

**THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
ROSS AND CROMARTY COMMITTEE
THE SKYE COMMITTEE
THE LOCHABER COMMITTEE**

Agenda Item	10
Report No	SA/7/16

**3rd FEBRUARY 2016
29th FEBRUARY 2016
11th FEBRUARY 2016**

WEST HIGHLAND AND ISLANDS LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Report by Director of Development and Infrastructure

SUMMARY

This report sets out the content of the Main Issues Report for the West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan. Members are asked to approve this document for public consultation.

1 Context

- 1.1 The West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan (in the rest of this report simply referred to as the “Plan”) will be the principal, local, land use policy document in determining planning applications and other development investment decisions in the West Highland area. The Plan area comprises Wester Ross, Skye and Lochalsh, Lochaber and a mountainous and largely unpopulated part of Badenoch north and south of Loch Laggan. It will replace two existing local plans for this area.
- 1.2 The Plan will be one of three area local development plans which will provide the local detail on *where* development should and should not be supported and are complemented by the overarching Highland wide Local Development Plan which provides the Council’s general policies on *how* development should happen.
- 1.3 The Main Issues Report (MIR) is a consultation document containing questions and options as to the best way forward. It is intended to promote debate and discussion on the best future vision, spatial strategy and choice of development sites within the area whilst also clarifying the Council’s initial preferences and reasonable alternatives.

The MIR is a culmination of considerable **work to date** which has included:

- a widely advertised “Call for Sites & Ideas” which yielded around 330 suggestions which have been assessed for inclusion within the MIR;
- three public ward forum meetings;
- discussions with and comments from statutory key agencies, Members, other consultees and stakeholders, and engagement with local High Schools;

- a Monitoring Report which contains a quantitative analysis of recent trends that have implications for development in the area; and
- specific assessment of environmental, flood risk and transport issues (the Transport Background Paper is **Appendix 3** to this report available via www.highland.gov.uk/whildp).

2 Main Issues Report Content

- 2.1 The MIR suggests four headline **outcomes** listed in **Appendix 1** which represent a joining-up of the outcomes and objectives of a variety of bodies set out at national, Highland and sub regional level plus the main issues garnered from the work to date listed in paragraph 1.3 above. In a climate of expenditure constraint, the way to achieve the Council's aims is to agree them with others who can help make them happen. This can range from community groups taking responsibility and ownership for local implementation or national agencies co-ordinating their capital programmes to complete larger infrastructure. The MIR's outcomes foresee a West Highland where economic growth is encouraged, places are better designed, resources managed, and communities and development supported. Most importantly, these provide a consistent, consensual and actionable vision for the future. Although seemingly generic in nature, the outcomes flow logically through the whole Plan into the site-specifics so that the general public and other partners can see how broad aims can be translated into practicable action.
- 2.2 The **spatial strategy** map in **Appendix 1** is a visual representation of the largest physical projects and policy proposals supported within the Plan. Many of these are underpinned by flood risk assessment and transport appraisal work which are available via the Council's website. Changes to improve the consistency of the boundaries of the Plan area's Special Landscape Areas, and the suggested, unchanged, retention of Fort William's housing in the countryside Hinterland are also depicted.
- 2.3 The MIR content (detailed in **Appendix 2** which is available via www.highland.gov.uk/whildp) represents an evolution of previous planning policy. Many of the sites, local priorities and constraints to development have not changed in the last 5-10 years and therefore the emphasis has been on review and re-assessment rather than reinvention. The Plan will retain a positive framework for growth despite a context of lower projected population and household growth, lower development pressure than expected, and the likelihood of lower public investment levels than when the previous local plans were prepared. For example, there is now a requirement on the Council to scale back by 40% the housing capacity of land earmarked for future development. Accordingly, much of the Plan content suggests consolidation rather than major growth locations. Officers' initial site and policy preferences are based upon this premise, and are respectful of financial, environmental, infrastructure and physical constraints. We have sought to clarify the feasibility of development sites with landowners and developers and to understand infrastructure capacity and any improvements required. Similarly, there has been a review of greenspace valued by the wider, general public as greenspaces and are considered appropriate for safeguarding from development. Green networks have been identified to maintain or improve connections for people and wildlife.

- 2.4 The Council's new style local development plans are proportionate and tailor the level of policy detail and **settlement hierarchy** to how much development pressure needs to be managed or can reasonably be encouraged in each location. Accordingly, the Plan in **Appendix 2** provides comprehensive mapping and text for the 18 main settlements and a set of development principles for a second tier of settlements, termed "growing settlements", where future development is encouraged subject to assessment against a set of pan Highland criteria. There is also an opportunity for local groups to produce their own community plans based on the place making priorities identified within the Plan. This approach will be particularly suited to smaller settlements that are seeking to positively influence their future.
- 2.5 The most significant **new sites and policies**, proposed in this MIR, compared to the old local plans content are as follows:

Wester Ross and Lochalsh

- support for a distillery and more tourism proposals off the Morefield quarry road, for an industrial site north of Morefield, and for further harbour expansion, all at Ullapool;
- proposals to expand harbour facilities, amend infill housing areas and to allow expansion of the village centre at Gairloch;
- a new safeguard for a bypass and for greater expansion at Kirkton, Lochcarron;
- greater potential for built development on the Plock at Kyle of Lochalsh;

Skye

- a re-opening of the debate on where Portree's long term expansion should be located;
- land allocations to allow greater options in the relocation and/or redevelopment of Broadford and Dunvegan Primary Schools;
- a site for a potential new distillery / brewery south of Dunvegan;
- new Sleat housing sites at Teangue and west of the Gaelic College at Kilbeg;
- more Staffin housing site options and support for harbour expansion;

Lochaber

- deletion of an A82 bypass safeguard at Fort William and expanded development potential at Carr's Corner;
- a new economic development area allocation at Inverlochy Castle Estate;
- a new housing site and village park at West Laroch (South Ballachulish);
- the re-introduction of tourism led development sites at Glenachulish and north of the A82 at South Ballachulish; and
- a larger expansion area for Mallaig Harbour.

- 2.6 The MIR has been designed to be most easily read online, where comments will also be encouraged. 80-90% of recent development plan responses have been made by electronic means and, with broadband connectivity being improved and

extended, many more will find it easier and faster online compared to conventional methods. Moreover, the online mapping is available at an enlarged scale, and connected documents can be browsed at the touch of a button. Other methods of engagement will still be provided for those who have difficulties in accessing the internet.

3 Proposed Consultation Arrangements

- 3.1 It is suggested for Members' consideration that the MIR be subject to a 10 week consultation period, starting as soon as practicable, allowing for printing of the document after Committee. Publicity, including the use of social media, will advertise the opportunity for comment and attendance at any of a series of drop-in exhibitions/workshops to be held across the Plan area. It is also proposed to notify immediate neighbours of all sites specifically identified within the Plan.

4 Next Steps

- 4.1 Towards the end of this year, representations received from this consultation will be reported back to this committee for comment, and thereafter to the Planning Development and Infrastructure Committee, for decision on what the Plan should contain in its Proposed Plan form. This next stage of the Plan represents the settled view of the Council which is then re-issued for public consultation.
- 4.2 Any party whose comments do not align with the Council's Proposed Plan then has an opportunity to have its views heard by an independent Scottish Government appointed Reporter, who then makes binding recommendations back to the Council on the final plan to be adopted by the Council.

5 Implications

- 5.1 Environmental
The Plan requires a full Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) which includes consideration of climate change implications. An Environmental Report has been prepared which has influenced officers' initial site and policy preferences and has been available for Members' consideration via the Council's website and Members' Library. It will be advertised and published alongside the MIR.
- 5.2 Equality
An Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) screening report has been undertaken and placed on the Council's website and found that a full EqIA is not required.
- 5.3 Gaelic
Headings and a Member Foreword will be added in Gaelic.
- 5.4 Resource
Resources to complete the statutory processes are allowed for within the Service budget.
- 5.5 Legal and Risk
In terms of legal and risk implications, the Plan can be challenged in the courts but

only on matters of process not planning judgement emphasising the need for the Council to continue to adhere to all statutory procedures throughout the Plan's progress so that the Council will have a defensible position in the event of any challenge.

5.6 Rural

The vast majority of the Plan area is rural and therefore there will be no bias or other implications in respect of this issue.

RECOMMENDATION

Committee is invited to:

- note that the Main Issues Report (**Appendix 2**) has been shaped by a series of appraisals, suggestions and discussions outlined in paragraphs 1.3 and 2.1 of this report;
- approve the Main Issues Report, accepting that a number of minor presentational and typographical changes will be made prior to publication; and
- agree the approach to consultation outlined in paragraph 3.1 of this report.

Designation: Director of Development and Infrastructure

Date: 25 January 2016

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Background Papers:

1. Call for Sites and Ideas Responses: Various: 2015
2. West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan: Strategic Environmental Assessment: Environmental Report: January 2016
3. West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan: Monitoring Report: January 2016
4. West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan: Equalities Impact Assessment January 2016

Above documents available via: www.highland.gov.uk/whildp

APPENDIX 1: WEST HIGHLAND AND ISLANDS LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN: MAIN ISSUES REPORT: VISION AND SPATIAL STRATEGY

OUTCOMES

HEADLINE OUTCOMES FOR WHILDP

ECONOMIC GROWTH ENCOURAGED

The local economy is growing and diverse. West Highland has an enhanced reputation as a heritage tourism destination, as a base for marine renewables and as an effective place for working at home and with the land.

PLACES BETTER DESIGNED

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.

RESOURCES MANAGED

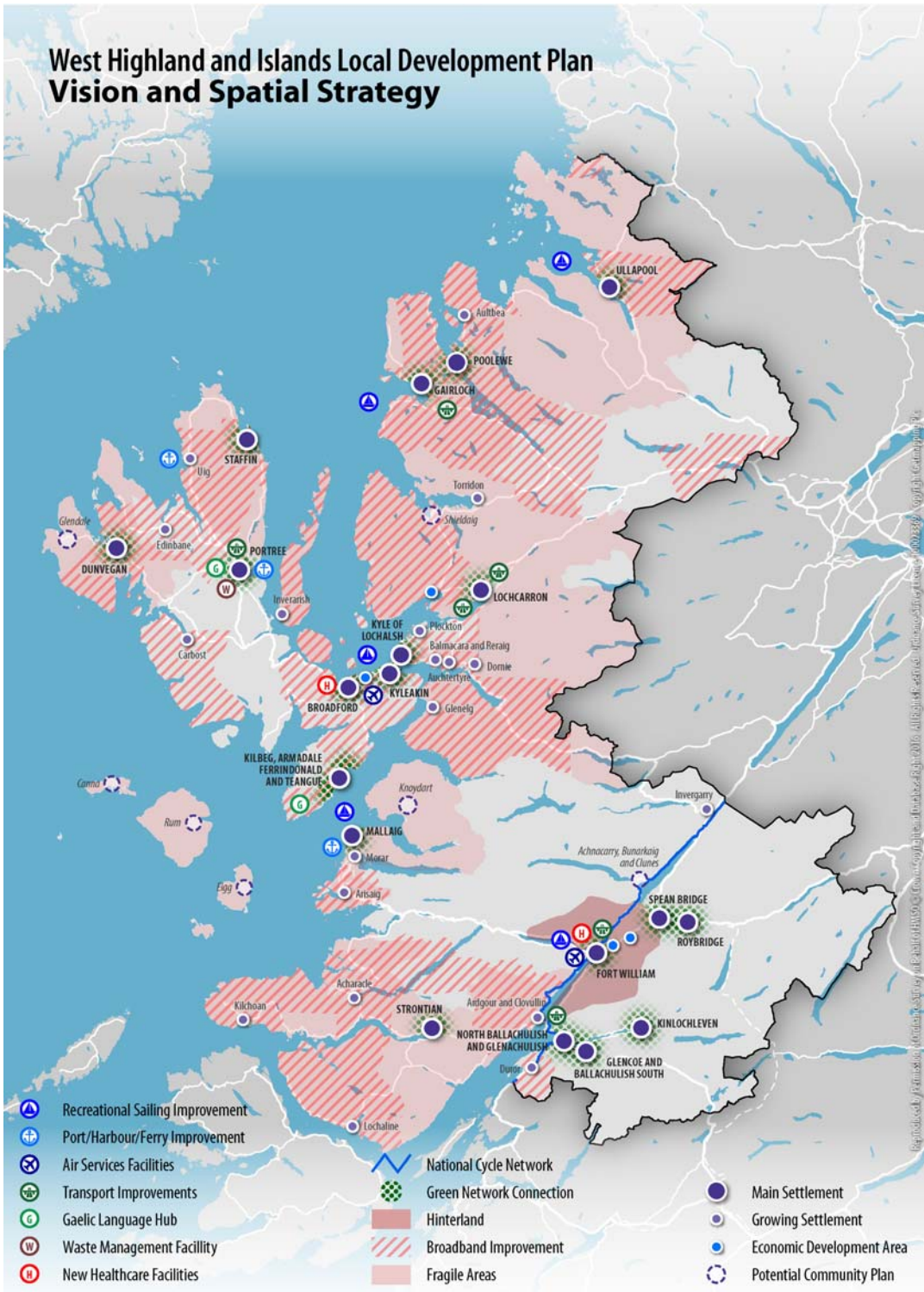
Resources are better managed:

- 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 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.

COMMUNITIES AND DEVELOPMENT SUPPORTED

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. Public agencies and other partners co-ordinate and optimise their investment in agreed growth locations.

West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan Vision and Spatial Strategy



APPENDIX 2: COMMITTEE DRAFT OF WEST HIGHLAND AND ISLANDS LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN: MAIN ISSUES REPORT: JANUARY 2016

APPENDIX 3: WEST HIGHLAND AND ISLANDS LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN: TRANSPORT BACKGROUND PAPER: JANUARY 2016

Both available via www.highland.gov.uk/whildp