



Thurso

Community Development Trust

Community Consultation Report:

How good is our Place?

THURSO

April 2018

Research conducted: 1 – 31 March 2018

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1. Introduction

Thurso Community Development Trust (TCDT) formed in the Spring of 2018 as a reaction to evidenced support in the Thurso Community for an organisation to take forward sustainable development of the town. A Public Meeting had been held in late 2017 where Helen Houston of Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust had presented the benefits of this model of organisation to those attending following which a group came forward to create TCDT.

The aim of TCDT has been very strongly from its initial conception to consult and bring the Thurso Community with us through every step. We strongly believe that by giving the people of Thurso a voice which is listened to TCDT can begin the process of identifying their needs and deliver on them through sustainable community led development.

TCDT are ambitious, forward thinking and strongly focused on sustainable development for the town of Thurso which is responsive and identified by the community from the ground up. Thurso has many challenges to overcome in the future, most notably from the run-down of Dounreay. Thurso also has the same challenges which exist in rural communities throughout Scotland such as an aging population, inequalities, youth migration and ensuring a stable, diverse and vibrant local economy. Thurso also has many assets such as its location, community, heritage and stunning natural spaces. However, it is also widely accepted from the frequent cries of “someone needs to do something in the Town” that in the face of these challenges and to capitalise on our assets action needs to be taken to secure a bright future for Thurso and its community.

TCDT seek to take that action to promote, empower and deliver community led sustainable development. We will work with local, regional and national initiatives, funding

sources, create partnerships and learn from successes in other communities to do so. The first step in this is the identification of the needs of the people within our Community to shape and move forward a community development plan for Thurso. During March 2018, TCDT led widespread community consultation via a public consultation event and online survey using the Place Standard Tool to identify community views and identify priorities. An unexpected yet phenomenal 1,180 people took part in the consultation exercise. This report provides the results.

Tracey Sparling
Chairperson
Thurso Community Development Trust



2. Thurso Background Information

Thurso is the most northern town on the British mainland. The town has a population of circa 9,074. (ONS, 2011), it is served by main transport links of the A9 roadway, the most northern train station in the UK network and ferries to Orkney. The main employer and secondary employment supply chain employer has been for many years the Dounreay Nuclear Power Establishment (CNSRP, 2017) which is currently in the process of being decommissioned anticipated to be complete in the mid 2030's (DSRL, 2017). The area is therefore in flux, a town charrette process held in 2013 recognised the need for development in the town and emphasised that a "Team Thurso" was required to oversee, initiate and deliver community led development (Highland Council, 2013). The feedback from the town Charrette process has been incorporated into 'CaSPlan' and will form the Local Area Plan officially in late summer 2018. Destination tourism marketing activities such as the North Coast 500 and Venture North seek to encourage visitors to the area yet anecdotal evidence in the area and as identified in the charrette process the town does not sustainably cater to tourists or serve the needs of residents.

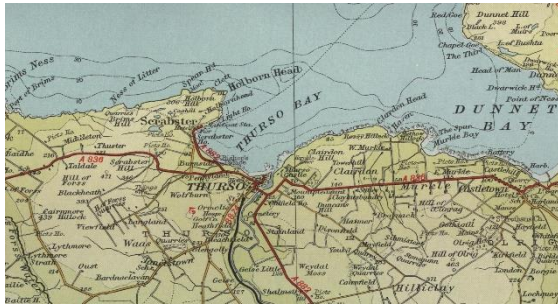
A higher than average for the Highlands and Islands area percentage of the population are aged 45 years plus at 52.5% compared to the rest of the region at 41.9% and across Scotland being 44.3% (HIE, 2014). Issues exist in retaining young people in Thurso akin to much of the Highlands region. Thurso has a higher than average percentage of the population employed in manufacturing, engineering and skilled trades activity as relative to Highlands and Islands sector employment levels. (HIE, 2011: 2014) Much of this is attributed to direct, indirect and induced employment at the Dounreay Nuclear Power Station which is a significant socio-economic factor in the area. While Caithness as a whole will be impacted by

the decommissioning of Dounreay, Thurso is the largest settlement to the site and employment both direct and indirect in Thurso is heavily dependent on Dounreay. The input to the local economy of Thurso through wages paid to those working at the plant is highly significant and efforts must be made now to ensure for a vibrant town centre before decommissioning end state is reached.



3. Place Standard Methodology

Why is place important?



Both instinct and research tell us that the places we spend our time have important impact on our lives. The way a place looks, functions and feels can influence everything from our health and wellbeing to the opportunities we can access. In addition, improving the quality of places can help to tackle inequalities.

We all aspire to live in a good place and, in our own way; we are all striving to improve our place. In Thurso, we are lucky to live in a place with outstanding qualities – natural, community and heritage and it is important to both conserve those qualities and improve on those which require further work.

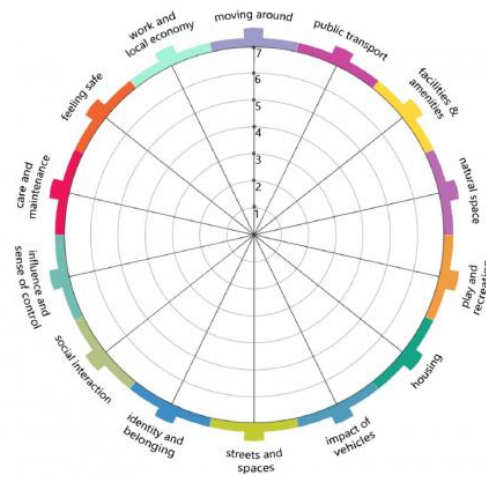
Thurso Place Standard Consultation

For Thurso Community Development Trust to create a Plan which conserves and improves the town appropriate to needs of the community it was felt vital to use a survey method which:

- Establishes what people think about Thurso
- Gives the Thurso Community the chance to say what should be improved
- Identify how best to make improvements

The *Place Standard* was jointly developed by NHS Health Scotland, Architecture and Design Scotland and the Scottish Government. The tool is intended to enable the physical, social and environmental quality of a place to be evaluated and initiate positive conversations on how it can be improved.

How does the *Place Standard* work?



We wanted to get a full overview of how the Thurso Community see and feel about our town rather than focussing on individual projects or being led by a project already in mind. By using the *Place Standard* a cohesive picture could be formed and used as a benchmark in future years to measure what has improved or requires further work.

The *Place Standard* method of survey invites the community to rank Thurso against 14 different themes. It breaks new ground in focusing on the all important connection between the physical and social environments and how this affects our health and sense of well-being.

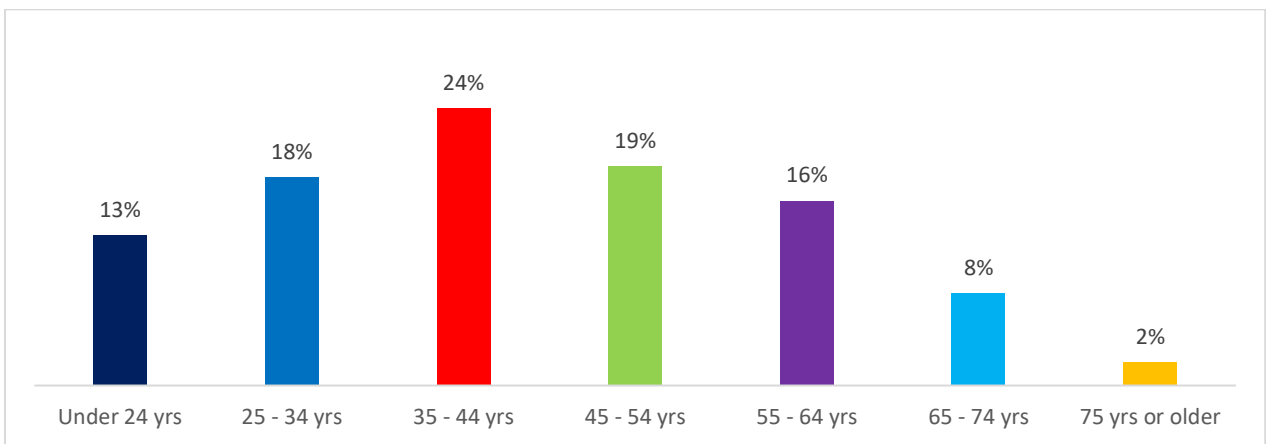
In addition to providing a ranking the community are invited to comment throughout giving their structured opinions on what works and isn't working in Thurso. Due to the structure of questions the survey design aims to initiate positive conversations which allow for consideration of actions to be taken and identify priorities.

The *Place Standard* Tool was used by Thurso Community Development Trust in a series of Community Consultation facilitated events running from 26 February 2018 – 31 March 2018. In addition, an online survey was run from 1-31 March 2018.

4. What THURSO said Who took part?

In total **1,180** people provided valid responses and made **7,045** comments. Of these responses 60 were made at public engagement community consultation events and the rest gathered from online responses. The level of engagement and quality responses received was wholly unexpected by TCDT. Around 19% of the Thurso population submitted responses. It is therefore felt that these results indicate a significant community engagement exercise and there is substantial interest in turning these opinions and the aim of Thurso Community Development Trust into action.

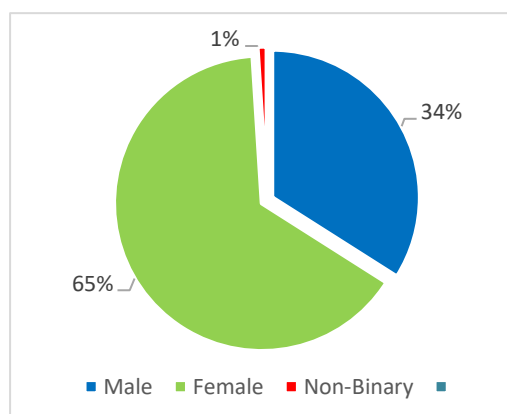
Age of Respondents



Response Rate

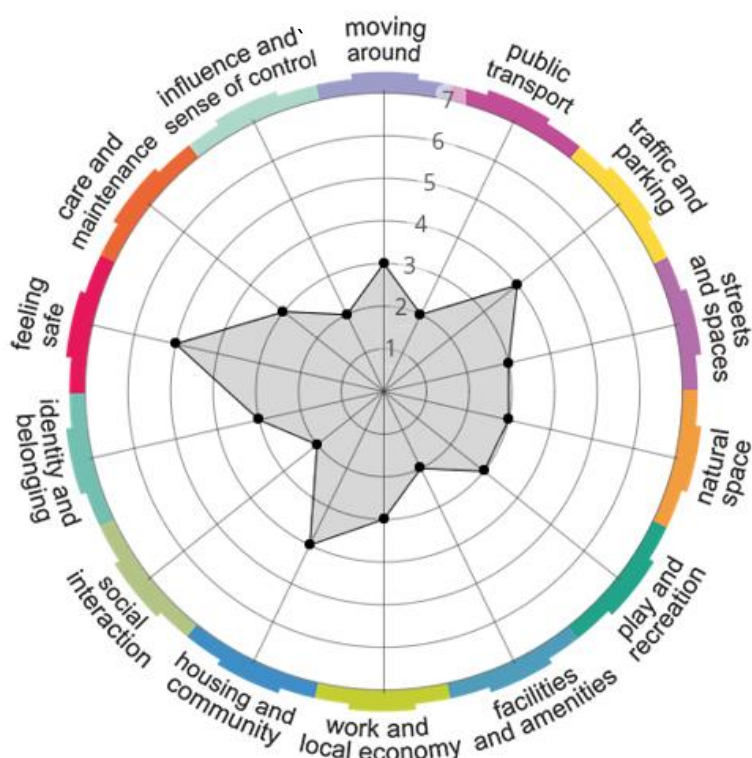
Thurso Population (2011 Census)	Child Population (HIE Area Profile)	Adult Population (Population – Child)	Number of Responses	Response Rate % of Adult Population
7,933	1,603	6,330	1,180	18.6%

Respondents by Gender



5. What THURSO said Overall Results

Place Standard Map



Summary

Moving around Rating 3.14	Work and local economy Rating 2.95
Public transport Rating 2.12	Housing and community Rating 3.14
Traffic and parking Rating 4.23	Social contact Rating 2.56
Streets and spaces Rating 3.05	Identity and belonging Rating 3.26
Natural space Rating 3.32	Feeling safe Rating 5.27
Play and recreation Rating 3.22	Care and maintenance Rating 3.31
Facilities and amenities Rating 3.25	Influence and sense of control Rating 2.01

Place Standard tool asks participants to rank each section from 1 – 7, where 1 means there is a lot of room for improvement and 7 means there is very little room for improvement.

The results indicate that there is room for improvement across the board in Thurso. While average rankings have come in low the accompanying comments do give positive aspects to the town and the issues experienced. In general, all respondents scored more highly for **Housing and Community**. Where **Feeling Safe** saw very high rankings in those aged over 35 there were significant instances of it scoring very low in those under 35 and particularly under 25. The lowest scoring section across the board is **Influence and sense of control** where people across all ages and gender do not feel they have a voice which is being listened to.

Work and Local Economy scores very low in the age groups under 35 years with higher results being recorded elsewhere however not enough to bring up the figures. This trend when taking age analysis into account is prevalent throughout. The age groups under 35 years rate each section at a low level however as higher age groups are ranking this as average the overall ranking remains low. In gender analysis women have scored **Facilities and Amenities**, **Care and Maintenance** and **Play and Recreation** noticeably lower than men. This applies to women of all ages.

Natural Space surprisingly for the coastal location ranks as having room for improvement however as shall be demonstrated in individual comment analysis this is mainly due to **Care and Maintenance** issues.

6.1. Moving Around

Average Rating of
3.14

Word Cloud Text
Analysis of 551
Comments

Track Apart Difficult Crossing Points Plenty Poor Condition Places
Child Victoria Walk Mount Pleasant Pavements
Issue Paths Seating Routes Nightmare Town
Dounreay Traffic Thurso Castlegreen Road Pot Holes
Wheelchair Users Cycle Lanes People with Disabilities Safer Flagstones
Caithness Litter

Key Issues for Moving Around

- Appreciation for the main amenity walking routes at Thurso Riverside and Victoria Walk
- However, these require improvements. Accessibility and lighting are issues.
- Routes are often perceived as being dangerous in winter due to frost, ice and flooding while in summer routes are often overgrown and untidy.
- Potholes and conditions of pavements is a key difficulty throughout. With safe crossing points a significant concern.
- Cycling was raised as a high priority with all comments being negative that cycling is difficult in town, dangerous and there are no clear routes.
- A number of respondents raised suggestions of more joined up and linked pathways for a better community and visitor experience.
- Suggestions are also made to better signpost walking routes throughout the town.

“Roads and paths need repaired for safety for everyone using a wheelchair is a chore. Not nice to walk into dog poo even when there are bins in some area. Flooding is another problem i.e. around Spring Park area you can follow the route all the way down to the main road at the dummies. Also the Thurso river. Would like to see things to help people to come and visit Thurso”

“There are some good routes already established for walking such as the mall and Victoria walk but no real cycling routes would be great to see move development of further walks and safer cycle routes”

“The main roads lack a cycle path which could be beneficial. Walking around the town is good. The main promenade would look better painted up/plants to make it prettier.”

“Environmental improvements could be made to the river/mall walks and esplanade/Victoria walk. It would be good to have a public right of way that linked the west end of Victoria walk back over to the river around the edge of the town. Great for circuit training!”

6.2. Public Transport



Average Rating of 2.12

Word Cloud Analysis of 371 Comments

Facilities Trolley **Not Reliable** Say **Late** Two Buses
Train Station Fit for Purpose **Expensive** Railway
Thurso Aware **Service** Walk
Public Transport Drivers **Unreliable** Steps
Break Mobility **Bus Stops** Cheaper **Bus Routes** Shocking
Frequent Public Toilets **Busses** Local Transport

- High levels of dis-satisfaction evident when considering Public Transport
- Local bus service seen as being infrequent and unreliable
- Wick to Thurso route seen as regular but can still be unreliable. Other areas such as Castletown and Town Service seen as being infrequent or non-existing.
- Clear difference in opinion between users and non-users of Public Transport. Non-users feeling the services are adequate but those who use having drastically different opinion.
- Lack of services to the West.
- Concern over provision of public transport to visitors.
- No clear timetables on display for bus.
- Concerns raised over the condition and accessibility of public bus service.

“I tend to drive or walk. There is a regular bus to Wick. But I work out west and there is no public transport options suitable.”

“If you park in front of the Miller Academy for the train station you’ll come back to a car covered in bird mess, the bus shelters and phone boxes need a good clean! The town bus service is essential but a small ‘terrier’ style bus with good accessibility for elderly, infirm or buggies must be the norm.”

“I rarely use public transport as I think seems more convenient to use my car. Maybe that in itself shows that the perception is that local public transport would not be convenient.”

“Drivers are all nice, buses are in terrible repair. If I need to use buses, I plan according to timetables. They could use a shuttle bus for local runs”

“Should be more local bus routes and also more routes for tourists. Train station is a disgrace with the mart site right beside it plus no shops, toilet often closed, hardly any parking and very little information. We should make more of the fact that it’s the most northern train station”

6.3. Traffic & Parking

Average Rating of 4.23

Word Cloud Analysis of 247 Comments



- Rating indicates a low priority however analysis of results indicates that the issue is divisive within the community with many comments suggesting there is parking aplenty with others stating not enough in the town centre.
- Issues with where people choose to park, particularly in centre of town.
- Issues raised regarding conditions of current car parks in the town.
- A significant number of responses raised concerns regarding cars parked in the housing estates of Thurso.
- Need for further traffic calming measures at the Harbour and around schools.

“There is enough parking. We don't want to become Americanised and have lots of eye soring parking spaces. People who don't really require a car to go into the town centre should park further away”

“People are too lazy to park in public car parks, I believe we have plenty of parking in town. People are too lazy to walk and therefore park irresponsibly. The council should allow for residents parking and charge a small annual fee for the privilege. Illegal parking should be heavily fined!”

“Within the town centre there appears to be ample parking all within walking distance to the shops. The only issue I see is in the housing estates, as there's is little off-road parking, the streets and junctions can be lined with many cars which are difficult to see around, both walking and driving.”

“There is not enough parking in the town centre. There could be more traffic calming or preferably a 20mph limit in built up areas. At times there is too much traffic.”

“Parking in Thurso is a nightmare and will discourage passing tourists from stopping in the town. In addition people coming into work in the town are parking in residential areas causing unnecessary inconvenience to local residents. This has to be number one priority for any improvements.”

High School^{Hill} Signage^{Faces} Town Centre^{Answer}
 Spaces^{Question} Walk^{Old} Cattle Market^{Place} Given
 Look^{Future} Shops^{Arriving by Train} Attractive
 Friendly^{Old Mart} Run down^{Buildings} Street^{Blessed}
 Beautiful^{Falling} Derelict Buildings^{Similar}
 Historic Buildings



- Typically found in the majority of responses were references to the Old Mart Site – the impression this gives entering Thurso by train and generally being an unloved and neglected site. Added to this are impressions given by the ‘motor mile’ down Ormlie Road. One respondent at the Public Meeting noted “How can we expect kids to take pride in Thurso when they sit in the High School looking out over derelict land”.
- The town centre is felt by many to have attractive potential but general consensus is that it feels and looks run down, shabby and grey.
- Potential in derelict buildings in the town for Community Usage.
- Concern that Thurso does not meet the needs of tourist visitors with both a lack of attractions and those we do have are poorly celebrated and signposted. Lack of information apparent for the visitor and a lack of vibrancy in the centre.
- Shop frontages lack care and attention.
- Lack of anything to do/see in the evenings.
- Thurso Harbour and beach front area in dire need of development.

“So much more could be done. Look at the Caithness & Sutherland Local Plan charrette exercise and the vision for Thurso that came out of it - excellent ideas that tie together in a coherent strategy/master plan.”

“I don’t believe we make the best use of public spaces. Working in the town and living locally, I rarely spend time in the town centre and I’m not sure why! (Sorry!) Areas such as the Old Mart is an eyesore - although we do have nice areas such as the beach area and Victoria Walk. Areas such as the castle would be greatly enhanced with information boards, restoring the costal path to Lady Janet’s Seat (erosion!) and night time illumination (although this was in place for a short while).”

“I think Thurso has a lot to offer visitors and most places are well signposted. With the rundown at Dounreay I think more should be done for visitors though. No cafes or restaurants are open late when some people may wish to just pop in for a drink to have a look at a map or to talk to locals. Not sure if this bit should be here or not, but I also think closing shops for lunch is something from the dark ages and all shops should remain open to assist not only visitors but also local people looking for something in their lunch hours. Later opening for shops would be useful too. Imagine arriving in a new place to find nothing open. Despite it looking beautiful, would you come back?”

6.5. Natural Spaces

Average Rating of 3.32

Word Cloud analysis of 264 comments

Question Poo Winter Live Problem Interesting Park Caithness
Thurso Excellent Walk Putting Green River
Picnic Tables Natural Spaces Rubbish
Accessible Run Think Environment Lighting Lined
Outside Negative Gardens in Town



- We are very fortunate to live in an area with a number of quality natural spaces on our doorsteps.
- However in Thurso itself it is felt our natural spaces such as the Beach and Riverside require more work to make them attractive.
- The seafront and harbour area are seen to be grey, concrete, lifeless.
- The Riverside has a lack of activities and is poorly maintained.
- Emphasis on caring and improving spaces we have and extending them. E.g. Paths from Thurso East to Lady Janet’s Seat, Paths further up the Riverside.
- Accessibility issues at all of the designated walks spots.

“Caithness has some stunning scenery, which are great if you can travel by car to get to. It would be lovely to make more use of our town and immediate surrounding area - coast walks, beaches, green areas/parks in town.”

“There are an abundance of natural spaces around town. The beach, the river walk, the boating pond, Thurso East, the Victoria walk, the moors. 'Pay it Forward' Thurso is doing a fantastic job of tidying up these spaces.”

“The river walk could do with being more accessible, and could do with being tidied up”

“When I think of natural spaces, three places come to mind. Victoria walk, The river/Mall and the beach. Very beautiful assets to our town but in need of a boost. We could encourage learning by having information boards for families highlighting natural things to look out for or educational games to play. The harbour area is drab and uninviting and could do with a serious face lift. Some community art on the walls of some of the buildings could brighten it up? I love seeing the creations from the Stone festival each year and really admire the work they have achieved so far-more things like that please! I'd love to see the festival grow so there are enough participants to make a large scale natural sculpture...perhaps a large draughts board or something that families could play together (using natural objects as counters) surrounded by the stone chairs/benches they've created before.”

“Very few spaces and what we have is poorly or not maintained as they should be. The community has had to take matters in to their own hands.”

6.6. Play & Recreation

Average Rating of 3.25

Word Cloud analysis of 281 comments



- Generally, playparks for younger children are seen to be run down and in need of improvement.
- Many mention travelling to playparks in Castletown and Watten, see that community involvement has encouraged these facilities however, the survey respondents seem to feel that this is still a requirement of the local authority.
- Improved outdoor sports facilities needed, what we have has drainage and maintenance issues.
- Call for greater indoor sports and recreational facilities.
- High number of responses remark at lack of facilities for older children/teenagers.
- Higher priority placed on teenage facilities than soft play for younger children.

“There is a lot of room for improvement if you compare to Orkney. A climbing wall should be a must. Beach changing facilities for surfers like at Strathy. Kids trails around town. Engage with the plentiful outdoors more, canoeing, mountain biking, sea swimming, climbing, skate park, parkour, bmx. Modern sports better for teenage engagement. Will provide tourist attractions and can generate employment. A similar enterprise to transitions extreme in Aberdeen would be amazing.”

“This town is in desperate need of a soft play or indoor play area for children of all ages to enjoy all year round, there is also very few attractions suitable for taking children to for days like birthdays. I feel the community is turning into a retirement area not encouraging for families to live in it.”

“Mini concrete half pipe at the breaker. Surfers always have skateboards. Scenic location and would be well utilised..south of France and Brazil utilise space near surf spots to encourage people to skateboard”

“We have access to a nice up to date swimming pool and gym and if you can afford highlife membership then it is good value for money. There is a couple of playparks in town that are lovely when first installed but unfortunately have been vandalised and bits have broken and not been fixed.”

“The parks near the sea are bare. There doesn't seem to be a good youth space that looks appealing. I think a large area dedicated to young people with a mini skate park, swings, climbing frame and more in official”

6.7. Facilities & Amenities

Average Rating of 3.22

Word Cloud analysis of 305 comments

Sports Pity **Public Toilets** Potential **Swimming Pool**
Room for Improvement **Health Care** Coffee Shop **Choice**
Soft Play **Places** Kids **Facilities** Hard **Town**
Maternity **Local** Young Children **Think** Open Late
Doctors Money **Health Services** Benefit **Charity Shops**
Summer **Variety** **GPS**

- The improvements to the Leisure Centre, Library and facilities such as Caithness Rugby Club Clubrooms are assets to the town.
- Healthcare and health provision is seen as a serious obstacle in the health and wellbeing of respondents and also in retaining or recruiting people to the area.
- Shops are seen as lacking in choice and opening hours put people off.
- Evening facilities are seen as lacking. No-where other than a Pub to meet friends or socialise.
- A lack of a dedicated community centre is seen as an impediment to community cohesiveness.
- Lack of indoor facilities during the winter for children and adults to meet and enjoy activities.
- Lack of community cohesiveness and joined up thinking when it comes to promotion of activities. Many are unaware that events, facilities and activities exist in the town.

“You can get most things in thurso, but it takes local knowledge to know where to go, as it is not always well signed.”

“Thurso has many cafes, pubs and hotels. Also some options for shopping, sports etc. Thurso businesses don’t like to open over lunch or into the evening. . . Meaning if you want to socialise or visit Thurso in the evenings your forced into a pub.”

“In comparison to some out High Street has very few empty spaces. Some shops great opening hours and the Sunday opening at Christmas is forward thinking. Food wise limited choice, everything is very similar and can be quite high end so expensive. The PPP cafe in Wick is great for families on tight budget, would be great to have something similar”

“There are quite a few sporting facilities but no 'town hall'”

“I feel the teenagers could do with more facilities for something to do. I've begun to notice a growing amount of 13-16 year olds hanging around Tesco at night times. I thought why on earth are they hanging around a supermarket but then thought well where else are they going to go. There is no-where for them to go at that age. Now I realise there is probably no easy fix for that but perhaps some thought could go into that.”

“Sadly our shops are on the decline. Need to make use of empty shops for local craft outlets or teenage cafes where young people can meet without alcohol. Empty shops need to be kept in good visual condition, not left to lie dirty. Health services are a disaster from cradle to grave.”



- High level of concern regarding rundown of Dounreay and a need to diversify the economy.
- Number of respondents felt that there should be a 'large scale' replacement.
- Work needs to be done to encourage and support entrepreneurs.
- Tourism seen as a likely main employer to the town in the future however requires additional investment and programmes to make work. E.g. Childcare often not available to meet tourism needs hours of working.

"It's pretty obvious that compared to the halcyon days of Dounreay, Thurso is in decline. We either accept that and let the town slip into a "comfortable retirement" with fewer job opportunities for the young and poorer services overall or look for some radical change."

"I think Thurso is being overlooked for a lot of opportunity ie new hotel, there are shops closing, there seems to be a general lack of community"

"We are at the mercy of the internet and supermarkets for so much of what we might choose to buy. The local shops have a hard battle, but our local produce (veg, meat, fish etc but sadly not milk) is worthy of more active promotion."

"Apart from Dounreay, Vulcan which are running down, BT, some small local business, the bulk appears to be in the catering industry, hotels, shops etc. We need to attract more diverse industry to the area."

"Sadly our local economy is based solely on dounreay as it is the largest employer in that so many have peoples work have something to do with the site without diversifying and getting ourselves out of the dounreay shadow can we bring our economy up and more local"

"People seem reticent to take the plunge, why don't people try starting a shop or cafe? Take a risk and try something new. Best surf area in U.K. But no surf shop?!?!?"

"Thurso is quite engineering driven, with Dounreay and rolls Royce I feel the majority of opportunity lies there. A varied range of job opportunities would benefit people who end up moving away (maybe not by choice) for the type of job they're after."

Nice Question New Build start Country Money Good Mix
 Good Quality Housing Families Appears Rent Experience
 Thurso Disabled Council Issue Affordable
 Shortage Think Larger Town Sold Variety of Housing
 Homeless Prices Unsure Decent

- The Public Meeting Community Consultation saw a higher average of 5.2 rating for Housing and Community, people at this facilitated session saw that there was an abundance of properties in Thurso and main concerns expressed there were maintenance and given Dounreay run down would properties still be filled in ten years time.
- Online Survey questionnaire elicited more personal responses of individual difficulties in housing.
- Social housing not being large enough for large families.
- Difficulties experienced in gaining social housing.
- Private rental properties being very expensive.
- Lack of student accommodation.
- Perception of anti-social behaviour on some housing estates.
- Care and maintenance on some housing estates, Pennyland and Ormlie.
- Young, single men with substance issues being housed in properties traditionally for the elderly.

“Variety of housing but care needs to be taken that all the nice stuff isn't over taken by air B&B and tourists as the nc500 takes off. “

“There is plenty housing in the area and no great demand for new build at present. It would be more sustainable to encourage regeneration of existing stock.”

“We are lucky to have good housing, both council and private, plenty of single storey homes, thurso far better in this respect than many other towns.”

“Thurso has an incredible mix of social housing, private lets and private housing. Private lets do tend to be fairly expensive though, but there is still plenty of housing association property available.”

“We do have a good mix and affordable housing, all areas could Be improved, green spaces could be added, deprived areas supported more.”

“I found it really difficult to find a rental when moving to Thurso. I’m looking to buy in a year or two and am hoping it won’t be too difficult to find suitable properties in the areas I want to buy in”

Friendly Experience Teenagers Terms Weather Definitely
 Town Hall Not Bad Spaces Lots Going Groups
 options Community Bring People Meet Pool
 Places Drink Alcohol Thurso Better Advertised Indoor Set
 Cafes Venues Elderly Idea Poor

- Priority need is a Community Centre facility to bring events, services and activities together cohesively.
- Lack of advertising options to let people know what groups and activities already exist in Thurso.
- Lack of places to meet for adults other than licensed premises.

“There is no local community centre”

“I feel much of the social space has been lost - no town hall, no dedicated sports halls for groups to rent, few indoor community spaces (country communities fare better as most have a community / village hall). Yes you can ask to use the Legion, a hotel meeting room, or similar but no actual community-owned & run places I can think of”

“There are a few small organisations that do bring people together. Loneliness is a terrible affliction that lowers self esteem and confidence making it difficult to interact after a while. We need to help the town by helping these people and give them good community facilities to meet.”

“Beyond the pub I find it hard finding social space. The town could benefit from having more attractive walking routes and outside spaces to make going outside a more attractive option.”

“Shops and cafes are the main meeting places. There is nowhere for things like chess, draughts etc. where a range of ages could interact”

“Many of the 'traditional' meeting places for older people have now gone - example the Band Room in the Town Hall. Coffee shops are booming but don't replicate the meeting aspects for social interaction.”

“I am a member of an indoor bowling club there is little way advertising what there is for people to do instead of going to the bars all the time.”

“There is a lack of social club options for evenings and weekends. The Legion or Skinandis are the only options. This leaves a wide range of tastes and age groups without any options.”

Folk_{Managed} Promoted_{Close Knit} Place_{Outside} Heritage
 Great Work Town Events Community Neighbours
 Thurso Social Think_{Groups Help} Local_{Road Signs}
 Belonging_{NC500} Identity_{Safe} Pay it Forward



- Community apathy is evident. However, many feel this is beginning to return due to initiatives such as TTIA changes and Pay it Forward Thurso.
- More needs to be done to celebrate the history and culture of Thurso.
- Thurso is perceived as being very friendly.
- More of our history, heritage and identity needs to be explored and promoted.
- Town Centre Events celebrating the identity of the town to be encouraged.

“I think Thurso is viewed reasonably positively, however more could be done to give it a true identity. I often think if I was to make a post card of Thurso what image would I put on the front to let people instantly know it's from Thurso and I can't think of one. The town centre church, the beach, the harbour? My point is what is Thurso unique selling point, what would make tourists want to come here other than it's a way to get over to Orkney. I look at Falkirk as an example, before the Kelpies were built who would have thought to visit Falkirk. Now people see the Kelpies, think of Falkirk straight away and often plan a visit to see them, I know I have. I'm not suggesting Thurso needs something on the scale of the Kelpies but I feel something of that note would be hugely beneficial to the tourist industry of the town. Something that instantly grabs the attention and you associate straight away with Thurso.”

“Thurso has a lot of heritage etc but no place to see it on display like Wick heritage”

“Community spirit is ok but the demographic has changed a lot, with the Internet opening up visual contact with family worldwide through Facetime & Skype, so folk are less social I feel. Really come together when raising money or when someone needs help though.”

“There is not a lot to keep tourists here to get them talking and get people come here and go away happy and telling what the town has to offer.”

“I think that the Thurso identity is almost non existent. Much more should be made of its history, such as the flagstone industry that was once so important. The important people that were born or lived in Thurso should be celebrated. A few boards with the info is not enough. Pay it Forward Thurso has had a good impact bringing lots of people together of different ages etc, but I don't think there are that many community groups such as that.”

“We don't make the most of our local history and natural environment. We only have to look over the firth at Orkney at what they do to promote this aspect which underpins their economy in so many ways.”



- Consensus is that majority of respondents feel very safe living in Thurso.
- Small perceived increase in safety for children playing outdoors but this is indicative of culture generally across Scotland.
- Issues raised concern mainly isolated pockets of anti-social behaviour mainly as a result of alcohol or substance misuse.
- Isolated pockets of crime felt to be the same.
- Comments regarding substance misuse suggest this is more widespread than many are aware.

“I generally feel safe in Thurso but things have changed over the last few years. I would no longer feel safe to walk back streets at night. There are a lot of people now living here who have been rehoused due to social problems. Thurso has a significant drug problem and this is something that is becoming increasingly obvious when spending time in town.”

“Feel safe during the day but not out at night when the pubs emptying which is probably a different matter. Pubs should be held responsible for selling drink to already intoxicated persons to cut down in violence. Any anti social behaviour needs to be addressed in a severe way.”

“I think Thurso is as safe a place as any to live , the lack of police on the beat is concerning and the younger set hanging around the precinct can be daunting in the summer months but it is generally just cheek and backchat.”

“I feel generally safe, but there has definitely been a shift in recent years. Would no longer comfortably walk home alone late at night. However that’s a societal change rather than one specific to the town.”

“I would have always said that Thurso was a very safe place and I always felt comfortable walking around whatever time of day. I think this has changed in recent years however and it does not feel as safe as it once was. There appears to be a much higher rate of alcohol induced violence.”

“It’s a small community with familiarity, there’s no reason to feel unsafe”



- The town feels generally uncared for and unloved.
- Praise for initiatives such as Pay it Forward Thurso and also for HC Gardener.
- Recognition that more community action needs to be taken however this needs to be supported by other agencies such as Highland Council.
- Littering an issue particularly from the High School and more education is needed with that group and also in the wider community regarding disposal of litter and recycling.

~There's lots of room for improvement here. Potholes need filled. The grass needs cut more often. The High School children need to understand that their mothers aren't on hand any more to pick up their litter and the council can't afford to pay someone to do that either. There are too many derelict buildings and more about to become derelict (eg the Thurso Club) unless someone intervenes."

"I think everyone should be encouraged to take responsibility for there surrounding areas. For example picking up litter if you see any, leaving things clean, neat and tidy. Ideally taught at school level but also reinforcing to adults how it would be a better place if we all worked together"

"Community involvement in maintaining public areas has made an improvement. More people would help if they knew what was needed. If you can't do physical work perhaps you could make hot drinks or do baking. Perhaps school children could be involved in making a pictorial list of what not to recycle as there was a report in the press about inappropriate items put into the bins."

"Would like to see the empty shop fronts kept to a good standard some are a disgrace and give the town a neglected look eg old pet shop and book shop in olrig and empty shop in arcade. Government cutbacks affect the area in general but we must retain our lovely floral displays and grass cutting."

"More bins in general please and in particular recycling bins in town. The recycling centre is a great facility but only accessible by car. Could there be a central drop off point where people could drop items if they don't have a car? Can it be more widely advertised what can be taken at the recycling centre and what can go in the blue bin for Highland Council?"

"Litter is a big issue, especially the trail from Tescos back to the High School after lunch. Why our young people don't have pride in our town is a mystery? The cigarette bins outside pubs that never get emptied is also disappointing and disgusting."

"Again cost cutting in council run areas is an issue but excellent community groups have stepped up to tidy areas. This could be expanded to include school volunteer groups."

6.14. Influence and Sense of Control

Average Rating of 2.01
Word Cloud analysis of 339 comments



- Priority for action with very low rating.
- Influenced by concerns currently evident in community regarding health care provision.
- People want their opinions to be heard but are unsure where to give their opinions.
- Lack of local decision making.
- Feeling throughout of Thurso being forgotten about and just part of wider Caithness, Highland region.

“There is a sense of being able to get involved but to make true change requires a lot of time and dedication, that I and most don't have. A more balanced representation of the people who do make decisions would mean people felt represented.”

“The local planning held a charette to gain the views of the locals but we have as yet seen very little of the ideas put forward. Financial considerations mean that many of the worthwhile suggestions are still at the planning stage.”

Listened to.....but suitably deflected? This survey hopefully will make a difference to that?? Please!

“There are plenty of organisations /groups that people can join and make a difference to Thurso. Plenty Of people moan about Thurso but very few step up to make a difference”

“I feel and hear that no one is heard in Thurso. Decision making and benefits seem to be shifting to Wick with all agendas impacting Inverness. Feeling of being forgotten about and cut off is ripe.”

“It would be nice to think we could make a difference and improve things but more people need to get involved. People need to be motivated to do that and I think only a small number are.”

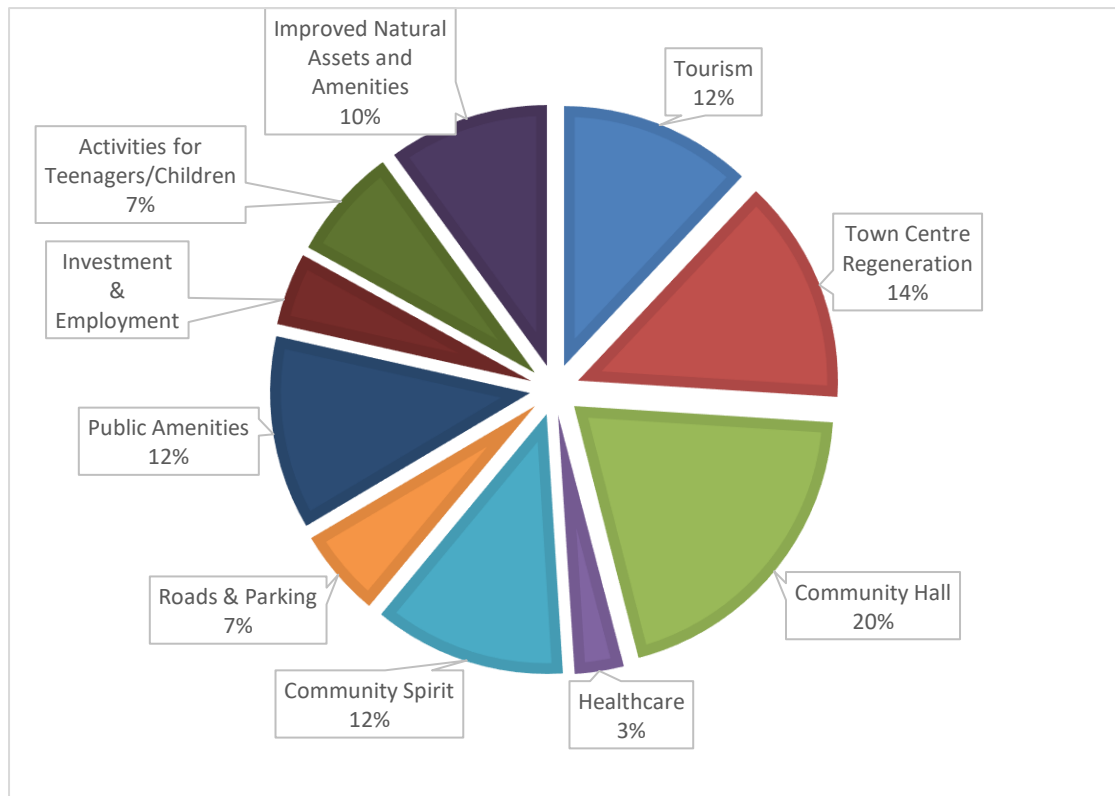
“Things like this survey are a good thing and should be encouraged. The thing I don't know is what happens to the data that this survey generates. Who compiles the ideas put forward and who has the final say on what gets done. It's one thing asking people to give their opinion on what Thurso needs but it's another thing doing something about it.”

“I don't know how to get involved or what is available to be involved in. I'm filling in this survey as I do want my voice heard but I am unsure how that information is best to be given to.”

7. Priorities

Respondents were asked what they felt the 3 priorities for action were in Thurso. These responses were wide ranging. The methodology used to analysis was to code the data into categories and quantitatively analysis from there.

Wide ranging priorities for development were identified from tourism to town centre regeneration to a community space and healthcare being paramount given the current campaign climate in respondent's minds. While there were some minority issues raised the 97% of responses can be summarised into the following categories.

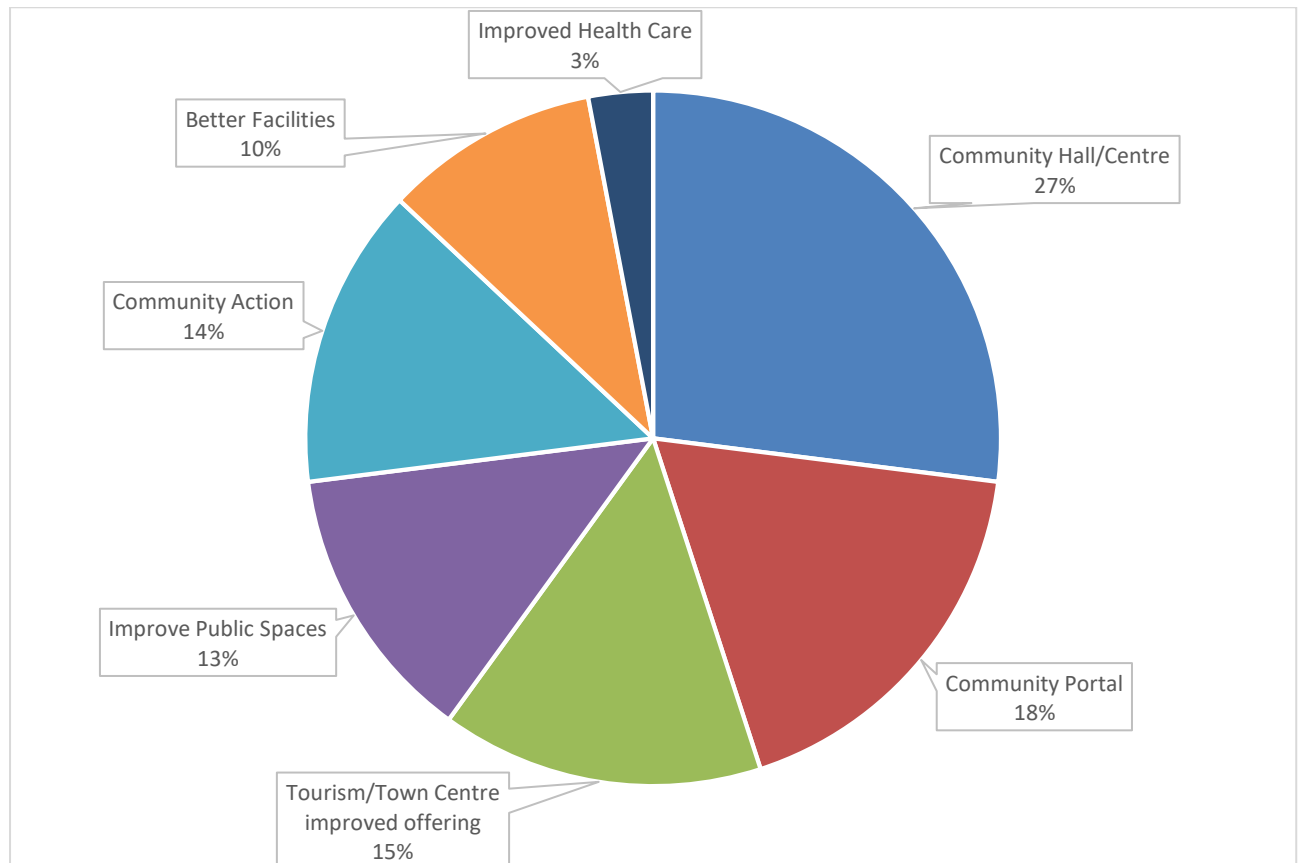


We found that while these are the categories identified many of them were linked. For example, the lack of a focal point for the community in terms of a community hall/centre was closely linked to the raising of community spirit. In turn the raising of community spirit also aligned with Tourism in that it was felt that there is a need to celebrate Thurso more in terms of our heritage, culture and natural assets.

Tourism again is also pivotal in terms of town centre regeneration and Investment and Employment along with improvements to natural assets and public amenities. Improved Natural Assets and Amenities includes issues of maintenance on paths whereas Public Amenities is more closely aligned with activities and things to do. Such was the response regarding youth development it was felt it should have its own category particularly as issues raised were in the majority for teenagers and older children.

8. Actions

In a similar methodology to analysing perceived priorities of respondents the question was asked “What do you see as the actions to address these priorities?” From these qualitative responses, each was coded into a category to best represent the comment made.



The need for a Community Hall of quality/community Centre is paramount amongst respondents. This also links to many stating that they would be more involved in the community but do not know where to find information on groups. This was a reoccurring issues raised at our public meeting that many do not know what is going on in the town in terms of events or groups nor know where to find that information. Community Action represents the focused need for a group such as Thurso Community Development Trust to take action in the town and many identified this as their number one action. Tourism is again represented strongly where many suggestions are made to improve our tourism offering the town. Our Public Spaces are felt to be good and an asset to the town however again issues are raised that these could be much improved and taken care of. Due to the current climate on health issues as apparent in the healthcare redesign healthcare is thought to also be a priority for action. Please note: Healthcare is not asked of specifically in this survey so while it features it was not specifically asked of respondents.

Thurso Open Spaces Natural Countryside Beautiful Air Safety surf
 Friendly Gardens Town Landscape Location Walk
 Beach Bay Scenery Skilled Community Tourism
 History Harbour Safe Sea River Square

Respondents were asked to give what they felt are Thurso’s 3 greatest assets.

67% of respondents stated as their number one asset, our PEOPLE and COMMUNITY. Whether this was expressed via our friendly we are or in some manner towards the general community respondents very strongly recognised that the key to Thurso’s future was in its people and those people taking action for the town.

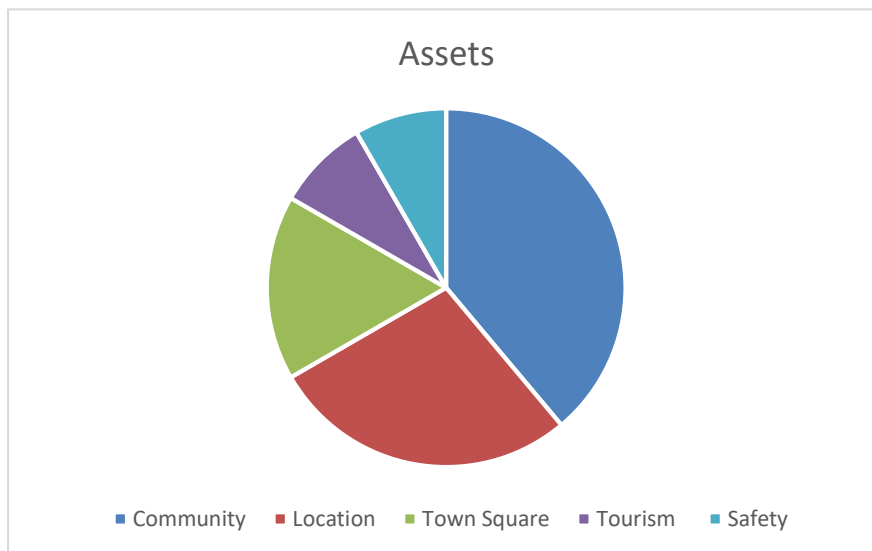
While specific assets were listed such as the approach into Thurso and the Town Square the majority of comments related to our location, heritage and the safety that is felt living here.

“People are friendly and willing to make a change”

“It’s friendly people and fantastic seaside location”

“Outdoor spaces, Beach, River, Parks”

“Natural beauty of bay and beaches”



10. Conclusions

The number of respondents at 1,180 represents a significant proportion of the adult community of Thurso and it is clear throughout the responses that the opportunity to have their say on the current standard of the town and the needs of respondents has been welcomed.

The place standard has raised a number of issues most notably that there is room for improvement across the board in Thurso and the scale of this could be somewhat overwhelming to achieve. However, we believe as Thurso Community Development Trust that by working together for the benefit of our community that significant changes can be made.

The lowest scoring section of the survey is **Influence and Sense of Control** scoring at only 2.01. People in Thurso feel that they do not have a voice when it comes to decision making. A high proportion of responses throughout comments received express concern that many essential services such as Highland Council and employment services are based in Wick. There are concerns regarding the centralisation of local government to Inverness. However, optimistically people also referred to the survey as being a start of the process of being listened to and taking part in the decision-making process for future development of Thurso. The Thurso Charrette process is mentioned throughout the survey responses and most notable in this section. These were conducted in 2013 and little movement has been perceived by respondents of this survey to opinions submitted at that time. This is due to the process of submission to Scottish Ministers and is now due to come into effect in late summer 2018. The Charrette report and now associated CaSPlan speaks of a 'Team Thurso' to take forward the community led aspects of the plan. We believe that given the appetite demonstrated in the number of responses to the survey and the opportunity that this new development plan for the town provides that Thurso Community Development Trust are well placed to be 'Team Thurso'.

The aim of Thurso Community Development Trust is sustainable community led development of Thurso which promotes a vibrant and engaged town which identifies and delivers on the needs of the community. We aim to be 'Team Thurso' and invite membership from the community to have their say clearly in the projects and activities we complete. Working with other community groups, organisations and external agencies to deliver on the needs you tell us you have.

Clear priorities for action are identified within the survey and these are not dis-similar to those identified within the Thurso Town Charrette process. To make our public amenities more attractive providing additional activities for residents and visitors. To have a community focal point such as a community centre which is found to be the number one priority from which additional services and a gathering point can bring the Thurso community together. We have a strong voluntary sector within Thurso, new groups such as Pay it Forward Thurso and the new direction of Thurso Town Improvements Association were particularly appreciated by respondents. It is evident that more people in Thurso would like to get involved in shaping the future of the town but currently don't know who to go to or where to start to do this. Evident also, is the need to begin securing a future for Thurso given the imminent end state of decommissioning being reached at the Dounreay Nuclear Establishment and many fear that the future of Thurso socio-economically will be challenging as a result.

Many of the sections score relatively similarly and are inter-related. **Social Contact** at 2.56 with **Public Transport** at 2.12 with people suggesting that elderly or the very young are isolated due to the lack of transport facilities in the town and this hinders taking part in activities. **Social Contact** then becomes inter-related to **Facilities and Amenities** where again people feel that for adolescents and adults there are a lack of facilities and range of activities available. Many make mention that **Social Contact** is minimal

unless visiting licensed premises and that there is a lack of other activities to take part in. This in turn influences **Identity and Belonging** scoring at **3.26**.

The general consensus throughout the survey responses is that Thurso is a beautiful town with significant assets; the most northerly town on the UK mainland, our coastal location, the friendliness of the people here, the amazing work done by the voluntary sector, the River, the Beach, the endless tourism opportunities on our doorstep from the wild open landscapes of the Flow Country to the birdlife on soaring sea cliffs, our links to the new NC500 route and the opportunities available with increased tourism capacity and our links to Orkney and beyond. However, we do not do enough to celebrate how wonderful Thurso is to either ourselves or the visitor. We have a unique identity in the town with a rich Norse heritage and cultural tradition of fishing and farming combined with the influence that many families who settled here because of Dounreay have had on the town in forming music, art and sports clubs. There is an appetite within respondents of the survey to capitalise on this and improve our assets while celebrating the town.

However, it is also widely accepted throughout the survey that our corner at the end of Scotland has become a little drab, grey and uninviting. We do have significant plus points with the entrance to Thurso coming over the road bridge and seeing Sir John's Square being described as a significant asset. But many feel that the town centre and other areas of the town are not as loved and looked after as in previous times this influences the scores for **Streets & Spaces, Care & Maintenance, Facilities & Amenities**. Widespread recognition is made of new group, Pay it Forward Thurso and the work that they have done. Most significant within this recognition is the realisation within the community that in order to improve what we have we can take control and lead as a community to deliver. The survey optimistically points to a realisation within Thurso people that the "somebody who needs to do something" can be us, Team Thurso.

This type of survey using the Place Standard Tool provides a snapshot of respondents feelings are about Thurso at this point in time of March 2018. There are issues brought up that are not within the remit of Thurso Community Development Trust but we can advocate on behalf of Thurso to push for results and provide options to resolve with organisations and external agencies. The Place Standard Tool provides a benchmark which we can return to in the future to measure successes against. Above all the tool has allowed our Thurso Community to have a say on how you feel about the town. To tell us what your priorities are, what needs to be improved and how you would like to see that happen. We are committed as your initial steering group to following a plan of development with initial projects which fulfil the needs of our community and we are very grateful for all who have taken the time to complete the survey. From this point we will work with Thurso organisations and external agencies who can assist in making your priority actions a reality for the benefit of Thurso.

11. Next Steps

The survey revealed a number of issues in Thurso which you our community would like to see addressed. There is a long road ahead of us and continual improvements to be made but we are committed to beginning this process and doing the best that we can for Thurso and our community.

These are the steps therefore that we have already taken and will be progressing with immediately to bring about change in our community.

1. Thurso Community Development Trust has formed as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO). We have selected to be a two-tier SCIO which invites community membership to the Trust. This means that the decisions we make are driven by the view of our membership. Our steering group at present will interpret these decisions as an interim Board until we hold our first AGM. At this point any members are more than welcome to stand for election to the Board. This will happen on an annual basis to ensure that we are **always** doing the best for our community. In the meantime, if you wish to join our steering group new members are always welcome. Following the publication of this report we will also launch a membership campaign for the Trust. Membership allows you the chance to have your say and be listened to as we go forward. The greater the Membership we have the more influential we can be in securing funding and assistance from external agencies to promote development in Thurso.

2. Our first step is to make sure this report is seen and recognised by our fellow community organisations in Thurso and external agencies involved in the development of Thurso and can assist in the improvement of the town and to brief this report back fully to the people who matter – those of you who have taken the time to respond – our community. Those of you who took the survey expressed an appreciation for the opportunity to have your say, we thank you for doing so. We also promised you that it would not sit on a shelf being dusty and would mean something, your say does mean something and we will use it to advocate on behalf of you all and to secure funding, resources and support as we move forward.

3. 27% of you told us that the main priority for the town is a community facility of quality from which services, celebrations, events and inclusion of **all** members of the community can be provided. We have researched various options for this and found that currently our best approach to provide this would be attempting the purchase of an empty property in Thurso Town Centre. The Drill Hall, Sinclair Street is currently on the market and survey suggests its best chance of survival and restoration is as a community facility. We will therefore as our priority project embark on attempting to secure the funds for its purchase and renovation as a community facility consulting with the people of Thurso throughout to ensure it meets your needs.

3. Tourism is identified as a priority. We will therefore work to secure funds to embark on improving the tourism offering for Thurso with accommodation suppliers, visitor attractions and businesses coming together in a “Visit Thurso” marketing activity and improvements in the town for visitors. This has been very successful in other small Highland towns as a means of increasing tourism capacity and

sense of identity for their areas. Through this project we hope to deliver a website and social media presence marketing Thurso, increase signage for visitors for walks and activities, interpretation of the town, hold events celebrating Thurso and kickstart much needed town centre regeneration which you also saw as a priority. We would love to also ensure through customer service and localisation workshops that everyone working within the tourism industry of Thurso can give well informed and friendly advice to our visitors.

4. It has been expressed that the community needs to come together in Thurso. We have already facilitated the first “Thurso Conversations” meeting to bring community groups together and will continue to do so. We also intend to create a community portal “one stop shop” website and social media to give up to date information on community groups and how you can get involved. Many of you told us that you would like to get more involved but don’t know how to contact community groups. This will give that opportunity. Many of you also said that we should all be working together for the benefit of the town and this is true – running a community organisation particularly on a volunteer basis is demanding but we will reach out to all that we can and provide assistance where we can. We aim to regularly bring groups together and foster a culture of us working together for the benefit of Thurso and making sure you know where to go and who can help you!

5. You wanted us to make more of our natural spaces and felt that care and maintenance of these are an issue and also added that more could be done in terms of activities at these spaces. We are therefore currently beginning the process of investigating what can be done at Thurso Riverside and Thurso Beach/Harbour to make these areas more attractive for both the community and the visitor. These are significant assets in the town which you have told us you appreciate and see as benefits. We will devise a plan to take care of these in the longer term.

6. It is apparent throughout the survey comments that inequalities exist in the Thurso. There are clearly significant gaps in terms of work and the local economy and facilities which raise concerns for many of you. Young people leaving the area to find suitable work is an issue across the Highlands and one that concerns us in Thurso. While we might not immediately have the answer to this we will work with other organisations such as the Caithness Community Partnership, Caithness and North Sutherland Regeneration Partnership to advocate for the people of Thurso. Working together for long term solutions.

These are large undertakings but we feel that Thurso is ready to support these aims. We welcome membership of Thurso Community Development Trust and actively encourage it. The stronger our membership base the more that we can advocate and secure funding for these projects. Thurso Community Development Trust is for the benefit of the town and we believe that in working together with ambition and clear direction on these projects while also taking advantage of opportunities that come our way we can create a positive impact on the town for the benefit of Thurso. This is our Thurso, our community and we seek to benefit Thurso in all of our aims.

If you would like to contact us with regards to any information contained in this report please do so via email to thursoanddistrict@outlook.com