



Orkney Report



Island: Orkney

Date: 03/07/2019

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 Orkney. 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

On the 3rd and 5th of May 2019, two focus groups took place on the Isle of Orkney in Kirkwall and Stromness. The goal was to capture both what works well on the island and the challenges faced by the community on Orkney. 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.

Orkney as a great place to live

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

- Good facilities
- Quality of life
- Safe & secure environment
- Education
- Community Participation
- Health
- Business Opportunities
- Environment
- Vibrancy of island compared to other rural mainland areas
- Very welcoming community to newcomers



It is evident that there are many things that make Orkney a fantastic place to live. The list above only affords a glimpse, but it does highlight that participants value the level of facilities currently provided, both in terms of healthcare and leisure/sports facilities. Additionally, they find the island community to be welcoming, and are proud of the high level of community participation. Finally, they value the environment and the general quality of life on the island, and the 'vibrancy' of Orkney as a rural area.



Challenges on Orkney

The consultation moved on to discuss the current challenges on Orkney and the main concerns of the island community. The following are the main issues that were shared by the participants at the event:

- Stopping Population Decline
- Economic Development
- Healthcare
- Community Empowerment
- Transport
- Digital Connectivity
- Fuel Poverty
- Housing
- Education
- Abboitor



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
- Transport
- Economic Development

The following are the suggestions that we believe stemmed from the participants present at the consultation on Orkney:

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, which is aimed at retaining the population across all age groups. ▪ Revise current legislation in regards to holiday/second homes to ensure they don't saturate the housing market at the expense of permanent residents. ▪ Explore the feasibility of introducing a tax on holiday homes and second homes. ▪ Work with UK Government to remove 20% VAT for derelict housing barrier and provide incentive to renovate rather than build new.
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review and reform of the transport policy in line with island communities' interests and priorities (ferry, air and bus).



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Need for integrated transport policy and timetable, as transport for island communities is not just a service (it's a lifeline, it's a right). ▪ Introduction of public subsidies for travel costs for islanders.
<p>Economic Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Revise current legislation to ensure that it is island proofed and does not obstruct the development of the island economy. ▪ Recognise that boosting economic development on an island requires joint thinking with other policies and opportunities beyond those directly focusing on the island. ▪ Explore the possibility of funding schemes to encourage the development of small, local businesses on the island. ▪ Consider the development of minimum legally binding requirements in relation to digital connectivity, starting from the periphery. ▪ Explore the possibility of introducing a mobile abattoir to island communities.

Orkney 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 Orkney we have identified the following specific traits to Orkney:

In terms of sustainable economic development, participants made it clear that, in many key sectors such as agriculture, building and renewable energy, derogations to current law and policy are essential to allow for a degree of flexibility in relation to the unique environment of the



islands. At present, the likes of health and safety procedures result in too much 'red tape', which acts as a deterrent to those who would be inclined to open a business on the island. Orkney also has a huge amount of renewable energy potential that is currently being severely underutilized; installing infrastructure that allows excess renewable energy to be sold directly back into the national grid through an interconnector would be transformative for the island community.

The introduction of an island focused housing strategy would have a positive ripple effect on the sustainability of the island and its population. At present, housing stock is negatively affected by the amount of holiday homes on the island, whilst there is a disincentive to renovate the numerous derelict houses due to the extra 20% VAT charge to upgrade a derelict house rather than construct a new build. However, any development of housing policy must not be developed centrally considering rural communities and island communities on the periphery, but rather should afford a degree of flexibility for the housing needs of different island communities.

Finally, the transport sector highlights the discrepancy and ineffectiveness of policies adopted and sought by non-islanders. There is a need to revise this sector to ensure that it is driven by island communities, and that it is recognised as being a 'lifeline' service for islanders rather than just an economic service. Crucially, the cost of both air and ferry travel is seen as extremely expensive, and measures should be taken to effectively reduce this cost where possible and allow for uniform reductions to be applied to all ferry services operating from the island.

It should also be noted that, in general, there is concern that many of the services and facilities on the island are being centralised to Kirkwall, resulting in the decline of services elsewhere on the island. Caution should be taken even within islands themselves to ensure that policies and strategies take into consideration the differing rurality's and needs of communities on islands.



What now?

First and foremost we wish to thank those who attended the consultation events on Orkney. 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/>

