

Agenda Item	5
Report No	SCC/10/20

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Sutherland Committee

Date: 5 November 2020

Report Title: Tourism Infrastructure

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report updates Members on recent work to produce a Tourism Infrastructure Plan for the Highland area and details the local element. The draft plan, which includes an audit of existing tourism infrastructure and gives some initial observations regarding possible gaps in provision is included for members consideration.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- i. Note the range of tourism infrastructure that is already provided in Sutherland,
 - ii. Note the initial observations of where there may be considered to be gaps in provision; and
 - iii. Consider whether further gaps exist that should be included in the Tourism Infrastructure Plan.

3. Implications

3.1 Resources

The resources required to produce the draft Highland Tourism Infrastructure Plan and any future local plans are met from the Service budget. Should either the Tourism Committee or any Area Committee decide that any gaps identified should be filled by Council projects this would have resource implications which would require to be considered as part of the Council's budget setting process. There are no specific funds earmarked at this time, and it is anticipated that in most cases the emphasis will be on seeking additional external funding wherever possible.

3.2 Legal

There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)**

There are no community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) implications arising directly from this report. However, the delivery of any projects to address identified gaps would be expected to produce positive benefits for communities as well as for visitors.

3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever**

There are no Climate Change / Carbon Clever implications arising directly from this report, but a number of the infrastructure projects proposed, should they be undertaken, would help reduce climate change impacts.

3.5 **Risk**

There are no risk implications arising directly from this report.

3.6 **Gaelic**

There are no Gaelic implications arising directly from this report. However, in keeping with agreed Council policy there would be a Gaelic element to projects subsequently undertaken as a result of being identified in this plan.

4. **Draft Highland Tourism Infrastructure Plan**

4.1 Members of the Council's Tourism Working Group previously tasked officers with the production of a Tourism Infrastructure Plan that would provide a simple audit of relevant tourism infrastructure around Highland which in turn will allow gaps in provision to be identified. Led by the Principal Tourism Officer, a draft plan was produced following a number of discussions with Ward Managers and specialists in the service areas concerned, as well as with partner agencies. The draft plan was subsequently presented to the Council's Tourism Committee on 14th October 2020.

4.2 Although aiming to be as comprehensive as possible, it should be recognised that the information contained in the draft plan does still have a degree of subjectivity about it. In particular the gaps in provision described are largely based on the professional opinions of the officers involved and so will not correspond with all external views that have been or may be put forward. To an extent this is perhaps inevitable as communities and residents will understandably put forward views specific to their location whereas the Council needs to take a more strategic view in particular to avoid any unnecessary duplication.

4.3 Following discussion Members recognised the work already undertaken but agreed that some further local consultation be undertaken to include further engagement with local Members as well as seeking views from communities before the plan was finalised. It was however recognised that many of the things in the plan were derived from existing engagement with communities and that a full-scale consultation could also take time that made it difficult to implement changes quickly. Members of the Tourism Committee therefore suggested further input is provided by Ward Managers seeking the views of community Councils and by tourism officers engaging with local Members through ward business meetings. As Tourism infrastructure was already agreed as an agenda item for this meeting of the Sutherland Area Committee it is suggested this provides a suitable alternative to the ward business meeting approach for this area.

4.4 Members also discussed the merits of having plans at a more local level and as a way of gauging the benefits of this approach the Sutherland elements of the Highland plan have been extracted and are included in a Sutherland Tourism Infrastructure that is attached as **Appendix 1** to this report and which can form the basis for discussion.

5. Existing Tourism Infrastructure in Sutherland

- 5.1 The draft plan attempts to provide an audit of what infrastructure already exists in Sutherland. However, it is important to recognise that in so doing some definitions have had to be used to ensure manageable levels of data are included and that this is related to the visitor needs. As an example, where parking is concerned there has been an attempt to include all parking areas where visitors might park for a period of time and leave their vehicle – for a walk, to visit a natural or historic feature but a layby primarily used for a short photo stop or areas of road verge occasionally parked on are not included.
- 5.2 Where parking is concerned it is considered that in broad terms adequate provision is available in the larger population centres although it is accepted that this may not always be in the best location or easily found by visitors. From a parking perspective the plan therefore focusses mainly on the parking infrastructure in the rural areas.

6. Gaps in tourism infrastructure and future provision

- 6.1 Covid-19 restrictions led to some marked changes in Highland tourism during summer 2020. In part this was due to the “tourist season” being compressed into a shorter (and later) period of time with some facilities also being unable to open or having limited capacity (this applied to both public facilities and some businesses) and in many cases this highlighted where gaps in infrastructure exist. At this time, it is unclear whether this will be repeated in 2021 and beyond but there are indications that some sectors will continue to see growth – for example motorhome sales continue to increase, suggesting this sector will see continued growth. It will therefore be necessary to identify and prioritise which gaps are the most pressing and how they might be filled in a sustainable way.
- 6.2 The types of infrastructure considered particularly relevant to visitors that are included in this plan and where gaps in provision may need to be identified / addressed are:-
- Parking
 - Electric Vehicle charge points
 - Public toilets
 - Motorhome waste disposal facilities
 - Public Wi-Fi services
 - Paths and trails
- 6.3 While it is undoubtedly relevant tourism infrastructure, the Council has an existing programme in place to rollout further Electric Vehicle charge points which also recognises visitor needs so it is not anticipated that any more are required. However, if gaps are identified that are not already recognised in the EV charge point plans these could be recommended to the team for inclusion.
- 6.4 In a similar way Paths and trails are important infrastructure for visitors but a formal process already exists through the Core path planning and review process which again takes the needs of visitors into account. It is therefore recommended that no further tourism specific work is required.
- 6.5 A number of public Wi-Fi networks have been installed across Highland and in addition to these a wider rollout of a further 6 Sutherland sites along the NC500 is being supported by the Scottish Government. Bearing in mind that any future plans would need to consider how the rollout of other technologies such as 4G & 5G might influence need or

demand this may influence whether or not further investment in a wider Wi-Fi network was appropriate. It is therefore recommended that no further tourism specific rollout is prioritised but if a viable opportunity arises and the benefits are deemed worthy then further projects could be taken forward.

6.6 Assuming the recommendations on using existing prioritisation and planning processes outlined in sections 6.3 to 6.5 are accepted, this would focus further work on three areas of infrastructure: -

- Parking – to include both day and overnight parking for motorhomes
- Public toilets
- Motorhome waste disposal facilities

It is recommended that using the attached draft plan as a basis, members consider whether any further gaps that exist that should be identified in the plan, which of these might be prioritised and how funding might be sourced to help deliver these.

6.7 In considering the above infrastructure, it should, also be noted that the report to the Council's Tourism Committee considered that private sector initiatives may form part of the solution to providing overnight parking and related facilities for motorhomes. This approach was considered a useful one in terms of creating business opportunities including diversification options for some landowners as well as recognising that Council resources that could be used for this are limited. To gauge interest in this a press release was issued following the Committee meeting on 14th October with interested parties invited to notify the Council of their interest. To date 25 responses have been received that expressed an interest in taking forward such a development with 7 of those being in Sutherland. Officers therefore propose producing some simple guidance that would assist those interested parties in navigating the legal, planning and licensing requirements for such developments.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment

Date: 29 October 2020

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Appendices: Appendix 1 – Sutherland Tourism Infrastructure Plan



Sutherland Tourism Infrastructure Plan

1st Draft

October 2020

Purpose

The Highland-wide Tourism Infrastructure Plan aims to provide a simple audit of relevant tourism infrastructure around Highland as well as identifying gaps in provision. Similarly this plan will detail existing provision but will focus more on the gaps in provision around Sutherland. The plan has a particular focus on publicly provided infrastructure normally or commonly delivered by the Council, public sector partners or communities rather than facilities or services that are more commonly provided on a commercial basis by the private sector.

In some cases, it is appropriate to consider some forms of third-party / commercial provision as this may be necessary in order to help identify gaps in provision. These have only been included where the facility or service concerned is similar to facilities or services that might reasonably be expected to be provided by the Council and where these are made easily available to visitors that are not otherwise customers of the business concerned. As an example, toilets in a village hall made available to visitors are included but those in cafes, restaurants etc. are not unless they are recognised Highland Comfort Scheme Providers.

Plan structure

For each of the types of tourism infrastructure included in the plan a three-stage approach is used:

- **Existing provision** – a listing of existing provision is given based on a desktop audit and engagement with other Council officers and selected external partners
- **Proposed projects** – projects already under way or with plans in place for development in the near future
- **Possible gaps in provision** – and initial indication of possible gaps in provision is given. This is based on the knowledge and professional opinion of a number of officers and external partners but further engagement with local stakeholders is likely to be required to refine these lists.

Types of Infrastructure

A number of different types of infrastructure that are used by visitors are currently provided by the Council. Some of these, while important to and used directly or indirectly by visitors, are not dedicated “tourism infrastructure”. These include infrastructure and facilities such as roads, parking, harbours, piers, slipways and waste / recycling centres. As usage of this infrastructure is much broader and Council consideration of operational details and future investment are driven largely by other factors these are not covered in detail here. However, in cases where such infrastructure is deemed to be primarily aimed at / used by visitors these have been included where considered relevant to the purpose of this infrastructure plan.

The types of infrastructure considered particularly relevant to visitors that are included in this plan are:-

- Parking
 - off road parking in popular tourism destinations (but excluding larger settlements where a significant amount of both on and off road parking is generally available)
 - off road parking at visitor sites, or access points for activities such as a hill walk.
 - roadside laybys where these are heavily used by visitors for an extended stop
 - Dedicated overnight parking for motorhomes (excluding commercial caravan / camping sites)
- Electric Vehicle charge points
 - Public sector provided charge points
 - Charge points provided by private businesses / others but made publicly available
- Public toilets
 - Council operated facilities
 - Facilities operated with support from the Council (Highland comfort scheme)
 - Other facilities made freely available to the wider public
- Motorhome waste disposal facilities
 - Waste facilities on commercial sites made available to non-residents (included in the audit to identify overall provision and thereby help identify gaps)
 - Standalone motorhome waste facilities
- Public Wi-Fi services
- Paths and trails

Parking

Existing provision

Across Sutherland there are many car parks or other public areas such as on road parking and laybys where cars can be parked. Many will be in larger communities and / or used almost entirely by local people for parking at their home or for work, shopping or accessing local services. While sometimes used by visitors these are not considered “tourism infrastructure” so are not included here. Similarly, roadside laybys typically used for a brief stop such as a rest stop or to take a photograph are excluded.

Parking areas where a visitor will normally leave their car for a longer period of time so as to visit a community, beach or other natural feature or to undertake an activity such as walking, cycling, water sports or fishing might reasonably be considered to be dedicated “tourism infrastructure”. Parking that meets this definition, whether operated by the Council or others is shown in the table below.

Town / village / area	Location	Town / village / area	Location
Sutherland			
Durness	Keoldale Ferry	Durness	Balnakeil Bay
Durness	The Square	Durness	Old tourist info Centre
Durness	Durness Beach	Durness	Smoo Cave
Durness	Ceannabeinne (x2)	Tongue	Tongue Causeway East
Tongue	Village Car Park	Tongue	Ribigill / Ben Loyal
Tongue	Coldbackie Beach	Bettyhill	Village Car park
Bettyhill	Farr View Car Park	Strathly	Strathly Point
Strathly	Beach / Cemetery	Melvich	Melvich Beach
Melvich	Village	Blairmore	(Sandwood Bay access)
Tarbet	Tarbet pier	Scourie	Village
Scourie	Scourie beach	Kylesku	Kylesku North
Kylesku	Kylesku South	Drumbeg	Drumbeg viewpoint
Achmelvich	Achmelvich Beach	Clachtoll	Clachtoll Beach
Lochinver	Surgery Car Park	Lochinver	Middle
Lochinver	Bay View Car Park	Lochinver	Glencanisp road end
Assynt	Quinag car park	Assynt	Inchnadamph Hotel
Assynt	Inchnadamph Bone Caves	Helmsdale	Harbour Car Park
Helmsdale	Bridge Car Park	Lairg	Village
Lairg	Sutherland Arms Hotel	Lairg	Ferrycroft / Ferry Wood
Brora	Golf Road	Brora	Gower Street
Brora	Lower Brora	Brora	Beach
Golspie	Golspie Burn	Golspie	Fountain Road
Golspie	Rhives	Golspie	Golspie Forshore
Golspie	Shore Street car park	Golspie	The Mound
Golspie	Littleferry Road end	Bonar Bridge	Balblair Forest
Bonar Bridge	Picnic Area	Ardgay	Village car park
Dornoch	The Square	Dornoch	The Meadows
Dornoch	Beach car park	Dornoch	Camore Wood

Possible gaps in provision

In considering where the provision of parking does not meet current demand it is more common to find that some provision exists, but that capacity is inadequate rather than there being a gap in provision. There are however a few sites now becoming more popular with visitors and demand is arising for parking in locations that did not previously require it.

In order to relate possible gaps to existing provision, locations where parking exists but is not adequate for the demand experienced at certain times are shown with an orange background. Locations now seeing more visitors but where no dedicated parking is available and passing places or road verges are increasingly being used are shown with a red background in the table below.

Sutherland		
Durness (Balnakeil Bay)	Durness (Keoldale Ferry)	Durness (Smoo Cave)
Durness (Ceannabeinne)	Ben Hope	Coldbackie Beach
Tongue (Ribigill / Ben Loyal)	Melvich Beach	Blairmore (for Sandwood Bay)
Tarbet	Clachtoll	Achmelvich
Lochinver (Glencanisp)	Ardreck Castle	Inchnadamph
Inchnadamph (Bone Caves)	Ben Klibreck	Brora beach

Dornoch – coach parking in Town Centre

In most of the locations referred to above some additional parking provision is likely to be required if capacity issues are to be addressed. However, where only limited additional capacity is considered necessary there may be some “soft” approaches that could be used such as improving the delineation of individual parking spaces to ensure existing capacity is used as efficiently as possible.

Dedicated overnight parking for motorhomes

Existing provision

In addition to the wide range of commercially operated caravan and campsites a small number of locations around Highland offer fairly basic overnight stop locations, typically for a small charge. Loosely based on the French system of “Aires” these locations are designed for short stops (typically a single night while travelling). They are commonly found close a community so as to encourage visitors to make use of the businesses such as shops, bars or restaurants in the community. The range of facilities can vary but some will provide services such as fresh water, electric hook-up points or waste disposal. A small number of locations already exist where businesses actively offer this service in their own car park such as at Glencoe ski centre, Dundonnell Hotel and the Royal Hotel, Ullapool. However, there are very few established sites which are publicly provided with only the one listed for Sutherland in the table below identified during this audit of facilities.

Sutherland
Kinlochbervie

In addition to the above established sites, Forestry & Land Scotland trialled a system during summer 2020 where a number of their car parks were made available for overnight parking by self-contained motorhomes. The choice of locations offered was dependent on a variety of factors including car park size, proximity of commercial campsites or, environmental constraints. Further details are available at <https://forestryandland.gov.scot/staythenight>. Further work to evaluate the success or otherwise of this approach is being carried out before any decisions are made on longer term plans. While there are locations around Lochaber, Easter Ross and Inverness & Area where this service was made available, Forestry and Land did not trial any locations in Sutherland.

There are numerous other locations across Highland where informal camping in motorhomes takes place. These range from urban / semi urban locations such as at Nairn harbour or Dornoch beach to rough parking areas remote from any community – e.g. alongside Loch Quoich in Lochaber or in the walkers car park below Quinag in Sutherland.

Proposed new provision

In addition to the established site a number of additional sites that will offer dedicated overnight parking for motorhomes are currently in development.

Location	Details		Location	Details
Sutherland				
Lochinver	Community led Rural Tourism Infrastructure funded project providing 3 spaces and 1 motorhome waste unit at Assynt leisure centre under way		Helmsdale	Community led Rural Tourism Infrastructure reserve project providing 14 spaces and facilities at Coopers yard expected to proceed late 2020
Brora	Tourism infrastructure project including motorhome parking and waste facilities supported by Town Centre Fund under way		Bonar Bridge / Lairg	Community led project to provide spaces and facilities at Bonar Bridge picnic area and falls of Shin.

Possible gaps in provision

Motorhome visitors are currently a growing market for Highland, and this, along with recently experienced pressures at some locations suggests some additional formal provision may be required. However, as mentioned above, numerous locations across Highland are already used for informal camping in motorhomes and it is not realistic to expect all of these to become formal overnight parking areas. There are instances where the locations currently used are not appropriate and so some local provision of dedicated overnight parking, perhaps with related facilities may be appropriate.

It can be difficult to recommend specific gaps that require public provision as there is also already a commercial market in terms of existing campsites. Provision of more basic designated overnight parking areas could be considered a business opportunity for example for landowners, farmers or crofters who have suitable land or for businesses such as restaurants or bars that may wish to offer such a service to drive additional trade. Normally, if such a facility was to be provided by the Council and run commercially, this would only be done where there was some evidence of market failure meaning there was no alternative provision in that area. With there being a possible commercial market and this being a rapidly changing situation it is considered more appropriate at this time that the Council recognise that there is a general need for more provision and support others such as communities in providing facilities where they are keen to do so. The Council could then consider identifying gaps that still exist and that may be filled by public provision.

Electric vehicle charge points

Although not dedicated “tourism infrastructure” electric vehicle (EV) charge points have been included here in recognition of the importance that having a good network of charging points is in giving visitors traveling by electric vehicles the confidence to visit an area.

Existing provision

Highland has an existing network of EV charge points with many of these provided / maintained by the Highland Council and others provided by other public sector partners or private businesses. Many of these are available to the general public but some others, for example at a Bed & Breakfast operated in a private home, may only be available to their own guests. This list shows those which are available in Sutherland for wider public use.

Location		Council Owned?	S	F	R
Sutherland					
Durness	War Memorial Car Park (currently unavailable)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tongue	Car park	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bettyhill	Car park	✓	✓	✓	✓
Melvich	Public toilet car park	✓	✓	✓	✓
Scourie	Public toilet car park	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lochinver	Community Hall	✓	✓	✓	✓
Helmsdale	Dunrobin Street car park	✓	✓	✓	✓
Falls of Shin	Visitor Centre		✓	✓	
Ardgay	Drovers Square		✓	✓	✓
Dornoch	Meadows car park	✓	✓	✓	✓

S – Standard

F – Fast charger

R – Rapid charger

Proposed new provision

A programme providing a wider network of EV charge points across Highland is currently under way which will see new or further charge points provided in Sutherland at the following locations: -

Sutherland		
Durness (replacement)	Kinlochbervie	Helmsdale
Lairg	Brora	Golspie

In addition, further new or additional charge points have been proposed for the following locations although specific plans have yet to be developed: -

Sutherland	
Kylesku	Edderton

Possible gaps in provision

With the use of electric vehicles growing there is anticipated to be demand for further charging points. This includes both: -

- Additional points in locations that have some existing provision but where provision may not meet current or anticipated levels of demand.
- New charge points in locations where charge points are not yet available.

The rate of growth in usage, allied with changes in battery technology which affect the range of EVs make it difficult to identify how quickly and / or how far apart new or additional provision will be required.

With increasing numbers of visitors travelling in electric vehicles the provision of EV charge points in a community is also seen to be a way of increasing dwell time and boosting economic benefits as visitors can be encouraged to use local businesses while their vehicle charges. In a similar way there is merit in considering whether charge points in communities might be complemented by provision

at some key tourism sites. This could improve the visitor experience by allowing vehicles to be charged while the visitor undertakes their visit.

Many commercial attractions are expected to provide for their own customers and existing plans for new publicly funded provision are already in progress. These are based on Transport Scotland and Highland Council recommendations as well as public suggestions and include good coverage for visitors, so it is not considered that any activity beyond that already proposed is currently required. However, any plans for further phases of provision should continue to recognise the needs of visitors and this may warrant specific consideration of providing charge points at some visitor sites in future.

Public Conveniences

Existing provision

The Council currently operates and supports a network of public conveniences across Highland. A number of these are directly managed by the Council while others are operated by third parties such as communities or businesses with some financial support from the Council through the Highland Comfort Scheme.

In addition, some businesses, communities and public sector partners manage visitor sites where toilet facilities are provided that could reasonably be described as being publicly available i.e. available to visitors without the visitor having to be a customer of the business or facility providing them. Those toilets that are publicly available in Sutherland are shown in the table below.

Location	Seasonal	Operator	Location	Seasonal	Operator
Sutherland					
Durness (village)	N	HC	Durness (Smoo Cave)	N	HC
Tongue	N	HC	Bettyhill	N	HC
Strathy Beach	N	Other	Melvich	N	HC
Blairmore (Sandwood)	Y	JMT	Oldshoremore	Y	HC
Kinlochbervie	N	HC	Rhiconich	N	HC
Tarbet	Y	HC	Scourie	N	HC
Kylesku	N	HC	Stoer lighthouse	N	Other
Drumbeg	N	HC	Clachtoll	N	HC
Achmelvich	Y	HC	Lochinver	N	HC
Little Assynt	N	Other	Lairg	N	HC
Rogart	N	HC	Golspie	N	HC
Brora	N	HC	Bonar Bridge	N	HC
Dornoch	Y	HC			

Operators: - HC – The Highland Council
 CS – Highland Comfort Scheme provider (community, business etc).
 FLS – Forestry & Land Scotland
 HLH – High Life Highland
 JMT – John Muir Trust
 SNH – Scottish Natural Heritage

Proposed new provision

Funding has been committed for one project in Sutherland to provide new publicly available toilet, part funded through the Scottish Government's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund but currently subject to conditions, such as planning consent which the group are currently working to address.

Location	Seasonal	Operator	Details
Sutherland			
Helmsdale	N	Other	Round 2 Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund project. Work currently under way to allow construction to start.

Possible gaps in provision

In addition to the projects under way and proposed, it has been identified that some gaps still exist, either due to distance from the nearest facility or because there is a particular type of demand e.g. at a beach where visitors will commonly spend lengthy periods of time. Possible gaps that may warrant investigating options for new facilities or a Comfort Scheme arrangement with another operator are shown below. Those shown with a **red background** currently have no provision while those with an **amber background** (**none currently identified for Sutherland**) have facilities, but these may not always be adequate for the level of demand.

Sutherland
Talmine

A number of community led applications to the third round of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund were submitted on the 14th October 2020. At this time, it is unknown if these bids will be successful or not, but this plan can be updated once results of any applications are known. There is currently one public toilet project submitted for Sutherland at **Bonar Bridge**. This car park already has existing toilet provision; however, the Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust are keen to provide a brand-new upgraded facility that will also offer disabled toilets and showers.

Motorhome Waste facilities

Existing provision

Currently there is very limited provision of facilities for the disposal of motorhome waste except on formal caravan and camping sites. Many sites limit the use of these facilities to visitors staying with them overnight, but some also offer waste disposal to non-staying visitors – often for a small charge. As some sites only do this infrequently / on request or don't wish to publicise this service, it has been difficult to produce a definitive list of facilities. A survey of sites was attempted in winter 2019/20 with an incomplete response but based on this, the following table shows known availability of waste facilities in Sutherland for non-staying motorhome visitors.

Sutherland		
Kyle of Tongue Holiday Park	Kinlochbervie Loch Clash Stopover	Clachtoll Campsite

Proposed new provision

In Sutherland a further two locations have plans in place or work under way to provide new facilities all part funded through the Scottish Government's Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund. These locations are:

Sutherland	
Lochinver	Helmsdale

Further plans are being developed by communities seeking funding from round 3 RTIF or other funding sources to provide additional stand-alone motorhome waste facilities in Sutherland. These are: -

Sutherland	
Falls of Shin	Bonar Bridge

Possible gaps in provision

While it has been identified that more provision is required, defining precise gaps is more difficult. Most self-contained motorhomes can travel for around three days before needing to empty their waste tanks so there is not a need for facilities in every community, but rather a good network of facilities that is also well publicised to allow visitors to plan their stops accordingly. Suitable locations will also be dependent on other infrastructure being suitable – for example having a suitable sewage system in place.

Many communities have been in contact with the Council in recent months expressing an interest in providing such facilities and based on these approaches and feedback received from other sources including business groups and visitors the following locations may be ones that could be considered:

Sutherland		
Durness	Tongue	Bettyhill
Scourie	Brora	Golspie
Dornoch	Melvich	

Public Wi-Fi

Existing provision

Through the Inverness & Highland City Region Deal, the Council has installed public Wi-Fi in 16 Highland Communities whilst Brora also has a public Wi-Fi service previously installed as a pilot scheme by HIE. More recently, the Council was approached by the Scottish Government with an opportunity to deploy Public Wi-Fi at further sites along the NC500 route as currently internet connectivity is limited. The NC500 Wi-Fi proposal, which would connect into the current Council Project, and deliver a strategic network along the NC500 was commenced in spring 2020 but has been delayed due to the Covid-19 situation.

Existing sites in Sutherland are as shown in the table below in green with the proposed additional sites in orange.

Sutherland		
Bettyhill	Brora	Dornoch
Durness	Golspie	Helmsdale
Lochinver	Tongue	

Possible gaps in provision

Many other communities across Highland as well as visitors to these communities could benefit from public Wi-Fi networks. However, on the basis that it is unrealistic to expect that this could be provided in every community. However, it can be argued that some communities stand out on the basis of scale and as being more popular visitor destinations. In Sutherland the following location has been identified as an appropriate area for further Wi-Fi development:-

Sutherland
Lairg

It should however be noted that any plans would need to consider how the rollout of other technologies such as 4G & 5G might influence need or demand and this may influence whether or not further investment in a wider Wi-Fi network was appropriate.

The Council has faced challenges in terms of the ongoing costs of maintaining the public Wi-Fi services in the locations where this has already been delivered. Similarly, this issue is still being addressed in relation to the wider rollout of sites along the NC500 as the Scottish Government support will only offer capital funding towards the setup of the new sites. With this in mind any further rollout of sites would need not just a Council capital funding allocation but would also need to be considered in the context of future resource implications for the Council. This may require the support of a third party to take on any further sites.

Paths and Trails

Existing provision

With many of Highland's visitors coming to the area specifically for walking holidays and most others doing some walking as a leisure activity while here, the network of paths and trails they use can be considered a key part of the area's tourism infrastructure.

Perhaps best known from a visitor perspective are the 3 formally designated national Long Distance Trails – The Great Glen Way, West Highland Way and Speyside Way – with the latter two also including sections that extend into other local authority areas. Other long distance routes such as the South Loch Ness Trail and Affric-Kintail Way also exist but are not formally designated in the same way and opportunities exist for further routes to be developed. Information on these can be found here;

https://www.highland.gov.uk/outdoorhighlands/info/1/long_distance_trails_in_the_highlands/3/long_distance_routes

Numerous other paths also exist and under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 the Council has a statutory duty to produce a Core Path Plan which records many of these. As the number of paths is counted in the hundreds and these are already recorded in the core path plans a complete list is not provided here but an interactive map of these is available at:

https://www.highland.gov.uk/outdoorhighlands/info/2/paths_in_the_highlands/1/paths_in_the_highlands with individual area maps also downloadable from:
https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/1225/countryside_farming_and_wildlife/161/outdoor_access/4

Possible gaps in provision

The Council's obligations in relation to the Core Path Plan is for these to periodically be reviewed. This is done on a sub-regional basis with some reviews having recently taken place while others are still under way. As a formal process already exists for reviewing paths and that this can include the addition of new paths, it is deemed unnecessary to attempt to identify gaps through this tourism infrastructure plan. It is considered sufficient that this plan notes that paths are an important part of Highland's tourism infrastructure and that the needs of visitors as well as residents will continue to be considered in future revisions of the Council's Core Paths Plan.