

# Community Led Local Development Leasachadh fo Stiùir na Coimhearsnachd

FOLLOW-ON TO THE LEADER PROGRAMME

March saw the end of another busy year for Community Led Local Development (CLLD) in the Outer Hebrides. In 2023-24, our Local Action Group (LAG) and Youth Local Action Group (YLAG) managed a budget of around £415,000, much of which was made available to local groups and organisations via funding schemes. Between four funds – Design Grant, Small Grants Scheme, Capital Fund and Youth LAG Fund – 38 projects received over £330,000 to make a real difference to people and communities the length and breadth of the Outer Hebrides. The LAG further commissioned the establishment of a Community Transport Network and collaborated with partners in Orkney and Shetland to fund a study into the possible impacts of upcoming changes to agricultural policy. Meanwhile the Youth LAG attended events across Scotland, sponsored a young filmmaker to produce a short film about crofting and also participated in the production of a film about YLAGs nationally. Both films will be available in the near future. LAG and YLAG are now waiting for confirmation from the Scottish Government about what their budget for 2024-25 will be, before deciding on their next programme of activity.

## Urras Oighreachd Chàrlabhaigh – West Coast Wind Energy

Urras Oighreachd Chàrlabhaigh are working in partnership with Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn and Urras Sgìre Oighreachd Bharabhais to develop a small wind farm on community-owned land, with the aim of securing a long-term income stream for the estates and taking advantage of opportunities arising from the new – higher capacity – interconnector cable. They were awarded £21,225.60 from the Design Grant to undertake some of the preliminary work required on what is likely to be a multi-million pound project. Urras Oighreachd Chàrlabhaigh's Development Manager, Donald Mackinnon, provides an update:

"CLLD funding has enabled us to progress the planning and development stage of our renewable energy project in partnership with Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn and Urras Sgìre Oighreachd Bharabhais. Ultimately the work showed that the scale of the proposed development was viable, giving us the confidence to continue to pursue the project. It has also accelerated our plans to submit a grid application."

For CLLD to be community-led, we need your input. We are keen to hear from our communities about how best to support you. To get involved, please contact us, in Gaelic or English:

✉ ohclld@cne-siar.gov.uk

📘 @outerhebridesclld

📘 @OHYLAG



## North Harris Trust – Meavaig North Affordable Housing

Wishing to retain young people and attract more economically active people to the area, the North Harris Trust have been exploring all avenues to deliver affordable housing for their community. Plans have been developed to build two family homes at Meavaig North using modular build methods which, if successful, could act as a catalyst for similar initiatives in other parts of the islands. Potential funders for the capital stages were keen to see planning in place before committing to supporting the project though. An award of £9,260.00 from the Design Grant enabled the North Harris Trust to undertake this next step, as their Development Officer, David Wake, explains:

"This application was for a small part of a larger project that will benefit the whole North Harris Community. The current lack of affordable housing is stalling employment and stalling population growth. Design Grant funding has allowed us to secure planning permission and seek further funding for the next stages."

## Tagsa Uibhist – Uist Community Food Hub

Tagsa Uibhist received funding from both the Design Grant and the Small Grants Scheme to support their Uist Community Food Hub. The Design Grant contribution enabled them to appoint an architect to design a welcoming and inclusive building which will provide a vibrant addition to the well-established community garden, while the Small Grants Scheme contributed to Biadh Blasta Uibhist, Tagsa Uibhist's Home-grown Meals on Wheels scheme, during the winter months. Speaking about Biadh Blasta Uibhist, Alex Mackenzie, their Local Food Development Manager, explains:

"The project provided high quality ready-made meals to our vulnerable elderly clients living on their own in Berneray, North Uist, Benbecula and South Uist. This helped meet our clients' nutritional needs whilst stimulating local food production. The project resonated well within the community because it utilised local food for local people and kept the income generated within the community. The project also received substantial media coverage and praise from the community and further afield."



## MidAS Training

Towards the end of March, a Minibus Driver Awareness Scheme (MiDAS) training course, which provides a nationally recognised standard for the assessment and training of minibus drivers, was delivered in Stornoway. As a result, representative from Voluntary Action Barra & Vatersay, Cothrom, Scalpay Minibus and Third Sector Hebrides are now qualified to deliver training and assess individuals in their organisations and wider communities. A lack of MiDAS-trained individuals had previously been identified as an issue in a CLLD-funded baseline study into community transport in the Outer Hebrides.

By covering course fees and offering the course locally, the costs and time commitment required from delegates, who would normally have to travel to the mainland for this 3-day course, were significantly reduced. The newly-qualified trainers are now among the first nationally to have been trained in the recently revised MiDAS syllabus.

All attendees agreed that the course had been very useful and they were unanimous in their praise for their trainer, Kenny. One stated: "This was an excellent course. It was really informative and I enjoyed it loads. Kenny is clearly very knowledgeable and enjoys delivering the course." Demonstrating that the learning was not one-sided, Kenny responded by saying: "The delegates were very helpful in supporting me take my Gaelic vocabulary into almost double figures", concluding with "tìoraidh an-dràsta". A special thanks goes to attendees from the Southern Isles and their employers for freeing up the time to attend the course.

An attendee of the Comunn Eachdraidh Nis Day Club alighting from their accessible vehicle. CLLD funding enabled Comunn Eachdraidh Nis to buy a wheelchair and other accessories to enhance the vehicle's functions.



## Sgeama nan Oifigearan Gàidhlig

The Youth LAG recently prepared a response to the announcement that funding used to employ Gaelic officers in communities across Scotland would no longer be available in 2024-25. In their response, which calls on government ministers to reverse their decision, they said:

"In 2023-24 the Outer Hebrides Youth LAG identified youth employment and working towards equity with the mainland as well as Dùthchas and Dualchas as key priorities to focus on. The loss of 29 Gaelic development officers will directly counter our ambitions. As the historical Gaelic heartland and one of the few areas where Gaelic is still spoken in everyday situations, these cuts will disproportionately affect our rural communities as 11 of the officers are located in the Outer Hebrides and a further 14 in the Highlands and Argyll, which means that 25 of the 29 jobs are located within rural and island communities. (...)

Members of the Outer Hebrides Youth LAG have directly benefited from this scheme. One of our members' post is currently funded by it and another was up until last year. Other members work closely with the officers active in their local areas. Officer posts are typically filled by young people at the beginning of their careers, the very demographic that must be supported to remain and thrive in the islands if the Government is serious about addressing depopulation trends. Instead, the low pay and insecure career prospects in a sector that should be the cornerstone of Gaelic promotion in Scotland means that these officers are under tremendous pressure. There is a danger that the very small number of people willing and able to do these jobs will become disillusioned and lose their enthusiasm due to constantly being let down by the system which is supposed to support them and their communities."

## Agricultural and Rural Communities Bill

Towards the end of 2023, the SRUC was commissioned by the LAGs and Councils of the three island groups, under the lead of Orkney, to investigate likely impacts of changes to agricultural subsidies resulting from the upcoming Agricultural and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill. The research proved more timely than initially expected and headline messages have already fed into a stage 1 discussion of the Bill in the Scottish Government. The more detailed findings will help inform subsequent stages, with the aim of ensuring that the unique circumstances of our islands – albeit different in each island group – are fully taken account of in the development of the Bill.

Some of the key points the research found are:

- There are varying levels of understanding among stakeholders about current policy proposals, with many exhibiting poor awareness of forthcoming changes.
- The absence of proposals in relation to common grazings (66% of Western Isles' agricultural area) is particularly concerning.
- CLLD is vital to the sustainability of Scotland's Island communities. In many of these communities, the business base is low and therefore community-led activity is vital to sustaining key services, and therefore to maintaining population levels.
- Island community consultation and engagement needs to be meaningful and focused. It is important to engage with 'hard-to-reach' groups.
- Continuing neglect within policy proposals of island-specific circumstances risks excluding large numbers of land managers and large areas of land from support, with detrimental implications for local food production, environmental conditions and community vibrancy.

The report's initial findings have already been used to call into question the Islands Community Impact Assessment the Scottish Government undertook on the proposed Bill, which came to the conclusion that "There is no specific identified or different impact of the policy on islands or island communities, compared to other communities. (...)" Therefore, a full Islands Community Impact Assessment is NOT required."