THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS



SCOTLAND

WELCOME TO SCOTLAND
FÀILTE GU ALBA



WELCOME TO THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS, a vibrant region offering a thriving economy and a wealth of natural assets.

As rich in development opportunities as it is culture and heritage, the Highlands and Islands region offers an ideal location to live, work and invest.

Inverness is one of Europe's fastest growing cities and offers culture and convenience, contrasted by striking mountains and coastlines. Charming towns like Fort William, Oban, Portree, Stornoway and Grantown-on-Spey dot the landscape. Locations such as Orkney, the Outer Hebrides and Highlands often rank amongst the top UK locations for work-life balance.

The region boasts a rich history, vibrant economy and broad range of assets which will support the growth of your business in Scotland. From energy and health tech to space, manufacturing and food and drink, the Highlands and Islands region is already home to a wide variety of global investors.

Companies operating in marine science, oil and gas and renewable energy sectors are benefitting from ideal environmental conditions thanks to the substantial natural assets available in the Highlands and Islands region.

Meanwhile, tourism and food and drink industries are world-renowned, and investor attractiveness is boosted by the growing international reputation of the life science and aerospace sectors across the region.

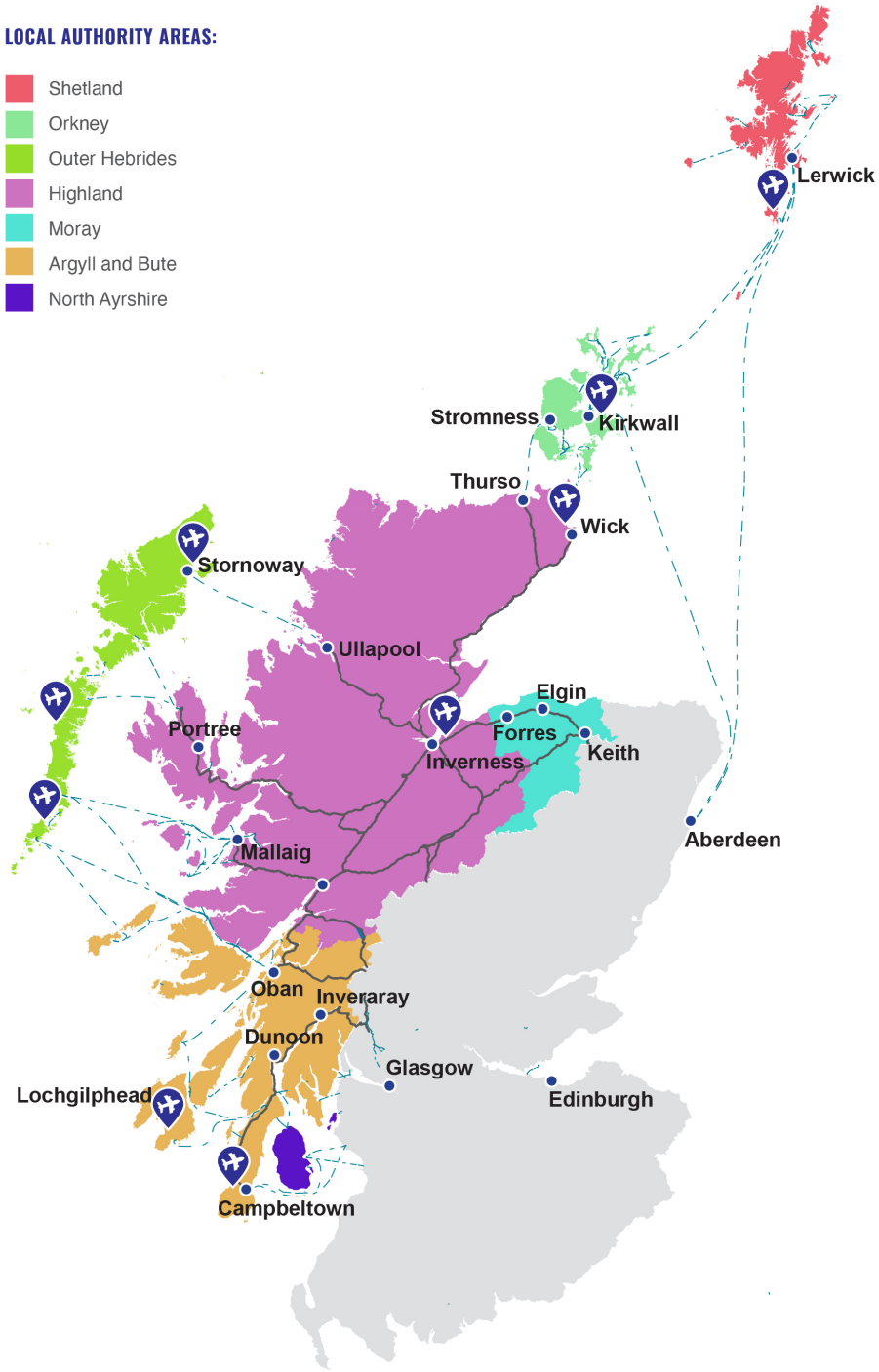
Across all sectors, new opportunities for regional innovation and prosperity are underpinned by strong educational infrastructure, while affordable property options and easy access to the great outdoors come together to create an exceptional quality of life.

In fact, this region has been named 'the happiest place to live in Scotland' by the Bank of Scotland Happiness Index, and when you take a look at what's on offer away from the office, it's not difficult to see why. From mountain biking to fishing for brown trout or Arctic char in the region's freshwater lochs, you will find the perfect activity to unwind.

The Highlands and Islands has the economy, the environment, the assets and the opportunities you need to achieve your business ambitions. Now is the time to invest in Scotland. So come on in; be part of Scotland's continuing success story.

Cover image: European Marine Science Park, Dunstaffnage, near Oban in Argyll (Scotphoto/HIE).

THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS





Bow Fiddle Rock, Moray

STRATEGICALLY LOCATED AND WELL CONNECTED

The Highlands and Islands region covers almost 27,000 square kilometres and has comprehensive transport links that keep people and businesses well connected. Of a population of 470,000 people, 62% live in rural areas of the region, 23% in large settlements – 13% in the city of Inverness – and around a fifth on an island.

AIR

Strong road, rail and air connections underline the global interconnectivity of the region, making travelling to, from and around the Highlands and Islands easy. There are nine national and international airports spread across the region, with direct flights from Inverness airport to major European cities such as London and Amsterdam.

RAIL

The region has an excellent railway infrastructure which traverses the whole of Scotland and major train stations in the UK. Inverness acts as the primary railway hub for the mainland north of Scotland, connecting the region to Edinburgh and Glasgow in the south, Aberdeen in the east, Thurso and Wick in the north and the Kyle of Lochalsh in the west.

ROAD

Major trunk roads connect the Highlands and Islands with the rest of Scotland and the UK. There is a direct highway corridor to Inverness or a more scenic route via Loch Ness. The Highlands and Islands has a well-developed electric vehicle infrastructure network with an impressive number of publicly available charging points relative to the region's population size.

SEA

A network of regular ferry services provides access to and from the region all year round, connecting the mainland with some of the islands and the more rural communities.

DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

Commercial and publicly funded fibre broadband rollout has delivered access to superfast speeds for over 89% of homes and businesses across the Highlands and Islands. Ultrafast full fibre is available to around 59% of the region's premises.

CAN I GET THE RIGHT PEOPLE IN THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS?

When it comes to finding the talent you need, the Highlands and Islands region benefits from a strong talent pool of well-educated, skilled and knowledgeable professionals across a broad range of sectors.

From apprenticeships to industry leaders, the region offers a dynamic workforce with a higher number of people in high or medium skilled occupations than in Scotland as a whole.

TALENT PIPELINE

Seven universities have a presence in the Highlands and Islands region:

- University of the Highlands and Islands
- Glasgow School of Art
- University of Stirling
- Heriot-Watt University
- University of Aberdeen
- Scotland's Rural College (SRUC)
- Robert Gordon University

The region produces 10,000 graduates per year, giving your business access to a constant supply of highly educated, quality talent across a range of disciplines.

University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI)

UHI is Scotland's newest university with over 36,000 local and online students across 13 separate locations, integrating both further and higher education.

Skills Development Scotland (SDS)

As Scotland's national skills agency, SDS helps businesses around the world discover what Scotland's talent can do for them. They can support you for the whole journey – before, during and after you locate in Scotland.

SDS partners with employers in the region to encourage sustainable economic growth, helping businesses maximise the impact they can have on Scotland's people and the economy.

Apprenticeships offer a flexible way to develop your workforce and build the skills your business needs to grow. There are more than 100 types of apprenticeship available in Scotland that attract funding for training activity. Over 12,000 Scotland-based businesses are already benefitting from these – and you can join them.

Workforce North has also been launched by SDS, HIE, UHI, local authorities and other key partners. By working closely with local businesses and inward investors, the initiative will promote and support co-investment in talent development and retention to create long-term opportunities for communities across the Highlands and Islands.

KEY INDUSTRY ASSETS

FOOD AND DRINK

The food and drink sector in the Highlands and Islands is a cornerstone of the regional economy, providing around 36,000 jobs within more than 5,000 enterprises across the region, delivering a powerful multiplier effect that benefits communities, supports rural populations, and contributes to wellbeing.

The region's food and drink offering draws on abundant natural resources and high-quality ingredients, with a rich heritage that is embracing innovation and technological advancement to meet growing sustainability demands and shifting consumer preferences. Iconic, global brands such as Baxters and Walkers exemplify the region's commitment to excellence, combining tradition with innovation to produce premium products that are directly attributed to its world-class natural assets.

Whisky

By locating in the Highlands and Islands, distilleries can leverage the region's unique water, geology and climate to produce flavourful whiskies. Did you know that four of Scotland's five Scotch whisky regions are located in the Highlands and Islands? Supported by the Scotch Whisky Association, the industry has committed to reaching net zero emissions in its operations by 2040 and to dramatically reducing the environmental impact of Scotland's national drink in other areas such as packaging and water usage. Aligned to these ambitions, significant investments are being made in low carbon energy solutions, sustainable supply chains and new facilities.

Salmon

Sheltered sea lochs and cool, clean, oxygen-rich waters in the Highlands and Islands create the ideal environment for farming Atlantic salmon. For over six decades, the sector has been a cornerstone of the region's economy, now strengthened by a highly skilled local workforce and a diverse, innovative supply chain. Businesses work in partnership with leading research institutions to address regional and global challenges, ensuring Scottish salmon remains a healthy, sustainable blue food. Scottish farmed salmon is the UK's highest-value food export, prized in premium markets worldwide for its quality, provenance and sustainability credentials.



Image credit: John Paul / HIE.



Image credit: John Paul / HIE.



LIFE SCIENCES

The dispersed population and unique geography of the Highlands and Islands makes it an ideal location to develop, test and trial new and innovative technologies in healthcare and health tech. The region's ambition is for healthcare technologies to enable patients to be treated remotely if appropriate, meaning they don't need to travel long distances to access hospital care.

LifeScan

LifeScan, one of Scotland's largest medical technology companies, is located in Inverness, employing over 500 staff in the development and manufacturing of blood glucose monitoring devices. Producing 4 billion test strips annually, they supply global markets from their Inverness base.

Inverness Campus

For life sciences businesses, Inverness Campus, developed by Highlands and Islands Enterprise, offers a world-class location within a thriving community of businesses, researchers and innovators. There's also a breadth of activity in the Aquaculture, Animal health and Agri-tech sectors (AAA). Companies locating here can benefit from tax incentives through the Inverness & Cromarty Firth Green Freeport.

European Marine Science Park (EMSP)

A thriving cluster of more than a dozen marine business enterprises near Oban. More than 100 marine scientists are permanently stationed at the EMSP to better understand local marine ecology and expand the region's scientific reputation.

The Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS)

Based at the EMSP, SAMS – Scotland's oldest and largest independent marine science organisation – focuses on understanding how to build a productive and sustainable marine environment. Their pioneering research into marine robotics and autonomous technologies, cutting-edge climate studies and marine biodiversity and ecosystem monitoring make them a world-renowned collaboration partner.

Scotland's Rural College (SRUC)

Based at Inverness Campus, researchers work to improve and maintain animal health and welfare.
SRUC opened a new £12.5m Rural and Veterinary Innovation Centre (RAVIC) in 2024. This centre, based on Inverness Campus, harnesses expertise in big data and research into animal epidemiology to create and grow businesses.



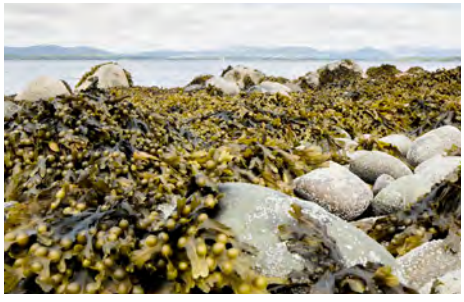


Image credit: Chris Robson / HIE.

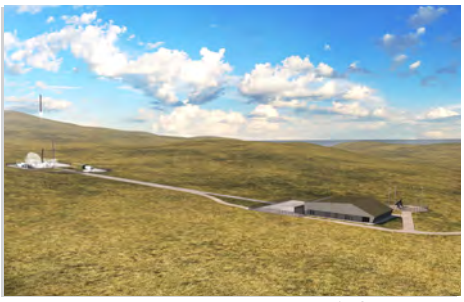


Image credit: NORR / HIE.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

With a strong legacy in the oil and gas industry and an abundance of renewable energy resources, the Highlands and Islands is ideally placed to be at the forefront of the energy industry.

Inverness & Cromarty Firth Green Freeport

Inverness & Cromarty Firth Green Freeport is at the heart of Europe's renewable energy industry. Together, they're building Scotland's renewable energy powerhouse, combining strategic tax incentives, world-class infrastructure and direct access to Europe's richest offshore wind resources.

The tax incentives and infrastructure are designed to create competitive advantages for businesses and investors, while prime access to Europe's largest offshore energy market provides unique opportunities to unlock growth across several key locations, including:

- Port of Cromarty Firth
- Port of Nigg
- Port of Inverness
- Highland Deephaven
- Ardersier Energy Transition Facility
- Inverness Campus

These sites collectively span approximately 520 hectares, forming the largest green engineering development area in the UK.



ENERGY TRANSITION

The Highlands and Islands are already playing a global leading role in renewable energy deployment and technology development. Utilising our natural resources - including access to fresh water, high wind and marine energy resource, and natural safe harbours – the region will play an integral role in decarbonising the UK's energy grid and growing Scotland's economy.

Wind Energy

The ScotWind and INTOG (Innovation and Targeted Oil and Gas) leasing rounds have set the stage for the installation of over 37GW of offshore wind in Scotland. Of the 27 projects proposed, 18 projects are in the waters off the coast of the Highlands and Islands. With 13 of these using floating foundations, the region is at the centre of this emerging technology market and poised to play an international leading role in floating wind development. Scotland is home to some of the most experienced offshore energy ports in Europe, creating a pool of highly capable port facilities and operators playing a key role in the deployment of renewables and hosting high-end manufacturing such as Sumitomo Electric's subsea cable factory at the Port of Nigg.

The region is also host to an onshore wind development pipeline of 11.5GW and growing. Onshore wind is a key component of the UK Government's Clean Power 2030 ambition and is developing an ever-expanding local supply chain around this expanding subsector.

Wave and Tidal

Scotland is currently leading the world in the development and testing of tidal stream and wave energy technologies and the Highlands and Islands is home to several leading projects. Our local marine supply chain companies have gained worldwide recognition of being suitably equipped with a highly skilled workforce to maintain and further develop a robust supply chain for the sector as it expands and projects are built out over the coming years.



European Marine Energy Centre (EMEC)

Established in 2003, the European Marine Energy Centre (EMEC) Ltd is the world's first and leading facility for demonstrating and testing wave and tidal energy converters. To date, more ocean energy converters have tested at EMEC than any other site in the world. The centre is also pioneering the creation of hydrogen from tidal energy.



Hydrogen

The Highlands and Islands is emerging as one of Scotland's most important regions for green hydrogen production, export and innovation. The scale of offshore and onshore wind projects in the region represents a major opportunity to power the generation of green hydrogen along with green ammonia and methanol production. This combined with existing marine and port infrastructure, including deepwater oil and gas export terminals, provides the opportunity for large-scale hydrogen export infrastructure.

Pumped Storage Hydro

The geography of the Highlands and Islands with its mountains and lochs lends itself to the development of hydro power. It is already home to Scotland's only operational pumped storage hydro (PSH) projects with a total of 740MW of capacity. The advent of a new UK support mechanism, the Cap and Floor scheme, has enabled the planning of 8GW of new large scale pumped storage hydro projects.

TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

When you locate in the Highlands and Islands, you'll be connected to a network of innovation centres, providing you with the support you need to grow your business.

The Data Lab

The Inverness hub of the Data Lab helps businesses to maximise the value of their data by providing specialist advice, support and training.

The Sustainable Aquaculture Innovation Centre (SAIC)

SAIC works to increase the economic impact and reduce the environmental impact of aquaculture by leveraging commercial enterprise and academia to fund and support commercially relevant, collaborative research.

Techscaler hub

We're ready to turn Scotland into a tech nation. The Scottish Government is investing £42 million to establish a network of seven hubs across the country, giving companies like yours access to education and mentoring, as well as opportunities for peer learning and networking.

AEROSPACE AND SPACE

The Highlands and Islands is fast becoming a hub of space sector activity in Scotland and looks set to continue to play a vital role in the years to come.

Commercial Satellite

Scotland's northern geography and low population base provide the perfect conditions to launch commercial satellites into low earth polar and sun synchronous orbits.

Spaceports

There are currently four spaceports in the region which are undergoing development to provide launch or test capability in the coming years. These are:

1. Spaceport 1, Scolpaig, North Uist, Western Isles
2. Sutherland Spaceport at the Mhoine, Sutherland
3. SaxaVord Spaceport, Unst, Shetland Islands
4. Machrihanish Air Base, Argyll



Image credit: NORR/HIE



A POWERHOUSE OF INNOVATION AND INVENTION

The Highlands and Islands has a flourishing business community and is a centre for academic R&D. Inverness Campus has fostered innovative partnerships between the National Health Service, academia and the public and private sector, while Orkney's EMEC is a world-leading hub of marine energy research.

Orkney Research and Innovation Campus

Fully owned by HIE since 2025, the 3.75-acre Orkney Research and Innovation Campus supports the growth of existing research and innovation and the expansion of companies across Orkney's world-leading marine renewables, energy and low carbon sectors.

The Moray Rural Centre of Excellence for Digital Health and Care Innovation (MRCE)

Funded as part of the Moray Growth Deal, the MRCE supports the remobilisation of health and care services in the region by investing in R&D activities through programmes like Skills Development and person-centred Living Labs.

Advanced Manufacturing Centre (AMC)

The UHI West Highland AMC in Fort William can help bring your ideas to life by supporting your business with free manufacturing and design technology access and expertise from its highly experienced team.

Make It Smart Hub

The Make It Smart Hub is a free-to-use resource that enables the region's business community to access support, up-to-date training, equipment and business opportunities.

PROPERTY OPTIONS

The Highlands and Islands has a well-established commercial sector that provides the square footage, technology and infrastructure you need to get your business up and running quickly. Highlands and Islands Enterprise has a large portfolio of property and land available for immediate development, allowing you to hit the ground running.

1. **Enterprise Park Forres** is a flexible business space suitable for a range of sectors, situated on 100 acres of sustainable ground.
2. **Inverness Airport Business Park** is a mixed-use commercial property development of 275 acres with 36 acres of serviced land currently available for occupation.
3. **Arnish**, located four miles from Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis, is home to one of Scotland's key renewable energy manufacturing sites and has been developed as a key location for the renewable and oil and gas energy sectors.
4. **Machrihanish** is a former RAF aerodrome in Kintyre that offers much socio-economic growth potential by transforming the 1025 acres of unique property and assets into a thriving business park.
5. **Inverness Campus** is a world-class location to invest, grow and scale innovation-led businesses. The established 215-acre campus offers ready-to go development opportunities and space to expand across life sciences, technology, renewables and advanced manufacturing.
6. **European Marine Science Park** provides quality office and laboratory accommodation in an established location for marine science.





Inverness

HIGH-QUALITY, LOW-COST LOCATION

The region is one of the most cost-competitive in the whole of Scotland – and the UK – affording you and your people greater lifestyle opportunities and welcomed financial freedom. Businesses like yours will benefit from our unrivalled natural resources and ambitious cross-sectoral collaboration, while being connected to the rest of Scotland, the UK and the world.

From remote cottages and seaside villages, cosmopolitan flats and modern family homes, the Highlands and Islands has a wide choice of property to buy and rent, perfect for people of all budgets. Better still, the region is committed to building affordable homes for all.

Regional Growth Deals are set to deliver sustained, secure economic and community-wide prosperity and transform the region with a public and private sector cash injection totalling £775 million over the next 10-15 years.

GROWTH DEAL PROJECTS INCLUDE:

- £7 million for Manufacturing Innovation Centre for Moray (MICM), which aims to boost local manufacturing. Part of the Moray Growth Deal, it offers support for innovation, decarbonisation and productivity
- £70 million for Argyll and Bute to position the area as a must-visit location for the international maritime leisure market
- £335 million for the Islands to boost green jobs and sustainable energy, health, tourism and food and drink sectors while supporting the decarbonisation of Orkney, Shetland, and the Outer Hebrides

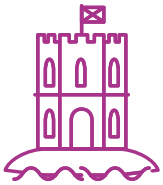
QUALITY OF LIFE

The Highlands and Islands is the perfect location to enjoy the best of both worlds: coastal or rural living and bustling city life.

When you choose the Highlands and Islands, you'll experience one of the most distinctive and diverse landscapes anywhere in the UK. With scenic coastlines, sandy golden beaches and rugged mountains, there's so much to explore, right on your doorstep. In fact, the region lays claim to 86% of Scotland's coastline.

You'll discover a treasure trove of global tourism attractions, from Loch Ness, the Isle of Skye and its Fairy Pools and the stone age settlement of Skara Brae in Orkney to the Cairngorms, the mystical Callanish Stones in the Outer Hebrides, Ben Nevis and the famous Bealach na Bà single-track road through the mountains of the Applecross peninsula.

What's more, there's an endless number of sporting and outdoor activities on offer in the Highlands and Islands. From hiking and fishing to canoeing and mountain biking, the region presents countless opportunities for new experiences and exciting adventures. The Noss National Nature Reserve in Shetland is one of the most spectacular wildlife sites in Europe and a haven for photographers due to its unique light.



THE BEST PLACE TO LIVE IN SCOTLAND

Did you know the Highlands and Islands regularly ranks highly in quality-of-life surveys? The Outer Hebrides has been named the best place to live in Britain for work-life balance, and two other locations in the region – Orkney and Highland – placed in the top 20.



THE NORTH COAST 500

The spectacular North Coast 500 stretches for just over 500 miles through the North Highlands, taking in stunning coastal and inland scenery across Wester Ross, Sutherland, Caithness, Easter Ross, the Black Isle and Inverness-shire.



THE WHISKY EXPERIENCE

There are more than 100 whisky distilleries spread across the region with global brands including Macallan, Glenfiddich and Balvenie deeply embedded in its history and heritage alongside newer distilleries such as Nc'Nean Distillery, a pioneer in sustainable whisky, and the UK's first net zero whisky distillery for its direct operations (Scopes 1 & 2) If you're a fan of a wee dram, you've come to the right place.



THE HOME OF GOLF

With almost 100 courses, many designed by world renowned names such as James Braid and Donald Ross, the Highlands and Islands offer the complete package for golfers of all abilities. From championship courses continually rated in the world's top 100 like Machrihanish, Royal Dornoch, Nairn and Castle Stuart, to less demanding but equally spectacular nine-hole courses, the area has it all.



NATURALLY SCOTTISH

The region is globally recognised for its outstanding natural larder and world class food and drink. Alongside premium salmon and seafood, Scotland's diverse produce—from speciality coffee, baked goods and confectionery to venison, cheese and craft spirits—underpins our exporting success and is celebrated internationally.



HISTORIC CASTLES

Inverness Castle, Urquhart Castle and Eillean Donan Castle are just a few of many across the region, connecting ancient clans, traditions and folklore, evoking imagery and stirring the imagination.

COMMUNITY SPIRIT

No matter where you choose to settle in the region and build your business enterprise, you will discover a welcoming, keen sense of community spirit. Resources are invested in areas to enhance sustainable growth, including social need and market opportunities, fair work practices and resilient business models.

SO, WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? IT'S TIME TO DISCOVER THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS

Connected business support is available for you before, during and after you locate here, from a range of public sector partners.

We will make the connections you need to ensure your investment goes smoothly allowing you to focus on growing your business.

To find out more about why the Highlands and Islands is the right location for your company, or to experience the area for yourself, get in touch and we will be happy to arrange this for you.

NOW IS THE TIME TO INVEST IN SCOTLAND



Camusdarach Beach, by Morar

GET IN TOUCH

WE'D LOVE TO WELCOME YOU

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