

Business/Industry and Employment Growth Strategy And Report of 'Big Business Survey' by Grigorhill Business Group

Submission to Nairnshire Local Place Plan June 2024

Executive Summary

There are three recognised business and industrial employment zones in the township of Nairn. These are; Balmakeith Commercial and Business Zone, Grigorhill Industrial Estate and Balblair Sawmill within what is known as the Nairn South area. Collectively the employers located within these areas employ up to approximately 500 employees.

Business and employment growth is a primary catalyst for local prosperity and well-being of local people and this is something which the Scottish Government fully support through its recently consented National Planning Framework 4 policies. The objective of the Business/Industry and Employment Growth Strategy is to grow/promote business opportunities in Nairn which will create local well paid jobs, develop substantive career opportunities, and create a more prosperous local economy.

Two proposed expansion plans are outlined in the Strategy document.

Introduction/Background

For centuries, Nairn Town has been recognised as the county hub for the surrounding villages, settlements, and hamlets of Nairnshire. Nairn Town is surrounded by good farming land and wonderful beaches along the Moray Coast, with an abundance of green spaces, golf courses and an environment which is the envy of most Cities and Towns in the country. The Victorians gave Nairn the title of 'Brighton of the North' because of its dry and moderate climate and came in droves to soak up the restful ambience of Nairn.

With the loss of the fishing industry which was historically a mainstay for the town hence 'Fishertown' a local conservation area and with a declining numbers of visitors and tourists because vacationing abroad was becoming more accessible to more people, the Town sought to encourage small business and industrial outlets to locate to Nairn bringing with them much needed employment which contributed to the economy of the local area.

The Town's population grew gradually until McDermotts Fabrication yard was opened at Ardersier and in order to accommodate a new workforce, there was an expansion of housing and the population started to rise. However, with the closure of the fabrication yard in 2001 this left a significant number of the population without employment.

The small/medium sized employers which were already located at Grigorhill Industrial site, Balmakeith Business Park and Gordon Timber at Nairn South then became the primary sources for local employment outside tourism, health, and other commercial related businesses. Many of these businesses have been a mainstay for local employment for half a century or more and have expanded to meet business demands. However, further expansion is required in order to ensure efficiency, competitiveness and local economic growth and it is more environmentally friendly and financially more viable to expand and remain in their current location than to relocate.

Support of this Strategy is required to build a sustainable and resilient Nairnshire community.

Growing population and evolving future

Nairn's population has grown, almost doubled, in the last 30 years and with the significant 1000 homes development at Lochloy, the Town has seen a steep rise in the number of over 55s coming to live in Nairn, many of whom are semi-retired while the young of Nairn leave to seek better well paid job opportunities in large cities.

Local Development Plan

The Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 (IMFLDP2) was adopted by Highland Council on 27 June 2024. The following are excerpts from the plan

- Para 3 - *priority to focus on making best use of existing places and infrastructure especially in our City and Towns creating networks of resilient communities ...*
- Para 4 - ... Existing settlements and towns will also be the prime locations for employment
- Para 37 – Employment – Bullet 3 – Responding to the supply and demand pressures by allocating a range of business and industrial land, both in terms of scale and location
- Bullet 4 – Safeguarding existing industrial land from competing uses and promotes new sites to come forward for development.
- Para 46 – Industrial land *Fundamental shortfall in industrial land in and around Inverness and highlights that without investment it is likely to pose a major risk to the area’s future competitiveness and restrict economic growth. There is also strong demand for and significant under investment in small scale industrial units which serve local businesses and communities.* Business and Industrial Land Audit 2018 did not show the Grigorhill business Site.
- Para 47 - Protect the current supply of industrial sites, including the industrial allocations which are set out in the Plan for such uses and to encourage new sites to come forward.
- Policy 7 – Industrial Land – All existing industrial sites will be safeguarded for such uses and proposals to redevelop them to uses other than class 4,5 and 6 will not be supported [Agent of Change principle needs to be forcefully applied in order to protect existing businesses being put under pressure to change their operational management and lose viability in order to satisfy housing requirements/residents.]
- Proposals for new industrial development on land not allocated in this plan, including land out with settlement development areas will be supported if it can be demonstrated that it is a sustainable location and accords with relevant policies set out in the development plan. Key policy issues will be whether the site:
 - o *Is in a location which supports or has the potential to support sustainable travel;*
 - o *Does not adversely impact the amenity of neighbouring properties; and*
 - o *Does not adversely impact the environment.*
- Placemaking Priority 27 – *“Strengthen the local economy and increase local employment opportunities through the protection of established industrial and business sites and support for suitable new sites to enable further growth.”*

In order to ensure that Nairn remains a sustainable and self-supporting local community, the following Place Making priority statement was adopted as part of the IMFLDP2.

“Strengthen the local economy and increase local employment opportunities through the protection of established industrial and business sites and support for suitable new sites to enable further growth”

By

“providing land to accommodate the expansion of industrial activities (Class 5 and 6) at Grigorhill (the amount of land to be determined through further assessment of business needs)”

Additionally, the IMFLDP2 Examination Reporter made clear in her Findings as recently as January 2024 that if Nairn East (NA05) was *“identified as a longer-term opportunity, a developer requirement would be necessary to indicate that the development of Nairn East is wholly dependent on the completion of the Nairn Bypass.”*

The Community fully endorse and support the Reporter’s findings. The strategy covered by this document therefore focuses on these two clear statements.

Local Place Plan – what the people of Nairnshire want

Extensive community engagement has been undertaken and the three loud and clear messages which have come across are

- (1) the need for business/industry and employment growth locally: this received the highest number of responses during community engagement events;
- (2) Nairn and its environs do not want to become a commuter town for either Inverness or Elgin; and
- (3) Nairn does not want to become a retirement destination.

That said the community has also made it clear that it does not regard Nairn as an industrial Tier 1 growth area. It does not want to compete with Inverness. It wants to retain its historic identity and character which is balanced between being a county town/hub, tourism and a healthy and resilient locally scaled business and industry centre (classes 4, 5 and 6) which can support its immediate population and be locally accessible to employees.

Business and employment growth

Business and employment growth is a primary catalyst for local prosperity and well-being of local people and this is something which the Scottish Government fully support through its recently consented National Planning Framework 4 policies with which this Strategy and proposed Masterplan fully accords. The objective of the Business/Industry and Employment Growth Strategy is to grow/promote business opportunities in Nairn which will create local well paid jobs, develop substantive career opportunities, and create a more prosperous local economy.

Two proposed expansion plans are outlined in the undernoted document

- (1) Grigorhill Industrial site at the eastern approaches to Nairn will form a major part of how the town proposes to develop to meet the inevitable future challenges and effectively directly benefit from the proposed Nairn Bypass. In combination with Balmakeith Business Park, these two sites have the potential to meet a broad range of land/premise requirements from small units to larger areas of land. It provides local people on the east side of Nairn with the opportunity to walk/cycle/wheel to employment.
- (2) Nairn South site will enable Gordon Timber to expand and diversify.

These collaborative plans have been designed as part of an holistic, Nairnshire approach to local planning ensuring that any development proactively supports and contributes to the wide ranging needs and well-being of local people, while at the same time enhancing Nairn's wonderful natural environment.

Planning Policy

National Planning Framework 4 sets out planning policy for the future and provides a series of policies which are intended to ensure that the 'place principle' of development planning is tackled in a local and holistic manner with Infrastructure First being at the heart of planning policy. This very welcomed approach by the Scottish Government is something which has been regrettably overlooked during the last 30 years as thousands and thousands of housing developments have been consented by the Planning Authorities without parallel improvements to essential infrastructure.

While the focus of this Strategy document is Business/Industry and Employment Growth in Nairn, such growth is interdependent on ensuring connectivity with the many cross-linked policies contained within the NPF4 e.g. Infrastructure (water, sewage, energy, roads, schools, doctors, dentists, transport links etc.) Climate change and environment, and Housing to name but a few.

Masterplan Consent Areas (MCA)

Like Local Place Plans, MCAs form part of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 legislation. **MCAs are a means to take forward place-based approaches. They are a flexible placemaking tool, grounded in and responding to a place, and how it may change to meet local needs and outcomes.** Planning authorities will be able to use MCAs as part of a proactive, placemaking approach to planning and consenting. It is a new way for authorities to shape new development in their places – enabling the type and quality of development they wish to come forward in their places.

Given MCAs are effectively just a different means of granting consent, they are a flexible tool that could support a wide range of scales and types of development.

It is important to note that an MCA is not about over-simplifying the process for developers, nor does it mean a loss of standards of development, amenity or protection for the environment. A number of 'checks and balances' are built into the proposed process.

MCAs can provide for new development such as new construction and changes to the use of land and buildings, which can contribute towards regeneration of areas. They have the potential to unlock significant areas, including of brownfield land, and also support wider objectives including town centre renewal, and town centre living. They can also provide authorisation for infrastructure, new roads and streets, energy developments, business development, new homes and services, and conversions to bring empty buildings, including listed buildings back into use.

MCAs are expected to come into force towards the end of 2024 and consideration of this 'tool' for business development will be addressed in this strategy.

Defining the Strategy

The Community has been clear what it expects from this strategy –

- Scaled local business, industry and employment growth;
- Retention of Nairn's identity and character. People want to retain the essence of a small town and the community spirit it engenders, and to be in control of how their place is developed;
- Retention of the balance between county town hub/tourism/business/industry and environment;
- Measured growth to ensure infrastructure improvements are undertaken in parallel with development;
- A town developing and evolving in a way that meets the needs of local people who live and work in the area;
- A deliverable strategy where short term solutions can be put in place until the longer term objectives are achieved.

Strategy

It is to comply with the criteria set out by local people, businesses and NPF4 policies and in compliance with the current Local Development Plan that this Strategy has been prepared.

Context of the Strategy

Nairn, over the last century, has a proud history of being a tourist destination, and the Local Authority has recognised Nairn should be developed as one of the Highland's sustainable tourism areas. People come from all over this country and from other parts of the world to enjoy Nairn and all it has to offer. That being said, it is vital that Nairn is not wholly reliant on Tourism. Indeed it would not be prudent nor in the best interests of our future generations to take a narrow view of both the potential expansion of existing business and industry opportunities which Nairn is ideally situated to serve and develop and of taking a forward proactive approach to encouraging new businesses to locate to Nairn.

With this aspiration as the template for future existing business/industry expansion and the promotion of new businesses, it is necessary that business/industry and tourism/environment complement Nairn and enhance the distinctive character of the town.

As part of the Local Place Plan process, this strategy has recognised and taken into account -

- the need for a more balanced approach between employment land uses, green spaces, environment and the local need for housing and other amenity uses;
- protecting the wellbeing and lifelong needs of local residents;
- best use of current infrastructure;
- the need for net zero constructions and energy emissions i.e. a sustainable business park;
- transport efficiency and active travel;
- the Council's objective to revitalise and develop Nairn Town Centre by retrofitting vacant properties, empty buildings and derelict town centre land for affordable local housing;
- the future of Nairn as a whole and how it can be delivered.

The case for additional business and industrial land

To evidence the need for additional business and industrial land, it is necessary to

- (1) consider the expansion of existing local businesses; and
- (2) seek to encourage a new and diverse range of businesses to the area, particularly in light of the proposed/forthcoming Bypass which will make Nairn ideally located to serve the A96 corridor and North East of Scotland.

As part of the assessment process, a survey was conducted earlier in the year involving all sizes, and types of local business/Industry at Grigorhill, Balmakeith and Nairn South including tradesmen and motor trade but excluding commercial, retail and hospitality. Its aim was to

- quantify the scale of demand for expansion from existing businesses;
- identify the type, size and scope of land/premises required to meet existing demand;
- project the impact such expansion would have on creating new local jobs; and
- set out an anticipated delivery timeframe.

Equipped with this information and more focused discussions with local businesses about land/premises and prospective enquiries from new businesses, the second part of the assessment process was to project realistic land/premises requirements to allow for new business development, while at the same time ensuring that the scale and type of new business/job creation was in compliance with both the desire of local people to retain the distinctive landscape of Nairn and surrounding area but also to encourage a green approach to business development whenever possible.

The questionnaire was sent out to 80 existing businesses and tradesmen over a two week period to 31 May 2024. There was a 15% response to the questionnaire.

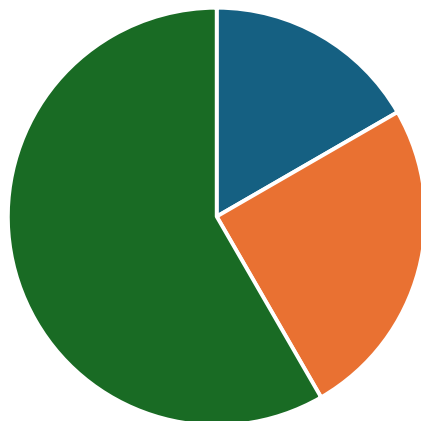
Analysis has indicated the following –

Types of Business/Industry in Nairn
who responded to questionnaire
excludes commercial, retail & hospitality



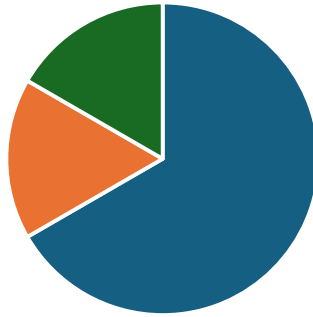
- IT & EPOS
- Plumbing and heating services
- Information and Communication
- Construction
- Manufacturing and processing
- Other
- Wholesale, Food Services and retail trade
- Transport and Storage

How long located in Nairn



- 1-5 years
- 6-10 years
- Longer

Being located in Nairn - a positive or negative impact



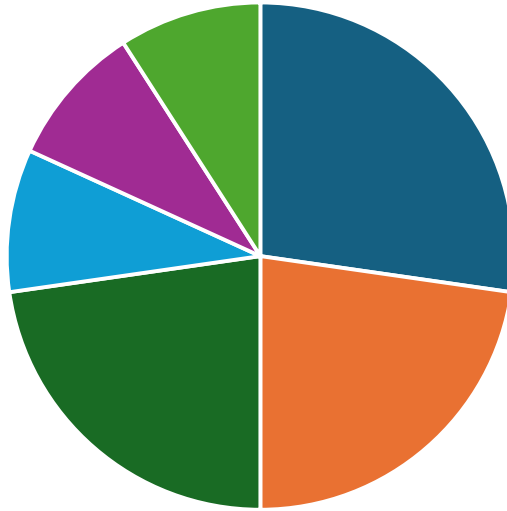
■ Positive ■ Negative ■ Not Sure

Positive and Negative reasons for being located in Nairn



- Proud to be located in Nairn
- A local business supporting the people of Nairn and Nairnshire
- Central location for work across Highlands and Moray
- Traffic congestion

Reasons which prevent existing business/industry from expansion



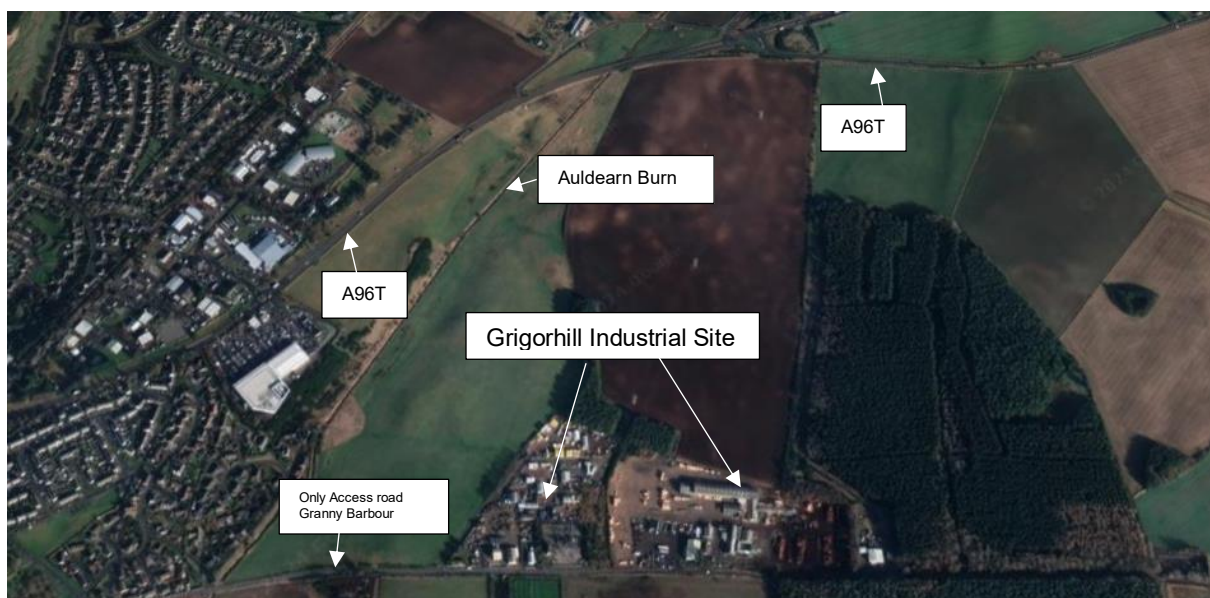
- Accessibility and Traffic congestion
- No business/industrial land/premises
- Shortage of skilled people
- Lack of Infrastructure - Water, Electricity, Digital
- Financial Reasons
- Other
-

Overview of Nairn



Existing businesses

Present position at Nairn East – Grigorhill



The original out of town site was set aside for industrial use and is located at Grigorhill, Nairn. The industrial site in question was shown as part of the Nairn East site i.e. NA05 previously considered as part of the allocation site table for the IMFLDP2 which was subsequently removed by the Reporter on examination. The site already accommodates business and industrial companies, including a Sawmill.

This site has been a long established part of Nairn for more than 50 years. Its location works and fits in well with the current nearby housing developments, residential amenity, and landscape, and is within easy access for local people via paths and cycle networks.

Current businesses on the east of Nairn provide long term employment and contribute significantly to the local circular economy and community life.

Current Grigorhill industrial site – 29 acres

Electricity – Electricity substation, Electricity Battery Parks – 11.02 acres

Public Land – Cemetery – 7.54 acres

No. of employees - 216

HGV movements appx 120 per day (with other vans, plant and machinery movements etc. in addition)

Types of businesses already at Grigorhill – a wide range of different business/industry exists at this site.

Constraints (road access, lack of water and electricity, traffic congestion)

Present position at Nairn East – Balmakeith Business Park



Business Park – Appx. 39.18 acres

No. of employees appx. 275

HGV Movements appx. 100 per day (with other vans, plant and machinery movements etc. in addition)

Types of businesses already at Balmakeith -a wide range of different business exists e.g. Bakery, Dairy, Garages, Haulage, Plant and Machinery Hire, Call Centre, Foundry, Retail and Manufacturing etc. at this site.

Access constraints (road access – only one way in/out , limited staff and public parking)

Present position at Nairn South



Gordon Timber currently operate from a single site at Nairn South.

As recognised by the Council in its existing NA06 allocation (see site below), this current site is at 100% capacity and is unable to be expanded further because of being land constrained.

The Company currently consumes 140,000 tonnes of raw material per annum and has plans in its strategy to grow this incrementally by 25% to 30% over the next five years.

Having been trading successfully for over 160 years, the Company is looking to increase local employment opportunities by maintaining and increasing the number of direct jobs it provides.

By being able to expand, the Company would look to strengthen further the strong ties and contribution it makes to the local economy of Nairnshire.

All of this expansion is predicated on the ability to secure and develop more land to the South of its existing site boundaries.

As can be seen from the site map, there is an existing NA06 allocation for expansion of the sawmill which extends to some 4.8 hectares.



Current size of site – Appx. 19 acres

Agreed LDP Expansion NA06 site – 11.86 acres

No of Employees - 85

Vehicle movements – appx. 150 per day

Constraints – Poor and constrained road access, (railway bridge)

Summation of existing local business situation

Nairn East (Grigorhill & Balmakeith)

As recognised by the Council, the current sites, i.e. Grigorhill is at 100% capacity and existing businesses within this site cannot move forward with investment/expansion plans because they are land constrained.

Currently the size of units at the nearby Balmakeith Industrial Estate, which again is almost at 100% capacity, are too small and not suitable for other reasons. Most prospective businesses require larger sites which will enable 24x7x365 days a year operating in order to enable them to compete in very competitive markets, and the fact that the Grigorhill site already operates in this way, makes it a very attractive and functional site.

Nairn South

The Gordon Timber site at Balblair Road is fully utilised and further expansion land additional to that already agreed in the Local Development Plan is needed to grow and diversify the business.

The need for new businesses

Albeit Nairn is a well-known and popular tourism destination, expanding the sustainability and self-resiliency of the Town and area is important. To meet these needs, new/expanded business and employment opportunities are required to protect the local circular economy for future generations and this can only be done with the support and collaboration of local businesses.

Existing businesses have already received six serious expressions of interest from businesses keen to locate to Nairn. These businesses range from green energy, construction allied businesses, commercial/significant office space, and local community wealth creating start-up businesses etc. Prospective businesses recognise the potential of locating to Nairn particularly as they look to the future when the Bypass will enable them to more effectively compete without the serious traffic congestion problems which now affect existing businesses and inhibit economic growth along the A96 Corridor from Inverness to Aberdeen.

Highland is already leading the way as a global centre of excellence for renewable energy innovation and generation. The recent decision to award Cromarty/Inverness Ports 'Freeport' status and with the Port of Ardersier announcing its intention to play its part in the renewable energy sector, new and emerging businesses will undoubtedly be attracted to the area. Although Nairn does not see itself in competition with Inverness as a Tier 1 business/industry development area and this is recognised by Highland Council in its IRSS, Nairn does see itself as a self-sufficient town not wholly reliant on tourism but one where local business/industry contributes to local employment through a diverse range of jobs.

Need for more long term employment

Retaining and having an available local workforce is crucial to the success of any business and this is only possible through the creation of local employment opportunities and this has been borne out in the survey. The first step on this road is to ensure Nairn has sufficient land set aside to enable existing and new business growth.

With the experience of the difficult and isolated years of the pandemic, BREXIT, War in Ukraine, followed by the energy and cost of living crises, these have sharply highlighted the importance of people having a local supportive family structure and a familiar, accessible local community network. Local businesses want to play their part by providing attractive, well paid local jobs, apprenticeships and by working with schools and further education, thus encouraging people, and particularly our younger people, to live, work, shop and raise their families in Nairn and its environs. This is the bold vision of the people and businesses of Nairn.

Building the foundations for a sustainable Nairn

Highland Council envision Nairn as a future sustainable tourism destination. However, following the extensive community engagement exercise undertaken earlier this year, local people have made it clear they want more sustainable local businesses and employment opportunities rather than to solely rely on tourism.

There can be no doubt that climate change is accelerating faster than anticipated with rising sea levels which are eroding our beaches and coastal areas at an increasing rate year on year. This is particularly relevant for Nairn whose tourist industry is predicated on our beaches, links, coastal walks and golf courses. River flooding is also becoming more frequent with the landscape and low lying areas, e.g. Fishertown being significantly impacted when old Victorian combined sewerage networks are unable to cope with more frequent thunderstorms and heavy prolonged periods of rain.

It is for these reasons that it is sensible and prudent to plan for the future by ensuring Nairn has a sustainable and resilient business sector which can offer local employment opportunities and contribute significantly to the local economy, in addition to promoting a vibrant tourism sector.

Proposed Nairn Bypass

The A96 dualling from Inverness to Wester Hardmuir including the Nairn Bypass is under the control of the Scottish Government. Historically completion of the A9 dualling was seen by the Scottish Government as a pre-requisite before commencement of the A96 dualling and Nairn Bypass, however, significant pressure from MSPs, Local Authorities, Communities and the public in general resulted in Made Orders for this section of the A96 dualling from Inverness to Wester Hardmuir to be issued in March.

No objections were received by the Scottish Government and commencement of compulsory purchase orders has now begun. However, at the time of writing this strategy Nairn still awaits the bypass it was promised many decades ago. The present Cabinet Secretary for Transport at a meeting on 31 May 2024 provided a firm commitment to get the bypass built – nothing was off the table, however

- no decision had been taken regarding the *'inclusion of the two major A96 projects i.e. A9-A96 Link and A96 Dualling from Inverness to Wester Hardmuir'* as part the procurement strategy which was due to report by end September 2025 for the remainder of the sections of the A9;
- if included as part of the A9 procurement strategy a decision would have to be made regarding the procurement model to be used i.e. Scottish Government capital funding or the mutual investment model;
- no decision had been reached on whether the Bypass could be constructed first before any further sections of the A9, A9-A96 link and Inverness to Gollanfield dualling;
- no decision had been reached on whether the two major projects should be broken down into 'bite size chunks'; and importantly
- no timetable for the commencement or completion of the Nairn Bypass could be announced until all the above decisions had been agreed and announced by the Scottish Government.

The health, wellbeing and safety of the people and children of Nairn and its neighbouring communities are day and daily being put at risk because of

- traffic congestion, which is causing air pollution, particularly for school children at Rosebank Primary School, Nairn
- steadily increasing volumes of HGV and other traffic
- increases in Tourist traffic almost throughout the whole year
- speeding of traffic through B and C roads close to schools and homes
- frustration of motorists and HGV drivers being held up for close to an hour to drive through Nairn causing fatalities, serious injuries and near misses
- business efficiency and financial viability is being severely impacted

Without an operational bypass there can be no further development in Nairn except where existing infrastructure can be utilised, e.g. Town Centre. Not only is this not good for Nairn(shire) from a sustainability and economical point of view but it also detrimentally impacts the whole A96 corridor and the communities which live alongside it.

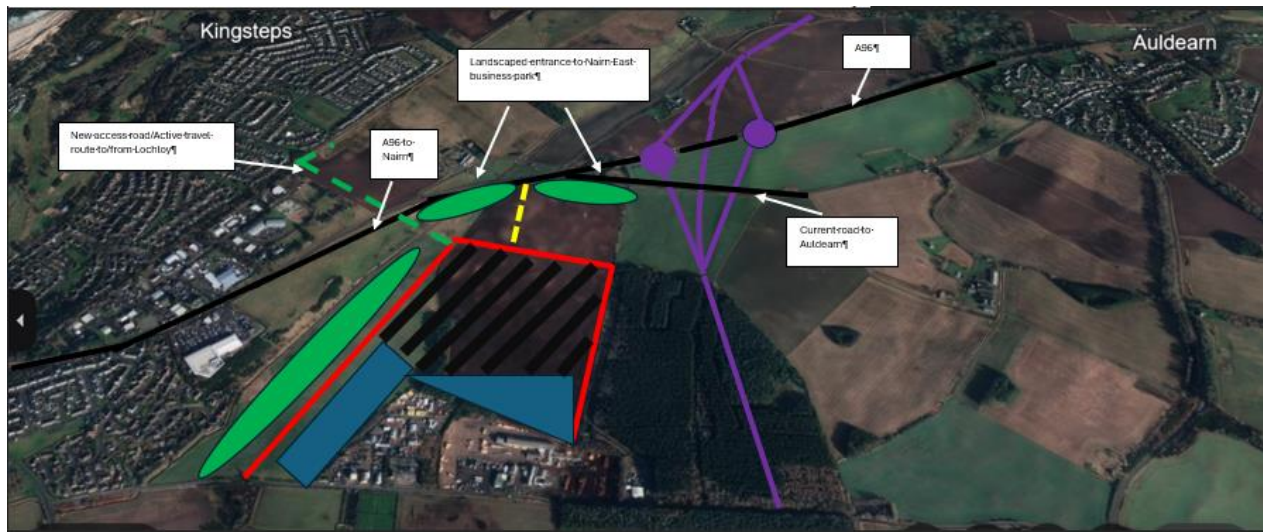
This Local Place Plan Strategy takes the long term, optimistic view that a Nairn Bypass, based on the commitment made by the Cabinet Secretary in May 2024, will be completed within 10 years, and therefore the Strategy proactively plans for economic growth through the development and expansion of business and jobs in Nairn.

Proposed Strategy – Nairn East

The proposed plan addresses both the additional land required for existing business expansion but also potential future need while at the same taking a balanced approach, integrating employment land uses with the need to protect the health, wellbeing and amenity of local residents, and environment.

In collaboration with Highland Council, Highlands & Island Enterprise and other stakeholders, the objective is to promote and develop the site for smaller, local businesses who all form part of and contribute to not only Nairnshire's local economy but to the wider Highland economy. It is also hoped that some benefits from the development and growth of the Inverness/Cromarty/Ardersier Freeport and other green/renewable technologies will find its way into the Nairnshire local economy.

Proposed new Nairn East Business Park



The vision is to develop an attractive and versatile business gateway similar to the HIE Forres Enterprise Park.

Green areas – Woodlands/greenspace. It is intended to mitigate the effects of further business/industry development on adjacent housing and on the entrance to Nairn via the A96 from the east by planting woodlands/greenspaces. The woodlands will not only mitigate the high risk of river and watercourse flooding and be good for the environment and biodiversity but they will provide a more natural and balanced approach to land uses ensuring the expanded development site aesthetically blends into the landscape and creates an attractive green amenity space on the eastern approach to Nairn.

Blue area – Expansion land for existing businesses

Red area/Black Hatch area – Scope of land proposed for development – Land set aside for potential new from businesses as evidenced from the demand from the business survey.

Purple – represents Nairn East Interchange and road approaches

Yellow dash – proposed new access road from de-trunked A96.

Green dash – possible new road/active travel route from Lochloy.

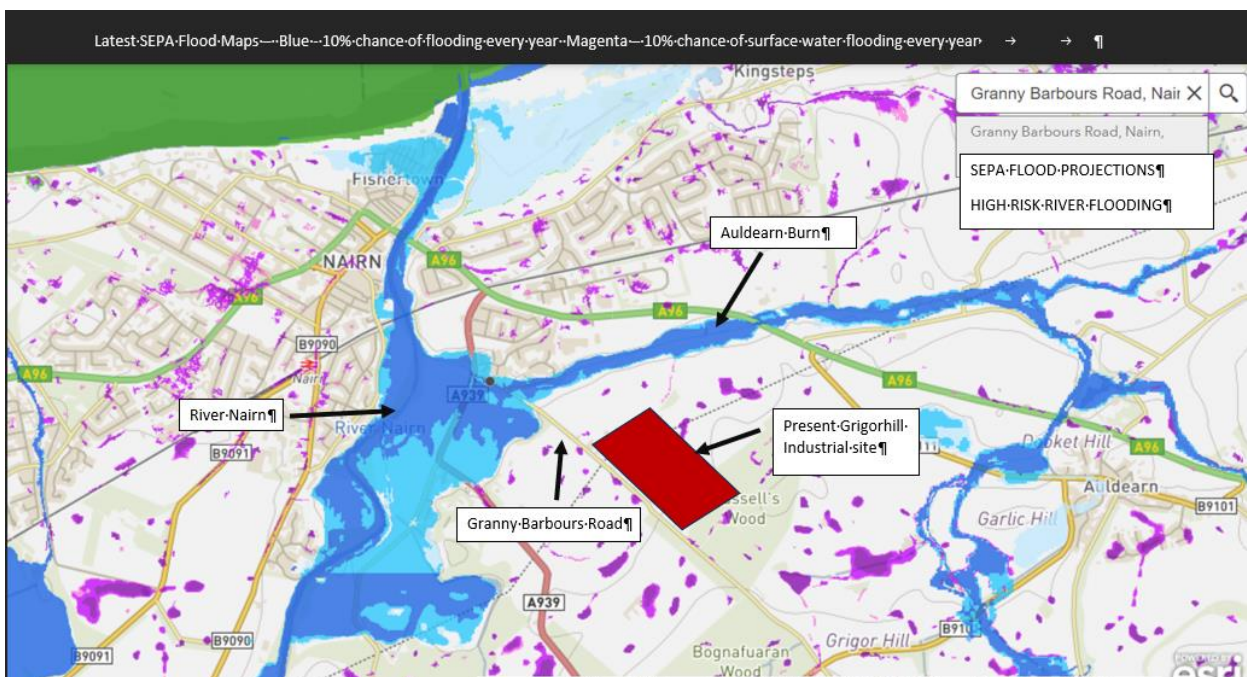
The figures given are approximate illustrations of % land required +/- for Expansion of Existing businesses and proposed land for creation of new businesses (excludes new woodland/green space).

| Proposed new expanded site | Appx. Acres |
|----------------------------|-------------|
|----------------------------|-------------|

| | | |
|--|----|-----------|
| | | |
| Current Industrial site | | 29 |
| Land for expansion of existing businesses (Purple areas) | 22 | |
| Land for new businesses (Black area) | 35 | 57 |
| | | |
| Total land for employment use | | <u>86</u> |

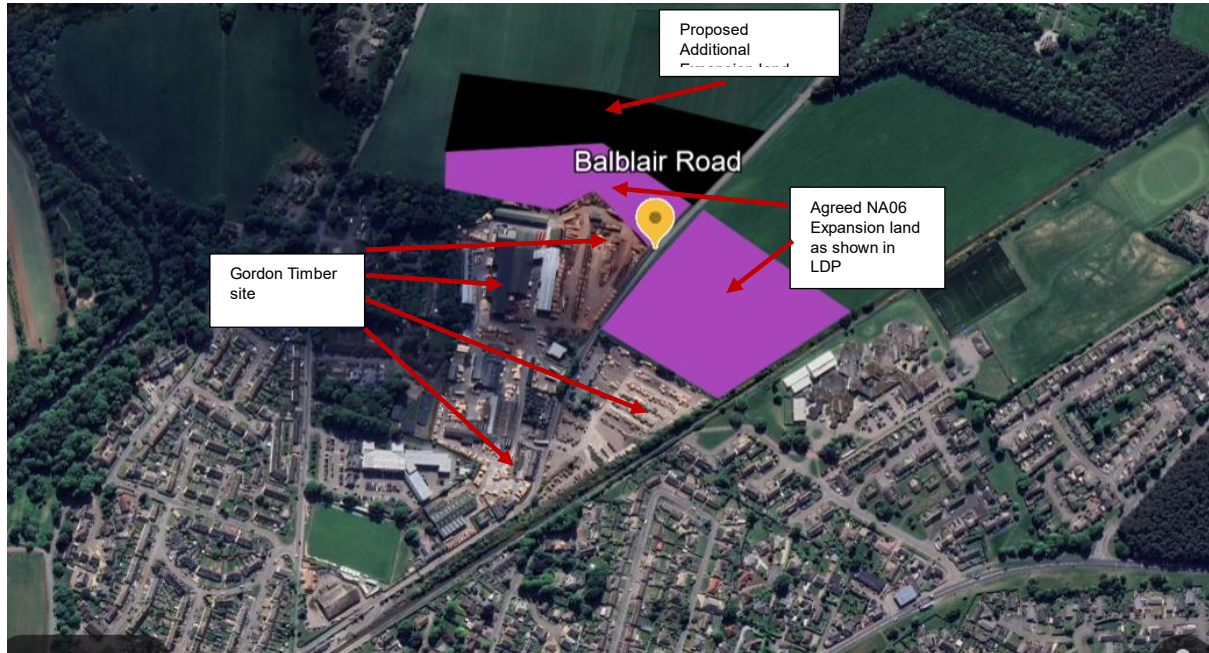
Climate Change – SEPA flood projections – Nairn East

Shown below is the current Grigorhill Industrial site (shown in red) which highlights in blue SEPA’s areas of high risk from River and other water course flooding. Because climate change is accelerating faster than anticipated, this is why the proposed plan has taken a precautionary approach and set aside a significant boundary of woodland/greenspace to mitigate the risk of flooding



Nairn South (Gordon Timber)

Albeit the Bypass only identifies two interchanges to serve Nairn, ie. Nairn West and Nairn East, the reduction in traffic congestion through Nairn and its local roads infrastructure will considerably improve the ability of Gordon Timber to increase traffic movements but to do so this will require additional land to enable expansion throughout the process. The following is a proposed plan for the zoning of additional land for industrial expansion at Balblair.



In order to ensure the continued viability of the business, and specifically the anticipated area of land take needed to achieve growth of the nature of 25% to 30%, the existing NA06 land (11.86 acres) would need to be increased by a further 50% i.e. a further appx 5.9 acres.

Given the current volume of vehicular traffic accessing and egressing the site, creation of a new entrance with associated weighing facility, within parts of the expansion land required, would reduce the current bottleneck at the existing weighbridge.

The Company also has plans to relocate and develop further its secondary processing of sawn timber having been converted in the main sawmill line. This secondary processing should be located with the expansion land required. These additional land requirements are particularly needed on the East side of the NA06 allocation.

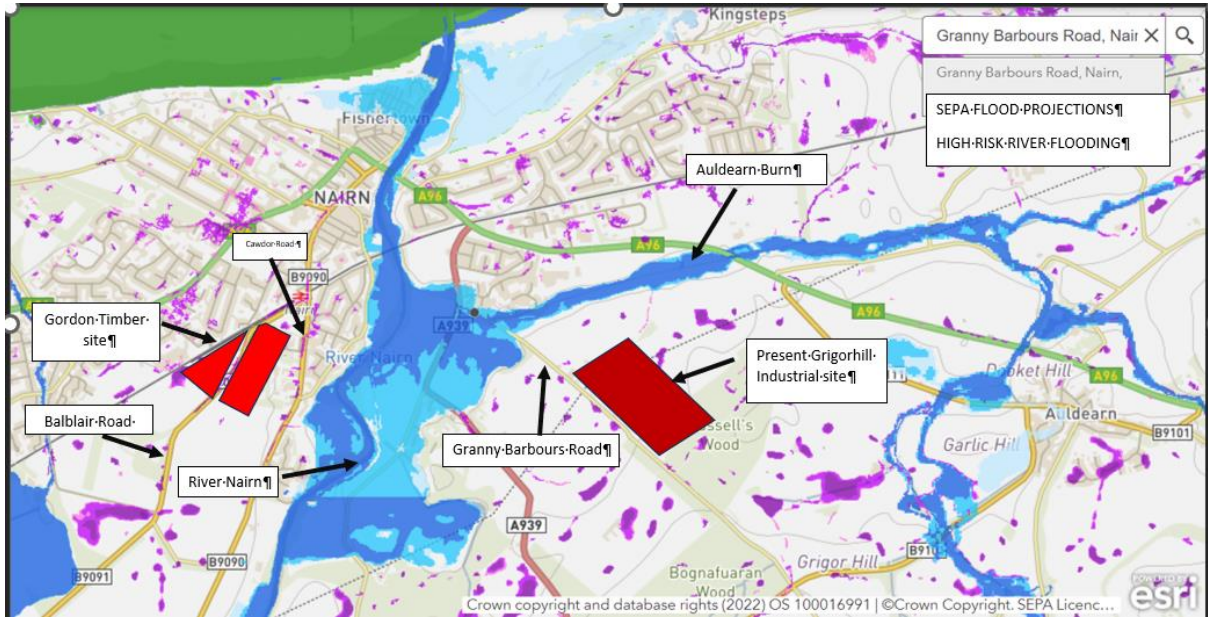
Black area – Proposed additional Expansion of Gordon Timber. (appx 5.9 acres)

Additional employment opportunities both direct and indirect

Increases local economic sustainability and self-reliance

In the face of climate change which could impact the Tourism sector of Nairn, expansion of the sawmill will help to offset any climate change influences.

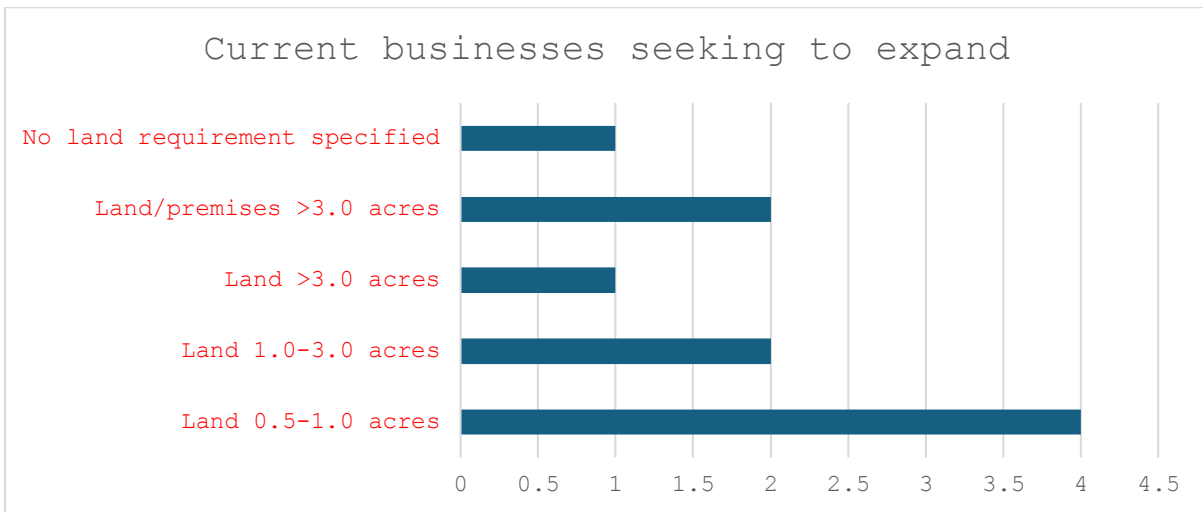
Climate Change – SEPA Flood Projections Map – Nairn South



As can be seen from the projected flood map, there are no concerns relating to flooding issues at this site.

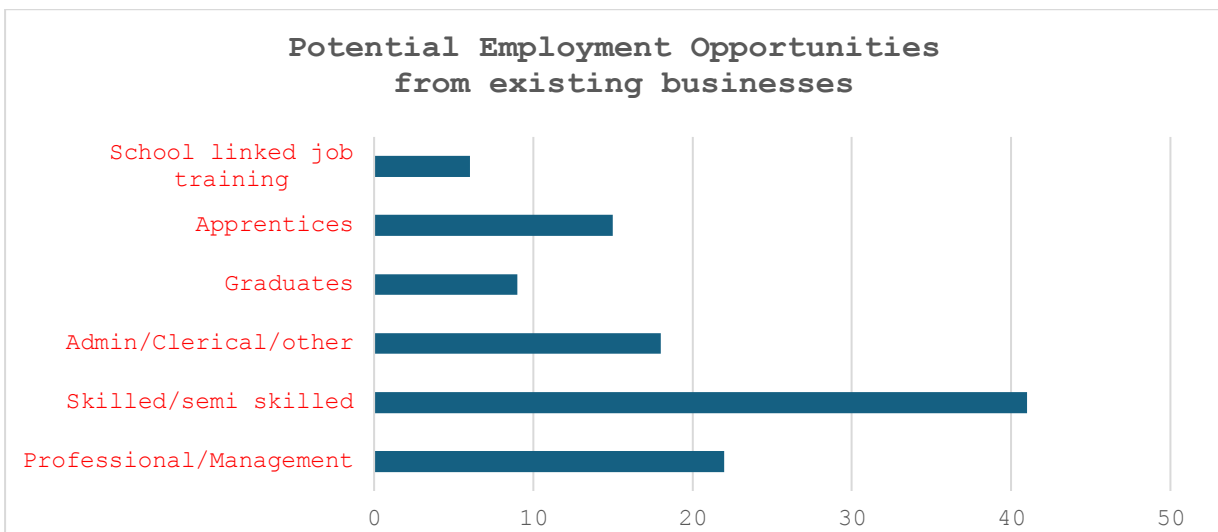
Projected new businesses

If the proposals contained in the strategy for B&I zoning of land are accepted, we are confident that small/medium size businesses as well as many local tradesmen will actively seek land/premises so that they could grow their businesses. Shown below are those current businesses who have responded to the survey seeking to expand.



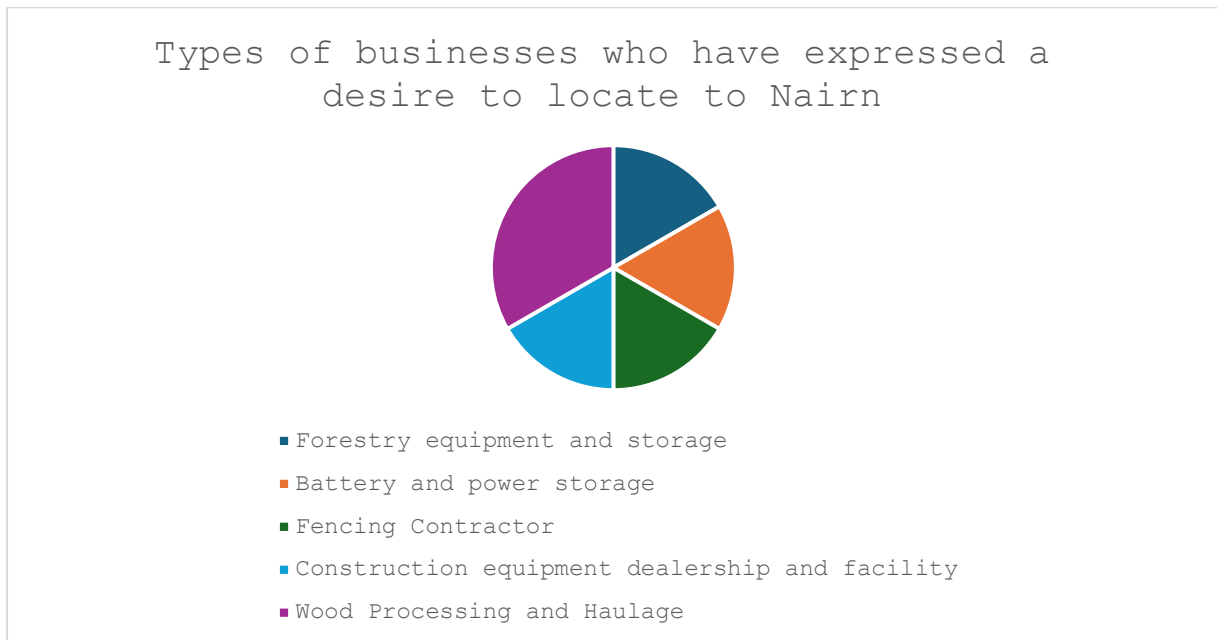
Projected employment potential from new land zoned for business and industrial use (Classes 4,5, and 6)

The businesses who responded to the questionnaire currently employ 290 staff. Upwards of an additional 110 new employment opportunities are proposed to be generated from the expansion of existing businesses.



Potential new businesses

Shown below are the types of businesses who have expressed an interest in locating to Nairn. However, with the increasing development in green technologies, operational capabilities of the Freeport area, attraction of the area for tourism and outdoor activities, it is anticipated that new businesses will be attracted to the Nairn location.



The expansion and development of both the Grigorhill (Nairn East) and Gordon Timber (Nairn South) sites for small/medium sized businesses will be in keeping with the distinctive character of Nairn and will help to ensure its economic stability. Promotion of the sites both in local and Highland/Moray areas and nationally, will be undertaken on a more proactive basis once the land has been zoned for Business/Industrial use. However it is hoped that new businesses will provide at least 250 new local jobs, may be more.

The current Cabinet Secretary has welcomed the expansion and development of business/industrial sites within Nairn and has indicated that the Scottish Government will do what is necessary to ensure infrastructure improvements take place to enable expansion and development to take place.

Infrastructure – What needs to be improved

The IMFLDP2 states ...'**priority is to focus on making best use of existing places and infrastructure especially in our City and Towns creating networks of resilient communities**'.

There is a pragmatic recognition by Highland Council that funding in infrastructure is a real problem not only in Nairn, and the Highlands but nationally. The Highland Investment Plan agreed by the Council on 27 June 2024 sets out an additional new commitment of £50M for roads and transport infrastructure as part of the 2024 budget setting process and a long term investment plan for roads and transport infrastructure.

However the Council has determined that making best use of existing places i.e. Town Centres, brownfield sites, derelict buildings, and vacant property is the most appropriate use of current infrastructure such as water, sewerage and energy provision. Other infrastructure such as the A96 Nairn Bypass (Transport Scotland), Electricity (SSEN) and major water/sewerage upgrades (Scottish Water) are out with the control of Highland Council. However, discusses the infrastructure issues, including housing, in more detail below.

The Scottish Government intends to introduce an Infrastructure Levy by Spring 2026 which will be payable by Developers to the Local Authority. Highland Council will then decide how the monies from this levy will be used within Highland Region to improve infrastructure to meet local needs.

Nairn Bypass

Nairn East Interchange – Nairn Bypass

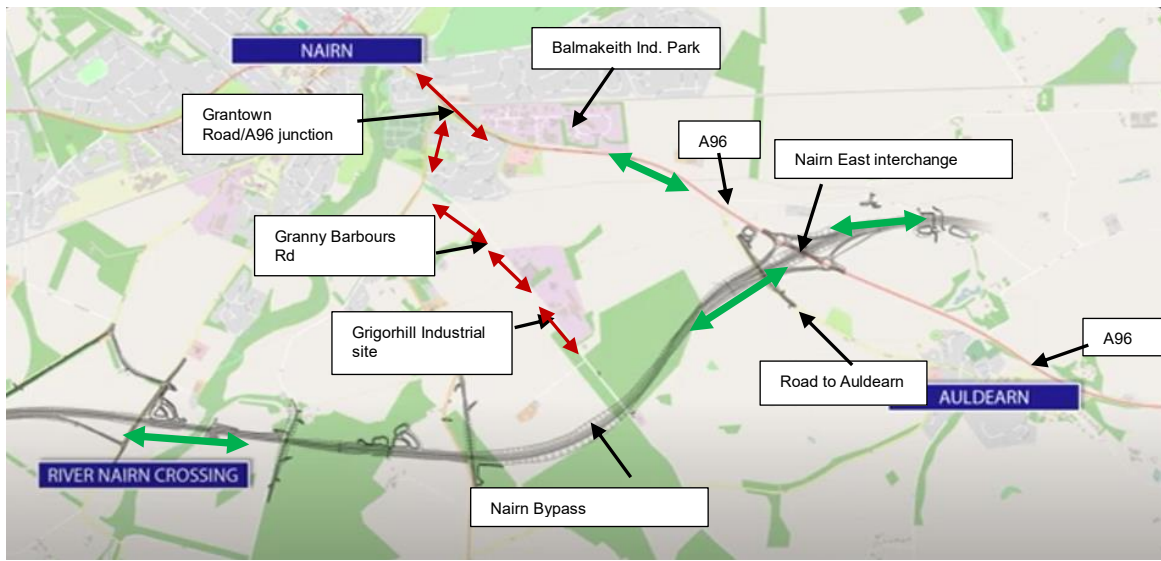
The new Bypass, which, along with other improvements to primary infrastructure in the area, is fundamental to business/industry/employment, housing and tourism growth. Looking forward to the completion of the Bypass, it will provide -

- two new interchanges, one at Nairn West and one at Nairn East close to Auldearn.
- access/exit directly from A96 and local adjoining roads to Nairn East/West interchanges
- allow the creation of new access roads onto the A96 to divert business, construction and other heavy goods vehicles off local roads which intersect with or run through housing areas and town centre;
- smooth transition from the A9 to A96 via the forthcoming West link, avoiding Inverness

It is well documented and widely recognised that the severe traffic congestion problems which gridlock Nairn and seriously impact businesses and the local and wider economy have now been recognised by the Scottish Government with the publication of the A96 Inverness to Wester Hardmuir Made Orders in March 2024. Albeit no specific funding or dates for commencement/completion of the much needed Nairn Bypass have been announced, some limited progress has been made and this is welcomed by the community as a whole. (NPF Pol 13)

Current local road access to Grigorhill Site

Shown below is the current route (shown in Red) taken by vehicles which cuts through Nairn Town Centre, whereas when the Bypass is operational traffic will access/exit via the Nairn East interchange (shown in Green).



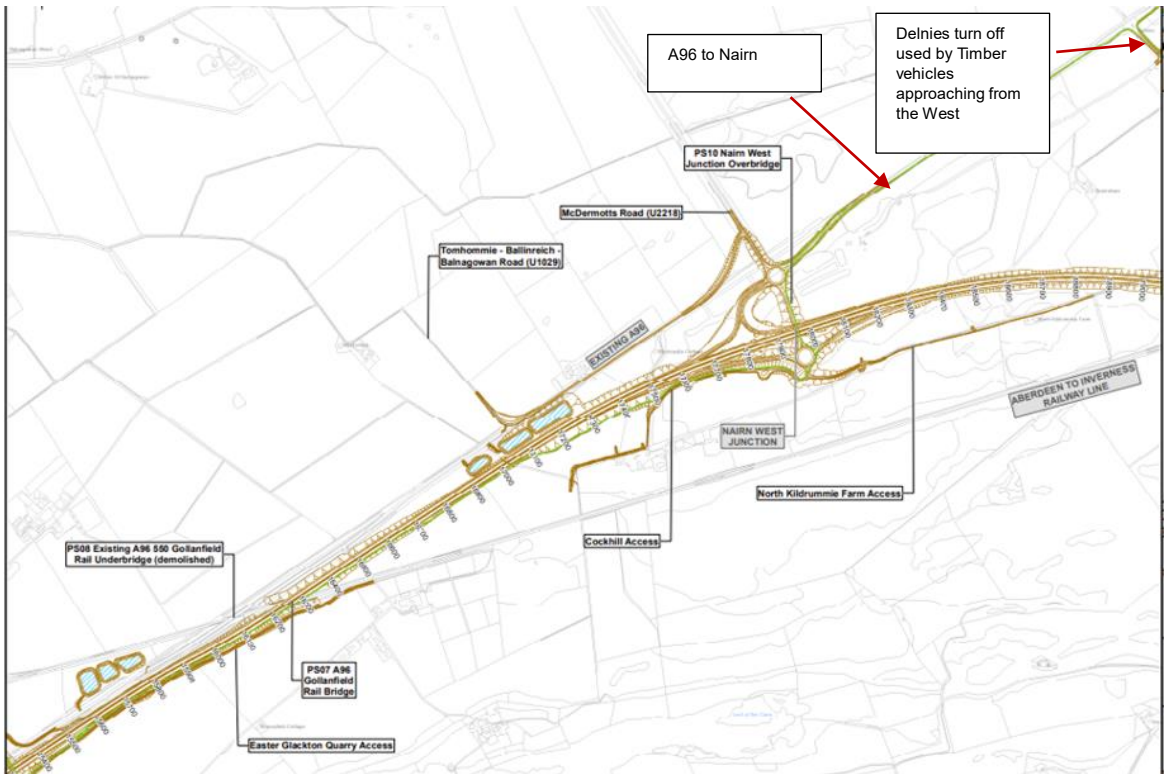
Presently the Grigorhill site is accessed via Granny Barbour's Road, a road adjoining the A939/A96. It is anticipated that once the Bypass is completed and the A96 is de-trunked, a new access point can be created from the A96 into the newly expanded Industrial site thus alleviating traffic on Granny Barbour's Road and allowing better access for business users via the A96.

With the new Nairn East Interchange being almost adjacent to the current Grigorhill Industrial site, this will assist existing businesses become more time efficient enabling them to expand and move forward with their investment and diversification plans, while at the same time attracting new businesses to locate to Nairn.

Nairn West Interchange

Approaching Nairn South (Gordon Timber)

The Nairn West interchange will provide an off/on ramp onto a new roundabout which leads to the Port of Ardersier and A96 into Nairn. Current HGV traffic to the Gordon Timber Mill will continue to use the Delnies turn off and partial single track road which leads onto Balblair Road as shown in the following map.



Shown below is Delnies road from the west, which is significantly single track with passing places, is the only route which can be used by log lorries and other HGVs going to Gordon Timber. Road improvements/more passing places would greatly assist business development and sustainability of the area.



Approaching Gordon Timber from Nairn East

Current local road access to Gordon Timber (Nairn South)

As can be seen from the map below, access from the East by log and other HGVs to Gordon Timber sawmill and premises is via a convoluted route. These roads are not really suitable for the high volume of HGV movements per day/week. Roads are narrow in places and any heavy/prolonged rain can cause flooding making it both difficult and costly for HGV owners and Gordon Timber.



Once the Nairn Bypass is operational this will contribute to business and employment growth while at the same time building Nairn's community wealth (NPF Pol 25)

(a) Sustainable Transport etc. (NPF Pol 13)

Businesses are keen to ensure they make best possible use of new technologies, as and when these emerge, with regard to transportation and other plant, equipment, and operational processes, all of which will make a positive contribution to reducing emissions as far as possible. (NPF Pols 1,2)

(b) Flooding

The proposed Grigorhill site bounded on the north and west sides by a high risk flooding area – shown in blue on SEPA's latest flooding projections map. Recognising the accelerating threat from climate change and weather patterns, the area being proposed for further employment land use, has been set far enough away to protect residential properties and new businesses.

It is hoped the creation of a woodland between the Auldearn burn and employment land will be a positive step forward to enabling a more natural way to prevent flooding and will complement any measures taken by Highland Council as part of any flood protection scheme for the area. (NPF Pols 22, 6)

(c) Water

Currently businesses report seriously reduced pressure particularly when businesses are simultaneously using the supply. In collaboration between the Community, Scottish Water, Highland Council, and HIE it is hoped that this major infrastructure constraint will be addressed in parallel with expansion of existing and development of new businesses.

(d) Drainage

All businesses are cognizant of the need to ensure drainage is handled in the most environmentally friendly way and presently most yards on the Grigorhill Site have their own soakaways or natural land drainage. The proposed Masterplan would build on this method and would consider the most efficient use of grey water for other uses. (NPF Pol 22)

(e) Energy

Existing businesses at Grigorhill currently experience frequent power outages which impact their business performance and viability. Adjacent to the east and south of the site, several battery parks have been or are about to be consented and these facilities may address existing problems.

However, the proposed Strategy, will encourage the use of renewable energy, e.g. solar panels, heating networks, and other new green technologies wherever possible. (NPF Pols 11, 19)

(e) Zero Waste

The proposed Strategy will encourage the use of natural/recycled construction resources which enable building materials, components and products to be disassembled and reused, as well as set out how much waste the proposal could be expected to generate and how it will be managed. (NPF Pol 12)

(f) Climate Change

Albeit Highland Council's Regional Spatial Strategy has sought only to designate Nairn as an area for tourism, continued tourism is predicated on there being beaches, links area, caravan park and golf courses. Future proofing of Nairn through the expansion and development of existing and new businesses is the sensible and pragmatic way to go. (NPF Pol 2)

(g) Rural Development

NPF Policy 29 encourages rural economic activity, innovation and diversification whilst ensuring that the distinctive character of the rural area and the service function of small towns (such as Nairn). The development proposals will contribute to a sustainable and resilient local economy. The Policy also sets out at (a) "*Development proposals that contribute to the viability, sustainability and diversity of rural communities and local rural economy will be supported including: (ii) diversification of existing businesses; (iii) production and processing facilities for local produce and materials, for example Sawmills or local food production; (ix) small scale developments that support new ways of working such as remote home working and community hubs.*

The development proposals being brought forward are suitably scaled, sited and designed to be in keeping with the character of the area, and will contribute towards local living and take into account the transport needs of the development as appropriate for the rural location and purpose.

(h) Housing

Businesses recognise the need to identify land/sites for future housing development in the local development plan. While the proposed Strategy has taken a more even handed approach to land use in order to strike a balance between the need for local employment and housing, we believe there remains ample land within site NA05 to accommodate more housing if such an additional local Nairn need is identified. Any housing required would, under this Strategy, be set apart from the industrial site and any flood risk but would have the benefit of nearby shops and café at Househill while still having access to walking and cycling routes to the town centre. However, in the light of the previously mentioned infrastructure constraints, consideration would also be required with regard to the best use of the current service provision, i.e. – water, sewage, drainage and energy.

(i) Town Centre Regeneration

The Council's current Scottish Housing Investment Programme identifies Nairn's Town Centre as the highest priority for affordable housing within the area and recently the local community identified a list of empty and derelict land/properties within the centre (potential for 200+ affordable homes), which could not only meet this need but would help revitalise the Town Centre hub. (NPF Pols 15,18, 27,28)

(j) Biodiversity – Greenspaces

The Strategy proposes swathes of woodland areas which can be connected with paths and active travel routes. This will enhance biodiversity and will aesthetically align with the distinctive green character of Nairnshire. (Pols 2,3,4 ,6, 8 and 20)

(k) Local Living – 20 minute neighbourhoods

The proposed Strategy complies with NPF4 inasmuch as consideration was given to existing settlement pattern, and the level and quality of interconnectivity of the proposed development with the surrounding area, including local access to employment, including active travel routes and access to local shops. We are aware that further guidance is shortly to be provided by the Scottish Government on this topic. (NPF 15)

Delivery

Delivery of this much needed strategy is dependent on collaborative working with national government, local authority, and other stakeholders. However, having Nairnshire's strategy clearly defined illustrates the strength of vision of the people of this community to shape the area where they live and work.

Clearly neither the Local Authority nor the Community have control over the commencement, progress or completion of the A96 Nairn Bypass which is pivotal to the long term successful delivery of the strategy. However, work needs to continue to ensure that the goals of this strategy are both met by setting out short term and long term delivery objectives

(a) Short term objectives

- (i) To produce a robust and achievable Business/Industry and Employment Growth Strategy which proposes two business expansion areas which meets the needs and vision of the Nairnshire community and which enjoys their full support through the Nairnshire Local Place Plan;
- (ii) Produce a robust and credible business case, including cost analysis
- (iii) To ensure the proposed sites are zoned for business/industry use in the forthcoming Highland Local Development Plan [which will not be adopted until autumn 2027].
- (iv) Assuming the sites are zoned for business/industry , to engage collaborative with Highland Council, HIE, Landowners and other stakeholders to fulfil the vision of the Strategy.
- (v) Give consideration to requesting THC to develop a Masterplan Consent Area for the new business parks

(b) Long Term Objectives to align with the completion of the Nairn Bypass

- (i) Work with relevant stakeholders to ensure planning permission and necessary infrastructure is in place
- (ii) Develop an eastern gateway entrance to the site(s)
- (iii) Publicise/market and promote the sites to an initial targeted audience
- (iv) Work collaboratively with new businesses to ensure their requirements are met where possible

Main References

National Planning Framework 4 – consented 11 January 2023
Circular 1/2022 – Local Place Planning
IMFLDP2 (2024)
HwLDP 2012
Relevant Highland Council policies
Masterplan Consent Area draft proposals and Highland Council paper
The Highland Investment Plan June 2024
Scottish Gov consultation on Flood resilience strategy
Climate Change – a local perspective paper
Scottish Gov consultation on introduction of Infrastructure Levy

(List not exhaustive)

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PREPARATORY CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE MASTER PLAN

CROSS LINKING NPF4 POLICIES/OUTCOMES

Following consent by the Scottish Parliament, NPF4 and its policies are now embedded as part of Scottish Planning Policy. The pivotal objectives described below have informed and guided the basis for this proposed plan and hopefully cross link the various policies to ensure deliverable positive outcomes for residents, businesses and the community as a whole.

Sustainable & Productive local economy (Policies 13,14, 18, 23,25, 26,29)

Much is talked about having a sustainable and productive local economy but what does that really mean in reality. Existing businesses contribute, directly and indirectly, to the sustainability of all aspects of the local economy – use of local tradesmen, local suppliers and local produce. However, these existing businesses cannot be expected to bear the brunt of expectation. Nairn itself must be able to attract more businesses and local employment and when this happens the local economy will become more robust and able to cope with global crises such as the COVID pandemic, war in Ukraine and the knock on effect on energy/cost of living, and importantly retain its local workforce.

Currently existing businesses work with the local community to shape Nairn and ensure the Town is a great place to live and work. But we need to do better. By increasing the number of businesses in the area, the community wealth of Nairn will grow allowing for better amenities and services.

Liveable place (Policy 14)

Nairn has a character all of its own, alongside its quite distinct and well known micro climate, it has beautiful beaches, a glorious seascape, lush green spaces, wildlife and biodiversity, and miles of paths and walks.

It is a self-contained rural farming town which boasts a local community hospital, a town centre with a variety of diverse shops, hotels and restaurants, primary and secondary schools, Community and Arts Centre, Swimming Pool, variety of sports clubs, the famous Nairn Links, Nairn Highland Games and much, much more. It has virtually everything anyone needs to have an enjoyable, healthy life.

Quality Homes and neighbourhoods (Policies 15-17, 19, 21, 22)

Ensuring local people have access to high quality, affordable and sustainable homes in the right locations is a priority. The proposed plan recognises this by illustrating where a substantial number of affordable homes providing choice across tenures could be located, away from the areas designated by SEPA as being at the highest risk of flooding and the industrial site.

Town Centre regeneration (Policies 9, 27, 28 30, 31)

By making best use of centrally located empty properties, derelict land and brownfield sites, town centre living can bring much needed life, footfall and energy back into our local hub, while retaining our green fields for local food growing and reducing the reliance/need on car usage.

Again this is a much desired objective of the NPF4 and will significantly reduce the carbon footprint by ensuring best use is made of existing buildings and materials, enabling smaller more environmentally and energy efficient one bedroom homes (61% of Nairn Waiting list applicants require a one bed room home) to be accommodated in the Town Centre, reducing the need for car travel while at the same time freeing up larger homes with gardens in neighbouring areas for families.

Joined up, holistic approach to community led planning

The overarching goal is to create more local employment opportunities through the expansion/creation of existing and new businesses at the established Nairn East (Grigorhill Industrial site) and Nairn South (Gordon Timber site).

There is no doubt that this is a big challenge for businesses and the community but one which must be tackled collaboratively and done properly through the Local Plan Planning process.

Grigorhill Business Group supported by community research volunteers

27 June 2024