

Nairn Riverside

Improvement Plan

Alan Jones Associates 2026

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Executive Summary

Nairn Riverside is one of the town's most important natural, recreational and community assets, providing green space, wildlife habitat, opportunities for sport and informal recreation, and largely traffic-free connections between the town centre, residential areas, Fishertown, harbour and beach. Nairn Improvement Community Enterprise (NICE) commissioned this Improvement Plan as a focused continuation of the Nairn Local Place Plan, translating its wider community priorities into a coordinated programme for the future improvement, management and stewardship of the Riverside. The Plan takes a broad placemaking approach, recognising the important contribution that the Riverside makes to local wellbeing, access to nature, community activity and the overall quality of life and sense of place within Nairn.

The Plan has been informed by extensive community and stakeholder engagement, including community, young person and business surveys, community drop-ins, future walks, school engagement and more than 20 stakeholder meetings and discussions. The main community survey attracted 533 responses, supplemented by 101 responses from young people. A clear message throughout is that investment should enhance what already makes the Riverside special rather than result in unnecessary or intensive development. Its river, trees, wildlife, open spaces and informal character are highly valued, while priorities for improvement include paths and accessibility, maintenance, bridges, basic amenities, sport and recreation, safety, biodiversity and facilities for young people.

The Plan brings these priorities together under five themes: Connecting the Riverside; Celebrating the River; Conserving Nature; Creating Active Places; and Caring for the Riverside. Thirteen projects are identified, ranging from path, bridge, lighting and wayfinding improvements through interpretation, public realm and environmental projects to investment in pitches, athletics, wheeled sports, play and long-term Riverside custodianship. These are listed below:

Connecting the Riverside
Riverside Path Improvement Programme, Active Travel Connections & Missing Links
Bridge Accessibility & Renewal Programme
Riverside Lighting & Wayfinding
Celebrating the River
Riverside Interpretation & Heritage Programme, Riverside Trails, Art & Discovery
Public Realm, Seating, Viewing Points & Outdoor Learning Space
Conserving Nature
Riverside Biodiversity & Habitat Improvement Programme

Invasive Species Management Programme
River Stewardship, Biosecurity & Citizen Science
Creating Active Places
Riverside Pitch & Pavilion Improvements
Maggot Athletics Improvement Programme
Mill Road Wheeled Sports & Youth Activity Hub
Play, Youth & Informal Recreation Improvements
Caring for the Riverside
Riverside Custodianship, Management & Maintenance Programme

The projects are at differing stages of development and the costs presented are indicative only; more significant proposals will require further feasibility, technical assessment, design and procurement before their scope and cost can be confirmed. The projects should not be regarded as a ranked or sequential capital programme, with individual opportunities progressing as appropriate partnerships, funding and approvals are secured.

Flood risk is a fundamental consideration. Parts of the Riverside, particularly the Maggot, form part of the River Nairn's functional floodplain. This does not prevent appropriate investment, but proposals must be compatible with flood risk and avoid adversely affecting flood behaviour elsewhere. Paths, open space, grass sports pitches, biodiversity enhancement and informal recreation can potentially remain appropriate, while buildings, synthetic surfaces, changes in ground level and other substantial interventions will require greater technical scrutiny. Environmental management is similarly important, including coordinated action on Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed and giant hogweed, habitat restoration, biosecurity and community stewardship.

Delivery is intended to be phased, partnership-based and opportunity-led. NICE will provide an important coordinating role, but successful implementation will depend upon The Highland Council, sports clubs, environmental organisations, community groups, schools and other partners taking responsibility for relevant projects. Short-term opportunities include paths planning, lighting and wayfinding, interpretation, public realm, biodiversity, invasive-species management, citizen science and establishment of improved custodianship arrangements.

A particular early priority is to support Nairnshire Athletics Club in resolving its lease and occupancy arrangements at the Maggot. Establishing secure and appropriate tenure will provide greater certainty for the Club and create the basis from which detailed facility proposals, external funding applications and future investment can be progressed. Larger interventions – including pitch and pavilion improvements, the Mill Road Wheeled Sports & Youth Activity Hub and play and recreation improvements – will require further feasibility, technical assessment, design development and funding.

The Improvement Plan should therefore be regarded as a live framework for coordinated investment rather than a fixed programme of capital works. Its success will not be measured solely by the delivery of physical projects or the level of capital investment secured, but also by its contribution to placemaking, health and wellbeing, accessibility, biodiversity and community involvement, while ensuring that new and existing assets are properly managed.

The overall objective is a Riverside that is better connected, more accessible, environmentally stronger, more active and better cared for, supporting the wellbeing of the local community while retaining the natural and informal character that makes it such an important part of Nairn.

Introduction & Background

Project Background

The Nairn Riverside is one of the town's most important natural, recreational and community assets. Extending through the heart of Nairn, the river corridor provides valuable green space, wildlife habitat, opportunities for walking, cycling, sport and informal recreation, and largely traffic-free connections between different parts of the town. Its combination of natural environment, open space and community facilities means that the Riverside performs several important functions while contributing significantly to the character, wellbeing and quality of life of Nairn.

Nairn Improvement Community Enterprise (NICE) commissioned this Riverside Improvement Plan to provide a coordinated framework for the future improvement, management and stewardship of the area. Rather than considering individual facilities or locations in isolation, the Plan takes a Riverside-wide approach, identifying how investment in access, recreation, biodiversity, public amenities and environmental management can complement one another. In doing so, the Plan takes a broad placemaking approach, recognising that successful places are shaped not only by physical development, but by their contribution to health and wellbeing, access to nature, community activity, safety and a sense of place. Central to the study has been an extensive programme of community and stakeholder engagement. This included community, young person and business surveys, community drop-in sessions, future walks, school engagement and more than 20 stakeholder meetings and discussions. The main community survey generated 533 responses, with a further 101 responses from young people. This has provided a substantial evidence base from which to understand how the Riverside is currently used, the issues experienced by different users and priorities for future investment.

A consistent message is that improvement should build upon the qualities that already make the Riverside valued, rather than seek unnecessary or intensive development. Its natural character, river environment, trees, wildlife and open spaces should therefore remain central, alongside improvements to accessibility, paths and connections, sport and recreation, public amenities, safety and long-term maintenance. Protecting and enhancing these qualities is itself an important part of placemaking, supporting wellbeing and ensuring that the Riverside remains an attractive and valued place for people of all ages and future generations. Flood risk and environmental sensitivity are also fundamental considerations in determining what can appropriately be delivered. The resulting Plan brings these priorities together under five themes: Connecting the Riverside; Celebrating the River; Conserving Nature; Creating Active Places; and Caring for the Riverside. Together, these provide a practical framework for phased investment, partnership working and community involvement, while ensuring that future improvements can be appropriately managed and maintained over the longer term.

Nairn Local Place Plan

The Nairn Local Place Plan has been developed as a community-led framework for the future development of Nairn and Nairnshire, identifying local priorities for investment, improvement and the use of key community assets. Through community surveys and engagement events, the process considered a wide range of issues including transport and active travel, town-centre regeneration, community facilities, leisure and recreation, the natural environment and the future use of public green spaces. Importantly, it provides a wider place-based context within which individual projects, including the Riverside Improvement Plan, can be developed and progressed.

The Riverside Improvement Plan should be viewed as a focused continuation of the wider Nairn Local Place Plan process, rather than as a standalone exercise. The Place Plan engagement established a broad community-led vision for the future of Nairn and identified a number of priorities directly relevant to the Riverside. Within that earlier work, the Riverside was recognised as an important but potentially underused place asset, with opportunities to strengthen its role in recreation, tourism, active travel and the wider identity of the town. There was particular support for better connecting the Riverside with the High Street, harbour, beach, Fishertown and other destinations, creating a more coherent network for walking and cycling.

The Place Plan also identified many of the practical issues subsequently explored in greater detail through this study. These included improved paths and accessibility, better maintenance and cleanliness, seating, toilets, bins and visitor infrastructure, alongside a desire for more attractive and better-managed open spaces. There was also support for improved sport and leisure opportunities, particularly facilities for young people, while recognising the importance of protecting green space and biodiversity.

Importantly, the Place Plan demonstrated that improvement should not mean intensive development. There was strong support for protecting the Riverside and other Common Good green spaces, retaining their natural character and public accessibility while making them more usable, inclusive and better maintained. It also identified interest in stronger community involvement in the future management of local assets. The Riverside Improvement Plan therefore takes the principles and priorities established through the Place Plan and develops them at a more detailed, location-specific level. Through additional Riverside-focused engagement, stakeholder discussions and project development, it provides the next stage in translating that wider community vision into a practical programme of projects, partnerships and actions.

Nairn Improvement Community Enterprise (NICE)

Nairn Improvement Community Enterprise (NICE) is a community-led organisation working to support the regeneration and sustainable development of Nairn for the benefit of local residents. Its work focuses on helping local people shape the future of the town, developing projects, supporting community use of assets and working collaboratively with public bodies, businesses and other community organisations.

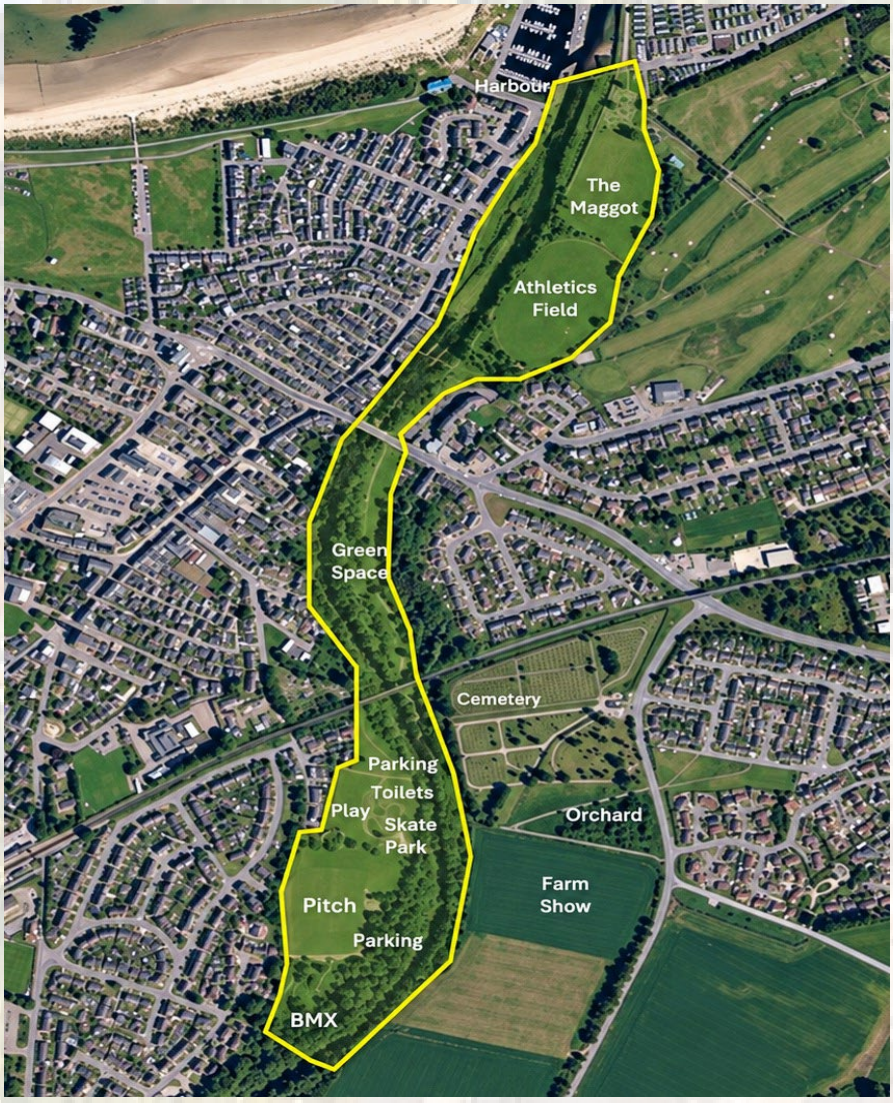
NICE has played a central role in developing the Nairn Local Place Plan, providing a mechanism through which community priorities can be translated into practical projects and investment. This Riverside Improvement Plan builds on that wider work, with NICE acting as the commissioning and coordinating organisation and seeking to establish partnerships through which individual projects can be progressed. This partnership approach is particularly important given the range of land, infrastructure, environmental and recreational interests represented across the Riverside.

Study Scope and Limitations

This Improvement Plan provides a strategic framework for the future development and management of the Nairn Riverside. The projects identified are at differing stages of development and should be regarded as opportunities for further progression rather than detailed or approved proposals. The study has not included detailed design, engineering, structural, ecological, hydrological or flood-risk assessment, nor detailed investigation of landownership, utilities or ground conditions. These matters will require further consideration as relevant projects progress. Similarly, indicative capital costs are provided for initial planning and funding purposes and will require refinement through feasibility, technical assessment, design development and procurement. Implementation will also remain subject to landowner agreement, statutory consents, funding availability and the establishment of appropriate delivery and long-term management arrangements.

Project Area

To support the engagement, and better define the project, a distinct project area has been used for this work. The area includes the Council, Common Good, and Parks & Trust owned or leased land along the length of the River Nairn from the Harbour, upstream to the end of the existing BMX track.



Project Context - Understanding the Riverside

Key Riverside Users & Activities

General Public

The Riverside is an important everyday recreational space for people living across Nairn and wider Nairnshire. It is used extensively for walking, dog walking, running, cycling, informal exercise and social recreation, as well as providing opportunities to enjoy nature and the river environment. The path network also performs an important connecting function between residential areas, the town centre, Fishertown, harbour, beach and other destinations. Use is therefore not dependent upon organised activities or facilities. Maintaining the Riverside as an attractive, accessible and predominantly natural open space is important, alongside improvements to paths, seating, accessibility, maintenance, safety and other basic infrastructure.

Young People

Young people use the Riverside for a mixture of recreation, sport, active travel and informal social activity. The area around Mill Road is particularly relevant because of the existing skatepark and cycling facilities, while the wider Riverside provides open space for informal activity and connections across Nairn. The Improvement Plan recognises the importance of providing places where teenagers can spend time independently, rather than concentrating provision solely on younger children or organised sport. Opportunities include improved wheeled-sports facilities, informal recreation and social spaces, alongside safer and more accessible walking and cycling routes.

Football Users

Football is an established organised use of the Riverside, centred on the existing grass pitch and associated pavilion facilities. The area provides opportunities for matches, training and wider grassroots football activity, while also accommodating informal recreational use. Existing infrastructure would benefit from improvement, including the pitch and supporting changing, toilet, storage and spectator facilities. As the football area lies within the floodplain, future investment will need to recognise periodic flooding and ensure that improvements, materials and any additional infrastructure are appropriate to the location.

Wheeled Sports Users

The Riverside already provides opportunities for skateboarding, BMX and other wheeled sports, particularly around the existing facilities at Mill Road. These provide an important dedicated space for young people and other users but are ageing and offer relatively limited opportunities compared with modern wheeled-sports provision. The Improvement Plan identifies potential to develop this area as a broader wheeled-sports and youth activity hub, accommodating different ages, abilities and disciplines. Future proposals should be developed through direct engagement and co-design with users, with consideration given to safety, accessibility, flood risk, drainage, informal social space and long-term management.

Nairnshire Athletics Club

Nairnshire Athletics Club is an important, organised user of the Maggot, providing structured athletics training and opportunities for local participation. Existing facilities provide an established base for activity but are relatively basic, with opportunities to improve the track and associated fencing, storage and field-event provision. A key immediate issue is establishing appropriate long-term tenure for the Club, providing greater certainty and enabling future investment and external funding to be pursued. Any physical improvements will also need to respond appropriately to the Maggot's floodplain location and its wider recreational and environmental functions.

Anglers

Angling is one of the activities most directly connected with the River Nairn itself, with users having an interest in access to the river alongside water quality, fish passage, riverbank condition and the health of the wider river environment. These interests overlap with several of the Improvement Plan's environmental themes, including habitat enhancement, invasive-species management, biosecurity and river stewardship. Future works close to the river will need to recognise the sensitivity of aquatic habitats, while anglers and other river users could also contribute valuable local knowledge and potentially participate in monitoring, stewardship and interpretation activity.

Visitors

The Riverside forms part of Nairn's wider visitor offers and provides an attractive connection between the town centre, Fishertown, harbour, beach and surrounding green spaces. Visitors use the area for walking, cycling, enjoying the river and wildlife and moving between other destinations within the town. Its role as a visitor destination remains relatively informal, with opportunities to improve orientation, interpretation, seating and viewpoints without compromising its natural character. Better wayfinding and interpretation could also encourage visitors to explore more of Nairn and strengthen connections between the Riverside, town centre and other visitor attractions.

Children and Routes to School

The Riverside path network provides opportunities for children and families to make walking, wheeling and cycling part of everyday journeys, including travel to and from school. Its largely traffic-free environment is an important advantage, although the usefulness of individual routes is influenced by path condition, bridge accessibility, road crossings and connections beyond the Riverside. Improvements can therefore provide benefits beyond recreation by supporting safer and more attractive alternatives to short car journeys. The opening of the new Nairn Academy further reinforces the importance of considering Riverside routes as part of the wider active-travel network serving schools and residential areas.

Environmental and Community Users

The Riverside is also an important focus for environmental organisations, community groups and volunteers involved in protecting and improving the river and its surrounding habitats. Existing and

potential activities include invasive-species management, habitat improvement, wildlife and water-quality monitoring, litter removal, citizen science and environmental education. Organisations such as the Rivers Trust, alongside local groups, schools and volunteers, can therefore play an important role in the Riverside's future stewardship. These activities complement the physical projects proposed within the Plan and provide opportunities for local people to become directly involved in caring for the Riverside, building knowledge and supporting its long-term ecological health.

Other Key Local Projects

Several projects are progressing elsewhere in Nairn which influence, complement or potentially overlap with the Riverside programme and should therefore be considered as individual projects develop.

New Nairn Academy

The new Nairn Academy is a major £61 million investment in education and community facilities and is scheduled to open to pupils on 26 October 2026. The three-storey campus will accommodate up to 800 pupils and includes significant new sports provision, including a synthetic grass pitch, multi-use games area, 100m running straight , games hall, gymnasium, fitness suite, with community access outside school hours. The development is relevant to the Riverside Improvement Plan both in terms of routes to school and active travel, and the need to consider Riverside sports proposals alongside the enhanced facilities becoming available at the Academy.

Nairn Links Toilets

A parallel project is progressing to replace/improve the public toilet provision at Nairn Links, responding to a longstanding need for higher-quality and more accessible facilities serving residents and visitors. The proposed development includes modern public toilets and a fully accessible Changing Places facility, with the Nairnshire Committee allocating up to £200,000 towards the capital funding package in August 2026. The project is particularly relevant to the Riverside because consultation found toilets as an important local priority. Improved provision at the Links should therefore be considered alongside, rather than duplicated by any future Riverside amenity proposals.

Nairn Dune Resilience Project

Led by NICE, the Nairn Dune Resilience Project is delivering environmental restoration and community engagement focused on Nairn's coastal dune system. The work responds to damage caused by intensive footfall, invasive vegetation and the replacement of native marram and lyme grass, with physical restoration supported through the Nature Restoration Fund. NICE secured a further £10,000 from the Highlands and Islands Environment Foundation for a 12-month education and engagement programme running from July 2026 to July 2027. This includes schools and community engagement, volunteer training, biodiversity monitoring and public information. The project provides an important parallel to the Riverside proposals around biodiversity, environmental education, citizen science and community stewardship.

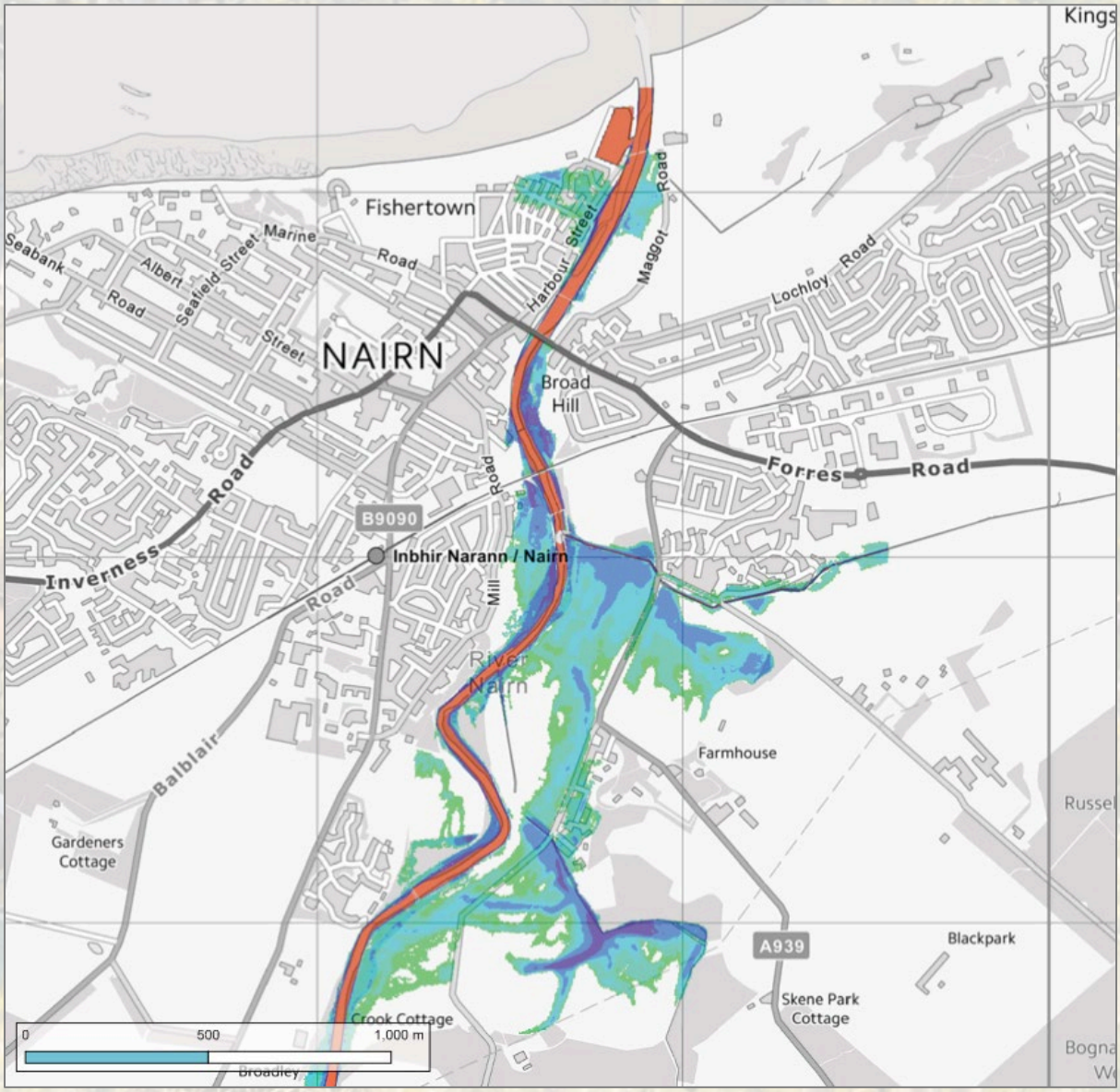
Nairn BID Heritage Signage Replacement

Nairn BID is progressing a Heritage Trail project to replace ageing heritage interpretation boards around Nairn and provide a more coordinated approach to presenting the town's history. The project has secured more than £80,000, principally from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Historic Environment Scotland, and combines replacement interpretation panels with a walking trail, QR-linked digital information and connections to Nairn Museum. This is directly relevant to the Riverside Improvement Plan's proposed interpretation, trails and heritage programme. Future Riverside interpretation should therefore complement the BID scheme, adopting a coordinated approach to locations, content, design and digital information and avoiding unnecessary duplication of signage.

Flood Risk

Flood risk is a fundamental consideration for the Nairn Riverside Improvement Plan. Part of the study area forms part of the natural floodplain of the River Nairn, with risk arising from both fluvial flooding from the river and coastal influences towards the lower reaches. The flood appraisal modelling considers these sources together, using the maximum modelled depth, velocity or level from fluvial and coastal events for scenarios up to the 1-in-200-year event.

The flood maps demonstrate how the extent of flooding increases significantly during less frequent events. At the 1-in-30-year event (mapped below), flooding extends substantially across the low-lying land around the Maggot, while the 1-in-100 and 1-in-200-year scenarios show progressively greater inundation of this area and land adjoining the river corridor. Climate-change scenarios indicate a further increase in both the extent and depth of flooding. The modelling also demonstrates that flood risk is not uniform: some areas experience relatively shallow inundation, while deeper flooding is modelled across parts of the functional floodplain.



Flooding Map – 1 in 30 years (SEPA)

This reinforces feedback received from The Highland Council Design Unit during preparation of the Improvement Plan. The Riverside, and particularly the Maggot, should be regarded as a functional floodplain, and future proposals need to satisfy two important principles: that the proposed use is appropriate for its level of flood risk, and that development does not displace water or otherwise worsen flood behaviour elsewhere. Raising ground levels or introducing development that materially reduces flood-storage capacity is therefore likely to be particularly problematic.

Flood risk does not, however, prevent appropriate improvement of the Riverside. Many of the uses proposed through this Plan – including paths, open space, grass sports pitches, biodiversity enhancement and informal recreation – can potentially remain compatible with a location that periodically floods, provided their design, materials and management recognise this constraint. Conversely, new buildings, substantial structures, synthetic surfaces, changes to levels and other more intensive interventions will require greater scrutiny and potentially detailed Flood Risk Assessment.

The Plan therefore treats flooding as a design and delivery constraint rather than seeking to provide a flood-defence solution. This should not be presented as flood mitigation without further technical evidence, but could provide biodiversity, landscape and climate-resilience benefits while retaining the area's ability to accommodate floodwater.

Accordingly, flood risk should be considered from the outset as individual projects progress. Early engagement with The Highland Council Project Design Unit and, where appropriate, SEPA and the Rivers Trust will be important, with more detailed hydrological and flood-risk assessment undertaken where the scale or nature of an intervention requires it. This approach will allow appropriate investment in the Riverside while ensuring that its essential floodplain function is understood and protected.

Invasive Species

Invasive non-native species represent an important environmental and management consideration along the Nairn Riverside. Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed and Giant hogweed are present within the river corridor, with the Scottish Invasive Species Initiative identifying established areas upstream of Jubilee Bridge. Their spread can displace native vegetation, reduce habitat diversity, affect riverbank condition and create an increasing long-term management requirement.

The issue extends beyond individual sites. As the River Nairn forms a connected ecological corridor, effective control needs to be considered at a catchment scale, coordinated with work elsewhere along the river. The Rivers Trust has similarly identified invasive-species management and biosecurity as important elements of protecting the river environment, alongside water quality, fish populations and wider habitat improvement.

Invasive species are also a practical consideration for future capital works. Path construction, earthworks, vegetation clearance and movement of soil can inadvertently spread contaminated plant material, particularly Japanese knotweed. Surveys and appropriate treatment should therefore precede works in affected locations, with specialist management used where required.

Longer-term control should be coordinated with the wider biodiversity programme. Following treatment, opportunities should be taken to restore native vegetation and habitats, while community stewardship, monitoring and citizen science can help identify new growth and reduce the risk of reinfestation. This creates a direct link between invasive-species management, biosecurity and the longer-term ecological health of the Riverside.

Community & Stakeholder Engagement

The engagement programme was designed to gather a broad and representative range of views from residents, young people, businesses, community organisations, sports clubs, public agencies and other stakeholders with an interest in the Riverside. A mixed-method approach was adopted, combining community, young person and business surveys with school and community events, direct stakeholder discussions and opportunities for more detailed location-specific feedback. This approach allowed quantitative survey findings to be considered alongside more detailed qualitative feedback, helping to identify areas of consensus, differing perspectives and priorities for the future development and management of the Riverside.

The following activities were undertaken:

- Community Survey *
- School & Young Person Survey *
- Business Survey *
- 2 x Community Drop-in Sessions.
- 2 x Community Future Walks
- 2 x School Lunch Drop in Sessions
- 20+ Stakeholder Meetings & Discussions

** These engagement opportunities were promoted by a flyer maildrop delivered to all 6,800 residential and business addresses in and around Nairn.*

The engagement undertaken demonstrates that the Nairn Riverside is highly valued by the local community as an important natural, recreational and connecting space. The community survey attracted 533 responses, supplemented by 101 responses from young people, a dedicated business survey, community and school engagement events and discussions with a wide range of clubs, community organisations, public agencies and other stakeholders. Across these different strands there is broad support for investment in the Riverside, but also a consistent message that improvement should enhance what already makes the area special rather than result in unnecessary or intensive development.

Protecting The Character of The Riverside	The river, trees, wildlife, open green spaces and sense of tranquillity are among its most valued qualities. Walking, running, cycling, dog walking and informal recreation are particularly important, alongside the Riverside's role as a largely traffic-free connection between different parts of Nairn. Future proposals should

	therefore retain the natural and informal character of the corridor while improving its usability and condition.
Maintenance, Accessibility and Basic Infrastructure	Poor or uneven paths, drainage, vegetation, invasive species, graffiti, litter, damaged infrastructure and the condition of bridges were repeatedly identified. There is strong demand for improved public toilets, seating, bins, signage and accessible paths and crossings. Accessibility is particularly important, including opportunities to improve routes for wheelchair and mobility scooter users, people with buggies and cyclists.
Investment In Sport, Play and Recreation Facilities	Feedback supports retaining and improving the established grass football pitch, with changing rooms, toilets, drainage and maintenance particular priorities. There is support for proportionate enhancement of the athletics area and considerable interest in improving the BMX and skate facilities, including potential development of a modern pump track. Young people particularly highlighted the need for better facilities and positive spaces for teenagers and older children.
Safety - Particularly After Dark	While the Riverside is generally considered safe and well used during the day, perceptions change significantly at night. Poor lighting, secluded areas, anti-social behaviour, graffiti, vandalism and alcohol or drug-related activity were recurring concerns. However, the engagement also suggests that the response should not rely solely on enforcement or physical security: better maintenance, positive activities, improved facilities and increased legitimate use of the area could all contribute to making the Riverside feel safer and more welcoming.
Nature, Biodiversity and Flood Risk	Stakeholder engagement highlighted opportunities for habitat enhancement, invasive species management, and native planting creation, alongside greater community participation in environmental stewardship. At the same time, flood risk represents a fundamental constraint. Future investment should work with the Riverside's role as part of the floodplain, avoiding development that increases risk elsewhere and recognising that open space can itself contribute to flood resilience.
Delivery And Long-Term Custodianship	There is a strong message that is as important as capital investment. The community wants existing and future assets to be properly maintained, with clearer responsibility for their management. Stakeholders identified opportunities for clubs, community organisations, schools, volunteers, businesses and public agencies to play a greater role in future delivery. The Riverside Improvement Plan should therefore provide not simply a list of physical projects, but a coordinated and realistic framework for investment, partnership working, community involvement and the long-term care of the Riverside.

The findings demonstrate the importance of the Riverside as one of Nairn's principal natural, recreational and community assets, while also identifying opportunities to improve accessibility, paths and connections, existing sport and recreation facilities, public amenities, biodiversity, safety and the long-term care of the area. Importantly, the engagement also highlights a strong desire to retain the Riverside's natural and informal character and to ensure that future investment responds appropriately to flood risk, environmental constraints and ongoing maintenance requirements. This report brings together the evidence gathered through the engagement process and will provide a key foundation for identifying, assessing and prioritising the projects and actions taken forward through the Riverside Improvement Plan.

Project Summary

From the programme of Community and Stakeholder engagement undertaken, the following projects and initiatives have been identified. These are grouped under the following key themes:

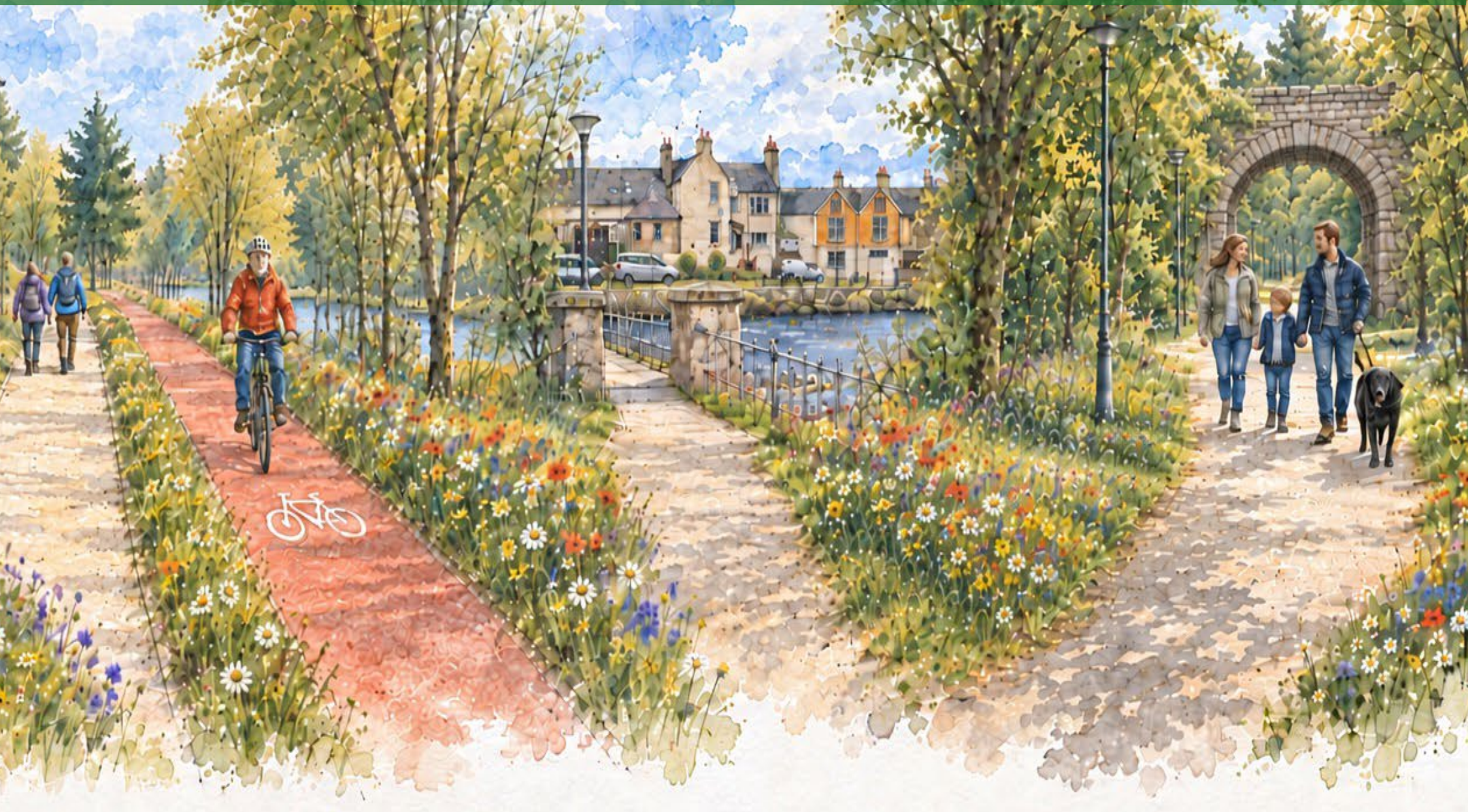
- **Connecting the Riverside**
- **Celebrating the River**
- **Conserving Nature**
- **Creating Active Places**
- **Caring for the Riverside**

Connecting the Riverside	
Riverside Path Improvement Programme, Active Travel Connections & Missing Links	• Improve surfacing, drainage, width, vegetation clearance and accessibility across the existing path network. • Address gaps in walking and cycling connections, including links towards the harbour, Lochloy, Cawdor, schools, the High Street and wider Nairn. • Consider path widening, separation of users where appropriate, safer road crossings, route markings, cycle parking and bike repair facilities.
Bridge Accessibility & Renewal Programme	• Consider improvements to the Jubilee, Merryton and Bailey bridges, including approach gradients, accessibility, repair, replacement and long-term ownership/maintenance.
Riverside Lighting & Wayfinding	• Targeted lighting of key paths, bridges and underpasses alongside improved directional signage, balanced against ecological impacts.
Celebrating the River	
Riverside Interpretation & Heritage Programme, Riverside Trails, Art & Discovery	• A coordinated approach covering the River Nairn, wildlife, salmon, local history, bridges, the cemetery and wider cultural heritage. • Family and nature trails, interactive interpretation, public art, Story Chair restoration and other small-scale attractions.
Public Realm, Seating, Viewing Points & Outdoor Learning Space	• Accessible seating, picnic areas, riverside viewpoints, public furniture and improvements to key gathering spaces. • Flexible space for schools, outdoor classes, community events, music, wellbeing activity and informal gathering.
Conserving Nature	
Riverside Biodiversity & Habitat Improvement Programme	• Native planting, wildflowers, woodland enhancement, habitat creation, riverbank management and biodiversity improvements.
Invasive Species Management Programme	• Coordinated long-term control of Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed, Giant hogweed and other invasive species, including volunteer involvement where appropriate.

River Stewardship, Biosecurity & Citizen Science	• Community and school involvement in environmental monitoring, water quality awareness, biosecurity, fish protection and biodiversity recording.
Creating Active Places	
Riverside Pitch & Pavilion Improvements	• Improve the existing grass pitch, drainage, fencing, changing rooms, toilets, storage, and car parking.
Maggot Athletics Improvement Programme	• Appraise a range from modest grass-track, fencing, storage and throwing improvements through to more substantial synthetic surfaces and floodlighting.
Mill Road Wheeled Sports & Youth Activity Hub	• Combine BMX, pump track, skatepark and former cycle-proficiency space into one appraisal, with options ranging from refurbishment through to comprehensive redevelopment.
Play, Youth & Informal Recreation Improvements	• Inclusive play, provision for older children and teenagers, climbing/bouldering, basketball, informal fitness, shelters and flexible social/recreation space.
Caring for the Riverside	
Riverside Custodianship, Management & Maintenance Programme	• Establish the long-term management model covering community volunteering, club involvement, school participation, reporting mechanisms, litter and graffiti management, vegetation maintenance, asset inspections, positive youth activity and partnership working with The Highland Council and other agencies.

Connecting the Riverside		
Riverside Path Improvement Programme, Active Travel Connections & Missing Links	Project led by NICE, collaborating with key local partners	**Medium Term (2-5 years)**
Bridge Accessibility & Renewal Programme	Highland Council, supported by NICE	**Medium Term (2-5 years)**
Riverside Lighting & Wayfinding	Project delivered by NICE	**Short Term (1-2 years)**
Celebrating the River		
Riverside Interpretation & Heritage Programme, Riverside Trails, Art & Discovery	Project led by NICE, supported by local partner organisations	**Short Term (1-2 years)**
Public Realm, Seating, Viewing Points & Outdoor Learning Space	Project led by NICE	**Short Term (1-2 years)**
Conserving Nature		
Riverside Biodiversity & Habitat Improvement Programme	Project led by NICE in partnership with key environmental groups.	**Short Term (1-2 years)**
Invasive Species Management Programme	Project supported by NICE but led by another group – potential for Green Hive to be lead entity given their experience, with support from NICE and Rivers Trust to develop capacity.	**Short Term (1-2 years)**
River Stewardship, Biosecurity & Citizen Science	Project delivered by a collaboration of existing environmental organisations, building on existing initiatives. Supported by NICE	**Short Term (1-2 years)**
Creating Active Places		
Riverside Pitch & Pavilion Improvements	Collaboration of existing user groups with support of NICE	**Medium Term (2-5 years)**
Maggot Athletics Improvement Programme	Nairnshire Athletics Club	**Short Term (1-2 years)**
Mill Road Wheeled Sports & Youth Activity Hub	New entity to be supported and developed by NICE	**Medium Term (2-5 years)**
Play, Youth & Informal Recreation Improvements	NICE led project	**Medium Term (2-5 years)**
Caring for the Riverside		
Riverside Custodianship, Management & Maintenance Programme	Project led by NICE coordinating informal collaboration of key stakeholder and groups.	**Short Term (1-2 years)**

Connecting the Riverside



Riverside Path Improvement Programme, Active Travel Connections & Missing Links

Project Ownership: Project lead by NICE, collaborating with key local partners		**Indicative Cost:** circa £1,000,000	**Medium Term** (2-5 years)
Community Support Path condition, drainage, accessibility and vegetation encroachment were among the most consistently raised issues through the community engagement. Improved path surfaces and walking, wheeling and cycling routes also received very strong support. Respondents repeatedly highlighting walking, cycling and the ability to move between different parts of the town away from busy roads.	**Stakeholder Support.** Improved paths and accessibility were repeatedly supported by community organisations, the Access Panel and public-sector stakeholders, with particular emphasis on creating safer and more inclusive routes. Active travel and safer connections have been supported through stakeholder discussions, including links to schools, the harbour and wider community destinations.	**Potential Stakeholder / Partner Involvement** There is strong potential for partnership involving The Highland Council, active travel interests, community organisations, schools and accessibility groups. Developer contributions and safer-routes funding may also support appropriate sections of the network.	**Capital Affordability & Fundability** Costs will vary significantly depending on surfacing, drainage and specification, but improvements can be phased and packaged into manageable sections. Path and active travel work also align with several established external funding themes. Smaller missing links could be relatively affordable, but new crossings, substantial path construction or major route alterations could be expensive.
Operational Costs & Ongoing Management Paths require routine vegetation clearance, drainage management and periodic resurfacing, but these costs are generally predictable and can form part of a planned maintenance programme.	**Youth Involvement Potential** Young people identified paths and connections as priorities and could participate in route audits, design discussions, accessibility reviews and community maintenance initiatives. Routes to schools and improved everyday cycling connections offer particularly strong opportunities for young people to participate in design and planning.	**Environmental Impact** Better-defined paths can reduce informal trampling and concentrate movement, although construction and surfacing need to avoid unnecessary habitat loss and excessive urbanisation of the river corridor. Improved active travel can reduce reliance on cars and encourage sustainable movement.	**Planning / Regulatory Deliverability** Some maintenance and resurfacing works should be relatively straightforward, although drainage, works close to the river, floodplain constraints and land ownership will require consideration in some locations.

Implementation & Next Steps

- Undertake a condition, accessibility and connectivity audit of the existing path network.
- Explore existing and previous work undertaken on active travel locally.
- Identify priority sections, missing links and barriers to walking, wheeling and cycling.
- Develop outline designs covering surfacing, drainage, widening, crossings and route connections.
- Confirm landownership, environmental constraints and maintenance responsibilities.
- Engage the Access Panel, schools and active-travel users on priority improvements.
- Prepare a phased programme and seek active-travel, accessibility and developer-contribution funding.

Bridge Accessibility & Renewal Programme

Project Ownership: Highland Council, supported by NICE		**Indicative Cost:** TBC	**Medium Term** (2-5 Years)
Community Support. Bridge condition and accessibility were repeatedly raised, particularly the access gradient, and difficulties associated with Jubilee, Merryton and other crossings.	**Stakeholder Support** Accessibility stakeholders and wider community organisations have highlighted river crossings as essential to creating genuinely connected and inclusive routes.	**Potential Stakeholder / Partner Involvement** The Highland Council, bridge owners, access groups and community organisations would all have roles, although ownership of some structures is not straightforward. Merryton Bridge, for example, has specifically been identified as requiring partnership working.	**Capital Affordability & Fundability** Bridge refurbishment, replacement or structural alteration can involve substantial capital costs, particularly where significant engineering is required.
Operational Costs & Ongoing Management Bridges create long-term inspection, repair and structural maintenance liabilities which must be assigned to a suitably resourced body.	**Youth Involvement Potential** Young people would benefit from safer crossings and improved links, particularly to recreation and school routes, but opportunities for direct involvement in technical bridge projects are more limited.	**Environmental Impact** Accessibility improvements offer social benefits but works over or beside the river could affect habitats, river processes and species and would require careful design.	**Planning / Regulatory Deliverability** Structural works may require planning, building standards, flood-risk assessment, environmental consents and agreement with individual bridge owners, making this one of the more complex project areas.

Implementation & Next Steps

- Confirm ownership and maintenance responsibility for each bridge.
- Undertake structural condition and accessibility assessments.
- Identify immediate repairs and longer-term renewal or accessibility requirements.
- Develop options for the Jubilee, Merryton and Bailey bridges.
- Confirm engineering, flood-risk, environmental and consent requirements.
- Prepare a prioritised, costed programme for repair and replacement.

Riverside Lighting & Wayfinding

Project Ownership: Project delivered by NICE		**Indicative Cost:** £50,000	**Short Term** (1-2 Years)
Community Support Poor lighting was frequently associated with concerns about safety after dark, while improved signage was also well supported. However, some respondents cautioned against excessive lighting because of wildlife and the natural character of the Riverside.	**Stakeholder Support** There is support for targeted safety improvements, but environmental interests are likely to favour a restrained approach rather than continuous illumination along all paths.	**Potential Stakeholder / Partner Involvement** The Highland Council, Police Scotland, community groups, Access Panel and environmental organisations could contribute to identifying appropriate locations and specifications.	**Capital Affordability & Fundability** Signage and targeted lighting are relatively moderate-cost interventions and can be phased, although electrical infrastructure can increase costs in more remote locations.
Operational Costs & Ongoing Management Lighting introduces energy, inspection, repair and replacement costs, alongside ongoing maintenance of signs and wayfinding infrastructure.	**Youth Involvement Potential** Young people have raised safety concerns and could contribute to identifying locations where lighting or wayfinding would make routes feel more welcoming.	**Environmental Impact** Artificial lighting can affect bats, birds and other wildlife and may undermine the natural character strongly valued by the community.	**Planning / Regulatory Deliverability** Wayfinding is likely to be straightforward, while new lighting may require technical, ecological, landownership and electrical considerations.

Implementation & Next Steps

- Undertake an evening safety, lighting and wayfinding audit.
- Identify priority bridges, underpasses, routes and decision points.
- Engage residents, young people, Police Scotland, the Access Panel and environmental interests.
- Develop a coordinated signage and targeted-lighting strategy.
- Identify opportunities to integrate with existing projects – signage, interpretation etc. (Including BID work underway)
- Assess ecological, electrical and long-term maintenance implications.
- Implement priority locations first and monitor their effectiveness.

Celebrating the River



Riverside Interpretation, Trails & Heritage Programme

Project Ownership: Project led by NICE, supported by local partner organisations		**Indicative Cost:** £30,000	**Short Term** (1-2 Years)
Community Support The community engagement found interest in the river, wildlife, local history and vandalism at the cemetery. Interpretation boards, wildlife and heritage interpretation, activity trails, art and family discovery ideas were all raised positively, although individually they represent smaller elements of the overall engagement.	**Stakeholder Support** Environmental groups, community organisations, schools and heritage interests all provide potential support for interpretation linked to the Riverside. Community, environmental, educational and cultural interests could support development of a coordinated trail programme.	**Potential Stakeholder / Partner Involvement** The Rivers Trust, schools, local history groups, community organisations and public agencies could contribute content, knowledge, activities and potentially funding.	**Capital Affordability & Fundability** Interpretation can be delivered incrementally at relatively modest cost and is well suited to heritage, environmental, tourism and community funding streams.
Operational Costs & Ongoing Management Physical interpretation requires periodic inspections, cleaning, repair and updating, but ongoing liabilities are generally modest.	**Youth Involvement Potential** Schools and young people could research local history, biodiversity and river ecology and participate in creating interpretation and digital content. Children and young people could contribute directly to artwork, trail design, interpretation and creative environmental projects.	**Environmental Impact** Good interpretation can increase awareness of biodiversity, biosecurity and responsible use without requiring significant physical intervention. Trails can promote awareness of nature and encourage responsible use.	**Planning / Regulatory Deliverability** Most interpretation should present relatively few planning or regulatory difficulties where carefully located and sensitively designed.

Implementation & Next Steps

- Develop an overall interpretation and discovery framework for the Riverside.
- Identify priority stories relating to wildlife, salmon, heritage, bridges, cemetery and local history.
- Audit existing interpretation, trails, art and features – consider the replacement of the damaged Story Chair.
- Engage schools, historians, artists and environmental organisations in developing content.
- Identify a mix of physical, digital and interactive interpretation.
- Identify opportunities to integrate with existing projects – signage, interpretation etc (Including BID work underway)
- Deliver initially through a small number of visible pilot projects before expanding the programme.

Public Realm, Seating, Viewing Points, and Outdoor Learning Space

Project Ownership: Project led by NICE		**Indicative Cost:** £50,000	**Short Term** (1-2 Years)
Community Support Improved seating received strong support, with repeated requests for benches, picnic areas and places to stop and enjoy the river. Outdoor space was raised positively through engagement.	**Stakeholder Support** Accessibility and community stakeholders have particularly highlighted the importance of inclusive seating and rest points. Schools, community organisations and environmental interests could make strong use of outdoor learning and activity spaces.	**Potential Stakeholder / Partner Involvement** Community organisations, Access Panel, local businesses and The Highland Council could contribute to design, sponsorship and delivery.	**Capital Affordability & Fundability** Individual interventions are relatively affordable and can be delivered progressively as funding becomes available.
Operational Costs & Ongoing Management Amenity furniture requires inspection, cleaning and replacement but does not normally create major operational liabilities.	**Youth Involvement Potential** Young people specifically value places to sit and socialise and could contribute to design and location decisions.	**Environmental Impact** Carefully sited seating and viewing areas can focus activity at interesting locations while helping people appreciate nature without significantly altering habitats. Outdoor education can encourage appreciation of the natural environment, provided the structure is sensitively located and avoids impinging on important habitats.	**Planning / Regulatory Deliverability** Most interventions should be straightforward, although installations within the floodplain or close to sensitive habitats may need additional consideration.

Implementation & Next Steps

- Audit existing seating, gathering places, viewpoints and informal learning areas.
- Identify locations where additional facilities would have the greatest accessibility and recreational benefit.
- Engage the Access Panel, schools, young people and community groups on design and location.
- Develop a coordinated design approach for seating, picnic areas, viewpoints and outdoor-learning provision.
- Confirm flood-risk, environmental and maintenance requirements.
- Phase delivery alongside path and accessibility improvements where practical.

Conserving Nature



Riverside Biodiversity & Habitat Improvement Programme

Project Ownership: Project led by NICE in partnership with key environmental groups.		**Indicative Cost:** £100,000	**Short Term** (1-2 Years)
Community Support Wildflowers, native planting, wildlife habitat and protection of the Riverside's natural character were repeatedly supported through the engagement.	**Stakeholder Support** Environmental organisations and community stakeholders strongly support biodiversity enhancement and better management of riverside habitats.	**Potential Stakeholder / Partner Involvement** Rivers Trust, Green Hive, schools, community groups, volunteers and public agencies could all contribute expertise or practical involvement.	**Capital Affordability & Fundability** Some interventions can be delivered at modest cost and are well aligned with biodiversity, climate and community grant programmes.
Operational Costs & Ongoing Management Establishment and periodic management will be required, but proper habitat management may reduce intensive mowing or conventional landscape maintenance.	**Youth Involvement Potential** Planting, habitat creation, wildlife surveys and environmental learning offer extensive opportunities for school and youth participation.	**Environmental Impact** Biodiversity enhancement is a direct project objective and could provide significant habitat and ecological benefits.	**Planning / Regulatory Deliverability** Most habitat improvements should be relatively straightforward, although works affecting riverbanks, protected species or flood infrastructure will need specialist advice.

Implementation & Next Steps

- Complete a baseline ecological and habitat assessment.
- Identify priority areas for native planting, wildflowers, woodland and habitat enhancement.
- Coordinate proposals with flood, invasive-species and path projects.
- Develop a phased habitat-management and planting plan.
- Involve schools, community groups and volunteers in appropriate delivery and monitoring.
- Identify biodiversity, nature-restoration and climate funding opportunities.

Invasive Species Management Programme

Project Ownership: Project supported by NICE but led by another group – potential for Green Hive to be lead entity given their experience, with support from NICE and Rivers Trust to develop capacity.		**Indicative Cost:** TBC	**Short Tem** (1-2 Years)
Community Support Invasive species were repeatedly raised as a concern, and 94% of survey respondents supported their removal.	**Stakeholder Support** Environmental stakeholders strongly support coordinated management of Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed, Giant hogweed and other invasive species.	**Community Support** Invasive species were repeatedly raised as a concern, and 94% of survey respondents supported their removal.	**Stakeholder Support** Environmental stakeholders strongly support coordinated management of Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed, giant hogweed and other invasive species.
Operational Costs & Ongoing Management The key challenge is that control must be sustained over several years and coordinated across the wider catchment rather than treated as a one-off exercise. Consideration should be given to the full river course, noting that mitigations further upriver will be essential.	**Youth Involvement Potential** Appropriate invasive-species activity, particularly Himalayan balsam control and awareness, could involve schools and youth volunteers under suitable supervision.	**Operational Costs & Ongoing Management** The key challenge is that control must be sustained over several years and coordinated across the wider catchment rather than treated as a one-off exercise. Consideration should be given to the full river course, noting that mitigations further upriver will be essential.	**Youth Involvement Potential** Appropriate invasive-species activity, particularly Himalayan balsam control and awareness, could involve schools and youth volunteers under suitable supervision.

Implementation & Next Steps

- Survey and map invasive species across the Riverside.
- Prioritise treatment according to species, location and ecological risk – consider plans for the full river course.
- Agree proper treatment methods with the Rivers Trust and specialist partners.
- Coordinate activity with wider catchment management where possible.
- Establish safe opportunities for volunteer and community involvement.
- Develop a multi-year treatment and monitoring programme, including habitat restoration following clearance.

River Stewardship, Biosecurity & Citizen Science

Project Ownership: Project delivered by a collaboration of existing environmental organisations, building on existing initiatives. Supported by NICE		**Indicative Cost:** £30,000	**Short Term** (1-2 Years)
Community Support Direct survey support is less measurable than for paths or toilets, but environmental volunteering, education and community involvement were recurring themes.	**Stakeholder Support** The Rivers Trust and other environmental stakeholders have strongly found custodianship, citizen science and environmental monitoring as opportunities.	**Potential Stakeholder / Partner Involvement** Schools, volunteers, Rivers Trust, Green Hive, community groups and public bodies could all contribute to programme delivery.	**Capital Affordability & Fundability** The programme is primarily activity- and partnership-based and would require comparatively little capital investment.
Operational Costs & Ongoing Management Coordination and staff or volunteer leadership will be needed, but costs should remain modest compared with management of physical facilities.	**Youth Involvement Potential** Citizen science, water-quality monitoring, biodiversity recording and biosecurity education provide particularly strong routes for sustained youth participation.	**Environmental Impact** Better monitoring, knowledge and stewardship can directly support biodiversity, water quality and responsible use of the river environment.	**Planning / Regulatory Deliverability** Most activities create little or no planning burden, provided monitoring and practical works follow appropriate environmental guidance.

Implementation & Next Steps

- Agree the scope of the programme with the Rivers Trust and environmental partners.
- Identify suitable monitoring sites and priority themes such as biodiversity, water quality and biosecurity.
- Develop simple monitoring protocols and volunteer training.
- Establish partnerships with schools, community organisations and youth groups.
- Create arrangements for recording and sharing findings.
- Review results regularly and use the evidence to inform wider Riverside management.

Creating Active Places



Riverside Pitch & Pavilion Improvements *(Replacement Pavilion, Car Parking, Pitch Surface & Drainage Work)*

Project Ownership: Collaboration of existing user groups with support of NICE		**Indicative Cost:** circa. £2,500,000	**Medium Term** (2-5 Years)
Community Support There is clear support for retaining and improving the existing grass pitch, with drainage, changing facilities and toilets identified as key issues for improvement.	**Stakeholder Support** Existing clubs and user groups strongly support improvements to the existing facilities, particularly drainage, changing, fencing and supporting infrastructure.	**Community Support** There is clear support for retaining and improving the existing grass pitch, with drainage, changing facilities and toilets identified as key issues for improvement.	**Capital Affordability & Fundability** The project represents a significant capital investment, although improvements could potentially be phased. Football facility improvements align with established sport and community infrastructure funding programmes, with opportunities to combine external grant funding with local and club contributions.”
Operational Costs & Ongoing Management Changing facilities, pitches, lighting and buildings create significant maintenance, utilities, cleaning and lifecycle responsibilities.	**Youth Involvement Potential** Football is an established youth activity, and improved facilities could directly benefit young players and clubs, although the project is principally a facility investment rather than a youth-led initiative. Other pitch sport users would also provide benefit through youth activity.	**Operational Costs & Ongoing Management** Changing facilities, pitches, lighting and buildings create significant maintenance, utilities, cleaning and lifecycle responsibilities.	**Youth Involvement Potential** Football is an established youth activity, and improved facilities could directly benefit young players and clubs, in addition to rugby, shinty and other pitch sports. However, the project is principally a facility investment rather than a youth-led initiative.

Implementation & Next Steps

- Undertake a detailed assessment of the pitch, drainage, pavilion and supporting facilities.
- Agree priorities with existing and potential clubs and other regular users.
- Develop phased options covering pitch works, fencing, changing, toilets, storage and seating.
- Assess the flood-risk and planning implications of larger interventions such as lighting or additional training provision.
- Agree future ownership, maintenance, booking and operating responsibilities.
- Prepare costed proposals and pursue sports and community funding.

Maggot Athletics Improvement Programme

Project Ownership: Nairnshire Athletics Club		**Indicative Cost:** £250,000	**Short Term** (1-2 Years)
Community Support Athletics improvements have a clear constituency and respondents generally support investment, but participation is more concentrated than for Riverside-wide improvements.	**Stakeholder Support** Nairnshire Athletics Club has identified a range of improvements, from modest fencing and storage through to substantially upgraded track and field facilities including improved throwing and jumping equipment.	**Potential Stakeholder / Partner Involvement** The athletics club, sport bodies, schools and The Highland Council could potentially participate in funding and management.	**Capital Affordability & Fundability** Modest improvements are affordable, but a full synthetic track and associated field-event infrastructure would require substantial capital investment.
Operational Costs & Ongoing Management Synthetic facilities, floodlighting, storage and ancillary buildings introduce inspection, maintenance and lifecycle replacement costs.	**Youth Involvement Potential** Improved athletics provision could support junior development, school participation and additional opportunities for young people.	**Environmental Impact** Large areas of synthetic surfacing and floodlighting would represent greater intervention within an open floodplain setting.	**Planning / Regulatory Deliverability** More substantial improvements would need to demonstrate compatibility with flood risk and may require significant technical and planning work.

Implementation & Next Steps

- Support Nairnshire Athletics Club to resolve issues surround existing lease.
- Work with Common Good to agree long term lease – using the data from Riverside Improvement Plan as a basis for statutory engagement requirements.
- Develop brief for improvements to fencing, storage, in-field events and ancillary facilities.
- Develop phased options ranging from modest improvements to more substantial investment.
- Assess flood-risk, planning and environmental implications of synthetic surfaces and lighting.
- Prepare capital and lifecycle costs for each option.
- Progress the preferred proportionate option to detailed design and funding via sportscotland as lead funder.

Mill Road Wheeled Sports & Youth Activity Hub

Project Ownership: New entity to be supported and developed by NICE		**Indicative Cost:** £800,000	**Medium Term** (2-5 Years)
Community Support The existing BMX and skate facilities are widely considered outdated or poorly maintained, and there is substantial interest in improving provision. Additionally, there is strong support for developing a new pump track to complement the existing BMX track.	**Stakeholder Support** Community and youth stakeholders support creating more positive opportunities for teenagers, although the exact form of BMX, pump-track and skate provision remains open to appraisal.	**Potential Stakeholder / Partner Involvement** Young people, wheeled-sports users, community groups, Police Scotland, schools and sports organisations could potentially participate in design and programming.	**Capital Affordability & Fundability** Comprehensive concrete skate and pump-track development could require significant investment.
Operational Costs & Ongoing Management Durable concrete or tarmac provision can have relatively modest routine maintenance requirements, but inspection, cleaning, graffiti management and repairs remain necessary.	**Youth Involvement Potential** This is one of the strongest opportunities for genuine youth co-design and involvement, with young people directly identifying shortcomings in current facilities.	**Environmental Impact** Redevelopment of an existing activity area can minimise new land take, but extensive hard surfacing should still be balanced against the Riverside's green character.	**Planning / Regulatory Deliverability** Floodplain location, surfacing, drainage, noise, lighting and potential landform changes will require careful design and consultation.

Implementation & Next Steps

- Identify potential individuals and groups that may form part of a new delivery partner.
- Assess the current BMX, skatepark and former cycle-proficiency facilities.
- Undertake direct co-design with young people and existing users.
- Develop options ranging from refurbishment to comprehensive redevelopment.
- Appoint specialist wheeled-sports design input at concept stage.
- Assess drainage, flood risk, noise, lighting, safety and maintenance requirements.
- Agree a preferred phased option and pursue appropriate sport, youth and community funding.

Play, Youth & Informal Recreation Improvements

Project Ownership: NICE led project		**Indicative Cost:** £200,000	**Medium Term** (2-5 Years)
Community Support There is support for better play and informal recreation, alongside repeated concern that the Riverside offers too little specifically for older children and teenagers.	**Stakeholder Support** Community groups and stakeholders recognise the value of providing positive recreational opportunities as part of a wider response to antisocial behaviour.	**Potential Stakeholder / Partner Involvement** Schools, youth organisations, community groups, Police Scotland, sports organisations and local families could participate in design and delivery.	**Capital Affordability & Fundability** Costs will depend heavily on the eventual mix of play, climbing, basketball, fitness and shelter provision but can be phased into individual components.
Operational Costs & Ongoing Management Play and recreation equipment requires regular inspection, maintenance and eventual replacement, but responsibilities can be planned through a coordinated management arrangement.	**Youth Involvement Potential** The project provides a clear opportunity for children and teenagers to influence what is provided and how spaces are designed and used.	**Environmental Impact** New innovative play/facilities should be concentrated in appropriate existing amenity areas to avoid unnecessary development of natural sections of the Riverside.	**Planning / Regulatory Deliverability** Most play and informal recreation provision should be achievable, although flood risk, surfacing and more substantial structures may require planning consideration.

Implementation & Next Steps

- Undertake targeted engagement with children, teenagers, families and youth organisations.
- Identify gaps in existing play, social and informal recreation provision.
- Develop a prioritised mix of facilities rather than a predetermined single solution.
- Identify suitable locations, concentrating development within existing activity and amenity areas.
- Prepare concept designs and indicative capital and maintenance costs.
- Coordinate delivery with the wheeled-sports, public-realm and custodianship projects.

Caring For The Riverside



Riverside Custodianship, Management & Maintenance Programme

Project Ownership: Project led by NICE coordinating informal collaboration of key stakeholder and groups.		**Indicative Cost:** £30,000	**Short Term** (1-2 Years)
Community Support Poor maintenance, vegetation, litter, graffiti, damaged fencing and infrastructure and uncertainty over responsibility were among the most consistent concerns across the engagement.	**Stakeholder Support** Stakeholders repeatedly emphasised that long-term maintenance and custodianship are as important as securing capital investment.	**Potential Stakeholder / Partner Involvement** The programme could involve The Highland Council, NICE, community councils, sports clubs, schools, environmental groups, businesses and volunteers.	**Capital Affordability & Fundability** The programme requires little major capital expenditure, although equipment, volunteer support and small maintenance budgets may be needed.
Operational Costs & Ongoing Management This is inherently an ongoing programme and therefore requires sustained coordination and revenue commitment, although wider partnership and volunteer involvement could reduce direct costs.	**Youth Involvement Potential** Schools and young people could participate in litter removal, planting, environmental monitoring, reporting, practical skills activity and stewardship.	**Environmental Impact** Better management can directly support habitat quality, invasive-species control, litter reduction and more sensitive care of the Riverside environment.	**Planning / Regulatory Deliverability** Most management and stewardship activities require little formal planning approval, although individual maintenance works would still need to follow appropriate environmental requirements.

Implementation & Next Steps

- Map existing ownership, management and maintenance responsibilities across the Riverside.
- Identify gaps, duplication and areas where responsibility is unclear.
- Establish a partnership with key organisations.
- Develop clear reporting arrangements for litter, graffiti, vegetation and damaged infrastructure.
- Define appropriate roles for clubs, schools, businesses and volunteers.
- Prepare an annual maintenance, volunteering and stewardship programme with identified resources.
- Review the arrangements regularly to ensure new investment is sustainably maintained.

Project Implementation

Summary of Capital Estimates

The costs presented within this Improvement Plan are outline estimates provided for indicative planning and funding purposes only. They are based on the expected scale and nature of each project at this stage and should not be regarded as detailed cost plans or tender prices. As individual projects progress, costs will require further development through feasibility work, surveys, design development, technical assessment and, where appropriate, specialist cost advice. Final costs will ultimately be decided through detailed design and competitive procurement. Allowance should also be made for factors including inflation, site conditions, professional fees, statutory requirements and project-specific contingencies.

Connecting the Riverside	
Riverside Path Improvement Programme, Active Travel Connections & Missing Links	c. £1,000,000
Bridge Accessibility & Renewal Programme	TBC
Riverside Lighting & Wayfinding	£50,000
Celebrating the River	
Riverside Interpretation & Heritage Programme, Riverside Trails, Art & Discovery	£30,000
Public Realm, Seating, Viewing Points & Outdoor Learning Space	£50,000
Conserving Nature	
Riverside Biodiversity & Habitat Improvement Programme	£100,000
Invasive Species Management Programme	TBC
River Stewardship, Biosecurity & Citizen Science	£30,000
Creating Active Places	
Riverside Pitch & Pavilion Improvements	c. £2,500,000
Maggot Athletics Improvement Programme	£250,000
Mill Road Wheeled Sports & Youth Activity Hub	£800,000
Play, Youth & Informal Recreation Improvements	£200,000

Caring for the Riverside	
Riverside Custodianship, Management & Maintenance Programme	£30,000

Potential Funding Sources

The following section highlights potential funding sources relevant to the Riverside programme. Funding programmes, eligibility requirements and application timescales change regularly and should therefore be reconfirmed as individual projects progress.

sportscotland

sportscotland is the national agency for sport in Scotland and its Sport Facilities Fund is the principal capital programme relevant to the Riverside's sports infrastructure. The Fund supports projects that create or improve places where people take part in sport and physical activity, with a particular emphasis on projects that demonstrate strong equality, diversity and inclusion outcomes. Priority is given to projects addressing barriers to participation, including those serving rural communities, people with additional needs and other under-represented groups. Environmental, economic and social sustainability are also important considerations.

The Fund operates with an annual budget of around £2 million, meaning competition is significant. Applications are currently considered against deadlines of 1 April and 1 September each year, and sportscotland strongly recommends early discussion with its facilities team before an application is prepared. In 2025/26, sportscotland made 29 facility awards across its capital programmes, helping enable approximately £11.6 million of total investment.

For the Riverside, sportscotland is most relevant to the Maggot Athletics Improvement Programme, Riverside Pitch and Pavilion Improvements and potentially the Mill Road Wheeled Sports and Youth Activity Hub. Applications will be stronger where facilities are demonstrably multi-use, respond to evidenced participation needs and have sustainable management arrangements. It should be considered a potentially important contributor, but projects are likely to require a wider package of match funding rather than relying solely on sportscotland.

Scottish FA – Pitching in Fund.

The Scottish FA's Pitching in Fund is a major potential source of capital investment for football-related elements of the Riverside programme. The programme follows the Scottish FA's earlier Football Facilities Fund and is delivered in partnership with the UK Government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Between 2021 and 2026, £28.7 million of investment helped deliver more than £60 million of football facility development. A further £8.14 million has been allocated through Pitching In for 2026/27.

Investment is aimed at football facilities where there is an evidence-based need and where improvements will retain or increase grassroots participation. Priorities include facilities serving areas of deprivation, growth and retention of girls' and women's football, participation by under-represented groups and projects offering wider multi-sport use. Where possible, facilities are expected to provide at least five hours of non-football activity each week, while sustainability measures should be incorporated within proposed developments.

The Fund is therefore particularly relevant to the proposed Riverside Pitch and Pavilion Improvements, including improvements to pitches and supporting facilities. A proposal demonstrating community use beyond individual clubs, female and youth participation, accessibility and wider recreational use would be strongest. The 2026/27 application window has now closed, so the project should engage with the Scottish FA regarding future rounds and use the intervening period to develop its facility brief, costs, partnership arrangements and evidence of demand.

Highland Coastal Communities Fund

The Highland Coastal Communities Fund (HCCF) is administered by The Highland Council and is financed from revenue generated through Crown Estate marine assets. Its purpose is to support economic regeneration and sustainable development within Highland's coastal communities, making it particularly relevant to Nairn given the close relationship between the Riverside, town, harbour and coast. Eligible applicants include constituted community organisations, charities, voluntary organisations, social enterprises, public bodies, co-operatives and development trusts.

Projects are expected to show sustainability, viability, value for money, additionality, local support and positive impacts. The HCCF now sits within the Council's wider Community Regeneration Funding framework. Rather than operating primarily through open competitive calls, the Council is increasingly using its BeConnected mapping process to identify and prioritise projects before inviting Expressions of Interest and subsequently full applications. Annual funding is allocated to Local Area Committees, which determine local priorities.

The Fund represents a strong potential source for some Riverside projects, particularly paths and active-travel connections, public realm, seating and viewpoints, interpretation and heritage, recreation infrastructure and environmental improvements. It may also provide useful match funding toward larger capital schemes. The Riverside Improvement Plan itself provides a useful strategic evidence base demonstrating that these proposals form part of a coordinated programme rather than isolated interventions. NICE should ensure priority Riverside projects are represented through the Council's emerging BeConnected process and maintain early dialogue with the Community Regeneration team and Nairnshire members regarding future allocations.

Highland Council – Community-Led Local Development Fund

The Community-Led Local Development Fund (CLLD) is supported by Scottish Government funding and administered locally in Highland. For 2026/27, Highland Council's programme is focused on two priorities: improving community assets and tackling inequalities affecting children, young people and families. The current small-grants programme provides awards of up to £10,000, with applications assessed on a rolling basis while funds remain available. Nairn is within the eligible rural Highland geography.

For capital projects, the strongest route is Priority 1, which supports physical and practical improvements that help community-run assets remain sustainable, affordable and useful. However, applicants are expected to own or manage the relevant community asset. Priority 2 is more activity-focused and supports initiatives reducing barriers associated with poverty or isolation, including youth inclusion, skills development, wellbeing and transport. General sports or leisure activity without a demonstrable inequality outcome is specifically excluded.

Consequently, CLLD is unlikely to function as a major capital funder for the overall Riverside programme. Its relevance would increase where NICE, a sports organisation or another community body has a clear management interest in a particular asset, or where a project combines relatively modest capital equipment with targeted community activity. Potential opportunities include youth activity, environmental volunteering, equipment, community stewardship and smaller improvements associated with community-managed facilities. It should therefore be treated primarily as a complementary funding source rather than a lead funder for major infrastructure.

Highland Council – Developer Obligations

Developer Obligations, also referred to as developer contributions, provide a potential source of investment where new development creates added demand for local infrastructure. Highland Council can secure contributions towards areas including community facilities, transport and green infrastructure, generally through upfront payments or Section 75 agreements. The key principle is that developer contributions must mitigate the impact of new development rather than correct deficiencies that already exist.

This distinction is important for the Riverside. Funding could potentially support improvements where it can be demonstrated that planned or completed housing development places additional demand on Riverside paths, recreation facilities, community infrastructure or open space. For community facilities, contributions

can be sought from developments of four or more homes where additional capacity is required. Highland Council also confirms that third party-managed recreational or community facilities may potentially receive contributions where works increase their capacity to meet the needs generated by new households.

For the Riverside, possible applications include active-travel connections, green infrastructure, sport and recreation facilities and increased capacity at community-managed facilities. However, availability is highly location- and agreement-specific; there is not a general pot from which any Riverside project can simply draw funding. NICE should therefore collaborate with the Council's planning and developer-contributions teams to identify existing unallocated contributions within the relevant Nairn catchment and determine which projects satisfy the original planning obligations. Requests by community groups can be considered through the Council's Developer Contributions Board.

Regeneration Capital Grant Fund

The Regeneration Capital Grant Fund (RCGF) is a Scottish Government programme delivered jointly with COSLA and local government. It has historically supported larger-scale, place-based capital regeneration projects capable of addressing inequality, stimulating inclusive growth and supporting disadvantaged or fragile communities. Applications can only be made by Scotland's local authorities, either directly or through appropriate regeneration vehicles, meaning any Riverside proposal would require The Highland Council to function as applicant and strategic partner.

The programme has previously supported substantial community buildings, regeneration schemes and transformational place-based investments rather than small standalone works. A Riverside proposal would therefore need to demonstrate outcomes beyond environmental or recreational enhancement alone, including regeneration, community benefit, economic impact, inclusion and wider strategic significance. A coordinated package incorporating community facilities, activity and wider regeneration would generally offer a stronger fit than individual items such as paths, seating or routine public-realm improvements.

However, the current position is important. The Scottish Government states that, due to pressure on public-sector capital budgets, RCGF is presently paused and there is no confirmed timetable for future funding rounds. The 2026/27 projects were committed through the most recent cycle, but new applications are not currently being invited.

RCGF should therefore remain in the Riverside funding strategy as a potential longer-term opportunity rather than an immediately available fund. If reopened, it may be relevant to a substantial integrated Riverside regeneration package, but project delivery should not presently depend upon it.

Nairn Common Good Fund

The Nairn Common Good Fund is managed by The Highland Council on behalf of the former Burgh of Nairn. Common Good Funds hold and manage assets and income for the benefit of the communities to which they relate. Income is first required to support stewardship and maintenance of Common Good assets; where surplus resources are available, funds can also support non-essential improvements, investment and local community initiatives. Any supported activity must provide a clear community-wide benefit.

The Nairn Fund is particularly relevant because parts of the Riverside itself comprise Common Good land and assets. This potentially creates a stronger connection than would exist for a conventional third-party funding application. The Nairnshire Committee reviews the Fund's finances, annual programme and individual proposals. In May 2026, for example, the Committee considered an artwork proposed for installation on Nairn Common Good land at the Riverside, demonstrating that direct investment and improvement within the area is already within the Fund's remit.

Potential Riverside applications could include public realm, seating, interpretation, environmental improvements, recreational facilities and improvements to Common Good assets, although available funding will depend upon the Fund's annual budget, existing commitments and investment priorities. Larger projects may therefore be more realistic where Common Good funding provides a contribution or match rather than full project costs. Early discussion with Highland Council officers and the Nairnshire Committee

would help identify which projects can legitimately be supported from the Fund and how they relate to the longer-term stewardship of Common Good land.

National Lottery Heritage Fund

The National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) represents one of the strongest potential strategic funders for the environmental, natural heritage and interpretation elements of the Riverside programme. National Lottery Heritage Grants support projects connecting people and communities with the UK's natural, cultural and historic heritage. Current awards are available at £10,000–£250,000 and £250,000–£10 million, providing the potential to support either individual projects or a substantial coordinated programme.

Importantly for the Riverside, NLHF's definition of heritage extends well beyond historic buildings. Projects can encompass landscapes, habitats, species, natural heritage, local stories, interpretation and community participation. Recent Scottish awards include substantial support for habitat, citizen-science and community heritage projects, demonstrating the breadth of eligible activity.

A particularly compelling approach would be to combine several Riverside proposals into a River Nairn Natural and Cultural Heritage Programme, invasive-species management, river stewardship and citizen science, heritage interpretation, trails, outdoor learning and improved access to heritage. The programme should clearly demonstrate how people will actively engage with, understand and care for the Riverside rather than presenting primarily as physical infrastructure.

For applications below £250,000 an optional Project Enquiry can secure early feedback; proposals above £250,000 require an Expression of Interest before a full application. This makes early dialogue with NLHF particularly worthwhile before the environmental and heritage projects are developed separately.

The National Lottery Community Fund

The National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF) supports community-led activity across Scotland through several programmes. For a Riverside project of meaningful scale, the most relevant current programme is likely to be Community Action, which provides £20,001 to £250,000 for projects lasting up to five years. It focuses on open, inclusive and community-led projects that help people connect, address disadvantage and build on community strengths.

Projects must achieve at least two programme outcomes, which include building positive relationships, improving health and wellbeing, increasing people's connection with nature and making a positive difference to the environment. These outcomes align well with the overall Riverside vision, particularly where investment is accompanied by community participation, volunteering, youth activity and environmental stewardship.

The principal limitation is that Community Action is not primarily a capital programme. Capital expenditure can form part of an application but is currently limited to £50,000 of the overall request. This means it is better suited to programming, staff, volunteer activity, equipment and relatively modest physical improvements than to major paths, bridges or sports construction.

For Nairn, possible applications could bring together custodianship, citizen science, environmental volunteering, outdoor activity, youth engagement and improved connection with nature, with capital investment supporting delivery. The Community Fund should therefore be considered an important source for activating and sustaining the Riverside programme alongside capital funders responsible for the major infrastructure.

National Lottery Small Eco Awards

Small Eco Awards is a new National Lottery Community Fund programme launched in July 2026 specifically to help communities take practical local action for nature and the environment. Grants of £300 to £20,000 are available in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, with applications accepted on a rolling basis and decisions expected in approximately 12 weeks.

The programme supports projects that improve local places, protect nature, tackle pollution and waste, improve climate resilience and help people connect with the environment. It is deliberately accessible and applicants do not need to be specialist environmental organisations. Eligible organisations include constituted community groups, charities, not-for-profit companies, CICs, community benefit societies and, in certain circumstances, sports groups, schools and statutory bodies where the activity benefits the wider community.

This represents a particularly useful source for small, visible environmental projects within the Riverside programme. Potential applications might include native planting and habitat enhancement, biodiversity areas, environmental education, volunteer equipment, wildlife features, community monitoring, citizen-science activity, small-scale improvements improving people's access to nature or elements of the invasive-species programme. Given its modest award level and relatively straightforward purpose, Small Eco Awards could provide an early-win funding opportunity while larger environmental schemes progress through feasibility, permissions and applications to organisations such as HIEF and the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) are Scotland's regional economic and community development agency for the Highlands and Islands. Its support for communities is broader than a single grant programme and can include funding, specialist advice, community and asset development and support to strengthen organisational capacity. HIE places particular emphasis on strong, capable communities, inclusive growth, sustainability and community-led economic development.

HIE should therefore be viewed as both a potential investment partner and strategic development partner for the Riverside rather than as a guaranteed open capital fund. Its recent activity demonstrates continued investment in community-owned and community-led assets: in 2025/26, HIE recorded £15.2 million of capital-asset investment within supported community organisations and social enterprises and supported 277 community-led projects.

For NICE, HIE's relevance is likely to be strongest where Riverside investment contributes to place-making, visitor infrastructure, community enterprise, asset development, economic regeneration or sustainable community management. It could therefore be particularly valuable in developing the delivery model for facilities, visitor and heritage infrastructure or projects where community ownership or management is proposed.

HIE also jointly delivers the Scottish Land Fund, offering £5,000–£1 million where communities seek ownership of land or buildings, although that is relevant only if asset acquisition becomes part of the Riverside strategy. Early engagement with HIE's local team is recommended to establish what direct financial assistance or development support may be available as individual projects mature.

SSE Renewables – Sustainable Development Fund

The SSE Renewables Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) supports larger strategic community projects in areas associated with SSE's renewable-energy developments. Highland is an eligible region, with the Fund focusing on projects capable of producing significant and lasting benefits beyond the immediate communities hosting individual wind farms. Its priorities are creating opportunities, empowering communities and building sustainable places.

The sustainable-places theme is particularly relevant to the Riverside, supporting meaningful regeneration and improvements to local infrastructure, landscape, biodiversity and heritage. Projects are also expected to consider wider economic, social and environmental impacts. Recent funding demonstrates the scale at which the programme can operate in June 2026 SSE announced £2.1 million for 17 Highland projects, including awards supporting significant community capital investment.

The Riverside programme has a potentially good strategic fit where projects are packaged to demonstrate substantial long-term benefit rather than individual small interventions. A combined environmental, accessibility or community-infrastructure project could therefore warrant future discussion with SSE.

However, the timing is an important constraint. The Highland Sustainable Development Fund is currently closed and is not expected to reopen until autumn 2027. It should consequently be treated as a medium-term funding prospect. This may align reasonably well with projects requiring feasibility, permissions and detailed design, allowing NICE to prepare a strong pipeline proposal ahead of the next round rather than relying on the Fund for immediate implementation.

Haventus Ardersier Port Community Benefit Fund

The Haventus Ardersier Port Community Benefit Fund is administered by Foundation Scotland and provides a particularly relevant local funding opportunity. Established in 2024 by the owners of the Ardersier Energy Transition Facility, Haventus has committed £100,000 per year, inflation-linked, for ten years, providing more than £1 million of support to surrounding communities.

Crucially, eligible areas include Nairn West and Suburban Community Council, alongside Petty and Ardersier, Cawdor and West Nairnshire, and Croy and Culloden Moor. Organisations outside the defined areas may also be considered where they can demonstrate clear benefits to residents living within them. Grants are available up to £10,000, with small awards of £200–£1,000 accepted at any time and larger applications considered through scheduled rounds. The next stated large-grant deadline is 30 September 2026, followed by 6 January 2027.

The Fund supports charitable activity that improves quality of life, strengthens community activity and creates healthy, successful and sustainable communities. Eligible expenditure can include equipment, consultation, staffing and maintenance or refurbishment of community facilities. For the Riverside, it could support small public-realm improvements, environmental activity, youth and recreation projects, interpretation, equipment or community stewardship.

Given its geographic relevance, the Fund should be treated as a strong local match-funding opportunity, particularly for discrete projects up to £10,000 rather than major capital infrastructure.

Garfield Weston Foundation

The Garfield Weston Foundation is a UK-wide charitable foundation providing support across a broad range of charitable activity. Importantly for the Riverside, it funds capital projects, specific projects and core organisational costs. Capital funding can support building works, repairs and equipment required for an organisation's charitable activities.

For conventional community capital projects, the Foundation recommends that approximately half of the required project funding is already raised before an application is made. Capital awards are normally no more than around 10% of total capital costs and, for local community schemes such as community centres and similar facilities, awards are generally unlikely to exceed approximately £30,000. Larger requests are possible under the Major Grants process, but projects seeking major capital support generally need a total project value of at least £1 million.

The Fund is therefore best viewed as a valuable match funder rather than the principal investor in the Riverside. Its strongest relevance is likely to be to projects delivered by an eligible charitable organisation, including football or pavilion facilities, athletics infrastructure, wheeled sports and youth facilities, community amenities and potentially environmental or heritage projects where there is a clear charitable purpose.

Applications will require robust costs, evidence of organisational capacity and a credible approach to future operating costs. Where buildings are involved, applicants should normally have ownership, or a sufficiently long lease and relevant permissions should already be in place.

Gordon & Ena Baxter Foundation

The Gordon & Ena Baxter Foundation is a particularly relevant regional charitable funder because it supports organisations operating across Highland, Moray, Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, the Western Isles,

Orkney and Shetland. Its funding themes include health and wellbeing, arts and heritage, and conservation and the environment, creating several potential connections with the Riverside programme.

The Foundation is specifically a capital funder. It considers applications for tangible assets expected to benefit organisations over the longer term, including buildings, fixtures, fittings, equipment and vehicles. It does not generally support project overheads, routine maintenance, feasibility studies, research, events, land or existing-building purchases, or projects considered to be principally the responsibility of a statutory authority. Applicants must have at least one year of accounts and normally need to wait three years following an award or unsuccessful application before reapplying.

For the Riverside, this suggests the Foundation could be a useful contributor to community-owned or managed sporting facilities, pavilion equipment, wheeled-sports infrastructure, interpretation equipment or tangible environmental improvements. Its environmental theme may also create opportunities around habitat or conservation infrastructure, provided the expenditure is clearly capital in nature.

The next stated 2026 deadline is 30 October 2026, with decisions expected in early December. Given both its Highland geography and capital focus, the Foundation should be considered a worthwhile match-funding source, although project responsibilities and ownership structures will need to be clear before an application is submitted.

National Lottery Awards for All Scotland

National Lottery Awards for All Scotland is an accessible small-grants programme administered by The National Lottery Community Fund. It currently offers £300–£20,000 for community-led projects lasting up to two years, with applications accepted on a rolling basis and decisions normally made within approximately 12 weeks.

The programme focuses on projects that bring people together, strengthen relationships, improve important community places and spaces and help people reach their potential. It can support new activity, continuation of existing work and one-off initiatives, making it flexible for early-stage or relatively modest interventions.

For the Riverside, Awards for All is unlikely to finance major capital projects such as bridge replacement, substantial path construction or large sports facilities. Its value instead lies in supporting smaller project components and community activation. Potential examples include environmental volunteering, youth co-design, outdoor learning, citizen science, heritage interpretation, small recreation equipment, seating or modest public-space improvements, volunteer equipment and pilot activity associated with the proposed custodianship model.

It may also provide a useful means of progressing an early demonstrator project while more complex schemes move through design and funding development. Because the wider Riverside engagement already provides a substantial evidence base, individual applications can demonstrate how relatively modest investment responds to community priorities and contributes to the longer-term Improvement Plan.

Hugh Fraser Foundation

The Hugh Fraser Foundation is a Scottish grant-making trust supporting registered charitable organisations across a wide range of themes. Areas supported include arts and culture, health, education, the environment, care and support for younger and older people, disability and disadvantaged communities. The Trustees are particularly interested in areas of Scotland where local economic circumstances can make charitable fundraising more difficult.

The Foundation can support both capital and revenue expenditure, giving it greater flexibility than some charitable trusts. Applicants generally need to be registered charities or eligible community interest companies, meaning the identity of the organisation taking forward each Riverside project will be important. There is no standard application form; submissions should explain the organisation and project, provide an appropriate budget and include recent accounts or other relevant financial information. Trustees normally

meet four times each year. The next stated deadline is 30 October 2026 for consideration at the December meeting.

For the Nairn Riverside, the Foundation could potentially contribute towards environmental improvements, accessible recreation, community amenities, youth provision, sporting infrastructure or heritage activity, particularly where a charitable applicant can demonstrate clear and lasting community benefit. It is likely to be most useful as part of a broader package of charitable and public funding rather than as the principal source for large infrastructure.

Its comparatively broad remit means applications should be carefully focused on a specific deliverable and beneficiary outcome rather than seeking generic support for the overall Riverside programme.

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation

The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation is a major UK charitable foundation, but it operates differently from many conventional capital grant programmes. Its current strategy is centred on three aims: Our Natural World, A Fairer Future and Creative, Confident Communities, with funding targeted at organisations capable of achieving significant long-term impact and influencing wider change. Applications are generally accepted on a rolling basis through an initial Expression of Interest, followed by assessment and a fuller proposal where invited.

The Our Natural World programme has particular relevance to the Riverside, with priorities including creating space for nature and achieving clean and healthy freshwater. The Foundation seeks work that restores and protects nature while benefiting people, and places particular value on collaboration, wider influence, systems change and projects capable of generating learning beyond a single site.

This means a straightforward application for paths, planting or small capital works would be unlikely to represent the strongest fit. However, a more ambitious River Nairn partnership programme addressing freshwater ecology, habitat connectivity, community stewardship, catchment management, invasive species, monitoring and citizen science could merit exploration, particularly if delivered with organisations such as the Rivers Trust and capable of generating approaches applicable elsewhere.

Esmée Fairbairn should therefore be classed as a strategic and potentially high value but competitive prospect, principally for the environmental programme rather than general Riverside infrastructure. Early informal assessment of strategic fit would be advisable before significant application development is undertaken.

Highlands and Islands Environment Foundation

The Highlands and Islands Environment Foundation (HIEF) is one of the clearest charitable funding matches for the Riverside's environmental projects. HIEF supports community-led projects protecting and restoring nature throughout the Scottish Highlands and Islands, with grants currently ranging from £5,000 to £20,000. It also offers potential Crowdfunder match pledges of up to £10,000.

Projects must demonstrate a clear and measurable environmental benefit and be either community-led or able to evidence strong community involvement. HIEF's four current areas of interest are tackling environmental threats, protecting habitats and species, restoring ecosystems and empowering communities for nature. It favours projects delivering sustainable long-term results, developing community capacity and, where possible, approaches that can be replicated or scaled elsewhere.

This creates a particularly strong fit with the proposed Riverside Biodiversity and Habitat Improvement Programme, Invasive Species Management Programme, River Stewardship and Citizen Science, and potentially defined components of other projects. The Foundation has already supported environmental projects within the Nairn area, including work associated with Nairn dune resilience, demonstrating direct geographic relevance.

HIEF operates three application periods annually. The final 2026 Expression of Interest deadline was 7 September, meaning the immediate round has just closed, but future rounds should be monitored. For individual environmental packages of £5,000–£20,000, HIEF should be regarded as a high-priority prospect.

Outline Implementation Plan

The Riverside Improvement Plan provides a framework for delivery rather than a commitment to implement all projects simultaneously. The programme comprises projects of significantly different scales, complexities and levels of readiness. Some relatively modest interventions can progress in the short term, while larger projects will require further feasibility, technical assessment, partnership development, permissions and funding. The Plan identifies an anticipated lead organisation and broad delivery timescale for each project, with NICE expected to lead or coordinate much of the programme while other projects are more appropriately progressed by The Highland Council, sports clubs or environmental/community partners.

Implementation should therefore be phased and opportunity-led, allowing projects to progress as funding, organisational capacity and technical information become available. Delivery does not need to follow a single sequential programme: several projects can progress concurrently, with early practical improvements helping demonstrate momentum while feasibility and funding are developed for larger schemes. Importantly, delivery should be viewed through the wider placemaking objectives of the Plan. Success will not depend solely on delivering capital projects, but also on protecting and enhancing green space, supporting health and wellbeing, improving accessibility and safety, strengthening biodiversity and encouraging community involvement and stewardship. This broader approach also creates opportunities to align individual projects with funding programmes across health and wellbeing, active travel, environment, community development and place.

Immediate / Short-Term Actions (0-2 Years)	The initial focus should be on establishing the partnerships, responsibilities and information required to move from the Improvement Plan into delivery. Key actions should include: • Confirm a named lead organisation and project champion for each project and establish the principal delivery partners. • Establish a small Riverside coordination group, led or facilitated by NICE, to maintain oversight of the programme and coordinate activity between partners. • Provide early support to Nairnshire Athletics Club to resolve its lease and occupancy arrangements at the Maggot. Securing a clear and sufficiently robust tenure should be treated as a priority, providing the Club with greater certainty and establishing the basis from which it can plan investment, pursue external funding and take forward improvements to the athletics facilities. This should involve early dialogue between the Club, relevant landowner(s), The Highland Council and NICE, with NICE supporting coordination where appropriate. • Once the lease position is clarified, support Nairnshire Athletics Club to develop the next stage of the Maggot Athletics Improvement Programme, including an agreed facility brief, assessment of priority improvements and development of proportionate costed options. The Plan already identifies the Club as the lead organisation and the project as a short-term priority. • Progress other relatively deliverable short-term projects, including lighting and wayfinding, interpretation and heritage, public realm improvements, biodiversity enhancement, invasive-species management and river stewardship/citizen science.

	• Begin the condition, accessibility and connectivity audit required to develop the Riverside Path Improvement Programme, including consideration of previous active-travel work and priority missing links. • Establish the proposed custodianship, management and maintenance arrangements, ensuring that new investment is accompanied by clear responsibility for its future care. • Maintain engagement with users, schools, young people, sports clubs and environmental organisations as individual projects move towards design.
Medium-Term Project Development (2-5 Years)	• The larger capital projects should move through a more detailed development process before significant funding applications are submitted. This includes football and pavilion improvements, Mill Road Wheeled Sports and Youth Activity Hub, play and informal recreation improvements, together with larger elements of the paths programme. • For each project, the next stage should establish a clear project brief, ownership and delivery model; undertake necessary site and technical investigations; develop concept or outline designs; and refine capital and lifecycle costs. Particular attention will be required where proposals lie within the floodplain. The Plan recognises that substantial structures, synthetic surfaces and changes to ground levels may require more detailed flood-risk assessment. • Funding strategies should then be developed on a project-by-project basis, identifying appropriate lead and match funders. Where beneficial, related projects should be packaged together – for example environmental projects, access improvements or sport and youth provision – to create stronger strategic funding propositions.
Longer-Term Delivery (5+ Years)	• The Bridge Accessibility and Renewal Programme is expected to require a longer delivery period because of engineering, ownership, funding and regulatory complexities. The Highland Council is identified as the principal lead, supported by NICE. Initial work should nevertheless commence earlier through confirmation of ownership and maintenance responsibilities, structural and accessibility assessments and preparation of a prioritised programme for the Jubilee, Merryton and Bailey bridges. • Longer-term delivery should also respond to changes in funding availability, other investment within Nairn and opportunities created by related projects. The Improvement Plan should therefore remain a live framework, capable of adapting as projects are completed and new opportunities emerge.
Review and Monitoring	NICE should undertake an annual review of implementation, recording projects completed, funding secured, projects progressing through development and any changes to priorities or delivery responsibilities. An early review should specifically monitor progress in resolving the Athletics Club's tenure, given its importance in unlocking future investment in the Maggot facilities. Success should ultimately be assessed not simply by the amount of capital investment secured, but by whether the programme results in a Riverside that is better connected, more accessible, environmentally stronger, more active and better cared for, while retaining the natural and informal qualities that are central to its value to Nairn.