.

Statements of Agreement / Dispute

Agreement on Evidence

- 12.181 Agencies who responded and agreed with the evidence and content presented included:
- Historic Environment Scotland **(THC066)**.
 - Nature Scot **(THC088)**.
 - THC Environmental Health - Contaminated Land Team **(THC201)**.

Disputes with Stakeholders

- 12.182 No disputes were raised by respondents, small amendments that were made have been updated in this chapter and statement of agreements were provided by these agencies.

Information Gaps

- 12.183 The Council recognise that our knowledge of heritage assets and places in Highland is incomplete. Through ongoing research and as new surveys and investigations take place across the area, our understanding and appreciation of our past and how people interacted with our landscape, from prehistory to more recent times, continually grows and evolves. Throughout the length of this plan the Council will work closely with its internal Environment Team to be sure our historic assets and places continue to be protected and enhanced, and that development does not adversely impact our important historic assets.
- 12.184 The Council awaits updates from Scottish Government on Compulsory Purchase Reform. The [Compulsory Purchase Reform: Progress Report December 2024](#) recaps progress to date on the SG comprehensive programme of work to reform and modernise the compulsory purchase system in Scotland. It summarises emerging proposals and sets out next steps heading into 2025. SG state that any substantive change to compulsory purchase legislation will involve making amendments to primary legislation, which will require a Bill. Subject to the outcome of the May 2026 election and preferences of the incoming Government, this would need to be taken forward in the next Parliamentary Session. The Council acknowledge this information gap and will consider this throughout the life of this plan.
- 12.185 It is considered that community-led Local Place Plans would be informative evidence sources of relevance, and several remain in production at the time of writing. To 30 April 2026, 20 communities in Highland have formally registered Local Place Plans. Any Local Place Plans registered will be considered in the production of the LDP if timeously available.
- 12.186 It is considered that an Urban Capacity Study would be an informative evidence source of relevance to this section of the evidence report that would strengthen the evidence base in relation to NPF4 Policy 9, yet it is acknowledged that the council does not have the resource to produce an Urban Capacity Study at present and is not in a position to commit to commissioning further consultancy work of this nature.

Chapter 13 : Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking

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(2A) - A local development plan is to include a statement of the planning authority's policies and proposals as to the provision of public conveniences. Section 15(2B) - A local development plan is to include a statement of the planning authority's policies and proposals as to the provision of water refill locations Section 16D: - A planning authority must assess the sufficiency of play opportunities in its area for children in preparing an evidence report. Town and Country Planning (Development Planning) (Scotland) Regulations 2023: Regulation 9 - The planning authority is to have regard to the open space strategy in preparing a local development plan
NPF4 LDP Requirements	NPF4 Policy 14 – Design, Quality and Place: - LDPs should be place-based and created in line with the Place Principle. The spatial strategy should be underpinned by the six qualities of successful places. LDPs should provide clear expectations for design, quality and place taking account of the local context, characteristics, and connectivity of the area. They should also identify where more detailed design guidance is expected, for example, by way of design frameworks, briefs, masterplans, and design codes. - Planning authorities should use the Place Standard tool in the preparation of LDPs and design guidance to engage with communities and other stakeholders. They should also where relevant promote its use in early design discussions on planning applications. NPF4 Policy 15 – Local Living and 20-minute Neighbourhoods:

- LDPs should support local living, including 20-minute neighbourhoods within settlements, through the spatial strategy, associated site briefs and masterplans. The approach should take into account the local context, consider the varying settlement patterns and reflect the particular characteristics and challenges faced by each place. Communities and businesses will have an important role to play in informing this, helping to strengthen local living through their engagement with the planning system.

NPF4 Policy 20 – Blue and Green Infrastructure:

- Local Development Plans should be informed by relevant, up-to-date audits and/or strategies, covering the multiple functions and benefits of blue and green infrastructure.
- The spatial strategy should identify and protect blue and green infrastructure assets and networks; enhance and expand existing provision including new blue and/or green infrastructure. This may include retrofitting.
- Priorities for connectivity to other blue and/or green infrastructure assets, including to address cross-boundary needs and opportunities, should also be identified.
- LDPs should encourage the permanent or temporary use of unused or under-used land as green infrastructure. Where this is temporary, this should not prevent future development potential from being realised.
- LDPs should safeguard access rights and core paths, including active travel routes, and encourage new and enhanced opportunities for access linked to wider networks.

NPF4 Policy 21 – Play, Recreation and Sport:

- LDP should identify sites for sports, play and outdoor recreation for people of all ages. This should be based on an understanding of the needs and demand in the community and informed by the planning authority's Play Sufficiency Assessment and Open Space Strategy. These spaces can be incorporated as part of enhancing and expanding blue and green infrastructure, taking account of relevant agencies' plans or policy frameworks, such as flood risk and/or water management plans. New provisions should be well-designed, high quality, accessible and inclusive.

NPF4 Policy 23 – Health and Safety:

- LDP spatial strategies should seek to tackle health inequalities particularly in places which are experiencing the most disadvantage.

	• LDPs should identify the health and social care services, and infrastructure needed in the area, including potential for co-location of complementary services, in partnership with Health Boards and Health and Social Care Partnerships. • LDPs should create healthier places for example through opportunities for exercise, healthier lifestyles, land for community food growing and allotments, and awareness of locations of concern for suicide. NPF4 Policy 27 – City, Town, Local and Commercial Centres: • LDPs should support sustainable futures for city, town, and local centres, in particular opportunities to enhance city and town centres. They should, where relevant, also support proposals for improving the sustainability of existing commercial centres where appropriate. • LDPs should identify a network of centres that reflect the principles of Local Living and the town centre vision. • LDPs should be informed by evidence on where clustering of non-retail uses may be adversely impacting on the wellbeing of communities. They should also consider and, if appropriate, identify where drive-through facilities may be acceptable where they would not negatively impact on the principles of local living or sustainable travel. • LDPs should provide a proportion of their Local Housing Land Requirements in city and town centres and be proactive in identifying opportunities to support residential developments. NPF4 Policy 28 – Retail: • LDPs should consider where there may be a need for further retail provision. This may be where a retail study identifies deficiencies in retail provision in terms of quality and quantity in an area, or when allocating sites for housing or the creation of new communities, in terms of the need for neighbourhood shopping, and supporting local living. • LDPs should identify areas where proposals for healthy food and drink outlets can be supported.
Links to Evidence	(THC110) Public Health Scotland Public Health Observatory Highland Profile Report (THC111) NHS Highland Public Health Intelligence Partnership Profiles (THC178) Place Standard Tool Design Version (THC162) Air Quality Action Plan 2024 (THC163) HSE Consultation Zones and Hazardous Sites (THC164) SportScotland FPM Highland Council Report (THC165) High Life Highland Evidence Submission

(THC166) Draft Surface Water Management Plan (SWMP)
(THC167) Draft SWMP Long List and Short List
(THC168) Local Living Consultation Report
(THC169) Highland Child Healthy Weight by Intermediate Zone
(THC170) Tackling Payday Lending and Gambling in Scottish Town Centres and neighbourhoods
(THC171) NHS Submission on Overprovision
(THC172) Highland Alcohol Licensed Retailers
(THC173) Register of Highland Tobacco and NVP Retailers
(THC174) Development Plan Delivery – Committee Report
(THC176) Place Standard Tool Children’s Engagement Materials
(THC177) Place Standard Tool Young People’s Engagement Materials
(THC144) Transport - Draft Chapter Key Agency and Stakeholder Consultation Report

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
THC857	Place Principle	20.03.26
THC858	Six Qualities of Successful Places	20.03.26

	THC859	Creating Places: A policy statement on architecture and place for Scotland	20.03.26
	THC860	Place Standard Tool	20.03.26
	THC861	Place and Wellbeing Outcomes	20.03.26
	THC862	Place and Wellbeing Outcome Indicators	20.03.26
	THC863	Developing a Place Based Framework	20.03.26
	THC864	Future Highlands Strategic Partnership Priority 4: Place Based Planning and Investment in Communities	20.03.26
	THC865	Designing Streets: A Policy Statement for Scotland	20.03.26
	THC866	Designing Streets toolkit	20.03.26
	THC867	Planning (Scotland) 2019 Act	20.03.26
	THC868	Masterplan Consent Area Guidance	20.03.26
	THC869	World Health Organization (WHO)	20.03.26
	THC870	Scotland's health is worsening	20.03.26
	THC871	Improvements in life expectancy have stalled	20.03.26
	THC872	Healthy life expectancy in Scotland	20.03.26
	THC873	Public Health Observatory Dashboard	20.03.26
	THC874	NHS Highland Annual Report of the Director of Public Health 2024	20.03.26
	THC875	Overviews of Demographic Profile, Adult Health and Child Health - NHS Highland Public Health Intelligence	20.03.26
	THC876	Health inequalities	20.03.26
	THC877	Scotland's Population Health Framework	20.03.26
	THC878	Health in All Policies: A Primer	20.03.26
	THC879	Evidence behind Place Standard Tool and Place and Wellbeing outcomes	20.03.26
	THC880	Wellbeing Economy Toolkit	20.03.26
	THC881	Local Wellbeing Economy Monitor Guidance	20.03.26
	THC882	Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)	20.03.26
	THC883	Final report of the Access Data Short-Life Working Group	20.03.26
	THC884	Understanding the changing nature and context of poverty in Scottish rural and island communities since 2010	20.03.26
	THC885	Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP)	20.03.26
	THC886	Guide to Public Health Impact Assessment	20.03.26
	THC887	Health Impact Assessment Support Unit	20.03.26

	THC888	<u>Creating Hope Together – Year 1 Delivery plan (2023-24)</u>	20.03.26
	THC889	<u>Probable Suicides, 2024 - National Records of Scotland (NRS)</u>	20.03.26
	THC890	<u>National Guidance on Action to Address Suicides at Locations of Concern</u>	20.03.26
	THC891	<u>Place and wellbeing: integrating land use planning and public health in Scotland</u>	20.03.26
	THC892	<u>Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland: an analysis of Scotland's Census 2022</u>	20.03.26
	THC893	<u>Bingin Noggins Tobar – Taking Our Journey [2023-25] – Progress In Dialogue</u>	20.03.26
	THC894	<u>UK National Air Quality Strategy</u>	20.03.26
	THC895	<u>Cleaner Air for Scotland 2 (CAFS2)</u>	20.03.26
	THC896	<u>National Air Quality Objectives</u>	20.03.26
	THC897	<u>Air Quality Management Area</u>	20.03.26
	THC898	<u>Highland Council Environmental Health – Air Quality Update 2024/25</u>	20.03.26
	THC899	<u>Air Quality in Scotland</u>	20.03.26
	THC900	<u>Air Quality concerns expressed by doctors</u>	20.03.26
	THC901	<u>Scotland's Noise Map</u>	20.03.26
	THC902	<u>Transportation Noise Action Plan</u>	20.03.26
	THC903	<u>Highland Council Road Safety Plan to 2030</u>	20.03.26
	THC904	<u>Highland Council's Active Travel Strategy</u>	20.03.26
	THC905	<u>Local Transport Strategy (LTS)</u>	20.03.26
	THC906	<u>Transport Poverty: A Public Health Issue</u>	20.03.26
	THC907	<u>Why is transport important for health?</u>	20.03.26
	THC908	<u>Public Health Scotland Transport Poverty</u>	20.03.26
	THC909	<u>Obesity Action Scotland Factsheet (2024)</u>	20.03.26
	THC910	<u>Coal Authority Development High Risk Areas</u>	20.03.26
	THC911	<u>Dounreay & Vulcan NRTE Offsite Emergency Plan</u>	20.03.26
	THC912	<u>Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) Group Draft Strategy</u>	20.03.26
	THC913	<u>A More Active Scotland: Scotland's Physical Activity Delivery Plan</u>	20.03.26
	THC914	<u>National Physical Activity for Health Framework</u>	20.03.26
	THC915	<u>Active Highland Strategy (AHS)</u>	20.03.26
	THC916	<u>Local Wellbeing Economy Monitor: Guidance</u>	20.03.26
	THC917	<u>OS MasterMap Greenspace Layer</u>	20.03.26

	THC918	Third State of Scotland's Greenspace Report	20.03.26
	THC919	Scottish Household Survey Data	20.03.26
	THC920	Tree Equity Score UK	20.03.26
	THC921	Working together to build climate resilient, healthy and equitable places:	20.03.26
	THC922	Water Resilient Places	20.03.26
	THC923	Blue and Green Infrastructure Mapping	20.03.26
	THC924	Recommended riparian corridor layer	20.03.26
	THC925	Geomorphic risk layer	20.03.26
	THC926	Riparian vegetation planting opportunities	20.03.26
	THC927	Scottish Wetland Inventory layer	20.03.26
	THC928	Obstacles to fish migration	20.03.26
	THC929	Culverts	20.03.26
	THC930	LDP Evidence Gathering: Achieving sufficiency of evidence relating to flood risk and the water environment	20.03.26
	THC931	Crofting Commission Annual Report and Accounts 2023/24	20.03.26
	THC932	The Value of Crofting	20.03.26
	THC933	Economic Condition of Crofting 2019-2022	20.03.26
	THC934	Highland Good Food Map	20.03.26
	THC935	Growing Our Future - A Community Food Growing Strategy for Highland	20.03.26
	THC936	Scotland Play Vision Statement & Action Plan	20.03.26
	THC937	Playpark Strategy & Action Plan 2023-2033	20.03.26
	THC938	PSA Planning Guidance	20.03.26
	THC939	Highland Play Sufficiency Assessment Report	20.03.26
	THC940	Highland Play Sufficiency Assessment Map	20.03.26
	THC941	Highland Council leisure centres	20.03.26
	THC942	Highlife Highland Progress Report 2024	20.03.26
	THC943	Sportscotland's Facilities Database	20.03.26
	THC944	Highland Council Core Paths	20.03.26
	THC945	West Highlands & Islands Core Paths Plan Review	20.03.26
	THC946	Long Distance Routes	20.03.26
	THC947	Local Living Interactive Map	20.03.26
	THC948	Local Living Mapping Technical Note	20.03.26
	THC949	Local Living and 20-Minute Neighbourhood Planning Guidance	20.03.26
	THC950	How to map a 20 Minute Neighbourhood Guidance	20.03.26

	THC951	<u>Living Well Locally: 20 Minute Communities in the Highlands and Islands</u>	20.03.26
	THC952	<u>Working together to build climate-resilient, healthy and equitable places</u>	20.03.26
	THC953	<u>Approaches to Public Conveniences and Action Plan</u>	20.03.26
	THC954	<u>Public Conveniences Map</u>	20.03.26
	THC955	<u>Highland Comfort Scheme</u>	20.03.26
	THC956	<u>Scottish Water Top Up Tap Map</u>	20.03.26
	THC957	<u>Town Centre First Principle</u>	20.03.26
	THC958	<u>A New Future for Scotlands Town Centres</u>	20.03.26
	THC959	<u>Town Centre Toolkit</u>	20.03.26
	THC960	<u>Town Centre Action Plan Review</u>	20.03.26
	THC961	<u>Town Centre Health Checks Storymap</u>	20.03.26
	THC962	<u>High Streets in Great Britain</u>	20.03.26
	THC963	<u>Office of National Statistics</u>	20.03.26
	THC964	<u>Housing to 2040</u>	20.03.26
	THC965	<u>Getting the Right Change – A retail strategy for Scotland</u>	20.03.26
	THC966	<u>Town Centre Health Checks Dashboard</u>	20.03.26
	THC967	<u>Business Improvement Districts</u>	20.03.26
	THC968	<u>Inverness Strategy</u>	20.03.26
	THC969	<u>Inverness City Centre Retail Audit Dashboard</u>	20.03.26
	THC970	<u>Inverness Retail Parks Dashboard</u>	20.03.26
	THC971	<u>Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Scotland) Order 1997 (UCO)</u>	20.03.26
	THC972	<u>To Explore the Relationship Between the Food Environment and the Planning System</u>	20.03.26
	THC973	<u>Evidence Brief - Are takeaways adding pounds? - MRC Epidemiology Unit</u>	20.03.26
	THC974	<u>Public Health Observatory Dashboard</u>	20.03.26
	THC975	<u>Diet and Weight: Out of Home Action Plan</u>	20.03.26
	THC976	<u>Local Levers for Diet and Healthy Weight</u>	20.03.26
	THC977	<u>Managing takeaways near schools: a toolkit for local authorities</u>	20.03.26
	THC978	<u>Food Environment Assessment Tool</u>	20.03.26
	THC979	<u>Path networks to schools interactive mapping</u>	20.03.26
	THC980	<u>CreshMap</u>	20.03.26
	THC981	<u>A cross-sectional analysis of the relationship between tobacco and alcohol outlet density and neighbourhood deprivation</u>	20.03.26

THC982	Health harms of vaping – evidence briefing	20.03.26
THC983	Tobacco and Vaping Framework	20.03.26
THC984	Registered Highland Tobacco Retailers	20.03.26

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 that there are relevant crossovers between Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking and other topics including:

- **Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy**
- **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**
- **Chapter 7: Flood Risk Management**
- **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**
- **Chapter 9: Housing**
- **Chapter 10: Transport**
- **Chapter 11: Infrastructure**
- **Chapter 12: Historic Assets, Brownfield Land and Empty Buildings**

Where apparent, the Council has referenced relevant linkages between policies areas throughout the chapter.

Summary of Evidence

- 13.1 The Council ambition is to reinforce our existing communities across the entire Highland region to ensure they are modern, resilient and fit for the future, whilst safeguarding and protecting our existing important built heritage asset. To achieve this, the Council will need to encourage, promote and facilitate well designed developments where our residents live in healthy and well-designed communities, which have quick and easy access to shops, workplaces, community facilities, play and open space, and local services, allowing them to spend less time commuting and more time with family and friends. This chapter brings together a summary of evidence required to address these issues. This Summary of Evidence focuses on information relating to:
- **Placemaking**
 - **Health and Wellbeing**
 - **Health Harms**
 - **Open Space, Recreation and Blue-Green Infrastructure**
 - **Local Living**
 - **Retail and Town Centres**
 - **Clustering of Non-Retail Uses**

Placemaking

National Context

- 13.2 The Place Principle is the overarching context for place-based working in Scotland. Place is where people, location and resources combine to create a sense of identity and purpose and is at the heart of addressing the needs and realising the full potential of communities. Places are shaped by the way resources, services and assets are directed and used by the people who live in and invest in them.
- 13.3 The Place Principle encourages a joined-up and Design, Quality and Place participative approach to services, land and buildings, across all sectors within a place to enable better outcomes for everyone and increased opportunities for people and communities to shape their own lives.
- 13.4 The Six Qualities of Successful Places are outlined in NPF4 Annex D as follows:
- **Healthy:** Supporting the prioritisation of women's safety and improving physical and mental health,
 - **Pleasant:** Supporting attractive natural and built spaces,
 - **Connected:** Supporting well connected networks that make moving around easy and reduce car dependency,
 - **Distinctive:** Supporting attention to detail of local architectural styles and natural landscapes to be interpreted into designs to reinforce identity,
 - **Sustainable:** Supporting the efficient use of resources that will allow people to live, play, work and stay in their area, ensuring climate resilience and integrating nature positive biodiversity solutions,
 - **Adaptable:** Supporting commitment to investing in the long-term value of buildings, streets and spaces by allowing for flexibility so that they can meet the changing needs and accommodate different uses over time.
- 13.5 Creating Places: A policy statement on architecture and place for Scotland underpins the Scottish Governments approach towards good places and describes good design as not something that is merely aesthetic but something that enhances the quality of the lives of the people and adds value, namely:
- Physical value – enhances a setting;
 - Functional value – meets and adapts to the long-term needs of all users;
 - Viability – provides good value for money;
 - Social value – develops a positive sense of identity and community; and
 - Environmental value - efficient and responsible use of our resources.
- 13.6 The values of good buildings and places that are put forward in *Creative Places* are grouped into themes which align with the Six Qualities of Successful Places.
- 13.7 The Place Standard contains 14 themes that support the Six Qualities of Successful Places, providing a consistent framework to consider and to assess the

quality of new and existing places. The [Place Standard Tool](#) is designed to support communities, public, private and third sectors to work effectively together to assess the quality of a place and to support the consideration of development planning and design within the framework of the 14 Place Standard themes and to deliver on the [Six Qualities of Successful Places](#).

- 13.8 The [Place and Wellbeing Outcomes](#) provide a consistent and comprehensive focus for where place impacts on the wellbeing of people and planet. The incorporation of these Outcomes within NPF4 supports their consistent use across Scotland. There are a core set of [Place and Wellbeing Outcome Indicators](#) that can be measured and reviewed over time to assess the contribution to the delivery of the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes locally.

Placemaking in Highland

- 13.9 [Developing a Place Based Framework](#) sets out the case for applying a place lens in Highland and has been designed to support communities and public sector partners to take a collective approach to service design, planning and area priority planning taking a place-based approach.
- 13.10 Communities across Highland have been invited to consider preparation of their own Local Place Plans - a community's proposals for the development or use of land and buildings in their local area, to reflect on how to make their place better, agree priorities for the future and how to act on them. Priorities identified within Local Place Plans registered to date have been evidenced throughout this Evidence Report and will inform the HLDP.
- 13.11 In addition, sub-regional Area Place Plans bring together an overview of existing strategies and projects, to provide a future guide to get the best impact for people living in an area, based on a shared understanding of local need. At its simplest, Area Place Plans will be tools that make publicly clear what activity and investment is happening in each area, the outcomes being delivering against, when they are intended to be delivered and who is responsible for doing so.
- 13.12 The Highland-wide Area Place Plan programme was initiated following the publication of [Future Highlands Strategic Partnership Priority 4: Place Based Planning and Investment in Communities](#) and has been endorsed by the Council and Highland Community Planning Partnership. The programme has brought in partners from across council services, the wider public sector, third sector, business and communities to steer the process Place Standard Tool results for the 10 areas within Highland are detailed in the respective Area Place Plans referred to in **Chapter 2: Area Profiles and Position Statement**.

Placemaking within the Development Plan

- 13.13 A number of policies already exist in the Council's current Local Development Plans which were designed to combat placemaking issues. The most recent review of the IMFLDP2 brought these issues into sharper focus.
- 13.14 A new Placemaking Policy was developed as part of the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan Review (IMF2 - General Policy 8: Placemaking) which developed a new approach requiring developments of 4 or more dwellings, and major non-housing applications, to complete a Placemaking Audit. This Placemaking Audit was developed in-house and aimed to ensure high quality design, appropriate site layouts and developments being built at the right density in the right location, all of which combine to achieve good placemaking whilst protecting our finite natural and biodiversity resources.
- 13.15 As the Audit was prepared before the publication of NPF4, by the time the IMFLDP2 was considered at [examination](#) a number of the requirements and ambitions, including the 6 qualities of placemaking were outdated. Consequently, the Reporter recommended that the Placemaking Audit be excluded from the adopted version of the IMFLDP2 and instead that the Council progress the Audit as non-statutory planning policy. This recommendation to exclude the Audit from the adopted IMFLDP2 was accepted by the Council and work is ongoing to consider bringing forward the Audit as non-statutory guidance.
- 13.16 The [Inverness Strategy](#) serves as an Inverness City Centre Masterplan and focuses on key priorities for the City Centre, with recognition that quality placemaking is vital to the success of other policies, namely business and investment; health and wellbeing, and sustainable transport.
- 13.17 Street design is a key consideration in placemaking. [Designing Streets: A Policy Statement for Scotland](#) and the [Designing Streets toolkit](#) provide guidance on how to create well-design streets. The guidance emphasises placemaking in street design, moving away from a system focused upon the dominance of motor vehicles, to achieve better outcomes and the creation of successful places.

Masterplan Consent Areas

- 13.18 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. The principle behind the MCA process, in terms of it giving consent, is akin to other consenting. The main differences between the application route

to planning permission and MCAs are that an MCA is led by the authority and can offer four types of consent, which can be in place for up to 10 years.

- 13.19 As discussed in **Chapter 8: Business, Economy, Tourism and Productive Places**, and **Chapter 9: Housing**, the Council considers that MCAs provide significant potential to support the delivery of major projects and enable large scale infrastructure projects such as housing needs, national developments, and Green Freeports. 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. Meetings with Scottish Government officials and other potential *early adopter* councils have taken place as to the use of MCAs in Highland and elsewhere. The Council seeks to be proactive in working collaboratively with stakeholders to identify feasible locations for MCAs.
- 13.20 MCAs are a means to take forward place-based approaches and go further than previous masterplan initiatives undertaken by the Council thus far. They are an important addition to the planning and placemaking toolkit, as a way for authorities to proactively shape and facilitate development.
- 13.21 MCAs will allow planning authorities to plan; front-loading consideration of design, infrastructure and environmental matters at an earlier stage in the planning process. This can allow local authorities to take a leadership role in the planning of high-quality places, rather than reacting to applications before them.
- 13.22 They are a flexible placemaking tool, grounded in and responding to a place, and how it may change to meet local needs and outcomes. MCAs are an opportunity for the authority to set its expectations around quality. MCAs can incentivise high quality development by providing a streamlined consent process for those proposals which comply with the scheme, helping to create well-designed places in line with the [Six Qualities of Successful Places](#).

Health and Wellbeing

Context

- 13.23 The [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) defines health as *'a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'*. Health is a fundamental human right.
- 13.24 After decades of improvement, [Scotland's health is worsening](#) report Public Health Scotland. For example: people are dying younger, the number of people dying early is increasing people are spending more of their life in ill health, the gap in life expectancy between the poorest and the wealthiest is growing. [Improvements in life expectancy have stalled](#) and are currently below the 2012-2014 values for both males and females. [Healthy life expectancy in Scotland](#) has fallen to near ten-year low.

Health Profile

- 13.25 The Public Health Scotland Public Health Observatory Highland Profile Report **(THC110)** evidences the health of Highland's population across a range of health indicators drawn from the [Public Health Observatory Dashboard](#). Life expectancy in Highland is generally higher in Highland for both males (77.4 years) and females (81.9 years) relative to Scotland equivalents, though [lower than for England and Wales](#). Healthy life expectancy – the number of years spent in good health – is also higher in Highland for males (63.5 years) and females (65.8 years) than in Scotland (60 years for females and 59.6 years for males).
- 13.26 **Chapter 9: Housing** demonstrates that Highland's populations aged 65-74 and 75+ have been rising more rapidly than Scotland since 2014. The prevalence of many conditions and the number of people with frailty are likely to increase as the number of older people increases. This is understood to increase demand for Adult Health and Social Care Services ([Annual Report of the Director of Public Health 2024 - Health Inequalities](#)) as referenced in **Chapter 11: Infrastructure**.
- 13.27 Across a broad range of health indicators **(THC110)**, Highland generally performs well relative to Scotland in some areas such as smoking attributable conditions, hospitalisations and deaths, yet performs worse than Scotland for alcohol indicators such as consumption habits, premise licenses per 10,000 population, alcohol-attributable hospital admissions in young people aged 11-25 years, and recorded incidences of driving under the influence.
- 13.28 There are significant variations in the health profile of Highland's communities. [Overviews of Demographic Profile, Adult Health and Child Health provided by NHS Highland Public Health Intelligence](#) have also been considered at Area level which highlight areas of strength or concern for specific health indicators within Highland's diverse areas, this data can be found in **(THC111)**.
- 13.29 To summarise, the Inverness area, East Ross, Mid Ross and Caithness all have live birth rates higher than the Highland average, while Lochaber, Nairnshire, Badenoch & Strathspey, Skye, Wester Ross and Sutherland have lower birth rates and have populations that are ageing faster than Highland as a whole. Over recent years, the number of deaths caused by dementia and Alzheimer's disease has increased. Life expectancy at birth has stalled across Highland, and is lower in East Ross, Caithness and Inverness relative to Highland overall.
- 13.30 [Scotland's Population Health Framework](#) sets out Scottish Government and COSLA's long term collective approach to improving Scotland's health and reducing health inequalities. The Framework is structured around the prevention drivers of health and wellbeing, including 'Places and Communities'. A key action of this framework is to "embed health and wellbeing considerations into the development and delivery of Local Development Plans (LDPs)".

Health Inequalities

- 13.31 Health inequalities, defined by Public Health Scotland, mean an unfair outcome of reduced life expectancy in parts of Scotland. They are the unjust and avoidable differences in people's health across social groups and between different population groups. In the most affluent areas of Scotland, people live longer in good health, compared to those living in deprived areas.
- 13.32 Characteristics such as housing, infrastructure and the economy influence population health. These are sometimes referred to as the wider determinants of health, or the metaphorical 'building blocks' of health as used in Scotland's Population Health Framework. When people across Highland experience these differently they can contribute to health inequalities, which are systematic, avoidable and unfair differences in people's health outcomes across the population or between social groups within the same population (Health in All Policies: A Primer).
- 13.33 Highland contains areas with multiple deprivation within urban areas and towns. Income and employment deprivation are highest in Inverness, East Ross and Caithness. Health inequalities by deprivation have been demonstrated in many measures of health, including life expectancy. Highland has a substantial remote, rural and island geography. Whilst there are many positive aspects to this, including access to green and blue spaces, there is significant deprivation in access to services. Higher costs of living in remote, rural and island areas can compound difficulties in accessing services and be a barrier to healthy lifestyles.
- 13.34 'A Scotland where we live in vibrant, healthy and safe places' is one of the six Public Health priorities in Scotland (Annual Report of the Director of Public Health 2024 - Health Inequalities). There is growing evidence on how the design and function of neighbourhoods impacts on health and wellbeing and contributes to inequalities. To tackle these inequalities, it is necessary to consider action beyond the health and care system.
- 13.35 Place based approaches to improve health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities acknowledge the link between the physical and economic environment and its impact on the people who live, work, play and learn there. This affects different groups in different ways and requires interventions to be based on an understanding of people and the place itself. Elements within a place that are likely to improve health and wellbeing, and tackle inequalities are described in a set of Place and Wellbeing Outcomes which are also structured around the same 14 themes as the Place Standard Tool and are based on evidence of how place impacts on health and wellbeing (Evidence behind Place Standard Tool and Place and Wellbeing outcomes). Place and Wellbeing

- Outcomes also includes quantitative indicators for monitoring place and wellbeing outcomes.
- 13.36 Delivering health and wellbeing in places, through the design and development process can be supported by tools such as the Place Standard Tool Design Version **(THC178)**. This tool adapts existing Place Standard questions and enables them to be used to guide proposals during the design process, with flexibility for the different stages in the design and development process.
- 13.37 The quality of our neighbourhoods varies from place to place. This variation contributes to increasing inequalities. People in our most deprived areas are more likely to experience poor quality buildings and community spaces, and are more likely to have increased exposure to health harming commodities, such as alcohol, tobacco, High Fat Salt and Sugar (HFSS) foods, and gambling.
- 13.38 The Wellbeing Economy Toolkit and the Local Wellbeing Economy Monitor Guidance have informed the selection of indicators presented throughout this chapter, recognising that a range of built environment aspects have implications for health and wellbeing.
- 13.39 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) data reveals Scotland's most and least deprived data zones, using domains of indicators for health, income, access employment, education, housing and crime. Accordingly, 20 of Highland's 312 data zones are within the 20% most health deprived nationally, of which 8 are within the 10% most health deprived nationally. These are clustered in the Dalneigh, Hilton, Merkinch, and Muirtown areas of Inverness, in addition to Alness, Invergordon and Wick. While there are limitations to the SIMD in capturing individual experiences of inequality, it is still a useful evidence source at a local population level. This data dates from 2020 however and the 2026 planned update will be welcomed and considered by the Council when available.
- 13.40 Rural and island communities experience higher costs of living, which can compound difficulties in accessing services and be a barrier to healthier lifestyle choices (NHS Highland The Annual Report of the Director of Public Health 2024). Since 2010, the changing nature and context of poverty in Scottish rural and island communities demonstrates their distinct challenges, including significant and widening disparities in rates of poverty. Observed poverty trends between geographical likely result from multiple intersecting factors related to changes in demographics, employment challenges, housing pressures, geopolitical changes and access to public services amongst others. These factors are recognised in the evidence presented in **Chapters 8 & 9**.
- 13.41 The need to tackle inequalities is recognised and committed to within the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP) vision to tackle inequality and

maximise opportunities for all people of Highland. The HOIP contains three strategic priorities that HLDP will require to have regard to:

- People - Enable people to live independently, safe and well,
- Place - Work in partnership to develop sustainable and resilient local communities, and
- Prosperity - Creating opportunities to thrive economically.

Health Impact Assessments

- 13.42 Health impact assessment (HIA) is a practical way to systematically consider the potential, and sometimes unintended, effects a policy, strategy or service plan may have on the health of a population. HIA considers the socioeconomic determinants of health and the pathways through which they influence health outcomes. It is particularly useful for considering effects on vulnerable or disadvantaged groups and promotes a 'Health in All Policies' approach ([Health in All Policies: A Primer](#)). NPF4 includes the potential for HIA to be required within development management, but it would be required for the planning authority to identify the policy framework setting out the criteria for when this would apply, and a procedure for reviewing any HIA received.
- 13.43 Public Health Scotland's [Guide to Public Health Impact Assessment](#) and [Health Impact Assessment Support Unit \(HIASU\)](#) provide guidance and resources on how to conduct a HIA, including for initial screening stages to ascertain whether a HIA would be beneficial in developing policy such as the LDP. A HIA is not a statutory requirement as part of LDP preparation, unlike other impact assessments such as Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA), Public Sector Equality Duty Assessment (PSED), Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment (FSDA), Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA), Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), and Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA). Local Development Planning Guidance iterates that planning authorities may wish to undertake a Health Inequalities Impact Assessment as the spatial strategy is prepared, which may encompass other assessments already being undertaken. As NPF4 asserts that LDP spatial strategies should seek to tackle health inequalities, the Council will require to consider whether a HIA is proportionate and feasible to fulfil this.

Suicide Prevention

- 13.44 Since the early 2000's suicide prevention has been a strategic priority in Scotland ([Creating Hope Together – Year 1 Delivery plan \(2023-24\)](#)). NPF4 Policy 23(f) requires that development proposals be designed to take into account suicide risk. Local development planning guidance suggests that an awareness of locations of concern for suicide should be addressed in the Evidence Report.

13.45 Highland's rate of suicide has been persistently among the highest in Scotland for many years for both men and women (Figure 13:1), although the majority of registered suicides are among men. Highland's mortality rate for suicide was most recently recorded as 20.5 per 100,000 people, relative to Scotland's equivalent rate of 14.6 **(THC110)**. At area level, mortality rates for suicide are higher still within Easter Ross, Lochaber, Inverness and Caithness. Deaths from suicide in young people aged 11-25 are also higher in Highland, with a rate of 17.1 per 100,000 relative to Scotland's rate of 10.9 **(THC110)**.

13.46 Creating Hope in Highland is the local suicide prevention plan for Highland, developed with partners and stakeholders including the HCCP. One of the 8 objectives within this seeks to identify places of concern and develop actions to make them safer within a subsequent Locations of Concern Action Plan. The Planning Service has collaborated with the Suicide Prevention User Group to address the suicide risk posed by a number of sites, which has led to several physical interventions already being implemented.

13.47 National Guidance on Action to Address Suicides at Locations of Concern published by Public Health Scotland iterates that the reasons why particular sites become locations of concern are complex. These locations can often be particularly scenic or iconic public structures or sites such as:

- Tall buildings, bridges, cliffs and other manufactured or natural structures,
- Rural or secluded locations such as car parks, roadside lay-bys and woodlands,
- Sections of railway lines and roads where bridges span the tracks,
- Locations that provide access to water



Figure 13:1 Age-standardised mortality rate per 100,000 people for probable suicides in Highland Council and Scotland by sex – five-year averages (*Probable Suicides, 2024 - National Records of Scotland (NRS)*)

- 13.48 The Planning Service remains part of the Suicide Prevention User Group and remains informed of sites considered to be a risk and ongoing actions.
- 13.49 It is recognised open space provision, play spaces, community facilities and healthcare facilities provided through development can support health and wellbeing or promote the inclusion of features and amenities that will enhance health and wellbeing ([Place and wellbeing: integrating land use planning and public health in Scotland](#)). Putting health equity at the heart of development aligns with Scotland's [Population Health Framework](#), which calls for collective accountability for population health outcomes and inequalities.
- 13.50 Using the Place Standard Tool and statutory and non-statutory community-led planning approaches such as Local Place Plans, Community Action Plans, provide opportunities for community input into the identification of infrastructure needs that support health and wellbeing are enabled – **Chapter 3: Statement of Engagement** outlines the approaches taken for this Evidence Report.

Gypsy/Traveller Communities

- 13.51 Gypsy/Traveller communities in Highland are part of Scotland's rich cultural fabric but remain one of its most marginalised populations. While the 2022 Census recorded 3,343 individuals identifying as Gypsy/Traveller across Scotland (0.06% of the national population), it is widely accepted this figure underrepresents the true population, with estimates reaching 20,000 or more ([Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland: an analysis of Scotland's Census 2022](#)). In Highland, community members often live in remote rural areas or roadside locations, where access to stable housing, education, healthcare, and mental health services is frequently compromised.
- 13.52 [Bingin Noggins Tobar – Taking Our Journey \[2023-25\] – Progress In Dialogue](#) - explored the root causes of mental health challenges and substance abuse among Gypsy/Traveller communities in Highland. The findings point clearly to structural and cultural drivers of distress:
- Discrimination and cultural exclusion from school age onwards;
 - Deep mistrust of services, particularly social work and statutory health care, linked to fear of surveillance or child removal;
 - A lack of safe spaces to talk about grief, trauma, or addiction without judgement;
 - Fragmented families and disrupted cultural ties, especially through the justice and care systems;
 - Barriers to accessing work, support, or recognition while maintaining cultural identity.

13.53 Root causes of addiction and mental health inequalities within Gypsy/Traveller communities are severe and are amplified by the stigma associated with help-seeking, systemic racism, and social isolation ([Bingin Noggins Tobar – Taking Our Journey \[2023-25\] – Progress In Dialogue](#)). For example:

- Gypsy/Traveller people are three times more likely to report “bad or very bad” health and twice as likely to live with long-term health conditions.
- Suicide rates are estimated to be six to seven times higher than the general population.
- Mental illness is often hidden or poorly understood in cultural contexts, with symptoms described using vague terms like “nerves,” reflecting a lack of accessible, culturally competent language and support.
- Mental health remains a taboo subject within Gypsy/Traveller communities, heavily stigmatised and poorly understood within both community and institutional contexts.

Health Harms

Air Quality

13.54 Air quality is monitored across Highland in accordance with the [UK National Air Quality Strategy](#). [Cleaner Air for Scotland 2 \(CAFS2\)](#) is Scotland’s second air quality strategy. CAFS2 sets out how the Scottish Government propose to further reduce air pollution to protect human health and fulfil Scotland’s legal responsibilities over the period 2021 – 2026 and aims for Scotland to have the best air quality in Europe.

13.55 The Council undertakes annual air quality reviews of its areas to make sure the [National Air Quality Objectives](#) will be achieved. If the objective for a pollutant is exceeded or predicted to be exceeded by the required date for compliance, the local authority must declare the affected area an [Air Quality Management Area](#) (AQMA). The authority must then implement an action plan to reduce pollution levels in the specified area. Highland had one AQMA in Inverness City Centre, which was declared in 2014.

13.56 The priorities set out in the Air Quality Action Plan (**THC162**) aim to minimise air pollution emissions from road traffic, the main emission source of nitrogen dioxide. This includes Priority 3 which is to use the planning system to ensure that air quality is fully considered for new development, by reviewing planning applications for new commercial and industrial installations and early engagement with stakeholders in major pre-application discussions. IMFLDP2 includes the [Inverness City Centre Development Brief](#) which has a stated vision to make development convenient and attractive to access city centre destinations on foot or by bike or public transport, improving air quality where required and supports the delivery of **THC162**.

- 13.57 Since 2016, there has been a general trend of reduction in nitrogen dioxide levels and air quality within the AQMA has achieved compliance with all UK and Scottish Government objectives since 2020. [The Council formally revoked the AQMA in Inverness on 1 June 2025](#). The Council continue to monitor the air quality in the city centre, at other locations in Inverness, and in Fort William, Nairn and Dingwall. For Highland, annual reporting is submitted to the Scottish Government, then published on the [Air Quality in Scotland](#) website..
- 13.58 Highland Council also are cognisant of [concerns expressed by doctors](#) about poor air quality outside schools in urban areas impacting children's health, and have been conducting our own short term air quality monitoring and awareness raising at primary schools in Highland (mainly Inverness, but also Fort William and Nairn). This information is included in the Annual Progress Reports to Scottish Government. Council also take part in initiatives such as Clean Air Day to encourage a reduction in vehicle idling outside schools.

Noise

- 13.59 The Environmental Noise (Scotland) Regulations 2006 initiated the production of strategic noise maps for major roads, rail, airports and industry; and the development of Noise Action Plans (NAPs) to reduce noise levels when required and preserve noise quality where it is currently good. None of Highland's urban areas have populations exceeding 100,000 people and therefore no Agglomeration NAPs or Airport NAPs are produced within Highland.
- 13.60 Evidence in relation to noise exposure has been considered from [Scotland's Noise Map](#), which highlights areas where people are exposed to high levels of environmental noise. Most areas of high exposure are within proximity to strategic transport infrastructure, such as trunk roads and the rail network. A national [Transportation Noise Action Plan](#) produced by Transport Scotland covers major roads and rail, including all trunk roads and wider transport policy, and identifies three Candidate Noise Management Areas (CNMA) within Highland, all of which are in central Inverness:
- A82 Kenneth Street,
 - A82 Longman Road, and
 - A862 Telford Street.
- 13.61 Determination of a CNMA is a means of highlighting that a geographical area should be considered further in terms of a potential need for noise management. None of the three CNMA's have at the time of writing been progressed to Noise Management Area (NMA) status which is the primary consideration when formulating environmental noise management actions/policy following the actions listed in the [Transportation Noise Action Plan](#).

Transport and Health

- 13.62 To avoid repetition, **Chapter 10: Transport** more fully details evidence in relation to transport, but it is acknowledged that there are considerable linkages between transport and health.
- 13.63 In the first instance, associated health impacts from both **Noise** and **Air Quality** aforementioned are largely derived from transport movements and emissions. Encouraging more sustainable transport choices by directing future development towards locations where sustainable transport options are available is recognised as a key planning mechanism to improve this.
- 13.64 How transport infrastructure is designed and used also has direct health and safety implications for road casualties which disproportionately impact vulnerable road users, including pedestrians, cyclists and road users aged over 70. At a national level those who live in areas of deprivation are more likely to be involved in traffic collisions than those in the least deprived areas. The Council's [Road Safety Plan to 2030](#) evidences that this is not borne out in Highland with the split of collisions involving people from the 10% most and 10% least deprived areas being very similar. Regardless, achieving safer roads and travel across Highland remains a priority for the Council.
- 13.65 The [Highland Council's Active Travel Strategy](#) also emphasises the key health benefits of making active travel an easier choice, namely:
- Encourages physical fitness and a healthy lifestyle as part of daily activity.
 - Benefits mental health by increased physical activity and more time outdoors.
 - Improves respiratory health through less exposure to air pollution.
- 13.66 The Council's [Local Transport Strategy \(LTS\)](#) also highlights the need for the transport system to support active lifestyles throughout people's lives to support health and independence in recognition of Highland's ageing population, who will inevitably become more dependent on alternatives to the car for everyday journeys.
- 13.67 The [LTS](#) outlines that access to transport in most parts of Highland is poor, based on financial cost, time and inconvenience. Even in urban areas some neighbourhoods experience poor access. In more rural areas, a lack of alternatives can lead to 'forced' car ownership, putting low-income households at risk of increased poverty. [Transport Poverty: A Public Health Issue](#) states that transport is a building block of good health and enables us to access other important building blocks including: education and employment opportunities; affordable and good quality healthy foods; leisure and the natural environment; and social and community connections. In rural areas, distances to key services are longer and public transport options are often more restricted. This limits

opportunities, particularly for those on low incomes. Travel times by public transport are consistently longer than by car.

- 13.68 People on low incomes, who are more reliant on public transport, are therefore more likely to have longer average journey times than those in higher income groups. Population growth rates tend to be higher in rural areas as discussed in **Chapter 9: Housing** and within [Transport poverty: a public health issue](#). This has implications for the population share who could be transport deprived, with lack of transport choices in future. For residents who rely on public transport, such as those in remote rural areas, accessing health and social services can be costly and restricted. The infrequency of bus services may require residents to use more expensive forms of public transport, such as taxis, or restrict their availability for in-person medical appointments to times when public transport is running.
- 13.69 Public Health Scotland, in their article, [Why is transport important for health?](#), give several reasons why transport is important for health, both for individuals and as a community:
- Help people get to health and social care services when they need treatment or support
 - make it easier to stay connected with friends, family, and the community
 - support physical and mental health
 - boost local economies by bringing more people to shops and services, especially in towns and cities
- 13.70 Motorised transport is associated with air pollution, noise pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, injuries, physical inactivity, stress, and community severances, all of which negatively impact health. Places that prioritise car use not only further increases these negative impacts but also health inequalities. This leads to disadvantages especially for people who do not or cannot access a car, for whatever reasons. People who walk often, including to access public transport, are improving their health through physical activity. The same applies to wheeling and cycling. These modes also improve informal social contact, opportunities to be in green or blue spaces and footfall for local businesses.
- 13.71 Transport poverty is defined by [Public Health Scotland](#) as “the lack of transport options that are available, reliable, affordable, accessible or safe that allow people to meet their daily needs and achieve a reasonable quality of life”. Transport poverty impacts health in a number of ways:
- limit access to the building blocks of good health, such as good work, training and education;
 - reduce access to health and care services;
 - increase exposure to transport-related health harms, such as pollution and injury from collisions;
 - reduce community engagement.

- 13.72 Addressing transport poverty and lack of transport choices is particularly important for Scotland at a time when life expectancy and healthy life expectancy are falling, health and social inequalities are widening, and there is an urgent need to ensure that our transition to a sustainable transport system is just. In addition, the prevalence of obesity in Highland Health Board Area is a problem, reported in the [Obesity Action Scotland Factsheet \(2024\)](#): 70% of the adult population were obese or overweight (compared to nationwide figure of 29%) and for the 2022/23 school year children had 12.7% risk of developing obesity (compared to 10.5% nationwide). Obesity is a complex issue, but physical activity helps treat and prevent it, and being active for some everyday journeys is for many people a practical and affordable way of building some physical activity into daily life.
- 13.73 In response to **Chapter 10: Transport**, the Active and Sustainable Travel team within Council evidence (**THC144**) the demographic and geographic factors impacting transport poverty and travel choice in Highland. For example, car ownership in Highland is higher than the Scottish average, however so is household expenditure on travel. The ageing population, and issues in attracting and retaining young working people and families means that a significant minority of the population won't or can't drive simply because they are too old, too young, have a mobility impairment or cannot afford to. These people are already at a disadvantage in terms of transport independence for their everyday trips and accordingly risk isolation, reduced access to goods and services, and lack of employment and social opportunities. People living in mainland rural or island communities are also more at risk of transport poverty and car dependency due to lack of alternative transport choices. To add to that, increasing numbers of people – especially young people - choose not to drive or would like to be less car dependent for environmental reasons, for financial reasons, to support good physical and mental health, to be more active and social with friends and family, or simply for enjoyment.

Coal Mining

- 13.74 Mine gases are hazardous to human health. Highland has not had an extensive history of coal mining within the authority area. [Coal Authority Development High Risk Areas](#) mapping indicates that there is one identified development high risk areas within Highland, at Brora.

Pipelines and Hazardous Substances

- 13.75 The Council has considered evidence relating to the locations of pipelines and heavy industrial uses that could create nuisance, pollution or hazards where the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) are consulted as part of routine development

management protocol. Mapping of HSE Consultation Areas for Pipelines and Hazardous Sites (**THC163**) illustrates the proximity of these sites in relation to each other and to surrounding development, including settlements in relevant locations. This enables the Council to consider the associated risks and potential impacts of development within the vicinity of these sites.

- 13.76 Pipeline infrastructure is predominantly confined to the Inner Moray Firth Area, adjacent to the A96 Corridor and settlements such as Inverness, Nairn and Tornagrain. Pipeline infrastructure also crosses the Inner Moray Firth across the Black Isle, in proximity to North Kessock.
- 13.77 Hazardous sites by contrast are more widespread across Highland, but are often small in scale and area of coverage. Clusters of HSE Consultation Areas both for pipelines and hazardous sites are evident in central Inverness in an area characterised by a busy city centre environment, and a large nearby industrial estate. The Council will require to maintain accurate records of these areas in order to determine planning applications in accordance with NPF4 Policy 23.

Dounreay and Vulcan Nuclear Decommissioning

- 13.78 The former experimental nuclear site at Dounreay is being decommissioned due to the cancellation of the fast-breeder reactor program in 1988, leading to the closure of the site and the end of its operational life, leaving a complex legacy of contamination that must be cleaned up and dismantled to protect human health and the environment. The large-scale project involves removing radiological, chemical, and industrial hazards from numerous facilities on the site including reactors and reprocessing plants, alongside a variety of radioactive waste, storage and disposal facilities.
- 13.79 Councils with nuclear facilities in their areas, and nearby, have recently been required to review these plans and create additional strategic level plans for wider areas around these sites, known as Outline Planning Zones. In the case of the Dounreay and Vulcan NRTE, the Outline Planning Zone extends to 5km. Protective arrangements for people in the Outline Planning Zone would only be activated if it was determined the risk from the event extended beyond the Detailed Emergency Planning Zone (DEPZ) area for which detailed emergency plans already exist. The Outline Planning Zone, DEPZ and the role of various agencies should a radiological incident occur is detailed in the [Dounreay & Vulcan NRTE Offsite Emergency Plan](#).
- 13.80 HwLDP Policy 24 alongside the Dounreay Planning Framework 2 (DPF2) is primarily for use by those preparing planning proposals for Dounreay and by the Council to assist in making decisions on planning applications within a different planning framework boundary than the Outline Planning Zone or the DEPZ. DPF2

was prepared by the Council in partnership with Nuclear Restoration Services (NRS) Dounreay and its main principles are:

- The timely, safe and environmentally acceptable decommissioning, restoration and after-use of the Dounreay site;
- phasing through to the interim end point, setting out the developments required for decommissioning and restoration towards achieving the site end state, including new build, adaptation, demolition and remediation;
- sufficient flexibility to respond to changing constraints whilst not placing undue restrictions on the site operator;
- indication of potential new interim uses and end uses for parts of the site in support of economic development of the area; and
- developer requirements as set out in Appendix 5 of the Revised Environmental Report for the HwLDP Policy 24.

- 13.81 The [Nuclear Decommissioning Authority \(NDA\) Group Draft Strategy](#) published in July 2025 publishes a roadmap for mission delivery at NRS Dounreay and notes that the scope of work at the Dounreay site is fundamentally unchanged from the previous strategy, albeit with changes to the implementation by splitting elements into specific programmes, and the production of a new site plan. The roadmap presumes that all buildings on the site would be demolished or reused by 2078 and suitable for reuse by 2079.

Open Space, Recreation and Blue-Green Infrastructure

- 13.82 NPF4 Policy 21 (Play, recreation and sport) requires Local Development Plans to identify sites for sports, play and outdoor recreation for people of all ages. This should be based on an understanding of the needs and demand in the community and informed by the planning authority's Play Sufficiency Assessment and Open Space Strategy.
- 13.83 The Scottish Government's [A More Active Scotland: Scotland's Physical Activity Delivery Plan](#) aims to encourage and support people to be more active. It seeks to encourage inactive people to become active, sustain physical activity throughout life, improve infrastructure, promote wellbeing, and increase sports participation. The [National Physical Activity for Health Framework](#) recognises that plans and strategies across transport, education, planning and the environment have as great an impact as do those in health or sport in helping to improve the health and wellbeing of people in Scotland through increasing levels of physical activity.
- 13.84 For Highland, the [Active Highland Strategy \(AHS\)](#) is an evidence-based multi-agency strategic framework for physical activity, which aims to support and promote collaboration between partners, strengthening the Council's offer to communities, especially those people that will benefit most from being more

active. It follows a systems-based approach to physical activity which moves away from short-term, solitary interventions and shifts thinking towards strategic cross-sectoral efforts that work in a complementary way to maximize limited resources and facilitate population levels of physical activity.

- 13.85 A wellbeing economy should protect the quality of our local living environment as this has a direct impact on our health and wellbeing – a key component of living well locally ([Local Wellbeing Economy Monitor: Guidance](#)). A natural environment is source of satisfaction, improves mental wellbeing, allows people to recover from the stress of everyday life and to perform physical activity. Having access to green and blue spaces is an essential part of our quality of lives.
- 13.86 Blue Infrastructure as defined in NPF4 comprises water environment features within the natural and built environments that provide a range of ecosystem services. Blue features include rivers, lochs, wetlands, canals, other water courses, ponds, coastal and marine areas including beaches, porous paving, sustainable urban drainage systems and raingardens.
- 13.87 Green Infrastructure as defined in NPF4 comprises features or spaces within the natural and built environments that provide a range of ecosystem services. Green Networks by extension comprise connected areas of green infrastructure and open space, that together form an integrated and multi-functional network. These are distinct from Nature Networks, discussed separately in **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**, although it is recognised that enhanced Blue and Green Infrastructure can provide ecosystem features that support biodiversity.
- 13.88 The [Local Transport Strategy](#) integrates consideration of blue-green infrastructure into transport in policy P1.13: Integrate blue-green infrastructure into the design of transport schemes. This includes the 'green' and 'blue' features that can provide environmental benefits and contribute to quality of life. Examples include woodlands, street trees, play spaces, allotments, community growing spaces, playing fields, road verges, swales, green walls and living roofs, rivers, canals, streams, wetlands, sustainable drainage. Active travel routes are another example, but in the context of this policy the focus is on non-transport blue-green infrastructure to complement the transport system.

Open Space

- 13.89 The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 introduced a new requirement for the preparation of an Open Space Strategy, which must contain an audit of existing open space provision, an assessment of current and future requirements and any other matter the planning authority consider appropriate. Open space is defined in the Act as space within and on the edge of settlements comprising green

infrastructure or civic areas such as squares, market places and other paved or hard landscaped areas with a civic function.

- 13.90 The provision in the Act that sets out the duties in respect of Open Space Strategies has so far only been commenced to the extent of enabling Scottish Ministers to prepare regulations. A joint Scottish Government consultation on draft Open Space Strategies (OSS) regulations and Play Sufficiency Assessments (PSA) regulations ran between December 2021 and March 2022. While the PSA regulations were finalised and came into force in 2023 (See **Play Spaces**), the OSS regulations have not and no OSS guidance has been issued. Therefore, the statutory duty on planning authorities to prepare an OSS has not commenced.
- 13.91 The Council have however been undertaking an Open Space Audit (OSA), which includes areas of open space over 0.5ha within or adjacent to Highland's settlements. While the statutory duty to prepare an OSS has not yet commenced, the audit was helpful in underpinning any future OSS should the statutory duty commence at a later stage. It was accepted that open spaces often offer valuable opportunities for informal play and the audited open spaces serve as a helpful component of the PSA detailed in **Play Spaces**. On-site assessments were undertaken in 2025 and have been mapped in the [Open Space Audit Map](#).
- 13.92 While the OSA remains in development, the Council has considered alternate evidence to inform a Highland-wide baseline at this stage, including the Scotland's Greenspace [OS MasterMap Greenspace Layer](#), which shows accessible and non-accessible greenspaces in settlements with a population over 500 people and includes a 500 metre buffer around the settlement.

Table 13:1 Highland and Scotland Greenspace Summary Statistics (Source: [Third State of Scotland's Greenspace Report](#))

	Highland	Urban Scotland
Total Greenspace (ha)	9,032	159,274
Publicly Accessible Greenspace (ha)	7,430	119,299
Greenspace as % of urban area	58	54
Publicly Accessible Greenspace as % of Urban Area	47	41
Greenspace per 1,000 people (ha)	77	36
Publicly Accessible Greenspace per 1,000 people (ha)	63	27

- 13.93 The [Third State of Scotland's Greenspace Report](#) (2018) provides summary statistics of the Greenspace layer and identifies that Highland has high provision

of total greenspaces, relative to Scotland, as demonstrated in Table 13:8. Further disaggregation of these totals by Greenspace Types as provided in Table 13:9, outlines that in Highland, provision of natural greenspace types such as woodland, beaches and open semi-natural far exceeds the national equivalents, while other categories such as parks and gardens are below these. A full description of the Greenspace Types is provided within [Third State of Scotland's Greenspace Report](#). This establishment of a Highland baseline assists in identifying settlements with relatively sufficient or insufficient open space provision in the Council's OSA

Table 13:2 Summary Totals for Greenspace Types in Highland and Scotland (Source: [Third State of Scotland's Greenspace Report](#))

		Highland		Urban Scotland	
		(ha)	(%)	(ha)	(%)
Park Or Garden		53	1%	6,288	4%
Private Garden		1,602	18%	39,975	25%
School Grounds		133	1%	3,468	2%
Institutional Grounds		84	1%	2,283	1%
Amenity		2,558	28%	58,624	37%
Play Space		2,355	<1%	251	<1%
Playing Field		108	1%	2,673	2%
Golf Course		405	4%	9,006	6%
Tennis Court		1	<1%	31	<1%
Bowling Green		3	<1%	176	<1%
Other Sports Facility		36	<1%	1,738	1%
Natural (Total)		3,852	43%	30,318	19%
	Beach or Foreshore	853	9%	6,723	4%
	Inland Water	180	2%	3,173	2%
	Open Semi-Natural	1,745	19%	12,429	8%
	Woodland	1,074	12%	7,993	5%
Total Allotments Or Community Growing Spaces		5	<1%	176	<1%
Religious Grounds		15	<1%	399	<1%
Cemetery		55	1%	1,199	1%
Camping Or Caravan Park		28	<1%	279	<1%
Land Use Changing		84	1%	2,390	1%
Total		9,032	100%	159,274	100%

- 13.94 While community food growing and allotments is accounted for within these categories and remains informative of provision relative to Scotland as of 2018, the Council's information provided for this aspect in **Food-Growing and Allotments** is considered to be more reflective of the current provision.
- 13.95 Scottish Household Survey Data reveals that Highland's provision of outdoor recreation areas is reflected in recreational indicators relating to blue and green spaces. As evidenced in Table 13:10, a greater share of Highland's population is closer to their nearest blue or green spaces, use them more frequently, tend to be more satisfied with those spaces and make more frequent visits to the outdoors, as compared to Scotland.

Table 13:3 Summary of Access to Blue and Green Spaces in 2023 (% population)

		Highland	Scotland
Frequency of Visits Made to the Outdoors			
	Once or more times a week	72.9%	68%
	At least once a month	9.1%	11.9%
	At least once a year	3.9%	10.2%
	Not at all	14.2%	9.8%
Walking Distance to Nearest Blue or Green Space			
	In 5 minutes	75.8%	68.2%
	6 to 10 minutes	17.4%	20.9%
	11 minute walk or more	3.8%	9.4%
	Don't know	2.9%	1.6%
Frequency of Use of Nearest Blue or Green Space			
	Every day / Several times a week	55.7%	44%
	Once a week	8.6%	12.6%
	Once a month	9.8%	13.9%
	Less often	6.8%	10.6%
	Not at all	18.8%	18.6%
	Don't know	0.3%	0.2%
Satisfaction with Nearest Green or Blue Space			
	Very satisfied/Fairly satisfied	79%	75.6%
	Neither	11.7%	9.7%
	Very dissatisfied/Fairly dissatisfied	4.7%	9.8%
	No opinion	4.6%	4.9%

- 13.96 As evidenced in Table 13:11, some limited disaggregation by Urban-Rural Classification reveals that a greater share of Highland's population within Class 2: Other Urban Areas and Class 6: Remote Rural Areas are closer to their nearest

green and blue spaces and make more frequent visits to the outdoors, as compared to populations in these classifications across Scotland as a whole.

Table 13:4 Summary of Access to Blue and Green Spaces in 2023 by selected Urban Rural Classifications (% population)

		Highland		Scotland	
		Other Urban Areas	Remote Rural Areas	Other Urban Areas	Remote Rural Areas
Frequency of Visits Made to the Outdoors					
	Once or more times a week	71%	72%	63.2%	74%
	At least once a month	11.6%	7.2%	13.7%	9.9%
	At least once a year	4.4%	5.1%	11.6%	4.8%
	Not at all	13.1%	15.6%	11.5%	11.3%
Walking Distance to Nearest Blue or Green Space					
	In 5 minutes	80.3%	78.7%	69.7%	74.1%
	6 to 10 minutes	16.2%	11.4%	21.2%	11.4%
	11 minute walk or more	2.8%	3.7%	8.0%	9.3%
	Don't know	0.7%	6.3%	1.2%	4.3%
Frequency of Use of Nearest Blue or Green Space					
	Every day / Several times a week	48.1%	63.8%	43.1%	56.9%
	Once a week or less	30.9%	19.5%	35.9%	25.7%
	Not at all	21.0%	15.8%	20.8%	17.0%
	Don't know	0.0%	1.0%	0.2%	0.4%
Satisfaction with Nearest Green or Blue Space					
	Very satisfied/Fairly satisfied	73.5%	84.1%	74.8%	83.3%
	Neither	17.3%	4.7%	9.5%	7.2%
	Very dissatisfied/Fairly dissatisfied	5.7%	4.1%	10.3%	4.9%
	No opinion	3.6%	7.1%	5.3%	4.6%

- 13.97 Access to high quality recreational areas and blue and green spaces tends to be higher in less deprived communities in Scotland. Further disaggregation of Scottish Household Survey Data indicators by SIMD quintiles is not available for Highland owing to the small number of data zones that rank within the most and least deprived. Comparing open space provision between settlement areas of

high and low deprivation is an identified action to undertake as part of the future Open Space Strategy, based off the OSA findings.

- 13.98 While woodland and forestry are considered in **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**, urban trees are vital for health and wellbeing, contributing towards improved air quality, provision of shade and shelter, greater biodiversity, stress reduction, increased climate resilience and helping to create attractive and vibrant places to live and work. The [Tree Equity Score UK](#) is a map-based tool which identifies communities most in need of more trees. It uses data on tree canopy cover, health, deprivation, urban heat and air quality to calculate a Tree Equity Score for every urban neighbourhood in the UK. The lower the score the greater the need for more trees. A score of 100 means tree equity has been achieved.
- 13.99 Highland's composite Tree Equity score is 80 (across urban areas of Fort William, Inverness and Nairn). Areas with lower tree equity include central Fort William (score 66), west Caol (score 69), eastern Nairn and Fishertown (score 69), and in Inverness, neighbourhoods of Merkinch (score 53-73), Dalneigh (score 65-76), Hilton (score 59-91), Raigmore (score 59-86), Longman (score 67) and Inverness city centre (score 44). Planting trees in these areas could deliver significant social and environmental benefits, improving tree equity, health and wellbeing. The Council's forthcoming Forestry and Woodland Strategy will consider more definitive inclusion of urban trees in order to supplement NPF4 Policy 6a.
- 13.100 Further, there are strong links between the root causes of health inequalities and the factors that influence climate risk. Poverty, lack of power and the unequal distribution of resources and assets in the community underpin both health inequalities and vulnerability to climate impacts. Social and spatial vulnerability to impacts of climate change are also further considered in **Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy**.
- 13.101 Public health principles which can help to achieve climate resilience, health and equity were presented in a briefing for local government and partners - [Working together to build climate resilient, healthy and equitable places](#):
- Understand the building blocks of good health
 - Use a Health in All Policies approach
 - Deliver a blend of upstream and downstream actions
 - Build relationships and exchange knowledge between stakeholders
 - Agree shared outcomes and develop win-win actions
 - Base action on evidence
 - Empower communities
 - Understand who will benefit from and who might be disadvantaged by actions and develop strategies to reduce harm
 - Monitor and evaluate to inform learning

Drainage and Blue and Green Infrastructure

- 13.102 Understanding blue-green and natural infrastructure and how this can be optimised to support sustainable flood risk management and drainage is fundamental to creating great places that are resilient to climate change.
- 13.103 [Water Resilient Places](#) recommends that a suite of measures are implemented to harness the co-benefits of blue and green infrastructure, including that as part of place-making, planning authorities should establish blue-green infrastructure needs from the outset by:
- Defining natural infrastructure,
 - Undertaking strategic flood risk and drainage assessments, and
 - Defining a blue-green infrastructure plan.
- 13.104 The Council's draft Surface Water Management Plan (**THC166**) acknowledges that identifying and protecting networks of blue and green infrastructure play a vital role in surface water management. As detailed in **Chapter 7: Flood Risk Management**, increased urbanisation, removed vegetation and reduced provision have led to significant changes in natural drainage characteristics, reducing the ability for natural infiltration and evapotranspiration, increasing the volume and rate of surface water run-off.
- 13.105 NPF4 Policy 22 while principally concerned with flood risk, specifies that resilience should be supported by identifying opportunities to implement improvements to the water environment through natural flood risk management and blue and green infrastructure. The Council notes the 9 Priority Areas identified within the SWMP, and the details for 41 determined hotspots in each of the priority areas (**THC167**) which are deemed to have significant surface water issues, and where solutions for blue and green infrastructure may be required to support their respective objectives and priorities.
- 13.106 The Council has initiated mapping to identify the known natural blue and green infrastructure network within Highland, so that the spatial strategy can protect these assets and networks, albeit this is not complete and will be informed by the Forestry and Woodland Strategy, the Open Space Audit, the Core Path network and Nature Network mapping.
- 13.107 [Blue and Green Infrastructure Mapping](#) encompasses the following datasets:
- [OS MasterMap Greenspace Layer](#)
 - Scotland's Environment Map - [Recommended riparian corridor layer](#)
 - Scotland's Environment Map - [Geomorphic risk layer](#)
 - Scotland's Environment Map - [Riparian vegetation planting opportunities](#)
 - Scotland's Environment Map - [Scottish Wetland Inventory layer](#)
 - Scotland's Environment Map - [Obstacles to fish migration](#)
 - SEPA - Water Environment Fund projects – existing and proposed

- [Core Path Network](#)
- [Long Distance Routes](#)
- Ancient Tree Inventory
- [Culverts](#)
- Riparian Woodland Dataset

13.108 This mapping is intended to illustrate the extent of the known blue and green network within 500m of Highland's settlements with populations of 500 people or more. This is due to the [OS MasterMap Greenspace Layer](#) extents which are confined to settlements of this size and scale. Once the Council's Open Space audit is completed, this mapping will likely be updated to reflect current provision of green infrastructure, and potentially including settlements that are otherwise excluded from the [OS MasterMap Greenspace Layer](#).

13.109 The [SFRA mapping](#), which relate to blue and green infrastructure, includes the SEPA Natural flood data maps v3.0 dataset. The SEPA datasets have been included in accordance with SEPA's [Evidence Gathering Planning Advice Note for Planning Authorities: LDP Evidence Gathering: Achieving sufficiency of evidence relating to flood risk and the water environment](#) and are mapped across the whole Council area. However, for considering the full blue-green infrastructure network the 500m buffer around settlements of 500 or more people is the boundary given the availability of other data.

Food-Growing and Allotments

13.110 NPF4 notes that LDPs should create healthier places through land for community food growing and allotments. As detailed earlier in **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**, Highland benefits from an established practice of crofting, having 10,197 registered crofts as of 2024 ([Crofting Commission Annual Report and Accounts 2023/24](#)). Crofting's small-scale food production is traditionally characterised by a mix of livestock rearing and crop cultivation. It is also common practice for crofters to grow at least some home grown produce for their own consumption. While the economic value of this produce may be small, the health benefits can be significant ([The Value of Crofting](#)). Crofts range in scale and levels of activity, and at present there are no measurable output statistics for crofting food production, however the Scottish Government recognises that optimising use of croft land can produce food more sustainably, serving local and often rural communities ([Economic Condition of Crofting 2019-2022](#)).

13.111 Allotments and food growing spaces provide valuable community spaces and improve access to healthy, locally produced food. The Council chairs an Allotment Steering Group which maintains a list of the Council's allotment sites, including numbers of plots and a waiting list for sites. As of September 2024, 115 people were awaiting an allotment plot, as shown in Table 13:12.

Table 13:5 Allotment Plot Waiting List

Site	Allotment Association	No. total plots	No. community plots	No. plots with no tenant	Waiting list	No. waiting >5 years	Area (m ²)
Lybster	Latheron, Lybster & Clyth CDC/ Lybster Allotments Association	21	1	1	0	0	1316
Hawthorn Inverness	Hawthorn Allotments	69	0	0	85	0	14682
Nairn Sandown	Nairn Allotment Society	79	4	0	0	0	16456
Nairn Mill Road	Nairn Allotment Society	43	1	0	20	0	3885
Ullapool	Lochbroom & Ullapool Gardens & Growers Society	65	3	1	0	0	3377
Wick	Wick Allotments	11	1	0	0	0	2100
Milnafua Alness	Alness & District Allotment Society	24	2	0	10	0	2600
Total		312	12	2	115	0	

13.112 In addition, the Steering Group maintains a Register of Interest by Ward of new people who seek an allotment. A summary extract of the register as of September 2024 shows that there is a demand for a total additional 296 allotment plots across the region as outlined in Table 13:13.

13.113 This register is used to gather data to inform understanding of demand and to support community efforts when new allotment associations and sites are in development. The register is not a waiting list, and people are signposted to their nearest allotment site or community food growing project to make enquiries. Data gathered from the allotments register since April 2020 indicates that the level of demand is rising, with note of high levels of demand in all of the Inverness City Wards, Culloden and Ardersier, and Badenoch and Strathspey. Allotment associations with projects in a development stage exist in Inverness, Dingwall, Aviemore and Culloden/Smithton. Aviemore, Dingwall and Culloden do not currently have any allotments site.

Table 13:6 Steering Group Register of Interest in Allotments by Ward

Ward	20/21 Requests	21/22 Requests	22/23 Requests	23/24 Requests	Total Requests
1 North, West, and Central Sutherland	0	0	0	0	0
2 Thurso and Northwest Caithness	0	2	2	0	4
3 Wick and East Caithness	2	0	0	0	2
4 (East Sutherland and Edderton)	0	0	2	2	4
5 West Ross, Strathpeffer, and Lochalsh	0	0	2	0	2
6 Cromarty Firth	1	0	3	2	6
7 Tain and Easter Ross	4	0	1	2	7
8 Dingwall and Seaforth	2	0	5	4	11
9 Black Isle	0	2	3	6	11
10 Eilean a' Cheò	1	0	1	0	2
11 Caol and Mallaig	0	0	1	1	2
12 Aird and Loch Ness	1	0	2	3	6
13 Inverness West	5	1	12	16	34
14 Inverness Central	7	5	12	14	38
15 Inverness Ness-Side	4	3	6	9	22
16 Inverness Millburn	2	0	9	9	20
17 Culloden and Ardersier	5	1	12	17	35
18 Nairn and Cawdor	0	2	0	4	6
19 Inverness South	4	2	11	13	30
20 (Badenoch and Strathspey)	2	1	4	36	43
21 (Fort William and Ardnamurchan)	0	2	5	4	11
Total	40	21	93	142	296

13.114 The Council works with a number of community groups in the establishment of community orchards, gardens and other food growing spaces across the region. These areas are not specifically recorded, but a number are located on Council-owned lands, and their development is however supported through the [Growing Our Future - A Community Food Growing Strategy for Highland](#). The Council currently does not record any private allotments operating across the region.

- 13.115 [Highland Good Food Map](#) is a map resource which shows food activity and community food provisions across Highland, including community food growing initiatives such as allotments.

Play Spaces

- 13.116 Scotland's Play Strategy dates from 2013 and has been written to support Local Authorities to improve play opportunities within their regions for all children under the age of 18. The Scottish Government commissioned a progress review on the Play Strategy and Action Plan in 2019 and 2021. Scotland's Play Strategy protects a child's right to play within their community and has been written in alignment with many national and international guiding documents including the Equalities Act, Disability Discrimination Act and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). [Scotland's Play Vision Statement and Action Plan](#) published in 2025 outlines the steps the Scottish Government will take within that time to achieve their vision and aims.
- 13.117 The Council's [Play Strategy](#) outlines the Council's ambition for new and upgraded play facilities across both Council owned/managed sites and developer provided play facilities. As part of this strategy, details of Developer Contributions required for new and expanded play facilities under the existing [Developer Contributions Supplementary Guidance](#) requirements are outlined.
- 13.118 The Council has a statutory duty to undertake a Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA) to ensure there is good quality evidence on the sufficiency of both outdoor Formal Play Spaces (FPS) (such as play areas, playgrounds or play parks) and Informal Play Spaces (IPS) for children in their local neighbourhoods and in their local authority areas, recognising that opportunities for outdoor play are not restricted Formal Play Spaces (FPS).
- 13.119 It is widely recognised that to meaningfully enable children and young people to play outdoors more readily and to play in their communities, the planning system should promote and support provision for a variety of both formal and informal play spaces ([Scotland's Play Vision Statement and Action Plan](#)).
- 13.120 The [Play Sufficiency Assessment Planning Guidance](#) describes IPS as areas not formally designated as playgrounds but where children can enjoy free, unstructured play. These may include natural environments such as woodlands, open green spaces, or quiet residential streets that allow children to explore, interact, and be creative without fixed equipment or defined boundaries. The [Play Sufficiency Assessment Planning Guidance](#) recognises that IPS can be wide-ranging, varied, and challenging to accurately identify or map. As such, a requirement for mapping informal play spaces has not been prescribed in the guidance and it sets out that informal play spaces within a planning authority area can be identified by the planning authority or by children for a PSA. Council

has summarised within **Chapter 3: Summary of Engagement** how consultation with children and young people was undertaken to support the development of the Highland Play Sufficiency Assessment Report.

13.121 In Highland, the extensive landscape provides many opportunities for informal play including outwith settlements. However, with recognition for the resources available to support the development of the [Highland Play Sufficiency Assessment Report](#), IPS have been identified by Council officers within settlement areas only as part of the Open Space Audit which identified Informal Play Spaces (IPS) as:

- areas surrounding Formal Play Spaces, where informal play often complements equipped areas and;
- areas within identified open spaces where there was potential or evidence of informal play (e.g. such as improved, relatively level or maintained surfaces for play).

13.122 The Council has set out in the [Playpark Strategy and Action Plan for 2023-2033](#), a vision to create three different types of play parks: neighbourhood, settlement and destination. While these categories have not been applied in the audit of FPS for [Highland Play Sufficiency Assessment Report](#), the assessment recognises the range of FPS in Highland that serve different functions within a community and play spaces vary in their facilities and features. For example, in addition to the overall score for a FPS assessment of FPS quality should also consider its size, context and intended provision within the context of the wider provision of play spaces in the community. This is because for example some scores are dependent upon the range of equipment and age ranges of children and young people catered for by the play space, and not every play space within an area is intended to provide and cater for all.

13.123 An audit of FPS, which will inform the [Highland Play Sufficiency Assessment Report](#), was completed by Council officers across summer 2023, summer-autumn 2024 and summer 2025. All existing Formal Play Spaces (FPS) within settlement development areas were surveyed, equating to a total of 445 play spaces, of which 324 are owned by Council and 121 are owned by other organisations. FPS comprise 30.25ha in Highland (including Cairngorms National Park). A summary of FPS provision is provided in Table 13:14.

13.124 Informal Play Spaces (IPS) within settlements areas were evaluated as part of the Open Space Audit, totalling 1037ha. A summary of IPS within open spaces (as defined in 13.149) is provided in Table 13:15. Cairngorms National Park and Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee were excluded from the Open Space Audit - and therefore the IPS audit - as the National Park Authority undertake their own Open Space Audit.

Table 13:7 Formal Play Space (FPS) provision summary in Highland, within settlement areas of Local Committee Area (Source: [Highland Play Sufficiency Assessment Report](#))

Local Committee Area	FPS within settlements	FPS provision per person (m ²), within settlement areas	Total FPS (m ²), within settlement areas
Badenoch and Strathspey*	26	-	-
Black Isle and Easter Ross	61	1.7	39,911
Caithness	55	2.7	42,629
Dingwall and Seaforth	25	1.0	11,926
Inverness and Area	138	1.7	125,635
Lochaber	39	2.3	32,484
Nairnshire	11	0.9	9,519
Skye and Raasay	19	0.8	3,832
Sutherland	40	4.2	26,059
Wester Ross Strathpeffer & Lochalsh	31	2.1	9,678
Total	445	2.0	301,673

* Badenoch and Strathspey are excluded from the Highland Council FPS provision as they have their own PSA report covering that.

- 13.125 The *Highland Play Sufficiency Assessment Report* has been prepared in accordance with the Play Sufficiency Assessment Regulations, [Play Sufficiency Assessment Planning Guidance](#) and approved by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee in May 2026. It will inform the preparation of the new HLDP and will also benefit Highland communities and stakeholders of play spaces. It will be used by the Council to inform decision-making around the provision, improvement, investment, and long-term management of play spaces.
- 13.126 An online public consultation was undertaken between 16 January and 27 February 2026 to gather feedback from the wider community on the draft Play Sufficiency Assessment. This consultation provided residents with an opportunity to review the draft findings and comment on play provision across the area. Responses highlighted that children and young people highly value their local play spaces, while also raising concerns around limited equipment, safety, maintenance and vandalism. Adult responses similarly focused on the adequacy, quality and distribution of provision, alongside requests for improvements.

Table 13:8 Informal Play Space (IPS) provision summary in Highland, within open spaces of settlement areas of Local Committee Area (Source: [Highland Play Sufficiency Assessment Report](#))

Local Committee Area	IPS provision per person (m ²), within settlement areas	Total IPS (m ²), within settlement areas
Badenoch and Strathspey*	-	-
Black Isle and Easter Ross	57.5	1,326,352
Caithness	49.8	799,794
Dingwall and Seaforth	54.9	628,542
Inverness and Area	6.6	475,458
Lochaber	45.4	629,782
Nairnshire	62.0	638,283
Skye and Raasay	60.6	280,951
Sutherland	58.7	361,654
Wester Ross Strathpeffer & Lochalsh	73.7	342,643
Total	52.1	5,483,459

* Badenoch and Strathspey are excluded from the Highland Council Open Space Audit, and so IPS were not identified for that Committee Area.

13.127 Data from the PSA is presented in the [Highland Play Sufficiency Assessment Map](#), an online interactive map. The 'Info' panel reports the overall total score, average category score achieved (%) by each FPS (giving all assessment categories equal weight), a bar graph summary of percentage scores for each category and scoring summary of criteria within each category with a description of how each is scored. FPS which on average score over 75% across the categories are ranked as 'very high', 50-75% as 'high', 30-50% as 'medium' and below 30% as 'low'.

13.128 Each FPS was evaluated across six categories::

- Age-appropriate Play Equipment (maximum score 26)
- Open Space Options for all age groups (maximum score 5)
- Accessible play spaces (maximum score 14)
- Location of play spaces (maximum score 6)
- Usage and Maintenance (maximum score 6)
- Additional Facilities (maximum score 7)

13.129 The average provision of play equipment by equipment type and age Groups served (Nursery, Primary and Secondary) are shown in Table 13:16.

Table 13:9 Average provision of equipment in FPS across all 8 equipment types, by the number of Age Groups served (Source: [Highland Play Sufficiency Assessment Report](#))

Local Area Committee	Total FPS	Average provision of equipment (%) serving 1-3 Age Groups in FPS			Average number of equipment types provided in FPS (max 8)
		1	2	3	Total
Badenoch and Strathspey	26	14%	24%	30%	5
Black Isle and Easter Ross	61	9%	28%	14%	4
Caithness	55	1%	24%	23%	4
Dingwall and Seaforth	25	18%	32%	12%	5
Inverness and Area	138	12%	24%	20%	4
Lochaber	39	7%	31%	29%	5
Nairnshire	11	11%	36%	23%	6
Skye	19	5%	30%	26%	5
Sutherland	40	4%	23%	21%	4
Wester Ross Strathpeffer and Lochalsh	31	5%	36%	25%	5
Total	445	9%	27%	21%	-

Note: each play space is classified as being suitable for one, two or three different Age Groups, which are Nursery (N), Primary (P), and Secondary-aged (S) children

13.130 Table 13:16 illustrates that on average 27% of FPS provide equipment for two Age Groups, while 21% make provision for all three Age Groups. Local Committee Areas with highest average provision for all three Age Groups equipment are Badenoch and Strathspey (30%) and Lochaber (29%).

13.131 FPS offering open space options for children are shown for each Area Committee, in Figure 13:2. In all areas except for Inverness, 70%+ of play spaces provide open space for running and chasing. Provision of quiet places, space for ball games and natural play vary widely. In general, there is a low provision of hang out places for teenagers of less than 50% of FPS in all Areas, and less than 20% in Badenoch and Strathspey and Nairnshire.

13.132 The [Highland Play Sufficiency Assessment Report](#) highlights specific Formal Play Spaces with equipment nearing the end of their usable life, which can inform identification of opportunities for area-based or location-based upgrades or replacements of Council-maintained equipment in FPS

13.133 The majority of FPS that provide wheelchair accessible features are concentrated in Inverness and Caithness (Table 13:17). A need for enhanced provision of accessible features and facilities within Highland's formal play spaces will be raised within the [Highland Play Sufficiency Assessment Report](#)

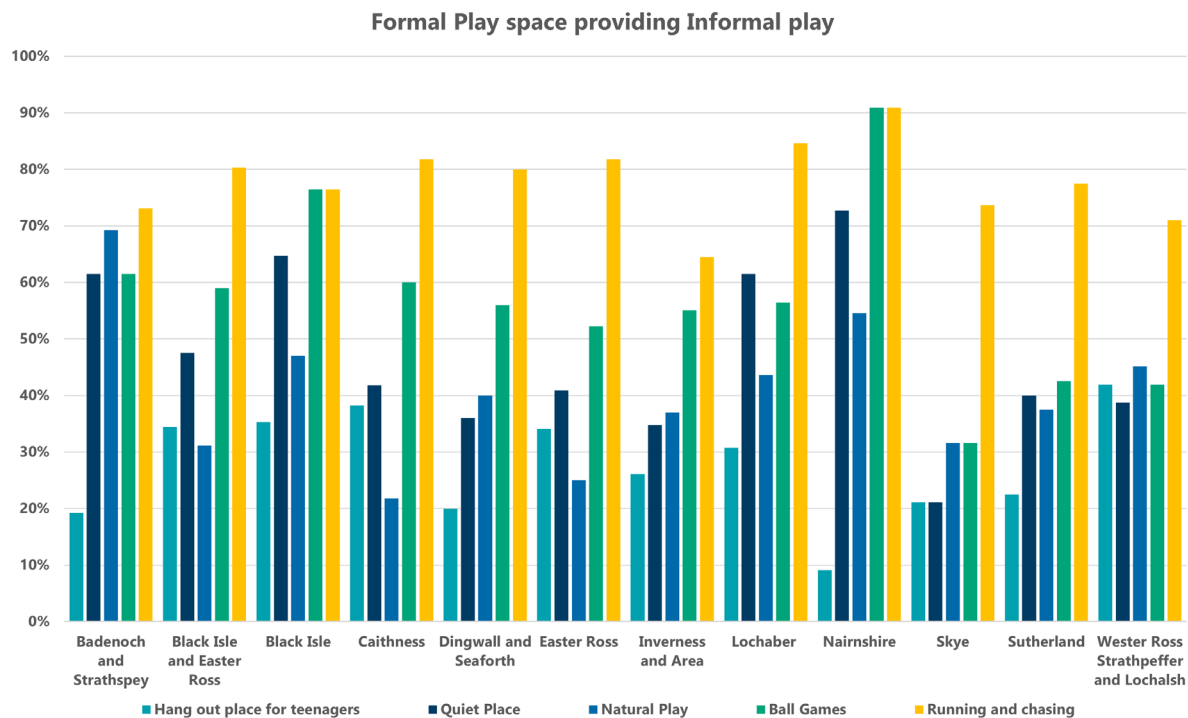


Figure 13:2 Provision of open space options for all age groups within Formal Play Spaces, by Area Committee in Highland (Source: [Highland Play Sufficiency Assessment Report](#))

13.134 FPS were evaluated across five key location-based criteria: the centrality of their placement within communities, the extent of passive surveillance they receive (such as visibility from nearby homes or streets), availability and proximity to public transport options, and the presence of safe crossing points on adjacent roads. Together, these factors help assess how accessible, safe, and well-integrated each play space is within its surrounding environment. In all but one Local Committee Area, 89% or more FPS are in residential areas - the exception is Badenoch and Strathspey which has 65% of FPS in residential areas. FPS accessibility by public transport is relatively limited in Highland, ranging from 36% (Nairnshire) to 69% (Caithness). There is wide variability in provision of safe crossings at formal play spaces, between Local Area committees.

13.135 FPS were each evaluated based on their usage and maintenance, across four criteria: frequency of site usage, pleasantness, level of maintenance and surface condition as shown in Figure 13:3. Overall, most formal play spaces in Highland are well-used and maintained to a good standard.

Table 13:10 Provision of accessible features within Formal Play Spaces by Local Committee Area in Highland (Source: [Highland Play Sufficiency Assessment](#))

Local Area Committee	Accessible Parking	Wheelchair Friendly Path	Equipment for Fully Disabled children	Equipment for Moderately Disabled children	Equipment for Less Disabled children	Fencing	Surface for visually impaired children
Badenoch and Strathspey	8%	19%	0%	8%	19%	35%	19%
Black Isle and Easter Ross	23%	23%	0%	2%	25%	46%	31%
Caithness	27%	87%	0%	2%	35%	67%	69%
Dingwall and Seaforth	20%	4%	0%	4%	16%	44%	16%
Inverness and Area	17%	38%	1%	4%	22%	52%	37%
Lochaber	26%	59%	0%	5%	28%	72%	41%
Nairnshire	36%	64%	0%	0%	27%	27%	36%
Skye	58%	68%	0%	5%	47%	95%	58%
Sutherland	28%	58%	0%	0%	25%	80%	60%
Wester Ross Strathpeffer and Lochalsh	35%	39%	0%	13%	29%	55%	45%
Grand Total	24%	45%	0%	4%	26%	57%	42%

13.136 Provision of toilets at or near FPS is very low across all Local Committee Areas in Highland, ranging from 0% - 8% with the exception of Nairnshire (18%), and this trend of low provision of toilets near or within FPSs is regardless of who maintains the play space. (Note the general provision of public toilets in Highland is also discussed in **Public Conveniences**). At least half of all play spaces provide seating across all Local Committee Areas, with percentages ranging from 51% – 84%. Provision of shade and shelter in FPS is just 4% in Dingwall and Seaforth, 11% in Caithness and Black Isle and Easter Ross, 18% in Sutherland. The highest provision of shade in FPS in Highland is in Badenoch and Strathspey (38%) and Lochaber (59%)

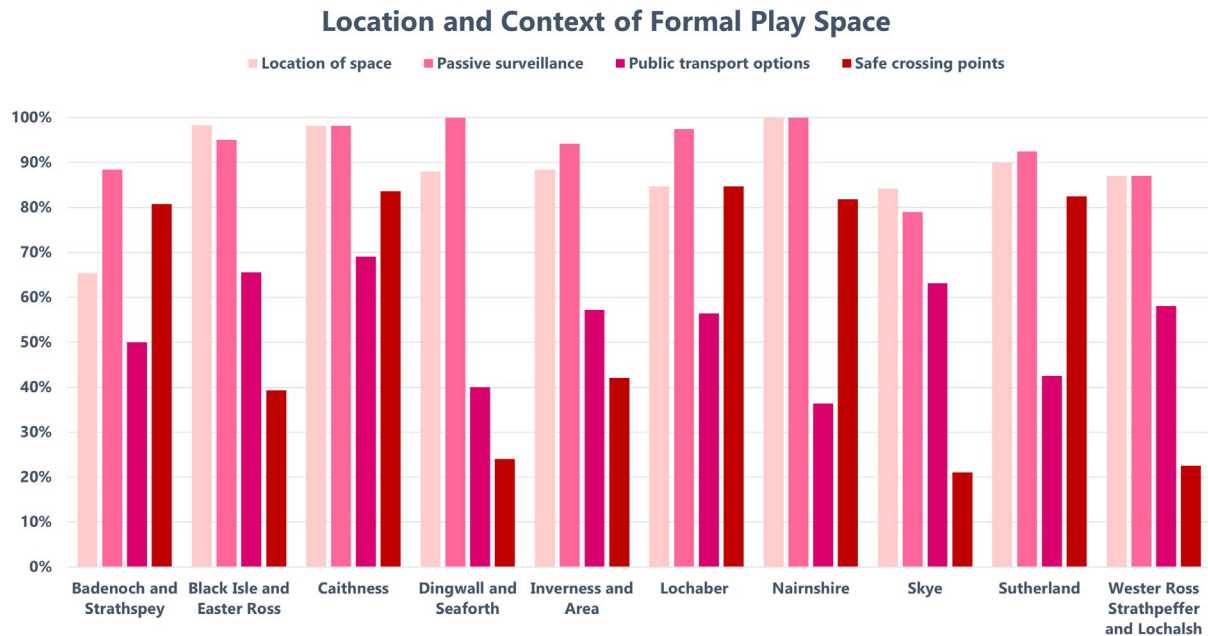


Figure 13:4 Location and Context of Formal Play Space by Local Committee Area in Highland

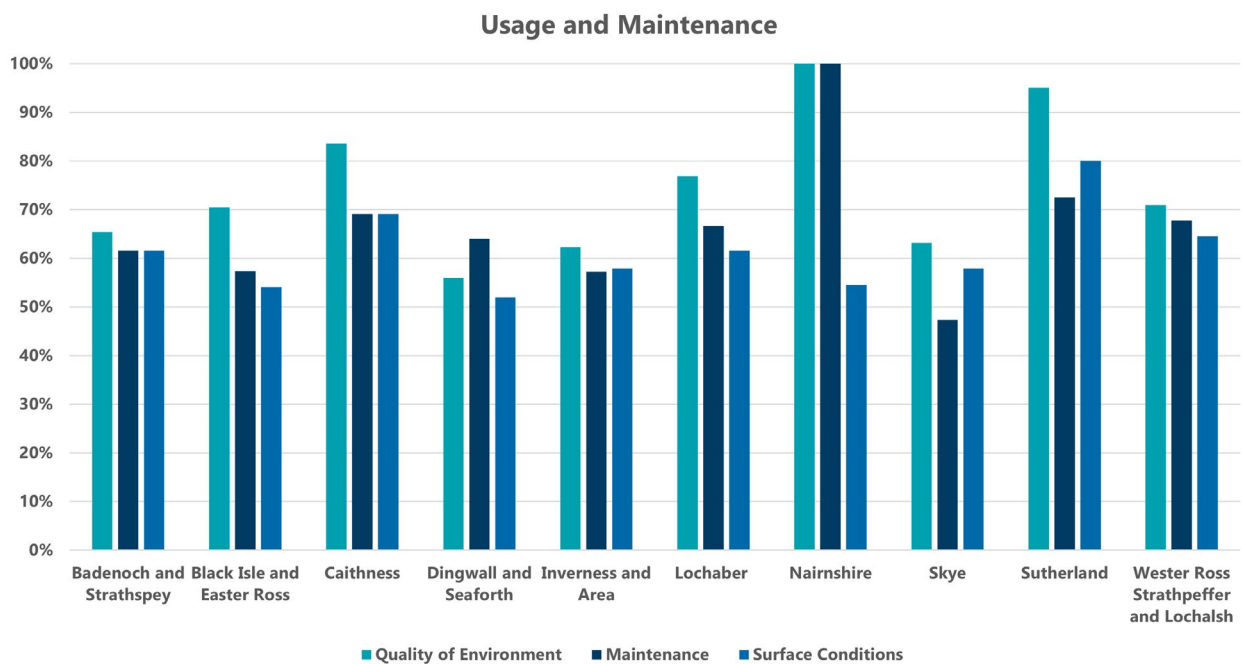


Figure 13:5 Usage and Maintenance category summary for Formal Play Spaces, by Local Committee Area in Highland (Source: *Highland Play Sufficiency Assessment*)

- 13.137 The State of Play in Scotland highlights that there are socio-demographic differences in children's opportunities for play, although children in both the most and least deprived areas experience a lack of affordable, accessible opportunities for play. As the Highland Play Sufficiency Assessment Report progresses, the Council shall undertake a geospatial assessment of access to play spaces from data zones ranked within the 20% most deprived in Scotland from the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation Index. This can further inform assessment of future needs for play spaces in a manner that narrows health inequalities.
- 13.138 The Highland Play Sufficiency Assessment methodology recognises that there are opportunities for play beyond formal play spaces. The Open Space Audit identified a range of spaces within Settlement Areas with play potential, including IPS as well as open spaces and community spaces for recreation and relaxation and amenity areas for connection with nature. Analysis and reporting on the Open Space Audit is currently in progress and will inform the preparation of HLDP when published. **Sports Facilities**, below, presents evidence on indoor and outdoor spaces which facilitate organised sports, play and recreation.
- 13.139 Policy 21e of NPF4 notes the opportunity of streets and public realm to be inclusive and enable children and young people to play and move around safely and independently, maximising opportunities for informal and incidental play in the neighbourhood. Designing Streets: A Policy Statement for Scotland offers best-practice guidance on how to create well-designed streets and public realm areas which create inclusive social spaces for children to play.
- 13.140 To support the ongoing provision of play opportunities in Highland, future efforts should focus on the context of play provision, demand for play (e.g. new development areas) and the range of FPS within the area which all contribute to the sufficiency of play available to inform targeted upgrades or investment to improve play space quality, quantity or accessibility and inclusivity. Benchmarks for future Play Space Assessments (PSAs) in Highland is established through maintaining a consistent, evidence-led framework that will allow performance of play spaces to be measured over time and across locations.
- 13.141 PSA will serve as a key evidence base to inform the preparation of the Highland Local Development Plan (HLDP) and the content of the Supplementary Guidance documents will be reviewed through the preparation of the HLDP. Any new or updated policies and guidance will be considered to support the ongoing provision and enhancement of play spaces. The PSA can also be used to inform future decision-making on investment priorities and budget planning for play provision. In this context, the Council will review the current approach to developer contributions relating to open space, including play spaces, and may bring forward a revised approach where appropriate.

Sports Facilities

- 13.142 High Life Highland is a charity established to deliver leisure services and community learning on behalf of Highland Council, which among other aspects, includes provision of libraries and [leisure centres](#). In 2024, 44,417 people, or 18.8% of Highland's population had a High Life Highland membership card for leisure use specifically, which represented a 4% increase from 2023, shared in the [Highlife Highland Progress Report 2024](#), and offers an indicator evidencing the reach of High Life Highland Facilities within Highland's population.
- 13.143 Sportscotland's Facility Planning Model (FPM) Report for Highland (**THC164**) provides data and maps of sports halls, swimming pools and synthetic grass pitches, outlining capacity, accessibility, and unmet demand. The FPM helps identify facility needs and informs planning and development strategies. A National Summary Report is produced every two years, providing outputs for each local authority. [Sportscotland's Facilities Database](#) also demonstrates the locations of these facilities spatially. Sportscotland notes that the FPM is a model which predicts likely patterns of demand, it does not predict actual usage. Decisions about any changes to sports facility provision should be taken based on more detailed analysis and local engagement.
- 13.144 Most demand for sports facilities in Highland is expected to be met however levels of unmet demand are higher than the national average, and this is not unexpected given the geography of the area. Unmet demand is mainly due to people living too far from a facility, rather than the number or capacity of facilities.
- 13.145 Highland has 59 sports halls in 31 sites at schools and sports centres. Highland has the equivalent of 8 courts per 10,000 population, slightly higher than the national average of 7 courts per 10,000 population (**THC164**). Analysis of the walking catchments to Sports Halls in Inverness reveals that areas in Culcabock, Culduthel and Milton of Leys are often outwith a 20-minute walk catchment.
- 13.146 Approximately 20% of the Council area population does not have access to a car and 33% of people living in Highland can walk to a 3-court hall in 20 minutes or less, relative to the national figure of around 60%. Of those living in the 10% most deprived areas, around 37% are within a 20-minute walk of a 3-court hall, compared to the national figure of 75%. Most demand for sports halls and sports facilities more widely is predicted to be met by car travel (around 83%).
- 13.147 Percentage of utilised capacity at sports halls in the peak period is estimated within **THC164** to be around 36% across the Council area, although there are variations suggested between the halls in terms of how busy they may be at peak times. Only one facility (Nairn Academy) is predicted to be full, but the model has included only very limited hours of public availability. Culloden Academy and

Leisure Centre and Hilton Community Centre are also predicted to be busy at over 80% utilised capacity.

- 13.148 Highland has 26 swimming pools at 20 sites which equates to non-commercial waterspace of 19sqm per 1,000 population, compared to the national average of 14sqm of waterspace per 1,000 population. The rural nature of the area means that while some areas have access to between 1-5 pools within the 20-minute driving catchment, many areas are outwith the drive catchment of any pool. Areas of 'reachable unmet demand' are low within Highland but are concentrated in the Inverness Area. Percentage of utilised capacity at swimming pools in the peak period is estimated within **THC164** to be around 31% across the Council area, which is below the national average of 51%.
- 13.149 Highland has 24 full size synthetic grass pitches (SGPs) across 22 sites, equating to 1 SGP per 10,000 population which is the same as the Scottish average. Some of the council area has access to between 1-5 SGPs within a 20-minute driving catchment but as with other sports facilities, many areas are outwith this.
- 13.150 Inverness at present has 7 artificial pitches, and the Evidence Submission from High Life Highland (**THC165**) reveals that these pitches were booked on 5,138 occasions for use by various sports and leisure clubs, schools and other organisations in 2024. The Inverness Royal Academy Sports Centre specifically received 1,701 bookings, while Canal Park received 897 in 2024. While 4 of the artificial pitches in Inverness are located within schools, many of those booking facilities are other schools, highlighting a potential capacity issue given the various range of organisations seeking suitable facilities for sport and physical activity.

Core Paths and Trails

- 13.151 Core paths can be paths, waterways or any other means of crossing land to facilitate, promote and manage the exercise of access rights under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, and are identified as such in access authority core paths plans. A Core Path Plan provides a basic framework of routes for the purpose of giving the public reasonable access throughout a particular area for walking, cycling, horse riding and other non-motorised activities. Records of [Highland Council Core Paths](#) are available publicly. Core paths should be accessible to the public at all times and can play a vital role in supporting recreation and connecting areas of blue and green infrastructure within settlements.
- 13.152 The first core paths plan for Highland was adopted by the Council in September 2011. After the completion of the first Highland Council Core Paths Plan it was decided to review the core path plans alongside the cycle of the area Local

Development Plans. The first core paths plan to be completed was for Caithness and Sutherland which was published for formal consultation from December 2017 to March 2018, submitted to Scottish Ministers in 2019, and finally approved in November 2024.

- 13.153 The proposed West Highlands and Islands core paths plan was opened for consultation in May 2019. The plan promoted a number of changes to the first Core Path Plan for Highland, and received a number of comments of support and objections to some of the proposed routes. The objections were considered by the relevant Local Access Forum and Council's Area Committee and most were not agreed and were therefore sent to the Scottish Government to appoint a Reporter to conduct the West Highlands And Islands Core Paths Plan Review which remains ongoing.
- 13.154 Owing to the resources of undertaking work of this scale across the Highlands, and ongoing resources to consider comments and objections to the other Core Paths Plans, the amended Core Paths Plan for the Inner Moray Firth area has not progressed. The adopted Core Paths within this area therefore remain as depicted in the first Core Paths Plan for Highland from 2011 and reflected in the Highland Council Core Paths Map.
- 13.155 In addition, there are a number of Long Distance Routes in Highland which promote multi day recreational routes, and for which the Council has direct responsibility, namely:
- The Great Glen Way (79 miles),
 - The Speyside Way (84 miles), and
 - The West Highland Way (96 miles)
- 13.156 There are other long-distance trails within the authority that the Council do not have direct responsibility for, namely:
- Affric-Kintail Way (44 miles),
 - South Loch Ness Trail (37 miles),
 - Dava Way (24 miles),
 - John O' Groats Trail (147 miles),
 - Cape Wrath Trail (c250 miles, but unofficial, unmarked route).
- 13.157 The importance of these routes is recognised both for their recreational and tourism value (**See Chapter 8: Economy, Business Tourism and Productive Places**), in that they facilitate rural tourism and access to nature in more sustainable ways than other predominantly car-dependent alternatives.
- 13.158 HwLDP contains specific policies 77 Public Access and 78 Long Distance Routes, which the Council's Environment Team and Access Officer, consider to afford more explicit policy protection for Highland's Core Paths, Long Distance Routes and Access more generally, than NPF4 Policy 20. HwLDP Policy 77 also includes

the requirement for major development proposals to include an Access Plan, which is not contained within NPF4. HLDP will likely therefore consider how best to retain these stronger policy provisions to safeguard Core Paths, Long Distance Routes and access more generally.

- 13.159 The Council has additionally pursued two compulsory Path Orders, both in relation to different segments of the Peffery Way, Dingwall, also mentioned in **Chapter 10: Transport**. One Path Order has been confirmed by Scottish Ministers, while the other remains under consideration. A local authority, where they consider it impracticable to delineate a path by agreement under section 21 of the Act, may make an order (a 'path order') delineating it under section 22 of the Act. The local authority may make a path order only if they consider, having regard to the rights and interests of the owner of the land over which the proposed path passes and persons likely to exercise access rights on or over the land, it appropriate to do so.

Local Living

- 13.160 The Local Living Framework has been developed to provide a consistent structure to consider how local living is, or can be, supported in a place consistent with the [Place Principle](#) within 5 overarching categories of Movement, Space, Resources, Civic and Stewardship.
- 13.161 NPF4 Policy 15 requires LDPs to support Local Living within settlements, with the Council defining the Local Living concept as a method to reinforce and create communities that are attractive, safe, walkable places where people of all ages and abilities can access services, greenspace, learning and leisure within a walk of around 20 minutes (10-minutes to any destination(s) and 10-minute return journey). There are acknowledged links between these aims and wider policy ambitions to improve active travel mode share as outlined in **Chapter 10: Transport**.
- 13.162 In order to measure how well Highland communities already meet the ambitions of the local living concept, the Council has developed a map-based tool to plot the location of 17 different services including shops, greenspace, leisure and education across all Settlement Development Areas and Growing Settlements. The tool then calculates the actual ten-minute walking radii (800m) around each service, with each of the 17 services weighted according to importance. These weighing's are then amalgamated to provide a numeric result for over 500,000 50metre hexagon cells across our communities. These cells are then colour coded to illustrate the findings in the Council's [Local Living Interactive Map](#). Greater detail as to the methodology and development of the tool is provided within the [Local Living Mapping Technical Note](#) and has considered facilities in alignment with the [Local Living and 20-Minute](#)

Neighbourhood Planning Guidance. Scores for each cell range from a minimum of 0 outlining very few walkable services to a maximum of 16 outlining a high level of walkable services. Limitations and caveats for the methodology are outlined in these two reference documents.

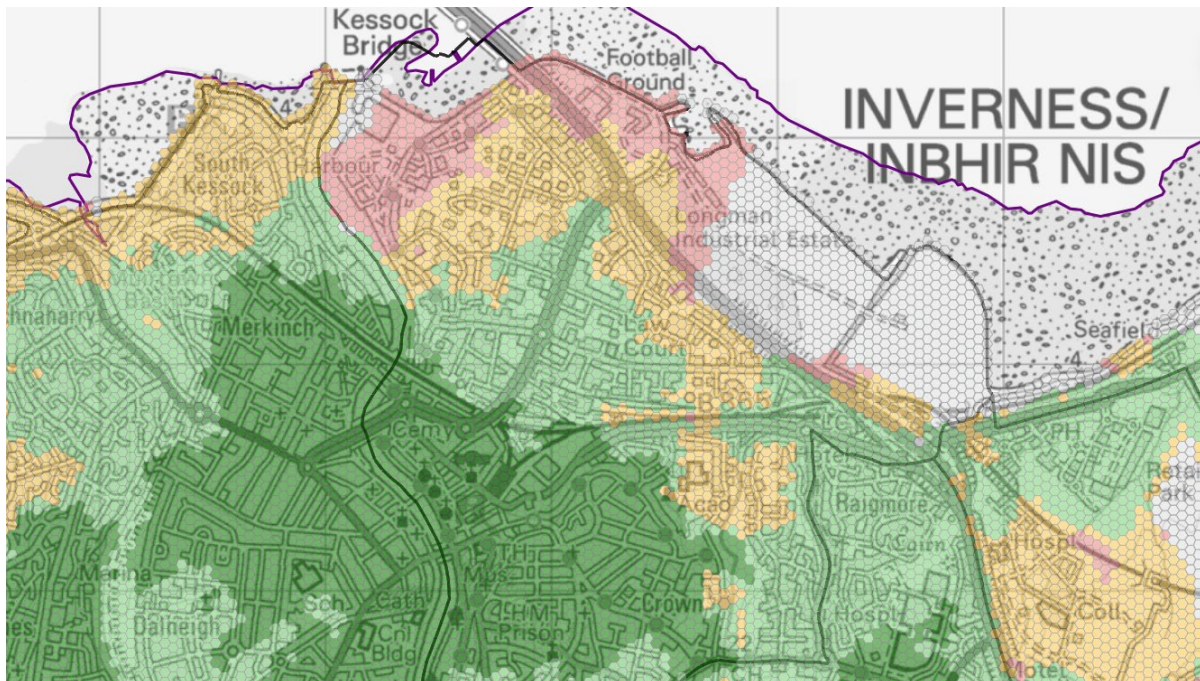


Figure 13:4 Overview of The Local Living Interactive Map

- 13.163 The Local Living methodology developed by Highland Council has been recognised by the Improvement Service within the How to map a 20 Minute Neighbourhood Guidance as an example of best practice in assessing access to a diverse range of facilities and services in an integrated way. To support the implementation of NPF4 Policy 15, this guidance has compiled best practices from local authorities across Scotland that have undertaken 20-minute neighbourhood analyses. The approach outlined in this guidance is based on the methodology developed by Highland Council.
- 13.164 Given the significant work and public consultation **(THC168)** that has been invested in this project, the accuracy of the data and the existing requirements of NPF4 to consider Local Living in the determination of current planning applications, the mapping resource is now being used where appropriate as a material consideration in the determination of planning decision applications.
- 13.165 For the progression of HLDP, the Local Living mapping highlights areas with greatest propensity to support local living within settlements and identifies areas with poor levels of walkable services, including for example retail provision. Most notably, areas within larger recent housing developments on the outskirts of

Inverness and other town centres are evidenced within the mapping to often have very few walkable services, in that only a portion of these developments near the access to main roads are close enough to access the nearest facilities, while the interior of the development is outwith these walkable distances. This is most apparent for areas East of Nairn, to the West of Inverness at Ruighard and South of Inverness at Leys, Holm and Slackbuie.

- 13.166 The Council is acutely aware of the rural settings that characterise much of the Highlands and accepts that 20-minute neighbourhoods based on walking and cycling parameters are only likely to be feasible within settlements, and are not to be inappropriately deployed in contexts where they would be unfeasible or based on realistic expectations. [Living Well Locally: 20 Minute Communities in the Highlands and Islands](#) demonstrates how inclusion of public transport can make rural clusters that typically share services, more conducive to 20-minute neighbourhoods in some locations.
- 13.167 The briefing [Working together to build climate-resilient, healthy and equitable places](#) discusses how Local living can contribute to both public health and climate goals. For example, local living can play an important role in lowering emissions through promoting sustainable and active travel (see **Chapter 10**), as well as developing the wider resilience of our communities against the impacts of climate change (see **Chapter 4**).
- 13.168 In applying Local Living frameworks in practice, the Place Standard Tool, [Place and Wellbeing Outcomes](#) and Place Standard Tool Design Version (**THC178**).

Public Conveniences

- 13.169 Councils in Scotland do not have a legal or statutory requirement to provide public conveniences. The Highland Council recognises the value of public conveniences used by local communities, travellers and tourists alike, and is committed to providing the service to support health, wellbeing, viable communities, and tourism in Highland
- 13.170 The Communities and Place Service provides and [manages 70 Public Conveniences sites and manages 4 sites via service level agreements](#) as of November 2024. These are available in various locations as illustrated by Highland Council Open Map data of [Public Conveniences](#). These vary in terms of age, building condition and facilities offered, where some sites offer disabled provision, baby change facilities and some sites also have enhanced facilities such as showers. Provision of public conveniences was last reviewed and redesigned by the Council in 2018, guided by a principle that there was not more than 15 minutes journey time by car between remaining sites. As a result, 12 public conveniences were closed (Wick Camps, Thurso Harbour, Talmine, Keiss,

Lybster, Halkirk, Mealmarket Close, Grantown Burnfield, Elgol, Fortrose, Rosemarkie, Avoch). There have been 16 community asset transfers and leases have been supported since 2018 leading to several of the closed public conveniences being opened, enhanced and operated by communities.

- 13.171 To supplement the Council's owned sites, a [Highland Comfort Scheme](#) is also operated where the Council pays local businesses and community groups to open up their facilities to non-customers. This has expanded in recent years and now encompasses 53 locations.

Water Refill Locations

- 13.172 The [Scottish Water Top Up Tap Map](#) has been accessed to consider provision of water refill locations within Highland, which at present are typically confined to larger towns, and there are considerable distances between some locations. At present the Council does not supplement this through any formal programme to maintain water refill locations, and no robust evidence is therefore available on the likely provision of free to access water in the authority area.

Retail and Town Centres

Overview

- 13.173 The [Town Centre First Principle](#) asks that government, local authorities, the wider public sector, businesses and communities recognise the role of town centres and the need to prioritise and support them. It seeks to put the health of town centres at the heart of decision making and deliver the best local outcomes, align policies and target available resources to prioritise town centre sites, encouraging vibrancy, equality and diversity ([A New Future for Scotlands Town Centres](#)). The [Town Centre Toolkit](#) aims to put Scotland's policy approach to town centres into practice to deliver the [Town Centre First Principle](#), the [Place Principle](#) and the [Place Standard Tool](#). The [Town Centre Action Plan Review](#) (joint response from Scottish Government and COSLA) signals clearly that planning policies have a direct role in delivering these aims through:

- focusing on brownfield development,
- reusing vacant and derelict land and repurposing existing properties,
- locating homes closer to services and facilities, and
- supporting 20 minute neighbourhoods.

- 13.174 The two most recent Council's area LDPs IMFLDP2 (2024) and WestPlan (2019) both include Town Centre First policies. IMFLDP2 notes the principle of the policy is to reinforce the role of town centres as the heart of our communities, and will achieve this by directing all significant footfall generating development to the main town centres of the Plan area, has been strengthened to provide more

robust consideration of out of town retail, provide greater support for town centre living and increase flexibility for repurposing existing buildings. The aim is to help attract a wide range of uses which are active throughout the day and evening.

- 13.175 All three Area LDPs have identified city and town centres boundaries across the main settlements, these were developed to safeguard the main retail and service centres. Additionally, HwLDP, has a long-established policy (Policy 91: Retail Development) which was designed to encourage economic growth and urban realm improvements within Highland's City, towns and village.
- 13.176 NPF4 Policies 27 & 28 have provided an up-to-date policy direction and advises new LDPs should include the identify of a network of centres that reflect the principles of 20-minute neighbourhoods and town centre vision. There is no requirement in NPF4 for a specific retail hierarchy to be shown or protected. The identification of a retail hierarchy and adoption of a sequential approach has been refined and focused to a simple two-tier hierarchy of town centres and elsewhere, which contrasts with previously identified hierarchies of district, commercial, neighbourhood and village centres.
- 13.177 Highland's adopted LDP's have identified 93 Settlement Development Areas (SDAs) and a further 56 Growing Settlements.
- 13.178 Town Centre Health Checks are prepared by Local Authorities to monitor the strength and vitality of town centres across Scotland. Indicators such as accessibility, community, property, activities and the physical environment are recommended assessment measures; all of which contribute towards the health of a town centre.
- 13.179 Highland's 2022 Town Centre Health Checks comprised audits of Inverness City Centre, three Inverness Retail Parks and 14 other Town Centres selected for Health Checks on the basis of either having populations greater than 3,000, or for their importance in a local context. The methodology undertaken and reports produced for these is available within the [Town Centre Health Checks Storymap](#). More recent Town Centre Health Checks for 2024 were undertaken and work is ongoing to finalise the analysis and prepare similar reports and dashboards to disseminate results in a similar manner to those undertaken in 2022.
- 13.180 The Council has considered information from the ONS [High Streets in Great Britain](#) statistics dating from 2020, which provide estimates of high street employment, land use and resident population at local authority level. While this evidence predates the Covid-19 pandemic, it reflects the most recently available baseline on these attributes. An analysis of high street addresses by land use category reveals that a large proportion of addresses in Highland Town Centres are classed as residential as evidenced in Table 13:18.

Table 13:11 Addresses on High Streets by Land Use Category (Office of National Statistics)

Land Use	Highland	Scotland
Retail	39.7%	32.5%
Offices	12.2%	10.5%
Community	2.4%	2.0%
Leisure	0.4%	0.4%
Residential	45.3%	54.5%

13.181 Employment on Highland's high streets has broadly stayed consistent with trends in other locations between 2015-2018 as evidenced in Table 13:19.

Table 13:12 Counts of Employment by Broad Industrial Group in Highland (Office of National Statistics)

Broad Industrial Group	Location	2015	2016	2017	2018
Accommodation & Food Services					
	High Street	2,320	1,890	2,090	2,110
	Other	11,700	10,990	11,470	11,520
Health, Education & Public Admin					
	High Street	2,080	1,920	1,770	1,890
	Other	33,570	33,910	31,200	32,910
Other Industries					
	High Street	1,310	1,470	1,480	1,420
	Other	28,000	29,620	29,710	29,960
Other Service Industries					
	High Street	3,210	3,370	3,260	3,070
	Other	18,950	20,810	19,130	20,500
Retail					
	High Street	3,050	3,150	3,120	3,000
	Other	8,500	8,730	8,880	8,550

13.182 NPF4 Policy 27 states that LDPs should support a proportion of the LHLR being met within city and town centres. [Town Centre Action Plan Review](#) outlines that delivering more town centre housing aligns with [Housing to 2040](#) as discussed in **Chapter 9: Housing**. ONS [High Streets in Great Britain](#) statistics demonstrate that in 2020, 3.2% of Highland's population resided in high street locations, which is considerably lower than Scotland's equivalent rate of 8.5%.

13.183 The breakdown of residential age categories reveals that those living in high street locations in Highland are slightly more likely to be aged 16-64, and less likely to be aged under 16. Town and City Centre living has a greater uptake in authorities with higher student populations. Highland's residential population on or around High Streets is not evidenced to be correlated with student status, as only 1.7% of Highland's residential population on or around high streets are students, in contrast with 6.3% for Scotland. There have been some successful city and town centre living projects over recent years including:

- Union Street, Inverness: 53 units,
- Castle Street, Inverness: 7 units,
- Glashan Court, Church Street, Inverness: 10 units, and
- Castle Square, Nairn: 12 units.

13.184 Increasing provision of accommodation options within proximity to high streets and town centres is recognised as supporting student populations, sustainable travel modes, and the nighttime economy.

Retail Provision in Highland

13.185 Highland, like much of Scotland has seen a significant change in retailing in recent years, initially led by out of centre retail growth, and in more recent times the growth of online retailing. [Getting the Right Change – A retail strategy for Scotland](#) acknowledges transformation within the retail sector nationally, driven by changes in customer behaviour, the Covid-19 pandemic, leaving the EU single market, global supply pressures, rising inflation and increasing costs.

13.186 In Highland, this has coincided with a rise in vacancy rates evidenced by the [Town Centre Health Checks Dashboard](#) from 8.1% in 2018 to 18.4% in 2022. In the 2024-2025 Town Centre Health Check vacancy rates in Highland were 12.2% on average. Significant variation in 2024-25 vacancy rates is evidenced, with vacancy rates reaching 23.9% in Wick, 23.7% in Alness and 23.4% in Invergordon, by contrast the equivalent vacancy rate for Portree is just 0.8% and Beaulieu 4.9%. From 2018 to 2024, the most notable changes in vacancy rates are 15.6% increase in Alness, 20.5% decrease in Brora and 6.9% decrease in Beaulieu.

13.187 A number of town centres have been looking to revitalise themselves through diversification, retail space reduction, urban realm improvements and collaborative working through initiatives such as [Business Improvement Districts](#), which are established in Fort William, Dornoch, Inverness and Nairn. [Getting the Right Change – A Retail Strategy for Scotland](#) asserts that the way in which we planned our towns, cities and neighbourhoods of the past has impacted on retail trends, and therefore the way we plan for cities and towns of the future will contribute to a successful and sustained recovery of the retail sector. The roles of placemaking and community wealth building are recognised in this effort, in

tandem with a transition towards anchor institutions (as discussed in **Chapter 8: Business, Industry, Tourism and Productive Places**) as a way of attracting footfall, where traditionally, larger retail stores would have fulfilled this role.

- 13.188 The [Inverness Strategy](#) demonstrates that large floor area retail spaces are less in-demand and are creating vacancies across the city centre, where an over-reliance on retail has left it vulnerable to changes (such as internet shopping). Retail will remain a core function of the city centre, but it will become increasingly independent, compact and diverse, adding to a unique experience rather than replicating other city centres dominated by national and international brands. Diversification of uses is required to increase footfall, and this will be achieved by creating more places to live, work and spend leisure time and this needs to offer a genuine alternative to out-of-town retail parks. This will require more green and civic space, including connecting to the River Ness, as well as growing the cultural and tourism offer.
- 13.189 An additional [Inverness City Centre Retail Audit Dashboard](#) further details the results from an on-site assessment of the Retail Sector in Inverness City Centre. Inverness City Centre's Retail Sector consists of the area surrounding the High Street, including Market Brae and the Eastgate Shopping Centre.
- 13.190 In addition to the Retail Audit of the Inverness Retail Sector, retail data capture was carried out for the city's main 3 retail parks; namely, Inverness Shopping and Business Park, Inshes Retail Park and Telford Retail Park and is available in the [Inverness Retail Parks Dashboard](#). This data highlights any changes since 2018, use classifications, physical condition, independent/ national retail mix, leisure facilities and vacancy rates. The results of both dashboards for the retail sector within the City Centre and Retail Parks is summarised in Table 13:20.
- 13.191 Inverness City Centre also includes the Eastgate Centre, which is centrally located and is adapting to wider retailing trends affecting the City and Scotland more widely. Dating from 1983 and then extended in 2003, the Eastgate Centre has more recently faced a loss of anchor stores within the premises and has introduced non-retail outlets to adapt to shopping habits such as banking branches, education businesses and an NHS Vaccination Centre.
- 13.192 NPF4 Policy 28 requires LDPs to consider where there may be a need for further retail provision. This may be where a retail study identifies deficiencies in retail provision in terms of quality and quantity in an area, or when allocating sites for housing or the creation of new communities, in terms of the need for neighbourhood shopping, and supporting local living. The Council has not undertaken a retail study but considers the [Local Living Interactive Map](#) to be informative in highlighting levels of walkable retail provision within Settlement Development Areas and Growing Settlements.

Table 13:13 Summary of Inverness Retail Provision (2022)

	City Centre Retail Sector	Retail Parks		
		Inverness Shopping Park	Inshes Retail Park	Telford Street Retail Park
Number of units	229	36	15	19
Change since 2018 base	+12	+8	0	0
Changed occupant or use since 2018 base	92 (40.2%)	+15 (41.7%)	4 (26.6%)	5 (26.3%)
Use Classifications				
Comparison Retail	86	14	5	7
Leisure Services	46	7	5	4
Other Non-Retail Uses	14	5	2	2
Accommodation	5	4	0	0
Retail Services	35	2	0	0
Convenience Retail	4	2	3	4
Vacant	35	2 (-1 since base)	0 (-1 since base)	2 (+1 since base)
Financial, Business and Property	6	0	0	0
National / Local Split				
National Retailers	73 (77.7%)	15 (100%)	9 (100%)	11 (100%)
Independent and Local Retailers	21 (22.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Clustering of Non-Retail Uses

13.193 NPF4 Policy 27 requires LDPs to be informed by evidence on where clustering of non-retail uses may be adversely impacting on the wellbeing of communities. Non-retail uses in this context refer to hot food takeaway outlets, betting shops and pay day loan shops. In Highland, these uses are found to cluster in town centres, alongside retail and service uses.

Hot Food Takeaways

13.194 The [Town and Country Planning \(Use Classes\) \(Scotland\) Order 1997 \(UCO\)](#) notes that establishments selling hot food for consumption off the premises are not included in Class 3 and are instead classed as sui generis as hot food take-away shops raise different environmental issues, such as litter, noise, longer opening hours and extra traffic and pedestrian activity, from those raised by other Class 3

uses ([Research Project: To Explore the Relationship Between the Food Environment and the Planning System](#)).

- 13.195 Evidence more recently also suggests that greater exposure to over-concentrations of hot food takeaways has negative health outcomes for communities ([Evidence Brief - Are takeaways adding pounds? - MRC Epidemiology Unit](#)). Local Development Planning Guidance asserts that it may be useful for the Evidence Report to assess the nature of the food environment in the area, including the diversity and availability of food through retail and how it is or is not contributing towards healthy diet and weight in the area. The proportion of Primary 1 children recorded as being a healthy weight is the best point of measurement for this indicator in Scotland owing to the high degree of coverage. In Highland 73.5% of Primary 1 children were recorded as being a healthy weight in 2021, which is lower than the Scottish national equivalent figure of 74.7%. Further evidence of child healthy weight disaggregated at Highland's intermediate zone level was accessed via the [Public Health Observatory Dashboard](#) and is shown in **THC169**.
- 13.196 Areas which lack easy access to fresh nutritious foods are sometimes known as food deserts. The [Diet and Weight: Out of Home Action Plan](#) asserts that planning policies should address the impact on the Out of Home (OOH) food environment on public health including the ability to enforce access to healthier food and take account of the location and density of food outlets in local areas. [Local Levers for Diet and Healthy Weight](#) identifies that planning policies to restrict further hot food takeaways is one lever that can contribute towards wider measures to support healthier diet and weight in an area. These policies are most commonly enforced within specific areas in proximity to schools or other locations for children and families ([Managing takeaways near schools: a toolkit for local authorities](#)).
- 13.197 The [Food Environment Assessment Tool](#) (FEAT) identifies provision of supermarkets and hot food takeaways, highlighting areas that have higher density of hot food takeaway outlets. Density of takeaway food outlets at home, at work, and along commuting routes increases population exposure, with exposure being associated with increased takeaway consumption, a greater Body Mass Index (BMI) and likelihood of obesity ([Evidence Brief - Are takeaways adding pounds? - MRC Epidemiology Unit](#)).
- 13.198 The Council's [Local Living Interactive Map](#) identifies that provision of food retail outlets such as supermarkets and convenience stores are often concentrated, leaving several largely residential areas underserved. This is apparent in areas East of Inverness such as Westhill, Balloch, Woodside of Culloden, and South of Inverness in Leys, Slackbuie and Ness Castle. Food retail in the South of Inverness

is evidenced to be particularly concentrated in larger supermarkets which serve large areas geographically, but require car access to serve demand.

- 13.199 Outwith Inverness, many other areas with lower access to food retail through provision of supermarkets and convenience stores include North of Dingwall, Garve, Alness (Milnafua and Obsdale), East of Invergordon, East and West of Nairn, Tore, West of Tain, Northeast of Dornoch, Southwest of Golspie (Drummuie), Wick (Broadhaven), Northwest of Thurso, Ullapool (Morefield and Braes), Gairloch (Smithstown and Lonemore), Northeast of Mallaig, and Fort William (West Corpach, Tomonie, Camaghael, Lochyside, and Auchintore), Dalwhinnie, and Aviemore (Dalfaber and Milton).
- 13.200 Proximity of hot food takeaways specifically to both primary and secondary schools has been calculated and considered within the Councils [interactive mapping](#) showing the locations within a 400m return journey threshold based on the road and path network. As many Highland towns are small, schools and retail outlets are clustered within or near town centres. This results in many hot food takeaways being within 400m of schools, but within designated town centre locations, where these uses would have traditionally been preferred. Hot food takeaway units tend to be located in towns with secondary schools. Many villages with only primary schools have no takeaway units at all. Towns on average each have one or two takeaway units, although some have considerably more. Towns with significant clusters of hot food takeaways around schools include Dingwall (8), and Alness (6), while Wick has a cluster of hot food takeaways immediately beyond the 400m threshold.
- 13.201 The LDP will require to consider how such matters are addressed and implemented, through allocations or policies so that healthier food environments can be supported in manners that are conducive to Local Living.

Betting Offices and Pay Day Loan Shops

- 13.202 The over-provision and clustering of betting offices and pay day loan shops was a concern for the Scottish Government (**THC170**) and led to changes in permitted development rights in 2017, taking them out of Class 2 (Financial, Professional and Other Services) of the Use Classes Order (UCO) and therefore making them sui generis uses. Changes of use of premises to a betting office or a pay day loan shop now require planning permission.
- 13.203 A pay day loan shop describes a premises from which high-cost short-term credit is provided to visiting members of the public. The changes to the UCO were accompanied by a definition of pay day loan shops as premises which provide 'high-cost-short-term credit' which has the meaning given in the edition of the Financial Conduct Authority's Handbook which came into effect on 1st April

2014. As of April 2025, there are no known records of authorised, operational Pay Day Loan Shops within the Highland Council area.

Table 13:14 Betting Shop provision in Highland Wards (2022)

Ward	Population	Premises Licenses	Type
1 North, West, and Central Sutherland	5,791	0	
2 Thurso and Northwest Caithness	12,301	1	Betting Office
3 Wick and East Caithness	12,909	2	Betting Office x 1 Other x 1
4 East Sutherland and Edderton	7,696	2	Betting Office x 1 Other x 1
5 West Ross, Strathpeffer, and Lochalsh	12,196	0	
6 Cromarty Firth	12,747	1	Betting Office
7 Tain and Easter Ross	8,784	0	Betting Office
8 Dingwall and Seaforth	13,029	1	Betting Office
9 Black Isle	10,517	0	
10 Eilean a' Cheò	10,686	0	
11 Caol and Mallaig	8,872	0	
12 Aird and Loch Ness	12,093	0	
13 Inverness West	10,175	0	
14 Inverness Central	12,171	6	Betting Office x 4 Other x 2
15 Inverness Ness-Side	11,114	1	Betting Office
16 Inverness Millburn	9,543	1	Other
17 Culloden and Ardersier	11,543	0	
18 Nairn and Cawdor	12,585	3	Betting Office x 2 Other x 1
19 Inverness South	16,656	0	
20 (Badenoch and Strathspey)	12,782	1	Betting Office x 1 Other x 1
21 (Fort William and Ardnamurchan)	11,216	2	Betting Office
Total	238,060	21	Betting Office x 13 Other x 8

- 13.204 Evidence of the clustering of betting shops has been considered from the [Highland Licensing Board Gambling Policy Statement](#). Gambling Commission statistics for the industry indicate that numbers of average number of premises (for betting shops only) is one betting shop per 10,000 people at UK level. With 13 betting shops in Highland, this equates to an approximate distribution of one betting shop for every 18,300 people, but considerable clustering is evident as per Table 13:21 in Inverness Central with one betting shop for every 3,000 people. This ward contains some of Highland's most deprived data zones in Merkinch, Muirtown and Dalneigh as evidenced by [SIMD](#). Over-provision relative to national averages are also evident in Nairn and Fort William
- 13.205 This clustering of betting shops as of data from 2023 is easily visualised using the SPECTRUM Consortium open access [CreshMap](#), which focusses on the commercial determinants of health inequalities and enables the visualisation of unhealthy commodities in Scotland at various geographic scales including data zones. Input from the Council's Licensing Team who maintain the Register of Gambling Licenses evidences a decline in the number of betting offices operating within Highland over time.
- 13.206 HLDP can take a view regarding whether any intervention is required to mitigate proliferation and clustering of betting shops in the interest of promoting health and wellbeing in areas of known deprivation.

Alcohol, Tobacco and Vaping

- 13.207 Tobacco and alcohol consumption are two of the most important preventable causes of ill-health and premature death. In Scotland, one in every five deaths are attributable to tobacco use, and one in twenty are attributable to alcohol ([A cross-sectional analysis of the relationship between tobacco and alcohol outlet density and neighbourhood deprivation](#)). Unlike other venues such as Hot Food Takeaways and Betting Offices which have specific planning use classes, no such use class exists for tobacco retailers or off-sales alcohol retailers, which are both absorbed within Class 1 (Shops) uses. Alcohol provision is regulated by licensing and tobacco retailers are regulated by the Council's Trading Standards team.
- 13.208 In 2024, Scottish Government published evidence on the known health harms of vaping ([Health harms of vaping – evidence briefing](#)). The systematic review and meta-analyses found agreement that vaping products cause nicotine addiction, cause health harms in non-smokers (to which they would otherwise not be exposed) and vaping is less harmful than smoking when smokers completely switch to e-cigarettes. Although evidence on the long-term harms of vaping and on the effects of vaping on young people is still emergent, a precautionary approach has been adopted by the Scottish Government for policy, with the main

- objective being to protect public health and prevent nicotine addiction and other known potential health harms deriving from the use of vaping products, especially in children, young people and non-smokers.
- 13.209 On sales alcohol retailers in planning terms comprise Class 3 (Food and Drink) use classes, alongside public houses. Public Houses are classes as a sui generis use class within the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Scotland) Order 1997 (UCO), and therefore require planning permission. Instances where further public houses would be refused typically have occurred where the use was considered incompatible with neighbouring (often residential) uses where noise levels were a material consideration. There has been to date no policy approach taken in Highland to restrict further public houses on the basis of reducing exposure to alcohol-related harms.
- 13.210 As public health indicators reveal higher prevalence of alcohol-related harms in Highland relative to Scotland (**THC110**), the NHS Submission on Overprovision (**THC171**) evidences an association between the number of licensed premises in an area and alcohol-related health problems. Neighbourhoods with higher availability of alcohol outlets in Scotland have higher alcohol-related deaths and hospitalisations and are significantly more likely to be deprived.
- 13.211 There are 1,268 alcohol licensed premises in Highland (**THC172**). The majority (598) operate as combined on-sales and off-sales premises often representing a diverse range of business types such as delis, farm shops, craft breweries, distilleries among others. There are 346 on-sales licences in Highland where alcohol is consumed on the premises while 322 are off-sales premises only.
- 13.212 This represents a total off-sales provision of 920 premises for the authority, equating to 16.5 premises per 10,000 population, far in excess of Scotland's equivalent crude rate of 11.6 (**THC110**). Highland's total crude rate of alcohol licenses (on-sales and off-sales combined) is 63.9 per 10,000 population, again far in excess of Scotland's equivalent crude rate of 37.2.
- 13.213 GIS analysis undertaken to calculate the number of alcohol licensed locations within a fifteen-minute walk from the population of each data zone in Highland provides a measure of consumer access and potential exposure to communities. This has been overlayed with SIMD data (**THC171**). For all licensed premises, many of the data zones with high levels of provision are within the environs of Inverness City Centre. In this context, the all-licensing category includes diverse businesses servicing hospitality and entertainment for residents and visitors. However, the access to off-sales premises identifies considerably higher exposure to and opportunity for purchasing alcohol in some of Highland's most deprived neighbourhoods such as Muirtown and Merkinch. Given the known association between deprivation and alcohol health-related harms, it should be a concern

- that a number of the communities in Highland with the highest availability of alcohol retailing outlets are among the most deprived neighbourhoods.
- 13.214 Scotland aims to be tobacco-free by 2034, meaning a smoking prevalence of 5% or less ([Tobacco and Vaping Framework](#)). This goal is part of a larger plan to create a tobacco-free generation. The plan includes strategies to prevent youth from starting smoking, support those who want to quit, and restrict tobacco access.
- 13.215 There are 469 registered retailers in Highland on the Register of Tobacco and Nicotine Vapour Product (NVP) Retailers (**THC173**) of which 116 are registered to provide tobacco products only, while 63 provide NVPs only, and 290 are registered retailers of both. The Council maintains an interactive map of [Registered Highland Tobacco Retailers](#) demonstrating this visually.
- 13.216 Council's Trading Standards team regulate NVP retailers. From 1 June 2025, the sale and supply of single-use vapes has been banned in the UK.
- 13.217 The requirement for retailers that sell tobacco and NVPs to register with the Register of Tobacco and Nicotine Vapour Product Retailers became mandatory in April 2017. Analysis of **THC173** indicates that new premises have continued to register in recent years, and this has increase has been notable for retailers supplying NVPs. Provision has increased mostly in Inverness which now has 115 retailers in total supplying both tobacco and NVPs. Other settlements with larger numbers of registered retailers include Fort William (28), Thurso (27), Wick (22), Nairn (17), Dingwall (16), Lairg (14), and Alness (12). The density of tobacco provision is visualised at datazone level using [CreshMap](#) which evidences an association with the numbers of registered retailers and areas of deprivation in Highland.
- 13.218 Proximity of Tobacco and NVP registered retailers specifically to both primary and secondary schools has been calculated and considered within the Councils [interactive mapping](#) showing the locations within a 400m return journey threshold based on the road and path network. As many Highland towns are small, schools and retail outlets are evidenced to generally be clustered within or near town centres. This results in many registered retailers being within 400m of schools, but within designated town centre locations. Areas with a significant cluster of registered tobacco and NVP retailers in proximity to schools include Thurso (24), and Wick (15), Dingwall (13), Nairn (13), Merkinch (12), Alness (11), and Central Inverness, where over 30 are located. Fort William is an example of where clusters of tobacco and NVP retailers in the town centre are less proximate to school environments, owing to the location of the schools further from the town centre area.

13.219 The planning authority can continue cross-departmental engagement to consider the role that HLDP could have in reducing exposure to health-harming commodities using planning policy and regulations.

Drive-through facilities

13.220 NPF4 Policy 27 identifies that LDPs should also consider, and if appropriate, identify any areas where drive-through facilities may be acceptable where they would not negatively impact on the principles of local living or sustainable travel. The locations of existing drive-through locations in Highland are shown in Table 13:22. Many of these are located within settlements in proximity to residential areas. These developments have all progressed without an explicit policy support within any preceding LDPs and have been considered on a case-by-case basis.

13.221 The Council notes that HLDP will be required to identify areas where further drive-through facilities can be supported, where these would not negatively impact on the principles of local living, sustainable travel or health outcomes. This means that a plan-led framework for suitable drive-through locations will need to be considered in HLDP, which may involve a policy position specifying the locations where these would be appropriate.

Table 13:15 Drive-through facilities in Highland

Drive-Through Facility	Location
Burger King	Inverness Retail and Business Park, Inverness
McDonalds	Inshes Retail Park, Inverness
Costa Coffee	Inshes Retail Park Inverness
KFC	Millburn Road, Inverness
Starbucks	Asda, Slackbuie, Inverness
McDonald's	Nairn Retail Park, Nairn
McDonald's	Fort William
Costa Coffee	Fort William
KFC	Fort William (Temporarily closed)

Summary of Stakeholder Engagement

13.222 A full breakdown of all stakeholder engagement undertaken to support the Evidence Report is provided within the **Chapter 3**. All meetings and engagement exercises with stakeholders and key agencies are detailed within the Log of Engagement (**THC001**). A summary of the key stakeholder engagement activities undertaken for the evidence presented within this chapter are detailed below.

Stakeholders and Key Agencies

13.223 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 Drafts of the evidence presented in this chapter were circulated to key agencies and other stakeholders on 15 May 2025, which included:

- SEPA
- Scottish Water
- NatureScot
- Historic Environment Scotland
- Highlands and Islands Enterprise
- HITRANS
- NHS Highland
- Crofting Commission
- Transport Scotland
- Sportscotland
- Wider Council Services: Amenities Team, Flood Risk Management, Bereavement Services, Licensing, Environmental Health, Active & Sustainable Travel, Integrated Services (Adult), Gypsy Traveller Community Health Worker.

13.224 A summary of feedback received is as follows:

13.225 NatureScot (**THC088**) confirm that they are satisfied with the approach taken for this chapter.

SEPA (THC089)

Main views raised	Blue green infrastructure section is in accordance with the SEPA evidence sufficiency PAN with all of the suggested evidence sources included, recognising that the mapping to include SEPA sources is in progress at the time of reviewing.
Council's response	SEPA mapping has been included in Strategic Flood Risk Assessment mapping, mapped across full Council area, see Chapter 7: Flood Risk Management for further information.
Areas of agreement	The Council agree with the points made and amendments to the chapter, or other relevant chapters have been made.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.

Is the agency content with the evidence?	Yes, SEPA are content with the evidence presented within this chapter.
Implications for proposed plan	No implications have arisen from these comments.
Actions for proposed plan stage	No further actions are required by these comments for the proposed plan stage.
NHS Highland (THC077)	
Main views raised	Recognised the interdependencies between chapters. Highlight challenges of delivering plans and services in remote and rural areas, numerous in Highland. Recommendations for future policy, including application of HIAs, health service capacity assessments and colocation of services. Provided the updated Independent Sector Care Home overview and Collaborative Support Update May 2025 , and additional data on unpaid adult carers.
Council's response	New and updated data included in Evidence Report. Noted interdependencies for consideration in other chapters.
Areas of agreement	The Council agree with the points made and have made necessary amendments where requested.
Outstanding issues	The Council have sent a further draft to NHS Highland and will add any further information to the chapter when provided.
Is the agency content with the evidence?	The Council awaits response from NHS Highland.
Implications for proposed plan	No implications have arisen from these comments.
Actions for proposed plan stage	No further actions are required for the proposed plan stage.

Highland Council, Active and Sustainable Travel (THC188)	
Main views raised	Comments provided on Chapter 10 in relation to links with transport and health, and transport poverty and references provided (THC116) to include in Chapter 13. Detail on the Tree Equity Score UK shared, highlighting urban areas of Highland included. Noted the Active Highland Strategy and its relevance to the Evidence Report, as the local strategy linked to A More Active Scotland: Scotland's Physical Activity Delivery Plan , and the relevant policies of Local Transport Strategy regarding transport and open space, recreation and blue-green infrastructure.
Council's response	Evidence added to Chapter 13 on transport and health, fuel poverty, tree equity scores and links between Local Transport Strategy and open space, recreation and blue-green infrastructure.
Areas of agreement	The Council agree with the amendments requested, these have been added to the chapter.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is the agency content with the evidence?	Yes, Active and Sustainable Transport are content with this evidence chapter.
Implications for proposed plan	No implications have arisen from these comments.
Actions for proposed plan stage	No actions for the proposed plan have arisen from these comments.
Defence Infrastructure Organisation (THC043)	
Main views raised	Any references to DSRL to be updated to NRS Dounreay to reflect that DSRL have merged with Magnox Group to form Nuclear Restoration Services (NRS). Remove word Naval before NRTE as acronym 'N' is for Naval. Correct DEPZ acronym typo.
Council's response	Amendments made accordingly.
Areas of agreement	The council agree with the suggested amendments.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.

Is the agency content with the evidence?	Yes, Defence Infrastructure Organisation, Ministry of Defence are content with the evidence presented in this chapter.
Implications for proposed plan	No implications have arisen from these comments.
Actions for proposed plan stage	No actions have arisen from these comments.
Highland Council, Environmental Health (THC189)	
Main views raised	The Air Quality Management Area in Inverness was formally <u>revoked on 1 June 2025</u> , update to paragraph required. Air quality monitoring in the city centre and at other locations in Inverness and urban centres in Highland will remain unchanged. There have been recent concerns expressed by doctors over poor air quality outside schools in urban areas impacting children's health, and so Environmental Health have been conducting short term air quality monitoring and awareness raising at primary schools in Highland.
Council's response	AQMA evidence updated, and other air quality work added to Chapter.
Areas of agreement	The Council agree with the comments made and amendments have been made.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is the agency content with the evidence?	Yes, THC Environmental Health are content with this evidence chapter.
Implications for proposed plan	No additional implications have arisen from these comments.
Actions for proposed plan stage	No additional actions are required for the proposed plan stage following these comments.

Public Health Scotland (THC191)	
Main views raised	Suggest references to Scotland's Population Health Framework, Working together to adapt to climate change and deliver health benefits for all, Place Standard Tool Design Version (THC178), earlier and clearer referencing of the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes. Suggestion that developer contributions could be directed towards community-focused development. Include World Health Organisation definition of health, health as a human right and national and local context on health. Define health inequalities, and refer to wider determinants of health with the 'building blocks' metaphor used in Scotland's Population Health Framework. Note the limitations of SIMD for individuals, and compounding challenges for rural communities. Suggest reference to Health Impact Assessment Support Unit, Health and Social Care Service Renewal Framework. For local living, suggest additional narrative on quality and financially affordable local living, and risks of clustering unhealthy services and how drive-through food places may undermine local living. Suggestions on community engagement, adopting National Standards for Community Engagement. Wide range of suggested implications for the Proposed Plan.
Council's response	Noted, and additional references and details except for the following points. Council developer contributions policy already includes policy for the provision for community facilities, and these are considered within Chapter 11. Chapter 3: Statement of Engagement has included statements on how LPPs will be integrated into wider plan-preparation and decision making, and the role that non-statutory community-led plans can have. Chapter 3 also outlines the approach to engagement. Local living and 20 minute neighbourhoods guidance and Local Living Mapping Technical Note outline the methodology for the Local Living tool, including caveats and limitations of the tool such as evaluation of quality, affordability or operating hours of services. The Local Living tool purpose and intent is not to evaluate health risks but rather access and proximity to services, and note the clustering of unhealthy services is considered in Clustering of Non-Retail Uses.
Areas of agreement	The Council agree with the points made and have added amendments accordingly.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is the agency content	Yes, Public Health Scotland are content with the evidence presented in this chapter.

with the evidence?	
Implications for proposed plan	No additional implications arose from these comments.
Actions for proposed plan stage	No additional actions are required following these comments.

SportScotland (THC190)

Main views raised	Limitations of data in Highland FPM report raised and reiterated available resources for evidence gathering.
Council's response	Caveat about FPM report limitations added to evidence report. Additional evidence resources noted, including that updated FPM will be published in 2026.
Areas of agreement	The Council agree with the points made and have made amendments where requested.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is the agency content with the evidence?	Yes, SportScotland are content with the evidence presented in this chapter.
Implications for proposed plan	No implications have arisen from these comments.
Actions for proposed plan stage	The Council will continue making itself aware of FPM data and will make any further updates to this evidence when possible.

Summary of Local Place Plan Priorities

13.226 Ardgour Local Place Plan (**THC010**) has identified the following priorities relating to Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking:

- Need for local facilities and services because of unreliable Corran ferry connection;
- Needs for new/improved community hub village halls at Ardgour and Treslaig;

- All weather pitch and better play facilities behind Ardgour primary school;
- A new community shop and café and possible community purchase of Ardgour Inn;
- More community food growing and sale opportunities at Clovullin and Achaphubuil;
- Better care for older people at home and at dedicated Strontian centre;
- Better local childcare facilities and services to allow younger families to stay and work;
- Local defibrillators, community first responders and more GP services;
- Better more reliable transport connections to higher order services – e.g. Corran and Camasnagaul ferry links, community filling station, community transport scheme;
- Safer active travel links within and between settlements for locals and visitors;
- Local heritage centre in Ardgour, local area website and promotion of Gaelic language;
- More affordable housing for those with a local connection or who are economically active – and financial disincentive for second and holiday homes;
- Innovative rural housing – e.g. woodland crofts, cohousing, reuse of empty properties
- Improve digital connectivity and energy efficiency of existing housing stock.

13.227 Black Isle Local Place Plan (**THC011**) has identified the following priorities relating to Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking:

- Support 20 minute cycle communities for main villages and more community facilities, affordable housing and improved infrastructure for those communities;
- Particular need for Black Isle based swimming pool, all weather sports pitches, play space, disabled people facilities, improved public toilets, improved digital connectivity, increased police presence, network of community hubs, mobility hubs and community transport schemes;
- More local food growing and community based energy opportunities;
- Improve local active travel networks for locals and visitors;
- A new Black Isle heritage and cultural centre;
- A more permissive policy for affordable housing development within or close to main villages;
- Improve energy efficiency of worst existing building stock;
- Tighter policy and financial controls on holiday and second homes – stronger preference for housing to be allocated to those with a local and/or employment connection.

13.228 Broadford and Strath Local Place Plan (**THC012**) has identified the following priorities relating to Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking:

- New mixed community use (and some housing) proposals at Broadford School land, Old hospital, land north of village hall, Elgol School and Elgol Village Hall;
- Woodland related employment proposals north of Broadford Industrial Estate;
- Protect and enhance existing main village greenspaces and other heritage sites;
- Enhance safety, quality and extent of active travel network within and between settlements notably at Broadford;
- Community Transport Hub at Broadford to enhance the connectivity of its facilities to the wider area;
- More sensitive siting and design other housing for those with a local or employment connection;
- Improved digital connectivity to improve online access to facilities for those at Elgol and Torrin;
- Improve energy efficiency and physical condition of housing stock;
- Further commercial and housing development as close as possible to western core of Broadford – e.g. at Campbell's Farm.

13.229 Dores and Essich Local Place Plan (**THC013**) has identified the following priorities relating to Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking:

- Speed limit suggestions (including speed control measures like speed humps or islands);
- Concerns of lack/poor state of car parking;
- Provision of new as well as improvement of toilet facilities;
- Improvement and enhancement of public spaces including play parks, football field, paths and cycle routes, and woodland walk;
- Concerns about capacity of cemetery;
- Protecting the beach area by taking several measures like policing, Ranger post, Fire prevention signs, restricting wild camping, water quality signs by SEPA, and general maintenance;
- Upgrading Community hall;
- Future development of Dores Inn;

13.230 Duror and Kentallen Local Place Plan (**THC014**) has identified the following priorities relating to Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking:

- Improvements to active travel network and links to national cycle route;
- Develop community transport scheme and improve (frequency and diurnal spread) bus service particularly for health facility access, onward long

distance travel connections and teenagers wanting to travel for entertainment/employment;

- Better traffic speed, parking, littering, wildfire and other crime enforcement to increase safety and amenity;
- Better use of school and community centre for more community based services – e.g. nursery, public toilets, library, bank, permanent café, shop selling local produce, evening classes, heritage centre etc;
- Better digital connectivity at small workspaces to attract new sole trader rural businesses;
- Retain local people of all ages via more sheltered housing and affordable houses for those with a local and/or employment link
- Protect, better interpret and improve access to local natural and built heritage.

13.231 Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Local Place Plan (**THC022**) has identified the following priorities relating to Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking:

- An ambition for local living: affordable homes, local facilities and services
- A focus on young people, by having a range of facilities, activities and opportunities, covering jobs, learning, recreation and play.
- Upgrade public toilets in key settlements, including maintenance budgets, play areas, tennis court, and create outdoor shelter for young people.
- Acquire Fort Augustus Memorial Hall for community space and offer community resilience facilities in halls.
- Open up campus outdoor recreation facilities outwith school hours.
- Provide space and facilities for small businesses and homeworkers to support them to create viable businesses or work remotely from home.
- Investigate community transport to help resolve these public transport issues, particularly the lack of local transport.
- Improvements to rural path network close to villages and the Great Glen Way, including signage and bins, and create local path network in Convent Wood.

13.232 Gairloch Local Place Plan (**THC015**) has identified the following priorities relating to Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking:

- Support mixed development integrating housing and business development
- Improve sports facilities and access to changing rooms and facilities
- Create parks that offer safe and diverse play options for children
- Improve health care support and provision
- Increase opening hours for key public facilities
- Offer wide range of activities and entertainment in the area
- Encourage improved maintenance of existing car parks
- Invest in career opportunities in the local area

- Offer wider support to local businesses and sole traders

13.233 Garve and District Local Place Plan (**THC016**) has identified the following priorities relating to Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking:

- Preserve and maintain burial grounds at Garve and Achanalt,
- Promote existing path network while considering opportunities for new or enhanced paths, specifically to the War Memorial, Contin and Gorstan,
- Easier access to and provision of NHS services, including dentists,
- Recognise or enhance informal open spaces and play areas,
- Retail and community use opportunities welcomed as part of the development of the former Garve Hotel site,
- Retain post office service as a vital facility,
- Identifying new opportunities for community development and preserve existing community spaces such as the Garve War Memorial, Garve Football Area, Silver Bridge Public Toilets, Garve Playpark and Wyvis Natural Playpark, among others.

13.234 Kinlochleven Local Place Plan (**THC017**) has identified the following priorities relating to Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking:

- Redevelopment of former aluminium works as key placemaking opportunity;
- Revitalise Island Park via new/improved playpark and footpath network;
- Reinvigorate village by reopening local businesses – e.g. Ice Factor Business Park, Post Office, Aluminium Story etc – to recreate jobs for young local people;
- Reboot school and community “campus” – e.g. community composting, new/improved play parks;
- Support other community development projects – e.g. affordable housing, local energy production, youth spaces, public art, year-round events programme, community food growing and café etc;
- Better management of visitor pressures and natural environment.

13.235 Lochalsh Local Place Plan (**THC018**) has identified the following priorities relating to Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking:

- Improve active travel network within and between settlements;
- More affordable homes to help retain local people and support local employment;
- Improve reliability of transport connections to higher order centres – e.g. Stromeferry bypass, community transport schemes, transport interchanges for onward journey connections;
- Retain and enhance the local facilities that do exist and reinstate those that no longer exist (e.g. dentists, Dornie village shop);

- Improve digital connectivity to improve online access to services and facilities and to support online rural jobs;
- Better manage second/holiday home and other visitor demand (e.g. parking) and its adverse impacts;
- Redevelop brownfield sites to improve amenity – e.g. Marconi Yard at South Strome;
- Better and easier community access to school facilities;
- Public art in key prominent locations;
- Better sewage treatment facilities to improve local amenity and support new development.

13.236 Nairnshire Local Place Plan (**THC023**) has identified the following priorities relating to Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking:

- Apply traffic calming measures, improved public spaces, and enhanced streetscaping to help transform King Street into a welcoming and dynamic area.
- Create a mix of retail, dining, entertainment, and residential options that draw people in and encourage them to spend time in the area, with a Town Centre First approach. Supporting and encouraging small and sole trader businesses to locate in the town centre, including in co-working spaces. Changes of use should be supported where it will support the aims of a regenerated and vibrant town centre.
- Develop attractive, accessible public spaces where people can gather, relax, and participate in community activities. Enhance parks, squares, and pedestrian zones to create a welcoming environment that encourages foot traffic and social interaction.
- Ensure that infrastructure to provide for highspeed broadband and mobile data connectivity across Nairn and Nairnshire is robust and available to all.
- Support the audit and consolidation of the public use of community buildings to support the viability of key community assets.
- Consideration of wider outcomes from any development, including an integrated approach to Health and Care, Education and Training, Health and Wellbeing.
- The A96 bypass has implications for Nairn, that with new access and movement options open, there are great placemaking opportunities. For example, de-trunking of Academy Street, King Street and St Ninian Road creating opportunities for public spaces and other uses in these corridors.
- Preserve Common Good land as greenspace for leisure, climate mitigation and adaptation, and access to natural environments.
- Safeguard woodland (planted or naturally regenerating) spaces for appropriate uses.
- Develop a pump track to replace the BMX track at Riverside.

13.237 Stratherrick and Foyers Local Place Plan (**THC019**) has identified the following priorities relating to Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking:

- Maintain and create play parks and greenspaces in each village (Errogie, Foyers, Gorthleck, Inverfarigaig, Torness and Whitebridge),
- Improve local path networks including local short walks in each village and key tourist routes (e.g. Falls of Foyers, South Loch Ness Trail, and Trail of the Seven Lochs),
- Create sports and recreational facilities in Foyers: Riverside Field and Foyers Bay,
- Create and maintain local community hubs including The Hub in Foyers, Foyers Medical Centre, Foyers Shop, Camerons Tearoom, Boleskine House, Stratherrick Village Hall (Gorthleck), Whitebridge Hotel, Wildside Centre (Whitebridge), Errogie Kirk, Torness field sports club and Inverfarigaig forest school,
- Retain Foyers Post Office and shop.

13.238 Torridon and Kinlochewe Local Place Plan (**THC020**) has identified the following priorities relating to Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking:

- Stronger and specific support for further development at Kinlochewe;
- Service and facility improvements in the closest higher order settlements such as Gairloch and improved lower carbon transport connections to those settlements;
- More local recycling and waste management facilities and collection;
- Better local digital connectivity to reduce the need for travel;
- Conversion of existing surplus buildings to affordable housing and other community uses – e.g. 2 primary schools;
- New/improved play areas at Torridon and Kinlochewe;
- Safer active travel routes within and between settlements for locals and visitors.

13.239 Golspie Local Place Plan (**THC021**) has identified the following priorities relating to Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking:

- Spatial proposal C1 Village Hub re-defining existing assets of public realm, community infrastructure and buildings to strengthen community interaction, reduce inequalities, promote wellbeing signalling a departure from existing allocations in CaSPlan;
- Green-blue strategy integrating flood management biodiversity enhancement public realm and amenity;
- Recognition of existing strong offer: golf, mountain biking, beach, woodland and varied outdoor recreation;

- Priorities to enhance and expand recreational opportunities improving and retaining playing fields, with upgraded changing facilities and free access where possible,
- Public realm improvements and green infrastructure are used as primary tools for both wellbeing and regeneration;
- Shift toward nature-based, multi-functional solutions (flooding, biodiversity, recreation, wellbeing);

13.240 Caol Local Place Plan (**THC024**) has identified the following priorities relating to Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking:

- Mental health is a major priority, with repeated concerns about access to services and impacts on the community (including young people);
- Strong focus on supporting vulnerable groups, including young people and older people (care needs, ageing population, care at home);
- Improving safety and perceived safety (especially for young people and women) through lighting, CCTV, police presence, safer streets;
- Strong emphasis on better use and coordination of existing community assets, rather than large new developments;
- Focus on improving quality, access and maintenance of existing assets, especially green space and community facilities;
- Lack of accessible sports pitches and facilities for children and schools, playparks described as run down, unsafe or poorly maintained;
- Better walking and cycling connections to facilities (including school, pump track, pitch areas) needed.

13.241 Sleat Local Place Plan (**THC025**) has identified the following priorities relating to Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking:

- Clear need for improved healthcare provision, particularly for an ageing population;
- Recognition that community wellbeing is linked to infrastructure and services, including transport and access to care, digital connectivity, energy and affordability;
- Wellbeing is framed holistically, integrating: cultural identity (Gaelic language, social activity, and economic opportunity).
- Development should combine housing, workspaces, services and cultural uses;
- Need for better sports and leisure facilities across the peninsula, links to wider wellbeing and retention of population, especially for young people and families;
- Improved multi-use facilities linked to the proposed community hubs.
- Blue and green infrastructure reflects working landscapes in this context rather than amenity greenspace.

13.242 Croy and Tornagrain Local Place Plan (**THC026**) has identified the following priorities relating to Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking:

- Overall vision emphasises a “healthy future” for the communities, linking wellbeing to environment and infrastructure;
- Wellbeing issues tied to lack of recreation and social space, especially for children and young people, and limited access to local services in Croy (loss of shop, fuel, etc.)
- concern that housing growth in Croy has occurred without supporting infrastructure or placemaking;
- Placemaking priorities include provision of community hubs within new development and integration of services, facilities and open space with housing
- Lack of recreational space in Croy, no accessible playing field or sports facilities and limited provision for children over aged 6;
- Better integrate settlements and services through active travel infrastructure;

13.243 Morvern Local Place Plan (**THC027**) has identified the following priorities relating to Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking:

- Health and wellbeing are delivered through stronger community infrastructure (halls, hubs, shared spaces), active lifestyles, and improved housing, with a particular focus on sustaining young families and supporting an ageing population;
- Health and wellbeing are delivered through stronger community infrastructure (halls, hubs, shared spaces), active lifestyles, and improved housing, with a particular focus on sustaining young families and supporting an ageing population;
- Suite of specific, community-generated projects (c.22 proposals), directly linking aspirations to implementable development and land-use changes;
- Recreation is delivered through multi-use initiatives (e.g. leisure facilities, sports pitch expansion, youth spaces), integrated with tourism, events and community life rather than treated as standalone provision;
- A comprehensive network of walking, cycling and outdoor routes is central to the plan, supporting health, reducing car reliance, improving access, and enhancing both everyday life and visitor experience;
- Significant emphasis on managing flood risk, coastal change and climate impacts through nature-based solutions, alongside broader ambitions for a low-carbon, renewable energy-led future.

13.244 Kyle of Sutherland Local Place Plan (**THC028**) has identified the following priorities relating to Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking:

- Reflects local living principles, maintaining services, improving access to jobs and facilities, and ensuring settlements remain functional places to live, not just commuter or ageing communities;
- Aspirations to create a resilient, inclusive and sustainable community, with development supporting long-term viability of dispersed settlements rather than growth for its own sake.

13.245 Glen Urquhart Local Place Plan (**THC029**) has identified the following priorities relating to Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking:

- Prioritises better access to services, local employment and reduced reliance on commuting, supporting more self-contained and viable rural living;
- Health and wellbeing are addressed via proposals such as a community health and wellbeing centre, improved recreation, and stronger social infrastructure, aimed at enabling people to stay longer in the area and improving quality of life;
- Strong emphasis on the natural environment (Loch Ness, paths, landscapes) as a key asset, with proposals including improved access, recreation opportunities, landscape protection and better visitor management;
- Priorities include new footpaths, cycle routes, safer travel along the glen and improved public transport (including electric bus routes), addressing isolation and enabling both everyday life and visitor movement.

Summary of Implications for the Proposed Plan

Placemaking

13.246 HLDP should be place-based and prepared in alignment with the [Place Principle](#), Area Place Plans and community-led Local Place Plans.

13.247 HLDP's spatial strategy will be derived from the [Six Qualities of Successful Places](#) and informed by results of the [Place Standard Tool](#).

13.248 HLDP will require to provide a policy framework that provides clear expectations of design, quality and place, which includes identifying where more detailed design guidance is expected. The Council is committed to bringing placemaking into the development plan and proposes to review, revise and further develop the Placemaking Audit as part of the HLDP. As such, following refinement, further engagement with the development industry will be undertaken.

13.249 HLDP will be informed by the Scottish government [Designing Streets toolkit](#) guidance and templates for streetscape development and placemaking, and aiding the design of masterplans for development briefs.

13.250 As part of its response to the Highland Housing Challenge, the Council shall consider proposals for Masterplan Consent Areas (MCAs) to take forward place-based approaches and allow the Council to take a leadership role in the planning

of high-quality places. The Council intends to progress 3 MCAs and will continue dialogue with Scottish Government officials and other potential *early adopter* councils. The Council seeks to be proactive in working collaboratively with stakeholders to identify feasible locations for MCAs. As part of this, the Council will evaluate whether these would present a feasible and deliverable solution in particular areas.

Health and Wellbeing

- 13.251 HLDP will be informed by evidence in relation to health inequalities and the spatial strategy should seek to tackle health inequalities particularly in places which are experiencing the most disadvantage, in line with NPF4.
- 13.252 HLDP will have regard to the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan's three strategic priorities and vision to tackle inequalities, and will require to consider how the spatial strategy can contribute to these.
- 13.253 HLDP will be informed by a range of impact assessments, including the EQIA, PSED, FSDA, ICIA, SEA and HRA and will consider whether a Health Inequalities Impact Assessment would also be proportionate and feasible to encompass aspects of these other assessments. HLDP shall also consider how to develop a policy framework for Health Impact Assessments within development management and will require to engage and consult widely with stakeholders on this aspect.
- 13.254 HLDP will take due consideration of the risk factors associated with suicide and have regard to any further detail provided within a forthcoming Locations of Concern Action Plan developed by the Suicide Prevention Steering Group. The Planning Service will not publish known locations of suicide risk, but notes that the drivers of sites being locations of concern are complex and often involve isolated natural and built features that are typical features across many parts of Highland. The Council notes the higher prevalence of suicide in Highland relative to elsewhere in Scotland and will continue to liaise with health partners and Emergency Services on this matter throughout the production of HLDP.
- 13.255 The current HwLDP contains an adopted planning policy on air quality, although this was produced before NPF4. As part of developing the HLDP, the Council will review this policy and will collaborate with SEPA and colleagues in Environmental Health on this matter.
- 13.256 HLDP will note the identification of three CNMAs within the [Transportation Noise Action Plan](#) and will consider any implications of these should Transport Scotland provides further updates, or should they progress to designated NMAs.
- 13.257 HLDP will be informed by the locations of hazardous sites and major hazard pipelines as identified in the Evidence Report, and will require to maintain an

accurate record of these, in consultation with the HSE, to ensure that risks and impacts of these sites in relation to each other and to adjacent development are appropriately considered.

- 13.258 HLDP shall be cognisant of the Outline Planning Zone and DEPZ for the Dounreay and Vulcan NRTE sites, alongside any updates to the [NDA Group Draft Strategy](#) if timeously available. The operational requirements ongoing as part of decommissioning works at the site are multi-faceted, and in the absence of any tailored NPF4 policy specifically concerned with energy/zero waste applications of this complexity, HLDP will likely require to set out a tailored approach to guide appropriate development on or in proximity to the site, in collaboration with NRS.
- 13.259 HLDP will be cognisant of the Population Health Framework and seek alignment to ensure the plan contributes to Scotland's long-term vision for improved population health.
- 13.260 HLDP will have consideration for the integration of climate resilience and health co-benefits, ensuring that planning decisions actively support climate-resilient, healthy and equitable places on alignment with the [Working together to build climate-resilient, healthy and equitable places: A briefing for local government and partners](#).

Open Space, Recreation and Blue and Green Infrastructure

- 13.261 HLDP will be informed by an updated Open Space Strategy based on audits of current open space provision, to fulfil the requirements under the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019. The policy provision for open space within HLDP will therefore replace current the Council's Supplementary Guidance on Open Space in New Residential Development which was adopted in 2013 and has the remit at present for open space, play sufficiency and sport and recreation facilities.
- 13.262 HLDP will be informed by the Highland Play Sufficiency Assessment Report and the Highland Play Strategy, which will additionally inform the policy framework for developer contributions for new and upgraded play facilities across both Council owned/managed sites and developer provided play facilities. Regard will be given to a need for increased provision in areas with poorer sufficiency at present, in addition to provision for disabled children and older children, as evidenced from the Play Sufficiency Assessment Data. HLDP will require to update the *Supplementary Guidance on Open Space* to strengthen play space design guidance for the sufficiency and quality of new play spaces.
- 13.263 HLDP will have regard to Sportscotland's FPM so that provision for play and sports facilities is safeguarded and enhanced in accordance with NPF4 Policy 21. The Council understands that an updated FPM National Report will be produced

in 2025 and the findings of this will be considered accordingly. Any proposed loss of such facilities for play, recreation and is likely to conflict with the prevailing NPF4 policies and impact on provision, access and demand.

13.264 HLDP will have regard to areas of deprivation in Highland when considering increased provision of and access to open spaces, play spaces, sports facilities and blue and green infrastructure, in the interest of reducing health inequalities.

13.265 HLDP will require to progress a policy framework for safeguarding blue and green infrastructure assets and networks within and in proximity to towns and urban areas, ensuring that opportunities for linkages are not fragmented. This will involve a review and expansion of the scope of the existing HwLDP Green Networks Policy, to more fully encompass the water environment and the possibility for ecosystem, recreational and drainage co-benefits. The Council's Open Space Strategy once complete will also be a crucial tool in developing policy framework for protecting blue and green infrastructure, and will inform whether specific enhancements are required to increase access to recreational spaces in areas of deprivation.

13.266 The Proposed Plan will have consideration for the opportunity to create nature rich places that support wellbeing which are accessible for all, through the integration of spaces with compatible or overlapping functions such as enhanced blue and green infrastructure, creation of nature networks and so on.

13.267 The Council notes the 9 Priority Areas with known surface water issues as identified in the SWMP **(THC166)**. The Council will continue collaboration internally with colleagues in Flood Risk Management, and with SEPA and Scottish Water to consider whether a specific policy framework for blue and green infrastructure provision in these locations is required within HLDP to support the objectives and priorities for each Priority Area identified within the SWMP.

13.268 HLDP will be informed by adopted Core Paths within the Core Paths Plans, Long Distance Routes, and other active travel routes which are subject to ongoing compulsory Path Order consideration.

13.269 HLDP will consider how best to retain strong policy provisions within HwLDP Policies 77 and 78 to safeguard Core Paths, Long Distance Routes and access more generally, including the requirement for major development proposals to include an Access Plan.

Local Living

13.270 HLDP will be informed by the [Local Living and 20-minute Neighbourhood Planning Guidance](#). It is proposed to use the [Local Living Interactive Map](#) tool to identify appropriate sites for allocation within the HLDP. This will also be utilised to identify the scale of retail provision within an area in accordance with NPF4

Policy 28 and can additionally be used to consider small scale infrastructure improvements to existing communities to make them more attractive, safe and walkable places.

13.271 In compliance with the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, as amended, the Council will consider the existing locations of publicly available Water Refill locations provided by Scottish Water under their '[Top Up Tap](#)' [programme](#) and will develop a statement of the planning authority's proposed policies and proposals on the expansion of these.

13.272 In addition, also in compliance with the above Act, the Council will review its [public conveniences provision](#), along with its privately run [Comfort Scheme](#) and will include a statement of the planning authority's proposed policies and proposals on the location of and access to these.

Retail and Town Centres

13.273 While Town Centre First policies have been established within Highland's previous adopted HwLDP and Area LDPs, HLDP will require to progress town centre living in a way that embeds the concept of local living and where appropriate, 20-minute neighbourhoods as a principal component of spatial planning and decision making.

13.274 While directing retail, commercial and other footfall generating uses towards town centres and other designated commercial centres within a defined retail hierarchy has previously been supported by previous Scottish Planning Policy, this has not prevented support for local convenience shopping outwith these designated centres. The Council's local living mapping evidences the consolidation of retail units within these former designated centres which are predominantly car-dependent retail parks, which has resulted in several areas of Inverness suburbs being poorly served by convenience retail that supports walkable access to daily needs.

13.275 The Council anticipates that HLDP will require to approach convenience retail, and specifically food retail provision, in a more plan-led manner in order to address spatial deficiencies and support local living and where appropriate, 20-minute neighbourhoods.

13.276 NPF4 requires Local Development Plans to consider where they may be a need for additional retail space, with NPF4 suggesting this can be done by a retail study which identifies deficiencies in retail provision in terms of quality and quantity in an area. The suggestion that a retail study may have better informed the production of IMFLDP2 was raised within the IMFLDP2 Examination Report **(THC269)**. The Council will utilise the most up to date Town Centre Health Check as a starting point for reviewing the supply and demand of retail provision and

the boundaries for the city and town centre approach within HLDP, but considers that this is an area that would benefit from a stronger evidence base. Given the ambitious housing provisions that the Council wishes to support through the LHLR, the need to support sufficient retail provision in ways that are conducive to Local Living is recognised.

- 13.277 The Council considers that there is significant uncertainty within the retail sector and estimates for consumer spend and the dominance of internet-based shopping available to the Council at present are already outdated, not specific to Highland and remain static, of a fixed point in time, and are therefore of limited value when forecasting potential demand until the end of the HLDP period (2038). Evidence from planning applications incidentally evidences a fall in demand for retail provision and greater trends towards retail spaces being repurposed for other uses. The Council recognises that baseline information in relation to expenditure per head/household, existing and committed stock and estimates of turnover would likely involve commissioning further consultancy work. At present, the Council cannot necessarily commit to undertaking this at this time but has identified that doing so is a priority where resources provide.
- 13.278 HLDP will consider matters relating to the clustering of non-retail uses within town centres and informed by the evidence presented, will take a view as to whether it is appropriate to propose policies to control the concentration of betting offices and pay day loan shops.
- 13.279 HLDP will also consider how it may control the concentration of Hot Food Takeaways within town centres and within proximity to schools. This should occur in tandem with a review of how planning policies can support healthier food environments within Highland, using the [Local Living Interactive Map](#) as a first step to identify areas that are underserved by affordable, healthy food.
- 13.280 Increasing availability of alcohol and tobacco within or within short distances of deprived areas may contribute to health inequalities. The Council will collaborate with colleagues in Licensing and consider if it is appropriate to propose a policy to control the concentration of premises which are granted licences to sell alcohol and tobacco.
- 13.281 The Council intends to identify further developable, brownfield sites and review existing planning policy to ensure a positive planning regime exists to support town centre living and the allocation of a portion of the LHLR within designated city and town centres. The majority of successful town centre living housing projects have been delivered by the Council and as part of the Plan's preparation, work, the Council will also review and consider how best to bring back into use existing vacant spaces above commercial units across all localities.

Statements of Agreement / Dispute

Agreement on Evidence

13.282 Agencies who responded and agreed with the evidence and content presented included:

- NHS Highland
- Sportscotland
- SEPA
- NatureScot

Disputes with Stakeholders

13.283 None at the time of submission to Gate check.

Information Gaps

13.284 The Council's Local Living mapping work to date only applies to settlements identified in the existing Local Development Plans and not the region's more rural locales. Given advice from the Scottish Government which encourages its use across the whole of a region, the Council is giving consideration as to how the project could be used outwith settlements and as part of the HLDP, and shall continue to identify how this could be achieved.

13.285 The Council acknowledges that an Open Space Audit has only recently commenced and will take considerable time to complete owing to the scale of Highland's area. The Council considers that this audit once complete will enable the Council to strengthen the evidence base in relation to NPF4 Policies 20 and 21 and develop a policy framework that delivers better outcomes for blue and green infrastructure, and play, recreation and sport. The Council will use outputs from the Open Space Audit continuously as it progresses, owing to the likely considerable timescale that it may take.

13.286 The Council again recognises that evidence regarding retail capacity, demand and consumer expenditure could be strengthened to inform HLDP, but at present is not in a position to commit to commissioning further consultancy work of this nature.

13.287 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 in Highland have formally registered Local Place Plans. Any Local Place Plans registered will be considered in the production of the LDP if timeously available.

Chapter 14 : Performance of the Plan

Context

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

Table 14:1 Highland's Development Plan Time Series

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

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

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

- 14.4 As the CNPA is responsible for producing its own LDP, and NPF4 is produced by the Scottish Government, this chapter focusses on the evaluation of the components of the development plan that have been led and produced by the Council as the Planning Authority, namely HwLDP and the area LDP's. The first Inner Moray Firth LDP was adopted in 2015 and was in place until IMFLDP2 was adopted in 2024. Where relevant, the performance of both Inner Moray Firth plans is assessed in this chapter.
- 14.5 It is important to understand that due to the tiered plan system in Highland, where general policies or land allocations feature in NPF4, HwLDP and area LDPs, the most up to date document prevails as the Council's policy for that site/issue.
- 14.6 The Cairngorms National Park sets the planning policy framework for its area (which includes a portion of the Highland Council area) through its own respective LDP and all planning applications in the National Park are determined in line with this policy framework.
- 14.7 However, planning applications within the CNPA are submitted in the first instance to the relevant local authority. The Cairngorms National Park then 'calls in' and determines the most significant planning applications for the National Park, leaving the remainder to be determined by the local authorities. Of the 1,266 planning applications determined since the Cairngorms National Park LDP adopted in 2021 and 31 March 2025, 94% of those have been determined by the constituent local planning authorities, of which 57% (716) have been determined by The Highland Council.

Delivery on Outcomes and Allocations

Outcomes

- 14.8 A significant period of time has passed since the adoption of the HwLDP in 2012. During this time, there have been significant social, economic and political

changes at a local, national and international level, including the UK's exit from the European Union and the COVID-19 Pandemic. Many of these changes, whilst not directly related to planning or within control of the planning system, have had impacts on achieving the outcomes of LDPs.

HwLDP

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

Table 14:3 HwLDP Outcomes and Progress

Outcome	Progress
We will have enabled Sustainable Highland Communities by: • increasing the population of the Highlands to achieve a balanced age range and by providing opportunities for market housing and affordable housing both within settlements and within the Highland countryside; • providing developments which cater for Highland's ageing population; and • ensuring the effective delivery of the plan strategy through efficient and transparent use of developer contributions and linking into Council and partner agency development programmes.	Some • Census data indicates there has been a modest 1.4% population growth in Highland between 2011 and 2022 and that relative to the Scottish average, there is a higher proportion of its existing and projected future population in the older age groups; • HwLDP and area LDPs have allocated over 300 sites for housing, and provided a policy framework that supports new housing in the countryside in appropriate locations; • A number of new care homes have been developed, including in Fortrose and Inverness, and other housing provided that is suitable for an ageing population, however, there have also been several care home closures throughout Highland; • The policy framework, including Developer Contributions Supplementary Guidance and LDP Delivery Programmes, has allowed for the

	efficient collection of developer contributions towards a range of infrastructure projects.
We will have safeguarded our Environment by: • ensuring that development of renewable energy resources are managed effectively with clear guidance on where renewable energy developments should and should not be located; • ensuring that the special quality of the natural, built and cultural environment in Highland is protected and enhanced; • taking a lead in reducing the amount of greenhouse gases released into the air, adapted to the effects of climate change and limited the amount of non-renewable resources development uses; and • leading the way in the delivery of sustainable waste management set out in the Council's waste strategy and those brought forward by the private sector.	Some • The policy framework, including Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance, has sought to provide clear locational guidance for renewable energy development; • The policy framework has sought to ensure the natural and built environment is protected and enhanced, a number of additional designations have been made, and guidance has been produced, including several Conservation Area Management Plans; • Highland has made a substantial contribution to renewable energy generation, including significant growth in onshore and offshore wind in the last 20 years; • Whilst Highland household waste recycling rates continue to be below the Scottish average, there has been significant investment in recent years, including the expansion of food waste collection and capital investment in waste infrastructure.
We will have supported a Competitive, Sustainable and Adaptable Highland Economy by: • providing opportunities which encourage economic development and create new employment across the area focusing on the key sectors of life sciences, energy, tourism, food and drink, higher education, inward investment, financial and business services, creative industries, aquaculture and renewable energy, whilst at the same time improving the strategic infrastructure necessary to allow the	Good • Numerous large scale employment sites that support a number of different sectors have been delivered, and are continuing to be developed across Highland, including the Inverness Campus, Inverness Airport Business Park, and Kishorn Yard and within ICFGF sites at Nigg, Invergordon, Evanton, Inverness and Ardersier. Inverness Castle opened as a major visitor cultural attraction in late 2025. Highland's significant aquaculture industry makes a substantial contribution to the economy. • There have been significant improvements to the transport network in Highland, including the delivery of the West Link in Inverness and A9 Berriedale Braes Improvement Project. Progress

economy to grow over the long term; • helping to deliver, in partnership with Transport Scotland and other transport bodies, transport infrastructure improvements across the area in line with the Council's Local Transport Strategy and the Scottish Government's Strategic Transport Projects Review; • promoting a positive and innovative approach to masterplanning new developments that contribute towards reducing the need to travel and encourage people to walk, cycle or use public transport; • promoting the development of tourism, whether in terms of additional accommodation or new facilities; • promoting the delivery of a twenty first century telecommunications network which allows all areas across the Highlands to better access the opportunities in the wider global economy; and • ensuring that the planning guidance for mineral development, coastal developments, forestry, agriculture, aquaculture and croft land is clear and consistent and that key resources are protected where appropriate.	has made within Highland as part of the A9 dualling scheme, where the Tomatin to Moy section is under construction. Statutory processes for other major Transport Scotland projects, including A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton, A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) and A9/A82 Longman Junction Improvement Scheme have been progressed but firm funding and delivery timescales are yet to be confirmed. • New large mixed-use developments at Inverness have been successfully masterplanned through Council-led development briefs with focus on sustainable travel. • As explained in the Council's Sustainable Tourism Strategy, tourism has grown significantly since 2012, with annual visitor numbers increasing by 65%. The policy framework is supportive of additional accommodation and there has been a significant rise in the number of short term lets across Highland, and a number of new hotels have opened in Inverness. New facilities have also been provided in a number of locations. • 87% of Highland now has access to Superfast broadband, and plans are in place for this coverage to be increased. • The policy framework provides a clear approach towards mineral, coastal and aquaculture development, and development that may affect forestry, agriculture, and croft resources. Guidance was published for coastal development, forestry and aquaculture.
We will have achieved a Healthier Highlands by: • providing for the development of places that contribute to increasing healthy lifestyles, opportunities for quality open space provision and access to enjoy the outdoors; and	Good • Area LDPs identify and safeguard areas of quality open space and identify opportunities for developing green networks and active travel routes. New developments are required to provide areas of new open space consistent with the policy framework. Direct provision and/or developer contributions are sought

• protecting and enhancing the green network within and around settlements leading to a cohesive and fit for purpose network of greenspaces and opportunities for active travel.	towards active travel improvements where appropriate.
We will have provided better opportunities for all and a fairer Highland by: • promoting opportunities that allow for investment in services and infrastructure, and opportunities for investment and diversification in the economy, in our deprived areas and areas at risk of long term unemployment as a result of changes in the wider economy.	Some • Developer contributions allow for opportunities to seek investment for additional capacity in services and infrastructure; • Opportunities continue to be delivered throughout Highland, including in some areas of deprivation. For example ICFGF sites are close to a number of areas of deprivation, including parts of Alness, Balintore, Invergordon and Inverness. A key aim of the Green Freeport is to promote growth and regeneration. • Whilst the timescales for the decommissioning of Dounreay Power Station have been significantly extended, its 1,500 employees are being supported to plan their futures beyond decommissioning and support is being provided to the community to diversify its economic base. A number of global companies have already provided new employment opportunities in the far north, in particular engineering, energy and communications firms.

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

Table 14:4 HwLDP Outcomes and Progress Caithness and Sutherland

Objective	Comment
• be a regenerating place with a network of strong communities – through the promotion of attractive and thriving town centres, with the	Some • The policy framework aims to encourage, promote and facilitate development in town centres, including a CASPlan 'Town Centre First'

main centres having enhanced positions as service centres along with improved economic prospects of ports and harbours in the area.	policy. Despite this framework, there have been significant changes in retailing in recent years, in particular the growth of online retailing. This has coincided with a rise in vacancy rates, with Wick significantly above the Highland average. • Several key ports and harbours in the area have benefitted from improvements, including at Scrabster and Gills Bay.
• be a competitive place connected to the global economy – the exceptional environment, along with thriving local communities will provide an incentive to business location. The main east coast settlements complement each other, and there will be strong economic ties between the two counties and with the Inner Moray Firth area enabled by improved telecommunications networks and broadband coverage. Locally UHI will provide courses meeting local and international needs.	Some • Various business, particularly in the energy, tourism and food and drink sectors have chosen to locate in the area. HIE has continued to invest in business parks to provide additional units, including at Wick and Golspie. • Telecommunications networks and broadband coverage have improved, including delivery of Local Full Fibre Network in Wick and Thurso. • UHI provides a range of courses from their campuses at Dornoch, Halkirk and Thurso, including specialist renewable energy, golf and equine courses.
• be a connected and accessible place – A9 improvement schemes, including Berriedale Braes, will be delivered, as well as there being a significant increase in rail freight consolidating Lairg and Georgemas as distribution 'hubs' along with strategically located sidings with loading facilities. Developments will promote increased passenger numbers on the Far North rail line through a full peak time return Invernet commuter service extending to Lairg, Ardgay and Bonar Bridge. The case for twin-tracking locally important roads, which are currently single track, will be maintained. Residents will have	Some • The Transport Scotland Berriedale Braes Improvement Project was completed in 2020, this improved journey time and road safety on this part of the A9. Georgemas Junction strategic rail freight and transport hub supports some freight movements. A new rail siding for transporting timber is under construction at a timber processing facility at Morayhill, locations for other new sidings continue to be explored. • Early parts of the plan period saw increases in rail passengers, however more recently passenger numbers have not reached pre-pandemic levels. • A replacement Naver Bridge south of Bettyhill on the A836 was completed in 2026 at a cost of £11M, this included the upgrading a section of

adequate water and waste-water networks.	this road to twin track. Limited road upgrades have taken place elsewhere. • A number of water and waste-water improvement projects have been delivered, including upgrades to water mains at Wick and Occumster and sewer upgrade at Thurso.
• be a place of outstanding heritage: safe in the custody of local people – by the protection and enhancement of the outstanding natural assets, including landscapes, geology, habitats and species of national and international importance. Economic opportunities will be realised associated with the Sutherland Geo-park, and the marketing of the 'Green Firth' around the Dornoch Firth. The Flow Country will have been inscribed on the World Heritage Site list and enjoys the support of local communities, land managers and visitors alike. The high quality of life will be helping to increase and maintain population levels.	Some • The policy framework has sought to ensure the natural environment is protected and enhanced. • The North West Highlands Geo-park and Dornoch Firth area attract high numbers of tourists each year, many of whom stay in serviced accommodation. • The Flow Country World Heritage Site was inscribed by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in July 2024 with broad support from a range of stakeholders. • The population of Caithness and Sutherland fell by 5% and 3.1% respectively between the 2011 and 2022 Census, indicating an ongoing challenge to achieve this outcome.
• be a centre of excellence for energy and engineering – Dounreay's current 2,000 strong workforce will have found alternative sources of employment both on and off site in terms of decommissioning and throughout Caithness and North Sutherland where a more flexible approach to business and housing development has provided a fertile context for growth in jobs particularly in the new engineering and energy sectors where employers make good use of their transferred skills.	Good • Dounreay continues to be a site of major construction, demolition and waste management. The decommissioning programme was extended in 2024 from 2033 until the 2070s. This will have significant implications for continuing employment and investment in the area. It employs approximately 1,500 people directly and is supporting staff to plan their futures beyond decommissioning and supporting the community to diversify its economic base. • New job sectors are developing, particularly in the renewable energy sector.

• have become an international centre of excellence for marine renewables – the Pentland Firth will be the location for marine renewables; related facilities and industries will be available locally. UHI through North Highland College will develop centres of excellence in marine engineering and environmental management. The spatial strategy supports the growth of this sector and an updated planning framework will be put in place to ensure opportunities are grasped.	Good • A tidal energy site, known as MeyGen, has been operating in the Pentland Firth since 2018, with future phases planned. • Other related facilities and industries are available locally, including at Scrabster Harbour. • The UHI is at the forefront of research into climate change, marine science, aquaculture and renewable energy. • An updated planning framework, focussing only on onshore wind energy, was published in 2016.
• have a high-quality tourist industry – tourists attracted by the outstanding natural heritage, outdoor activities and key tourist destinations providing high quality facilities e.g. John O'Groats, Wick. Developments at UHI Dornoch campus and elsewhere will support the sector.	Good • The growth in popularity of the North Coast 500 route has been a catalyst to significant tourism growth, with large surveys reporting natural landscapes, scenery and nature-based activities are being cited as main motivators for visiting the region. • Tourism growth has put pressure on some key infrastructure, namely roads, parking and conversion of housing stock to tourist accommodation, these impacts potentially affect the quality of tourism experiences. • The John O'Groats masterplan has been realised, through the delivery of tourist accommodation, cafes, bars, visitor attractions and significant upgrades to the public realm. • UHI Dornoch – which provides specialist courses in tourism, hospitality and professional cookery – has been extended in recent years, including the provision of purpose-built student accommodation.
• have a more diverse economy - other enterprises will have been attracted by a more flexible planning regime throughout Caithness. This will have reduced the area's former dependence on the	Some • Various new enterprises, particularly in the energy, tourism and food and drink sectors have helped to diversify the economy. • Given the decommissioning programme for Dounreay has been extended until the 2070s it

nuclear industry although decommissioning will still provide some employment opportunities in the early years of this Plan. All sectors are now represented and welcomed.

is expected that employment opportunities will remain throughout the plan period, and into the next plan period. Despite this, staff numbers are expected to change and Dounreay is supporting staff to plan their futures and supporting the community to diversify its economic base.

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

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

Objective	Comment
• be better connected - residents, visitors and employers will have faster, more reliable, safer and more frequent connections. Trunk road (particularly the A82) and urban link road improvements at Fort William and Portree will have relieved local and regional economic constraints. Similarly, better facilities for ferry, rail, inter-modal freight transfer (particularly at Corpach), Caledonian Canal freight movements and marine access will have helped economic growth. Scheduled air travel will have been re-introduced via a seaplane connection to Loch Linnhe and an airstrip at Broadford. Residents will also have better active travel (walking and cycling) and public transport access to greenspace and schools. All will have better access to local waste recycling and to adequate water, sewerage, broadband and electricity networks.	Some • Integrated Transport Plan for Fort William is currently being prepared that aims to increase resilience and reliability on the trunk road. • Completion of the remaining section of the Portree link road between the A87 and A855 was awarded loan funding, and is anticipated to be completed by autumn 2026. • Several new ferries are planned to replace the aging fleet, and associated port improvements are being delivered, including a major upgrade at Uig. New infrastructure on the Ardgour and Nether Lochaber sides of the Corran Narrows has planning permission and is expected to be delivered by 2027. • Challenges remain in delivery of aviation projects. • A number of active travel projects delivered, including as part of the flood prevention schemes at Coal and Lochyside and in Ullapool. • Improvements have been made to utilities, broadband and electricity networks.
• have more efficient public service provision - services will be	Some

provided in better facilities in more accessible locations - for example, new health care facilities will have been provided at Blàr Mòr in Fort William and at Broadford.	• A new hospital opened in Broadford in 2022 and funding allocated for a new hospital at Blàr Mòr with anticipated construction in 2027. • Other new public services include a Joint Campus at Caol in Fort William that opened in 2017 and planned new Primary Schools in Broadford and Dunvegan on Skye.
• have more affordable housing - particularly social rented accommodation - via creative, multi-agency delivery methods similar to that progressed at Home Farm, Portree. Also, surplus, publicly owned land and buildings whether forestry plantations or redundant schools, will have provided cheaper and available sites.	Good • Several affordable housing sites delivered, many of which were on surplus publicly owned land. This includes developments at Broadford, Armadale, Raasay, Staffin, Kilbeg, Fort William, Spean Bridge and Strontian.
• have a more diverse economy - particularly via renewable energy developments that deliver genuine and proportionate benefits to local communities. New opportunities associated with marine renewables will have been delivered in locations such as Kishorn in Wester Ross and west coast ports and harbours will also see supply side developments that enhance the local economy. Flexibility in the level of developer contributions sought will have attracted inward investment from more pressurised areas.	Some • A number of renewable energy projects have been delivered, including large scale wind farms at Edinbane and Ben Aketil on Skye. • Adoption of the Social Value Charter for Renewable Energy Investment. • Following investment, Kishorn Port reopened as a renewable energy and construction facility in 2017; significant further investment is now underway to enable the port to play a pivotal role in the delivery of offshore wind projects. • Significant investment at other ports and harbours, include new ferry and extended pontoon facilities at Ullapool; upgraded harbour facilities, and a new terminal building at Uig. • Developer contributions have been sought towards key infrastructure where capacity issues have arisen.
• have rationalised but protected its lifeline services - the larger villages within the remoter areas, for example Gairloch and Lochcarron, will have grown sufficiently to hold on to amalgamated services.	Some • Census data shows the wider Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Ward area saw its population decline slightly between 2011 and 2022, despite this many lifeline services remain operational.

• be re-connected with its land and natural resources - “working the land” will once again be a respectful balance between the limits of natural resources and the economic needs of local communities. New crofts, forest crofts, native woodland management, allotments and more effective husbandry of wider natural resources and heritage, will have all helped restore this balance.	Some • The policy framework has contributed to achieving this balance. • Whilst a limited number of new crofts have been registered and some areas of peatland have been restored, many of these land management-based outcomes are not directly within the control of the planning system and require intervention from a range of agencies.
• have a greater and more diverse age profile of population than currently projected - underpinned by better employment, housing and further education opportunities for younger people, for example at Baile Chlann Domhnaill: A’ Chill Bheag (the new Kilbeg Village) on Skye. Sabhal Mor Ostaig, Lochaber and Skye and Wester Ross colleges will bring new residents to the area.	Limited • New employment, housing and further education opportunities have been delivered in key areas, despite this census data found there to be significant increases in the proportion of the population aged 65+ between 2011 and 2022 in the Plan area. • Census data shows the population in Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh declined slightly, whereas Lochaber increased slightly and the Isle of Skye and Raasay more substantially at 4.3% since 2011. • First housing phases delivered at A’ Chill Bheag. • The new Sabhal Mor Ostaig (Skye Gaelic College) building opened in 2015, and UHI North, West and Hebrides continues to operate several campuses in the area.
• be a place of outstanding natural and cultural heritage - heritage assets including the landscape and wildlife will have been safeguarded and enhanced. The high quality of life and economic opportunities associated with these assets will be helping to increase and maintain population levels.	Good • The policy framework has sought to ensure the natural environment is protected and enhanced. • Economic opportunities associated with these assets have manifested in large increases in tourism numbers to key visitor attractions, including the Fairy Pools, Old Man of Storr, Glen Coe and the Glenfinnan Viaduct. • Census data shows population levels have been broadly maintained in Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh and Lochaber and

	increased by 4.3% on Isle of Skye and Raasay between 2011 and 2022.
• have re-established and promoted its unique identity - as a centre for Gaelic culture and language and as having a high quality tourism product providing high quality facilities, service and exceptional cuisine based on high quality local produce. The area will be recognised and promoted as an all year round destination building on the current and ongoing branding associated with the Outdoor Capital of the UK, an internationally renowned “outdoor” destination and event/trail outdoor activity with a wide range of activities including skiing, mountain biking, sailing, climbing etc. based draw for tourists attracted by the area’s outstanding natural and cultural heritage.	Good • Annual visitor numbers to Highland have increased by 65% since 2012 (THC345). • Lead drivers of tourism sector include: landscape and scenery, culture and heritage, sports, outdoor adventure and food and drink. • High tourist season has stayed roughly constant date-wise, but winter tourism has soared across the region since 2012. • The Nevis Range has been upgraded in recent years, including a new hotel, bunkhouse and mountain bike trail. • Several high-profile sporting events have taken place in the area, including the Mountain Bike World Cup.

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

Table 14:6 HwLDP Outcomes and Progress Inner Moray Firth

Objective	Comment
• have increased the number of jobs, people and facilities - the Inner Moray Firth will be a larger and more efficient “engine” for the wider Highland economy. Growth of jobs and population, especially to the A96 and Easter Ross Corridors will have continued the latter being underpinned by the competitive and	Some • The Inner Moray Firth experienced population growth of 2.7%, with growth across all areas except remote small towns (THC081). • The ICFGF is anticipated to bring further growth to the area, with the prediction of 11,300 new jobs within Highland and £6.5bn investment in sites and ports at Ardersier,

sustainability advantage of its improved rail route connections. New and better facilities will have followed this growth in demand. Service centres such as Dingwall, Nairn and Tain will have grown to support the delivery of the facilities required.	Inverness, Highland Deephaven, Invergordon and Nigg as well as Inverness Campus. • Rail infrastructure improvements, including more frequent services and new stations at Conon Bridge and Inverness Airport. • A new rail siding is under construction at a timber processing plant at Morayhill. • Nairn, Dingwall and Tain have seen modest population growth; infrastructure improvements planned and under construction include a recently completed 3-18 campus in Tain and a replacement secondary school in Nairn is under construction.
• have a growing City – building on the growth and opportunities of its role as the major service and administrative centre, Inverness will have developed in a way that promotes the key aspirations of the updated City vision, focuses development where infrastructure exists or can be provided in the most efficient way and maintains a thriving City centre as the focus for services and retail provision.	Good • Inverness has grown significantly, with over 6,000 house completions in the Inverness Housing Market Area since 2012 (House Completions Highland Dashboard). • Many house completions have contributed to achieving the spatial strategy for Inverness continues to be realised, with significant housing growth delivered at Culduthel/ Slackbuie, Milton of Leys and Inshes. Development at Ness-side, Inverness East and Westercraigs continues to be delivered. • Several key development sites in the city have been realised, including Inverness Castle in 2025, a new justice centre in 2020, £15.5M of improvements to the Northern Meeting Park and Bught Park in 2025 and a new prison due for completion in 2026. • Like many city centres across the UK, Inverness has faced challenges due to the growth of out of centre and online retailing. Despite this, its vacancy rate has decreased to 9.2% in 2024/25 which is below the Highland average of 12.2%. Some elements of the city centre appear to be thriving, particularly the food and drink sector during the peak tourism periods.
• have safeguarded and enhanced its special places - the firths around which the settlements and	Good • The policy framework has ensured significant and sustained development close to sensitive

economic activity are located have retained their quality, support an abundance of internationally and nationally important wildlife and provide a special place for residents and visitors alike. The environmental limits of the area will have been respected, particularly in the countryside around its towns and along its coast, where the effect of sea level rising from climate change has been allowed for in the location of new development.	coastal areas has allowed these special areas to be safeguarded and enhanced. • The policy framework, including the use of updated SEPA flood mapping, has sought to protect coastal communities and assets whilst allowing these areas to develop sustainably and adapt to climate change.
• have made it easy for people and wildlife to move about through a green network – large scale and small scale habitat corridors have been protected and enhanced so that species can move about within and around development, including species that are affected by climate change. People will have better access to high quality places using a network of paths for walking and cycling, which contributes to quality of life, health and inward investment. Effective masterplanning will have ensured that linkage to the green network, accessible civic and greenspaces and enhanced access will have accompanied development.	Some • The IMFLDP2 identifies and safeguards areas of quality open space and opportunities for developing green networks and active travel routes. New developments are required to provide areas of new open space, including supplementary guidance. Direct provision and/or developer contributions are sought towards active travel improvements where appropriate. • New large-scale mixed-use developments at West and East Inverness have been successfully masterplanned through the use of Council led development briefs with a focus on green networks and sustainable travel, for example the Inverness Campus.
• have more efficient forms of travel – the area will have seen substantial improvements to the existing transport network through improvements to the road network, seeing an increase in the numbers of people walking, cycling as a result of the green network, and taking	Some • Considerable improvements to transport networks, including delivery of new active travel routes to link key destinations in Inverness and within other Inner Moray Firth settlements. • Modest increases have been seen in the number of people walking and cycling.

the urban rail/bus networks and delivery of better connections for local road freight to and from longer haul Caledonian canal, rail, sea and air routes. As part of these improvements, a new railway station will have been provided at Dalcross.	• Rail freight is a successful mode of transport, with Needlefield Rail Yard currently operating in Inverness and a new rail siding at a wood processing plant near Morayhill under construction. • Two new rail stations opened, Conon Bridge in 2013 and Inverness Airport (Dalcross) in 2023. • Port of Inverness and Port of Cromarty Firth continue to support the movement of goods in and out of the region.
• have resolved its infrastructure constraints - an effective partnership of all funding bodies will have removed the barriers to growth. As well as improvements to the A9 trunk road, the West Link, A96 upgrade, the Nairn By-pass and a new station at Dalcross will have been delivered. Broadband, electricity grid networks and drainage infrastructure will no longer restrict the economic potential of the area.	Some • Challenges remain in resolving some significant transport constraints, whilst West Link in Inverness was completed in 2017 and the final section of A9 dualling in the Highland LDP area is under construction, firm funding and delivery timescales are yet to be confirmed for other major Transport Scotland projects, including A9/A96 Inshes to Smithton, A96 Dualling Inverness to Nairn (including Nairn Bypass) and A9/A82 Longman Junction Improvement Scheme. • Significant broadband improvements have taken place, alongside ongoing upgrades to electricity grid and drainage networks.
• have diversified its economy - there will be more, different jobs. A new education campus accommodating a range of educational institutions, including a base for the University of the Highlands and Islands and Inverness College UHI, space for commercial spin-off companies and a regional sports facility, will have expanded educational opportunities and generated employment, helping stem the loss of young people from the region. Other ports and harbours, including Inverness and Invergordon will have supported the growth of tourist and renewables	Good • The Inverness Campus opened in 2015, almost 50,000sqm of floorspace and 1,200 jobs have been delivered, including UHI Inverness and a National Treatment Centre, as well as other technology, life sciences, renewables and advanced manufacturing organisations. Ambitious phase 2 mixed use planning application for over 80,000sqm floor space is currently under determination. • „Plans at advanced stage for a new floodlit all-weather pitch facility within Inverness Campus. • All ICFGF sites, including Inverness and Invergordon have ambitious renewables related expansion plans.

related economic development. More all weather tourist facilities related to the environment will have bolstered the role of the area as a tourist hub and gateway to the wider Highlands. The airport and its related business park will have expanded to accommodate increased national and international trade. The UHI will have developed a thriving City campus contributing to academic excellence in fields such as bio-technology and life sciences based on the Centre for Health Science. More traditional local industrial enterprises will also have been accommodated in a new location east of Inverness.	• Port of Cromarty Firth (Invergordon) has seen significant growth in the number of cruise ships calling, with a peak of 130 in 2023. • A number of all-weather tourist facilities have been upgraded, including the Loch Ness Centre at Drumnadrochit and a number of distilleries. • Inverness Airport terminal building upgraded to accommodate additional passengers, and further expansion is being considered. • Several large-scale developments have been delivered within Inverness Airport Business Park, capacity remains for further development. • New facility for Scottish School of Forestry was completed in 2016 in Balloch, east Inverness.
• be regenerated and renewed – brownfield land and buildings in the City and other settlements across the area will have been brought back into more productive use. This will range from buildings in our City and town centres and major regeneration areas such as the Longman landfill site, the Longman Industrial Estate core area and the Invergordon Tank Farm.	Some • Some reuse of land and buildings in the city and towns, including delivery of affordable homes within city centre sites at Union Street, Academy Street, Church Street and Raining's Close and Nairn town centre. • Whilst there have been a number of new developments within the Longman Industrial Estate, challenges remain in delivering comprehensive regeneration at the Longman Landfill site and Invergordon Tank Farm.

CaSPlan

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

Table 14:7 CaSPlan Outcomes and Progress

Objective	Comment
Growing Communities: A network of successful, sustainable and socially inclusive communities	Some • Caithness and Sutherland have experienced greater population and working age population

where people want to live, which provide the most convenient access to key services, training and employment and are the primary locations for inward investment.	decline than all local authorities in Scotland. Decline has occurred in both remote rural areas and the towns of Wick and Thurso. • Town centres have faced significant challenges in recent years, in particular the growth of online retailing. This has coincided with a rise in vacancy rates in most Caithness and Sutherland towns, with Wick significantly above the Highland average at 23.9% in 2024/25. • Larger settlements in the area continue to provide a range of key services. • UHI provides a range of courses from their campuses at Dornoch, Halkirk and Thurso, including specialist renewable energy, golf and equine courses. • Some employment facilities are located within settlements, including Golspie Business Park and Wick Business Park. Town centres also provide employment facilities, particularly in the food and drink sector. Other significant employers are locations without settlements, in particular at Dounreay.
Employment: A strong, diverse and sustainable economy characterised as being an internationally renowned centre for renewable energy, world class engineering, land management and sea based industries and a tourist industry that combines culture, history, adventure and wildlife.	Good • Caithness and north east and central Sutherland, has attracted many proposals for generation, storage, use and transmission of renewable energy and associated employment, both on and off shore. • Sea based industries continue to provide employment, including fish farming and Scrabster Harbour for landing large catches of fish, as well as calls from cruise ships, cargo vessels and ferries. • The growth in popularity of the North Coast 500 route for the region. • Upgrades to visitor facilities at tourist attractions that celebrate the natural environment, including at the North West Highlands Geo-park and at Forsinard Flows within the Flow Country World Heritage Site.
Connectivity and Transport: Enhanced communications, utilities	Some

and transport infrastructure that support communities and economic growth, with development anchored to existing or planned provision.	• Telecommunications networks and broadband coverage have improved, including delivery of Local Full Fibre Network in Wick and Thurso. • The Transport Scotland Berriedale Braes Improvement Project was completed in 2020, this improved time and road safety on this part of the A9. Naver Bridge south of Bettyhill on the A836 was replaced in 2026 at a cost of £11M, including the upgrading a section of this road to twin track. Georgemas Junction strategic rail freight and transport hub supports some freight movements and locations for new sidings continue to be explored. • A number of water and waste-water improvement projects have been delivered, including upgrades to water mains at Wick and Occumster and sewer upgrade at Thurso. • A key factor that informed site allocation choices for development in CaSPlan was the availability of infrastructure, a number of these sites have been completed and are under construction. • Northwest 2045 is a cross-sectoral network operating across North West Highland to attempt to reverse trends of unaffordable housing for local people, falling school rolls and employment scarcity.
Environment and Heritage: High quality places where the outstanding environment and natural, built and cultural heritage is celebrated and valued assets are safeguarded.	Good • The policy framework in national policy and the HwLDP has sought to ensure the natural environment is protected and enhanced. • A key achievement in the protection of natural assets was the inscribing of The Flow Country as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2024. • Several historic buildings restored to a high standard, for example The Barn Business Centre in Ardgay and Kyle House near Tongue, the latter winning a RIAS Architecture Award.

WestPlan

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

Table 14:8 WestPlan Outcomes and Progress

Objective	Comment
Growing Communities: All places are better designed. Larger settlements and their centres have retained and expanded facilities. Their populations have increased because of this better access to facilities and because they are safe, attractive and healthy places to live.	Some • New high quality, modern developments, have been delivered, including a new hospital at Broadford and new private and affordable housing developments. • Vacancy rates in WestPlan's recognised town centres (Fort William, Ullapool and Portree) remain below the Highland average and Portree continues to have a very low vacancy rate of 0.8% in 2024/25. • Census data from 2011 and 2022 The population in Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh declined slightly, whereas Lochaber increased slightly and the Isle of Skye and Raasay more substantially at 4.3%. • Place Standard results found the area to score relatively well in terms of safety and access to nature and parks, but less well for facilities and services, active travel and public transport. • Many improvements have been made to active travel connections, including in Caol and Lochyside and Ullapool through the delivery of flood prevention schemes. • Fort William 2040 is a shared vision for the future of Fort William and Lochaber based around a number of themes that aim to deliver a range of improvements to the area, including affordable housing, visitor accommodation, improved connections and focus on taking advantage of water assets to support industry, tourism and communities.
Employment: The local economy is growing, diverse and sustainable. West Highland has an enhanced reputation as a heritage tourism	Good • Economy continues to provide employment in traditional industries such as manufacturing and

destination, as a base for marine renewables and as an effective place for working at home and with the land.	fisheries as well as more diverse opportunities in renewable energy and tourism. • The areas reputation as a heritage tourism destination continues to grow, with increased visitor numbers to heritage attractions, in particular the Glenfinnan Viaduct and a number of iconic castles. • Further investment is now underway at Kishorn to enable the port to play a pivotal role in the delivery of offshore wind projects. • Census data shows the proportion of people working from home in 2022 was higher than both Highland and Scottish averages, suggesting the area is an effective place to do this.
Connectivity and Transport: Public agencies and other partners co-ordinate and optimise their investment in agreed growth locations. Communities are better supported to become more self reliant, to have more pride in their area and identity, to diversify their populations, and to have more control of local resources.	Some • Investment planned and taken place, including mixed use developments at Broadford, A' Chill Bheag and Blàr Mòr at Fort William. • Challenges to diversifying populations, with census data finding there to be significant increases in the proportion of the population aged 65+ between 2011 - 2022 in the Plan area. • A range of policy areas, rather than the planning system alone, can help to allow communities to become more self-reliant, for example contributions towards this have been made through the establishment of community trusts and community asset transfers. • Registered Local Place Plans haven begun to enable communities to convey their proposals for the use of land and buildings in their local area, including at Lochalsh, Broadford and Torridon and Kinlochewe.
Environment and Heritage: Resources are better managed: • A higher proportion of journeys are shorter, safer, healthier, more reliable and made in a carbon efficient way. • Water, heat sources, land and buildings are used, sited and	Some • Improvements have been made to a number of active travel routes to encourage modal shift towards active travel. • The policy framework in national policy and the HwLDP has helped to ensure that water, heat sources, land and buildings are used, sited

designed in a way that is carbon clever and respectful of heritage resources. • Waste is reduced, reused, recycled or treated as close to source as possible to generate renewable energy. • High quality places predominate where the outstanding environment and natural, built and cultural heritage is celebrated and valued assets are safeguarded.	and designed in a way that is carbon clever and respectful of heritage resources. • Significant improvements have been made to waste and recycling, including a new Waste Transfer Station in Fort William that began operating in 2025 and a new facility is currently under construction in Portree. • The policy framework has sought to ensure the natural and historic environment is protected and enhanced.

IMFLDP

- 14.15 IMFLDP1 was adopted in 2015. This plan's vision was as set out in the HwLDP for the Inner Moray Firth area, no updated vision or outcomes were identified within this plan. For an overview of the progress in achieving the HwLDP vision for the area see Table 14:6. A number of the objectives described were achieved during the period IMFLDP1 was in force (2015 to 2024).
- 14.16 IMFLDP2 was adopted by the Council in July 2024. Its outcomes are listed in Table 14:9. Given the relatively recent adoption of this LDP it can be expected that progress on meeting some of its outcomes are at an early stage.

Table 14:9 IMFLDP2 Outcomes and Progress

Objective	Comment
Environment: The Inner Moray Firth's built, cultural and natural assets will be safeguarded and appropriately managed. Water, waste, heat, land and buildings will be used, re-used, located and designed in a carbon clever way. Environmental quality of all places will be safeguarded and enhanced.	Good • The policy framework in national policy and the HwLDP, and new environment policies in IMFLDP2, have sought to ensure the environment is safeguarded and appropriately enhanced.
Employment: The Inner Moray Firth economy will be growing, greener, circular and diverse. Local enterprises will be national leaders in the life sciences, sustainable tourism and renewable energy	Good • The ICFGF was announced in 2023 and aims to boost innovation, create high quality jobs, promote growth and regeneration and make a significant contribution to achieving net zero ambitions. It is anticipated to create 11,300 new

sectors. More traditional sectors such as construction, food and drink and smaller scale general industry will have continued to thrive and provide jobs close to where people live reducing the need to travel.	jobs within Highland over 25 years and £6.5bn investment. It is centred at ports in Ardersier, Inverness, Highland Deephaven, Invergordon and Nigg as well as sites at Inverness Campus. • The Inverness Campus has continued to attract the life sciences sector, including the opening in recent years of the Life Sciences Innovation Centre and an NHS National Treatment Centre. It also attracted other sectors, with a new headquarters for a large energy and infrastructure provider currently under construction. • Sustainable tourism potential growth areas identified in the plan, particularly at Loch Ness, where the Tourism BID was named the first carbon neutral BID in the UK, have made progress towards sustainability. • More traditional sectors have continued to thrive and provide new opportunities, for example through the construction of housing sites in Inverness and Tornagrain and industrial development at the nearby Ardersier Port. • Shortages in industrial land in and around Inverness are understood to continue to pose a risk to competitiveness and economic growth.
Growing Communities: Our communities will be sustainable, well-designed places with homes which meet people's needs. More people will want to live in Inverness and the larger towns and villages as they are attractive, safe, socially inclusive and healthy, with thriving centres and better access to services and facilities. Inner Moray Firth communities will function as networks of locally resilient and self-supporting places with equality of access to local resources.	Good • The policy framework, in national policy, HwLDP and this plan's policies on placemaking, affordable housing, accessible and adaptable homes and transport seek to ensure our communities will be sustainable, well-designed places which meet people's needs. • Inverness continues grow, with over 500 housing completions in its housing market area since the plan's adoption. Many of these completions were with key strategic growth sites at Ness-side, Inverness East and Westercraigs. • In terms of local resources Local Living analysis found between 67% and 75% of homes

	within settlements had either a very high or high level of walkable services.
Connectivity: It will be easy to move around and between settlements in the Inner Moray Firth area. Walking and cycling will be the logical choice for most day to day trips, with longer journeys made using an efficient, reliable public transport system and, in rural areas, shared transport and electric vehicles. Sustainable regional, national and global connections will be available from modern bus and rail stations, harbours and Inverness Airport. Improved digital connectivity throughout the Plan area will enable home working for most people, helping to reduce the need to travel.	Some • The plan's sustainable transport strategy is contributing to the delivery of new and improved active links within and between settlements, including the £1.4M Culbokie Active Travel Village project that is currently under construction. • Number of electric vehicles and charging facilities has increased substantially throughout the plan area (Licensed ULEVs and EV Public Charging Infrastructure Statistics). • Issues are ongoing relating to the reliability of public transport, in particular a national shortage of bus drivers is limiting an efficient and reliable public transport system. This is an issue outwith the control of planning system that will require ongoing multidisciplinary initiatives to overcome. • The Inverness Station Masterplan continues to progress in partnership with key stakeholders. • Port of Inverness and Port of Cromarty Firth continue to support the movement of goods in and out of the region, these ports, alongside other ICFGP at Ardersier and Nigg also have ambitious renewables related expansion plans. • Passenger numbers continue to increase at Inverness Airport, and new routes have been introduced to Gran Canaria and Lapland. Further expansion continues to be considered. • Digital connectivity continues to be improved throughout the plan area, including through the Scottish Government R100 Programme.

Allocations

Housing

- 14.17 Detailed evidence on housing has been provided within **Chapter 9 Housing**, including data and commentary on housing completions and housing land supply. This section of the chapter should therefore be read in conjunction with **Chapter 9**, and further detail can be obtained from a number of sources, including

the Council's [Housing Land Audit](#), [New House Completions Dashboard](#) and [Deliverable Housing Land Pipeline](#).

- 14.18 A range of sites are allocated for solely housing and housing as part of mixed-use sites in the HwLDP and the area LDPs. A breakdown is provided in Table 14:10 that outlines the progress of sites allocated for housing in each LDP. A number of sites, particularly in the Inner Moray Firth area, are allocated in both the HwLDP and relevant area LDP, a number of sites were also allocated in IMFLDP1 and rolled forward into IMFLDP2. This is reflected in Table 14:10, and as such these columns should not be summed.

Table 14:10 Progress of Sites Allocated for Housing

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

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

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

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

- 14.19 Table 14:10 demonstrates some progress on a number of sites allocated for housing in the HwLDP. Many of the HwLDP allocations are large scale sites that are being developed in phases (including at Inverness East and Tornagrain) and therefore were expected to take a significant number of years to reach completion. A number of other sites in the HwLDP were not carried forward or were allocated for alternative uses in area LDPs. These reasons help to explain why a relatively small number of sites have been completed in the HwLDP.
- 14.20 In the CaSPlan and WestPlan areas, a considerable number of allocations have planning consent for all or part of allocated sites. Whilst a number of sites are under construction or complete, historic challenges to delivering homes in these areas of Highland continue to inhibit progress. The remote nature of many of these areas and physical constraints of development mean that there is a virtual absence of private, volume house builder interest in these areas.
- 14.21 The IMFLDP area experiences the most development pressure within Highland, and this is reflected in the number of housing allocations and the progress of

sites in both IMFLDP1 and the more recently adopted IMFLDP2. A significant number of large-scale sites have been completed, are under construction and/or have planning consent. The highest number of housing completions is within Inverness city, where a number of strategic sites have made considerable progress, including the completions of Culduthel/Slackbuie, Milton of Leys and Inshes developments. Development at Ness Castle, Ness-side, Inverness East and Westerbraigs continues to be delivered.

- 14.22 A breakdown of housing completions per year in Highland is illustrated in Figure 14:1. The large number of completions, each year and collectively, helps to illustrate that Highland maintained a generous supply of deliverable housing land throughout much of the plan period. Figure 14:1 shows there were fluctuations in completions since 2012, with a significant drop seen in 2020/21 during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Subsequently completion numbers rose to peak levels and in recent years completions have decreased to become more comparable to pre-pandemic years.
- 14.23 Figure 14:1 shows also shows the number of housing completions on allocated sites in comparison to the total number of completions. The portion of completions on allocated sites has generally increased since 2012, to a peak of 86% in 2022/23, suggesting a move towards a more plan led system in Highland. Whilst the proportion of homes completed on allocated sites has decreased in recent years, it remains above levels pre-2018.

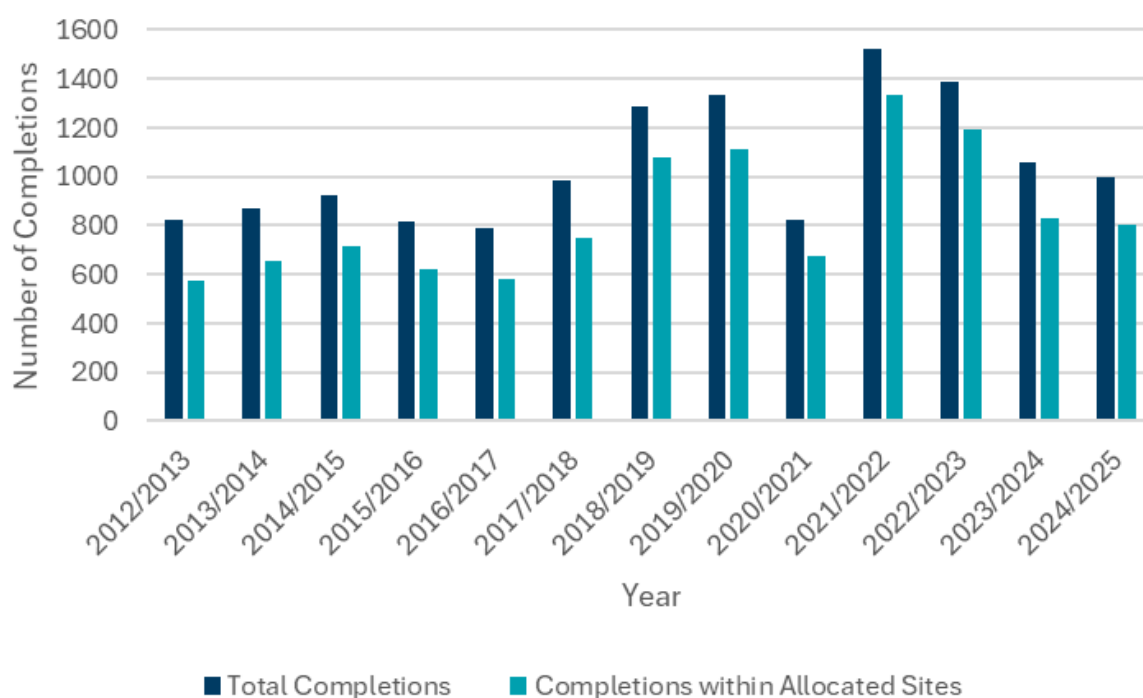


Figure 14:1 Housing Completions in Highland 2012/13 – 2024/25 (*House Completions in Highland*)

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

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

LDP	Number of house completions*	Number of completions on allocated sites**	Proportion of completions on allocated sites
HwLDP	13,045	1,767	N/A
CaSPlan	1,220	532	44%
WestPlan	2,602	852	33%
IMFLDP***	9,223	7,096	77%

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

***Recorded completions to end of July 2025*

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

Employment Land

- 14.25 Detailed evidence on employment land has been provided within **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**. This section of the chapter should therefore be read in conjunction with **Chapter 8**, and further detail can be obtained from a number of sources, including the Council's [Highland Delivery Programme](#).
- 14.26 A range of sites are allocated for business and industrial use in the HwLDP and area LDPs. Each area LDP details employment land allocations within the Plan area's main towns and villages, as well as strategic sites which can generate significant employment activity outwith these settlements, known as Economic Development Areas.
- 14.27 The number and progress of sites in each of the LDPs is shown in Table 14:12. The data presented in Table 14:12 has been collected by desk top analysis of data available on the Council's planning and building standards software systems. The table provides a high level overview of the uptake of allocations where information was available. Future, more detailed studies, including a future Business and Industrial Land Audit, will present more detailed results.

- 14.28 The delivery of sites allocated for employment land differs from many housing sites. Typically, allocated sites are delivered incrementally by a number of different developers and/or occupiers. It is therefore normal for sites to take a number of years to be fully built out. A number employment sites in the HwLDP were not carried forward or were allocated for alternative uses in area LDPs. Despite this, the previous Business and Industrial Land Audit found that there were significant constraints to the delivery of numerous employment sites for a range of reasons, including ownership, marketability, physical constraints and the level of investment required to service sites. These reasons help explain why a relatively small number of sites have been completed.
- 14.29 Despite numerous sites remaining undeveloped, there are localised areas where there are known shortfalls, in industrial land. The IMFLDP2 explains that there is a shortfall in industrial land in and around Inverness, to meet both large and small-scale business needs. To address this imbalance this plan includes a new industrial land policy which aims to protect the current supply of industrial sites, new industrial land allocations and provides a supportive framework for new industrial development on unallocated sites. Due to the limited time since IMFLDP2 was adopted it is difficult to comprehensively assess the performance of this policy. However, it is known that there has been significant interest for industrial development on several sites within and close to Inverness.
- 14.30 There have been several areas where substantial areas of employment land have been, and continue to be delivered, including Inverness Campus, Inverness Airport Business Park, Port of Cromarty Firth and Port of Nigg.

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

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

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

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

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

Planning Appeals

14.31 The outcome of planning appeals, both local reviews and to Scottish Ministers, are a useful indicator of how local development plans are performing. Table 14:13 provides a breakdown of the proportion of original decisions upheld since the HwLDP was adopted.

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

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

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

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

Department of Planning and Environmental Appeals (DPEA)

- 14.33 There were 24 appeals to the DPEA in the period from February 2023 to August 2025 (excluding applications within in the CNPA area). Of these, 10 were at appeal because an officer approval recommendation had been overturned by Councillors at Planning Application Committee meetings. Of these, nine appeals were allowed, and one refusal was upheld.
- 14.34 Of the 14 instances where applications were refused at Planning Application Committee meetings consistent with the officer recommendation, there were five instances where the DPEA overturned the Council's decision. This represents 36% of appeals to the DPEA during this period. These applications were for a range of different developments, including different scales of residential development and energy developments. Numerous policies are referred to in these decisions including NPF4 policies 14, 11, 17, 29 and HwLDP policies 28, 29, 35, 36 and 56.
- 14.35 Two proposals were for new homes. In one case, the Reporter allowed a house in the countryside as it was considered the proposal was consistent with NPF4 Policy 17 (a) to reinstate a former dwelling house, and that part (b) relating to local living was not applicable, and also because design policies and guidance were interpreted differently. Similarly, the second case was allowed due to different interpretations of design policies and weight was given to the efficient use of brownfield land.
- 14.36 Two other cases where the Council's decision was overturned were for energy applications. The first related to a wind farm re-design, where the Reporter concluded, contrary to the Council's reason for refusal, that the increased height of a number of turbines would not have a significantly detrimental visual impact. The other appeal allowed was for an anaerobic digestion plant, where the Reporter did not find any grounds to suspect any significant adverse effect on aviation safety, contrary to a key reason for Council refusal.
- 14.37 Given the small number of instances where the DPEA overturned the Council's decision, the range of different developments and the differing reasons for overturning Council decisions, there are no fundamental policy issues arising. A detailed policy issue which may require consideration is the application of NPF4 Policy with regard the part (a) criterion viii relating to reinstating former dwelling homes.

Local Review Body

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

Legal Challenges

- 14.41 There have been a small number of legal challenges to planning decisions in the plan area in recent years, a number have been concluded and some are ongoing. Those that have concluded have not raised any policy issues, including the Sutherland Space Hub legal challenge described below.
- 14.42 The Sutherland Space Hub was granted planning permission by The Highland Council in August 2021 for the construction of vertical launch space port with launch operations control centre, site integration facility, launch pad complex, antenna park, access road, fencing, services and associated infrastructure. The decision of the North Planning Applications Committee to grant permission was challenged via a judicial review. The hearing for this was held between 08 and 10 June 2021, and the Council were subsequently informed of the judgement in the case where the petition made to the Court requesting the decision of the Council to be quashed. The judgement dismissed the petition and therefore the planning permission stands. Given the outcome of this judicial review, it does not raise any policy issues.

Appropriateness of Spatial Strategy

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

Caithness and Sutherland

- 14.45 The CaSPlan Strategy Map shows the spatial strategy for the area which aims to address priorities through the Vision's four key outcomes. Commentary on achieving these outcomes was provided in Table 14:7 and overview of its appropriateness is provided below.
- 14.46 This Spatial Strategy was appropriate for the following reasons:
- Directed development to the most sustainable locations in the largest settlements with sufficient infrastructure capacity.
 - Within remote and rural areas, it took a flexible approach to development to help maintain and grow the population of these areas.
 - Recognised tourism potential, including the North Coast 500, East Coast Tourism Corridor and an area for Coordinated Tourism Connections around the Dornoch Firth and Kyle of Sutherland.
 - Focussed economic development within Caithness, identifying much of the area for business expansion, including several economic development areas.
 - It sought to increase the vibrancy and vitality of town centres by steering a mix of uses to these locations, encouraging reuse of vacant land and buildings and increasing activity and potential custom.
 - Supported the delivery of key infrastructure including digital fibre network and high voltage energy transmission network.
 - It sought to value and enhance the natural environment by enhancing green networks and recognising the value of peatland resource.

West Highland and Islands

- 14.47 The WestPlan vision and spatial strategy diagram provides a visual representation of the key projects and policy proposals supported within the Plan, that aim to achieve the plans vision through four key outcomes. Commentary on achieving these outcomes was provided in Table 14:8. An overview of appropriateness of the wider spatial strategy is provided below.
- 14.48 This Spatial Strategy was appropriate for the following reasons:
- Directed development to the most sustainable locations in the largest settlements with sufficient infrastructure capacity.
 - It maintained the Fort William hinterland to allow for a managed approach to housing development to help prevent unsustainable growth, protect its character, landscape and setting and breaching of service network capacities.
 - It identified fragile areas where there is a flexible approach to development to help maintain and grow the population of these areas, including rural diversification.
 - It sought to increase the quantity, quality and type of job opportunities by allocating land for industrial expansion at key harbours such as Kishorn, providing mixed-use allocations that could support home working, and by providing support for rural diversification in particularly fragile areas.
 - It supported tourism expansion where it would better utilise the area's outstanding natural and cultural heritage for example at Inverlochy Castle, Aonach Mor and within Sleat.
 - It sought to guide "destination" developments to sites within the principal town and village centres to bolster their role as well-connected meeting places and as hubs for local facilities.
 - It provided land allocations/safeguards to support new, faster and more reliable transport connections for business and tourist users, including link roads for Fort William and Portree, ferry service improvements particularly at Uig, cycle network improvements, air service improvements particularly at Ashaig and recreational sailing improvements.
 - It sought to enable growth while respecting the built and natural environment that is highly valued by residents, businesses and visitors.
 - It sought to provide protected, connected and enhanced green networks within/around every larger settlement.
 - It supported the delivery of key infrastructure including broadband improvements and new health and school facilities.

Inner Moray Firth

14.49 The IMFLDP2 spatial strategy diagram shows the spatial priorities for delivering its four outcomes. Commentary on achieving these outcomes was provided in Table 14:9. An overview of appropriateness of the wider spatial strategy is provided below.

14.50 This Spatial Strategy was appropriate for the following reasons:

- Policies and proposals were incorporated to protect, enhance and create habitats such as riparian green networks.
- It identified sites within existing settlements and town centres for employment, alongside a number of Economic Development Areas and strategic renewable energy zones where major new employment is expected to enable the transition to net zero.
- It sought to reinforce the role of town centres as the prime destinations for people and business by helping centres to adapt to challenges and ensuring they continue to function as sustainable cores of our communities.
- It directed development to the most economically viable and environmentally sustainable places.
- It maintained the Inner Moray Firth hinterland to allow for a managed approach to housing development to help prevent unsustainable growth, protect its character, landscape and setting and breaching of service network capacities.
- It identified three specific areas, the Loch Ness corridor, around Nairn and an area around the Sutors of Cromarty, as offering significant potential to grow as tourism destinations because of their locational and sustainable connectivity advantages.
- It promoted a pattern and mix of development that should minimise the need for unnecessary travel.
- It identifies a range of transport improvements, including between settlement active travel network, where growth is supported by rail corridors and other transport improvements.

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

Lessons Learned

- 14.52 The Council hosted lessons learned workshops with officers from Development Management in spring and summer 2025. Within the lessons learned workshops, it was explained to officers that these lessons learnt could be in regard to the ease of interpreting and applying the policy, communicating it and defending decisions, or the standard of developments that result from it. Any development types that do not currently have a robust policy framework upon which to determine them were also discussed.
- 14.53 The lessons learned outlined below have focussed on lessons learnt since the publication of NPF4, looking forward to what the format of the HLDP will take without duplicating NPF4 policy. Lessons learned should be read in conjunction with implications for the plan of each Evidence Report chapter. The policies discussed below focus on those that have been found to be the most resource intensive to apply, as such not all policy areas are covered. A comprehensive overview of the implications for the plan for all policy areas is covered within Evidence Report chapters.
- 14.54 The Council is also reviewing the future role of its current suite of statutory and non-statutory supplementary guidance documents. Given that supplementary guidance can no longer come forward for adoption, the Council is considering whether any key provisions covered in supplementary guidance need to be provided within the HLDP as policy and/or as detailed appendices.

Tiered LDP Framework

- 14.55 Despite not being part of a former Strategic Development Planning Authority, a tiered LDP framework continued in Highland with the adoption of the HwLDP in 2012 followed by three area LDPs. However, this has resulted in a complex policy landscape as planning considerations continue to expand.
- 14.56 HwLDP has emerged as the dominant player in regard to planning policy wording, while area LDP's in practice provide settlement or allocation specific context and requirements. Area LDPs do also contain general policies but, with the exception of IMFLDP2, many of these require review to reflect changing circumstances such as the recognition of the Climate and Ecological Emergencies, new trends and opportunities in the development industry and wider economy, and the evolution of national planning policy through NPF4.
- 14.57 The preparation of Area LDPs with a greatly expanded remit than was the case previously has resulted in a delay to updating the HwLDP owing to the increased resources needed to prepare LDPs. This means the overarching policies used in determining all planning applications have been in place since 2012 and were of a considerable age when NPF4 was adopted in 2023.

- 14.58 It is imperative that HLDP brings clarity and a consistency to planning policy across Highland, and updates policies used in decision making. While there is no requirement for HLDP to replicate NPF4, better alignment will reduce pressure on resources in communicating policy position.

Policy Lessons

Cultural and Natural Heritage

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

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

Soils

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

- Whether small scale developments may be acceptable on CPP, for example telecommunication masts.

- Introduction of a requirement for sequential site selection.
- Ensure there is a presumption against development within CPP that has previously been restored.
- Provide clarification on how to judge when disturbance concerns are outweighed by wider public benefit, this could, for example, include affordable housing.
- Provide more consistent wording, for example similar to NPF4 Policy 6 Forestry, Woodland and Trees.
- Consider policy specifically for the Flow Country World Heritage Site, including limitations for development and opportunities for restoration.

Coast

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

Energy

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

and proposed residential areas to future proposals for hubs, substations, and ancillary works.

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

Transport

14.63 National and local planning and transport policy has evolved in recent years and there is now a much sharper focus on responding to the climate change emergency by reducing the need to travel unsustainably. Despite this, census data shows there is a persistent dominance of car-based travel in Highland. Given large parts of Highland are rural and sparsely populated, the plan will accept that vehicles will always be needed, including private cars, in some capacity to enable movement of people, goods and services. However, there is real potential for modal shift in certain parts of Highland, in particular within larger settlements. It is important any HLDP policy considers feedback listed below alongside implications for the plan in **Chapter 10 Transport:**

- Embeds the NTS2 Sustainable Travel Hierarchy and Sustainable Investment Hierarchy.

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

Design

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

Rural Housing

- 14.65 HwLDP Policy 35 and Policy 36 relate to housing in the countryside. Policy 35 places a restrictive approach on new housing in Highland's most pressured areas, known as 'hinterland areas', around Inverness and other Inner Moray Firth settlements and Fort William. Policy 36 supports the principle of new housing development elsewhere in the countryside subject to detailed considerations, including siting and design. These policies are not wholly aligned with NPF4 Policy 17, there are a number of key differences (as detailed in **Chapter 9: Housing**), including:
- Opportunities to expand defined 'housing groups' in rural areas are not explicitly supported in NPF4;
 - Introduction of consideration of how new rural homes will contribute towards local living;
 - The use of The Scottish Government's sixfold Urban Rural Classification 2020 to identify remote rural areas which is derived differently from the Hinterland boundary; and

- Requirement for proposals to be supported in remote rural areas to support and sustain existing fragile communities; and support identified local housing outcomes.

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

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

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

Developer Contributions

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

- Most appropriate place for detailed guidance, potential for an appendix to the plan or non-statutory supplementary guidance.
- Introduction of developer contributions towards a wider range of infrastructure where suitably justified by evidence, including waste facilities and healthcare.

- Ensuring tourism development contributes to relevant infrastructure as is currently not required to contribute to community facilities/open space.
- Considering whether commuted sums towards existing adjacent parks are more appropriate than provision of new small play parks which have often been poorly maintained and offer poor range of equipment for all ages.
- The key role the Delivery Plan plays in identifying schemes contributions should be taken towards, including the South Loch Ness Strategy Road Improvement Strategy.
- Mechanisms to ensure all relevant developments are required to pay contributions, including allocated and windfall sites.
- Review levels of discount applied to small scale developments, some level of discount should still be applied in the interests of viability and resources.
- Ensure contributions to be collected from small scale, piecemeal housing development when any specified thresholds are met.
- Where need is justified require all new homes to contribute to community facilities and affordable housing rather than limited to developments of four or more homes.

Blue and Green Networks

- 14.69 There have been some challenges in implementing NPF4 Policy 20 Blue and Green Infrastructure to development proposals. The HLDP should consider providing greater detail, for example policy protection for access rights and core paths, including existing and planned/improved active travel routes and habitat corridors and greater consideration for opportunities within/near settlements. There is also an opportunity to review IMFLDP2 greenspace and green network policies for inclusion in the HDLP. Implications for the plan of **Chapter 5 Nature and Environment** and **Chapter 13 Design, Wellbeing, Local Living and Placemaking** should also be considered.

Flood Risk

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

Tourism

- 14.71 Both HwLDP Policy 44 Tourist Accommodation and NPF4 Policy 30 Tourism have been frequently used in the assessment of planning applications owing to the significant increase in tourism in Highland. In north Highland this can be attributed in part due to the North Coast 500. There has also been a significant increase in the number of Short Term Lets to accommodate tourists.
- 14.72 These policies have been found to have limited effectiveness in controlling the cumulative impacts of 'camping pod' type developments, directing when a new home associated with tourism accommodation may be acceptable and the consideration of accommodation for seasonal and construction employees.
- 14.73 There has been a significant rise in 'camping pod' type development throughout Highland, both within settlements and rural areas. Cumulative impacts, including landscape, transport, servicing and amenity considerations are having an impact on Highland communities. In particular amenity issues can arise for camping pod type developments located within urban gardens.
- 14.74 There has been ongoing debate in Highland regarding the role of Short Term Lets (STLs) and their impact on the availability of housing in recognition of pressures on the housing market over the next 10 years. The continued growth of the tourism industry has reinforced the debate as to whether more areas warrant consideration for designation as Short-Term Let Control Areas (STLCAs).
- 14.75 Consideration will need to be given in the preparation of the HLDP to:
- The merits of introducing a tourism accommodation policy to allow for the specific circumstances of Highland, in particular to provide clear policy on circumstances when camping pods within settlements may be supported.
 - Any circumstances where a new rural house for a manager of tourism accommodation may be supported.
 - Address current policy void for worker accommodation, that is often proposed in the form of caravans or modular units for hospitality staff and construction workers.
 - Consider preparing policy guidance, building upon guidance that was previously drafted for caravans.
 - Potential for further STLCA which require review of the existing non-statutory STLCA Policy, so that this is made statutory and well suited for application in any STLCAs designated.
- 14.76 Implications for the plan in **Chapter 8 Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places** and **Chapter 9 Housing** should also be considered.

