



Hoy and Walls Report



Island: Hoy and Walls

Date: 04/07/2019

This report has been produced by the Strathclyde Centre for Environmental Law and Governance (SCELG) and Scottish Islands Federation (SIF) in the framework of their collaboration with the Islands Team of the Scottish Government. The goal of this report is to capture the essence of the discussions that have taken place at the consultation event on Hoy. The report will be sent out to participants who authorised us to do so in order to receive further comments and feedback. The report is not to be considered as an indication of what will ultimately go into the National Island Plan, but it will inform the latter. The report is also not to be considered as an indication of the position of Scottish Government on any of the points mentioned therein.

Introduction

On 4th July 2019, a focus group took place on Hoy, and was attended by seven people. The goal was to capture both what works well on the islands and the challenges faced by the communities on Hoy and Walls. The consultation is required by the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, as a means to inform the National Islands Plan that Scottish Government will be presenting to Scottish Parliament on 4 October 2019.

Hoy and Walls as a great place to live

The consultation highlighted the following things that make living on Hoy and Walls great:

- Sense of community
- Safety
- Freedom
- Natural Environment
- Health Service
- Medical Facilities
- School
- Heritage
- Lifeboat
- Social activities
- Low Numbers



It is evident that there are many things that make Hoy and Walls a fantastic place to live. The list above only affords a glimpse, but it does highlight that participants value the sense of community on the islands, and the safety and low crime rates it affords them. Additionally, the environment and the general quality of life on the island is considered as a positive contributing factor, and the low number of permanent residents was stated as allowing 'people to shine'. The community is also very proud of its heritage and culture, particularly in relation to its lifeboat services.



Challenges on Hoy and Walls

The consultation moved on to discuss the current challenges on Hoy and Walls and the main concerns of the island community. The following are the main issues that were shared by the participants at the event:

- Stopping Population Decline
- Economic Development
- Community Empowerment
- Transport
- Digital Connectivity
- Fuel Poverty
- Housing
- Education
- Land Management
- Biosecurity



The National Islands Plan and the Response from the Participants

During the consultation, key challenges were discussed in greater detail. We wish to make it very clear that a more in depth focus was undertaken for the purposes of the face-to-face consultation, and should not be considered as any indication of prioritization in the framework of the National Islands Plan.

The areas discussed more in depth were:

- Housing
- Economic Development
- Third Sector Burnout

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

Challenge	Suggestion from participants
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop and implement an island focused housing policy that creates locally affordable housing stock, which is aimed at retaining the population across all age groups.
Economic Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recognise that boosting economic development on an island requires joint thinking with other policies and opportunities beyond those directly focusing on the island. ▪ Revise current legislation to ensure that it is island proofed and does not obstruct the development of the island economy. ▪ Explore the possibility of funding schemes to encourage the development of small, local businesses on the island. ▪ Consider the development of minimum legally binding requirements in relation to digital connectivity, starting from the periphery.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop and implement an island focused housing policy that creates locally affordable housing stock, which is aimed at retaining the population across all age groups.
<p>Third Sector Burnout</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore the possibility of developing a fund to directly support the volunteer sector on islands. ▪ Revise policy relating to the volunteer sector to ensure that it provides adequate financial support to those undertaking volunteer work for essential services. ▪ Work with organisations (like the emergency response services) to ensure that strategies and training programmes are 'island proofed' to take into consideration the unique environments of Scottish islands.

Hoy and Walls Vision

Island communities know that good governance requires an integrated and holistic approach to policy. We wish to stress once again that the National Islands Plan and its implementation will not address specific issues in isolation, but rather will consider all factors together whilst taking into account their crosscutting nature. In addition, each island has its own unique character and its own unique challenges. From the consultation on Hoy and Walls we have identified the following specific traits:

In terms of sustainable economic development, participants made it clear that boosting the economy of the islands is very much reliant on increasing the demographic of economically active persons within the population. At present, the island suffers from a continually aging demographic due to an influx of retirees and an outward migration of young people. This is largely attributed to the lack of affordable, fit for purpose housing, and sustainable job opportunities. Revising current housing policy to ensure that it creates locally affordable housing stock, which is aimed at retaining the population across all age groups, would be extremely



beneficial for the population of Hoy and Walls, and provide an incentive for young people to remain, or return, to the island.

Additionally, participants stipulated that there is a current lack of available land to purchase for either housing or agriculture, and that the cost of the available land is disproportionate to earning ability. Consequently, there is an issue with 'empty acres', which has the potential to be improved by supporting community/investment owned agricultural land with secure tenancies available for true active farmers.

It should also be noted that economic development was heavily reliant on the improvement of the current standard of digital connectivity, and that although there was a lot of potential business opportunities on the island, more support and guidance must be provided at both the inception phase of these businesses, and throughout their operation to ensure sustainability.

Participants to the consultation event also highlighted the high degree of third sector burnout which is prevalent on the island, largely due to a lack of support for those who volunteer their time to undertake essential roles. This is particularly evident in the emergency services sector. However, participants stressed that although there is an ingrained assumption that services such as these would be reliant on voluntary input for their implementation, the volunteers themselves are spread extremely thin and not given enough support. Additionally, the same training and safety standards are applied to the volunteer sector on the island and the mainland, with no derogations to take into account the uniqueness, and often increased difficulties, of undertaking such volunteer work on an island. A revisal of current support systems, both in financial terms and the degree of flexibility offered, should be undertaken in an attempt to relieve the pressure felt by those who devote time to the third sector which is essential to continued development on islands.



What now?

First and foremost we wish to thank those who attended the consultation event on Hoy. You can find the consultation document that provides background information about the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, the National Islands Plan and the Islands Communities Impact Assessment at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-islands-plan-islands-communities-impact-assessment-guidance-consultation/>.

More importantly, please send us any comments/feedback on this report at n.crook@strath.ac.uk

The National Islands Plan will only be useful if it is truly informed by the island communities and by all those who have an interest and a stake in Scottish islands. Thanks to your participation in the consultation event and your comments and feedback, we are confident that the work being undertaken towards the National Islands Plan is capturing the voice of island communities. We are also sure that this is only the beginning and that, together, we can make sure that the National Islands Plan is not just “another” plan, but “The Plan” that works for island communities in Scotland.



Useful links:

- *On-line consultation* - <https://consult.gov.scot/agriculture-and-rural-communities/national-islands-plan/>
- *Consultation document* - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-islands-plan-islands-communities-impact-assessment-guidance-consultation/>
- *Islands (Scotland) Act 2018*
- *Strathclyde Centre for Environmental Law and Governance (SCELG)* - <https://www.strath.ac.uk/research/strathclydecentreenvironmentallawgovernance/>
- *Scottish Island Federation (SIF)* - <http://www.scottish-islands-federation.co.uk/>
- *SCELG portal on the consultation* - <https://www.strath.ac.uk/research/strathclydecentreenvironmentallawgovernance/ourwork/research/labsincubators/eilean/islandsscotlandact/consultations/>

