

# The Highland Council

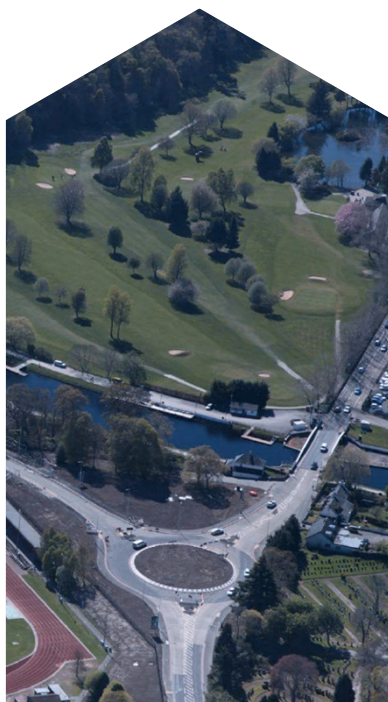
## Planning Performance Framework 2016-17

# Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

## Frèam Dèanadas Dealbhaidh 2016-17

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July 2017



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# Foreword

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As Chair of the Places Committee of Highland Council I am very pleased to submit the Planning Performance Framework for 2016/17.

2016/17 was another year of growth for the Highlands, and the Council's planning service has continued to deliver a number of key development projects over the year. In light of the challenging financial position of the Council, efforts have been made to improve efficiency in delivering our services to the customer whether that be at Local Development Plan or Development Management stage. I am particularly pleased that the levels of usage of ePlanning is one of the highest in Scotland, and that we have built on the benefits offered by ensuring a mobile working solution is available to all of our staff. Good progress is being made on the City Region Deal which will bring significant investment and set a strong framework for future growth.

This Planning Performance Framework reflects the good work of the Service over the course of the last year, illustrated through case studies, and also highlights some key improvements we will be progressing during the course of this year.



Councillor Allan Henderson

Chair of the Places Committee  
The Highland Council

# 1. Defining and Measuring a High Quality Planning Service

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## 1.1. Quality of Outcomes

Throughout the last year the planning service has worked closely with communities, developers and partner organisations and groups to deliver a range of developments across the Highlands.

Our policy framework is being strengthened with good progress is being made in preparing our two remaining **Area Local Development Plans** with the Caithness and Sutherland LDP (CaSPlan) reaching Examination stage and the West Highland and Islands Proposed LDP being published for consultation at year end. Timescales set out in the Development Plan Scheme are largely being met aside from a slight delay in the CaSPlan (Performance Marker 8). Alongside, two **community/public agency based land use plans** have been prepared for the **Isle of Rum** and **Aonach Mor** with a further **Masterplan for Mallaig Harbour** being progressed in collaboration with the harbour authority.

In other updates, we adopted a **Historic Windows and Doors Planning Guidance** which gives detailed advice on the repair, refurbishment and replacement of windows and doors in Listed Buildings and unlisted buildings in Conservation Areas. The guidance was produced in response to a consistently high volume of enquiries relating to windows and doors from prospective applicants who rarely considered the advantages of repair and refurbishment of historic fabric. The guidance prioritises the preservation of surviving historic windows and doors and describes potential options for refurbishment and upgrading, as well as clarifying the circumstances and guidelines for provision of replacement units. The guidance is helping to ensure transparency and clarity in the planning process and ensure consistent decision making in dealing with this common and often time consuming issue (Performance Markers 3 and 11).

We continue to facilitate the **Inverness Design Review Panel (IDRP)** by chairing meetings, providing secretariat support and encouraging developers to seek the Panel's advice at an appropriate stage in the design process. Over the course of the reporting period the Panel considered eight proposals for major or locally significant developments in the city. The scope of the Panel is also broadening by providing design advice on emerging policy documents including the emerging Draft Inverness City Centre Development Brief and Draft Inverness East Development Brief. The Panel also undertook the first review of the effectiveness of its work, which is intended to take place on an annual basis. We also contributed to the national networking event for Local Design Panels that took place in Edinburgh in February 2017, which was attended by four IDRP members.

The service has been instrumental in enabling a number of developments to be delivered over the last year bringing **new housing, jobs, schools and civic developments, and tourism attractions**. The Council has made significant investment in new schools and civic facilities, and the planning service in particular has played a central role in ensure the timely delivery of these projects. Effective management and



improvement of our built heritage has also featured highly and a number of our Case Studies highlight examples of where heritage issues have been carefully handled by officers in partnership with key agencies and Historic Environment Scotland.

Meanwhile, the **Inverness City Region Deal** was formal approved on 30th January 2017 setting out the wide-ranging projects where the Scottish and UK Government will commit funding in combination with the Council and public sector partners. Projects being progressed through the deal include an innovative business growth project, a Science Skills Academy, a School of Health and Life Sciences at the University of Highlands and Islands, adapting Inverness Castle to create a new tourism and cultural destination, major road and digital infrastructure improvements, a rent to buy scheme for affordable housing, land remediation for major regeneration and East link road and Longman interchange.

Within the framework of the adopted City Centre Development Brief the City Centre has seen major improvements over the last 12 months. Case Study A highlights progress made on the regeneration of **Academy Street** in Inverness City Centre including partnership work on the Rail Station Project and improvements delivered through the Townscape Heritage Initiative. The **Inverness Town House** is also in the midst of a major refurbishment, in line with advice from officers.

The Development Brief has also informed the consideration of a Listed Building Consent that led to the subsequent delivery and opening of a new viewing tower with exhibition rooms at **Inverness Castle**. The tower offers spectacular 360 degree views of the city and surrounding landscape. This is the first phase of an extensive development of the castle that will see the Scottish Courts Service relocate to a new site elsewhere in the city (see Case Study E), paving the way for the remainder of the castle to be turned into a major tourist attraction.



# A: Academy Street

Action to regenerate Inverness city centre is currently focused on Academy Street, an important gateway to the city for people arriving by rail and bus. Following the setup of the Inverness Townscape Heritage (TH) in 2015, the last year has seen good progress towards the restoration and adaptive re-use of the A-Listed, Al Welders' Building with assistance from the planning process. This former foundry building, whose upper floors have been vacant since 1988, is listed on the Buildings at Risk Register for Scotland. Its ornamental mosaics are an important part of the city's built heritage. When completed, the restoration will make a significant contribution to the visual and spatial character of the surrounding townscape, reinforcing the impact of the adjacent new-build development of 31 flats at 92-94 Academy Street.

Over the course of the reporting period we have also collaborated with the TH project to support a traditional shopfront improvement scheme, including liaison with shop owners and the preparation of draft planning guidance on shopfront design that will shortly be issued for public consultation.

We are also working closely with Abellio Scotrail and the TH project to finalise proposals for public realm improvements at Station Square as part of a scheme to invest over £4M in the re-development of Inverness Railway Station.

We have also assisted with setting up the Victorian Market Traders Association to enhance the role of this important civic asset as a visitor attraction.



Station Square – existing



Option for improving Station Square



114 Academy Street - before improvement.



114 Academy Street - following improvement.



## B: Highland Schools & Surplus Land

The planning service has played an important role in the Council's programme of new school building across the Highlands which has created modern facilities for education and community use. We have also provided support for vacant sites resulting from improvements to the school estate, including redevelopment proposals and allocation within Local Development Plans.

In Wick, partnership working with the Council's Care & Learning Service and architects along with Hub North Scotland has led to the opening of a new £48.5m Wick Community Campus in April 2017. The Campus provides for secondary, primary, nursery and special educational community needs replacing several existing schools, whilst also consolidating a range of community facilities in one place including library, swimming pool. The original application was accompanied by various detailed supporting information including a Design and Access Statement, and 3D visualisations. In working closely with others throughout the process planning officers helped to ensure the successful processing of the application within the statutory 2 month timescale.

The Community Campus has been hailed as one of the best educational developments in Europe after judges awarded Hub North Scotland a prestigious prize at the 2015 Partnership Awards. It claimed gold in the 'best education project' category - ahead of nominations from as far afield as the Philippines, Poland and France.

Other recently vacated sites in Wick have been considered for alternative uses through the preparation of the Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan which allocates new uses for them.

In Fort William, a number of combined school and community facilities have been provided with the most recent primary school completed in April 2016. Officers have provided advice and support from the outset through to delivery of these school projects and have played a central role in shaping the proposals that have emerged. This included an application and listed building consent for the redevelopment and extension of the former Secondary School site to create new Council offices together with an archive centre for which construction is now well advanced.



Gaelic School, Caol.



Lundavra Primary School.



Caol Primary School Campus.

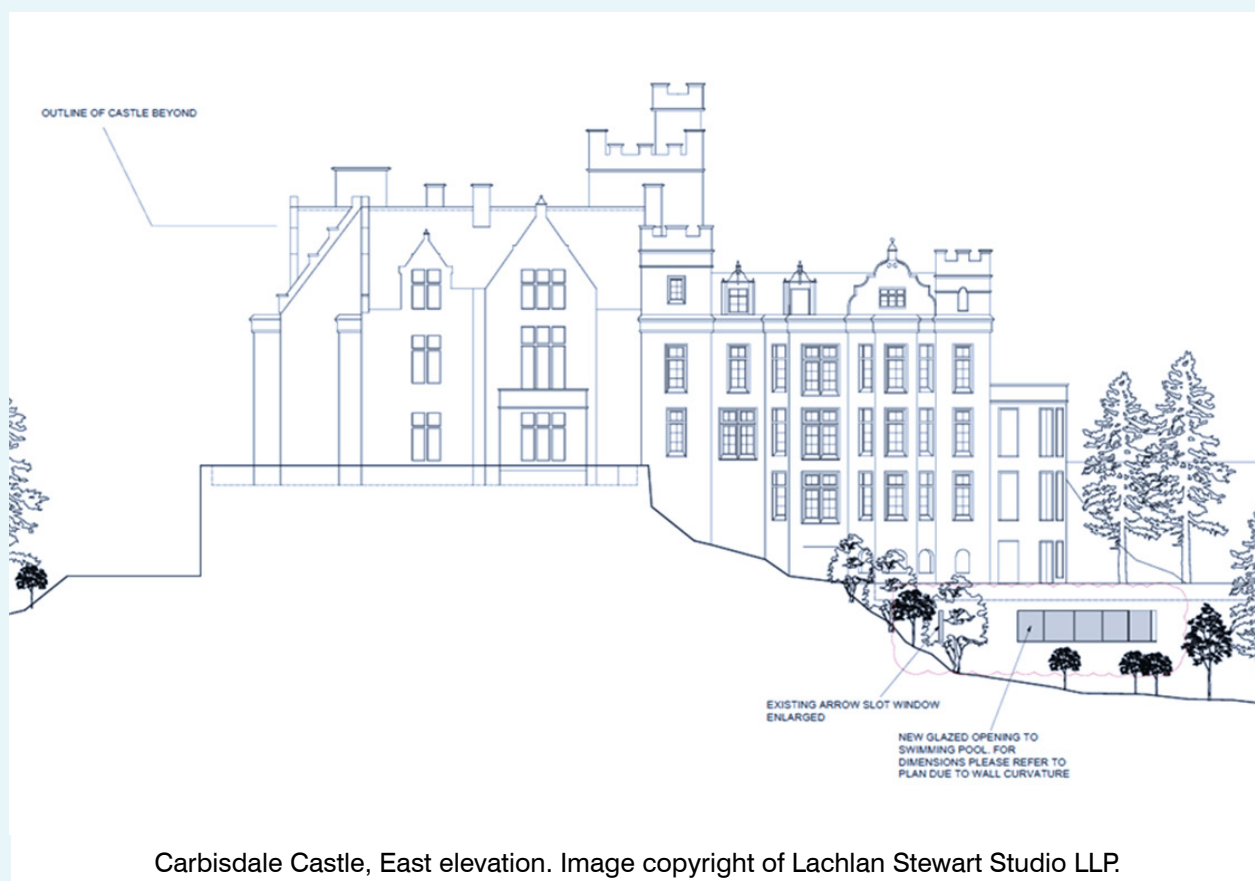
Nearby at the former Lochyside Primary School, following consideration and determination of a planning application for 60 affordable homes, amenity area and play park, work has commenced on the provision the site has been subject to plan. Work has commenced on demolition.

For each of these developments, the differing sites and designs raised a wide range of issues, including servicing and infrastructure, privacy and amenity, flooding and drainage, and siting, design and finishes. Solutions and changes were successfully negotiated throughout the planning process and decisions taken in time to meet the programme of delivery of these inter-related sites.

## C: Carbisdale Castle

This application involved the renovation of the iconic B-listed castle and change-of-use from a former Youth Hostel back into a single dwelling. Through a pre-application site visit officers provided the applicant with clear and up-front advice on alterations to and reinstatement of the historic layout and fabric that would be considered acceptable, including more contentious elements such as the formation of a new spa at sub-basement level.

6 conditions for recording and further details were applied to the LBC, incorporating consultation advice from Historic Environment Scotland. On balance, the proposals represent a significant reinstatement of the Castle to its original plan-form and intended use, with sensitive adaptations to modern living. Both applications were processed within their 8-week period.





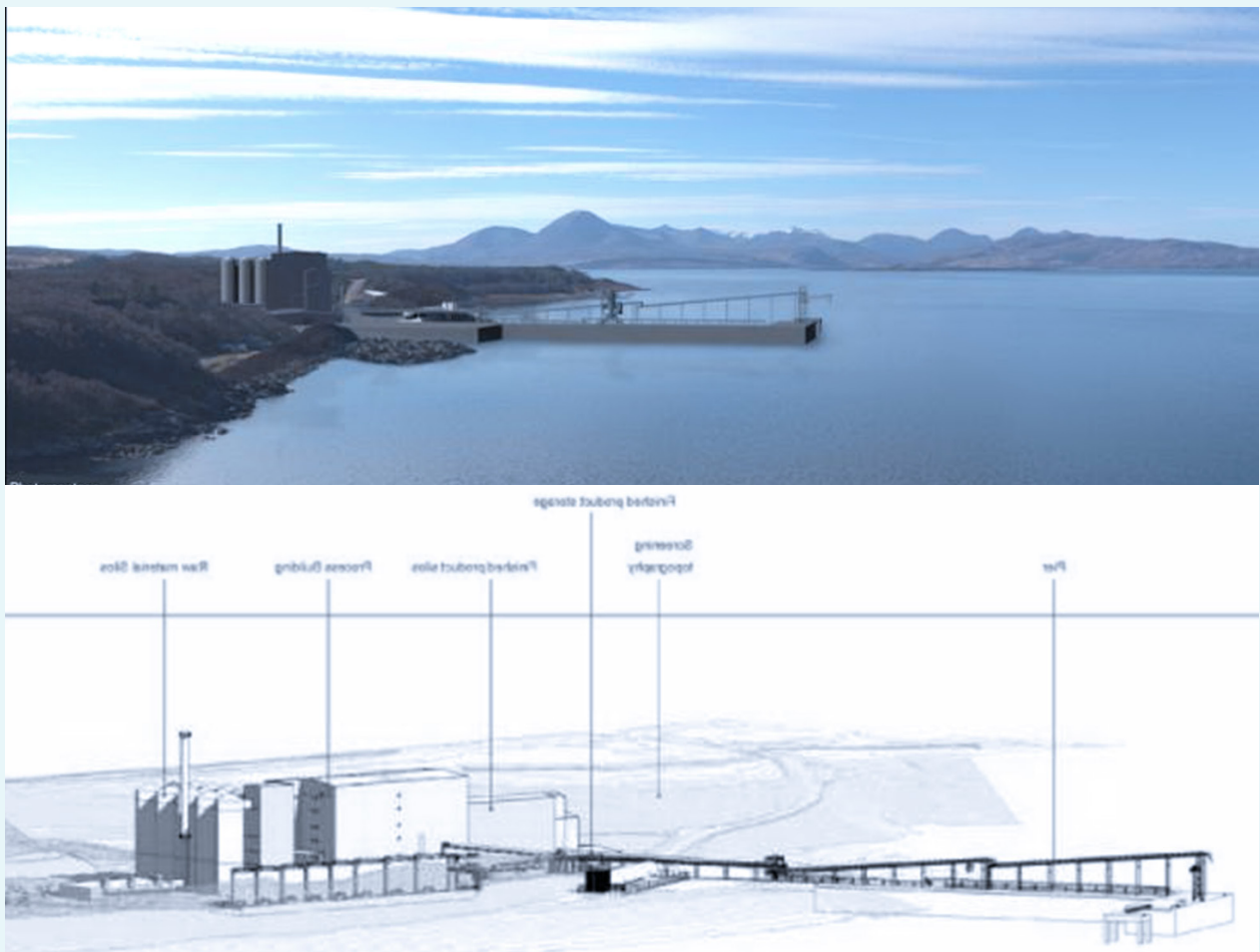
# D: Marine Harvest – Kyleakin

This proposal for the erection of a salmon feed manufacturing plant at Kyleakin, including an extension to the existing pier, presented a number of challenges for the authority as a result of its scale, complexity and location. Not only did it require planning permission it also fell within the EIA regulations and also required a marine license, pollution prevention and control consent from SEPA and hazardous substance consent. The main production building is 50m high and visible to users of the adjacent Skye Bridge so visual impact was a key material consideration. An NSA, cSAC and a MPA were all material considerations, as well as culverting of watercourses.

The main challenges successfully met by the authority were;

1. coordinating the number and complex nature of the various consultation responses received and drawing out timely responses from the applicant.
2. maintaining open and positive relations with the applicant and responding to the very tight commercial timescale placed upon the project by the company.
3. providing the planning committee with a clearly written report and presentation that explained the complex material considerations so that they could make a decision.

As a result the application was able to be approved and the plant is currently under construction.



## 1.2. Quality of Service and Engagement

A key aim of the Council is to engage positively with stakeholders from an early stage, and collaborate with other Council services and partners as appropriate, to ensure the delivery of sustainable economic growth. This approach applies from the development plan stage, then pre-application stage right through to delivery.

Our **Inverness East Development Brief** is being prepared in collaboration with a range of stakeholders culminating in a draft Supplementary Guidance to be published for consultation later this year in line with the Development Plan Scheme (Performance Marker 8, 11). During the preparation of our **West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan (WestPlan)** we have had to take a flexible and responsive approach in planning for a major economic development and employment opportunity that arose at the **Fort William Smelter** site (see Case Study G). We continue to engage a broad range of services and partners in planning for the implications of this development as it moves closer to implementation (Performance Markers 3, 10).

The Highland Council's **Pre-Application Advice Service for Major Developments** continues to be an efficient and effective service for national, major and local applications. The number of local pre-applications went up from 586 in 2015/16 to 598 in 2016/17, with 20 development proposals considered through the Major Pre-Application Advice Service. Many of the case studies in this report highlight the value which is added from applicants engaging with the pre-application service. However, the **Inverness Justice Centre** outlined below (see Case Study E), highlights the process and benefits from a particularly challenging case (Performance Marker 3).

Through the consideration of planning applications we actively promote the use of **processing agreements** to provide certainty on how proposals will be handled (Performance Marker 2).

The Council has been proactive in driving the delivery of development, including the formation of the **Highland Housing HUB** which was established in June 2016. The HUB provides a forum through which the Council, their housing association partners and Scottish Government meet to monitor the investment programme and agree site priorities based on the Housing Strategy, Strategic Housing Investment Plan and the Development Plan. The Council's drive to prepare a more accurate and transparent Housing Land Audit which is tied in with the updated Developer Contributions SG and the Inner Moray Firth LDP Action Programme reflects the emphasis given to enabling and delivering development and infrastructure.

In addition, our **Enforcement functions** continue to operate well, with our enforcement charter being available on the Council web-site. We have spent much of this year reviewing our processes and developing strategies to deal with persistent enforcement issues such as unauthorised road side signage. These will be reported on in next years PPF. The review of processes is to lead to a project managed approach to enforcement with early and effective decisions being taken on each report of a potential breach. This will make the process more efficient and will lead to greater certainty as to the outcomes of enforcement action for all parties. The Enforcement Charter was last published in June 2015. A new Enforcement Charter will be reported on in next years PPF.

# E: Pre-Application Advice Service - Justice Centre

Inverness has been chosen as the location for Scotland's first Justice Centre - a development bringing together the Courts and Tribunal Service alongside support service to the Scotland's justice system. The site proposed for the development is at the edge of Inverness City Centre on the main route into the City on a site formerly occupied as a car park and bus depot.

When the proposal was first presented to the Council the applicant was asked to take the proposal through the Council's Pre-Application Advice Service for Major Developments so that all consultees can have an early and effective discussion about the merits of the case, particular challenges posed by the site and how these can be addressed.

Given that this is a gateway to the City, the applicant's were advised that a visually prominent with a level of gravitas and stature should be brought forward in line with the emerging City Centre Development Brief and reflecting the use of the building. Working with the applicant it is felt such a design was achieved.



A significant challenge of the site was that the location between a busy arterial trunk road and a well used local route within an industrial estate and the difficulties of access that this brings. Through the discussions at the pre-application stage we were able to quickly agree the scope of the Transport Assessment meaning less delays through the application process.

In addition to the meeting and feedback pack provided at the pre-application advice service meeting on-going pre-application discussions were undertaken right up to the day of submission to ensure that once submitted the application could be dealt with efficiently. This included a gateway check of the application where the documentation and initial designs were discussed between the case officer prior to submission to ensure that sufficient and appropriate level of information were available to determine the application. This meeting also included the agreement on determination timescales and the drafting of a processing agreement to ensure that the determination of the application could be project managed.

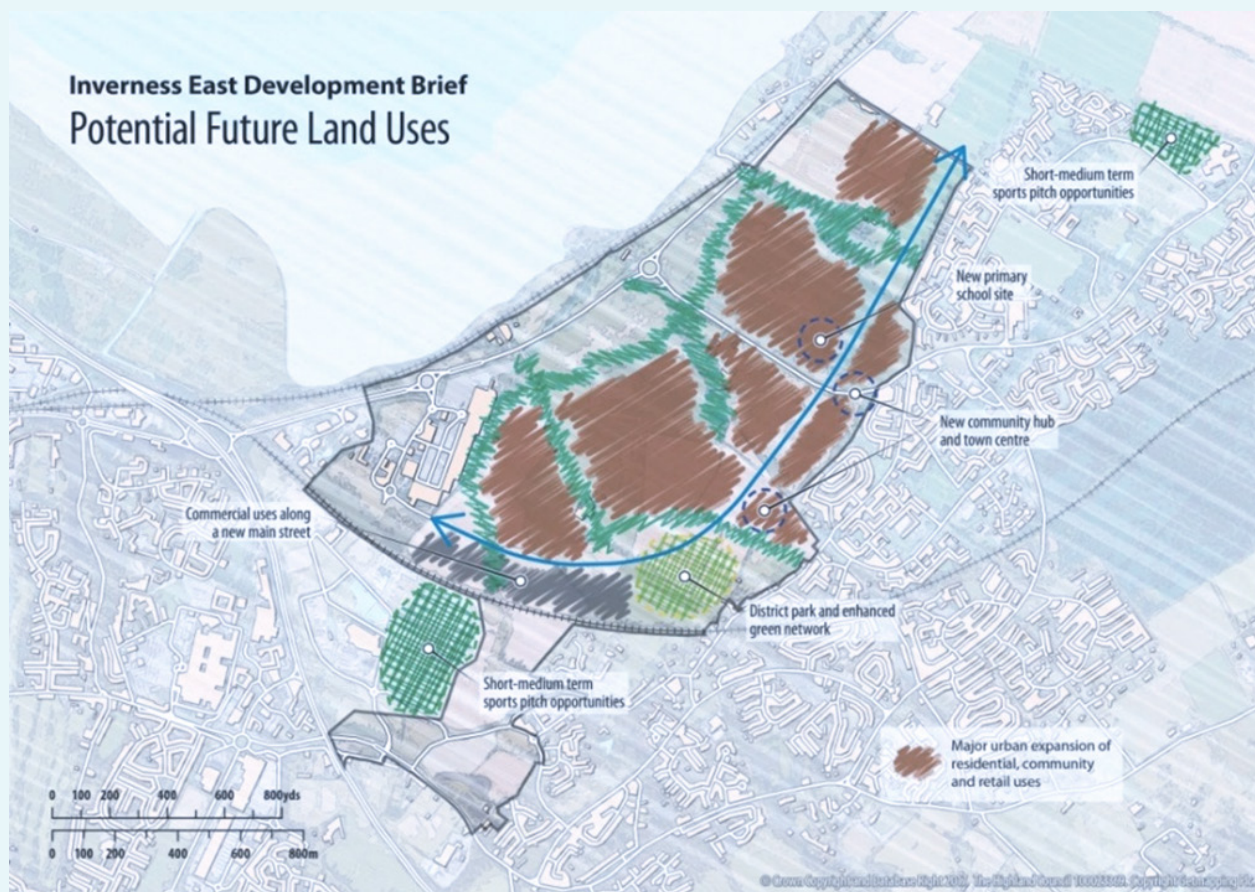
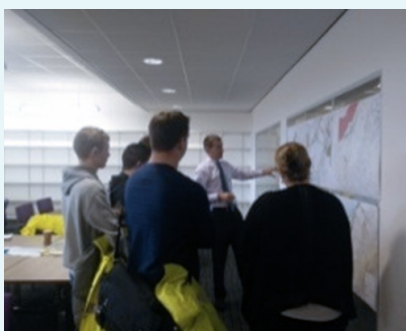
Through these pre-application discussions, and a project managed approach to the application by the Planning Authority, the challenges of the site were largely overcome prior to submission of the application meaning that this complex and innovative development was determined within 4 months of validation by the South Planning Applications Committee.

Site clearance work commenced late spring 2017.



# F: Inverness East Development Brief

We are progressing work on a Development Brief for a major city expansion area. Inverness East will form a new urban quarter comprised of around 3000 new homes, new schools, community facilities and places for work and leisure. To ensure our vision for the area is shared with stakeholders and is realistic we undertook early engagement using the [Place Standard<sup>1</sup>](https://placestandard.scot/) online and at a workshop in November 2016. 70 people attended our workshop and we received 354 comments online from members of the community, landowners, developers and public service providers. The range of ideas and issues raised were considered in detail and the emerging ideas [reported to the City of Inverness Area Committee<sup>2</sup>](http://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/71687/item_7_inverness_east_development_brief_%E2%80%93_update). Based on this front-loaded engagement we prepared a [draft Brief<sup>3</sup>](https://www.highland.gov.uk/directory_record/712056/inverness_east_development_brief) for consultation that balances high quality placemaking with clear and transparent expectations of developers (design standards, developer contributions, community facilities). The draft Brief provides a clear vision for developing the area, prioritising place before movement and setting out specific infrastructure requirements to realise the vision and needs of the community.



1 <https://placestandard.scot/>

2 [http://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/71687/item\\_7\\_inverness\\_east\\_development\\_brief\\_%E2%80%93\\_update](http://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/71687/item_7_inverness_east_development_brief_%E2%80%93_update)

3 [https://www.highland.gov.uk/directory\\_record/712056/inverness\\_east\\_development\\_brief](https://www.highland.gov.uk/directory_record/712056/inverness_east_development_brief)

# G: Enabling and Coordinating Employment Expansion at Fort William Smelter

The Highland Council's development plan and its related Action Programme is proving the ideal way to coordinate the myriad of Scottish Government, private sector, community, local government, and public agency interests that are involved in attracting and implementing investment and dealing with its impacts in Highland.

In line with Scottish Government thinking in drafting the new Planning Bill, the Council's West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan concentrates its efforts on those locations where the planning system can make a difference. The aluminium smelter site at Fort William and its intended diversification to manufacture a much wider range of aluminium products is one such location. We are using the Plan, its process and its related work, spatially, to coordinate agencies and their investment to maximise the positive and minimise the negative effects of expansion.

A responsive planning system relies upon a smooth transition from development plan allocation to pre-application discussions to planning application processing to implementation. The Council is using its innovative major application pre-application service, its development plan, its action programme and other purpose specific action and delivery groups to enable the expansion of industrial operations at the smelter. Direct, net additional jobs are estimated in the 300-1,000, which in West Highland terms will be a significant boost to the local and sub-regional economy.



Employment growth is welcome but has knock-on implications for housing land requirements, affordable housing targets, school capacities, water and sewerage investment and transport networks. Again, the development plan and its related appraisal documents provide the ideal way to assess and plan for these knock-on implications. Whether it's seeking proportionate developer contributions or coordinating public agency investment to best effect then the Plan provides the spatial framework to achieve this. For example, the Plan will provide the process through which landowners, developers, funding agencies and the community can debate and resolve where, when and how the knock-on development, service capacity and environmental implications can be addressed.



### 1.3. Governance

Local Governance within the planning system is a key commitment for the Council. Decisions made on Highland wide planning documents and policy are taken by the recently formed Places Committee. Area specific planning policy documents are taken to the relevant local committee, of which there are eight across Highland. Over the course of the last year the Council has progressed several important Development Plan documents. Members from relevant area committees approved the **Proposed West Highlands and Islands Local Development Plan (WestPlan)** for consultation (which ran from 5th May to 21st July) and the submission of the **Modified Proposed Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan)** to Examination (submitted 7th April) (Performance Marker 7, 8).

**Community and stakeholder engagement** in the plan making process has remained a key priority. Having a **SP=EED** verified Planner within the Development Plans team has helped to plan for and carry out effective engagement projects and consultations. Involving local Councillors from the outset has been an important aim and their contribution has been integral in shaping the strategy and allocations of WestPlan and CaSPlan. The Council's fortnightly ward business meetings have been used frequently to brief and seek ideas from local Councillors on the plan process, proposed consultation methods and timing, and the plan content.

Towards the end of the financial year we commenced preparations for the local Council elections by engaging the services of **Planning Aid for Scotland (PAS) who provided training for new members**. We considered this to be a valuable addition to internal Councillor training given the independent and impartial role of PAS (Performance Marker 9, 10).

During the reporting period the Service continued to operate efficiently and effectively. The Council's **Scheme of Delegation** is regularly reviewed and kept up to date and can be viewed on the Council's web site. During 2016/17 around 97% of all applications were determined under our scheme of delegation. This figure includes 79 delegated refusals. It is considered that this consistency of approach provides confidence and certainty for application and developers alike.

The 2016/17 performance figures are a reflection of the challenging circumstances facing Council. There has been a slight increase in average times taken to determine major and local applications. Although this is disappointing the overall longer term trend is downwards, through active and ongoing work on legacy cases to remove older planning applications from the system. As stated elsewhere, a total of 49 "**legacy**" **cases** were dealt with during this period. We continue to adopt a proactive approach to tackling legacy cases to ensure applications are managed effectively to give confidence to the public and developers alike. Legacy cases amount to fewer than 5% (43) of all current live applications. A key component in to help this is the use of processing agreements to help project manage large scale proposals (Performance Marker 4, 14).

The Head of Planning and Environment meets with the two Development Management managers on a fortnightly basis to discuss and action unresolved and legacy cases. Progress on all major legacy applications are also reported to every meeting of the area planning committees to provide Members with an update.



Average Timescales (weeks)	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15
Major developments average	22.8	20.6	24.9
Local developments (non-householder)	12.4	11.9	12.3

	2016-17	2015-16	2014-15
Number cleared during reporting period	49	61	21
Number remaining	43	39	37

There is currently a project underway to review the **Road Construction Consent (RCC) process**, which is being driven primarily by Scottish Government's aspiration to [Align Consents](#)<sup>1</sup> and also a recent internal audit of the process. As part of the project, we have held a customer engagement workshop with agents and developers so their feedback is also driving our review of the process. Earlier engagement at planning and consistency of response were the two key messages that came out of that and with this in mind we have a proposed redesign to incorporate a Street Engineering Review into our Major and Local Pre-application Advice processes. This proposed process will be trialled to begin with. Another aspect of the project is looking at the RCC Application process itself, both to improve the quality of submissions we receive and to achieve an electronic process that is consistent with how we process our Planning and Building Standards applications. This includes utilising the ePlanning.scot Portal for the electronic submission of documents and Idox EDRMS for the sharing of case files across the various teams involved. The project is very much in the redesign phase and work on this continues (Performance Marker 12).

1 <http://www.creatingplacesscotland.org/designing-streets/process/aligning-consents>

# H: West Link – Independent peer review

The West Link Road is an ambitious project which will complete the link between the Dores roundabout and the A82 at Torvean, crossing the River Ness. There are many benefits, including reducing traffic congestion in the city centre, improving connections and assisting the economic development of the city. Members approved planning permission for the Inverness West Link road in April 2014. Funding was agreed for the West Link Road and associated enhanced sports facilities in March 2015. Enabling works began in September 2015 in preparation for the building of the road, and work on the road commenced in May 2016. The project for reconfiguration of the Canal Parks and the new Rugby Club were included as part of the West Link Stage 1 construction.



Phase 1 of the West Link Road Scheme is well underway.

One of the planning conditions relating to the West Link and Canal Parks project was the appointment of an independent planning consultant, as set out below:

*No development shall commence until the Planning Authority has approved the terms of appointment and the identity of the appointee by and at the cost of the Developer of an independent and suitably qualified consultant to assist the Planning Authority in the monitoring of compliance with conditions attached to this deemed planning permission during the period from commencement of Development to the date of completion of the development.*

As this was a Council project it was decided to use in-house skills to provide this Service. To ensure the consultant was separate from officers who dealt with the planning applications or may deal with any enforcement issues, an experienced Development Management officer from a different planning area office within Highland Council was appointed.

The consultant has been involved from the start of construction. Initial works involved a review of the planning conditions and liaising with the client and the appointed contractor to ensure all information required by planning conditions was formally submitted to the Planning Authority. Throughout the construction process the Planning Consultant has chaired a monthly meeting attended by the Client, Contractor, Ecological Clerk of Works and Landscape and Forestry consultants to monitor compliance with the planning conditions. Minutes of the meetings have been prepared and circulated to interested parties, including the planning applications case officer. This process has ensured there has been a specific focus on compliance with the planning permissions all through the process ensuring the Council has led by example in terms of their planning responsibilities. This process has allowed issues to be properly dealt with as they arise rather than a reactive approach to enforcement as a result of complaint. An added benefit has been an opportunity for the planning consultant to gain experience of the relationship between the client and contractor and issues beyond, but affecting, the planning process as a result of the contract between the two. In addition it is hoped there have been benefits to the client in gaining further knowledge of the planning process through direct and regular contact with the planning officer.

## I: “Virtual” Validation Team

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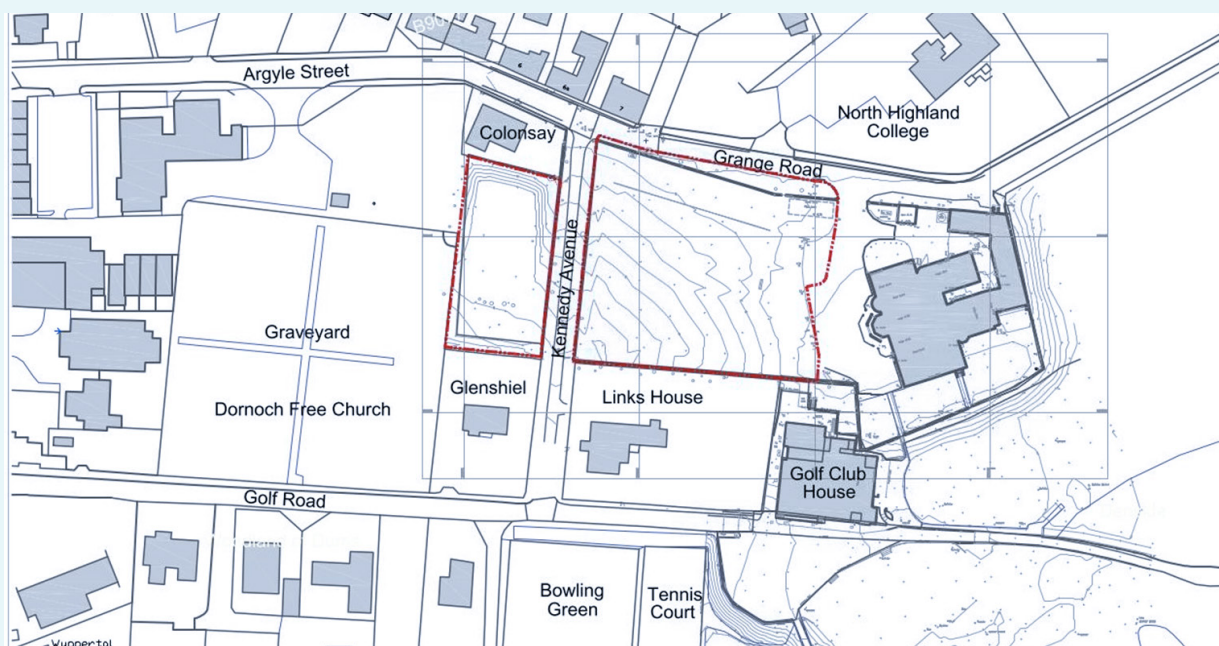
In order to help make best use of our professional support staff and to improve our effectiveness and efficiency we have recently introduced a virtual validation team. Previously validation was done by our professional support staff at local area level, with some working in joint area teams. The distribution of professional support staff across the area offices is not uniform. Following the successful roll out of Enterprise we have now established a virtual validation team with all professional support staff operating as one team across the Highlands. This approach has allowed greater flexibility in allowing applications to be work-flowed between different locations electronically. This helps avoid pressure building in small area teams with the work shared between all professional support officers regardless of their location and ensure a constant work flow including at times of absences through ill health or leave. It will also provide consistency in the application and interpretation of validation standards (Performance Marker 12).



# J: Efficient Delivery of Planning Permission and Legal Agreements

Planning Application (17/00108/FUL) Erection of twenty-four apartments and four affordable cottages with associated car parking and landscaping at Royal Golf Hotel Dornoch by Kirkwood Homes Ltd. & Dornoch Developments Ltd.

The site is located within the centre of Dornoch, a stone's throw from the world renowned and top ranked Royal Dornoch Golf Club and the strategic and prominently located Royal Golf Hotel, forming part of its garden grounds.



## LOCATION PLAN

Scale 1:1250 at A3



The development constitutes twenty-four apartments and four affordable cottages with associated car parking and landscaping, with the tree-lined Kennedy Avenue running through the site. The application was accompanied by a Design Statement.

The application was received on 12 March 2017 and approved on 9 June 2017. Within this overall processing period, the developer and the Council rapidly concluded a s75 Legal Agreement within a 3 week period covering affordable housing, developer contributions for sports facilities, public art; confirmation of detail of road and access improvements.

The development commenced on the ground in early June 2017.



## 1.4. Culture of Continuous Improvement

We have continued to look for ways in which to improve our customer service and have a Performance and Systems Support team based in Inverness, which liaises with the Corporate Improvement Team and area teams to carry out Business Process Improvement on an ongoing basis.

The **professional development** of Council staff also remains a key part of a continuously improving environment. Two team members have been supported through RTPI accredited distance learning courses as part of our 'grow-your-own' agenda. Every year all planning staff from across Highland are required to attend an internal training day which is tailored each year to the issues which staff are facing and opportunities for improvement. The training event typically includes a number of presentations and a workshop/discussion session. This year topics included: refreshing our approach to developer contributions supplementary guidance (See Case Study below) (Performance Marker 15); the introduction of new performance and system processes; wild land which was presented by SNH; and, updates from the built heritage, aquaculture and Legal teams (Performance Marker 6).

To help **share good practice, skills and knowledge between authorities**, the Highland Council is a member of the North of Scotland Development Plans Forum (NOSDPF) which meets quarterly to discuss topical issues. This also helps to feed into the HoPS led National Development Planning Sub Committee. The constituent authorities have also used the NOSDPF meetings to discuss and share views on the national planning review. Officers in Highland shared their feedback from workshops held at the national level, and in turn considered feedback from the partnership group to inform the debate.

The Council has also held meetings with neighbouring authorities including Moray, Argyll and Bute and Cairngorms National Park to discuss good practice and share knowledge and experience on particular issues including developer contributions and e-development processes (Performance Marker 13).

With the continued need for accurate and up-to-date information and research, while also faced with increasing budget constraints, several **innovative methods have been introduced for gathering, analysing and displaying data**. For example, the Council launched an interactive Story Map (using ArcGIS Online) to show all hydro power schemes and associated planning applications across Highland. This mapping enables Officers, Members and the public to easily identify historical, constructed and in planning schemes with further detailed scheme available by clicking on each scheme e.g. planning reference, installed capacity etc. ArcGIS Online has also been used to populate and display information on the Housing Land Audit (Performance Marker 12).

Over the past few years we have been focussing on improving access to our published and emerging land use plans and the background evidence that supports them. Following the success of our **consultation portal** which has seen continual increases in use by customers, about 94% of all comments received on our latest consultation- the Proposed WestPlan - were submitted via the portal (Performance Marker 12).

## K: Developer Contributions – Protocol and influence on emerging work

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As part of our service improvement plan, a new protocol has been developed for dealing with developer contributions. This protocol makes clear the procedure that should be followed from initial pre-application inquiries through to contributions being received and spent. It outlines clear responsibilities at stage for a range of Council's services, including business support and finance. A key change is that invoices are now issued when developer contributions are due to paid; this allows for a clearer audit trail and a transparent mechanism for ensuring payments are made.

We also began a comprehensive review of The Council's Developer Contributions Supplementary Guidance. Dating from 2013 there are a number of aspects of the guidance that require updating to reflect different methodologies and levels of contribution to be sought. The aim is to make the guidance clearer for applicants and officers to enable developer contributions to be calculated in an efficient and transparent manner to provide increased certainty for developers.

The effectiveness of the new protocol and implementation of the updated supplementary guidance will be reported in next year's PPF (Performance 15).

## L: Sweet Success – Tablet Technology

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Development Management and Professional Support Officers have been issued with Tablets to enable greater flexibility and mobile working. This means that electronic files can be taken on site and to meetings, and that annotated plans and site notes can be subsequently loaded back onto the Service's document management system in an effective and efficient manner.



This change in working practice enables faster and smarter working for Officers and has reduced both the volume of paper being generated, and the associated reprographic costs. Furthermore, the Tablets have additional functionality with Officers having access to their email and electronic diaries; and photography and video is also enabled for recording details of sites.

The use of the Tablets has considerably changed Officer working practices, with the Service moving from generating around 5500 paper files per year to an (almost) paperless office, with staff encouraged to operate a clean desk policy (Performance Marker 6, 12).



## 2. Supporting Evidence

Part 1 of this report was compiled, drawing on evidence from the following sources:

- local and major pre-application advice service feedback questionnaire results;
- a broad range of Council committee reports;
- results of both formal and informal monitoring, data and information gathering and internal auditing, primarily undertaken by our Performance and Systems team; and
- various in-house reports, minutes, meeting agendas and briefing notes.

These are the key sources of supporting evidence but the list is not exhaustive. Wherever supporting evidence used is publicly available it has been hyperlinked in the body of the report.

## 3. Service Improvements 2017-18

In the coming year we will:

- Introduce further improvements to our approach to developer contributions including updated supplementary guidance and the implementation of the IDOX monitoring module;
- Improve the role and function of the LDP Action Programme with increased cross service involvement in its delivery;
- Implement a project to align all of the consents required for all development proposals;
- Establish a 'virtual' small development applications team; and
- Set up a Housing Delivery Team which will include staff from Development Management, Building Standards, Transport Planning, Development Plans (Policy and developer contributions).

Delivery of our service improvement actions in 2016-17:

Committed improvements and actions	Complete?
<p>Improve the project management of consents required for Council projects (including development of affordable housing) to assist with the delivery of the overall Capital Programme during 2016/17.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Contribution to the preparation of the Housing HUB</li> <li>● Attendance of planning staff at the Capital Programme Board</li> <li>● Membership of project boards delivering a range of Council projects, including Inverness West Link Road Scheme, Inshes junction and City Centre Task Force.</li> <li>● Set up a protocol for regular engagement and joint working with education colleagues</li> </ul>	YES

<p>Fully implement Enterprise for Development Management by end 2016/2017.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● First phase of delivering Enterprise is complete with validation of applications implemented and operational.</li> <li>● Second phase is awaiting Service wide improvements, including the establishment of the Housing Delivery Team.</li> </ul>	<b>YES</b>
<p>Carry out further benchmarking exercises with our benchmark family authorities (and other local authorities) during 2016/17.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Benchmarking through working on specific issues with authorities (including Fife, Argyll and Bute and Cairngorms National Park) and via regular contact with neighbouring authorities at the North of Scotland Development Plans Forum. Members of HoPS also visited English local authorities.</li> <li>● Sharing knowledge and initial views on the planning review recommendations and providing feedback from the wider group to help shape the recommendations</li> </ul>	<b>YES</b>
<p>Improve efficiency, quality, certainty and consistency in delivering Aquaculture and Listed Building permission and consents, and delivery of development on the ground through creation of specialist teams and project focussed training.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Appointment of specialist roles for key Development Management officers including aquaculture and built heritage who have a case load and provide advice across the Highland Council area.</li> </ul>	<b>YES</b>
<p>Establish cross boundary working on validation of all applications to maximise best use of specialist staff and to ensure consistency.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Creation of a 'virtual' validation team (See Case Study above)</li> </ul>	<b>YES</b>
<p>Introduce a formal process for handling of requests for Non Material Variations to manage customer expectations in terms of timescales and improve efficiency and recording.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● New approach to Non-Material Variations has been developed and made available on the Council's website</li> </ul>	<b>YES</b>
<p>Continue to support and provide opportunities for continuing professional development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Annual Staff Training Day</li> <li>● Staff attended a variety of training courses and planning related events</li> <li>● Continued support given to the RTPI Highlands and Islands Chapter</li> </ul>	<b>YES</b>

## 4. National Headline Indicators

Key Outcome	2016-17	2015-16
<b>Development Planning</b>		
● Age of local/strategic development plan(s) at end of reporting period. (Requirement: less than 5 years)	3 years and 4 months <sup>1</sup>	3
● Will the local/strategic development plan(s) be replaced by their 5th anniversary according to the current development plan scheme?	N <sup>2</sup>	N
● Has the expected date of submission of the plan to Scottish Ministers in the development plan scheme changed over the past year?	Y-later <sup>3</sup>	N
● Were development plan scheme engagement/consultation commitments met during the year?	Y	Y

1 Average age of our 2 adopted LDPs

2 The review of Highland-wide LDP will not be achieved within 5 years of its adoption

3 The Caithness & Sutherland LDP was subject to modified plan consultation

<b>Effective Land Supply and Delivery of Outputs</b>		
● Established housing land supply	29117 units	29310 units
● 5-year effective housing land supply	4496 units	4524 units
● 5-year housing supply target	5714 units <sup>4</sup>	5714 units
● 5-year effective housing land supply	3.9 years	3.9 years
● Housing approvals	1681 units <sup>5</sup>	15135 units
● Housing completions over the last 5 years	4530 units	4583 units
● Marketable employment land supply	2384 ha <sup>6</sup>	2384 ha <sup>5</sup>
● Employment land take-up during reporting period	NA	NA

4 Based on the 2015 HNDA (avg of high & continued growth scenarios).

5 Total Number of units (all tenures) consented during the reporting period.

6 Business, Industrial and Retail allocations from adopted LDPs – excludes mixed-use allocations.

## Development Management

### Project Planning

● percentage and number of applications subject to pre-application advice	12.36%	362
● number and number of major applications subject to processing agreement or other project plan	80%	10

### Decision-Making

● application approval rate	95.6%	95%
● delegation rate	96.4%	86%

### Decision-Making Timescales

● Average Number of weeks to decision:		
○ Major Developments	22.8	20.6
○ Local Developments (non-householder)	12.4	11.9
○ Householder Developments	7.7	7.3

## Legacy Cases

● Number cleared during reporting period	49	61
● Number remaining	43	39

## Enforcement

● Time since enforcement charter published/reviewed (Requirement: review every 2 years)	21 months <sup>7</sup>	9
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<sup>7</sup> The Enforcement Charter was last published in June 2015. A new Enforcement Charter will be completed by June 2017 however will not be formally adopted until Places Committee in August 2017 due to dates of committee cycles.



## 5. Official Statistics

### 5.1. Decision-making timescales (based on 'all applications' timescales)

Category	Total number of decisions 2016-2017	Average timescale (weeks)	
		2015-2016	2015-2016
<b>Major developments</b>	16	22.8	20.6
<b>Local developments (non-householder)</b>	1700	12.4	11.9
● less than 2 months	57.4%	6.8	6.8
● more than 2 months	42.6%	19.9	21.7
<b>Local developments (householder)</b>	692	7.7	7.3
● less than 2 months	84.1%	6.2	6.1
● more than 2 months	15.9%	15.7	14.9
<b>Major housing developments</b>	3	44.0	46.1
<b>Local housing developments</b>	919	13.4	13.2
● less than 2 months	53.2%	7.0	7.2
● more than 2 months	46.8%	20.7	21.2
<b>Major business and industry</b>	5	20.9	13.9
<b>Local business and industry</b>	246	10.9	10.7
● less than 2 months	63%	6.5	6.8
● more than 2 months	37%	16.5	19.0
<b>EIA developments</b>			
● Local developments subject to EIA	0	0	59.7
<b>Other consents<sup>1</sup></b>	346	9.9	10.1
<b>Planning/legal agreements<sup>2</sup></b>	41	32.4	29.1
● Major (average time)	16	22.8	27.7
● Local (average time)	2392	11	29.4
<b>Local reviews</b>	32	8.9	8.6

1 Consents and certificates: Listed buildings and Conservation area consents, Control of Advertisement consents, Hazardous Substances consents, Established Use Certificates, certificates of lawfulness of existing use or development, notification on overhead electricity lines, notifications and directions under GPDO Parts 6 & relating to agricultural and forestry development and applications for prior approval by Coal Authority or licensed operator under classes 60 & 62 of the GPDO.

2 Legal obligations associated with a planning permission; concluded under section 75 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 or section 69 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.

## 5.2. Decision-making: Local Reviews and Appeals

Type	Total number of decisions	Original decision upheld			
		2016-17		2015-16	
		No.	%	No.	%
Local reviews	57	32	56.3	44	88.6
Appeals to Scottish Ministers	144	17	11.8	27	37

## 5.3. Enforcement Activity

Activity	2016-17	2015-16
Complaints lodged	374	355
Cases taken up	117	136
Breaches identified	117	136
Cases resolved	390	282
Notices served <sup>9</sup>	29	33
Reports to Procurator Fiscal	None	None
Prosecutions	None	None

<sup>1</sup> Enforcement notices; breach of condition notices; planning contravention notices; stop notices; temporary stop notices; fixed penalty notices, and Section 33 notices.

## 5.4. Context

There has been a challenging financial climate facing the Council, resulting in a number of personnel changes throughout the year. This has impacted on performance, and the emphasis is now on completing improvement projects to ensure that efficiency remains as high as possible.

## 6. Workforce and Financial Information

### 6.1. Head of Planning Service

	<b>Tier 1</b> Chief Executive	<b>Tier 2</b> Director	<b>Tier 3</b> Head of Service	<b>Tier 4</b> Manager
Head of Planning Service <sup>1</sup>			X	

### 6.2. Staff Levels

Post/position		DM	DP	Enforce-ment	Other
<b>Managers/Team Leaders<sup>2</sup></b>	Number of posts	6	1	0	0
	Vacant	0	0	0	0
<b>Main grade posts</b>	Number of posts	23	10	2	2
	Vacant	0	0	0	0
<b>Technician</b>	Number of posts	10	1	0	0
	Vacant	0	0	0	0
<b>Office support/clerical</b>	Number of posts	0	0	0	0
	Vacant	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		39	12	2	2

Note: Office Support/Clerical provided through central business support.

### 6.3. Staffing Profile

Staffing age profile	Number
Under 30	5
30-39	18
40-49	13
50 and over	20

<sup>1</sup> Please note only the tier in which the most senior member of the planning service falls under.

<sup>2</sup> Managers are those staff responsible for the operational management of a team/division, in addition please log staff that are identified as team leaders or line managers under this heading.



## 6.4. Committees

Committees and site visits <sup>1</sup>		Number per year
Full Council committees		10
Planning committees	Planning, Environment and Development Committee	4
	Planning Applications Committee (North)	8
	Planning Applications Committee (South)	8
Area committees	City of Inverness Area Committee	5
	Caithness County Committee	4
	Sutherland County Committee	4
	Nairnshire Committee	4
	Badenoch and Strathspey Area Committee	3
	Lochaber Committee	4
	Isle of Skye and Raasay Committee	4
	Ross and Cromarty Committee	4
Committee site visits		10
LRB <sup>2</sup>		6
LRB site visits		1

1 References to committees also include National Park Authority Boards. Number of site visits is those cases where visits were carried out by committees/boards.

2 This relates to the number of meetings of the LRB. The number of applications going to LRB are reported elsewhere.



