

Agenda Item	8.
Report No	CC/04/20

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Caithness Committee

Date: 19 February 2020

Report Title: Caithness and Sutherland Town Centre Strategy Supplementary Guidance

Report By: Chief Executive Officer Infrastructure and Environment

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This paper presents the results of public consultation on the Draft Caithness and Sutherland Town Centre Strategy Supplementary Guidance. The Strategy aims to support the delivery of the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan) 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.
- 1.2 The intention is that the Strategy will be statutorily adopted as Supplementary Guidance to the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan 2018.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- i. consider the issues raised in consultation responses to the Draft Caithness and Sutherland Town Centre Strategy (Section 5 and Appendix 1) and revisions to the Strategy (Appendix 2);
 - ii. agree that the Strategy, finalised in line with the decisions of the two Area Committees, be submitted to Scottish Ministers for consideration as per the statutory process for adoption of Supplementary Guidance;
 - iii. note that the Strategy will be a material consideration for development management purposes with immediate effect;

- iv. agree to the adoption and issuing of the submitted version of the Strategy as statutory Supplementary Guidance to the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan upon completion of the requisite 28 day period for consideration by Scottish Ministers, subject to any directions from Ministers indicating otherwise;
- v. note that the associated Action Programme will be drawn together by officers in consultation with Ward Members and the parties mentioned in it and subsequently will be published and promoted to those parties and the wider communities.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource: Resources to complete statutory processes for the finalisation and adoption of the Strategy and for preparation and publication of the associated Action Programme are allowed for within the service budget. The Council would consider separately its resource availability to contribute to any specific projects within the Strategy/ Action Programme that it becomes involved in.
- 3.2 Legal: The Strategy could be subject to legal challenge once it is adopted but due process has been followed for consultation and will be for adoption of the Strategy, therefore the Council will have reduced the risk of challenge and have a defensible position in the event of any challenge.
- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island): The Strategy sets 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.
- 3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever: By seeking to safeguard and strengthen town centres, including measures such as provision for active travel and green infrastructure, the Strategy can be beneficial for helping to address climate change concerns. As previously reported, the Strategy was screened in respect of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and we determined that an Environmental Report was not required. CaSPlan allocation WK11 'Site at the Shore', which features in the Strategy, was subject of environmental assessment as part of the preparation of CaSPlan (including Habitats Regulations Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment) and suitable mitigation text incorporated into the wording of CaSPlan.
- 3.5 Risk: There are no known significant risks associated with the Supplementary Guidance.
- 3.6 Gaelic: Gaelic headings have already been included in the Strategy document.

4. Publicity and Consultation

- 4.1 Public consultation on the Draft Strategy was formally launched on Friday 14 June 2019 and ran until Friday 23 August 2019. The Draft Strategy was published on the Council's online consultation portal through which comments could be submitted. A paper copy of the Draft Strategy was available to view in Mobile Libraries and at Council HQ. The consultation was publicised through public notice in local newspapers, a news story, social media and also through correspondence sent to a wide range of organisations and individuals from our consultation database with potential interest – providing details and encouraging people to comment. This included (but was not limited to) direct correspondence to Community Councils, Community Action Groups and Development Trusts, Local Community Planning Partnerships and Key Agencies.

- 4.2 In the lead up to and during the consultation, officers were invited along to and attended three meetings at which there was opportunity to hear about relevant community-led projects in the respective settlement and provide information about the Draft Strategy, answer questions and encourage response to the consultation:
- Brora NC500 Group – 28 May 2019;
 - Wick Town Centre Regeneration – 10 June 2019;
 - Dornoch Area Community Interest Company – 06 August 2019.

5. Results of Consultation

- 5.1 A total of 69 comments were received from 32 individual respondents as part of the formal consultation. The consultation responses are summarised in Appendix 1. Officers' consideration and recommendations have also been informed by additional discussions with some key stakeholders and agencies as well as internal teams of the Council. The revised Strategy recommended for adoption is in Appendix 2.
- 5.2 Given the nature of the document, many of the points raised have been incorporated within or have influenced the final version of the Strategy recommended for adoption. Based on the comments received, officers have typically either amended/refined existing references or added additional ones to take account of any opportunities or concerns raised. Following comments on certain issues, we have completely removed reference to a small number of particular opportunities/actions.
- 5.3 In response to comments that the document should do more to highlight a vision for the town centres, we have attempted to draw out more strategic and overarching priorities within the Opportunities sections. As part of this, we have included greater detail within the Potential Actions to better indicate the ways in which the Opportunities could be delivered.
- 5.4 Common themes raised during the consultation included:
- Factual updates to certain health check findings or references within the Recent Investment/Planning Activity sections;
 - The need for introducing traffic management measures to improve the pedestrian environment by reducing the impact of vehicular traffic, consider pedestrian crossing points and reconsider parking arrangements and greater enforcement;
 - Opportunity to capitalise on the growing tourism market, particularly the NC500 which passes through or near each of the five town centres – suggestions/priorities included improvements to signage and enhanced visitor facilities;
 - Opportunity to create better quality active travel links;
 - Support for the enhancement of public and civic spaces whilst recognising and protecting the range of functions they currently serve;
 - Bringing back into use vacant and derelict sites to enhance facilities and improve appearance of the town centre.
- 5.5 The single issue which received the most comment was the suggestion in the Consultation Draft that there may be opportunity to create an addition to the National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 1 to connect Dornoch. This suggestion was made in response to a finding of the Town Centre Health Check for Dornoch that the town was not located on the NCN. Objections to the suggestion were made by several community councils, community organisations and members of the public. The main reasons for the

opposition were: that the Route is important for the central Sutherland economy; it is a quieter, more scenic and safer route for cyclists; and Dornoch and the east coast already benefit from large tourism numbers. In response to these comments we have removed reference to the suggested addition to the NCN from the Strategy.

- 5.6 As part of objections to the NCN suggestion, several respondents raised concerns about the rationale for the selected town centres and the Scottish Government's Town Centre Regeneration Fund. As set out in the Strategy, the five town centres were identified as part of the preparation of the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan), as a means of protecting them from certain development which may have adverse impacts on the settlements and to promote footfall generating uses to the town centre in the first instance. The Scottish Government's Town Centre Regeneration Fund distributed funds to local authorities based on the number of settlements with populations over 1,000. We are not aware of any consultation on the methodology used to allocate funds in that way.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1 Subject to the two Area Committees agreeing the final version of the Strategy for adoption, officers will finalise and include map content to help reference the location and nature of proposed actions following Committee and the Strategy will then be submitted to Scottish Government with our request for clearance to adopt and issue it as Supplementary Guidance to CaSPlan. Whilst, in time, Supplementary Guidance will be phased out as a document type as a consequence of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, for the time being the Council is able to prepare and adopt Supplementary Guidance that relates to an existing Local Development Plan (LDP), and it can retain that status until CaSPlan itself is replaced by another LDP in the future.
- 6.2 Once adopted as Supplementary Guidance, 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.
- 6.3 Following adoption of the Strategy the associated Action Programme, outlining steps that may be taken by a range of individuals and bodies to improve their town centres, will be drawn together by officers in consultation with Ward Members and the parties mentioned in it and subsequently will be published and promoted to those parties and the wider communities.
- 6.4 Progress updates provided from time-to-time by those working on actions included in the associated Action Programme may be used to produce and publish Action Programme updates. If there is considered to be a need to review the Strategy itself in the future then that could be considered for inclusion in the Council's work programme; any such review would be in the context of review of the Local Development Plan or preparation of non-statutory guidance, given the emergent legislation.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment

Date: 4 February 2020

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Background Papers:

[Consultation Draft of Caithness and Sutherland Town Centre Strategy \(2019\)](#)

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

[Town Centre Health Checks](#)

[Town Centre Toolkit](#)

APPENDIX 1 - Summary of comments on the Consultation Draft

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Brora

SNH

- Support the Opportunities and Actions identified as these should make active travel more appealing for pedestrians and cyclists, as well as contributing positively to placemaking qualities.

Friends of the John o' Groats Trail

- Under the Accessible heading, there should be an additional item as follows: "Improve opportunities to walk to and from the town centre on trails providing walks for all levels of users. This should include the John o' Groats Trail long distance route that already goes through the centre but could have improved signage and path surface. This will encourage an active town population and provide recreation for visitors."

Brora & District Action Group

- Agree with the opportunities identified as they concur with findings of a public survey conducted in February 2019 by BaDAG on behalf of the community.
- Opportunities - There are additional Opportunities and Potential Actions which could optimise the economic benefits of the NC500. Station Square has been highlighted in the health check, but has already seen significant visual improvement and development of previously unoccupied buildings since the health check. The main focus should be improvement/development of Fountain Square, particularly the under-utilised and under-developed Braes Hotel building, which was the stand out concern of the public in the recent survey, as it has been in a number of recent consultations over the last 5 years.
- Actions - As the town's Development Trust, BaDAG is working closely with NC500 Ltd and North Highland Initiative in order to scope out up to three large projects to support the town centre and wider town improvements as a result of the recent survey. These are likely to involve redevelopment of Fountain Square and the surrounding area, providing improved signage to alert potential visitors to the public car parking areas, the beach, heritage and

other leisure facilities and improved visitor facilities within the town centre area, e.g. chemical waste disposal and electrical charge point services in the town centre. Potential projects are, of course subject to successful funding applications once they are fully scoped out. Some measures detailed in the potential actions are only able to be implemented by statutory bodies, e.g. traffic calming and crossing points.

Transport Scotland

- Replace the Recommended Actions 1 and 2 for Brora with the following: “The Council will work with Transport Scotland to identify the need for traffic speed management and the improvement of accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists alongside, and across, the A9 trunk road, whilst recognising the strategic function of the route”. Transport Scotland recommends the wording change to highlight the strategic nature of the trunk road and that the Council will be required to work with Transport Scotland in considering any potential changes to the A9(T). The actions as currently worded suggest that measures will be implemented and are going ahead.

Dornoch

SNH

- Support the opportunities identified, as these should make active travel more appealing for pedestrians and cyclists, as well as contributing positively to placemaking qualities.
- Planting at the main square would provide an opportunity to contribute to biodiversity, particularly native flowering species which are attractive to pollinators as well as people.

SEPA

- In relation to proposed changes to the main square SEPA suggest an additional opportunity: Partial de-culverting of the Dornoch Burn, which runs under the square, could be used to divide up the area and provide the opportunity for the proposed additional planting, which is generally lacking in this area. As well as the obvious improvements to the watercourse, including potentially some additional flood storage and riparian planting, the works may help better define different areas of the square.

*Dornoch & District Community Association,
Dornoch Area Community Council and
Dornoch Area Community Interest Company*

- Any changes to the Square must allow unhindered access to the current full-width carriageway for access & turning of daily bus services, and variety of events throughout the year. Other improvements would include addressing the MOT centre in Church Street

parking customer cars on the Square and introducing a 20mph zone along Castle Street to the Square as a safety measure and a low cost option.

- There is plenty of natural landscaping with and no further planting is required. There are already difficulties in maintaining the existing landscaping.
- DACIC is currently investigating Project Curlew - a multipurpose new build community & leisure centre with car and coach parking in Dornoch South. This would allow cars and coaches to park off the Square but close to the town centre. Whilst not within the town centre boundary, should 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.
- DADCA was pursuing Meadows Park for the location of a new community centre. Those plans failed through lack of funding. DADCA is now working with DACIC to incorporate a new community centre into Project Curlew, based in Dornoch South which includes car & coach parking. DACIC is also progressing an asset transfer of the Police Station for conversion into the Dornoch HUB as a business, creative and wellbeing centre with a gym.
- A connection to NCR1 is not needed or wanted. This route provides a vital income stream to the communities in the Kyle of Sutherland and we do not want to cause any displacement. Their quieter roads are far more suitable for cyclists. The Dornoch junctions on the A9 are very dangerous for cyclists. Our roads and especially the Square are already very busy with cars and coaches and to encourage multiple cyclists into that mix is irresponsible.
- Steps could be taken to improve cycle parking and storage facilities. Cycling racks will be provided and the Dornoch HUB (ex Police Station) and Project Curlew. However, we do not wish to promote Dornoch as a cycling 'destination' but rather encourage cycling as one of many activities.
- The bank building and the residential flat on the first floor have been sold and are being returned to a single residential property in September 2019. There are currently no empty buildings in Dornoch town centre.
- Reference should be added that the considerable investment in the built environment by Dornoch Stores creating the General Store and Hardware Store as well as residential flats on the first floor. Also a renovation of an ex-solicitors office to a clothing boutique opening in Castle Street in September 2019.
- It is difficult to see how to 'safeguard all other retail units from conversion to other uses'. A number of properties combine residential and retail, but when put up for sale may not attract buyers to maintain that combination.
- There is still a real challenge in getting footfall into the Retail Park and businesses struggle there. Hopefully, a car & coach park in Dornoch South will improve this situation.

Individual

- Objects to Action 1 as the current layout offers parking facilities in the centre of the village which are convenient for visitors and businesses. Changes to this layout may result in greater risk of accidents.

- Supports Action 2 for improving cycle infrastructure within the town and connecting to other local routes. Potential changes to National Cycle Route 1 is a matter for Sustrans and a task to be addressed by more national planning bodies.
- Action 4, retention of the use of former commercial premises is frequently best left to normal market forces. Planners and business development agencies should already have powers and incentives to stimulate repurposing.

Friends of the John o' Groats Trail

- Requests additional item under the Accessible heading: "Improve opportunities for walkers to walk to and from the town centre on trails providing walks for all levels of walkers. This should include the John o' Groats Trail long distance route that already goes through the centre but could have improved signage and path surface. This will encourage an active town population and provide recreation for visitors."

Individual

- Questions whether there are any problems with Dornoch Square regarding parking, however requests that any changes should be practical improvements.
- Need to diversify the economy and not rely solely on tourism and golf.
- Supports priority for commercial usage of town centre properties rather than allowing conversion to private dwellings.
- Safe active travel across the A9 should be a priority with opportunity to invest in a bridge or tunnel.

Individual

- Supports need to attract more cyclists/cycle touring to Dornoch and the wider area. The John o'Groats Trail long distance route provides an opportunity.

Ardgay & District Community Council, Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust, Heart of Sutherland Tourism, Crannag Bistro, Creich Community Council, Lairg Community Council, Lairg & District Community Initiative, 6 x Individuals

Objects to and requests removal of references to amending the current National Cycle Route 1 for one or more of the following reasons:

- The existing route is not particularly close to Dornoch.
- The A9 should be avoided because it's unsafe for cyclists and frequent high wind warnings over the Dornoch Bridge.
- The existing route is much quieter and it also encourages cyclists into the less visited heart of Sutherland.
- The economic impact of the Dornoch Bridge on the communities of Central Sutherland is still felt. Since the closure of Carbisdale Castle as a hostel, and the success of NC500, Central Sutherland has been left with few, if any, nationally (and internationally) promoted tourism products, with the exception being NCR1.

- The existing route provides a vital income stream to the communities in the Kyle of Sutherland which have suffered economically from the opening of the Dornoch Bridge. The proposal may reduce the number of visitors which follow the route through our fragile communities.
- The opening of the Dornoch Bridge which now bypasses Ardgay and Bonar Bridge has had a significant adverse impact on the local economy.
- A town centre plan should focus on the town centre; improve facilities for those who cycle and develop safe routes around the community.
- Dornoch and the edge of the Northern Highlands has had a huge boost from NC500, and been the focus of much development and investment. New businesses are emerging, investment is being made into existing ones and the local economy is booming. Dornoch economy is booming, and has been boosted by cruise ships and the town centre is thriving. It also has a tourism and development group that financially supports the promotion of the town and inwardly invest in its development.
- There is a great focus on encouraging visitors to go off route, stay longer and explore to spread the visitor load and provide the economic boost to other areas.
- Lairg and Bonar Bridge are ideally suited to be promoted as a great base stay location due to their central location, great road and rail networks, close proximity to the NC500 route, beautiful scenery, and range of accommodation, activity providers, restaurants and facilities.

Golspie

SNH

- Support the opportunities identified, as these should make active travel more appealing for pedestrians and cyclists, as well as contributing positively to placemaking qualities.
- Support the incorporation of planting as part of the introduction of public art, as this would contribute to biodiversity in addition to placemaking.
- The inclusion of greenspace as part of the reduction of the amount of car parking at Fountain Road would be particularly beneficial.
- Support the actions that would benefit active travel (points 1,2) and placemaking (point 1,4, 5).

Individual

- Requests the following is added: Signage required to highlight Tourism opportunities and Wall at Shore Street needs removed to open up the beach area when heading North. We are challenged with the tunnel effect and traffic drives through without being made aware we have great amenities, e.g. beach, walks, bike track etc.

Friends of the John o' Groats Trail

- Requests the following is added: The town sits on the route of the rapidly developing John o' Groats Trail and there are opportunities to harness this trade to grow the local economy. Walking trails are the ultimate "slow tourism."

SEPA

- Welcomes the proposal to introduce some additional green space to the central carpark. This could be used to treat some located surface water drainage and help reduce the load going to the combined sewer.

Individual

- Requests the following is added: A signage strategy (vehicle and pedestrian/cyclist) and potentially a theme would benefit the village. It would highlight the vast array of amenities available, e.g. the mountain bike track. Golspie suffers from a funnel effect on the A9 and requires areas to be opened up to travellers like West End stores corner when heading North to enable folk to see the sea and beach. The usage of the School Car Park as general parking would be good and marking of parking spaces beside the surgery could gain more spaces. A one way system at Coop Lane would be safer than cars creeping onto the A9.

Individual

- Access to Main Street from both North and South is too narrow to accommodate the width of HGV and PSV vehicles and the volume of traffic during peak times. Further assessment is needed to maintain safe use of the peripheral areas by pedestrians and road users.
- Pavements adjacent to A9 are not in good condition, often used as additional vehicle parking and generally are too narrow, particularly outside the Co-operative store. Pavement condition has to be considered a priority for elderly and disabled people.
- Timing of the pedestrian crossing has to be optimised for pedestrian use whilst maintaining safety for road traffic.
- Little evidence of cycles being used during peak periods so provision of facilities needs to be evaluated to assess demand.
- There is no vacant space for public art without further impeding pavements.
- The provision and improvement of community notice boards should be fundamental to improvement of town centre.

Individual

- Golspie might be best served if through traffic could be diverted from Main Street, which is too narrow to accommodate the increasing size of HGV and PSV vehicles.
- Vehicles servicing retail/commercial outlets impede the flow of traffic and unnecessary parking on pavements impede pedestrians - all issues need to be addressed to provide an overall comprehensive proposal for improving Main Street for all users.
- Traffic calming measures affect all road users and fails to discriminate against vehicles who are intolerant or ignore speed restrictions. The problem is essentially how to adapt a route

through the town that is more than a century old to the requirements of modern users, taking in to consideration the needs of the community as well as visitors.

- The requirement for enhanced parking for cycles needs further evaluation on the numerical demand before any scarce public resources are allocated.
- A property previously used for retail purposes is falling into neglect and the possibility of being re-purposed as a community enterprise has to be considered.
- The whole of the Fountain Road / Golspie Health Centre / access to Golspie High School would benefit from a comprehensive re-design as a community focal point - not just as a parking space.
- Further assessment of pollution at peak use times and noise from passing vehicles throughout the 24-hour day is essential.
- Suggested delivery agencies include: Transport Scotland, Highland Council, Golspie Community Council, Sutherland Community Planning Partnership, Go Golspie.

Individual

- The existing traffic lights are too slow to activate people get fed up waiting.
- A 20 mph speed limit would make the village Main Street (A9 town centre) safer, it would give time for vehicle passengers to notice our carparks, toilets, stop and walk about.
- The hanging baskets and planters are much admired and encourage people to stop as long as they are not going too fast.
- What is public art, not murals please.

Individual

- The village centre has traffic calming (A9 Main Street) it has a 20 mph zone from the Bowling Green to the Stags Head Hotel which is almost the whole centre but the 20mph is only switched on when the High School is going in or out. If we had that on all the time the problem would be solved with no expenditure.
- We have an excellent cycle route along the promenade, safe and scenic from shore street carpark to Duke Street.
- The Fountain road carpark should not be changed there is ample parking behind the health centre, this was a bus park but we do need all parking areas white lined.

Go Golspie

- While the opportunities are positive they do not have enough vision or ambition. Golspie has huge potential for development and the Opportunities and actions do not explore the full range of possibilities that are available.
- There is also an untapped resource along the seafront that is ripe for development. The lack of restaurants deters visitors and we need to encourage entrepreneurs to invest in the area to provide facilities that will encourage visitors to spend longer in the area and in the evenings in particular.

- There is limited promotion of the facilities that are available such as the excellent mountain bike track. The success of the NC500 is not being capitalised on and the lack of camping and Caravan facilities results in wild camping in scenic areas with disappointing consequences. The car parking in the Fountain road is poorly laid out which restricts the number of cars that can be accommodated. The overflow parking in the bus park is not signposted and does not encourage visitors to make use of it.
- There is a run down business park in the centre of the village that is not promoted effectively and needs refreshed.
- Traffic calming measures are restricted by Transport Scotland (TS) and there is no desire on the part of TS to put any restrictions on the A9. While it is recognised that this is the main trunk road north to south no consideration is given to the residents of the village, the emphasis is on traffic rather than people and that needs to change with people taking precedence.
- While Cycling is to be encouraged it is not a priority when the development of the village is being considered.
- Indeed we are very fortunate in having a superb mountain bike trail.
- The YMCA has the potential to deliver social and developmental space for locals and visitors alike but due to neglect it needs major renovation. As a town centre building allowing it to continue to deteriorate is not an option and Go Golspie is actively engaged in returning this iconic building to community ownership.
- Not only does the Fountain Road Car park need redeveloping the Shore Street Car park needs to be enhanced as it sits in a prime location to allow access to the beach and the esplanade. This is an excellent place to encourage beach front development to unlock the potential that undoubtedly exists in this untapped resource.
- While Public art is to be encouraged there are greater and more important areas of development that must be considered in the first instance. If there is a vibrant town centre Public Art will surely follow.
- Development of the underused and run down business park in the centre of the village will encourage new business start up. Currently it is in a poor state and is continues to decay as the current owners show a serious lack of vision and place obstacles in the way to prevent community development.
- The open space that is the school green space could become a much more integrated sports facility that would be beneficial to education and the community. It could also be linked to the all weather facilities that exist opening up opportunities for a wide variety of sporting events.
- Overall we need vision and ambition to be an integral part of this plan and this document falls well short of that goal. All of the above information has been identified through feedback that has been gathered by Go Golspie who are actively promoting the village and who are seeking advice and support from HIE to develop a Master Plan for the village.

- Replace the Recommended Actions 1 and 2 for Brora with the following: “The Council will work with Transport Scotland to identify the need for traffic speed management and the improvement of accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists alongside, and across, the A9 trunk road, whilst recognising the strategic function of the route”. Transport Scotland recommends the wording change to highlight the strategic nature of the trunk road and that the Council will be required to work with Transport Scotland in considering any potential changes to the A9(T). The actions as currently worded suggest that measures will be implemented and are going ahead.

Thurso

Individual

- Supports the Opportunities listed but seeks that better enforcement of parking within the town centre as it being largely ignored at present and represents a major health and safety issue.

Individual

- Promote the Treasure Trails maps for Wick, John O Groats, Thurso to allow visitors and townsfolk to see hidden parts /rediscover the towns. The one in Stirling was great fun and allowed you to walk around the town seeing sights and this in turn made you stop at cafés, shops you may of otherwise not come across.

SNH

- Support the Opportunities identified, as these should make active travel more appealing for pedestrians and cyclists, as well as contributing positively to placemaking qualities.
- Support the Actions that would benefit active travel (points 1, 2) and placemaking (points 1, 2, 4).
- Recommend that the strategy encourages the incorporation of planting as a means of improving the quality of the public realm and to increase biodiversity.

Friends of the John o’ Groats Trail

- Under the Accessible heading, there should be an additional item as follows: "Improve opportunities to walk to and from the town centre on trails providing walks for all levels of users. This should include the long distance walking route that is planned to go through the centre and could have improved signage and path surface. This will encourage an active town population and provide recreation for visitors."

SEPA

- In relation to the Placemaking Priority to “relocate industrial uses along the riverfront and replace them with residential and mixed use development to make the most of the river corridor setting “ SEPA request that the strategy makes clear that this would only be acceptable if it was demonstrated by Flood Risk Assessment that the development was not at risk of flooding. The change in use from industrial to residential represents an increase in land use vulnerability from least to highly vulnerable as detailed in SEPA’s ‘Flood Risk and Land Use Vulnerability Guidance’.
- In relation to Action 3 to identify new uses for vacant units and concentrate retail uses in a smaller area than at present with the remainder converted to residential. It is noted that some of these proposed developments are along Rotterdam Street which leads into the High Street. SEPA highlight that they have records of past property flooding in this area and on two occasions (we are aware of) 23.10.2006 and 6.11.2011, different shops were flooded. SEPA emphasise that in any redevelopment from retail to residential, potential flood risk would need to be considered further. Additionally small areas of surface water flooding have been identified on the SEPA Flood Map. In most cases surface water flooding will be managed through appropriate drainage and SEPA consider the water quantity aspects of surface water drainage to be the remit of local authorities. SEPA therefore recommend that you consult with your flood risk management team who may have a greater local knowledge of this area and who we consider are better placed to provide more detailed advice on any necessary surface water mitigation measures.

Individual

- Objects to removing cycling restrictions on Rotterdam Street as vulnerable adults and children should not have to share their space with cyclists. Many city and town centres protect pedestrian space from vehicles and other forms of transport includes cycles. There are a number of other routes which cyclists can take to avoid this area and they can also dismount and walk the bicycle.

Caithness Chamber of Commerce

- The cluster of vacant units identified is linked to banking closures and it would be interested to know if the Council has been involved in any discussions with Jamie Stone MP and the relevant banks about his ‘banking hub’ proposal.

Caithness Disabled Access Panel

- Highlights that there is inadequate provision of disabled parking spaces. Existing disabled spaces are poorly road marked with poor signage.
- Some shop entrances are not disabled user friendly however it is appreciated that not all can be easily modified due to building constraints.

Individual

- There are issues with early evening economy when most cafes and shops are closed.

- Add under Accessible the need to control parking to tackle parking on double yellow lines, notably at junctions, parking in disabled parking spaces.
- Add under Attractive identify appropriate uses/ activities to support and highlight the amenity of existing green space, e.g. river walks.
- There is a lack of cycle racks and disabled parking spaces at the X99 bus stop which may necessitate relocation
- Requests that the reference to Caithness Horizons is updated.
- Requests that reference is made to electric vehicle usage and the need for more charging points.

Wick

Individual

- The public toilets in Wick need a total refurbishment.
- The Made in Caithness shop was popular when it was open.
- Better information at bus stops, including electronic timetable boards
- The Tourist Information centre should be in Wick Train Station, tourists then have someone to speak to and to possible help book tours etc.
- Locals find it hard to use local transport let alone tourists.

SNH

- Support the opportunities identified, as these should make active travel more appealing for pedestrians and cyclists, as well as contributing positively to placemaking qualities.
- Support the actions that would benefit active travel (points 1, 2) and placemaking (points 1, 2, 4-6).
- To make the most of the opportunity presented by points 4 and 5, SNH recommend that the strategy encourages the incorporation of the planting of native flowering species as a means of improving the quality of the public realm as well as contributing to biodiversity.

Friends of the John o' Groats Trail

- Requests that the following Opportunity is added: "The town sits on the route of the rapidly developing John o' Groats Trail and there are opportunities to harness this trade to grow the local economy. Walking trails are the ultimate "slow tourism."

SEPA

- In relation to the Placemaking Priority for Wick to have "riverside rejuvenation" SEPA request that the Strategy should highlight that any development activity adjacent to the Wick River, would require consideration of flood risk and if necessary (dependant on proposal) be supported by a Flood Risk Assessment.

- It is proposed under Action 3 that retail to residential conversion would be supported. On the Wick map, buildings on Bridge Street (A99) adjacent to the Bridge of Wick are identified for possible conversion of use. As highlighted above SEPA would not support redevelopment with an increase in vulnerability of use, without a FRA demonstrating the proposal accords with Scottish Planning Policy.
- Action 7 relating to the redevelopment of WK11, SEPA previously commented on this site that there are records of coastal flooding and an assessment of flood risk would be required prior to it being established that this is a suitable location for residential development.

Wick Community Council

- Supports the need to increase footfall in the town centre and requests inclusion in the strategy of the proposal to convert a large vacant retail unit into an indoor market on the ground floor with offices and/or business starter units on the upper floors. The Community Council with support from Highland Council aim to carry out a feasibility study on using a large vacant retail unit for the above purposes, this will be done by the Community Council with support from Highland Council

Caithness Chamber of Commerce

- Note with interest the point that public transport links from Wick are felt to be undesirable. What makes Wick specifically undesirable compared to other town centres in the region?

General Comments

Individual

- We should liaise with Orkney who have a thriving tourist industry so we can get advice on realise our full potential. This should include better signage for tourists and business rates need to be lowered to allow new businesses to start up and current businesses to continue trading.

Individual

- The Council has the tools but is not using them effectively. For many years, a culture of 'navel-gazing' has developed with many inward-looking schemes and initiatives. We need to spread the net and look further afield for investment, encouraging major businesses to re-locate their entire operations, not just 'outposts.'

Caithness Chamber of Commerce

- Welcome the aspiration to move to mixed-use developments in the town centres, with the aim of generating greater footfall. However, we are concerned that an open question remains as to how the private sector will be incentivised to invest in town centre

development. This strategy needs to explore options for incentivising private sector investment in town centres.

- Concerned that the 'potential actions' do little more than restate the opportunities identified. They are vague, aspirational, and lacking in detail. Given the level of work previously undertaken from the Wick and Thurso Charettes in 2013 through to the finalised Caithness & Sutherland Local Development Plan we would have expected this strategy to have identified significantly more detailed proposals as to how these actions should be taken forward.
- The third sector, particularly Development Trusts and the Development Officers within Caithness have done good work and the Council is urged to work closely with these groups to maximise the potential benefits of any action or investment.

Individual

- There is a growing recognition of the link between greenspace and health. Within the NHS, a national work programme being led by SNH, it is hoped that greater use of the outdoors can help to tackle physical inactivity through encouraging walking and cycling, mental health issues and health inequalities.
- Supports the identified need for better cycle infrastructure for both residents and tourists and references to slow traffic, particularly for the elderly.
- Seeks that strategy includes reference to
 - opportunities associated with e-bikes and charging points
 - opportunities for improving the public realm to enable frailer members of the community to gain more independence.
 - Planting should be used as an opportunity to enhance biodiversity. Use native species that encourage bees and butterflies.
 - Improved signage to existing walking and cycling paths, particularly to local services, leisure opportunities and local greenspaces.
 - The lack of publically accessible toilets can be a key barrier to people getting out
 - Lighting and shelter, particularly at bus stops, allows for continued walking throughout the year.
 - Dog owners often have better health and dog friendly establishments would encourage people to leave the car and walk into town.

National Grid

- National Grid has no comments to make in response to this consultation but wish to be involved in the preparation, alteration and review of plans and strategies which may affect our assets.

Ardgay & District Community Council, Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust, Heart of Sutherland Tourism, Creich Community Council, Lairg Community Council, Lairg & District Community Initiative, 1 x Individual

- The Highland Council should be using this strategy to boost smaller towns and encourage business growth, investment into new facilities, employment and our young people to stay and work in the towns. Tourism is the way that this can happen.
- The Strategy focuses exclusively on settlements around the edge Caithness and Sutherland, as is the case of much development planning the central region is regarded as almost a no go area.
- The basis of the strategy, which only looks at towns with 1,000 residents or more, is flawed and highly biased against the more rural vast and sparsely populated areas of our region.
- Surely the Highland Council could have requested more flexibility from the Scottish Government, which might have highlighted the issues of rurality. It is disappointing that the Scottish Government's Town Centre Regeneration Fund (assumed) does not apply to smaller villages and townships (populations less than 1000) within Sutherland. It risks, inadvertently, bringing disadvantage to the rest of fragile remote and rural Sutherland.
- A Town Centre Strategy is not fit for purpose in a rural county such as Sutherland as it looks at the towns in isolation, which creates displacement of smaller settlements. By focussing on further developing the three towns with populations over 1,000, and ignoring the smaller population centres, we are increasing the likelihood of population drift to the bigger 'towns'.

Appendix 2

Caithness and Sutherland Town Centre Strategy Supplementary Guidance

February 2020

Committee Version

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1 Introduction | Ro-ràdh

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): Brora, Dornoch, Golspie, Thurso and Wick. These town centres were identified as they play important social, economic and cultural roles within the town and the wider communities in the area.

'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 and through consultation with the public and key stakeholders. It also takes account of existing work carried out by public agencies and/or communities to identify priorities and actions to improve the town centres. It should be noted that the many of 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.



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, including out of town retail and business development and a move towards online shopping. These have contributed to a decline in footfall on traditional shopping streets which has had a damaging effect on the vitality and vibrancy of many town centres.
- 1.5** Whilst retail has historically been the dominant feature of most town centres, it is apparent that a wider mix of footfall generating uses is required. 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

1.6 The Council consulted on a draft Strategy between 14 June and 23 August 2019. The comments made during this period alongside further engagement with key stakeholders have been taken into account when preparing the final version of the Strategy. The table below highlights the key stages in the preparation and adoption of the Strategy as Supplementary Guidance.

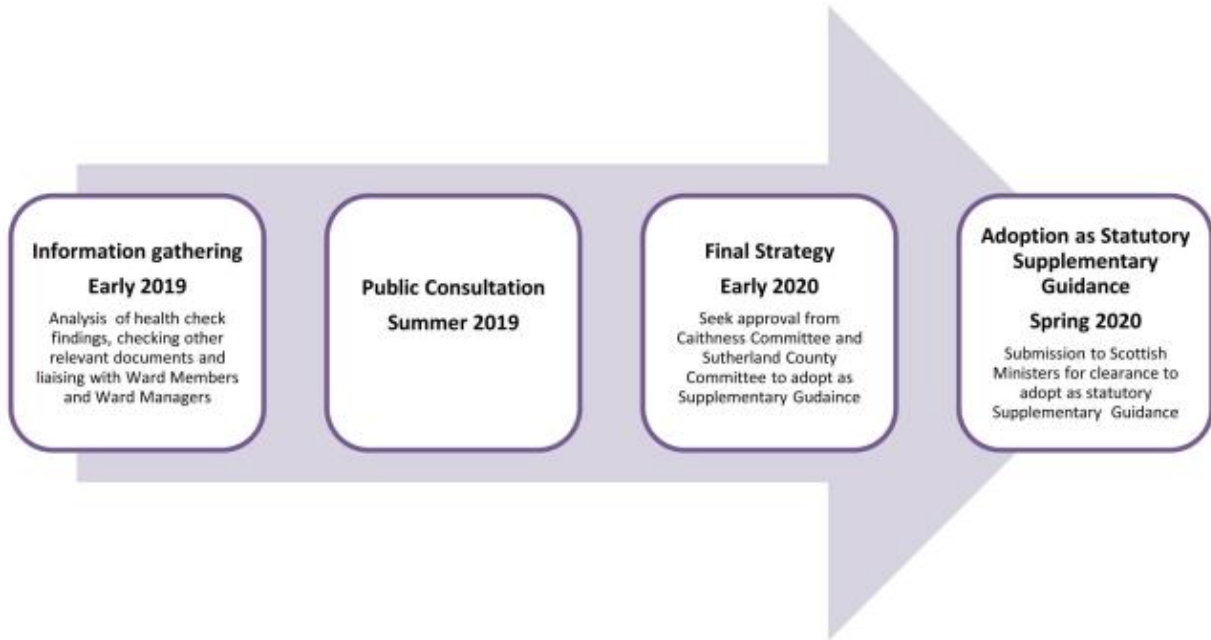


Figure 1.1 Process Diagram

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 settlements typically rely on these towns for a wide range of goods and services.
- 2.2** The area faces some major challenges, foremost among these being a projected decreasing and an ageing population and the decommissioning of the Dounreay nuclear facility. It is therefore important that Caithness and Sutherland take steps to retain young people and diversify the economy to prosper in the years ahead. While the area faces certain difficulties, it also has a number of key assets and 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 increase economic activity. Caithness and Sutherland is a relatively remote part of Scotland and the five town centres that form part of this strategy are ideal bases from which to explore its dramatic and fascinating landscape. If the Flow Country is successfully designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site it is likely to provide a further boost to the local area.

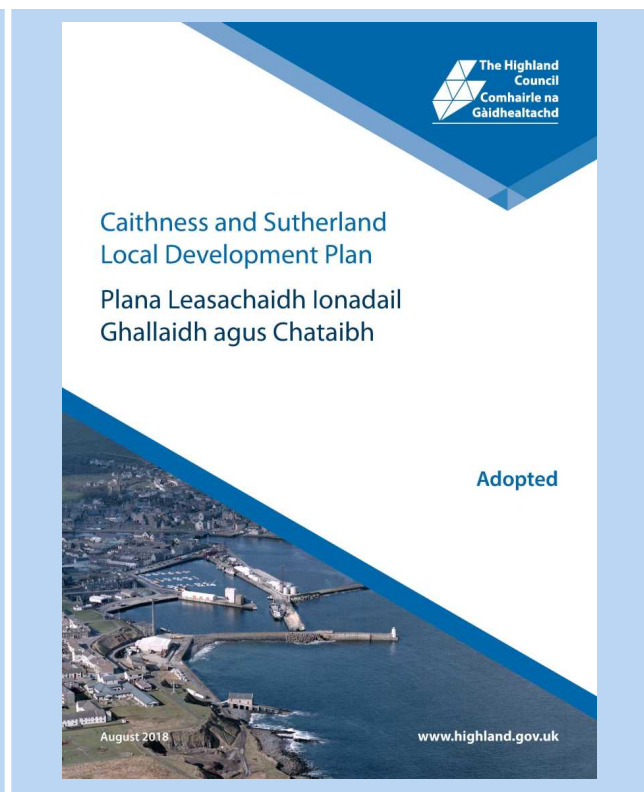
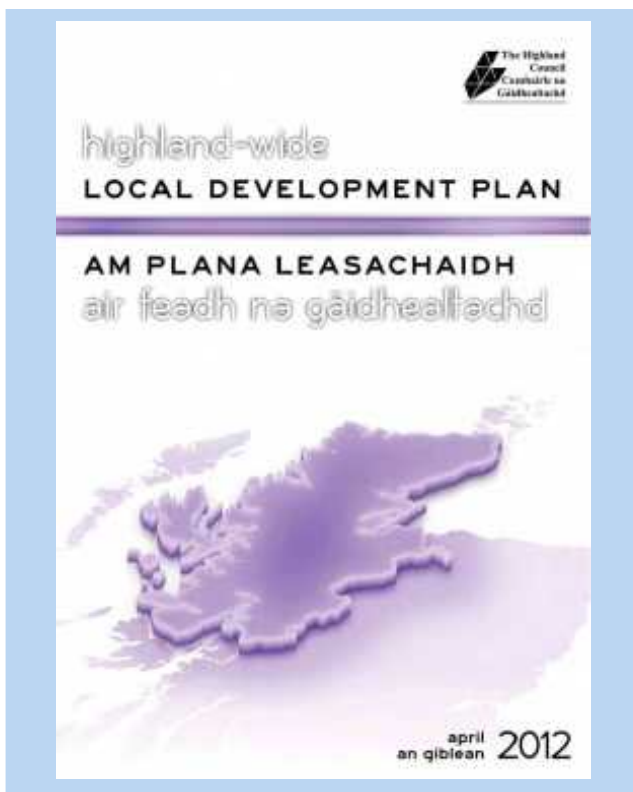


Map 2.1 CaSPlan Area

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. HwLDP also 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 2018 and outlines where development should take place in the the area over a 10-20 year period. CaSPlan Policy 1 Town Centre First, in line with Scottish Planning Policy (2014), indicates the Council's intention to prepare a strategy and action plans for the five defined town centre boundaries following the completion of town centre health checks. The survey work of these health checks was undertaken during the summer of 2018 and the findings published in late 2018.



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 table below highlights some key features for creating a successful town centre:

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

2 Context | Co-theacsa

2.4 Key Challenges

2.7 Each of the five town centres is distinct and 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 of the five town centres 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 included little green infrastructure 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 to Help Improve the Town Centres

2.8 This strategy takes account of a number of relatively recent documents that have sought to identify ways in which to improve the vitality and vibrancy of the town centres.



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

2 Context | Co-theacsa

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 a large number of different parties to oversee improvements.
- 2.11** To help inform the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan), the Council undertook a series of extensive public workshops to explore ideas for the improvement of the two towns. The results were incorporated into a 'New Vision for Wick and Thurso' document which set out a range of aspirations and proposals for each town including extensive redevelopment for the town centres 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 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, to help identify opportunities for walking and cycling. 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 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.
- 2.14** There are a number of potential funding sources which could be utilised to help deliver town centre regeneration. For example, the Caithness & North Sutherland Fund, established by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority and the Dounreay Stakeholder Group, has supported a number of initiatives in recent years such as Thurso History Interactive project for Thurso Heritage Society and the Wick Riverside Play Park Project for the Wick Gala Committee. In 2019, the Scottish Government introduced the Town Centre Regeneration Fund which allocated funds to Local Authorities based on the number of settlements with over 1,000 inhabitants. The aim of the fund is to stimulate and support place-based economic investments which encourage town centres to diversify and flourish, creating footfall through local improvements and partnerships. In November 2019 the Council agreed that, within Caithness and Sutherland, funding would be made available to help redevelop the vacant former police station in Dornoch and the refurbishment of Caithness Horizons in Thurso.

3.1 Introduction

3.1 Brora is an important service centre on the east coast of 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 6 miles north-east of Golspie and 45 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 funded from a combination of The Highland Council's capital programme, 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 few years. 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

- Brora was found to benefit 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.
- There were 10 vacant units in the town centre (1/3 of the total) which 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 were having a significant effect on the appearance of the town centre and as such are likely to have a detrimental impact on nearby homes and businesses.
- Station Square felt run down and buildings were vacant at the time of the health check.

Opportunities Based on Town Centre Health Check Findings - Brora

Opportunities Based on Town Centre Health Check Findings

- Capitalise more on the large numbers of people passing through the village, particularly those doing the NC500, by better promoting the rich heritage, visitor attractions and range of available facilities.
- 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.
- Improve and promote opportunities for active travel to, from and within the town centre. This should include the John o' Groats Trail long distance route that already goes through the centre but could have improved signage and path surface. This will encourage an active town population and provide recreation and attractions for visitors.
- Redevelopment or refurbishment of the former Braes Hotel building at Fountain Square (which is not listed and of little architectural value) would significantly enhance the village centre and present an opportunity to establish it as a key focal point for the village. A recent public survey identified that the enhancement of Fountain Square, and more specifically the redevelopment of Braes Hotel, was the standout priority for improving the town centre.
- Station Square is a key entry point into the town centre and improvements to the area would help create a positive first impression and could encourage visitors to extend their stays.
- Addressing the large number of vacant units would do much to improve the appearance of the town centre.

3 Brora | Brùra

3.4 Potential Actions

Potential Actions - Brora

Accessible

1. Work with Transport Scotland to assess the need for and identify traffic management measures and the improvement of accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists alongside, and across, the A9 trunk road, whilst recognising the strategic function of the route. Consideration should be given to designated crossing points near Fountain Square and at Station Square.
2. Improve the visitor facilities within the town centre, including the creation of secure and covered cycle parking facilities, electric vehicle charging infrastructure and a chemical toilet disposal point.
3. Develop a clearer and more effective wayfinding and signposting strategy for both pedestrians and vehicles, to improve orientation and promote local attractions including those within the town centre and across the settlement as a whole.
4. Continue to enhance and promote the John o' Groats Trail long distance route that goes through the town centre.

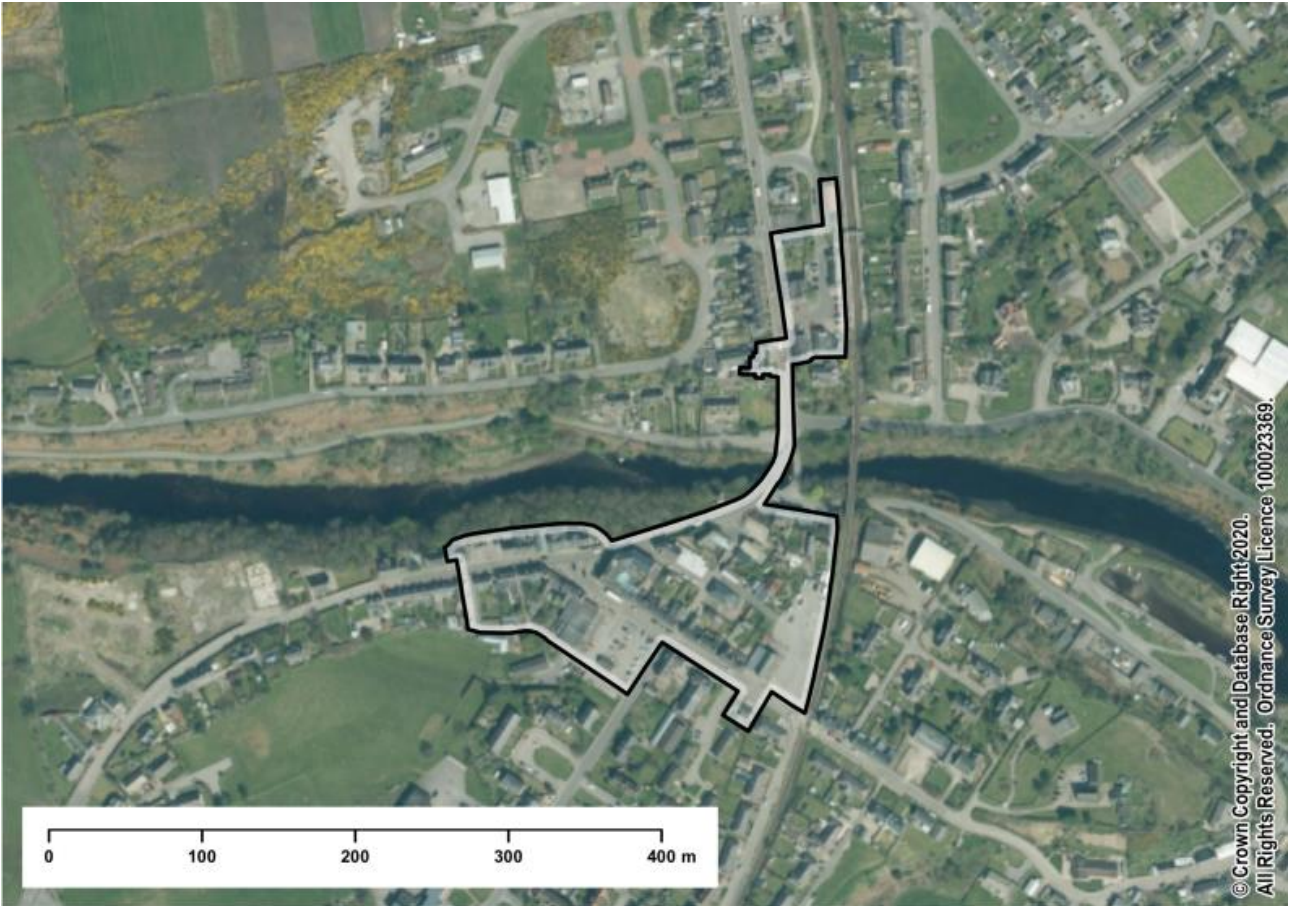
Active

5. Identify ways to help encourage vacant units to be brought back into active use; this could include exploring idea of installing artwork into vacant shop windows to enhance the appearance of the area and as a means of introducing public art and enhancing the sense of place.
6. 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

7. Enhancement of Fountain Square to establish it as the main focal point of the town centre, including the redevelopment of the former Braes Hotel building together with improved connections and public realm on Gower Street to the main car park.
8. 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.
9. Brora NC500 Group to prepare 'Vision for Brora', a pilot project to show how partners can work together across a community to cater for NC500 tourists, and benefit from it in terms of jobs, skills and training.

Brora | Brùra 3



4 Dornoch | Dòrnach

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

4.2 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. The former bank building, which was identified in the health checks as vacant, has since been converted to a single residential property.

4.3 There has been long standing community aspirations to deliver new multi-purpose community facilities in Dornoch. Proposals, known as Project Curlew, are being developed for a new community centre/ curling rink, multi purpose games area, driving range and car/coach parking at the former abattoir site at Dornoch South. There has been significant progress made towards the conversion of the former police station into a business, creative, wellbeing and community hub. An asset transfer request was completed in September 2019 and a subsequent planning application approved in October 2019. Work is expected to commence in early 2020. Whilst both these projects lie outwith the town centre boundary as defined in CaSPlan, they are within close proximity and will likely attract people to the town centre and help deliver wider objectives, such as relocating coach parking.

Recent Planning Activity

4.4 A number of planning applications have been approved in Dornoch town centre over the last few years 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. Permission was granted in principle in 2019 for the change of use of the former bank building on High Street to residential accommodation.



Picture 4.2 Castle Street, Dornoch

4 Dornoch | Dòrnach

4.3 Health Check Findings & Opportunities for Improvement

Town Centre Health Check Findings - Dornoch

- 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.
- Green space was plentiful and high quality, however, the main square is poorly defined and the parking area at the junction of Castle Street and Church Street lacks legibility and is potentially confusing to visitors and lacks legibility.
- Cycling facilities in the town are limited and lack quality.
- Relatively wide range of leisure and culture suggests healthy night time economy.
- 'Eyes on the streets' from a residential population and a general sense of safety was felt throughout.

Opportunities Based on Town Centre Health Check Findings - Dornoch

Opportunities Based on Town Centre Health Check Findings

- Enhancement of the main square to better define its position as the town's main civic and commercial centre. This could include introducing traffic management measures, such as parking enforcement and speed limits, together with public realm improvements to enhance the legibility of the spaces. Any group taking forward proposals would need to work closely with all relevant stakeholders to ensure potential changes would not have an adverse impact on the currently wide range of uses and interests such as car and coach parking, as a venue for events throughout the year and active travel movement.
- Potentially partial de-culverting of the Dornoch Burn, which runs under the square, would provide opportunity for environmental improvements such as additional flood storage, riparian planting and for enhanced recreation through new seating areas and cycle parking facilities.
- Whilst not within the town centre boundary, should Dornoch Area Community Interest Company (DACIC) be successful in delivering a new community hub at Dornoch South, there may be wider opportunities for the town centre, such as creating additional car and designated coach parking.
- Improvement and promotion of opportunities for active travel to, from and within the town centre. This should include the John o' Groats Trail long distance route that already goes through the centre but could have improved signage and path surface. This will encourage an active town population and provide recreation and attractions for visitors.
- Safeguard existing retail units from conversion to other uses due to the low vacancy rate in the town centre area.

4.4 Potential Actions

Potential Actions - Dornoch

Accessible

1. Develop a strategy for the enhancement of the main square to improve the public realm and better define the street design, parking arrangements and layout whilst respecting its wide range of current functions. Consultation with all users and the wider community will be essential.
2. Incorporate secure and/or covered cycle parking into plans for a community and enterprise space at the former police station.
3. Continue to enhance and promote the John o' Groats Trail long distance route that goes through the town centre.
4. Create a designated area for coach parking, potentially at the former abattoir site at Dornoch South, to alleviate pressure on the town centre during peak tourism periods.

Active

5. Presumption against any proposals which reduce active frontages within the town centre, particularly any proposals to convert retail units to other uses.

Attractive

6. Renovate the existing public toilet facility on Shore Street.

4 Dornoch | Dòrnach



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 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

5.2 Progress to Date

Recent Investment

5.2 One of the most noteworthy investments 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 since then. The 'Mannie Two' sculpture

5 Golspie | Goillspidh

and a stone circle were unveiled as part of the Shore Street Open Space Project in 2013. Golspie Community Council has asked the local 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 particular note have been approved in Golspie town centre over the last few years. 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

- Golspie's town centre was found to be comparatively healthy, benefiting from having a range of retail and service facilities, well maintained streets and good access to 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.
- There is limited cycling infrastructure within the town centre.
- 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 may be difficult to achieve without impeding on other uses.
- Whilst some public art exists it is not particularly visible to road users and Main Street has no examples.

Opportunities Based on Town Centre Health Check Findings - Golspie

- Introduce traffic management measures across the town centre to prioritise pedestrian movement and safety. This will help make the area more accessible and could boost the local economy. Opportunities may exist to lessen the adverse impacts of the A9 trunk road, improve the flow of traffic, reconfigure parking arrangements and upgrade active travel connections.
- Capitalise on people passing through Golspie on the A9, including those doing the NC500, and visitors to the Highland Wildcat mountain bike trails.
- Make the most of the seafront location and prolong the night time economy by establishing the promenade as an active travel corridor and encouraging footfall generating uses which better exploit the views and recreational opportunities.
- Enhance signage across the town centre to better promote the wide range of facilities and attractions to visitors and local residents.
- Improve and promote opportunities for active travel to, from and within the town centre. This should include the John o' Groats Trail long distance route that already goes through the centre but could have improved signage and path surface. This will encourage an active town population and provide recreation and attractions for visitors.
- Make the public spaces in the town centre, particularly at Fountain Road and Shore Street, more distinctive and welcoming civic spaces to encourage more people to stop and spend more time in the centre of Golspie and enhance the appearance of the area. This could incorporate additional seating areas, greenspaces and signage.
- Better maintenance of pavements and 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. The incorporation of planting would provide an opportunity to contribute to biodiversity in addition to placemaking.
- Identify ways to help bring back into use or enhance the image of any vacant buildings in the town centre.

5 Golspie | Goillspidh

5.4 Potential Actions

Potential Actions - Golspie

Accessible

1. Work with Transport Scotland to assess the need for and identify traffic management measures and the improvement of accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists alongside, and across, the A9 trunk road, whilst recognising the strategic function of the route. For example, this should include exploring the potential to introduce a 20mph limit in the town centre and an assessment of the timings of the lights controlled pedestrian crossing which have been flagged by members of the public as being too slow to activate.
2. Identify key locations and funding opportunities for creating secure and/or covered cycle parking.
3. Enhance the role of the seafront promenade as the main active travel corridor through the settlement, by improving signage, surface materials and cycle infrastructure.
4. Continue to enhance and promote the John o' Groats Trail long distance route that already goes through the centre.

Active

5. Renovation of the vacant YMCA building to form much needed, modern social and developmental space.
6. Identify potential opportunities along the seafront promenade for the creation of restaurants/cafes and other retail/tourism uses.

Attractive

7. Create and deploy a signage strategy for Golspie town centre to promote the wide range of facilities and attractions. This should focus on capturing more of the passing trade travelling through the village and encourage people visiting Golspie, such as those using the mountain bike trails, to stay longer.
8. Create a strategy for the reconfiguration of the parking areas and public open space between Fountain Road and the school to create a distinctive and welcoming village square. This could include identifying areas for enhanced seating, improved greenspaces and surface water drainage, better defined surfaces and active travel routes, more efficient parking arrangements and improved signage and interpretation/community notice boards.
9. Improve the overall appearance and function of the Shore Street car park to make the most of its prime location and create better access to the beach and promenade.
10. Explore potential for creating a one way system on the lane west of the Coop to enhance pedestrian safety and improve the flow of traffic.
11. Identify further opportunities for the installation of public art to build on the success of the 'Mannie'
12. Upgrade the street furniture currently in place.

Golspie | Goillspidh 5



6 Thurso | Inbhir Theòrsa

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

6.2 Progress to Date

Recent Investment

6.2 The street surface at Rotterdam Street was improved in the early 2000s and in 2008 Caithness Horizons museum was opened on the High Street. Following its closure at the beginning of 2019, the Council has allocated over £200K capital investment for building works and £75K per annum for 3 years revenue funding for Caithness Horizons to help secure its future operation. In 2016, the Council also completed the renovation of the 200 year old, B Listed building at 30 Princes Street into flats following acquiring it via compulsory purchase.

Recent Planning Activity

6.3 A number of notable planning applications have been approved in Thurso town centre over the last few years. 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. The Council has also given support to at least two change of use proposals from commercial to residential more peripheral areas of the town centre in recent years.



Picture 5.2 War memorial, Thurso

6 Thurso | Inbhir Theòrsa

6.3 Health Check Findings & Opportunities for Improvement

Town Centre Health Check Findings - Thurso

- 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 vehicles, including heavy goods vehicles travelling to and from 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 is not particularly distinctive or attractive and is dominated by hard surfaces.

Opportunities Based on Town Centre Health Check Findings - Thurso

- Create better movement and accessibility within the town centre through a range of traffic management measures.
- Improve opportunities to walk and cycle to and from the town centre on trails providing paths for all levels of users.
- Make the most of the seafront and river setting through mixed use redevelopment of vacant and underutilised sites and public realm and streetscape improvements.
- Enhancement of cycling infrastructure, such as surface materials and secure and/or covered cycle storage would make the town centre more cycle friendly and could encourage greater uptake of the mode of travel.
- Better maintenance of roads and pavements will improve the experience of all users.
- Finding new uses for the cluster of vacant units on Traill Street would improve the attractiveness of this main thoroughfare and create a more vibrant and positive image of the town centre.
- Capitalise on the growth of tourism and capture more benefit from those people passing through Thurso on the NC500 and the National Cycle Route 1 by promoting the rich heritage of the area and wide range of attractions and facilities available in the town centre.
- Establish the open area at the High Street as a main public space and vibrant focal point of the town centre.

6.4 Potential Actions

Potential Actions - Thurso

Accessible

1. Work with partners to identify and implement traffic management measures which improve movement and accessibility. This should include: greater enforcement of parking across the town centre and vehicular restrictions to the Rotterdam Street; increase provision and better maintenance of existing disabled parking bays; creation of electric vehicle charging points.
2. Improve cycling infrastructure in the town including: exploring opportunities to upgrade the junction at St George's Street/Sinclair Street; introduce measures which would accommodate cyclists within the pedestrianised areas; and providing legible and convenient cycle parking points.
3. Identify initiatives which help to promote the rich heritage of the area and wide range of facilities and attractions within Thurso town centre. This could include creating a heritage trail highlighting key features and areas of interest, for example setting up a 'Treasure Trail' map.

Active

4. Long term strategy to consolidate the current wide distribution of retail units and other businesses within a more central core and support change of use of vacant units to residential outwith this area. This will be a long term, ongoing strategy which will progress as and when proposals come forward. The impact of surface water flood risk should be considered as part of proposals to change from retail to residential.

Attractive

5. Improve the quality of the public realm, including the introduction of green infrastructure, at the High Street and take steps to revitalise the square area in front of Caithness Horizons.
6. Identify and implement ways in which to improve the streetscape, public realm and active travel links at the harbour and along the river and sea front.

6 Thurso | Inbhir Theòrsa



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 evidenced 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.



Picture 7.1 Wick town centre

7 Wick | Inbhir Ùige

7.2 Progress to Date

Recent Investment

- 7.2** The most recent significant 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 over recent years 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** During the summer of 2019, local Councillors kick started a campaign to galvanise support within the community to rejuvenate the town centre. Three key priorities have emerged: redeveloping derelict buildings; creating an 'anchor' development; and physical regeneration. Progress has been made on several fronts with the funding secured for the enhancement of the main car park and a successful bid for the Sustrans Street Design Programme, a national award which will work with locals to redesign the town centre. Trials of an indoor market place at Caithness House proved successful and efforts are now focused on establishing a permanent base in the town centre. Plans are also underway for the formation of a Wick Development Trust to oversee the delivery of certain projects.

Recent Planning Activity

- 7.4** Over recent years there have been a number of applications that have had or will have an effect upon Wick town centre. An application was approved in 2016 for the conversion of the first floor of 17-19 Bridge Street from offices to form two flats and an application to convert a residential unit to an office was approved the same year.



Picture 7.2 Retail in Wick

7.3 Health Check Findings & Opportunities for Improvement

Town Centre Health Check Findings - Wick

- 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 (of 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 generally a lack of green infrastructure.
- The town centre faces challenges from Wick Retail Park and the retail provision 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 - Wick

- Create an anchor development in the heart of the town centre to drive up footfall and enhance the area's vibrancy and vitality.
- Strengthen the Market Square's role as the centrepiece of the town by improving the overall appearance, bringing vacant properties back into use, installing artwork into vacant shop windows and introducing more greenspaces to soften its hard edges and increase biodiversity.
- Addressing the number of vacant buildings and sites would do much to improve the appearance of the town centre.
- Make Bridge Street a more welcoming environment for visitors and local residents by considering a package of traffic managements and public realm improvements such as streetscape works and traffic calming. The traffic problem is a standout issue in the town centre and tackling the problem could yield significant benefits.
- Improve opportunities to walk and cycle to and from the town centre on trails providing paths for all levels of users. This should include the John o' Groats Trail long distance route that already goes through the centre but could have improved signage and path surface. This will encourage an active town population and provide recreation and attractions for visitors.

7 Wick | Inbhir Ùige

7.4 Potential Actions

Potential Actions - Wick

Accessible

1. Identify potential traffic management measures on Bridge Street to enhance the pedestrian experience and provide greater priority to active travel movement.
2. Identify ways of improving cycling infrastructure both in terms of movement through the town centre and provision of secure and/or covered cycle parking.
3. Continue to enhance and promote the John o' Groats Trail long distance route that already goes through the centre.
4. Develop a clearer and more effective wayfinding and sign posting strategy for both pedestrians and vehicles, to improve orientation and promote local attractions including those within the town centre and across the settlement as a whole.

Active

5. Create an anchor development by acquiring the former Original Factory Shop building on the High Street and convert it to a mix of modern retail, enterprise and business spaces.
6. Address the large number of vacant units in the town centre and promote the principle of changes to non-retail use outwith the prime retail area. This will be a long term, ongoing strategy, which will progress as and when proposals come forward. The impact of surface water flood risk should be considered as part of proposals to change from retail to residential.

Attractive

7. Redesign and upgrade of the riverside car park area including: resurfacing works; extension of the car park and allocation for motorhomes; charging points for electric vehicles; new cycle shelter; new bus shelter; power-washing of kerbs and pavements; upgrading and re-establishment of tree beds and flower tubs; and a town centre interpretation board.
8. 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 green infrastructure and the perception of it being sterile and hard.
9. Install artwork into vacant shop windows to enhance the appearance of the area and as a means of introducing public art and enhance the sense of place.
10. 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.
11. Redevelop the site at The Shore which is allocated in CaSPlan (WK11) for a Business, Tourism and Retail uses. 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.

Wick | Inbhir Ùige 7



8 Action Programme | Prògram Gnìomh

Following adoption of the Strategy an associated Action Programme, outlining steps that may be taken by a range of individuals and bodies to improve their town centres, will be drawn together by officers in consultation with Ward Members and the parties mentioned in it and subsequently will be published and promoted to those parties and the wider communities. In preparing this Action Programme we will refer to the potential actions in this strategy and will use the template below. Progress updates provided from time-to-time by those working on actions included in the associated Action Programme may be used to produce and publish Action Programme updates.

Town Centre	Potential Action	Lead Player	Timescales	Priority Level	Status
<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 Action programme template