



# ISLAND COMMUNITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

## PRE CONSULTATION

*Historic Environment Scotland 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 Communities Impact Assessment. This document provides an initial screening assessment to inform our consultation.*

## 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 Non-Departmental Public Body with charitable status, and the lead public body established to investigate, care for, and promote Scotland's historic environment.

On behalf of Scottish Ministers and for the people of Scotland, we care for some of the most culturally significant places in Scotland. There are over 300 Properties, more than 43,000 objects and over 5 million archival records in our Collections. These assets are uniquely valuable to our cultural identity, to society, economies and our environment, including Island Communities.

The Properties and Collections Strategy is a long-term strategy for HES, for the next 10 years, and is a culture shift in how we consider the purpose of the Estate and how we manage it.



The Strategy takes a sustainable development approach, balancing outcomes across social, economic, environmental and cultural benefits. Delivering sustainable management - and a broad and balanced range of outcomes – is our aim across all our assets, whether in islands or mainland.

Our strategic Vision is ‘to increase understanding and achieve sustainable management of the cultural assets in our care’.

The Strategy involves the whole Estate and associated Collections in care. There are Properties in Care within island communities in the following local authority areas: Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Argyll and Bute, North Ayrshire, and Highland.

Our long-term Strategic priorities are:

- Focusing on the cultural assets in our care that have both the greatest conservation need **and** the greatest potential to make a difference to people and place
- Ensuring Scotland’s most significant cultural assets are conserved and sustainably managed for future generations

In the long-term we will identify need and potential through our increased understanding of the assets, both in themselves and within the context of place, and what they mean to communities.

In the short-term, we will prioritise:

- the most significant cultural heritage assets in our care that are at the highest risk of decay and loss
- to protect and grow our income from key revenue-generating Properties, without compromising what makes them special, to directly reinvest in the wider Estate.

This means that we can use income generated from ticketed Properties and Collections with strong footfall, such as those closer to urban centres, and balance benefits by reinvesting in the wider Estate including those in islands and within island communities.

In the short term, while protecting and growing income from key income-generating Properties, we will approach reinvestment of revenue in the wider Estate to fulfil our long-term objectives.

We will analyse datasets, using evidence and expertise to determine need and potential from the assets. In this way, we can target investment where it is needed most and where it can make the most positive difference for people and place.

By using a values-based approach that takes geography and local and regional economic contexts into account, our objectives should ensure Island communities will



not be disadvantaged. For example, we aim to balance the benefit of attracting tourists to world-class heritage sites with concerns about ‘over-tourism’ as we take a responsible approach to tourism.

In terms of climate change, the increasing impact of rising sea levels, coastal erosion, storms and wind driven rain are taking a particular toll on Properties in exposed coastal locations. In addition, at Properties in coastal locations where associated Collections are housed, internal environments and collections care may require enhanced approaches to mitigate the consequences of climate impacts.

The level of risk to cultural significance through loss of historic fabric, and to the benefits that could be impacted, may require us to prioritise resources to prevent loss or manage loss well, so that alternative benefits can be garnered.

## Impact on Islands

Under the Islands Act, islands are identified as either ‘Island Groups’ or ‘Island Communities’.

The Strategy is nationwide in scope and does not specifically identify nor differentiate for the Islands; we have the same objectives for islands as on the mainland. However, as required by the Islands Act we have taken this opportunity to consider whether the impact, intentional or otherwise, of the Strategy could potentially differ in the islands, as we would not wish to make decisions that would disadvantage any island communities.

## 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 manage 336 Properties and over 43,000 associated Collection objects. This Estate spans a diverse range of geographies across Scotland, including a significant presence within island communities. The HES website shows the locations of all Properties in Care: [Choose a Region](#)



For further context, the [Scottish Islands Typology: overview 2024](#) provides data on island populations, access to local amenities, and access to mainland Scotland. The report gives a picture of the differences and similarities between islands.

Properties in Care located on an island account for 21% of the Estate. These island Properties, 42% of which have associated Collections items, represent an important group within the wider Estate, particularly in terms of cultural, community and economic values.

Across the islands, we manage 73 properties located on 15 islands. These collectively support a population of approximately 88.5k people. The distribution of properties varies, with the highest number of island Properties, numbering 36, on Mainland Orkney and Connected Isles. The second highest concentration of properties occurs on the Isle of Arran, and Mainland Shetland and Connected Isles, both numbering 8 Properties. Three islands, Iona, Isle of Bute, Lewis, Harris & Connected Isles, have 3, 3 and 6 Properties respectively. There are 8 islands with single Properties, including Eileach an Naoimh, Eilean Mor, Inchcolm Island, St Serf's Island, an uninhabited island in Loch Leven and an uninhabited island off the coast of Barra.

The context of island Properties can differ markedly from that of the mainland. Island Properties can be more challenging to reach and logistically complex to maintain. They may be more exposed to the impacts of climate change. They are however just as important to communities, places, local identity, and economies as anywhere else.

Of the 73 island properties, 16 are staffed, ensuring a consistent on-site presence and community interface. The majority of the Properties, numbering 57, are unstaffed. There are 63 Properties which are open all year, while 10 of the Properties allow seasonal access. There are local key keepers in place at 12 Properties.

This staffing model reflects both operational realities and the need for tailored approaches in island contexts. Recruitment can be harder due to a combination of limited affordable housing, higher living costs, and geographic location, which can make it challenging to attract and retain staff - especially younger workers and people in sectors such as health, education, and hospitality.

Island Properties contribute to the Estate's economic and social value. Net direct spend across our island Properties in 2024-25 totals £22.46 million and resulted in 586 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs, modelled in-house estimate based on ONS visitor surveys and site data. Recorded visitor numbers are available for 13 of our island Properties and in 2024-25 these reached a combined total of 301,232. These figures underpin the strong footprint of island Properties, as heritage assets contributing positively to cultural identities and acting as drivers for tourism, community development, and



economic activity. Through a lack of available data, it's possible that the positive impact island Properties generate is underestimated, and that there is a need to enhance our understanding of their contribution.

The seasonal nature of island visitation, coupled with transport and infrastructure challenges, requires a nuanced understanding of how these sites operate and how they can be sustainably supported.

As we look to the future management of the Estate, it is essential for us to engage with stakeholders in island communities who understand the distinct needs and opportunities that the Properties and Collections present. Stakeholders include local authorities, community development trusts, heritage organisations, transport and tourism providers. Insights will be vital in shaping a Properties and Collections Strategy that is representative of island communities, their specific needs and ambitions.

## 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?*

### **Who do you need to consult?**

We will consult a wide range of stakeholders including all local authorities across Scotland. This will of course include those with Properties in islands communities, as well as community planning partnerships, heritage and tourism organisations, equalities groups, and local communities connected to the Properties and Collections.

National bodies such as the Scottish Islands Federation, Development Trust Association Scotland, and Bòrd na Gàidhlig will also be included to ensure representation of island-specific interests.

### **How will you carry out your consultation?**

Consultation will be delivered through a 15-week public consultation period (October 2025 to January 2026), supported by a specialist third-party engagement consultancy.

We will use a mix of in-person and virtual engagement methods to ensure accessibility for island communities. This includes community listening events and targeted digital outreach. Hyper-localised messaging will be used to ensure people living near island Properties and their Collections are aware of the consultation and can participate



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meaningfully. Given 49% of the island Properties are in Orkney Islands, we are planning targeted in-person consultation events on the Strategy in Orkney.

### **What questions will you ask when considering how to address island realities?**

We have asked the following question in our public consultation survey:

Do you think the Strategy is likely to have an effect on an island community which is significantly different from its effect on other communities (including other island communities)?

- Yes [Please explain below]
- No
  - Why do you think the Strategy is likely to have a significantly different effect on an island community? (free text box)

### **What information has already been gathered through consultations and what concerns have been raised?**

The public consultation is our first step in testing the Properties and Collections Strategy objectives and approaches. While the draft Strategy has been informed by our work and our connections with communities across the Estate including the islands, this is the formal launch of consultation and engagement to find out what island communities think and wish to tell us. We will capture this feedback and use it to hone the Strategy so that our objectives and approaches are fitting and responsive to island contexts.