

Agenda Item	5
Report No	CC/13/25

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Caithness

Date: 28 April 2025

Report Title: Caithness Area Place Plan

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report invites Members to adopt the Caithness Area Place Plan

The Caithness Area Place Plan within **Appendix 2** has been developed using a Place Based approach and does not set out to replace existing plans and policies for the area. Instead, it aims to capture and present what the common themes and priorities are and aims to serve as a comprehensive document that not only reflects the aspirations of the local community but also aligns with existing strategic and localised plans, ensuring that Caithness thrives as a sustainable, liveable, and prosperous community.

This report also provides an update on next steps for progressing the plan.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:-

- i. **Consider and agree to adopt** the Caithness Area Place Plan, using it as a tool to inform and support decision making about Caithness;
- ii. **Agree to support and promote** the plan where possible in terms of its consideration within other plans, strategies, development and funding opportunities across or impacting the Caithness area; and
- iii. **Note** the next steps for progressing the work set out in the plan.

3 Implications

3.1 **Resource** – No additional resource is requested. Highland Council support for initiatives outlined in the Plan may have resource implications in the future which would be subject to appropriate Committee or Service decision making.

Ongoing involvement in Place Planning activity requires input and commitment from services across the Council to ensure Place Plans provide the framework to support targeting resources, service delivery and provide a clear vision for attracting external investment.

The Plan 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** – There are no legal implications rising from the adoption of the Caithness Area Place Plan.
- 3.3 **Risk** – The Caithness Area Place Plan will help to coordinate future activity and investment in the area. 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.
- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – There are no staff Health, Safety and Wellbeing implications arising from this report.
- 3.5 **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 Impacts

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children’s Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken
- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3 An Integrated Impact Assessment screening has been undertaken. The conclusions have been subject to the relevant Manager Review and Approval. The Screening process has concluded that the Plan has a positive impact on promoting equality, addressing inequality (including socio-economic) and targeting the priorities of the people of Caithness and therefore a full impact assessment is not required. Members are asked to consider the summary below and detailed within **Appendix 1** to support the decision-making process.

Impact Assessment Area	Conclusion of Screening / Full Assessment
Equality	Positive impact
Socio-economic	Positive impact
Human Rights	No impact
Children’s Rights and Wellbeing	Positive impact
Island and Mainland Rural	Positive impact
Climate Change	No Impact
Data Rights	No impact

5 Background

5.1 In 2021, Highland Council made a commitment to develop Area Place Plans mainly based on Area Committee boundaries. The Plans have been developed and facilitated in various ways across Highland, as each area is different. This Area Place Plan (APP) for Caithness has been developed using a place-based approach and does not set out to replace existing plans and policies for the area. Instead, it aims to capture and present what the common themes and priorities are and aims to serve as a comprehensive document that not only reflects the aspirations of the local community but also aligns with existing strategic and localised plans, ensuring that the area thrives as a sustainable, liveable, and prosperous community. Clarification on the difference between Area and Local Place Plans is noted below.

5.2 Area Place Plan

The Place Principle is a Scottish Government and CoSLA initiative to encourage better collaboration and community involvement. It is about understanding the issues, opportunities and relationships in a place, to allow effective partnership working to improve the quality of life for communities. Knowing how a community is structured and how it works helps make good decisions on investment, service delivery and how to coordinate change.

In Highland, APPs are being developed to provide an overview of existing strategies and projects. Community engagement builds a shared understanding of how Place underpins development, service delivery and how communities and organisations work together. These plans will be a future guide to maximise the impact for people living in an area, based on shared understanding of local need.

At its simplest, APPs will create a shared vision for an area, outlining priority outcomes and how they will be achieved. The Plans will make clear what activity is happening in each area, the outcomes being sought, when they are intended to be delivered and who is responsible for doing so.

5.3 Local Place Plan

Following recent changes to the national planning system, communities have been invited to consider preparation of their own Local Place Plans – a community's proposals for development of use of land and buildings in their local area. Currently across Highland, many groups are engaging their local community to reflect how to make their place better, agree priorities for the future and how to act on them – often working with others. While Local Place Plans have a particular role in the planning system, they may also highlight other priorities for service delivery and community action.

6 How the Plan was Prepared

6.1 The Caithness Area Place Plan was developed in conjunction with a wider group of stakeholders, including representation from: Highland Council (Elected Members and services); Highlife Highland; NHS Highland; Community Partnerships; Police Scotland; Scottish Fire and Rescue Service; Highland Third Sector Interface; Highlands and Islands Enterprise; Community Councils and Community Development Companies. All are thanked for their input to the Area Place Plan. The Area Profile set out within the APP provides an overview of the key information relating to Caithness.

6.2 Existing Plans

To remove duplication and identify gaps, existing plans relevant to the Caithness area have been collated and the common themes from these have been included within the Area Place Plan.

6.3 Engagement

Various engagement opportunities took place between November 2024 and March 2025:-

- Monthly Stakeholder Meetings;
- Survey – online and hard copies in various locations;
- Public Drop-in Sessions in Wick, Thurso and Lybster; and
- Online Workshop

In order to ensure maximum efficiency and to minimise engagement ‘exhaustion’, the drop-in and on-line sessions were attended by a number of officers and incorporated materials and engagement on the Area Place Plan, Highland Investment Plan, Highland Local Development Plan and consultation on the potential Visitor Levy.

The responses received are detailed in the Engagement Report within **Appendix 3**. These responses have informed the Caithness Area Place Plan and have been shared with relevant partners to help inform their own work.

7 Priorities for Caithness

7.1 For ease of reference between the Caithness Area Place Plan and wider statutory and strategic documents, the emerging Priorities for Caithness have been aligned to the three pillars of People, Place and Prosperity.

7.2 People

- Health and Well-being
- Public Transport
- Airlinks
- Sport and Recreation

7.3 Place

- Active Travel
- Roads
- Town Centres
- Waste and Recycling
- Housing
- Community Wardens

7.4 Prosperity

- Diverse Economy
- Renewable Energy Development
- Population Decline and Youth Migration
- Tourism

7.5 How the Plan will be used

This plan will provide all those with an interest in or those responsible for providing services and looking after assets in Caithness with a helpful tool to:-

- establish a shared understanding of local needs and opportunities;
- inform decisions on service design and delivery;
- provide evidence to support funding bids for projects;
- encourage public, private, and community collaboration for long-term sustainable growth;
- make best use of available resources and forward plan for when funding and investment becomes available; and
- link with local and national decision-making processes, influencing public services, budgeting, and planning policies to reflect the needs and aspirations of the Caithness community.

7.6 Development and Delivery of the Caithness Area Place Plan

A bespoke action plan will be created to set out the route for delivery of the priorities within the Caithness Area Place Plan. The action plan will seek to:

- further understand and develop each priority, in discussion across all sectors;
- set out to identify the best mechanism for delivery and the range of partners to be involved
- assess potential barriers
- assess potential funding opportunities
- provide estimates of timescales

Not all priorities will be achievable in the short to medium term, however, priorities within this plan have the widest community support and this plan, along with appendices, can be used to evidence and inform developments and funding decisions.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 14 April 2025

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Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix 1: Integrated Impact Assessment
Appendix 2: Caithness Area Place Plan
Appendix 3: Engagement Report

Integrated Impact Assessment

Impact Assessment Area	Conclusion of Screening / Full Assessment
Equality	CAPP identifies the issues of the whole community, however it does aim to support improvements to services targeted at young, elderly, disabled people and/or improve their access to services.
Socio-economic	CAPP identifies a range of socio-economic issues relating to opportunity including access to education, training and apprenticeships, employability support and removing barriers to work such as childcare and transport. It highlights the issues faced by the rural small town and remote rural communities in Caithness including transport and housing, and how initiatives can help to improve household income through support and services such as social care, food larders, and other public sector and voluntary support.
Human Rights	No impact
Children's Rights and Wellbeing	<p>The main impact of CAPP is highlighting issues identified by children and young people so that they can be prioritised and addressed by service deliverers and community partners.</p> <p>Children and Young people were consulted during the development of the plan. The issues and challenges they identified are highlighted in the plan including affordability and access to community facilities, services and activities; community capacity; access to local health and wellbeing services, including mental health; concern for the urban environment especially vacant buildings, litter and dog fouling; wanting to feel safe in their community; additional support for young people with difficulties like dyslexia or ADHD; access to youth workers and help with employment and transport.</p>
Island and Mainland Rural	The plan highlights issues faced by communities living in remote small towns and remote rural areas.
Climate Change	No impact
Data Rights	No impact



Caithness Area Place Plan Plana Àite Sgìre Ghallaibh

Web address

Executive Summary

Geàrr-chunntas Gnìomhach

The Caithness Area Place Plan (APP) has been developed in conjunction with various services, organisations and most importantly the communities within the area. It aims to capture priorities, strengths, challenges, opportunities and community aspirations within one overarching Plan which should be used or referred to by services, groups and organisations operating in Caithness. This will help to ensure service provision, funding and developments reflect collective community wants, needs and priorities.

Through the process of producing the APP, it became clear that many community priorities and aspirations reflect those which have been voiced for some time, but also that new upcoming ideas and opportunities were being identified.

In order to make the APP easier to utilise, the aspirations have been categorised under the primary headings of People, Place and Prosperity to reflect the groupings being used by many of the major organisations such as Highland Council, NHS Highland and the Community Partnership. These are summarised as follows:

PEOPLE	PLACE	PROSPERITY
Health and Well-being	Active Travel	Diverse economy
Public Transport	Roads	Renewable Energy Development
Air links	Town Centres	Population Decline and Youth migration
Sport and Recreation	Waste and Recycling	Tourism
	Housing	
	Community Wardens	

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1 Introduction

Ro-ràdh

In 2021, Highland Council made a commitment to develop Area Place Plans (APPs) mainly based on Area Committee boundaries. The Plans are being developed and facilitated in various ways across Highland, as each area is different.

Area Place Plans set out the vision, ambition and priorities for people and place in that particular area. This will support targeting resources, service delivery and provide a clear vision for attracting external investment.

The APPs inter-relate with a number of other plans, including Local Place Plans (LPPs), the Highland Local Development Plan (HLDP), the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP), the Highland Investment Plan (HIP), the Highland Delivery Plan (HDP) and the Community Partnership Plans.

This Area Place Plan focuses on Caithness, and will help the Highland Council, partners and communities secure funding for the Area by evidencing the impact of every pound spent here. The associated actions will provide clarity and manage expectations around how and where resources are prioritised. The APP will also provide a stronger framework for communities within our Area to prepare more local plans (should they wish to) empowering them to drive and deliver change in our towns, villages, communities and settlements.

The Caithness Area Place Plan is ambitious but realistic, covering the aspirations within our communities and focusing on outcomes for the whole Area. It will help inform local and regional decision making about public services, budgeting and policy areas, as well as informing those wider statutory plans. It recognises the good work already taking place in our Area and supports community action to make the most of opportunities.

2 How the Plan Was Developed

Mar a Chaidh am Plana a Leasachadh

The production of this plan was facilitated by The Highland Council and involved a wide group of stakeholders throughout the process. This included input from Elected Members (Councillors) as well as a wide range of Council services; Community Councils; Community Development Companies; High Life Highland; Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE); Highland Third Sector Interface (HTSI); Caithness Community Partnership; Whole Family Wellbeing Team; NHS Highland as well as consulting with other specialist groups and colleagues where required.

Initially, the focus was on gathering existing plans, strategies and documentation together, finding the common themes through these and their accompanying consultations and undertaking desktop analysis. Findings from the Place Standard Survey, carried out in 2024, were also referenced.

Following this, the Engagement Strategy for the Plan was devised and approved by the Stakeholder Group. The strategy consisted of surveys and ideas boards available electronically and hosted on the Council's Engagement HQ portal, as well as public drop-in sessions held in Thurso, Wick and Lybster, supported by semi-structured interviews with selected individuals representing marginalised groups, followed by a stakeholder workshop. The findings from these have been built into the Area Place Plan, as well as fed across (where appropriate) to relevant partners for consideration in their plans and action where possible.

3 Caithness at a Glance

Gallaibh gu h-Aithghearr

Caithness spans over 600 square miles and is often referred to as the "lowlands beyond the Highlands". Renowned for its expansive skies, this county is proud of its rich heritage while also being forward-thinking, seizing new opportunities as they come. The people of Caithness are friendly, independent, and justifiably proud of their County, which offers much to residents, visitors, and potential investors alike.

The landscape of Caithness, a blend of coastal and farmland, rural and urban areas, is always impressive. The county's remarkable environment is recognised through various designations, including Dunnet Head, the northernmost point of the British mainland, the Flow Country (a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2024), and the protected East Caithness cliffs. This vibrant area is rich in community spirit, with the main towns of Thurso and Wick offering essential amenities such as leisure centres, libraries, parks, hospitals, GPs, and dentists. Caithness benefits from a strong voluntary sector driving change, offering support and bringing people together.

The County is divided into two Highland Council wards: Thurso and Northwest Caithness and Wick and East Caithness, each with four elected Highland Councillors. There are 12 Community Councils in Caithness, with one each covering Wick and Thurso towns and the remainder covering larger rural areas. The Caithness population of 25,210 (Census 2022) makes up 10.7% of the total Highland population. Of this, 12,301 live in the Thurso and Northwest Caithness Ward and 12,909 in the Wick and East Caithness ward. Overall, the population fell by 5.0% between 2011 and 2022, with the greatest fall in Thurso and Northwest Caithness. Over half of the population live within the towns of Wick and Thurso with the remainder of the population living in areas classified as very remote rural. Further information on population statistics and trends can be found in the Appendices.

The recent Place Standard and Local Living exercises carried out by Highland Council's Development Plans Team record public perceptions of the physical and social aspects of place in Caithness and highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the County. Nature, feeling safe, and identify and belonging all scored highly, whereas lower scores were achieved for public transport, walking, wheeling and cycling, and influence and control. Further detail can be found in the Appendices.

4 Challenges and Opportunities

Dùbhlain is Cothroman

4.1 The key messages heard

Some of the key overarching findings from the community engagement activity were:

Addressing depopulation - Caithness has a projected population decline of 21% by 2041. Addressing this requires a collaborative approach to deliver a range of measures and interventions with a particular focus on boosting local employment through a variety of well-paid jobs. Increasing access to apprenticeships and training will help keep young people in the area and enhancing childcare and family support will make it easier for families to stay or move into the County.

Lack of investment - there was a strong feeling within the community about Caithness being overlooked and ignored with many saying they believed key decisions about local service design and delivery were being made outwith the County.

Access to Services – concerns were raised about accessing services locally, with many highlighting significant challenges with healthcare resulting in people having to leave the County for appointments and procedures. The distance, condition of the roads and limited public transport all add to this pressure. People called for improvements to be made to health and social care services and recognised an opportunity through the NHS Highland Redesign to achieve this.

Poverty and Inequality - many recognised that there continues to be a divide between "*those that have and those that have not*" with specific references to food and fuel poverty being made. People asked for fair allocation of resources and investment and for the unique challenges Caithness faces to be recognised.

Community empowerment and local decision-making

There was a push for more local decision-making powers with fewer decisions being made centrally. Capacity-building support for community groups was noted as a priority to ensure communities were able to deliver local solutions.

Strengthened partnership working between third and public sector agencies was also wanted. Some people spoke about a disconnect between decision makers and the community, and felt important decisions about Caithness services were often being made centrally outwith the County

The Plan is organised around three key themes: **People**, **Place**, and **Prosperity**, each representing an area of focus to support improved outcomes. We held drop in events in Wick, Thurso and Lybster, and asked local people what it was like living in Caithness – we asked them what they liked about living in Caithness, but also what the challenges are.

4.2 People

Health and Wellbeing

Access to health services was a recurring theme. Concerns were raised regarding access to maternity services, with the need to travel to Inverness, limited access to GP practice lists and limited access to dentists. It was however noted that it is possible to get GP appointments promptly in some areas. The need for good quality accommodation to be available for health professionals was also noted. More local care delivery was seen as important, along with the potential to bring consultancy services to Caithness. The importance of access to mental health and drug and alcohol services was highlighted along with concerns around the mental health of young people, including the need for a personalised approach. Greater investment in care at home services was also seen as important for the support of more vulnerable residents. The importance of identifying young carers at the earliest opportunity was stressed as this would maximise the chances of affecting positive interventions and outcomes. The creation of a partnership between relevant third sector organisations and The Highland Council was suggested as being necessary to facilitate referrals and more quickly identify vulnerable young people.

People also highlighted the importance of accessing the coast and countryside to improve mental health and wellbeing. In relation to poverty there were comments about how the gap between “haves” and “have nots” affects wellbeing. There was widespread concern about funding cuts affecting public services, especially libraries, schools and healthcare, with calls for increased investment. There is widespread appreciation for library services across Caithness. Many highlighted demand for more accessible community spaces, such as sports facilities, libraries, and community halls, with some comments pointing to the need for new or better-used spaces and longer weekend opening hours to improve. The cost of hiring community spaces was also cited as a barrier, even preventing some groups continuing with their activities. A need for more support for neurodiverse young people with, for example, autism, dyslexia or ADHD, was also noted.

Public Transport

The need for improved public transport resonated across different groups and for different uses. Transport within and between towns, linking Caithness to Inverness and on to the central belt were all seen as inadequate, disadvantaging those without access to private transport. In particular, reference was made to the difficulty experienced by disabled people without private transport, with some local buses having few seats suitable for disabled people, with additional issues created by able bodied people, often taking these designated seats. Disabled access was also highlighted on coach services to Inverness. Public transport was highlighted as being important for work and study, accessing services, including those in Inverness and for socialising – more evening and weekend services are needed so people can go to events or visit friends and family. Possible community and local authority solutions were suggested with people asking what the potential impact might be of Highland Council's investment in bus services.

The importance of transport to allow people access to the natural environment was also referenced, as without such transport it is more difficult for people to enjoy the health and wellbeing benefits access to nature can bring. The need to check bus times online was also seen as a barrier for some. Local transport to rural areas and circular routes in the towns were felt to be lacking. Connections between modes of transport were felt to be disjointed, for example bus and train and bus and ferry timetables. Cancellation of services and poor reliability is a major frustration for users. Community Transport is viewed as a potential solution for local rural and urban routes.

Air links

With regards to air links from Wick John O'Groats airport, there was a feeling that there should be more flights from Caithness including reinstating flights to the Central Belt. There was some dissatisfaction with the reliability of the existing services.

Sport and Recreation

Affordable access to sport and recreation facilities was seen as important, particularly for young people. With a focus on young people, it was also suggested that an art project focusing on empty town centre buildings would improve both the local environment and access to activities for young people and could provide them with a dedicated town centre-based youth space.

Young people themselves were also keen to have more staff support to supervise under 16s wanting to hire facilities. A call was made for close engagement with young people to ensure spaces are designed and delivered to meet their needs.

4.3 Place

Active travel

When asked about transport and getting about, active travel was raised as a key issue. The need for footpaths on the A9, A99, NC500 and sections of the John O'Groats trail was mentioned. Walking and cycling links between villages were highlighted not only to connect communities but also to provide safe and attractive opportunities for accessing work, exercise, tourism and safer routes to school. There was recognition of the great walking opportunities in the county and the role of voluntary effort in maintaining routes. Some specific opportunities were identified including adding footpaths when roads are improved; repurposing the dismantled railway line between Wick and Lybster as an active travel route; creating a path to connect Wick High and Newton Primary Schools in Wick; and safer routes in Keiss.

Roads

The County's roads and pavements proved to be a prominent issue. Among the issues highlighted are potholes, road condition in general, white lining, drainage and street lighting. The impact caused by damage to vehicles as well as perceived dangers to cyclists and pedestrians were mentioned. The need for better gritting and snow clearance in rural areas to enable access to the main roads was referred to. Good roads were identified as being important to connect the county's settlements and to connect Caithness with the rest of Highland and so supporting the economy.

Town Centres

People felt that attention needs to be paid to town centres, and Wick in particular was mentioned. Both Wick and Thurso suffer from empty shops and neglected buildings. The closure of banks was highlighted, although the plans for a new banking hub for Wick and further opportunities for bank services to be included in the proposed Points of Delivery (PODs) was acknowledged. People questioned why the Council cannot do more to encourage owners to invest in their buildings. Council legacy buildings should also be addressed by the Council's property rationalisation programme.

Others suggested the need for more grants and other incentives to repurpose empty buildings for different uses such as housing or community uses. There were comments about the need for maintenance and investment in the town centre environments to attract visitors and shoppers and to instil a sense of pride. Parking in town centres has proved to be a prominent issue, particularly in Thurso where recent community engagement gathered feedback from residents and visitors about the current traffic management arrangements, particularly parking and waiting restrictions. A key finding was the need to support town centre businesses by extending parking times on town centre streets and in particular on Princes Street.

Waste and Recycling

People highlighted issues around litter, rubbish and dog fouling. It was felt that cheaper bulky uplifts would discourage fly-tipping. Recycling centres need to be open more, including at weekends, and better information on opening hours is required. People highlighted the need for better promotion and information about the new bins. Another suggestion was more education on composting.

Housing

Housing generated a significant number of comments. People highlighted the poor state of some housing in Caithness and felt that the maintenance of social housing should be better. Improvements such as better insulation and the expansion of district heating schemes were mentioned. People were keen to explore the repurposing of empty retail premises and other buildings into housing. People mentioned shortage of housing for single people and accessible housing for elderly and disabled households, with nearby services being crucial. Second homes purchased for short term lets were identified as a cause of housing shortage, particularly for first time buyers.

Community Wardens

The discussion around housing also generated comments about community wardens, who, alongside the Police and the Council, are seen as central to keeping neighbourhoods safe and tidy. Elderly and vulnerable residents in particular would find their presence reassuring. Wardens could also assist residents to organise community tidy ups and other schemes to improve the local environment.

4.4 Prosperity

Diverse Economy

Comments highlighted a perceived historic reliance on Dounreay, although the decommissioning programme continues to offer attractive opportunities. It was felt there is a need to attract investment, large organisations and government agencies to the north. This would provide a variety of well-paid roles to attract and retain families in the area, including returning natives who have worked and/or studied out with the area. It was also noted that a high proportion of jobs within the construction industry provide short-term contracts which can lead to financial instability. People also recognised supports such as flexible working and childcare provision were also important to have in place for families. Likewise, reference was made to the need for clearer pathways from school and college in to work. Attracting energy investment was highlighted as an opportunity but there were some misgivings about the impact of windfarms on the landscape. Self-employment also plays an important role, with a diverse range of businesses being supported by Business Gateway. In 2024/25 almost 400 businesses have started up in Highland, with around 15% from Caithness.

Renewable Energy Development

Both positive and negative comments were received about renewable energy with some noting the renewable energy sector having the potential for transformational change to the local and regional economy. Others, however, asked for the landscape to be protected from further development, with particular mention being made of wind and battery storage. People also highlighted that not all communities have access to community benefit funding through renewables and called for a general fund to be established for county and Highland-wide initiatives to ensure equitable distribution of benefit, with some specifically requesting community benefit be used to target child poverty. Opportunities were also sought for developers to create the legacy of a skilled workforce of local workers, particularly young people, and invest in community training programs with suggestions being made of developing a Caithness based training centre for sustainable energy, recognising the important role Caithness has to play in the wind and tidal energy sector. The Council's Social Value Charter sets out the community benefit expectations Highland has for companies wishing to invest in renewables in this area.

Population Decline and Youth Migration:

The shrinking and ageing population, coupled with young people moving away for better opportunities was highlighted by many as a key challenge that could affect the area's future workforce. Many reflected that young people were leaving the County for better opportunities. Limitations in subject offerings in schools and difficulties around teacher recruitment and retention (particularly specialist teachers) were cited as challenges. The need to strengthen pathways between schools and major employers was emphasised as well as expanding vocational education and apprenticeships in public and private sectors. Better promotion of the courses available through UHI was called for as well as providing more accessible online courses. It is noted that the Prince's Trust has recently withdrawn support services and funding from rural areas which is likely to have an impact.

Tourism

Many people highlighted Caithness as being a great place to visit. They mentioned attractions such as the NC500, Flow Country and John O'Groats Trail, brochs and castles, and the diversity and natural beauty of the coast and countryside. However, it was also felt that there are unrealised opportunities – suggestions included the need for more tourism information, better promotion of the county and its attractions, Caithness branding, learning from Orkney's tourism success, and the need to develop more attractions for locals and tourists and ensure the County is seen as a destination. There were few negative comments about the impact of tourism, however the pressure on housing from short-term lets was mentioned. Town centres were felt to be unattractive and require investment to make them more appealing to visitors and locals alike.

4.5 What young people told us

In the development of this plan, we reached out to young people to establish what was important to them. Their responses made clear that they, along with adults, are concerned about a wide range of issues.

Access

Young people recognised there are things to do, particularly sport, but affordability and access to community facilities, services and activities continues to be an issue.

They called for service providers to be more aware of the barriers facing young people and families and to respond to improve inclusion. They asked for more support for communities to build capacity to run services and activities for themselves, for example provide more supervision to enable young people to use sports halls and courts. There was a specific focus on access to health and wellbeing services locally, including mental health.

Place

Making the most of what Caithness has to offer through promoting attractions like Old Wick Castle & Heritage Centre and making sure the information is accessible to all was seen as important. Young people were concerned about how the town centres looked and felt. In particular they highlighted the number of vacant premises, litter and dog fouling and the need for improved street lighting to help people feel safer when they move about their communities. Young people also commented on the condition of the roads noting potholes as a significant issue. Concern was raised about unhealthy fast-food outlets in Wick. Young people also expressed a clear interest in support for healthy options including whether a healthy fast-food outlet could be encouraged.

Opportunities

Young people commented that they liked how some classes were interactive, and would like to see this extended to more lessons as well as additional support for young people with difficulties like dyslexia or ADHD. Young people also stated that having access to a youth worker to talk to was important along with a call for more youth facilities such as skateparks, climbing walls, and indoor sports facilities which are open for longer hours. Young people also asked for more investment in local job opportunities, including access to employment support and public transport, particularly from the outlying villages into Wick and Thurso. Some young people also expressed an interest in learning to grow their own veg.

Appendices

Eàrr-ràdhan

A	Wider Plan Landscape	P17
B	Population Statistics & Area Information (including Caithness Area Profile)	P28
C	Place Standard	P35
D	Local Living Outcomes	P39

Appendix A Wider Plan Landscape

Area Place Plans sit within the wider strategic context and also exert some influence on both strategic and operational plans on a Highland-wide and locality planning arena. This appendix situates the plans as well as signposting to those wider documents.



Highland Wide Plans, Programmes & Documents:

Highland Delivery Plan (HDP) – Our Future Highland:

Sets out the programme of Highland Council for the five-year period up to 2027. It makes commitments to secure social and economic transformation on behalf of Highland communities. The operational delivery plan shows how Highland Council will deliver on these commitments through a major programme of transformation for our people and places, working in collaboration with others to create a vibrant and sustainable Highland area. It has a range of workstreams, programmes and projects measured by the Performance Plan or by specific service plans and is also the means by which the Council will deliver on its three-year budget strategy (2024-2027). It also shows how the Council will work with others to implement commitments expressed in the Community Planning Partnership's Highland Outcome Improvement Plan. The Plan is available here - [Our priorities | Delivery Plan 2024-2027](#)

Highland Local Development Plan (HLDP):

The new Local Development Plan for Highland is currently being prepared. Local Development Plans show how local places will change in the future, including where development should and should not happen. The new plan will be place-based, people-centred and delivery-focused and sit within the national context as set out in National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4). The aim is for the HLDP to be place based (so that it is relevant, accessible and useful to people with an interest in their place), developed in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders and based on robust evidence so that it is deliverable. Evidence gathering is in progress and related engagement including consultation events being held from late January to early May 2025. The work programme includes preparation and Council approval of the formal Evidence Report between mid and end of 2025 and a subsequent Gate Check, with the Proposed Plan stage towards the end of 2026. Information on the HLDP is available here - [Highland Local Development Plan \(HLDP\) | Highland Local Development Plan \(HLDP\) | The Highland Council](#)

Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (HOIP):

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 requires each Community Planning Partnership (CPP) to prepare and publish a Local Outcome Improvement Plan which sets out the local outcomes which the CPP will prioritise for improvement. Tackling inequalities will be a specific focus.

The Highland Community Planning Partnership works to the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan 2017-2027 which outlines the aspirations for Highland and the actions required to deliver them and was developed by the HCPP following extensive engagement with communities across

Highland. It focuses on and aims to tackle inequalities. The HOIP itself is currently under review however the Partnership Board has approved in principle the draft revised HOIP for 2024-2027, which includes the updated Vision: *Maximise Opportunities and Tackle Inequality to Build a Thriving Highlands For All* and the addition of three high level Strategic Priorities: People – *Enable people to live independently, safe and well within their community*; Place – *Work in partnership to develop sustainable and resilient local communities*; Prosperity – *Creating opportunities for all people and places to prosper and to thrive economically*.

[2024-2027-Revised-HOIP-Approved-HCPP-Board-1st-March-2024.pdf \(highlandcpp.org.uk\)](#)

Highland Investment Plan (HIP):

The Highland Investment Plan (HIP) commits £2.1 billion of capital funding over a twenty-year period, based on the ring fencing of 2% council tax per annum, or an equivalent revenue stream. These funds will be capitalised to create an investment fund that will be used to tackle the major capital challenges that Highland Council faces: transport and roads; schools and community facilities; depots and offices – as part of work towards a single public estate and integrated community operating model. Thurso is one of the priority areas targeted to benefit from this funding - [Highland Investment Plan | Highland Investment Plan | The Highland Council](#)

Local Housing Strategy (LHS):

Housing is one of life's basic needs. Everyone should have a good quality home that they can afford to live in and heat, which will in turn help them to enjoy better health and achieve their full potential. Good housing also contributes to stronger communities that benefit everyone living in them. The Council's current Local Housing Strategy, co-produced with delivery partners, stakeholders and local residents sets out aims for housing over the next five years and what will be done to increase the supply of homes so there are enough houses in the right places to meet housing needs; support people to live independently for as long as possible in their own homes and communities; prevent and respond to homelessness and make sure people have the right help to let them make decisions on their housing options; and improve the condition of housing and minimise fuel poverty to improve the quality, comfort and affordability of homes.

The vision for Highland is that *"Everyone in Highland has access to a quality home which is attainable, affordable and supports the local economy in a sustainable, connected community where people wish to live, work and study."* The Strategy can be accessed here - [Housing strategy | Housing strategy | The Highland Council](#)

Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP):

The Strategic Housing Investment Plan sits alongside the Local Housing Strategy (LHS), with the current SHIP setting out how investment in affordable housing will be directed over the five-year period 2024/25 to 2028/29 to achieve the priorities identified in the LHS. It contributes to the national Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP), assisting in fulfilling the Scottish Government's commitment to deliver new affordable homes both during this Parliament as well as to extend delivery beyond that period.

https://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/84033/10_strategic_housing_investment_plan_2025%E2%80%932030

'Blue Light' Services

Operational delivery plans for local policing, fire and rescue services:

- [Local Fire & Rescue Plan, Highland 2021-2024](#)
- [Highland Local Policing Plan, 2023-2026](#)
- [North Highland Area Command Priorities \(Police\)](#)

Highlands & Islands Enterprise Strategy:

Sets out priorities for economic development to ensure a greener, fairer and more resilient region.

<https://www.hie.co.uk/media/vczc0zca/hie-strategy-2023-28-final-031023.pdf>

Local Plans, Programmes & Documents:**Caithness & Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan)**

The current strategic plan for land use, development and place making across the area; including allocations for housing, community facilities, leisure, open space, business, retail, tourism and industry. In due course, the CaSPlan will be replaced by the forthcoming Highland Local Development Plan (HLDP).

https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/178/local_and_statutory_development_plans/283/caithness_and_sutherland_local_development_plan

The associated **Delivery Programme** outlines priorities for development and investment for each settlement area:

https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/28972/highland_delivery_programme

Specific opportunities for regeneration of Wick and Thurso town centres are identified in the **Caithness & Sutherland Town Centre Strategy**:

https://www.highland.gov.uk/directory_record/1225069/caithness_and_sutherland_town_centre_strategy

Local Place Planning:

Local Place Plans (LPPs) are community-led documents that aim to easily convey a community's proposals for the development or use of land and buildings in their local area. Introduced by the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, LPPs are a way for Community Councils or Community-controlled bodies to engage with their local community, to think about how to make their place better, to agree priorities, and to take action (often working with others). [Local Place Plans | Local Place Plans | The Highland Council](#)

LPPs are currently being prepared by Thurso, Wick, and Dunnet and Canisbay Community Councils.

Caithness Community Partnership

The Caithness Community Partnership (CCP) is one of nine Community Partnerships across Highland dedicated to tackling inequalities. Bringing together public sector partners, third sector organisations, and local agencies, CCP serves as a collaborative forum to identify shared local priorities and coordinated actions. Through shared resources, joint initiatives, and collaborative working, the CCP aims to improve service delivery and address community needs. This collective effort reflects a commitment to community engagement and making meaningful, positive changes that benefit everyone in the Caithness area.

The Partnership works across identified priorities:

- Mental Health and Wellbeing – [Caithness Cares](#) including the Here for Caithness website: [Here For Caithness](#)
- Poverty – [Caithness Poverty Action Group](#)
- Employability – Caithness Local Employability Partnership

Other themes include:

- Inequalities
- Repopulation
- Transport
- Disabilities
- Achieving Net Zero

Click on the links below to view available locality and community plans:

[Castletown Locality Plan](#)

[Dunbeath and Berriedale Locality Plan](#)

[Thurso Locality Plan](#)

[Wick Locality Plan](#)

Additional reports available from Caithness Community Partnership

[Adult Health Caithness 2023](#)

[Demography Caithness 2022](#)

[Caithness Profile](#)

[Have Your Say Caithness](#)

[My Life in the Highlands & Islands – C&S Summary Report 2022](#)

[Children & Young People's Health & Wellbeing Profile Caithness 2023](#)

Living Well Locally - Achievements and Learnings from the Caithness Challenge

In Autumn 2023, community members, leaders, organisations and services came together to join the Caithness Challenge, supported by the Innovation Unit. This was all about helping people to live well locally in Caithness. It brought people together from across the County to test out ideas to make best use of existing resources and breathe new life into the local spaces. The Caithness Challenge is part of the Caithness Place-Based Demonstrator and is supported by Scottish Government funding. It also worked in partnership with local anchor organisations including NHS Highland, The Highland Council, University of the Highlands and Islands, and Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Caithness Voluntary Group, who formed the Caithness Collective Leadership Group. The Caithness Place-Based Demonstrator is about enabling a sustainable approach to change that is rooted in communities and is supported by infrastructure and architectural work. The learning is shared with Scottish Government and with places across Scotland, to demonstrate what a place-based approach can look like in practice.

The full report is available at: <https://highlandcpp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Caithness-Challenge-FINAL-version-report-Aug-24.pdf>

Focus North

Focus North is a partnership of Caithness Chamber of Commerce, Highland Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, NRS Dounreay, Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, Scottish Government, Skills Development Scotland and UHI North, West and Hebrides. Focus North delivers transformational initiatives in the north of mainland Scotland to generate economic growth and lead the low carbon economy. Focus North's geographical area includes Caithness and north Sutherland, but it is not defined by a precise line on a map. It is deliberately flexible to accommodate the differing needs of multiple emerging inward investment opportunities that will benefit the north of mainland Scotland. Thanks to the iconic North Coast 500 tourist route, an increasing number of visitors are discovering the unspoilt landscape and endless skies. But tourism is not the only growth industry in the far north, which has a unique sectoral mix including nuclear decommissioning, onshore and offshore wind, tidal stream generation, hydrogen production, battery research, space, and conservation science. The Flow Country, an internationally important carbon sink, is a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Focus North vision is a sustainable region, providing a healthy, economically stable environment for its growing population. Its network of thriving communities will reflect the rich heritage and varied landscapes of the region.

Focus North goals are to:

- Develop a fairer, resilient, more balanced economy
- Expand the working population
- Grow and diversify a sustainable economy
- Increase the number of private sector businesses operating locally
- Attract investment

The Focus North Masterplan can be seen at <https://www.focusnorth.scot/wp-content/uploads/Focus-North-Masterplan-2-Feb-23-v7-1.pdf>

Envisioning the Future of Public Transport for the North of Mainland Scotland in 2030

Focus North commissioned a detailed local transport study from innovation consultancy Urban Foresight. Their research included a survey of local residents and stakeholders that captured more than 350 responses. The responses identified four main desires from public transport users:

- increased bus and train services
- affordable fares
- better connections between transport modes
- a shift towards sustainable transport

The main challenges were:

- infrequent and unreliable services
- long journeys
- poor infrastructure for active travel

Urban Foresight's report did not aim to completely move away from private car usage, which it recognises as unavoidable due to the remote communities in the region. Instead, it focuses on reducing reliance on private cars by providing enhanced public transport options. Urban Foresight proposed the following solutions:

- a network of electric, community-owned vehicles offering flexible routes
- mini-mobility hubs with bike sharing
- consolidated booking and payment platforms
- oversight by a community-led organisation

Under the most ambitious modelling scenario, the above changes would reduce private car journeys, by 15% and create a three-fold increase in bus transport. However, the solution requires a significant inward investment (running a fleet of 18 electric minivans over 10 years would cost upwards of £8m). The full Urban Foresight report is now available at:

https://focusnorth.scot/wpcontent/uploads/2024/04/Future_Transport_NScotland_Final.pdf

Caithness Transport Forum

The longstanding Caithness Transport Forum aims to bring together local transport stakeholders and operators to promote a strong, inter-connected road, rail, sea and air transport network to, from and within the county of Caithness for the economic, social and environmental benefit of businesses and residents of Caithness. To achieve this the Forum:

- Engages with government agencies, the business sector and the Caithness community to inform and influence planning and delivery of transport infrastructure and services to, from and within Caithness
- Consults with local individuals, organisations and businesses to establish current and future transport needs.
- Establishes the extent that existing services meet those needs.
- Engages with statutory, business and voluntary agencies to enhance the effectiveness of transport services and infrastructure and to increase transport provision,
- Promotes best practice and most efficient use of existing resources.

- Makes information on local, regional and national transport issues available to local individuals, organisations and businesses, where appropriate.
- Considers the implications of and, in consultation with key local transport stakeholders, provide informed opinion on local, regional and national transport policy initiatives.

The Forum takes cognisance of, and promotes, the fact that the county is dependent on a variety of transport networks – road, rail, sea and air – and gives due attention to each form of transport.

The Forum is funded by Highland Council and NRS Dounreay and has been facilitated by Caithness Chamber of Commerce since December 2012.

<https://www.caithnesschamber.com/what-we-do/contracts-funded-projects/caithness-transport-forum/>

Active Travel Masterplans

HiTrans (Highlands & Islands Transport Partnership) plans outlining development opportunities with potential to improve walking and cycling routes in the Thurso and Wick areas.

- Wick Active Travel Masterplan:
https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/22651/wick_active_travel_masterplan_2020
- Thurso Active Travel Masterplan:
https://www.highland.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/22650/thurso_active_travel_masterplan_2020.pdf

Forestry & Land Scotland: Caithness Land Management Plan

<https://forestryandland.gov.scot/what-we-do/planning/active/caithness-lmp>

Flow Country Management Plan

<https://theflowcountry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/2023-02-20-The-Flow-Country-Proposed-World-Heritage-Site-Management-Plan-Nomination-Draft-final-proofed.pdf>

Appendix B Population Statistics & Area Information

Introduction

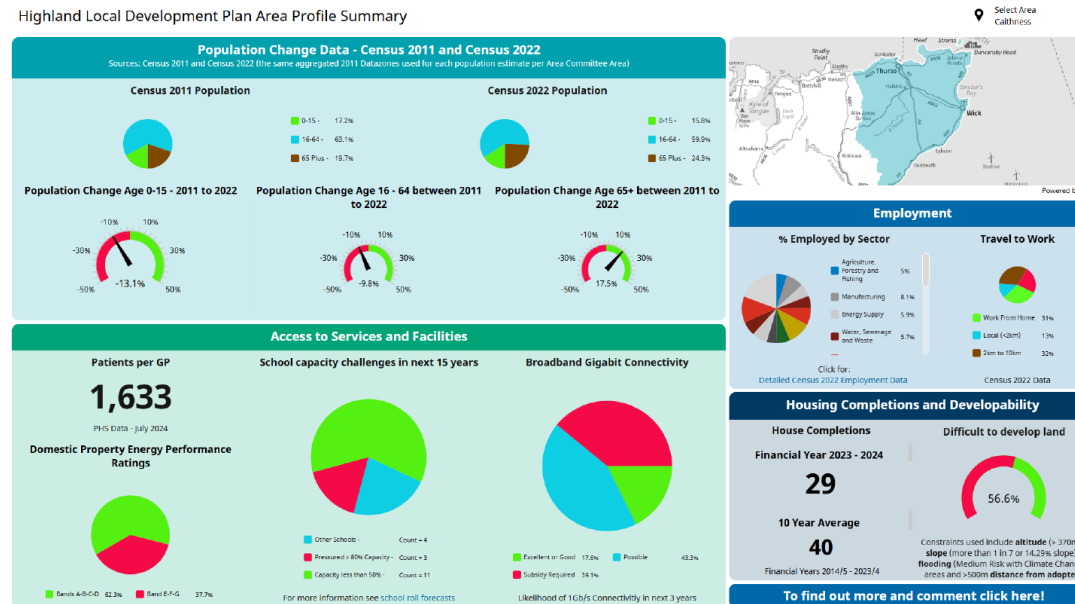
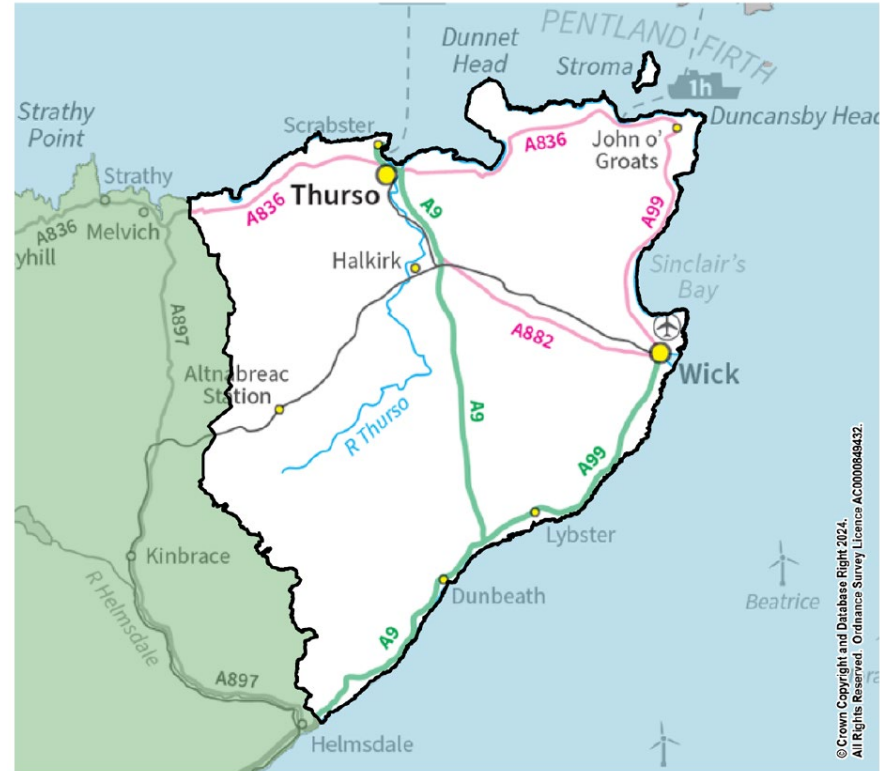


Figure: Dashboard summary for Caithness

The full dashboard is available [online](#).

The principal settlements as defined within the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan are Thurso, Wick, Castletown, Halkirk and Lybster.



Map: Caithness area

Caithness lies in the northern part of the Scottish mainland, it is divided from the Orkney Islands by the Pentland Firth, and from the county of Sutherland by a picturesque mountain range stretching from the celebrated headland of the Ord to Drumhollistan on the north Atlantic. Caithness is remote in UK terms but connected through road, rail, sea and air both north and south and to offshore opportunities. Tourism supports an increasing share of the local economy stimulated by the North Coast 500 route and renowned destinations such as John O'Groats. Large parts of the local landscape are flat, farmed and exposed to climatic conditions that inhibit significant natural regeneration of woodland. Conversely, this climate has attracted many proposals for the generation, storage, use and transmission of renewable energy and associated employment. The local economy has other opportunities, for example, decommissioning of the former nuclear plant at

Dounreay has seeded many supply chain opportunities; Rolls Royce, Subsea 7 and BT are among the global companies investing in employment in the far north of Scotland.

How well does the area function?

Caithness fares better than other remote areas because it has a strategic location enroute to the Northern Isles and close to offshore opportunities. However, its lack of a critical mass population means that higher order services such as consultant and referral services healthcare are limited. Trunk and local road networks are lightly trafficked but maintenance issues are significant given the length and extent of the network and the resources available.

Car ownership is seen by many as essential because of the paucity, cost, duration of journey, and unreliability of public transport alternatives. Disappointingly, the need to travel has been magnified by sporadic housing developments in the countryside by those not willing or able to find suitable accommodation within the main settlements. Locating additional facilities and services within the major centres of Wick and Thurso could help reverse this trend so that a higher proportion of people's daily needs could be within a shorter more sustainable journey.

Diversifying the economy is a key challenge especially when there is a tension between the tourism and renewable energy sectors. For example, assets such as the Flow Country world heritage site should attract more visitors but more onshore renewable energy development may compromise that draw.

Facts and figures

Infrastructure Capacities:

Digital Connectivity – as of September 2024 only 4,478 premises in Highland had taken up ultrafast (1Gb/s) (FFTP or Broadband Voucher scheme for up to 1Gb/s via the R100 contract) digital connectivity. Within Caithness there are 15,067 premises 2,653 (18%) of which have the potential to access 1Gb/s speeds, 5,889 (39%) where it may be possible that a commercial provider will provide such speeds within the next 3 years and 6,525 (43%) premises where a public subsidy will be required and that subsidy is currently not programmed.

School Capacities – there are no current and/or forecast physical capacity constraints at any Caithness school except Wick High which is forecast to breach for the next 5 years. See [school roll forecasts](#) for more information.

Water and Sewerage Capacities - there is spare water capacity at the sub regional works but sewerage capacity issues at the smaller sewage works at Dunnet and Halkirk. There are also water and sewerage network limitations at Wick, Dunnet and Halkirk.

Significant Road Capacity Constraints and Investments – vehicle numbers and congestion aren't year-round capacity issues. However, road safety and maintenance issues predominate with limited investment targeted to address these matters.

Health Facility Capacity – Caithness General Hospital was operating at greater than 90% occupancy in the 2022-2023 year. The number of registered patients per GP is above the Highland average at the following practices: Thurso and Halkirk (Thurso), Castletown, Pearson Practice (Wick) and Three Harbours (Thurso). However, below Highland average numbers are recorded (July 2024) at Dunbeath.

Other Key Facts and Figures:

A summary of this information is available in the [HLDP dashboard](#).

- Population Total - (Census 2022) 25,210 (10.7% of Highland population)
- Population Change - (Census 2011-2022) -5.0% (Scotland +2.7%, HLDP +1.8%)
- Age profile (Census 2022) 0-16 (16.9%) 65+ (24.3%) (similar to Highland profile, but older than Scotland profile) – however falling birth rates and numbers is a general trend with the number of live births at Raigmore Hospital dropping 16.5% from a peak of 2,140 in 2008/2009 to 1,787 in 2022/2023.
- Proportion of Homes within Main Settlements (Council Tax Data 2023) 89.3%
- Households – (Census 2022) 6,074 occupied households
- House Completions - long term average 63 per year which is 5.6% of Highland long term average completions – full details in the [housing completions dashboard](#).
- Energy Efficiency of Housing Stock – (Scottish Govt FOI Release 2024) – Caithness has half (5%) the proportion of the Highland average (10%) proportion of residential accommodation with best A or B Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Rating and a higher (17%) proportion than Highland (13%) with the worst EPC rating of F or G.

- Poverty – the most recent [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation \(2020\)](#) highlights pockets of poverty within north east Wick (Willowbank) and south east Wick (close to the distillery).
- Visitors to Highland – a 2023 Visit Scotland survey of 1,041 overnight visitors to Highland found that half were international and half from the UK, most (75%) were older or retired, the most popular reason for choosing to visit was the scenery/landscape, half stayed in serviced accommodation, and hiking and visiting castles were the top attractions and activities. According to Caithness and Sutherland Tourism Destination Recovery Strategy 2021-2024 report a significant portion of tourism and hospitality businesses in the region are short-staffed, with 64% of hotels facing shortages. In the Northern Highlands, 74% of tourism businesses, and 89% in the West Highlands, struggle to attract local workers, largely due to a lack of affordable staff accommodation, which 44% of employers identified as a key barrier.
- Earnings and Employment – within the Thurso and Wick Travel to Work Areas, in 2023, the average gross weekly pay was £714.60 (Thurso), £748.90 (Wick)
- Working from Home and Commuting – (Ward data from Census 2022) – around 29% of the workforce work mainly from home (slightly lower than Highland and Scotland averages) but around 41% commute more than 10km to work (higher than the Highland and Scotland averages).
- Unemployment – (Highland June 2024) 3,235 or 2.2% of economically active
- Employment sectors – (2020 HIE data for the Caithness and Sutherland area) the top 3 employment sectors are: human health and social work (18.8%), wholesale and retail (12.5%) and accommodation and food services (15.6%). More local detail via [Invest Caithness](#) website). Self-employment (including sole traders) across a very wide range of sectors is a significant contributor to the economy.
- Environmental and other constraints - 57% of Caithness is covered by significant development constraint in terms of altitude, future flooding, national environmental, or international environmental designation (NSA, SAC, SPA, NNR, SSSI, Peatland [Class 1 and 2], TPO, Ancient Woodland Inventory, land over 370m, being over 500m from the adopted road network, future 1 in 200 year fluvial and coastal flood risk areas and current 1 in 200 year pluvial areas).

Place Plans and Outcomes

The following plans and documents contain a range of community and community partnership priorities that will be considered in shaping the plan content for the area. Where one of these plans falls partly within a number of our HLDP Area Profiles, we have referenced it only under the profile for the area in which it is mainly located.

Local Place Plans:

Local Place Plans in The Highland Council area can be found via the Council's Local Place Plan Register, which comprises:

- [Directory of Local Place Plans](#)
- [LPP online map](#).

Completed and Registered

None to date.

In Preparation

- Dunnet and Canisbay Local Place Plan
- Thurso Local Place Plan
- Wick Local Place Plan

Area Place Plan

The Highland Council is leading the preparation of an Area Place Plan (APP), with a stakeholder group formed to deliver the plan in draft by mid-2025. The APP will collate and prioritise an overview of local priorities development, investment and service delivery across Caithness - identified through stakeholder and public engagement in addition to reviewing the content of existing plans and strategies across public and community partners. This includes consideration of priorities for the future of prominent Council assets as part of the Highland Investment Programme.

The APP will comprise a key source of evidence for consideration in development planning, future service delivery and community action.

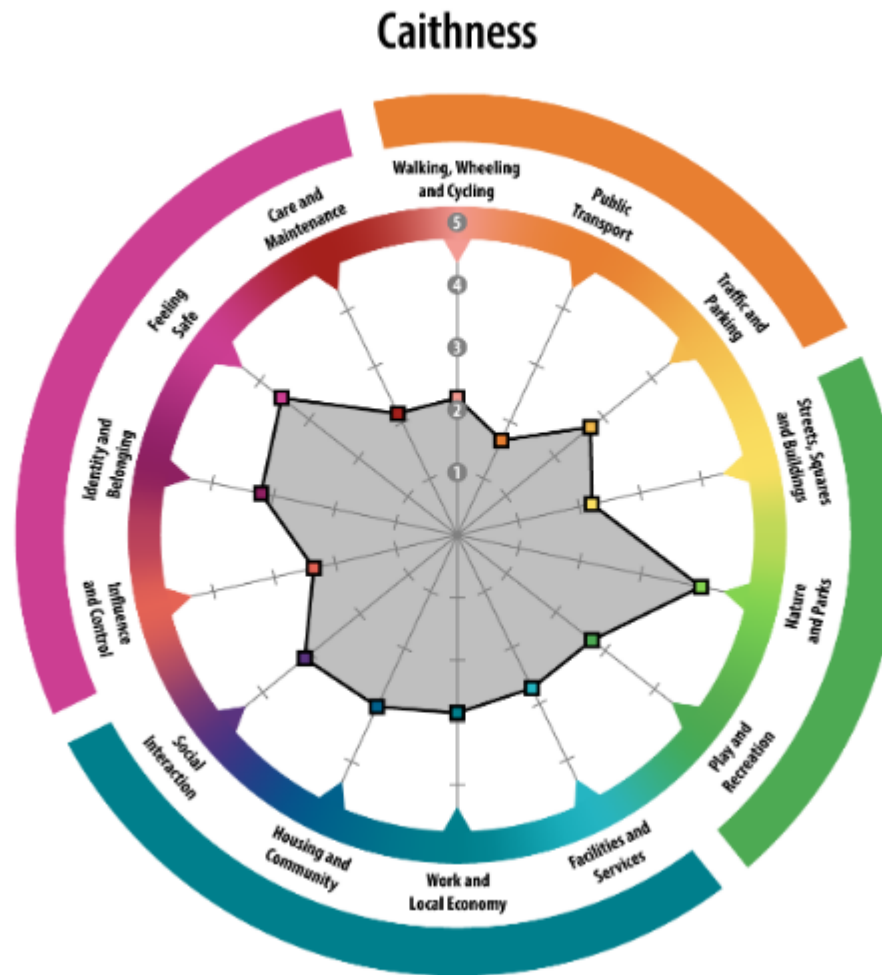
Community Partnership Plan

Caithness Community Partnership (CCP) has been set up to bring together key public sector bodies, third sector organisations, and other key groups and agencies to work collaboratively to tackle inequalities and prevent disadvantage across the Caithness area. By working together to identify priorities, share resources and improve the lives of residents and the services they receive CCP is the forum for partners to come together to actively work towards improving the lives of residents across the area.

The CCPs key priorities are mental health and wellbeing, poverty, and employability. Additional themes include addressing inequalities, repopulation, transport, disabilities, and the goal of achieving net zero. Locality Plans are available for Castletown, Dunbeath and Berriedale, Thurso, and Wick. The information can be accessed [online](#).

Appendix C Place Standard

Place Standard : Public perceptions of the physical and social aspects of place were scored on a scale of 1-5 (very poor to very good).



Caithness Average Score (2.7) is joint-lowest among sub-regional areas in Highland.

Area response rate: 148 online responses, plus 21 young people engaged in HLH facilitated sessions.

Domains for which Caithness scores low compared with rest of Highland:

Spaces grouping (3.0) is lowest in Highland, within which:

Streets, Squares and Buildings (2.3) is lowest in Highland

Civic and Stewardship grouping (2.8) is joint-lowest in Highland, within which:

Care and Maintenance score (2.2) is lowest in Highland

Walking, Wheeling and Cycling (2.2) scored joint lowest in Highland.

Facilities and Services (2.7) scored among the lowest in Highland: See summary of qualitative feedback on this domain, below.

Domains for which Caithness compares well with rest of Highland:

Housing and Community (3.0) is joint-highest in Highland.

Traffic and Parking (2.7) among the highest in Highland.

Highest scores for area: Nature and Parks (4.0); Feeling Safe (3.6)

Lowest scores for area: Public Transport (1.7); Walking, Wheeling and Cycling (2.2)

Qualitative Feedback

Affordable housing is generally seen to be available, with options meeting various needs. However, some raise concerns over the availability and increasing cost of long-term rentals and need for social housing targeted at young families and older residents, in particular. General frustration over poor maintenance and dampness of council properties in some areas.

Regard for the valuable role of volunteers in maintaining the upkeep of public areas. However, there are frequent calls for improved upkeep and improvement of playparks as well as increased availability of indoor spaces for young people during winter months.

Significant concerns about the condition of roads and pavements, with frequent mention of potholes, uneven surfaces (particular issue for wheelchair users) and lack of safe, well-connected cycling paths.

Desire for better signage to manage tourist traffic and responsible parking.

Limited and infrequent public transport services, particularly in rural areas, hinder access to work, school and essential services. This is exacerbated by perceived high costs, poor integration of timetables and unreliability of services, which discourage usage.

Complaints about poor internet and mobile service in certain areas, with suggestions for upgrading digital infrastructure to improve connectivity.

Calls for more local decision making powers, including regard to the role of community groups in expressing local views. This view partly reflects local tensions over Caithness' significant contribution to renewable energy production, which is appreciated by many residents, alongside parallel concerns over impacts of associated infrastructure on the natural landscape and parallel need for wider improvements to local infrastructure, including flood defences, drainage, and sustainable public transport.

Qualitative Feedback in relation to Facilities and Services:

Education Infrastructure and Maintenance: Numerous comments highlight the poor condition of schools, particularly Thurso High School, and the need for investment in new, safer, and more modern school buildings. Despite some criticism, many comments highlight the presence of good schools, including recently built facilities (Wick), as a positive.

Maintenance: Issues with the maintenance of public infrastructure, such as roads and buildings, with suggestions for better upkeep and renovation to prevent further decline.

Health Services Accessibility: There is a significant concern about the lack of local health services, particularly NHS dental care, general practitioners, and specialist services. Travel times to hospital can be a concern, particularly specialist services, which often require long trips to Inverness.

Retail and Local Economy: The decline of local shops and high streets, with calls for lower business rates, more support for small businesses, and a broader range of shops, particularly clothing and DIY stores. High vacancy rates in town centres and development of retail out of town are highlighted as a concern.

Tourism and Town Aesthetics: Concerns about the appearance of town centres, with suggestions to improve signage, renovate vacant buildings, and provide better support for tourism services.

Community Spaces and Facilities: There is widespread appreciation for library services across Caithness. Many highlight demand for more accessible community spaces, such as sports facilities, libraries, and community halls, with some comments pointing to the need for new or better-used spaces and longer weekend opening hours to improve uptake.

Public Services Funding: Widespread concern about funding cuts affecting public services, especially libraries, schools, and healthcare, with calls for increased investment.

Public Transport and Accessibility: Issues with public transport, including limited bus services and poor connections to facilities (including within towns), as well as the accessibility of buildings and services for people with disabilities. Although Thurso and Wick are well served for facilities, including services from libraries, some respondents find these facilities are not easily accessible by foot, and depend upon car use (e.g. library, gym, pool).

Concerns arising for Children and Young People:

Improving Access to Youth Facilities: transport and parking to make youth and leisure facilities more accessible.

Call for More Youth Facilities: such as skateparks, climbing walls, and indoor sports facilities that are open for longer hours (limited weekend hours). Comments suggest concerns over limited availability of public swimming, when facilities are booked out by schools.

Youth Job Opportunities: need for investment in young people and job opportunities in Wick.

Concerns over the number of vacant premises in Wick.

Appendix D Local Living Outcomes

Local Living in Highland – Consultation Report

In the city of Inverness and Highland's towns and villages, the local living concept aims to reinforce and create new neighbourhoods that are attractive, safe, walkable places where people of all ages and abilities can access services, greenspace, learning and leisure within a walk of around 20 minutes (ten minutes to any destination(s) and 20 minute return journey).

The Highland Council are developing a tool to help assess how well our places meet the principles of local living. A review of approaches taken elsewhere in the UK was carried out to inform an appropriate methodology for the Highland Council area. Thereafter, a map-based tool was developed using Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to plot the location of a variety of services including shops, greenspace, leisure and learning within over 100 of Highland's largest settlements. GIS was then used to measure the accessibility to these services within a ten minute walking distance (800m) and presented the findings on an easy to use interactive map.

Scottish Government Guidance and the Council recognise that communities and businesses have an important role to play in informing local living. As such the Council held a public consultation on the map based local living tool. Views were sought on the tool in terms of the services included, the level of importance given to each service, accuracy and what approaches we could take to rural areas.

The consultation ran for a nine week period from the 17 June to 16 August 2024. The consultation was publicised in a number of ways:

- issuing two Council Press Releases;
- through social media (Council's Facebook page, X (formerly Twitter) and LinkedIn);
- by email to all Community Councils, those on the Development Plans consultation database and other interest groups;
- requesting libraries to display posters, provide weblinks and assistance; and
- officers took a stall at the Highland Youth Parliament 2024 at Inverness Leisure.

Feedback was sought using an online form. The Council received 27 responses to the consultation with a total of 46 comments. The comments were received from a range of parties, including individuals, community council's and community development organisations. A summary of comments and responses is provided below.

Once finalised, the tool will then form an important part of the evidence base for our new Highland Local Development Plan. It will help us prepare a settlement hierarchy for Highland, consider which areas may be suitable for new development, and the kinds of services and infrastructure needed to support them. It can also help assess new development proposals against the principles of local living and may be used by other Council services to inform future infrastructure investment decisions.

The mapped Local Living results are available in the Council's [online mapping tool](#).

In Caithness, we surveyed **42202 Hex Cells** - 11553 fall within or around SDA or growing Settlements. Of these - **3280** Cells contain the **9695** Residential properties in the area (Residential Cells).

Within these Residential Cells:

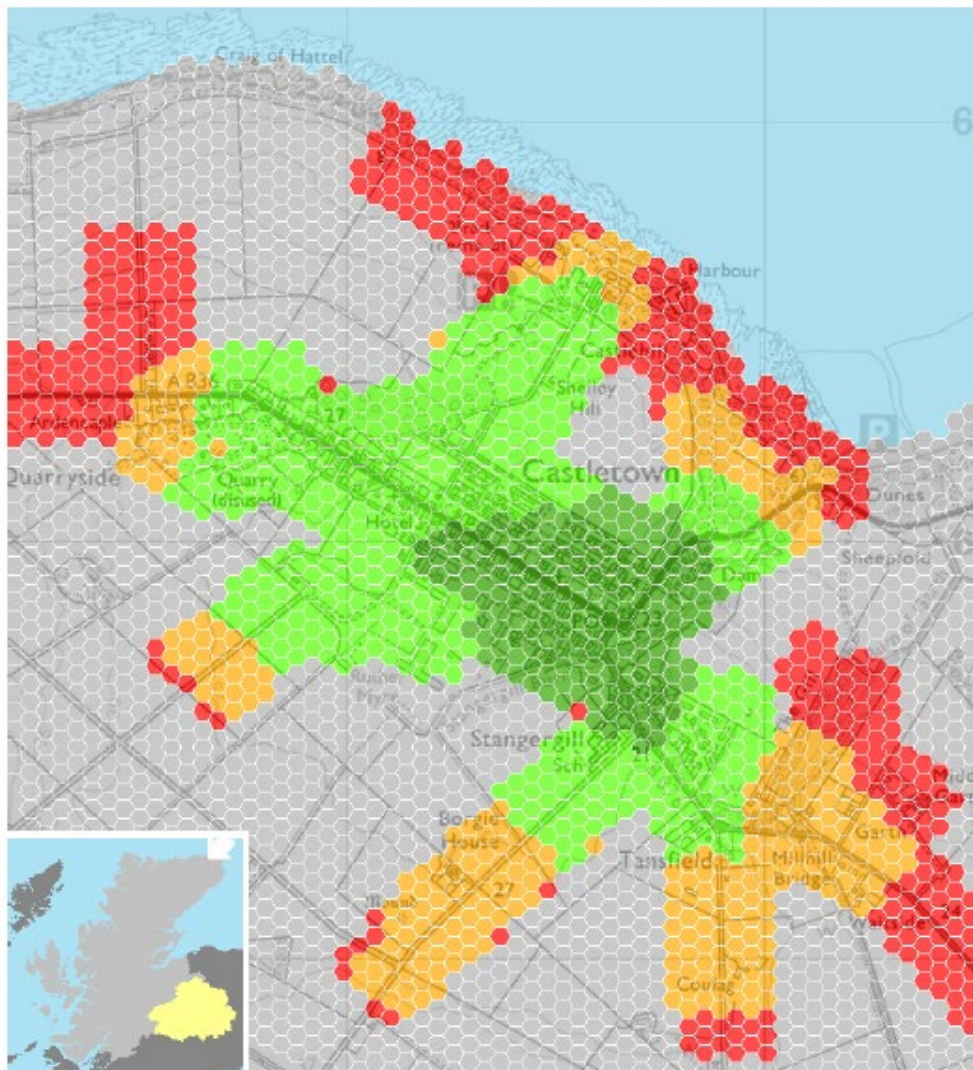
82.9% of residential properties are in cells classified as either **Very Highly Walkable** (4539) or **Highly Walkable** (3501)

2.3% of residential properties (229) have **Few or No Walkable** services.

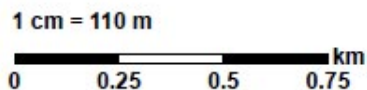
The **Average Local Living Total score** for a Residential Property in one of these Residential Cells in Caithness Area Committee Area is **10.9** (out of a maximum possible of 16).

The highest scoring residential cells are in **Wick** and score **15.8** out of the maximum of 16.

Thurso/Scrabster and Wick SDAs have the highest average residential score (at **11.3** per property) whereas **Latheronwheel** Growing Settlement has the lowest average residential property score with an average of **5.0**.



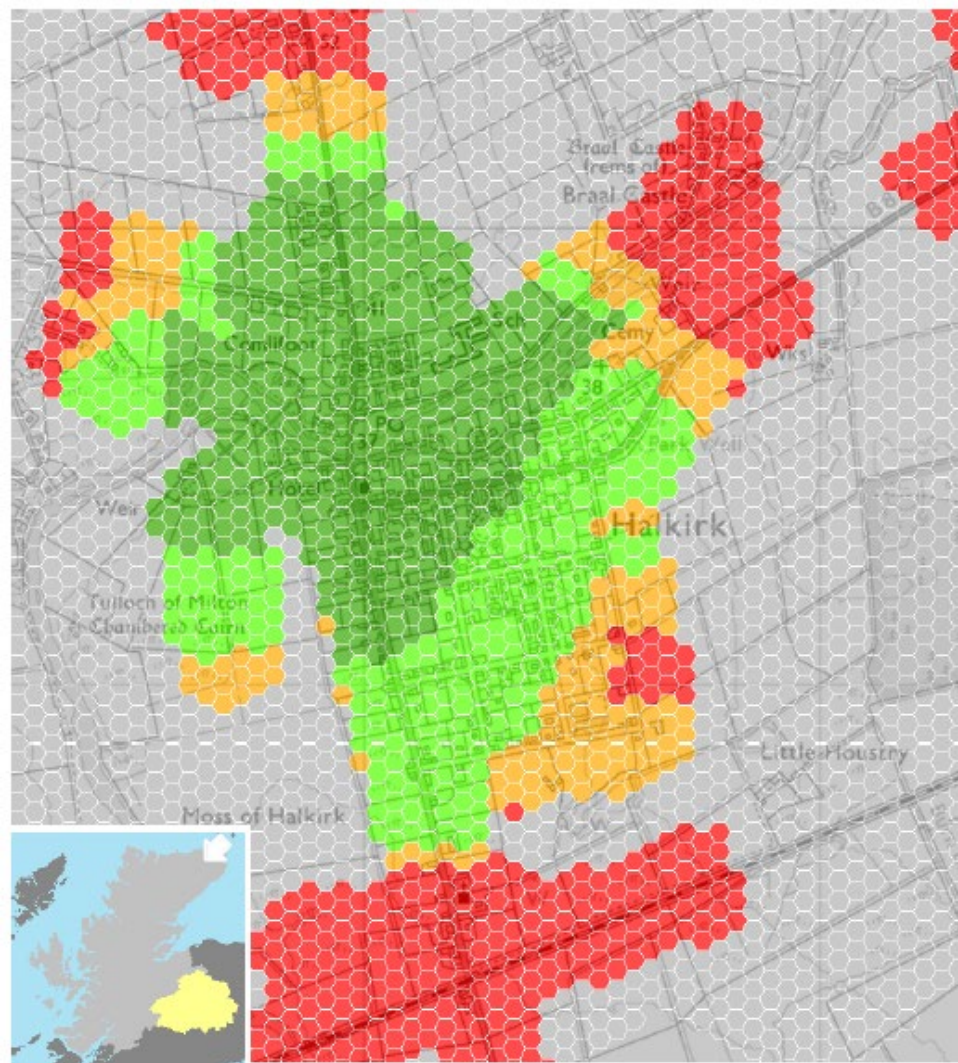
Local Living Service Accessibility: Castletown



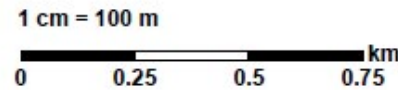
Services Results (50m Hexagon Grid)

Total number of services

- Very Few Walkable Services (0 - 1.1)
- Few Walkable Services (1.2 - 3.9)
- Some Walkable Services (4.0 - 7.9)
- High Level of Walkable Services (8.0 - 11.9)
- Very High Level of Walkable Services (12.0 - 16.0)



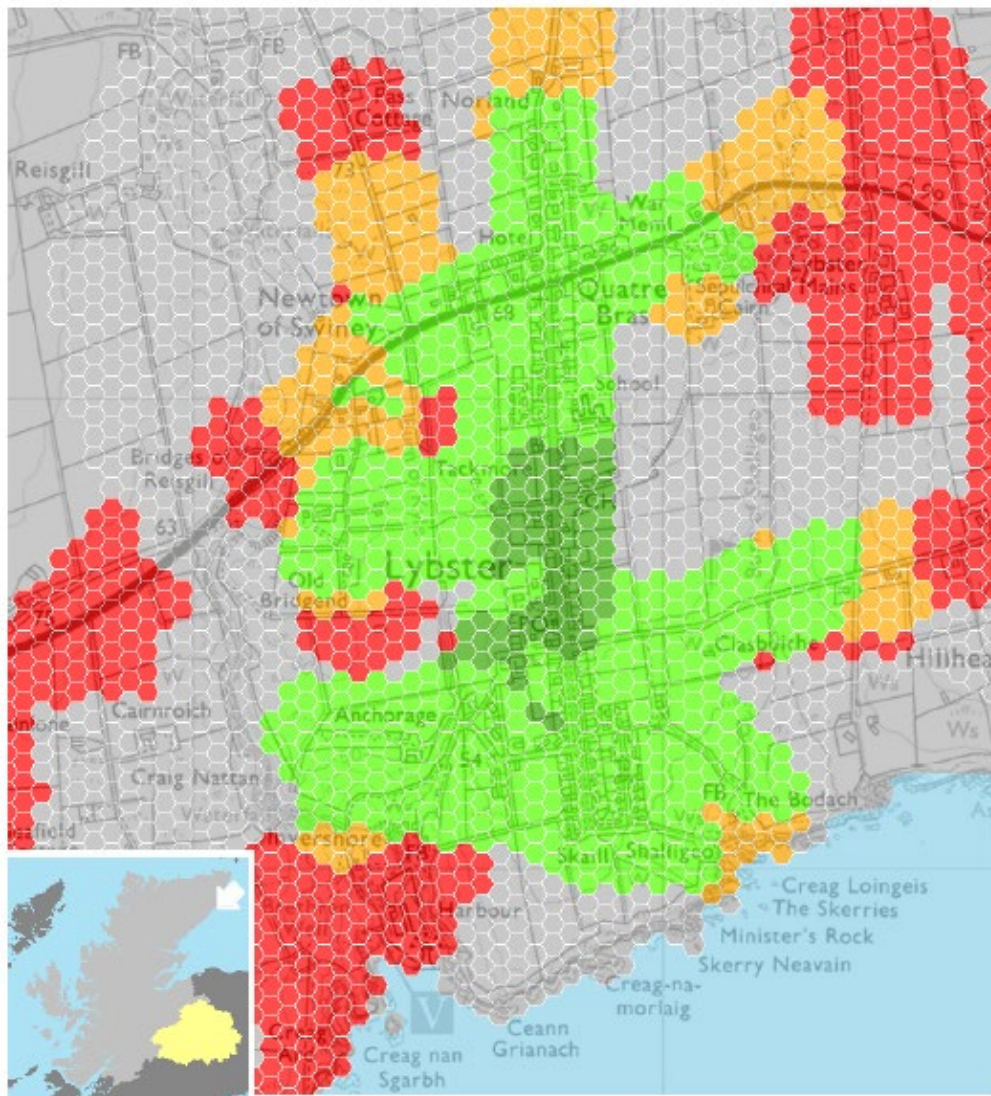
Local Living Service Accessibility: Halkirk



Services Results (50m Hexagon Grid)

Total number of services

- Very Few Walkable Services (0 - 1.1)
- Few Walkable Services (1.2 - 3.9)
- Some Walkable Services (4.0 - 7.9)
- High Level of Walkable Services (8.0 - 11.9)
- Very High Level of Walkable Services (12.0 - 16.0)



**Local Living Service Accessibility:
Lybster**



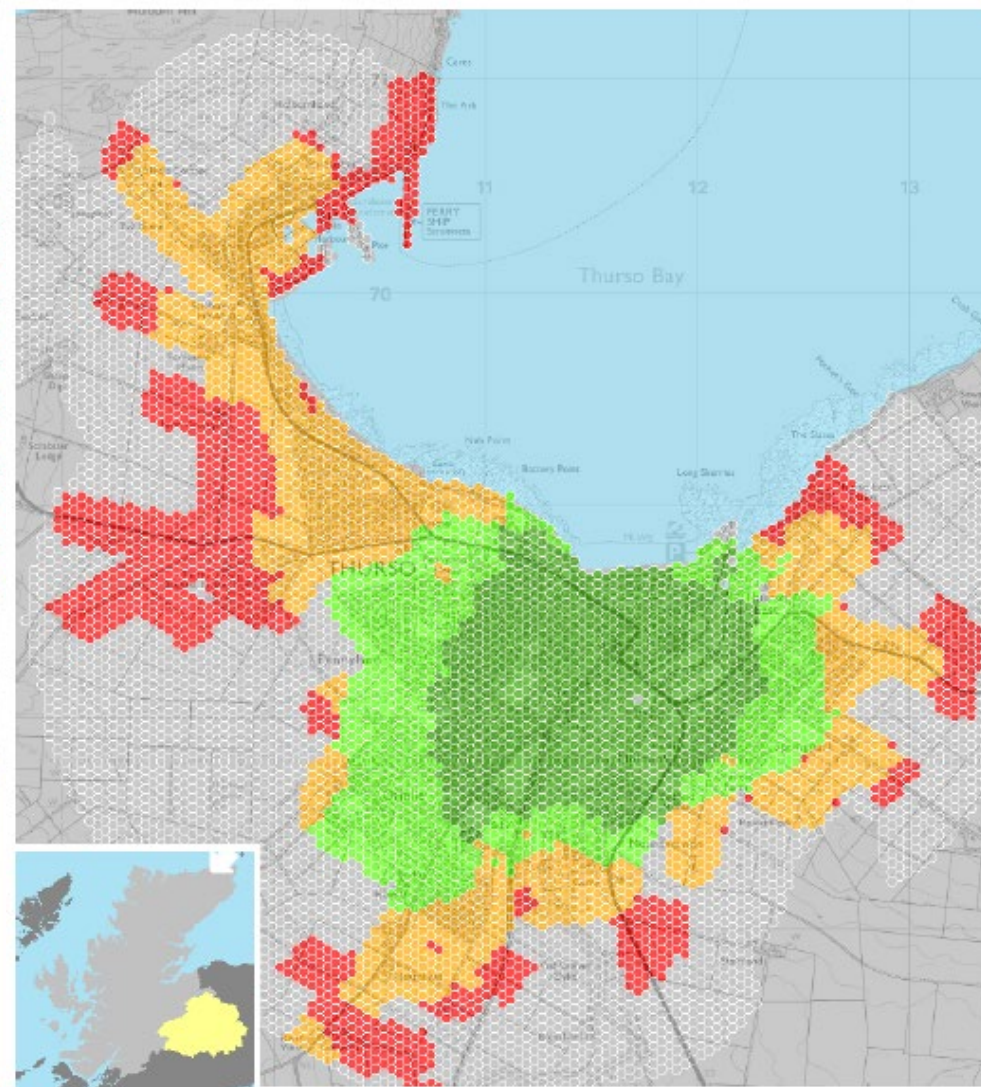
1 cm = 100 m



Services Results (50m Hexagon Grid)

Total number of services

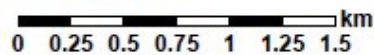
- Very Few Walkable Services (0 - 1.1)
- Few Walkable Services (1.2 - 3.9)
- Some Walkable Services (4.0 - 7.9)
- High Level of Walkable Services (8.0 - 11.9)
- Very High Level of Walkable Services (12.0 - 16.0)



**Local Living Service Accessibility:
Thurso/Scrabster**



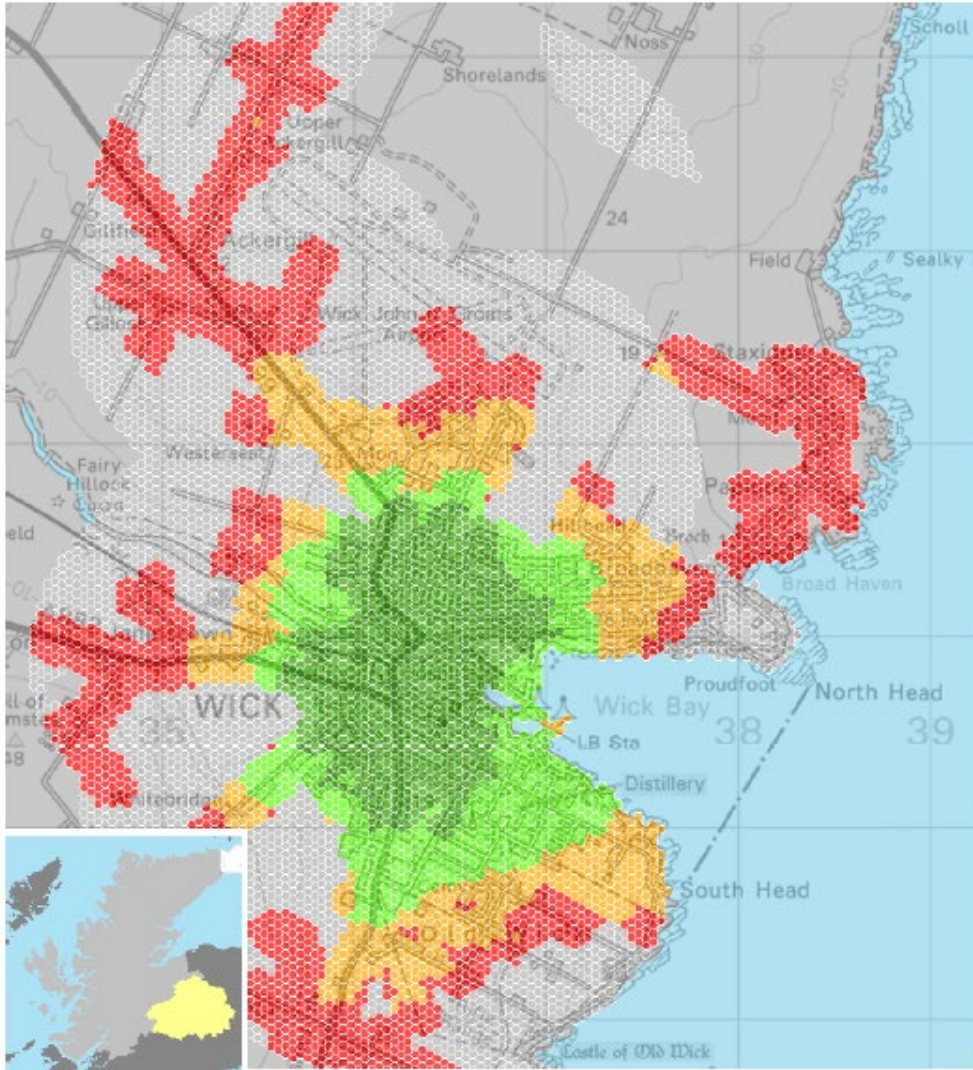
1 cm = 220 m



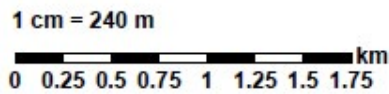
Services Results (50m Hexagon Grid)

Total number of services

- Very Few Walkable Services (0 - 1.1)
- Few Walkable Services (1.2 - 3.9)
- Some Walkable Services (4.0 - 7.9)
- High Level of Walkable Services (8.0 - 11.9)
- Very High Level of Walkable Services (12.0 - 16.0)



Local Living Service Accessibility: Wick



Services Results (50m Hexagon Grid)

- Total number of services
- Very Few Walkable Services (0 - 1.1)
 - Few Walkable Services (1.2 - 3.9)
 - Some Walkable Services (4.0 - 7.9)
 - High Level of Walkable Services (8.0 - 11.9)
 - Very High Level of Walkable Services (12.0 - 16.0)

HOUSING AND POPULATION

CONSULTATION LOCATION

THEMES/ISSUES

Thurso	Need for mixed housing
Thurso	Struggled to find accomodation when first moved into the area which was quite a barrier. Lots of short term lets over long term lets
Thurso	Energy efficient
Thurso	Equitable spread/allocation of resources
Thurso	Accessible housing
Thurso	Lack of accessible housing in Thurso
Thurso	Maintenance of housing estates
Thurso	Depopulation
Thurso	Accessible housing
Wick	Housing Associations - Cairn, Albyn, Pentland - tackle mould and heating problems
Wick	RTS Switch
Wick	Experiences of services - housing experience really positive got house quickly in Caithness
Wick	Repurposing buildings
Wick	Was Population projection based on major employer projections pre 2024?
Wick	Repurposing buildings
Wick	Community Heating
Wick	How many council houses remain empty in Caithness by area - Wick, Thurso, Castletown, Halkirk etc
Wick	Infrastructure needs improving
Wick	2nd homes
Wick	Council gardening around residential areas is poor in Thurso - weeds everywhere, grass clippings left in damp clumps causing slippery moss on paths
Wick	Second homes lying empty most of the year
Wick	Properties suitable for young and first time buyers hoarded as 2nd homes
Wick	High rents and lack of repairs - no minor works guttering etc
Wick	Upgrade current council properties
Wick	Concern about decreasing population - services, schools, jobs
Lybster	Pre age and childcare locally - not Wick or Thurso
Lybster	Why is there nothing on area plans for Lybster and Latheron?
Lybster	Breakfast and afterschool clubs
Lybster	Houses in disrepair Council fixing is just quick repairs
Lybster	Rented properties for older people need to have services close by - shops, bus, GP etc
Lybster	Please don't stop short term lets - its how some of us earn a living and are employed
Lybster	All properties need insulation - silly adding heat source but no insulation or draft proofing
	The Housing services do all that they can to keep people in their own homes, including disabled adaption, so that they can stay close to friends & neighbours, which is really important for health & wellbeing. This can be especially important for someone who is vulnerable. Norscot have designed houses suitable for all stages of life which helps. The Council should install ramps rather than steps as a matter of course
	more good quality housing - could help encourage doctors to come and work in the area
	Housing used by older people could meet the needs of young people

WORK AND THE ECONOMY

CONSULTATION LOCATION

ISSUES/THEMES

Thurso	Everything hinges on Dounreay - employment levels. We need to attract families so there needs to be varied well paid roles
Thurso	Caithness needs to diversify - monoculture in employment because of Dounreay
Thurso	No reason large organisations and government agencies do not have admin centres in the North. How do we attract?
Thurso	Need to have more opportunities for young people. Jobs for them to come back if they leave for university etc
Thurso	Better links to identify pathways for local people into big employers, e.g. NHS
Thurso	If industries want to invest here, e.g. windfarm, then they must employ and use local workers and provide training and education. Local and national training centre for sustainable energy
Thurso	Better links with employers and High Schools is trying to do what they can. Need to have wider range of subjects in High School. Need to encourage specialist teachers to come here
Thurso	Tourism - tourism office shut and sold off a number of years ago - both Wick and Thurso
Thurso	Two biggest towns on the NC500 and not a tourist office between them
Thurso	Tourism in Caithness massively under-developed compared to Orkney which makes £68M
Thurso	Need an attractive industry to keep younger population and also attract new people. Tourism? As a skilled professional I struggled to find work initially.
Wick	We need to create a place people want to stay/return after higher education. Delapidated town centre, lack of leisure activities all link into this
Wick	Investment needed in High Street
Wick	Has the extension to Dounreay decommissioning to 2060 been considered?
Wick	Not only youth that need help gaining work placements
Wick	Accessible courses online. More advertising for Thurso UHI on whats available.
Wick	High Street needs significant Government intervention similar to deals in Elgin and Dumfries
Wick	Young person thinks she will need to move to Inverness to find better work opportunities
Wick	Global Wind Organisation Training - more opportunities needed locally for renewable training
Wick	Our youth are moving away to get jobs
Wick	How to attract visitors and people to come and visit
Wick	Develop town centres
Wick	Need of jobs for professional incomes
Wick	Better vocational education for young people
Wick	When will the Wick town centre development take place? Is funding available from Scottish Govt.?
Wick	Apprenticeship in office work
Wick	more apprenticeships in public sector
Wick	more jobs for locals. Council jobs going south. We don't want governed from south
Wick	Promoting our town. More awareness is needed of what is available to see and do. We have so much to offer that even the locals are not aware of.
Lybster	We pay delivery as if we are an island. Healthcare is a longer travel than an island. Why do we not benefit from business rates like an island?
Lybster	Encourage more young people to stay and work in the area
Lybster	More permanent positions for newly qualified teachers. Improve education
Lybster	Not enough employment opportunities being brought to Caithness - all centralised
Lybster	Tourism industry hit again and again since COVID. Give us a chance to recover. Business rates re-evaluation and threshold reduction. Bottle return scheme a waste of money. STL
Lybster	Visito Levy (sad face). Cost of Living. Rate reduction for hospitality not passed on by Scottish Government.
Lybster	There should be a general pot of wind farm money for Highland wide and more support from developers
Lybster	Wind farm developers should provide more support for community ownership. Some communities have no wind farm funds, others have vast amounts
Lybster	Islands get an island deal - Caithness has similar issues but not the same support

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Consultation

Location

ISSUES/THEMES

Thurso	Health and Wellbeing linked to everything. Communities cut off due to transport and facilities etc
Thurso	Lack of indoor facilities for sport
Thurso	Community Sports Centre needed
Thurso	Gaps in staff and recruitment retention in Health and Social care. Need to promote area as a place to live
Thurso	Young drug deaths is an area for concern. For early prevention to work with young people and families need access to healthier options. The facilities are lacking to host these in Thurso or cost prohibitive.
Thurso	Dentists!!
Thurso	The aging population with depopulation of young people is worrying. Increase in training and wages for carers jobs is vital.
Thurso	Promotion of Parkrun (Sat @ 0930) at the Boating Pond Thurso
Thurso	A decent sports centre as per Sports Scotland proposal in 1998/99
Thurso	Investment in Care at Home Services. Carers skilled employees and should be recompensed accordingly to increase recruitment and retention.
Thurso	Increase in mental health and drug support
Thurso	Hospital and medical facilities need improving but this hinges on employment and population! Need to keep skilled people.
Wick	Protect behavioural and emotional youth workers in Wick High School
Wick	Increase tourism by making Wick Town Centre more attractive
Wick	Full time consultant for maternity. More maternity staff
Wick	More funding for Town and County Hospital
Wick	Difficult to get a GP appointment
Wick	How has the NHS near me video link improved outpatients going to Inverness?
Wick	Re-open Wick Hospital that would serve people on all levels
Wick	Bring consultancy services to Caithness to save patient travel
Wick	Travel to Inverness - we need to Caithness General Hospital to reopen as a hospital
Wick	Fairer access to health improvement should be free to people on universal credit
Wick	More resources for teenagers - cinema in Wick. Café in Town Centre
Wick	10minute appointment 2 half hour travel (sad face)
Wick	Difficult to get appointments within the County. Everything sliding south
Wick	Lack of mental health support for youngsters - waiting lists at CAMHS/NDAS
Wick	Getting a GP appointment
Wick	Cycling routes
Wick	Easier to get GP appointment - online service?
Wick	Raigmore travel
Wick	Better mental health services - all ages
Wick	Difficult to see a doctor. Difficult to get appointments. I have a good connection with one of the practice nurses.
Wick	Health and Wellbeing??!! Extremely difficult to have a face to face by appointment. Onward specialist referrals are so slow. Activities - we are very fortunate for activities for all abilities and age groups. Pity we couldn't have more visiting specialists to reduce travel for those usually unfit due to illness having to travel. Overnight accommodation can be expensive but necessary for some appointment times.
Wick	I am 83 years of age. If I need to see a consultant in Inverness it entails a 6 hour return journey by bus which is unacceptable.
Wick	Take back free toenail cutting for elderly
Wick	Increase pension. Bring fuel allowance back
Lybster	Maternity and Women's Healthcare needs to be in Wick - too many excuses
Lybster	Remote appointments are not always suitable
Lybster	Community venues need to have wheelchair accessible toilets - but don't
Lybster	Having to travel to Inverness for appointments is inappropriate
Lybster	Need more ability for surgeries and procedures in Caithness General Hospital
Lybster	Lack of mental health provision
Lybster	Access to some services are non-existent. Wait times are too long
Lybster	Cycling UK (Highland) funding was not renewed for health walks and cycling. Please fund this
Lybster	As a 1st time mother I was given NO CHOICE but to give birth at Raigmore which has left me with lifelong health issues
Lybster	Access to NHS dentist is difficult. We have to travel to Invergordon
Lybster	more specialist care should be reinstated at Caithness General Hospital e.g. gynae and maternity

Lybster Need maternity care in Wick NOT Inverness

Lybster There are no local NHS dentists taking on new patients

Lybster Lack of maternity and proper womans gealth care is primal!!

Lybster Make better use of online appointments consultations. Some specialists insist on face to face

Lybster Caithness Healthcare should be similar to the Islands model

Lybster More and more specialists only available in Raigmore or even Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow

Lybster Ability to choose GP practice or change is non existent

Lybster Orkney and Shetland have very successful healthcare models. We are effectively and island too!

Lybster I have to travel 70 miles to a dentist!

 lack of maternity services - have to go to Inverness even for straightforward births

 Better services overall would encourage more people to come and live here

 NHS - lack of joined up thinking

COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICE

**CONSULTATION
LOCATION**

ISSUES/THEMES

Thurso	Our pavement and roads network is a shambles. Little investment. It all goes to Inverness
Thurso	Poor sports facilities, lack of games hall or decent maintained halls
Thurso	More opportunities for local clubs etc. Need to travel for these currently
Thurso	Through my work in Planet youth in both Wick and Thurso, the need for indoor facilities and covered outdoor areas for sport is particularly lacking in Thurso. This has been raised in our Community action groups.
Thurso	Forward plan for emerging play area
Thurso	Flagship play area in main location
Thurso	Lack of coherent information e.g. "what's on" although there is a monolith in the precinct outside of the council offices. Supermarket and shop windows. They need to be open all day not just half day
Thurso	For planet youth to succeed there needs to be free activities for all age groups and families together. Lack of a community hub in Thurso for sports and the arts is evident.
Thurso	General maintenance and pride in the area. Town Centre is run down and don't encourage spending time in the area
Thurso	Security long term life for art galleries and museums
Thurso	State of the streets - weeds abound. Rubbish, fag ends outside of pubs and hotels. Property private or public needs to be legally cared for, repaired, repointed. Empty properties are neglected (Wick)
Thurso	Roads need more investment and maintenance- potholes particular issue
Thurso	When NHS leaves Bayview House - use it for student accommodation
Wick	Shops - high business rates!!
Wick	This generation is going to suffer with no future in Caithness
Wick	Support local sports clubs with sponsorship for travel
Wick	Cheaper deals for services through High Life Highland (gym/pool access)
Wick	More activities for young people - have to travel to Inverness for opportunities
Wick	Maybe giving young people an opportunity for art for vacant buildings - RBWCC are pursuing this project at the moment
Wick	Better use should be made of Council facilities at a reasonable cost to youth organisations
Wick	Allow affordable use of schools in evenings and weekends for community groups
Wick	Street lighting failing - continually lamps out
Wick	More education on composting - issues with new bin arrangements
Wick	Too much centralisation in Highland - Inverness
Wick	Weeding, overgrown areas in residential areas. Community groups being formed to assist
Wick	Where did the community wardens go?
Wick	Bring back evening classes for adults at the college
Wick	Lower Councillor expenses
Wick	Better funding for kids with additional support needs
Wick	Safeguard youth work services
Wick	Regular Councillor surgeries needed
Wick	Locals often under informed of what's on - could large floor standing screens be located in public spaces (PPP, Tesco) to let people know what's on, opportunities to engage?
Wick	Legacy buildings need addressed in Wick - through THC Asset Rationalisation
Wick	Roads are an issue. No shops. No opportunities for out people that includes school leavers. Wick people are lovely. It's a shame they have to put up with the way Wick has become.
Wick	Spaces and places should be clean but they are dirty. State of empty shops. Cleanliness of the town is an issue.
Wick	Buildings in Wick High Street at Bridge Street are an eyesore
Wick	Wick Assembly rooms in need of new dressing room with toilet and accessibility to stage
Wick	PPP Centre is valued and should be looked after.
Wick	Medical Centre is valued and should be looked after.
Wick	Heritage Centre and Hospital is valued and should be looked after.
Lybster	The swimming pool in Wick is closed more than it is open.
Lybster	Wick Campus is not fit for purpose - using other buildings, e.g. Assembly Rooms
Lybster	Last Bank will close in April which will leave no bank in Wick. New hub for banking planned for Wick (early stages of development)
Lybster	Get grass cutting locally, e.g. around Latheron War Memorial and other public spaces
Lybster	Wick High School is too small. Not enough classrooms
Lybster	Better control and facilities for NC500 travellers
Lybster	Encourage multi-user centres to reduce upkeep of low use spaces
Lybster	Bring community groups together to share vision and way forward in community
Lybster	Rationalise school estate - resource new schools
Lybster	Need better banking services
Lybster	Straff in schools are organised around max. numbers in schools not individual classroom - some primary kids can have 3-4 different teachers in a week
Lybster	Ensure windfarm community benefit fund is used for legacy projects
Lybster	Find a way to support the college in Thurso which is struggling financially. College is needed to keep our young people in the area.
Lybster	Caithness and the North are powering Scotland and beyond which on/off shore wind, tidal and battery infrastructure yet we pay a premium for electricity
Lybster	Banks - some older people still want to go to a branch
Lybster	Repopulation - need quality opportunities for young people
Lybster	There is good education which supports opportunity but could still be improved
Lybster	empty shops in Wick are very noticeable - need joined up thinking and the potential for buildings to be multi tenanted

NATURE AND ENVIRONMENT

CONSULTATION

LOCATION

ISSUE/THEMES

Thurso	Our environment needs protection from big business. Too many windfarms and more at the planning stage.
Thurso	John O Groats Trail and North Coast Trail show off the best of Caithness and benefit both social and economic wellbeing in our area - but needs support!!
Thurso	Fuel poverty in a country that exports energy is a disgrace. The highest standard charge rate in the UK.
Thurso	Protect our beautiful landscape from more wind turbines and battery storage
Thurso	All ages need to stop leaving rubbish, throwing it out of car windows into country verges. Education, education, education - and dog walkers to be more responsible.
Thurso	Caithness has a wealth of heritage attractions which would benefit from investment - Brochs and Castles!
Thurso	Subsidies for farmers/landowners to all access?
Thurso	For such as beautiful and diverse environment there is minimal provisions for access to nature. Caithness should be shouting about this asset!
Thurso	We could make more of our outdoor environment through active travel and trails. Needs to maintain and showcase heritage.
Wick	Maximise world heritage site status
Wick	Strengths - quiet and nice nature
Wick	Wick town centre not attractive. Shops empty needs to be tidied up.
Wick	Nature and Environment - tourism is significant untapped in Caithness. Orkney good example
Wick	Support schools to engage RSPB Forsinard (World Heritage)
Wick	Better disabled access to SSI Sites!
Wick	Towns falling apart but countryside ideal for wellbeing
Wick	More attractions for locals and tourists to participate in
Wick	Caithness branding required
Wick	Encouraging young people to participate more - forest walks , foraging - more on Thurso side and centralised
Wick	Sand batteries for energy distribution - excess from windfarms(look a Swedish model). Sand is cheaper and takes up less space than other battery storage.
Wick	More info on recycling (better hours at recycling centres at weekends)
Wick	Scrap windfarms
Wick	Offer cheaper uplifts to discourage dumping in furniture etc
Wick	Apart from the obvious, the obvious change in our weather
lybster	Too many tourists distroying the local environment
lybster	Support for local businesses to go green - grants local funds helped by windfarms
lybster	plenty of nature areas that need protecting
lybster	NO MORE WINDFARMS
lybster	A beautiful, peaceful place to live
lybster	I really love Caithness but there is so many barriers to the way to plan longterm living here
lybster	Wind - really push for update to energy bill so that a % of revenue comes back to Caithness
	there is a place near Halkirk which is wheelchair accessible. Having a Disabled Access panel is really useful and helps make contact with services – the panel is currently trying to deliver a beach wheel chair buggy project to allow access to the beach.
	In Thrumster there are a number of groups joining together building a place groups like Brownies can go to. The intention was for this to also be wheelchair accessible , but the changes required for this have not been made.
	A district heating system in Ormlie (the Wormlie project) would make a big difference - it would be greener and also better for those struggling for money. The project could provide a template. It needs a better profile. Could develop lots of district heating systems with wider HC support needed. Could create a data centre

TRANSPORT AND GETTING ABOUT

CONSULTATION LOCATION

ISSUES/THEMES

Thurso	Getting about
Thurso	Reliable trains needed
Thurso	Direct transport to Inverness needed
Thurso	Definite need for more public transport. Especially given the need to travel to Inverness for hospital appointments
Thurso	Better public, modern transport. Community transport options run that also give people jobs.
Thurso	Lack of white lines on main roads, side roads and junctions. Very dangerous at night. Parking on the estates. Poor access for emergency vehicles.
Thurso	Potholes on roads and pavements
Thurso	No bus to nucleus or airport
Thurso	Poor connections to Inverness to Thurso bus connection. Can miss the bus!
Thurso	Difficulties in travelling to main towns and between need to drive to work in Thurso, bus wouldn't be an option. Timetables need to be reliable and clear.
Thurso	Airport - ease of access to Central Belt. Reliability. Flights cancelled too often.
Thurso	Make more use of Wick airport - gateway to Scandinavian - to and from. And could we have a bus station please.
Thurso	Better bus and train services urgently needed. Not old buses from Inverness.
Thurso	Town bus for social isolation. Community led, e.g. Caithness Rural Transport or DE Buses
Thurso	Better roads. Hard to walk on some footpaths too.
Thurso	Need better public transport - not everyone has a car. Roads need to be fit for purpose - not at the moment!
Thurso	Pavements are becoming too dangerous in some places. Need good cycle lanes for people to consider as an alternative to cars
Thurso	Edinburgh Airlink!!
Thurso	Better Airport links and a PSO Flight to the central belt
Thurso	A later bus from Inverness especially in the summer
Thurso	No public transport which is wheelchair accessible from Inverness to Thurso
Thurso	No wheelchair accessible taxis in Thurso/County
Thurso	Reinstate the Wick to Edinburgh flight
Wick	50MPH is ridiculous for A9
Wick	Poor state of the pavements
Wick	Potholes pavements in Wick are in a poor condition
Wick	Lack of bus services makes it difficult to get about without a car
Wick	Train cancellations
Wick	How do we have the Wick Edinburgh flight reinstated
Wick	Lack of bus services to serve rural areas. Poor flight options from Wick airport
Wick	Lack of public transport in the County is a concern. No connectivity
Wick	Connectivity - air, rail, road
Wick	Signage and lining of car park at back of Poundstretchers
Wick	Lots of older people affected by lack of bus to Pulteney and don't know the times they run. Need to go online to find out
Wick	Safe routes Keiss Primary - no road marking this needs to be reinstated
Wick	Fantastic walking routes in Wick - Riverside- Newtonhill. Both volunteer upkeep Council needs to have more input/funding to support
Wick	State of the roads in Caithness - needed to connect to markets
Wick	The trains hardly run - need more choices
Wick	Lack of buses
Wick	Flights and trains being cancelled too often - not reliable
Wick	Train cancellations
Wick	Campervans do not support local businesses and leave mess
Wick	Dismantled railway into path to connect Wick to Lybster and everything in between
Wick	Personal experience pothole damage to vehicles £1300 to fix damage

Wick Potholes. Busy Roads. Drivers ignoring the speed limit

Wick Loss of regular bus round Pulteney is a problem for Tesco etc. Have to online shop

Wick Have a train shuttling back and forth between Wick and Thurso stopping in Watten and Georgemas

Wick When roads are improved or pipework laid down on drainage roadside improved use that as an opportunity to add a pedestrian path or at least a wider verge to make walking and cycling safer

Wick Please put in a path (or allow access through school grounds) to make it possible to walk from WHS to Newtonpark primary. At the moment you have to go around Newtown Ave and Seaforth Ave.

Wick Extend the footpath at Keiss. Currently there is 100m section needed south Keiss

Wick Roads and Streets massive improvement. Can't ride a bike without hitting massive potholes or walk safely.

Wick Road infrastructure needs total reset. Complete resurfacing (potholes)

Wick Lack of reliable bus services. Retarded areas have no line painting particularly at junctions

Wick Does Caithness Transport Forum contribute to the HC strategy. Will purchase of DE Coaches benefit Caithness in anyway?

Wick Not enough bus cover to rural areas at weekends and evenings, e.g. no John O Groats to Wick or back on Sundays or Weekdays after 1pm.

Wick Construct path where only non motorised vehicles allowed to connect villages. Makes it easy and attractive to access outdoors, get exercise and leave the car at home.

Wick Potholes and footpaths

Wick Public transport

Wick Dangerous potholes on road at Barrock (4 burst tyres)

Wick Cyclist most at risk

Wick bus routes? Reliability

Wick Improve public transport to more rural areas

Wick Better snow clearance in villages - unable to get to main roads at times when snow is bad

Wick I have a walker and can't go about without a taxi to get to places. The bus services - no bus services. Getting on is an issue. Transport (reliable) to travel should to the BIG wide world is an issue. Airline service and trains not consistently running. Poor airline destination choices. Sealinks are much better but none go 'south'. We do have a decent bus service to Inverness but oh my! The roads make the trip horrendous - I travelled recently and reported the same to citylink.

Wick Bus services between Wick and Dunbeath are an issue

Wick Terrible, uneven pavements. Crossing roads is also problematic for pedestrians due to potholes. Pedestrian only in the Market Square. Bollards at both junctions.

Wick Pavements and roads in Wick in need of huge improvements. Town Centre sadly needs refurbishment.

Lybster Many potholes need fixing

Lybster Pothole repairs

Lybster Cross drains on A99 need clearing

Lybster Costs from NHS Highland for travel to appointments not fit for purpose

Lybster Not near enough public daily transport plus lack of reliability of what is!

Lybster Roads are in need of major repair! Potholes and drainage

Lybster Repair the potholes

Lybster Road improvement required. Surface condition potholes. Improve drainage

Lybster No Saturday bus service. Young people from rural areas cannot meet up with town friends. Cannot get Saturday jobs in Town.

Lybster Lack of flights from Wick and Inverness

Lybster Good, reliable punctual bus service. Please mend the potholes

Lybster John of Groats and NC500 walkers and cyclists on A9/A99 - need footpaths

It takes 2 ½ hours to get to Inverness. One company (Stagecoach) only has 3 rows of seats for disabled people, all other seats are up the stairs. And sometimes able bodied people use the disabled seats and don't offer to move. One bus company says it cant get a bus with disabled access round the Berridale Braes.

It is hard for a person from Lybster to get to an appointment, for example a pre op appointment, in Dunbar and back in one day using public transport

It would be really helpful if there were smaller buses doing more different routes

There needs to be more money invested in roads to keep them in a reasonable condition.

The kerb by the 2nd traffic lights in Bridge street is broken and dangerous.

There have been really good services for deaf & blind people with a worker who goes above and beyond. But due to funding cut that post will no longer exist, so it will be more difficult for people to get replacement batteries etc. The Deaf Centre used to visit places like Lybster and Dunbeath, so people could see them more locally.

In Wick there are some disabled kerbs which are not opposite each other. Also people park along side dropped kerbs, blocking them.

The standard of reinstatement work after the Highland Broadband contract is poor.

Roads - lots of potholes. Need better bus services, especially from Pulteney area to town centre.

Better infrastructure

Trains get cancelled without notice

cost of transport

WICK YOUTH FOCUS GROUP

Traffic & Travel

Potholes (expected! 😊)

Extend street lighting a bit further out of town

Potholes

Education & Youth

Some lessons are less interactive than other in school

Good: Having youth workers to talk to in school

No school dress code!

They felt that more could be done to support pupils with dyslexia or ADHD for example. Again, on the vacant buildings theme – there are buildings like the old Factory Shop that could be turned into a dedicated hangout space for young people.

Protecting youth services

Community Facilities

Provide staff to supervise under 16's who want to hire facilities (gym / games hall)

Encourage more people to help run local facilities

They echoed the feeling that you mentioned around the need to repurpose buildings. They would like to see more national “big name” retailers and takeaways, though views differed on the idea of whether these should be healthy foods or more health focussed takeaways! But essentially the message they had was could the council encourage big name retailers to invest in coming to the area.

Infrastructure & Food

More help to learn to grow your own veg suitable to local climate

There are lots of unhealthy fast food places in Wick, could we encourage a healthy fast food outlet?

Community Services

More doctors could visit for special appointments instead of lots of people having to travel

More people need to work in community services

Landscape & Tourism

Good: Old Wick Castle & Heritage Centre, can we make more people aware of good things like these?

Litter is a problem, and dog fouling

More information about local places to visit in Caithness would be good (for example local hills)

Adds to the sport & leisure - They recognise that there is nature in abundance, but there isn't the commercial backup to support people to explore this. Visitor centres, businesses to guide people, lead activities etc

Sports & Leisure

Good: We like that there are a lot of sports to do

Even with a budget card, I struggle to afford the pool or gym

They would like to see more commercially run activities. A couple of examples were a trampoline or inflatables centre, ice rink, climbing wall etc

ANYTHING ELSE ?

CONSULTATION LOCATION

THEME/ISSUE

Thurso	The only way for Caithness to move forward is to look after themselves What are the timescales for short, medium and long term aims?
Lybster	Visitor Levy Council advertising is biased on how to spend money - NOT showing budgeting impacts Community Councils are not really representative (older, white) - and don't tend to be interested in wider issues and they are often not sufficiently connected to the community. The planning role they have is good but if they had more power and influence over community funding that might help. People don't feed back as they think their comments won't make a difference
Lybster	It feels like Caithness is largely ignored which needs a massive boost and improvement

COMMENTS FROM ON-LINE SESSION BELOW

What will happen with vacated HC buildings vacated (Wick) - major concern

Old Police Station - bought by a private person, but left a 'disgrace'

Caithness House - no maintenance provision? Algae removal, window cleaning, looks terrible. Essential new builds have appropriate maintenance schedule

East Caithness campus - way contract set up - very difficult to get things done + school lets / HLH. Barriers to use need to be removed.

Needs indoor sports provision

Learn from East Caithness campus - engage with existing and potential user groups

Need to include provision for ASN

Really need some sort of community hub - any reasonable sized event has to be held in eg hotel

Definitely needs more sports provision in Thurso

Poverty + inequalities. Gulf between haves and have nots - causes significant animosity

Skills development. NHC construction skills course - short-term contracts with no development - mainly labouring. Leads to mental health / despair - increased drug use/deaths. Economy must diversify to provide meaningful, permanent jobs.

Little or no active travel. Corridor between Thurso and Wick was meant to be developed

Public transport costs - major impact on eg sports groups having to travel to Inverness. No bus service to Vulcan.

Housing Community Wardens really helped keep areas look/feel better

Drugs - need more mental health support across a range of issues

Public transport isn't reliable - often cancelled

Need better marketing of community facilities eg Assembly Rooms and Town Hall and other large buildings - could be income generators for HC and HLH

Need mechanism to allow CC to find way of getting more money to run Community Council

Need more capacity building and collaboration for community groups

Disparity in available community benefit as most available in rural areas only. Repowerment might offer opportunities to help communities get better share

Column1	Column2
Sub headings and Key Themes	Category
Enabling Access to the countryside- better disabled access to sites, active travel options	PEOPLE
Support for Community Groups	PEOPLE
Education and Schools - subject offering, including CLD (evening classes) and school estate	PEOPLE
Sports, leisure and cultural facilities - lack of facilities, affordability of hire, encourage multi user services, promoting activities	PEOPLE
Access to services - mental health, drug and alcohol services, local options, waiting lists, particularly to young peoples' mental	PEOPLE
Appointments - access to GP	PEOPLE
Lack of dentists - people having to travel 70 miles to dentist	
Healthcare and appointments only available in Inverness - travelling to Raigmore, need to invest in services in Caithness, inves	PEOPLE
Lack of maternity services in Caithness	PEOPLE
Active travel - better connections between villages, pavement improvements, better cycle network, safe routes	PLACE
Air links - central belt option, connectivity for on flight options	PLACE
Public transport - issues around reliability, connections between rural villages, late bus option from Inverness, make more of c	PLACE
Roads infrastructure - potholes and pavements	PLACE
Recycling and Education - uplifts, education on recycling, preventing littering	PLACE
Managing the impact of tourism	PLACE
Lack of investment in town centres, general maintenance	PLACE
Need for banking services	PLACE
Repurpose old buildings	PLACE
Town Centre - state of the town centres, particular focus on Wick	PLACE
Standard and poor maintenance of social housing	PLACE
Impact of 2nd homes and short term lets	PLACE
Need for accessible houses close to services	PLACE
Need for community wardens	PLACE
Repurposing of empty and derelict buildings for housing (Wick)	PLACE
Renewables - both positive and negative messages	PROSPERITY
Making more of Caithness has to offer - maximise world heritage sites, valuing the wealth of heritage attractions and the Caithn	PROSPERITY
What's needed, marketing, investment	PROSPERITY
Tourism - developing the offer - making more of what Caithness has to offer	PROSPERITY
Opportunities for Young people - apprenticeships, particular mention of public sector opps - education opportunities leading to	PROSPERITY
Increase variety of jobs available	PROSPERITY
Depop - better quality jobs and better paid jobs, big increase in services (including childcare) provided locally to attract people	PROSPERITY
Lack of fair share and investment in Caithness	VISION