

Agenda Item	13.
Report No	CPPB/23/23



Highland
Community
Planning
Partnership

Com-pàirteachas
Dealbhadh
Coimhearsnachd

na Gàidhealtachd

Highland Community Planning Partnership Board – 5 December 2023

Highland Adapts Project Update

Report by: Highland Adapts

Summary

This report highlights the importance of developing climate change resilience across Highland and provides an update on Highland Adapts' work over the past year, including the development of the first Highland Climate Risk and Opportunity Assessment.

Highland Adapts recommends that the Highland CPP Board climate-proof all Highland CPP plans. Climate change disproportionately impacts those already experiencing inequalities. The Highland Climate Risk and Opportunity Assessment will be a valuable resource for the Highland CPP's work to reduce these impacts. Organisations are encouraged to contribute to the assessment before it is published next year.

1. Background

- 1.1 *About Highland Adapts:* Highland Adapts was formally established in 2021 when nine founding partner organisations committed to working together to drive transformational action towards a prosperous, climate-ready Highland. Those nine founding partner organisations are The Highland Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Zero Waste Scotland, Sniffer/Adaptation Scotland, NatureScot, Forestry and Land Scotland, the Highlands and Islands Climate Hub, Changeworks, and NHS Highland. Highland Adapts' wider network extends throughout the Highlands and to key partners in greater Scotland and abroad.
- 1.2 *Our region's changing climate:* Climate change is already impacting the Highlands. This includes changes in the frequency and severity of storms, high and low temperatures, and intense rainfall which is causing more frequent flooding, wildfires, and landslips. These impacts will intensify in the coming years, impacting people, infrastructure, and services. We need to act now to reduce risks and increase resilience.

1.3 *Climate change adaptation:* The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) defines adaptation as: "adjustments in natural or human systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli or their effects, which moderates harm or exploits beneficial opportunities." Climate adaptation has two aspects: (1) adapting to present climate and weather and (2) making changes based on future projections in climate.

1.4 Former Highland Adapts Principal Project Manager Emma Whitham presented updates to this board in December 2021 and December 2022.

2. 2023 Year in Review

2.1 *Stakeholder engagement and partnership building:* Highland Adapts engaged with stakeholders through community events and online engagements; community, business, and public sector meetings. The Highland Weather and Climate Story Map launched in March and gathered 130 individual stories of weather and climate impacts. These stories provide valuable evidence to better understand the region's climate risks and opportunities. Highland Adapts supported community engagement and development in Alness and Invergordon through the Climate Action Towns initiative.

2.2 *Information sharing:* Highland Adapts place-based planning team, community climate advocates, and public sector gathering convened to facilitate information sharing across organisations and areas. Specifically, the Highland public sector gathering featured presentations from the Highland Council, Forestry and Land Scotland, Transportation Scotland, and Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd.

2.3 *Risk and opportunity assessment:* Risk and opportunity assessment: To develop a strong knowledge and evidence base, Highland Adapts is conducting the first Highland Climate Risk and Opportunity Assessment. Additional information about the assessment is available below. As part of the assessment, Highland Adapts commissioned an economic assessment of climate impacts in Highland, which was conducted by Paul Watkiss Associates. The assessment is in the process of being finalised and will be made available in the new year.

2.4 *Project administration:* The Highland Adapts board agreed to new terms and conditions, further developing the basis for the project's future. Highland Adapts staff contracts are currently hosted by the Highland Council. For the next 18 months, staff contracts will be hosted by Sniffer, a Scottish sustainability charity and Highland Adapts founding partner. The Highland Adapts board will still govern the partnership with equal powers.

3. Highland Climate Risk and Opportunity Assessment

3.1 *Why it is important:* To develop climate resilience, we must first understand our risks and opportunities. The UK Government publishes a Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA) every five years. The Highland Climate Risk and Opportunity Assessment builds on the UK-wide assessment in the Highland region's context. Unlike previous assessments, the Highland assessment's unique place-based approach means that it reflects robust scientific data and community experiences and priorities.

The assessment will support regional and local decision-making and enable partners to identify priorities for further action at the community level. Further work will be required to agree on specific adaptation actions that are needed to address the risks and opportunities that are identified. The assessment will also identify areas for undertaking additional analysis on sectors or regions of concern or interest.

3.2 *Assessment aims:* The Highland Climate Risk and Opportunity Assessment aims to:

- Identify and prioritise the risks and opportunities from climate change to Highland's society, economy, and environment between now and 2080;
- Build on existing scientific data and local insights and perspectives;
- Lay the foundation for a transformational approach to climate adaptation and resilience for the region;
- Support a just transition to a net zero and climate resilient economy, in a way that delivers fairness and tackles inequality and injustice.

3.3 *For example, the assessment considers:*

- Risks to mental health and wellbeing from extreme weather events;
- Risks to people and communities from wildfires;
- Risks to service provision from extreme weather;
- Risks to the Highland Economy from impacts on key industries;
- Risks to people and communities from flooding;
- Risks and opportunities to social justice and inequalities from climate change and adaptation responses.

Additional information about the Highland Climate Risk and Opportunity Assessment is available on the Highland Adapts website.

3.4 *Highland CPP's role:* Climate change disproportionately impacts those already experiencing inequalities by compounding and amplifying disadvantages. Community planning strategies must evolve to meet these challenges. Climate-proofing every Highland CPP plan is a step towards future-proofing Highland communities and addressing these risks.

The Highland Climate Risk and Opportunity Assessment will be a valuable resource for the Highland CPP's work to reduce these impacts. The Highland CPP and partner organisations are encouraged to contribute to the assessment before it is published next year. Doing so will ensure that their unique organisational perspectives and insights are included.

Recommendations

The Board is asked to:

- i) Climate-proof all Highland CPP plans. Integrating climate change mitigation and adaptation into all Highland CPP plans will safeguard their future viability and minimise the risks associated with climate-related impacts on existing inequalities.

ii) Contribute to the Highland Climate Risk and Opportunity Assessment, which will be a valuable resource for the Highland CPP's work to reduce climate-related inequalities across Highland.

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Date: 5/12/23