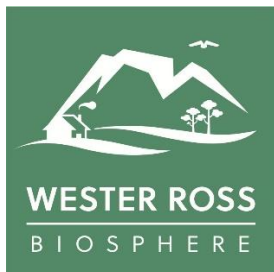




# NorthWest2045 Regional Land Use Partnership

## Land+ Snapshot Report

### May 2026



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# Executive Summary

The Land+ Snapshot Project is a community-led exploration of land use and land use change across the North West Highlands, undertaken in partnership with the NorthWest2045 Regional Land Use Partnership (NW2045 RLUP).

The word ‘Snapshot’ has been used in the title to reflect the project’s brevity. Funding restrictions required the whole project to be completed in just 8 weeks. Thus, the issues identified really are just a ‘snapshot’ from across the area, as time and resource allowed. They are not intended to be considered comprehensively representative of the wide range of the issues and perspectives across the area.

The work was commissioned by the Scottish Government to help inform future priorities and focus for the NW2045 RLUP. The project team comprised four local experienced land management and community development practitioners and researchers, led by the Wester Ross Biosphere.

The fieldwork phase involved the recruitment of six local ‘co-leads’ drawn from each of the community council areas, who conducted interviews with individuals and groups within each of their areas through late February and early March 2026.

Creative sessions were held with the three High Schools in the NW2045 area. In total around 120 people were engaged through the project, of whom over 50% were young people.

The research approach adopted was tailored to the time and budget available. Utilising a team of locally resident co-leads within each community enabled trust to be built quickly, evidenced by the depth of insights captured.

Summaries of the interviews and creative sessions were produced and then synthesised to identify key themes and issues arising. There was a high degree of conformity of themes evident across the area.

These included: housing, crofting, renewable energy, land management and community voice. Additionally, tourism was a major issue identified in two of the six areas investigated. Opportunities for young people is a fundamental cross-cutting issue. For each of these, opportunities, challenges and areas for collaboration were collated.

A further synthesis was undertaken looking at how the key themes identified map out across the whole NW2045 RLUP area and what future actions the RLUP could undertake to help address the challenges and opportunities arising.

The inter-connectedness of the issues raised was striking. Housing surfaced as a key issue time and time again, often closely connected to various other themes. Thus, whilst the acute housing shortage is crucial to address, it cannot be viewed nor tackled in isolation, and must be considered more broadly with the provision of other key services and facilities.

The process by which decisions are made is as important as the decisions themselves. Local agency in land use decision making varies considerably across the NW2045 area with some communities feeling empowered through ownership and others feeling their voices are not being heard or even actively repressed.

The passion, enthusiasm and determination amongst many young people to forge a future for themselves in the North West, with a strong connection to the land, inspires hope and optimism. Whilst the challenges are complex and multi-faceted, there is a desire and energy to see these addressed through greater collaboration and empowerment.

# 1. Introduction

This report presents findings from the Land+ Snapshot, a community-led exploration of land use and land use change across the North West Highlands, undertaken through February and March 2026. The work was commissioned by the Scottish Government, delivered by a team of local researchers and practitioners, led by the Wester Ross Biosphere. It was undertaken in partnership with the NorthWest2045 Regional Land Use Partnership (NW2045 RLUP), part of a wider cross-sector network working towards a shared long-term vision for the region to 2045, supporting sustainable, resilient and thriving communities.

NW2045 brings together community organisations, landowners, public bodies and other partners to address shared challenges including depopulation, access to housing and employment, and the long-term sustainability of rural communities. Within this context, the RLUP provides a platform for more collaborative and locally informed discussions around how land is used and how decisions are made.

The Land+ Snapshot project focuses on how land use is experienced on the ground, drawing on conversations with people living and working in the area. Through a series of interviews and discussions, the study explores local priorities, challenges and opportunities in relation to housing, crofting, renewable energy and land management.

The work is intended to help ground-truth existing evidence by capturing lived experience and place-based knowledge. Issues such as access to housing and land, population change and the balance between different land uses are widely described as shaping what is possible at a local level.

There is a strong sense of local knowledge and commitment, with communities actively identifying ways to respond to these challenges.

This report brings together these perspectives as a baseline snapshot, highlighting both shared themes and locally specific experiences.

The report is structured around a series of area summaries, followed by cross-area insights and opportunities for collaboration. It is intended to support ongoing dialogue between communities, landowners and public bodies, and to inform future work through the NW2045 RLUP and related initiatives.



Map 1: NW2045 RLUP Area (<https://www.northwest2045.scot/about>)

## 2. Methodology

### Aim

The aim of the Land+ Snapshot work was to find out how people living in Coigach and North and West Sutherland view current land use decisions and their impacts, to what extent they feel involved in these decisions and what changes they anticipate and want to see in the future.

The word ‘Snapshot’ has been used in the title to reflect the project’s brevity. Funding restrictions and procurement processes required that the whole project to be completed in just 8 weeks, with a fieldwork phase of just 4 weeks within that. Thus the issues identified are very much a ‘snapshot’ both in terms of representing a moment in time and the views of just a small number of people within each community council area.

We sought a broad range of views in help deepen our understanding of subtleties and sensitivities, while also trying to get a sense of priorities that our communities agree about. Crucially, we involved a local person (termed a ‘co-lead’) in each of the six community council areas to lead the research in their own community, to ensure that this was community-based research, done by us and owned by us.

### Kinlochbervie

Over the period 2023-25 the NW20245 RLUP was primarily focused on the Kinlochbervie area, with extensive data collected through numerous conversations and discussions.

It was therefore not deemed appropriate or necessary to commit our very limited time and resource to the Kinlochbervie area. A summary of findings from the previous work is presented within this report, whilst the

Land+ Snapshot focused on the other six community council areas within the NW2045 area.

It should however be noted that since the NW2045 RLUP focus in the Kinlochbervie area there has been a major development, in the form of public consultation around plans for Kinlochbervie Estate – a crofting estate - to develop a wind farm in partnership with Galileo Empower ([Kinlochbervie Renewable Energy Project](#)). It is beyond the scope of this project to comment on this proposal, suffice to say that it has divided opinion locally, polarising views, and in some instances generating hostility and conflict. The impacts are felt in neighbouring areas too, with references to the proposal emerging in the findings presented (in Section 3) from Scourie and Durness.

### Scoping and preparation

The core research team (Natasha Hutchison, Fiona Saywell, Rich Williams and Mandy Haggith, three out of four of whom live in the NW2045 area) worked closely with the core NW2045 RLUP team. They were joined by six local co-leads, one in each of the Coigach Assynt, Scourie, Durness, Tongue /Melness /Skerray and Bettyhill /Altnaharra/Strathnaver community council areas, so each co-lead had their own geographical ‘patch’ to research in. They were encouraged to identify relevant stakeholders and use methods appropriate to their local circumstances.

The research began with a desk based study by the core team, surveying existing NW2045 RLUP documentation to create an overview of land use issues across the region. This was used to generate area summaries for each community council area.

Once the community co-leads had been appointed, a full-day workshop was held in Scourie with co-leads and NW2045 RLUP team to explore and agree methods, to establish a clear ethical protocol, to discuss key land use issues and research questions and to support a sense of teamwork.

The co-leads then created plans for their area, identifying people to engage with and deciding on their data gathering methods. Each co-lead was set the goal of engaging with around 10 people, with a spread of ages, genders and occupations, either by having structured conversations (or doing interviews) with local people or attending local events at which activities could be organised to gather opinions.

Guidance was provided for interviews, as were the materials necessary for ensuring an ethical approach was taken: participant information sheets and consent forms for ensuring prior informed consent to participate, plus clear instructions on management of personal data. A short guide to the ethical framework for this project was provided to co-leads and it is included as an appendix.

## Data gathering

Our overarching approach was one of respect, gratitude, sensitivity, patience and kindness. Participants were contacted in person, by phone or by email and where possible the relevant materials were sent to them by email in advance of engagement in the project. We encouraged co-leads to meet participants in neutral, public places, rather than in either researchers' or participants' homes. Conversations/interviews were up to an hour long. Most of the co-leads met some participants singly and others in small groups of up to 4 people.

Co-leads prepared their own questions to ensure they were locally appropriate and these were shared with participants beforehand where possible. These covered the four themes identified in the project brief developed by Scottish Government in partnership with the NW2045 RLUP:

- Identifying priority issues relating to land, land use, and land use change.
- Understanding the main challenges and opportunities faced by communities.
- Exploring what is required to overcome barriers and unlock opportunities.
- Finding out thoughts on how communities can collaborate more effectively to deliver shared outcomes.

Conversations were encouraged to roam freely. If participants and researchers were comfortable they were recorded, and recordings transcribed, then deleted, or notes were taken. Notes were also taken of conversations and comments at events, with participant permission.

Other data was generated using creative methods with participants at social events. This included three events with the High Schools at Ullapool, Kinlochbervie and Farr, which involved a mixture of map-based interpretation, discussions around photographs and creative writing, all geared towards encouraging the students to project themselves imaginatively into the future and think about what they would like to see in the landscape and what role they would see themselves playing in their communities.

## Data management

Personal data was collated in a shared, password protected online file, backed up by Wester Ross Biosphere, where it will be secure for as long as it is needed. Any personal data was then deleted from researchers' devices. Transcripts and notes from interviews and other conversations and engagements were uploaded into a secure online area.

A record was kept of any participants who would like to see how their engagement has been used, and the final report will be shared with them in due course. This is a crucial aspect of ensuring that everyone involved feels that this is a conversation that will continue and that their views matter, they have been listened to and will make a difference.

## Data analysis

Data from each area was collated and a preliminary thematic analysis carried out by the core team. This generated four primary themes: housing, crofting, renewables and land management. Youth and community voice also emerged as crucial, with tourism impacts being particularly noted in two community council areas.

Thematic summaries were then produced for each community council area, and for the schools' data. These summaries were structured according to the following topics: issues, barriers and constraints, opportunities, and recommendations. Given the severe time constraints on the project, it was not possible to carry out further, more nuanced analysis of the data. These summaries are nonetheless a worthwhile and meaningful research output and a useful snapshot of current and future projected land use and the associated wider community development aspirations in the NW2045 area.

A further synthesis was undertaken looking at how the key themes identified map out across the whole NW2045 RLUP area and what future actions the RLUP could undertake to help address the challenges and opportunities arising.

## Engagement

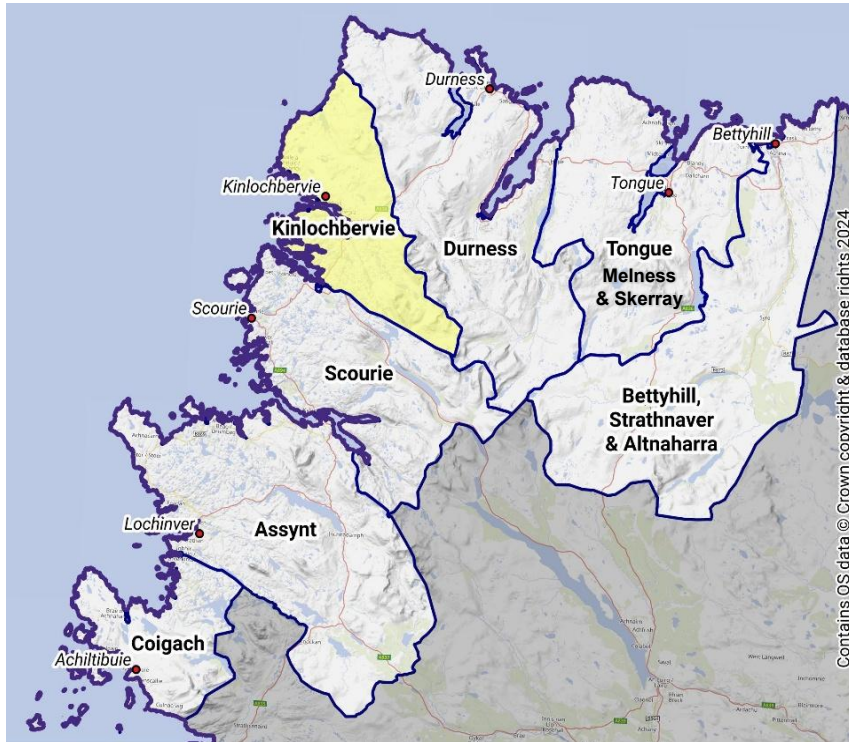
In total 59 people were interviewed and 58 young people engaged in sessions held in the three high schools, as follows.

Community Council Area	Interviewees
Coigach	9
Assynt	11
Scourie	10
Durness	11
Tongue, Melness & Skerray	12
Bettyhill, Altnaharra, Strathnaver	6
Farr High School	17
Kinlochberrie High School	11
Ullapool High School	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>117</b>

### 3. Area Summaries

This section presents a summary of findings for each area included in the study. Each summary reflects local perspectives on the key themes emerging. They are intended to reflect how these issues are described and experienced within each community.

#### 3.1 Kinlochbervie



Map of NW2045 area showing Kinlochbervie Community Council Area

Kinlochbervie is where the original Land+ pilot work<sup>1</sup> started in 2023. It involved in-depth conversations across the community to explore local perspectives on land use and provides a more detailed starting point for this study. This work involved 100+ hours of conversation with members of the community of place, undertaken by 3 community co-leads.

For this report, a lighter-touch approach has been taken in Kinlochbervie, with the earlier findings sense-checked rather than revisited in full. The themes identified through the pilot remain closely aligned with what has been heard through this wider process and continue to reflect how people describe the area. It is important to note that – as explained in section 2 above – since this initial work was undertaken, the proposed renewable energy development is a significant additional issue.

As in other areas, access to land and housing is understood to shape what is possible locally, alongside wider pressures linked to employment, population change and the ability of younger people to remain in or return to the area. Crofting and land use reflect both continuity and change, with interest in diversification alongside ongoing barriers to accessing and making use of land.

People also spoke about wanting a stronger voice in how land and resources are managed. Underneath it all is a shared focus on keeping the community going and building local capacity, with land use shaping both day-to-day life and what is possible in the future.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.northwest2045.scot/rlup-land-handbook>

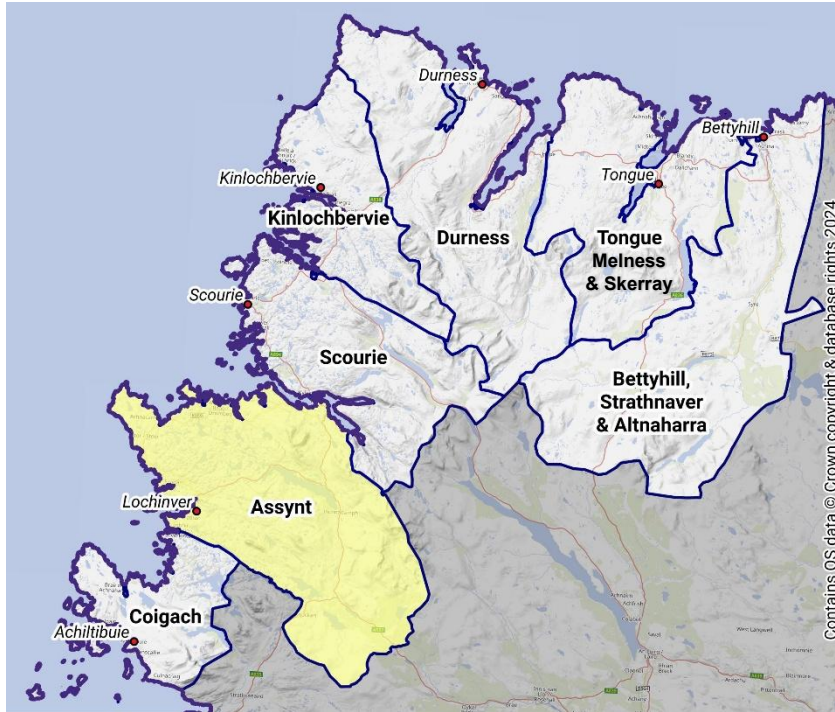
The figure below is a summary of the main themes of those conversations in Kinlochberrie across 2023-4.



Figure 2: Summary of Kinlochberrie conversations, 2023-4, from NorthWest2045 Regional Land Use Partnership Land+ Handbook, 2021-2025.

### 3.2 Assynt

*This information is based on 11 in-depth interviews with residents across Assynt Community Council area.*



*Map of NW2045 area showing Assynt Community Council Area*

Land use in Assynt is rarely talked about in purely practical or economic terms. Instead, it is understood as part of a wider set of relationships between people, place and nature. Crofting sits at the heart of this, tied to ideas of reciprocity, shared effort and producing food not just for individual households, but for the wider community.

There is a strong sense that land could be managed in ways that are both more sustainable and more productive. At the same time, people are clear about the limits they face. Access to land, housing and basic infrastructure all shape what is actually possible, often leaving a gap between what communities feel could be achieved and what can realistically be delivered.

Even with these constraints, there is a solid foundation to build on. Local knowledge remains strong, community ownership is well established, and there is a clear appetite for approaches that are rooted in place. Land use in Assynt is not static: it continues to shift, shaped by longstanding practices as well as new ideas about how it might better support livelihoods and strengthen community resilience.

**Community Council Area:** Assynt

**Theme:** Housing

**Issues:**

- There is a significant shortage of housing, particularly affordable and suitable homes for local people
- High levels of second / holiday home ownership are reducing availability for permanent residents
- A lack of rental accommodation limits options for workers, young people and families
- Housing is not just limited in supply, but often not serving the needs of the local community

**Challenges:**

- Access to land for housing is limited, despite willingness from some crofters to support local housing development
- Unclear or inaccessible routes to ensure housing is delivered for local need rather than the open market
- High build and infrastructure costs in a remote area
- Crofting tenure and regulatory processes can slow or complicate housing delivery
- Second homes and external buyers driving up prices and reducing available stock
- Local processes and power dynamics can make it difficult for people to engage or influence outcomes

**Opportunities:**

- Community land ownership creates potential to deliver housing with clear local benefit
- Strong local interest in housing that supports year-round residents rather than second homes
- Potential for targeted developments (e.g. affordable housing, worker accommodation, hostel-type provision)
- Young people and crofters express a clear desire to live and work locally if housing is available
- Opportunity to link housing with crofting, self-sufficiency and local livelihoods

**Conclusions / Recommendations:**

Interviewee Quote: *“I’d only want to sell land if it was for social housing — not for second homes.”*

- Increase supply of housing that is accessible to local people, particularly affordable and rental options
- Introduce clear mechanisms to prioritise local occupancy and reduce second home pressure
- Use community-owned land to deliver housing with defined community benefit
- Create clearer pathways for crofters and landowners to release land specifically for local housing
- Support a mix of housing types, including accommodation for workers and younger residents
- Improve transparency and accessibility of decision-making processes

<b>Community Council Area:</b> Assynt	<b>Theme:</b> Crofting	
<b>Issues:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Crofting is widely seen as essential to the future of the area and to maintaining people on the land</li> <li>- Fewer people are actively crofting, with ageing demographics and reduced collective working</li> <li>- Barriers around housing, income and access to land limit the ability of people to take on or sustain crofts</li> <li>- There is a growing gap between the importance of crofting and how difficult it is to make it viable in practice</li> </ul>		
<b>Challenges:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Crofting regulation is slow and complex, with limited capacity in the Crofting Commission</li> <li>- Administrative delays (e.g. registration, reallocation) restrict timely land use decisions</li> <li>- Financial barriers, including upfront costs and limited or inflexible grant support</li> <li>- Lack of coordination between crofters and reduced collective working at township level</li> <li>- Generational differences in expectations, with younger people facing higher barriers to entry</li> <li>- Wider economic pressures affecting viability (e.g. market returns, subsidy changes)</li> </ul>	<b>Opportunities:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strong interest from younger people in crofting, self-sufficiency and land-based livelihoods</li> <li>- Community ownership creates scope to support active crofting and bring land back into use</li> <li>- Opportunities to diversify crofting into food production, small enterprises and local supply chains</li> <li>- Potential to reintroduce more collaborative approaches to grazing and land management</li> <li>- Crofting can underpin population retention, local food systems and community resilience</li> </ul>	
<b>Conclusions / Recommendations:</b> Interviewee Quote: <i>“There’s a bright future if young people can take on the land.”</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improve responsiveness and capacity within crofting regulation and administration</li> <li>- Reduce financial barriers, including addressing upfront costs linked to grants</li> <li>- Support access to crofts for new entrants, particularly younger people</li> <li>- Encourage more active use of land, including addressing underuse where it occurs</li> <li>- Strengthen local coordination to support shared approaches to land use</li> </ul>		

- Support crofting as part of a wider system including housing, food production and local economy

<b>Community Council Area:</b> Assynt	<b>Theme:</b> Renewable Energy
<b>Issues:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Renewable energy is seen as a potential income source, but delivery has been mixed</li> <li>- Existing infrastructure limits the ability to expand generation</li> <li>- There are tensions between renewable energy development and landscape / nature considerations</li> </ul>	
<b>Challenges:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Limited grid capacity and access to three-phase power restrict further development</li> <li>- Previous renewable projects have faced technical or environmental constraints (e.g. turbine failure, site exposure)</li> <li>- High costs and complexity of infrastructure in a remote area</li> <li>- Uncertainty around long-term viability and community benefit</li> <li>- Balancing income generation with environmental impacts and community priorities</li> </ul>	<b>Opportunities:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Existing hydro schemes provide income and local grant support</li> <li>- Potential for small-scale renewable energy (e.g. solar on public buildings, micro-hydro)</li> <li>- Renewable energy could support community organisations and local services through income generation</li> <li>- Future infrastructure upgrades could unlock additional capacity</li> <li>- Opportunity to link energy generation with wider community benefit and resilience</li> </ul>
<b>Conclusions / Recommendations:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improve grid infrastructure to enable future renewable energy development</li> <li>- Focus on smaller-scale, locally appropriate energy solutions</li> <li>- Build on existing schemes to strengthen long-term income streams</li> <li>- Ensure renewable energy development reflects local priorities and environmental context</li> <li>- Explore models that retain more value within the community</li> </ul>	

**Issues:**

- Wildlife management, particularly deer, is a key factor shaping land use and habitat condition
- Deer are both a valued resource and a source of pressure on grazing, vegetation and woodland regeneration
- There are differing views locally on how the land should be managed, particularly between working land use and conservation approaches
- The area is recognised for its landscape and wildlife, but there is disagreement about how this should influence land management in practice

**Challenges:**

- High deer numbers impacting vegetation, woodland regeneration and crofting activity
- Lack of coordinated management across multiple land ownerships
- Tensions between conservation approaches (e.g. tree planting, fencing) and locally grounded land use practices
- Differences in perspective between those living and working on the land and external organisations
- Limited capacity and continuity to deliver long-term, consistent management

**Opportunities:**

- Potential to increase local benefit from wildlife through venison and nature-based tourism
- Wildlife management can support local employment, skills and land-based livelihoods
- Opportunities to combine practical land management with environmental outcomes
- Scope for more locally informed approaches that reflect how the land is used day-to-day
- Existing natural assets provide a strong basis for low-impact tourism and education

**Conclusions / Recommendations:**

Interviewee Reflections: Deer are a resource, but they also need to be managed.

- Increase coordination of deer management across landholdings
- Support approaches that balance practical land use with environmental outcomes
- Strengthen local involvement in decision-making around wildlife management
- Develop economic opportunities linked to wildlife, including venison and guided experiences
- Improve communication between land managers, community organisations and external bodies

<b>Community Council Area:</b> Assynt	<b>Theme:</b> Tourism
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**Issues:**

- Tourism is placing increasing pressure on infrastructure, services and the local environment
- Visitor numbers have grown significantly, with a shift from seasonal to near year-round activity
- There is concern that tourism is not being managed in a way that reflects local capacity or priorities
- The type and pace of tourism is changing, with more short/transient visits and less engagement with the area

**Challenges:**

- Road infrastructure and local services are under strain from increased traffic and visitor numbers
- Limited facilities to support the volume of visitors (parking, waste, toilets)
- High-impact tourism associated with routes such as the NC500
- Balancing economic benefit with impacts on community wellbeing and environment
- Lack of mechanisms to control or shape tourism development / Limited opportunities for the community to influence how tourism develops and is managed locally

**Opportunities:**

- Tourism remains an important source of income for local businesses and crofters
- Strong potential for low-impact, nature-based and “slow tourism” approaches
- Opportunities to develop guided experiences and deeper engagement with the landscape and culture
- Opportunity to involve the community more directly in shaping tourism to reflect local capacity and priorities

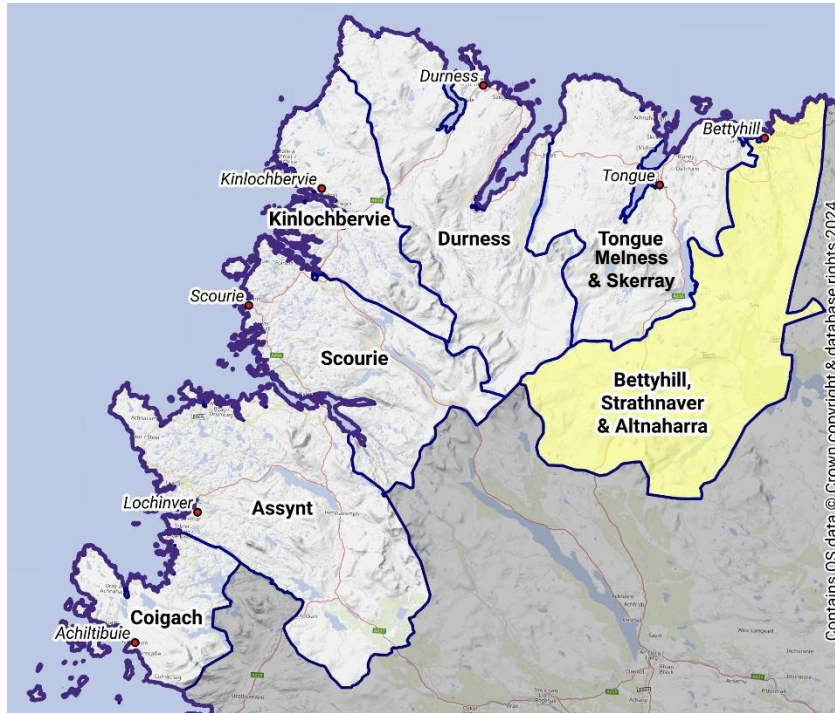
**Conclusions / Recommendations:**

Interviewee Quote: *“Tourism used to be something to look forward to.”*

- Shift measure of success from visitor numbers to improving the quality and type of tourism
- Encourage longer stays and more place-based experiences
- Improve infrastructure to better manage visitor impact
- Develop approaches to manage or influence visitor behaviour and flow
- Create clearer routes for community input into tourism planning and decision-making
- Support locally led approaches to managing tourism, including community involvement in setting priorities

### 3.3 Bettyhill, Strathnaver & Altnaharra

*This information is based on 6 in-depth interviews with residents across Bettyhill, Strathnaver and Altnaharra Community Council area.*



Map of NW2045 area showing Bettyhill, Strathnaver & Altnaharra Community Council Area

Access to housing, land and employment comes up repeatedly as shaping what it's like to live in Bettyhill, Strathnaver and Altnaharra, particularly for younger people who want to stay or return. Rising house prices and patterns of land ownership are seen as key drivers, with some pointing to knock-on effects from neighbouring areas.

Land use is closely tied to identity and culture, as well as to livelihoods. Crofting, Gaelic and place-based knowledge are central to how people understand and relate to the land. The landscape is not just physical, but lived-in and storied, closely connected to memory, practice and everyday life.

There is a strong sense of both potential and limitation. Community-led work, local leadership and a willingness to act collectively are clear strengths. Ongoing tensions around decision-making, particularly in relation to deer management and wider land use change, continue to shape what feels possible, with some references to renewable energy development in the wider area.

<b>Community Council Area:</b> Bettyhill, Strathnaver & Altnaharra	<b>Theme:</b> Housing
<b>Issues:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rising house prices and limited availability of affordable housing</li> <li>- Housing increasingly out of reach for younger people and those seeking to return</li> <li>- Wider patterns of land ownership and housing purchase influencing local availability</li> </ul>	
<b>Challenges:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Knock-on effects from neighbouring areas where housing is being acquired at scale</li> <li>- Limited mechanisms to prioritise local access to housing</li> <li>- Barriers for younger people to establish themselves locally</li> </ul>	<b>Opportunities:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Potential to limit second home ownership and prioritise local occupancy</li> <li>- Growing recognition of housing as a key factor in sustaining communities</li> </ul>
<b>Conclusions / Recommendations:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Intervention in house sales to prioritise local people</li> </ul>	

<b>Community Council Area:</b> Bettyhill, Strathnaver & Altnaharra	<b>Theme:</b> Crofting
<b>Issues:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Young peoples' access to crofts is limited</li> <li>- Crofting remains central to identity and land use, but difficult to access and sustain</li> </ul>	
<b>Challenges:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of incentives for landowners to create new crofts</li> <li>- Complex crofting legislation and processes</li> <li>- Croft holdings cannot easily be expanded</li> <li>- Younger people face barriers to entry and confidence (“just a crofter”)</li> <li>- Deer pressure significantly affecting grazing and cultivation</li> <li>- External pressures including tourism and infrastructure impacting livestock movement</li> </ul>	<b>Opportunities:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strong interest from younger people in crofting and land-based livelihoods</li> <li>- Deep cultural connection to land through Gaelic language and place-based knowledge</li> <li>- Scope to support new entrants and revive active crofting</li> <li>- Potential to strengthen collaboration between crofters and landowners</li> </ul>
<b>Conclusions / Recommendations:</b>	

- Recognition by landowners of crofters’ different priorities
- Create clearer pathways for new crofts and access for younger people
- Recognise and support the cultural and practical role of crofting

<b>Community Council Area:</b> Bettyhill, Strathnaver & Altnaharra	<b>Theme:</b> Land Use & Management
<b>Issues:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tensions around how land is used and who makes decisions</li> <li>- Need to balance different land uses, including crofting, conservation and development</li> </ul>	
<b>Challenges:</b>	<b>Opportunities:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Deer management is seen as contentious and impacts crofting viability</li> <li>- Lack of coordinated approaches across landholdings</li> <li>- Perception that decision-making power sits with a small number of actors</li> <li>- Tensions around approaches such as rewilding and “wilderness” framing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More diverse land ownership creates greater scope for local agency</li> <li>- Strong cultural connection to land through Gaelic language and lived experience</li> <li>- Potential for more joined-up, locally informed land management approaches</li> <li>- Opportunities to develop local enterprise (e.g. industrial estate development)</li> </ul>
<b>Conclusions / Recommendations:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support more coordinated, place-based approaches to land management</li> <li>- Recognise cultural relationships with land in decision-making</li> <li>- Strengthen local involvement and influence</li> </ul>	

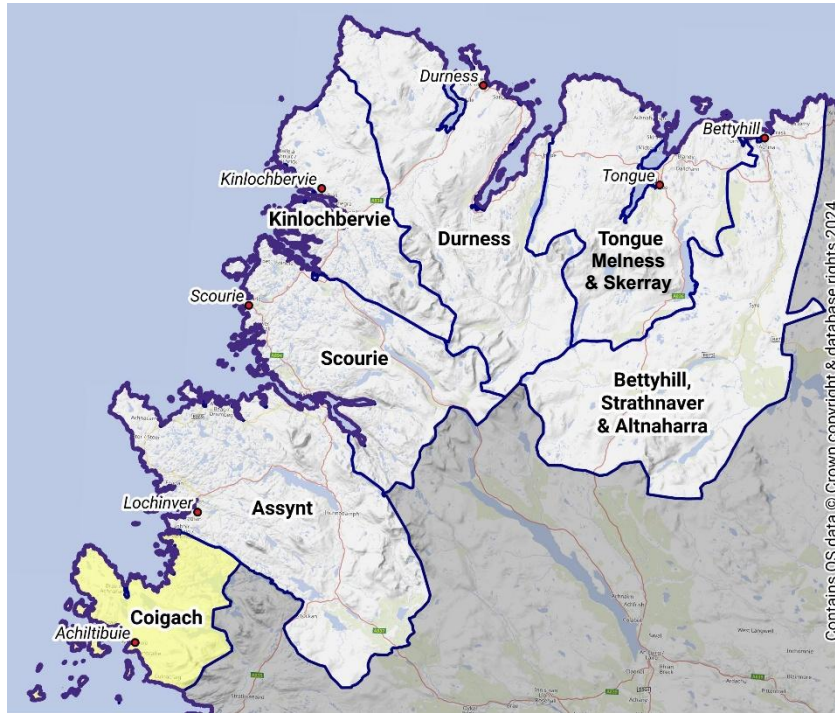
<b>Community Council Area:</b> Bettyhill, Strathnaver & Altnaharra	<b>Theme:</b> Renewable Energy
<b>Issues:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Renewable energy developments, particularly wind farms, are a central issue</li> </ul>	
<b>Challenges:</b>	<b>Opportunities:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Limited local control over decision-making</li> <li>- Lack of shared ownership models or local power purchase agreements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strong support for renewable energy where community benefit is clear</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Concerns around landscape, peatland and access to land</li> <li>- Perception that benefits are not always retained locally</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Community benefit funds seen as a significant opportunity for local investment</li> <li>- Potential for apprenticeships and training linked to renewable energy</li> <li>- Exploration of additional energy opportunities (e.g. tidal energy)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Conclusions / Recommendations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop shared ownership and local benefit models</li> <li>- Increase investment of renewable income into communities</li> <li>- Create training and employment pathways linked to energy developments</li> <li>- Strengthen community involvement in decision-making</li> </ul>	

<p><b>Community Council Area:</b> Bettyhill, Strathnaver &amp; Altnaharra</p>	<p><b>Theme:</b> Other issues</p>
<p><b>Issues:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Community cohesion</li> <li>- Perceived lack of influence in decision-making</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Challenges:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some perceived tensions between long-standing residents and those more recently resident in the area</li> <li>- Decline in community gatherings and shared spaces</li> <li>- Local employment and economic sustainability</li> <li>- Consultations perceived as tokenistic</li> </ul>	<p><b>Opportunities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strong local leadership, including a more active and younger Community Council</li> <li>- Community-led initiatives such as the food larder</li> <li>- Potential to better connect organisations and initiatives locally</li> <li>- Strengthening cultural identity through Gaelic and place-based knowledge</li> <li>- Opportunities linked to remote working</li> </ul>
<p><b>Conclusions / Recommendations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support community-led initiatives and local leadership</li> <li>- Create more opportunities for people to come together</li> <li>- Improve coordination between organisations</li> <li>- Meaningfully include community voices in decision-making</li> </ul>	

### 3.4 Coigach

*This information is based on 10 in-depth interviews with residents across Coigach Community Council area.*



*Map of NW2045 area showing Coigach Community Council Area*

In Coigach, land use is often talked about in terms of constraint, access and the day-to-day realities of living and working in a remote rural area. Housing, crofting, renewable energy and wildlife management are closely linked, with pressures in one area frequently spilling into others.

There is a clear appetite for community-led development, but this is often held back by structural barriers. Complex governance systems, limited infrastructure, and the cost of land and housing all shape what can move forward. The result is a noticeable gap between what communities feel motivated to do and what can actually be delivered in practice.

Even so, there is a strong base to build on. Community ownership, local knowledge and a willingness to work together all come through clearly. Land use in Coigach continues to be shaped by the need to balance competing demands, while holding on to local benefit, control and a sense of long-term sustainability.

**Issues:**

- There is a significant shortage of affordable and suitable housing, with demand far exceeding supply
- High house prices and competition from second / holiday home buyers are limiting access for local people
- A lack of rental properties makes it difficult for young people, families and workers to live in or return to the area
- Housing is a key constraint on population retention, service viability and long-term community sustainability

**Challenges:**

- Planning processes are slow, complex and often perceived as disconnected from local context
- Crofting tenure creates legal and administrative barriers (e.g. decrofting, resumption, unclear grazing rights)
- High construction and infrastructure costs (roads, utilities, remote location) make development expensive
- Limited land availability for housing, despite perceptions of abundant land
- Second home ownership and external buyers driving up prices and reducing available stock
- Complex governance and land ownership structures affecting decision-making and delivery

**Opportunities:**

- Community land ownership (e.g. Badentarbat Estate) creates new potential for planned housing development
- Achagarry housing project will deliver new affordable homes and demonstrates local delivery capacity
- Potential to develop a mix of housing types (affordable, rental, self-build) to meet local needs
- Scope to unlock underused croft land and create new crofts for housing and livelihoods
- Remote working trends increase viability of rural living if housing is available
- Community-led development approaches could align housing with wider social and economic goals

**Conclusions / Recommendations:**

Interviewee Quote: *“Croft house sites starting from around £100,000, making it difficult for locals to buy.”*

- Increase housing supply, with a focus on affordable and rental housing for local people
- Simplify and accelerate planning and crofting processes, with greater flexibility for rural contexts
- Use community-owned land proactively to deliver housing at scale and in appropriate locations
- Improve access to serviced plots (roads, utilities) to reduce development barriers
- Introduce mechanisms to prioritise local occupancy and reduce second home pressures
- Support coordinated, community-led housing delivery linked to wider services and economic development

**Issues:**

- Crofting remains central to land use and cultural identity, but its role is changing and under pressure
- There is a decline in active crofting, with underused and absentee-held crofts reducing productivity and opportunity
- Access to crofts is limited, particularly for younger people or those without family connections
- Crofting is not always financially viable on its own, requiring additional income streams
- Crofting is closely linked to wider issues of housing, land access and community sustainability

**Challenges:**

- Complex legislation and governance processes create significant delays and uncertainty
- Decrofting, resumption and grazing rights make development (including housing) slow and costly
- Underused and absentee crofts reduce the availability of land for active use
- Limited enforcement of regulations undermines confidence in the system
- Crofting structures can create tensions between stakeholders (crofters, community landowners, regulators)
- The system can unintentionally exclude non-crofters or new entrants from accessing land

**Opportunities:**

- Crofting provides a framework for locally rooted land use and community-based livelihoods
- Community land ownership creates new potential to support active crofting and reallocate land
- Crofts offer opportunities for diversification (e.g. food production, small-scale enterprises, environmental management)
- Potential to create new crofts to support younger people and population renewal
- Crofting can contribute to local food security, climate resilience and sustainable land management
- Collaborative approaches (e.g. shared growing, cooperative models) can increase viability

**Conclusions / Recommendations:**

Interviewee Quote: *“Crofts are sometimes used primarily to sell houses rather than for crofting purposes.”*

- Reform crofting governance to reduce complexity and make processes clearer and faster
- Take stronger action on absenteeism and underuse so land is actively contributing to the community
- Use community-owned land to pilot new approaches and improve access for new entrants
- Support diversification of crofting into food production, small enterprises and environmental management
- Improve access to guidance, legal support and funding for those navigating crofting processes

- Create clearer working relationships between crofters, community landowners and public bodies to reduce conflict and improve decision-making

<b>Community Council Area:</b> Coigach	<b>Theme:</b> Renewable Energy
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- Issues:**
- Renewable energy is an established part of the local landscape, but future development is constrained
  - Existing infrastructure limits the ability to expand generation or realise wider community benefit
  - There are mixed views within the community on the impacts of renewable energy development

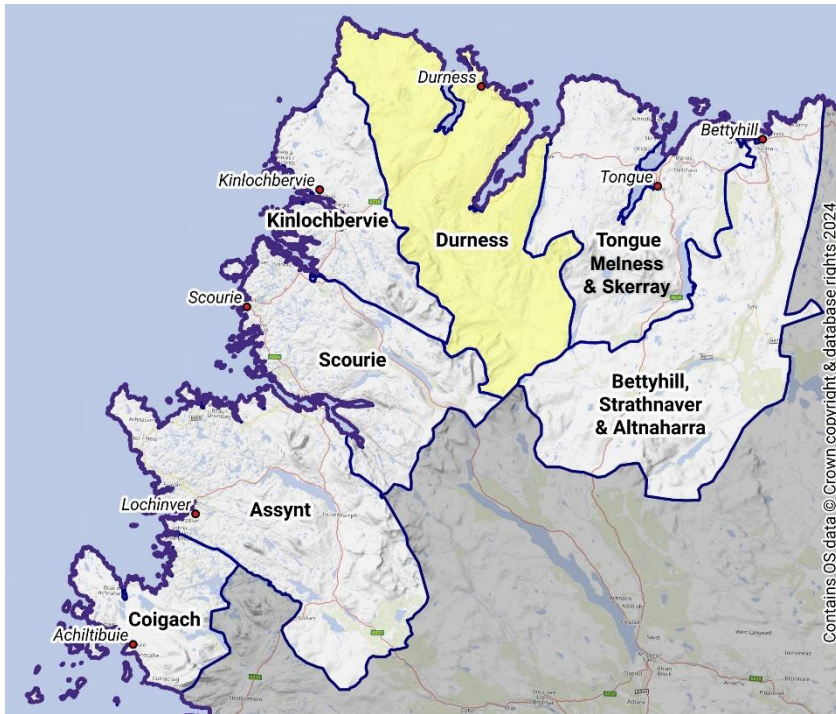
- Challenges:**
- Limited grid capacity (including lack of three-phase power) restricts further renewable energy projects
  - High infrastructure upgrade costs may not be justified at current scale of opportunity
  - Planning and regulatory processes can be complex and uncertain
  - Community divisions around wind turbines and associated infrastructure
  - Short-term nature of existing planning consents creates uncertainty for long-term energy generation

- Opportunities:**
- Community-owned renewable energy provides a vital and flexible income stream for local projects and services
  - Potential to expand renewable energy generation if grid infrastructure is upgraded
  - Opportunities to use energy income to support local priorities (e.g. services, housing, community facilities)
  - Future changes in legislation could enable local energy use or direct supply, reducing costs and retaining value locally
  - Renewable energy contributes to community confidence and a sense of local control over development

- Conclusions / Recommendations:**
- Upgrade grid infrastructure to unlock additional renewable energy potential
  - Explore options for local energy distribution or community supply where policy allows
  - Extend or replace existing renewable energy assets to maintain income streams
  - Use energy revenues strategically to support wider community development priorities
  - Ensure early and meaningful community involvement in decisions around new infrastructure

<b>Community Council Area:</b> Coigach	<b>Theme:</b> Land Use & Management
<b>Issues:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wildlife management, particularly deer, is a key factor shaping land use, crofting and habitat condition</li> <li>- High deer numbers are impacting grazing, woodland regeneration and wider biodiversity</li> <li>- There is growing interest in more active and locally involved wildlife management</li> <li>- Deer are both a management challenge and a potential local resource that is not fully realised</li> </ul>	
<b>Challenges:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Deer populations are difficult to manage effectively across different land ownerships</li> <li>- Impacts on crofting (grazing, crops, gardens) and on habitat recovery</li> <li>- Balancing environmental objectives (e.g. woodland regeneration) with agricultural use</li> <li>- Skills, capacity and coordination required to undertake effective deer management</li> <li>- Potential tensions between different land management priorities and stakeholders</li> </ul>	<b>Opportunities:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Community Deer Management Initiative provides opportunities for local involvement, training and skills development</li> <li>- Potential to increase local benefit from deer through venison supply and local food systems</li> <li>- Better deer management could support woodland regeneration, biodiversity and environmental outcomes</li> <li>- Wildlife management can contribute to local employment, skills development and community-led land use</li> <li>- Scope for collaboration across landholdings to deliver more effective and joined-up management</li> </ul>
<b>Conclusions / Recommendations:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase coordinated deer management across landholdings</li> <li>- Build local skills and capacity to enable greater community participation</li> <li>- Improve use of venison and strengthen local supply chains</li> <li>- Support integrated approaches that consider crofting, biodiversity and land use together</li> <li>- Make sure wildlife management decisions reflect both environmental and community priorities</li> </ul>	

### 3.5 Durness



Map of NW2045 area showing Durness Community Council Area

*This information is based on 11 in-depth interviews with residents across Durness Community Council area.*

Access to housing, land and employment comes through as a consistent concern in Durness. Limited housing availability and rising costs make it harder for people to stay in the area or move in. These pressures are linked to wider structural factors, including patterns of land ownership, the growth of second homes and short-term lets, and constraints within planning and crofting systems. Taken together, they are seen as creating real barriers to the community’s long-term sustainability.

Tourism plays an important role in the local economy, but recent growth is described as bringing added pressure on infrastructure, services and housing. Changes in visitor behaviour and demand are also shaping how the area functions, with the benefits not always felt evenly across the community.

Land use reflects a mix of local priorities and outside influences. There is support for environmental initiatives and renewable energy, alongside concerns about scale, siting and the level of local input into decisions. What comes through clearly is a desire for approaches that are more grounded in the area, balancing environmental, economic and community needs, and maintaining Durness as a place where people can continue to live and work.

**Community Council Area:** Durness

**Theme:** Housing

**Issues:**

- Severe shortage of affordable housing to buy or rent, especially for young people
- High proportion of second homes, holiday lets and unoccupied properties
- Housing increasingly inaccessible to younger people
- Ongoing competition between local and second / holiday home buyers
- Quote: *“Lack of spare accommodation, of any sort, needed for seasonal workers, resulting in local businesses being severely restricted in achieving their full potential and failing to be able to meet the demand from visitors in summer months”.*

**Challenges:**

- Planning and de-crofting processes are time-consuming and costly
- Short-term letting regulations are raising standards but reducing available accommodation
- No clear increase in housing availability for local people

**Opportunities:**

- Simplify and clarify planning processes
- Work with the Crofting Commission to release land
- Identify small parcels of land for local housing
- More input from Scottish Government in terms of funding and support

**Conclusions / Recommendations:**

- Quote: *“Failure to invest in our fragile rural communities would likely lead to a further and perhaps drastic decline and reach a point of no return for some of them. This would seem a tragic outcome, given the wealth of potential these communities and their land offer.”*
- Quote: *“The solutions for many of these local issues are beyond what individuals, or even the communities themselves can fund.”*

<b>Community Council Area:</b> Durness	<b>Theme:</b> Crofting
<b>Issues:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Access to crofts is highly constrained</li> <li>- Crofting processes are complex and slow</li> <li>- Challenges around use and management of common grazings</li> </ul>	
<b>Challenges:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seeking agreement within grazing committees over best / alternate uses of common grazings is difficult; the committee and the debate can be dominated</li> <li>- Ageing demographic profile of crofters</li> <li>- Challenging for new entrants to access crofts as they can accumulate via inheritance</li> </ul>	<b>Opportunities:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Having a greater awareness of different land management options would be helpful, and an appreciation that these are not binary choices, i.e. it's not sheep or trees, room for variety of uses</li> <li>- More local food production, small scale veg production / sales have been very positively received</li> <li>- A degree of compromise and collaboration is important, and perhaps support is needed to enable grazing committees to adopt this approach</li> </ul>
<b>Conclusions / Recommendations:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increased diversity of crofters and croft activity would deliver a range of community and wider benefits</li> <li>- Quote: <i>"The setting up of a Durness Land Bank could be a way of making unused crofts available for use (rent, or loaned?) so that young people and others wanting to get started with their own croft could start small, try it out. Leases or agreements could be on a flexible annual or several years basis"</i>.</li> </ul>	

<b>Community Council Area:</b> Durness	<b>Theme:</b> Renewable Energy
<b>Issues:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Proposed Kinlochbervie wind farm is a significant concern among those interviewed</li> <li>- Concerns around scale, environmental impact and limited long-term employment</li> <li>- Perception that consultation has been insufficient</li> </ul>	
<b>Challenges:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Impacts felt locally despite development being outside the CC area</li> </ul>	<b>Opportunities:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The recent community initiated, financed and controlled Hydro power generation plant at Rhiconich, which is, Quote: <i>"highly productive,</i></li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Divided opinion within the community</li> <li>- Limited clarity on economic benefits</li> </ul>	<p><i>efficient and brings direct rewards to the locals, but without having a large visual impact”.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Potential for smaller-scale, locally focused energy generation</li> </ul>
<p><b>Conclusions / Recommendations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quote: <i>“It is thought that many people opposing the KLB scheme are not against having more renewable energy in the area, but they do care deeply about where and how we go about it, and also consider local involvement in this process and feel [that] a more locally led and invested approach would be far better”.</i></li> <li>- Changes to legislation would allow communities to own, generate and sell their own power directly, thus reducing energy bills for local residents and generating more revenue for communities</li> </ul>	

<p><b>Community Council Area:</b> Durness</p>	<p><b>Theme:</b> Land Use &amp; Management</p>
<p><b>Issues:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Significant land use change linked to new estate ownership east of Durness</li> <li>- Concerns about pace, approach and limited community input</li> <li>- Decline in active crofting affecting traditional practices</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Challenges:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Divided opinion on rewilding approaches</li> <li>- Decline in bird populations</li> <li>- Power imbalances within grazing committees</li> <li>- Limited diversity in agricultural activity</li> </ul>	<p><b>Opportunities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ecological education and awareness raising</li> <li>- Greater diversity in livestock and land use</li> <li>- Changes to agricultural subsidies may help reduce the (quote): <i>“... dominance and over-reliance on just one main activity at the cost of diversity in farming/crofting practices”.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Conclusions / Recommendations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase dialogue between landowners and communities, especially but not restricted to changes in ownership or management</li> </ul>	

**Community Council Area:** Durness

**Theme:** Tourism

**Issues:**

- Rapid growth in visitor numbers, particularly linked to NC500
- Shift to short-stay, high-volume, vehicle-based tourism
- Pressure on roads, parking, waste and key sites
- Environmental damage from informal camping and visitor behaviour
- Reduced local spend despite high visitor numbers
- Loss of housing and accommodation for locals and seasonal workers

**Challenges:**

- Infrastructure not keeping pace with visitor demand
- Road safety and traffic management on single-track roads
- Balancing tourism income with landscape and community impacts
- Recruiting and housing seasonal staff
- Managing visitor behaviour and expectations
- Limited capacity of local services during peak periods

**Opportunities:**

- Strong visitor demand supports local economy and businesses
- Potential to encourage longer stays and deeper engagement
- Linking tourism with local food, crafts and culture
- Improving visitor experience through infrastructure and information
- Community-led tourism approaches retaining local benefit

**Conclusions / Recommendations:**

- Increase on-the-ground management (more wardens/rangers) to actively manage visitor behaviour and pressure points
- Invest in specific infrastructure fixes (passing places, safer walking routes, parking at key sites like Smoo Cave)
- Reintroduce or strengthen visitor information (loss of Tourist Information Centre noted as a gap)
- Support models that encourage longer stays and reduce churn from one-night visits
- Improve provision for managed camping and waste disposal

**Community Council Area:** Durness

**Theme:** Community Voice

**Issues:**

- The community council is generally regarded as an effective forum, but grazing committees are noted as being imperfect forums for advancing decisions and making change
- Decisions around big local infrastructure projects (e.g. Spaceport) appear to have been made by agencies without regard for community priorities and benefit (e.g. a proposed jetty in Loch Eriboll)

**Challenges:**

- Tensions between long term residents and those more recently resident in the area
- Resistance to change and a feeling that traditional ways of live are under attack, and not valued as they should be
- An ageing population, and very limited elderly care / facilities

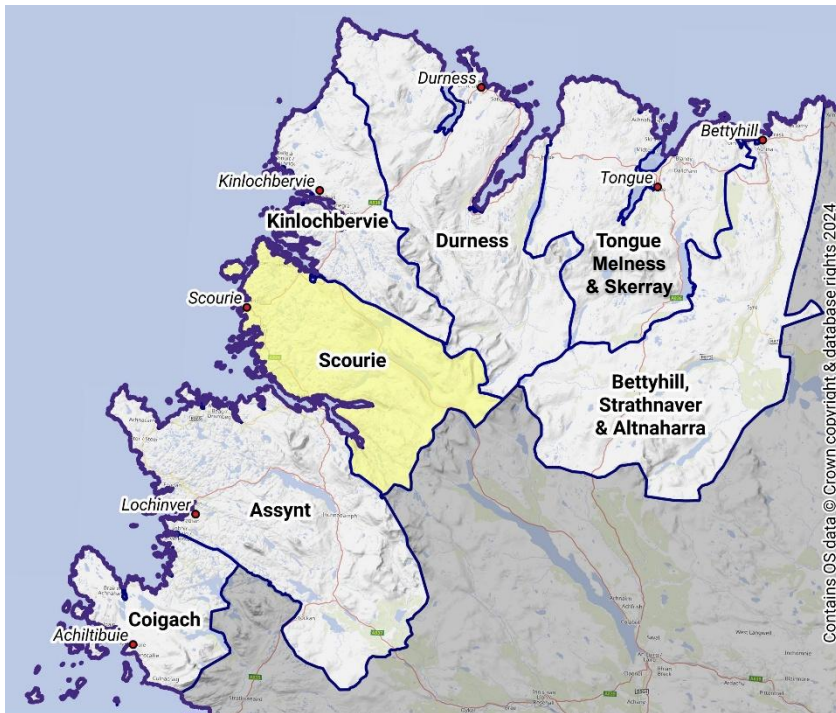
**Opportunities:**

- Learning from other communities
- The proposed Development Officer Role (shared with Kinlochbervie & Scourie)
- Recent growth in primary school numbers

**Conclusions / Recommendations:**

- Strengthen community role in shaping local future
- Taking lessons from what has worked well elsewhere in other North West communities
- Improve how agencies understand and respond to community need

### 3.6 Scourie



Map of NW2045 area showing Scourie Community Council Area

*This information is based on 10 in-depth interviews with residents across Scourie Community Council area.*

Housing pressure, access to land and wider population change shape much of the picture in Scourie. Limited availability, rising costs and competition from second homes and staff accommodation all make it harder for people to stay or return. These trends are closely linked to longer-term challenges around depopulation, an ageing population and the loss of year-round jobs.

Land use is also shifting, with fewer active crofters and more land left underused or unmanaged. This is changing both the look of the landscape and how people relate to it, alongside a gradual loss of skills and local food production. There is, however, growing interest in doing things differently, including diversification, woodland regeneration and approaches that could bring both economic and environmental value back into use.

Tourism, particularly linked to the NC500, is bringing additional pressure on infrastructure, services and day-to-day life. It remains an important source of income, but concerns come through around traffic, safety and environmental impact, as well as how much of the benefit stays local. There is also a clear interest in developing paths, facilities and shared spaces that work for both residents and visitors.

Community Council Area: Scourie	Theme: Housing
<p><b>Issues:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No significant housing development in recent years</li> <li>- Local families priced out of available housing</li> <li>- Persistent shortage of affordable homes</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Challenges:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Limited access to land for development</li> <li>- De-crofting is time-consuming and costly</li> <li>- Housing used for staff accommodation reduces availability for families</li> <li>- High number of second and holiday homes</li> <li>- High construction costs and difficulty securing contractors</li> </ul>	<p><b>Opportunities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Scourie Community Development Company (SCDC) have planning consent to build 9 new affordable homes,</li> <li>- Potential to limit the number of holiday homes</li> <li>- Develop associated and much needed facilities for children and young people; play parks, bike trails, other sporting facilities</li> </ul>
<p><b>Conclusions / Recommendations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- SCDC housing development project is expected to have a positive impact</li> <li>- Housing should be considered alongside wider infrastructure and services</li> <li>- Address absentee crofting to support further housing development</li> <li>- Streamline the process for building new homes to make it more time and economically efficient</li> </ul>	

Community Council Area: Scourie	Theme: Crofting
<p><b>Issues:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High number of absentee crofters, including non-UK residents</li> <li>- Significant decline in active crofting</li> <li>- Loss of skills, knowledge and experience</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Challenges:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Very few active crofters remaining</li> <li>- De-crofting processes are slow and costly</li> <li>- Land perceived as abandoned, affecting community morale</li> <li>- High costs and barriers to sub-letting crofts</li> </ul>	<p><b>Opportunities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Greater Crofting Commission presence and engagement</li> <li>- Opportunities for diversification and local food production</li> <li>- Training and support for diversification</li> <li>- Potential for community ownership</li> </ul>

<p><b>Conclusions / Recommendations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Interviewee Quote: <i>“The Crofting commission do a great job I just think it's just modernization that’s needed, and visiting the rural places more, not just the village hall 45 minutes away on a weekday when most people are working”.</i></li> <li>- A more active crofting community could deliver wider economic, social and environmental benefits</li> <li>- Strengthening crofting could help rebuild community identity and confidence</li> </ul>	

<b>Community Council Area:</b> Scourie	<b>Theme:</b> Land Use & Management
<p><b>Issues:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Decline in crofting leading to underused and overgrown land</li> <li>- Desire for increased woodland and habitat restoration</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Challenges:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Declining number of active crofters</li> <li>- Difficulty agreeing on approaches to land use</li> <li>- Invasive species management</li> <li>- Threats to biodiversity from inappropriate verge cutting</li> </ul>	<p><b>Opportunities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Woodland regeneration, to provide habitat, shelter and amenity benefits (examples of past projects thriving)</li> <li>- Diversity of species and habitat condition could be a source of pride for the village</li> <li>- Increased Ranger presence to police tourist behaviours and educate, inspire and engage the younger generation</li> <li>- Encouragement for wildlife friendly crofting</li> <li>- Bee keeping and other local food production</li> <li>- Involvement of schools and young people</li> <li>- Make more of the area’s geology, Scourie Rocks VC</li> </ul>
<p><b>Conclusions / Recommendations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Greater access to land and local decision-making</li> <li>- Increased community involvement across activities</li> <li>- Opportunities to strengthen cohesion and wellbeing</li> </ul>	

<b>Community Council Area:</b> Scourie		<b>Theme:</b> Tourism	
<b>Issues:</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The NC500 route passes through Scourie, which now receives a huge amount of passing traffic, often at excessive speed</li> <li>- There are currently very limited facilities and attractions for visitors, which mean many stop only briefly, if at all</li> </ul>			
<b>Challenges:</b>		<b>Opportunities:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High number of passing tourists, often at speed</li> <li>- WC facilities are not up to scale / standard</li> <li>- Visitors need more of a specific 'attraction' to stop and linger</li> <li>- Limited affordable accommodation options, so visitors tend to pass through quickly</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Potential for 'slow tourism' encouraging people to stay a few days and explore the area more</li> <li>- Scourie Rocks Visitor Centre as a key opportunity</li> <li>- Expansion of footpath network</li> <li>- Improved signage and interpretation</li> <li>- Variety of associated business development opportunities</li> </ul>	
<b>Conclusions / Recommendations:</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Invest in facilities and attractions to retain visitors</li> <li>- The way that tourists interact with and 'treat' the village is currently having a detrimental impact on the community's pride of place and perception of itself. This needs to be improved.</li> <li>- Learn from approaches taken in neighbouring areas</li> </ul>			

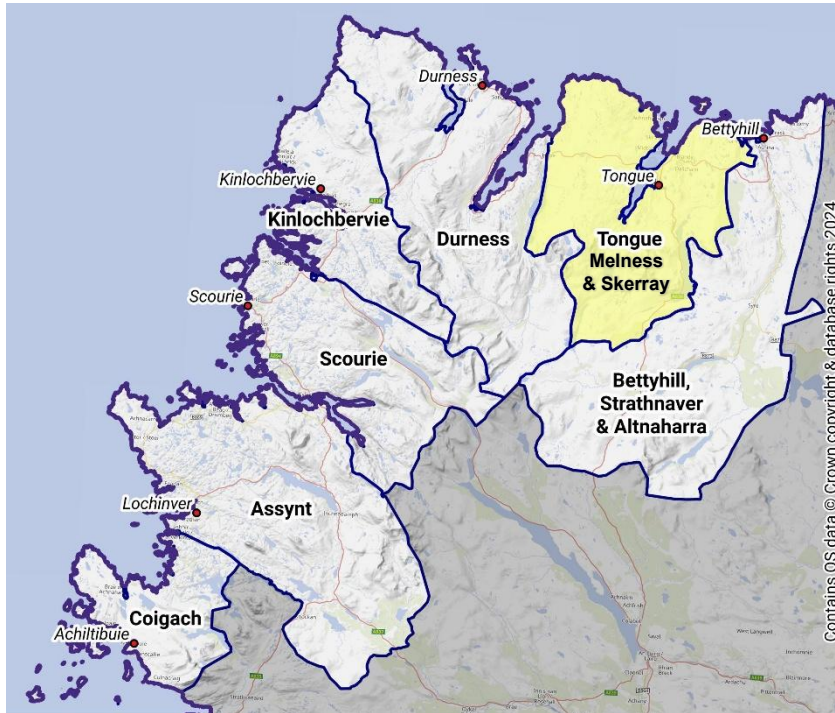
<b>Community Council Area:</b> Scourie		<b>Theme:</b> Community Voice	
<b>Issues:</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tensions between long-standing residents and those more recently resident in the area</li> <li>- Perception of the village as a place people pass through</li> <li>- Decline in community activity and pride</li> </ul>			
<b>Challenges:</b>		<b>Opportunities:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A perceived resistance to change (particularly amongst longer term residents)</li> <li>- A feeling that changes is desperately needed (particularly amongst those more recently resident in the area)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- SCDC's affordable housing project should be a big boost</li> <li>- Scourie Rocks similarly</li> <li>- Making more of the community's shared spaces / facilities</li> <li>- Developing and improving the local path network</li> </ul>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Population decline and reduced services</li> <li>- Limited activities and facilities for young children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More in person community gatherings, bringing back the annual Gala as an example</li> <li>- A shared (with KLB &amp; Durness) development officer post should provide an opportunity to reinvigorate ideas and projects</li> </ul>
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**Conclusions / Recommendations:**

- Develop a shared vision for the village
- Encourage collaboration across the community
- Strengthen community participation and cohesion
- Support long-term sustainability through collective action

### 3.7 Tongue, Melness & Skerray



Map of NW2045 area showing Tongue, Melness and Skerray Community Council Area

*This information is based on 12 in-depth interviews with residents across Tongue, Melness & Skerray Community Council area.*

Access to land and housing underpins many of the challenges facing Tongue, Skerray and Melness. Limited land availability, concentrated ownership and the prevalence of tied housing are seen to restrict opportunities for people to stay or move into the area. These pressures link closely to employment, depopulation and the difficulty for younger generations in building a future locally.

Crofting and land use show both continuity and change. There are ongoing efforts to maintain traditional practices, alongside growing interest in diversification. Progress can be slow, shaped by barriers to accessing land, uncertainty around regulation and differing views on how land should be used. There is clear potential in sharing knowledge across generations, expanding local food production and making fuller use of land, but this relies on greater access and flexibility.

There is also a wider feeling that decisions about land and development often sit beyond the community, with limited scope for meaningful input. This influences not just outcomes on the ground, but also confidence, participation and community cohesion. A strong theme is the need to create more opportunities for young people, strengthen local voice and support activity that is rooted in culture, heritage and place.

Community Council Area: Tongue, Melness and Skerray	Theme: Housing
<b>Issues:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Derelict or underused housing not meeting local need</li> <li>- Difficulty accessing land for new housing</li> <li>- High prevalence of tied housing linked to employment</li> </ul>	
<b>Challenges:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Highly concentrated land ownership limiting land release</li> <li>- Housing tied to jobs creating insecurity and limiting long-term settlement</li> <li>- Limited options for local ownership or progression</li> <li>- Feeling that housing and land decisions are controlled externally</li> </ul>	<b>Opportunities:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Crofting Trust activity creating some land availability for housing</li> <li>- Community buyout and land reform as potential routes to increase access</li> <li>- Interest in alternative housing models (e.g. part-buy, part-rent)</li> </ul>
<b>Conclusions / Recommendations:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase community ownership and control over land for housing</li> <li>- Expand mechanisms that enable local people to access and remain in housing</li> </ul>	

Community Council Area: Tongue, Melness and Skerray	Theme: Crofting
<b>Issues:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Limited access to crofts and difficulty establishing new ones</li> <li>- Crofting knowledge, skills and viability are unevenly distributed</li> </ul>	
<b>Challenges:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Land for new crofts is not being released by landowners</li> <li>- Crofting regulation and grant systems can restrict flexibility</li> <li>- Divisions between “traditional” and “new” crofting approaches</li> <li>- Difficulty accessing unused or underutilised crofts</li> <li>- Limited understanding of soil condition and land capability</li> </ul>	<b>Opportunities:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strong potential for intergenerational knowledge sharing and collaboration</li> <li>- Interest in diversification, including woodland crofts and mixed approaches</li> <li>- Opportunities to connect crofting with housing, food production and local economy</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Potential to strengthen cohesion by bridging different approaches to land use</li> </ul>
<b>Conclusions / Recommendations:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support creation of new crofts and access for local people</li> <li>- Enable greater flexibility in crofting practice and land use</li> <li>- Encourage diversification to support viable livelihoods</li> </ul>	

<b>Community Council Area:</b> Tongue, Melness and Skerray		<b>Theme:</b> Land Use & Management	
<b>Issues:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Productive land underutilised or not used for local benefit</li> <li>- Tensions around land management and land use change</li> <li>- Concerns about food production and long-term land condition</li> </ul>			
<b>Challenges:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Landowners not prioritising food production or local use</li> <li>- Opposition to certain land management practices (e.g. drain blocking)</li> <li>- Single ownership models limiting diversity of land use</li> <li>- Difficulty influencing land management decisions locally</li> </ul>		<b>Opportunities:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Community ownership as a route to more productive and locally relevant land use</li> <li>- Potential to expand food production, including community growing initiatives</li> <li>- Recognition of global environmental responsibility (e.g. UNESCO status)</li> <li>- Opportunities for recreation, play and wider use of land</li> </ul>	
<b>Conclusions / Recommendations:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support more diverse land ownership and use</li> <li>- Enable greater local involvement in decisions about land management</li> <li>- Increase use of land for food production and community benefit</li> </ul>			

**Community Council Area:** Tongue, Melness and Skerray

**Theme:** Other issues

**Issues:**

- Sense of powerlessness within the community
- Decline in community cohesion and shared activity
- Limited access to services and infrastructure
- Tourism pressures

**Challenges:**

- Perception that landowners hold disproportionate control over land and economy
- Community members feel unable or afraid to speak out
- Consultations described as limited or one-directional
- Tourism placing pressure on infrastructure without clear local benefit
- Poor connectivity and transport limiting access to work and services
- Divisions between residents (both long and short-term) and estate workers

**Opportunities:**

- Community buyout and land reform as a route to increased agency
- Strong cultural identity rooted in Gaelic language, history and place
- Opportunities to strengthen youth engagement and create spaces for younger people
- Potential to rebuild community activity and shared spaces
- Interest in arts, crafts, sport and local enterprise
- Creation of new foot/cycling paths

**Conclusions / Recommendations:**

- Community ownership of land
- Pathways for young people and others to start businesses
- Improve access to services, including healthcare, childcare and transport
- Strengthen opportunities for community gathering and participation

## 4. Young People

This section draws together perspectives from young people across the North West Highlands, based on; workshops held at Farr High School (17 pupils), Kinlochbervie High School (11 pupils) and Ullapool High School (30 pupils), an open day at Glencanisp involving Lochinver Primary School, and group conversations with younger children in Tongue. All these events were undertaken through February and March 2026.

It sits alongside the interview findings and offers another way of looking at many of the same issues. There is a clear similarity with what has been heard elsewhere, particularly around housing, access to land and the difficulty of building a future locally. Young people speak about wanting to stay, or to come back, and the barriers that make that feel uncertain and often seemingly unobtainable.

What comes through strongly is a focus on everyday life as well as future possibilities. Young people talk about the need for places to go, things to do and ways to connect with others. There is also clear interest in being more involved with the land and sea, whether that's growing food, learning about wildlife or gaining practical experience that could lead to local jobs in the future.

Conversations with younger children in Tongue echo many of these points, while also bringing in a strong sense of community, friendship and care for the environment. Young people are concerned about what the future might look like, including whether there will be opportunities to return, together with ideas about how places could feel more active, supported and lived in.

Theme	What young people said	What this points to
<b>Housing</b>	More affordable housing is needed; concern that homes are not being used by families; uncertainty about being able to return in future	Housing is central to whether young people can see a future locally and return after leaving
<b>Crofting &amp; Land Access</b>	Strong interest in crofting; desire to access land; interest in gaining hands-on experience	Pathways into land-based livelihoods need to be more accessible and visible from an early stage
<b>Land and Environment</b>	Concern about climate change, wildlife and marine health; interest in growing food and environmental care	Strong environmental awareness, with interest in active involvement in stewardship and local food systems
<b>Renewable Energy</b>	Interest in jobs linked to renewables; some concern about impacts on wildlife and landscape	Renewable energy is seen as a source of future opportunity, where local benefit and environmental care are both important
<b>Activities &amp; Social Life</b>	Lack of places to go, activities and social spaces; interest in sports, outdoor activities and shared spaces	Quality of life is closely tied to retention, with everyday experience shaping whether young people want to stay
<b>Infrastructure &amp; Services</b>	Concerns about roads, transport, shops and access to services; desire for better connections	Infrastructure shapes both day-to-day life and longer-term viability for younger generations
<b>Future Opportunities</b>	Desire for local jobs, training and the ability to return after leaving; interest in earning a living locally	Clear need for pathways into employment, skills development and opportunities to come back

## 5. Cross Area Insights

Looking across the NW2045 RLUP area, many of the same themes come up in how people describe land use, housing and community sustainability. Each place has its own context, but there are clear patterns in what people are experiencing.

It's also important to note that many of the themes are interconnected and should be considered in the round rather than in isolation. For example, whilst housing is an acutely important issue, it is best tackled in conjunction with other issues, such as crofting and local service provision. Similarly, crofting and wider land management should be considered holistically. Grant schemes and policies often reinforce a sectoral mindset and management approach, but the reality on the ground is a far greater degree of inter-connectedness and co-dependence than is often acknowledged or evidenced through the design and implementation of grant support schemes.

### Local Influence & Decision Making

Questions around decision-making and influence are a consistent thread in how people describe land use and change.

Experiences differ between places. In some areas, there is a sense that decisions are largely shaped by external actors, including landowners, developers or regulatory processes, with limited opportunity for communities to influence outcomes. In other areas, participants describe more collaborative relationships, where communities, landowners and project developers are working together in more constructive ways.

What comes through clearly is that the process matters as much as the outcome. Across all areas, there is a shared interest in being involved

earlier, having clearer communication, and seeing more joined-up approaches to decision-making, particularly where changes have long-term impacts on communities.



Figure 9: Artistic rendering of discussions during Co-lead Workshop in Scourie, Feb 2026 © Charlotte Watters

## Housing

**Interviewee quote:** *“I’d only want to sell land if it was for social housing- not for second homes.”*

Housing comes through as a central concern in every area. People repeatedly describe a critical lack of affordable, suitable and available homes. Rising house prices, in part a result of second and holiday home ownership, has made home ownership an increasingly unrealistic ambition for many. The rise of short term lets amongst existing homes further exacerbates this dynamic, making it increasingly difficult for those wishing to stay in, or move back to, the area. These challenges are closely tied to employment, population change and the long-term viability of communities. Attempts to overcome the pressure by building new houses are often thwarted by regulatory burdens and disproportionate costs of new builds caused by haulage and skills gaps.

## Crofting & Access to Land

**Interviewee Quote:** *“There’s a bright future if young people can take on the land.”*

Questions and challenges around access to land appear in multiple forms across the study. In some places, this is spoken about in direct terms, particularly in relation to housing or crofting. Elsewhere, it is discussed more indirectly, shaped by patterns of ownership or changes in neighbouring areas. In all cases, there is a clear sense that improving access to land would open up further opportunities for local development.

Crofting is evolving fast, shaped by market and demographic changes. This is leading to both threats and opportunities, and there is a sense that the current system is not serving the purpose for which it was originally intended, but if it were to operate as intended then there could be significant benefits and opportunities generated.

## Population & Young People

There is widespread concern about population decline, particularly in relation to younger people. Many participants reflect on the difficulty of building a future locally, often linking this to housing, employment and access to land. There is a strong desire from both young and older people to create conditions that would enable people to remain in, or return to, their communities.

Whilst housing and employment opportunities are key themes highlighted, the limited nature of recreational and educational facilities and opportunities is also a major factor that needs to be addressed. Recreational needs expressed range from mountain bike trails to water sports facilities. Educational needs range from adventure skills training to trades apprenticeships.

Young people are also highly critical of the failures in the area’s infrastructure, including pothole-riddled roads, limited public transport provision, distance to and difficulty of accessing health and care services. Young people need to be engaged in decision-making around addressing these issues in order to enfranchise and empower them, and give them a belief that future lives here could become tenable.

Work to address these factors will come in multiple forms and will be a key part of the jigsaw of encouraging more young people to remain in and / or return to the area.



Figure 10: “11 teen 7 teen time” — a young person’s drawing of their future hopes for Tongue.

## Balancing Land Use

**Interviewee Reflection:** “Deer are a resource, but they also need to be managed”.

Land use is often discussed in terms of balance. Different priorities, including crofting, environmental management and renewable energy, are seen as intersecting in ways that can create both opportunities and tension. In several areas, participants highlight the need for better coordination, particularly where decisions in one area are felt to affect others.

Discussion around land use can quickly become binary, with different uses often seen to be in conflict with one another, representing different viewpoints and traditions, rather than the possibility for mutual

coexistence and compromise. Creating forums for proper debate and understanding, and enabling a range of different activities and outcomes to be achieved would be positive, with opportunities for learning and collaboration.

## Renewable Energy

Experiences of and attitudes towards renewable energy developments vary considerably from community to community, but two themes recur consistently; the huge opportunity, and the disparity of views around what is considered appropriate and suitable for the landscape and communities.

Coigach has a community owned wind turbine which generates a meaningful annual income for the community, whilst other localities benefit from funding streams linked to privately operated wind farms and hydro schemes. This income is targeted towards infrastructure improvements, housing projects, community development officers and community grant schemes enabling a wide range of benefits. There are further developments in the planning pipeline, along with the associated transmission infrastructure.

The process by which communities input to the planning and decision making processes needs to be improved, with better communication around opportunities and benefits, and informed, respectful debate and discussion to help communities navigate this complex and challenging area, whilst making the most of opportunities which can have a once in a generation impact.

## Infrastructure & Services

Infrastructure and services are a big part of how people experience living in these areas. Transport, healthcare, digital connectivity and local services all come up as shaping daily life and longer-term prospects. When these are lacking, they tend to make other challenges, like housing, jobs and population, harder to address.

## 6. Potential for Collaboration Across Communities

Participants often spoke about the need for more joined-up working, both within and between communities, and with landowners, public bodies and other partners. The following areas highlight where collaboration could help address common barriers and build on existing strengths.

<b>Theme:</b> Young People	
<b>Issues Emerging</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Young people are the future of all communities. Unless they are encouraged to remain and / or return following further education, employment experience etc the future viability of the whole area will be under threat</li> <li>- Access to land and housing is a huge barrier for many</li> <li>- Employment and training is also crucial; it's what draws many young people away from the area</li> <li>- Provision of facilities and recreational activities is crucial; for many there is a sense of boredom and frustration, which creates a longing to leave</li> <li>- Concern about climate change, and biodiversity loss is very real amongst young people, and within that an opportunity and desire to make an impact locally</li> <li>- Whilst local employers may be keen to provide apprenticeships, many struggle with the HR admin element</li> <li>- In short: there is a need to make it easier for young people to remain in and / or return to the area, with the skills, knowledge and experience to pursue a career and make a life in the area; to thrive rather than just survive; for it to be a positive and pro-active decision</li> </ul>	
<b>Potential 'Local' Opportunities</b>	<b>Potential 'External' Opportunities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More apprenticeships, and supporting employers to provide these</li> <li>- Interest in food growing and land stewardship / environmental care</li> <li>- Young crofter collectives (like the Assynt Model)</li> <li>- Rural career pathways</li> <li>- Greater involvement and agency in decision making, formal roles on community councils, development trusts etc</li> <li>- School careers fairs, and employee open days (eg Reay Forest Estate)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support for further education providers (eg UHI) to have more of a presence in the area, to enable (particularly vocational courses) to be delivered in a local context, tailored to local need and demand</li> <li>- Require – and support - contractors working in the area to make provision for local apprenticeships</li> </ul>
<b>Proposed NW2045 RLUP Actions</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensure that 'youth impact' is a key tenet and rationale of any work, action, or project undertaken by NW2045</li> </ul>	

- Create a youth wing or forum within NW2045; include young people on working groups and consistently engage with, encourage, listen to and amplify young peoples' views
- Work with the employers across the area to understand need and opportunity, providing a 'matching service' to ensure that skills and training is closely aligned with future labour needs
- Create a 'skills academy' to work closely with the young people, schools, educational stakeholders and businesses and estates in the NW2045 area (and potentially those further afield) to offer opportunities and build knowledge and entrepreneurial capacity for the area.

**Theme:** Housing

**Issues Emerging**

- Shared frustration around planning, land access, second homes
- Desire for small-scale, locally appropriate housing
- Associated costs for delivery and construction

**Potential 'Local' Opportunities**

- Continue to advance affordable housing delivery projects
- Share learnings, and offer support, between community Trusts around common challenges, including:
  - o Rural housing delivery (small sites, phased builds)
  - o Navigating planning processes
  - o De-crofting / Resuming land for the purposes of development
- Open-up opportunities for young people to gain skills

**Potential 'External' Opportunities**

- Joint advocacy with appropriate agencies and statutory authorities to:
  - o Simplify rural planning pathways for community led affordable housing development
  - o Seek dedicated planning officer time and support for NW2045 communities
  - o Unlock more public funding support, to recognise the time, complexity and cost of housing development in remote rural locations

**Proposed NW2045 Actions**

- Continue to convene and promote the NW2045 housing working group
- Share learnings across and amongst NW2045 communities and from further afield
- Explore a "rural housing toolkit" based on local examples to inform and inspire
- Create a joint scheme for training and trades apprenticeships
- Explore new models of housing development, based around off-site modular construction to reduce complexity and delivery time

**Theme: Crofting**

**Issues Emerging**

- Demographic, economic and cultural factors are impacting on crofting activity; main areas are witnessing a significant decline in activity, especially a reduction in stock numbers
- These factors are impacting on knowledge sharing and skills transfer, with a fear that a traditional way of life will vanish
- Numerous reports and concerns raised around absenteeism, manifested with a rise in ‘vacant’, ‘derelict’ and ‘abandoned’ crofts
- Crofting bureaucracy is felt to be too complicated, time consuming and costly
- Feeling of ‘missed opportunities’ on common grazings with falling stock numbers, but as yet no agreement on the best alternate uses for that land for social, biodiversity or climate benefit, nor clarity on how best to undertake such projects
- Feeling that the purpose and spirit of crofting is being lost, at a time when it has the potential to support and enable community’s sustainable development in multiple ways

**Potential ‘Local’ Opportunities**

- Support for grazing committees to help facilitate discussion and debate, navigate conflict and deal with tensions (many of which can be generational)
- Sharing of ideas and good practice around diversification, habitat restoration projects, peatland restoration, woodland creation, food production and others
- Promote opportunities for new / young entrants
- Explore how access to smaller parcels of land could be made available, for those that don’t require a full croft but would like access to an area for food production etc
- Support Assynt Young Crofters and seek to support the development of the initiative elsewhere
- Creation of new crofts on community-owned land

**Potential ‘External’ Opportunities**

- Joint advocacy with appropriate agencies and statutory authorities to improve processes and enforcement of existing rules and regulations (particularly around absenteeism)
- Seek dedicated crofting commission time and support for NW2045 communities
- Learning from others involved in common grazings peatland restoration projects

**Proposed NW2045 RLUP Actions**

- Convene a crofting working group, ensuring strong representation from young crofters (ref Assynt Young Crofters)
- Share challenges and learnings across and amongst NW2045 communities and from further afield
- Seek greater involvement from the Crofting Commission to work collaboratively to help tackle the issues raised
- Support, guidance and promotion around opportunities for common grazings, including peatland and wider habitat restoration

Theme: Renewable Energy	
<b>Issues Emerging</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strong support for smaller scale community managed generation projects, particularly hydro power</li> <li>- Frustration and in some cases concern at the process for large scale generation project development, and what is perceived as the limited opportunities for community input to that process</li> <li>- Disconnect between energy generation development and grid connection decision-making</li> <li>- Lack of any long-term strategy for improving electrical connectivity to provide 3-phase electricity throughout the region and exploiting undersea cables from off-shore wind to deliver power to our coastal communities</li> <li>- Desire for more community involvement in decision making processes and benefit from schemes that are taken forward</li> </ul>	
<b>Potential 'Local' Opportunities</b>	<b>Potential 'External' Opportunities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Share learnings, support, ideas and inspiration between communities</li> <li>- Explore scope for shared ownership models for both generation and supply</li> <li>- Recognise and respect the diversity of views and opinions present within communities</li> <li>- Ensure that community benefit is proportionate</li> <li>- Put in place mechanism to ensure any financial benefits are distributed equitably, in line with local development priorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Joint advocacy with appropriate agencies and statutory authorities to: improve transparency of process, increase community involvement, and ensure greater benefit remains locally</li> <li>- Joint advocacy for the necessary legislative changes to enable communities to generate and sell power direct to consumers thus retaining more benefit locally</li> </ul>
<b>Proposed NW2045 RLUP Actions</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Explore support and guidance available for communities from the various groups already active in this space, including; <i>Local Energy Scotland, Highland CIC, Highland Tourism, Highland People's Power, DTAS, Community Energy Scotland, HC Community Benefit team, H&amp;I Climate Hub</i></li> <li>- Share learnings across and amongst NW2045 communities and from further afield</li> <li>- Create a joint scheme for training and trades for renewable sector focused apprenticeships</li> </ul>	

<b>Theme: Land Use &amp; Management</b>	
<b>Issues Emerging</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- High deer numbers are impacting habitat condition and connectivity, woodland regeneration and crofting activity</li> <li>- Lack of coordinated management across multiple land ownerships (dysfunctionality of deer management groups)</li> <li>- Tensions between conservation approaches (e.g. tree planting, fencing) and more traditional land use practices, such as muirburn</li> <li>- Differences in perspective between those living and working on the land and external organisations</li> <li>- Limited capacity and continuity to deliver long-term, consistent management at landscape level</li> <li>- Connectivity between terrestrial and marine life and wider, longer-term impacts and trends/declines which are being witnessed</li> <li>- Concentration of land ownership: in some areas activities and projects are delivered with minimal community involvement or discussion, across huge areas of land with considerable long-term impacts and consequences</li> <li>- Wide interest in smaller-scale land access and management for local food growing, community gardens, woodlands</li> </ul>	
<b>Potential 'Local' Opportunities</b>	<b>Potential 'External' Opportunities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase local benefit from wildlife through venison and nature-based tourism</li> <li>- Wildlife management can support local employment, skills and land-based livelihoods</li> <li>- Opportunities to combine environmental outcomes with traditional practices</li> <li>- Scope for more locally informed approaches that reflect how the land is used day-to-day</li> <li>- Existing natural assets provide a strong basis for low-impact tourism and education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Work with agencies (NatureScot, Scottish Forestry etc) to identify opportunities and provide support</li> <li>- Increase coordination of deer management across landholdings</li> <li>- Strengthen local involvement in decision-making around wildlife management</li> <li>- Develop economic opportunities linked to wildlife, including venison and guided experiences</li> <li>- Improve communication between land managers, community organisations and external bodies</li> </ul>
<b>Proposed NW2045 RLUP Actions</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Facilitate discussion around opportunities for different approaches and models for land management, drawing examples and lessons from elsewhere that showcase community involvement and benefit</li> <li>- Help to improve dialogue and discussion between stakeholders, increase communication and opportunities for community involvement, recognising the themes of inequality around land use decision making identified, and acknowledging the various impacts this can have on communities</li> <li>- Advocate for more local / accessible land management staff, especially amongst eNGOs and absentee owners</li> <li>- Convene conversation about how to increase land used for local food production</li> </ul>	

**Theme: Tourism**

**Issues Emerging**

- Tourism is placing increasing pressure on infrastructure, services and the local environment
- Infrastructure (roads, parking etc) and local service provision (public transport, WCs, etc) is already suffering under-investment, unable to properly cater for local needs, yet along the huge annual influx of visitors
- Visitor numbers have grown significantly (eg Smoo Caves: increase from 40,000 to 250,000 visitors pa over the past decade) with a shift from seasonal to near year-round activity
- There is concern that tourism is not being managed in a way that reflects local capacity nor priorities
- High impact tourism associated with the NC500, which has changed the nature and pace of visitor engagement; more short / transient visits and less deep / longer engagement with places, communities and the environment
- Lack of mechanisms to control or shape tourism development and limited opportunities for communities to influence how tourism develops and is managed locally

<b>Potential ‘Local’ Opportunities</b>	<b>Potential ‘External’ Opportunities</b>
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- Tourism remains an important source of income for local businesses and crofters
- Strong potential for low-impact, nature-based and “slow tourism” approaches
- Develop guided experiences and deeper engagement with the landscape and culture
- Development of a Visitor information centre for the area as part of the Scourie Rocks Visitor Centre (working title only), a centre that is being developed as the hub for the whole of the North West Highlands Geopark area

- Work with and advocate to agencies and organisations (Highland Council, Visit Scotland, North Coast 500) to ensure more direct community involvement in shaping tourism to reflect local capacity and priorities, along with greater investment in local infrastructure
- Quality tourism offerings have the potential to provide good career and livelihood options for young people
- Consider an area wide branding / marketing exercise to help shift perceptions, attract investment and pivot the industry towards longer, slower, higher quality stays

**Proposed NW2045 RLUP Actions**

- Support community calls for greater investment and input to decision making
- Consider potential for area wide branding / marketing exercise
- Seek opportunities to work with the key agencies and businesses, including the North Coast 500, involved across the area to address local concerns and need
- Work with SCOTO <https://www.scoto.co.uk/> to explore ways to empower communities in tourism

<b>Theme:</b> Community Voice and Decision-Making Processes	
<b>Issues Emerging</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In many instances communities and especially young people feel disconnected from and unable to input to or influence decisions (around all the issues raised) many of which have considerable and lasting impacts in multiple ways</li> <li>- This can apply to communities' interactions with large landowners, agencies and statutory bodies</li> <li>- Local democratic structures (eg community councils, grazing committees) vary greatly in effectiveness, representation and genuine community engagement</li> <li>- In many areas there are reports of a small number of individuals dominating discussion and decision making, and splits between long-standing residents and those more recently resident in the area in terms of views, opinions and opportunities</li> <li>- There exists huge amounts of energy, passion and ideas for how life and land could be improved in multiple ways, but often the opportunity for this input is not available, individuals feel that they lack the authority to be able to take these ideas forward, or past experience deters people from getting involved</li> </ul>	
<b>Potential 'Local' Opportunities</b>	<b>Potential 'External' Opportunities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Greater involvement with existing democratic structures, to make the most of the powers and influence that does already exist</li> <li>- Support Community Councils to broaden their diversity and representation</li> <li>- Explore options for delivering conflict management / meditation training to support and promote greater dialogue and debate</li> <li>- Engage young people in meaningful ways in local organisations and decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support from Highland Council, Scottish Land Commission, Community Land Scotland and other organisations to strengthen and develop local democracy and decision making and to facilitate discussion and engagement with landowners</li> </ul>
<b>Proposed NW2045 RLUP Actions</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create and nurture links between communities and organisations which can help local communities make the most of the powers and opportunities that currently existing,</li> <li>- Develop and amplify local voices representing our communities' needs at regional and national levels</li> <li>- Channel useful information from national and regional levels to communities</li> <li>- Support and advocate on communities' behalf on matters which have an impact on community life, demographics and longer-term sustainability, but which are outwith the direct control of individual communities.</li> <li>- Recognise that this work requires tenacity and energy, and support communities to sustain the energy required.</li> <li>- Create a youth wing or forum, include young people on working groups and consistently engage with, encourage, listen to and amplify young peoples' views</li> </ul>	

## 7. Reflections from the Land+ Snapshot Project

### Reflections on the process

The voices of young people have been heard throughout this process. They are undoubtedly the most important of the voices as they will be the ones in the future benefitting or otherwise from the decisions that are being made today. They should therefore be heard through all decision-making processes. NW2045 needs to do more to highlight young people's views. For example, where working groups have been proposed to tackle issues, it is recommended that the terms of reference of these groups should require explicit, meaningful consultation of young people and even state a target percentage of the young participants.

Due to the shortened timescale of this contract the research process was redesigned to enable as much data as possible to be gathered within

the timeframe given. Within a period of eight weeks the project leads set up the systems, recruited and engaged 6 co-leads, delivered a training workshop, oversaw data gathering, analysed data and wrote up this report. The project co-leads were tasked with contacting and setting up conversations with individuals, carrying out interviews, transcribing and writing up notes, all within a three week period.

The 59 participants interviewed represent an overall 2.22% of the population of the areas being focussed on in this research. In addition, 58 school children took part of whom at least 35 live in the NW2045 area, giving a total of around 3.1% of the population.

Community Council area	Total participants n/o	Total population of the CC area (2022 census)	Percentage of population participated in research
Assynt	11	937	1.17%
Bettyhill	6	432	1.39%
Coigach	9	274	3.28%
Durness	11	287	3.83%
Scourie	10	240	4.17%
Tongue	12	489	2.45%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>2,659</b>	<b>2.22%</b>
KLB	n/a	351	<i>KLB not included in this research; see methodology.</i>
School students	35		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>3,010</b>	<b>3.12%</b>

With this highly restricted timescale, it can be reasonably assumed that there are voices that have been missed that may have wished to be involved in the research. This limited timescale will undoubtedly also have been a reason why an element of bias or partiality is likely to have entered the research. Each member of the team has their own position and opinion about aspects of land use, they are the age, gender and class they are, they have their livelihood history and their circle of known people, all of which can be influences in who they asked to participate

and the issues that emerged from their conversations with those participants. Selecting people that would be likely to offer a positive response to a request was potentially a factor in the choice of who to speak with - there was simply not time for researchers to identify people beyond the circles they could reasonably easily get access to. These voices are therefore probably not, in all areas, the “lesser heard voices” that the previous much longer piece of [Land+ research in Kinlochbervie](#) strove to reach. There were several people who declined to be part of the

process, possibly partly due to the co-leads' lack of time to engage more deeply in the first approach - if they had the opportunity to engage in person in the first instance, this is likely to have led to participation by different people.

Likewise, the kinds of questions asked, the directions that conversations/interviews take, and the points written up by researchers can all subtly reflect the views of 'what matters' to the researcher. Therefore, where we see differences in emphasis between different community areas in our region, this may be due to a genuine geographical difference and it may also be a reflection of researcher bias, whether unconscious or conscious. One of the benefits of the approach that we took, involving six different co-leads (plus the four people in the core team) of different genders, ages and backgrounds, means that some of that bias should even out across the region as a whole, and we trust that issues important to a particular cohort in our communities have had an opportunity to be expressed through one or other of the diverse group of people involved in this piece of work.

A longer, slower process would have enabled us to cover a bigger and more representative sample of the population, in considerably more depth.

## Reflections on Findings

This research is informed by recent [research by Biggar Economics](#) that shows our area to be facing a demographic crisis of falling numbers of young people and a lack of housing and opportunities for young people to remain or return to make a life here. This research underlines the need

for us to help young people to feel welcome and to play an active part in creating a better future.

A key finding is the strong interconnection among various aspects of land use. Housing, crofting, employment, renewable energy, and land management are commonly viewed as interconnected components within a larger system. Adjustments in one sector often impact others, underscoring the necessity for comprehensive strategies that acknowledge these relationships rather than addressing concerns in silos. Housing is undoubtedly the burning issue, standing at the heart of all other land use issues.

The significance of process is also prominent. Factors such as how land use decisions are made, the actors involved, and the timing of engagement are seen as equally influential as the decisions themselves. Many areas express a need for earlier participation, enhanced communication, and more coordinated methods, particularly when changes have enduring consequences for communities and land use. Land owners and users need to see themselves as part of a land-use mosaic, to collaborate and understand better how their decisions impact others and to join up land-use decisions at a landscape level.

Thirdly, this analysis underscores the advantages of a community-led, place-based approach. The Land+ process has facilitated the inclusion of local knowledge, lived experiences, and diverse perspectives in a structured framework, thereby strengthening the evidence base and highlighting both common themes and area-specific priorities. There is an opportunity to expand upon this approach in future initiatives, especially in fostering cross-community collaboration and supporting decision-making that is responsive to local needs.

## 8. Next steps

*This section has been written by the core NW2045 RLUP team.*

This has been an essential piece of work, providing an insight into the issues that are prominent for communities in this area at this moment in time. Of course, we acknowledge that it is not thoroughly representative of the full breadth of views on all issues across this large geography. It is a snapshot.

It is important to note that this is not a standalone piece of work: it is a step in the NW2045 Regional Land Use Partnership process.

These findings will be shared with people who were involved in the Land+ Snapshot work; the Steering Group of the NW2045; the wider NW2045 network, and then will be available on the NW2045 website.

A summary of the Land+ Snapshot findings will be presented at the first (annual) NW2045 RLUP Gathering (scheduled for 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2026, in Elphin, Assynt). Participants at the Gathering will include: Members of the NW2045 collective, including the NW2045 Steering Group and those from the NW2045 community who have been involved in RLUP work (including landowners – private, community and environmental charities); and representatives of regional and national bodies with an interest in land issues, including:

- Crofting Commission
- Community Land Scotland  
Highland Adapts
- Highland Council
- Highlands & Islands Climate Hub
- Highlands & Islands Enterprise

- NatureScot
- Scottish Land Commission
- Scottish Land & Estates
- Scottish Environment Link
- Scottish Government

The participants will discuss whether these findings are as they expected; whether there are any surprising omissions or things that were more prominent than anticipated.

The participants will then identify ways in which they – and others locally and beyond – can collaborate to help overcome the challenges or make the most of opportunities. This will inform how and where the NW2045 RLUP team focus their work over the coming months.

We hope that this conversation will result in new ways of working together across the area - and with partners from outwith the area – so that communities are empowered to believe we can create change and to negotiate the support we need, and energised to persevere for the long term!

The work of the NW2045 RLUP team will be to support these collaborations – to catalyse action.

For further information and updates, please keep an eye on our website - [northwest2045.scot](http://northwest2045.scot) – where you'll find links to our social media.

*Our thanks to all for your input to this work.*

## Appendices

**A. Associated Documents:** A small number of supporting documents were reviewed as part of the desk-based research. These are listed below for reference.

Document	Location
Highland Outcome Improvement Plan (2024-2027)	<a href="https://highlandcpp.org.uk/about-hcpp/highland-outcome-improvement-plan/">https://highlandcpp.org.uk/about-hcpp/highland-outcome-improvement-plan/</a>
NW2045 Regional Land Use Partnership: Land+ Handbook (2025)	<a href="https://northwest2045.scot/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Handbook.pdf">https://northwest2045.scot/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Handbook.pdf</a>
Sutherland Area Place Plan (2025)	<a href="https://highlandcpp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Sutherland-APP.pdf">https://highlandcpp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Sutherland-APP.pdf</a>
Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Area Place Plan (2025)	<a href="https://highlandcpp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Wester-Ross-Strathpeffer-and-Lochalsh-Area-Place-Plan.pdf">https://highlandcpp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Wester-Ross-Strathpeffer-and-Lochalsh-Area-Place-Plan.pdf</a>

**B. Ethical Framework:** A short ethical framework and guidance document was provided to co-leads to support delivery of the project.

Title of Project: **NorthWest2045 Land+ Snapshot Project**

This is a short project that involves people and we must ensure that all this interaction is done ethically – thoughtfully, respectfully and in full compliance with relevant legislation. There are three main areas that we must be aware of: firstly, making sure participants have consented to take part; secondly, the need to safeguard them from any physical, mental or emotional harm, particularly if any of them are children or vulnerable; and thirdly, obeying regulations on handling personal data.

### 1. Obtaining informed consent

There is a 2-page document, called the Participant Information Sheet, which researchers must share with participants, on paper or electronically. The first page summarises what we are doing and how they will be involved. The second page covers our legal commitments for handling data. This may seem daunting, but printed out double-sided it is easy to share with people and it is useful for them as it has contact details, etc. Please at least explain what it covers.

There is a second document, the consent form, which should be signed by participants. It includes 4 questions: the first asks them if they feel *informed*; the second ensures they realise this is *voluntary*; the third asks for their *consent*; and the fourth asks if they want to share any *personal data*. Again it can feel daunting to ask people to sign a form, so it is helpful

to think of this as being about being respectful to your participant and letting them know they have choices. If they do not want us to have any of their personal data they do not have to share contact information and you must not record them (audio or video). If a participant is under 16, then a parent, guardian or other adult with authority (such as a schoolteacher in a classroom situation) must give consent on their behalf. There is a different form for this. We will not record any personal data from children in this study so it does not have the fourth question.

## **2. Safeguarding**

It is highly unlikely that this study will cause any physical, mental or emotional harm, but you must ensure that you have considered this. If you are doing something with participants outside, you should do a simple risk assessment. You should keep Natasha's contact details handy (they're on the Participant Information Sheet), and feel free to contact her

and ask for help if a participant becomes upset or triggered by something that comes up. In the last resort, make sure you have the contact details of your local health centre or GP, so you can act speedily to get help if need be.

## **3. Data security**

We must comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), in particular treating people's personal data with care. Personal data is anything that can be used to identify someone – including contact details, recognizable images, audio or video recordings etc. By default we will anonymise everything, removing all personal data. But some participants may want to be named, or contacted in future and question 4 is for that case. Note that everyone has rights under the law and these are listed at the bottom of page 2 of the information sheet. The purpose of that page is to offer reassurance that we will not do anything irresponsible with what they share with us.

## C. Creative Economy

Creative artists use land in the NW2045 area in important and interesting ways that differ from ‘traditional’ land use in being almost entirely non-extractive of natural resources, yet highly significant in how they affect people’s perceptions and interpretations of the land. The creative economy is an unquantified element in the economy of the North West (although across the Highlands, HIE estimates it employs 5,500 people and is worth £740 million to the economy). Like crofting, the arts and crafts sector consists mostly of small independent businesses, sole traders and part-time workers but it also includes some larger players, such as Highland Stoneware, which employed 23 people in 2024. It is not unreasonable to hypothesise that the creative economy is equivalent in value to traditional, extractive land-uses such as ranching sheep and other livestock. As the tourist trade grows, this sector will only become more important, yet it is under-researched and there is very little data available about it.

The creative industries have their roots in local culture, drawing on long traditions of creative inspiration from the land, including the Gaelic song and poetry that forms the heart of the ceilidh tradition, the rich heritage of wool crafts and the ancient production of pottery, which dates at least back to the Iron Age. Arts and crafts provide social ‘glue’, with opportunities for gatherings and sharing of skills and culture. They also have a significant economic importance. One local business, who runs a shop selling the work of multiple artists, said, *‘It’s important that creative, non-extractive engagement with land is properly represented in any land-use conversation’*. They point out that all of the artists whose work they offer for sale are drawing from the land, for inspiration, subject matter and sometimes materials, and this has real value: *‘the landscape is central to both their subject matter and their market appeal’*.

### The creative economy includes:

- writing and publishing
- painting
- ceramics
- metal work
- wood work
- land art
- photography
- video and other digital media
- textiles
- music
- dance, drama and other performance arts

### Outlets for the products of this economy in the NW2045 region include:

- An Talla Solais, Ullapool
- Ceard, Ullapool
- Havorn, Ullapool
- The Captain’s Cabin, Ullapool
- Ullapool Book Shop
- Ceilidh Place, Ullapool
- Ullapool Craft Market
- Rhue Art Gallery
- Fisk Gallery, Polbain
- Kernos, Knockan
- Wild Tiles, Elphin
- Elphin Tea Rooms
- Elphin Craft Market

- Highland Stoneware, Lochinver and Ullapool
- Fergus Stewart Ceramics Studio, Glencanisp, Lochinver
- Rockpool, Lochinver
- Lochinver Bookshop
- Ripplescrafts, Clachtoll
- Crafts on the Croft, Drumbeg
- Made in Assynt Craft Markets
- Kylesku Old Ferry Craft Shop
- Oldshoremore Retreats Craftshop
- Balnakeil Craft Village - multiple artist workshops, studios & shops
- Lotte Glob Sculpture Croft, Laid, Loch Eribol
- Konstantina Pateraki Jewellery, Skerryay
- Weavers Craft Shop, Tongue
- Cereal Bookshop and Bakery, Tongue/pop-up
- Strathnaver Museum
- Bettyhill Library
- North Coast Market
- Clachan Cafe, Bettyhill (formerly Elizabeth's Cafe and Crafts)
- The Old Jammery, Culkein

#### Relevant links:

- <https://www.ullapool.com/visit/arts-and-crafts.php>
- <https://www.madeinassynt.co.uk/>
- <https://oldshoremoreretreats.co.uk/thingstodo>
- <https://balnakeilcraftvillage.weebly.com/>
- <https://www.strathnavermuseum.org.uk/>
- <https://xponorth.co.uk/>
- <https://www.hie.co.uk/our-region/our-growth-sectors/creative-industries/>
- <https://www.highlifehighland.com/>
- <https://includeplus.org/exploratory-project/kinlochbervie-emerging-technologies/>
- <https://theoldjammery.co.uk/>

The following chart sets out how various creative approaches to the land and sea in our region bring with them challenges and opportunities.

Land use theme	Significance and examples	Challenges and Opportunities
Stories, songs and poems about the land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Oral traditions from the storied landscapes of our area.</li> <li>- A key part of Gaelic heritage.</li> <li>- Novels and books offer long-form interpretations of the land and repositories of knowledge.</li> <li>- Short-form texts such as poems and blogs can provide easily digestible material about the land and sea.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gaelic is almost lost in some parts of the region.</li> <li>- Ceilidhs are not so frequent as in the past.</li> <li>- Tourists enjoy reading local material.</li> <li>- Digital storytelling and the internet offers new opportunities.</li> </ul>
Visual landscape representations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Photographic imagery is a crucial way that this landscape is ‘sold’ to visitors, e.g. on social media.</li> <li>- We have many iconic views.</li> <li>- Changeable weather makes our landscape endlessly different.</li> <li>- Local artists create new perspectives and capture fleeting elements of the landscape.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ‘This most beautiful corner of the land’ as poet Norman MacCaig put it, offers an endless stream of visual opportunities.</li> <li>- Every tourist carries a phone, many take selfies for social media, with a risk of our landscape becoming a commodified cliché.</li> <li>- There are educational opportunities to learn from our many skilled visual artists.</li> </ul>
Art and crafts using local materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Examples include woodwork, woollen textiles, pottery and glazes</li> <li>- The volumes of material used, for example to glaze pots or dye wool, tend to be very small.</li> <li>- These provide sustainable sources for useful objects for local people and unique souvenirs for visitors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Production is mostly small-scale and the level of extraction of materials from the landscape are very sustainable.</li> <li>- Businesses such as Highland Stoneware demonstrate that production can be effectively scaled up to provide year-round employment for many people.</li> <li>- There are opportunities for off-season work and integration with other work (e.g. crofting), as part of ‘portfolio livelihoods’.</li> <li>- These arts create opportunities to add value to locally-generated materials (e.g. wood and wool) that have low market value in their raw state.</li> <li>- It can be hard for small-scale production to achieve affordable commodities (such as hand-knitted garments).</li> <li>- Production facilities need premises and investment.</li> </ul>

<p>Art and craft taking inspiration from other landscape features</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Examples include the landscape-inspired yarn colour of the month by Ripplescraft, and the metal animal sculptures by Duncan Hutchison</li> <li>- These unique interpretations of the landscape bring visitors from far afield.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There are opportunities for off-season work and integration with other work (e.g. crofting), as part of ‘portfolio livelihoods’.</li> <li>- There are opportunities to link with other arts (e.g. visual arts, music).</li> </ul>
<p>Film, video, virtual reality, gaming and other digital arts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Several films have already been made in this landscape (e.g. ‘Edie’)</li> <li>- These non-extractive interpretations of the landscape offer the refreshment of authentic beauty in a world dominated digital monstrosity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There’s a lack of digital infrastructure, e.g. poor internet bandwidth.</li> <li>- Digital weighs nothing, so global markets can be reached.</li> <li>- Big opportunities for new skills and livelihoods for young people.</li> <li>- Kinlochbervie’s Emerging Technologies project is a great innovation in this area</li> </ul>
<p>Edible crafts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Examples include Cruciferous Croft’s fermented vegetables, Elphin’s Green Bowl food hub, Chocolate Mountain at Balnakeil and many others.</li> <li>- These can be an important source of food for locals year round.</li> <li>- They provide distinctive ingredients for hospitality businesses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Local food is hugely popular as an idea but actually relatively thin on the ground.</li> <li>- Production facilities need premises and investment. There is a dire lack of meat processing infrastructure (a long way to abattoirs etc).</li> <li>- We have a lot of land and water, proximity to the sea for seaweed and local heritage of food production to build on.</li> <li>- Craft food is a way to add value and longevity to local production (e.g. preserves of locally grown fruit)</li> <li>- There is a strong appetite for more local food growing via community gardens and crofters.</li> <li>- There’s an opportunity for the new seaweed cultivation project to provide fertiliser.</li> </ul>