

Full steam ahead towards a representative

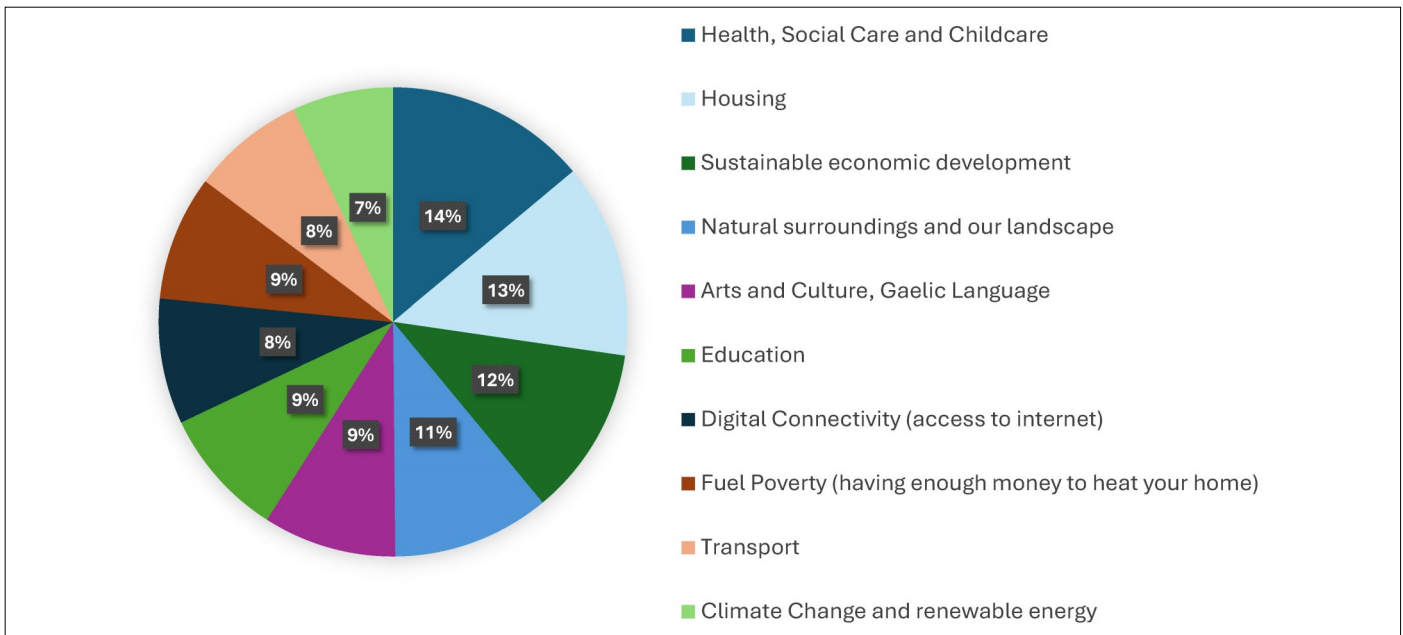
Over sixty-eight Hearachs filled in the form to support the Local Place Plan for Harris by answering questions about what they would like for Harris, their community, as well as their families to create a future for the island.

The questionnaire launched by the Harris Forum between 20 November 2024 and 31 January 2025 is the first part of the community consultation process to form a strong case for the Isle of Harris and represent the wishes of the islanders within a Local Place Plan.

Local Place Plans are a new right for communities to produce their own plans as part of the new Scottish

like to see “fewer motorhomes” driving along the narrow windy roads these can barely fit on. They would wish to “minimise the disruption that the large numbers of tourists who come to the island cause”. Some people even asked for a “management of tourism” as well as a “better education for tourists”, so they know the dos and don’ts on an island like this.

Besides tourism, sustainable economic development with a “sustainable year-round and gainful employment” is important, as well as “cross-island cooperation, support for local businesses, support for crofting, and local food production”. Most of all, “good economic

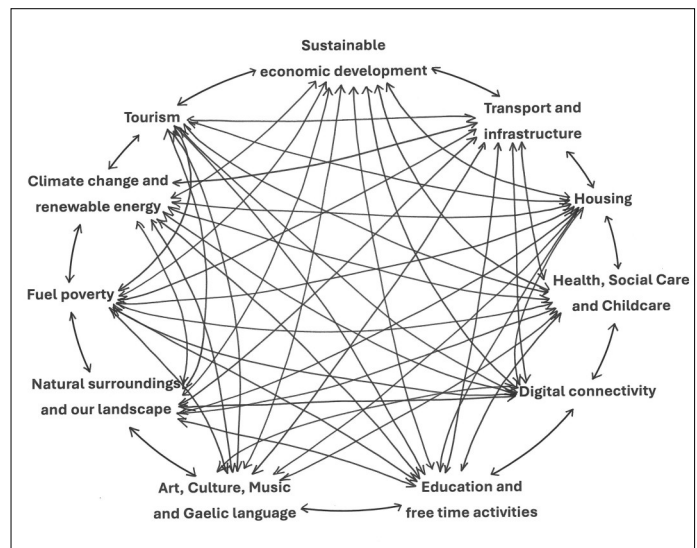


planning system. They offer communities the opportunity to develop proposals for their local area, expressing their aspirations and ambitions for future change. By developing and submitting a Local Place Plan, communities can set out a vision and priorities for their future, particularly around the use of land and buildings.

From the sixty-eight responses, the majority see the biggest issues within health, social care and childcare, closely followed by housing, sustainable economic development, as well as natural surroundings and landscape. All main topics are closely interwoven, relying on each other and must be considered together.

One dominant topic was the impact tourism has on the island. It provides a good income source for the islanders through holiday homes and other types of accommodation, boosts the local economy, and brings income into the local area. However, the number of tourists visiting the island in a short space of time comes at a price. The infrastructure is suffering under the incredible number of travellers and people would

opportunities for young people” are the key to keeping the island alive and thriving. All parts of the island would benefit from learning to communicate better and to be more open about ongoing processes. We need a Harris-wide “community which works together for the benefit of everyone”.



Local Place Plan for Harris

There needs to be more **“affordable, reliable, and sustainable transport links”** with frequent bus services, after 5 pm in particular, so people can socialise. And there is no better place to hear what’s going on within your community than having a chat at a local gathering space, which at the same time tackles the social isolation a lot of people suffer from.

A community can only be sustained if it’s able to retain people, especially young people and families. To be able to do so, more **“quality and affordable housing”** is needed. **“Less empty, partially lived in homes”, “a reduction in the number of holiday or second homes”,** and **“regulation of housing and croft usage”** are required. More **“energy-efficient housing”** is needed to reduce fuel poverty within the community. To be able to benefit from the tourist streams coming to the islands, and support intermittent workforce increases for infrastructure projects, temporary and **“seasonal accommodation for staff”** is necessary.

Within a flourishing community, all age groups need to be represented. Each of the groups has its specific needs which have to be addressed and accounted for. To enable parents to go to work, for example, sufficient childcare needs to be in place as well as **“full-time nursery provision”** and **“access to high-quality education”** for their children. For the elderly, there needs to be **“more care facilities”** available, as well as general **“accessible health services”** in close proximity with preferably **“ultrasound”** facilities too.

“Harris has the potential to be a model of using the new remote, digital workplace as a way to attract young working people. Such a population influx would strengthen the local economy, rebalance the islands' age profile, and therefore keep public facilities - especially schools - alive and thriving”. In some areas of Harris, despite government efforts, a reliable internet connection isn’t guaranteed or does not exist. To offer a wide range of work opportunities, the requested **“good and inexpensive internet”** is required all over Harris, which also includes **“mobile phone signal”** throughout the island.

A fit and healthy community is key to a better life. To be able to enjoy free time activities on the island **“improved sports facilities, play parks for children, as well as outdoor spaces that can be used in most weathers”** would like to be seen here. Gravelled walking paths on the main hikes within Harris would not only benefit the walkers and hikers, but they would also protect the nature around them. This will enable people to enjoy the natural surroundings and our landscape even more. With a **“focus on wildlife conservation”**, preservation of **“dark skies and quiet**

areas”, “more picnic areas” as well as **“cleaner pavements”** and **“no littering”**, our natural surroundings could be preserved.

“A continued focus on Gaelic music, literature, storytelling, and arts to strengthen Harris’s role as a cultural beacon within the Gaeltach” is a desire many people share. To keep the **“culture, island traditions, and history of Harris”** valued and supported is essential to prevent knowledge loss.

But it wasn’t only demands people provided during the first part of the consultation. A few suggestions were made such as **“tidal generation of electricity”** for community use, **“housing and croft usage to be regulated and restricted to dissuade, stop crofts and houses being bought only for second homes and guest houses”**, or to **“explore opportunities to develop partnerships with power generation which deliver community-wide benefits in the form of reduced electricity bills”**.

Based on these individual responses (highlighted) within the questionnaire, it is clear that things need to be done to improve the current situation.

During the next consultation stage, people are asked to take these comments and turn them into ideas, suggestions, and improvements located within their area to provide the basemap for the Local Place Plan.

The Local Place Plan is a great opportunity for the islanders to say what they would like to see within their local area. Come and have your say!

