

**Comhairle nan Eilean Siar**

# OUTER HEBRIDES VISITOR INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN



## **Outer Hebrides Visitor Infrastructure Plan**

Final  
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**prepared by**

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# 1. Introduction

The purpose of the Outer Hebrides Visitor Infrastructure Plan (OHVIP) is to provide a framework for planning, supporting and prioritising visitor infrastructure investment in the Outer Hebrides for the period 2022-2031. The plan uses a 10-year timeframe as this is a realistic period in which to address current weaknesses and to expand infrastructure to cope with the sharp increase in visitors predicted from the development of the deep-water port in Stornoway added to the underlying growth rate.

The preparation of the plan has been funded by VisitScotland which also administers the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) on behalf of the Scottish Government. The RTIF will be a potentially significant source of funds to support plan delivery. However, the plan takes a broad view of infrastructure needs in order to address issues in an integrated manner. Therefore, the plan will depend upon a broad range of funders and actors for successful delivery.



## 2. The Outer Hebrides & Tourism

The Outer Hebrides comprises more than 100 islands, of which 15 are inhabited. Each island has its own distinctive landscape (or diverse landscapes) and each has its own unique culture built upon a core history of crofting, fishing, weaving and the Gaelic language. This combination of factors make the islands particularly attractive to visitors.

The principal town and port of entry is Stornoway in Lewis. There are main ferry ports with links to the mainland in Stornoway, Tarbert, Lochmaddy, Lochboisdale and Castlebay and inter-island ferries across the Sound of Harris and Sound of Barra. There are airports in Stornoway, Benbecula and Barra (with Barra's beach runway being a tourism attraction in and of itself).

The population of the Outer Hebrides was 27,684 in 2011 and is projected to fall to 25,181<sup>1</sup> by 2028 and 22,709 by 2043. Lewis has a population of approximately 20,000 with the other island areas of Harris, North Uist, Benbecula, South Uist and Barra & Vatersay each having populations of between one and two thousand.

Tourism has grown strongly during the 21<sup>st</sup> century driven by a range of factors including improved transport links, greater visibility and easier planning of trips because of internet availability and regular exposure on broadcast TV and popular literature. A key driver of growth was the introduction of Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) in 2008 which significantly reduced the cost of travel to, and between the islands.

There were an estimated 218,590 visitors to the Outer Hebrides in 2017<sup>2</sup> comprising 148,641 for leisure purposes, 41,532 for business and 28,417 who were visiting friends and relatives. The total value of visits was £65m, an average spend of £309/visitor.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Records of Scotland

<sup>2</sup> Source: Outer Hebrides Visitor Survey 2017

### 3. Methodology

The research to prepare this plan consisted of a number of methods:

A review was carried out of existing policies and strategies affecting the tourism industry at local and national level to scope the framework within which tourism operates and the factors that will influence its development in the years ahead. Team members carried out desk studies, area visits and engagement with key stakeholders including Outer Hebrides Tourism, Stornoway Port Authority, HIE, and community landowners either by video call, telephone or face to face to develop a database of existing facilities, attractions, associated infrastructure, and any existing plans for increased or additional facilities. These were mapped and used as a starting point for discussions with local communities regarding the scope of their local infrastructure, pressure points and potential solutions.

An online survey was developed with support from staff of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Outer Hebrides Tourism. Respondents to the survey were directed to the maps prepared for their own area and asked to identify any errors or omissions. Their views were sought on the quality of existing facilities in their area, those which required most upgrading and which activities have the greatest impact upon their local area. People were given the opportunity to comment on a wide range of issues and their comments were collated and sorted by topic.

The survey was available in March 2002, during which time 126 people took part. It was reopened in May following requests from people attending the community Zoom meetings (see below) and numbers rose to 554. Participants were distributed across all parts of the island chain. A summary report of the complete survey was prepared, along with similar reports for each area.

A series of 9 local area Zoom meetings were arranged to present the initial findings of the survey and to explore issues associated with tourism and the pressures it may have on local communities. These were attended by 46 people.

The team used the data gathered to better understand the causes and distribution of particular pressures and to identify potential solutions. These were drawn together to prepare the report and final maps.

## Policy and Strategy Context

The OHVIP has been developed in the context of a range of plans, strategies and policies at the national and regional level that influence the development of the tourism industry and the infrastructure on which it depends. These include Scotland's National Performance Framework, the Scottish tourism strategy *Scotland Outlook 2030*, the Outer Hebrides Local Development Plan and Sealladh 2030, the Outer Hebrides tourism development strategy.

## National Performance Framework

The Scottish National Performance Framework<sup>3</sup> provides a structure within which the Scottish Government and other public bodies work. It has five aims, of which two are particularly relevant to the context of this visitor infrastructure plan:

- increase the wellbeing of people living in Scotland
- create sustainable and inclusive growth

The following national outcomes of the framework are the most relevant to the issues being addressed by the OHVIP. These are that people:

- live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe
- have a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy
- value, enjoy, protect and enhance their environment
- have thriving and innovative businesses, with quality jobs and fair work for everyone
- are healthy and active
- respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination
- are open, connected and make a positive contribution internationally
- tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally

## The National Islands Plan

The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018<sup>4</sup> placed a duty upon ministers to prepare a National Islands Plan<sup>5</sup> in order to improve outcomes for island communities. These include improving and promoting sustainable economic development, environmental wellbeing, health and well being, and community empowerment, alongside improving transport services and digital connectivity. The first National Islands Plan notes that in its consultation process "Tourism was highlighted as a positive, but with some caveats around the need for environmental protection and capacity of services to meet demand." It identifies that it is important "to ensure that tourism continues to flourish and grow sustainably." It goes on to state:

*"It is important that we work to ensure 3 key aspects of island destinations are met: providing an enjoyable experience for our tourists; gaining support for the communities which see the benefits of tourism reinvested; and, supporting the industry to develop and grow across the islands."*

The plan states the commitment of the Scottish Government to supporting the sustainable growth of tourism and notes the contribution of the RTIF in this regard.

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<sup>3</sup> [National Performance Framework | National Performance Framework](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Islands \(Scotland\) Act 2018 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [The National Plan for Scotland's Islands - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

## Net Zero

The Scottish and UK governments are committed to continuing carbon emissions reduction targets, with the eventual goal of reaching Net Zero emissions. In the Outer Hebrides tourism context this will see a major move to properties and vehicles being powered by renewable electricity and potentially by green hydrogen created by the use of locally generated renewable electricity.

## Transient Visitor Levy Legislation

The Scottish Government is proposing to create a power to allow local authorities to introduce a Transient Visitor Levy (TVL), should they wish to do so. The revenues raised by TVL would need to be reinvested in tourism infrastructure to relieve pressure caused by increasing visitor numbers. Should parliament pass this legislation it would give CnES an opportunity to increase investment in core infrastructure.

## Scotland Outlook 2030

Scotland Outlook 2030<sup>6</sup> is the Scottish strategy for tourism developed in partnership between the industry, government and public agencies<sup>7</sup>. It has the challenging vision to be "... the world leader in 21<sup>st</sup> century tourism." The Scotland Outlook 2030 mission statement is:

"Together we will grow the value and positively enhance the benefits of tourism across Scotland by delivering the very best for our visitors, our businesses, our people, our communities and our environment."

In further explaining that mission statement the strategy document states:

"Working together, we can improve the quality of our experiences by improving our infrastructure, facilities and services and create the right conditions for further growth and investment."

As part of the vision the strategy gives 3 commitments, all of which are directly relevant to the preparation of a Visitor Infrastructure Plan and the approach to infrastructure delivery required. These are:

- Scotland's tourism sector will make a full contribution to our national ambition to become a net-zero society by 2045.
- We will ensure that tourism leads to improved community wellbeing and nurtures thriving places across Scotland
- We will ensure the value of tourism to Scotland's economy continues to increase, and delivers shared prosperity for all, by encouraging the right growth in the right areas.

These commitments arise from recognising that tourism is "a significant consumer of energy and producer of waste", that it is important that "...it brings net benefits to communities across Scotland", that "Communities should have a say in the way that the tourism evolves locally..." And that "Strengthening the economic sustainability of Scotland's tourism sector also requires careful prioritisation of resources in the right places".

Alongside the three commitments are four key priorities, one of which is "Our Thriving Places". Under this priority the picture of success is envisaged as including tourism being "recognised ...locally as a positive force", working "together to ensure that the right growth happens in the

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<sup>6</sup> [Scotland-Outlook-2030.pdf \(scottishtourismalliance.co.uk\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> Partners are: Scottish Tourism Alliance, Scottish Government, Visit Scotland, Scottish enterprise, Highlands & islands Enterprise, and Skills Development Scotland



right areas”, “Our places will be better connected physically and digitally”, and “Our natural assets ... will be cared for, protected and invested in...”

The strategy recognises that there is a need to address existing gaps in technology infrastructure and therefore gives a commitment to “Capitalise on new technologies to develop technology-driven solutions to tourism industry challenges.” In order to implement Scotland Outlook 2030 further commitments are given to support the implementation of the strategy. This will be done through building new alliances in order to deliver the vision and communicating the strategic approach to the sector in order to generate engagement and support from stakeholders.

## Outer Hebrides Local Development Plan

The delivery of future infrastructure at the island level will be dependent upon compliance with the Outer Hebrides Local Development Plan<sup>8</sup> which was adopted by CnES in November 2018. The vision of the plan is:

*“To encourage and facilitate sustainable economic growth and help build confident and resilient communities, the Plan will provide planning policy that delivers long term benefits to the communities of the Outer Hebrides by ensuring development contributes to the creation of well-designed and attractive places, and that our natural, marine, and cultural resources are valued and utilised efficiently and sustainably”*

There is a strong emphasis on Placemaking & Design (Policy PD1) and the development of infrastructure that supports active travel (Policy PD2). Development proposals need to ensure there is no adverse impact on existing uses (including non-residential caravan sites) (Policy PD6). Advertisements and signs must be appropriate to their surroundings, avoid creating clutter, not prejudice public safety and developers are encouraged to use composite signs (Policy PD7).

Flood risk assessments may be required and allowances need to be made for future enhanced risk caused by climate change (Policy EI 1). Development proposals should avoid adverse impacts on the water environment (Policy EI 3) and should be designed to minimise adverse impact on soils and development will only be permitted where it has been shown that unnecessary disturbance of carbon rich soils has been avoided (Policy EI 5). Developments must not exacerbate coastal erosion (Policy EI 6) and they must protect the Hebridean Way, Core Path network and established access points to water (Policy EI 7). Proposals to improve or expand the path network to improve access to key natural and built heritage will be required to demonstrate appropriate consideration has been given to the need for associated way marking, information boards, car parking and other facilities (Policy EI 7).

The spinal and inter-island routes, the airports at Stornoway, Balivanich and Barra, and the ports and harbours are priorities for development. Development proposals associated with them will need to accommodate pedestrians and cyclists, and CnES will support the provision of new electric car charging infrastructure (Policy EI 9).

Development at sites affected by international environmental designations will be tightly controlled (Policy NBH2), there is a strong presumption against the removal of existing trees and woodland and CnES will seek opportunities for new woodland creation in association with new development (Policy NBH 3).

Development which preserves or enhances existing built heritage assets will be supported. Proposals for development should have regard to a building’s particular features and special

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<sup>8</sup> [ohldp-adopted-plan.pdf \(cne-siar.gov.uk\)](https://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/ohldp-adopted-plan.pdf)

interest. Proposals that do not preserve or enhance the special interest of a building will not be supported (Policy NBH 4). Development proposals which preserve, protect, or enhance the archaeological significance of heritage assets, including their settings, will be supported. There is a presumption in favour of the in situ preservation of all scheduled archaeological remains (Policy NBH 5).

## Sealladh/Outlook 2030

Outer Hebrides Tourism has developed a tourism strategy for the industry *Sealladh/Outlook 2030* with the strapline “Creating a Leading 21<sup>st</sup> Century Tourism Destination”. Its vision is:

“We INSPIRE curious travellers everywhere to visit our Chain of Wild Atlantic islands, WELCOME every one of them as a friend and our islands FEED their soul, like nowhere else they have ever been.”

In order to achieve this vision OHT sees its mission as:

“Creating authentic, engaging experiences from more of our unique, natural and cultural assets to grown tourism sustainably, support vibrant communities, stimulate population growth and enhance economic performance.” It seeks to support vibrant communities through 4 categories of Collaboration, Shared Value, Events & Experiences, & Infrastructure. The Infrastructure category has 3 bullet points:

- Signage & Information
- Motorhomes & Parking
- Toilets & Facilities

The strategy identifies that core visitors to the Outer Hebrides are from Scotland, are independent and are seasoned explorers. Growth markets are Northern Europe and the rest of the UK, Young Fogies, Heritage links to Scotland, Tour/short break, Active Families.

## Summary

Scottish Government and CnES policies and plans favour the sustainable development of tourism in the context of conserving the environment and supporting the communities upon which tourism is based. The prospect of a Transient Visitor Levy offers an opportunity to significantly increase investment in visitor infrastructure. Scottish and Hebridean tourism strategies aim to place Scotland at the forefront of tourism destinations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with a strong emphasis on minimising impact to the environment, delivering benefits to local communities and achieving Net Zero outcomes.

## 4. Strategic Developments & Influences

In developing a plan that looks forward over a 10 year horizon it is important to take account of key strategic influences upon supply and demand for tourism infrastructure over this period. These issues will play a significant role in shaping the numbers and types of visitors coming to the Outer Hebrides and therefore the kind and amount of infrastructure that will be required.

### Ferry Capacity

At the time of writing in 2022 growth in numbers is constrained by available ferry capacity to the islands, with the key constraints being on the Uig-Tarbert-Lochmaddy route, and lesser but still significant constraints on the Ullapool-Stornoway route. Capacity on the Uig-Tarbert-Lochmaddy triangle has been reduced by Calmac's decision to stop using the mezzanine deck on the mv *Hebrides* due to its inability to load and unload the boat quickly enough to keep to timetable. This constraint will remain in place until the replacement vessel, currently being constructed, comes into service (currently predicted for late 2023). Further constraints on ferry capacity are the result of change in traveller behaviour. The trend over time to larger cars and increasing numbers of larger motorhomes on ferries has the effect of reducing total numbers of people able to travel with vehicles on the ferries when at full capacity. This may be mitigated somewhat by the introduction of increased fares for motorhomes over 6m which were introduced in 2022 to align them more closely with commercial rates.

### Stornoway Deepwater Port

The Stornoway Port Authority is currently constructing a deepwater port which will allow cruise lines to berth in Stornoway, rather than anchor offshore as at present and use tenders to bring passengers to shore. The key effects of this will be to increase the numbers of people coming ashore from any one cruise ship, to attract larger cruise liners with greater passenger capacity to visit the port and to increase the total number of liners coming to the port. The SPA predicts that without the deepwater port the number of passengers landing in Stornoway would be in the region of 10-15,000/year. In contrast following completion of the port numbers will rise to 47,068 in 2025 and 78,162 in 2031 (Table 1)

2024	27,313
2025	47,068
2026	65,426
2031	78,162

These numbers may prove to be conservative. By way of comparison Orkney receives over 125,000<sup>9</sup> cruise ship visitors annually and Shetland over 90,000<sup>10</sup>. In addition, the Ukraine war has resulted in St Petersburg being removed from cruise ship itineraries, causing a reduction in planned visits to the Baltic and an increase in bookings for the UK.

<sup>9</sup> Source: [Cruise Ships | Orkney Islands Council Harbour Authority \(orkneyharbours.com\)](https://www.orkneyharbours.com/)

<sup>10</sup> Source: [Shetland Cruise | Make the most of your cruise visit to Shetland](https://www.shetlandcruise.com/)

The effect of greater numbers coming to Stornoway on any given day will be to increase the demand for coach tour services around Lewis and Harris, and for these coaches to deliver many more visitors to individual sites than has historically been the case. It is also likely to bring increasing numbers of cyclists to the Stornoway area as ships offer the facility of standard or e-bikes to customers to make the holiday experience more active and sustainable.

## The Hebridean Way

Separate walking and cycling routes stretching through the islands for 186 miles and 156 miles respectively were launched in 2016, are being promoted, and attracting increasing numbers of cyclists and walkers. In 2019 the two routes attracted around 7,500 people, contributing c. £3m to the local economy<sup>11</sup>. At present there is not a formal management and maintenance programme in place for the route.

## New & Improved Visitor Centres

There are plans in place for a number of new and improved visitor centre facilities in the Outer Hebrides which will significantly increase the capacity of the islands to provide engaging cultural and historical experiences to visitors. A number of these are included in the Islands Growth Deal and the CnES bid to the UK government's Levelling-Up Fund:

- Cnoc Soilleir. A Gaelic cultural and educational centre with visitor facilities opened in South Uist in June 2022.
- Calanais Standing Stones and Visitor Centre. As noted above this is the most popular visitor attraction in the Outer Hebrides with over 150,000 visitors/year. A planned £5.3m development will greatly increase capacity.
- Slighe Hiort – St Kilda Trail. Three separate developments in Harris, Lewis and Uist will interpret the story of the St Kilda archipelago.
- An Taigh Mhor. The accommodation in Breasclete for the former lighthouse keepers and their families serving the Flannan Isles lighthouse. This £3.2m project will tell the story of the lighthouse, its associated tragedy, and the wider story of lighthouses and their keepers, while also acting as a local cultural centre.
- Iolaire Centre. A proposed centre at the waterside in Stornoway to commemorate the lost and the survivors of the 1919 Iolaire tragedy.

## Longer Term Developments

The proposed facilities outlined in the section above have the potential to provide 21<sup>st</sup> century standard visitor facilities to address the large, anticipated increase in visitors to Lewis and Harris, and a continuing steady increase in Uist. At the time of writing this plan Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL) have begun a consultation on replacing the Lochboisdale pier, which has reached the end of its life. The favoured option is to move to a new location at Gasaigh, which would not only allow for easier and safer berthing by ferries but also has the potential to allow for cruise ship berthing. If this were to occur it is likely that Uist and Barra would experience similar proportional increases in visitors as are expected in Lewis and Harris in response to the creation of the Stornoway deepwater port. The removal of Calmac from the pier area in Lochboisdale will

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<sup>11</sup> Source: Sealladh 2030

create an opportunity to redevelop the site which could include improved visitor facilities and the waterfront of Lochboisdale.

Barra is one of six Scottish islands to be included in the Scottish Government's Carbon Neutral Islands project<sup>12</sup>. These islands are to be supported to become carbon neutral by 2040. The designation could attract more visitors to holiday on Barra and be used as a useful marketing tool.

The development of a spaceport on North Uist at Scolpaig has the potential to provide a unique visitor experience watching rocket launches. It is unclear at this stage what impact this may have on vacation tourism but it is likely to lead to a locally significant rise in business tourism.

## Covid-19 influence

It is difficult at this stage to be certain what the long-term impact of Covid-19 upon tourism demand may be. The difficulty of travelling abroad and the perception of the Highlands & Islands as a lower risk area encouraged much greater numbers of visitors to come to the islands when restrictions were lifted, causing considerable stress on the limited available local infrastructure and environment. Large numbers of visitors are once again able to travel abroad, even though the World Health Organisation has stated that the pandemic is far from over. The ability to travel abroad may bring a return to more normal numbers for a period but there may be longer term impacts. If even a modest proportion of people change their long-term behaviour to avoid contact with larger numbers of people, this will cause a movement away from facilities with close mixing such as bunkhouses and hostels and towards those that offer more self-containment such as holiday lets and motorhomes.

## Summary

Looking ahead over a 10 year horizon to 2032 major changes to the scale and shape of island tourism are anticipated. The biggest impact will come from increased cruise liner landings with lesser impacts from growth in ferry passenger arrivals. This will put increased pressure upon existing tourism infrastructure, which could be ameliorated in part by the provision of significant additional visitor attraction capacity.

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<sup>12</sup> [Carbon Neutral Islands named - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/carbon-neutral-islands)

## 5. Consultation Findings

### Online Survey

The online survey was accessed by 554 individuals. Of these 64% identified themselves as being Private Individuals Resident in the Outer Hebrides and 24% as Tourism Business operators based in the Outer Hebrides. A further 6% were individuals resident elsewhere, with the remaining representing private and community landowners, community organisations, tourism operators based elsewhere and others.

All except 10 people identified their place of residence. The largest number came from Stornoway and the surrounding area (88), followed by 70 from Harris (Figure 1). The smallest numbers were from Benbecula (19) followed by North Lochs, South Lochs & Kinloch (29).

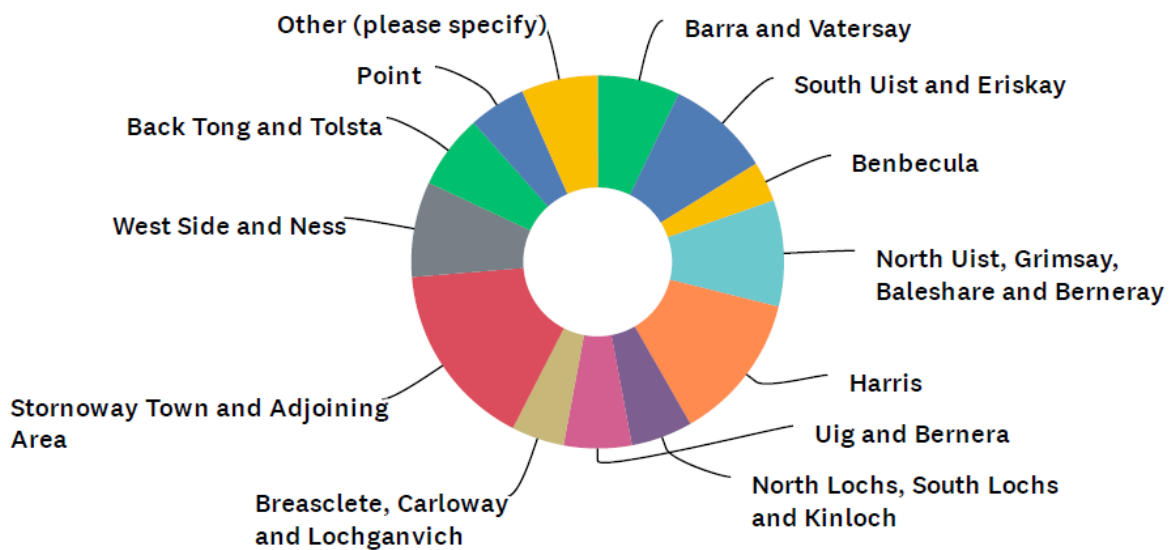


Figure 1: Place of residence

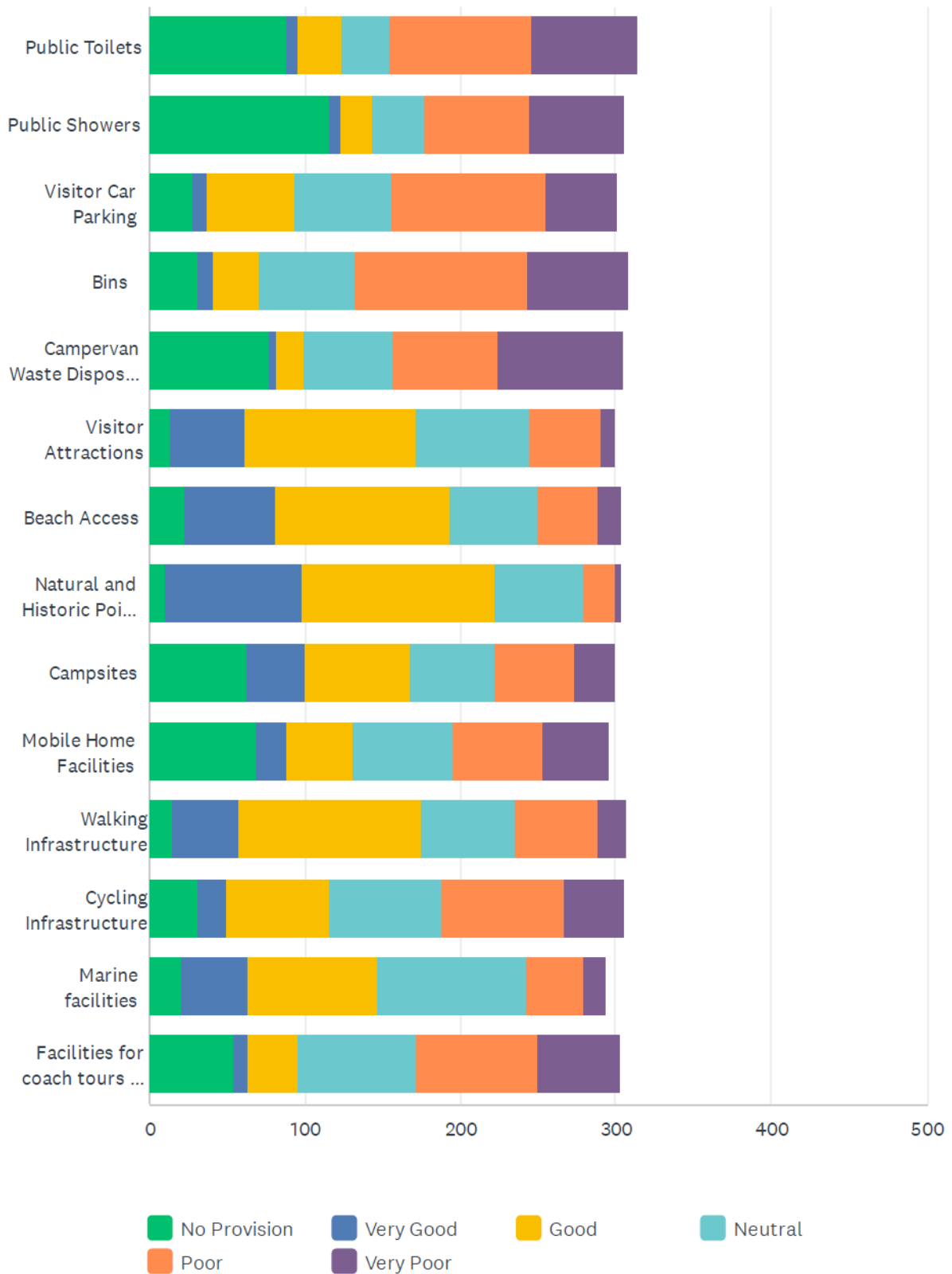
### Rating of Facilities

Respondents were asked to rate a range of facilities in their own areas using categories from “No Provision” then “Very Poor” to “Very Good”. Approximately 300 people rated each of 14 facilities. The most common categories identified as having “No Provision” were Public Showers (38%), Public Toilets (29%), Campervan Waste Disposal (26%), and Mobile Home Facilities (23%) (Figure 2).

Those facilities with the most ratings of Very Poor and Poor were Bins (58%), Public Toilets (52%), Campervan Waste Disposal (50%) and Visitor Car Parking (49%). Combining the No Provision and Poor categories the provision that respondents expressed least satisfaction with were Public Toilets and Public Showers.

In contrast those categories with the greatest number of Good and Very Good responses were *Natural & Historic points of Interest* (70%), Beach Access (56%), Walking Infrastructure (54%) and Visitor Attractions (53%).

Figure 2: Rating of Local facilities



There was considerable variation in perceptions of the availability of facilities across the different local areas. Perceptions of No Provision in Barra were no higher than 8% across all categories, whereas at the other extreme Lochs recorded over 50% each for the seven categories of public toilets, public showers, campervan waste disposal, beach access, campsites, mobile home facilities, and facilities for coach tours and cruise ship visitors.

None of the 12 areas recorded a combined Good/Very Good score of more than 50% for the categories of public toilets, public showers, visitor car parking, bins, Campervan waste disposal, cycling infrastructure, and facilities for coach tours and cruise ship visitors. Only two areas (Barra & Vatersay and Benbecula) scored 50% or more Good/Very Good for mobile home facilities.

Ten of the 12 areas scored more than 50% Good/Very Good for natural and historical points of interest, nine for beach access, and six each for visitor attractions and walking infrastructure.

Example comments regarding the availability (or otherwise) of facilities and their quality include:

### **Toilets & Showers**

*"Appalling"* (Harris)

*"Non-existent except for 2 single toilets at braigh which have only recently Reopened"* (Point)

*"No toilets for miles Harris to Ballan nothing and then Balallan to Stornoway nothing. Toilets in Stornoway regularly closed"* (Stornoway)

*"Very, very poor provision particularly on Sundays. Feels completely unreasonable to expect visitors not to need to use facilities on Sundays, or to drive dozens of miles to find one."* (Breasclete, Carloway, Lochganvich)

*"The only 24hrs are back in Galson, there are no facilities at the Butt (the start/finish point of the walk/cycle Hebridean way, not advertising facilities, is not the same as advertising that there are NOT toilet facilities there..."* (West Side & Ness)

### **Key Visitor Locations**

*"Butt of Lewis a shambles, Callanish a Shambles, Gearranan a shambles"* (West Side & Ness)

### **Parking**

*"Not enough - Tarbert in particular - overflow from Distillery clogging street Tarbert parking full - no where for people working to park"* (Harris)

*"Real lack of public parking. Any free parking spaces being used by campervans (Barra & Vatersay)*

*Not enough parking at tourist spots."* (Breasclete, Carloway, Lochganvich)

### **Marine facilities**

*"Good use of Lochboisdale marina, noted not enough access points for launching kayaks etc as we are asked a lot"* (South Uist & Eriskay)

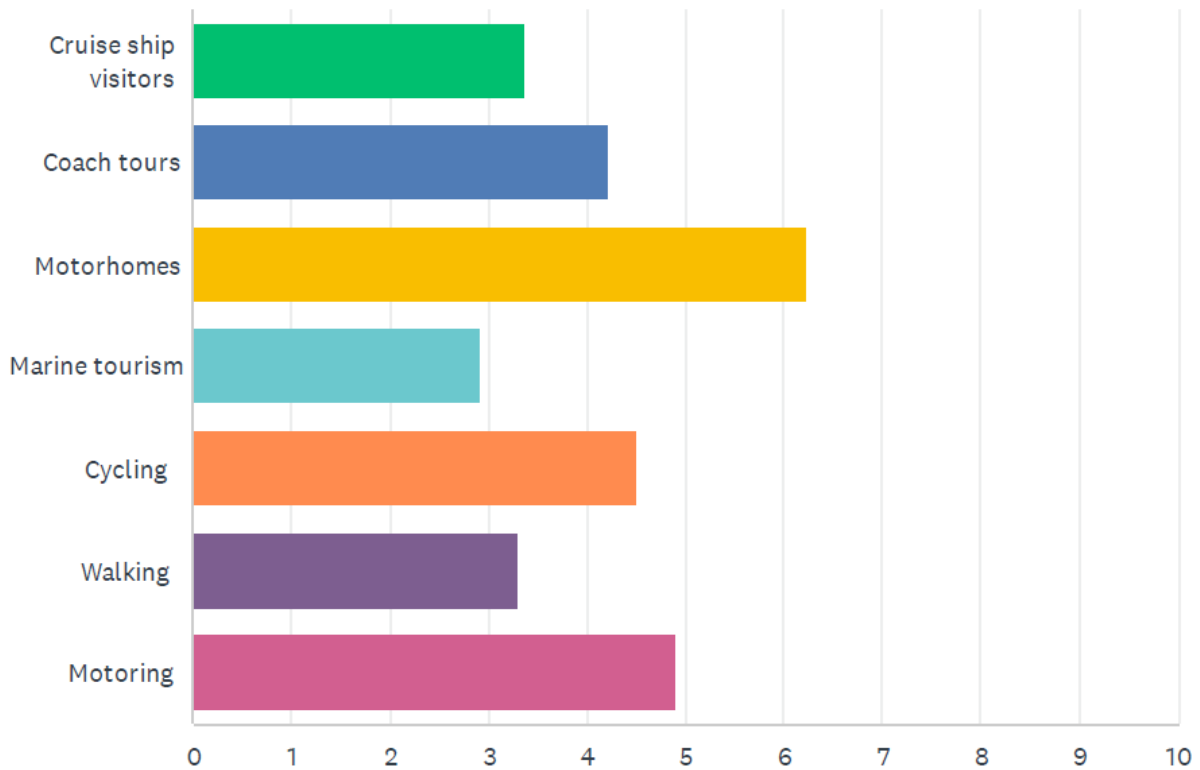
*"Very poor. So much more could be done. For instance a marina such as was built in Stornoway or the smaller one in Scalpay Harris."* (West Side & Ness)



## Ranking of Activities

Participants were asked to rank the tourist activities having the greatest impact in the area where they lived. Motorhomes were identified as having the greatest impact, with 66% of people giving them a ranking of 1 (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Ranking of Activities Having Greatest impact



Motoring has the next greatest impact, followed by cycling (discussed below). Marine Tourism and Walking were identified as having the least impacts.

These findings were consistent across the 12 island areas with all areas rating motorhomes as having the greatest impact. Motoring was rated 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> by 10 areas with only Stornoway (5<sup>th</sup>) and Benbecula (6<sup>th</sup>) rating it lower, whilst cycling was ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> at the local level. Marine tourism was ranked 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> by 10 areas and walking was ranked 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> by 10 areas.

Comments about the impact that different activities were having included:

*“Most campers respect the community and environment, some are just unaware of the impact they have and a small minority cause a problem. More facilities are needed to provide better infrastructure for campers.” (Harris)*

*“Yes a really problem with dumping rubbish as there are hardly any bins at the campsites. Local dump won’t take campers rubbish” (Barra & Vatersay)*

*“Yes as the fragile marram grass is being parked on by campervans.” (South Uist & Eriskay)*

*“Abuse of ‘wild ‘ mostly by motorised campers” (Harris)*

*“Increased erosion e.g. Vatersay Bay, Heaval.” (Barra & Vatersay)*

These activities were also having a more general impact upon daily life:

*“Over run with tourists who park their huge vans wherever they want. Only benefits Islanders if it isn’t interfering with day to day life which it is. Over run every area. Difficult to travel Over to town without passing 10 to 20 campervans and same amount of cyclists who behave as if the road is theirs Over 2 to 4 wide.” (West Side & Ness)*

*“Affects my daily walk - having to see men urinate as I walk along the sea wall. I have to leave longer to get to Tarbert for the post office run in the summer and also longer to get to work as people do not understand the rules of the road” (Harris)*

*“Cyclists have greatly increased with the launch of the Hebridean Way but no thought to Islanders being held up constantly by people ‘taking their time’ and not being courteous.” (Barra & Vatersay)*

*“Not enough passing places on the roads, poor signage leading to many asking for directions. Poor 4g coverage across Uig resulting in many not able to check their location or directions.” (Uig & Bernera)*

*“Increased traffic on single track roads throughout islands increases journey times, supermarkets sell out quickly of fresh produce, ferry bookings need to be made in advance for inter island travel so visiting relatives on other islands on a whim is no longer possible” (South Uist & Eriskay)*

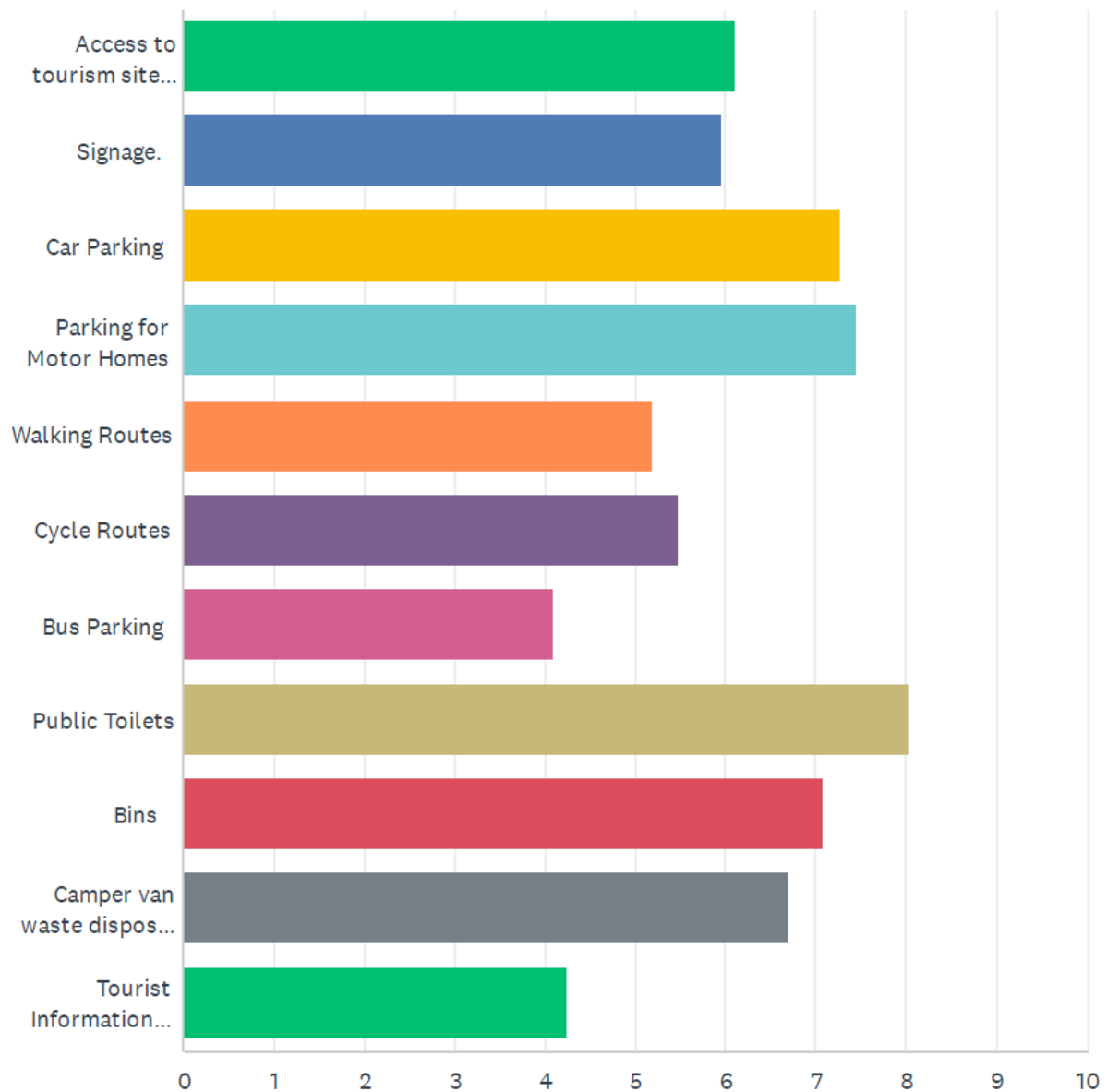
*“Cyclists in particular are a nuisance when travelling to and from my workplace. Lack of stock in local shops due to demand created by tourists” (Benbecula)*

*“Empty shop shelves, no bread, no milk. No increased deliveries from the mainland to support that many people on the island.” (North Uist)*

### Ranking of Facilities in Need of Upgrading

Respondents were asked to rank 11 facilities according to their need of upgrading, with 201 responses. Those facilities considered most in need of upgrading were Public Toilets, Parking for Motor Homes, Car Parking and Bins, with Campervan waste Disposal close behind (Figure 4). Those considered least in need of upgrading were Tourist Information points and Bus Parking.

Figure 4: Ranking of Facilities Most in Need of Upgrading

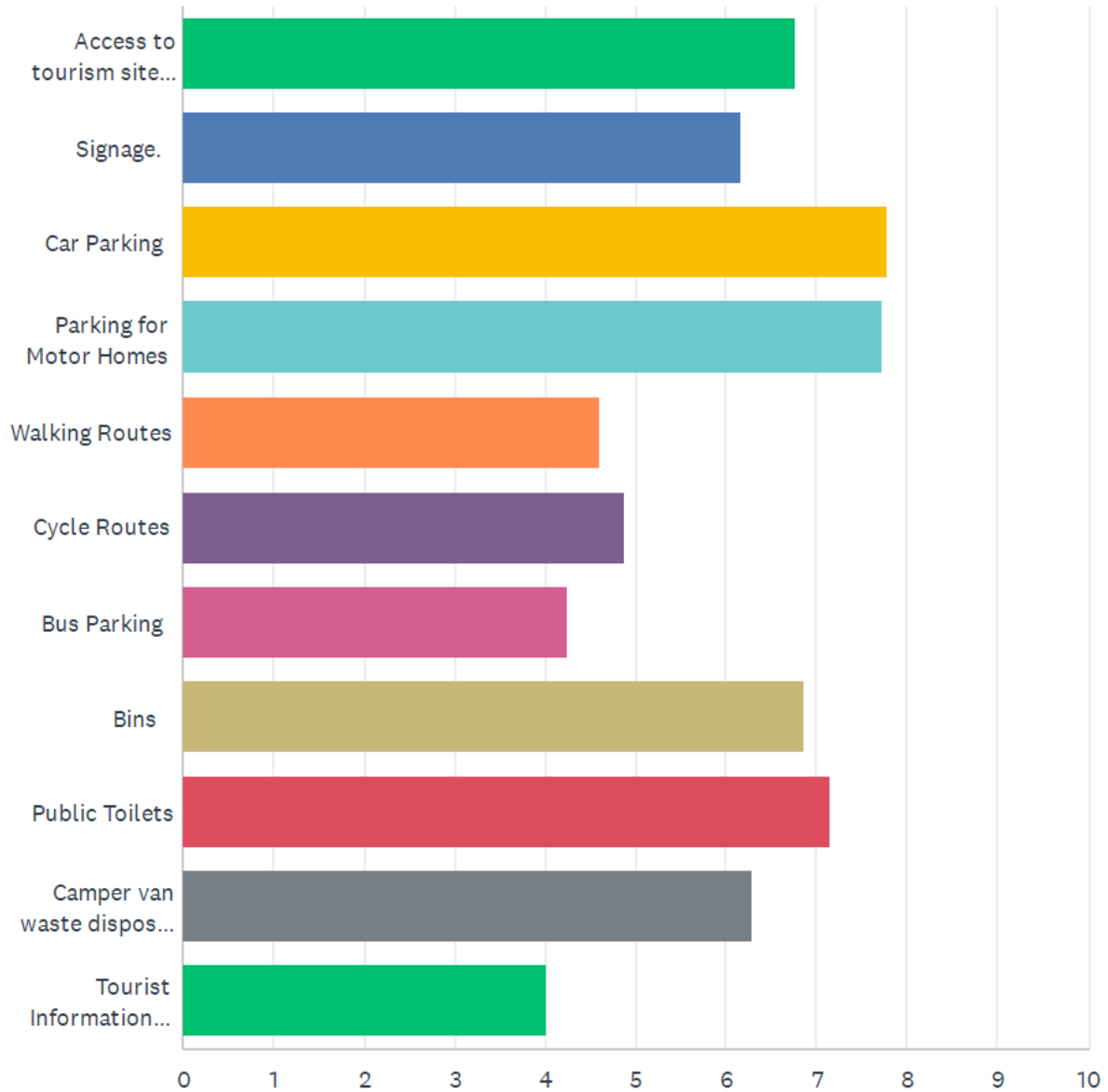


Similar preferences were demonstrated at the local level with 10 of 12 areas ranking public toilets 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup>. Eight of the 12 areas ranked parking for motorhomes 1 to 4<sup>th</sup> while 9 areas ranked car parking provision 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup>. At the other end of the scale eight areas ranked both tourist information points and bus parking 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> in terms of priorities.

The most notable regional differences were for South Uist & Eriskay placing signage 2<sup>nd</sup> and Benbecula and North Uist, Grimsay, Baleshare & Berneray placing access to tourism sites (including beaches) 2<sup>nd</sup> also.

Those completing the survey for their own area were then invited to rank facilities in a part of the islands that they had visited in the past 12 months, and 44 did so. Although a much smaller sample size the findings were very similar to rankings for people's own areas. Those identified most as in need of upgrading were once more Car parking, Parking for Motor Homes, Public Toilets and Bins (Figure 5). Similarly, those facilities considered least in need of upgrading were Tourist information points and Bus parking.

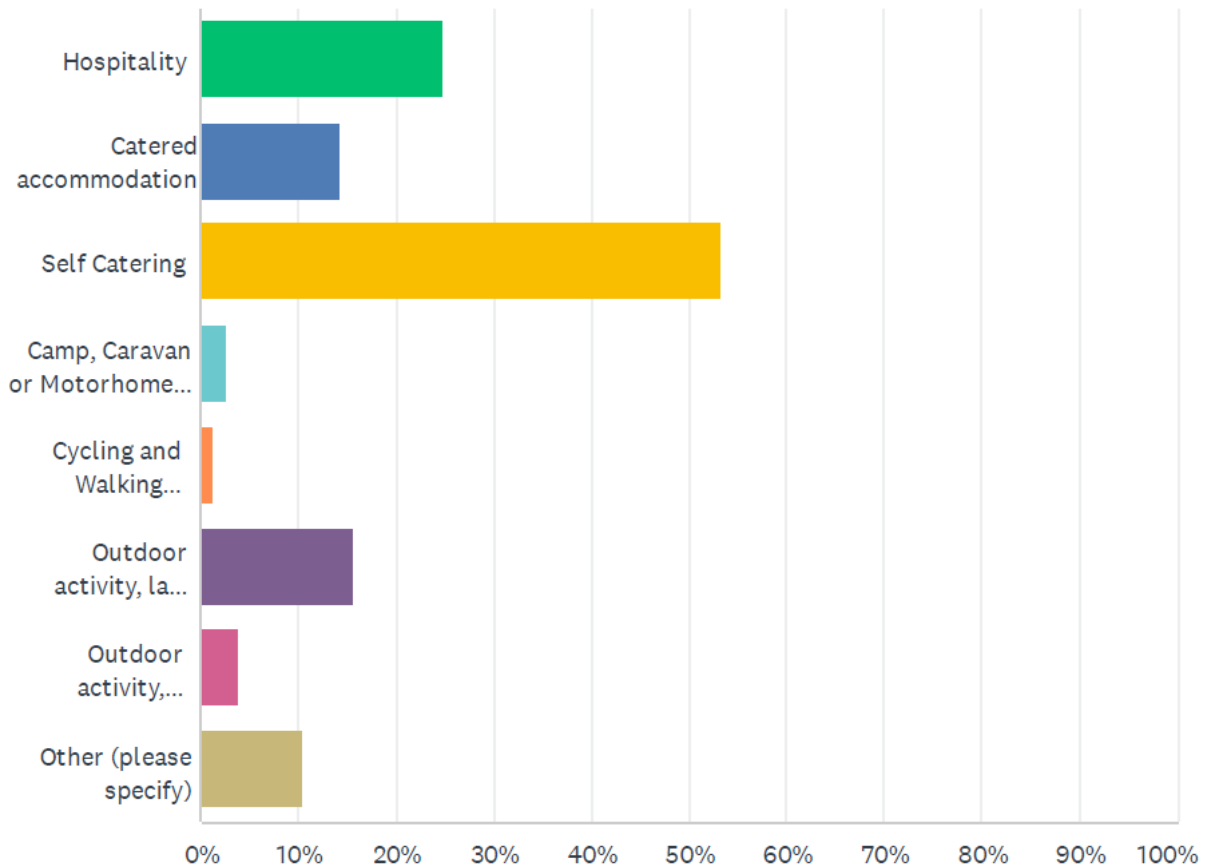
Figure 5: Ranking of Facilities Most in Need of Upgrading in Another Area



## Tourism Businesses and Infrastructure

77 of the 131 individuals running Outer Hebrides tourism businesses were willing to identify the categories of the 95 businesses that they operate. The most significant category of these were Self-catering, followed by Hospitality, Land Based Outdoor Activities and Catered Accommodation.

Figure 6: Types of businesses owned by Tourism Operators



Of these, 83% said that improved visitor infrastructure would enable them to grow their business. The following are examples of the types of improved infrastructure suggested by businesses:

*"We badly need more accessible paths, beach access, fishing spots access. I am going to offer disabled accommodation but there are few places where people with e.g less mobility can go"* (Point)

*"Public Toilets"* (x2 answers – Barra & Vatersay)

*"Marked walking routes, guides to local attractions, signage and info boards for local attractions would all give visitors an express reason for visiting Uig. Despite have tons of eagles in Uig we frequently have visitors staying who get up early and drive all the way to Harris to visit the eagle observatory or drive to Bosta to walk the marked circular walking route as there are no equivalents in Uig."* (Uig & Bernera)

*“Improved parking for visitors - would ensure they don’t block access to our properties and land  
“(South Uist & Eriskay)*

*Signage / visitor information - to allow people to make the most of their visit finding  
attractions/points of interest (South Uist & Eriskay)*

## **Summary of Survey Findings**

In conclusion the survey has shown that there are high levels of dissatisfaction with the lack of, and poor quality of provision of Bins, Public Toilets, Campervan Waste Disposal, and Visitor Car Parking. Motorhomes were identified as having the biggest tourism impact in local areas and those facilities identified as most in need of upgrading were Car parking, Parking for Motor Homes, Public Toilets and Bins. Tourism operators believe that improving visitor infrastructure will help them to grow their businesses and therefore the local economy.

## **Zoom & Telephone Consultations**

These were held in two forms. Firstly, one to one consultations were carried out with representatives of community landowners, sectoral stakeholders and knowledgeable community figures to identify existing infrastructure, gaps in infrastructure provision, points of pressure and any plans the community may have to address the challenges caused by increasing visitor pressure.

Secondly, public Zoom meetings were advertised on community social media, in community newspapers and promoted via direct emails and word of mouth. The numbers attending these meetings were much smaller than participated in the online survey, but the quality and quantity of information received was high. Those who attended were very knowledgeable about their own areas, identifying important infrastructure, sites valued locally, if not more widely, and able to give information on specific problems at particular sites.

Key themes came through the consultation process from both the stakeholder calls and the public Zoom meetings were:

### **Inadequate Public Toilet Provision**

A constant concern was the lack of public toilet provision. People reported that visitors constantly struggle to find public toilets to use. A particular note of concern was the lack of provision for walkers and cyclists on the Hebridean Way. People reported seeing cyclists toileting by the roadside because of the lack of provision. By the very nature of their mode of transport active travellers require facilities to be closely spaced to be able to use them than those travelling in vehicles.

Respondents noted the declining provision of (the already inadequate) public toilets in the region. A number of community-based facilities were supported historically by revenue grants from CnES but these were then cut or discontinued. Some places kept their facilities going using an honesty box system but then closed at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and have not reopened. Of those that remain only a limited number are fully accessible. One Zoom participant noted that “a year ago disability access was not something I thought about” but today he has to think about it daily and is unable to access many toilet facilities.

Representatives of the Cruise Ship industry and an Outer Hebrides-based walking holidays provider both noted that they cater for an older demographic who tend to need access to toilet

facilities more than younger groups. A similar observation could be made for the whole of the tourism industry with 46% of leisure visitors being over the age of 55.

### **Inadequate Refuse Collection Provision**

There were many comments about the lack of bins to accommodate general waste produced by visitors. Requests were made for more or larger bins. It was noted that motorhome drivers who choose not to stay at official campsites do not have a proper outlet for their general waste other than using public bins. These bins are quickly filled and can lead to others leaving bags next to the bins expecting the refuse collectors to pick them up (if they remain intact and in place) at the time of the next collection.

### **Insufficient Campervan Waste Disposal Facilities**

It was noted that this provision has improved in recent years but that there are still limited numbers of sites open to all, as opposed to those sites which are accessible only to resident vans. Mention was often made of problems with campervan waste being dumped. A number of these were reporting what they had heard but there were instances of first-hand experience, including the finding of human waste deposited in a refuse bin.

### **Access to beaches & Protection of machair**

Problems of beach access were highlighted as being often single track roads with limited passing places feeding official car parks that are inadequate for the number of vehicles trying to access them. This leads to parking on verges and where able, driving across machair leading to damage to the fragile habitat. It can also affect the ability to sustain traditional crofting practices. Sites identified as particular problems were Vatersay, Northton, Berneray East Beach, Horgabost, Luskentyre, Husinis, Dalmore, & Eoropie.

An associated issue affected the machair is the making of small fires burning away the surface vegetation, creating open spots, and risking windblown erosion.

### **Access to Historic Sites**

Calanais stones, the Dun Broch and Gearranan blackhouse village were all highlighted as having major problems with large numbers of vehicles trying to access far too few parking spaces. Smaller sites that could spread the load of visitors also had problems with limited parking including Whalebone Arch and Clach an Triseil.

### **Congested Settlements**

The theme of too few parking spaces also extended to settlements with participants noting the difficulties of parking to carry out basic shopping needs and activities requiring only a short-term stay in the settlement. Problems highlighted included campervans parking up for long periods of time unnecessarily in available spaces and Calmac mainland staff bringing cars over on the ferries and parking them locally.

### **Inadequate Signage**

Concerns were expressed about lack of signage in a range of situations. Poor signage can unnecessarily cause people to wander through crofts while looking for a route, the lack of a designated access route to some beaches can cause multiple routes and therefore a lot of damage to the dunes. Signage of walking routes, sites of interest and parking were all considered in need of improvement. Several people mentioned the work of Outer Hebrides Tourism to develop a range of generic practical signs to help inform the public of particular issues at local sites.

### **EV charging for car and bikes**

Participants noted the increasing need for EV charging facilities for cars and that the distribution of existing units could be improved. One respondent who was accustomed to giving hospitality to cyclists noted that those riding e-bikes suffered range anxiety in a similar way to car drivers and were looking for more places to charge their bike batteries.

### **Cyclist & other road users' safety**

Participants were asked why they thought respondents to the online survey had designated cyclists as having the 3<sup>rd</sup> biggest impact upon had the biggest impact after campervans and general motoring upon the local community. A common answer given was that other vehicles find it very difficult to pass groups of cyclists on single track roads, thereby slowing down travel and increasing driver frustration. One person described the problems of overtaking cyclists on the Barvas moor road where overtaking can be difficult due to blind summits in the road, leading to manoeuvres that threatened the safety of cyclists and other car drivers. One person who cycled regularly in Uig stated that if a cyclist meets a large campervan on a single track road between passing places the cyclist has to dismount and leave the road to let the van past.

### **Pressure on Roads & Other Infrastructure Capacity**

The pressure of congestion has been noted above but participants concerns expanded beyond the occurrences to the impact that vehicle numbers and size are having on the roads themselves and the communities they serve. Concerns were expressed that many roads were not designed to take the present amount of traffic and are deteriorating considerably under the strain. Lack of understanding of the use of passing places can also cause problems for local traffic with inappropriate parking and failing to give way slowing down traffic. Others were concerned that the increased pressure was having a sustained negative impact on the lives of individual and communities.

### **Limited Capacity & Capital to Deliver Change**

Community groups and, more recently, community landowners have been responsible for developing a wide range of infrastructure including visitor centres, public toilets, footpaths, parking and local signage. They continue to address these issues but are finding it increasingly difficult to progress projects, particularly those where there may not be an immediate revenue generating opportunity available. Existing staff are increasingly spending more of their time managing assets that they have created. At the same time rapidly increasing tourism pressures mean that there is a continual need for new infrastructure to address pressing issues and it is often very hard to access funds for these types of projects.

### **Summary of Consultations**

The participation of over 500 people in the online survey demonstrates a high level of engagement within the Outer Hebrides on visitor infrastructure issues. The collective view from the survey that the poorest quality infrastructure is in the areas of bins, toilets, and parking was largely supported by those taking part in the Zoom consultations. The ability to park and to safely and easily gain access to beaches and natural and historical sites of value is an important consideration. There was concern at damage to fragile habitats, and this being exacerbated by poor signage. Those who are most aware of local issues and are in positions of ownership and management of land are finding that their ability to deliver new projects is struggling to match the rate of change required.



## 6. Planning for Change

The study to this point has highlighted the key factors driving tourism change and tourism infrastructure weaknesses. It has demonstrated the impact that the combination of these driving factors and infrastructure weaknesses bring to local communities in the Outer Hebrides. In addition to the normal drivers of growth the deepwater port in Stornoway will bring a step change in visitor numbers to the islands. The provision of new visitor attractions will in part address the additional influx of visitors but their provision will need to be matched by other provision at the islands' beaches, sites of cultural, historical and natural interest, and within the islands' settlements. The increasingly popular Hebridean Way will also need to be managed and developed to meet the needs of thru hikers and those using parts of it on a daily basis.

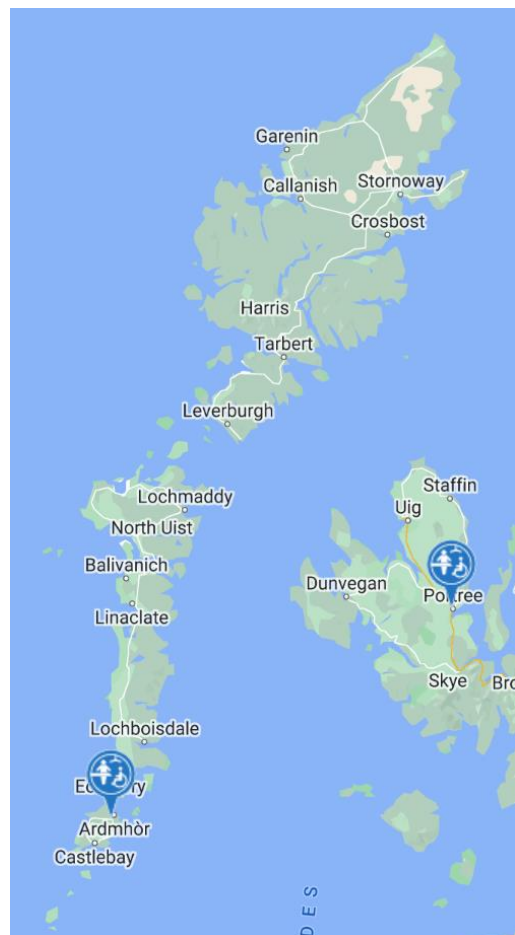
It is appropriate to develop the plan through two key themes in order to be able to take a strategic approach to infrastructure development. It also helps to demonstrate the cohesiveness of packages of small projects, which together can have a much more significant impact than when looked at in isolation.

### Improved Basic Facilities & Services

It is important to lay proper foundations so that the future visitor leaves the islands with images in their mind of those things that the tourism industry wants them to remember and not the poor state of basic facilities. This is especially the case if Scotland aspires to be the world leader in tourism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. At the same time an end goal of this plan is for local people to experience as few negative effects of increased visitors as possible.

It was noted above that three of the four infrastructure elements seen as having the poorest provision and most in need of improvement were toilets, bins, and campervan waste disposal. These are indeed basic facilities, but foundational to the quality of life for everyone. The loss of toilets in recent years has had a significant impact in local areas and upon the visitor experience. Some toilet provision dates from the last century, is in increasingly poor condition and was designed before proper consideration was given to all abilities access. Today the inability of a less able person to go to the toilet in a dignified manner is considered to be a basic human rights issue. Therefore, this needs to be a priority. In addition to standard accessible facilities there is a need for Changing Places facilities for the neediest, and groups planning facilities should be encouraged to consider these where possible. The only registered Changing Places facility on the Outer Hebrides is at the Garadh a' Bhagh a' Tuath in Northbay, Isle of Barra – encouraging provision throughout the Outer Hebrides would ensure the region is accessible to the whole population and literally put the islands on the map.

Figure 7: Extract from [www.changing-places.org](http://www.changing-places.org)



The provision of bins had the poorest satisfaction rating and there is a real demand for this service to be improved. The provision of more and larger bins will have resource implications and will therefore need to be considered and planned carefully.

Both toilet and bin provision have long term revenue costs. Given the priority given to these by local people an improved provision to cope with increasing visitor demands could potentially be made through a Transient Visitor Levy. This is discussed further below.

There is still a need for further CDW facilities in certain areas to provide a wider network for those vans not staying in campsites.

An important rule for business is to get the basics right. If these facilities and services can be delivered a significant proportion of the current weakness in infrastructure will be addressed.

Potential projects that can address these issues are:

- Lochboisdale Toilets (Storas Uibhist)
- Scaladale toilet facilities (North Harris Trust)
- Cliff Beach campsite – (Valtos Grazings Committee)
- Port of Ness visitor facilities
- Butt of Lewis Visitor Facility (Galson Trust)

Further opportunities may be considered at:

- Locations on the Hebridean way
- Bosta Beach

## **Integrated Access & Transport Solutions**

As noted in the consultations section above the management of traffic is a key issue. As a general rule the problems are not caused by having too many people at individual sites but having too many vehicles for the limited infrastructure. The limited availability of parking spaces to accommodate these vehicles can lead to inappropriate parking, congestion of single-track roads and damage to fragile machair land.

In specific locations with modest visitor numbers (as considered below) providing additional parking spaces will be the appropriate solution. In other locations the combination of very high numbers of vehicles, and the inability to provide sufficient additional parking space due, the lack of availability of suitable ground close to site, and the unsuitability of particular roads for coaches means that other solutions need to be sought. Examples of this are: beach access at Northton, Luskentyre and Dalmore; and historical site access at Calanais, Dun Charlabhaigh and An Gearranan. These issues which are chronic and locally serious at times in 2022 will become severe and persistent over the lifetime of this plan unless concerted action is taken to address them. The increased ferry traffic and vastly increased cruise ship visitor numbers could easily overwhelm the current inadequate infrastructure.

Parallel to the need to resolve these issues are the wider societal aims of reducing car use and promoting public and active transport solutions. No single solution will be suitable for every site, but a range of tools can potentially be developed to deliver sustained transport infrastructure improvements that will enhance the visitor experience and significantly improve the quality of life for local people.

## Calanais to Butt of Lewis Integrated Transport Study

The traffic management issues at Calanais are clear with current provision clearly inadequate and difficulties being encountered in accessing more land to create additional parking. However, it is important not to consider one site in isolation. Many of the visitors in cars and coaches that stop at Calanais also stop at the Doune broch and at An Gearranan, as well as other sites on the west side all the way to the Butt of Lewis. A solution is not only required for large coaches but also for cars at these sites. Ideas that have been raised so far include:

- A large parking area close to the Stones where passengers can decant from large buses and cars to smaller buses to access the stones
- A park and ride type facility somewhere on the west side that would allow users to take smaller buses to visit a range of historical sites and beaches
- Charging for parking at key sites
- Parking provision adjacent to the main A858 and A857 roads with active travel options including bike and e-bike hire to enable access to beaches and coastal sites

The knowledge of individual local community groups is insufficient to know how successful these individual options may be, what the unintended consequences of an action in one place may be elsewhere, and what impact an integrated strategy may have on the whole area. The needs of cruise tour operators and local coach providers will also need to be considered in order to match their needs with the potential transport solutions to be created.

*It is therefore recommended that an integrated transport study be commissioned as a priority to cover the whole of the west side of Lewis from Calanais to the Butt of Lewis.*

This to seek to understand the issues in detail, to evaluate a range of ideas that may come from the community and to work with community landowners and other stakeholders to devise an innovative and integrated approach to the whole area. The need for this work is immediate, in order to allow workable solutions to be developed before the arrival of vastly increased cruise ship passenger numbers in 2025.

The west side of Harris may benefit from this approach as well with the potential for a park and ride facility somewhere near the Luskentyre road end and coaches serving the beach hotspots. Either the two could be included in a single study or the west side of Lewis used a pilot with follow up studies building on the experience gained there.

Projects and sites to be covered by this study could include:

- Calanais Visitor Centre
- An Taigh Mor, Breasclete
- Dun Charlabhaigh
- An Gearranan
- Proposed Barvas Campsite
- Whalebone Arch
- Clach an Truseil
- Eoropie
- Port of Ness
- Steinecleit
- Butt of Lewis Visitor Facility

## Case study: Schiehallion

Schiehallion is a distinctive mountain in Perthshire that is very popular with walkers. It is accessed via a 7-mile long single track road from Braes of Foss to Tummel Bridge. Much of the mountain is owned by a conservation organisation but the car park provision is owned by Forestry and Land Scotland. Numbers of visitors increased so that cars parked along the short access road to the car park and then in recent years starting parking along the road verge.

In 2020 more than 100 cars were counted parked on the verge and encroaching on to the road at different times. This prevented passage by farm, council and emergency vehicles and was recognised as a threat to the safety of the local community. Different stakeholders worked together to provide additional parking and provide advisory information to motorists. Perthshire Council designated the road a clearway for its full length and advised drivers that it would tow away vehicles and issue fines to anyone parking by the roadside. The combination of measures has had a major impact upon local congestion.

### Luskentyre Access & Parking

An alternative approach may be to consider Luskentyre in isolation and use an approach or approaches there as a trial for other sites where an attraction is some distance along a peripheral single-track road. Increasing parking availability at Luskentyre beach adjacent to the graveyard is difficult because of the limited room available. Croft land within immediate walking distance may be suitable but it is good quality machair pasture and is also required for grazing livestock. There is then no suitable land until the junction with the A859 spinal route where a car park could potentially be created as an overflow for cars unable to park next to the graveyard.

People would then have the option of walking, cycling or taking public transport 2- 2 ½ miles to reach their destination. There is a risk of random parking occurring along the verge of the road and in passing places. This could potentially be managed by designating the road a clearway which would prohibit parking along the roadside.

Its implementation could be enforced by Police Scotland and by council officials and would require personnel resource. The prohibition on parking would apply to all road users so could potentially catch crofters parking for brief periods by the roadside, for example.

Another option that has been discussed and which would avoid an enforcement approach would be to install a sign at the junction with the A859 to advise drivers when there is no parking available and encourage them to travel to an alternative location.

## Strategic Access Enhancement

While trying to provide an ever-greater number of parking places at the most congested sites may not be the appropriate solution, making suitable provision at many smaller sites will be. There are a wide range of sites at which a modest level of parking provision will make a significant difference to local access issues. The study has identified a range of locally important sites that need a modest increase in parking provision, and where that will not be too difficult to provide. In some cases these are individual sites that stand alone as a place of interest. In others there are a group of sites within an area that would all benefit from increased provision. By taking a broad approach to providing this space the cumulative impact of several smaller projects can relieve pressures across an area and, enable visitors to have a broader choice of places to visit. One such group could include the Whalebone arch, Clach an Truseil and Steinecleit at the north end of Lewis.

Projects/locations that would fit in this category include:

- Parking to facilitating short walks on the Hebridean Way
- Vatersay beach/machair
- Barra beaches
- Gleann Ulladal, N Harris
- Aline Community Woodland (for buses)
- Sideval Stone circle and Clan Mackenzie memorial, Loch Seaforth
- Bosta Beach
- Whalebone Arch
- Clach an Truseil
- Steinecleit
- Eoropie
- Port of Ness

## Parking Management

The consultations section noted the problem of a lack of parking at honeypot sites and within settlements. These issues can be addressed in part (alongside additional provision where appropriate) by the use of the techniques of charging and time-limited parking

This system helps to keep a turnover of traffic, to maximise access and business to local shops, while preventing unnecessarily long stays by those who do not need to be there. The introduction of this system may be appropriate for (parts of) settlements such as Stornoway, Tarbert and Castlebay.

Historically, the cost of parking has been free at most sites throughout the Outer Hebrides. Where charges have been proposed there has been some resistance but on introduction they have then been accepted with high rates of compliance to charges. Charging is a tool to manage traffic flows and one way of enabling infrastructure providers to raise funds to pay for the cost of that infrastructure and to maintain it. The cost of introducing parking payment systems is justified where traffic volumes are significant and the revenue raised is greater than the costs of delivery.

The Outer Hebrides is probably one of the last areas in the UK where free parking is available at sites that are very popular and under pressure by increasing visitor numbers. A blanket free parking approach may have been appropriate when visitor numbers and associated pressures were low were low but it is harder to justify when certain sites become increasingly congested and the quality of life for local communities is affected. Introducing charges offers the ability to raise revenue to maintain and increase provision, encourage visitors to stay at one location for

only as long as they need, and to discourage casual use of parking provision for general purposes unconnected with accessing sites. The introduction of this system may be appropriate for (parts of) settlements such as Stornoway, Tarbert and Castlebay.

Visitors coming to the Outer Hebrides from other locations in the UK and abroad are used to paying charges in other parts of the country, and therefore it would not be an unusual departure to be expected to pay charges here. Urras nan Tursachan has advised coach operators that it intends to charge for parking from 2023, while the North Harris Trust is introducing parking charges at Huisinis in 2022. Some other groups are considering doing the same at other locations.

One concern over charging can be the impact of having to pay upon local people, but there are options to address this. Charging can be limited to daytime only but free in evenings when sites are quieter. Local residents could have a card or sticker in their car to give them free access to a site. Alternatively, a free period of parking can be given e.g. 1hr, after which charging (or penalties) applies. Some councils have a cardboard disc with a clock scale which users can place in the car to indicate the time they parked. Wardens can then note this and allow the appropriate time for the person to carry out their business. This can be useful at congested sites to keep a turnover of traffic and prevent long term parking by those who do not have a good reason for parking their car there.

*We would strongly recommend consideration of charging at sites where large numbers of vehicles means constant parking congestion and lack of available space.*

## Indicative Solution Design – Parking Provision and Bin Storage

Fraser Architecture have developed an indicative design for new 6 bay parking area that meets the published statutory guidance of CnES. Communities can refer to this as best practice in future infrastructure developments to satisfy the demand for smaller interventions as described above.

Alongside this they have prepared an indicative solution to community bin store that could be installed beside a public road with a service area for the CnES refuse vehicle to service the site. This is shown in addition to a parking area but could be developed in isolation at particular pressure points.

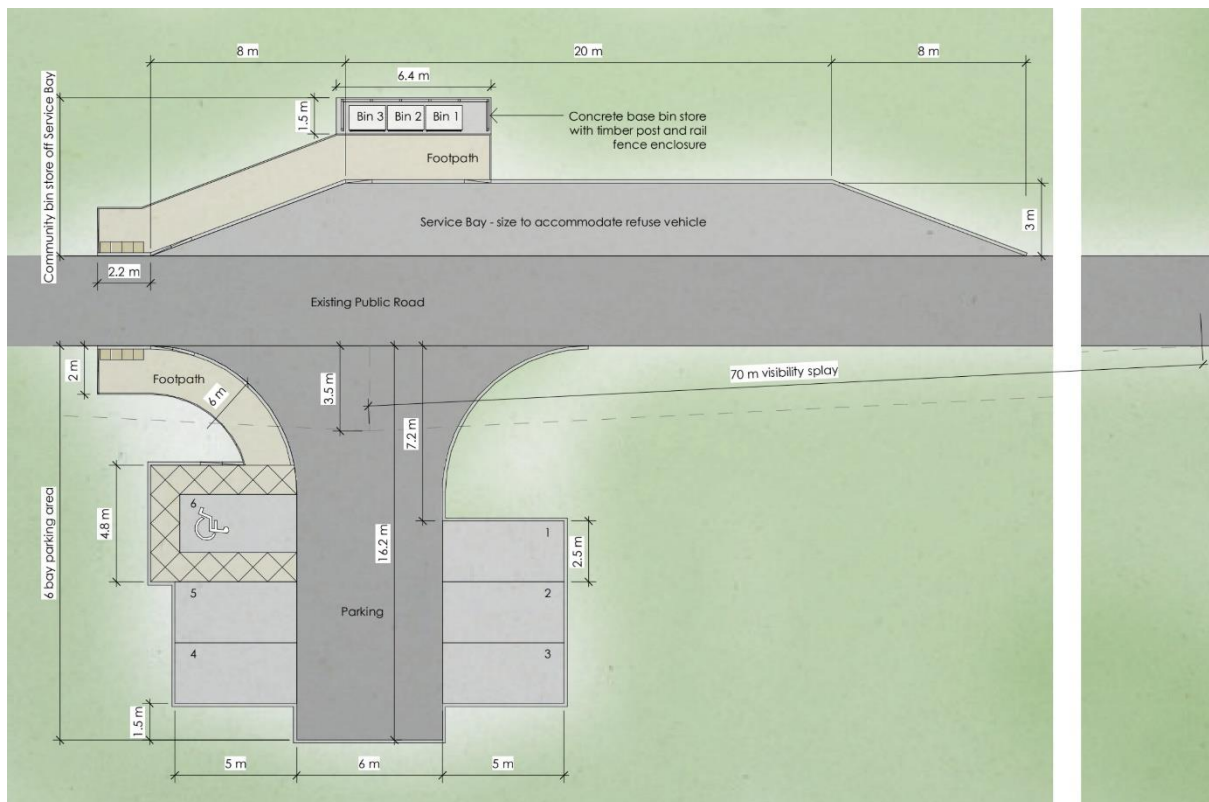


Figure 8: Indicative Parking Area & Bin Store Design \_ c Fraser Architecture LLP 2022.

Torrance Partnership are providing input into indicative costing for the solutions. These are

- Parking Area
- Bin Store
- Combined Development

As with the fire pit indicative solution, these plans are intended to enable robust project planning by communities and CnES, and each project should be designed by a suitable professional to meet the specific proposed context.

## Informing & Guiding Visitors: Protecting the Environment

The creation of additional facilities as outlined above is an essential requirement for an infrastructure that has not kept pace with the rapid growth that has occurred, and even more so with expected increases in numbers. However these facilities will not be utilised, nor their locations properly enjoyed without enhancing the knowledge and actions of visitors. There are four elements to this:

- **Signage.** As noted in the consultations visitors are unable to access sites if they do not know about them or if they are unaware of the facilities servicing them. Consultees noted the need for improved signage to sites.
- **Interpretation.** This can be in two forms:
  - Physical. Interpretation boards in situ are valuable for guiding and orienting people as to the natural, historical and cultural value of sites. There are many locations lacking this and others with old interpretation that has reached its end of life due to long term exposure to the elements.
  - Digital. Groups are increasingly experimenting with digital applications to provide information to visitors. This can range from QR codes at sites to link to websites to area apps to guide visitors. Galson Trust has developed a Visit Galson app which provides a range of information on visitor infrastructure and local services. Uist Unearthed has developed an app for exploring archaeology using augmented reality and 3D models. Both of these apps are useful at providing a lot of information in the absence of physical interpretation. Similar apps or one covering the whole of the Hebrides could be of major assistance to visitors, apps such as Scottish Island Passport could be liaised with on a national level to ensure infrastructure is properly mapped and visitors informed.
- **Information.** Many visitors are simply unaware of the impact of their actions because they have no prior experience of the Outer Hebrides. They therefore need to be informed of the potential consequences of their actions in a respectful and helpful manner. It will therefore be important to disseminate the range of helpful signs developed by Outer Hebrides Tourism and to develop other bespoke signs for individual sites.
- **Facilitate.** Encouraging good behaviour by words alone is helpful but enabling people to act responsibly can nudge them to adopt appropriate behaviours. One issue highlighted by the consultations and by observation is that of the number of pockets of fire damage on the machair at various locations in the islands. The provision of fire pits at designated and attractive locations will give people the opportunity to have a fire in a responsible manner.



### Indicative Solution Design – Fire Pit Area

Fraser Architecture have developed an indicative design for new fire pit area that would designate a location for safe lighting of wildfires. Alongside the development of a safe working code for the areas in compliance with the national codes for outdoor use, communities can begin to manage their assets in a meaningful way while not restricting one of the most popular ways that tourists enjoy areas. It is shown within a stockproof enclosure that could be secured from use when wildfire high risk warnings are in force.

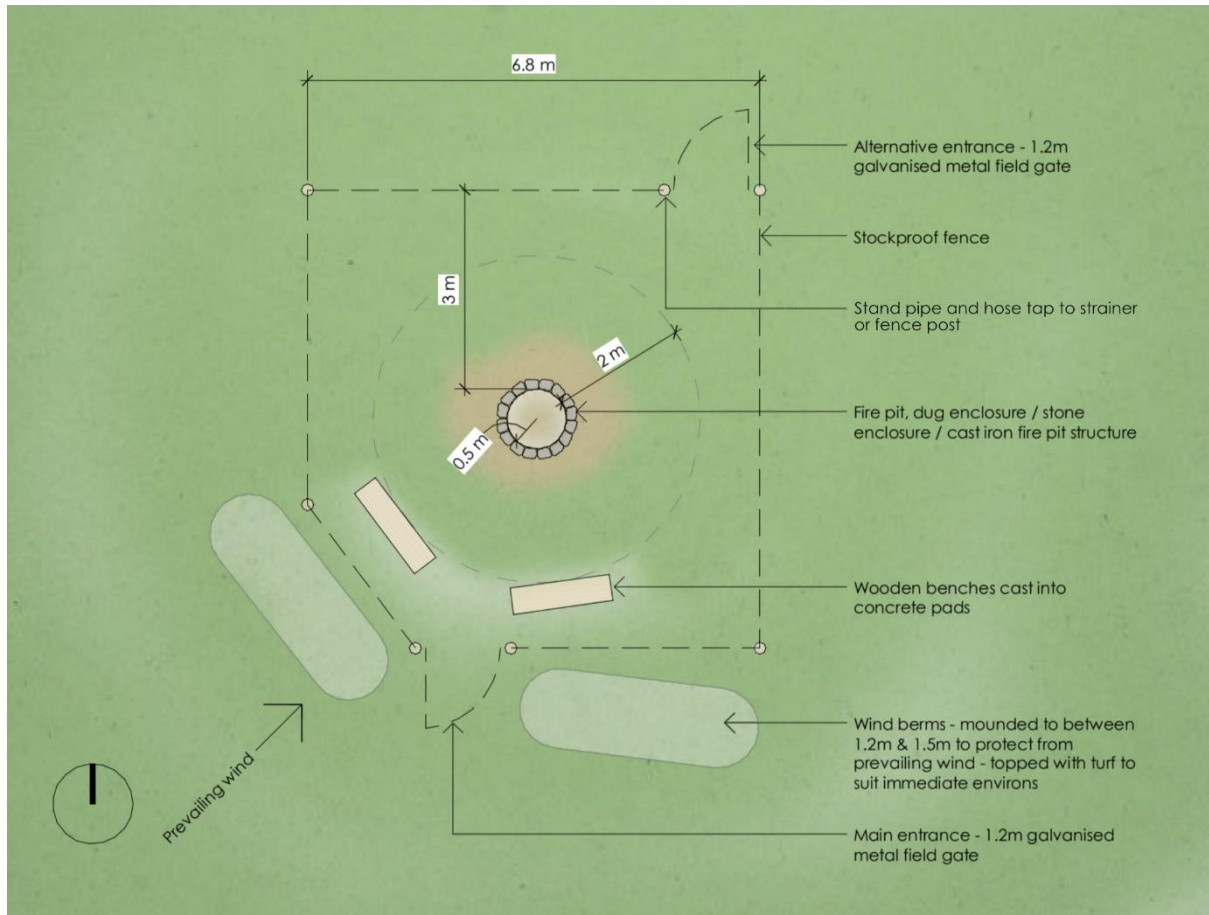


Figure 9.1 : Indicative Fire Pit Design with stockproof fence \_ c Fraser Architecture LLP 2022

Torrance Partnership are providing input into indicative costing for the solutions.

This potential solution is intended to enable robust project planning by communities and CnES, and each project should be designed by a suitable professional to meet the specific proposed context with an action plan for implementation that meets recognised best practice.

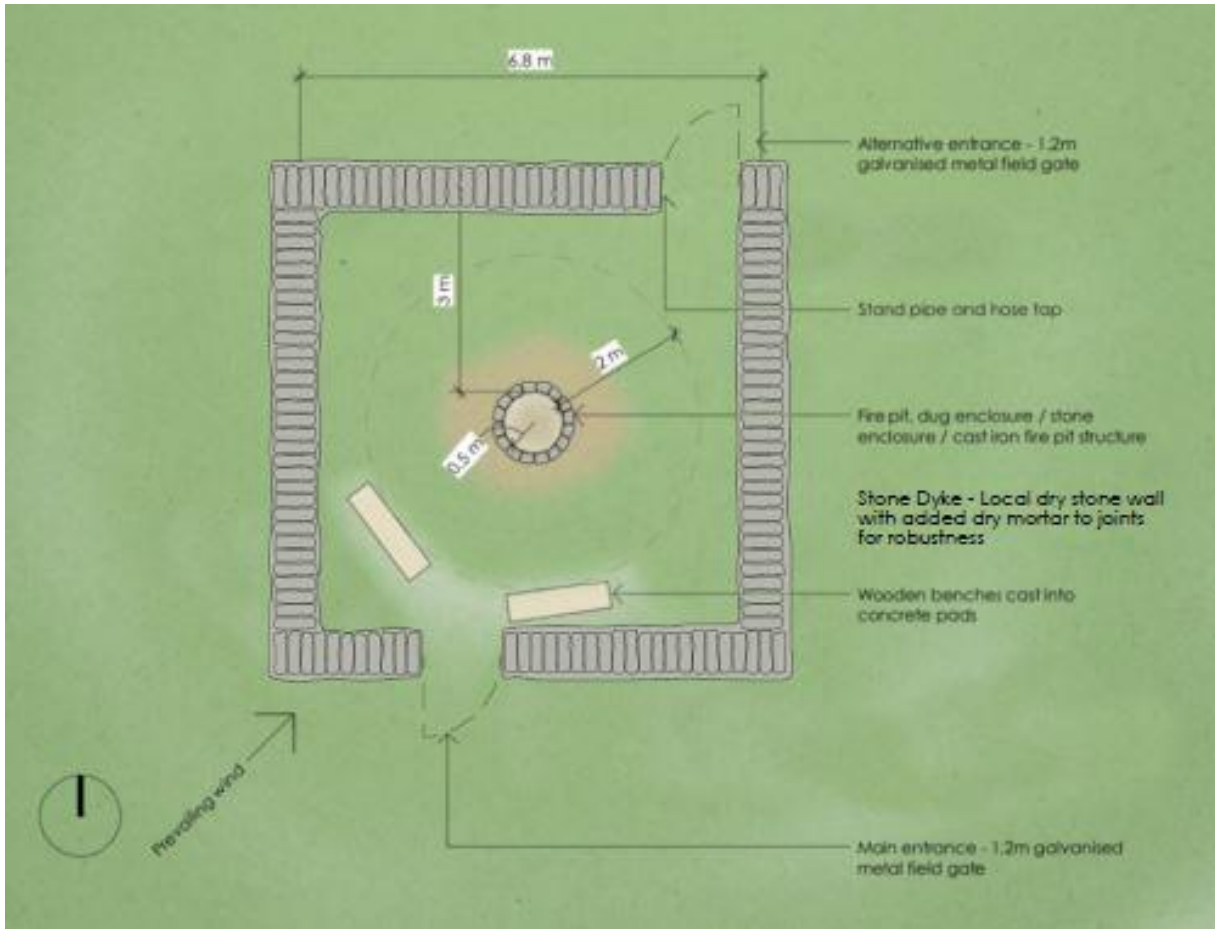


Figure 9.2 : Indicative Fire Pit Design with stonedyke \_ c Fraser Architecture LLP 2022

## Hebridean Way and Enhanced Active Travel provision

The Hebridean Way has become a significant asset for the islands and attracts increasing numbers of people. The consultations section noted the problems associated with it of a lack of infrastructure such as toilets at suitable intervals and battery charging for those with e-bikes. Improving basic parking opportunities adjacent to the route will enable visitors and locals to more easily enjoy the route, an example being the lack of any parking on the Locheport road for access to the Locheport-Langass walk.

Investment in these facilities will deliver strongly against the 3 key commitments of Scotland Outlook 2030 for the tourism sector to make a full contribution to becoming a net-zero society by 2045, ensuring that tourism leads to improved community wellbeing and nurtures thriving places across Scotland, and by ensuring tourism delivers shared prosperity for all, by encouraging the right growth in the right areas.



Figure 10: Images of the Hebridean Way path between Carinish & Langass Woodland on North Uist as an illustration of the current condition and dangers \_ c Fraser Architecture LLP 2022.

There is currently no manager or development strategy for the route which is a serious failing. There have been reports of damage to some sections of the route in Uist. Repairs to 2 bridges were carried out in 2021 by the Uist ranger and CnES Environment Officer and a survey of the

walking route through Uist showed that 28 waymarkers were missing or required and an additional 108m of boardwalk was needed<sup>13</sup>.

*These actions are welcome but a formally instituted structure and planned regime is required if the Hebridean Way is to be kept in good repair across all of its length, and if it is to be developed to cope with increasing numbers of walkers. It would be a sensible aim to find a mechanism to fund a Route Manager's post and allocate a maintenance budget by 2024.*

A Route manager could also address the strategic needs of the route in terms of both cyclists and walkers' infrastructure needs. The provision of toilets at reasonable intervals along the routes is an important issue as covered by the section on basic facilities and services above.

Active travel by visitors extends beyond the confines of the Hebridean Way. There are a lot of visitors and island residents who enjoy walking and cycling despite the limited facilities available for them. Others are willing to walk or cycle if it is made practical and easy for them to do so. There is scope for a significant increase in the amount of bike shelters and stands across the islands so that users can park their bikes safely.

This plan period also gives an opportunity to start thinking more strategically about dedicated and segregated cycle and walker provision separated from other road users. Some of these issues can be considered as part of the proposed Calanais to Butt of Lewis transport study. However, there is also a need to think of how to make use of existing infrastructure and adapt it to modern use. The Hebridean Way for walkers already makes use of sections of old road between Clachan and Luib. It would be of great value to commission a study to look at using other similar sections of old road elsewhere in the islands. Suitable candidates could include Ardhasaig in Harris to Aline in Lewis, and Garynahine to Giosla. There is also a section of dismantled tramway from Newmarket to Loch Or an Stairr which it has been suggested could be used as the first part of a longer route parallel to the Stornoway to Barvas road.

Areas with inherent dangers should also be reviewed, for example in the Uists where walkers have no option but to use causeways that at single track pinch points creates a major risk to them and disrupts traffic.

*It has been proven that investment in segregated cycle provision encourages much greater participation in urban areas, the opportunity for the Outer Hebrides to invest in making itself a destination for walkers and cyclists in safe and outstanding surroundings would be an aspirational medium to long term aim for the islands.*

Separate to the preparation of this plan HITRANS has commissioned active travel plans for the settlements of Stornoway, Tarbert, Lochmaddy, Balivanich, Lochboisdale and Castlebay, with expected completion by the end of 2022.

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<sup>13</sup> Source: Uist ranger report 2021

## 7. Action Plan

The following plan outlines the actions to be taken with indicative dates for delivery and the outcomes that would occur on their delivery:

Projects are ranked on a scale of 1 to 5, based primarily upon the ranking of facilities most in need of upgrading identified on p19. It should be noted that these rankings are relative because the study identified through online survey, area meetings and interviews that all of the issues are the cause of significant problems and concerns.

Priority	Issues
1	Public Toilets, Parking for Motorhomes
2	Car Parking, Bins, Campervan Waste Disposal
3	Access to Tourism Sites, Signage
4	Cycle Routes, Walking routes
5	Tourist information, Bus Parking

For ease of reading on an A4 page the following table is restricted to providing information on project location, type, cost, year of delivery for the first 3 years and an overall indicative cost for 10 year needs to 2032. It assumes that funding applications are made in the year prior to delivery. A more comprehensive table which includes data on detailed project descriptions, delivery bodies, current stage of development, and an additional breakdown of potential spend for the periods 2026-28 and 2029-32 is available as accompanying appendix 5.

Activity	Location	Project	Unit Cost (£)	Priority	Indicative 3 year cost (2023-25) (£)	2023 (£)	2024 (£)	2025 (£)	Indicative 10yr Cost (2023-32) (£)	Outcomes
Research	West Side of Lewis	Integrated Transport Study		1	40,000	40,000			40,000	Strategic Plan for West Side transport issues
	Luskentyre	Local Traffic Study		2	20,000	20,000			20,000	Plan to resolve local congestion
	Various	Study to provide separated active travel routes		1	40,000	40,000			40,000	Plan for providing separate active travel routes leading to:
Improve Basic Facilities	Barvas	Barvas Gateway (Phase 1)		1	980,000	980,000			980,000	Campsite with public facilities, laundry and e-bike hire
	Urgha, Harris	Urgha Aire		1	125,000	125,000			125,000	Overnight services for campervans
	Horgabost	Disabled beach access		1	75,000		75,000		75,000	Full access to facilities and beach for the least able
	Rodel	Improved Public Facilities		1	150,000		150,000		150,000	Fully accessible toilets

Activity	Location	Project	Unit Cost (£)	Priority	Indicative 3 year cost (2023-25) (£)	2023 (£)	2024 (£)	2025 (£)	Indicative 10yr Cost (2023-32) (£)	Outcomes
	Lochboisdale	Lochboisdale Public Toilets Renovation		1	150,000		150,000		150,000	All abilities access to basic facilities
	Various	Comfort stops on Hebridean way	150,000	1	600,000		150,000	450,000	2,100,000	All abilities access to basic toilet and camping facilities
	Lochs	Campsite		1	0				250,000	All abilities access to basic facilities
	Bosta, Lewis	Campsite/parking		1	250,000			250,000	250,000	All abilities access to basic facilities
	Cliff, Lewis	Cliff Campsite		1	125,000		125,000		125,000	All abilities access to basic facilities

Activity	Location	Project	Unit Cost (£)	Priority	Indicative 3 year cost (2023-25) (£)	2023 (£)	2024 (£)	2025 (£)	Indicative 10yr Cost (2023-32) (£)	Outcomes
	Port of Ness	Parking/toilets/ restaurant		1	0				1,000,000	All abilities access to basic facilities
	Butt of Lewis	Visitor facilities		1	0				3,000,000	All abilities access to basic facilities
	Point	Point Gateway			200,000			200,000	200,000	Toilet, interpretation and orientation facilities for Point
<b>Strategic Access to Natural Environment Sites</b>	Uist, Barra, Berneray	Uist & Barra beach access:		2	300,000			300,000	900,000	Improved Parking provision
	Loch Ainort	Improved parking		2	60,000			60,000	60,000	
	Loch Skipport	Improved parking		2	60,000			60,000	60,000	
	South Lee	Improved parking		2	60,000			60,000	60,000	
	Northton	Improved parking		2	120,000			120,000	120,000	Reduced village congestion



Activity	Location	Project	Unit Cost (£)	Priority	Indicative 3 year cost (2023-25) (£)	2023 (£)	2024 (£)	2025 (£)	Indicative 10yr Cost (2023-32) (£)	Outcomes
	Luskentyre	Improved parking/park & ride		2	180,000			180,000	180,000	Reduced village congestion
	Glean Ulladal	Create Parking for access		2	80,000		80000		80,000	Creation of Parking provision
	Eoropie	Improved parking		2	120,000		120,000		120,000	Improved Parking provision
Strategic Access to Historical Sites	Sideval, Seaforth Head	Parking and access to stone circle and memorial	60,000	2						Improved Access
	Clach an Truseil	Improved parking	120,000	2						Improved Parking provision
	Bragar	Whalebone Arch Parking	60,000	2						Creation of Parking provision; Improved road safety
	Steinecleit	Improved parking	60,000							Improved Access
	Combined Project			2	300,000			300,000	300,000	

Activity	Location	Project	Unit Cost (£)	Priority	Indicative 3 year cost (2023-25) (£)	2023 (£)	2024 (£)	2025 (£)	Indicative 10yr Cost (2023-32) (£)	Outcomes
Parking Charges	Various	Investigate and introduce charging as appropriate			0					Assisted Site management
Informing & Guiding Visitors: Protecting the Environment	Outer Hebrides	Strategic Signage		3	95,000			95,000	95,000	Improved Signage to Sites
	Outer Hebrides	21 <sup>st</sup> century Interpretation	4,000	5	80,000			80,000	80,000	Improved Physical interpretation
	Outer Hebrides	Fire pit provision	30,000	2	180,000		90,000	90,000	570,000	Improved facilities for visitors
Heb Way & Enhanced Active Travel	Outer Hebrides	Appoint Route Manager	45,000		135,000	45,000	£45,000	45,000	450,000	Improved Planning for maintenance
	Various	Provision of bike and e-bike facilities	10,000	2	80,000			80,000	80,000	Network of bike and e-bike facilities
	Arising from Research Study		50,000		250,000			250,000	750,000	First separated active travel routes in Outer Hebrides

Activity	Location	Project	Unit Cost (£)	Priority	Indicative 3 year cost (2023-25) (£)	2023 (£)	2024 (£)	2025 (£)	Indicative 10yr Cost (2023-32) (£)	Outcomes
	Various	Comfort stops on Hebridean way	150,000	1	0					All abilities access to basic facilities
Project Management	Based in any CnES office in the islands or working from home		45,000		135,000	45,000	£45,000	£45,000	450,000	Well coordinated delivery of projects achieving anticipated spend on time
<b>TOTAL COST</b>					4,855,000	1,250,000	985,000	2,620,000	12,410,000	

## 8. Plan Delivery

In order for the improvements identified in this plan to occur over the timescale of the plan and quickly enough to match the expected increases in visitor numbers it will be important that a constant stream of projects is able to be developed, funded and delivered.

There are several key risks, which, if they occur will have a negative impact on plan delivery:

- **Insufficient Capacity.** The fact that infrastructure is already pressured means that there is an element of catching up to do, in addition to planning for the future. As noted above many groups are struggling for capacity to deliver additional projects, and where staff are funded from self-generated revenues their focus will be principally on revenue-generating projects. Others may lack the skills required to either develop a particular type of project or to develop it quickly.
- **Insufficient Capital funding.** The origins of this plan lay in the lack of success of Outer Hebrides projects in accessing the Rural tourism Infrastructure Fund in Rounds 2,3 & 4, after initial success in Round 1. The Scottish and UK Governments are facing a spending squeeze due to the aftermath of COVID-19 and building inflation is much higher than in recent decades. All of these elements together threaten to prevent the plan from being delivered.
- **Insufficient Revenue Funding.** The ongoing management of toilet facilities, footpaths and other infrastructure requires revenue funding and this has become increasingly unavailable from statutory sources.

In order to address these risks a number of mitigating solutions will need to be developed. These could include:

- **The appointment of a Plan Delivery Coordinator.** The role could involve the person:
  - developing greater detail of the plan
  - Working with groups to identify projects that fill gaps
  - Providing technical support to those developing projects
  - Assisting groups to raise funding
  - Providing support in project delivery, or acting as project manager in some instances
- **The appointment of a Hebridean Way Route Manager.** This role will involve the person:
  - Developing the facilities specifically required for the Hebridean Way
  - Fundraising for those projects
  - Providing support in project delivery, or acting as project manager in some instances
  - Identifying longer term funding sources and strategies to continue the post

These 2 posts will cost £270,000 over a 3 year period, representing 6.2% of the overall project budget.

- **Introducing a Transient Visitor Levy.** It will be for CnES to decide on whether or not to introduce a TVL, if and when parliament passes an Act to make the power available to local authorities. It has the potential to be raise considerable sums of money for capital investment and revenue support for infrastructure.

- **Parking charges.** As noted above a widespread use of parking charges where visitor numbers are high enough to justify them could generate revenue streams for individual facility operators to allow for reinvestment in other elements of infrastructure.

### Appendices included alongside the report:

Appendix 1 \_ (00)01-41 - OHVIP Maps

Appendix 2 \_ Combined Survey Results

Appendix 3 \_ Fire Pit Indicative Design with stockproof fencing

Appendix 4 \_ Parking Area & Bin Store Indicative Design

Appendix 5\_ Full Action Plan Table

Appendix 6\_ Fire Pit Indicative Design with stonedyke



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