A Regenerative Future for the North Highlands

10-Year Strategy 2026–2035 (AT A GLANCE)

Tourism has created real opportunity across the North Highlands. It has also created pressures. Our proposed strategy is about what comes next: managing tourism more responsibly, involving communities more closely and making sure the benefits are felt locally.

THIS IS A DRAFT.

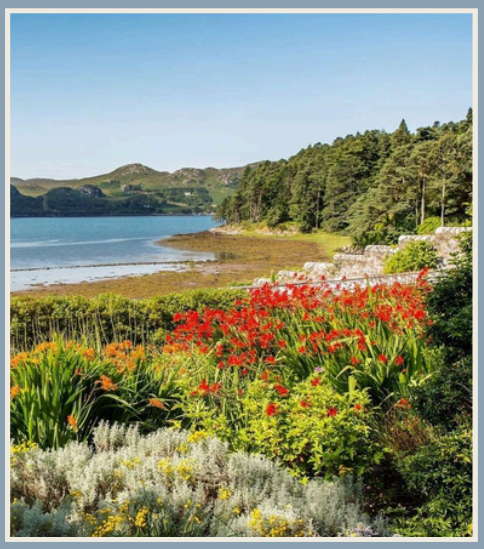
WE WANT YOU TO HELP SHAPE THE FINAL VERSION.

Consultation Dates:

10th November - 31st March







WHY CHANGE?

The next chapter needs to look different.

The independent NC500 Impact Assessment confirmed the significant economic value tourism brings to the North Highlands. It also highlighted concerns around infrastructure, visitor behaviour, environmental impact and whether local voices are adequately represented.

The proposed strategy responds by moving away from a focus on visitor growth alone. The ambition is regenerative tourism: tourism that actively strengthens communities, protects landscapes and supports the long-term resilience of the North Highlands.

NC500 Ltd's role will also evolve. As Guardian of the Route, we propose to use the reach of the NC500 brand to convene, coordinate, advocate and communicate - working with communities, businesses and public sector partners rather than acting alone.

The message is simple: future success should be judged by the value tourism creates for people and place, not just by how many people visit.

FOREWORD FROM THE EXECUTIVE CHAIR

"The North Coast 500 has brought significant benefits to the North Highlands over the past decade, supporting local businesses, jobs and communities but the independent study also highlighted challenges that we need to address.

"We've worked with stakeholders to develop a proposed direction for the next ten years, but this isn't a finished strategy. We want communities to tell us what we're getting right, what we're missing and what they want to see change. "The NC500 is much more than a road trip, it’s about the people and places that make the North Highlands special, and we want them to be at the heart of shaping its future."

THE PROPOSED STRATEGY

One vision. Five priorities.

OUR VISION

To establish the North Coast 500 as one of the world's leading examples of regenerative tourism, where tourism strengthens communities, protects landscapes and celebrates the culture and character of the North Highlands.

OUR MISSION

To lead and coordinate a collaborative approach to tourism along the NC500, championing responsible travel, supporting local communities and working with partners to deliver positive economic, social and environmental impact across the North Highlands.



FROM STRATEGY TO ACTION

What happens if we get this right?

The strategy will be delivered in phases over ten years. Early work will focus on foundations such as visitor management, community engagement, governance and partnership working. Longer-term projects will require collaboration, investment and regional alignment.

Progress will be measured through the NC500 ESG Framework and Impact Index, with an annual Impact Report showing what has changed, what is working and where more needs to be done.

The strategy is deliberately adaptable. Tourism, community priorities and infrastructure pressures will change over the next decade, so delivery will be reviewed and adjusted as the evidence changes.



Now we want to hear from you.

The strategy has been approved by the NC500 Board as a draft for consultation - it has not been finalised. We want to understand what you support, what concerns you, what needs strengthened and what we may have missed.



THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF A CONVERSATION, NOT THE END OF ONE.

Following consultation, we will publish what we heard and explain how feedback has influenced the final strategy.