

THE NORTH HARRIS TRUST



NINETEENTH ANNUAL REPORT

November 2020– October 2021

AGM MARCH 2022

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Chairman's Comments

The world-wide coronavirus pandemic dominated the news and significantly affected people's lives throughout the past year. The Trust continued to meet via Zoom meetings, staff worked predominantly from home and members of the public were unable to visit the offices for most of the year. Despite these difficulties, the work of the Trust continued. Staff and directors are to be commended for their fortitude in progressing an impressive amount of work in very challenging circumstances.

Due to restrictions on people's movement and the ability to meet with others, it has been more difficult than usual to interact with members of the community. However, staff and directors have always been available to discuss aspects of the Trust's work with members of the public throughout the estate. The principal reason for having directors geographically distributed throughout the estate is that they can be easily accessible. Members of the public are encouraged to engage with their local director(s) if they have suggestions or comments, particularly when the office is not always open.

There were a couple of changes among the staff and directors during the year. Karen Macrae, who had been employed by the Trust, for a number of years as a development officer, moved to a post with the Crofting Commission, based in Stornoway. We thank Karen for her work with the Trust and wish her well in her new employment. Phil Bertin, who had served, for a number of years as a director for the Tarbert area, stood down since he was unable to devote sufficient time to the Trust due to work and personal commitments. We thank Phil for his contribution to the work of the Trust while serving as a director. Phil has been replaced by Lena Morrison as a director for the Tarbert area.

Despite the challenging trading conditions during the past year, the reduction in core staff and staff being on flexible furlough, there were many positive achievements during the year. A number of short-term and part-time employment opportunities were provided. These included an estate maintenance team, the employment of a Ranger and the employment of community wardens throughout the summer in partnership with other agencies. For a time during the summer, the Trust was employing as many as twelve staff. The community recycling facility and associated retail outlet at Urgha continued to expand its range of provision and services. Improvements to outdoor facilities for visitors and locals continued, particularly with improvements to paths. There was a lot of positive feedback on the Trust's facilities such as the Hushinish Gateway and campervan site.

Despite the fact that the Trust currently has a strong balance sheet, it finds itself in a challenging financial position. This is principally as a result of a reduction in annual income due to the closure last year of the Amhuinnsuidhe salmon hatchery. The hatchery was probably the Trust's single largest source of annual income. Apart from the financial loss to the Trust, the closure of the hatchery meant the loss of a number of jobs in the local community. The Trust aims to focus on ways in which it can address the resulting financial deficit. The Trust is currently in the process of reviewing its forward

direction and priorities for the next five years. The initial stage of this process involved engaging a consultant to work with staff and directors on a review of the Trust's current position and what it aims to achieve in future. Detailed plans and action points will be drawn up over the next few months.

The issue of social housing provision continues to frustrate. It is very pleasing to see the completion of the HHP flats at West Tarbert. However, the current high cost of building means that the Trust cannot progress its own plans for building more homes in North Harris at present. NHT continues to liaise with HHP and with other partners in an effort to facilitate further housing development in Harris.

As always, the Trust is grateful for the support it continues to receive from a number of organisations and agencies. Partnership working is particularly important in these challenging times. Partner organisations include Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Nature Scot, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Scottish Government, John Muir Trust, Western Isles Development Trust, Outer Hebrides Tourism, West Harris Trust. We continue to have a strong working relationship with Reasort Estates, particularly on land management issues.

Although this has been a challenging year for the NHT, progress continues to be made on a range of projects which will be of benefit to the community of North Harris. It is hoped that we can look forward to the world-wide situation and the local situation improving in the year ahead.

Manager's Report

The Trust continues to face challenges and adapt to changing circumstances and short-term opportunities.

Throughout the reporting year, the finances around core operation were continually monitored and it was highlighted to the board that the Trust is operating a significant annual deficit which must be addressed if the organisation is to remain financially healthy. This deficit has come about due to the unexpected loss of key incomes, particularly through the closure of Amhuinsuidhe Hatchery, but also through the expiry without replacement of annual agricultural and management agreements on the Estate. This led to the board beginning a process to address the situation, the results of which to date can be summarised as:

1. The production of a detailed financial plan which outlines how the Trust can move towards a break-even position over the next three years, beginning from April 2022.
2. The publication of an up to date strategy document, summarising the direction and priorities for the Trust through until 2027. This will provide a transparent frame of reference for the Trust moving forward and allow us to focus on the key deliverables for the organisation.

This year saw a great number of changes in staffing, both in seasonal and year-round positions. Firstly, Karen MacRae moved on from her role as Development Officer with the Trust in February 2021. This was a substantial loss to the overall capacity of the organisation as, due to the evolving financial situation outlined above, the decision was taken not to replace the post.

John Maclean took up the position of Ranger in October 2020, his contract and supporting funding from Bòrd na Gàidhlig expired in October 2021, meaning that this post is vacant until funding can be sourced. We hope to have an NHT Ranger in place from April 2022. Clara Risi also continued as JMT Community Ranger on an extension of 6 months until September 2021, working between NHT and the West Harris Trust, with support from Crown Estate Coastal Communities Fund and the John Muir Trust.

We also administered the Harris Warden Service from July to October 2021, through funding from NatureScot Better Places Fund. These are new posts focused on visitor management and proved to be an effective means of engaging more fully with visitors and reducing negative impacts.

Finally, we were able to employ an Estate Maintenance Team of three members throughout the summer. This allowed work to be completed on a few key parts of the estate that needed attention. Of note are improvements to the Staimair path at Huisinis, improvements to access around Eilean Glas, Scalpay, and the completion of the Lacasdail Lochs circular path. All popular places for a walk with both visitors and locals.

The ongoing project to deal with the invasive non-native species *Gunnera tinctora* continued throughout the summer of 2021, building on previous years' work. Most of plants throughout Harris were treated effectively, however a few populations in the Bays and Leverburgh were not tackled due to limited resources. NatureScot continue to support our work in dealing with INNS and this is set to continue into the medium term.

We were approached by NatureScot towards the end of the reporting year to make a direct application to the newly established Nature Restoration Fund on the basis of previous Trust applications and projects to improve biodiversity on the Estate. We were successful in this application which awarded £272,000 to the Trust to be spent on a habitat restoration project with the core aim of planting 200,000 native trees over the next four years. Various crofting townships were approached to determine if they wished to be involved in the project in the eastern half of the Estate, where opportunities for native woodland establishment are possible without fencing infrastructure as the local deer density remains low through continued stalking pressure.

Development Officer's Report

The North Harris Trading Company (NHTC) is the wholly-owned subsidiary of the North Harris Trust (NHT). It was established in 2003 to deliver new income streams to the Trust to allow it to expand its community development activities.

This year saw Earth Capital (EC) exit its two Harris hydro schemes. NHTC worked closely with The West Harris Trust to bid to secure community ownership of both the Bunavoneader and Glean Dubhlinn hydro-electric schemes. EC eventually accepted a superior bid from Hydropol, a Czech Republic based developer. As part of the original agreement, Hydropol acquired the minority shareholdings held by the two community groups. As of August, NHTC has no stake in the scheme ownership. NHTC has since agreed terms to continue to provide monthly checks on the scheme. NHT will continue to receive a ground rent.

Early in the year, one of the Monan wind turbines experienced a catastrophic failure during maintenance. Pictures of the blades scattered on the ground were circulated widely on social media. Health and Safety concerns were raised with Constantine Wind Energy (CWE), the majority owner of the scheme. Later in the year CWE asked NHTC to co-sign a refinancing deal. The potential liabilities of this, along with operational concerns prompted the decision for NHTC to sell its minority shareholding in the windfarm.

Microgeneration has continued unabated throughout the pandemic. NHTC owns and operates three solar PV installations and three wind turbines. Quotes were received for the replacement of the Urgha Westwind turbine, as it is no longer supported. These proved to be too expensive to allow an acceptable payback time. It was agreed to inspect the turbine and continue operation.

NHTC continues to operate the North Harris Community Recycling Site on behalf of CnES. This year has once again been challenging with a lack of serviceable skips and drivers, meaning that skips haven't been turning over as quickly as needed. We have continued the restricted winter opening schedule throughout the year. There is some hope of the situation improving as CnES has secured funding to purchase new equipment.

The Crofting Supplies business continued to grow throughout the year. The product range has developed with the recent addition of wild bird feed and feeders and the broadening of the supplier base. As well as a card-payment terminal, a cloud-based till system was installed. This, along with the ability to print receipts, is providing an easier way of documenting sales and reporting VAT due. In May we received Kickstart funding to employ a young person for 6 months. This has offered extra help with the retail and recycling operations as well as supporting the Estate Maintenance team. The local availability of animal feeds and fencing materials has been well received by the community during this second year of the pandemic.

We continue to investigate opportunities to create more business space in North Harris. Following an earlier feasibility study into redeveloping the area around the recycling site at Urgha, a site investigation was undertaken. The conclusion drawn from the results of numerous trial pits was that any development would involve the removal of significant volumes of peat and spoil contaminated with years of domestic refuse. The possibility of relocating the recycling operation to the Gun Club is still being investigated with the use of portacabins/containers that don't require foundations excavated.

Huisinis Gateway was busy in the second half of the year when restrictions were relaxed. We saw 496 campervan nights at the hook-ups, with double that number in the Gateway carpark, in the 5 months to the end of September. Having these numbers for the first time has allowed us to determine that with the system of donations, only 50% of visitors are making the suggested donation. A text-to-donate system has been set up. This is making it easier for people to donate and has worked well.

To help address issues caused by the increase in visiting campervans, a site was surveyed adjacent to the Recycling Site at Urgha. Plans were drawn up for 6 pitches with hook-ups. Planning Permission was secured. Quotes were received for the development and an application for funding submitted. The expression of interest for Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund v4 was accepted and we were invited to apply for the main fund. Unfortunately after year-end, we received notification that none of the Western Isles proposals had been funded. The search for funding continues.

A project to develop trails in the Community Woodland at Ardvourlie has been underway for a couple of years. The opening of the Cycling Facilities Fund prompted more focus on the proposal this year. Working with Lewis & Harris Youth Club Assoc. a proposal was drafted to build downhill MTB tracks, a multi-use contour path to link with the existing Langadale track as well as a facilities building on the existing carpark. With initial funding from Crown Estate, design work was completed and planning applications submitted. A further award from Nett Zero Tourism Fund has allowed further design and survey work to assist the planning process and mains electricity to be installed. Funding applications for the capital works on this £800K project were submitted to Sports Scotland (CFF) and Scottish Government (Regeneration Capital Grant Fund). Expressions of interest were accepted and invites to submit to the main fund received. The RCGF application was rejected in October, with the CCF application being deferred after year end. The search for funding is once again under way.

Following the issues raised by the influx of new campers to the island in 2020, NHT joined forces with West Harris Trust and Outer Hebrides Tourism to commission a Visitor Management Strategy. Funding was secured from Nature.Scot to engage specialists to carry out a consultation and draw up recommendations. The report was published in March. Some of the recommendations involved longer-term improvements to infrastructure, but there were a couple seen as quick-wins. A team of Wardens was employed for the season to educate and help manage the influx. The "Harris is a Special

place” marketing campaign was kicked off, again to educate visitors new to the area. CnES has since commissioned a Strategy for the wider Western Isles, to which the Harris study will contribute.

Affordable Housing is still an issue for the community. We continue to explore ways of developing sites in North Harris. We have so far been unable to find a viable way of developing the NHT-owned site at Meavaig. With the cost of materials sky-rocketing from COVID and BREXIT this is proving difficult.

Rangers’ Report

Two full-time Rangers were in post throughout this reporting year, providing additional resilience and capacity to the Ranger Service. This was possible due to the available funding opportunities.

Engagement was the primary focus, both in working with the local community and educating visitors. Volunteer days for various activities and weekly guided walks were successfully led. Several John Muir Awards were completed on the island through facilitation by the Ranger Service in the summer of 2021. Schools continue to engage in ranger-led volunteering opportunities and university/other groups join regularly in practical land management tasks.

Overall visitor numbers were higher in 2021 compared to 2020. Particular ‘hotspot’ areas of the estate have been impacted harder with a perhaps less evident adherence to the Scottish Outdoor Access Code than in the past. Work within estate management has continued carrying out habitat monitoring, tree planting, pathwork, beach cleans, litter picks and land management planning.

THE NORTH HARRIS TRUST
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES
(INCORPORATING AN INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT)
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 OCTOBER 2021

	Notes	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	31.10.21 Total funds £	31.10.20 Total funds £
INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS FROM					
Donations and legacies	3	47,789	1	47,790	8,776
Charitable activities					
Charitable activities	6	113,792	44,193	157,985	114,682
Other trading activities	4	3,093	-	3,093	1,312
Investment income	5	188,831	-	188,831	187,813
Other income	7	-	-	-	258,144
Total		353,505	44,194	397,699	570,727
EXPENDITURE ON					
Charitable activities	8	274,402	105,264	379,666	295,437
Charitable activities					
NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE)		79,103	(61,070)	18,033	275,290
Transfers between funds	22	(2,922)	2,922	-	-
Net movement in funds		76,181	(58,148)	18,033	275,290
RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS					
Total funds brought forward		195,141	4,411,737	4,606,878	4,331,588
TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD		271,322	4,353,589	4,624,911	4,606,878

THE NORTH HARRIS TRUST

BALANCE SHEET
31 OCTOBER 2021

	Notes	31.10.21 £	31.10.20 £
FIXED ASSETS			
Tangible assets	15	4,171,283	4,160,940
Investments	16	60,000	60,000
		4,231,283	4,220,940
CURRENT ASSETS			
Debtors	17	61,275	15,327
Cash at bank and in hand		356,592	374,930
		417,867	390,257
CREDITORS			
Amounts falling due within one year	18	(24,239)	(4,319)
NET CURRENT ASSETS		393,628	385,938
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES		4,624,911	4,606,878
NET ASSETS		4,624,911	4,606,878
FUNDS	22		
Unrestricted funds		271,322	195,141
Restricted funds		4,353,589	4,411,737
TOTAL FUNDS		4,624,911	4,606,878

The financial statements were approved by the Board of Trustees and authorised for issue on and were signed on its behalf by:

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C J Mackay - Trustee

North Harris Trust Directors

As of November 2021

Calum J MacKay **Chair**
Retired, Crofter
Represents Ardhasaig and Bunavoneadar area

Tim Langley **Vice Chair**
Solicitor
Represents Tarbert area

Barbara MacKay
Retired
Represents Tarbert area.

Donald J Morrison
Bus Driver, Crofter
Represents Urgha area

Paul Russ
Crofter
Represents Scaladale, Ardvourlie, Bowglas area

Robert MacKinnon
Postman
Represents Tarbert area

Donnie MacLeod
Marine Engineer
Represents Scalpay area

Finlay Ewen MacLeod
Fisherman
Represents Kyles area

Philip Butterfield
Retired
Represents Scalpay area

Kirsty Mary MacKay
Legal Adviser
Represents Rhenigidale, Marig, Eileananabuich area

Kate Lewis
Outdoor Instructor
Represents Hushinish – Meavaig area

Donald MacLeod
Fisherman / Crofter
Represents Scalpay area

Staff Information

As of November 2021

Member of Staff	Job Title	Year of Appointment	Length of Contract	Salary Paid By
Michael Hunter	Manager	2020	Permanent, Full-time	NHT
Diana MacLennan	Office and Land Administrator	2007	Permanent, Full-time	NHT
David Wake	Development Officer	2009	Rolling 12 Months 0.8 FTE	NHT
Steven Morrison	Chargehand	2010	Rolling 12 Months 0.8 FTE	NHT (reimbursed by CNES)
George Owens	Estate Worker	2021	6 months	NHT (Kickstarter funding)

Some moments from the year

Clockwise from top left; Eagle Walkers on The Border at Tom Ruisg, looking north into Lewis; The North Harris Trust Youth Group (NHTYG), beach cleaning at the head of Loch Trolamaraig; a mix of local and visiting volunteers restoring the old path to Eilean Glas Lighthouse; Members of the Harris Stalking Club out for a day of path work at Bogha Glas; a member of the NHT Maintenance Team building the Lacasdail Lochs Community Path.

