

LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

CONSULTATION/ENGAGEMENT REPORT

April 2025

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Housing Strategy Manager

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires that local authorities consult on their LHS, and the statutory Equality Duty on public bodies requires the involvement, consultation and engagement of as wide a range of local residents and tenants and communities of interest as possible.
- 1.2 Local Housing Strategy Guidance states that the LHS should demonstrate how engagement and consultation:
 - Was undertaken early on in the LHS development process and how it has continued through its development and subsequent annual review;
 - Used a range of media to ensure as wide an audience as possible within local communities and from relevant representative groups including people with or who share protected characteristics;
 - Ensured, in an effort to end inequality, that the make-up of the local population is accurately reflected;
 - Recognised that some people's views may not be readily heard through traditional engagement methods and provide evidence of how those less willing or able to engage, were given the opportunity to do so;
 - Has influenced the development of LHS priorities, outcomes and actions.
- 1.3 The paper, therefore, gives an overview of the community engagement the Comhairle has carried out to date (April 2025) towards the preparation of the forthcoming Local Housing Strategy 2025-2030. It is structured as follows:
 - Section 2 gives an overview of the various formal groups that were used as mechanisms for consultation.
 - Section 3 highlights the Early Engagement Survey carried out.
 - Section 4 outlines the in-person engagement events and details all the items raised at these events.
 - Section 5 details responses to the questionnaires that were left for distribution after in-person consultation.
 - Section 6 draws together the five major themes for engagement.

2. GROUP ENGAGEMENT

HOUSING MARKET PARTNERSHIP/LHS STEERING GROUP

- 2.1 The Comhairle's Housing Services Team together with the Development Plan Manager, Planning Officer, Research Officer, and relevant external stakeholders formed a Housing Market Partnership (HMP) in 2022 in order to provide input and guidance towards the development of the Housing Need and Demand Assessment 2023-2042 (HNDA). The two elements of this group – the core internal group and the external stakeholder group – allowed for different views from individuals and representative bodies to be taken into consideration in respect of all aspects of the HNDA, from external consultation to be carried out to formulation and agreement of survey content, for example, it was via the HMP that agreement was made to conduct two surveys in respect of housing need and demand for individuals and for the business community.
- 2.2 Following the HNDA's "Robust and Credible" assessment via the Scottish Government's Centre for Housing Market Analysis (CHMA) in October 2023, membership of the HMP was enhanced to provide additional input towards development of the LHS, and the Local Housing Strategy Steering Group (the "Steering Group") was formed. Current membership is as follows:
- Iain Watson, Housing Services Manager, CNES
 - Angela C Smith, Local Housing Strategy Manager, CNES
 - Mary Ann Graham, Housing Development Officer, CNES
 - Lorraine Graham, Homeless Services Manager, CNES
 - Mairi MacIver, Development Plan Manager, CNES
 - Kathleen Shirkie, Research Officer, CNES
 - Anna Hulme, Senior Researcher, CNES
 - John MacIver, Clerical Assistant, Housing Services Team, CNES
 - Emma MacSween, Head of Partnership Services, Health & Social Care, CNES
 - Graeme Miller, Commissioning Services Manager, Health & Social Care, CNES
 - Iain G Smith, Service Manager (Resources), Education & Children's Services, CNES
 - Sonja Smit, Occupational Therapy Services Manager & AHP Mental Health Lead, NHSWI
 - Mustapha Hocine, Comhairle Member for Uibhist a Tuath
 - Dena MacLeod, Chief Executive, Hebridean Housing Partnership (HHP)
 - Donna Smith, Chief Executive, Tighean Innse Gall (TIG)
 - Joanna Peteranna, Area Manager Innse Gall, Highlands & Islands Enterprise
 - Jemma MacVicar, Board Member, Community Land Outer Hebrides (CLOH)
 - Mary MacLean, Fas Fallain Manager, Public Health, NHSWI
- 2.3 The Steering Group meets on the last Thursday of each month and considers all matters pertaining to the development of the LHS.

MEMBER OFFICER WORKING GROUP (MOWG)

- 2.4 The Comhairle's Member Officer Working Group (MOWG) considers policy/strategy documents relating to Housing prior to the Sustainable Development Committee and adds a level of scrutiny to Housing related matters and LHS development.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

- 2.5 The Sustainable Development Committee meets five times annually and considers Housing matters prior to Comhairle. As per the MOWG, it allows for scrutiny and discussion on Housing matters and recommendations to be made or amended, as required.

COMMUNITY COUNCILS

- 2.6 Community Councils from across the Outer Hebrides were invited to contribute to LHS development as two different groups: Lewis & Harris and Uist & Barra. The sessions were held online via Microsoft Teams to maximise attendance and allow different area representatives to meet together without the need to travel.

HOUSING AND LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN TEAMS

- 2.7 Comhairle Officers from the Housing Team and Local Development Plan Team continue to work closely together during the implementation of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) to ensure that the connection between housing and land supply is fully aligned and reflects the Comhairle's aspirations for the future of housing development in the Outer Hebrides.

OTHER

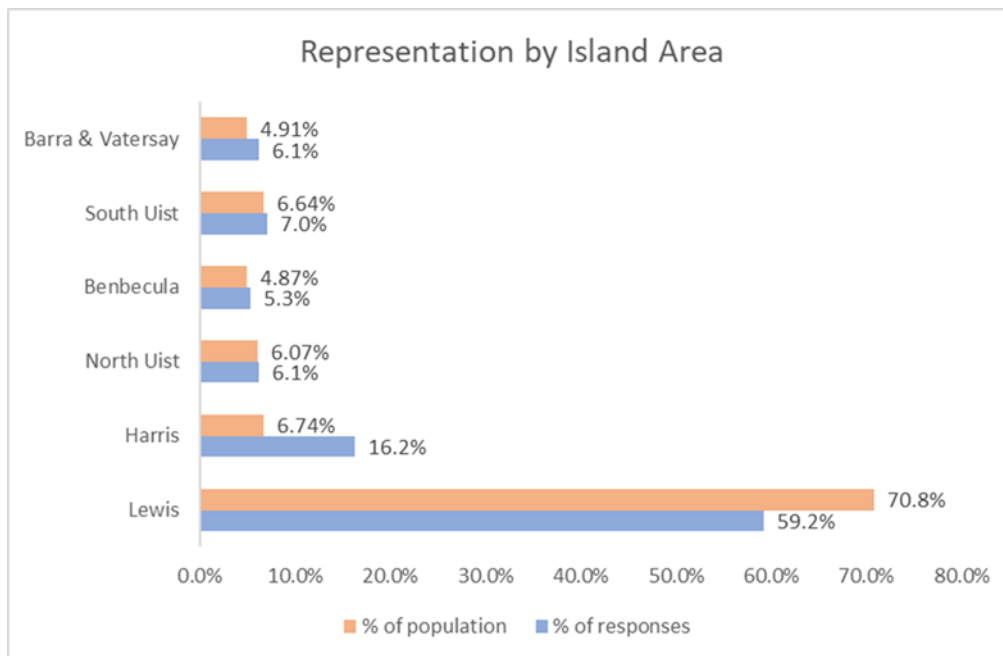
- 2.8 The Housing Services Team has also sought views on housing aspirations from organisations such as:
- Stòras Uibhist
 - Uist and Barra Housing Group
 - North Uist Estate
 - Harris Area Forum
 - North Harris Trust
 - West Harris Trust
 - Harris Development Ltd
 - Uig Development Trust
 - Great Bernera Community Development Trust
 - Pairc Trust
 - Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn
 - Urras Oighreachd Chàrlabhaigh
 - Grazings Committees throughout the Outer Hebrides

3. EARLY ENGAGEMENT

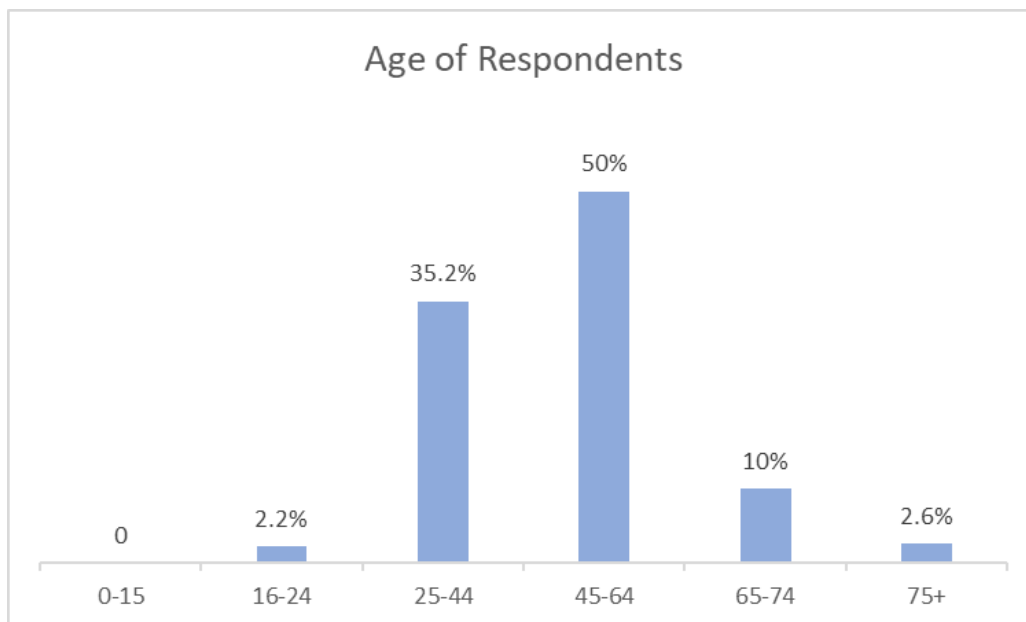
- 2.1 An Early Engagement Survey took place over the six-week period from 6 December 2023 to 17 January 2024 as follows:
- Ten questions were asked via the online Survey Monkey platform;
 - It was advertised in the local press and via social media by the Comhairle and Partners;
 - Three reminders were issued during the timeframe of the Survey;
 - It received 232 responses, which is less than 1% of the population; and
 - It was largely representative of the population of each island area.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS BY QUESTION

- 2.4 Question 1 asked about the vision of the previous LHS. The majority of respondents were happy with the previous vision – 84% stated yes, and 16% stated no. Where respondents answered no, the majority thought the population aspect of the vision should be developed.
- 2.5 Question 2 asked respondents to rate listed housing challenges from 1-5. The housing challenge which received most '1' and '2' responses was Population Decline, but the challenge which received the greatest number of responses was Fuel Poverty.
- 2.6 Question 3 asked respondents about the greatest challenge facing the area they lived in, and the response was the supply of housing.
- 2.7 Question 4 asked respondents to suggest one single action that would have a major and positive impact on the operation of the housing system in their area, and the most common response was to increase supply.
- 2.8 Question 5 asked what a well-functioning housing system looked like. The general response was that a well-functioning housing system was one that had access to a home and services that suited mental and physical need, including employment, education, childcare, connectivity and healthcare.
- 2.9 Question 6 asked whether respondents knew how their home would be affected by the new energy efficiency standard and 52% stated that they did know, while 48% stated that they did not know.
- 2.10 Question 7 asked respondents who answered “yes” to Question 6 whether they thought they would be able to fund any additional works to meet the standard, and 23% stated that they would be able to fund additional works.
- 2.11 Question 8 asked what homes and communities in the respondent’s area should look like in 2040? Responses were analysed and the following statement captures their aspirations:
- By 2040 homes should be energy efficient, well-insulated, affordable, sustainable, with outside space to support food production, and good digital connectivity. There should be hubs and options for home working. There should be thriving communities with sufficient homes for all, that are appropriate for place, with low running costs; they should be fit for purpose including size & quality, robustly constructed & retrofitted where required. Tenures should be mixed in communities.*
- 2.12 Question 9 asked where respondents were from and the profile by island area is below. Most areas were very representative when we compare against percentage share of population, but Lewis had 11% fewer respondents and Harris had almost 10% more respondents than population share.



2.13 Question 10 asked respondents about their age, and the profile is below.



4. IN-PERSON CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Once the Early Engagement responses had been collated and analysed, in-person consultation commenced. The responses were used as a means to stimulate discussions.
- 4.2 The in-person events were advertised by social media, in the local press and via community groups.
- 4.3 Items raised are listed below in order of discussion, and grouped by meetings in Benbecula and Barra, Targeted Groups, Lewis and Harris.

BENBECULA & BARRA

- 4.4 The first period of engagement took place in Benbecula and Barra in May 2024, as follows:
- 6 May 2024 @ 2pm – CNES Balivanich, with 13 individuals in attendance;
 - 6 May 2024 @ 7pm – CNES Balivanich, with 2 individuals in attendance;
 - 7 May 2024 @ 2pm – UHI Learning Centre, Castlebay, Barra, with 3 individuals in attendance; and
 - 7 May 2024 @ 7pm – UHI Learning Centre, Castlebay, Barra, with 1 individual in attendance.
- 4.5 On 8 May 2024, we also met HHP representatives at their area office in Balivanich to gauge their perceptions on local housing matters, including demand and potential development.

BENBECULA

- 4.6 The items raised are summarised below:

#	ITEM RAISED	SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION
1	Vision	Attendees agreed that vision was still relevant.
2	Supply	Attendees agreed that more housing stock was required to encourage young people to stay, and enable them to return, given difficulties in securing a property on the open market. They felt more social homes were required but agreed that different options were also required as there were people who could afford mid-market rent or rent-to-buy. They wanted more options to enable people to get on to the property ladder.
3	Development	Desire for community organisations to develop housing thwarted by lack of support, both financial and project development/management. There are developable buildings but few avenues to enable development.
4	Demand / Need	Questions raised on demand and how many homes were actually needed to sustain and grow our population. Desire for more information on need and demand on an area-by-area basis. Need in Lewis will be different to need in Uist, and similarly, need in North Uist will be different to need in Eriskay.
5	Empty Homes / Buildings	There are a number of empty homes and empty buildings in deteriorating condition that could be developed, for example, Lochboisdale School. Desire to see these buildings in use again – lack of action on these buildings causing frustration.
6	House Condition & Fuel Poverty	Attendees would like to see better maintenance of older social housing stock. Impact on health conditions when homes were older, draughty and difficult to heat. Fuel poverty issues increasing.

#	ITEM RAISED	SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION
		Concern over condition of private sector homes and no grant assistance to maintain them.
7	Health	Negative impact of poor housing on health and mental health. Housing and health interlinked.
8	Employment / Services	Gaps in employment and services that proactive development of housing stock could help to plug. Concern over carers for elderly and vulnerable population.
9	Demographics	Declining population noted, but Uist Repopulation Zone work highlighted as evidence of potential to contribute to stability and growth. Housing is key to this, and particularly a spectrum of different housing options.
10	Private Rented Sector	Few options for people moving to Islands. No appetite for homeowners to rent properties as regulations deemed restrictive.
11	Short-Term Lets	Properties under £100k being swept up by Short-Term Let operators, which severely limits options for first-time buyers.
12	Downsizing	Keen to explore options to downsize for individuals living in properties too large for them.
13	House Building	Building your own home is no longer empowering – red tape, regulations and getting services can put people off. External Project Management can add £££ to cost of build.
14	Crofting	Croft House Grant felt to be too low for cost of build in Islands – it requires to be revisited. Administration / assignation process takes a long time.
15	Peers	Keen to talk to other groups / authorities to see how they are developing housing in rural communities. Desire for representatives present to be connected with other bodies to share experience and learning. Rural Housing Scotland keen to assist here.
16	One Stop Housing Information Service	Desire to see a “one stop” housing information service, potentially on the Comhairle website, where housing matters, grants, financial assistance, building and service contractors etc., could be signposted. There is help and assistance out there, but people don’t know what is available
17	Communication & Engagement	Attendees commented that more community engagement was required to resolve issues. Public Sector work needs to be more joined up. A “proper” framework/plan was required for the Islands.
18	Lochmaddy Development	Very positive feedback for the mixed tenure development at Lochmaddy – Ionad Doctair MacLeòd. Attendees were keen to see similar housing options being developed in different locations and to see different bodies (HHP/TIG) working together for the good of communities. A lot of interest in rent-to-buy as a tenure option as it allowed outright ownership and assisted tenants to save a deposit.

#	ITEM RAISED	SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION
19	Grants	Lack of grants for Private Sector home improvement is increasingly problematic.
20	Financial Inclusion	Is there any potential to work with financial inclusion service to raise awareness about what might be available to homeowners and tenants?
21	Availability of Funding	Awareness that this was a stumbling block to development and/or renovation for Community Groups.
22	Gateway Housing	Is there any potential to develop this further to allow prospective movers to get a taste of living in the Outer Hebrides?
23	Lending	Questions asked about diversification of lending – could public bodies (Comhairle, NHS etc.) or other benefactors (Crown Estate?) act as interim lenders to bridge gaps?

BARRA

4.7 A summary of items raised is below:

#	ITEM RAISED	SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION
1	Vision	Vision is still accurate.
2	Cleat Development	Very positive feedback re the new HHP homes at Cleat and the announcement of a further six to be built.
3	Housing Options	More housing and different options required. Recently a key worker left the area as they couldn't secure accommodation. Interest in rent-to-buy as an option.
4	Private Rented Sector	Owners pulling out of long-term lets as short-term more profitable. New regulations also contribute to owners pulling out of the PRS.
5	Tourism, Holiday Homes, Short-Term Lets	They were pricing people on lower incomes and first-time buyers out of the market. It was very difficult to compete with an established holiday let operator with enough finance to expand their portfolio. Acknowledged a need for tourism and rental properties but highlighted the use of pod-type accommodation as a solution to the problem, as they do not diminish the housing stock, yet still allow for holiday lets.
6	Services & Key Worker Accommodation	No dentist in Barra and only one GP – services are under huge pressure when potential applicants for vacant posts can't find accommodation. More work around Key Worker housing required.
7	Croft House Grant	Insufficient as building costs are so high.
8	Land	Land was viewed by many as an asset to be sold and not as a means to assist locals to live and work on the island. There was also a reluctance to release land for housing as it was felt that legislation (particularly around homelessness), acted against local people who had their name on the HHP Waiting List for considerable lengths of time.

#	ITEM RAISED	SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION
9	Environment – Coastal Erosion	Particularly problematic in Vatersay. Work required around the siting of settlements.
10	Empty Homes & Buildings	<p>A plea for publicly owned empty buildings to be utilised for homes before they become unsalvageable, for example, Craigston School.</p> <p>Re empty homes, there were many across the island which were retained by family members on the mainland and only used for a couple of weeks each year. This was difficult for the sustaining of communities but the reasons for retaining these homes were acknowledged. A complex situation for which there appeared to be no solution.</p>
11	House Condition	<p>There were many homes in poor condition in Barra, and owners without the means to repair them, or any option to move into a social rented home given the waiting list.</p> <p>Frustration around lack of repair and maintenance grants – for a relatively small amount of money a private sector home could be repaired, with positive impacts for the owner's health and potential to remain in their home for longer.</p>
12	Contractors	Difficult to find local contractors, and associated travel push up costs significantly. Succession hugely problematic for local trades.
13	Travel Infrastructure	Ferries are unreliable and are contributing to the cost of building a home – if a contractor can't get across to Barra because the ferry breaks down or doesn't sail, there is an associated cost, so the overall price is inflated from the outset and passed on to the homeowner.
14	Employment and Affordability	<p>Many people in Barra and Vatersay are employed in two or three different roles on a part-time basis, and despite having steady employment, it impacts their ability to secure a mortgage as the associated risk is higher. This is the nature of employment on a small island and lenders often fail to recognise this.</p> <p>Affordability is a barrier in terms of securing finance, but also as many of the more affordable homes which appear on the open market are bought for holiday lets.</p>
15	Major Economic Development	A reminder that benefits from the Major Economic Developments anticipated in Lewis and Uist should benefit all the islands in the Outer Hebrides. Barra and Vatersay are not in a position to benefit from local wind generation.
16	Community Development	<p>Acknowledgement that working closely with communities was key to enabling the kind of housing development they would like to see to support the Island. Cited the example and success of Bùth Bharraigh and what can be achieved when the community pulls together.</p> <p>Acknowledged finance as a barrier, however, though keen to be in contact with other rural organisations and agencies to understand what can be done.</p>
17	Demographics	Noted that Barra had an increase in population. A plea to help the island sustain it.

#	ITEM RAISED	SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION
18	Community Hub	Frustration voiced about the situation. There was a requirement for a Housing with Extra Care option in Barra, and queries as to whether St Brendan's Care Home could potentially be utilised for housing thereafter.
19	Barra as a Whole	<p>Requirement to look at housing as part of a plan for Barra as a whole.</p> <p>There is a solution required for the Community Hub issue as it is having an impact on Education, Health, and Health & Social Care. They needed a school, a care home and a hospital that is fit for purpose, and a housing system that supports jobs and the way people are employed on the Island. They no longer have mental health provision via a resident CPN, so Islanders can't access local mental health support to counter the impact of the issues many people are dealing with, which include instances of suicide and alcoholism. They need homes for an increasing population, yet they have a strong tourist market that helps to support their economy, and they must find a way to support both.</p> <p>Barra is a small island and the loss of one person might mean they lose a part-time carer, a part-time coastguard, and a part-time shop worker – three key roles being carried out by one individual. There is less resilience to things that communities in a bigger island like Lewis or Skye might be able to absorb.</p>

TARGETED GROUPS

- 4.8 As early engagement had a limited number of responses from younger age groups, we were keen to find a way to speak to younger people about their housing aspirations, so we contacted UHI's Student Services Officer and arranged for a drop-in event at the UHI campus in Stornoway on 21 May 2024 from 11am – 2pm. We invited Planning colleagues to attend this event as they had also identified younger age groups as harder to reach, and we felt both teams would benefit from this engagement.
- 4.9 A summary of items raised is below:

#	MATTERS RAISED	SUMMARY OF RESPONSES
1	Vision	<p>15 attendees stated vision was still correct.</p> <p>1 attendee suggested adding more narrative re the improvement and upgrade of the town centre to encourage/support local businesses and improving employment progression to get young people into jobs.</p>
2	Social Housing	<p>More advice/support to help tenants to maintain property.</p> <p>Assistance from Housing Officers in instances where it is difficult for tenant to speak with other agencies like the Council.</p> <p>HHP website should be more accessible to people who struggle with technology, so in-person options as well as online options should continue.</p> <p>Stock</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgrade older housing stock; • Tackle dampness issues in existing houses; • Kitchen sizes in both old and new stock are not conducive to family / modern life – too small.

3	Supply	<p>Build more social homes and affordable homes for single people, young people (under 30s), and locals.</p> <p>Prioritise local needs.</p> <p>More housing options such as rent-to-buy.</p> <p>Make more use of empty homes.</p> <p>Make self-build easier.</p>
4	Young People	<p>Scheme for young people who were brought up in the Islands, covering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assistance to get on to the property ladder; or • assistance with mortgage deposits. <p>Different grants could be put in place depending on whether the young person wanted to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • build; • buy and renovate; or • buy off the shelf. <p>More house sharing opportunities for students.</p> <p>Ensure students have access to enough space at home for online learning.</p> <p>Mental health support to improve wellbeing.</p>
5	Older Generation	<p>Ensure care stays local – care homes / units should be in every community so older people don't have to move away from their friends and support networks.</p>
6	Transport	<p>There should be transport links close to all housing areas, and more buses to enable people to travel from outlying areas.</p> <p>Camper van tax to be introduced with money going to roads and infrastructure.</p> <p>Allocated places on ferries for locals.</p> <p>Cycle lanes linking all out-of-town housing developments.</p> <p>Speed cameras, safe routes, and 20mph limits in places.</p> <p>Travel to get on and off island to be affordable.</p>
7	Demographics	<p>Enabling young people to move to the Islands should be a priority.</p>
8	Land	<p>Grants for locals to be able to buy land to build a home.</p>
9	Funding	<p>More funding required from Scottish Government.</p>

10	General	<p>Better parks, gym parks, play areas.</p> <p>Improve access to sports facilities in rural communities.</p> <p>More nurseries & childcare.</p> <p>More frequent recycling uplift.</p>
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LEWIS & HARRIS

4.10 A final period of in-person engagement commenced in February 2025 in Lewis and Harris as follows:

- 19 February 2025 @ 7pm – Kershader Resource Centre, 6 individuals in attendance;
- 21 February 2025 @ 7pm – Bernera Community Centre, 7 individuals in attendance;
- 25 February 2025 @ 6pm – CNES, Stornoway, 9 individuals in attendance;
- 6 March 2025 @ 7pm – Grinneabhat, Bragar, 3 individuals in attendance; and
- 11 March 2025 @ 7pm – Tarbert Community Centre, 14 individuals in attendance

KERSHADER

4.11 A summary of items raised is below:

#	ITEM RAISED	SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION
1	Vision	No feedback.
2	Rural Housing	<p>The supply of housing in rural areas is a concern and the size of the proposed houses in Gravir is not conducive to attracting families into the area. There is concern about the future of their primary school and childcare was an issue locally.</p> <p>A suggestion was made to include at least two family-sized homes with every rural development to encourage families to move into rural areas.</p>
3	Social Housing as Gateway Housing	One attendee spoke very positively about their experience of social housing being a fantastic entry point to the island and the local community. They bought a croft, were now working it actively and they renovated the associated empty home. More examples of things like this might encourage people to think about rural living.
4	Serviced Plots	Attendees wanted more tenure options locally and suggested making serviced plots available within villages, not on the periphery.
5	Demand / Need	A query was raised about how to capture demand from people who want to move into their area. Attendees spoke about surveys being carried out in the local area only and not being extended more widely. The community wants people to move into their area.
6	Crofting	The entire crofting system needs a complete overhaul to stop crofts from being sold on the open market for eye watering sums, and not for the purpose they were created.
7	Planning	They would like to see more flexibility from Planning in relation to getting approval for non-standard development i.e. off-grid homes.

#	ITEM RAISED	SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION
8	Legacy Housing	There was no indication as yet whether there will be legacy housing as part of the windfarm build. It was a missed opportunity to rejuvenate rural communities if not.
9	Funding	Difficult for communities to access funding but if community groups and landowners are expected to assist with developing homes, then there should be a pot of funding available to them to draw from.

BERNERA

4.12 A summary of items raised is below:

#	ITEM RAISED	SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION
1	Vision	No feedback
2	Demographics	Attendees were very concerned about the demographic profile of the area – a lot of older people and few families and children. This is unsustainable.
3	Rural Housing	There has been no development in Bernera for decades and family houses were required to stimulate communities.
4	Serviced Plots	A question was asked as to whether serviced plots could be included with all rural developments.
5	Tenure Diversification	A question was asked as to whether Shared Equity options or Rent-to-Buy could be included with all rural developments.
6	Trades	There were no tradespersons operating locally so people living in rural communities had to pay travel costs from Stornoway on top of costs for building/repair works. There was a need to enable tradespersons to live locally.
7	Planning	Mixed views of the Planning Service regarding proposed building works. One attendee stated they had been difficult to deal with whilst another stated that they found the team very helpful.
8	Short-Term Lets	Too many Short-Term Lets near beaches and scenic areas had an impact on available housing for people living in the area.

STORNOWAY

4.13 A summary of items raised is below:

#	ITEM RAISED	SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION
1	Vision	A mix of views on the vision. One attendee felt the vision remained accurate but wanted to see a Climate Change element reinforced, whilst another felt very strongly that the current vision was more a mission statement, and the vision should be solely about housing: if we got the housing element right, then all (or at least some of) the things that cascaded from the vision would be sorted.

#	ITEM RAISED	SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION
		There was a comment made on the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) as it was felt that all other aspects beyond the Housing element which were included in the previous LHS vision fell within the remit of the CPP and should be taken up by them.
2	Communities	<p>Several attendees stressed that comprehensive community consultation should be carried out prior to any feasibility work to ensure that any potential development fitted in with the village/community's plans. Feasibility work for affordable housing carried out in Gress without village consultation resulted in a backlash against any development, which could have been avoided.</p> <p>The villages and areas that grow organically are those that have retained their identity.</p> <p>In rural areas there is fear that older people will have to leave the communities they have lived in all their lives if they are unable to remain in their own home owing to illness or infirmity. The loss of these people makes the village/community poorer. There is a lack of understanding towards people who want to remain rooted in their community.</p> <p>In order to support struggling rural communities further, affordable family homes should be developed where small rural schools remain open, as the closure of a school diminished the hope of families moving into the area.</p>
3	Culture	When considering the LHS, it is critical to preserve the Island/Rural psyche – land/belonging/identity/language.
4	Future Proofing of Homes	We are not future proofing our homes or communities. Attendees cited all the single occupancy and smaller affordable homes being developed. What happens when an occupant might, for example, get married and have a family? We do not have the options that are available on the mainland when people can rent or purchase a bigger home in their local area.
5	Social Housing	Continued development is crucial in the retention of our population. Without affordable options people will neither remain in the Islands nor desire to move here.
6	Under-occupation of homes	<p>A couple of attendees responded to the Census statistic on the 34% under-occupation of homes in the Outer Hebrides. One attendee stated that downsizing was the key to freeing up larger properties for families and suggested a model of communal living for older people. A suggestion was made that the Comhairle and partners should look into incentives for people to downsize.</p> <p>Another attendee stated that it was right of the householder to live in whatever size of house they can afford and that not every older person wanted to live communally.</p>
7	Climate Change	Hugely problematic across the Islands. Where houses are sited is very important and we need to consider how these areas will look in 30 years' time. Uist was highlighted as an area which is more exposed to Climate Change challenges.

#	ITEM RAISED	SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION
		The work of Climate Hebrides was cited several times. The representative attending was keen to be involved in any LHS workshop/discussion/planning.
8	Fuel Poverty	<p>Linked to Climate Change above.</p> <p>TIG Report on Fuel Poverty cited. There is a requirement to look into climate emissions and then at properties, consider all the available data and</p> <p>Why is there no individual or team responsible for Fuel Poverty in the Comhairle? This must be addressed as a matter of urgency.</p>
9	Repair Grants	<p>No repair and maintenance grants available. Storms were increasing year-on-year with resulting damage to properties and there has been no assistance available for several years now. This leads to homes falling into further disrepair and puts pressure on NHS and Health & Social Care services when elderly homeowners' properties fall below the tolerable standard.</p> <p>The previous repair and maintenance grant was an excellent example of a spend-to-save option and its withdrawal was a retrograde step.</p>
10	Childcare	Access to childcare was hugely problematic across the islands but particularly in rural areas.
11	Community Benefit from Major Infrastructure Works	A suggestion was made that one of the benefits should be ultra-fast internet made available to all villages in the Outer Hebrides.

BRAGAR

4.14 A summary of items raised is below:

#	ITEM RAISED	SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION
1	Vision	No feedback
2	Lack of Services in Rural Communities	<p>Attendees raised the problem of people wanting to move to centers of population because of a lack of services and infrastructure in rural communities.</p> <p>A lack of new housing was cited but it more than that – shops, bus connections, rural employment, things for young people to do.)</p>
3	House Condition	Concern about deteriorating condition of homes, and impact on low-income residents when no repair and maintenance grant assistance is available.
4	Development	It is good to see small developments in villages of 2-4 houses. It is in keeping with village environment and very popular with residents.
5	Self-Build	<p>One attendee shared their experience of moving to the island – it was easier and cheaper to build from scratch rather than buy and renovate.</p> <p>They were looking to recruit for their hospitality business, but there was little demand locally for employment.</p>

#	ITEM RAISED	SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION
6	Demographics	<p>Ageing population of concern. A view that people don't consider moving to the Outer Hebrides until they are older – one attendee asked "why would they?"</p> <p>Young people leave to "achieve something" then they might return when they are older.</p> <p>There is a requirement to reverse the perception that there is nothing here for young people and families. Highly paid jobs and good infrastructure should help to reverse this.</p>
7	Empty Homes	It was good to see things being done with empty homes as there are a huge number in the Islands and they are a blight on communities.

TARBERT

4.15 A summary of items raised is below:

#	ITEM RAISED	SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION
1	Vision	The vision is too ambitious.
2	Outcomes and Actions	<p>Too much "waffle" in the previous Outcomes and Actions. They were great ideas, but the Team is clearly under resourced and over ambitious if we have only been successful in achieving half of the actions. A query was raised about whether money was being wasted if we are not achieving all we set out to achieve.</p> <p>The Housing Team needs to be optimised with people who have skill, experience and knowledge in Housing – streamlining what we want to achieve might give us a chance of doing it better.</p> <p>Look at strategies in other areas to see what is working well.</p>
3	Crofting Grant	There should be grant funding available for "normal" homeowners, not just crofters.
4	House Sharing	One attendee asked whether the Comhairle could encourage more house sharing.
5	Land	A suggestion was made for a pan Highlands & Islands forum – the 3 Island councils, plus Highland and the Crofters' Commission, to discuss land issues.
6	Landowners	Clarity was sought whether the Comhairle and partners were looking for land from private landowners as well as community landowners and Comhairle reps advised that all suitable land could be considered.
7	Waiting List Demand	Clarity was sought on how high demand needs to get on HHP's waiting list before a decision can be made as to whether to develop in an area, and Comhairle staff responded to say that any potential development project is required to be viable against a number of factors: there needs to be a clear indication of demand, suitable land with positive feasibility assessment, funding in place, and agreement with Scottish Government and development partners.

#	ITEM RAISED	SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION
		Attendees raised the fact that half the waiting list demand in Harris will be filled with the planned developments, but there will still be high demand on the list. There is a need for more affordable housing than the number planned.
8	Development	<p>Attendees recommended that there should be more than one housing association developing homes, then any potential underspend could be addressed. They were aware that CNES debt had necessitated the Tenant ballot when HHP was formed, but if the model was good it should be replicated.</p> <p>One attendee stated that they were aware of several builders that could potentially quote for works and the costs would not be as high as those being quoted publicly.</p> <p>Modular build should be considered. Is the Comhairle or HHP able to be that entrepreneurial?</p> <p>There is more rural development required to support communities. People would move into areas where houses are being developed.</p> <p>Queries raised on the cost of developments when mistakes were made. Who holds HHP accountable? (Response given to say HHP's Board, tenants, Funder, External Auditor, Scottish Housing Regulator and Scottish Government were amongst those who held HHP accountable, and HHP was very keen to have tenants sitting on their Board.)</p> <p>Queries raised on Scott Road development and if the project fell through, would the money committed to this development be ring-fenced for Harris. (Response given to say that it was likely once a commitment had been made to develop in an area, that alternative sites would be sought in the area as development is strategic.)</p>
9	HHP	A recommendation was made that there should be a permanent HHP presence in Harris as there is one in Stornoway and one in Uist.
10	Demographics	<p>The Comhairle needs to intervene in social housing provision for young people before they leave the island for good.</p> <p>There needs to be an element of risk taken to avoid further depopulation.</p>
11	Downsizing	There was a requirement to engage in conversations with householders regarding downsizing in order to open up space for families. People may be more inclined to downsize because of cost-of-living issues and fuel poverty.
12	Short-Term Lets	The impact of STLs on particular areas of Harris – anywhere with a beach view – was huge.
13	Staff Accommodation	It remains very difficult to find accommodation for staff. Can the Comhairle work together with HIE to try to find solutions?
14	Local Place Plans	Can the Comhairle work together with communities re Local Place Plans?

5. QUESTIONNAIRE: PRIORITIES AND SOLUTIONS

- 5.1 At each engagement event questionnaires were left for distribution to anyone else who might want to give their views. We asked the following three questions:
1. Is the LHS vision still the correct one?
 2. What should the priorities for the next LHS be?
 3. What actions will help us achieve these priorities?
- 5.2 There were 32 responses returned by 28 March 2025, and an overview of the major themes is below, with respondents' suggested solutions in the blue boxes.

VISION

- 5.3 There were 28 respondents who felt that the previous vision was still accurate, and 4 respondents who felt that it was not. Of those who said it was not accurate there was one suggestion that the population aspect should be made stronger, and one who felt that a more housing focused strapline was required.

THE SUPPLY OF HOUSING

SUPPLY GENERAL

- 5.4 Over half of the respondents stated that the supply of housing was an issue. There were various impacts associated with the supply of housing from population retention to the inability of businesses to recruit, to the inability of key workers to find a home in their area of employment, to the barriers associated with moving "home" as a younger person.
- 5.5 Almost half of the respondents stated that the supply of affordable housing was a major priority, including larger, family homes particularly in rural areas, and several respondents identified the fact that there is only one RSL developing homes in the Outer Hebrides as part of the problem.

- Have the right priorities in the Local Housing Strategy and place affordable housing high on the list.
- Ensure that there is a more strategic overview of social housing development so it doesn't become piecemeal with anyone developing anywhere.
- Have more than one social housing developer.
- Continue with rural development, ensuring that there are family-sized homes in every rural development.
- Find innovative ways to develop that reduces procurement costs.
- Review what peers are doing.

HOUSING NEED AND DEMAND

- 5.6 Several respondents stated that a better understanding of need and demand is required as different areas will have different requirements.
- 5.7 Surveys do not currently capture need and demand from outside the area and that does not assist with identifying people who might want to move into the area, which is what fragile communities need.

- Engage with different areas to determine need and demand and bring together stakeholders from different areas to agree targets for their areas.
- Establish the number of houses required in each community to maintain a proper demographic profile.
- CNES should support community groups by match funding the delivery of each new housing unit, for example, £50k RHI match funding via ACTISH.

DIVERSIFICATION

- 5.8 More affordable tenure options were required as people want to own their own homes. Respondents wanted to see more Shared Equity options or Rent-to-Buy options available.
- 5.9 More diverse building models, designs and approaches/ideas were required.

- Build Rent-to-Buy homes in or next to multiple existing townships, maybe 2-4 homes in each location, reflecting the organic way that communities in the rural Outer Hebrides have traditionally grown.
- Investigate factory-built single persons accommodation. We don't need to build homes that will be here in 50 years; a more temporary solution that would last 25 might be worth considering.
- Monitor developments related to designation of areas of linguistic significance which may provide additional funding streams e.g. A' Chìll Bheag in Sleat, Skye.

RURAL/URBAN SPLIT

- 5.10 The 55/45 rural/urban split was consistently missed and this needed to be addressed in the next LHS. Respondents felt that it is almost too late when the balance tips leading to local nursery and school closures and significant depopulation, as has already happened in some rural areas e.g. the west coast of Harris.

- Make the target 55% of new homes in rural areas an action not an aspiration.

PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

- 5.11 The sector is not big enough to assist people who may want to move to the islands

- Consider options to incentivise short-term let owners or second home owners to release their properties for long term private rent.

RURILITY/COMMUNITIES

RURILITY

- 5.12 Priority should be given to encouraging population retention and growth in rural areas especially those challenged by depopulation, and by inflated house prices due to second/holiday homes.
- 5.13 Thought should be given to reducing the inevitable focus on Stornoway, and bring attention to rural areas, which, with better public transport can represent a housing solution which also contributes to local infrastructure, depopulation and island growth.
- 5.14 The centralising of housing, jobs and facilities in Stornoway is draining the rural populations of their young working age people and families with children and often means the closure of schools and limited access to childcare.
- 5.15 Similarly the centralising of care facilities in Stornoway and other centres of population means that elderly people are being taken out of the communities they have lived in all their lives and there is an associated social impact on both the individual and their families and friends as the increased distance means an inevitable reduction in contact.
- 5.16 The lack of larger family homes in rural areas is a barrier to sustaining and developing rural communities.
- 5.17 The impact of short-term lets on certain rural communities is catastrophic. Uig and the west coast of Harris were cited several times.

- 5.18 There is a requirement to ensure that key workers such as carers are able to live locally in the rural areas they work in. This would enable better access to, and time with, clients.
- 5.19 The issue of empty homes in rural areas needs to be addressed. The supply of rural homes could be improved by a better approach to empty homes which includes grant funding. Currently there are no local authority grants available to assist with refurbishment, although mainland local authorities do offer grant funding.

- Build more affordable homes and larger family homes in rural areas.
- Link service provision closely to housing development in rural areas.
- Marry Hub and Housing approach similar to Talla na Mara development in Harris.
- Encourage Public Sector Employers to support rural home working and local rural community hub working to support well paid, secure, long-term employment in rural areas.
- Develop care accommodation in rural areas. Reinstate small care units in villages or areas.
- Address issue of Short-Term Lets in rural areas by coming up with well-planned incentives for owners to convert to long-term letting arrangements.
- Improve access to sports facilities in rural communities.
- Address issue of Short-Term Lets in rural areas by coming up with well-planned incentives for owners to convert to long-term letting arrangements.
- Consider housing initiatives for young people in rural areas.

COMMUNITIES

- 5.20 Priority should be designing community level strategies that form part of a larger strategy, engaging with communities and stakeholders to create priorities that support current challenges, align with future challenges, and which link to sustainability and combat depopulation. The Comhairle and partners should ensure that housing is affordable, accessible and that the community is involved in helping to identify local needs and preferences, ensuring that the LHS aligns with the community's vision and values.
- 5.21 Priority should be to ensure that any approach to housing includes an understanding of the “Island Psyche” in relation to land, belonging and identity, This includes retaining aspects of traditional design/building approaches to ensure that developments fit into the environment and landscape. Solutions that are not rooted in our Island communities will not last.

- Work with communities to develop local place plans, which fit together to make a larger reflective island plan for housing, depopulation, infrastructure, transport etc.
- Engage with local communities prior to any plans being drawn up.
- Proactive consultation/research in, and with, communities, not just landowners, even if “Community”.
- Support existing initiatives from local/community organisations in Lewis, Harris and elsewhere focused on their housing requirements for families, key workers, and other locally identified priorities.
- Encourage community-owned estates and other organisations to secure Rural Housing Body status, example given of Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn.

DEMOGRAPHICS

DEPOPULATION

- 5.22 Priority of the LHS should be population decline alone as it is the biggest threat facing the Outer Hebrides. In order to address population decline, the Local Housing Strategy should aim to retain the population who are at risk of leaving i.e. school leavers, students and young people, and aim to attract individuals, couples or families to the Outer Hebrides to boost the local population.
- 5.23 Continued work on population retention and growth is essential to the economic viability of the Islands.
- 5.24 It is important to ensure there are housing options for young people and families to live across all areas of the Outer Hebrides and not just Stornoway, to support our population.
- 5.25 Reference was made to the number of households that were under occupying their homes (34% - Census 2022) and if they were supported to “rightsize”, and free up these larger homes, we could perhaps retain twice or three times as many people in our islands - paying taxes, raising children and securing sustainable economic development in our islands.
- 5.26 We need to find ways to attract young people to choose to live in the Outer Hebrides as it is a great place to live. Many jobs in the UK are now being done remotely post-Covid and recent changes in technology have led to more flexibility in workplace location. However, there are issues with finding rented accommodation to trial this.
- 5.27 Securing childcare is problematic for families and there needs to be a solution so families can either move here or remain here.
- 5.28 Transport on and off the islands should be affordable and possible in order to attract and retain population.

- Build more family homes in demographically fragile areas.
- Designate more areas as Repopulation Zones as per the Uist Repopulation Project.
- Encourage immigration from other countries.
- Lobby Government to give settled to the refugees currently staying in the islands.
- Consider ultra energy efficient and renewable energy powered, Integrated Retirement Villages (IRV) so people can downsize or rightsize without losing their local connection.
- Grants for young people to get on to the housing ladder so they can remain in the islands.
- Housing support and advice for young people to get on to the housing ladder so they can remain in the islands.
- A scheme for mortgage deposits for young people.
- Childcare needs and options should be considered with every development.
- Lobby CalMac, Scottish Government.

SUSTAINABILITY, FUEL POVERTY, AND CLIMATE CHANGE

- 5.29 Priority to ensure sustainability, in relation to population, economy, climate, land. These factors must be taken into consideration in the new LHS. How do we design and build out emissions and fuel poverty, as well as retain finances in the islands?
- 5.30 It is necessary to consider fuel poverty and climate emergency together.

- Ensure the Comhairle's Climate Change and Fuel Poverty strategies are built into the LHS.
- Install solar PV systems on roofs of new and existing social housing.
- Re-establish a scheme like the former Home Improvement Scheme which wasn't means tested, where owners can access funds to bring existing homes into a better habitable, healthy and energy efficient state, thereby reducing harmful emissions.
- Explore the potential demand for allotments to be created adjacent to social housing to provide amenity and food production.

HEALTH, SUPPORT, AND INDEPENDENT LIVING

CARE AT HOME

- 5.31 Priority to increase investment in services to assist the Care at Home agenda and ensure there is sufficient funding for housing adaption grants for when people become disabled by age or health conditions so that they can continue to live comfortably in their own homes for as long as remains feasible.

- Increase and ring-fence funding for adaptations.
- Support the Extra Care Hub Project being developed by Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn.

HOUSING SUPPORT

- 5.32 Priority to ensure there is support available for tenants and homeless persons, or those at risk of homelessness, with the correct support in terms of mental and physical issues – things that might impact their ability to retain their tenancy and/or live independently.

- More Housing Officers or people who can come in and support with advice of maintaining a home, including financial advice.
- Online services to be fully accessible to assist people who struggle with technology.
- Non-online (in-person) options to be available for tenants.

TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

TRANSPORT

- 5.33 Priority to ensure that residents of all villages should be able to access Stornoway by public transport by 8am and return leaving town at 5.30pm on weekdays.

- Enhancement of public bus service.
- Link social housing development to public transport service provision.
- Safe and maintained cycle lanes linking all out-of-town housing developments (e.g. Parkend, Newmarket, Leurbost) with town.
- Lobby CalMac, Scottish Government.

CONNECTIVITY

- 5.34 Priority to ensure all residents of the Outer Hebrides have access to fast broadband.

- Make installation of infrastructure for superfast broadband part of major development community benefit.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

5.35 Priority to link planned development with the labour market – intelligent economic development.

- Ensure the islands maximise community benefit from the planned major construction projects – not just financial compensation, but construction of roads, utilities etc.
- Work with HIE to overcome problems in funding with joint housing/business developments.

LAND

5.36 Land banking should be a priority, so there is a need to work with Common Grazings and landowners to ensure there is sufficient land available for development in order to stimulate population retention and growth.

- Encourage crofters and landowners to give up areas for new homes for private and public housing.
- Encourage community owned estates to secure Rural Housing Status as this may enable development.

GENERAL COMMENTS

5.37 Priority to ensure unity of purpose.

5.38 A flexible LHS should be prepared in which time-barriers re diversification on the design of housing and where we build is addressed.

- Ensure good partnership working across all agencies.
- Establishment of a Single Island Authority.
- A robust, balanced strategy to be drawn up.
- More consultation with local people.
- Half the number of actions listed against outcomes so we have a chance of delivering them.

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 The various consultation and engagement events to date have raised a number of different concerns in relation to housing but the major themes that arose are as follows:

- Population decline:
 - The single biggest issue facing the Outer Hebrides.
 - Key question is how to enable young people, people of working age, and families to remain here or move here?
 - How do we support our older population to live well?
- The supply of housing:
 - More affordable homes are required to sustain communities, encourage people to move here, and stop young people moving away.
 - Tenure diversification with affordable options to help young people get on to the housing ladder, and serviced plots made available as standard.
- Establishing need and demand in different areas:
 - Demand should be established for each community.
 - Good partnership working could help to establish need and demand.
- Supporting rural communities:
 - Making the supply of rural homes a priority and establishing a rural/urban split that is set in stone rather than aspirations.
 - Enabling community groups to develop housing and involving them from the outset.
 - Managing second homes and short-term lets.
 - If community groups are being expected to be part of the housing solution, then it's only fair that they should be able to access funding to help with development.
- Financial considerations
 - Prohibitive cost of development, whether private or public.
 - Access to funding for development.
 - Access to grants for building or repairing and maintaining homes.
 - The cost of heating homes.

6.2 It is key to prepare a Local Housing Strategy with outcomes and actions that attempt to address the above, whilst working towards local and national priorities and policy objectives.