

Unst Report



Island: Unst

Date: 04/06/2019

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 Unst. 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 Unst between 7:30pm and 10:00pm. The event was attended by 12 people and the goal was to capture both what works well on the island and the challenges faced by the community on Unst. 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.

Unst as a great place to live

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

- Safety
- People look out for each other
- Social activities
- Good services and facilities
- Natural beauty
- Clean environment
- Peace and quiet
- Community events
- Outlook and outgoing
- Education
- Good health care

The event on Unst highlighted an island that benefits from a stunning beauty and where people feel safe. The island also features very good services, including excellent health services, good schools and wide range of shops. The island also possesses a very rich history and culture scene and has attracted both in the past (military) and in current times (aquaculture) good jobs with good salaries. However, this does mean that the island has always been reliant on one main employer.



Challenges on Unst

The consultation moved on to discuss the current challenges on Unst 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
- Free Music Lessons

Picture

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
- Community empowerment
- Environment

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 Unst:

Challenge	Suggestion from participants
Community empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop simplified procedures for access to funding for small scale community projects ▪ Develop a platform to exchange concerns and good practices from community groups involved in community projects (especially small scale)

Economic Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better understand the economy of islands and in particular those that are heavily reliant on one employer in order to have plans in place should that employer cease to operate • Promote diversification of an island economy by supporting start ups and shared business space
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement an integrated timetable that works for island communities • Explore the feasibility of fixed links between islands, also by drawing on examples elsewhere • Develop a plan to ameliorate and update an ageing ferry fleet and ferry land based infrastructure.
Environment	<p>Food security</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote funding for local community driven projects aimed at dealing with food security (e.g. community allotments, community kitchens, etc...) <p>Fossil fuel dependency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and promotion of community renewables • Support and promotion of electric vehicles

Unst 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 Unst we have identified the following specific traits:

Firstly, Unst has a rich history of hard working people that goes back centuries concentrated in a few well paid employment sectors. From the military to the current jobs in aquaculture, this has brought prosperity to the island, but, in a way, it has also stifled a certain entrepreneurial spirit. Against this background, participants raised an interest in promoting a wide range of community activities, from shops to allotments (some of which are already happening), but there appears to be a need to support training of island community members in community projects. In addition, more information about existing and future available funding opportunities would be welcome. Rather than large-scale projects, the participants were mainly focusing on small-scale projects that can have an immediate impact on the community.

Secondly, the above-mentioned discussion on the community boosting the economy in a co-operative manner is seen as a means to become more resilient should a large employer decide to leave or interrupts its operations. The participants made it very clear that Unst needs to diversify its economy in order to promote sustainable economic development. However, it was acknowledged that sustainable economic development is tied with many other sectors that need to be improved, promoted and supported. Digital connectivity, transport and housing were mentioned as some of the key elements that would be key to promote economic development on Unst. Sustainable economic development could also be boosted by community spaces where start-ups could operate and thrive.

Thirdly, transport was discussed as a key challenge on Unst. There were two aspects that are worth highlighting. On the one hand, more integrated timetables with input from the community could go a long way to making life on the island easier and promoting health and well-being and job opportunities. On the other hand, although the capital costs would be high, fixed links (tunnels) should be explored since in the long-term they could be not only effective, but also cost-effective. Meanwhile, Shetland as a whole is facing an ageing fleet and an ageing infrastructure.

Fourthly, environment was a strong concern for some of the participants. Food security was discussed and was considered an even bigger challenge in the long-term once climate change will



lead to more global negative effects. As a solution, community projects focusing on more food grown locally were discussed, amongst other possible solutions. A second environmental challenge was the over-reliance on fossil fuels. Climate change is a big concern for many of the participants and there is a strong desire to put in place mitigation measures, especially in the transport sector through, for example, the deployment of more electric vehicles.

One last but very important comment is that most, if not all, of the areas discussed are linked to each other. Community empowerment and community based projects are important to diversify the economy and promote sustainable economic development. The latter requires better and more integrated transport links. Transport is linked to the environment with cleaner ferries and electric vehicles. The discussion on Unst highlighted that island communities operate in an integrated manner and are holistic communities.





What now?

First and foremost we wish to thank those who attended the consultation events on Unst. 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 Unst

<p>-Depopulation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Hassle free building planning process ➤ More jobs for young people 	<p>-Economic Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Dark skies project / Northern Lights ➤ Planetarium simmer dim ➤ Employment opportunities ➤ More community involvement by young people ➤ Local food processing factory – salmon, mussels, geese ➤ Decentralisation from Lerwick ➤ Investment in good jobs ➤ Reasonable shipping charges ➤ More diversity of employment 	<p>-Transport</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Bridges and tunnels ➤ Better public transport ➤ Inter-island flights ➤ Fixed links ➤ Good local public transport (Around Unst) ➤ Better ferry service
<p>-Digital Connectivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Better telecommunications ➤ Good internet 	<p>- Environmental protection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Better recycling – local island centre 	<p>Land management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Community growing space / polycarbonate / access to land



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Better broadband 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Alternative green energy ➤ Adoption of all climate change recommendations ➤ Resilient infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Not covered in windfarms to supply energy to the mainland
<p>-Community empowerment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ongoing funding for community projects ➤ Men’s shed / Repairs / Recycling centre ➤ Locally cooked evening meal choice ➤ More community based events, drum circles, gardens, art projects ➤ Schemes / funding to attract young folk ➤ Repair Cafe 	<p>-Fuel poverty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Reduce fuel tax (road and heating) ➤ Alternative energy systems 	<p>Free music lessons</p>
<p>Health and well-being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Building resilience into community 		

