

Shetland Mainland Report



Island: Shetland mainland

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This report has been produced by the Strathclyde Centre for Environmental Law and Governance (SCELG) and Scottish Island 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 Shetland mainland. 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 3 June 2019 a consultation event took place in Lerwick between 7:30pm and 10:00pm. The event was attended by 10 people, including one person from Fair Isle and one person from Out Skerries and the goal was to capture both what works well on the island and the challenges faced by the community on Shetland mainland. 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.

Shetland mainland as a great place to live

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

- Tranquility
- Community spirit
- Tolerance
- Environment
- Safety
- Sociable
- Good services
- Culture, history and heritage
- Sense of identity
- Resourcefulness and resilience
- Extended families
- Many folks do OK financially (i.e. salary)



The event on Shetland mainland highlighted an island with a strong community and a strong sense of identity, with culture, history and music very much at the heart of it. Participants were pleased with the level and quantity of services offered to the island community. Shetland mainland is clearly blessed by natural beauty and people acknowledge that the environment is also what makes it a great place to live. However, it is the peace and quiet and the overall quality of life that brings people back to Shetland. The participant from Fair Isle highlighted that the island is doing particularly well in part because it has been able to develop a “brand” that has been able to attract investment and people. The Bird Observatory and developments in energy have also been driving forces on the island.





Challenges on Shetland mainland

The consultation moved on to discuss the current challenges on Shetland mainland 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):

- Depopulation
- Economic Development
- Environmental Protection
- Health and wellbeing
- Community empowerment
- Transport
- Digital Connectivity
- Fuel Poverty
- Land management
- Biosecurity
- Climate change
- Lower cost of living

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 prioritisation in the framework of the National Islands Plan.

The areas discussed more in depth were:

- Transport
- Economic Development
- Depopulation

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 Shetland mainland:

Challenge	Suggestion from participants
Depopulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transport timetable needs to be integrated and timetables needs to be informed by island communities - there needs to be a legally binding obligation upon transport providers to consult with island communities ▪ Promote a digital connectivity environment that enables remote working and the delivery of essential services online (for example telehealth)
Economic Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for a formal recognition of the unique challenges faced by islands and island communities when it comes to promote sustainable economic development



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the possibility of adopting an island allowance to take into account the higher costs of living on an island • Discuss the possibility to reconsider the Hub system, which promotes centralised and large scale public procurement
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Framing and recognition of transport as a lifeline service and not just as an economic service, especially when the North Link Ferries contract will expire • Consider the possibility of reinstating more inner isles flights • Integrating the timetable so that people living on smaller and more remote isles can connect with air and ferry links • Promote and fund more non fossil fuel ferry fleets

Shetland mainland 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 Shetland mainland we have identified the following specific traits:

Firstly, the three areas discussed in more depth by participants: transport, increasing population and economic development are all interlinked. It is just another example of how life on island communities is integrated. Transport, in particular, was seen as key to provide a pillar to sustaining population and to boost economic development. Many aspects of transport were discussed, but one concept that was developed very strongly and clearly was that of security of service. For an island to grow, both in terms of numbers of people living there and in terms of its economy, residents need to be sure that key services will be there in the future. It will be impossible to attract new people to Shetland mainland, and in particular to more remote isles, if



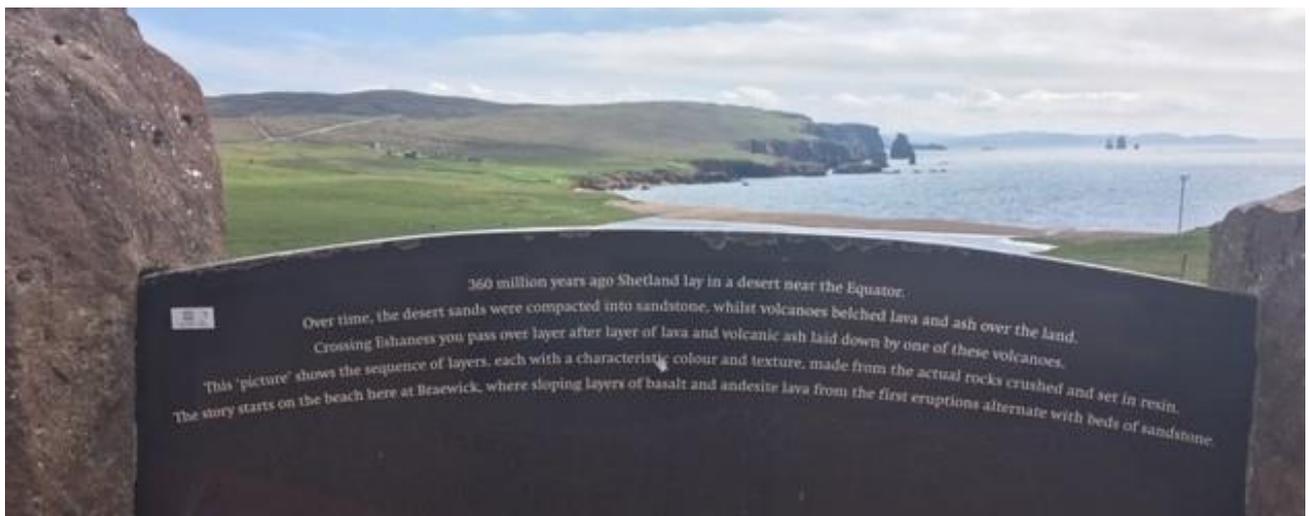
transport links are not secured, but also if education and health is not guaranteed. In other words, security of service is crucial for functional and viable communities. In addition to the concept of security of service, the frustration about non-integrated timetables that do not take into account the voice of island communities was made very clear. There needs to be a legally binding obligation upon transport providers to be informed by island communities when timetables are decided and/or amended. One further aspect mentioned by some participants is that ferries need to be climate proofed and need to make a conscious contribution to the fight against climate change. Cleaner and more energy efficient vessels need to be put in the water.

Secondly, economic development is also key to the prosperity of the island. However, even in this case, the participants made it very clear that this did not mean growth without limits or just with monetary parameters in mind. There was a rich discussion about whether economic development should not be measured in terms of better quality of life and happiness and not just economic output. Parallel to this important change of mindset, it was also made abundantly clear that some existing economic structures penalise island communities and, in this case, Shetland mainland in an unfair way. The Hub System, according to which public procurement operates centrally and on large scale procurements, makes it impossible for small scale providers on island to compete. Businesses operating in the construction sector or, from a different angle of society, school will purchase their equipment from the mainland because it would still be cheaper than being served by small businesses on the island. At the intersection of environment and economic development a concern was raised about Shetland being used as an “electricity generator” for the mainland. While clearly acknowledging the benefits (from a climate change perspective) of wind energy, there was a concern that the island was being inundated by unnecessary windfarms - just for the possibility of exporting energy back to the mainland through interconnectors. Shetland mainland could already be energy independent via renewables and it seemed, by some, unnecessary to pursue more wind farms at this stage.

Thirdly, the event on Shetland mainland highlighted the unique challenges of living on an island. Two examples come to mind. On the one hand, people from Shetland mainland need to devote



their attention every year to fund raise so that their kids can compete in sports competitions on the mainland. One participant mentioned a staggering amount of £70K per year for participating in swimming competitions. When Shetland mainland asked Aberdeen and Inverness for once to come up to Shetland their answer was a very simple *"We cannot afford it..."* On the other hand, the participant from Out Skerries talked about what is still a very resilient and wonderful community, but one that feels detached from mainland Shetland. There is a sense of unnecessary centralisation and for a need for more local "small" democracy and better community empowerment. Some issues already mentioned are relevant for realities, such as Out Skerries, where the lack of integrated timetables means that, in order to attend a 2-hour meeting, a person will need to be away from their home for three days. Some solutions were suggested to this challenging elements of "islandness", some being the consideration of an island allowance to take into account the higher cost of living on an island. For others the solution starts from a government recognition of the extraordinary emergency that some islands are facing and building from that recognition policies and strategies that are informed by island communities.





What now?

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

Annex

Challenges about living and working on Shetland mainland (Lerwick)

<p>-Depopulation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Security of services ➤ Housing ➤ Maintain population – possibly increase slightly ➤ Better planned development for housing and industry ➤ Modern version of ‘toonships’ (ecofriendly, affordable and rural) 	<p>-Economic Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ More apprenticeship business opportunities ➤ Centre of innovation for new technology ➤ Keep all high skilled jobs ➤ More job opportunities ➤ Promoted more and from tourism ➤ Help for students ➤ See all communities thriving 	<p>-Transport</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Cheaper transport (inter and outer) especially to South ➤ Tunnels to some of the islands ➤ Better transport (both within islands and to the mainland) ➤ Cheaper transport ➤ Electric ferries ➤ Tunnels
<p>-Digital Connectivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Better connectivity (broadband mobile) ➤ Communications 	<p>- Environmental protection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Seabird (lots of lots) 	<p>Land management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Island specific support for crofters/farmers ➤ Not covered in windfarms to supply energy to the mainland
<p>-Community empowerment</p>	<p>-Fuel poverty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Cheaper energy 	<p>Biosecurity</p>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Smaller local democracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Cheaper heating ➤ Less postcode discrimination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No new establishment of invasive non-native species
<p>Lower cost of living</p>	<p>Climate change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Carbon neutral ➤ Not affected by climate change 	<p>Health and well-being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Opportunities to grow your own food ➤ Address the problems in our society. Be honest, supportive, tolerant, acceptant, etc.... ➤ Medical