

Westray Development Trust  
Discovery Trip – Highlands and Islands 2015

**Background**

Reacting to the depopulation of the island Westray Development Trust was established in 1998. Twelve years after formation, the Trust successfully erected an Enercon E44 900kw wind turbine and with a fixed grid connection, it creates a significant income for the community.

The Trust has a well-developed grant provision system which is open to the community to support a broad range of social, educational and developmental activities.

Recognising that the Trust's current activity is predominantly reactive to presenting community need, the Trust is developing a more proactive approach aimed at supporting the social and economic infrastructure, galvanising resilience and nurturing sustainability.

Accordingly and recognising that sister Trusts in Orkney are forced to develop more technical based solutions of their curtailed wind turbines which have community benefit impact, the Trust looked out with Orkney.

The 2014 SURF Awards for Best Practice in Community Regeneration showcased Horshader Development Trust (HDT), who were the winners of the Community Lead Regeneration category. HDTs Community Growing Project showed that the growing of fresh, affordable fruit and vegetables is possible in the harsh environment of an island which, experienced similar weather patterns to our own island.

With similar needs, to increase the availability of fresh fruit and vegetables a visit to HDT was arranged and in order to maximise the value of making such a long journey, visits with additional Development Trusts, were arranged who had developed other projects of interest to Westray, such as community lead housing developments

**Planning**

With the support of local HIE officers who signposted the Trust to their Maximising Community Assets (MCA) grant programme, a successful application was made which supported up to a maximum of £1233 payable at the rate of 60% of the eligible costs of the visit.

Arranging the visits was predominately done through Community Energy Scotland (CES) who facilitates Community Power Outer-Hebrides and therefore had links with all of the Development Trusts in the Western Isles. Kathleen MacDonald of CES, Stornoway proved to be an invaluable point of contact and with her local knowledge she was able to coordinate the visits, reducing the travelling distances between each meeting. Having a point of contact in the area, known to the Trusts we wanted to visit, was also an advantage.

## Visits programme

Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> August

0930-1230	North Harris Development Trust	Housing development Waste Recycling Centre Business unit development
1400-1600	Stornoway Trust	Quarrying Golf Course Animal feed production
1800-2000	Community Energy Scotland	Meeting with: Tolsta Development Trust Galson Trust Barra and Vatersay Community Ltd Point Development Trust

Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup>

1030-1430	Horshader Development Trust	Community Growing Project
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Thursday 27<sup>th</sup>

1200-1300	Helmsdale Development Trust	Housing development Community Growing
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## Costs

Travel

Total 6 Ferry Journeys	£361.44
Mileage @ 25p per mile	£120.00

Accommodation

Night of Ferry	£67.20
2 nights in Stornoway	£360.00
1 night in Kirkwall	£140.00

Food and subsistence	£159.73
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**Total** **£1208.37**

## North Harris Trust

Formed in 2003 North Harris Trust (NHT) manages a vast land estate with around 700 residents who are mainly based in the Tarbert area.

Of interest to Westray Development Trust are their Housing Development Project, their waste recycling project and Business Unit Development Scheme. We were also interested in learning of their experiences of supporting commercial enterprise with grant assistance.



In order to attract people to North Harris and also to reverse depopulation in the area, the development of affordable housing and making land available for such developments are priorities for the North Harris Trust.

A social housing project reached completion at Bunavoneader in the spring of 2011. The project, by Hebridean Housing Partnership (HHP) and Tighean

Innse Gall (TIG) in partnership with the Trust and Ardhasaig Common Grazings, has delivered 8 affordable homes for rent. This development will help to meet some of the demand for affordable rental accommodation in the area.

The Trust also has 3 plots available at Sunnyhill, Tarbert, in cooperation with Tarbert Common Grazings, along with other plots at Brandersaig and Bedersaig. Two plots of land have been sold in Cliasmol with no development as yet. It is hoped that offering affordable plots of land will encourage, and make it easier for people to build homes in North Harris. [CLICK HERE](#) for more details

The Trust currently has two cottages for letting at Amhuinnsuidhe Quayside. There are also two 2-bedroom accommodation units built as part of the Tigh an Urrais office. All units are currently occupied. As a landlord, the Trust charges a modest, affordable rent for these properties.

Of note is NHT has not developed a local lettings policy and simply aims to attract any one to the community.

NHT is one of only a handful of Development Trust who are a registered Rural Housing Body. Rural Housing Burdens give communities and community landowners which are registered as a Rural Housing Body a special type of pre-emption right allowing them the opportunity to buy back property it has sold for the provision of affordable rural housing. (A right of pre-emption is an entitlement to have the first option to buy back the property in the event of it coming up for sale.)

Using a rural housing burden community landowners releasing land for sale at low cost can ensure that houses built on that land are not subsequently sold as holiday homes or lets and can also ensure continued affordability of the house.

### **Recycling Centre**

The Recycling initiative started with the creation of a Community Recycling Centre on the outskirts of Tarbert. The centre has been developed in partnership with the Local Authority and perhaps can best be described as a satellite of the main Creed recycling facility just outside Stornoway.

Waste is gathered and segregated on site to reduce the volume of waste going to land-fill.

This development provides:

- full-time employment for one operative
- a reliable location with empty skip capacity
- regular opening hours
- assistance and advice
- a base from which to expand into further recycling activities



The centre opened for business on Monday 8th June 2009 and has seen the number of visits gradually pick up.

There are three permanent skips on site. These vary by season but typically include GREEN, METAL and GENERAL waste. In addition they are diverting small electrical and white goods, lounge furniture, paint and oil from landfill. In 2011 they segregated 26 skips of recyclable waste, leaving 52 to continue to landfill. There are bottle and co-mingled bins located outside the gates. This gives 7 day access for deposits of bottles, cans, plastics, card and newspaper.

A clothing and textile bank is also in place. This is provided as part of a project run by Hebrides Alpha and Bethesda Hospice. The bank takes all sorts of textiles -not just clothing. Curtains, shoes, tablecloths and bedding are all acceptable.

They have also received waste vegetable oil from local hotels and restaurants over the summer months. They converted their first batch of oil to Biodiesel in November 2009 and have been running the Trust vans successfully on it ever since.

### **Business Unit Development**

It is widely held belief of NHT that if the office premises are not readily available then businesses would not come. For this reason, NHT initiated a project to build a number of



speculative starter units for small businesses. The aim is to attract new employers and new families to the area.

In January 2011, the study into the feasibility of Business Units was delivered. It evaluated three North Harris sites, and gave indicative costs for the development. In December, the planning application was submitted for three units on land in East Tarbert. The units

have been allocated a use-class of 4. This means that office and light industry will be permitted on the site.

Currently only one out of the three units is being occupied, but there are plans to aggressively market the units to the broader market.



## Charity Shop

Although not intended as a planned visit, Tarbert boasts a small volunteer lead charity shop, supporting the Harris Disabled Group. Mainly selling second hand books, DVDs, CD's, crockery and cookware with a small selection of clothes, the shop gifted over £7600 last year alone.

Predominantly the customer base is local residents with a health number of travellers, waiting for the ferry to Skye, passing through the doors.



The shop is based in a porta cabin type structure and sits within a small, well maintained garden.

The volunteer on duty explained that there is not much storage room in the shop, but have some space inside the porta cabin with an additional shed at the rear.

The Harris Disabled Group Charity Shop showed that a small community can develop and sustain an outlet that is able to raise much needed funds for other local groups.

### **Stornoway Trust**

Unfortunately, owing to a bereavement, the Factor or Stornoway Trust (ST) was unable to meet with us. A request has been submitted to the Factor asking for information on the operating models of their quarry sites and Golf Club.

Further details will be added to this report when received.

## Horshader Community Development

Horshader Community Development (HCD) is a community-owned charitable trust established in May 2005 and for the benefit of people in South Shawbost, Dalbeag and Dalmore run a community wind farm on the west coast of the Isle of Lewis. HCD was the first community group in the Western Isles to develop a renewable energy revenue-generating project in the form of an Enercon E44 900kW turbine.

Westray Development Trust became interested in HCD when their Community Growing Project won the 2014 SURF Awards for Best Practice in Community Regeneration. Similar growing projects had been attempted on Westray in the past, but with little success, therefore their successful model seemed a logical one to explore.



The activities of this project are

- providing a focus for community effort, bringing individuals together and forming an educational resource for young and old;
- increasing the availability of fresh, locally-grown produce, particularly for those who have difficulty travelling regularly to shops;
- promoting healthy, active lifestyles;
- cutting carbon emissions by reducing food waste and food miles;
- Encouraging water conservation through initiatives such as rainwater harvesting.

Through HCDs Outreach Worker, the produce is being used in a variety of ways to increase the impact of this project. The local school has engaged in a series of workshops, involving the children growing, harvesting, cooking and eating their own produce. Cookery demonstrations have been well attended by the adult population who have learned how to cook with alternative fruits and vegetables, some of which are new to the area.





HCD are using the award winning “Polycrubb” which is a form of polytunnel, developed in Shetland and which uses recycled salmon farm tubing and clad with double skinned polycarbonate sheeting. HCD have a development of six polycrubs, two of which are rented out, on a plot by plot basis to individuals of the local community.

Two employees manage the growing, selling and wider impact of the project on behalf of HCD.

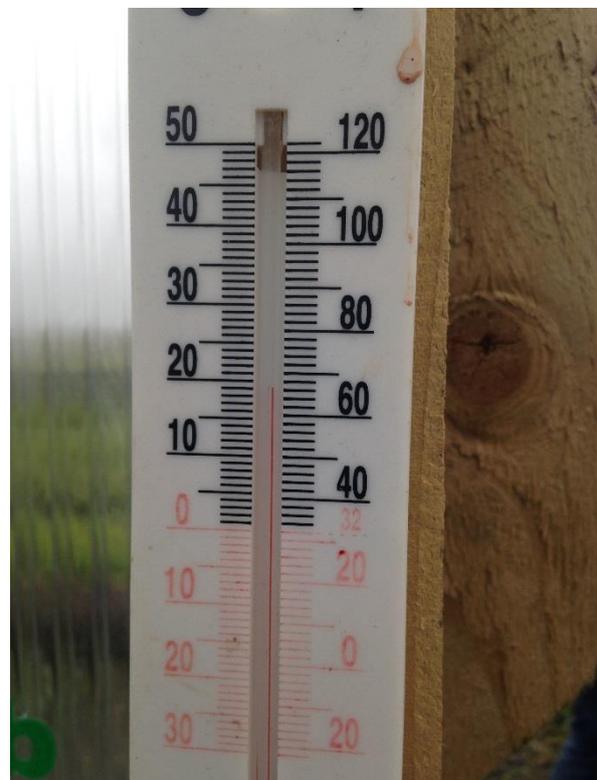
The Organic produce is sold at affordable prices (an objective of their project brief and condition of their grant funding) directly to members of the community with any surplus being sold at farmers markets and to the local hotel.

Currently the project is forecasted to make losses during and immediately after the grant funding expires. However, HCD have taken a stance that this is an acceptable and justifiable position to be in, as the wider impact on the whole community is readily identifiable.

With the proven ability to withstand winds of over 120mph and survive the impacts of roofing slates from a nearby house, the polycrubs provide a warm and light growing environment which lends itself to a broad variety of fruit and vegetable cultivation.

HCD received grant funding over £270,000 to develop the two sites, install the polycrubs, sheds and toilets, whilst also cover the salaries of the gardener and outreach worker.

WDT’s visit to HCD featured on the BBC Alba news that evening with the Project Managers of WDT and HCD being interviewed.



## Helmsdale and District Development Trust

Was formed in 2012, following on from the good work of the Helmsdale and District Development Group. Currently grant funded through the "Growth at the Edge" initiative, the HDDT plan to develop an income from two 500kw wind turbines in the near future.

The successes of HDDT housing project was showcased to Orkney based Development Trusts in the Spring of 2014 during a HIE facilitated Housing Seminar and as such has become increasingly interesting to Westray Development Trust.

The HDDT Development Officer, cannot stress enough the importance of a partnership approach to any community lead housing development. He lists the main ones as:

Scottish and Southern Energy – through their Local Connections Manager and the SSE Community Trust, grants are available to support 30-50% of electrical services installations costs of the groundworks.

Local Authority – early discussions with all local authority departments involved with a housing development is advisable and financial support to bridge the gap between building on the mainland and increased costs of building on an island could be available.

HIE were an invaluable source of support to HDDT and the Development Officer suggests that both financial and advisory support may be available through several of HIE's initiatives.

HDDT used the services of the Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust to establish their Housing Needs Assessment which was a broader study that also looked at the wider economic impact of a housing development.



The Links with commercial partners has also proven to be a valuable and rewarding experience for HDDT. CARBONLite for example were able to provide a bespoke design and prefab manufacturing service to create very emission, energy efficient, adaptable and affordable homes.

Created into the designs from the onset was the future proofing of some of the properties to ensure that they offered adaptability for a broad range of disabilities such as dementia and mobility issues. Thus building in the options for longer term tenancies.

Some of the outcomes of developing the current 4 house plot are the school role has increased by 5, 11 families have experienced indirect benefit and growth in house building in the area has been stimulated. HDDT have further plans to develop more housing in the very near future on their 3 acre site.

As well as the 4 affordable homes available, HDDT has offered 3 self-build initiative plots, to cover some of the expenses incurred. The plots are still available but have had several interested parties recently.

## Meeting with Community Power Outer-Hebrides

The Stornoway Office of Community Energy Scotland, through their Community Power Out-Hebrides initiative facilitated a meeting of those trusts whom no visits were planned.

The aim of the meeting was to discuss commonalities of issues experienced with the development of wind energy projects and the distribution of the incomes they create.

Two of the Trusts, Tolsta and Barra and Vatersay Community Ltd have commercially viable growing projects, with Barra having operated one for over 20 years and is developing plans to become a social enterprise.

Barra have chosen to use the Keder Greenhouse system which is similar in design to the Polycrubs, but these are commercially developed systems which are receiving good feedback from installations in harsh environments.



Constructed of tubular steel and patented double skinned cladding system the greenhouses have been tested in high winds with snow loads of over 2 tonnes.

A common theme held by all the Trust present was the issues associated with support the private sector contained within our communities. There was agreement from all that commercial activity underpins the fragile existence of small and island communities.

On the whole the model of a Charitable Trust, wholly owning a trading subsidiary who uses the Trust to gift aid a portion of its income, thus making it tax efficient works. However, there are imposed and legal limitations involved with benefitting the private sector.

Several case studies were explored where direct public benefit was evident, from supporting a childminder to purchase play equipment for her small but vital business to major manufacturers acting as the largest singular employer in the community whom could not be supported, under current legislation, by a charitable trust.

Those present agreed that a joined up approach could be undertaken to lobby for change in the legislation or as a minimum the creation of a regulator lead advisory body be established to directly advise and guide charities. It was suggested that Community Power Orkney and Community Power Outer-Hebrides could work together to develop this proposal further.

Grants and grant giving process occupied a significant part of the meeting and it appeared that Westray Development Trust had a system that would be of interest to some of the Trusts present. It was agreed that WDT would share its policy, processes and model through Community Energy Scotland (Stornoway).

## **Conclusions**

### **Housing Summary**

Community lead housing development is a reality and there are many examples of this across the Highlands and Islands.

The importance of the creation and maintenance of partnerships throughout any community lead housing development is of paramount importance. Of equal importance is the need to maintain communications with the community and potential benefactors of the new houses from the onset.

There is a broad range of funding and development options that can either benefit or hinder the intended outcomes of individual organisations. There is significant worth with engaging with a specialist organisation either through to a hand over point or conclusion, who will be able to expertly guide an organisation through the options.

### **Westray Housing Conclusions**

Westray Development Trust, in partnership with Orkney Islands Council and Orkney Housing Association Ltd have produced a report that offers a singular viewpoint of the housing needs of Westray. However, the report needs to address a much broader needs analysis.

Predominantly the survey returns give evidence to a need to relieve a pinch point on the current housing stock. Concluding that the development of housing, perhaps for those with secure incomes but owing to the lack of affordable housing stock cannot move on, would benefit from the Trust developing a housing solution.

However, Westray Development Trust must remain mindful that their purpose is to develop the economic, social and cultural sustainability of our community by harnessing the quality of our resources, people and island environment. The development of housing, although the provision of housing for those in necessitous circumstances is one of the Trusts objects, should therefore be considered as an output which aims to support the purpose.

The importance of working with local commercial partners, such as Aquaculture, Westray Processors Ltd and the farming community is of major importance. The housing needs report does not attempt to look at what the future needs of these major employers are in the future which, would directly impact the current housing stock and any future development.

The recent visit by the Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust, combined with our experiences in the Western Isles showed us that mixed but sympathetic develops of both commercial and residential properties can work with combinations of houses and office spaces with flats above. A development of this nature, which seeks to develop both the economy and sustainability of the island is more of an attractive proposition to potential funders.

### **Growing Project Summary**

During the visit we saw and heard evidence of three community growing projects which operate under different models. Whether organic and affordable or commercially produced, there is evidence of the need for locally produced, fresh fruits and vegetables. Each of the locations we visited or discussed were at the end of the fruit and vegetable supply chains. There are still folk actively growing their own fruits and vegetables, however there is an increasing demand on local outlets for fresh fruits and vegetables as lives become busier and the increased pressure on both parents to work.

What is also evident is the prevailing weather conditions of the communities visited limits the amount and variety of any produce or requires structures to be erected to provide more suitable conditions for growing. With structures comes the bonus of being able to install a combination of additional heat and light thus extending the growing season. These structures need to be robust enough to withstand the harsh conditions that they will be subjected to and owing to the high costs of installation would have to withstand these conditions for a number of years to come.

The production of fruit and vegetables in each of the locations we visited or discussed was only one outcome. Broad reaching benefits were also being recorded such as the social aspects of communal gardening, the sharing or bartering of produce between gardeners and the education and learning opportunities through very active outreach programmes.

The financial outcomes of each of the projects we visited or discussed were polarised. One project was focussed at producing large crops with salaried employees, but they subsidised the sale of the produce making it affordable to the consumer. On the other side of the scale was a project that produced larger crops of produce but used a volunteer workforce, therefore reducing the costs of production and being able to pass this saving on to the consumer. Whereas the third project saw small scale production, through salaried staff, but sold their produce at a much more commercially competitive price, thus covering the costs of production.

### **Westray Growing Project Conclusions**

With the exception of some locally grown items such as potato and turnips, generally the three outlets on Westray take delivery of fruit and vegetables once per week. The additional costs and time associated with transporting and distributing these items increases the cost to the consumer but decreases the freshness.

There have been several, failed attempts at developing a community growing project which, may be a factor with developing any further thoughts on this. There are also a number of poly-tunnel frames around the island which suggests that the traditional systems cannot withstand the local weather conditions. The visit to the Trusts in the Highlands and Islands with successful growing projects was partially aimed at gaining community confidence that such a project is feasible with the right structures and right approach.

### **Proposed Actions**

#### **Housing**

Approaches are to be made to potential funders to develop a strategic needs analysis which should include:

- Exit Strategies should the need for housing not be realised post development
- Testimonials from local employers, businesses and tradesmen, and from services such as NHS, Westray Junior High and other agencies with key worker status.
- Levels of available input from local authority and housing association.
- Valuations of current and predicted housing stock
- Availability of land options and access to roads and services
- Availability of potential funders and investors.

The potential to explore other presenting projects, such as the Joint Emergency Services Building proposal, as joint initiative

### **Growing Project**

A feasibility study should be conducted to:

- Identify the preferred structure to meet the growing needs and withstand the prevailing weather.
- Establish the current costs of fruits and vegetables to the island consumer in comparison with the mainland.
- Explore the willingness of the potential outlets to purchase the produce
- Explore alternative ways of distributing/selling the produce
- Identify suitable locations taking into account the need for water, depth of soil, access and weather.
- Explore potential partners, funders and broad beneficiaries.
- Gauge the need for and types of fruit and vegetables within the community

### **Epilogue**

The visit to the Western Isles was intended to enable Westray Development Trust to explore successful housing and produce growing projects, to develop confidence that these project areas were achievable and to explore the projects and governance of other Development Trusts to maximise the learning of the delegates.

The visit has certainly given Westray Development Trust sufficient information and confidence that developing both a housing and a produce growing project is feasible, but it has also showed that significant work is needed in both areas before any further progress is taken.

The proposed actions noted above will invigorate further thinking in these areas.

Westray Development Trust appreciates the support that has been given to finance and arrange this visit. The welcome we received from the visited Trusts was exemplary and the willingness to share their experiences was unfettered.