

# Community helps to shape the Local Place Plan for Harris

## Harris Forum

In the recent community consultations held across various areas of Harris—ranging from Huisinis, Tarbert, Scalpay, the Bays, West Harris to Leverburgh—several recurring themes and shared challenges emerged.

The conversations also highlighted opportunities that could shape the island's future. All of these valuable points of feedback will be addressed in the Local Place Plan for Harris.

### Housing and Affordability

A central theme across all meetings was the demand for more affordable housing. Many communities expressed frustration with the lack of affordable homes, the great number of second homes, and the absence of key worker accommodations. The housing crisis is exacerbated by rising property prices, particularly in areas like West Harris, which also face pressure from the tourism sector. Participants proposed a range of solutions, such as more affordable homes built within existing settlements, regulations to control second homes, and models like shared equity schemes. There was also a strong desire for a housing strategy that keeps funding within Harris, ensuring that new developments serve the needs of local residents rather than external investors.

### Tourism and Infrastructure

Tourism remains both an asset and a challenge for Harris, with several areas seeing a surge in visitors, especially from cruise ships. There is a growing consensus that tourism should be made more sustainable and accessible to all, with improved infrastructure to handle increasing numbers. Key suggestions included better public transport connections (particularly linking ferries with bus services), the installation of more public toilets, and the creation of



*Local Place Plan consultation which took place in Scalpay*

designated spaces for motorhomes. Consultations' participants would also like to see a more equitable distribution of tourist resources, ensuring that hotspots like Luskentyre don't become overwhelmed and that other areas of the island receive attention and promotion.

The need for tourist information centres, signage, and facilities like cafés was also highlighted. Many suggested using local community centres for multi-functional purposes—serving both as information hubs and as venues for local events.

### Transport and Connectivity

Transport continues to be another major point of concern. While bus services are available, there is a clear need for more frequent and better-coordinated transport options, particularly in remote areas and during peak tourist season. In some regions, participants discussed the need for shuttle buses to key locations like beaches and walking trails, as well as better road infrastructure to accommodate both locals and tourists. Additionally, there is a call for improved digital connectivity, with many areas still lacking reliable internet access and phone signal.

### Health and Social Care

The ageing population of Harris is placing additional pressure on healthcare services, with many discussions highlighting the strain on social care, particularly for elderly residents. There was widespread agreement on the need for more carers, extended time for home-based care, and better support for the growing number of pensioners. Additionally, childcare services were noted as insufficient, and the need for better access to healthcare, including travelling doctors and specialists, was stressed.

### Climate Change and Sustainable Development

There is a shared desire for sustainable energy solutions, with discussions revolving around the potential for community-owned renewable energy projects. Wind and tidal power were proposed as viable options for reducing carbon footprint while also generating local economic benefits. Many expressed interest in learning from successful models like the South Uist wind turbine project or the Galson Estate's community benefits from turbines.

Sustainable economic development was a recurring topic, with emphasis on creating year-round employment

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opportunities, supporting local trades, and developing key infrastructures such as Leverburgh's pier. There was a strong call for a more diversified economy, beyond tourism, that leverages Harris's natural resources and marine potential—such as a local fish market or marina development with ship repair.

#### **Free Time Activities and Community Engagement**

Across the island, there is a need for more recreational and educational activities for both young people and adults. Ideas included evening classes, sports clubs, outdoor gyms, and communal spaces for music and cultural events. In particular, the lack of facilities for youth activities, such as a youth club or dedicated sports spaces, was a concern. Several participants also expressed the need for better communication about available services and events, and the importance of using community

centres as multifunctional spaces for both locals and visitors.

#### **General Improvements**

The overall theme of improving communication and information-sharing surfaced repeatedly across all meetings. Communities suggested creating central information points, more transparent sharing of community development plans, and better public engagement from local councils. Several also mentioned the issue of volunteer fatigue and the need to balance the workload within the community to ensure that initiatives are sustainable in the long run.

#### **Conclusion**

The conversations across Harris point to a shared vision for a more connected, sustainable, and equitable future for the island. The overlapping themes—housing, tourism, transport, and community engagement—show a clear need for collaboration and forward-

thinking solutions. By addressing these issues collectively, Harris can better harness its potential, improve the quality of life for residents, and ensure its unique heritage and environment are preserved for future generations.

#### **How all of this will form your Local Place Plan for Harris**

Besides the common topics, each area addressed its own unique issues and solutions. All of those will feed into one plan, which is basically a map outlining areas for potential future houses, general improvements within the existing infrastructure, playgrounds, improved paths and road layouts, and so on. During the next months, this map will be prepared and afterwards, showcased in different locations throughout Harris for your additional comments. Keep an eye out for further announcements within the *Dè tha dol?*, on social media, as well as the Harris Forum website <https://www.harris-forum.co.uk>.



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**Public exhibition of the Local  
Place Plan** is planned towards  
the beginning of June in  
following locations (locations to  
be confirmed closer to the time):

Tigh mo Sheanar, Tarbert  
Tarbert Library  
Leverhulme Hub  
Talla na Mara, West Harris