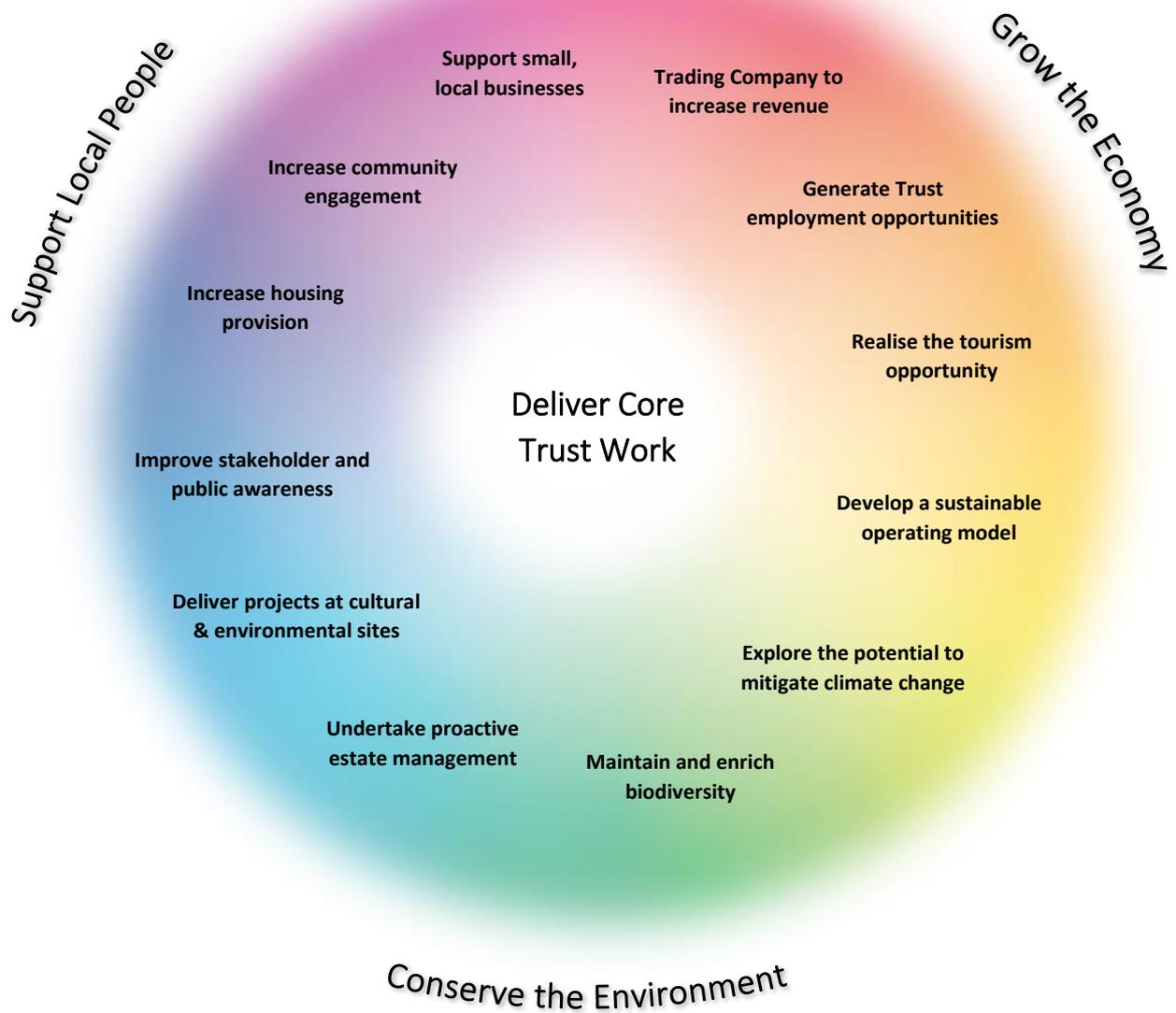


The North Harris Trust 5-Year Strategic Plan 2022-2027

Ro-innleachd Urras Ceann a Tuath na Hearadh



Foreword

This document is the result of recent work by the North Harris Trust to set out its direction and focus for the coming years. This comes in the context of an emerging range of new opportunities, as well as significant economic uncertainty. Consolidation in the aquaculture industry is once again affecting much of the community as well as directly affecting Trust income.

Population has remained stable in North Harris over the past 20 years, however this masks an increasingly aging demographic. Housing is in short supply, with property often being pushed out of the reach of local earning power by non-resident buyers. Housing is perhaps the biggest issue which prevents growth in Harris.

Economically, the island has a wide range of opportunities, including the tourism opportunity which continues to grow and provides a significant boost to the local economy. The rising cost of living will likely have an increasingly detrimental effect, with fragile and seasonal economies such as this likely to be more vulnerable.

Environmentally, in the North Harris Estate the community has a beautiful and unique asset in their ownership which offers resilience in change. The biodiversity of the area is a fantastic resource which must be carefully stewarded through the challenges of climate change and suitable development.

In this context, the Trust is confident that the organisation and supporting local community is both well-rooted and suitably forward-looking, so that the possibilities ahead can be grasped for the benefit of all. This strategic plan documents how the Trust will shape its operations, prioritise action, and communicate to all stakeholders, always being ready to adapt to change, challenge, and opportunity.

About the Trust

The North Harris Trust was established in 2003 before taking ownership and managing the North Harris Estate on behalf of the local community. Now covering approximately 25,900ha, it is responsible for one of the largest community-owned estates in Scotland. The organisation, a registered charity, is governed by a Board of 13 locally elected volunteer Directors, representing the various townships. The Board is supported by a small core staff and operates the North Harris Trading Company which was set up to facilitate commercial development and generate new income for the charity.

Since establishment, the Trust has been successful in many areas:

- creatively maintaining, managing and appropriately developing the beautiful North Harris Estate;
- facilitating employment, affordable housing and business opportunities throughout North Harris;
- delivering vital public services in visitor management and facilities, local recycling and waste disposal;
- attracting millions of pounds of investment to North Harris over the years.

The Trust's Aim

NHT has a broad range of objectives aligned with the central aim “to achieve the regeneration and development of the North Harris community by managing the North Harris Estate as an area of outstanding wild and rugged beauty, through local participation and working with other partners where appropriate, all for the benefit of the local community and the wider public.”

The Trust's Vision

A thriving North Harris community, with our community-owned land providing environmental security; wide-ranging economic opportunities; and high levels of physical, mental and social wellbeing.

Strategic Area: Core

Continued management of the community-owned estate.

The North Harris Trust has a primary responsibility for the management of the North Harris Estate, including the various crofting and land responsibilities that come with its position as community landlord. This will continue to be the focus of delivery for the Trust, and draw on a significant proportion of available resources, board attention, and staff time. The Trust will continue to be accessible to the community, working with crofters and residents to share knowledge and offer guidance on land matters.

The Trust will continue to represent the community on relevant issues, working with CNES, Scottish Government and their agencies wherever possible. This also includes the delivery of key statutory services, for example at the North Harris Recycling Centre. Partnership working with other organisations is standard Trust practice; both formal and informal relationships with key organisations are vital to our continued success. This has taken the form of participation in umbrella bodies such as the Harris Forum or Community Land Outer Hebrides, undertaking joint projects with the West Harris Trust, maintaining bilateral support on shared objectives with the John Muir Trust, or acting as the delivery organisation for important funding bodies such as HIE and NatureScot. Maintaining excellent working relationships with partners and funders will continue to be an important part of successful Trust business.

Strategic Area: People

The retention and attraction of people to ensure a sustainable population.

The Trust seeks to actively contribute to maintaining a sustainable population in North Harris and sees affordable housing provision as vital to achieving this. The local authority and housing partnership are therefore key in this area and the Trust will continue to offer support to them in consultation with the local community.

The Trust has directly developed four housing units since 2012 which it lets to local tenants at affordable rents. The short-term priority is to find a way forward for further development that continues this success. This could include more direct development on Trust land as well as seeking appropriate developers and partners to deliver additional housing, and to de-risk cost and resource requirements to the Trust. Showing what could be achieved and facilitating further interest in potential sites is a priority and the development of low-cost unit provision, particularly targeted at young people, is seen as vital to the sustainability of the community.

Strong community engagement in the Trust will be prioritised, and the active involvement of all community members encouraged. The central location of Tigh an Urrais in Tarbert facilitates this; staff and board members will continue to be available informally, as well as providing an annual formal consultation with the community.

Strategic Area: Economy

Sustainable economic growth where all have access to appropriate employment opportunities.

The Trust understands that it must pursue opportunities that facilitate sustainable economic development for North Harris. One of the short-term possibilities is realising the sustainable tourism opportunity, given the forecast growth in visitor numbers post-pandemic. The Trust will continue to develop facilities that manage and improve the visitor experience as it understands that this has a benefit to the wider North Harris economy. The opportunity for income generation opportunities to sustain the services provided will be considered and implemented.

This will include re-visiting donation opportunities across key sites and where practical, charging for the facilities provided, communicating that the additional income will be re-invested in the estate and its visitor provision. In terms of further income generation for the Trust, a framework shall be developed through which the board and staff team can review and react quickly to short timeframe funding and investment opportunities. Well considered, longer-term financial planning that seeks to invest in the estate assets to increase annual revenue and allow an uplift to budgets shall also become part of standard practice for the organisation.

Strategic Area: Environment

Attractive opportunities that improve the quality of life, wellbeing and health of all.

The Trust holds ownership responsibility for the land asset of the North Harris Estate on behalf of the community. This represents an enormous opportunity in terms of community wellbeing and one which must be proactively developed. To this end, the Trust will produce an updated Estate Management Plan, offering an overview of the possibilities for improving quality of life for the community and the wider public through conserving and improving the land asset. This will include complementary documents such as a Deer Management Plan that take a landscape level approach, as well as Site Management Plans that deal with specific locations with identified pressures or opportunities.

The twin challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change shall be addressed wherever possible in Trust work and will be among the foremost priorities when considering best use of the estate. This will be standard working practice in Trust land management and likely involve bespoke projects which aim to contribute to national targets of Net Zero and/or protect local native species and habitats.

Trust Goals to 2027

Within each strategic area, a number of goals for delivery have been identified to be achieved by the Trust over the next 5-years. Many of these build on achievements to date and integrate experience from on-going projects.

Strategic Area

Goal

Core Delivery

Continued management of the community-owned estate.

Successful management of all community-owned assets.

Active participation in appropriate bodies.

Continued delivery of important local services.

Excellent working relationships with partner organisations.

People

The retention and attraction of people to ensure a sustainable population.

Strong community engagement and good relations with the Trust.

Improved communication and strengthened involvement.

Increased availability of housing by utilising the Trust's land asset to develop housing, both directly and working with other agencies and developers.

An increased population of small local businesses facilitated by the Trust, offering training and apprenticeship opportunities.

High stakeholder and public awareness of the Trust as a community body to be supported in its work.

Economy

Sustainable economic growth where all have access to appropriate employment.

An increase in North Harris Trading Company revenue generation through business venture and investment in order to provide additional annual income to the Trust.

The successful development of the tourism opportunity; increased public use of Trust facilities and an increase in related local employment opportunities.

The development of a sustainable operating model for the Trust, including well considered, long-term financial planning.

The development of the potential to sustainably generate seasonal and full-time employment through Trust operations.

Environment

Outdoor opportunities that improve the quality of life, wellbeing and health of all.

The publication of an updated Estate Management Plan which expresses the maintenance and improvement of the estate on a landscape level.

Take forward projects that contribute to the unique natural environment and enrich local biodiversity.

The development of projects that realise the potential of sites in North Harris with historical, cultural or environmental value.

Encourage the realisation of the potential of the land asset to cope with, and play a part in mitigating, climate change.

Communication and Engagement

This document represents part of the strategy for increasing Trust communication and engagement. The primary target audience for the North Harris Trust is the local community. Those from further afield who have an interest in the Trust and the local area are also a key audience. Both groups require an increase in communication from the organisation to allow them to engage effectively.

An increased staff resource shall be dedicated to communications. There is much that the Trust already does which does not get conveyed to a wide audience or even much of the local community. This will be remedied through leveraging the central location of Tigh an Urrais in the centre of Tarbert, ensuring up-to-date information is displayed prominently and that the offices are open to the community and wider public during regular working hours. We will also make use of public events to widen engagement with both the community and visitors. There will be monthly updates in the local press, as well as more occasional pieces in national press, television and radio. Social media accounts will have a goal of at least weekly updates and the Trust website shall be updated to a more interactive and user-friendly format, including mobile-friendly functionality.

Volunteering shall be encouraged and promoted as a practical way for the community to engage with the Trust. Community involvement, especially by local young people, shall be encouraged and bespoke opportunities made available where possible. There has been strong public involvement in volunteering opportunities on the estate over the years. This shall continue to be facilitated and promoted through partner organisations and direct Trust communications.

Monitoring Progress

Individual Trust Directors shall be appointed to lead on strategic areas as Board Champions, supporting Trust progress. This strategy document shall be re-appraised annually by the full North Harris Trust Board of Directors and progress analysed. Progress on goals and the overall development of each strategic area shall be monitored on a regular basis by the Board Champions responsible. This allows staff to be supported where required and ensure that board understanding is sufficiently developed to make informed decisions and recommendations for implementation.

Directors shall engage informally with the community to gauge opinions and gather views on how the Trust is performing in the month prior to community consultations.

Members and the community at large shall be given an opportunity for formal feedback through annual community consultations in Autumn/Winter and again through the Annual General Meeting in Winter/Spring. The Trust shall strongly encourage input and feedback, both positive and negative, from the local community, and especially from Trust members, on the direction of the organisation and the way forward.

Financial Projections

The Trust is facing a significant annual deficit on core operations at time of writing in 2022, which although unsustainable in the longer term, is manageable in the meantime due to relatively large cash reserves. A financial plan shall be implemented alongside this strategy, which will aim to steer the organisation progressively towards a more balanced, break-even position over the course of 2022-27 through sensible investment in the estate asset to grow annual income. There are identified opportunities which will be pursued to increase revenue and the Trust will attempt to maintain service delivery at current 2022 levels, which are somewhat below historic levels. A sub-committee of Directors will regularly review financial status and delivery against these plans to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of the Trust.

Much of this planning is of course subject to economic conditions, which in the case of the Trust can vary considerably and change unexpectedly from one year to the next.

Implementation

An initial draft of this plan was presented at the North Harris Trust Annual General Meeting in March 2022 to seek community feedback and member input. The document went to open consultation in April 2022 for feedback from the public and partner organisations. The final version was adopted by the North Harris Trust Board of Directors in May 2022.

Many thanks to all those who took part in its shaping.

Contact

If you wish to learn more about the work of the Trust, get involved as a volunteer or donate to a project, staff will be happy to help – contact details can be found below.

The North Harris Trust, Tigh an Urrais, Tarbert, Isle of Harris HS3 3DB

www.north-harris.org 01859 502222 info@north-harris.org

Company No: SC235889. Charity No: SC033412. Established in 2002.