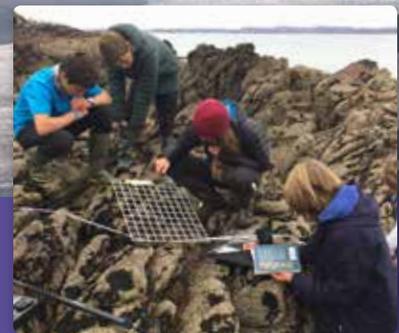


# NorthWest2045



OUR FUTURE, OUR CHOICE



## A Community Vision for the Future of the North West Highlands

Lèirsinn Coimhearsnachdan Iar-thuath na  
Gàidhealtachd airson an Àm ri Teachd

July 2022 An t-Iuchar 2022

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# Executive Summary

## Geàrr-chunntas ghnìomhaiche

We are renowned for our rich Gaelic culture and heritage, and our iconic landscapes and natural assets are valued by residents and visitors alike. Yet our communities face challenges of extreme population sparsity and chronic depopulation. Houses are unaffordable to most local people; school rolls are falling and jobs are scarce.

The world is ever changing and Scotland is considering how to address the challenges of the climate crisis, the repercussions of the Pandemic, and rural depopulation. With the urban population globally now larger than the rural population for the first time in history, it is not surprising that new visions of the future often focus on the urban context.

The success of many of the new policies relies heavily on the contribution of rural populations. How they evolve and adapt over the coming decades will determine our progress towards becoming “a more successful country with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish through increased wellbeing, and sustainable and inclusive economic growth”<sup>2</sup>.

We have areas with vast natural capital, and we therefore have a massive role to play: the North West Highlands has the opportunity to demonstrate to the world how rural areas such as ours can evolve to meet challenges whilst safeguarding our heritage that is so precious to us, and our many visitors.

The NorthWest2045 project is a unique collective of local partners: community groups, local development trusts, landowners and statutory bodies from across the North West Highlands, with a common interest in working together to see the area thrive economically, socially, culturally and environmentally. We came together to find the collective voice of the North West Highlands, and to develop a long-term vision for our future. From our extensive engagement with our communities three main Visions have emerged:

### 1. Vision 1: A place that is attractive for young people and families to live and work

*Àite tarraingeach do dhaoine òga agus do theaghlaichean*

The pandemic, with the acceleration towards remote working, has led many people to question what a good quality of life means to them, and to realise the importance of nature in

supporting mental wellbeing. It is now possible to pursue careers in a broad range of sectors whilst enjoying the high quality of life offered by rural areas. We need suitable infrastructure in place – such as affordable homes and reliable digital connectivity – so that we can retain and attract diverse people to live and work here and play an active role in community life. We will then be able to build the critical mass required for high quality services – including full, thriving schools which are the lifeblood of the community – to generate a virtuous cycle of community renewal and vitality.

### 2. Vision 2: A model for a new diverse and sustainable rural economy

*Modail ùr de threabhadas dùthchail seasmhach iolarach*

Rural economies of the future may look quite different and our research found that our communities want to develop a diverse rural economy that is less reliant on just a few seasonal industries. Both natural capital and remote working may feature more prominently, bringing new jobs, professions and skills to the area, but this will take time. We are therefore keen to invest in our enterprise infrastructure (for example, well-resourced ‘rural hubs’) to promote this transition, whilst supporting existing activities such as crofting and fishing to evolve towards more sustainable practice and seizing the immediate opportunities of key industries such as renewable energy and sustainable food production.

### 3. Vision 3: A place where our communities can determine their own prospects

*Coimhearsnachdan aig stiùir am beatha fhèin*

The national brand of Scotland is built on a vision of beautiful wild places, but what voice do the people of these rural places have in shaping their own futures, and that of our nation? Support to develop strong local capacity and democracy would catalyse our communities to seize new economic opportunities as they arise, and to address questions of land management – working with landowners from all sectors.

The Visions are interconnected – as the Routemap we have developed shows – and the partners of the NorthWest2045 Vision are committed to collaborating with each other and others to achieve them. We will need support to achieve real change,

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2. National Performance Framework;  
<https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/national-outcomes>

and we have outlined a number of ‘asks’ alongside the Visions.

In July 2021 we produced a short version of this Vision to be shared with key decision-makers across local and national government bodies, private business and investment to identify and shape key opportunities for development for the area. The Vision has been well received – Maree Todd MSP generously provided a Foreword – and has already catalysed action.

In this longer version of the Vision we have an opportunity to expand on themes and present more of the details of our findings and suggestions for action. Further data from the various surveys and consultations is available on request.

**The NorthWest2045 Vision is one of thriving and resilient communities, making best use of our resources, and leading the way in building the rural economies of the future.**



## Foreword Facal-toisich

*This Foreword was written by Maree Todd MSP for the short version of the NorthWest2045 Vision.*

This Foreword was written by Maree Todd MSP for the short version of the NorthWest2045 Vision.

I am delighted to introduce the NorthWest2045 Community Vision for the Future of the North West Highlands. This represents a remarkable coming together of community groups, local development trusts, landowners, charities and statutory bodies, to define and push for a more prosperous and sustainable future.

Their vision, of a place that is attractive for young people and families to live and work, with a diverse and sustainable rural economy, where communities are empowered to determine their own prospects, is one that has been created in collaboration with local people: Those growing up, going to school, living and working in the North West Highlands. I too share in this vision.

The following document contains bold ambition and clarity of purpose. It is an important step toward realising our shared aspirations and I would like to offer my congratulations to all involved in its creation. What it also makes clear, are the challenges faced by the North West Highlands here and now, as well as the work we must do to overcome those challenges and build toward a brighter future. In this, you have my continuing support.

*Maree Todd*

Member of Scottish Parliament  
Caithness, Sutherland and Ross

# Introduction Ro-ràdh

## About the NorthWest2045 Project

*Fiosrachadh mu dheidhinn am pròiseict NW2045*

The NorthWest2045 project is a unique collective of local partners, with representatives from community groups, local development trusts, landowners and statutory bodies from across the North West Highlands. We have a common interest in working together to see the area thrive economically, socially, culturally and environmentally.

Together we have worked with communities from Coigach and Assynt in the South, north to Durness and east to Bettyhill and the River Naver. We tried hard to engage people throughout the demographic range, and have particularly focused on amplifying the voices of young people: this is their future, and their involvement is crucial to ensure it is a vibrant one.

### Our objectives

- ▶ Co-create a **community-led, long-term vision** for the future of North West Highlands to the year 2045 through a wide engagement process that allows the **collective community voice** to be heard externally.
- ▶ Develop a platform for the community **voice to shape opportunities** now and in the future.
- ▶ Establish a **partnership approach with decision-makers** in local and national government, private industry and key agencies to inform and explore place-based solutions and opportunities for development in the area.

We believe there are genuine opportunities on the horizon for developing a more diverse and resilient rural economy; from using our natural assets to help meet national climate targets and contributing to a sustainable food system for Scotland, to capitalising on the rising interest in remote working and other industry investments bringing new skills and residents.

We are particularly optimistic about the possible developments of the natural capital of the Northwest and **have used '2045' in our name to align with the Scottish Government's pledge for Scotland to be carbon neutral by 2045<sup>2</sup>**. However, it is crucial that this is achieved via a Just Transition and a Green Recovery from the Pandemic.

### Methodology

Through our ethos and methodology we believe we have developed an approach that is distinct from the many community consultations that have gone before, which can help to build the foundations for a thriving future.

Our methodology comprised the following elements:

- ▶ **Online Survey for 16–40-year-olds** with approximately 90 respondents
- ▶ **Recruited and trained 8 young local interviewers from throughout the project area (as a result of the online survey)**
- ▶ **Young interviewers completed 65 Interviews**
  - **A targeted list was devised by the project partners and local interviewers, to achieve a broad range across education and employment status, sector, age and across all settlements.**
- ▶ **A Public survey circulated, with 248 completed**
  - **Circulated by Project partners, Local Development Trusts, Community Councils, Schools and interviewers**
  - **Targeted list developed to ensure broad representation**
- ▶ **School engagement with 33 responses**
  - **Dedicated school student survey designed for the three High Schools in the area, and follow-up online discussions held.**
  - **Responses: 14 from Ullapool, 12 from Farr, 7 from Kinlochbervie.**
- ▶ **Methodology design and data analysis with research support and input from local interviewers to identify key findings**
- ▶ **Local workshops focused on three areas (Coigach & Assynt; Scourie, Kinlochbervie and Durness; Tongue & Bettyhill) held online with local residents to test findings and further shape the Vision.**

Through these varied methods we estimate that we have engaged approximately 10% of the population of the area, and we feel we are building a collective approach to achieve the critical mass and coherent response that is necessary to meet the opportunities on the horizon. We have engaged as widely as possible to ensure those who often go unheard, and our young people, have a voice.

We have used the opportunity to invest in local capacity by directly involving young people (many of whose lives had been disrupted by the pandemic) – which we hope may strengthen community leadership for the long-term prosperity of our people and place.

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2. Energy Saving Trust (2021)

[Net zero by 2045: how Scotland is tackling the climate emergency](#)

In July 2021 we produced a short version of this Vision to be shared with key decision-makers across local and national government bodies, private business and investment to identify and shape key opportunities for development for the area. The Vision has been well received – Maree Todd MSP generously provided a Foreword – and has already catalysed action.

In this longer version of the Vision we have an opportunity to expand on themes and present more of the detail of our findings and suggestions for action. Further data from the various surveys and consultations is available on request.

## Our People and Place

### Ar coimhearsnachd agus ar àrainneachd

#### Why the North West Highlands?

*Iar-thuath na Gàidhealtachd- carson?*

The North West Highlands is an extraordinary place. The spectacular scenery, with small settlements scattered around the coast and amongst dramatic mountains, gives it world-class appeal. The land, sea and wildlife have multiple Protections and Designations that signal its value on a national and even global level. The peat and boglands are part of the widest expanse in Europe, and a critical carbon sink<sup>3</sup>. Meanwhile, our oceans are an important stock of 'Blue Carbon'<sup>4</sup>.

Our small communities are mutually supportive, and many experience a high quality of life in this stunning, spacious place. We are also innovative and motivated; this is the home of Scotland's first community land purchases almost 30 years ago.

But it is not always an easy place to live. This is one of the most sparsely populated areas in the country: the area of almost 3000km<sup>2</sup> has a population of around 3000 people, giving us a density of 1.12 people / km<sup>2</sup>; compared with an average of 70 people / km<sup>2</sup> across Scotland, and the Western Isles of 9 people /km<sup>2</sup>. Quality local services are difficult to maintain and we must travel long distances on poor roads to access many basic services.

Due to these – and other, associated – issues, our small population is ageing and declining. Sutherland (which makes up a large part of the area)



is projected to experience a 12% population decline from 2016-2040<sup>5</sup> (in contrast to the Scottish projection of a 2.5% rise from 2018-2043<sup>6</sup>) and school rolls are small and falling<sup>7</sup>. Despite the falling population there is a shortage of housing available for residents, due in-part to the market for second homes and holiday lets, which drives prices above the national average and above locally affordable prices<sup>8</sup>. Compounded by the paucity of training and employment options, this makes it very hard for our young people to stay; recent research shows they are vulnerable to feeling lonely and disenfranchised<sup>9</sup>. If they do stay, and have a family, childcare provision is scant and it costs 10% to 30% more for families with children to live in rural Scotland than in an urban area.<sup>10</sup>

With the fall in population comes the threat of reduced democratic representation, and a further erosion of services. A degenerative cycle of dwindling jobs, school closures and loss of other services could lead to the North West Highlands losing its vibrancy and cultural value, becoming little more than a tourist park.

Our area comprises 3.5% of the landmass of Scotland and 13% of National Scenic Areas<sup>11</sup>,

5. [Highlands And Islands Area Profiles 2020 Caithness & Sutherland](#)

6. [National Records of Scotland](#)

7. [Highland Council School Roll Forecasts 2021](#)

8. Coigach Housing Needs Survey Report (2018). Coigach Community Development Company (not online).

9. University of Edinburgh (2021) [Young adults loneliest in rural Scotland during Covid](#)

10. Glass, J., Bynner, C. and Chapman, C. (2020). [Children and young people and rural poverty and social exclusion: A review of evidence](#). Glasgow: Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland.

11. The project area contains 13% of Scotland's NSAs by land area, these cover approximately 60% of the project area. See Scottish Government. (2010). [National Scenic Areas of Scotland Maps](#)

3. [Plantlife Important Plant Areas – Caithness & Sutherland Peatlands and Peatland ACTION Carbon Facts](#)

4. SNH 2017 [Assessment of Blue Carbon Resources in Scotland's Inshore Marine Protected Area Network](#)

## The context



### Connectivity:

58.8% of households here do not have access to superfast broadband, compared to 3% nationally



### Scottish Government per capita spending:

Highland: £2544  
Western Isles: £4146  
Shetland: £4589



### Welfare:

From March-December 2020, North and West Sutherland saw a 153% increase in Universal Credit claimants



### School rolls:

High School rolls across the area are at an average of just 29% of their capacity and are forecast to fall by a quarter to 22% by 2035



### Population decline:

Sutherland is projected to experience a 12% population decline from 2016-2040 in contrast to the Scottish projection of a 2.5% rise from 2018-2043

but has only 0.06%<sup>12</sup> of the population. There are considerable natural assets under our stewardship, and we therefore need the voice to influence decisions on these and wider issues affecting our place and communities.

The problems have been exacerbated by the Pandemic; in Caithness and Sutherland 43% of people are employed in the sectors most exposed to the economic effects of COVID; higher than the Scottish average (38%)<sup>13</sup>. We will need significant recovery support to achieve a Green Recovery, especially if we are to meet the ambitious target of Net Zero Carbon Emissions by 2045 in an equitable way.

We are genuinely fearful about the viability of our communities in the future, but we have a strong desire and collective ambition to reverse this decline and address the interconnected difficulties we are facing. We also know that the Scottish Government is aware of the difficulties we face, and is committed to supporting repopulation and other supportive measures as we build towards a Green Recovery and a Just Transition to a low carbon world. Our communities can support Government efforts to create place-based change and real, tangible improvements to livelihoods.

We are all facing the vast challenges of the climate crisis, the impact of the pandemic, Brexit and the biodiversity crisis. We feel this extraordinary moment presents opportunities for our communities to work collaboratively with agencies to revive community life, and to ensure that we thrive: economically, socially, culturally and environmentally.

## Our visions in brief:

The NorthWest2045 project has given us a comprehensive view of the issues faced by communities. We have three broad 'visions' for addressing them:

- ▶ **Vision 1:** A place that is attractive / possible for young people & families to live & work
- ▶ **Vision 2:** A model for a new diverse and sustainable rural economy
- ▶ **Vision 3:** A place where communities have the ability to determine their own prospects

These Visions, and the various ways in which they might be achieved, are explored in more depth in the [Our Visions](#) section.

## The View from our Young People

### *Beachdan na h-òigridh*

Because the populations of these communities tend to be aging, we know that our young people face a particular suite of challenges. We therefore made a concerted effort to engage with young people and understand the issues they experience.

The data we gathered illuminated the experience of young people growing up in this area. There are of course many benefits of a childhood free from the constraints of urban life. Indeed, our data showed the most attractive factors to be the environment and landscape; local culture and community; quality of life, and family. The majority of those we surveyed (66%) do want to continue to live in rural Scotland.

However, the image of a 'rural idyll' can mask issues of concern for children and young people including poverty and other social issues. Loneliness

12. Op. Cit. Highland Council (2019); and National Records of Scotland. (2014). [Scotland's Population at its Highest Ever](#)

13. SNH 2017 [Assessment of Blue Carbon Resources in Scotland's Inshore Marine Protected Area Network](#)

amongst young people in rural areas is a real issue: in a recent survey of 3000 young people in rural areas of Scotland 32% of those aged 18 to 29 years old felt lonely most or all of the time. This compares with 3% in the 70 to 79 age group, compared to the national average for adults 7.2 %.<sup>14</sup>

Social isolation is exacerbated by lack of dedicated areas to meet and a dearth of organised activities. Without ‘sanctioned space’ in which to congregate, young people can be very conspicuous when they do get together and can be seen as a problem rather than as contributory members of their communities. This may exacerbate issues around agency and the feeling of being able to contribute to decisions made locally: a survey of rural young people from across the UK and other countries found that only 13% of those who took part feel that they have a say in the future of their own communities.<sup>15</sup>

Our research showed that even those who may want to live here in the longer term accept that they will need to move away for life experience, education and training – but this is not a negative in itself. Crucial factors in enabling them to move back again are paid skilled jobs; improved communications and access; availability of land or housing, and a critical mass of other young people.

*“That it becomes possible that returning is not a sacrifice in terms of work, social, culture, connectivity and connection to the world. That it becomes affordable to live there, and less beholden to tourism for income”*

(16-35, Young survey respondent, Coigach)

*“I don’t want to be stuck in a place where there is nothing to do and no jobs”*

(11-17, Farr High School)

*“That it will remain a beautiful landscape and be well protected, without leaving the villages deserted in a few decades due to very elderly populations”*

Our young people consider key priorities for their future to be jobs and a diverse economy, and exploring opportunities for an environmentally sustainable economy. Interestingly, more of the young respondents than older cohorts expressed an understanding that environmental issues and economic activity are not mutually exclusive.

*“I hope that there is an increase in the number of young people staying in the local area and making a life for*

*themselves. It would also be great to see an increase in local businesses with a real focus on environmental and community sustainability.”*

*“For me, sustainability and nature-based jobs are the highest priority when it comes to our future as a species on this planet. If this does not change imminently, the rest is futile.”*

(25-33, Assynt, Health and Care/Tourism/  
Environment/Education)

## Why now? Opportunities in the external environment: existing policies and mechanisms

*Poleasaidhean agus uidheaman-obrach ceangailte ri cothraman iomruith san farsaineachd an dràsta*

We are optimistic that with the energy and vision of our communities – and by working through a diverse, innovative partnership – we will be able to make the most of the many **promising opportunities in the external environment**, including:

- ▶ The **2045 net zero carbon target**
- ▶ The drive for a **Just Transition** to a low carbon economy and a **Green Recovery** from the Pandemic.
- ▶ The **Community Wealth Building** approach

### 1. Our natural assets support environmental targets

With the unique value of our natural assets, we are already making a meaningful contribution to meeting our climate change targets, and we are interested in how we can push further.

Scotland is committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2045 (and a 75% reduction by 2030)<sup>16</sup>. The North West Highlands can make a significant contribution to meeting these targets, through protection and restoration of our abundant natural assets on land and seas, through high-value carbon sequestration of peat, forestry, sustainable crofting practice, and ‘Blue Carbon’ off our extensive coast. For instance, The Scottish Government has a target to increase woodland cover in Scotland to 21% of the land area by 2032<sup>17</sup>; in Coigach & Assynt the cover is currently just 6.5%<sup>18</sup>: there is significant potential for increase. Meanwhile, the area is a combination of

14. University of Edinburgh (2021) [Young adults loneliest in rural Scotland during Covid](#), and Office For National Statistics 2021: [Mapping loneliness during the coronavirus pandemic](#)

15. Jane Craigie Marketing, [Rural Youth Project - 2018 Survey Report](#)

16. Energy Saving Trust (2021) [Net zero by 2045: how Scotland is tackling the climate emergency](#)

17. [Scotland’s Forestry Strategy](#)

18. [CALL Project Woodland Expansion](#)

Class 1 & Class 2 – nationally important carbon rich soil<sup>19</sup>. The peat and boglands are part of the widest expanse in Europe<sup>20</sup> – a critical carbon sink<sup>21</sup>; it is important that we explore the implications of this for local people.

The importance of ‘Blue Carbon’ is beginning to be recognised – the sea lochs of Scotland’s west coast are a particularly rich store of Inorganic Carbon<sup>22</sup>: we need to better understand the value of our coastline for storage and sequestration, and associated biodiversity habitats.

There is also potential for the expansion of renewables, including off- and on-shore wind and hydro-electric power. Our hope is that investments in industry related to our natural assets - renewable energy, forestry, peatland restoration, sustainable agriculture, eco-tourism, and land and marine management - can help bring greater economic and social stability through new, high skilled jobs. We welcome the opportunity to work with national agencies such as NatureScot to explore these possibilities.

## 2. A Just Transition and a Green Recovery for the people of North West Highlands

Whilst our natural assets provide high potential for carbon sequestration, it is difficult for residents to reduce their own carbon footprints: patchy broadband provision and the lack of local services mean people have to travel many miles to meet basic needs; the road infrastructure is poor, and public transport provision is scant. Therefore, aspirations to reduce car travel and live in ‘20 Minute Neighbourhoods’ – as proposed by the Government’s Programme for Scotland 2020-2021<sup>23</sup> – are currently impossible here.

Compounding this situation, we have some of the highest rates of fuel poverty in Scotland – over 40% of the households in Sutherland said to be in fuel poverty<sup>24</sup> – so policies that disincentivise the use of fossil fuels will disproportionately impact those on low incomes.

The Just Transition Commission states that Justice and Equity are integral in the transition to a low carbon world<sup>25</sup>. We view the push for a Just

Transition as a critical opportunity to redress the inequalities that are driving young people from the area year after year, and instead create inclusive and sustainable economic growth. Potential solutions – which are explored later in the document – include: improving broadband and digital access; creating local multi-use hubs to deliver a range of services whilst cutting costs and emissions for residents; developing sustainable travel opportunities.

Furthermore, as the country invests to recover from the Pandemic, it is crucial that we do so in ways that will also help address the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change: a Green Recovery<sup>26</sup> will benefit both people and nature.

## 3. Community Wealth Building for a new rural economy

The Community Wealth Building (CWB) approach is a people-centred approach to local economic development, which redirects wealth back into the local economy and places control and benefits into the hands of local people. CWB aims to build a ‘wellbeing economy’<sup>27</sup> – which the Scottish Government is committed to, as

*“an economy that is inclusive and that promotes sustainability, prosperity and resilience, where businesses can thrive and innovate, and that supports all of our communities across Scotland to access opportunities that deliver local growth and wellbeing.”<sup>28</sup>*

We feel that this CWB approach aligns with our aspirations for a more resilient and self-reliant local economy. Residents want a greater say over their resources, and for more of the benefit produced by land and renewables assets to be retained locally.

‘Placemaking’ in such sparsely populated rural areas will need to take a distinct approach: as mentioned above, the ‘20 Minute Neighbourhood’ is not realistic for our dispersed population, but planning at Local Authority or even Ward level is too large scale to be meaningful for residents. We therefore need a more appropriate level of development.

We have identified strong similarities among communities across in the North West Highlands – in both challenges and aspirations – and feel that a CWB approach could be piloted in our area. The area has strong community cohesion, support and action,

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19. Scotland’s Soils – [Carbon and Peatland 2016 Map](#)

20. [Plantlife: Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands – Important Plant Areas.](#)

21. [Scottish Natural Heritage. Peatland Action: Peatland and Carbon.](#)

22. Smeaton *et al* (2020): Re-Evaluating Scotland’s Sedimentary Carbon Stocks, [Scottish Marine and Freshwater Science Vol 11 No 2.](#)

23. Scottish Government (2020). [Protecting Scotland, Renewing Scotland](#), Page 58

24. Sutherland Community Partnership. (2020). [About Our Area.](#)

25. Scottish Government. (2021) [Just Transition Commission: A National Mission for a fairer, greener Scotland.](#)

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26. Scottish Government (update Dec 2020) [Securing a green recovery on a path to net zero: climate change plan 2018–2032](#)

27. See Guinan, J. *et al.* (2020) Owing the Future: [After Covid-19: A New Era of Community Wealth Building.](#)

28. Scottish Governments: [Wellbeing Economy Governments](#)

and a focus on local development priorities through its many Development Trusts. But people want to take this further, to see local institutions invest more to create a model of inclusive growth which can improve the job stability and incomes of working age people. There is a particular interest in strengthening local food production and consumption, as outlined in the Local Food Strategy in the Programme for Government<sup>29</sup>.

The experience of community support during the pandemic has helped to reinforce our desires for measures to build greater resilience in services, products and facilities – both for individual communities and together across the wider area.

## Key Mechanisms

We are already exploring some ‘key mechanisms’ which we believe can help us meet the opportunities described above.

1. Regional Land Use Partnerships (RLUP)
2. Repopulation Zones
3. Revitalised Crofting and Productive Land

### 1. Regional Land Use Partnerships (RLUP)

The mechanisms above are concerned with the management of land, particularly in relation to Scotland’s climate targets. RLUPs are a proposed decision-making framework to help achieve these climate targets through land use change. RLUPs will enable national and local government, land owners, stakeholders and local communities to work in partnership to make decisions and optimise land use in a fair and inclusive way – meeting local and national objectives and helping achieve Scotland’s climate change targets.

Highland Council is one of the first Local Authorities to trial the RLUP approach, and – largely due to the work of this project – the area of the NorthWest2045 project has been chosen as the pilot area for the RLUP. Assynt Development Trust, on behalf of the wider NorthWest2045 group, will employ a project manager to establish the partnership, then develop the frameworks for the following year.

This is a vital chance to explore how the drive for carbon sequestration will create long term opportunities for investment, industry, skills and jobs.

### 2. Repopulation Zones

The concept of ‘Repopulation Zones’ is being developed by the Convention of the Highlands and Islands to allow targeted interventions within areas that are experiencing particularly serious

depopulation. Zones would be provided with tools to drive innovation and to build new approaches that are appropriate to local circumstances – all specifically aimed at improving local population dynamics. Meanwhile, rural repopulation is a key theme of the Scottish Government’s National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) and although private developers are responsible for construction, Local Authorities are tasked with identifying suitable land for development.

The Highland Council have chosen our area to pilot this concept and wish to align the work with the NorthWest2045 group – *‘in no small way, due to the very dynamic and strong partnership [of the NorthWest2045 project]’*<sup>30</sup>. The Highland Council will recruit a Settlement Officer (a new job in the area) to look at housing issues in particular; identify land; collect data; overcome barriers; and liaise with communities and landowners with the aim to build a minimum of 4 homes during the pilot. They also wish to look at Community Wealth Building and facilitate what is required in collaboration with HIE.

### 3. ‘Revitalised’ Crofting and Productive Land

The National Development Plan for Crofting<sup>31</sup> published in April 2021 recognises the importance of crofting in rural communities, and of optimising land as a key asset to produce food more sustainably, to cut emissions and enhance our environment. Similarly, the 3rd Land Use Strategy<sup>32</sup> (March 2021) provides a holistic picture of sustainable land use, focusing on the importance of land for sustainable jobs, nature-based solutions, a circular economy and the transition to a low carbon society.

The way we use our land is crucial to sustaining our communities and, in the decades to come, will be a key part of delivering Scotland’s environmental and climate goals, whilst also providing important social benefits.

We are also interested in how local people can benefit from the opportunities for investment and subsidy around carbon sequestration and payments for economic services<sup>33</sup>. The North West Highlands could be an ideal place to test this in partnership with the Scottish Government and other agencies, with a focus on benefits reaching communities.

29. Scottish Government (2020). [Protecting Scotland, Renewing Scotland](#).

30. Highland Council, pers comm, August 2021

31. Scottish Government. (2021) [Crofting: National Development Plan](#)

32. Scottish Government. (2021) [Land use – getting the best from our land: strategy 2021 to 2026](#)

33. John Muir Trust are working on a concept of ‘Crofting Carbon’, to be piloted in 2022.

# Our Visions

## Prìomh theachdaireachdan

From our extensive work with residents of the area, we have identified three main Visions. Each of these aspirations has a number of ‘routes’ through which we can realise our vision. For some routes we have already identified the first actions; for other routes we accept that actions for the NorthWest2045 group will be identified in the coming years, but there are still lessons that can be used from other similar situations, and mechanisms that can be used to improve the situation.

### Vision 1

#### A place that is attractive for young people and families to live and work

*Àite tarraingeach do dhaoine òga agus do theaghlaichean*

We want to live in a sustainable economy where housing is affordable, accessible and energy efficient. Modern and sustainable infrastructure will help us meet the needs of residents and visitors. Quality education across the area – with a full curriculum and a variety of extra-curricular experiences – will ensure young people and families do not need to move away to better their prospects. We hope the nascent Repopulation Zones concept can support these aims in the coming decades.

By far the highest priority for residents in the North West Highlands is to see more young people and families living and working in the area – whether they have grown up here, or arrive from outwith the area.

Population ageing is particularly acute here, because of the challenges young people face in remaining here and because a high number of retirees migrate to enjoy the spectacular scenery and high quality of life. Consequently, there is an aspiration to create thriving communities where people of every age group can feel they belong; where life is affordable, and also rich and varied for all ages.

#### Route 1: Housing is affordable, suitable and energy efficient, for residents of all ages

*Amas 1: Dachaidhean aig prìosan rèusanta, a tha seasmhach agus freagarrach don choimhearsnachd gu leir.*

#### The issues

A key issue preventing young people from staying in the area is the lack of suitable and affordable housing. When properties become available, they are often bought by people from outwith the area seeking to retire or buy second homes, who can easily outbid local working residents.

With a lack of suitable accommodation available – including residential care options – we found in our research that movement in the housing market is slow, and larger family properties are rarely available at a price that is accessible to young families. This is not uncommon in rural areas across Scotland and the UK, but we know housing availability is at particularly critical levels here. In Tongue social housing provision is at 9.8% – well below the national average of 24.3%. An average house price in Coigach is seven times higher than average local income: a price that is out of reach of most working age residents.<sup>34</sup> Over 40% of the households in Sutherland said to be in fuel poverty.<sup>35</sup>

Availability of land for housing is a challenge due to issues around landownership and crofting – issues which are explored in [Route 11](#). For those who are able to find a home, the area suffers some of the highest fuel poverty rates in Scotland, despite the abundance of renewable energy assets, and the aging housing stock is often expensive to heat in this challenging climate.

#### The aspirations

Above all, we want to see working age residents given higher priority access to housing - whether this is for social housing, or measures to ensure that rental and purchase prices are realistic for local incomes. Some people call for further regulation and access to land for housing; there is enthusiasm for the new regulation around limiting the number of second homes and holiday properties in an area.

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34. Housing figures Based on evidence gathered from local settlements both by this project, and reported in: *Tongue, Melness, Skerryay Housing Needs Report*. (2018) Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust, commissioned by Up North! Development Trust; *Coigach Housing Needs Survey Report* (2018) Coigach Community Development Company. Highland Community Planning Partnership. (2016). Not yet available online.

35. [Scottish Natural Heritage. Peatland Action: Peatland and Carbon.](#)

Any new housing developments should be of mixed type and tenure, and should consider the potential to include business units and multi-use buildings, such as for community hubs or co-working spaces. Some people spoke of investing in quality accommodation for older people – such as retirement and care settings – so that properties can be made available

for others. There was interest in ensuring that properties are energy efficient, both to lower fuel costs and as part of wider measures by the Highland Council to meet their 2045 net zero targets.

## What can we do now?

### Action 1

#### Develop affordable local housing solutions

Several community organisations within our partnership (Scourie Community Development Council and Assynt Development Trust) are developing local housing projects, and two landowners (WildLand Ltd. and John Muir Trust) are exploring opportunities for making best use of existing crofts and making new land available for housing and crofting. The partners will work together to share learning and coordinate strategically with key local partners.

## What are we asking for help with?

### Our asks

- ▶ Further research is required to better understand the nuance of local housing needs (for example, social housing versus affordable homes for purchase) to make sure we develop innovative local solutions for affordable housing – with support from key partners such as the Communities Housing Trust and Highland Council.

### Quotes

*“Many second homes/holiday lets restrict progress for local young people, those settling in the area for work and employers finding staff is a key issue too. As part of a household running a small business, this is a huge issue... There needs to be some kind of control on housing... Any new housing needs to be appropriately sited, designed and let/sold so as to give opportunities to the local working demographic and not just serve a select few businesses.”*

(25-39, Scourie, Marine/Fishing)

*“Housing needs are at a critical level, and skilled, committed young families are being lost to the area.”*

(25-39, Coigach, Crofting/Academia/Research)

### What’s already happening? –

#### What can we build on?

See below: Scourie Community Development Council and Assynt Development Trust have on-going projects; Wildland Ltd and John Muir Trust are exploring options.

#### What examples can we learn from?

##### [Staffin Housing Development, Isle of Skye:](#)

a development of six three-bedroom houses, a new health centre and two business premises on croft land – led by Staffin Community Trust on Skye in partnership with Communities Housing Trust and Lochalsh and Skye Housing Association. It is the first affordable housing development in Staffin since 1998, and followed a housing needs report which identified a clear local demand for new homes.

Coigach Community Development Company, working with the Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust, [have built two small flats.](#)

#### What mechanisms can help?

The [Rural housing burden](#) is a title applied to a property or house plot which gives rural communities and community landowners the right of pre-emption and control of future sales when the property is to be sold.

The [Rural Housing Fund](#) can help build new homes; change buildings into homes; make empty homes ready to rent or sell. The planned homes must be affordable and can be for rent or sale.

The [Scottish Land Fund](#) – delivered in partnership with the National Lottery Community Fund and Highlands and Islands Enterprise - offers grants of up to £1 million to help communities take ownership of the land and buildings that matter to them, as well as practical support to develop projects.

[Highland Council Energy Efficiency Projects](#) work in partnership with E.ON Energy Installation Services Limited to deliver measures under Energy Efficient Scotland: Area Based Scheme.

## Route 2: Modern and sustainable infrastructure and services

### Amas 2: Seirbheasan agus bun-structair seasmhach agus comasadh

#### The issues

People must be able to access the services and activities they need in a way that is affordable and accessible.

Government investment in services is on a *per capita basis*, which means that depopulated communities in the North West Highlands are disadvantaged, and we therefore have amongst the poorest accessibility to services across the country. Without some real innovation and investment, residents will not experience the equivalent benefits that other Scottish citizens will reap from the '20-minute neighbourhoods' concept, and we will continue to face social inequality in many areas.

Access to healthcare is particularly challenging: some residents face a 6-hour round trip on single-track roads with damaged surfaces – or more if attempting to use public transport – to the nearest hospital in Inverness. Life for young families may cost 10-30% more in rural than urban areas of Scotland<sup>36</sup>. There is scant childcare provision, which means many parents rely on informal or familial care – or have no options at all – which can be a driver of child poverty, and may stymie career ambitions for young parents. High quality broadband is also a challenge.

#### The aspirations

To ensure it is possible for young people and families to live and work here, we are seeking some immediate basic improvements in infrastructure.

Improved roads and sustainable public transport options are priorities; not only in and around settlements but also for outlying areas, to improve connections between settlements and make it easier to reach key services and centres of population such as Inverness, Ullapool and Thurso.

We need services such as affordable, accessible childcare; and health and care support. There is potential to explore locally owned cooperative models of care and multiuse community hubs. Improved broadband connectivity would enhance our readiness for digital delivery of some services, whilst bringing many other benefits (discussed elsewhere).

People would also like to see more locally-owned renewable energy production (see [Route 5](#)), and regeneration of local infrastructure such as harbour redevelopment in Kinlochbervie.

Residents are not asking for huge investments or the same facilities as urban areas: often small changes can make a huge difference to lifestyle and affordability for people. These improvements are critical to our residents in the short term, will incentivise and enable businesses to be established and thrive, and will also benefit visitors. We do not want to fight for services, or be penalised for living remotely.

#### What's already happening? –

##### What can we build on?

[Highland Community Broadband](#) is a Community Interest Company which formed to bring highspeed broadband Ullapool and the outlying areas who had been told they would never receive it. The system uses an ingenious network broadcasting from small masts located on rocks and hills, crossing open water and wide areas, to reach remote dwellings.

##### What examples can we learn from?

[Galson Estate](#) is a community-owned estate of 56000 acres on Lewis with a thriving community hub.

[Kyle of Sutherland community hub](#) is community space with soft play, café, gym, meetings rooms etc. They run holiday clubs and it available for all ages. Community Development Officers have the time and experience to apply for funding to aid local projects.

##### What mechanisms can help?

From August 2021, the [entitlement for funded early learning and childcare](#) for all three & four-year-olds (and eligible two-year-olds) has increased to 1,140 hours a year.

The '[R100](#)' ('Reaching 100%') is a voucher scheme to help ensure everyone in Scotland will have access to superfast broadband by the end of 2021.

[SG4I \(Scottish 4G Infill Programme\)](#) is a partnership between Scottish Government and Scottish Futures Trust to provide mobile coverage in more remote rural and island areas.

36. Glass, J., Bynner, C. and Chapman, C. (2020). [Children and young people and rural poverty and social exclusion: A review of evidence](#). Glasgow: Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland.

## Quote

*“New technologies and infrastructure must be a priority...This is fundamental for any company or enterprise coming to this area, digital connectivity is paramount. I couldn't do my job without it.”*

(25-39, Tongue, Connectivity and Digital)

## What can we do now?

### Action 2

#### Explore local solutions to infrastructure and broadband

We want to improve access to key services for our residents, targeting support and solutions in areas that most need it; to ensure our facilities and roads are fit for purpose, and bring superfast broadband to all households.

## What are we asking for help with?

### Our asks

- ▶ Support from HIE on developing community-led alternatives for broadband in areas the market cannot yet reach, learning from the Highland Community Broadband model and using funds such as the Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme ([R100](#)) and the UK Government's [Project Gigabit](#).
- ▶ Targeted investment in roads and facilities to meet tourism demand and bring benefit to communities, potentially through existing mechanisms such as the £220m [UK Government Levelling Up Fund](#) and the £25m [Scottish Government Tourism Fund](#).

## Route 3: Education and training supports skills

*Amas 3: Fòghlam agus trèanadh a' toirt leasachadh do sgìlean.*

### The issues

School rolls across the area are precariously low and numbers are projected to fall (see [Why the North West Highlands?](#) section). This impacts on the experience the school can offer – specialist academic or vocational courses may be limited - and it is difficult to attract and retain teachers, some of whom are only funded to work part time. There is widespread concern that children's experience and future prospects are hindered, and this situation is compounded by the dearth of extracurricular activities that are so vital for developing skills needed to compete for jobs and higher education.

## The Aspirations

We would like to see greater general investment in local schools in the medium-long term – recognising that the offer in some schools (ie Ullapool) is more extensive than others. In the short-term there is interest in seeking solutions such as creating more opportunities for life skills and training to broaden the horizons for young people. People spoke of mentoring, advice and apprenticeship support from local business networks and regional employers, as well as involving more residents in offering extracurricular activities.

### What's already happening? –

#### What can we build on?

Ullapool School provides many extra-curricular activities such as Duke of Edinburgh; however, these are reliant on the motivation and initiative of individual staff members.

The [Coigach & Assynt Living Landscapes Partnership](#) has provided extensive outdoor learning experiences to a range of age groups in local schools. These have mostly been reliant on external funding and the initiative and enthusiasm of individual staff members.

#### What examples can we learn from?

[Argyll and Bute – Rural skills accelerator programme](#) delivers 21st century infrastructure for skills, training, education and enterprise to support growth and work opportunities for rural communities.

#### What mechanisms can help?

The UK Government provided [incentives for hiring a new apprentice](#) from 1st April – 30th September 2021.

The [Young Scots work promise](#) is a £70 million investment in youth employment offering every 16–24-year-old in Scotland the opportunity of a job, apprenticeship, further or higher education, training programme or volunteering.

The Scottish Government is committed to [increasing the teaching and pupil support assistants](#), and the [Attainment Scotland Fund](#) (£1bn over this parliamentary term) will support schools in this area via [Pupil Equity Funding](#) – additional funding allocated directly to schools to support pupils from low income families in P1-S3.

## Quotes

*“Increase the staffing numbers at school which would provide more extracurricular activities such as Duke of Edinburgh award etc. Local businesses and previous pupils could engage more with the school to encourage local job opportunities. Rural skills could be taught at school and skills could help to benefit the community.”*

(25-39, Education, Kinlochbervie)

*“Local businesses could have a closer relationship to the local High Schools to encourage children into apprenticeships or work-based schemes.”*

(25-39, Scourie, Food Retail)

## Vision 2

### A model for a new diverse and sustainable rural economy

*Modail ùr de threabhadas dùthchail seasmhach iolarach*

Developing a diverse, more resilient local economy is of utmost importance for our communities, and it will take time. Achieving more well-paid, skilled and stable jobs is a priority, and we see many routes to achieving these goals. We need to ensure that the investment in renewable energy benefits communities – whether through community led or commercial schemes, and that natural capital investment in land and sea leads to opportunities for us to gain from our substantial carbon stocks, whether directly through carbon credits or in new ‘green’ jobs.

We would like to explore ways of making traditional livelihoods and industries economically viable, and resilient to the climate crises – specifically recognising the contribution that changes to crofting practices can make to local food production, and how our local fishing fleet can develop local and national markets. Government changes to rural policy around local food, land use and the Crofting National Development Plan could provide significant benefit and support to these precarious livelihoods. There are a number of strategic policy developments that can help: the challenge is to have the local voice heard.

We want a sustainable, slow form of tourism that promotes deeper connection to our people, our culture and our landscapes.

We seek to attract and seed new business and industry to become less dependent on a few employers. We believe digital connectivity and modern facilities can enable diverse careers and flourishing enterprises for those attracted by the quality of life in this beautiful place.

Above all else, the people of the North West Highlands aspire to a rural economic model that can capitalise on the value of this extraordinary place and the skills and talents of its people. 94.3% of people surveyed in our research want to see a stronger, more resilient local economy built on a variety of sectors and industries. We want economic and environmental interests balanced to ensure that our communities are sustainable in the long term: socially, culturally, economically and environmentally.

### Route 4: Investing in renewables for local benefit

*Amas 4: Tasgadh ann an bunan lùtha ath-nuadhachail airson buannachd ionadail.*

#### The issues

There are local examples of renewable schemes generating much-needed funds, such as the community owned wind turbine in Coigach and the privately owned wind farm at Altnaharra with its benefit fund for local communities. However, energy costs remain high for many, with communities unable to benefit from some commercial schemes and others struggling to establish their own renewables schemes.

#### The aspirations

Whilst people in this area have demonstrated that we care about our environment, we also want to ensure that we are ready to make the most of climate change mitigation measures, and capitalise on the increase in renewable energy investment. We need to build our local capacity so that we can compete for the new high-skilled jobs, and to ensure that the models of community ownership or benefit actually do retain meaningful and proportionate income for local communities.

We hope that the benefits that off-shore wind have brought to the North and East coasts of the Highlands could be replicated on the West coast. There is also interest in on-shore wind and hydro-electric power developments that could provide more high-skilled jobs for local people.

## Quote

*“Things like development of wind farms, hydro schemes, and other renewable energies that are going to be part of the environmental targets, we need to start developing and grabbing these now so people can benefit from the jobs as they become our main industries.”*

(25-39, Bettyhill, Crofting/ Marine/ Fishing)

### **What’s already happening? – What can we build on?**

[Coigach Community Wind Turbine](#) is a single 500kW turbine, owned by the Community and managed by Coigach Community Wind – a subsidiary of Coigach Community Development Trust. It has been turning since 2017 and profits are distributed by the Small Grants Fund which supports a wide variety of needs from a Health and Well-being Programme at the Community Hall, to training needs for individuals, and provided emergency funding to families during the Covid pandemic.

### **What examples can we learn from?**

[Apple Juice \(Applecross\) Limited](#) is a Community Benefit Society which has been formed by local people to fundraise, construct and operate a 90kw community hydro scheme. It is estimated that the scheme will generate a gross income of £106,356 in its first full year; surplus income will be invested in local projects.

The [EDF Renewables Corriemoillie Wind Farm Education & Training Fund](#) supports individuals and organisations with the costs of education and training plus other initiatives that help to create job opportunities in the ‘catchment area’ of the fund.

### **What mechanisms can help?**

The new [Green Jobs Workforce Academy](#), delivered by Skills Development Scotland, will help people take a greener approach to their careers, from accessing training and learning new skills, to finding a new green job.

## Route 5: Natural capital investment in land and sea

*Amas 4: Tasgadh ann an gnìomhachas neo pròiseactan ceangailte ri muir agus tìr.*

### The issues

Our area boasts a wealth of natural capital (on both land and sea), including wildlife and landscape characteristics which are cherished by residents. People are aware that more value could be derived and retained for local economic and social benefit, but we don’t know exactly what that means in practice, or how to access the opportunities. Some residents are concerned about the tension between developments to mitigate the climate crisis – such as renewable energy infrastructure – and the importance of protecting and conserving the natural environment. This is particularly the case for larger developments by external interests.

There is some scepticism about the environmental agenda: some people feel that conservation interests have stymied much-needed developments that could have benefited the local economy and created jobs. There is uncertainty about whether ‘nature-based jobs’ can provide high-skilled, long-term employment for a significant number of people. Our research showed that younger generations are less likely to perceive a divide between economic and environmental interests, with many recognising the two can work hand in hand.

We need open and informed debate, and space to bring together perspectives of diverse local interests; discuss concerns and aspirations about the environmental sector and its potential to deliver inclusive economic growth and nature-based opportunities.

### The aspirations

Residents overwhelmingly value their natural environment and want to protect it wherever possible from unsympathetic development and damaging practice, whilst recognising the opportunities for natural capital investment.

Carbon sequestration could be a significant area for growth – particularly in replanting and enhancing woodland and forestry; restoring peatland, and in Blue Carbon. Existing local projects have already provided support for woodland and peatland restoration, but there is potential for more activity which could lead to real economic benefits for local communities. The potential of Payments for Ecosystem Services and other forms of carbon credits could help to underpin a more sustainable local

and national economy for the long term – but it is important that the benefits are shared equitably, in line with the principles of the Just Transition. There is much to explore and understand for stakeholders in national and local government, climate finance bodies and, critically, local communities.

Changes to rural and marine subsidies which will impact on crofting, wider land management, fishing and aquaculture must take communities into consideration. Steps must be taken to ensure there is a ‘Just Transition’ towards net zero emissions - especially for those with the most precarious livelihoods such as crofting and fishing. Many want to see crofting valued more as an environmentally sustainable practice which can be used to support increased local food production and connection to the land (see [Route 6: Traditional industries renewed.](#))

Changes promised by Land Reform and the new Land Use Strategy<sup>37</sup> are a key part of the picture, with a strong desire among residents for local people to either own and control more land and assets, or to have a greater say in the use of local land which they don’t legally own. However, all those managing land - whether private landowners or tenant crofters – will be incentivised to meet climate and biodiversity targets, and the new Regional Land Use Partnership model could offer a key opportunity to open up debate around land use, as well as innovative models of land ownership. (This issue is explored further in the section on [Regional Land Use Partnerships.](#))

## Quotes

*“New development around the area and protection of natural landscape like the flow country”*

(11-17, Farr High School)

*“There is a lot of potential here for jobs and resources locally but this needs time and investment to establish (training to widen skills base, tree planting to establish local forestry for example and most importantly a process to widen people’s horizons, perception and understanding of what could work and is possible.”*

(Male, 41, Assynt, Engineering/Tourism/Environment)

*“There are challenges of climate change, biodiversity decrease – these can be drivers to sustainable economic activity, in harmony and enhancing the natural capital of the area.”*

(60+, External, Land Management)

37. Scottish Government (2021) [Land use – getting the best from our land: strategy 2021 to 2026](#)

## What’s already happening? –

### What can we build on?

Local MPAs and other protected sites (Flow Country, CALLP...)

The Dasgupta Review calls for better economic models for biodiversity

### What examples can we learn from?

[Lynbreck Croft](#) have worked with Forest Carbon to have their woodland regeneration project validated as Carbon Credits under the Woodland Carbon Code. They have planted an 11ha woodland, set aside 9ha to natural regeneration, additional small ‘agroforestry’ copses in a grazed pasture, as well as over 1 km of hedging. This is a practical contribution to tackling the climate emergency – and provides extra income from carbon to support the wider crofting business. The Woodland Carbon Code – managed by Scottish Forestry on behalf of the UK government and devolved administrations.

There is [interest in \(and concern about\) the concept of ‘Green Lairds](#) purchasing large areas of land for their environmental credentials, and the potential impact on communities.

### What mechanisms can help?

[Rural Food Tourism Places](#) are being piloted in Shetland and Uist to support agricultural businesses as they explore diversification opportunities, to deliver economic growth, sustainability and resilience by developing new products and services across agricultural, food, drink and tourism sectors.

**New rural and marine subsidies will be aligned to net zero targets; details not yet finalised.**

**There are developments in markets for Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES); details not yet finalised.**

*Note. There are no specific Actions or Asks identified for this Route at this point.*

## Route 6: Traditional industries renewed

*Amas 6: Ath-nuachadh  
do ghniomhachas tradiseanta.*

### The issues

Some industries and livelihoods are synonymous with ‘Highland life’: residents are understandably determined that Crofting and Fishing should be retained for their economic and cultural value, but both face challenges. The Crofting system was never designed to be financially viable as a sole source of income<sup>38</sup>, and this is still the case; meanwhile small-scale fishing undertaken by local boats – which is now largely confined to shellfish at the bottom of the food chain. It is reliant on foreign export markets and has been hit by Brexit uncertainty.

Conversely, Tourism has expanded in the area since the initiation of the North Coast 500 driving route, and is a major industry and source of income for the North West Highlands; Caithness & Sutherland is more reliant on accommodation and food services (15.6%) than across the Highland region (11.8%) and nationally (8.2%)<sup>39</sup>. However, there are deep concerns among residents about the current nature of tourism and its local impact.

Many want to see other industries flourishing so that there is a reduced reliance on tourism jobs, due to the seasonality and low wages experienced in many roles. Young people are particularly concerned that low-skilled work in tourism is all that is available, and they struggle to see how this will provide long-term opportunities for their professional development.

### The Aspirations

#### Crofting and Fishing

With food systems responsible for 34% of global carbon emissions<sup>40</sup>, our primary producers will play a key role in meeting our climate change commitments. Small scale, local food production are the very industries that we hope will form the backbone of a more resilient, circular economy for Scotland. The ‘Good Food Nation’<sup>41</sup> bill supports food produced in environmentally sustainable ways, with fewer food miles and greater health equity

38. Russell, Z., Beattie, L. and Heaney, D. (2021) [Spaces of Well-Being: Social Crofting in Rural Scotland](#), Journal of Rural Studies.

39. Highlands & Islands Enterprise: [Caithness & Sutherland Area Profile 2020](#)

40. United Nations (2021) [Food systems account for over one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions](#)

41. This bill has been delayed due to Covid-19, however information on good food nation policy is available here: <https://www.gov.scot/policies/food-and-drink/good-food-nation/>

for citizens. Include National Development Plan – Crofting; ‘Ambition 2030’ to double food production.

These industries provide high-quality produce and the opportunity to both boost our local diets and wellbeing – both through the production (particularly if it involves community participation) and consumption of this Good Food. Therefore, **a dedicated focus on a local food strategy** could be part of what revives these culturally important industries, contributes to national and local climate targets, and supports a more resilient local economy that will be of value to residents and visitors alike. We hope changes in subsidies and incentives will underpin such changes and help revive our culturally significant industries.

In addition, we must explore innovative models of crofting such as woodland crofts and educational crofts to build rural skills – perhaps linking with [Route 3 \(Education and training\)](#). The Western Isles are currently benefitting from four new island-based Crofting Development Officers<sup>42</sup>; perhaps equivalent roles could be created within our (even more remote) area of the North West Highlands.

#### Tourism

A large majority of people are supportive of a strategic focus on slow tourism and greater coordination and investment to ensure amenities and infrastructure can cope with increased visitor numbers. Many would like to see visitors stay and engage more meaningfully with the communities they are visiting, to develop a deeper care and connection to the place, the people and the culture and heritage of the area – as some say was the norm in the past. There could also be opportunities given the outstanding landscape, local wildlife and offer for outdoor pursuits to focus more on ecotourism: an industry which globally is growing at 6-8 times the rate of other forms of tourism.

#### Quotes

*“If given the opportunity to recover, our Inshore Waters will contribute greatly to the sustainability and economic security of our fragile rural communities which are currently dying on their feet.”*

(40-59, Highland other, Marine/Fishing)

*“Far more local organic food production, including through crofting”* (40-59, Assynt,

Tourism/ Health & Care/Crofting/Culture & Heritage)

42. Crofting Commission July 2021 [Community engagement at the heart of new Crofting Commission roles](#)

*“The agricultural value of a croft is no longer considered, the price has risen beyond the reach of young crofters- it’s not financially viable. Crofting is part of the culture and has been for generations. It is the outside influence that puts crofting so low on the agenda, thinking of it as quaint. Once it is lost, that is generations of expertise and knowledge lost with it.”*

(Male, 60, Highland Other, Agricultural)

*“I’d like to see the infrastructures for tourism to improve, with the NC500 we desperately need spaces for these tourists to stop and enjoy our area, without causing the local community angst and damage to our area, the road needs to be maintained , they are falling apart!”*

(40-59, Tongue, Crofting/ Health & Care/ Tourism)

*“Slow tourism down as the community is exhausted after each summer season. Would like tourists to engage more with the community.”*

(40-49, Kinlochbervie, Faith group)

*“The relationships between the locals and tourists is the worst it’s ever been due in part to the way the tourists treat this place.”*

(25- 39, Assynt, Tourism & Hosp)

## What can we do now?

### Action 3

#### Scope a local food strategy

We have potential to produce more high quality, sustainable – and even regenerative – food and drink in this area, and to stimulate local markets for local products. This would have wide-ranging benefits, including reduction of local and global environmental impact; support of local businesses, and the health and well-being of our residents.

## What are we asking for help with?

### Our asks

- ▶ Work in partnership with public and private sector bodies to promote existing regional initiatives such as the Highland Good Food Partnership; to understand the potential in our area and support a coordinated approach in producing and consuming more sustainable food locally.

## What’s already happening? –

### What can we build on?

[The Green Bowl](#) local producers’ network in Elphin, Assynt use the [Open Food Network](#) to sell their produce locally.

The [Highland Good Food Partnership](#) aims to support and inspire local people to come together to create a food system that is fair to all.

### What examples can we learn from?

A local food strategy somewhere?

**Open food network? Connects producers and consumers locally creating new markets and offering support for small scale production**

Lynbreck Croft

### What mechanisms can help?

Information about support for [Woodland Croft creation](#)

[Good Food Nation Bill](#)

**Scottish Government launched a [Local Food Strategy consultation](#) which covers a range of issues including promoting local produce, encouraging people to grow their own food and making quality local food and drink available to all.**

**The previous Scottish Government proposed a [Circular Economy Bill](#).**

[National Development Plan for Crofting](#)

**[Ambition 2030](#) for farming, fishing, food and drink to be Scotland’s most valuable industry by 2030, recognised at home and abroad as a model of collaboration and a world leader in responsible, profitable growth.**

## Route 7: Attracting and seeding new business and industry

*Amas 7: A' tarraing gnìomhachas agus dreuchdan ùr don àite.*

### The issues

We are currently disproportionately reliant on a few key industries and employers. There is therefore a strong desire to stimulate and attract new industry and businesses to the area. Poor infrastructure can be a barrier; the reliability of broadband is a particular issue, as is recruiting employees with suitable skills.

### The aspirations

We do not need a huge influx of businesses: attracting just a few employers or new industries could dramatically shift local prospects. The majority of local residents are supportive of the proposed Sutherland Spaceport near Tongue and are optimistic about the range of ancillary jobs and economic activity that might benefit the North coast in particular.

We have world-class landscapes and natural assets, such as the UNESCO World Heritage Site Geopark and the tentative UNESCO designation for the Flow Country, and there are hopes that the area could gain a reputation as a centre of excellence for research, attract talent, and encourage learning and skill exchange internationally. There is increasing interest in the value of 'Blue Carbon' – and with the majority of our settlements based on the coast this could also be a focus of research excellence. See [Natural Capital Investment etc – Route 5](#).

If broadband improvements continue sufficiently swiftly, we could 'market' the area as a wonderful place to live and work, to capitalise on the rise in remote working to attract and grow a range of new businesses lured by the lower costs – and higher quality of life – of basing a business in a rural area.

With the vast majority of businesses employing under 50 employees, the area might look to further grow and nurture the community of Small-Medium sized Enterprises and self-employed people, for instance in trades; and 'green', creative, heritage and entrepreneurial sectors.

Modest investments in business support and infrastructure could help to seed and attract such businesses, for example in co-working spaces and peer networks for certain sectors. Many residents already base their living on multiple forms of employment, such as having several part-time jobs, and this could build on that existing model for those

who enjoy working in a flexible, varied way.

With remote working becoming more ubiquitous, it is important that our children and young people are ready to take on a range of professional and high-skilled jobs remotely. Ensuring that our skills and training agencies are able to help facilitate these opportunities through promotion of STEM subjects could be revolutionary for the area.

### Quotes

*"Greener, more eco-friendly, small micro business premises providing workspace for small scale industry and creative spaces."*

(40-59, Highland other, Marine/fishing,

*"More support for other local sectors – primarily food production (fishing, aquaculture, crofting) but also other local skills (trades, engineering, craftspeople) should be championed."*

(Female, 36, Scourie, Marine/Fishing)

### What can we do now?

#### Action 4

##### Develop the case for multi-use rural hubs

Thriving community spaces are a priority for local infrastructure development. These can host a range of activities such as community groups, childcare, drop in health and welfare services and co-working and enterprise spaces. We want to explore how to maximise existing assets to meet local needs by providing several services in one place. Such 'multi-use hubs' would differ from place to place depending on requirements and resources, and we will learn from innovative models elsewhere. We anticipate that interest in co-working spaces will increase in response to the recent rise in remote working, and hope that more local public sector staff will work from these hubs.

### What are we asking for help with?

#### Our asks

- ▶ Work in partnership with existing Rural Hub schemes (including the Scottish Futures Trust) to build a case for investment and develop 6 local hubs across our area, enabling us to work towards the '20-minute neighbourhood' aspiration of the Scottish Government. Support from local public service partners to extend existing service provision through these facilities and accelerate the possibilities of employing staff to work out of these hubs as part of a commitment to Local Place Planning for our area.

## Vision 3

### A place where communities have the ability to determine their own prospects

*Coimhearsnachdan aig stiùir am beatha fhèin*

We want our communities to have a clear voice in shaping the prospects of our place and in decisions made about land and other natural resources. Our small population and large geographic area means it is difficult to make sure we are sufficiently represented.

We see an opportunity to promote Community Wealth Building to stimulate local investment in jobs, skills and produce. We must build strong local democracy and voice, reinvigorating and reinforcing our local democratic structures and community groups. This will ensure a wider diversity of voices can influence decisions at the local level and will position our area to engage more effectively in regional and national decisions. We wish to use and create opportunities for communities to positively influence decisions about land use and ownership locally and ensure that we have a rich community life and activities for all age groups.

We want to pursue a model of economic resilience which invests in local products, services and skills to retain and grow the value that is already present here (in our people, our natural capital and other assets). We need mechanisms and resources to help our local communities – both separately and together across the area – to become more self-reliant and resilient, by deriving greater benefit from, and investing in, our assets.

The people of the North West Highlands want to redress the low level of representation we face in decisions on a range of issues that matter to us, from housing, planning and infrastructure to land use and wider resource allocation. We need to strengthen local democratic structures and community groups to ensure a wider diversity of voices can influence decisions at the local level. We need to improve the representation of the area as a whole to local and national government. These are fundamental steps to helping us flourish.

## Route 8: Community Wealth Building to stimulate local investment

*Amas 8: A' leasachadh beartais ionadail, gus tasgadh a' bhrosnachadh 'sa choimhearsnachd*

### The issues

Many in this area feel that their resources and power are centralised in Inverness, with insufficient devolution to the local level. Furthermore, the benefits from a range of local assets – such as renewable energy and land – often do not reach local residents.

With the low population density and poor infrastructure in the area, creating a viable rural economy can be an uphill challenge. It can be hard for the North West Highlands to attract and retain businesses when we must compete with areas with a critical mass of people and the infrastructure and support to stimulate growth.

### The aspirations

Strategies to stimulate local growth and prosperity are needed to ensure our resources and assets are capitalised on (in the potential and skills of our residents, and natural and built assets). Ensuring the value of our assets – particularly in renewables and our land – can have greater benefit for our local communities is of real interest alongside other forms of investment to kick start local growth.

It feels as if the opportunities offered through a 'Community Wealth Building (CWB) approach'<sup>43</sup> are aligned to our aspirations for a more self-reliant and resilient local economy. Communities across the area responded with phenomenal solidarity to the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns: the mutual aid among neighbours and local organisations demonstrates the resilience and self-reliance that people often say characterises Highland communities. We want to see this powerful attribute extended, to form the foundation of a more diverse and self-reliant rural economic model drawing on the principles of a CWB approach.

A virtuous cycle, powered by revenue from locally owned renewables and other assets including land, could be established to produce self-propagating benefits. Local government and large employers invest in local jobs and procure resources locally; peer-networks in specific sectors share skills, learning and resources to improve their performance; there is a rise in production and consumption of quality food, produce and crafts, with concomitant health and environmental benefits for residents and visitors.

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43. Community Wealth Building (CWB) is a people-centred approach to local economic development, which redirects wealth back into the local economy, and places control and benefits into the hands of local people.

## Quotes

*“Investment in renewable schemes such as windfarms and hydro schemes which will bring income to the area.”*

(60+, Kinlochbervie, Third Sector)

*“We need to encourage more people to become self-sustainable and produce goods for the local community.”*

(25-39, Tongue, Health)

*“Setting up a group of people that could be contacted like mentors to discuss business ideas and share stories and provide hope [as] community role models.”*

(40-59, Scourie, Tourism)

## Route 9: Strong local democracy and voice

*Amas 9: Teachdaireacd agus democrasaidh làidir, bùnaidechd 'sa choimhearsnachd.*

### The issues

Residents are clear in their desire for better representation at the local and national government level. Many feel that the Highland Council is distant and Edinburgh and Westminster are even further removed.

This is not simply a factor of geographic distance from the centres of power, but rather a result of democratic deficit. To put it into context, the Western Isles has one councillor for every 700 people; Orkney and Shetland have one for around 800 people, whilst this area has one for every 1000 people. If changes proposed by the Boundary Commission go ahead, this would fall to one councillor for every 2700 people.

Meanwhile, the amount allocated per capita by the Scottish Government is also lower in Highland (£2544) by comparison to the Western Isles (£4146) and Shetland (£4589)<sup>44</sup>. Not only do we have fewer resources, there is a concern that we have less say over how they are spent: many residents bemoan the lack of power or resource of Community Councils and the paltry sums available through the Ward Discretionary Fund. Community participation and empowerment, albeit prominent on the national agenda – particularly with the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 – are not the norm in everyday experiences in the North West Highlands.

## The aspiration

One area where there has been the opportunity for greater local self-determination is in the establishment of Development Trusts and the acquisition of community assets including land, buildings and renewables. It was here in Assynt that some of the world's first community land buyouts succeeded and the area still boasts strong community action and a focus on local development priorities through local trusts. Residents are strongly in favour of improving our democratic choice. We want to build more representative structures that ensure a diversity of voices can shape what happens in local communities, including through improving the effectiveness of Community Councils. Many want to see more young people involved in these structures, and there is interest too in improving cross-settlement collaboration on key issues to strengthen our local voice in discussions with decision-makers.

## Quotes

*“A more regionalised/localised democratic voice somehow; more wealth brought to/retained in the area through national independence and far-reduced tax spend on arms/military; the area (by way of an independent Scotland) re-joining the EU.”*

(Male, 44, Assynt, Tourism & Hosp/Health & Social Care/Crofting/Culture & Heritage)

*“Would like to see more policies at government levels for targeted support.”*

(Female, 51, Bettyhill, Crofting)

*“Fairer support and funding for this area of Highland from local and central government.”*

(Female, 69, KLB, Education)

*“Local government needs sorting out – more power and budgets to local offices and community councils.”*

(Female, 57, Coigach, Tourism & Hosp/Crofting/Culture & Heritage)

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44. David Bell, [The challenges Sutherland faces are formidable](#), Northern Times April 2021.

## What can we do now?

### Action 5

#### Invest in community resilience and voice

Our population is small but our land area is large. A significant proportion of the land (60%<sup>45</sup>) is protected because of its important contribution to the nation's public goods and services: we are therefore key stewards of these crucial natural and cultural assets. However, the sparseness of our population leads to a democratic deficit: our voice is not heard on issues that matter to us such as housing, land use and resource allocation. We want to learn from other examples, such as the Islands Bill, which has given a voice to sparsely populated rural areas similar to ours, so that their needs are met and they can then be more effective stewards of these crucial natural assets.

Furthermore, community action is a key strength of our region – but there are gaps, and volunteers are stretched. We must support and encourage people of all ages and backgrounds to participate in community life and have their voice heard, and to help places with low community capacity 'level up' with better-resourced areas. Strengthening collaboration across the area will help to maximise knowledge, skills and resources and enable coordinated strategic action on key issues. Learning from peers elsewhere and key agencies working in rural community development, such as the Scottish Rural Parliament will support improved practice.

## What are we asking for help with?

### Our asks

- ▶ Learning from the success of the Islands Bill<sup>46</sup>, we want to explore a legislative mechanism to give voice to rural mainland areas, to ensure a Just Transition for our future local economy and livelihoods.
- ▶ We would like assistance to explore ways of strengthening our local democracy – such as reinvigorating our Community Councils – enabling a wider diversity of people to feel empowered and inspired to participate in creating the society they believe in. We are interested in working with the Council to test ideas emerging from the Local Governance Review.
- ▶ We are looking for targeted support to build local capacity to seize existing and emerging opportunities for funding, training and development, coordinate learning with peers nationally and internationally, and to work with Government and other agencies.

45. [National Scenic Areas of Scotland Maps](#)

46. [Islands \(Scotland\) Act 2018](#)

## Route 10: Communities positively influence decisions about how land is owned and managed locally

*Amas 10: Tha buaidhean buannachcail ann nuair a tha coimhearsnachdan an luib stiùireadh agus sealbhaireachd oighreachd*

### The issues

People really want to see changes in the ways land is owned and managed locally. One of the key local issues is the prevalence of absentee owners – of both land and crofts. This is linked to concerns about derelict and unproductive land, coupled with an unsated demand for crofts. For example, 87% of respondents to a Crofting Commission survey (across crofting counties) identified unused crofts as an issue and 90% of respondents indicated that lack of croft availability to new entrants is an issue<sup>47</sup>. Whilst data on the extent of unused crofts in the project area is not available, anecdotally people in the communities report cases of – for instance – 46 crofts in one township with only 4 or 5 in active use. Regarding land more generally: communities are not currently empowered to influence decisions about land use, and do not feel there is enough consultation and engagement, especially from larger landowners.

### The aspirations

Responding to the above issues, people want to see legislative changes to reduce absenteeism, so that land can be better used and made productive. They would like to see crofts available for young people, and a limit to the extent of ownership of land and crofts by any one individual. This shows communities' aspirations for more opportunities to own land and assets themselves, so that benefits flow to the community. Finally, local people want the power to influence decisions about land and to be consulted about how it is used by existing owners, particularly larger organisations.

Some of the aspirations can be met and supported through opportunities within existing legislation, such as the upcoming Land Reform<sup>48</sup> and Community Empowerment Acts<sup>49</sup>, better enforcement by the Crofting Commission of existing duties for crofting<sup>50</sup> and adopting good practice protocols developed by the Scottish Land

47. Crofting Commission. (2021).

[Croft Under-use and Availability Survey Results.](#)

48. [Land Reform information](#) from the Scottish Government.

49. [Community Empowerment Act \(Scotland\) – summary.](#)

50. [Crofting Commission. Crofters' Duties](#)

Commission<sup>51</sup>. However, others are tied up with newly emerging proposals from the Scottish Land Commission and proposed legislative change around land and crofting that has not yet been adopted by the Scottish Government.

## Quotes

*“Reform crofting laws and force absentee landowners or crofters to use their land or hand it back to the community.”*

(40-59, Kinlochbervie, Tourism/Crofting/Third Sector/Engineering)

*“I believe crofting is an environmentally sustainable pursuit, I believe crofters and environmental bodies have many common goals which are sometimes overlooked.”*

(60+, Bettyhill, Crofting/Engineering and Trades)

*“Law changes so absentees landowners and crofters are made to assign/tenant their land to local people so it is being used.”*

(25-39, Kinlochbervie, Education)

## What can we do now?

### Action 6

#### Develop new approaches to land management

As previously mentioned, [Regional Land Use Partnerships](#) enable national and local government, land owners, local communities and other stakeholders to fairly and inclusively optimise land use, in order to meet local and national objectives and help achieve Scotland’s climate change targets. The Highland Council is one of the first Local Authorities to trial the RLUP approach, and the NorthWest2045 Project area is the pilot for this work. This is a vital chance to explore how the drive for carbon sequestration will create long term opportunities for investment, industry, skills and jobs.

## What are we asking for help with?

### Our asks

- ▶ We need support from the Scottish Government, Scottish Land Commission (SLC) and Highland Council for the NorthWest2045 partners to develop an RLUP, and broker land investment opportunities. We will work with SLC to use existing protocols to promote dialogue between communities and

landowners regarding decisions on land use, and encourage the Crofting Commission to better enforce existing duties for Crofting. We need to use existing mechanisms, with the support of the Crofting Commission, to improve access to crofts for new entrants, and explore the potential for creating local Crofting Development Officers for the region, learning from the new posts in the Western Isles.

## Route 11: Rich community life and activities

*Amas 11: Beartas de bheatha choimhearsnachd agus de thachartasan*

### The issues

With many services now provided outwith local settlements instead of in local centres, people feel that there are few occasions for natural social connectedness for, and across, all age groups. There are not enough community events and places to come together to play, learn and socialise together. Many people are concerned that the unique culture and heritage that is such an important feature of this part of the Highlands is being slowly eroded, with language and traditions lost.

### The aspirations

Improving infrastructure is not only desirable for practical reasons, but for the social and cultural benefits that strengthened connectivity can bring between settlements and create the critical mass needed for a vibrant and varied community life. Multi-use community hubs that are locally owned can offer space for a wide range of activities, as well as co-working space and service provision, and could help create new focal points for connection in settlements.

There is a particular desire to protect and preserve traditional culture including the Gaelic language, music traditions, local skills related to crofting and other traditional knowledge and crafts being passed onto future generations.

During our interviews with young people, they mentioned the need for dedicated spaces and activities where they feel they belong: to socialise, build social connection, and tackle loneliness, which can be so prevalent in this age group. They also spoke of the need to improve play parks for younger children who have ‘nothing to do’ after school.

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51. Scottish Land Commission. (2021) [Land Rights and Responsibilities: Good Practice Protocols](#)

## Quote

*“Local village halls could provide more events, especially for children. Villages could share this between them weekly which would increase community cohesion.”*

(25-39, Scourie, Food Retail)

## Next Steps *Ath-cheumannan*

We have identified a range of interconnected issues to explore to help realise the long-term aspirations for the North West Highlands, as we have outlined throughout this report. We do not and cannot plan to tackle all of these issues at once; rather we aim to build strong foundations over the next 5 years (2021-26), from which we can evolve strategies and plans to meet our long-term objectives by 2045.

### Short Term (2021-2026)

We are already working on the [Rural Land Use Partnership](#), and the [Repopulation Zones](#).

We will use this first developmental phase to:

- ▶ Build the basis of a strong collective approach and community capacity to lead and deliver plans and key developments.
- ▶ Strengthen our understanding of the key opportunities for development and challenges on the horizon and the best ways to meet these, by learning from our peers within the community and examples elsewhere in Scotland and beyond.
- ▶ Develop a partnership approach with decision-makers in local and national government, private industry and key agencies to inform and explore place-based solutions and opportunities for development in the area.

The NorthWest2045 partners are committed to continue our work together and to look for ways to embed the community vision in our own organisational and collective practice. To realise the potential of our work so far, we are seeking support to help us maintain the positive community dialogue that has been established by this project, and specifically to:

- ▶ Stimulate repopulation to see our school rolls rise to at least 50%–60% of capacity by 2045, from the current levels of 29%
- ▶ Carry out an urgent review of why existing statutory mechanisms are failing to reverse depopulation in sparsely populated mainland rural areas.

- ▶ Explore legislative options to give a voice to rural mainland areas where the population is low but the value to the nation of our public goods is high (in our cultural and environmental assets) – learning from the success of the Islands Bill. When we have greater say in the issues that affect us, we can be more effective stewards of our place and our people, and this will help to achieve a Just Transition for our future local economy and livelihoods.

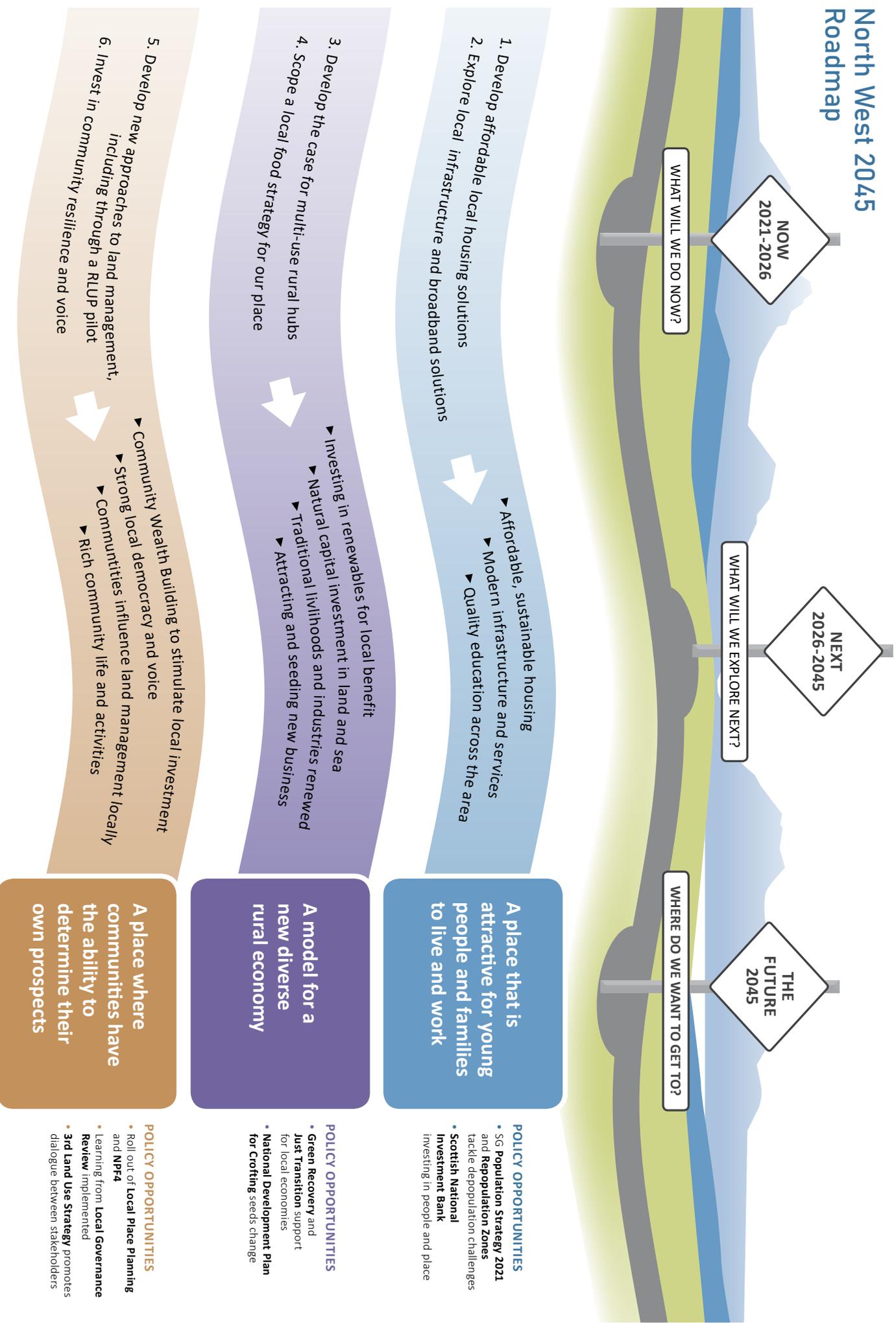
### Medium – Long Term (2025-2045)

- ▶ We anticipate that the actions above will impact positively on our livelihoods in the short-medium term, and build a strong foundation for further positive change.
- ▶ We hope we will start to see a reversal of population decline, which may be further assisted through the [‘Repopulation Zone’](#) concept.
- ▶ From our strong foundation we will be well placed to take advantage of opportunities in the medium-long term, such as the developing markets for natural capital and ecosystem services and development of larger commercial renewables operations.
- ▶ Our improved understanding of our economic situation may help us build a case for our area being considered a ‘Mainland Island’ due to our population sparsity, and therefore requiring additional support similar to that given to the Western and Northern Isles.

*“I would hope we’ll be seen...for the wonderful, resilient, caring communities we are, that they invest in us...to help us create more vibrant sustainable communities that people will want to come and live in...a place where people will live, work and thrive.”*

(25-39, Coigach and Assynt.)

# North West 2045 Roadmap



# NorthWest2045



OUR FUTURE, OUR CHOICE

[www.northwest2045.scot](http://www.northwest2045.scot)

## Conclusion Cò-dhùnadh

Collaborating with multiple partners across different sectors and perspectives, and consulting with disparate communities across a wide area (especially during a Pandemic) is a challenging process. But it is important work, and even before the documents were prepared and the Vision had been shared, this process had been worthwhile: relationships formed and common ground found on which new plans and initiatives could be built.

We already have evidence that this is working. Our coherent approach has attracted the Rural Land Use Partnership pilot and the Repopulation Zone work, and who knows what more opportunities will come our way because of it.

Working together in this way is enabling us to take part in the national conversation with one strong collective voice; to speak up for our beautiful but challenging corner of the country. With the right support we can attract people to live and work; find a model for a diverse rural economy, and determine our own prospects.

## Further details

To find out more about the work of the NorthWest2045 project, visit [www.northwest2045.scot](http://www.northwest2045.scot)

## Acknowledgements Taking

### Our partners

We have representatives from; Assynt Development Trust, Assynt Foundation, Highland Council, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, John Muir Trust, North Highland Initiative, North West Highlands Geopark, Reay Forest Estate, Scottish Land Commission, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Scourie Community Development Company, Up North Development Trust, and Wildland Ltd. Collaborate CIC and Collective Leadership Scotland have provided support and capacity around process design and facilitation since the project's initiation.

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