

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee:	Economy and Infrastructure - Bulletin
Date:	4 February 2021
Report Title:	Highland Development Plan Newsletter 2021 and the National Planning Framework 4 – Bulletin Item
Report By:	Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure and Environment

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report presents the 2021 Development Plan Newsletter, which also acts as the Council's formal Development Plan Scheme. The Newsletter confirms what the main areas of focus will be for our development plan work over the coming year and how it is intended to engage our communities and stakeholders on development plan preparation and place planning while social distancing measures are in place. The report also provides an update on Scottish Government's preparation of National Planning Framework 4, including its publication of a Position Statement in November 2020, and on opportunities for the Council to input to NPF4, including further developing the Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy (IRSS) for Highland. The timescales for the NPF4 will influence the Council's timescales .

2. National Planning Framework 4

- 2.1 As Members will recall, the Scottish Government is preparing a new National Planning Framework (NPF4), which will incorporate Scottish Planning Policy and when finalised will be part of the Development Plan for the first time. As part of early engagement in the preparation of NPF4, the Scottish Government launched a 'Call for Ideas' in January this 2020 with engagement materials being published on the website <https://www.transformingplanning.scot/>. Planning Authorities were also invited to prepare Indicative Regional Spatial Strategies (IRSS) to inform NPF4, potentially doing so as part of a regional grouping with other authorities. Draft NPF4 is expected to be laid before Parliament and opened for consultation in Autumn 2021. It is anticipated that the new Development Plan making provisions of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 (including but not limited to the introduction of statutory provisions for the preparation of Regional Spatial Strategies) will be enacted when NPF4 is finalised, which is anticipated to be spring/summer 2022.
- 2.2 During the course of 2020, the Council, in consultation with partners and stakeholders, prepared and submitted to the Scottish Government a Highland Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy (IRSS) together with its suggestions for National Developments and thoughts on a wide range of policy topics. These were published on <https://www.highland.gov.uk/npf> .
- 2.3 Having digested the information received through the Call for Ideas, in late November 2020 the Scottish Government produced an NPF4 [Position Statement](#) setting out its current thinking and alongside that a package of information including:

- [Overview Presentation \(self-read\) of the Position Statement](#)
- [Summary Sheet of Potential Key Policy Shifts](#) (see below)
- [Infographics on the four NPF4 themes](#)
- [Summary of emerging IRSS work](#) (which includes a Highland IRSS summary).

The Position Statement aims to inform further discussions and is not itself a document setting out policy. Scottish Government has emphasised that no decisions have been made and the detail will be extensively consulted on in Autumn 2021. Scottish Government has summarised the potential key policy shifts as follows:

“The Position Statement signals a key shift towards a net zero agenda and sets out thinking over 4 key themes – net zero emissions, resilient communities, wellbeing economy and better greener places.

Some of the most significant changes we expect to explore in the development of NPF4 are:

- *Stronger support for sustainable, low and zero carbon developments.*
- *A renewed emphasis on design, quality and place.*
- *Support for development that reduces the need to travel, in line with the concept of 20 minute neighbourhoods.*
- *A shift in the way we plan our homes so that we focus on meeting our diverse needs, and improve the quality of our places.*
- *New policies to promote an infrastructure-first approach to development at all scales.*
- *A new approach to ensure our places work for everyone, and are greener and healthier.*
- *Enabling development and investment, including inward investment, that improves our collective wellbeing and supports fair work.*
- *New policies to address key economic sectors including food and drink, culture and the creative sectors, and tourism.*
- *Reimagining our city and town centres as a place to live, work and enjoy.*
- *Prioritising development on vacant and derelict land.*
- *Support for development that improves the resilience and sustainability of our rural economy and communities.*
- *Facilitating improvements to our biodiversity and the significant expansion of green infrastructure.”*

2.4 The published deadline for submission of feedback on the Position Statement to Scottish Government is 19 February 2021. Also, we will be receiving feedback from Scottish Government on the Highland IRSS in January 2021 and we are expected to submit a refined version of the IRSS to Scottish Government by the end of April 2021. The timescales placed upon us are tight and the constraints on methods of engagement due to the pandemic continue. At the time of writing, we have asked Scottish Government whether more time can be allowed for responding to the Position Statement and we await a response; we are also looking at options for how to further engage with members, colleagues and stakeholders during this phase of the NPF4 and IRSS work, taking account of timescales, restrictions and pressures. In the meantime the Council's Development Plans Team, in consultation with colleagues, are considering the ideas set out in the Position Statement and how well they align with the Council's earlier submissions. Ahead of us being in a position to advise on more direct and focussed engagement opportunities, we invite Members to review the recent information from Scottish Government linked to above, and email devplans@highland.gov.uk with any queries or points they wish to raise.

3. Context for and updates in the 2021 Development Plans Scheme (Newsletter)

3.1 Planning legislation requires that all local authorities publish a Development Plan Scheme (DPS) outlining the timescales for preparing and consulting upon development plan documents.

3.2 The coronavirus pandemic and the necessary lockdown and social distancing measures clearly have some impact on development plan preparation, particularly in terms of site visits, and public and partner engagement. However, officers are making efforts to continue the plan making process and to engage people despite the more challenging working conditions. Indeed, the Development Plan is likely to play an important role in economic recovery from the impacts of the pandemic alongside addressing the climate and ecological emergency. The Development Plan Scheme includes the following Participation Statement which confirms how people can expect to be engaged in plan preparation while social distancing measures continue to be in place:

Participation Statement

1. We will continue to use our online development plan webpages www.highland.gov.uk/devplans and corresponding consultation portal <http://consult.highland.gov.uk/> as the central location for engaging on our plans. Those that have registered through the portal will receive updates and announcements at key stages of development plan preparation.
2. We will produce interactive online documents that are easy to read and comment upon, and which include clear maps and graphics.
3. We will share online guides, videos or webinars to share information on our main consultations and look into options for holding meetings with particular groups and about specific issues.
4. We will make announcements at key stages using a range of media including social media to keep you up to date and let you know how and when you can get involved.
5. We will continue to liaise with statutory agencies and community groups at key stages to encourage them to participate.

6. In the event that libraries re-open we will provide copies of consultation documents for viewing.
7. In the event that the ban on public meetings is lifted we will review options for face to face events.
8. We will continue to notify the immediate neighbours of potential development sites at both the Main Issues Report and Proposed Plan stages of our Area Local Development Plans.
9. We will monitor feedback on our engagement methods and respond to requests to carry out other forms of engagement and/or extend periods of consultation.

3.3 The Development Plan Scheme also highlights the timescales for plan preparation and where people can contribute to key stages. Our focus over the next year will be to continue the review of the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan and to coordinate the Council's input to the National Planning Framework which, alongside wider changes to the planning system in Scotland, will help to confirm the shape and scope of planning policies required at the local level. The DPS also sets out the role that officers are playing in coordinating development and regeneration activity at the local level that supports the delivery of the development plan.

3.4 Full details of these updates are set out in the Newsletter in **Appendix 1**. The content has been updated to track performance against timescales set out in the 2020 Newsletter, and to provide an indicative programme for preparation of Local Development Plans, Development Briefs and Supplementary Guidance.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure and Environment

Date: 20 January 2021

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Development Plans Newsletter

Cuairt-litir Phlanaichean Leasachaidh

February 2021

This is the annual update of the Highland Council's Development Plans Newsletter which provides an overview of the timetable for preparing land use planning documents for the Highland Council area. This newsletter also acts as the Council's **Development Plan Scheme** that we submit annually to Scottish Government.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented some significant and unexpected challenges for our everyday lives and how our communities are designed for work, education, shopping and leisure activities. It has highlighted and reinforced issues that need to be addressed through ongoing development plan reviews at the national and local level, details of which are set out in this Newsletter.

With restrictions on public gatherings in place for the foreseeable future the approach to consultation has had to adapt. With staff working entirely from home all interactions with customers, partners and colleagues is by electronic means. In light of these arrangements, in June last year the Council approved a revised Participation Statement for development plan preparation (see below). This will continue to guide our approach until national guidelines for social distancing are reviewed.



Our Participation Statement:

1. We will continue to use our online development plan webpages www.highland.gov.uk/devplans and corresponding consultation portal <http://consult.highland.gov.uk/> as the central location for engaging on our plans. Those that have registered through the portal will receive updates and announcements at key stages of development plan preparation.
2. We will produce interactive online documents that are easy to read and comment upon, and which include clear maps and graphics.
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8. We will continue to notify the immediate neighbours of potential development sites at both the Main Issues Report and Proposed Plan stages of our Area Local Development Plans.
9. We will monitor feedback on our engagement methods and respond to requests to carry out other forms of engagement and/or extend periods of consultation.

What's happening now and looking ahead

The focus now and in the year ahead will be the review of the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan, and coordinating Highland's input to new national planning strategy and policies, including preparation of a Highland Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy, and early evidence gathering for future plans.

The delivery of the Development Plan at the local level, alongside other plans and strategies, will continue to feature as an important role of the planning service. Our plans and strategies will also influence the approach to economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and also the climate and ecological emergency. Following the role that the service played in coordinating the Fort William 2040 project, further 'place-planning' work will be progressed over the year ahead including collaboration with communities and partners to prepare an Investment Plan for Skye & Raasay. Other regeneration projects are likely to be identified as the Council and its Economic Recovery Board identify the priority issues and areas to be addressed. We will also continue to provide advice on how proposals for development, regeneration and economic recovery align with and are compatible with the Development Plan.

Monitoring processes are playing an increasingly important role in how wider services and assets are managed across the Council, including through the LDP Delivery Programme and the inter-relationship with the Council's Capital Programme. Further details on this work is set out below.

Scottish Government's National Planning Framework (NPF4)

The Scottish Government has been progressing preparation of a new [National Planning Framework 4 \(NPF4\)](#). The 'Call for Ideas' consultation held in Spring 2020 sought views on 31 topics, to help decide which of these are covered by a suite of future new national planning policies. For the first time NPF4 will incorporate Scottish Planning Policy and be part of the Development Plan. The Highland Council made submissions to the 'Call for Ideas', including thoughts on the policy topics and suggestions for National Developments. During 2020 we also engaged with key stakeholders to prepare an [Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy \(IRSS\) for Highland](#). It was submitted to Scottish Government in Autumn 2020 to further inform NPF4 on vision and priorities for Highland.

During 2021 we will continue to coordinate the Council's input to NPF4 to help ensure that it meets the priorities for Highland and recognises the area's vital contribution to national outcomes. Scottish Government published an NPF4 Position Statement in November 2020. We are considering the ideas set out in it and how well they align with our earlier submissions. We will provide Scottish Government with feedback and take up opportunities to be further involved in development of NPF4's strategy, policies and priorities. That will include further work on the Highland IRSS. It is now helping to shape how we plan for Highland's future at the local level but also how we plan for economic recovery in the short to medium term. It is also influencing the Council's input to various regeneration and development that will help to deliver this vision for the future and the Council's own development plan. We will be receiving feedback from Scottish Government on the IRSS early in 2021 and will look to carry out further engagement as we consider that feedback and refine the IRSS for re-submission in April 2021.

The Planning Bill became an Act in 2019 and more details continue to emerge about changes being introduced step by step to the planning system over a period of about a couple of years. The programme for that was lengthened due to COVID-19. Scottish Government now anticipate reaching the stage of a Draft National Planning Framework 4 in Autumn 2021. When Draft NPF4 is published we will have a clear indication of its intended strategy, policies and priorities. This is important as it will set the national context and help us to firm up our intentions for the next generation of Local Development Plans and any local, non-statutory guidance that we feel is appropriate and needed. Our progression of that new programme of work is therefore dependent upon the timescales for NPF4 and the introduction of the Development Planning provisions of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019. There will also be statutory duties introduced for the preparation of Regional Spatial Strategies which will, in time, provide the framework for further evolving from the IRSS in the longer term.

Simplifying Highland Development Plans

The review of the planning system at the national level is hoped to lead to a more simple and consistent planning policies across the country. Progress will be monitored closely to understand the priorities and next steps for local planning policies in Highland, including how we address the issues that are currently set out in Supplementary Guidance.

At last year's Economy & Infrastructure Committee it was agreed that the Council's Highland-wide Local Development Plan, and the general planning policies it contains, remain largely fit for purpose and that a full review of the plan should only commence once the new national planning policies and legislation become clear. As things stand, it is envisaged that under the new legislation a new single plan for Highland could be prepared that would simplify and consolidate all existing plans into a single local development plan. This would combine a new suite of policies with content from the Area LDPs (updated where necessary – see below). To help prepare for this future review over the next year we will start work on the evidence required for a new-style Local Development Plan. The initial timescales for this approach are set out in the diagram below.

The Highland-wide Local Development Plan

The **Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP)** was adopted in April 2012 and contains a 20 year vision and spatial strategy for the Highlands, with planning policies and some strategic site allocations. The plan is accompanied by Supplementary Guidance (SG) and the Area LDPs that both contain more detailed policy and guidance that will be kept under review.

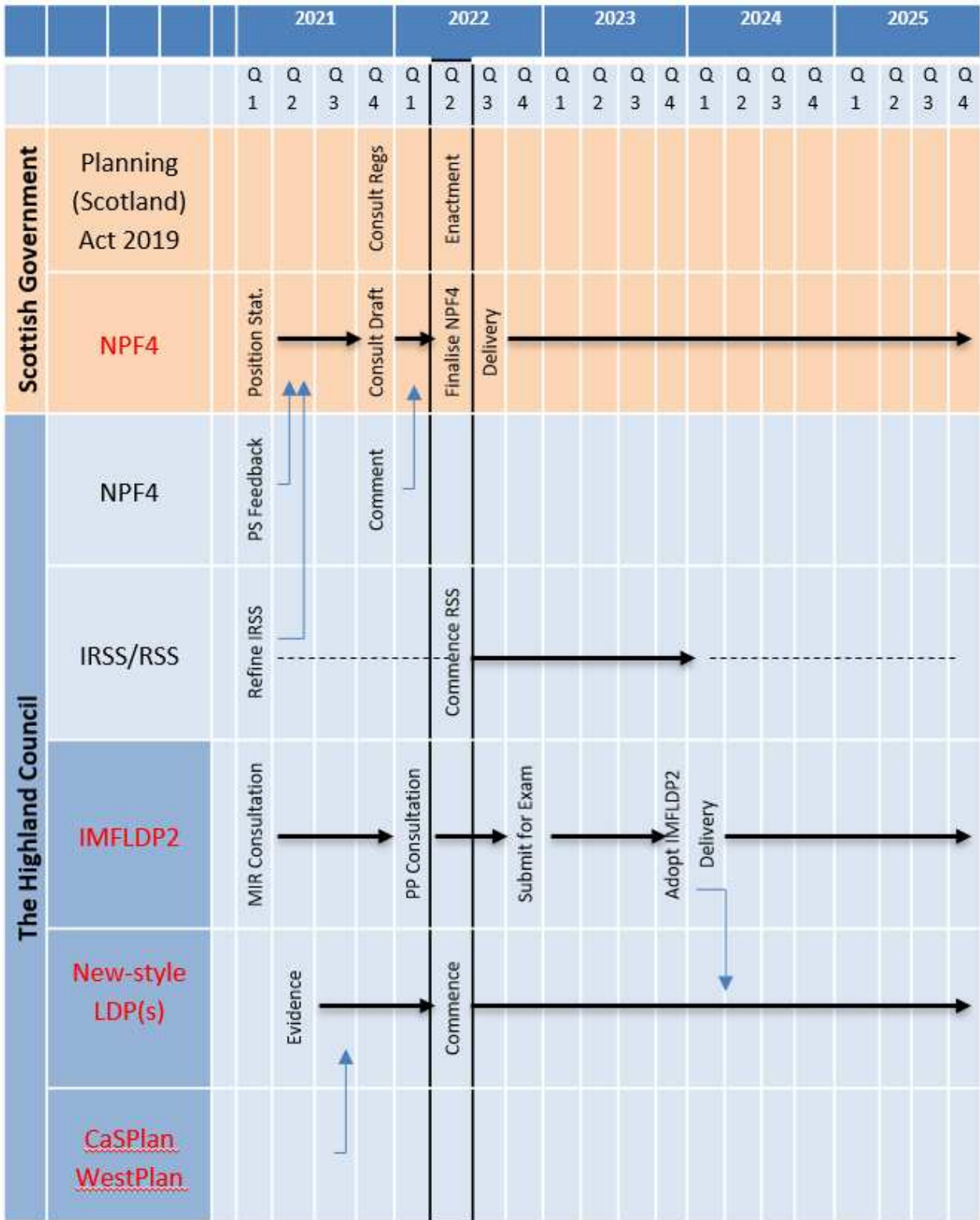
We will also keep our policies and decisions under review to ensure that plans and policies remain fit for purpose. In late 2020 a Member workshop was held to discuss the Developer Contributions Supplementary Guidance where it was agreed to continue with the current policy approach. In early 2021 we will carry out analysis of comments made on the Housing in the Countryside Supplementary Guidance and prepare a final version for Committee approval. We are also preparing guidance on Electric Vehicle charging and are carrying out further work related to the implementation of our Onshore Wind Supplementary Guidance.

Ongoing Monitoring work provides evidence for preparing and implementing Development Plans and provides information to the wider community. We will be carrying out essential monitoring work including the **Housing Land Audit, Renewables** monitoring and completion of the **Housing Need and Demand Assessment**. Monitoring and evidence gathering will also be commenced for the new plan arrangements outline above. However, some aspects of our monitoring work have been subject to delay due to staff being heavily involved in covid-19 related duties.

Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan (IMFLDP)

Although the pandemic has delayed the timescales for the IMFLDP review the Main Issues Report has been approved by the five relevant area committees and it will be published on Friday 29th January 2021 with just over an 8 week public consultation period ending on Thursday 1st April 2021. The Main Issues Report will be available in advance in read-only format at www.highland.gov.uk/imfldp from 15th January. Following the consultation period we will analyse and consider comments received in preparing the Proposed Plan which will be progressed to the same five area committees and the relevant strategic committee before the end of 2021. In early 2022 we aim to issue the Proposed Plan for public consultation. Representations received at that time and the Council's proposed response to them will then be reported back to committee before being sent to the Scottish Government for Examination before the end of 2022.

Work to prepare a Development Brief for the former Longman landfill in Inverness – which is linked to the adopted plan - will commence once further details become clear on Transport Scotland's A9 Longman junction improvements and the process for delivering the range of uses allocated in the plan.



Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan)

CaSPlan is the second Area LDP prepared in Highland. It was **adopted** in summer 2018. It sets out the vision, strategy and allocations that guide future development. The associated Delivery Programme (Action Programme) was adopted in autumn 2018. The focus going forward is on implementation of the Plan and the associated Supplementary Guidance. The Council, its partners and other stakeholders are and will be undertaking actions that will help deliver development and achieve the outcomes set out in CaSPlan and associated Supplementary Guidance and continue to monitor delivery.

West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan (WestPlan)

WestPlan is the third Area LDP prepared in Highland and was **adopted** in September 2019, followed by the associated Delivery Programme (Action Programme) in December 2019. The Applecross Community Land Use Plan has over the last year been adopted by the Council as non-statutory planning guidance. The focus going forward is on implementation of the Plan including monitoring and adoption of Supplementary Guidance. Linked to the Delivery Programme, we will look at options for continuing the collaborative work undertaken through the annual Fort William 2040 events.

Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan			
Where we Expected to be	Where we are Now	Future Stages	A M B E R
We expected to have completed the committee approval stage and have started the Main Issues Report consultation by the end of 2020.	We have completed the committee approval stage and the Main Issues Report has been published with a public consultation running from January to April 2021.	We will prepare and seek committee approval for the Proposed Plan content by the end of 2021. We will publish the Proposed Plan in early 2022 and prepare Council responses to representations received thereafter. We will send the Plan and those responses to the Scottish Government before the end of 2022.	
IMFLDP Area Based Supplementary Guidance			
Where we Expected to be	Where we are Now	Future Stages	
Longman Development Brief Development principles and requirements for the delivery of development in the Longman area of Inverness including the former landfill site.			
Draft Development Brief was to have been prepared for Committee consideration in 2020/21, subject to Waste Management Licence route-map being established for enabling areas of land to be redeveloped.	We have continued to provide advice to the proposals and feasibility studies for waste management facilities and for Transport Scotland road improvements. The Longman Junction Scheme has been progressing through detailed design stages and Draft Orders are expected to be published in early 2021. Waste management facility granted planning permission June 2019; further work underway for delivery as a Waste Transfer Station. Waste Management Licence issues for the closed landfill site under continuing discussion with SEPA to establish route-map for enabling areas of land to be redeveloped; key to progression of Development Brief.	Draft Development Brief to be prepared for Committee consideration in 2021/22, subject to Waste Management Licence route-map being established for enabling areas of land to be redeveloped.	

West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan			G R E E N
Where we Expected to be	Where we are Now	Future Stages	
n/a	Plan was adopted September 2019. Action Programme was approved in December 2019 and subsequently published.	Continue to monitor and update the Action Programme. Consolidate Action Programmes.	
Fort William 2040 Monitoring to help coordinate the delivery of development and infrastructure in Fort William and the wider Lochaber area.			
We had expected to hold the annual Fort William engagement event in September 2020.	The ban on public events means we will consider an online format for engagement.	Annual FW2040 monitoring exercise to be undertaken with stakeholders and communities.	
West Highland and Islands Area Based Supplementary Guidance			
Where we expected to be	Where we are Now	Future Stages	
Mallaig Harbour Masterplan Development principles, priorities for investment and regeneration in the harbour area.			
Nevis Forest & Mountain Resort Masterplan Development principles, priorities for investment and regeneration on land at Aonach Mor access road.			

Isle of Rum Community Land Use Plan		
Development principles and priorities for growth and development on the Isle of Rum.		
To have submitted the documents to Scottish Ministers for adoption as statutory Supplementary Guidance.	The associated environmental screenings process has been progressed and we are nearly ready to advance the documents to the process for statutory adoption.	The three documents will be submitted to Scottish Ministers in early 2021 for clearance to adopt each of the documents as statutory Supplementary Guidance.

Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan		
Where we Expected to be	Where we are Now	Future Stages
The Action Programme was to have been monitored and updated. Any actions from the Town Centre Strategy were to have been included in it.	The Action Programme is being monitored. An update is being prepared and is expected to be published in early 2021. It will include a link to the Town Centre Strategy action programme.	Publish the recently updated Action (Delivery) Programme. Continue to monitor and update it. CaSPlan itself was Adopted in Summer 2018 and is not yet due for review.

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CaSPlan Area Based Supplementary Guidance		
Where we Expected to be	Where we are Now	Future Stages
Town Centre Health Checks and Strategies		
Strategy to have been submitted to Scottish Ministers summer 2020, seeking clearance to adopt as Supplementary Guidance. Associated action programme content to have been worked up in discussion with delivery parties and included in CaSPlan Action Programme.	Strategy submitted to Scottish Ministers and adopted as Supplementary Guidance in autumn 2020. Associated action programme content has been worked up in discussion with delivery parties, published and promoted.	Continue to monitor and update the Action Programme. Link to it from the LDP Delivery Programme.

Highland-wide Local Development Plan		
Where we expected to be	Where we are Now	Future Stages
Was to be confirmed once more known about the scope of new national planning policies.	We prepared and submitted to Scottish Government the Council's response to NPF4 'Call for Ideas', including for new national policies that will become part of the Development Plan under the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 and minimise the need for local policy on general topics (as opposed to sites). We also prepared with input from partner and key stakeholder organisations an Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy (IRSS) for Highland as a further input to NPF4. We are currently considering the NPF4 Position Statement published by Scottish Government in November 2020.	To be confirmed once more is known about the scope of new national planning policies. Draft NPF4 is due to be published in autumn 2021 for consultation. In the meantime we will continue to engage in the NPF4 preparation process, including further refining our IRSS.

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Topic Based Supplementary Guidance		
Where we expected to be	Where we are Now	Future Stages
Onshore Wind Energy Guidance on managing onshore wind energy.		
Remaining programmed Landscape studies were to be progressed in 2020/21.	The Sutherland & Ross-shire study remains 'on hold'. Currently working with NatureScot and consultants on a pilot study using NatureScot's emerging revised guidance, updating and extending coverage of studies in the Dava, Nairn and Monadhliath areas up to the National Park boundary, which the Council will consult on during 2021. Sutherland & Ross-shire study to be prepared for consultation in late 2021 with final programmed Landscape study (Skye) yet to be commenced.	Remaining programmed Landscape studies to be progressed in 2021/22.
Housing in the Countryside Supplementary Guidance Guidance on smaller scale housing applications in the countryside.		
n/a	Following a consultation on a draft revised guidance we will carry out analysis of comments in early 2021.	Subject to resourcing alongside COVID related work) a final version will be prepared for Committee approval later in 2021.

What is the Development Plan?

The Development Plan is a set of documents that guide where and how new building and development can take place across Highland *. These documents include Local Development Plans (LDPs) that set out policies and site allocations, and Supplementary Guidance (SG) which contain more detailed guidance on specific issues or places. Planning applications for all types of development are assessed against these documents so it's important that people know when and how they can input to them. The best place to view and comment on Development Plans in Highland is the Council's website or the online Development Plans consultation portal:

www.highland.gov.uk/developmentplans <http://consult.highland.gov.uk/>

* Note that the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) prepare their own Development Plan – see www.cairngorms.co.uk.

How to get involved in preparing Development Plans

The 5 key stages of preparing a Local Development Plan are shown in the diagram above. We encourage people to get involved as early as possible in the process. This begins with the Call for Sites and Main Issues Report (MIR) stages (**shown in green**), followed by the Proposed Plan (**amber**). At the final stage an Examination (**red**) is carried out by independent Reporters who may invite further comments from those who commented on the Proposed Plan. When preparing Supplementary Guidance we will always invite comments on a draft and consider these in preparing and adopting a final version.

The five key stages for preparing a Local Development Plan

