



HISTORIC
ENVIRONMENT
SCOTLAND

ÀRAINNEACHD
EACHDRAIDHEIL
ALBA

CORPORATE PLAN 2025-2028 - ISLAND COMMUNITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

*HES is a named relevant authority within the [Islands \(Scotland\) Act 2018](#). When we are **planning or reviewing a policy, strategy or service** we need to consider whether it is likely to have an effect on an island community, which is significantly different from its effect on other communities (including other island communities) (Section 8 of the Act). If it does, we need to complete and publish an Island Community Impact Assessment.*

INITIAL SCREENING

STEP ONE: DEVELOPING A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR OBJECTIVES:

- *Is the policy, strategy or service either **new** or **under** review?*
- *What are the objectives of the policy, strategy or service?*
- *How are islands identified for the purpose of the policy, strategy or service?*
- *What are the intended impacts/outcomes and how do these potentially differ in the islands?*

Background

Historic Environment Scotland (HES) is a charitable Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) whose statutory functions are set out in the Historic Environment Scotland Act 2014. Its primary purpose is to investigate, care for and promote Scotland's historic environment, and to manage collections as a national resource for reference, study and research. These responsibilities are as set out in the Framework Document between HES and the Scottish Government.

The Historic Environment (Scotland) Act 2014 mandated that HES must have a corporate plan, which must be renewed every three years. The corporate plan provides a roadmap for decision-making, resource allocation, and performance measurement, ensuring alignment and direction across the organisation.

HES's current corporate plan, Heritage for All, was first published in 2019. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it only had a light-touch refresh when it was due to expire at the end of 2021-22. This most recent iteration of the corporate plan, retains the title Heritage for All, but offers a substantial revision, building upon these previous versions.

It aligns with and leads the delivery of several of the priorities within the historic environment's national strategy Our Past, Our Future. It also supports the Scottish Government's delivery in a range of policy areas, including the National Performance Framework 4 (NPF4), Scotland's Climate Change Plan and Scotland Outlook 2030. Internally, the Corporate Plan provides the strategic direction for HES's shorter term Annual Operating Plans, annual Directorate Plans and individual performance objectives.

The refreshed Corporate Plan focuses on the following priorities and outcomes:

Scotland's heritage

By 2028, we will have:

- increased investment in the heritage assets in our care
- provided inspiring and memorable visitor experiences
- enabled good decision-making for Scotland's protected places

Skills and Learning

By 2028, we will have:

- inspired a new generation of learners through our skills and outreach programmes

People and Places

By 2028, we will have:

- increased the economic and community benefits from Scotland's historic environment
- sustained our grant funding to ensure the historic environment delivers against national priorities

Climate action

By 2028, we will have:

- led the way in reducing our climate impacts
- made Scotland's heritage central to the just transition to net zero

Our organisation

By 2028, we will have:

- increased our income and invested it in Scotland's heritage
- provided a safe, secure, and inclusive environment in which our colleagues can thrive

Impact on Islands

The Corporate Plan is nationwide in scope and does not specifically identify nor differentiate for the Islands, with the intended outcomes the same for the islands as on the mainland. However, as required by the Islands Scotland (2018) Act we have taken this opportunity to consider whether the impact, intentional or otherwise, of the outcomes could potentially differ in the islands, as we would not wish to make decisions that would unilaterally disadvantage island communities.

In preparing this Impact Assessment we have considered all islands, not just those where we have an operational responsibility in relation to the management of the properties in care.

STEP TWO: GATHER YOUR DATA AND IDENTIFY YOUR STAKEHOLDERS

- *What data is available about the current situation in the islands?*
- *How does any existing data differ between the islands?*
- *Are there any existing design features or mitigations in place?*

Data

We have a number of datasets available which can tell us about the current situation on the islands, which were consulted and considered during the development of the Corporate Plan.

Some of the data can be disaggregated to Island level, though some national surveys typically struggle to produce reliable information for Island communities due to their sample sizes and collection methods, as such, data was supplemented with anecdotal and operational information.

Data considered included:

- National demographic and social surveys (e.g. Scottish Household Survey and SIMD)
- National labour market and visitor surveys
- Asset registers of scheduled and listed buildings, plus Buildings at Risk register, to better understand the need for and scale of investment and skills
- Site management information from 54 HES Properties In Care (PICs) located on islands, including 9 which are staffed visitor attractions
- Our grants investment, including directly to organisations and individuals in island communities
- Records of HES engagement within Island communities through community planning partnerships, economic development teams and local/planning authorities
- Records of advice and support to individuals and organisations in relation to protecting, conserving, understanding, and celebrating their heritage in island communities
- Previous consultations within the sector including that undertaken for the national strategy for the historic environment and specific projects like the Orkney Gateway.
- Feedback from HES members/visitors
- Feedback from people employed on or resident in the islands and working in the sector.

The existing evidence base for Island Communities, which relates to the intended outcomes of the HES Corporate Plan is set out below.

Engagement & Wellbeing

- Engagement with the historic environment is marginally higher in island Local Authorities (LAs) than the Scottish average, with the Scottish Household Survey in

2019 reporting 39% of residents in island LAs visiting a historic site in the previous 12 months compared to 35% for Scotland as a whole.

- Primary research conducted by HES in 2019 to establish the links between heritage engagement and individuals' wellbeing did not find any statistically reliable differences in the rate or types of benefits reported between island and non-island areas, with 76% of respondents reporting that their overall life satisfaction was improved through engagement with the historic environment.
- Through local engagement, consultation and research we know that the historic environment is an integral part of island communities – both the built heritage and the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) shaping their sense of place, pride, and traditions.
- In the 2023/24 financial year there were 750 school learning visits made to our staffed island sites, including Skara Brae, Arnol Blackhouse and Tormiston Mill. The total number of learning visits are undoubtedly higher overall as many of the sites in the area are unstaffed.

Historic Environment Asset Base

- The islands have unique and significant heritage assets, including some with World Heritage status (Heart of Neolithic Orkney, St Kilda).
- There are 336 scheduled monuments managed by HES on behalf of Scottish Ministers. 54 of these are on islands, including 9 which are staffed visitor attractions.
- The Scottish Housing Condition Survey showed that over the period 2017-2019 Island Authorities had significantly lower shares of urgent and critical disrepair to traditionally build residences than the Scottish average.
- HES's Climate Action Plan identified the islands' scheduled monuments (and other traditional buildings) as being at significant risk due to the high concentration of coastal sites affected by erosion and sea level rises, and the comparatively high exposure to weather conditions (wind, rain) than some mainland sites.

Economic Impacts

- There are currently 64 people working at HES's island-based PICs – a figure which can rise due to seasonal employment. Island sites and communities are also supported by national services, which are based in mainland depots and offices.
- From 2018 to 2023, 39 HES grants totalling £3,185,373 have been awarded for projects based on the islands.
- Heritage is a key driver of islands tourism with the Islands Local Authorities having a higher reliance on tourism in their overall employment mix than the Scottish average (8%).
- Over a third of international visitors list the historic environment as their main motivation for visiting Scotland, and half of international visitors engage with the historic environment during their visit.
- Visitors that include a historic environment visit in their trip spent over £3bn in Scotland in 2019.

Language impact

- According to the 2011 Census Data, 98% of Scottish people do not have Gaelic language skills.
- Of those that do, 27% are based in an island community meaning that island communities represent a strong concentration of Gaelic speakers and cultural heritage.

Projects and support

- HES has regular liaison with relevant economic teams in local authorities, community planning partnerships, and development agencies covering the Islands to check alignment of policies and plans, ensure joint partnership approach to key development projects in areas, and identify longer term thematic or policy issues to develop.
- HES have worked with Developing the Young Workforce around several key projects, including recruitment campaigns in both Orkney and Shetland and supporting skills and knowledge development.
- HES and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) have been supporting the Isle of Luing Community Trust over the past 5 years to create a small-scale slate enterprise on the island.
- HES works closely with Orkney Islands Council (OIC) and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) under the Memorandum of Understanding to deliver the multi-million pound Orkney Gateway programme of investment across the Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site.
- HES works with HIE and Comhairle nan Eilean to support Urras nan Tursachan in development of their tourism development project at Calanais.
- HES sits on the Islands Growth Deal Advisory Board.
- HES supports Scotland's Islands Research Framework for Archaeology as part of Scotland's Archaeology Strategy.

STEP THREE: CONSULTATION

- *Who do you need to consult?*
- *How will you carry out your consultation?*
- *What questions will you ask when considering how to address island realities?*
- *What information has already been gathered through consultations and what concerns have been raised?*

Consultation

The development of the HES Corporate Plan was undertaken through a wide-ranging consultation process, with input received both internally from staff across the organisation, as well as external stakeholders.

Internal consultation

We ran a series of engagement sessions both online and in person, for internal colleagues and stakeholders across the organisation. This consultation also featured a session with representatives from HES's internal Forums and Networks.

External consultation

A number of pre-engagement events were undertaken in summer 2024 which fed into the development of the consultation draft of the Corporate Plan.

A ten-week formal public consultation was launched on 23 October 2024 and closed on 3 January 2025. Within the consultation questionnaire, there was a question specifically relating to the impact of the Corporate Plan on the islands, asking 'What impact do you think the plan might have on people in island communities?'

We prepared and circulated a toolkit to organisations to enable them to work with their stakeholders and feedback to the consultation. These organisations were: The Scottish Islands Federation, Development Trusts Association Scotland, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Fèisean nan Gàidheal, Comunn na Gaidhlig (CnaG). In total, there were 34 responses received to the formal consultation, of which 15 were from organisations and 19 from individuals.

A series of engagement events and interviews were also undertaken during the consultation period, both online and in person. This included one island-specific consultation session which was advertised externally and promoted to contacts in the islands to provide an opportunity for islanders to voice their opinions, concerns and suggestions. Questions within this session focuses on the island experience. It took place on 5th December and attendees covered Orkney, Lewis, Harris, North Uist and Barra.

Summary of feedback and findings

Within the consultation, higher numbers of respondents reported that they believed that the Corporate Plan would have a positive rather than a negative impact on people in island communities, although the majority of respondents either felt there would be no impact or did not comment.

Comments received on this topic specifically noted that the impact would depend on the implementation of the Corporate Plan and specifically how well HES worked with island communities, as well as on the levels of support and assistance provided by HES to island communities.

The island residents and businesses who attended the island specific online consultation event noted that need to acknowledge and appreciate that the islands have a unique socio-economic landscape which must be considered when HES works with island communities. Some of the specific issues that respondents noted in the session related to specific issues and barriers faced by island communities included rural depopulation, higher costs and capacity issues.

Island based respondents also noted that they felt that there were barriers when engaging with HES as an organisation and there was a general agreement among all consultation

respondents that HES needed to offer more direct and personalised support and advice to communities. There was also strong agreement about a need to think about how HES could improve its grants and advice to island communities; reduce grant application barriers; and offer skills support, to better recognise Island communities' role in delivering the outcomes.

STEP FOUR: ASSESSMENT

You must now determine whether in your opinion the policy, strategy or service is likely to have an effect on an island community which is significantly different from its effect on other communities (including other island communities).

To form your opinion, the following questions should be considered and any further explanation or evidence provided below:

- Does your assessment identify any unique impacts on island communities? **No**
- Does your assessment identify any potential barriers or wider impacts? **No**
- Does the evidence show different circumstances or different expectations or needs, or different experiences or outcomes (such as different levels of satisfaction, or different rates of participation)? **No**
- Are these different effects likely? **No**
- Are these effects significantly different? **No**
- Could the effect amount to a disadvantage for an island community compared to the mainland or between island groups? **No**

Rationale

The intended impacts of the new Corporate Plan are not wholly exclusive to island communities. However, since the Corporate Plan will involve working across all parts of Scotland, including several islands, there is value in looking in detail at the way the outcomes of the plan may impact island communities differently to elsewhere. Though there are many similarities in both the intended outcome of the new Corporate Plan across island and mainland communities, the special considerations taken to assess island communities may have only a further positive impact, for example in assessing impact on rural or remote mainland communities. Of the outcomes listed above, we have considered whether the effect of an outcome on an island community would be significantly different from its effect on other communities.

Scotland's heritage

Historic sites, collections, and archives are integral to the identity of both island and mainland communities. Investments in their long-term future aim to ensure that these assets are available to all, with digital archives and resources potentially reducing geographic disparities.

We are aware of the unique challenges which exist for island communities. The majority of the historic building stock is privately owned and the cost of materials and labour is higher for those living on islands, as compared to the mainland.

Outcome	Is the impact significantly different for island communities?
By 2028, we will have increased investment in the heritage assets in our care	No - the preservation and care of assets in our care apply equally across Scotland, regardless of location
By 2028, we will have provided inspiring and memorable visitor experiences	No – we have properties both on mainland and on island communities
By 2028, we will have enabled good decision-making for Scotland's protected places	No – however, over the course of the Corporate Plan there may be value in considering the specific guidance needs of island communities, ensuring that all communities can benefit from our advice.

Skills and [Learning](#)

Nationally we are experiencing a shortage in the skills needed to maintain historic buildings and to adapt and mitigate against the impact of climate change. Consultation has told us that these skills shortages are more acutely felt on the islands.

Outcome	Is the impact significantly different for island communities?
By 2028, we will have inspired a new generation of learners through our skills and outreach programmes	No - lifelong learning and skills development opportunities will be inclusive and accessible throughout Scotland, and will benefit both island and mainland communities, addressing the skills shortages felt more acutely within island communities. Lifelong learning opportunities are intended to reach all regions through digital access and outreach, which will minimise the geographic barriers faced by island communities.

People and [Places](#)

In considering the outcomes relating to people and place we understand and acknowledge that our PICs can have more influence on the island community's local economy than in more populous areas, including through employment and use of local supply chains.

Outcome	Is the impact significantly different for island communities?
By 2028, we will have increased the economic and community benefits from Scotland's historic environment	No - efforts to grow Scotland's economy through the historic environment will address both local and national opportunities. Data suggests Island economies are often more reliant on tourism, and the development of heritage-focused economic opportunities, such as investing in visitor experiences at our PICs, can help to grow this,
By 2028, we will have sustained our grant funding to ensure the historic environment delivers against national priorities	No – our grants and support programmes are designed to consider diverse needs across Scotland, from urban centres to rural islands, ensuring equitable distribution of resources.

Climate action

In considering the outcomes relating to climate action we understand and acknowledge impact of climate change, especially as seen in rising sea levels and coastal erosion, has a far greater impact on the islands.

Outcome	Is the impact significantly different for island communities?
By 2028 we will have led the way in reducing our climate impacts	No - efforts to transition to net zero will focus on shared strategies that are equally applicable to historic properties on islands and the mainland. Island-specific challenges, like transportation emissions, may be addressed alongside broader efforts, including the unique vulnerabilities of island communities, such as coastal erosion
By 2028 we will have made Scotland's heritage central to the just transition to net zero	No - efforts to transition to net zero will focus on shared strategies that are equally applicable to historic properties on islands and the mainland. Island-specific challenges, like transportation emissions, may be addressed alongside broader efforts, including the unique vulnerabilities of island communities, such as coastal erosion

Our organisation

Outcome	Is the impact significantly different for island communities?
By 2028 we will have increased our income and invested it in Scotland's heritage	No - the goal of generating resources supports all HES activities, including those impacting island and mainland communities
By 2028 we will have provided a safe, secure, and inclusive environment in which our colleagues can thrive	No - inclusivity is a universal priority and will not differ significantly between island and mainland communities with measures designed to minimise geographic, social, and economic barriers, ensuring services are inclusive for both island and mainland populations.

Our evidence gathering and consultation responses does not suggest the corporate plan will have a significantly different impact for Island Communities and therefore a full ICIA will not be required.

The key considerations for HES when introducing and implementing the Plan are to:

- Maintain good communication channels around the development and implementation of specific policies, projects and investments that will affect the pool of sector stakeholders identified in this ICIA;
- The Corporate Plan is seen to be well aligned with key stakeholder sectors' own aspirations
- Acknowledge that any future work with communities will need to take into account the unique features of island communities, such as their remoteness, cultural identity, ICH, and natural landscapes.
- Use AOPs to revisit fundamental CP themes and highlight where performance varies or emphasis changes.

HES has made amendments to the objectives in the Corporate Plan since the draft was released for consultation and introduced a monitoring framework and key performance indicators to track progress, while retaining the 5 strategic themes. This approach has evolved the Plan to provide clearer focus in response to the consultation findings.

Approved by	Job Title	Date
Dr Adam Jackson	Head of Strategy and Policy	11/3/2025