



Rural and Agricultural Development – Maximising the Potential in the Islands of Orkney, Shetland & Outer Hebrides

Community Led Local Development



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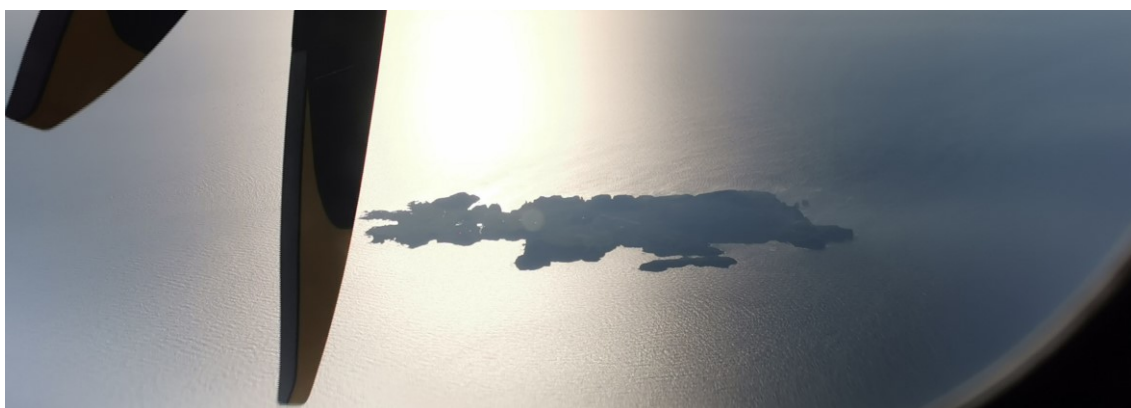
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392. Alongside our exploration of the implications of changes in the support system for farms and crofts, supply chains and economies, the team also explored the implications for the wider resilience of island communities. In particular, we focused on the characteristics and challenges of delivering recent Scottish Government-funded Community Led Local Development (CLLD) projects and CLLD projects funded from other sources (e.g. the Crown Estate), and on wider themes relating to the integration of agriculture and crofting on islands with the communities in which they are situated, changing land use and land management, and relating to national policies on islands.
393. The data for this section of the report was collected through a desk-based review of key documents (including academic and other relevant literature) as well as individual and group interviews with stakeholders across all three island groups. Interviews were undertaken with those involved in island community development in many different ways, through both Scottish Government-funded CLLD projects, and through the work of community trusts and other organisations funded from a variety of different sources.
394. The research team analysed recordings, transcripts and notes from these conversations. The conversations ranged from those which were largely unstructured, to semi-structured interviews, with all of them seeking to find out more about the activity(ies) in which individuals were involved, the particular characteristics of 'doing CLLD' in island communities (including any opportunities and challenges encountered and impacts achieved), and any recommendations for changes to policy, practice, etc. at all levels from national to regional to local. The data from the conversations was analysed thematically and this section reports the findings according to this thematic analysis, using direct quotes from interviews (shown in "*italics*") and evidence from particular case study projects and initiatives where relevant. At the end of this section, we suggest some recommendations specifically relating to the future of CLLD, and these are echoed in the overall recommendations presented at the end of this report.



11.1 Recent Scottish Government funded CLLD activity

395. All three island groups have undertaken evaluation work on their (past) LEADER and (more recent) CLLD projects and activities. These reports demonstrate the diversity of activities taking place, and the range of impacts achieved. The introduction of the Social Value Engine methodology for measuring the wider social impacts of CLLD activity has helped to demonstrate the scale of the important but less tangible aspects of CLLD²¹⁴.
396. All interviewees reflected on the significance of the loss of EU LEADER funding for bottom-up, community-led development for rural and island communities across Scotland. It was acknowledged that LEADER had its flaws, not least the increasing amount of bureaucracy in recent years and challenges with the computer-based reporting system (known as Local Action for Rural Communities – LARCS) which was intended to streamline processes²¹⁵. However, its many positives were also acknowledged, including the multi-annual funding which gave predictability and certainty and allowed for strategic planning. There was also recognition in LEADER of the importance of capacity-building and animation, and the emphasis placed on networking, collaboration and learning from other projects across Europe. Also, since it had been running for so long, the LEADER 'brand' including the name, philosophy and approach had become well known and generally well understood by all stakeholders. It is also worth noting that previous LEADER programmes have included funding for farm diversification, thereby offering an opportunity for farmers to engage in applying for funding to deliver the principles of LEADER.
397. Many interviewees reflected that, while the Scottish Government has funded replacement CLLD programmes, when compared to the LEADER approach the sums of money available are smaller (though for some, the number of projects had increased which in turn generated increased paperwork) and funding has only been available annually (reducing the ability to strategically plan over multiple years). Moreover, in reality, due to delays in confirming and then allocating funding each year, the actual delivery time for LAGs and projects has been much less than a year, making meaningful CLLD activity almost as difficult to achieve as strategic planning. Interviewees commented that Scottish Government CLLD funding (as well as some UK Government funding) has sometimes only been allocated to local areas in late summer/early Autumn, with projects needing to be delivered and

²¹⁴ More information on, and links to, these reports are available on request. More information on the Social Value Engine is available here [SVE | Social Value Engine](#).

²¹⁵ Some of these challenges are also discussed in relation to Wales and Andalusia in a 2016 academic paper: Navarro, F.A., Woods, M. and Cejudo, E., 2016. The LEADER initiative has been a victim of its own success. The decline of the bottom-up approach in rural development programmes. The cases of Wales and Andalusia. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 56(2), pp.270–288. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/soru.12079>

funds spent by the end of the subsequent March. In an island context, this means that activity is taking place during the winter months when projects may be particularly susceptible to delays for weather-related reasons. These delays may generate extra paperwork and therefore cost due to additional administrative staff time required and extra input from LAG members.

398. One interviewee referred to the “*desperate timeframes*” leaving staff “*focusing on the projects rather than taking a strategic approach... they are just focusing on getting money out of the door.*” One interviewee commented “*The annual funding model is a nightmare. It provides for no thinking or evaluation time and only a very short time to deliver projects. This isn’t good for Scottish Government or for LAGs.*” Projects are very difficult to plan, the process is much less efficient and, as the projects are rushed (at all stages, including application and implementation), they are sometimes not sufficiently developed and are therefore less impactful as outputs and outcomes cannot be fully achieved.
399. There are many, many community trusts and organisations across the three island groupings delivering CLLD²¹⁶, and several interviewees commented on the particular importance of CLLD activity in island contexts. They acknowledged the diversity across Scotland’s islands²¹⁷, including within island groups, and therefore the flexibility of CLLD in enabling different projects to be undertaken in different locations, for different groups within the community. Interviewees also acknowledged the role of these CLLD groups in providing inspiration and a forward-thinking foundation for other activities and people across their community. For example, a heritage and arts group which is able to use space in a building refurbished by the community trust, local people who have empty housing proactively approaching a community trust to buy the housing to make it available for local families (rather than selling it on the open market for a profit), and a café initially aimed at seasonal tourist visitors which is now opening all year round to serve the local population and thereby providing a warm space, hot food and a place to meet and socialise.
400. They went on: “*The projects coming in are not necessarily in a good state and CLLD coordinators have to take what they can get....It is best to have a selection of ‘shovel ready’ projects to fund when the money comes in but this doesn’t recognise the fundamental importance of CLLD in the island councils... CLLD may*

²¹⁶ It is not possible to list all of these groups, and their many diverse activities and roles here. Orkney Islands Council and HIE are currently working with a locally based designer to produce information sheets about community organisations across the islands and the work they are involved in. Orkney Islands Council and HIE are also currently working with a local media company to produce short films describing the important and diverse work of community groups across the Orkney islands. These will be publicly available.

²¹⁷ More information on island diversity can be found in the recently published [Scottish Islands Typology: overview 2024 – gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-islands-typology-overview-2024/pages/introduction.aspx)

take the place of public/private investment and it can be very ambitious, there are some big projects, but increasingly CLLD funding is being used to plug funding gaps and day-to-day needs."

401. Several interviewees also commented that they felt that the replacement Scottish Government CLLD schemes have been more top-down than LEADER (even if this wasn't intended to be the case) which had a more bottom-up approach in terms of determining objectives and priorities. One interviewee commented that *"Scottish Government CLLD funding is much more driven by policy with less local control."*
402. Nevertheless, the legacy of LEADER and CLLD funding has meant that a locally appropriate structure and system is in place to distribute funding – and potentially funding from multiple sources in future – in a transparent and independent way. In Orkney, for example, the argument has been made for other funding (e.g. Crown Estate monies, or UK Government Levelling Up funding) to be distributed through the Local Action Group (LAG) so as to use the same processes, criteria, etc. and to build on existing public, private and third sector LAG member relationships. An arrangement has been put in place recently in Orkney whereby the LAG scored funding applications for Crown Estate monies but the funding sign-off was undertaken by Orkney Islands Council.
403. The shorter timescales for Scottish Government CLLD funding were also cited as a reason why devoting time and money to vital animation and capacity-building activity has become harder, if not impossible. Several interviewees noted that, despite its importance, this funding is usually the first to be reduced when cuts are required. But at the same time, this pre-project work is all the more important as the time for actual project activity has been shortened, meaning more work is required by the development officer and those with potential projects to be 'shovel-ready' when the funding opportunity opens. Added to this, it was noted that funding for community development officers (some of which comes from Highlands and Islands Enterprise, HIE) has been substantially reduced recently and while attempts have been made to fund this activity from other sources (for example, Crown Estate funding) this had not yet been secured. As one interviewee noted, there is a real risk that reduced funding for animation and capacity-building reinforces the already highly uneven landscape of CLLD as only some communities have the capacity to bid for funding.

11.2 CLLD is intrinsic to island realities but challenging to deliver

404. Many of the interviewees were involved on a day-to-day basis in delivering CLLD, whether this was through the Scottish Government-funded CLLD scheme or through their involvement with projects funded from other sources (e.g. the

Coastal Communities Fund) and with community trusts and other community groups on the islands. They were all strongly in agreement that CLLD in all its forms is critical to maintaining sustainable communities across the islands. One interviewee commented on the limited scale of the business base on many islands, in particular, outer islands amongst island groups, where there may only be a small number of crofts or farms and perhaps a shop and café (often for tourists with seasonal opening hours) but limited other private sector activity. As a result, community-based development and CLLD and the people that are engaged in it, is absolutely critical to the resilience of these communities.

405. Beyond the Scottish Government-funded CLLD programme, there are many other funding sources for community-based development across the island groups, including significant funding from the Crown Estate and from the local authorities themselves including for socio-economic development and business support. Community-led organisations and trusts in the Outer Hebrides are often aligned with communities purchasing, owning and managing land.

- For example, Orkney has 10 active Development Trusts across the mainland and the outer isles with Community Development Officers who help build capacity and leverage funding for further projects, and a number of other community groups delivering a diverse range of local projects.
- Shetland Charitable Trust was originally set up in 1976 to disburse money from the oil industry to the local community as compensation for the new terminal in the islands. Since then, over £320 million has been disbursed to a wide range of local charities, organisations and individuals.

406. Crown Estate funding is also significant for CLLD in all three island groups. In Shetland for example, this money is disbursed through the Shetland Islands Council Coastal Communities Fund, which is *“designed to mobilise change and deliver positive outcomes for Shetland and its communities. The scheme seeks to support the community and economic development of Shetland by investing in infrastructure, community capacity building, and developing community assets and encouraging inclusive growth.”* Projects funded under the Fund must meet the priorities of the Shetland Partnership Plan, with the criteria for funding informed by what worked well under LEADER. The Fund has paid for a diverse range of different activities across Shetland over the years it has been running, but recently announced projects (December 2023) include a variety of village hall improvements, sports development support workers to enable more people (particularly from disadvantaged groups) to access sports activities, a resilience hub (providing shelter, warmth, food and communication) for a community during emergency events, a new rescue boat, and wind turbines and a new infrared heating system in an agricultural mart.

407. Despite the vital importance of CLLD across all three island groups, all interviewees spoke of the additional challenges and barriers to doing this community-based work in islands due to their location. Often the key difficulties encountered related to the additional costs of delivering CLLD on islands.
408. The cost of transport, and in particular ferries, and the associated additional costs of moving people and materials, with unreliability a further challenge are particularly significant issues. Box: 8 discusses ferry challenges experienced across the islands in more detail, while Annex 7 Ferry disruptions in Orkney discusses particular challenges encountered recently in terms of ferry transport in Orkney.

Box: 8 Ferry-related challenges across the island groups: reliability and cost

In making their case for an island's uplift to CLLD funding, Orkney, Shetland and the Outer Hebrides cite a number of ferry-related issues which impact on CLLD delivery, and indeed the lives of island residents and visitors. These are summarised below:

Islands across the three groups, in particular outer isles, face ferry capacity issues during the summer, when tourist numbers are higher, and during the (long) winter – when there are likely to be frequent weather-related ferry delays and cancellations.

The outer isles also sit 'at the end of the supply chain' and so there may be particular time lags in terms of the supply of goods and services when services are disrupted.

A large proportion of the ferry fleet across all islands is reaching the end of its life and replacement ferries are many years behind schedule. Frequent breakdowns mean that islands lose their 'lifeline services' often at short notice and for extended periods. Islands particularly affected recently are Barra, South Uist, Unst, Yell, Fetlar, Whalsay, Skerries and Fair Isle. As a result, people travelling to and from the islands will often travel a day or two early if they have a commitment, making organising short trips hard and meaning additional costs – over and above the already higher costs of ferry or plane travel to and from the islands. Works to harbours and related facilities have also meant ferry cancellations, often for significant periods.

Limited ferry capacity combined with unreliability also impacts on access to essential food items in Uist and Barra (according to a recent Nourish Scotland study) where island residents also reported paying an 'island premium' (when items are available) of 28% compared to urban Scotland. In addition to this, due to longer supply chains, the quality of the products available is often inferior. Families on a low budget or without transport are particularly adversely affected by this.

In terms of delivering CLLD projects, winter weather-related delays can be particularly difficult in short timescale funding, particularly if an island's only boat a week is cancelled for multiple weeks. This extends the project timeline and builds in a much greater risk for any potential building contractor and project applicant. Summer weather related delays can also occur due to high winds or technical issues on ferries, and fog leading to plane cancellations.

Goods produced on the islands demand heavy freight payments to get them to mainland customers. The costs of transporting livestock and machinery are high e.g. £350 to get a tractor transported from mainland Shetland to the outer islands, with additional cost of getting it shipped up on the ferry from Aberdeen or Orkney. It costs £10 to ship a sheep from the outer isles of Shetland to Aberdeen with cattle costs much higher. The costs of transporting animal feed are also higher. Unlike the Orkney and Shetland services, CalMac does not offer a cassette system on their ferries, meaning crofters are restricted in where they can sell their livestock while keeping to maximum transport times. It also means most people transport livestock using their car and a trailer, which requires additional time, adds to costs and increases carbon emissions.

409. Many interviewees specifically mentioned housing projects (which are vital across many islands where employers are reporting a shortage of housing for their workforce) and a number of associated challenges, including identifying suitable contractors on the islands to do the work, projects being costed at three times what community trusts can afford (especially if the focus of the project is providing housing at affordable rents/purchase prices), grant schemes not recognising or covering the additional costs of building on islands, difficulties in getting staff and raw materials on/off the islands and when people/items are being moved then taking up all of the space on a plane/ferry. Often housing projects are therefore having to look for multiple funding sources to cover all of these additional costs which adds to the admin and bureaucracy needed to manage and report on the project, and actually is not always possible as funding for housing projects tends to be limited to the Scottish Land Fund and Rural Housing Fund. One particular project seeking to build affordable housing on the Isle of Harris is described briefly in Box: 9 with more information provided in Annex 8 North Harris Trust.

Box: 9 The North Harris Trust: Affordable housing on the Isle of Harris

In the north of the Isle of Harris, the lack of affordable housing is a critical challenge for the economic and social sustainability of communities. It has meant, for example, that local businesses cannot recruit new staff as, even after offers of employment, they are unable to find housing.



The North Harris Trust has been exploring the potential to build two new 2-3 bedroom units on land it owns, but the estimated cost of the project (even from locally based construction companies) is too high for the Trust to afford, especially considering the properties will be let out at affordable rent levels. These higher costs result from the additional costs for construction companies of transporting materials and labour, and providing local accommodation for labour if that is required.

Further additional costs come from the higher costs of tradespeople to maintain services, and that is if tradespeople are available locally with the right skills. The Trust has therefore been exploring the potential for modular housing for which the costs quoted have been more reasonable. Annex 8 North Harris Trust provides more information on the activities of the Trust and its housing investment.

410. There was a strong feeling amongst many interviewees that some of these additional challenges should have been mitigated through the legislative commitment to undertake Islands Community Impact Assessments (ICIAs). However, interviewees were unable to cite many good examples of where they felt undertaking an ICIA had meant such challenges had been reduced (the ICIA process is explored in more detail later).
411. Alongside the challenge of additional costs, several interviewees commented on the increasing number of responsibilities that are being placed on communities in terms of managing assets and service delivery. Community trusts and groups are increasingly in a position where they can (and often do) take on the running of housing, business start-up units, community transport schemes, childcare provision and many other things, most of which have traditionally been delivered by the public sector. This is placing increasingly heavy demands on often small numbers of people, whether that be paid development officers or unpaid, volunteer board members and trustees. Added to this, many volunteers are older – perhaps the pre-retired or retired who have more time to devote to these kinds of activities (though some individuals may still be working a ‘day job’ too) – and bring immense skills, resources, knowledge, enthusiasm and commitment. However, very few community organisations have many young people involved or a succession plan for what will happen when older volunteers are no longer able or keen to be involved.
412. One interviewee, informed by their personal experience of working, often on a short-term basis, with communities to support their CLLD work, noted a number of additional challenges for community groups. For example, they mentioned that the supporting evidence requirement for projects, while important, is often disproportionate, particularly for smaller amounts of money. They noted a general lack of revenue funding options and suggested that if revenue funding could be attached to capital funding projects (even at a decreasing rate over time) this would take the pressure off communities. This would be helpful for some projects which may operate at a loss initially (for example a community café). It is a lot to ask communities to shoulder that burden of loss and risk initially until the project becomes self-sustaining. This interviewee also noted that communities are often disadvantaged by the lack of agility of public sector organisations (particularly funders) and resultant time delays for their work. More positively, the individual

noted that island communities are generally very innovative and therefore happy to be pioneers or pilots for different approaches, or to provide proof of concept for a different delivery model which could be rolled out elsewhere. But this requires funders to be more flexible and less risk averse. In general, they commented that funders need to be more open and understanding to situations where projects need to deviate from their original plan for very valid reasons (often weather-related in island contexts), instead of such deviations having to be paid for by community groups. For this interviewee, one of the most important parts of his role is networking and gathering local contacts, knowledge and intelligence which can be used in many different ways to support the success of projects. A second key element of the role is always thinking innovatively and being solutions-focused, which the interviewee argued is particularly important when working in island communities.

413. Several interviewees commented that we need better ways of measuring the wider impacts of CLLD, many of which are hard to measure, including the impacts on issues such as depopulation. There was mention of the need to move beyond measuring the number of projects funded or groups supported to measure much more intangible outcomes in terms of wellbeing, etc. and also to highlight aspects of the CLLD process which have brought benefits such as enhanced community cohesion, resilience and confidence.
414. There was also a recognition that land managers have an increasingly important role in delivering other public benefits including in relation to community development and other key agendas such as community wealth building, whether explicitly or implicitly. For example, they are/could be key players in expanding local supply chains through producing food for local selling, in local housing provision through making land available for new sites, and in terms of social prescribing and health and wellbeing. We should therefore refrain from separating direct funding for land managers from funding for wider rural and island community development. However, often the additional roles that land managers deliver are not adequately recognised and valued by policymakers regionally and nationally; at local, community level these links may be very evident and valued.

11.3 Looking ahead to future funding for CLLD

415. There is recognition both nationally and locally that LAGs, originally set up under LEADER, need to look beyond Scottish Government CLLD funding in the future, to funding from UK Government (e.g. the Shared Prosperity and Levelling Up Fund²¹⁸),

²¹⁸ It has just been announced in March 2024 that Orkney has been awarded £20 million of Levelling Up funding from the 'Long-Term Plan for Towns' funding stream. This involves ten-year endowment style funds allocated to local areas, with Boards then set up locally to make

other Scottish Government rural and islands funding (including funding available on a sectoral basis e.g. for housing or community land ownership), or private sector funding for communities (e.g. wind farm community funds). LAGs could provide an experienced, knowledgeable, transparent, holistic, and locally informed mechanism for distributing this funding in a much more coordinated way in future (lessons from LEADER have already informed the processes involved in distributing Coastal Communities Fund money in Shetland for example). In so doing LAGs could potentially also deliver to a whole range of national policy objectives, including community wealth building, enhanced wellbeing, community empowerment, asset transfer and local democracy, through the existing CLLD mechanisms and structures. Interviewees also noted that all this activity should be framed by a Local Development Strategy (as was the case in LEADER) which is holistic and place-based and enables a strategic focus on key priorities.

416. However, interviewees were keen to point out that this must not lead to a situation where project officers are having to chase funding and then to meet multiple national priorities and objectives with different reporting processes and timescales; a much more streamlined, consistent and strategic approach is needed where funding streams are properly brought together to ease the burden of managing this at local level. If this can be achieved, with LAGs playing a key role, this offers a real opportunity for CLLD on islands. Clearly an appropriate level of ongoing monitoring and evaluation of decision-making, impacts, etc. will be essential, including recognition of the wider intangible impacts beyond the number of jobs, etc. For one interviewee, involved in supporting communities build their CLLD proposals, *"the days of single funders are gone... Now there are 4 or 5 funders per project, each contributing 10–30% of the project costs."* He noted that the process is easier when we manage *"to secure a larger 'cornerstone' funder for a project, who maybe contributes 30–50% of the project from the outset – money follows money, and other funders are then more likely to come on board as they perceive lower project risk."* However, the same interviewee went on to argue that the emerging funding landscape often requires community groups to put their own money into a project but *"this depends on the capacity of the client. Do they have wind turbine money? But this contributes to the uneven landscape and capacity for community led development across the islands."* He went on to argue that this also depends on the capacity of the community group to think strategically, for example, in using renewable energy income to invest now in long-term community projects – but again this capacity to think and act strategically depends, at least to some extent, on access to money.

decisions on how funds should be spent. For more information see: [£20m of Levelling Up funding announced for Orkney](#)

417. LAGs will also need to undertake new activities and to build new partnerships and networks to maintain and enhance their role in community development. Progress on this is understandably slow for a variety of reasons, not least the short windows for most current funding schemes which gives staff very little time to think strategically about future arrangements.
418. The relationship between the Scottish Government and LAGs needs to be maintained – even if, and perhaps especially if, their role expands into distributing other funding. One important function of this relationship is that the LAGs provide a source of cross-organisation, cross-sectoral intelligence from across rural and island Scotland, including through the CLLD network and related meetings and events, which is highly valuable for national policymakers. It was also noted by one interviewee that continued and indeed enhanced LAG collaboration is an important part of the Scottish Government’s work with stakeholders, including Scottish Rural Action and the Scottish Islands Federation, to [create and strengthen a rural movement in Scotland](#).
419. Looking ahead interviewees reflected that there is an important balance to be struck in terms of CLLD and its funding. While the whole premise of this is undertaking activities to meet local priorities in ways that are appropriate for the local area, given ever tighter funding arrangements, there is also a need to demonstrate how local activities are directly meeting national policy priorities, including net zero, just transition, tackling child poverty, etc. This will include priorities that are closely related to agriculture, including shortening supply chains, local growing, farm diversification, etc. Interviewees recognised that LAGs will need to be ‘policy intelligent’ at the same time as dealing with the requirements of locally led and managed projects targeted at local priorities, building new collaborative relationships with stakeholders and doing more with ever-tighter financial limits and controls.
420. Interviewees also reflected on the need to continue to encourage LAGs to work together, network and collaborate as much as possible for mutual benefit, albeit they are by the nature of what they do, very different with different priorities, ways of working, etc. As cohesive and unified a voice as possible is important in terms of informing and lobbying national government, for example, in relation to the rural and island communities aspects of the Agriculture and Rural Communities Bill. Interviewees felt that this lobbying is important given the potential risk that funding for rural and island CLLD continues to be “*the poor cousin*” of direct funding for agriculture in future (this description was a reference to the relatively small amount of funding which traditionally went to LEADER as part of Pillar 2 of the CAP when compared to the rest of Pillar 2 and Pillar 1 support for land managers). To some extent, interviewees felt that this situation is at risk of being perpetuated through the Agriculture and Rural Communities Bill where support for

rural communities is somewhat secondary to support for land managers in the Bill as it currently stands.

421. Opposingly, others were more positive about communities being included. For these interviewees, splitting funding for agriculture and rural communities was an artificial distinction; for them, perhaps particularly in island contexts, funding for farmers and crofters is effectively funding for wider rural and island communities, because agriculture and crofting were considered vital in maintaining and ensuring the future of these communities.

11.4 “Wearing many hats” in island communities

422. When discussing the inter-twining of agriculture and crofting and wider island communities, many of our interviewees spoke about multiple job holding in island communities, which is critical to ensuring the ongoing functioning of these communities.
423. In reality, everyday life for many islanders involves “wearing several hats”, i.e. holding several different roles in the community, some of which are paid, some unpaid, some may be formal, some voluntary and informal, but all are critical to the functioning of the community and its residents. For example, an individual will not ‘just’ be a crofter, but will also often perhaps be a local volunteer fire fighter or harbour master or occupy other critical paid lifeline service roles, etc. Once the individual’s role as a crofter or farmer is threatened through a change in support for example, then all of their other roles are also put under threat. This may have fundamental implications for services and wider resilience (and indeed safety in an emergency situation) across the community – a kind of negative ‘domino effect’²¹⁹.
424. In a related point, one interviewee discussed how farming and crofting have changed and become more professionalised meaning there are now fewer opportunities for farmers and crofters to be so closely embedded in their communities, through running festivals or taking on other social and volunteering roles: *“farmers also need second jobs in order to have their crofts so they can’t give time to community halls and other community building aspects. There used to be local events celebrating the harvest, but this doesn’t happen anymore, people are working in other roles and don’t have time.”* Another interviewee noted: *“farming and agriculture is not done for love any more. It’s a chore with the paperwork... its transactional not emotive now. There is no space for community anymore because it’s all professionalised now.”* Echoing these points further, another interviewee felt that farming and crofting have become more individual

²¹⁹ The role of volunteer fire fighters was discussed in a recent BBC News article: [The volunteer firefighters keeping Scottish rural communities safe – BBC News](#)

occupations than they were in the past, which is *“losing the essence of farming”*. They are not the *“embedded, community-based activities”* that they used to be.

11.5 Linking people, communities, agriculture and crofting

425. While there may be socio-economic changes happening which are eroding the links between crofting and farming and wider island communities and community-related activities, interviewees all placed emphasis on the intrinsic inter-linking of agriculture and crofting and people and communities across the three island groupings in many different senses, whether that is related to economic, social, cultural or environmental linkages. In their view, despite recent shifts, this linking is stronger than in mainland rural communities.
426. Serious concerns were therefore expressed about a situation in which financial (and other) support to land managers (including farmers and crofters) is reduced in future which would lead to disproportionate and wide-ranging impacts on island communities. Some of these impacts would be economic in terms of reduced money coming into the island overall leading to a reduction in household incomes of farmers and crofters, in turn leading to reduced local spending in local businesses, etc.
427. In addition, in the interviews there was also much discussion about the wider social and cultural impacts of changes to support. Several interviewees spoke about the strong cultural connections between the land and the people who use it through language, history and heritage, music, peoples’ sense of belonging, connections to place and nature, and their sense of responsibility for stewardship of the land, etc. Annex 9 Youth-led CLLD provides information on a film that has been commissioned by the Outer Hebrides Youth Local Action Group to highlight the role and views of young crofters.
428. These connections form a key part of peoples’ belonging to their island communities and of the important tourism offering of these places. However, the movement of people into and out of island communities is impacting on the relationships between farming and crofting, the land and people, as new people move in often without strong family ties. One interviewee referred to *“parachute crofters”* in the Outer Hebrides for example, meaning people who have moved into crofting with no background in it. This interviewee felt that these incomers tend to have less connection to the land, nature and community and, in some instances, are more transient. For this interviewee, this was a result of people moving in from elsewhere without necessarily understanding or having knowledge of the context they were moving to, while for another interviewee this reduction in linkages was a result of mechanisation in farming and people effectively being removed from the land and communities because they were choosing, or being forced, to take

additional employment elsewhere. The former interviewee had noticed many new crofters were preferring to focus on horticultural activities (including growing food for local restaurants and shops) rather than having mixed enterprises which is changing the appearance and management of the land (see Box: 10 for brief information on this from one of the interviews and Annex 10 Need for adaptation and inclusion for more detail). They also commented that support schemes had not kept pace with the social and demographic changes in farming and crofting²²⁰.

429. At the same time, interviewees also recognised the need for changes in crofting to bring new people in (especially young people to reverse the ageing demographic of farmers/crofters and of island communities generally) and to bring empty and abandoned crofts and associated land back into use. Otherwise, one interviewee noted a risk that *“the unused land will be for the birds”* while crofting traditions and associated communities are further lost.

Box: 10 The need for adaptation and inclusion: migration, land management and local growing in the Outer Hebrides

One interviewee articulated some of the changes occurring in crofting in recent years with, for example, an increase in the number of crofters in some locations as new people have come in and taken over crofts. While this was positive in terms of the sustainability of communities, changes in the social make-up of communities were being observed as were changes in land management as many new crofters were preferring horticultural activities to keeping livestock. It was also observed that many of those with horticulture-based crofts were growing food for local selling in particular to cafés and restaurants, which again was regarded as generally positive.

However, it was felt that the support systems were not keeping pace with these changes and so often people were not eligible for funding, or worse, were not aware of whether they were eligible or not. For this interviewee, viewing changes to all support schemes, whether that be in agriculture or crofting or in terms of community development, through the lens of improving the resilience of island communities and maintaining populations would be worthwhile. See Annex 10 Need for adaptation and inclusion for more detail

430. Interviewees talked about instances where people have moved away from the islands (or perhaps move from their home as a child on an outer island to the mainland) but return regularly and are involved in crofting or agriculture and the associated social traditions. One specific example given was individuals and families returning to North Ronaldsay to clip the sheep. As one interviewee commented, individuals who had moved away felt it was important to return “so

²²⁰ This article (in Gaelic) refers to crofters losing out from a scheme: [Call air croitearan le sgeama nach eil a' pàigheadh a-mach – Naidheachdan a' BhBC \(bbc.co.uk\)](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/scotland-2014-08-20) (Title is ‘Loss to crofters with a scheme that does not pay out’).

that they are not the generation where that tradition and heritage is lost... but you need to have that yearning and that heritage in you”.

431. Interviewees felt strongly that the interconnections are generally not well recognised at national policy-making level where policy and funding interventions tend to be siloed (i.e. primary sector policies and funding separate from wider rural development support), and also often not at regional level (i.e. local authority) either in terms of policy implementation. At local level there is more recognition of the inter-relations between farmers and crofters and those involved in CLLD, although this is often quite informal, except in instances when the farming/crofting sector is formally represented on a LAG for example.

11.6 Increasing (competing) expectations on the land

432. Several interviewees talked about the sense in which land managers in the islands are being faced with multiple competing demands in a context in which the costs of farming or crofting are high. Several asked how (and indeed whether) it is possible for farmers and crofters to balance the requirements to produce food with a growing emphasis on nature, biodiversity and conservation, and their role in maintaining viable communities and delivering CLLD or community wealth building. One interviewee commented on the tendency for national-level conservation policies and organisations to unhelpfully reinforce the sense of “*a nature-people dichotomy – people v conservation*”. Furthermore, they commented that representatives of national organisations often come to island locations simply to deliver national schemes without taking account of local context (again confirming the widespread view that ICiAs were not impactful).
433. However, as one interviewee commented, the reality is that land managers have “*co-existed*” and “*co-flourished*” with nature and biodiversity for hundreds of years, and that it is increasingly important that future support systems recognise these multiple changing roles. See Box: 11 for brief information on this from research carried out on Uist, and Annex 11 Following the seeds for more information.

Box: 11 Following the seeds: Landrace’s unique and crucial role within Uist crofting.

Case study based on research undertaken by Leah Reinfranck in 2023 as part of an MSc in Ecological Economics at the University of Edinburgh

Recent research has highlighted the importance of, and multiple forms of value for, crofting practices unique to Uist. This machair cultivation and growing of corn native to the island (small oat, bere barley, and rye) now only take place in Uist and have an important role to play in the health and flourishing of the island’s machair and the species who call it home including rare birds, insects, and wildflowers, and the continuation of traditional crofting practices and associated cultural, heritage, and language practices.

Despite the value and importance of these practices and the linkages between crofting, ecosystem health, and community they face a number of challenges and threats including the viability of crofting and any changes to its support system, a lack of recognition for these local practices and therefore poorly targeted support, changing crofter demographics, and crop damage from geese populations. See Annex 11 Following the seeds for more information.

434. For one interviewee, however, the opposite seemed to be happening as in their view the Agriculture and Rural Communities Bill was likened to *“the clearances”* as the direction of travel it demonstrated would mean that the *“people would all be gone”* as a result of the proposed changes in support payments. Box: 9 earlier in this report has summarised the views of one interviewee about how crofting is changing and changing the balance between these three objectives in some communities.

11.7 Reflections on crofting and communities

435. Given the importance of crofting across many of the communities in these three island groups, it is important to report the key points made about crofting by interviewees in this study. As previously mentioned, several interviewees talked about the changes they had seen in crofting in recent years both positive and negative, with most acknowledging the need for young crofters to enter the sector to maintain both crofting and the communities of which it is part, but that this also meant changes in the sector, such as shift in the balance of livestock and horticultural activities.
436. It was also acknowledged that there were changes taking place in terms of speeding up and simplifying the process of getting people into crofting, and updating crofting-related records, with the Crofting Commission undertaking work in this regard, though it was argued by a number of interviewees that more needed to be done here.
437. Others commented on the need for better support for those seeking to retire from the sector, including a need for better remuneration in the form of a pension, as well as for those wishing to come in and take over crofts. Currently some older people are having to stay in crofting for longer than they wish to due to a shortage of young people wanting to enter the sector (partly due to low-income levels, particularly as feed, energy and other input, transportation, vets, etc. costs have increased so much recently). It was reported that on some islands, outer isles in particular, all of the farmers and crofters are likely to be seeking to retire in the next 10–15 years which raised significant concerns for the future of the whole sector.

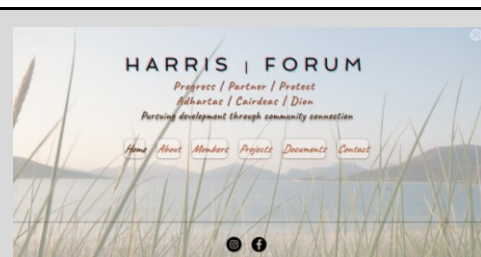
438. One interviewee commented that those moving-in to take over crofts needed to be more proactive in terms of the skills that they bring to the communities to which they move and in terms of their levels of engagement in those communities. This is an interesting perspective and raises questions about how far this would be expected of people moving into urban or accessible rural locations, for example. But perhaps it is more appropriate to reflect on this 'ask' of incomers in smaller communities that have a history of experiencing out-migration and depopulation. Several interviewees also noted that challenges tend to occur when people move into communities with unrealistic expectations of what island life will be like, for example in terms of service provision.
439. It was also noted that the person hours put into crofting, often in very poor weather conditions, are high, often for no remuneration. One interviewee noted that direct payment levels are already low and therefore many would leave the sector completely if these were to be substantially reduced (with all the wider knock-on impacts for communities discussed here).

11.8 The challenges of (affordable) housing on islands

440. This section has already emphasised the challenges relating to the delivery of affordable housing across the three island groups. Earlier the example of the North Harris Trust was featured, where they had faced the cost challenges of housing construction projects on Harris, resulting from the additional costs of transporting materials and labour and providing local accommodation if required for staff (if its available). In response, the Trust has been exploring the option of modular housing to try and reduce costs. There may still be challenges, however, in transporting the units if ferries are cancelled for example, leading to delays to the project. These costs are particularly difficult for community groups to bear, especially if the plan is to sell or rent the housing at affordable rates: *"the numbers just do not stack up"*, as one interviewee said. More information about the work of Harris Forum to deliver worker accommodation on Harris is available in Box: 12 and Annex 12 Delivering key worker accommodation on the Isle of Harris.

Box: 12 Delivering worker accommodation in Harris

The Harris Forum is working on a project to deliver worker accommodation in Harris. Local economic assessment work undertaken by the Forum highlighted the already significant gap in housing provision for the existing labour force, and thus the constraint the lack of housing is to new business formation and business and labour market growth on the island. By delivering the worker accommodation, private housing (for sale and rent) will be made available as businesses that had been forced



to buy/rent it for their workers will no longer need to do so. A key challenge in the Outer Hebrides (which is also the situation in Orkney and Shetland) is that there is only one Registered Social Landlord (RSL). The RSL is not using up the isles annual Resource Planning Allocation (RPA), which is the money given to Local Authorities to deliver housing. Despite the role of community groups in delivering affordable housing, they are not able to access that RPA unless they become RSLs themselves. For more detailed information on the Harris Forum project see Annex 8 North Harris Trust.

441. Many interviewees commented that funding available for affordable housing construction from national programmes and funding streams is not sufficient (and is generally limited to only two funding sources, the Scottish Land Fund and the Rural Housing Fund). It was also commented that, while some uplifts are available for constructing housing in island locations, they are not enough to full take account of the considerably higher costs of building projects when compared to the mainland.
442. A further challenge, also mentioned by several interviewees was the tendency for RSLs and local authorities to build new housing close to existing, and usually larger, settlements, such as Stornoway and Kirkwall on the largest island within the island groups. This tends to reinforce the sustainability of the main population centres, at the expense of smaller settlements, particularly on outer islands. One interviewee commented: *"the local authority tell me that there is no demand or waiting list for council housing on my island, but this is because there is no council housing on the island and therefore no waiting list for a product which does not exist."*
443. One interviewee commented on the need to plan ahead, build relationships and be innovative across all aspects of CLLD on islands. However, they noted several examples of being solutions-focused in relation to tackling housing challenges. They noted, for example, the importance of knowing which tradespeople and architects are working where across the islands (Orkney in this case) and their workload and capacity. It is also important to know their areas of specialism so that they can be matched as appropriately as possible to clients. They noted that some construction projects are building their own temporary worker accommodation for each project or using the housing they are building in the first year for workers before making it available on the open market (then rent is only lost during the construction period and other housing is not taken out of the market). They also noted that during winter months having builders and tradespeople travelling backwards and forwards to islands by boat/plane creates less of a capacity issue than during the summer when tourist numbers increase; at that point accommodating workers on islands is a better approach.

444. It is worth noting that there is a group of organisations working in partnership in Orkney to identify reasons and solutions for the islands' housing challenges and to draft the forthcoming Local Housing Strategy. The group includes developers, development trusts, other community groups, elected members and council officials (including planners), Orkney Housing Association Limited and Orkney College. By bringing together these cross-sectoral perspectives there is the potential to identify appropriate place-based and holistic solutions to the islands' housing challenges.
445. For all interviews, the lack of affordable housing for sale and rent is a huge barrier to sustainable demographic and socio-economic growth across their islands. Without an appropriate level of housing supply of a variety of sizes, school rolls are threatened if families can't stay/move in, labour market vacancies may not be filled, shops may not be able to open all year round or all the hours they want to, businesses may not be able to expand, groups delivering CLLD may not be able to continue to do so due to a lack of volunteers, etc. For one interviewee, having a housing allocations policy is critical to enable communities to fairly and transparently prioritise particular people to move into their community if they have children, particular skills related to future growth sectors, etc. They also noted the importance of burdens on new housing, for example, giving development trusts first refusal if properties come onto the market to keep that asset in the community for the long-term.

11.9 Islands legislation, plans and policies

446. The final theme relates to a number of points that were made by interviewees about national-level islands policy developments over the last 5-10 years.

Island Communities Impact Assessment – “a process in which Scottish public authorities must identify the effect that policies, strategies, or services are likely to have on an island community which may be significantly different from the effect on other communities (including other island communities) in the area in which the authority exercises its functions. This duty is often referred to as ‘island proofing’ and is set out under Part 3 of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018.”

[National Islands Plan review: consultation analysis – gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-islands-plan/review-consultation-analysis/pages/2.aspx)

447. As mentioned earlier, while there was recognition amongst interviewees that islands had seemingly risen up the national policy agenda recently with the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 and the National Islands Plan, there was a considerable amount of scepticism amongst interviewees about the effectiveness of ICIAs in particular. As one interviewee said “*ICIAs have been more notable in their absence than their application*”; another commented on the “*academic nature*” of the process and that they are somewhat removed from the realities of how things

work 'on the ground' in islands. The screening process which decides whether a full ICIA is required was particularly subject to criticism as being weak and not representing even cursory scrutiny of the issues in terms of breadth or depth (particularly from a lived-in experience). In fact, all their introduction had done was to place an additional burden particularly on local authorities, but also on other stakeholders too (including local and national stakeholders or various kinds who are seeking to inform the process), for little apparent impact.

448. There were calls for the ICIAs that have been undertaken to be evaluated so that lessons can be learned about how effective they are and to inform future assessments. It was recognised that island populations are continuing to change, with local young people leaving and newcomers moving in with different needs, challenges, expectations, etc. and that the voices of all people need to be heard in shaping the future of these communities. At the same time, interviewees expressed a considerable amount of frustration with the amount of consultation that had been undertaken in recent years, particularly as it was hard for them to see the tangible outcomes of this in national policymaking.
449. More broadly in terms of island policy, one interviewee commented that the number of priorities in the National Islands Plan makes the document meaningless as *"functionally that means it has no priorities"*. Echoing this, another interviewee also commented that the National Islands Plan was not specific enough to the Islands as the themes are those that would be found anywhere in the UK.
450. One interviewee made reference to the frequent movement of civil servants around policy teams in the Scottish Government. This has recently happened in the Islands Policy Team with many staff moving to other roles. This can lead to a loss of established relationships and trust, a lack of consistency in terms of both people and strategies, and a lack of continuity in terms of links between national and local policymakers and practitioners. Time therefore needs to be spent rebuilding relationships which would normally be spent on delivering projects, strategic thinking and development, etc. More broadly, one interviewee felt that there would be benefits from much closer working between the Islands Policy Team in Scottish Government and public, third and community sector partners locally, including local government, to ensure that national interventions are tailored to local needs and opportunities. This close working could be guided by a local development or investment plan to ensure activities are strategic and meet local priorities, with the LAG taking a key role in designing and delivering this.
451. While many interviewees described a strong sense of consultation fatigue across their local communities, there was also a sense that local communities views had not been adequately reflected in the National Islands Plan and other plans/legislation. More broadly, several interviewees commented that national

policy is not grounded in the reality for many islanders working to deliver CLLD. This section of the report has already discussed several examples of the higher costs of delivering projects in islands for example, whether that's relating to ferry costs and unreliability, a lack of local tradespeople or higher freight costs. For example, the assumed cost per housing unit used in national funding schemes is the same whether the house is being built in a mainland or an island location; the reality is that costs are very different. One interviewee commented that *"The formulae for calculating CLLD funding is laughable compared with the reality of how expensive things are to deliver on islands... not to mention that contractors moving staff take up all of the seats on the plane and building materials have to be carried by boat, leaving no space for anything else."*

452. One interviewee reflected on the islands bond scheme which was proposed recently by Scottish Government but then withdrawn, as an example of a policy that didn't fit well with local island circumstances. For example, they commented that there was a risk that businesses would be attracted to an island location from a Central Belt urban location but just simply wouldn't be viable. They also reflected on the fact that the proposed scheme had the potential to create a very uneven playing field between local business owners and in-migrant owners who took advantage of the scheme. They argued that *"this isn't a grounded approach to repopulation, it's not grounded in reality"* arguing that it demonstrated policy-makers lack of understanding of the rural/island context and *"sentiment... we need to develop on our own terms"*. Instead, this interviewee argued that a more appropriate approach would be to match skills gaps and the people who want to return, move or stay, rather than trying to attract new people *"chasing the island dream"* to come through financial payouts.

National Islands Plan review: consultation analysis

In April 2024, the [Scottish Government published a report](#) summarising the results of the consultation carried out to inform the review of the 2019 National Islands Plan. Respondents expressed support for the ICIA concept but voiced *"concerns about the perceived lack of consistency and quality in the use of ICIAs"* (5.32; p39). As a result, there was a sense amongst some respondents that policy decisions affecting island communities continued to be made from the 'top down' without input from local residents, while others expressed concerns that the ICIA process is not well understood.

In terms of solutions, some respondents suggested that: *"(i) greater clarity was needed in relation to the standard that an ICIA should meet, and (ii) a review of the use of this mechanism was needed to ensure that it is fit for purpose"* (5.32; p39). There was a sense amongst some respondents that ICIAs should be undertaken in relation to any policy development or implementation affecting island communities, with all potential impacts on island communities considered fully, and feedback given on the resultant actions or amendments. It was also suggested (and indeed

requested) by respondents that an accessible register of ICIAAs should be established which would enable an evaluation of the efficacy of ICIAAs to be undertaken, from the perspective of the intended beneficiaries (i.e. island communities). In this way, for some respondents, the ICIA process was seen as a way of better empowering communities. A further suggestion was that there should be an ICIA requirement for businesses as well as statutory bodies.

11.10 CLLD Summary and Recommendations

453. Through a review of desk-based literature and interviews with a range of stakeholders across all three island groups, this section of the report has described the vital importance of CLLD to the resilience and sustainability of island communities and some of the unique challenges faced in delivering it, in all its shapes and forms. The section has also focused on describing the important links between agriculture and crofting and people and communities across island communities. While islands within the three island groups are diverse, and there are significant differences between the three groups, there are also many similarities in terms of both the opportunities and the challenges they face.
454. There are many, many examples of community organisations delivering a huge range of projects across the islands, from affordable housing provision, to shops, cafes and restaurants, community centres, to electric vehicles for community transport, to small scale funding for wellbeing initiatives and for local people to upskill. However, the loss of EU LEADER funding has been significant for rural and island communities across Scotland. While the Scottish Government's continuation of CLLD funding has been welcomed, it is also acknowledged that there are challenges with this, the most important being the short timescales for delivering CLLD projects – often less than one year and often during winter months when delays are more likely. This has meant that delivering projects is difficult, and important animation and strategic planning work, almost impossible. This increases the risk of creating or exacerbating an already uneven landscape of CLLD activity.
455. Looking ahead, the continuation of local structures and processes which originated in LEADER – in particular the LAG – is important and could help in terms of the allocation of a range of other funding in future. Key is ensuring that CLLD activity meets local priorities, but also delivers to important national policy agendas, including through ensuring that LAGs (or their replacements) continue to network and share learning. However, all of this is reliant on CLLD groups being able to continue to attract appropriate numbers of volunteers who have significant time and energy to commit often for many years, often alongside a day job and several other important community roles.

456. An island location, and particularly an outer island location, brings a range of challenges to delivering CLLD, not least due to the additional costs and unreliability of transporting people and materials, particularly by ferry. A second key challenge for island communities is a lack of affordable housing. While this challenge is shared by many mainland rural communities, delivering affordable housing on islands is especially difficult again in large part due to the additional costs and unreliability of transport for labour and supplies.
457. There are strong inter-linkages between agriculture and crofting and people and communities in island locations. While some of these inter-linkages may have been weakened recently as a result of demographic change and migration, and the changing nature of farming and crofting themselves, they are still important for community cohesion and resilience. However, regional and national policy interventions focusing on agriculture and crofting and community development often do not acknowledge, or seek to build positively on, these inter-relationships. At the same time, farmers and crofters are being required to deliver more and more from their land as well as play significant roles in CLLD in their communities.
458. While islands have risen up the policy and political agenda in Scotland in recent years with new legislation (including to undertake ICIAs) and islands-specific plans, there was a sense in which, despite consultation and engagement taking place, national policymakers do not adequately take islands and their specific circumstances into account in their decision-making.
459. From this evidence, a set of recommendations can be distilled in relation to CLLD and wider community resilience across the three island groups:
- **A return to multi-annual CLLD funding is required** to ensure that applications are high quality, projects are delivered, and that animation and capacity-building work can happen alongside strategic planning – this includes capacity-building with communities as well as LAG members. This also provides greater certainty for LAG members and CLLD staff. Greater certainty of longer-term funding with built-in flexibility may also enable support to be provided, where appropriate, to groups that are acquiring and developing income-generating assets who may need revenue funding until the asset becomes sustainable.
 - **An enhanced role for LAGs in distributing other funding should be explored.** This might include UK and Scottish Government funding and private sector money. It is also worth acknowledging that LAGs already play a number of important roles, and these could be enhanced in future, including encouraging empowerment, engagement, partnership-working and collaboration (locally and beyond), facilitating a bottom-up approach to addressing local needs, building capacity, and monitoring and evaluation.

- Having a **Local Development Strategy with cross-sectoral buy-in is critical**, particularly if LAGs will be distributing multiple funding sources, to ensure that all activity is framed according to local place-based priorities.
- There are many similarities between the three island groups in terms of CLLD, and particularly the challenges faced relating to transport and housing infrastructure and the strength of inter-linkages between land and land use and people and communities. These similarities mean there is **potential for shared learning and collaborative working** to raise awareness of, and strong calls for action on, these issues. In particular, **islands are likely to be important sources of innovation and 'thinking outside the box' which will have wider applicability elsewhere**. More broadly, ensuring there is a network for LAGs from across rural and island Scotland to share CLLD learning and experiences, advocate and influence future policy in this area, and develop collaboration projects, is important.
- **Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of CLLD activity** is important to demonstrate its impacts both locally and in terms of delivering national policy objectives. This evaluation needs to recognise and value the diversity of impacts of CLLD activity through expanding the use of tools such as SROI or Social Value Engine, through gathering and valuing qualitative evidence, and through the use of non-traditional methods of raising awareness of the scale and scope of activity (such as through short films and the use of other visual techniques).
- **At the same time, as ICIAs take place at the level of island groups for example, there is a need for meaningful community engagement within island groups**, in particular to ensure that the different circumstances on outer islands are acknowledged.
- Nationally available funding streams for specific activities (including housing and CLLD) need to acknowledge and allow for the higher costs of delivering projects in island locations i.e. **an island uplift**. A range of robust evidence and data (including both quantitative and qualitative information) is required to ensure the uplift is appropriate and reflects the realities of island living and working.
- Although it has limitations (including in terms of the data on which it itself is based), **the recently developed Islands Typology may help to better understand the diversity of Scotland's islands** and may serve as an important means to present and compare data (both quantitative and qualitative).
- **Tackling the affordable housing challenge across island communities is critical** to ensuring the future sustainability of these communities. Communities are already doing a lot in terms of the delivery of affordable housing, but more flexibility in funding streams (for actual construction and for

accompanying development work) and other policies – for example, relaxing the restrictions relating to the RPA, providing more information on how the forthcoming key worker accommodation scheme will work, and ensuring worker accommodation can be funded through existing grant schemes – would help them to do more alongside other stakeholders.

- **Another key piece of island infrastructure – ferries – also need to be improved** to reduce delays that happen due to technical problems, particularly from having to use old boats. Ferries provide lifeline services for island communities but at present, in many instances, simply serve to add costs and unreliability to CLLD projects.
- **The (legislative) ICIA process needs to be strengthened**, with information on ICIAAs and actions taken in response to them made publicly available, and transparency in relation to the pre-ICIA screening exercises undertaken and how decisions are reached to go ahead or not with full ICIAAs. Existing ICIAAs need to be evaluated and lessons learned for how to do this evaluation (as well as the ICIA process itself) efficiently, effectively and robustly.
- **The importance of CLLD needs to be strengthened in the Agriculture and Rural Communities Bill**, with the important and mutually beneficial links between farming and crofting and communities made more explicit. This needs to ‘translate down’ to local level, with the **farming and/or crofting sector represented on LAGs for example**. It would also be worth continuing CLLD funding for farm diversification-based projects to encourage closer working between CLLD and the agricultural sector.
- **The links between the Rural Support Plan (which will accompany the Bill), the National Islands Plan and the forthcoming Rural Delivery Plan need to be carefully and clearly articulated** otherwise there is considerable potential for confusion across island communities.
- More recognition needs to be placed on using local island intelligence and experience to inform the development of future support schemes, whether these are related to land management, biodiversity, CLLD, etc. to ensure they are as appropriate as possible for island contexts. **At the same time, community consultation and engagement needs to be meaningful and focused**. Engaging with ‘hard-to-reach’ groups in meaningful ways is vital, as is reporting back to communities on how and why their views were or were not taken into account.
- **Culture, history, heritage and language are hugely important for locals, in-migrants and visitors to the islands**. There are land management practices, for example, which are unique to (some) islands and could form a strong part of future CLLD activities. There is a need for learning from communities that have successfully incorporated these assets into their CLLD and for a stronger recognition of the importance of culture in CLLD projects in future.