

## HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Agenda Item	<b>5</b>
Report No	<b>SCC/09/19</b>

**Committee:** Sutherland County Committee

**Date:** 22 May 2019

**Report Title:** Caithness and Sutherland Town Centre Strategy Supplementary Guidance

**Report By:** Director of Development and Infrastructure

### 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This paper seeks approval by the two Area Committees of the Draft Caithness and Sutherland Town Centre Strategy Supplementary Guidance (the Strategy), to be published for public consultation. The Strategy aims to support the delivery of the Caithness & Sutherland Local Development Plan by outlining a number of potential actions that may be undertaken to improve the vitality and amenity of the main town centres in the area: Brora, Dornoch, Golspie, Thurso and Wick. These actions are suggestions for how these centres may be improved in the years ahead and it is intended that they may be taken forward by a range of organisations and individuals. The actions were developed from the findings of the 2018 Town Centre Health Check undertaken by the Council and are structured within the framework established by the Scottish Government's Town Centre Toolkit.

### 2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. approve the Draft Caithness and Sutherland Town Centre Strategy Supplementary Guidance at **Appendix 1** for the purposes of public consultation;
- ii. authorise officers to make minor presentational changes prior to publication, in consultation with and agreement from the chairs of the Area Committees;
- iii. agree the approach to public consultation as set out in section 5 of this report; and
- iv. note that issues raised in comments received on the draft Strategy will be reported back to the two relevant Area Committees for their consideration, together with possible amendments to the Strategy prior to completion of procedures leading to its adoption as statutory Supplementary Guidance.

### 3. Purpose and Context of Strategy

- 3.1 The fundamental purpose of the Strategy is to take into account the findings of 'town centre health checks' and outline a range of proposals (primarily focussed on spatial land use planning) that may be undertaken to improve the appearance, vitality and amenity of the town centres. The Strategy applies to the town centres of Brora, Dornoch, Golspie, Thurso and Wick, as defined in the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan) 2018. CaSPlan sets out the commitment to prepare health checks for those five town centres and to prepare the strategies (to be Supplementary Guidance to CaSPlan). The Council subsequently carried out its town centre health checks in summer 2018 and published them in December 2018. In developing the draft strategies it was decided to include them for all five centres in a single Strategy document in order to expedite the screening, consultation and preparation processes.
- 3.2 The actions in the Draft Strategy are not yet, generally, firm actions and are not to be carried out solely by the Highland Council but are instead suggestions that can inform potential investment decisions made by a range of individuals and organisations. Potential actions have been grouped according to whether they would result in making the town centres primarily more attractive, active or accessible. The Scottish Government's Town Centre Toolkit states that successful town centre strategies and successful town centres should encompass all three of these characteristics and each of the five centres has at least one suggested improvement for each theme.
- 3.4 Once approved in its final form, the Strategy will provide a more detailed framework of potential actions (an action programme) that will outline steps that may be taken by a range of individuals and bodies to improve their town centres and allow the Council to respond appropriately to any future planning applications.

### 4. Content of the Draft Caithness and Sutherland Town Centre Strategy Supplementary Guidance

- 4.1 The Draft Strategy is attached as **Appendix 1** to this report. The preparation of the Draft Strategy has been informed by early engagement with local Ward Members and Ward Managers.
- 4.2 The content of the Strategy is based on the following structure:

**Section 1 'Introduction'** – Outlines the purpose of the Strategy, describes the socioeconomic conditions that have resulted in a requirement to prepare the Strategy and details the stages of preparation of and consultation on it.

**Section 2 'Context'** – Provides a brief analysis of the challenges and opportunities facing Caithness and Sutherland, outlines the existing planning policy framework which supports the Strategy, describes the relevance of the Town Centre Toolkit to the potential actions, outlines the key challenges facing the five town centres and describes previous work that has informed the Strategy.

**Section 3 'Brora', Section 4 'Dornoch', Section 5 'Golspie', Section 6 'Thurso', Section 7 'Wick'** – Each of sections 3-7 sets out for the respective town:

- An introduction to the town centre, including note of CaSPlan placemaking priorities applying to the town centre;
- Progress to date, covering recent investment and planning activity;

- Town Centre Health Check findings and Opportunities based on the health check findings;
- Potential actions.

**Section 8 ‘Action programme’** – This section includes a table outlining the potential actions for each town centre, the individuals or organisations that may be able to take them forward and when they may be taken forward. The detail for this section, for the suggested actions, has yet to be established and it is intended that it will be established through the consultation process.

## 5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Subject to Committee approval, the next main stage will be to undertake a public consultation on the Draft Strategy. It is proposed that the consultation will run for a minimum of 6 weeks and is expected to run from early Summer 2019. Subject to resources and availability, officers will take opportunities to attend relevant events and meet partner organisations to raise awareness of the Draft Strategy and the consultation.
- 5.2 The consultation will be publicised by public notice in the press, in news releases and on social media. In addition, correspondence will be sent to key stakeholders (internal and external to the Council), local community groups and relevant contacts on the Development Plans mailing list, seeking feedback. The Draft Strategy will be made available to view on the Council’s online portal <https://consult.highland.gov.uk> .
- 5.3 It is our intention to report back the findings of the consultation and present the recommended finalised Strategy to the Area Committees in November 2019. Once finalised and adopted as statutory Supplementary Guidance it will form part of the Council’s Development Plan.

## 6. Implications

- 6.1 Resource: Resources to complete statutory processes for the Draft Strategy are allowed for within the service budget.
- 6.2 Legal: The Strategy could be subject to legal challenge once it is adopted but due process will be followed in consultation on and adoption of the Strategy and therefore the Council will have reduced the risk of challenge and have a defensible position in the event of any challenge.
- 6.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural): The Strategy will set a framework for potential future actions to improve the five town centres of Caithness and Sutherland. This could help to strengthen the local community and provide new employment opportunities.
- 6.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever: Allocation WK11 ‘Site at the Shore’ contains derelict listed buildings and has a detrimental impact on its surroundings. As such, it was identified during the Strategy preparation process as a location for potential redevelopment. The principle of developing land in WK11 has been subject of environmental assessment as part of the preparation of CaSPlan. This includes Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) which has been informed through consultation with Scottish Natural Heritage, SEPA and Historic Environment Scotland. Suitable mitigation text has been incorporated into

the wording of the “parent” CaSPlan. This requires developers to undertake further environmental and other assessment work. The Strategy itself has been screened in respect of SEA and we are able to determine that an Environmental Report is not required.

6.5 Risk: There are no known significant risks associated with the Supplementary Guidance.

6.6 Gaelic: Gaelic headings have been added to the Draft Strategy document.

Designation: Director of Development and Infrastructure

Date: 2 May 2019

Authors: David Cowie, Douglas Chisholm, Peter Atkinson (Development Plans)  
01463 702827

Background Papers:

[Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan \(CaSPlan\) 2018](#)

[Town Centre Health Checks](#)

[Town Centre Toolkit](#)

# Caithness and Sutherland Town Centre Strategy

## Ro-innleachd Meadhan Baile Ghallaibh agus Chataibh

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May 2019

Draft Supplementary Guidance for Committee





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## 1.1 Purpose & Background

- 1.1** The purpose of this strategy is to identify opportunities and potential actions for the improvement of the five defined town centres in the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan). These include Brora, Dornoch, Golspie, Thurso and Wick which are extremely important within a wide geographical context and their success is crucial to the health of the local economy.

**'The purpose of a health check is to assess a town centre's strengths, vitality and viability, weaknesses and resilience. It will be used to inform development plans and decisions on planning applications.'** - Scottish Planning Policy (2014)

- 1.2** This strategy presents a number of potential actions that have been developed based on the findings of the 2018 Town Centre Health Check. These results, which identified problem issues that had generally been established through previous work, have been assessed against local priorities in order to gain an understanding of the requirements of each community. The potential actions outlined in this document are not proposals but rather suggestions for how the centres may be improved.
- 1.3** Policy 1 of CaSPlan 'Town Centre First' set out the commitment that, following the completion of the health check, the Council will prepare strategies for the town centres and adopt them as Supplementary Guidance. Once adopted, the strategy will then become part of the Development Plan and will be a tool to support the local area, providing a framework which the Council will use to inform its decisions on any future planning applications. It can help steer investment decisions by a wide range of organisations and individuals and provide a basis on which action by community organisations may be supported.

## 1 Introduction | Ro-ràdh



**Picture 1.1 Dornoch town centre**

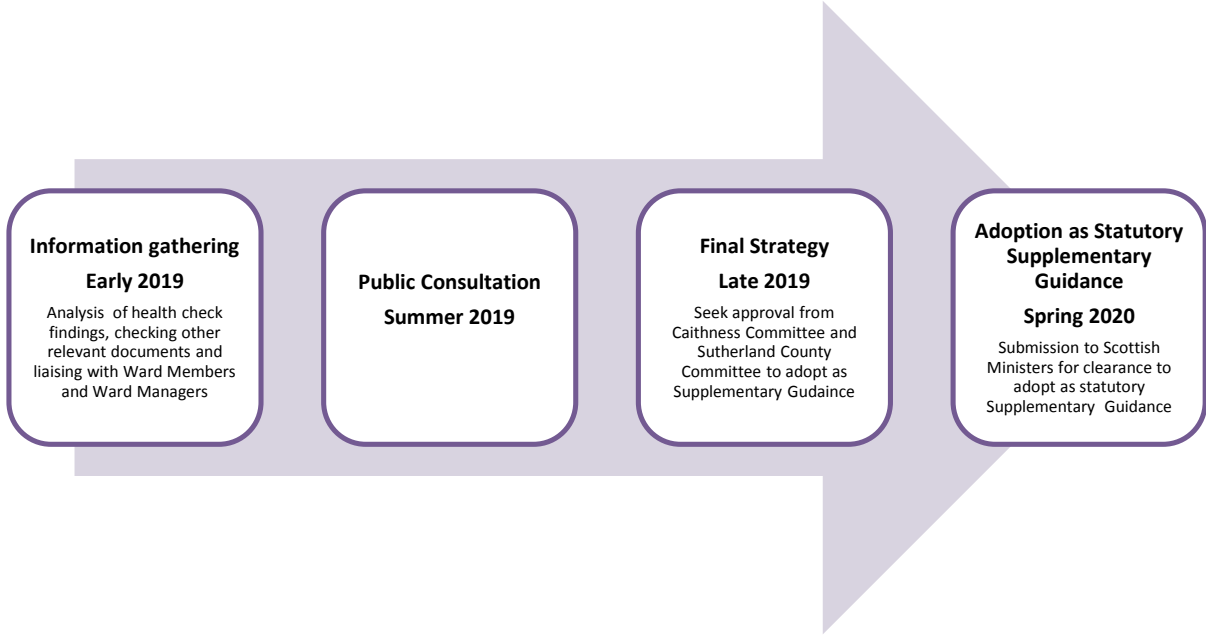
- 1.4** Promoting and maintaining the vitality of the town centres is a key aim of both the Highland Council and the Scottish Government. Town centres are the focus of much of the social and economic life of a region and ensuring that they remain healthy, vibrant places to live, work and visit is crucial to their sustainability. Town centres have faced significant challenges in recent years. Changes to the way that shopping is carried out have led to a substantial portion of retail sales being shifted online. The resultant decline in footfall on traditional shopping streets has had a damaging effect on the appearance and liveliness of many town centres.
- 1.5** Whilst retail has been the dominant feature of the visitor offer of most town centres, it is apparent that a wider mix of footfall generating uses is developed. These uses include shops, cafes and restaurants, hotels, commercial leisure uses, a night time economy, offices and essential public services. Promoting town centre living will also be of key importance if there is to be a sufficient number of people on the streets to support this healthy range of uses. It will only be possible to support and increase these essential uses if places are fully accessible to a range of travel modes, if they maintain a high level of business and social activity and if they are attractive places to visit and enjoy.



**Picture 1.2 Golspie Main Street**

# 1 Introduction | Ro-ràdh

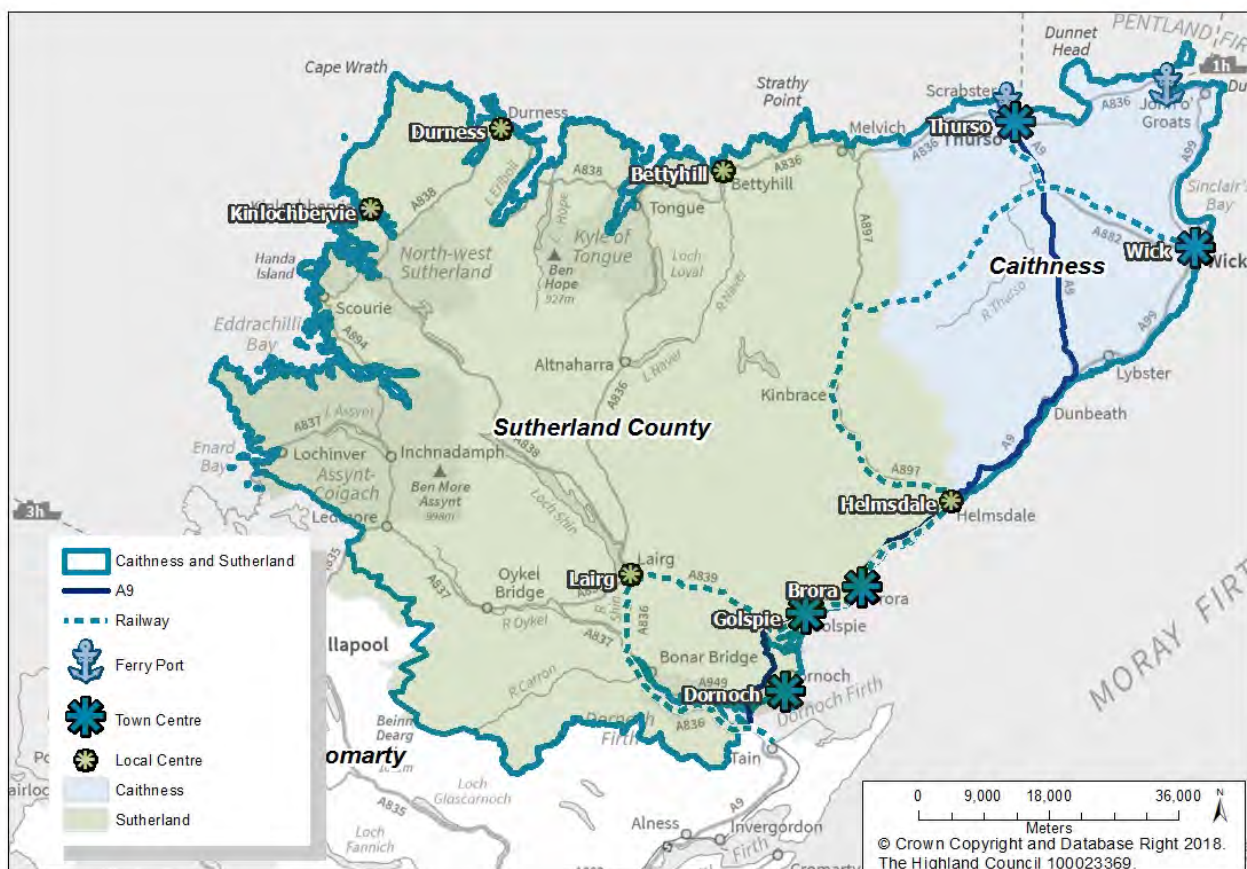
## 1.2 Stages of Preparation of & Consultation on the Strategy



**Figure 1.1 Process Diagram**

## 2.1 Area Analysis

- 2.1** Caithness and Sutherland are the northernmost counties on the Scottish mainland. The A9 trunk road is the chief transport artery for the area, rail lines provide a crucial link to the south and ferry ports at Scrabster and Gills Bay offer services to the Northern Isles. Wick and Thurso, the principal settlements in the area, are the locations for much of the economic and social activity that takes place in Caithness, while Brora, Dornoch and Golspie are the key settlements in Sutherland. A number of smaller villages, some remote, rely on these towns for a wide range of goods and services.
- 2.2** The area faces a range of challenges, foremost among these being an ageing population and the rundown of the Dounreay site. It is essential that Caithness and Sutherland attract incomers and investment in order to prosper in the years ahead. While the area faces difficulties, it also has a number of opportunities to exploit. The tourist trade continues to expand and, with the success of the North Coast 500 initiative, businesses in the area could further tap into the visitor market in order to spur wider economic growth. The area is isolated but beautiful and the five town centres that form part of this strategy are ideal bases from which to explore its dramatic and fascinating landscape. Each town centre has huge potential and the potential initiatives that this strategy identifies are intended to act as a catalyst for social and economic renewal.

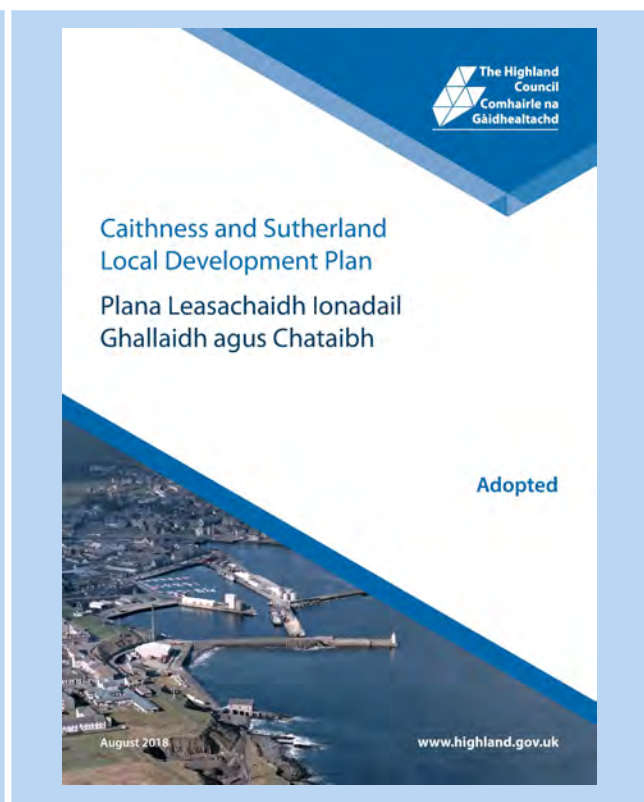
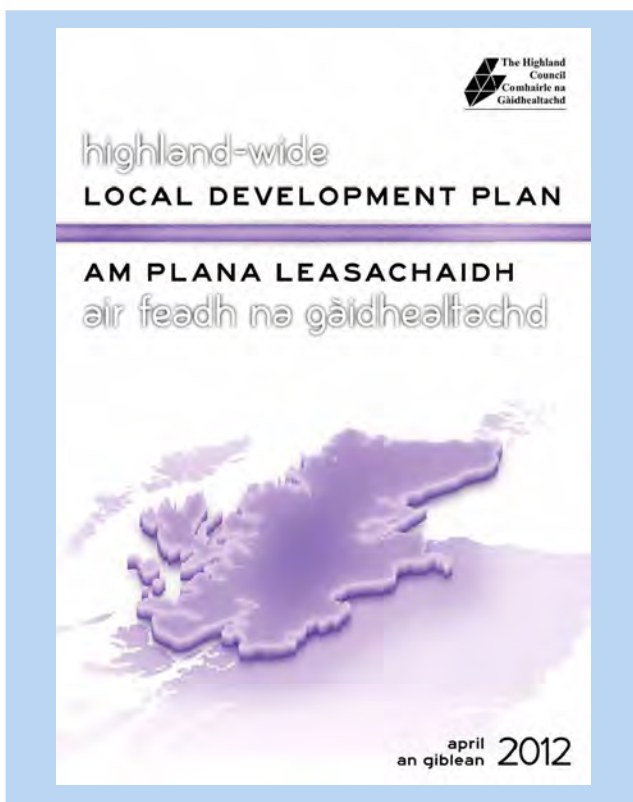


Map 2.1 CaSPlan Area

## 2 Context | Co-theacsa

### 2.2 Planning Policy

- 2.3** The Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP) was adopted in 2012 and is the overarching planning policy document for the Highland Council area. The plan makes a commitment to supporting town centres through a number of statements and particularly by means of Policy 40 Retail Development, which seeks to ensure that retail uses are first and foremost located in town centres. The plan outlines a vision for Caithness and Sutherland, stating that the area will have thriving town centres with enhanced positions as service centres by 2030.
- 2.4** The Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan) was adopted in August 2018. CaSPlan outlines where development should take place in the the area over a 10-20 year period and replaces a number of Local Plans which covered smaller geographical areas. CaSPlan Policy 1 Town Centre First, in line with Scottish Planning Policy (2014), stipulates that the Council should prepare action plans for the five town centres in Caithness and Sutherland following the completion of town centre health checks. The findings of these checks were published in late 2018 and identified a number of problem issues within the centres of Brora, Dornoch, Golspie, Thurso and Wick. The intention of this strategy is to take account of this information and to outline a number of potential actions to tackle those problems.



## 2.3 Town Centre Toolkit

**2.5** Promoting town centres is one of the key aims of Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) 2014. The Scottish Government has published a [Town Centre Toolkit \(2015\)](#) to support both the Town Centre First Principle and its Town Centre Action Plan (2013). The Town Centre Toolkit provides a number of suggestions as to how town centres can be changed for the better and includes best practice case studies of where improvements have successfully been made.

**2.6** The Town Centre Toolkit states that successful town centre strategies will incorporate aspects of the following three themes: Attractive, Active and Accessible. The toolkit provides a useful framework from which to group the potential actions identified in this strategy and, as such, they have been classified using the same three criteria. The majority of the potential actions outlined in this strategy are drawn from the recommendations made in the Town Centre Toolkit. The most relevant Toolkit suggestions to these potential actions are that a town centre should be:

<b>Attractive</b>	<b>Active</b>	<b>Accessible</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing identity and place</li> <li>• Working with existing buildings</li> <li>• Integrating new buildings</li> <li>• Creating active frontages</li> <li>• Improving and enhancing shopfronts</li> <li>• Designing public places to feel safe</li> <li>• Creating new green space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating more town centre flats and houses</li> <li>• Keeping property in use</li> <li>• Exploring opportunities for funding</li> <li>• Being distinctive</li> <li>• Promoting the town centre</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Putting people and pedestrians first, whilst integrating other modes</li> <li>• Creating an effective pedestrian network</li> <li>• Pedestrian priority</li> <li>• Creating a safe and encouraging cycle environment</li> <li>• Providing convenient cycle parking</li> <li>• Reducing the impact of cars on town centres without excluding them</li> <li>• Creating better pedestrian crossings</li> </ul>

## 2 Context | Co-theacsa

### 2.4 Key Challenges

**2.7** Each of the five town centres is extremely different in character to the next. A number of key challenges were identified for each settlement by the town centre health check, which were that:

- Brora had a very high number of vacant non-residential properties. Some of these units are highly visible to road users and detract from the image of the town centre.
- Wick town centre also had a high vacancy rate and several disused buildings and properties had a significantly detrimental effect on the town centre area.
- Every town centre suffered from a dominance of road traffic to some degree and the location of Brora, Golspie and Thurso on the A9, and Wick on the A99, resulted in high numbers of vehicle movements and the associated problems of pollution, danger to pedestrians and noise.
- Light controlled road crossings were absent from the centres of Brora and Dornoch, however, Brora suffered far more from this deficiency due to its location on the A9.
- High quality cycling facilities were lacking in each town centre and dedicated cycle lanes were not seen in any town centre at the time of the health check.
- High quality public realm was absent from the centres of Golspie and Wick. While they had both received investment, particularly in terms of paving, they lacked sufficient amounts of greenery and were dominated by hard surfaces.
- Public art was either not seen in the town centres, was lacklustre or was located away from key streets and frontages from where it could be seen and appreciated.



**Picture 2.1 Vacant units in Wick**



## 2.5 Previous Work

**2.8** A number of documents have been published in recent years that identified strengths and weaknesses and developed action programmes for town centres of Brora, Dornoch, Golspie, Thurso and Wick.



## 2 Context | Co-theacsa

- 2.9** The Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP) led to the preparation in 2018 of Community Plans for Brora and Golspie (supporting documents to the respective Locality Plans). The Highland Community Planning Partnership held a community workshop in Dornoch in 2017 and produced a document detailing its findings. These reports identified strengths and weaknesses for each of the three town centres and identified priorities aimed at driving improvements on a wide range of spatial, economic and societal themes.
- 2.10** The Dornoch Economic Masterplan was commissioned by Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and published in 2013. The document identifies a range of areas in which Dornoch could improve and outlines an action programme to deliver those desired changes. The brief was wide ranging in nature and established an Action Group comprising of a large number of different parties to oversee improvements.
- 2.11** 'A New Vision for Wick & Thurso' was published in May 2013 after an extensive public consultation on ideas for the improvement of the two towns. The proposals outlined in the documents are wide ranging and cover the towns in their geographical entirety. Extensive redevelopment was proposed for each town centre in the form of public realm improvements and the construction of new buildings. The document, produced through the involvement of a range of agencies and partners, remains a guide to inform any large scale redevelopment that may take place in Wick and Thurso.
- 2.12** Active travel audits were produced by the Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership (HITRANS) for Wick and Thurso and published in 2010/2011. They identified a number of weaknesses experienced by each town centre in relation to active travel, notably a lack of good quality cycling facilities and the potential for road accidents involving pedestrians to occur on some heavily congested streets.
- 2.13** The Caithness & North Sutherland Fund, established by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority and the Dounreay Stakeholder Group, published a report outlining its activities in the year to October 2018. It outlines a number of initiatives that have received investment from the fund, including the Thurso History Interactive project for Thurso Heritage Society and the Wick Riverside Play Park Project for the Wick Gala Committee.
- 2.14** The findings and lessons from each of these documents, many of which were also identified as part of the town centre health check exercise, have been taken into account when preparing this strategy and form part of the baseline of information from which to develop any proposals.

### 3.1 Introduction

**3.1** Brora is an important service centre for Sutherland, providing education and health services and a variety of shops. The town centre straddles both sides of the River Brora and lies on the main transport route, with the A9 trunk road running through the village and a railway station on the Far North Line. It is located approximately ten miles north-east of Golspie and forty-five miles south-west of Wick. The town was the location of the northernmost colliery in Scotland, which ceased production in the early 1970s. The tourism industry is now becoming an increasingly important part of Brora's economy.

**CaSPlan identified a number of placemaking priorities for Brora. Those that apply to the town centre are:**

- Regeneration of the town centre is a key priority, with some prominent vacant buildings that could be redeveloped to provide small units, for example retail units.
- A civic space would be beneficial.
- Brora Station and Goods Shed provide opportunities for regeneration and land around them could potentially provide additional car parking for the station.



**Picture 3.1 The Sutherland Arms, Brora**

## 3 Brora | Brùra

### 3.2 Progress to Date

#### Recent Investment

**3.2** Fountain Square received significant investment in 2009 in the form of flower beds, walling, seating and tree planting. The improvements were paid for from funding that had been allocated in The Highland Council's capital programme. The project was also part financed by the Scottish Government and the European Community Leader programme.

#### Recent Planning Activity

**3.3** A number of planning applications have been approved in Brora town centre over the last three years (01/01/16 to 01/01/19). The creation of a hot food takeaway on Gower Street Lane was permitted in 2017 and a change of use from an office to a café in Station Square was permitted in 2018. The café, now in operation, was recently mentioned in the press in relation to the opportunities presented by the North Coast 500. The takeaway was not recorded as being in operation at the time of the health check, however, and a conversion of the disused and listed goods shed to a house was permitted in 2017 but no work appeared to have taken place.



**Picture 3.2 Fountain Square Brora**

### 3.3 Health Check Findings & Opportunities for Improvement

#### Town Centre Health Check Findings

- Brora benefits from having a high number of independent retailers, several eateries, good public realm and plentiful green infrastructure.
- The A9 itself creates a substantial barrier between the two halves of the town centre, with traffic volumes and a lack of crossing points making the stretch hazardous and inconvenient to pedestrians.
- A significant number of vacant units in the town centre, assessed as ten at the time of the health check or 1/3 of the total, is having an adverse effect on the appearance of the area.
- Cycling facilities in the town were lacking in availability and South Brae/North Brae (A9) was busy with road traffic and potentially hazardous.
- The run-down buildings on Fountain Square could be improved. They have a significant effect on the appearance of the town centre and their presence is likely to have a detrimental impact on nearby homes and businesses.
- Station Square feels run down and buildings were vacant at the time of the health check.

#### Opportunities Based on Town Centre Health Check Findings

- Brora sits on the route of the popular North Coast 500 route and there are opportunities to harness this trade to grow the local economy.
- Improving the experience of cyclists visiting Brora could have the effect of increasing tourist numbers visiting and staying in the town.
- Replacement, refurbishment or reconfiguration of the buildings on Fountain Square, not listed and of little architectural value, would present an opportunity to realign the town centre towards a focus on Fountain Square.
- Station Square is a key entry point into the town centre and improvements to the area could encourage visitors to extend their stays.
- Efforts are being made on the part of the local community to attempt to reduce the speed of traffic moving through the town, however, a more comprehensive solution that tackles the problem would do much to improve the town's attractiveness from a visitor perspective, but also for those living in Brora.
- CaSPlan Policy 1 is supportive of changes of use from retail units to residential subject to certain requirements. This support could allow for reuse of some of the vacant buildings.

## 3 Brora | Brùra

### 3.4 Potential Actions

#### Accessible

1. Implement traffic calming measures to slow down traffic and allow drivers and passengers the time to consider stopping in the town centre. Cyclists would also benefit from this as the conditions would provide a safer and more pleasant cycling environment. The scope for this implementation may be limited due to the trunk road status of the A9 – nevertheless it is a standout issue in the town centre and tackling the problem could yield significant improvements.
2. Work with relevant stakeholders to deliver crossing point(s) to improve the safety of pedestrians.
3. Identify opportunities to create secure cycle parking facilities within the town centre.

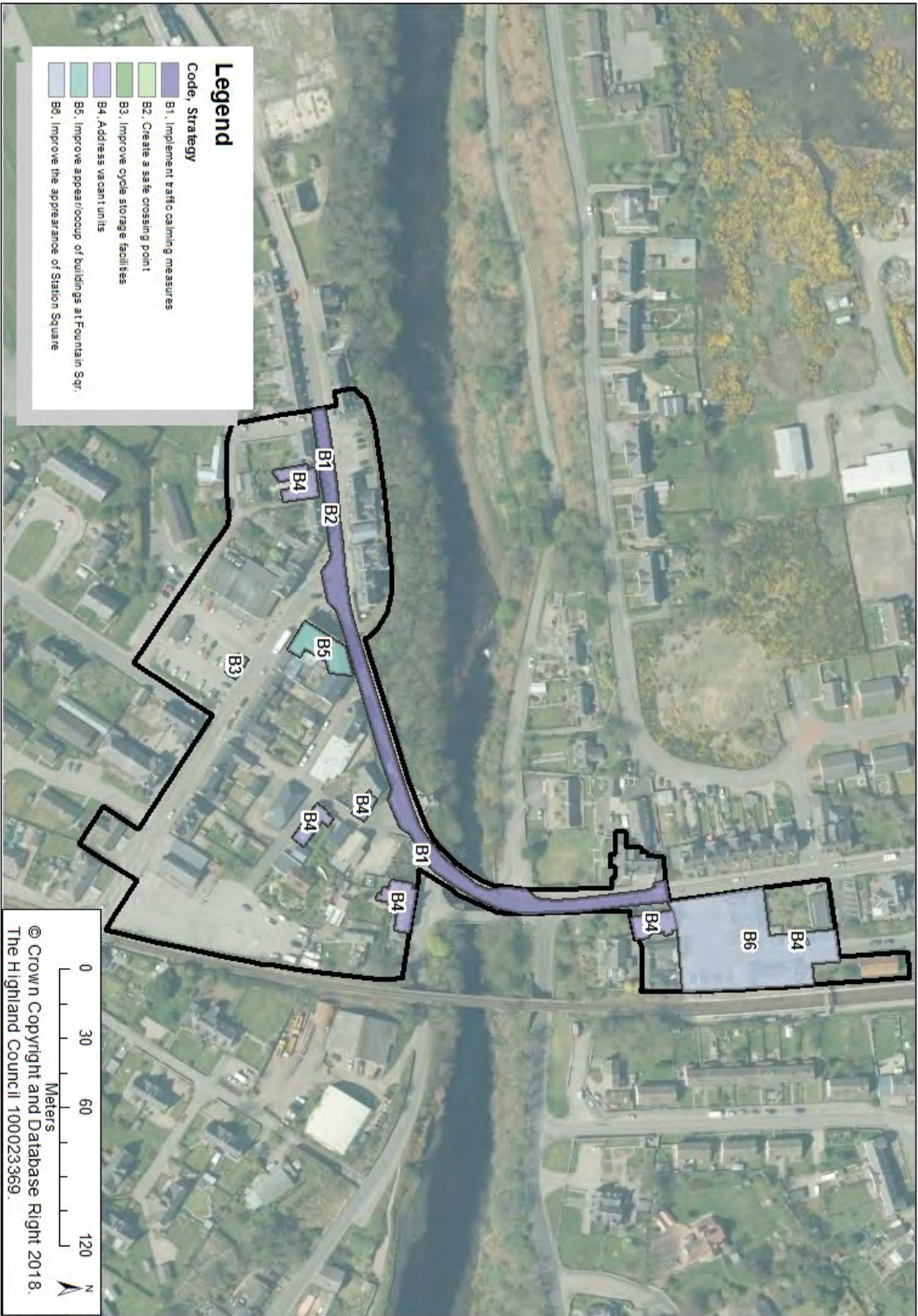
#### Active

4. Support uses that would result in vacant units in the town centre being occupied and allow changes to non-retail use on a case-by-case basis.

#### Attractive

5. Explore future uses and options for bringing the properties on Fountain Square back into sustainable use. Also, improve the connections and public realm on Gower Street to the main car park.
6. Support the creation of further visitor facilities at Station Square in conjunction with the recent success of the NC500 as well as improve its appearance.

Brora | Brùra 3



## 3 Brora | Brùra

### Question 1

#### CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

- Do you agree with the Opportunities and Potential Actions that we have identified? Have we missed any?
- How well do the Opportunities and Potential Actions address the health check findings?
- How can the Potential Actions be delivered? Who is best placed to take the actions forward and when could this happen?



## 4.1 Introduction

**4.1** Dornoch is a historic cathedral town, a short distance from extensive sandy beaches and the Dornoch Firth. It is the southernmost town in Sutherland and is around fifteen minutes drive from Tain in Easter Ross. It is a key tourist centre and tourism forms a key part of the local economy with visitors attracted by the historic nature of the town, the quality of the local environment and the internationally renowned Royal Dornoch Golf Course. A substantial number of historic buildings and other heritage features are located in the town centre and these, on the whole, have been well maintained. North Highland College UHI has a campus in Dornoch and student flats were recently developed to the south of the town centre.

**CaSPlan identified a number of placemaking priorities for Dornoch. Those that apply to the town centre are:**

- Environmental improvements at The Square.
- Assist and promote tourism and additional tourist facilities.
- Maintain access to Core Paths.



**Picture 4.1 Dornoch Cathedral**

## 4 Dornoch | Dòrnach

### 4.2 Progress to Date

#### Recent Investment

**4.2** A recent notable development in the centre of Dornoch was the renovation in 2015 of the B Listed former Dornoch Court House into a visitor and retail hub, featuring a visitor centre, spa, whisky cellars and a cafe.

#### Recent Planning Activity

**4.3** A number of planning applications have been approved in Dornoch town centre over the last three years (01/01/16 to 01/01/19) that have led to improvements in its appearance and character. Alterations to the Court House were granted in 2016/2017 in association with its redevelopment to a leisure development and permission was granted to Cocoa Mountain to transform an empty shop unit to a cafe in 2017.



**Picture 4.2 Castle Street, Dornoch**

### 4.3 Health Check Findings & Opportunities for Improvement

#### Town Centre Health Check Findings

- Dornoch was found to have a relatively healthy town centre due mainly to its well kept and attractive appearance, range of hospitality business and visitor facilities and its low vacancy rate.
- The parking area at the junction of Castle Street and Church Street is potentially confusing to visitors and lacks legibility.
- Cycling facilities in the town are few and lack quality.
- National Cycle Route 1 runs very close to but not through the town and is found at the other Dornoch Firth, linking Tain to Bonar Bridge.
- The bank building is vacant and should not be allowed to structurally deteriorate.

#### Opportunities Based on Town Centre Health Check Findings

- Improving the main square area would make it more legible and the possibility of doing so was raised in the Dornoch Economic Masterplan. Changing the square would require redevelopment work and would have to be planned, designed and undertaken sensitively given that it would take place within the town's Conservation Area. There is a potential to consider including planting as part of the proposal to break up the large expanse of the square. The impact on car and coach parking will need to be considered and proposals need to secure suitable and sufficient provision within the town. This may help to alleviate pressure on the centre and encourage visitors from cruise ships.
- Whilst not within the town centre boundary, should Dornoch Area Community Interest Company (DACIC) be successful in delivering a new community hub near Meadows Park, there may be wider opportunities for the town centre, such as creating additional parking which could be used by visitors to the town centre.
- An effort to connect the town to National Cycle Route 1 would make the town more attractive to cyclists. Sustrans regularly review their network and select new routes as part of the process. An extension or alternative route is therefore a possibility; Tain has a link that branches from the main north-south route.
- Steps could be taken to improve cycle parking and storage facilities. Doing so would enhance the town's reputation as a cycling destination.
- Proposals should be developed to bring the bank building back into use. The town has a healthy retail and leisure sector and it is likely that the substantial building could be found a new and sustainable use.

## 4 Dornoch | Dòrnach

### 4.4 Potential Actions

#### **Accessible**

1. Better define the main square area in order to more clearly differentiate between parking areas and roadway. Identify opportunities to establish suitable and sufficient car and coach parking close to the town centre.
2. Improve opportunities for cycling and work with Sustrans to explore potential to create a link to National Cycle Route 1. Enhanced signage may help and the opportunity to create a active travel bridge over the mouth of Loch Fleet should be explored.
3. Identify opportunities to create secure cycle parking and storage facilities within the town centre.

#### **Active**

4. Encourage the reuse of the vacant bank building and safeguard all other retail units from conversion to other uses due to the low vacancy rate in the town centre area.

#### **Attractive**

5. Flower bed creation and tree planting in conjunction with the main square improvements.

# Dornoch | Dòrnach 4



## 4 Dornoch | Dòrnach

### Question 2

#### CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

- Do you agree with the Opportunities and Potential Actions that we have identified? Have we missed any?
- How well do the Opportunities and Potential Actions address the health check findings?
- How can the Potential Actions be delivered? Who is best placed to take the actions forward and when could this happen?

## 5.1 Introduction

**5.1** Golspie is an attractive seaside village on the east coast of Sutherland. It is a hub for administrative services including the the location of the Council area offices, health care and primary and secondary education. It also provides a range of retail and hospitality outlets and sporting facilities. The village lies on the main transport routes through the Highlands - the A9 trunk road running through the middle of the village and Golspie train station is on the Far North Line. The village is popular with tourists with notable attractions being the historic town centre, its award-winning beach, the mountain bike trails at Ben Bhraggie and the Category A Listed Dunrobin Castle.

**CaSPlan identified a number of placemaking priorities for Golspie. Those that apply to the town centre are:**

- Assist and promote economic development.
- Assist and promote tourism and tourist facilities.
- The historic core may merit formal Conservation Area status.



**Picture 5.1 Golspie town centre**

## 5 Golspie | Goillspidh

### 5.2 Progress to Date

#### Recent Investment

**5.2** The most recent major investment in the town centre was in the form of a £286,000 public toilet block, which was delivered by the Highland Council in 2008. Small-scale environmental improvements have also taken place. The 'Mannie Two' sculpture and a stone circle were unveiled as part of the Shore Street Open Space Project in 2013. Golspie Community Council has asked Gail Ross MSP to request that the Scottish Government reduces the speed limit through the town centre from 30mph to 20mph in recognition of the impact the A9 has on its amenity.

#### Recent Planning Activity

**5.3** No planning applications of any note have been approved in Golspie town centre over the last three years (01/01/16 to 01/01/19). Outwith the town centre, the creation of a community sports area was approved behind Golspie Primary School. Much of the remainder of approved applications has been for new dwellings, a positive sign that town centre living is desirable in Golspie.



**Picture 5.2 Main Street, Golspie**



## 5.3 Health Check Findings & Opportunities for Improvement

### Town Centre Health Check Findings

- Golspie's town centre was found to be quite healthy, benefiting from having a range of retail and service facilities, well maintained streets and good open space/green infrastructure.
- The A9 itself creates a barrier to movement between the two halves of the town centre, with traffic volumes making the stretch hazardous and inconvenient to pedestrians. One crossing point does exist close to the middle of the town centre, however, the remainder of the long shopping area lacks safe places to cross. Whilst efforts are being made on the part of the Community Council to reduce the speed of traffic moving through the town, a more comprehensive solution that tackles the problem would do much to improve the amenity of the town centre.
- No cycling storage was noted.
- An effort has been made to introduce hanging baskets and other small areas of greenery, however, much of the centre is 'hard' and masonry predominates, which does little to dampen the traffic noise generated by the A9. Main Street is narrow and planting would be difficult to achieve without impeding on other uses.
- Public art is largely hidden from road users and Main Street has no examples.

### Opportunities Based on Town Centre Health Check Findings

- Improving crossing opportunities in the town centre would make it safer and more accessible and could improve the local economy. Doing so would do much to improve the town's attractiveness from a visitor perspective, but also for those living in Golspie.
- Improve cycling storage.
- There may be opportunity to create a central open space in the heart of the town centre if car parking at Fountain Road could be reduced slightly.
- Repairs to street furniture would improve the general appearance of the town centre and the introduction of additional pieces of distinctive public art would enhance the area's sense of identity in the eyes of visitors.

## 5 Golspie | Goillspidh

### 5.4 Potential Actions

#### Accessible

1. Implement traffic calming measures to slow down traffic and allow drivers and passengers the time to consider stopping in the town centre. Cyclists would also benefit from this as the conditions would provide a safer and more pleasant cycling environment. The scope for this implementation may be limited due to the trunk road status of the A9 – nevertheless it is a standout issue in the town centre and tackling the problem could yield significant improvements.
2. Identify locations and funding for enhanced cycling parking and storage facilities.

#### Active

3. Support uses that would result in vacant units in the town centre being occupied and allow changes to non-retail use on a case-by-case basis. For example, opportunity exists to renovate the vacant YMCA building and convert to much needed community space.

#### Attractive

4. Redevelop part of the Council car park at Fountain Road in order to allow for a larger area of open space in the heart of the town centre.
5. Introduce public art to build on the success of 'Mannie' and upgrade the street furniture currently in place.

# Golspie | Goillspidh 5



## 5 Golspie | Goillspidh

### Question 3

#### CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

- Do you agree with the Opportunities and Potential Actions that we have identified? Have we missed any?
- How well do the Opportunities and Potential Actions address the health check findings?
- How can the Potential Actions be delivered? Who is best placed to take the actions forward and when could this happen?

## 6.1 Introduction

**6.1** Thurso, the northernmost town on the Scottish mainland, acts as an administrative centre for a large part of Caithness and North Sutherland. Its town centre has a split character, with the older, eastern portion of the town following a looser street pattern and the 19th century western portion built to a rectilinear grid. The historic built environment is a major asset to the town and this is reflected in a Conservation Area designation covering much of the centre and containing a number of important Listed buildings. The port of Scrabster, on the edge of Thurso, is a key employer and forms an essential link to Orkney and Shetland. The Far North Line terminates at the town's railway station on the southern edge of the town centre.

**CaSPlan identified a number of placemaking priorities for Thurso. Those that apply to the town centre are:**

- Promote and enhance the built heritage of the town.
- Improvements to the road network to tackle congestion and movement issues.
- Relocate industrial uses along the riverfront and replace them with residential and mixed use development to make the most of the river corridor setting.
- Development should contribute towards the delivery of the priority actions identified in the Council's Thurso Active Travel Audit.



**Picture 6.1 Thurso Library**

## 6 Thurso | Inbhir Theòrsa

### 6.2 Progress to Date

#### Recent Investment

**6.2** The street surface at Rotterdam Street was improved in the early 2000s and a clock was installed. The clock has now ceased to function and the Council intends to replace it with a street light. Caithness Horizons, the town's museum, closed in early 2019 however efforts by the Highland Council are underway to reopen the facility for the summer tourist season.

#### Recent Planning Activity

**6.3** A number of notable planning applications have been approved in Thurso town centre over the last three years (01/01/16 to 01/01/19). An applicant was granted permission to subdivide a retail unit on Traill Street into two units in 2016 and permission was granted to change a retail unit on Rotterdam Street to a restaurant/leisure development in 2018.



**Picture 5.2 War memorial, Thurso**

## 6.3 Health Check Findings & Opportunities for Improvement

### Town Centre Health Check Findings

- Thurso town centre was found to provide a wide range of services, have a relatively low vacancy rate, felt safe and secure, offered a reasonable night-time economy and high quality open space/green infrastructure.
- Cycling through the town centre presents some challenges, notably the prohibition of cycle use on Rotterdam Street and the sharing of the A9(T) with heavy goods vehicles destined for the port of Scrabster.
- Certain parts of the public realm suffered from poor maintenance including areas of uneven and rutted road surfaces and weeds in some side streets.
- A small cluster of vacant units linked to the closure of bank branches was noted on Traill Street at the time of the health check.
- The public realm in the High Street area not memorable for visitors and dominated by asphalt.

### Opportunities Based on Town Centre Health Check Findings

- Enhancement of cycle storage and chaining points would make the town centre more cycle friendly and could encourage greater uptake of the mode of travel.
- Enhance general maintenance including repairing damaged surfaces which would improve the experience of road and pavement users.
- Finding new uses for the cluster of vacant units on Traill Street would improve the attractiveness of this main thoroughfare.
- The popularity of the NC500 could be exploited further to boost the economy.
- Better promote Thurso's rich heritage including the excellent Conservation Area which hosts a number of listed buildings to improve the image of the town centre.
- The High Street area has potential to become a key public space.

## 6 Thurso | Inbhir Theòrsa

### 6.4 Potential Actions

#### **Accessible**

1. Improve cycling facilities in the town - this includes exploring opportunities to upgrade the junction at St George's Street/Sinclair Street and providing better lock ups and chaining points.
2. Explore the possibility of removing cycling restrictions on Rotterdam Street - cycling should be encouraged and not prohibited.

#### **Active**

3. Consolidate the spread of retail units and other businesses within a central core area and promote change of use of vacant units to residential outwith this area.

#### **Attractive**

4. Improve the quality of the public realm in High Street and take steps to revitalise the square area in front of Caithness Horizons.



# Thurso | Inbhir Theòrsa 6



## 6 Thurso | Inbhir Theòrsa

### Question 4

#### CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

- Do you agree with the Opportunities and Potential Actions that we have identified? Have we missed any?
- How well do the Opportunities and Potential Actions address the health check findings?
- How can the Potential Actions be delivered? Who is best placed to take the actions forward and when could this happen?

## 7.1 Introduction

**7.1** Wick is a regional service and shopping centre and provides the main administrative and medical functions for the wider north Highland area. It is located on the eastern coast of Caithness and has grown around the harbour and Wick River. The A99 road runs through the centre of Wick and is a crucial artery in the Caithness road network. Wick benefits from a railway station on the Far North Line and having its own airport which flies to Aberdeen and Edinburgh. The town has a rich and distinctive history due to being one of Europe's largest herring ports during the 19th Century. This is evidence in the grandeur of the historic built environment within the town centre. Immediately south of the town centre boundary lies the Pulteneytown area which was one of Scotland's first planned industrial estates, and designed by renowned engineer Thomas Telford. In more recent times, out of town retail developments to the south and west have challenged the role of the town centre. The harbour area has experienced a revitalisation with creation of a marina for pleasure crafts and benefiting significantly from the renewables industry, particularly on-shore and off-shore wind farms.

**CaSPlan identified a number of placemaking priorities for Wick. Those that applied to the town centre were:**

- Conserve and promote the history and heritage of the town and surrounding area to help create a positive image and attract more visitors.
- Development should contribute towards the delivery of the priority actions identified in the Council's Wick Active Travel Audit.
- Town centre regeneration and riverside rejuvenation, including greater accessibility as identified in the Wick Charrette

## 7 Wick | Inbhir Ùige



**Picture 7.1 Wick town centre**

### 7.2 Progress to Date

#### Recent Investment

**7.2** The most recent change in Wick town centre has been the construction of new Highland Council offices, Caithness House at Market Place, completed in 2014. A number of road safety and traffic management improvements have been suggested for Wick town centre. Some of these include: gateway signage, roundels, 20mph repeater signs and Speed Indication Devices. Double yellow lines have also been proposed for Bridge Street as a means of improving the flow of traffic along the thoroughfare.

**7.3** Local Councillors have recently kick started a campaign to work with others to rejuvenate the town centre. It is still at the early stages with an inception meeting being held on 16 April 2019 with local business owners and other stakeholders to identify the issues and potential improvements. It is expected that the relevant findings and aspirations of this work will feed into the finalised Town Centre Strategy.

#### Recent Planning Activity

**7.4** The last three years (01/01/16 to 01/01/19) have seen a number of applications that have had and will have an effect upon Wick town centre. An application was received in 2016 and subsequently approved that would result in the conversion of the first floor of 17-19 Bridge Street from offices to form two flats, thereby potentially increasing the number of residents

## Wick | Inbhir Ùige 7

living in the town centre. Conversely, an application to convert a residential unit to an office was received and subsequently approved the same year. These approvals demonstrate that a change of use within a town centre is possible, given the satisfaction of a number of criteria, and can lead to a greater mix of uses.



**Picture 7.2 Retail in Wick**

## 7 Wick | Inbhir Ùige

### 7.3 Health Check Findings & Opportunities for Improvement

#### Town Centre Health Check Findings

- Although Wick town centre was found to perform well in terms of parking provision and open space, it did less well for all other factors.
- A large number of vacant and derelict sites and buildings may create a negative overall perception of the centre of Wick. Several vacant units are prominent and adversely affect first impressions of the town.
- The A99 (which Bridge Street and the western portion of High Street form a part) causes the streets to be loud with vehicle noise and hazardous for pedestrians. A proposed 20mph speed limit through the town may not be sufficient to comprehensively tackle the problem.
- The centre of Wick has a hard and sterile feel and there is a lack of greenery.
- It has been identified that the public transport arrangements for Wick are unsatisfactory and contribute to deterring new inhabitants from moving to the area
- The town centre faces challenges from Wick Retail Park and the retail units near the airport.
- Parking on Bridge Street is causing problems to the traffic flow through the town centre.

#### Opportunities Based on Town Centre Health Check Findings

- The town centre is sheltered and the introduction of more greenery would do much to soften its hard edges.
- Market Square has potential to be an excellent resource and could be enhanced to be the vibrant and logical centrepiece of the town.
- A solution to the lack of public transport options and availability would do much to draw the area closer to the service centre of the Inner Moray Firth area.
- Addressing the number of vacant buildings and sites would do much to improve the appearance of the town centre.
- Bridge Street is popular and has a large number of active uses - improvement to the streetscape in the form of traffic calming would support these uses and make the environment more pleasant, both from a visitor perspective but also for those living in Wick. The traffic problem is a standout issue in the town centre and tackling the problem could yield significant improvements.

## 7.4 Potential Actions

### Accessible

1. Identify improvements to help slow down traffic moving through the town centre and enhance the environment on Bridge Street.
2. Identify ways of improving cycling facilities both in terms of movement through the town centre on bike and provision of improved cycle parking and storage.

### Active

3. Address the large number of vacant units in the town centre and promote changes to non-retail use where appropriate.

### Attractive

4. Identify a series of improvements to Market Place and its immediate surroundings to make the most of its town square function and establish it as the focal point of the town. This could include: better signage; building on its sheltered position and existing nearby businesses; and providing opportunity to address the lack of greenery and the perception of it being sterile and hard.
5. Introduce public art to create visual interest in the town centre and enhance the sense of place.
6. Identify ways to improve the environment and sense of safety to the north of Bridge Street which is generally unattractive and dominated by the rears of many properties, some derelict, and the Poundstretcher service yard.
7. Redevelop the site at The Shore which is allocated in CaSPlan (WK11) for a Business, Tourism and Retail uses. Other uses may be considered if they enable the site to be redeveloped. Tackling this prominent derelict site, which is of heritage interest but regularly used as a car park, could help to draw visitors towards the area and may be a catalyst for further regeneration.

# 7 Wick | Inbhir Ùige





## Question 5

### CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

- Do you agree with the Opportunities and Potential Actions that we have identified? Have we missed any?
- How well do the Opportunities and Potential Actions address the health check findings?
- How can the Potential Actions be delivered? Who is best placed to take the actions forward and when could this happen?

## 8 Action Programme | Prògram Gnìomh

It is intended that each of the Potential Actions listed for each town centre will be included within the action programme, if agreed by the key stakeholders. The more accurate the information that it contains about a project (such as what, when and who) the more likely it can be delivered. The table below shows the structure of the action programme and the information needed to populate it.

<b>Town Centre</b>	<b>Potential Action</b>	<b>Lead Player</b>	<b>Timescales</b>	<b>Priority Level</b>	<b>Status</b>
<i>Name of town centre</i>	<i>Description of the project</i>	<i>List of key stakeholders including any leading group.</i>	<i>Timescales for completing the project including any key milestones</i>	<i>Identify whether its of high, medium or low priority</i>	<i>Provide information on any progress to date</i>

**Table 1**

### Question 6

#### CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

- Can you provide information on any of the suggested Potential Actions?
- Can you suggest any other Potential Actions? If so, who is best placed to take the actions forward and when could this happen?





**The Highland  
Council  
Comhairle na  
Gàidhealtachd**

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