



Seirbheisean Dualchais
Outer Hebrides Heritage Services

Museum nan Eilean

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

Forward Plan 2025-30

Two museums;



Museum
nan Eilean
Stornoway

Museum nan Eilean

Lews Castle

Stornoway

Isle of Lewis

Outer Hebrides

HS2 0XS



Museum
nan Eilean
Lionacleit

Museum nan Eilean

Sgoil Lionacleit

Lionacleit

Isle of Benbecula

Outer Hebrides

HS7 5PJ



Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

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Museum nan Eilean Forward Plan 2025-30

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Introduction

This Forward Plan sets out the strategic objectives of Museum nan Eilean for the period April 2025 – March 2030.

This plan is an updated version of the 2023-29 plan, which was adapted following the cyber-attack which hit all Comhairle nan Eilean systems in November 2023 and takes into account the effects of data loss on the Museums Service. The plan is also in line with our museums accreditation timetable.

The Forward Plan will be reviewed regularly but a full update will take place within at least 5 years.

However, as Comhairle nan Eilean Siar budgets are currently only set on an annual basis, there will be a need to review objectives and budgets annually to take into account the financial situation.

This plan was developed following input from staff on the mission, vision, and values of the Museum & Heritage Services and in identifying the key aims and objectives for the coming years. The plan has also taken into account the needs of users/ non-users as a result of an independent survey carried out in 2022, and wider sector strategies.

What does heritage mean to us?



Museum Statement of Purpose:

A Museum Service (Museum nan Eilean) with unique collections representing a cross section of island life and culture, which are cared for and managed to Accreditation Standards. It also disseminates and makes accessible the islands' heritage and culture through exhibitions, learning resources and interpretive programmes.

From the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Business Plan

Our Mission 2025 – we do this...

We promote the value and potential of Outer Hebrides heritage by safeguarding collections and making them accessible for present and future audiences through exhibitions, engagement and research, while upholding professional standards.

Our Vision 2025 – so that...

Our rich heritage will be valued, preserved and enjoyed as a key asset of the Outer Hebrides, with the necessary investment and professional skills, enabling it to grow sustainably and ethically, so that our collections, Gaelic culture and intangible heritage will enrich, educate, challenge, inspire and reflect diverse audiences.

Museum Core Values

Our core values are at the heart of our Museums and Heritage Services and underpin all that we do. They define who we are, how we work, what we believe in and stand for.

- **We are inclusive** by being welcoming, relevant & accessible to all
- **We strive for excellence** through being professional, ethical, accountable and meeting current sector standards
- **We encourage learning** through engagement, creativity, collaboration and innovation

Wider commitments to;

- Protecting the heritage of the Outer Hebrides
- Gaelic
- Our remit covering all the Outer Hebrides
- Supporting the wider Outer Hebrides heritage sector

1. Governance

Museum nan Eilean’s governing body is Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, the local authority for the Outer Hebrides. The [Scheme of Administration](#) details the membership, quorum, purpose and functions of the Comhairle and its Committees, Sub-Committees, Panels and Joint Consultative Committees. It also regulates certain aspects of procedure. It makes explicit reference on page 40 to the provision and management of museums for the display of antiquities, works of art and objects of educational and scientific interest being under the remit of the Sustainable Development Committee.

Local authority museums are deemed to have the power to operate museums through the **Public Libraries Consolidation (Scotland) Act 1887**. “The library authority or museum or art gallery authority, as the case may be, may from time to time for the purposes of this Act purchase, feu or rent any land, or any suitable building; and may erect any building suitable for public libraries, public museums, or for any one or more of those objects, and may alter or extend any buildings for such purposes, and repair and improve the same respectively, and fit up, furnish, and supply the same respectively with all requisite furniture, fittings, and conveniences..... The library or museum or art gallery authority, as the case may be, shall manage, regulate, and control all libraries or museums or art galleries established under this Act, or to which this Act applies; and shall have power to do all things necessary for such management, including the following powers; that is to say, to purchase books, newspapers, reviews, magazines, and other periodicals, statutory, pictures, engravings, maps, specimens of art and science, ... tape recordings and films]and such other articles and things as may be necessary for the establishment, increase, and use of the libraries or museums or art galleries under their control, and to do all things necessary for keeping the same in a proper state of preservation and repair:”

Section 32 of the above Act states “All libraries, museums, or art galleries established under this Act, or to which this Act applies, shall be open to the public free of charge, and no charge shall be made for the use of books or magazines issued for home reading.”

Section 163 of the 1973 Local Government Scotland Act refers to public libraries, museums and galleries “each regional council shall have a duty in consultation with regional councils within their region to ensure that there is an adequate provision of facilities for the purposes of the said Act in that application for the inhabitants of their region”.

2. Background to Museum nan Eilean

Museum nan Eilean was established in 1983 as the local authority Museum Service for Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council) and forms part of the Heritage Services section within the Chief Executives Department.

For the most part the Collections were built up following the establishment of the Museum Service in 1983, with two significant exceptions;

1. The earliest collection material was from the Lewis Museum, run by the Lewis and Harris Museum Society, and established in the 1950s. In 1983, an agreement with The Lewis Museum Trust led to Museum nan Eilean taking on the care and management of this collection.
2. The Calbost Collection is a highly significant social history collection built up by Angus Macleod for his private museum at Calbost, over a long period. In 1999 it was brought into the care and management of Museum nan Eilean by a similar agreement to that made with The Lewis Museum Trust.

Soon after the establishment of the Museum Service, the collections were re-located to Stornoway Town Hall, where display galleries were developed. In 1988 a smaller satellite accredited museum was established on Benbecula, as part of a new Community School at Sgoil Lionacleit with material from Museum nan Eilean relating to Uist and Benbecula displayed there. A Museum Development post based in Uist was also created at this time to care for these collections and make them accessible through future exhibitions.

Richard Langhorne was the curator from when the museum was established in 1983 until 2008. He was a key figure in expanding the island wide collections, moving the museum to Francis Street, attaining Museum Registration and then Accreditation, expanding the professional heritage team to include a Conservation Officer and Islands Archaeologist. As a Monument Fellow, funded by the Museums Association's Knowledge Transfer programme, he drafted the Documentation Policy and was instrumental in the establishment of the Collections Committee.

In 2013 an archivist was employed by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, following on from the 3-year ERDF funded Tasglann project. At this time, the Comhairle archives were transferred to the care and management of the Archive Service (Tasglann nan Eilean).

In 2015 a new museum and archives were built in Stornoway adjacent to Lews Castle, replacing the Francis Street Museum. The museum displays focus on inter-related themes of the land, the sea, the way of life and Gaelic-rich culture

of the people of the Outer Hebrides. A unique Gaelic-led approach to interpretation reflects the bilingual nature of the islands with objects, archives, oral, audio-visual and interactive displays helping to make the information and key messages accessible to all. The museum also creates an opportunity to showcase the network of independent museums and Comainn Eachdraidh groups there are across the islands.

The facility at Museum nan Eilean, Lionacleit continues as an integral part of the Heritage Service and is a platform for a changing exhibitions programme to showcase our own collections through in-house curated exhibitions, and also for touring exhibitions, community projects and the display of national loans. This museum has a different audience profile due to its location within Sgoil Lionacleit.

3. Key Achievements over the last 6 years (2018 – 2024)

2018
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scotland’s Early Silver touring exhibition from National Museums Scotland on display in MnE Stornoway for May & June and attracted 12,000 visitors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Heritage Service supported the development of an independent Heritage Forum. The Outer Hebrides Heritage Forum (Comann Dualchas Innse Gall) open to local community heritage organisations was constituted on 21 August 2018
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership projects for the Year of Young People included collaborations with SCAPE Trust (St Andrews), Taigh Chearsabhagh Museum & Art Centre and local schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pròiseact an Fhìor-Àite (the Great Place Project) funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund launched November 2018. Led by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and partners including Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the Outer Hebrides Heritage Forum and a range of local and national partners from across heritage, arts and tourism sectors. The purpose of the project was to develop a place-based Heritage Strategy for the Outer Hebrides with a ten year vision and an accompanying Action Plan. Central to the work was identifying strategic approaches to support and deliver appropriate heritage-led economic development, infrastructure requirements and priorities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme of temporary exhibitions in Stornoway and Benbecula: <i>Ulaidh: Treasure</i>, Donald Mackenzie <i>Threads</i>.
2019
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Iolaire 100 Years Project - a partnership between the Heritage Service, Acair and An Lanntair. Funded by Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS) World War One Fund, Acair and CnES enabled: Publication of ‘Call na h-Iolaire The Darkest Dawn: The Story of the Iolaire Tragedy’ by Malcolm MacDonald and Donald John MacLeod; Iolaire 100 exhibition of 100 portraits in oils by artist Margaret Ferguson at An Lanntair; ‘An Iolaire The Iolaire’ at Museum nan Eilean Lews Castle - a special exhibition curated in-house to commemorate the disaster. 1,015 pupils visited Museum nan Eilean or An Lanntair to undertake activities in relation to Iolaire exhibitions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership project started with Shetland Museum and Orkney Museum to create new museum exhibitions ‘Between Islands’ funded by Leader Programme and led by Alex MacDonald from An Lanntair
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discover The Flow Country exhibition in partnership with the RSPB and the Peatlands Partnership. Peatland in the far north of Scotland is a special place for wildlife and also plays a key role in defending us against climate change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme of temporary exhibitions in Stornoway and Benbecula: <i>An Leabhar Mor</i>, <i>Fishing the Minch</i>, <i>Gaelic Books Council</i>

2020

- Dualchas na Mara project (funded by MGS and Bòrd na Gàidhlig) – a programme of learning and recreational activities and events for all ages to promote the Year of Coasts & Waters and links to the islands’ heritage /collections (due to Covid19 converted into a virtual project)
- During Covid closure of our museums the focus turned to collections work including inventory, photography, contemporary collecting, digitising and making accessible online. Of particular note was;
 - Collections Revealed: a series of weekly bi-lingual Facebook posts by our Collections Officer to show what was happening in store and revealing never before seen artefacts to the public
 - Gibson Project: which encompassed the digitisation of almost 800 letters from the museum’s collection by the Visitor Services Officer and the transcription of these newly digitised documents by the archive collections assistant and Visitor Assistants (who were now based from home) under the co-ordination of the Archivist. These are now being shared weekly on our blog and Facebook, and are regularly used for enquiries or display.

2021

- The Sònraichte Project (funded by MGS) enabled work on assemblages from Museum nan Eilean’s archaeology collections (spanning finds from more than 10 sites across the Outer Hebrides which had legacy issues), resulting in improved and standardised documentation with detailed descriptions, which enables finds to be properly catalogued and enhance accessibility of this material for educational and research purposes. The project has also identified potential topics for further research and has tracked down finds from incomplete assemblages as part of due diligence with other research organisations. A number of Sònraichte Project Open Days were held at Museum nan Eilean to showcase the project’s outcomes and behind-the-scenes work, generating public interest in the archaeology collections
- Museum nan Eilean, Lews Castle reopened to the public on 15 June 2021. During Q2 there was a total of 14,460 visitors. This figure was lower than previous years due to the need to restrict numbers to meet Covid protocols
- ‘Get Into Summer’ Project, funded by MGS, enabled delivery of a variety of free outdoor activities for children and families during the summer holidays including giant Chess, Draughts and Castle building at Lews Castle, a Treasure Hunt in the Castle Grounds (in partnership with Comunn na Gàidhlig) and heritage-themed trips in Eriskay and Lewis (also in partnership with CnAG)
- Heritage Asset Audit completed as part of Great Place Strategy
- British Museum Knowledge Exchange Partnership enabled two members of our staff to benefit from the exchange plus two members of British Museum staff

2022

- Hosted 'Scotland's Photograph Album' touring exhibition from the National Galleries of Scotland and the National Library of Scotland with accompanying partnership engagement programme
- New Heritage Service website developed (funded by MGS) in order to improve online information and access for users
- A Communications, Marketing & Advocacy Strategy (funded by MGS) developed by Morrison Media in close collaboration with the Heritage Team
- New branding developed and to be launched (in 2023) alongside the new website and marketing strategy
- Archaeology Awakened Project (funded by MGS) built on the work of the Sònraichte Project and enabled work to complete documentation of Traigh na Berie archaeology assemblage, and associated public and schools engagement workshops
- Hosted Erskine Beveridge: Collecting Relics, Ruins and Ways of Life. A touring exhibition from Historic Environment Scotland
- Programme of temporary exhibitions including: *Collections Revealed* – an in-house curated exhibition to showcase some of the new artefacts and archives that have been donated to the museums and archive over the past few years; *Threads* by Donald Mackenzie; mini-exhibition to commemorate the Platinum Jubilee, using photographs and document from our archives.

2023

- Conservation Officer post has been filled after being vacant for almost 4 years
- Hebridean Digital Stories Project (funded by the Art Fund) launched and project officer in place to develop digital resources and interpretation solutions
- Delivery of activities programme across all islands to encourage visitors back into museums and provide opportunities for creative practitioners, funded by Creative Scotland Covid Recovery scheme
- Great Place Strategy launched
- Successful funding bid to Art Fund to enable two members of the Heritage Team to undertake a research trip to Nova Scotia in advance of *Hebridean Homecoming* exhibition and conference in 2025
- Hosted Gathering Light. Museum nan Eilean was the only Scottish venue selected to host this British Museum Spotlight Loan exhibition, which included one of the most significant pieces of Bronze Age metalwork ever discovered in Britain. The exhibition, which included objects from our own collections, was enjoyed by over 12,000 visitors.
- Hosted GLEAN / Ro-roinn. A touring exhibition on early 20th century female filmmakers and photographers in Scotland. A partnership between The Glasgow School of Art's Exhibitions Director Jenny Brownrigg (curator) and Vanishing Scotland Archive. It featured works from Violet Banks (1886-1985), MEM Donaldson (1876-1958), Beatrice Garvie (1872-1959), Jenny Gilbertson (1902-

1990), Johanna Kissling (1875-1961), Isabell Burton MacKenzie (1872-1958), Margaret Fay Shaw (1903-2004)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosted Remote & Rural Remedies. A touring exhibition from the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh which showcased the medical history of the Highlands and Islands over 500 years.
2024
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosted Seinn Spioradail: Soundscapes of the Highlands and Islands. On tour from Dr Frances Wilkins, Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen. The exhibition highlighted the sacred Gaelic song traditions of the region and explored sound recordings, film, objects, and a digital archive, soundmap and interactive virtual tour.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosted Rain Coming from the Hebrides. An exhibition of archive images of the Outer Hebrides taken in 1977 by Swedish photographer Gösta Sandberg. The images have now been gifted to Tasglann nan Eilean and this was the first time we have exhibited them in our museum.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Bornais Assemblage of 500 boxes of archaeological material which was awarded to Museum nan Eilean by Treasure Trove Scotland was deposited by Cardiff University. This resulted in a huge cataloguing and logistical project for the Heritage Team over many months.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosted Hebridean Light & Archaeology Exhibition. Photographs by Gus Wylie is an acclaimed photographer, who has photographed the Hebrides over the last three decades. The archaeological artefacts on display were recent acquisitions which Museum nan Eilean bid for through the Treasure Trove Scotland process. They included chance finds that were found locally by members of the public and highlighted selected pieces from the recently received Bornais assemblage.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosted Call of the Curlew Exhibition. A celebration of the Curlew through artwork, poetry, film, and sculpture along with conservation awareness banners by six UK artists - Barbara Murray, Paco Valera, Hester Cox, Sally Zaranko, June Gersten Roberts and Stephanie Smith.

4. Current Situation

4.1 Staffing

Between March and September 2019, Museum nan Eilean lost four members of staff. This represented more than 50 per cent of the professional staff. Two of these posts were disestablished, one was only filled in April 2023 and the fourth (Heritage Manager) remains vacant, as although still on the establishment there is no budget available.

Museum nan Eilean currently has the following core staff;

- Museum Development Officer (1 FTE) – based in Benbecula
- Conservation Officer (0.9 FTE) – based in Stornoway
- Visitor Services Officer (1 FTE) – based in Stornoway
- Collections Officer (0.8 FTE) – based in Stornoway
- Visitor Assistants (3.5FTE) – as from May 2023 the 0.5 is based in Benbecula, with the other 3 based in Stornoway.

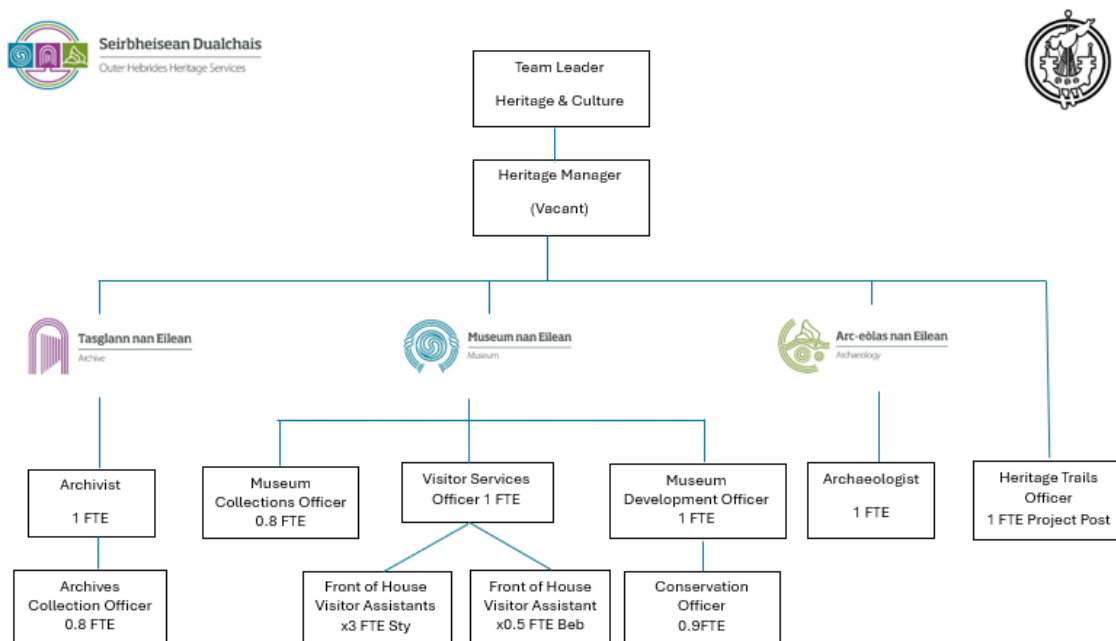
The Museum Service works closely with the Archive Service (Tasglann nan Eilean) which shares the building in Stornoway;

- Archivist (1 FTE)
- Archives Officer (0.8 FTE)

The Museum Service also works closely with the Archaeology Service;

- Archaeologist (1 FTE) but only a small percentage of their time can be allocated to museum input

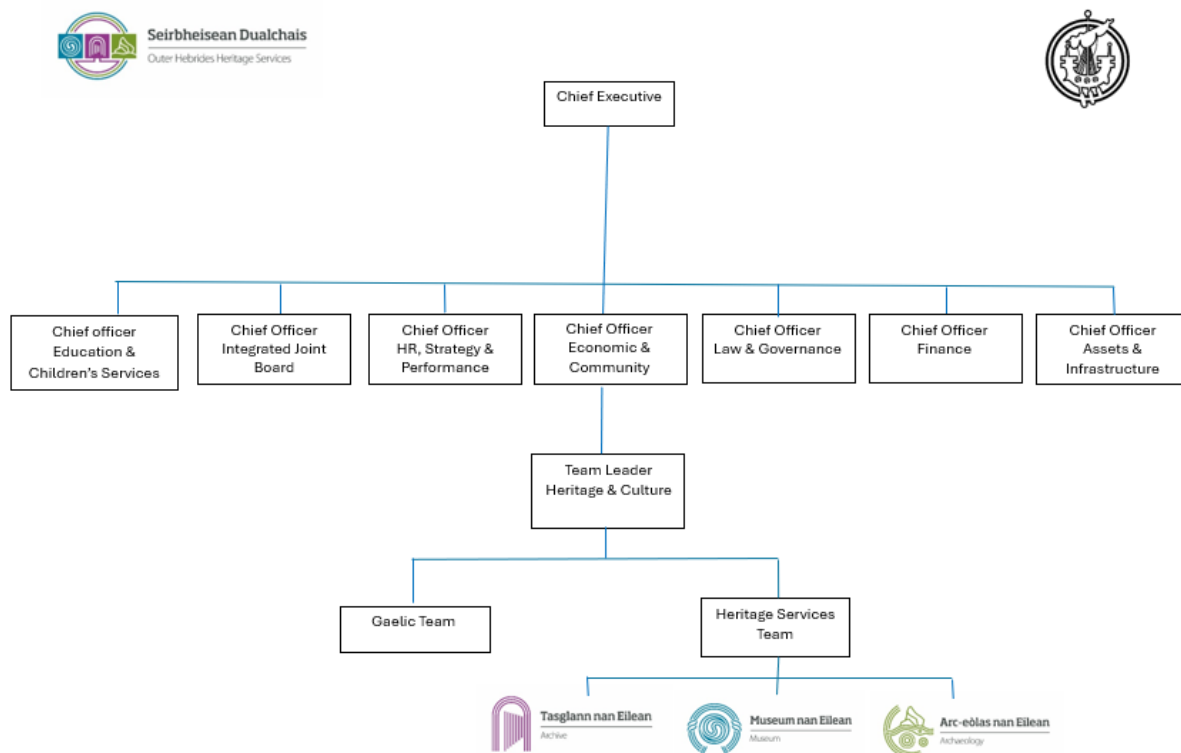
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Staff Structure October 2024
(detail for Heritage Service – part of Chief Executives Department)



The Heritage Service consisting of all three services – museum, archives and archaeology - was recently, following an internal CnES restructure, placed under a new Team Leader for Heritage and Culture.

The post of Heritage Manager which would sit under the Team Leader is currently vacant but remains on the establishment. There is an ambition to have it refilled if funding from CnES budget can be identified.

**Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Wider Structure 2024
(detail for Heritage Service – part of Chief executives Department)**



Externally Funded posts

From January 2023 until May 2024 there was also an externally funded (Art Fund) project post

- Hebridean Digital Stories Officer (1 FTE)

From May 2023 there is a two year externally funded (Scottish Government) project post

- Hebridean Heritage Trails Officer (1 FTE)

4.3 Buildings

Museum nan Eilean holds collections at four locations:

- Museum & Tasglann nan Eilean, Lews Castle, Stornoway
- Museum nan Eilean, Lionacleit, Benbecula
- Museum Collection Store, Torlum, Benbecula
- Museum Collection Store, Marybank, Stornoway

The stores operated by the Heritage Service at Marybank and Torlum are not fit for purpose and are in a deteriorating state in terms of size, condition, facilities and accessibility for staff or visitors. This has been highlighted in the CnES Suitability Surveys, in a number of Risk Assessments and in our last accreditation assessment.

The Heritage Team created a brief that was submitted unsuccessfully to Islands Deal and to the UK Levelling Up Fund to obtain funding for a feasibility study and options appraisal to deliver two new facilities that would meet collections care standards for the future. It is increasingly recognised, nationally and internationally, that museum best practice is to take an open access approach to enable stored collections to be seen by visitors - including school groups, researchers and creatives. New Collection Resource Centres would themselves become unique visitor experiences enabling people to get closer to collections than ever before, while also reducing our environmental impact. Going forward, this remains one of our key aims and objectives.

4.4 Cyber Attack

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and all its systems were hit by a criminal cyber-attack in November 2023.

Access to the Collections Management System (CMS) was lost as a result of this incident which has had a huge impact on all areas of museum core duties. Information about the museum collections is as important as the objects themselves and the CMS held all relevant information: legal ownership, location, conservation treatments, hazardous warnings, photographs, measurements, description, object history, loans, inventory, valuation and insurance. Without this information it is nearly impossible to respond to visitor or research enquiries or contribute to planning for public exhibitions. Existing paper records, including the accession register tell us approximately what is in the collection, but this only holds basic information, is non searchable and does not include external collections managed and stored by MnE (LMT and

CC) or the handling collection. As a result, the Comhairle and Museum nan Eilean cannot account for the location, value, or condition of the public collections it has responsibility for.

Prior to the cyber-attack Museum nan Eilean was in the process of migrating the database to a cloud-based system operated by a CMS provider. Due to this work, much of the existing database had been transferred to them for testing and was salvageable but it took 14 months for the data to be restored. Data has been restored up until June 2023 but will not be operational until March 2025.

In addition to the data stored on the CMS the museum, and the wider Heritage Service, also lost access to phonelines (some were restored in summer 2024 but others not till autumn 2024), printers and most importantly the internal servers where all work files were stored. This has had an enormous impact on day-to-day workload for staff as many template forms, letters, plans and policies were lost which needed to be recreated. Staff have also spent a huge amount of time trying to reclaim or recover standard enquiry answers, exhibition text, research studies, photographs and associated files from partners, contractors, archived emails and stand-alone drives. This work is still on-going and we may never fully recover all that was lost.

4.5 Finances summary

Information relating to the budget out-turn for the year 2023-24, the budget for 2024-25, and comparisons with previous years, is not available at the time of writing and will follow in an Appendix.

The Museum Service continues to strive to increase income through donations and the new shop operation. In the period between 1st April to 31st October 2024, the donations total was £41,424 compared to £36,173 in 2023 and £24,297 in 2022.

The total shop sales between 1st April to 31st October 2024 was £38,015, with a profit of £16,000. The service will endeavor to expand the offer of stock available to purchase in 2025, and increase income, within the confines of staff, resources and space available.

The Museum & Heritage Service have successfully attracted a range of external funding for revenue projects over the last 6 years. This has helped to create additional capacity within the team, through funded posts, to enable extra activities to take place that would not otherwise have been possible within our

own budgets, especially in view of the loss of the two Heritage Officer posts which had been on the establishment until September 2019.

2019	Dualchas na Mara Project (Year of Coasts & Waters)	£25,000 £ 5,000	Bord na Gaidhlig MGS
2020	Covid Adaption Grant	£ 7,500	MGS
2020	Sonraichte Archaeology Project	£39,851	MGS
2021	Marketing Strategy, Visitor Survey & new Website	£38,766	MGS
2021	Cruinneachaidhean Foillsichte (Transcription of oral recordings & translation for new website)	£20,400	Bord na Gaidhlig
2021	Summer at Museum nan Eilean	£ 6,506	MGS
2021	Didseatach – digital	£40,000	Art Fund
2022	Archaeology Awakened	£45,000	MGS
2022	Covid Recovery Fund for Cultural Organisations	£15,000	Creative Scotland
2022	Hebridean Digital Stories	£46,000	Art Fund
2023- 2025	Heritage Trails Project	£70,000	Scottish Government
2023	Jonathon Ruffer Curator Research - Canada	£ 5,280	Art Fund
2023	Canada Research & conference	£ 7,000	Crown Estates
2023	Proiseact Forais – Growing our Heritage	£30,217	MGS
2024	Visitor Assistants – additional hours data recovery support	£20,000	Crown Estates
	Total	£421,520	

4.5 Visitor Figures

Both museums were closed during the Covid pandemic and therefore it is hard to compare across years. It is however felt that figures have not yet recovered to pre-Covid figures but there has been steady growth since each museum reopened.

Museum nan Eilean Stornoway had 23,051 visitors January to December 2023. The numbers from January to December 2024 were 23,594.

Museum nan Eilean, Lionacleit was particularly badly affected as it is based within a school and was therefore closed for nearly two years as no members

of the public (including parents) were allowed into school buildings in an effort to control infection. As it was closed for an extra year it took longer to get visitor figures back up to normal and data was subsequently lost in the cyber attack.

A number of externally funded post-Covid activity/event programmes helped us to attract audiences back to the museums. Of particular note was the special exhibition 'Scotland's Photograph Album', on tour from the National Galleries of Scotland, which came with a budget both for activities and marketing, and funding from Creative Scotland in 2022-23 for creative and cultural activities across both sites.

Similarly, a full programme of exhibitions in 2023-24: Gathering Light, Seinn Spioradail and Remote & Rural Remedies in Stornoway, both attracted good visitor figures and feedback. Due to the data loss the hard decision was taken to postpone Special Exhibitions in Stornoway from January 2024 until June 2025. As can be seen from the visitor figures this has not affected the draw of the museum in Stornoway. Visitors can still visit the core galleries and learn about the heritage of the Outer Hebrides.

In order to support visitor figures in Museum nan Eilean Lionacleit, following its long closure during Covid, it was agreed to keep exhibitions running in this venue. Therefore, there has been a full programme of exhibitions in 2023/24 Co-roinn | Glean, Remote & Rural Remedies, Gosta Sandberg, Hebridean Light & Archaeology, The Cry of the Curlew and Seinn Spioradail so that there has been topics to attract different audiences from medicine, environment, spiritual music to treasure trove finds and archive photography.

4.6 Covid Lockdown Projects

While both museums were closed, the team worked on a number of projects, including the digitization and transcription of nearly 800 letters from the museum's collections. The letters were hosted on a blog on the CnES website but unfortunately this was lost as part of the cyber attack. We are currently working to find a solution.

An online exhibition was also curated as part of the 'Between Islands' partnership project with Shetland Museum and Orkney Museum funded by the EU Leader Programme and led by Alex MacDonald from An Lanntair.

<https://www.outerhebridesbetweenislands.co.uk/>

Lockdown also allowed staff to work on the collections inventory, and as a result, collections were shared through regular *Collections Revealed* Facebook posts.

The Dualchas na Mara Project was also delivered during this period.

4.7 Gaelic & Intangible Cultural Heritage

Gaelic is integral to understanding the local context for heritage in the Outer Hebrides. It is an asset in its own right used in everyday family, education and community activities. It is also the language which has been used to pass on heritage skills, traditions and folklore from generation to generation. The Outer Hebrides is a stronghold of the Gaelic language, where practices and traditions are still enjoyed and maintained.

A conscious decision was taken when designing Museum nan Eilean, Lews Castle to make all displays in the main galleries Gaelic First. This means that the text is not a translation from English. Gaelic content is available through video, sound recordings and through text panels. We strive to make information available in both Gaelic and English in support of the CnES Gaelic Language Plan and the terms of Section 3 of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005.

The report 'Ar Stòras Gàidhlig - The economic and social value of Gaelic as an asset' (May 2014) commissioned by Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Bòrd na Gàidhlig provides evidence of the importance of Gaelic within the heritage sector, and indeed the importance of the heritage sector to Gaelic.

<https://www.hie.co.uk/media/5585/hieplusreportplus2014plusfinalplusonline.pdf>

Through funding from Bòrd na Gàidhlig the Cruinneachaidhean Foillsichte Project recently transcribed our collection of Gaelic oral recordings and this rich resource will be made available through our new website.

4.8 Partnerships

Museum nan Eilean works in close partnership with Tasglann nan Eilean – the Comhairle’s Archive Service - and with the Comhairle’s Archaeology Service which are also part of the Heritage Service.

Museum nan Eilean also has a remit to support and advise the Comainn Eachdraidh (historical societies), independent museums and the Outer

Hebrides Heritage Forum. However due to limits on staff capacity this is not presently possible to the same extent as in previous years.

Museum nan Eilean has a good track record of successful partnership and project working, both locally and nationally, over the last 20 years.

Current partnerships/joint projects include:

Hebridean Heritage Trails:

The Heritage Trails project is a partnership with **Comann Dualchais Innse Gall – Outer Hebrides Heritage Forum**. A two year Heritage Trails post (funded by Scottish Government) is hosted by CnES within Heritage Team but works closely with the Heritage Forum to deliver the project that was originally identified as part of the Great Place Strategy. The aim is to deliver trails that will create economic benefits for heritage organizations in the Outer Hebrides.

Previous partnerships/ joint projects in the last 10 years include:

Cinema Sgìre:

Partnership between MnE and **National Library of Scotland** to digitise around 100 Sony videotapes to make them accessible now and in the future, and to deliver a programme of community curation and engagement to preserve knowledge surrounding these resources.

University of Liverpool & University of Glasgow

‘Building Community Resilience through Community, Landscapes and Cultural Heritage’ –funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The project investigates how communities have been affected historically by extreme weather events and how they have improved individual and community resilience through various adaptations and modifications.

British Museum:

- British Museum Knowledge Exchange Programme 2020-2021
- 2018- 19 Learning Museum traineeship – aimed at 18-24 year olds – led by the BM but also working in partnership with County Down Museum (Northern Ireland), Norfolk Museum Services (Great Yarmouth), Henley Rover & Rowing Museum (London), Royal Pavilion & Museums (Brighton), The Atkinson (Southport), Museum & Culture Warwickshire, Plymouth City Museum and Wrexham Museum (Wales). Funded through Skills for the Future from HLF.

- ‘A History of the World’ – MnE contributed stories and objects to this nationwide museum partnership with the BBC and British Museum.
- Museum nan Eilean also contributed to *The Museums that Make Us*, a BBC Radio 4 programme by Neil Macgregor exploring how museum collections reflect the identity and ambitions of local communities.

National Museums Scotland:

- Scotland Creates – Partnership project led by NMS working with MnE and three other Scottish museums - The McLean Museum & Art Gallery (Greenock), The McManus (Dundee) and the Dick Institute (Kilmarnock) - to deliver a national programme of exhibitions and events curated by 16 – 24-year-olds. Supported by the Esmè Fairbairn Foundation and Creative Scotland.
- 2011-2015 Partnership between NMS and MnE. This delivered a strategic aim of NMS to ‘to fulfil a national role by working in partnership with the museums, cultural and educational communities of Scotland, to deliver accessible services, advice and expertise’, and that of MnE ‘to make quality learning, outreach and interpretation for all an integral part of the Museum's service delivery. Working in partnership to deliver these aims underpins the Museum's work.’

Museum Galleries Scotland:

- Funded projects (see section 4.4)
- 2015-16 Heritage Horizons trainees x 2 – to encourage diversity in museum sector and to support non-traditional routes into museum work.

Heritage Network:

- Western Isles Skills Partnership – with Comann Eachdraidh Nis to deliver updated training in Heritage Skills to heritage organisations

An Lanntair:

- Between Islands Project – managed by An Lanntair but working in partnership with Shetland Museum & Archive and Orkney Museum Service 2019-2020

- Financial, practical and curatorial support of the Purvai project and the *Colin Mackenzie: Collector Extraordinaire* exhibition which included loans from the V&A London, the NL and the BM
- Iolaire 100 Project – funded by MGS – partnership between M&TnE, An Lanntair and Acair. Publication of the *Darkest Dawn* and two exhibitions - one in MnE and one in An Lanntair commemorating the centenary of the Iolaire Disaster; collaboration on some associated educational activities.

Scottish Fisheries Museum

- Partnership for their Three Ply Project –Gaelic storytelling element

Support in Mind Scotland (Mental Health Charity)

- Part of the pilot for the Highlands and Islands Connections Project – featured in the film *Caring Connected Communities* as part of Mental Health Awareness.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?fbclid=IwAR133vJykynJcTuW2VH4ggmvgBOWeVPFfUf6Qx9CsP0GcOAx47efoOGkzpQ&v=37zb-1E6VO4&feature=youtu.be>

5. SWOT Analysis

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two Accredited Museums (provisional for 12 months) • Qualified & experienced staff • Support from Archive & Archaeology Services • Significant national loans on display • Touring exhibitions • Strong collections including archaeological finds & assemblages • ICH & Gaelic culture • New website & branding • New Marketing & Communication Strategy 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cyber Attack resulting in data loss • Loss of full accreditation for 12 months • Condition of stores puts collections at risk and limits collecting remit • Lack of Heritage Manager affects strategic direction of service and local heritage sector • No dedicated marketing resource • No dedicated engagement person • No Heritage Officers to deliver bi-lingual outreach and learning opportunities • Location of MnE Lionacleit within a school • No succession planning • Not enough core staff which impacts resilience of team and ability to respond to emergencies and opportunities
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships with other museums – national & international • Local partnerships with Heritage Forum • Great Place Strategy • Contemporary Collecting • External funding • Income generation 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change / weather/storms • Continued pressure on local government finances • Loss of key individuals within the team • Total loss of Accreditation • Lack of housing in islands impacts on relocation of new staff • Consequences of Brexit • Cyber-attacks/ data loss • Increased pressure / competition on external funders

6. Wider Sector Strategies

Our Strategy has been developed to align with local government and national sector strategies;

- **Corporate Strategy 2022-27** - Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
[Corporate Strategy 2022-2027 \(cne-siar.gov.uk\)](https://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/corporate-strategy-2022-2027)

The vision • To have socially and economically thriving communities with a focus on sustaining our quality of life, natural heritage, and Gaelic language and culture.

- **Local Outcome Improvement Plan 2017-27** - Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership
[oh-cpp-local-outcomes-improvement-plan-2017-27.pdf \(cne-siar.gov.uk\)](https://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/oh-cpp-local-outcomes-improvement-plan-2017-27.pdf)

The Vision • Our vision is to promote and realise the full potential of the Outer Hebrides as a prosperous, well-educated and healthy community enjoying a good quality of life, fully realising the benefits of our natural environment and cultural values

- **Dualchas do Dhaoine** – Outer Hebrides Great Place Strategy 2023
<https://www.outerhebridesheritage.org.uk/service/heritage-policies/>

Vision • Bringing our heritage to life through inter-island partnership to secure the future of our communities | **Priorities** • Connecting young people to their heritage • Collaborative programming & storytelling • Networked community heritage • People, place & Land • Gaelic • Partnerships & collective action • Skills & capacity • Academia • Infrastructure • Entrepreneurship to spread benefits & unlock potential

- **Museum Association Strategy 2020-25**
<https://www.museumsassociation.org/about/our-strategy/#>

Their priorities • Advocacy – for museums to feel empowered • Ethics and sustainability - campaigning for museums to address the climate crisis • Impact - encouraging more museums to work in new partnerships to deliver social impact, be relevant to their communities, and tackle pressing contemporary issues in society through engagement and learning • Inclusion - Take significant action to improve representation, accessibility and inclusivity • Museum workers - Support workforce wellbeing campaign

- **Heritage 2033** – National Lottery Heritage Fund
<https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/about/heritage-2033-our-10-year-strategy#:~:text=We're%20working%20towards%20an,for%20current%20and%20future%20generations>

Their Investment Principles • Saving heritage - Conserving and valuing heritage, for now and the future • Protecting the environment - Supporting nature recovery and

environmental sustainability • Inclusion, access and participation - Supporting greater inclusion, diversity, access and participation in heritage.

- **Strategy for Scotland – Historic Environment Scotland**

https://haveyoursay.historicenvironment.scot/development-partnership/our-place-in-time-refresh-consultation/supporting_documents/Historic%20Environment%20Strategy%20for%20Scotland%20Consultation%20Draft%20Strategy.pdf

Their Priorities • Enabling the transition to net zero • Empowering vibrant, resilient, and inclusive communities and places • Building a wellbeing economy

- **Scotland’s Museums and Galleries Strategy 2023-2030 – MGS**

<https://www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk/strategy/scotlands-museums-and-galleries-strategy/>

Their Strategy Strands • Collections cared for, accessible and shared through • Connection - inclusion, health & well-being, education & place • Workforce - Skills & confidence, diversity & fair work • Resilience – financial resilience, climate action and collaboration

- **Pleasure, Connection and Purpose – how museums can leverage emotions to build greater public Support 2023 – Art Fund**

https://bibli.artfund.org/m/22335521965fec68/original/pleasure-connection-purpose.pdf?_ga=2.190869098.156368151.1678470615-1611914933.1676049271

The nine key emotions are • Pride • Hope • Fulfilment • Belonging • Nostalgia • Ownership • Curiosity • Excitement • Awe

7. What feedback have we received?

ScotInform were commissioned in 2022 to undertake a User and Non-User Survey.

The aims of the research were:

- To understand the profile of current visitors and users of each of the services
- To understand their motivations for engagement
- To understand patterns of engagement and levels of satisfaction with the experience
- To identify barriers to engagement with the services
- To identify how these might be overcome to generate repeat or new visits

The research took place towards the end of the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, but Museum nan Eilean Lionacleit was still closed, and this should be remembered when considering the responses presented from the report.

This project was funded by Museum Galleries Scotland.

7.1 Methodology

An online survey was designed by Scotinform with input from Heritage Service staff. Respondents had the option to complete the survey in English or in Gaelic. A link to the survey was shared across networks within the local area and a poster containing a QR code that linked to the survey was shared across the community, with organisations asked to display it on noticeboards. The survey was also advertised on the museum social media channels and on the Heritage Service pages on the council website.

7.2 Responses

The survey was launched on 12 April and ran until 23 May 2022.

A total of 390 responses were received. 42 respondents completed the survey in Gaelic.

Where percentages do not total 100% this is due to multiple responses, non-response or rounding.

7.3 Awareness of Services

Stornoway

91% of respondents were aware of Museum nan Eilean (Stornoway). Awareness was 99% for residents of Lewis. 75% of respondents had visited Museum nan Eilean (Stornoway) in the past.

Respondents who were aware of Museum nan Eilean (Stornoway) but who had not previously visited were asked why they thought this was.

25% of respondents said that the museum was difficult to get to, with a further 15% saying that travel to the museum was too expensive. Unsurprisingly, the proportion of respondents selecting these categories increased with distance from Stornoway. For residents of Lewis, the main barrier was 'the opening times are not convenient' (31% of Lewis residents).

All respondents were asked what would encourage them to visit Museum nan Eilean (Stornoway) for the first time, or more often.

Only 8% said that nothing would encourage them to visit. The most frequently cited options were 'more information about what's on' and 'exhibitions on a specific subject'. 47% of respondents with children at home selected 'more activities for children'. For local responders 63% selected 'exhibitions on a specific subject', 36% selected 'more activities for adults', and 22% 'better signage from the town centre.'

Lionacleit

It should be noted that at the time of the survey Museum nan Eilean, Lionacleit was still closed due to Covid restrictions.

52% of respondents were aware of Museum nan Eilean (Lionacleit). The figure was 95% for those who live in Uist and Barra. However only 34% of respondents had visited Museum nan Eilean (Lionacleit). 42% of respondents had last visited Museum nan Eilean (Lionacleit) on their own. This is a very high proportion of solo visits in our experience (typically 10-15%). This may be a result of the location within a school setting.

58% of respondents said they missed the museum while it was closed citing a range of educational, social and economic opportunities, some of which they were unable to derive elsewhere.

All respondents were asked what would encourage them to visit Museum nan Eilean (Lionacleit) for the first time, or more often.

The most frequently cited options were ‘more information about what’s on’ and ‘exhibitions on a specific subject’. 29% of respondents with children at home selected ‘more activities for children’. For local residents, the main barriers were the location inside the school and not knowing where it is -73% selected ‘more information about what’s on’ and 48% ‘exhibitions on a specific subject’, 29% selected ‘easier access’ and 22% ‘different opening times’. 24% would like more activities for children and 20% more activities for adults.

7.4 Access requirements

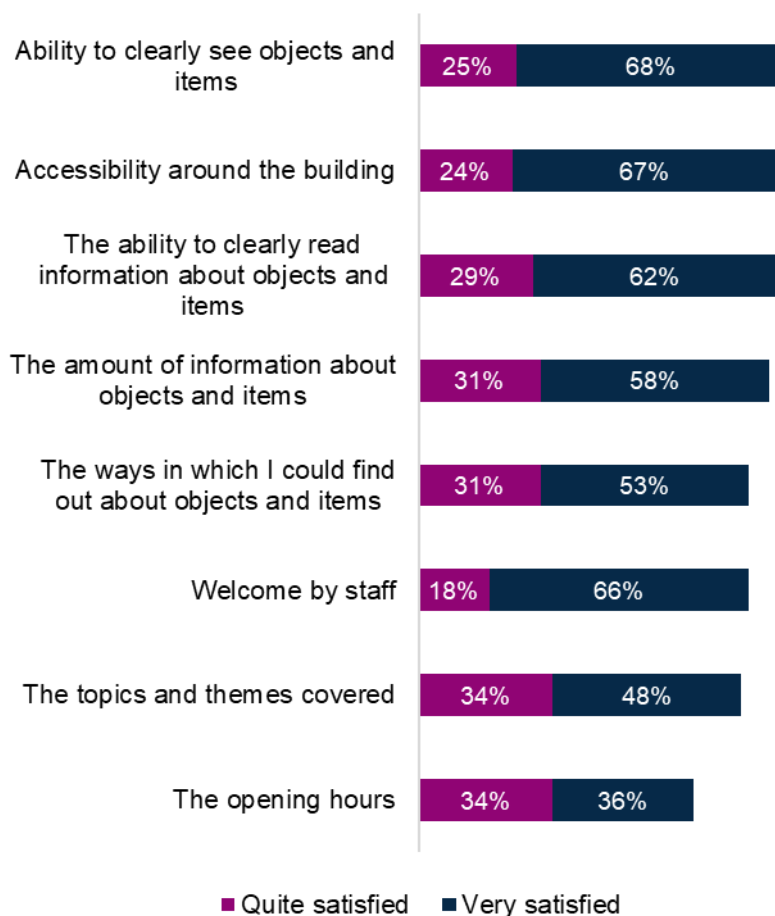
12% of respondents report that they are living with a long-term illness, condition or disability.

7.5 Satisfaction

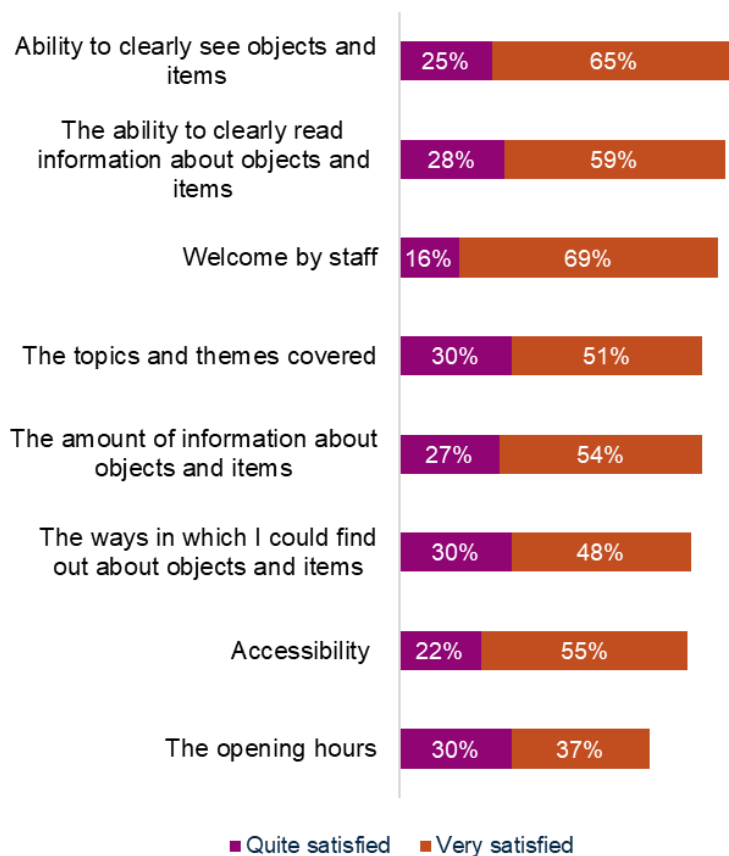
Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with a range of aspects of their visit experience.

Satisfaction ratings overall were excellent as can be seen over the page.

Base: respondents who have visited Museum nan Eilean (Stornoway) (291)



Base: respondents who have visited Museum nan Eilean (Lionacleit) (134)



7.6 The Future

Respondents were asked whether they would be interested in visiting accessible collections centres in Benbecula and Lewis, allowing them to view or find out about objects that are not currently on display in the museum.

There was strong support for this idea, with 75% of the sample saying that they would be interested (78% for local residents).

A combination of online and offline communications preferences exist for informing individuals about what the service is doing. In terms of social media, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (now X) appear to be the priority channels for this audience. Dedicated emails and websites remain popular, as do posters in community spaces. There were a number of comments about the need for better marketing

7.7 Conclusions of the report

Awareness of all services (particularly the museum in Lionacleit and the archive) is low. A marketing strategy to address this should be prioritised,

focusing on raising initial awareness and communicating the quality of the offer and of the service.

Satisfaction ratings for all three service strands are excellent, and particularly noteworthy in the archive service. The biggest concern is around the opening hours, which visitors feel should be extended to maximise benefit.

Both museums would benefit from a refresh or renewal of the product offer to encourage new visitors. This refresh might be achieved through the proposals to open up the collections centres, which were well received.

Respondents feel that the online offer could be further enhanced and more links made with other bodies to raise profile.

Opportunities should also be explored to generate commercial income (for example, increasing awareness of paid archival research, particularly outside of the Western Isles), and to develop partnerships (for example, with colleges or universities to support marketing activity).

8. Where do we want to be in 5 years' time?

Our Mission 2025 – we do this...

We promote the value and potential of Outer Hebrides heritage by safeguarding collections and making them accessible for present and future audiences through exhibitions, engagement and research, while upholding professional standards.

Our Vision 2025 – so that

Our rich heritage will be valued, preserved and enjoyed as a key asset of the Outer Hebrides, with the necessary investment and professional skills, enabling it to grow sustainably and ethically, so that our collections, Gaelic culture and intangible heritage will enrich, educate, challenge, inspire and reflect diverse audiences.

8.1 Museum nan Eilean Strategic Aims 2025-2030

Museum nan Eilean will;

1. Share our collections through exhibitions and activities that connect, challenge, inspire and enrich the lives of more people, supporting greater inclusion, diversity, access and participation in heritage
2. Contribute to safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Gaelic language of the Outer Hebrides for the benefit of present and future generations
3. Deliver our mission and goals in an environmentally responsible way which supports Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Climate Change strategy
4. Care, conserve and develop our collections in line with national standards ensuring their full unique potential is realised for the benefit of communities locally, nationally and internationally
5. Ensure our museums and wider Heritage Service have secure, adequate and sustainable resources, thereby enabling us to recruit and retain energised, knowledgeable and professional staff who feel valued and respected
6. Collaborate with funders, partners and our communities to create ambitious, innovative, engaging projects that will stretch boundaries and develop the Museum Service and the wider Outer Hebrides heritage sector
7. Raise awareness of the museum and the wider Heritage Service

8.2 Strategic Objectives 2025-30

Share our collections through exhibitions and activities that connect, challenge, inspire and enrich the lives of more people, supporting greater inclusion, diversity, access and participation in heritage

- 1.1. Develop an exciting and challenging Special Exhibitions programme for Stornoway and Benbecula museums that fosters curiosity and enjoyment;
 - by attracting touring national exhibitions and loans
 - by curating in-house exhibitions on local themes/events using stored collections
 - 1.2. Deliver a varied programme of heritage related events and activities (in Gaelic and English) for all ages/interests including experiences that support health and wellbeing to give people a sense of fulfilment and belonging
 - 1.3. Work to overcome barriers to engagement from under-represented individuals or groups in our community
 - 1.4. Further develop, evolve and roll out digital transformation – through new website, digital interpretation and apps – to enable engagement with a wider range of people
 - 1.5. Refresh our core galleries with new content and more of our own collections
- 2. Contribute to safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Gaelic language of the Outer Hebrides for the benefit of present and future generations**
- 2.1. Promote the richness of Gaelic language and culture within exhibitions and foster feelings of pride in our heritage
 - 2.2. Encourage staff to learn more Gaelic and to use more Gaelic in their working day
 - 2.3. Share/ collect/ research more of the Outer Hebrides intangible cultural heritage
 - 2.4. Investigate Gaelic tourism opportunities relevant to the museum
- 3. Deliver our mission and goals in an environmentally responsible way which supports Comhairle nan Eilean Siar’s Climate Change strategy**
- 3.1. Reduce waste and move towards the use of reusable/recyclable packing materials
 - 3.2. Reduce our energy usage in all our buildings within museum standard parameters
 - 3.3. Minimise business travel where practical
 - 3.4. Have buildings that are well insulated and use renewable energy sources as much as possible to increase our energy efficiency
 - 3.5. Raise awareness of climate change impacts through our exhibitions, where relevant
 - 3.6. Keep abreast of sector developments for environmental responsibility
- 4. Care, conserve and develop our collections in line with national standards ensuring their full unique potential is realised for the benefit of communities locally, nationally and internationally**
- 4.1. Develop two new Collections Resource Centres (Stornoway and Benbecula) to increase collections care and allow public access to our stored collections
 - 4.2. Continue to progress work on inventory as per Documentation Plan

- 4.3. Create a programme of collections conservation
- 4.4. Upgrade Adlib to Axiell Collections System - including public access to our website
- 4.5. Identify contemporary collecting priorities to fill gaps in our collections
- 5. Ensure our museums and wider Heritage Service have secure, adequate & sustainable resources, thereby enabling us to recruit and retain energised, knowledgeable and professional staff who feel valued and respected**
 - 5.1. Continue to present the case for three additional permanent posts in order to meet core remit – Heritage Manager to work at a strategic level and two Heritage Officer posts to deliver events/activities/schools outreach and create income through offering tourist packages
 - 5.2. Secure temporary special project posts for work outside core remit as and when funding opportunities become available
 - 5.3. Be a role model and professional advisor/ supporter for independent museums and the Heritage Forum in the Outer Hebrides
 - 5.4. Present the case for sufficient professional level staff in post to act as museum mentors for local independent museums
 - 5.5. Ensure staff have opportunities for CPD to keep up to date with sector standards
 - 5.6. Investigate how to diversify income streams to supplement our revenue budgets
 - 5.7. Develop succession plans for each skilled area within the museum service
- 6. Collaborate with funders, partners and our communities to create ambitious, innovative, engaging projects that will stretch boundaries and develop the Museum service and the wider Outer Hebrides heritage sector**
 - 6.1. Outer Hebrides Heritage Trails 2023-2025
 - 6.2. Hebridean Homecoming – international project focused on Nova Scotia 2025 (including Emigration conference)
 - 6.3. Islands Immigration & Migration project 2026
 - 6.4. Collection Resource Centre projects 2024-2028
 - 6.5. Refresh of core permanent galleries project 2027
 - 6.6. Be open to new ideas and partnerships 2028>
- 7. Raise awareness of the museum and the wider Heritage Service**
 - 7.1. Roll out new branding across all platforms
 - 7.2. Roll out new marketing plan
 - 7.3. Keep new website up to date and increase content
 - 7.4. Recruit Heritage Service Ambassadors
 - 7.5. Source support from the CnES Comms Team

9. How to get there?

In order to achieve our vision, aims and objectives, and to take account of feedback that we have received from users/ non-users and staff, we have already started a number of actions that will be built upon or completed in the period of this Forward Plan.

9.1 Early Actions/ Progress

Special Exhibitions:

The main theme for 2025 will be Emigration to tie into an Outer Hebrides wide theme of *Hebridean Homecoming* that is running from 2023-2025. To enhance the in-house curated Emigration exhibition two members of staff were awarded a Jonathan Ruffer Curatorial grant to undertake collections and exhibition research internationally. The focus of the research was the stories and perspectives of those that emigrated to Nova Scotia, including the impact of this emigration on the native people in the places they migrated to. This research will help to tell a more complete story within the context of diasporic communities and colonial histories.

The theme for 2026 will be Immigration/ Migration looking at the stories and experiences of people who have moved to the islands for a variety of reasons over the years. It is hoped the exhibition can build on the work already started by Tasglann nan Eilean as part of 'Voices: The Community Story' project which aimed to contribute to a national archive of stories reflecting experiences of migrant communities from across Scotland.

<https://www.scottisharchives.org.uk/community-archives/voices/>

This will be an opportunity to engage with some under-represented and harder to reach groups within our community and to tell their stories. There may also be opportunities to further enhance our collections through contemporary collecting. (Aim 1 – Obj 1.1, 1.3, Aim 4 – Obj 4.5)

Exhibitions Programme 2025-2026 (Summary):

2025			
Exhibitions / Theme	Date	Where	Partner/ Lender
Seinn Spioradail	Jan – mid March	Lionacleit	The Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen
Closed	Jan – June	Stornoway	Due to Data Recovery work and staff capacity

Cianalas 's Dochas Homesickness & Hope: Stories of Hebridean Emigration	End May– end Nov	Both	In-house curated & loans from NMS, Flemming Collection & Scottish Diaspora Tapestry
2026			
Exhibitions / Theme	Date	Where	Partner/ Lender
Sporting History – Island Games	Tbc	Both	Outer Hebrides Island Games Committee & CNES Sports Centre
Immigration/ Migration	Tbc	Both	Tbc

Digital: The Hebridean Digital Stories Project funded by the Art Fund helped to develop digital interpretation for Lews Castle which involves an Augmented Reality app to help create a new layer of interpretation that appeals to different audiences and learning styles. The Project also created online resources for schools and online training videos for the local community heritage groups. (Aim 1 – Obj 1.4)

Buildings: The museum stores have never been fit for purpose and were meant to be temporary accommodations only. The condition of the stores and the impact this is having on the collections, our energy efficiency and overall environment has been of great concern to the heritage team for a number of years and has been flagged as an area for improvement for Accreditation. The collections have huge research, access and income generation potential that is currently not being fulfilled. Our ambition is to create two Collections Resource Stores that will provide equal access to the stored collections, offer opportunities for research and protect Outer Hebrides heritage for future generations.

The first step will be to apply for funding to undertake a feasibility study and options appraisal and we have had a positive meeting with the CnES Senior Investment Delivery Projects Manager to get advice on how to progress. A report to Committee to get formal permission and political support to proceed to looking for funding has also been met with a positive outcome. A visit by councillors to the Marybank store was also organized and we hope to do the same for Torlum store in the near future. This has already been a long process and we acknowledge the difficult financial landscape for CnES and funders, but it is now absolutely critical for the care of our collections and in order to give

public access to these rich resources. Concluding this first step will mean that our projects will be at 'shovel ready' stage when funding opportunities arise. (Aim 3 – Obj 3.2, 3.4, Aim 4 – Obj 4.1)

Great Place Strategy: The Museum Service, alongside the wider Heritage Service engaged with the Great Place Strategy over the past 5 years. This project was led by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Highlands and Islands Enterprise and funded by the National Heritage Lottery Fund. A steering group, on which the Heritage Service sat, consisted of the lead partners and a number of local and national organisations across heritage, arts and tourism sectors.

The “Heritage for People” strategy document and the Heritage Asset Audit was publicly launched on 6 April 2023 and sets out the ambitious aims and priorities of the heritage sector of the Outer Hebrides over the next 10 years under the umbrella of the Great Place Scheme. Valuable input was received from communities and stakeholders throughout the development stage of the project. Priorities have been identified and cross-sector solutions are proposed in the action plan, which has been devised to support the aspirations and developments of the heritage sector across the islands. It is helping to make a strong case for increased investment and political support for the Heritage Service and the wider heritage sector in the Outer Hebrides.

The Museum Service anticipates it will help build support for the Collection Resource Centres and increased core staff for the Heritage Service in order to fulfill their remit across the Outer Hebrides. These were both identified as priorities in the Strategy (Aim 4 - Obj 4.1, Aim 5 – Obj 5.1)

Conservation Staff: The Conservation Officer post which had been vacant for almost 4 years was filled on 1 April 2023. This has added capacity to the core team and enhanced collections care and conservation. Their work programme has been affected by the data loss of our CMS but they have been assessing the collections and working through the backlog of tasks. (Aim 4- Obj 4.3)

Collections Management System: We are currently working with Axiell to transfer our Collections Management System from Adlib to Axiell. The cyber attack delayed this as the data was lost for 14 months and will only be fully operational again in March 2025. (Aim 4 – Obj 4.4)

Marketing: The Heritage Service website (funded by MGS) was launched in 2023 and was a vital resource for our team following the cyber-attack, as it was not affected, since it was a standalone website. The website is helping to tackle many of the issues identified in our user survey of the public not being

sufficiently aware of our services, venues, events and exhibitions. New branding has also been introduced to make it clearer that the Museum Service sits within the Heritage Service and is more easily identifiable. A Marketing and Communications Strategy (funded by MGS) was produced by Morrison Media, but the launch was delayed due to cyber issues. However, this needs additional support / resources to be fully implemented. (Aim 7 – Obj 7.1, 7.2, 7.3)

Gaelic: We promote and support Gaelic in numerous ways. Our new website is fully bilingual. As well as the Gaelic First approach to our permanent galleries, all interpretive text for special exhibitions curated in-house is bilingual. Where panels are not bilingual (in externally sourced exhibitions for example) we endeavor to provide exhibition text in Gaelic through hand-outs. We intend to adopt a Gaelic First policy in future in refreshing our core galleries. Where possible (i.e. if we have funding/ resources), Gaelic events are included in our learning or activity programmes. (Aim 2 - Obj 2.1, 2.3)

9.2 Medium/Long Term Actions

Exhibitions: In 2026 our core galleries will have been open for 10 years and will require a refresh. This is an area that has already been identified in the user survey as local audiences in particular look for new content to keep them coming back. We have already started discussions with NMS regarding their loans. This is an area that will require substantial staff time and will require additional internal and external funding to achieve. It is envisaged this project would potentially run 2027-28. (Aim 1 – Obj 1.5)

Buildings: As highlighted above the two Collections Resource Centre Projects will be medium term projects by the time they come to fruition and both internal and external funding is sourced. We would envisage that funding might need to be sourced to backfill core posts in order to give capacity to work on such a project. The timeframe would depend on synchronizing funding streams once the project is 'shovel ready'. (Aim 4 – Obj 4.1)

Learning: In order to deliver a programme of exciting heritage related events and activities (in Gaelic and English) for all ages/interests including experiences that support health and wellbeing, we would require additional resources of staff and budget. Since September 2019, when the two Heritage Officer posts were cut, the programme has been delivered through externally funded short-term projects. This puts a huge extra burden on core staff to keep finding

funding, manage delivery and to evaluate and report. Given the breadth of work which the service needs to deliver, as outlined in this Plan, it is not sustainable to continue delivering the Learning Programme in this way. The user survey has shown that there is demand for such heritage-related activities and good attendance at recent activity programmes backs up this research. Investment in the Learning Programme would also meet some of our objectives in relation to Gaelic. (Aim 1 – Obj 1.2, Aim 2 – Obj 2.1, Aim 5 -Obj 5.1)

Environmental responsibility: Some of the actions identified are already in progress, but the service can and will do more. We will be looking to the wider national sector for guidance, ideas and support for how to reduce museum packaging, and other waste, and how to reduce energy use in environmentally controlled areas.

The delivery of new museum resource centres would significantly improve the energy efficiency of our service and renewable energy sources would be looked at in the options appraisals. (Aim 3 – Obj 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 3.6)

Gaelic Tourism: It is known from surveys by the Tourism sector that heritage plays a large part in attracting visitors to the Outer Hebrides. There is an opportunity to develop Gaelic offerings for tourists who are specifically interested in this aspect but more research is required to find out what would fulfil visitors' needs and how the museum could participate or benefit from this strand of tourism. (Aim 2 - Obj 2.4 Aim 5 – Obj 5.6))

Collections & Digital: Fully searchable public collections database: once the process of transferring our collections data to Axiell Collections is complete, further work will then be needed to adapt the system to make it available on our website. It is likely to be a phased programme due to capacity and the need to ensure no confidential data is released publicly. (Aim 4 – Obj 4.4)

Diversify income streams: At present, most income is through donations. We have had a number of ideas on how to diversify our income, but resources are needed to explore these further, find out what would be viable, and implement. (Aim 5 – Obj 5.6)

Succession Planning: The team has identified possible actions as part of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's routine workforce planning, but further resource and management support will be needed to fully address this issue. (Aim 5 – Obj 5.7)

10.Next Steps

This Forward Plan lays out the Strategic Aims and Objectives of Museum nan Eilean for the next five years, and an indication of progress on these to date. It is put forward to Comhairle nan Eilean Siar for formal approval on the proviso that further work on detailed action plan and financial analysis will follow and be added as Appendices 1 and 2, and that sign-off on these will be through Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's usual approval processes at a later date.