

Case Study: Highland Adapts (Scotland)

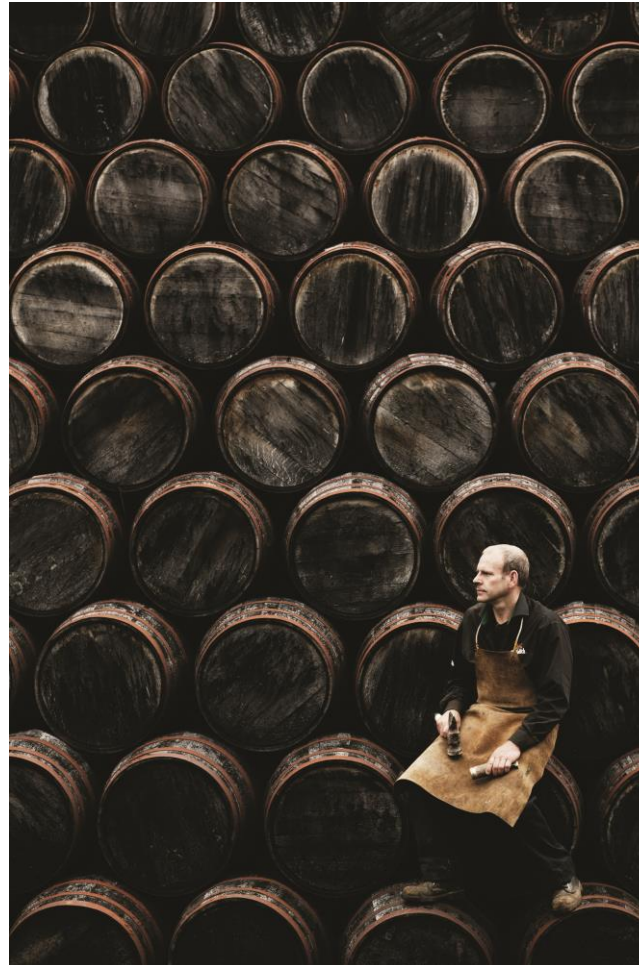
The Highland Adapts partnership is as outstanding and unique as the region it covers. Read on to find out how the initiative was formed and why shared power and collective action are at the heart of its approach.



Background

Highland is by far the largest region in Scotland, covering nearly 10,000 square miles in northern Scotland. Home to vast landscapes, diverse communities, and rich natural and cultural heritage the region is being profoundly impacted by climate change.

The Highland Adapts partnership was set up in 2021 and brings communities, businesses, land managers and public sector together to facilitate transformational action towards a prosperous, climate ready Highland.





Spotlight on Empowerment

The Highland Council's former Climate Change Manager Keith Masson started work in 2018 to discuss the potential for a joined-up approach to adaptation across the Highlands. Keith knew that the climate risks affecting Highland communities, nature, businesses, assets, infrastructure and culture were significant and hoped that a forward thinking, innovative approach to adaptation would deliver huge benefits for the region. He opened informal conversations with community planning partners and requested input from the [Adaptation Scotland programme](#) to develop the business case for a major new climate adaptation partnership for the region. Adaptation Scotland worked with Keith to design an inclusive approach to developing the business case, structured around the HM Treasury five case model. Interviews were held

with major organisations and a public survey was promoted across local press and radio. The business case process established a strong case for setting up a highland wide adaptation partnership, 'Highland Adapts' and drew out key values and principles that partners wanted to use as a foundation for the initiative.

The process of involving many different organisations and voices in developing the business case helped to develop a founding group who were strongly committed to developing 'Highland Adapts'. The founders committed early on to distributive power, recognising that diverse partners should be involved in Highland Adapts and that the leadership and decision making should not be restricted to the partners who were able to provide finance.

The Highland Adapts initiative was formally established in 2021 and Emma Whitham, Highland Adapts Manager, has worked with the partners to develop a purpose, guiding principles and objectives that reflect their

collective desire for a transformative approach to adaptation for the Highlands that is deeply rooted in the unique challenges, opportunities, and priorities of Highland communities.

[Find out more about the story and ethos of Highland Adapts on their website.](#)



Highlands Adapts Team



Spotlight on Collaboration and Building strong governance and supporting structures

When the Highland Adapts partnership was established in 2021 the founding partners spent time discussing the objectives and the guiding principles that would form a reference point for their work together. The Highland Adapts manager facilitated open and honest discussions that explored conflicting points of view and built consensus. The discussions were important in reaching agreement on the future direction of Highland Adapts and created space for the partners to hear and understand different perspectives and get to know each other. Establishing any new initiative requires a lot of time and effort in the start-up phase. The Highland Adapts partners have worked through different challenges including changes in personnel from founding organisations and the need to balance a huge interest and enthusiasm from stakeholders for engaging with the

partnership activities and the need to focus on delivering specific pieces of work. The governance and supporting structures allow these challenges and others to be addressed collectively.

Inclusion is prioritised through the Highland Adapts governance structure. A team of twelve Community Climate Advocates who represent grassroots networks, are actively working with people and communities across the region to take climate action, build

resilience, and empower community-led solutions to the triple crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and health. The Climate Advocates collaborate to ensure the region is working as whole and take a systems approach to social and environmental issues. The Highland Adapts engagement and business teams are also playing an important role in involving diverse sectors and laying the foundations for action to adapt.



Community Garden



Spotlight on Co-developing and maintaining the evidence base

The Highland Adapts initiative is developing a climate risk and opportunity assessment for the region. The approach to developing the assessment reflects the principles of the partnership. The assessment will value formal data and evidence such as academic research and data provided by major organisations alongside local knowledge and lived experience from Highland communities. The assessment will be codeveloped with people from across the Highlands and will be made freely available for all.

Highland Adapts has already begun to form research and practice collaborations including with the University of East Anglia OpenCLIM project team. The OpenCLIM team provided a PhD student placement during early 2022 to assess how the

climate risk assessment needs of partners in Highland could be met by the OpenCLIM integrated assessment model. Highland Adapts will continue to work with the OpenCLIM team as the Highland risk assessment is developed.



Climate Action Town Place Planning



Spotlight on Communication

The Highland Adapts website and social media channels are used to share information, stories and experiences and will continue to grow and develop as the initiative progresses with delivering its ambitious work programme. The Highland Adapts partners are working towards a joined-up approach to communications where each of the partners routinely promote Highland Adapts messages and outputs and contribute content that can be shared.

The Highland Climate Charter, published in 2022 has been developed by Highland Adapts and the North Highlands and Islands Climate Hub and aims to raise awareness of climate change, its impacts and to build a momentum across Highland

where individuals, communities, organisations and businesses are working together towards a transformational and prosperous climate ready Highland. The Charter is a call to action for individuals and community groups and is contributing towards building collective awareness and action. [View the Highland Climate Charter.](#)

The Highland Adapts Communication sub-group is a key part of the overarching Highland Adapts Governance model and will continue to play a vital role in helping the partnership achieve its purpose.

Climate Hub Engagement Event



The TaIX project is funded under the EPA Research Programme 2014-2020. The EPA Research Programme is a Government of Ireland initiative funded by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications.

Find Out More

Visit the Website at:
www.highlandadapts.scot

Email at:
hello@highlandadapts.scot

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