

Ardgay, Creich & Lairg Community Action Plan: Looking to 2030

Compiled 2022

Supported by

Ardgay & District Community Council

Bradbury Centre

Creich Community Council

Invershin Village Hall

Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust

Kyle of Sutherland Hub

Lairg Community Association

Lairg Community Council

Lairg & District Community Initiative

Lairg & District Learning Centre

Rosehall & District Action Group

Voluntary Groups Sutherland

Facilitated by Voluntary Action in Badenoch and Strathspey



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I. Summary

In late spring 2022, Ardgay & District Community Council, Bradbury Centre, Creich Community Council, Invershin Village Hall, Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust, Kyle of Sutherland Hub, Lairg Community Association, Lairg Community Council, Lairg & District Community Initiative, Lairg & District Learning Centre, Rosehall & District Action Group and Voluntary Groups Sutherland, agreed to carry out a review of the community action plans for the community council areas of Ardgay, Creich and Lairg, which had been previously undertaken in 2018. The purpose of revisiting and updating the plans was primarily aimed at giving these key community organisations, along with a range of other groups in the communities, plus public and private sector stakeholders, a strong mandate to move forward with tackling current and emerging issues, as well as leading on new community projects as identified by the residents and businesses of the area in autumn 2022.

With support from Voluntary Action in Badenoch & Strathspey, the community-led steering group, comprising representatives from the organisations listed above, agreed that they would seek the views of local residents and businesses on a number of key questions. This was achieved via a survey which was personally delivered to every household by volunteers - as a paper copy, which was also accessible online. In addition, the questions contained in the survey were also raised with targeted groups that were identified as being harder to get up to date/quality information from. This was undertaken by members of the steering group going out with the survey questions to places and events where it was considered that individuals or groups falling into this category might be approached.

The process was entitled **Ardgay, Creich and Lairg Community Action Plan: Looking to 2030**. Given the increased need now to focus on longer-term as well as short to mid-term goals, particularly in relation to the environment and the economy, residents were asked to consider where they and their community wanted to be by 2030, so generating an 8 to 10-year set of plans and aspirations. They were asked to think not only about what might be achieved together, but what projects would help their community/ies develop a more sustainable future. The views of children and young people were sought separately, but families were also encouraged to have a conversation together and see what they all felt and wanted to prioritise.

When communities come together to develop and progress key projects that benefit residents and businesses, everybody wins. Some great examples of successes across the area from previous community-led projects include:

Ardgay Regeneration	Ferrycroft Playpark
B-Big	Gearrhoille woods
Bonar Bridge Football Club	Lairg Community Market
Bonar Bridge PO refurbishment	Lairg Learning Centre/projects
Bradbury Centre renovations	Refurbishment of community halls
Community Bus	Rosehall Trails
Creation and development of KoS Hub	Winterfest

To help add to these significant community achievements, all residents were encouraged to take part in the action plan review in 2022.

The area is fortunate to have access to a number of significant community benefit funds, of increasing value both now and into the future. So it is **really important** that **all members** of these communities have a genuine and clear voice in deciding how these funds should be managed and spent over the coming years.

The process adhered to the National Standards for Community Engagement to ensure all of the following elements were fully taken into account during the community-led initiative: Impact, Communication, Methods, Working together, Planning, Support and Inclusion. See [Section 4. Community Engagement](#) for further details on the 7 Standards.

2. The Communities

The place covered by this community action plan encompasses three community council areas: Ardgay and District, Creich and Lairg. They are situated in the south and east of Sutherland and fall within the Highland Council local authority area. The whole locality comprises some 2500 people who live within the various collective settlements located in the area.

All of the communities and settlements contained within these boundary areas benefit from the Achany Windfarm Community Investment Funds as well as various others. The Achany Windfarm was established in 2010 and the community benefit funding available from it, helps to improve the way of life for the Ardgay, Creich and Lairg population. How the funds are distributed and utilised is agreed by a panel made up of community members who review applications and decide which projects provide the best collective benefit for the community.

This CAP was commissioned by SSE on behalf of the communities, to provide an up to date mandate (post Covid) from local residents and businesses, as to where their priorities are, in terms of ensuring their communities and ways of life are resilient, sustainable and thriving in the future.

Community Organisations

There are a great many community organisations/groups which work for the benefit of the communities in this area. They almost all have voluntary boards, with some also supporting paid staff, delivering on priorities for the communities they serve. These include but are not limited to:

Ardgay and District Community Council, Ardgay Public Hall, Bonar Bridge Community Hall, Bonar Bridge Football Club, Bonar Bridge Improvement Group, Bradbury Centre, Churches, Creich Community Council, Culrain and District Hall, Invershin Village Hall, Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust, Kyle of Sutherland Heritage Society, Kyle of Sutherland Hub, Lairg Community Association, Lairg Community Council, Lairg Crofters Show, Lairg & District

Community Initiative, Lairg & District Learning Centre, Lairg Gala Week, Parent Councils, Rosehall & District Action Group, Rosehall Village Hall.

Community Assets

As well as owning and operating the numerous village halls in the locality, the communities also operate/maintain other physical assets on behalf of and for the benefit of their communities.

These include Bonar Bridge Post Office, Bradbury Centre, Falls of Shin café and visitor area, Kyle of Sutherland Hub, Lairg Learning Centre, The Barn, Sutherland Arms site, Kincardine Old Church and other cultural heritage sites, floral displays, play parks, walks and trails, woodlands and a variety of sports grounds/facilities.

Local Businesses

There are a considerable number of local businesses operating in the area, although there is no Business Association operating currently to represent them.

Commercial activity includes local garage, visitor accommodation, service, retail and food outlets. A number of builders, joiners and other trades, together with farmers, crofters, people employed on estates and carrying out other kinds of environmental work and artisan industries make up the working heart of this part of rural Sutherland.

3. The Process

The Ardgay, Creich and Lairg community consultation period ran from April to November 2022 and during this time, the way in which the community action planning process was carried out, broadly fell into four stages. These were:

- 1) Gathering Information
- 2) Data Sorting and Collation
- 3) Involving People & Refining Ideas
- 4) Community Action Plan (CAP) document production

Within the four stages of the process, the following questions were asked by the steering group.

Gathering Information

- What do we want to know?
- What questions will we ask?
- What methods will we use?
- How will we practically do it?

Data Sorting

- What does it involve?
- How will we do it?
- Who will assist with this?
- In what form will we present it back to the community?

Involving People & Refining Ideas

- What stakeholder groups do we need to involve?
- How (& where) will we present the information gathered so far?
- How will people in the community help refine the information?
- Who will assist with this?

CAP document production

- What will it include?
- Who will put it together?
- How will it be presented to the community?
- What happens to it next?

In addition, the steering group also considered what timescales and key dates they wanted to aim for and how they would deal with Communications & Publicity - ensuring that these elements were robust, so the process was as inclusive as it could be.

The fifth and most crucial stage of the whole action planning initiative, involves delivery of the plan by the communities and other stakeholders. Essentially this deals with questions such as:

- Who will take responsibility for the CAP?
- How will it be driven forward?
- How will it be monitored and evaluated?

There is more detail on how this can be achieved in [Section 7. Next Steps](#)

Gathering Information

There was a lot of discussion about the nature and precise wording of questions in the survey, as the steering group didn't simply want to revisit questions asked in previous community-led action planning. So the focus was to re-establish what specific things people liked about their community and wanted to keep, what projects/activity they wished to start or (more critically) sustain, and also to encourage the community to look to an 8 to 10-year horizon, and consider how together they might tackle some of the trickier issues such as care for the environment, supporting younger and older residents, employability and transport. So questions were used which were broadly framed, to allow responders to bring up a wide range of issues and ideas without being led.

The paper version covered just two sides of A4 and the survey asked 4 questions:

- 1) *What do you like about living in your community?*
- 2) *What changes would you like to see in your community by 2030?*
(*You might want to think about how as individuals, or as a community, we can improve the environment, address the climate emergency, develop our local economy, increase social and leisure opportunities and widen local cultural experiences.*)
- 3) *If you could improve just one of these things in the community, what would it be?*
- 4) *Are there any new projects (large or small) that you would like to see happening in your community? Or any existing projects that need to be sustained?*

The survey also asked:

*Would you be willing to get involved in any projects you are interested in? YES / NO
If Yes, please provide contact details.*

This last additional question was included to try to encourage more people to come forward to help with projects that were of particular interest to them, in order to counteract the reduction in volunteer numbers, that had come about in recent years and especially following the pandemic.

It was decided that all households would receive a paper copy of the survey through their letterbox and this was carried out by distribution, via the Kyle Chronicle, to all households in Ardgay and District and Creich Community Council areas. In Lairg, a team of community volunteers organised by Lairg Community Association, delivered 500 copies out to all households in the community over the course of a few days. In addition, 40 spare paper copies of the survey were left at each of three locations: Lairg Community Centre, KoS Development Trust and KoS Hub in case anyone needed extras.

This method helped to deliver an inclusive process of community engagement, where everyone had the opportunity to respond to the survey if they wished and they were able to do this via hard copy, which could be deposited back into one of the centrally located survey boxes, or online via QR code which enabled the community to access the survey on a range of devices.

Data Sorting

All of the responses came in either online via Survey Monkey, by hard copy into CAP-branded boxes left at six busy locations in the communities (the KoS Hub, Ardgay Stores, Bonar Bridge PO, Invercassley Stores, Lairg Spar and Costcutters), or from information collated at events put on for specific groups in the village. Surveys were returned from primary and secondary school pupils and others attending youth-based activities at the Hub and these responses were collated separately to highlight the ideas and opinions of the communities' young people.

Every comment was recorded and categorised, so that everyone would be able to 'see' their voice in the displayed results. The information was sorted into 4 main themes: Social, Environmental, Economic and Cultural and the number of times a particular issue or idea was mentioned was noted, so priorities could rise to the top of the lists in each themed category. These lists were then prepared for display (see [Section 6. Action Plan – what the communities need](#) and [Section 9. Appendices](#)), so every member of the community could see what had been said and get involved in the next stage, when ideas were refined and solutions to issues sought.

Involving People & Refining Ideas

The process culminated in the **Big Conversation**, which took place over several days in October and November 2022 at various venues: Lairg Community Centre, Ardgay Public Hall and KoS Hub. At these drop in events, the results were offered back to the community and time given for reflection and discussion around the topics. During the six days of events,

all of the residents who attended were asked to consider the top priorities that had been identified from the process under the headings of:

- Climate Conscious Communities
- Culturally Vibrant Communities
- Economically Thriving Communities
- Socially Connected Communities

They were asked to look at those areas of particular interest to them and write on Action Plan Templates aimed at refining ideas by looking at questions such as:

What specific action needs to be taken to achieve this priority?

What are the key things to remember to include?

Who needs to be involved?

CAP document production

All of the comments and pieces of information given by the public during the Big Conversation events were collected and incorporated into this report, which now belongs to the Ardgay, Creich and Lairg communities and will be used as the basis for ongoing community development in the villages over the next 10 years, with support from the communities' organisations and all other relevant stakeholders from the public, private and voluntary sector.

Also a list of all those who came forward offering to volunteer their help with certain projects was compiled and will be held by the team taking the action plan forward (referred to as **ACL Community Action Forum** for the purposes of this report).

4. Community Engagement

The National Standards for Community Engagement are good-practice principles designed to improve and guide the process of community engagement.

They are clear principles that describe the main elements of effective community engagement. They provide detailed performance statements that everyone involved can use to achieve the highest quality results and the greatest impact.

The standards are particularly helpful for communities - their organisations and groups - to help them involve their members or the wider community in shaping the services and changes they need, and to make sure they accurately represent members' or the community's views in the decision-making processes.



5. Survey Responses

Thanks go to the 349 individuals and families in the CAP area who contributed so meaningfully and thoughtfully to the community survey – this number represents at least 16.5% of the communities' resident population. Also to the 83 people who attended the Big Conversation drop-in events at the various venues over the six days they ran.

For a detailed list of what came out of the survey responses, see [Section 9. Appendices](#) (list of appendices below). These show all comments made by each community council area in answer to the survey questions, prioritised in order of the number of people who mentioned them.

[Appendix 1](#) What do you like about living in your community?

[Appendix 2](#) What changes would you like to see in your community by 2030?

6. Action Plan - What the communities need

Project Themes and Priorities

The CAP sets out the communities' vision for the longer term (up to 10 years) with more detailed activity across the 4 specified themes:

- Climate Conscious Communities
- Culturally Vibrant Communities
- Economically Thriving Communities
- Socially Connected Communities

itemising priority outcomes and actions which are shown in the relevant tables below.

It is important to note that some of the project outcomes will be a “quick win” whereas others will take much more time to plan and execute. To achieve results and outcomes in the short, medium/longer term each high priority project/outcome will have its own activity plan which will be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely (SMART) and determined and agreed in the first part of the CAP implementation.

These 4 themes were taken and put into separate groupings, showing what the priorities are for each theme. Within each priority, projects have been listed that have been drawn from the high priorities that came out of the survey data. Further views and information for each priority were sought from those who attended the drop in event and suggested actions, together with any additional information are outlined below each section.

CLIMATE CONSCIOUS COMMUNITIES

Priority: Community Resilience

- 1) Develop local food provision initiative: community growing spaces; polytunnels in each community (at halls?); community gardens/orchards; community markets
- 2) Energy saving:
 - Community support scheme to help residents & businesses to insulate their properties (double glazing, solar panels, heat pumps, smart meters etc)
 - Cheaper local energy bills

Priority: Make the most of the Natural Environment

- 1) Active Travel Infrastructure:
 - Safe Biking & Walking trails: develop/upgrade/maintain for local & visitor use eg Ardgay to Bonar Bridge, Lairg to rail station, Rosehall, Migdale, Balblair etc
 - Cycle racks in communities
 - E-bike rental network
- 2) Support to maintain community woodlands

PRIORITY: COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Develop local food provision initiative: community growing spaces; polytunnels in each community (at halls?); community gardens/orchards; community markets

- Investigate all of the initiatives listed above, including researching what other communities have done with similar projects, suitable sites, resources required.
- Food larders / boxes to promote reduction in waste and to support all through cost of living crisis.
- Encourage local farmers/crofters to sell their produce through local markets.
- Widen discussions on climate issues and how to mitigate food shortages through more local initiatives.

Energy Saving

- Look into a scheme (including information/advice events) to support local homeowners and businesses to upgrade and improve heating and insulation in properties, through a variety of alternatives, so they are cheaper and more sustainable to run.

PRIORITY: MAKE THE MOST OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Active Travel Infrastructure

- Consider the separate options listed in the box above.
- Get local crofters on board with regard to access.
- Develop good signage/maps for infrastructure network.
- Better access/parking for big Loch Shin.
- Benches overlooking Little Loch Shin, between bridge and war memorial.
- Pedestrian walkway across dam to create a walking 'loop'.
- More blue runs in forest trails.

Support to maintain community woodlands

- Safeguard Gearrchoille community wood and develop woodland activities & extend woodland as appropriate
- Develop regular activity programme in community woodlands eg Forest Education with ranger.
- Support for tree planting (with Woodland Trust) appropriate to species and place.

CULTURALLY VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

Priority: Ardgay

- 1) Develop a community market
- 2) Path from Ardgay to Bonar Bridge

Priority: Creich

- 1) Support for Bonar Bridge FC with infrastructure (pitch), training & team events
- 2) Improve land and access areas in centre of BB
- 3) Maintain flower displays (B.Big)
- 4) Make a feature of the bridge

Priority: Lairg

- 1) Improve water sports infrastructure at Little Loch Shin
- 2) Develop Ferrycroft's attractions eg outdoor covered space, sculpture trail, information boards
- 3) Lairg things to see and do for visitors – include highlighted historical sites
- 4) Support for LLC, Crofters Show, Gala Week

ALL: Maintain support for all the key community organisations

PRIORITY: ARDGAY

Develop a community market

Path from Ardgay to Bonar Bridge

Further comments from Big Conversation events

- Look at reducing the speed limit between Ardgay and BB.
- Community Market in the village.
- Siting of an ATM in the village.
- Interpretation board in Square, with details of local walks/attractions eg Croick church, Carbisdale Castle, Gearrchoille woodland.
- How to encourage more people to get involved in projects/activities.

PRIORITY: CREICH

Support for Bonar Bridge FC with infrastructure (pitch), training & team events

- Priority funding for these improvements which involve a lot of young people.

Improve land and access areas in centre of Bonar Bridge

Maintain flower displays (B.Big)

Make a feature of the bridge

Further comments from Big Conversation events

- Reduce cars speeding around Bonar Primary.
- Swimming provision locally.
- Re-establish Highland Gathering for the area.
- Call for access to a community polytunnels.

PRIORITY: LAIRG

Improve water sports infrastructure at Little Loch Shin

- Further develop water sports and support the local club.
- Provide more picnic facilities.

Develop Ferrycroft's attractions eg outdoor covered space, sculpture trail, information boards

- Large pictorial sign advertising Ferrycroft and what can be discovered there. 'Find out about Lairg'.
- Play facilities at Ferrycroft for children with disabilities.
- New benches.

Lairg things to see and do for visitors – include highlighted historical sites

- Noticeboard to this effect at main car park.
- Information/walks booklet.
- Mural depicting local cultural heritage and landscapes – find appropriate site.

Support for LLC, Crofters Show, Gala Week

ECONOMICALLY THRIVING COMMUNITIES

Priority: Strategy for local jobs and businesses

- 1) Develop an economic working group to create a local jobs initiative strategy
- 2) Assistance for local businesses: keep local shops & hospitality open especially; provision of more small business units

Priority: Increase opportunities to attract tourism and business to the local area

- 1) Investment in range of accommodation eg serviced campsite/s, bunkhouse, hostel. Possible use of repurposed abandoned buildings (esp. BB and Lairg)
- 2) Falls of Shin: keep open to benefit all locally. Explore all options to get economic development of visitor centre right
- 3) Improve digital connectivity: superfast broadband, mobile infrastructure
- 4) Invest in local public toilets in key locations to cater for locals, visitors and mobile home waste discharge points

Priority: Cross-community co-operation

- 1) Operate a cross-community group to administer windfarm monies, with democratic community involvement in how it's spent

PRIORITY: STRATEGY FOR LOCAL JOBS AND BUSINESSES

Develop an economic working group to create a local jobs initiative strategy

- Free training for locals, to help meet the needs of local businesses and job opportunities eg local ambassadors and guides.
- Support and expand local apprenticeship schemes.
- Investigate benefits and viability of pop up shops/cafes, especially during tourist season – providing seasonal jobs for young people.

Assistance for local businesses: keep local shops & hospitality open especially; provision of more small business units

- Incentives for new (gap-filling) businesses to set up: rural business development fund.
- Look at slow tourism options and how to encourage visitors to stay in the area longer eg a what to do guide/app. Get all sectors on board.
- Local community markets to help footfall.
- Business park to support small business units.

PRIORITY: INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES TO ATTRACT TOURISM AND BUSINESS TO THE LOCAL AREA

Investment in range of accommodation eg serviced campsite/s, bunkhouse, hostel. Possible use of repurposed abandoned buildings (esp. BB and Lairg)

- Involve and prepare local groups and businesses, including community-owned asset holders in a co-designed plan of action, that includes a strategy for increased accommodation in the area.
- Serviced campsite with hardstanding for campervans in Rosehall behind Invercassley Stores – manager of store keen to drive this forward with Creich CC and Balnagowan Estates. Put together a business plan.
- Look at opportunities for motorhome facilities in Lairg.

Falls of Shin: keep open to benefit all locally. Explore all options to get economic development of visitor centre right

- Look at the best ownership options, both for the site and the communities' economic benefit.

Improve digital connectivity: superfast broadband, mobile infrastructure

- Create a working group to look into taking some initiatives forward.

Invest in local public toilets in key locations to cater for locals, visitors and mobile home waste discharge points

- Include facilities such as bins, clean water, grey and brown water waste discharge points.
- Invercassley Stores could be linked to public toilets in Rosehall, to oversee/run them?

PRIORITY: CROSS-COMMUNITY CO-OPERATION

Operate a cross-community group to administer windfarm monies, with more democratic community involvement in how it's spent

- Promote co-operation rather than competition – look into a 'participatory budgeting' approach.
- Following on from this CAP initiative, set up a system of liaison between local groups, to identify shared priorities that have come out of this CAP, avoid overlap and help to drive key projects forward on a holistic level. Ensure young people's voices are heard during this process.
- Community benefit monies to be administered by a team that equally represents all geographic areas, social, economic, environmental and cultural aspects, relevant to this CAP.
- Any conflict of interest to be dealt with, through clear policy/guidelines.

SOCIALLY CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

Priority: Support our Young People

- 1) Access to community-owned affordable housing for local people: to rent or buy, new or existing stock, to include flats
- 2) Improved regular and accessible transport: community-led scheme covering whole area, focus on electric / hydrogen vehicles
- 3) Upgrade the equipment & landscaping of area play parks (Ardgay, Bonar Bridge, Ferrycroft)

Priority: Sustainable community spaces, delivering for community needs

- 1) KoS Hub: support service & look into developments to include swimming pool, gym, office/meeting space, wraparound and childcare, bigger kitchen, intergenerational opportunities
- 2) Bradbury Centre: support & maintain this service including the Bradbury bus
- 3) Village Halls: financial support to improve/maintain; increased people support to provide more events and activities

Priority: Access to local provision of quality social care

PRIORITY: SUPPORT OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

Access to community-owned affordable housing for local people: to rent or buy, new or existing stock, to include flats

- Fund research (by Highland Community Housing Trust) into exactly what type/s of accommodation are required in the area eg size, price point, buy or rent.
- Identify sites (including derelict ones) in the communities/area that might be suitable for affordable housing.
- Support community acquisition to build community-owned housing.
- Investigate introduction of an appropriate scheme to enable local young people to buy and restore derelict properties. Include young people in its design.
- Work with partners on improving legislation to reduce number of residential units lost to the community through holiday let ownership.

Improved regular and accessible transport: community-led scheme covering whole area, focus on electric / hydrogen vehicles

- Investigate the range of transport need for local people in the communities: routes, timings, numbers, accessibility, frequency, cost.
- Work with key partners including Highland Council and HiTrans on feasibility of a community-led local transport scheme, to explore possible solutions to range of need. Job opportunities (community shuttle-bus or on demand?).

Upgrade the equipment & landscaping of area play parks (Ardgay, Bonar Bridge, Ferrycroft)

- Involve play park users (children and parents/carers) in co-design of what is needed. Together explore how it can be funded and project managed, including future maintenance requirements.

PRIORITY: SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY SPACES, DELIVERING FOR COMMUNITY NEEDS

KoS Hub: support service & look into developments to include swimming pool, gym, office/meeting space, wraparound and childcare, bigger kitchen, intergenerational opportunities

- Some of these elements have been requested and looked into in some detail before, with the conclusion that there is in fact limited potential take-up in reality. There should be opportunity for independent review of all these suggestions (again?) with support and involvement of the wider community, to assess which are viable options.
- Look into building a permanent extension (instead of marquee) to cater for additional activity – take into account any viable requirements concluded from exercise above.
- Gym is a fantastic facility and needs to be maintained/expanded:
 - have an under 25's slot for the gym – outwith the Hub youth café times
 - provide some instruction on how to use equipment – for safety when unmanned
 - system whereby gym can be open for longer
 - bigger space/more equipment to cater for variety of needs – involve users in potential plans.
- Keep the PT at the Hub free and accessible to all.

Bradbury Centre: support & maintain this service including the Bradbury bus

- Critical to keep this valuable service to the community ongoing and additionally explore where there may be potential for some expansion of services eg longer hours, further variety of offering.

Village Halls: financial support to improve/maintain; increased people support to provide more events and activities

- Review/rethink all community buildings to look at new and possible future use / repurposing.
- Investigate solar panels and sustainable heat sources for all halls in the area for financial and environmental benefit.
- Lairg Community Centre:
 - Better signage from main car park at bottom of main street
 - Upgrade to lighting and sound

Further comments from BC events

- Accessible safe, supported place/s for young people to meet up and hang out together.
- Safe space for young people in crisis, place to receive support.

PRIORITY: ACCESS TO LOCAL PROVISION OF QUALITY SOCIAL CARE

- Look into models for possibility of establishing a sustainable, local, social care at home team, involving locally trained staff, supplemented by volunteers/befrienders. Job opportunities.
- Explore options for use of health monitoring comms to enable people to remain safely at home in isolated areas.
- Links to be made with available housing to help older generations who may want to downsize (eg FIT type homes?).
- Mental health support provided locally at Migdale Hospital.
- Improve support for children and young people with disabilities and their families, as no current provision in Sutherland.
- Train more local childcare providers.
- Campaign to engage and retain local foster carers, to prevent out of area placement.

7. Next Steps: Suggestions for Delivery

Steps to deliver the Ardgay, Creich & Lairg Community Action Plan

The next steps to start working with the action plan and looking at how parts can start to be delivered will be subject to discussions within the communities' organisations, but broadly involves **collectively**:

- Setting up an *ACL Community Action Forum* (see below) to take the plan forward. Agreeing a chair for a specified period at a time, so will rotate after an agreed number of months or after an agreed number of meetings
- Agreeing to adopt the Values and Principles laid out below
- Agreeing what priorities will be taken forward initially
- Managing the project volunteer list that has come out of the process
- Involving all key stakeholders (organisations & individuals) in co-design of project delivery
- Drawing up a more detailed delivery action plan for each prioritised project, identifying aims, actions, milestones, who needs to be involved, key deliverables.
- Communicating progress with the community
- Reviewing progress on a regular basis
- Revisiting the action plan as required

Values and Principles

The following values and principles will underpin the way in which this action plan is rolled out and implemented:

- 1) A plan for all - it is the responsibility of the whole community (individuals and groups) to unite and work together for project ambitions to be realised
- 2) Transparency - all ideas should be planned and researched openly with a commitment to co-production where groups contribute to the ideas as they develop
- 3) Partnership - working together with a shared agenda will be at the heart of any activity arising from this plan
- 4) Inclusion - everyone is invited to participate and everyone benefits, regardless of age and ability
- 5) Impact - the success of this plan will be judged on activities which have a positive influence on people and communities
- 6) Involvement - ensuring the community is meaningfully involved in decisions that affect their lives.

ACL Community Action Forum

It is very important to ensure the effective delivery of this action plan, for all the communities to work together to implement it, ie a full area approach. This approach has been called *ACL Community Action Forum* in this report, but of course the wider community will decide on its own name for these purposes.

ACL Community Action Forum will be the environment for agreeing on how the Next Steps at the start of this section are taken forward, as well as where responsibility will sit in terms of delivering on the Values and Principles outlined above. It will not have a separate legal identity, but simply be a forum called maybe two or three times a year, perhaps by a rotating chair. It should comprise as a minimum, representatives from the organisations who initially

steered the action planning process, together with any other significant community organisations, who wish to be at the table and participate.

In addition, it is likely that each community area would wish to form its own Community Action Group, particularly to look at taking forward issues/projects specific to that place. These groups will then work together through the ACL Community Action Forum on bigger, cross-community issues.

Ongoing community engagement

A process for securing community mandates for projects at key milestones is advisable, so that projects can enjoy broad community support, follow best practice in terms of co-design and allow for those who will be most impacted by a project's deliverables to be involved in the activity.

Volunteer lists

A list of people who have come forward to volunteer in general or for specific projects, has been compiled from a question in the survey and also information given by residents at the Big Conversation events. The ACL CAP Volunteer list is a vital part of the action planning process and those on the list need to be kept informed of how things are being progressed and what part they might be able to play in that.

Levels of Support

The surveys have given the key community organisations in the three community council areas, a lot of detailed information coming from a wide sector of the community, regarding their thoughts on issues and ideas for projects that they would like to see taken forward on their behalf.

The priorities fall into two main groups and will require to be tackled in a different way:

- projects which, although some are mid to longer term, are possible for the community to take forward themselves, with some minimal support from the relevant key agencies or support organisations.
- large, complex issues around employment, housing, transport, business support and infrastructure, where the community will require a great deal of long term assistance from various public, third and sometimes private sector organisations in order to take these forward and make a notable difference.

Monitoring, Auditing and Evaluation of the Community Action Plan

Monitoring, auditing and evaluation are essential requirements of any Community Action Plan to ensure it is being implemented. The **ACL Community Action Forum** will meet regularly to review progress on the plan. Keeping records against each theme and project will be a useful tool to ensure progress is being maintained. These meetings will be open and accessible to all groups and individuals. Evaluation provides an opportunity to reflect and learn from activities, assess the outcomes and effectiveness of a project and think about new ways of doing things.

8. Thanks & Acknowledgements

Thanks for all their involvement and hard work in helping to make the process a success must go to the representatives of the following organisations who made up the CAP steering group:

- * Ardgay & District Community Council
- * Bonar Bridge Community Hall
- * Bradbury Centre
- * Creich Community Council
- * Invershin Hall
- * Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust
- * Kyle of Sutherland Hub
- * Lairg Community Association
- * Lairg Community Council
- * Lairg & District Community Initiative
- * Lairg & District Learning Centre
- * Rosehall & District Action Group
- * Voluntary Groups Sutherland

PLUS

- * All the Lairg delivery volunteers who put surveys through every household's door
- * All the community volunteers who helped organise and run the Big Conversation events across weekdays/weekends

Voluntary Action in Badenoch and Strathspey (VABS), as an independent community and volunteering development charity, supported the three communities through this community action planning process and facilitated the steering group meetings, but always following the communities' lead in how they wished to proceed.

Funding for this CAP process in 2022 in the Ardgay and District, Creich and Lairg Community Council areas was provided by SSE.

9. Appendices

Appendix i

What do you like about living in your community?

OVER ALL THE COMMUNITIES

- Good community spirit – friendly & supportive people & strong sense of belonging
- Lovely rural environment: beautiful scenery, clean air, peace & quiet, woodland, walks, nature, foraging, trails, easy access to the outdoors
- Fantastic amenities and resources for a rural area in The Hub, Bradbury Centre, Lairg Learning Centre
- Development Trust and Community Councils provision for people and families in need: community larders
- Activities & clubs for the whole community / all ages
- Quality of life / Relaxed pace
- Safe place to live / bring up a family / low crime rate
- Host of local talent & skills, providing lots of opportunities. Future potential with all the different community groups and organisations
- Events on in the local halls
- The trails/walks
- Good GP cover
- The privacy
- Volunteering and willingness to contribute
- The church
- Rail link to Inverness
- Ability to work remotely
- Mobile bank & Screen Machine calling
- Sense of optimism about future possibilities, including a crofting future

ARDGAY

- Good local facilities: Post Office, local shops, pharmacy, café, Crannog takeaway
- Support including good parents network

CREICH

- Good local facilities: Post Office, local shops, pharmacy, café, Crannog takeaway
- Activities for the elderly / youth / wider community
- Health Service / GP Surgery / Gym at the Hub
- Bonar Bridge FC
- The Golf club
- Balblair forest
- Great primary school in Bonar
- Pub
- Bonar Bridge film club

LAIRG

Lots of activities, community groups for community members incl. classes/workshops at LLC, post Covid

- Community Centre, local shops, school, library, medical centre, Learning Centre & Ferrycroft are great assets
- Healthcare (care@home, care for the elderly, assisted care)
- Rosehall having school. shop/cafe, pub, village hall and church. Flourishing village hall which provides varied entertainment throughout the year.
- Opportunities for children to be active and engage in their environment. Lovely to see the kids out on the water on a Saturday on Little Loch Shin
- Community Market
- Post Office, doctors and garage
- Gala Week & Crofters Show

Appendix ii

What changes would you like to see in your community by 2030?

ARDGAY

CULTURAL

- Encourage an Art Group and more artistic events eg life drawing, sculpture, landscape painting
- Interpretation of the Battle of Carbisdale or the clearances

ECONOMIC

- Wind farms should invest in more community projects or enterprises
- Better childcare provision to encourage families to stay and move here
- Encourage more community based initiatives
- Security of employment
- Better pay so young people can stay in the area
- Support local shops & tourism businesses
- Holiday rentals & self-catering be licensed to reduce sale of houses for investment rather than locals to live in

ENVIRONMENTAL

- More Active Travel routes for safe cycling for locals and visitors eg between Ardgay & Bonar Bridge
- Create community garden to grow fruit & veg for the community (Carbisdale walled garden?)
- More diverse habitats and livelihood opportunities
- More EV charging points
- More patches of wild flower meadow

- Ensure no loss of fields between main village and Ardgayhill (ie no sell off, no housing development there)
- Trails at Carbisdale Castle need to be reopened and publicised more
- Improved walking safety from Ardgay out to Kyle of Sutherland Heritage Society
- More local agricultural products from crofts and other local producers
- Opportunities for crofting community to highlight the issues and needs of good land care and land rights
- Protect/maintain/enhance the Gearrchoille woodland
- Put the plot of barren land behind the new houses at Drovers Square to better use
- Replace industrial forestry with more environmentally-friendly, native trees
- Deter dog owners from leaving poo bags for someone else to clean up

SOCIAL

- Leisure Centre & Swimming Pool
- Keep the Hub open – longer opening hours
- More community-led events for families/kids especially during summer
- Better communication of events
- Access to the Kyle from Ardgay and Culrain side to launch kayaks/canoes
- Refurbishment of Culrain Hall
- Repair café & a tool share group
- Encourage younger residents to be involved in community groups/management
- Strengthen cross-community ties/interaction

CREICH

CULTURAL

- Support for Bonar Bridge FC with infrastructure (pitch), training and team events
- Make more of the lovely bridge between BB and Ardgay

ECONOMIC

- Investment in Bonar Bridge village: reduce local eyesores and encourage people to stop (like Ardgay)
- Invest in local public toilets to cater for locals, visitors and mobile homes waste discharge points. Upgrade car park
- Encourage redevelopment of Bridge Hotel
- Develop joiner's yard on Tulloch Rd – possibly for community housing or small business use
- Put in a bunkhouse facility
- Encourage evening service facilities – especially places to eat
- Campsite with hook-ups in Rosehall

ENVIRONMENTAL

- More public bins and signage to help stop littering, especially in laybys
- Community polytunnel

- Loch Migdale: A path all the way around, pontoon for swimming/paddle boarding
- Clear land across from the PO (behind wall) and next to parking area/information board, to expose river & hills
- More trees planted along Kyle river bank
- Clean path slabs and remove moss from monument (across from Kyle Bakery)
- Improve dangerous path next to church
- Cycle tracks at Balblair Woods need to be reopened and publicised more, with easier runs to suit more people
- Enhance Rosehall trails and forest walks

SOCIAL

- Improvements to Bonar Bridge (BB) play park
- Continue to support the look of BB – flowers make a great impact
- Keep the Hub and Bradbury Centre open
- Community kitchen for processing locally grown produce
- Develop an informal social meeting space /marketplace for BB
- Reduce speeding at BB primary – speed bumps?
- Better facilities at Migdale playing field
- Public toilets in Rosehall
- Provision for tennis/badminton

LAIRG

CULTURAL

- History / Archaeology walks for locals and visitors
- Interpretation & development of many historical sites in area eg dams, brochs, lime kilns, old mill, walled garden
- Ferrycroft: outdoor covered space or shelter to use as hub for walks, mental health support groups, arts and crafts and nature-based activities.
- Ferrycroft: Art/sculpture trail and Information boards (birds to spot on the Loch)

ECONOMIC

- Investment in range of accommodation eg serviced campsite, bunkhouse, hostel (unused bank/PO/police station)
- Support to provide more small business premises/units
- Lairg things to see and do for visitors – promotional material (hard copy/digital)
- Sutherland Arms site plans brought to fruition
- Reliable ATM

ENVIRONMENTAL

- Repurpose some of the abandoned buildings
- Community growing space – with polytunnel/s. Tidy & maintain Lairg in Bloom polytunnel
- Community garden initiative

- More recycling and dog waste bins in village
- Pathway from Lairg to station
- Reduce overgrown areas / prune trees to benefit from views and to keep village/area looking tidy
- Benches along the Loch front
- Finish off plot opposite Costcutters and make into community space

SOCIAL

- Fix the play park areas especially Ferrycroft
- Support for our young people
- More weekend activities to help with social and community involvement eg bingo or quiz nights, swap events for clothes, toys etc
- After school activities for children – youth club
- Winter use of hall to put on events to reduce isolation: coffee mornings, crafting etc
- Fitness facilities
- Develop Little Loch Shin: more opportunities for sport and leisure on the water. Include picnic facilities
- Facility like the Hub and Bradbury, but in Lairg
- Improved bus timetable information – more easily available

KEY INFRASTRUCTURE /ISSUES

OVER ALL THE COMMUNITIES

- Access to community-owned affordable housing for local people: rent or buy, new or existing stock
- Improved/increased public transport / community transport scheme across whole area, centred around electric/hydrogen vehicles
- Improve/upgrade/maintain all the area's play parks (landscaping and equipment)
- Expansion of the Hub facilities: longer opening hours, more classes and use of café in evenings, childcare facility, wraparound school club
- Local jobs initiative: Investment in locally based training and learning opportunities (land-based amongst others)
- Pay a fair price for our power / Cheaper energy bills / Community ownership of wind turbine
- Target money to help residents/businesses to insulate homes/properties including double glazing, solar panels, heat pumps, smart meters
- Local food provision: Increased access to locally produced/sourced, affordable food. Project to support people to grow own food. Polytunnel for each hall?
- Access to local provision of quality social care
- Across-community group to administer wind farm monies /more community involvement in how it's spent
- Keep Shin Falls open and in community ownership. Get economic development of visitor centre right.
- Better digital connectivity eg superfast broadband infrastructure, mobile signals (esp. Strathcarron mentioned)
- Support for local businesses to keep them going in the area, especially hospitality
- Support for business development
- Access to local provision of quality childcare
- Support for those in poverty
- Encourage more local amenities like cafes, bakeries, craft shops to draw residents and tourists
- More walking & cycling trails
- Support for Village Halls
- More EV charging points
- Functioning area network of electric bikes, cars/vans for rent
- Support for all local community sports clubs and social venues (financial and volunteers)
- Citizens Assembly for local tackling of climate challenges
- Support for those with poor mental health
- Slow down traffic on all roads in area
- Help with shopping scheme for elderly or those with limited mobility, especially in winter
- Regular Community Forum with reps from local groups (eg Bradbury Centre, Community Councils, Community Halls, KoSDT, KoS Hub, LCA, LDLC, LDCI) for dialogue, arbitration and clear areas of action to benefit majority

- Develop 'Slow Tourism' model (not NC500 approach) – become a destination for longer stay in area
- Promote area as a Dark Skies destination
- Upkeep of all the area's war memorials

YOUNG PEOPLE (under 35)

OVER ALL THE COMMUNITIES

- Affordable places for young people to live: to rent or buy. Flats?
- Improve the local parks (landscape & equipment) especially for school ages
- Local transport initiative to get around the area better for young people, families, people without cars
- Leisure Centre with swimming pool
- Local jobs initiative
- Better biking and walking trails / Safer cycle paths between the villages
- Youth Club – more events for 16 to 25 year olds eg dances, intercommunity sports
- Taster sessions for young people to develop new hobbies eg music, drama, scouts, brownies, guides
- Skate park/jumps
- 4G pitch with floodlighting
- Swap shop for clothes, toys etc
- Subsidised childcare to help people into work
- Helping Hands Fund/ Vouchers to help with food shopping