



Lewis Report



Island: Lewis

Date: 30/04/2019

This report has been produced by the Strathclyde Centre for Environmental Law and Governance (SCELG) and Scottish Islands Federation (SIF) in the framework of their collaboration with the Islands Team of the Scottish Government. The goal of this report is to capture the essence of the discussions that have taken place at the consultation event on Lewis. The report will be sent out to participants who authorised us to do so in order to receive further comments and feedback. The report is not to be considered as an indication of what will ultimately go into the National Island Plan, but it will inform the latter. The report is also not to be considered as an indication of the position of Scottish Government on any of the points mentioned therein.



Introduction

Between the 23rd and 25th of April 2019, 8 consultation events took place in Craighouse, Stornoway, Sandwick and Carloway on the Isle of Lewis. These events included primary and secondary school visits. These events were attended by 119 people in total, and the goal was to capture both what works well on the island and the challenges faced by the community on Lewis. The consultation is required by the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, as a means to inform the National Islands Plan that Scottish Government will be presenting to Scottish Parliament on 4 October 2019.

Lewis as a great place to live

The consultation highlighted the following things that make living on Lewis great:

- Safe and secure
- Great environment
- Community spirit
- Sunday Observance
- Environment
- Healthcare
- Bilingualism
- Culture and Heritage
- Education
- Transport Links
- Renewable Energy
- College

It is evident that there are many things that make Lewis a fantastic place to live. The list above only affords a glimpse, but it does highlight that there is a true sense of community on the island, that islanders enjoy Sunday observance and that the culture and heritage of the island is crucial to the community. Education and the possibility of attending college on the island was also noted



as being a positive aspect across all age ranges, whilst both those at primary school and retirement age indicated that there was a significant amount of activities and clubs available to them. It is also worth noting that both education and healthcare were also noted as challenges by the participants, and will be discussed in greater detail below.

Challenges on Lewis

The consultation moved on to discuss the current challenges on Lewis and the main concerns of the island community. The following are the main issues that were shared by the participants at the event (see Annex for more details):

- Stopping Population Decline
- Economic Development
- Environmental Protection
- Health and wellbeing
- Environment
- Community empowerment
- Transport
- Digital Connectivity
- Fuel Poverty
- Land Management
- Biosecurity
- Housing
- Education
- Interconnector





- Current complication of crofting paperwork & funding
- Lack of entrepreneurial spirit

The National Islands Plan and the Response from the Participants

During the consultation, several key challenges were discussed in greater detail. We wish to make it very clear that a more in depth focus was undertaken for the purposes of the face-to-face consultation, and should not be considered as any indication of prioritization in the framework of the National Islands Plan.

The areas discussed more in depth were:

- Housing
- Environment
- Transport
- Economic Development
- Fuel Poverty
- Reversing Population Decline
- Digital Connectivity

For each, participants were asked to provide more details about the challenge, their proposed solution, next steps, who should undertake these next steps and when. The following are the suggestions that we believe stemmed from the participants present at the consultation on Lewis:

Challenge	Suggestion from participants
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop and implement an island focused housing policy that creates locally affordable housing stock.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policy acknowledgement that the housing challenge on the islands is critical and urgent and different from the mainland, and needs to be developed based on the needs and knowledge of island communities. ▪ Recognise the positive ripple effect that an island focused housing strategy will have on the sustainability of the islands and their repopulation. ▪ Reevaluate current planning restrictions and where necessary deregulate to allow easier access to land for islanders to build on. ▪ Improve quality of BTS (below tolerable standard) housing by ensuring funding is available to improve/repair housing through grants, loan policies and Housing Action Areas.
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Legal requirement for community input into revision of integrated transport timetabling with increased frequency of ferry crossings ▪ Review transport policy so that it fully takes into account the fragility of island communities (transport for island communities is not just a service, it's a lifeline, it's a right). ▪ Discussion with ferry provider to discuss improvement of the fleet in terms of frequency and capacity. ▪ Legislation to ensure that RET and ADS is made permanent. ▪ Revision of RET to include commercial vehicles and freight. ▪ Explore the possibility of offering subsidies for islanders in relation to transport services.
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Renewable energy island policy that focuses on how best to utilise renewable energy potential on islands to ensure that it benefits island economy. ▪ Explore the possibility of ensuring there is an onsite recycling centre on every island. ▪ Review limitations of interconnector



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the development of local smart grids distributing community owned renewable electricity at reduced unit prices to consumers and businesses to cut the cost of heating.
<p>Economic Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commitment to sustained educational development with clear pathways to employment on the island . Financial commitment that takes into consideration the added difficulties/costs of starting a business on an island Specific fund for island businesses. Increased support for community led renewables through government incentives and legislation. Research the possibility of a dedicated island development fund. Review of education routes and opportunities on islands. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Example of UHI campus offering courses that relate (but are not limited to) local industry. Strategically market the islands as having economic potential that would be of benefit of others to exploit. Encourage decentralization and devolve more power to the island community. Explore the possibility of a dedicated Island Development Fund
<p>Fuel Poverty</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of legislation to allow local energy producers to sell local renewable energy at a reduced rate. Revision of current policy to ensure cohesive government support to guarantee that all housing is insulated and not means tested. Review of policy to explore the possibility of subsidizing fuel to the island.
<p>Health & Wellbeing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revised system of allocating healthcare funds and facilities which takes into consideration the unique requirements of each island



	<p>community, which has to be supported with long term development and funding goals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revision of healthcare operational plan in relation to time spent with clients, with an emphasis on providing company rather than just a service.
<p>Reversing Population Decline</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise current policy to shift focus to appropriate housing that is locally affordable and is viewed as an essential right, which if dealt with properly will have a positive ripple effect. Revision of economic development policy with a focus on islands with a possible suggestion of the creation of a new agency that focuses solely on Scottish islands (separating the Highlands element). Interconnect education and employment strategy to allocate specific funding for local apprenticeships that boost island economy and retain young people. Revise Crofting House Grant Scheme application process.
<p>Digital Connectivity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise digital connectivity policy to discuss with service providers connectivity as a right/lifeline rather than just as an economic service (develop legally binding minimum standards that take such nature into account) Explore the possibility of providing an 'Island wide' wifi.

Lewis Vision

Island communities know that good governance requires an integrated and holistic approach to policy. We wish to stress once again that the National Islands Plan and its implementation will not address specific issues in isolation, but rather will consider all factors together whilst taking into account their crosscutting nature. In addition, each island has its own unique character and



its own unique challenges. From the consultation on Lewis we have identified the following specific traits to Lewis:

Firstly, it should be noted that the participants of the multitude of events across Lewis produced very similar challenges, despite generational and geographical differences. It was clear that those of primary school age felt that many of the challenges associate with living on the island could be classified as it not being the same as the mainland i.e. certain shops and activities are not available on Lewis. However, this sentiment was shared by those in the 20 – 30 age group, who felt that the issue of depopulation was aggravated by a lack of support and interests available to their demographic.

The issue of economic development was a recurring theme in all consultation events, with many interlinkages with other sectors. It is therefore known as a ‘transformative’ factor, in that improvement in this sector will result in positive effects in others such as housing and depopulation. The revision of economic development policy with a focus on islands is therefore essential, as is supporting such a policy with the necessary funding, which could potentially be specifically aimed at providing adequate training for young people within a long term, sustainable employment strategy. Digital connectivity was also viewed as greatly effecting economic development, with an improvement in broadband connection and readily available wifi allowing for more diverse year round income streams that are not solely reliant on tourism.

It is evident that the lack of affordable, fit for purpose housing is an issue on Lewis. Although applicable to all, this was specifically mentioned several times in relation to Croft Housing, which was stated as being the ‘social cement’ of the island but is now far more difficult to access due to a change in application procedure by the Crofting Commission. There was also a general feeling that the Commission failed to give adequate support to those attempting to self-build. Housing requires radical changes to policy to properly incorporate the local knowledge of housing needs by islanders, with appropriate support put in place to allow island housing development to be a community led endeavor. This also relates to the appetite for increased community



empowerment evident on the island in the sense of creating a system by which the community can take increased “ownership” of the decisions that affect and impact (positively and negatively) the island, with the suggestion of ‘decentralisation’ being put forward as a solution at multiple consultation events.

The potential of renewable energy, and particularly wind power, was another recurring theme across events, in relation to both economic development, fuel poverty and environmental wellbeing. Specifically, the current lack of a suitable interconnector is acting as a barrier to renewable energy on the island, and the potential money it could bring to communities is therefore being lost. Consequently, there is a need to recognise the potential of islands to act hubs of innovation when it comes to renewable energy projects, in order to reduce environmental impacts whilst simultaneously contributing to the economic development of the island. In order for this to be realized, energy island policy that focuses on how best to utilise renewable energy potential on islands to ensure that it benefits island economy must be developed, which supports the development of community owned renewable projects. For example, it was proposed that the profits earned from the development of a community owned renewable energy project could be used to support an island development fund by a percentage per watt.

Transport, in relation to ferry timetabling and capacity, and air travel, is also an issue which, if improved, would have transformative effects for the island. It is essential that current transport policy is reviewed to adequately take into account the importance of a reliable, well integrated transport system that puts the need of island communities first, before that of visitors.

Although healthcare was hailed as being a positive aspect on the island, the gradual reduction in the services available was also a concern for many, as demonstrated by the closure of the local hospital ward. This was specifically mentioned in relation to the elderly, who some felt were suffering from ‘social isolation’ due to a combination of fuel poverty and poor transport. It is therefore crucial that the system for allocating healthcare funds and facilities is revised in a way



which takes into consideration the unique requirements of the island community which has to be supported with long term development and funding goals.





What now?

First and foremost we wish to thank those who attended the consultation events on Lewis. We encourage you to fill in the on-line consultation at <https://consult.gov.scot/agriculture-and-rural-communities/national-islands-plan/>. You can find the consultation document that provides background information about the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, the National Islands Plan and the Islands Communities Impact Assessment at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-islands-plan-islands-communities-impact-assessment-guidance-consultation/>.

More importantly, please send us any comments/feedback on this report at n.crook@strath.ac.uk

The National Islands Plan will only be useful if it is truly informed by the island communities and by all those who have an interest and a stake in Scottish islands. Thanks to your participation in the consultation event and your comments and feedback, we are confident that the work being undertaken towards the National Islands Plan is capturing the voice of island communities. We are also sure that this is only the beginning and that, together, we can make sure that the National Islands Plan is not just “another” plan, but “The Plan” that works for island communities in Scotland.

Useful links:

- *On-line consultation* - <https://consult.gov.scot/agriculture-and-rural-communities/national-islands-plan/>
- *Consultation document* - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-islands-plan-islands-communities-impact-assessment-guidance-consultation/>
- *Islands (Scotland) Act 2018*
- *Strathclyde Centre for Environmental Law and Governance (SCELG)* - <https://www.strath.ac.uk/research/strathclydecentreenvironmentallawgovernance/>
- *Scottish Island Federation (SIF)* - <http://www.scottish-islands-federation.co.uk/>



- *SCELG portal on the consultation -*

<https://www.strath.ac.uk/research/strathclydecentreenvironmentallawgovernance/ourwork/research/labsincubators/eilean/islandsscotlandact/consultations/>

