

The Highland Council

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| Agenda Item | 9 |
| Report No | ERA-26-23 |

Committee: Easter Ross Area Committee

Date: 30 October 2023

Report Title: Easter Ross Area Place Plan – Update on Progress

Report By: ECO Communities and Place

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Following Council approval of the place based framework in December 2021 ([Place Based Planning and Investment in Communities](#)), which includes commitment to the creation of Area Place Plans, this report provides an update on the progress being made and next steps for the Easter Ross Area Place Plan (ERAPP). With major community and commercial activity proposed and some significant opportunities for future employment, economy and decarbonisation – not least through the Inverness & Cromarty Firth Green Freeport (ICFGF) - the ERAPP aims to provide a clear cross-sector partnership plan for investing in people and places across the area.
- 1.2 This report provides background information on the place-based approach, updates the Committee on the methodology for this work and presents progress to date, including early engagement for this work, and raises awareness of the emerging themes and priorities for action. Taking consideration of this, the report asks Members to note the next steps for broadening the participation and ensuring the plan represents all aspects of the community.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- i. Consider and discuss the emerging themes and priorities for action identified so far at Section 5.2, and the further background and information to be shared by the Officer through a verbal presentation on the day.
 - ii. Note the next steps for progressing this work and broadening participation, - including the launch of online engagement, aligning community-led activity and establishing governance model.

3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** – No additional resource is requested. Ongoing involvement in Area Place Plan activity requires input and commitment from services across the Council to ensure Area Place Plans provide the framework to support targeting resources, service delivery and provide a clear vision for attracting external investment. The Plans will

help the Highland Council, partners, and communities secure funding by evidencing the impact of every pound spent and the actions associated will provide clarity and manage expectation around how and where resources are prioritised.

3.2 **Legal** – No implications.

3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island)** - Place affects the lives, outcomes and opportunities of Highland residents and communities. The benefits of taking a place-based approach are to secure a better understanding of needs and strengths and the development of local priorities in working with communities and partners. This can have a positive impact on promoting equality, addressing inequality (including socio-economic) and targeting the priorities of rural areas. Community Planning Partners have a legal duty to focus on reducing inequality by working collaboratively and this is supported by a focus on place.

3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever** -Area Place Plans will help address climate change through identifying place-based priorities and actions. Environment and Climate is one of the emerging strategic themes.

3.5 **Risk** – The place plan work will help to coordinate future activity and investment in the area but requires clear communication and coordination of resources across partners and sectors. Developing a place-based approach is encouraged through the Scottish Government's Place Principle, the Christie Commission recommendations and is required by the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 for community planning.

3.6 **Gaelic** – A focus on place, and considering the priorities for a local area, has potential to support a focus on Gaelic language and culture if identified by communities and partners.

4 **Background**

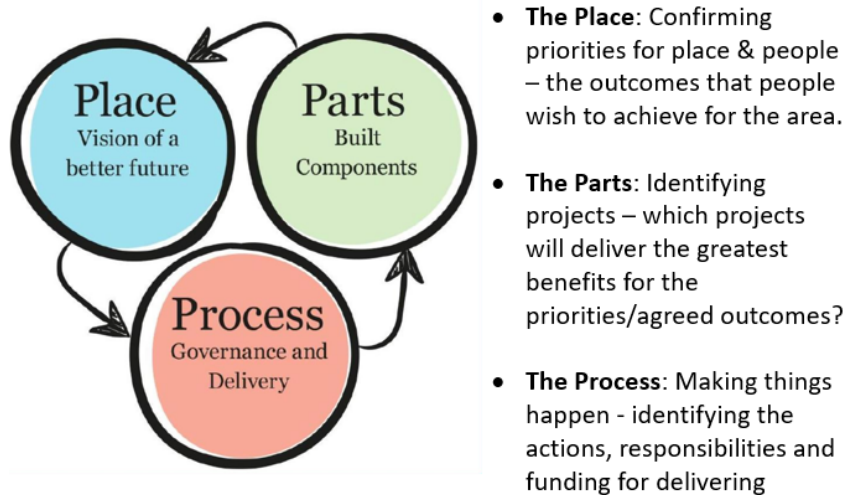
4.1 Highland Council, and subsequently the Highland Community Planning Board, agreed a Place Based Framework in December 2021. This presented a new way of working which requires both the Council and its partners to:

- apply a place lens to all that we do;
- ensure collaborative working between communities and partner organisations to identify and deliver shared vision, outcomes and priorities; and
- target resources, funding and action to address the needs of people and place.

4.2 The key drivers which underpin the Framework include, the Scottish Government's Place Principle which requests that all those responsible for providing services and looking after assets in a place need to work and plan together, and with local communities, to improve the lives of people, support inclusive and sustainable economic growth and create more successful places. It aligns with Christie Commission recommendations, community empowerment legislation, new planning legislation and the Council's commitments to support greater local decision making and community involvement. It also aims to improve communication and provide greater certainty to communities on how partners will support changes in a particular area, and to support and guide local communities in preparing plans for their own plans under new legislation.

4.3 With the potential developments and supporting infrastructure related to the ICFGF, along with the wider social, environmental and economic benefits, the timing and development of the next stages of the Area Place Plan in Easter Ross follows on from the outline business case for the ICFGF which was submitted to UK and Scottish Governments in early October. Partners have recognised the importance of being ready with a clear vision and set of priorities, shaped through comprehensive engagement, to maximise the positive impact and wider benefits the Green Freeport might bring for Easter Ross now and in the future. This will be supported by various direct community engagements proposed including a community webinar held on 24th October, and a business event held on the same day.

4.4 ERAPP activity began in January 2023 with the appointment of the Council’s Place Plan Project Manager. The work proceeded by making use of the Architecture and Design Scotland’s Place | Parts | Process methodology (summarised below), building upon the Climate Action Towns work they have carried out with communities in the area.



4.5 Key delivery milestones over the past nine months include;

- Establishing a steering group involving partners from community and public sectors;
- Stakeholder mapping;
- Preparation of an area brief following desktop research and review of a range of data sets, reports, plans and recent engagement activity;
- Creation of a participation statement setting out how communities and partners can get involved in shaping the APP;
- Community engagement and targeted focus group activity; and
- Delivering a cross sector workshop involving 60 services providers from across the area.

5 Emerging themes

5.1 Analysis of a range of data and early engagement with stakeholders, has identified the following themes and areas for action. The steering group for the Easter Ross Area Place Plan cover a broad range of partner organisations and interests and will now enter a process of co-creation with stakeholders to turn these broad themes into specific and measurable outcomes and actions which will be articulated in the final plan.

5.2

| Themes | Areas to consider for action |
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| Wellbeing | Ensure quality of life at all stages through adequate and effective services; interventions focus on positive mental and physical health; address loneliness; access to services locally; interventions to mitigate poverty; mental health training for community and businesses; promote social prescribing; investment in early intervention/prevention particular 3 rd sector support; enhance addiction service provision; increase opportunities for young people including teen gym provision; improve access to counselling services; support for families |
| Skills, Jobs & Business | Growth in economically active population; flexible and affordable childcare; promote opportunities for mentoring and work experience; community wealth building strategy; increase capacity through creation/support of development trusts; job opportunities for young people, including U16s; innovation in creating long term job opportunities through the Green Freeport; target training on emerging industries; locally trained and resident workforce; fairer distribution of wealth; employability support; realise the potential of ER through sustainable tourism plan/offer; tourist tax reinvested in local area; make ER a destination for everyone; promote local history; build resilient economy; community development and capacity support; develop clear pathways from learning to employment; support for small businesses including social enterprises and youth enterprise initiatives; |
| Connectivity | Getting about; active travel, including improved paths and safe routes for walking, cycling and wheeling; (greener) public transport with links across the area (particular focus on ER peninsular) at times when needed; affordability, increase number of bus stops and zebra crossings; extend free transport provision particularly for those accessing support services; improve availability of public/community transport; improve digital connectivity; prioritise investment to enable people to choose active travel first; improve rural path networks; maintenance of road infrastructure |
| Place | Infrastructure improvements to meet need of increased tourism – waste disposal for campervans; widened roads for coaches; access to public toilets; repurposing unused buildings; regenerating high streets; community hubs; improve inclusion and access to services including access at fair cost; vibrant spaces; new school campus 3-18 in Tain and Invergordon; access to banking services locally; protect our green and blue spaces; affordable quality future proofed housing including mid-market; provision of sheltered accommodation and social housing for families; housing support; safe spaces for young people to meet; access to quality play provision suitable for all ages; increase the number of benches in communities; free dog parks; Tomich junction |
| Cost of Living | Provision of cross sector multi agency hubs; affordable childcare provision and flexible working; community shop/community larders; |

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| | community growing spaces with support; fairer distribution of wealth; targeted income maximisation and debt relief; life skills support; employability support; clear employability pathways; access to services; affordable housing; targeted energy support and advice; affordable public transport; community wealth building strategy; early interventions to mitigate the effects – reduce isolation and anxiety through community support; improve addictions support; provision of breakfast clubs; increase opportunities for children & young people to take part in activities; support for families; strengthen partnership working; fair working practices; |
| Education and Learning | Whole community approach to school attendance; more variety in further education courses; ESOL provision; more clubs and activities for ASN; life skills training for work; ensure school nurse provision; offer more work experience opportunities from S3 onwards; address gaps in early years provision; address school lets – access and affordability; improve education on substance use; quality learning spaces fit for purpose; youth work provision including youth clubs; cross sector hub provision; strengthen partnership working and sharing of resources; |
| Environment and Climate | Support community interventions/adaptations to support climate action; look after and improve access to green/blue spaces; support community growing initiatives; invest in community programmes which build awareness, capacity and confidence of communities to address climate change; town turbines and solar arrays; community clean ups; oyster farm provision; support and advice on energy provision; community energy schemes – wind/solar/thermal storage; ensure eco-friendly development; tree planting including fruit trees in public spaces; water refilling points in all towns/villages; improve active travel infrastructure; repair/reuse shops; more interventions to connect with nature; protect and enhance land and marine biodiversity; community resilience plans; |

5.2 To help progress drafting the outline plan content and to support the continued involvement in the ongoing process, Members are invited to consider and discuss this initial feedback at the Committee meeting, with further background to be provided by the lead officer through a verbal presentation to the Committee meeting. Comments can be provided after the meeting by emailing fiona.richardson3@highland.gov.uk

6 Next Steps

6.1 Members are asked to note and provide feedback on the following next steps for progressing this work and broadening participation:

- Follow up partnership workshop, Thursday 2 November at the Seaboard Centre Balintore, which will focus on confirming the headline outcomes, identifying opportunities and solutions to support achieving our aims and mapping current projects and initiatives and identify opportunities for future projects.
- Launch of online engagement (Engagement HQ) platform to support wider community engagement and improve communication with all stakeholders on place-based activity.

- Work with partners to align community led action planning activity in Alness and Invergordon with ERAPP.
- Establish a governance framework informed by the ongoing process and supports community involvement.
- Mainstream the place-based approach across public sector and community through ER Partnership activity.

Designation: ECO Communities and Place

Date: 12 October 2023

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