

# NorthWest 2045

## *Our future, our choice*

Initial summary of analysis from community engagement  
exploring a long-term Vision for the North West Highlands  
May 2021

# Overview of sections

1. **About the project** – purpose, partners and plans
2. **Methodology** – details of interviews, surveys and other engagement to produce findings
3. **What we heard** – responses to a Draft Vision document testing aspirations and ideas for development to support the future of the North West Highlands
4. **A revised vision for the future** – a new version of a community-informed NW2045 Vision, describing a new set of aspirations, opportunities for development and immediate priorities
5. **Next steps** – testing the Vision and next steps to publication, and what happens next
6. **Appendix** – list of partner organisations and funders

# 1. Project Introduction

# What is the NW2045 project?

We are a collective from a broad range of sectors and interests with a common interest in seeing a future for the North-West Highlands where our communities thrive economically, socially, and environmentally (see [appendix](#) for list of partners and funders). We desire for our population to increase, job opportunities to broaden and average salaries to rise. This will require a resilient and diverse economic base making best use of our natural assets while enhancing local skills and opportunities. We are working together to make this happen.

2045 is a critical date, selected by the Scottish Government for achieving **net zero emissions** nationally. This ambition will shape many policy and investment decisions now and in the decades to come. Therefore we have selected this as the date our Vision looks towards. We are encouraged by the emphasis from Scottish Government on the importance of focusing on **social and economic benefits alongside environmental impacts** (through for example the Just Transition Commission) in ways that help Scotland become a fairer place for every citizen and community.

## Why now?

The impacts of Brexit and changes to rural subsidies, of the Covid pandemic, and of climate change and mitigation are already being felt acutely by local communities, impacting on the livelihoods and wellbeing of many residents (with a recent increase of **166%** in **benefit claimants** from Mar-Nov 2020, exacerbated by a **drop in population of almost 15%** between 2011-18 – one of the highest declines nationally).

But it is the long-term impact of these challenges that will decide the future of key industries and the very viability of our communities to survive and thrive, and why we think now is a key time to hear what the people of the North West Highlands want for their future.



# What are we doing?

During this phase of activity (April – June) we are

- **Engaging widely across all communities in the North West Highlands**; to reach the voices that too often go unheard through interviews and surveys, and to stimulate an active community-led conversation about the future
- **Investing in local capacity and skills** to help us develop the Vision and to strengthen community leadership for the long-term prosperity of our people and place (for example, with local interviewers and writing support)
- **Working in partnership with key decisionmakers** across local and national government, private business and investment to identify and shape key opportunities for the area

This work will enable us to deliver a first North West 2045 community-led vision to inform the new Scottish Government's Programme for Government in the summer and beyond.

We intend this to be a living, breathing document which can evolve over time. In the first instance, outputs at the end of this process will describe our key aspirations, set out opportunities to help realise the vision and some initial commitments to take action.

## 2. Methodology

# About this document

- This slidepack provides a first summary of analysis of our recent community research. Further research is ongoing, results of which will later be added to this analysis (a small number of additional interviews and targeted surveys). As such this is a draft document we are offering to stimulate discussion and feedback.
- We will also be testing and further shaping these initial findings in Local Workshops hosted online in the first week of June, and sharing these slides for feedback on our website [www.northwest2045.scot](http://www.northwest2045.scot)
- Here we share the key findings from research, suggest a revised version of the vision to be tested and refined through this community feedback process, and describe some next steps.
- Please read through and share your thoughts, questions and ideas!

# Methodology

- **Designed research methodology** testing a Draft Vision devised in the Spring based on review of existing local plans and previous consultations
- **Recruited and trained 8 young local interviewers** (2 in Coigach/Assynt; 2 in Scourie/KLB/Durness; 3 in Tongue/Bettyhill)
- **Interviewers completed 60 Interviews** – a further 5 being sought
  - Targeted list devised by to achieve a broad a range as possible of participants across education/employment status, sector, age and across all settlements.
- **Public survey circulated with 242 completed**
  - Circulated widely by community groups, partner organisations, schools and interviewers
  - Targeted list developed alongside to fill any likely gaps to ensure broad representation
- **School engagement with 12 responses**
  - Dedicated school student survey designed and circulated to Farr High School, with a follow up online discussion with 12 students
  - Currently liaising with Kinlochbervie and Ullapool High Schools to replicate engagement there
- **Young persons survey (16-35 yr olds) conducted in Jan/Fab, with 91 responses**
- **Initial analysis discussion** with interviewers conducted to identify key themes

### 3. What we heard



# What we heard: a summary

There is real strength of feeling that the area is threatened by irreversible decline due to many factors contributing to ongoing depopulation

Many also feel the area has been consistently disadvantaged and ignored by successive governments (local and national) by comparison to other remote rural areas (people pointed to the Islands receiving coordinated investment and policy support)

There is a strong desire to reverse this decline and recognition that what is required is a dedicated, cross-cutting approach which tackles all the interrelated issues contributing to depopulation

People want to revive a thriving community life with people of all ages involved; the most common desire is to redress population ageing by attracting and retaining more young people and families

The second priority is strengthening the local economy with people describing a more diverse and resilient local economy which evolves existing industries, invests in new ones (such as renewables) and stimulates small scale enterprise through greater opportunities for remote working

People want coordinated action (not a single solution) to improve services, infrastructure, jobs and housing and want to ensure these actions are good for both people and the environment – not one at the expense of the other

Two issues that prove to be contentious are attitudes towards tourism, and the environmental agenda. Despite this, it is clear residents overwhelmingly value the local environment and there are areas of consensus to explore. It is possible this contention has arisen because many feel their voices have gone unheard in decisions made in the past.

# What we heard: Aspirations

*We asked people about their long term aspirations for the area and tested these against four statements outlined in the Draft Vision...*

Our aspiration for the NW Highlands is for	No of mentions
<i>More of our young people return to stay and work</i>	113
<i>Sustainable, skilled and varied livelihoods</i>	110
<i>Visitors care for our place</i>	58
<i>Our environment is protected and productive</i>	47

Other topics people raised included;

- **Thriving community life** - greater social connectedness across generations and places enhanced by opportunities to meet through events, services traditional culture and more
- **Better infrastructure and affordable housing** – better housing options, road and digital connectivity for to create communities that are vibrant and lived in
- **Greater community power over land use** – greater say over land use, community ownership, to make better use of land for housing and crofting
- **Resources are de-centralised & places are empowered** – a desire for greater investment and penalisation for living remotely, and for greater control over decisions and resources at local level

# Aspirations: Young people return to stay and work

- Key focus in addressing **depopulation**
- Concerns around **declining school roll**
- Young people have little choice but to move away for **educational, professional and wider life experience**. Interestingly, some felt this was not an issue in itself, but there is value in young people gaining experience and new ideas they can bring back to the area.
- People commented on how closely linked retaining young people and families is with **housing and job opportunities** (more detail on these themes later)

*"We talk about species endangerment, the most endangered species are the young people of the Highlands. (60+, Highland other, Agriculture/ Tourism)*

*"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 would hope to see more people staying in the area, as in young families up and coming now to stay. There's nothing to encourage them to stay in the area, lack of work, lack of road network, lack of simple things like childcare!" (25-39, Tongue, Crofting)*

*"I don't want to be stuck in a place where there is nothing to do and no jobs" (11-17, Farr High School)*

# Aspirations: Sustainable, skilled and varied livelihoods

*People expressed a desire for...*

- More **stable employment** with 'viable salaries', less seasonal, part time
- A more **self-reliant local economy**, with jobs, products and services being exchanged and invested in within the local area, and fewer workers 'exported' in from outside
- **Greater diversity** in the local economy, less reliance on a few employers/sectors; major industry investments, investing in traditional industries, action to stimulate small enterprise and an economy which is environmentally sustainable
- A move away from **the reliance on the tourism industry**, which is typically seasonal and low paid

*"A mixed economy - agriculture, fishing/marine, tourism, forestry, tech/remote professional work, processing/value-adding to raw materials, research." (16-35, survey respondent, Assynt)*

*"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)*

*It's too reliant on only a few things (the local economy) like tourism and Dounreay – they're the only things going. (11-17, Farr High School)*

# Aspirations: Environment protected and productive

*People expressed a desire for...*

- the special character of the area and environment to be protected but **in balance with employment** needs
- **protecting the environment** (from unsympathetic development, poor business practice) and **restoring natural assets** (woodland, peatland)
- Introducing more **renewable energy** schemes (wind, hydro)
- Ensuring **crofting is valued** and helps support more local food production and a connection to the land
- Shifting to more **sustainable practice in key industries** (fishing, fish farming and tourism mentioned)

*"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)*

*"Crofts need to be valued at their agricultural crofting potential, with policies in place to protect those values to allow young people the opportunities to have a chance at a crofting lifestyle." (Female, 51, Bettyhill, Crofting)*



# Aspirations: Visitors care about our place

*People expressed a desire for...*

- **Suitable infrastructure** to meet rising tourism demand (roads, facilities, bins, signage)
- **Slow tourism**, with some wanting a return to the type of visitor and style of tourism present previously
- Opinion is divided and **tension high surrounding tourism**, particularly since the NC500. Some wish for advertising of NC500 to cease altogether and talk of the need for powers to police bad tourist behaviour. Others challenge this negative narrative and point instead to the opportunities.
- Promoting the area as **a place to stay and live**, rather than a place to visit, and ensuring that tourism functions for both residents and tourists.

*"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 need 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 we heard: Opportunities for development

We asked people the extent to which they agreed the following opportunities for development were important ...

Statement	Agreeing	Disagreeing	Neutral
1. Strengthening Community Leadership and Democracy	76.78	5.95	17.36
2. Diversifying Local Economy and Creating Skilled Workforce	95.83	3.57	.6
3. Improving Access to Land for Housing and Crofting	88.09	4.17	7.74
4. Using new technologies and improving infrastructure to enhance rural living	89.29	0.6	10.12
5. Creating a co-ordinated approach to tourism	83.93	2.98	13.10
6. Investing in an environmentally sustainable economy and nature-based jobs	85.12	2.98	11.90

Many respondents felt that all of the opportunities described were important for the future development of the area and **tackling all of the above was critical.**

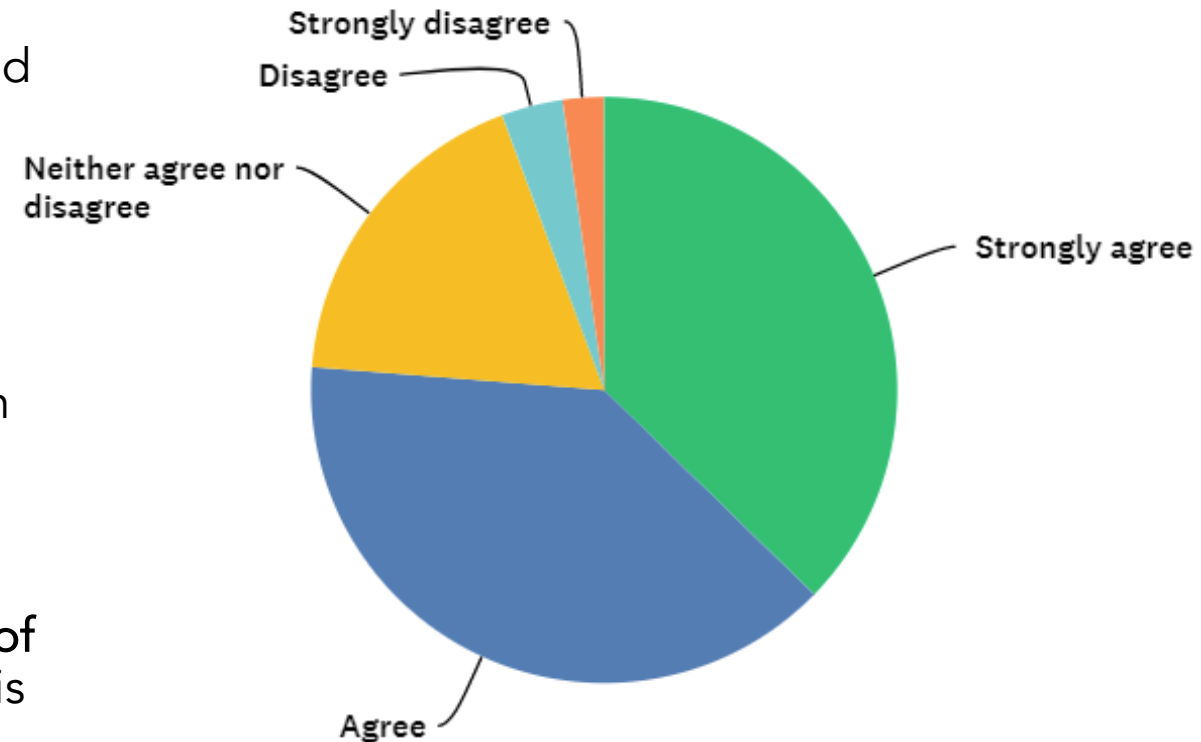
# Strengthening community leadership and local democracy

While there was strong agreement local residents needed greater control over decisions made that affect their communities...

...many were sceptical about who locally would be in charge of such decisions, with some concerned that current community groups **aren't sufficiently representative** and can be caught up in competition with one another.

There was a strong desire for **decentralisation of resources and decisionmaking** to local areas (from Inverness, Edinburgh, Westminster) and that **ownership of renewables** could provide much needed income. There is a real sense of resilience and achievement following successful **community response to Covid**.

*We need to address the democratic deficit, the utter powerlessness of community councils. It is absurd that the amount of money [they] have equates to a bar of chocolate per person. The total lack of power, it all resides in Edinburgh and Inverness... An example of this is the difference that wind farms are making to communities like Bettyhill whereby they are now empowered and have the resources to make a difference. There are so many competent people who are hiding because they feel they have no power to achieve anything. (60+, Bettyhill, Third Sector)*

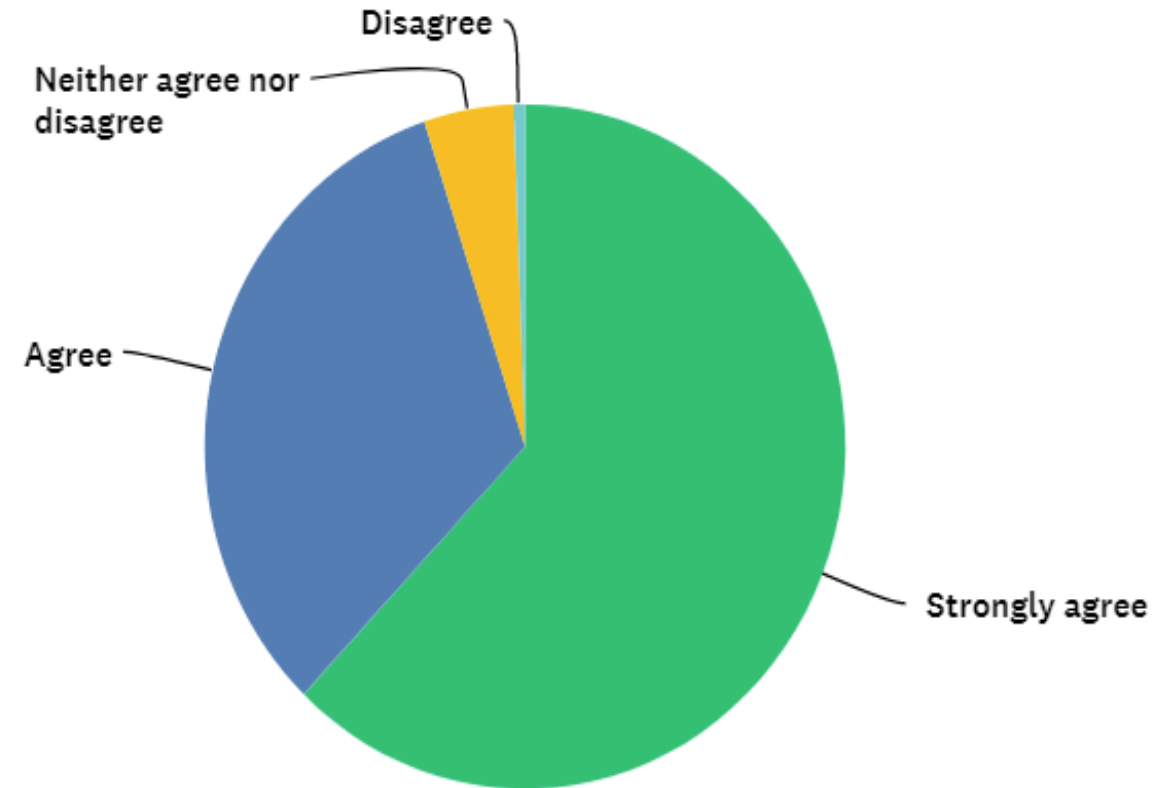


# Diversifying the local economy and creating a skilled workforce

People are concerned that the area relies too heavily on too few employers and industries, with many jobs only providing enough work for part time employment or seasonally. Concerns about tourism providing only seasonal work may be having a wider impact on attitudes towards the industry.

Ideas for economic opportunities to explore were wide and varied, with an overall desire for a **more blended, diverse job market** which pursues many options for socioeconomic and environmental benefit (see *Sustainable livelihoods* slide) and greater emphasis on training and skills.

*There needs to be more diversifying of incomes, so the communities can take a knock in one sector and bounce back as the others support them when one is down. We do not want communities that are vulnerably reliant on a monoculture of sectors or industries. (40-59, Bettyhill, Crofting)*



*Concentrate more on businesses and industries rather than focus on tourism. Seasonal, low-paid, zero hour contracts, with no maternity leave aren't good. (25-39, Assynt, Education)*

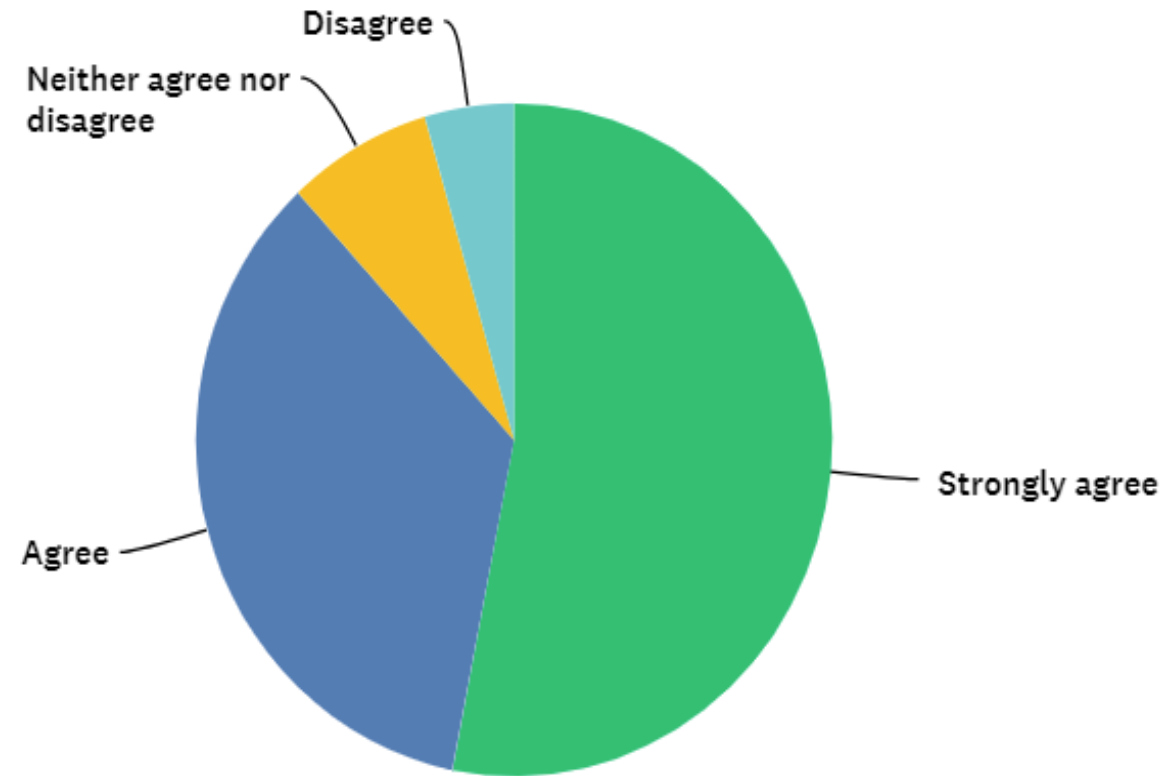
# Improving access to land for housing and crofting

With wages low and precarious, many highlight the dire need for **affordable housing** which gives preference to younger working age people to stay or come to the area.

**Restricting second home and holiday rental properties** was seen as a priority, as well as a more nuanced approach to social housing which fails to recognise or address current need.

Many felt regulation/management of **crofting needs attention** to ensure new entrants can take on crofts which are affordable. And a number spoke of the need to work with landowners or legislate change to give more powers to communities over land and housing.

*Many second homes/holiday lets restricts 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)*



*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)*



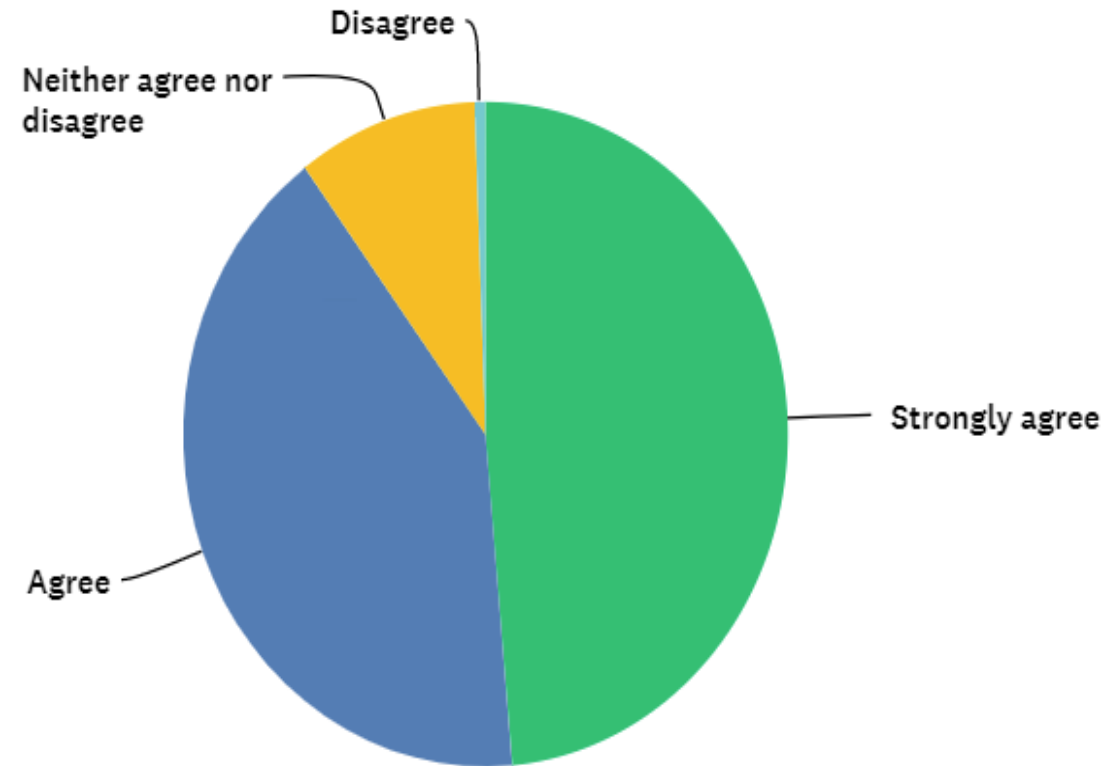
# Using new technologies and improving infrastructure to enhance rural living

Improving all forms of infrastructure is seen as critical for retaining and attracting people to the area. Improving **digital connectivity** to enable remote working and attract business was key.

**Improving roads** and access in environmentally sustainable ways was cited as important for quality of life for residents and for the increase in visitors since NC500.

This is turn was thought to support better access to services, with many desiring more **locally available solutions to services** too. Specific investment in renewables and in Kinlochbervie harbour (learning from Ullapool Harbour Trust) were highlighted.

*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)*



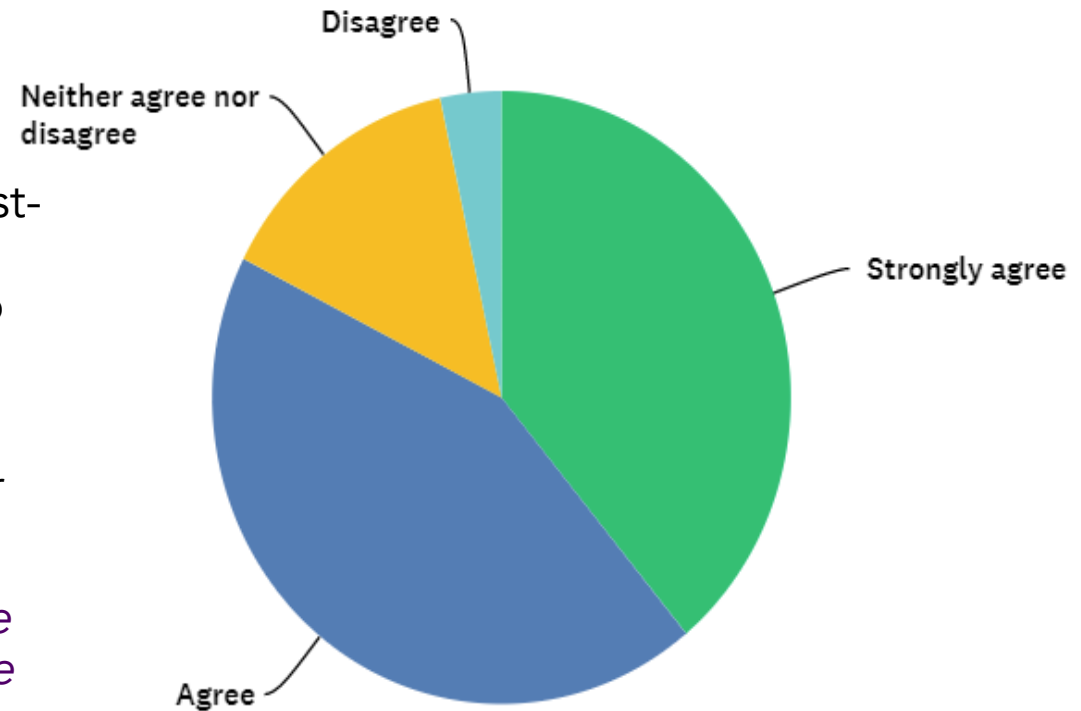
# Creating a coordinated approach to tourism

Many agreed a more coordinated approach was needed to manage tourism locally, though some were concerned this must not lead to the area becoming a 'theme park'. People were strongly in favour of adopting **slow tourism** and ways for communities to derive more benefit from visitors.

With **tension high** with regards the impact of tourism, and post-Covid when the lifting of restrictions has seen a particularly negative impact from visitor behaviour, any strategic action to tackle tourism must be handled with care

Some felt this **may not be a good area on which to focus the NWH Vision**, partly due to this contention, and partly as other organisations and initiatives are already acting on this issue.

*"I definitely agree there needs to be joined-up thinking where tourism is concerned. I do feel for the council and anyone else trying to find a solution on this though. The NC500 seemed to just have happened without any local say in it, and now we have to deal with it and the issues it is causing. I value tourism and people who want to enjoy the beauty of this area, but ...the naming of a route causing a sudden influx of visitors, without the infrastructure to cope." (25-39, Assynt, Tourism/Environment/Education/ Health and Care)*



*"Feels like things are all for the tourists"*  
*"Cafes only serve fancy teas and cakes... its not for us."*  
(Farr High School students)

# Investing in an environmentally sustainable economy and nature-based jobs

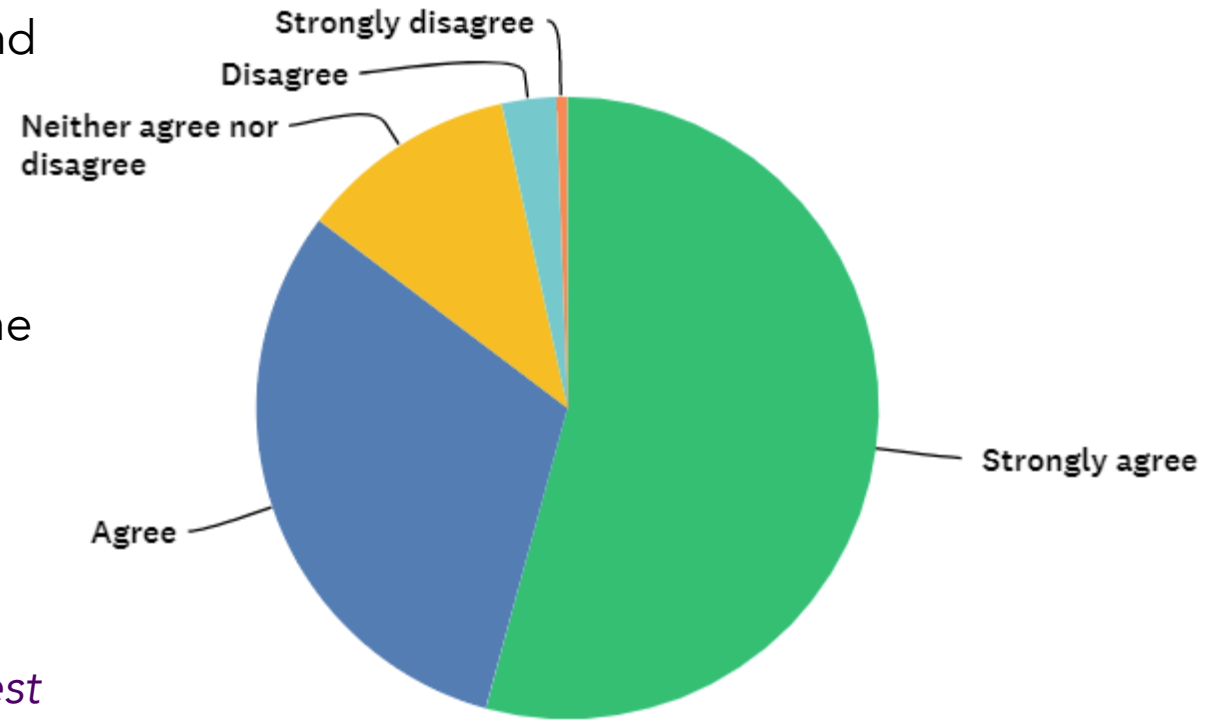
Generally, most people cherish the local environment and want to ensure industry and wider business practice in land and marine sectors do not degrade it. There is interest particularly in **renewables**.

But some are **wary of environmental and nature-based agendas** as they feel these may take precedence over the economic needs of the community.

As such opinions about the importance of an environmentally sustainable economy **vary widely**;

*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. We need to consider our actions and how they can be more in harmony with the environment and nature, which we are a part of. (25-33, Assynt, Health and Care/Tourism/ Environment/Education)*

*New development around the area and protection of natural landscape like the flow country (11-17, Farr High School)*



*I feel there is an over emphasis on nature-based jobs and environmental lobby groups and NGO's have too much influence over the Government. I do want a sustainable environment but in conjunction with other developments like the Space Hub which will be carbon neutral. (60+, Tongue, Retired)*

# What we heard: Ideas for action

We asked people what ideas they had for driving this work forward. Ideas shared included;

- **Community development officers** who might work across settlements
- Local employers and landowners **giving staff time for local voluntary work** to support community development
- Strengthening the **role and governance of Community Councils**, learning from Parish Council structures in England, and the success of CCs in Shetland and Orkney in making change. Ensuring they become **more representative and engaging** of residents views.
- **Involving young people** in community groups, and particularly Community Councils to improve representation and drive their priorities
- Using the recent rise (post-Covid) in digital technology to get a **broader range of voices** involved in community action and decisionmaking through zoom meetings etc.
- Establishing a **network of business and career mentors** from/in the local area to inspire and mentor younger generations. This could also extend to peer learning and even resource sharing among local businesses.
- To exchange **learning with other rural communities**, here and abroad, on sustaining rural life. Shetland and Orkney mentioned repeatedly as success stories.

## 4. A revised vision for the future



# Introducing a revised Vision for the future

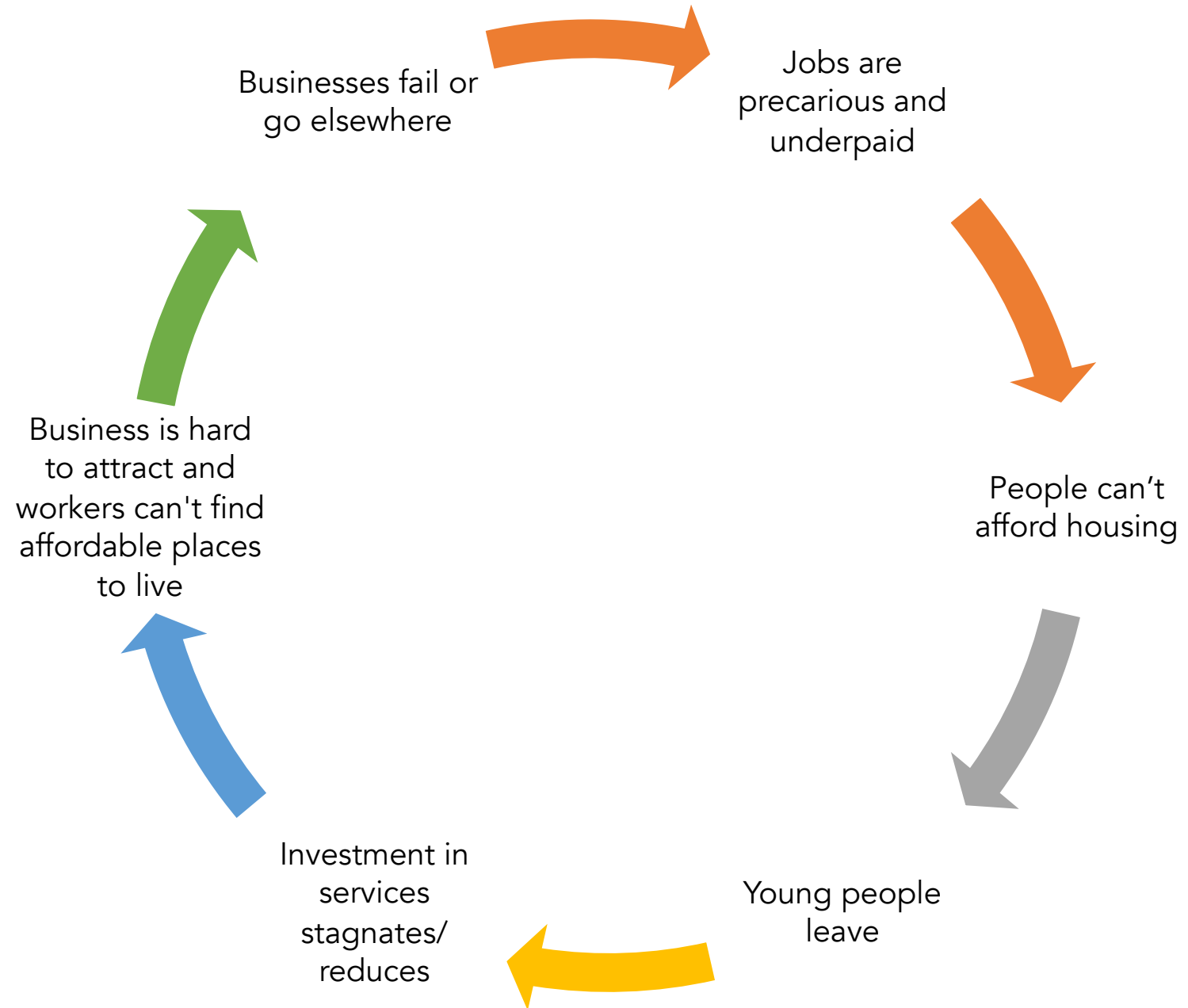
Reflecting on our findings and the Draft Vision shared, we believe we have heard;

- a common desire for a **fundamental shift** to improve the future prospects of the area socially, environmentally, and economically
- a new **set of aspirations** for how the NWH will look in 2045
- a range of ideas on the **opportunities for development** that will help us get there
- And some **immediate priorities** for investment that can lay the foundations for the vision to take shape

Together these form an initial long term Vision for the North West Highlands which we share in the following slides.

More work is needed to design strategies and develop these ideas in greater detail to help the area meet the aspirations. This work must continue to involve a broad and diverse range of voices and interests from across our communities, working with key external decisionmakers to help meet shared goals.

People in the  
North West  
Highlands want  
to see a shift  
from a  
degenerative  
cycle of  
depopulation...



... to a **regenerative cycle** which leads to vibrant, sustainable local communities

*"I would hope the government will finally see us and not for tourist pounds but for the wonderful, resilient, caring communities we are, that they invest in us, our schools, transport, help us create more vibrant sustainable communities that people will want to come and live in, not just visit. My hope is that the NW highlands will still be a place where people will live, work and thrive."*



# Our aspiration is that by 2045, the North West Highlands is...

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

- Housing is affordable, suitable and energy efficient for residents of all ages
- Modern and sustainable infrastructure and services so that childcare, education and healthcare is available and accessible
- Community life is rich and with activities available for all ages
- Education and training opportunities develop skills and broaden horizons

A model for a new diverse and sustainable remote rural economy

- Natural capital value is better recognised and helps attract investment and create jobs through carbon sequestration credits, alongside renewables investments to meet climate change targets
- New industries present in the area offering high-skilled work
- Traditional industries have evolved with support for strengthening sustainable practices (crofting, fishing, tourism)
- SMEs and creative industries thrive with remote and hub-based working common

A place where communities have the power, resources and self-reliance to determine their own prospects

- A circular economy of local skills, products and services is productive and sustainable with an increase in community owned assets
- Local democratic structures work and people feel involved in the issues that matter to them
- The relationship with government and landowners has become more equitable, with improved dialogue and shared decisionmaking the norm helping to create a more diverse model of land ownership

ASPIRATIONS

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

# What's the vision?

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

## Promote the area

Advertising jobs in the area further afield to attract more people to the area. ...Change the message of this being too remote and promote the opportunities for home working. 40-59, Durness, Gov official

## Housing

if you want to do an apprenticeship there's no housing available for young people to be able to do that.  
11-17, Farr High School

## Education and training

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, Kinlochbervie, Education

## Activities and community life

More extra-curricular activities for young people. Teachers more involved in their local communities, encourage them to stay here for longer and raise their children here. 25-33, Durness, Health and Social Care

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

## Services and infrastructure

Improve childcare options and reduce the costs. 25-33, Education, Kinlochbervie

Improve broadband which will increase the opportunities for home working. 25-33, Durness, Health and Social Care

We could learn from Germany's mental health schemes for young people 11-17, Farr High School

A minor injuries unit ...would prevent some trips to Raigmore hospital which is 100 miles away. 25-39, Scourie, Food Retail

# How do we get there?

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

- **Affordable housing options**

Suitable care accommodation frees up housing for families; housing stock is energy efficient to support net zero targets; measures ensure working age locals have priority access to housing

- **Modern and sustainable infrastructure and services**

Accessible and affordable childcare, education, and health and care support, enhanced by improved infrastructure e.g. local hubs, new transport options and digital delivery.

- **Rich community life and activities**

Cross-community collaboration and sharing of resources; multi-use community hubs; access to extra-curricular activities.

- **Education and training supports skills**

Mentoring, advice and apprenticeship support with local business networks and regional employers

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

## Policy & investment opportunities

- National Planning Framework 4 emphasis on repopulation of remote areas and provision of housing
- Housing energy efficiency schemes
- Repopulation Zones
- R100 Broadband roll out and data centres
- Electric Vehicle and hydrogen fuel infrastructure investment
- UK Gov incentives for apprenticeships

# What's the vision?

A model for a new diverse  
and sustainable remote rural  
economy

## Diversity

*There needs to be more diversifying of incomes, so the communities can take a knock in one sector and bounce back... We do not want [to be] vulnerably reliant on a monoculture of sectors or industries.*

*50-59, Bettyhill, Crofting*

## New industries

*More high level jobs ...and fusion power plant to replace Dounreay 11-17 Farr High School*

*The Spaceport is a great example of expanding expertise and job diversity....jobs related to this field in terms of research and data analysis are just the tip of the iceberg. 60+, Highland other, retired*

## Renewing traditional industries

*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*

*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*

## Enterprise and creatives

*Greener, more eco-friendly, small micro business premises providing workspace for small scale industry and creative spaces. 40-59, Highland other, Marine/fishing,*

## Natural capital and renewables

*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*

*The hillsides are regenerating with native woodland and the seas are full of fish... supporting a low intensity harvest. Crofts are producing food for the community. 40-59, Coigach, Environment*

# How do we get there?

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

- **Natural capital and renewables investment sensitive to environment**  
Investment in renewables projects with community ownership/ benefit; accessing funding and subsidies to meet climate change and biodiversity targets through land management with benefits for all
- **New industry/employers**  
Spacehub leading to a range of ancillary jobs; other new employers (e.g. research stimulated by UNESCO sites) attracted through improved infrastructure and a shift to remote working.
- **Traditional industries renewed**  
Existing industries (crofting, fishing, aquaculture and tourism) supported and financed to improve environmental and economic impact; local food production supported by Scotland brand
- **Enterprise and creative business support**  
Investment for SMEs and creative industries, supported by co-working Hubs, improved connectivity and peer support /learning

A model for a new diverse and sustainable remote rural economy

## Policy and investment opportunities

- Changes to rural subsidies and UK Shared Prosperity Fund
- Just Transition Commission
- Regional Land Use Partnerships
- Crofting grants for new entrants and new crofting practice (e.g. Woodland Croft grants)
- The Region of Sustainability Excellence (ROSE) project in Sutherland/Caithness offering support to local businesses
- New data centres for digital connectivity and enterprise Hubs



# What's the vision?

A place where communities have the power, resources and self-reliance to determine their own prospects

## Strong local democracy and action

*The Covid-19 pandemic reinforced the importance of community action, this is prime time to localise decisions. 60+, Highland other, Retired*

*Having a development officer for each area who could help with funding applications etc., 40-59, Kinlochbervie, Faith group,*

*Encouraging young people to get involved in local committees to drive projects in the right direction and for future generations. 60+, Highland other, Retired*

## A circular economy

*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*

## Equitable decisions

*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 would like to see a proper local government that works from the ground up, not starting from the top at Westminster and then coming down through Holyrood... We really need to get better representation for local communities and their distinct needs. I think an English Parish Council concept would be much better suited to this area 60+, Highland Other, Retired Government Official*

# How do we get there?

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

- **A circular economy that stimulates local investment**

Local government and large employers invest in (procure) local jobs/produce; peer networks in sectors share skills, learning and resources to improve their bottom line; increased production/ consumption of quality food, produce and crafts with health and environmental impacts for residents/visitors; all powered by revenue from locally owned renewables and other assets (including land)

- **Strong local democracy and voice**

Strengthened local governance and diverse representation through Community Councils, learning from success of Islands; creating more cross settlement collaboration to project a stronger voice to decisionmakers

- **Equitable approach to decisions and resources**

Stronger, coordinated voice across the area influences decisions made with government and landowners over investments, planning, land use and more. A more diverse model of land ownership developed. Improving dialogue and understanding to identify common goals key.

A place where communities have the power, resources and self-reliance to determine their own prospects

## Policy and investment opportunities

- Planning legislation (NPF4) Community Planning (LOIPs) emphasising participation
- Community Wealth Building and Circular Economy strategies
- Income from local renewables projects
- Rural co-working and community Hubs investments

# Immediate priorities

The previous sections describe the long-term aspirations and a range of ideas for development. It is clear too, that there are some immediate priorities that are raised consistently by respondents, and that will make possible and accelerate all the other changes desired;



## Securing effective broadband

Working with providers to ensure the best possible coverage, speed of connection and ability to take advantage of developing technologies



## Improving access

An urgent upgrade to our roads and facilities such as car parks, WC provision, and recreation facilities for the benefit of local residents and visitors



## Bringing more land into use, for housing and crofting

Ensure that more high-quality affordable housing is built across the entire area, as part of the existing settlement pattern



## 5. Next steps

# Engaging communities

We asked respondents if they would be interested in being involved with the NW2045 project into the future;

- **Adult survey** respondents were generally supportive (46% answering yes and 38% maybe) with most keen on **contributing ideas through interviews/surveys** and **engaging in meetings and online discussions**
- **Students** were interested (27% answering yes and 63% maybe) with most keen on **contributing ideas through interviews/surveys** and getting involved in **designing and delivering actions and projects**
- **Adult interviewees** came up with specific ideas that might entice more local residents to engage and drive the work forward;
  - Spaces and opportunities to **share ideas/perspectives** to combat fixed views and positions, and for areas to **share resources, ideas and actions across NW Highlands communities**
  - Clear, **tangible action** that people can get involved in that can start to make real change (e.g. starting with pilots) with funding to ensure this is possible and work doesn't only rely on volunteers
  - Having **young people engaged** and ensuring future action is led and has buy in from diverse voices in communities
  - **Various ways to engage** (workshops, email updates) but not bombarding people with information too frequently

# Next steps towards a NW2045 Vision

- The analysis and Revised Vision presented here will be tested at 3 online Local Workshops with residents (1st-3<sup>rd</sup> June)
- We will gather feedback through this process and welcome any additional written feedback to this summary (please email [info@northwest2045.scot](mailto:info@northwest2045.scot) or visit [www.northwest2045.scot](http://www.northwest2045.scot)).
- An updated version of the vision will be composed, with support from the project's Content Group with sign off sought from local community organisations and key stakeholders
- Two versions will be produced by the end of the first week of June
  - For local residents
  - For decisionmakers in government and key investment/development agencies
- From now and into the summer the NW2045 project group will be
  - Giving their time to work with key decisionmakers in government and other agencies to develop opportunities in response to the ideas outlined in the Vision
  - Reviewing their own responses as a group and as individual organisations to embed the vision in their own practice and through dedicated actions
  - Exploring funding to continue the work, identify and develop some tangible opportunities for action and work with communities to identify the right partnership structures to take the work forward, ensuring diverse voices remain engaged. The project will continue to maintain it's ethos of contracting local people to invest in skills in the North West as far as possible.

# Appendix



# Partners and funders

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 for Scotland have provided support and capacity around process design and facilitation since the project's initiation.

We are grateful for the generous funding support of the following organisations to our work to date;

Up North! Development Trust, Scourie Community Development Company, Assynt Development Trust, Coigach Community Development Company, Coigach & Assynt Living Landscape Partnership, Highland Council, John Muir Trust, North Highland Initiative, North-West Highlands Geopark, Reay Forest Estate, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Wildland Ltd.