September 2024

Nairnshire Local Place Plan



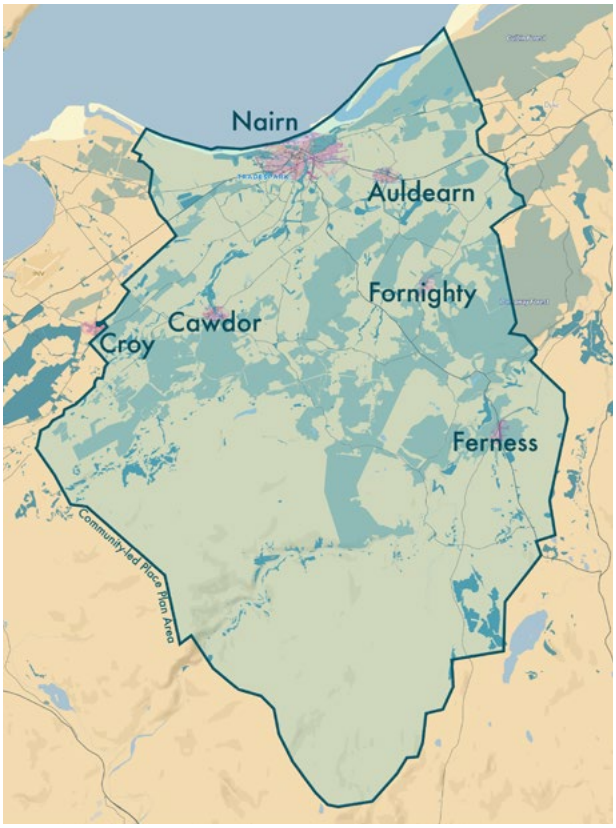
Ar Inbhir Narann
Our Nairn Our Future
ar n-àm ri teachd

To consult the complete Nairnshire Local Place Plan visit:

ournairnshire.org

What area does the Nairnshire Local Place Plan cover?

This community led Local Place Plan covers the geographical territories of Nairn River, Nairn West and Suburban, Auldearn, Cawdor and West Nairnshire and East Nairnshire community councils.



What is this Plan?

A Local Place Plan is a new kind of community led local planning document legally recognised in Scotland from 2024 under National Planning Framework 4.

Its focus is on 'spatial planning', setting out how the people who live in a place want to see local land, buildings and the natural environment in their area managed and developed over the next 10 years.

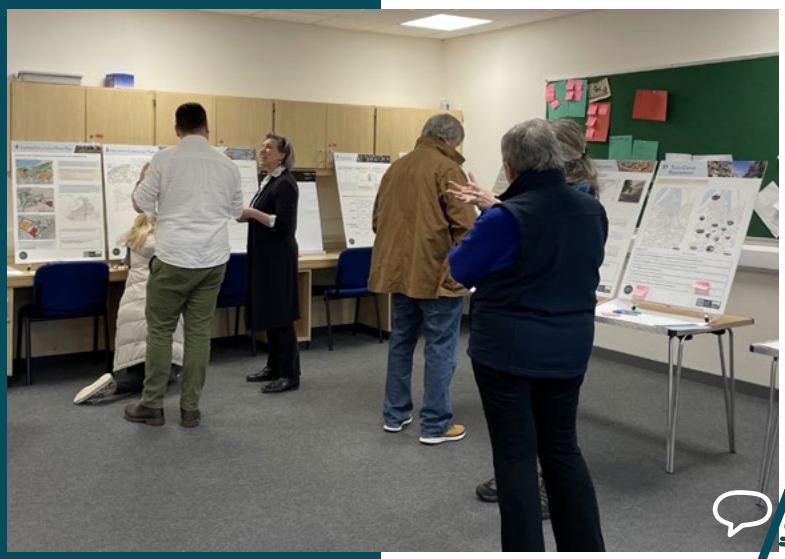


Image Credit: Iain Fairweather

NICE

How did we engage with the local community to create this Plan?

This plan is the product of a year of intensive consultation with the whole Nairnshire community. All households and businesses were invited to contribute through online publicity and 2 postal mail drops to IV12 addresses.



We gathered local views through:

- **Public stalls at summer events** – Riverside Picnic, Nairn Show and Highland Games
- **2 community surveys** (454 responses to initial survey, 87 to second detailed survey)
- **10 drop-in public consultation events** across Nairnshire (690 individual comments)
- **2 workshop sessions at Nairn Academy** (with responses from 110 senior pupils).
- **Five community stakeholder workshops**, facilitated by independent charity Planning Aid Scotland, pulled together priorities and key actions for the Plan from material gathered.



What is a Local Place Plan for?

A key aim of this plan is to ensure that future developments permitted in Nairnshire will reflect and address the needs and aspirations of the people who live and work here.

In the past, physical planning of housing, industrial space, community amenities and supporting infrastructure has been defined by local authorities, together with landowners and developers, through 10 year Local Development Plans, with communities consulted when developments reach Planning Committee stage.

Local Place Plans are a new community-led feature of the 2023 Scottish National Planning Framework (NPF4) to give local communities much greater and earlier say in shaping the places in which they live and work. They are designed to feed into and improve the quality and local relevance of Councils' Local Development Plans.

The community priorities presented in this Local Place Plan will inform the Highland Council's next Highland-Wide Local Development Plan, due in 2027/28. LPP priorities must also be taken account of in all future Highland Council planning decisions which affect the use of land and buildings, and the natural environment in Nairnshire.

The creation of Nairnshire's LPP has been led by NICE (a member-led community development trust and charity which covers Nairnshire and incorporates the Team Hamish initiative), and a steering group comprising local community councils and Nairn BID, representing High St and hospitality businesses, with input from Grigorhill Business Group representing larger industrial estate businesses.

Funding for community-led consultation and preparation and to appoint a part time LPP coordinator came from Highland Regeneration Fund, and UK Prosperity Fund, Nairn and Cawdor Ward Discretionary Fund, Development Trusts Association Scotland and donations from the local business community and two community councils. Advisory support was provided by Highland Council who funded independent facilitation from Planning Aid Scotland

What do local people and businesses want for this place?

Our first community survey identified 5 clear themes: **Sustainable Future, Jobs and Business, Getting Around, Town and Village Centres, Green Space and Leisure.**



1. Sustainable Futures

Promoting sustainability, resilience, and environmental stewardship, but also sustaining a population.



2. Jobs and Business

Focusing on creating the space and conditions for businesses to expand and accommodate growth, business support, and employment opportunities.



3. Getting Around

Improving transportation infrastructure and connectivity for all modes of travel.



4. Town and Village Centres

Revitalising town and village centres to create vibrant, attractive, and functional places. Sustaining and protecting village facilities.



5. Green Space and Leisure

Enhancing green spaces for recreation, nature, and community wellbeing.

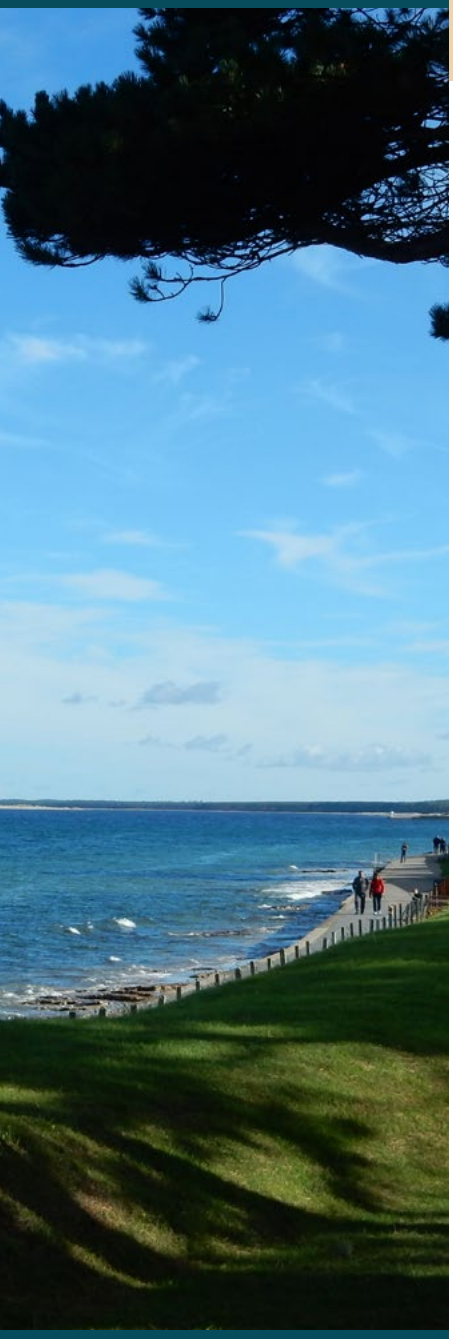
Five Themes identified through our first community survey.

Image Credit: Iain Fairweather



Top priorities of local people

- to get the long promised A96 bypass built.
- to address Nairnshire's other infrastructure gaps (e.g. sewerage, utilities).
- to improve community amenities to meet current needs and welcome visitors.
- a new Nairn Academy is underway, but community care provision has fallen behind the rising older population and intensive newbuild at Lochloy with no school has put pressure on school transport and existing primaries.
- to regenerate Town Centre buildings for business, homes and community use.
- to adopt a Town Centre Approach to prioritise future-proofing Nairnshire's existing buildings and housing stock and promote '20 minute neighbourhoods'.
- to favour small, heritage-sensitive developments in or near the Town Centre in preference to more out of town mass newbuild.
- to protect and enhance our valued green spaces and coastal amenities (including Common Good Assets) for future generations to enjoy.
- to create more business expansion space and local jobs in and around Nairn to balance the aging population.



1. Sustainable Future

- householders told us community infrastructure has not kept up with 20 years of intensive housing development at Lochloy, while Grigorhill businesses reported water shortages and power cuts.
- top development priority for locals is to upgrade Nairnshire's overstretched infrastructure over the next 10 years - with a bypass, modernised Victorian sewerage system, and increased capacity of utilities to meet 21st century needs.
- investment in flood defences and a local resilience plan is also a top ask, to protect Nairn's seafront from coastal erosion and manage river flooding which is a growing threat to historic Fishertown, riverside homes and our tourist industry.
- locals want to shift to a sustainable, walkable, liveable Nairnshire which embraces green building and renewable energy.
- urgent need to modernise Nairn's Swimming Pool which still runs on fossil fuel.
- better public transport and active travel routes to reduce traffic and car use.
- support community-led energy generation and district heating schemes.
- latest census stats show that Nairnshire's housing need is minimal over the coming decade with the Highland population levelling and set to fall and local housing list demand mainly for small 1 -2 bed central units for rent.
- local people want this and other public amenity needs to be met by prioritising reuse and retrofit of the many neglected and empty buildings we already have around the town in preference to more newbuild.
- Nairnites new and old want to conserve Nairn's identity, heritage and natural assets as a Victorian seaside and golf town with rural hinterland for both locals and visitors.
- they also want to balance Nairnshire's population by creating more local jobs to grow the young workforce and support older residents.
- many school pupils told us they see Nairn as 'a town for old people'.
- they want more night life, better shops, more public transport to nearby towns, active travel routes and leisure activities, to keep them here.



2. Jobs and Business

- a priority for businesses is to create more business expansion space with improved utilities at Grigorhill, and Nairn South; and completion of Balmakeith Business Park, to enable existing businesses (such as Gordon's Sawmill) to grow and create more jobs and training opportunities.
- more jobs will help to make Nairn a town for all ages not just for retirement.
- school pupils told us that a lack of suitable jobs and training opportunities was a big factor in most of them leaving Nairnshire after school.
- a training and innovation centre was also proposed at Grigorhill to attract new businesses to diversify the local economy and help employers meet workforce shortages.

Tourism

- many locals were concerned, even embarrassed by Nairn's poor visitor welcome.
- some asked for a staffed Nairn tourist information hub (with rural satellites).
- many asked for urgent action on improving public amenities such as toilets, changing spaces, parking and signage for both locals and visitors.
- a coordinated Nairnshire-focussed cross-sector tourism strategy does not currently exist despite being central to the local economy, heritage and identity as a seaside/ golf town, and 'castle' county.
- a Nairnshire tourism plan is likely to touch on many themes of this LPP such as provision of public transport, active travel and digital connectivity, flood and coastal erosion protection, promotion of leisure amenities (golf, watersports etc.) and conservation and promotion of Nairnshire's fragile natural assets including Sites of Special Scientific Interest.
- public responses highlighted a need to balance competing demand for tourist accommodation with demand for affordable central rented housing for local and incoming workers.
- this may merit exploring creation of short term let zones in Nairnshire as has happened in neighbouring tourist area Badenoch and Strathspey.



Moray Firth Green Freeport

- major industrial development proposed at nearby Ardersier Port and Cromarty Firth aims to create thousands of new jobs and training opportunities in the wider area in the renewable energy sector in coming decades, creating employment opportunities for our young people.
- 10,000 new homes already planned between Ardersier and Inverness at Tornagrain, Stratton, and Balloch, should be more than enough to accommodate the first wave of incoming workers during the 10 year scope of this first Nairnshire Local Place Plan
- in 10 years we hope that Nairn's A96 bypass will be close to completion.
- until then Nairnshire communities want to focus on upgrading overstretched and aging community infrastructure, regenerating our town centre, and expanding local industrial, small business, innovation and training space around Nairn, ready to accommodate some of the green jobs of the future.
- new jobs in the area are welcome but there is also concern that intensive industrial development around the Moray Firth, will add more pressure to Nairnshire's already stretched infrastructure and traffic congestion.
- the Freeport will also need to put in place close monitoring of environmental impacts and invest in mitigating measures to protect neighbouring communities and prevent damage to the fragile Moray Firth natural environment on which many Nairnshire tourism businesses depend.

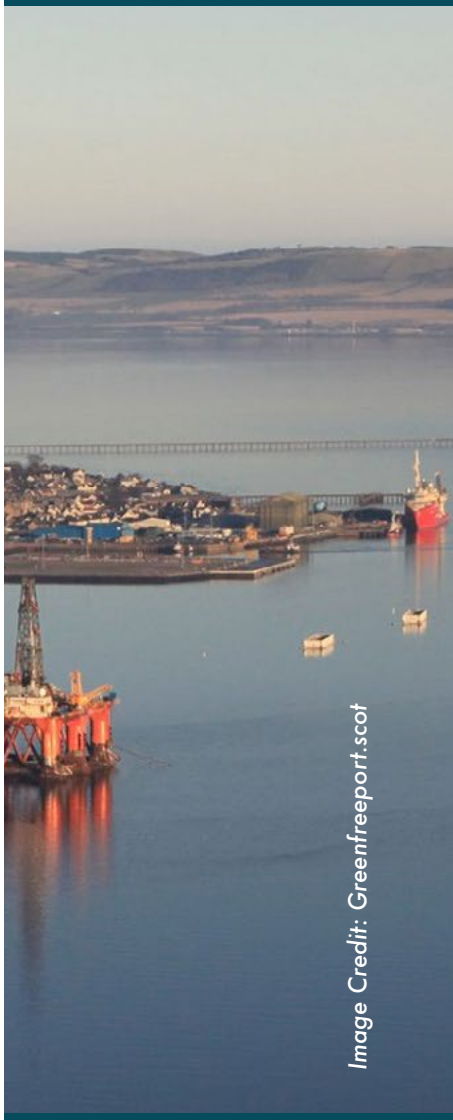


Image Credit: Greenfreeport.scot



3. Getting Around

- A96 Bypass is Number 1 priority for locals but still at least 10 years away.
- locals want this now to reduce road congestion and create opportunities to revitalise town and village centres.
- the busy A96 splits Nairn in two causing traffic jams, air pollution, a physical barrier and a daily danger to pedestrians, cyclists and other wheeled users.
- traffic jams also cause economic impacts such as delays for local workers in town and for commuters between Elgin and Inverness, as well as road safety issues for rural roads and villages being used as an unofficial bypass.
- Short/Medium Term – there is opportunity while we await the bypass to improve active travel and link road networks (e.g. between Nairn and villages, and Lochloy and the Retail Park) to reduce traffic congestion and create accessible and safe routes for walking, and wheeling to schools and shops.
- people especially the young want better public transport especially in evenings and to link rural areas to nearby towns and villages.
- some asked for improved signposting and connectivity from Nairn arrival points (bus, train station) to High Street and Seafront.
- a planned wheelchair-friendly bridge and lift at the Station is welcome but there is more to do to improve accessibility for all.



4. Town and Village Centres

- clean up and regenerate Nairn Town Centre and revitalise village centres.
- increase footfall to boost local economy.
- Town Centre First priority to reuse existing buildings in preference to out of town newbuild.
- improve basic amenities for locals and visitors (toilets, parking, accessible paths, signposting).
- more youth leisure activities, night life and diverse shops.
- create a tourist information hub and plan to improve Nairnshire visitor welcome.
- collaborative multi agency audit of town centre buildings and public amenities to maximise use and ensure viability of key community assets.
- make more use of neglected heritage assets/listed buildings, perhaps extending Nairn's Conservation Area status beyond Fishertown if this is viable.
- these include the vacant Old Italianate Building and Former Victorian Police Station, an underused Nairn Courthouse and Viewfield House -a Common Good Asset currently housing Nairn Museum, all currently owned or in the stewardship of the Highland Council.

- identify opportunities to repurpose vacant and underused buildings for housing, business and community use.
- Multi-use amenities could include, housing, pop-up shops and cafes, guest houses and co-working spaces to create vibrant public spaces for people to participate in community activities.
- maintain viability of key community run hubs such as Nairn Community and Arts Centre, Nairn Sports Club, Fornighty Hall, Cawdor community hub and Auldearn village halls, and improve road safety in Nairnshire villages.
- explore ways to sustain these key community hub buildings (including churches being 'retired') to support social, cultural and commercial activities.
- refurbish privately owned 'eyesore' properties.
- examples of these given by the public which require attention include empty flats above High Street, the former Windsor Hotel, Harbour burnt out flats and empty buildings on Church Street.
- there is an opportunity for Highland Council, community bodies and BID to work together with developers and private owners to regenerate empty properties to address Nairn's shortage of small, centrally located 1-2 bed rented housing, as starter homes for local young families, incoming workers and to enable older people to downsize and free up larger units for others.
- sustaining a vibrant High Street, with housing, shops, workspaces, modern leisure amenities and community hubs will help support local commercial, social, cultural and heritage activities for all ages so that people want to live, work and holiday in Nairnshire.



5. Green Spaces and Leisure



- locals both young and old want to conserve Nairnshire's natural assets and green spaces which are strongly valued by the community.
- they told us these provide an attractive environment supporting sports and recreation, nature and biodiversity, health and wellbeing- and are a big draw for visitors who spend money here.
- urgent need to future-proof key hub buildings which support leisure and cultural amenities such as Nairn Swimming Pool and Nairn Community and Arts Centre.
- young people were particularly vocal about the need to make the shift to renewable energy and protect Nairnshire's natural environment.
- green spaces including Nairn Common Good Assets need careful local stewardship, enhancement and conservation to sustain them for the future.

This means addressing flood challenges, and investing in modern green space infrastructure (leisure amenities, toilets, changing facilities, parking, all-ability access).

What Happens Next?

The Nairnshire Local Place Plan will be published on **ournairnshire.org** and on the **Highland Council website** with other Highland LPPs.

Creating this Plan brought local people from all sectors together for a common purpose. We want to keep this collaboration and momentum going to deliver a green sustainable future for Nairnshire.

The next step is for NICE to facilitate the setting up of a strong leadership team and working groups to champion and deliver our Nairnshire Local Place Plan. This is likely to include key community stakeholders who have helped prepare the plan and bring local knowledge and experience to the table. It will also include representatives from public agencies and locally elected Councillors who can help unlock resources to enable delivery.

To be effective and sustainable, future regeneration and development projects should be collaborative, and community supported (if not led), with The Highland Council, other property owners and developers, and local businesses working in partnership with the local community, with Highlands and Islands Enterprise also on board to support economic development ventures.

Levering in funds for local developments will be key and likely to be a mix of public funding, including developer contributions, private investment and 'crowdsourcing'.

We already have a strong track record of community led ventures to build on in Nairn.

An integrated approach to Nairnshire's development will also be needed.

Strategic local plans for tourism, climate resilience and economic growth proposed for Nairnshire must be taken forward in a joined up way so that they complement each other, and minimise negative effects, taking account of health, social, environmental and economic impacts of physical developments.

This, our first community led Nairnshire Local Place Plan, is intended to provide an evidence backed reference document and local information resource for both local authority planners and local community interest groups by laying out local residents and businesses needs and priorities to inform Local Development Plans and support future targeting of available funds. We hope it will also facilitate more joined up working and open dialogue with communities by local authorities and commercial investors to help Nairn thrive and to support any Community Action Plans which may emerge for particular neighbourhoods.

NICE welcomes the commitment already offered by the Nairnshire Community Partnership to help deliver on local community priorities as we move forward together.

There are some big challenges ahead for Nairnshire but developing this Plan has confirmed how resourceful and passionate our local community is to get things right for this place.

Now the real work begins.....



Credit for all images, except the bottom image, page 5: Iain Fairweather

If you'd like more information about this first community led Nairnshire Local Place Plan (Sept 2024)

or would like to help local partners to progress delivery of its priorities please contact

lpp@nicenairn.org.uk