



## Stronsay Report



Island: Stronsay

Date: 02/07/2019

*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 Stronsay. 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 2<sup>nd</sup> of July 2019, a focus group took place on Stronsay, and was attended by five people. The goal was to capture both what works well on the islands and the challenges faced by the community on Stronsay. 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.

## Stronsay as a great place to live

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

- Environment
- Opportunity to own land
- Education
- Healthcare
- Community
- Farming Culture
- Heritage



It is evident that there are many things that make Stronsay a fantastic place to live. The list above only affords a glimpse, but it does highlight that participants value the sense of community on the island, and that the culture and heritage that stem from Stronsay are integral to their identity as islanders. Additionally, the environment and the general quality of life on the island is considered as a positive contributing factor, with specific mention of the currently excellent standard of primary healthcare and on-island education, with participants stating that they would support a commitment to futureproof these island services to ensure their longevity. The community also values the general environment of the island, and the scenery and wildlife it affords them.

## Challenges on Stronsay

The consultation moved on to discuss the current challenges on Stronsay 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
- Community Empowerment
- Transport
- Digital Connectivity
- Biosecurity
- Housing
- Tourism



## The National Islands Plan and the Response from the Participants

During the consultation, 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
- Economic Development
- Transport
- Digital Connectivity

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

Challenge	Suggestion from participants
<b>Housing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 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.</li> <li>▪ Revise current policy to promote the repopulation of the island by an economically active demographic.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Focus on affordable housing and diverse job opportunities.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Economic Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Recognise that boosting economic development on an island requires joint thinking with other policies and opportunities beyond those directly focusing on the island.</li> <li>▪ Support innovative development of local resources and economy that specifically focus on increasing economic opportunities for young people.</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Renewable energy island policy that focuses on how best to utilise renewable energy potential on islands to ensure that it benefits island economy.</li> <li>▪ Review limitations of interconnector.</li> <li>▪ 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.</li> </ul>
<b>Transport</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Discussion with ferry provider to discuss improvement of the fleet in terms of frequency and capacity.</li> <li>▪ Legal requirement for community input into revision of integrated transport timetabling with increased frequency of ferry crossings</li> </ul>
<b>Digital Connectivity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Revise digital connectivity policy to discuss with service providers connectivity as a right/lifeline rather than just as an economic service.</li> <li>▪ Consider the development of minimum legally binding requirements in relation to digital connectivity, starting from the periphery.</li> </ul>

### Stronsay 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 Stronsay we have identified the following specific traits:

Firstly, participants made it very clear that achieving sustainable economic development was heavily reliant on the improvement of the current standard of digital connectivity, which is very inconsistent across the island. Although a 5G trial has been in place since February for a limited number of residents, and is hailed as a success by the participants, the longevity of this project has not been guaranteed. Consequently, although there are potential business opportunities on the island, specifically in relation to remote working and second jobs, these are currently unable to be utilised due to a lack of consistent and reliable connectivity. Improving digital connectivity would increase opportunities for employment, which would consequently encourage more people to move to the island.

In terms of population, it should be noted that Stronsay previously suffered from an aging demographic and that there was concerns regarding the closure of the school due to the lack of children on the island. However, largely due to the marketing of the island by the community themselves, the school population is now thriving with fantastic facilities in terms of education.

The economic landscape of the island could be revolutionised if the community was able to export its community produced renewable energy. The community has been very successful with its turbines, which fund a lot of projects such as kids school books, laptops etc. However, the turbines are currently heavily curtailed by legislation (70 -80%) and are therefore far from achieving their full, transformative potential. More renewable community energy support, to ensure that the island community benefit directly from the profits made, would allow more money to be invested in the community, by the community, and could have a ripple effect across all sectors.

Participants also indicated that they faced challenges in relation to the housing sector, with a lack of available, fit for purpose housing to rent and numerous vacant properties. Revising current housing policy to ensure that it creates locally affordable housing stock, with incentives to encourage the renovation of currently derelict properties, would be extremely beneficial for the community on Stronsay.

In terms of transport, the current infrastructure in place for ferries does not provide the necessary 'lifeline' service that the island communities are wholly reliant on. Participants indicated that the current ferry fleet was outdated and unreliable, and that there was a complete lack of public transport available on the island itself. There is a need to revise the transport sector to ensure that it is driven by island communities, and that it is fully recognized as being a 'lifeline' service for islanders rather than just an economic service.





## What now?

First and foremost we wish to thank those who attended the consultation event on Stronsay. 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](mailto: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/>





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