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1. Sustainability Strategy

What is a sustainability strategy

A sustainability strategy provides the framework and essential building blocks for the island to take forward sustainable development, both now and in the long term future. It takes into account the social, economic and environmental needs and resources of the area, in relation to every activity. It also takes into account the effects of the things we do on our island on other places and people, and on future generations. An essential part of this strategy and action plan is that it brings together the activities of many interest groups and organisations, and links them around a common goal.

The strategy and action plan identifies:

- Our vision for the future development of Eigg
- The objectives which will help us to meet that vision
- The actions we need to take to make it happen
- The roles of all the different individuals and organisations involved

The strategy takes a long-term view. The action plan concentrates on the implementation of the first set of prioritised objectives. For this reason, the action plan is likely to be changed and updated more often than the strategy itself.

Purpose of this strategy

This strategy and action plan has been compiled to plan and create a development path for the Isle of Eigg, which is based on – and sympathetic to – our natural and cultural heritage. A central focus of this development path is to gain the participation of local people as well as the support of key government agencies and the local authority. The following pages contain the Strategy and action plan that has been drawn up by the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust in planning a vibrant, sustainable Island.

Who is the strategy for?

This strategy and action plan are for all those who live and work on the Island of Eigg, the agencies who serve the island and everybody who cares about its future. The documents will be used by local people, community groups, public agencies and voluntary sector organisations. This will be a tool to help us work together for the good of Eigg, and to tell people what we are working towards.

How was the strategy developed?

This strategy is based on all the information gathered from the local community during workshops over the past five years and from the social and economic audit carried out by VAL and the LEC. This information was then shaped into a strategy by the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust directors and officers with a final local consultation process involving all residents of Eigg.

2. Isle of Eigg

Eigg is situated off the north-west coast of Scotland, to the south of Skye and to the north of the Ardnamurchan peninsula and a 16 mile ferry journey from Mallaig. It is the second largest of the four Small Isles of Rum, Eigg, Muck and Canna. The island is approximately 5 miles long by 3 miles at its broadest point and is approximately 2976 hectares in area. The population currently stands at 76 including 10 children attending High school in Mallaig.

There are no car ferries to the island. A new ferry terminal due for completion in Summer of 2003 will allow the Mallaig ferry to dock however a traffic restriction order will be in place prohibiting visiting passenger vehicles. In the winter there are 4 sailings weekly but these are often reduced by bad weather conditions. In the summer a smaller privately operated vessel sails from Arisaig. Although there is no car ferry for visitors, many residents have vehicles and there is a single track road across the island maintained by the Highland Council.

The island is owned and managed by the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust a unique partnership between the residents of Eigg, The Highland Council, and The Scottish Wildlife Trust. All residents over the age of 18 who have been resident for 6 months in the last 2 years are voting members of the Eigg Residents Association who also provide 4 of the 8 directors of the Trust, the other 4 being comprised of 2 from each of the SWT and the Highland Council with an independent chairman.

Natural Heritage

Eigg lies within the National Scenic Area of the Small Isles and has 3 SSSI designations:

- Laig to Kildonan, which takes in the basaltic cliff slopes with scrub and wildlife rich grassland, as well as fossil rich geological features
- Cleadale, with its hazel scrub, alpine plants, manx shearwaters, wildflower rich grassland and fen
- An Sgurr and Gleann Charadail, which includes grassland, maritime cliffs, peatlands, uplands and the geological feature of the Sgurr itself

Eigg has an exceptional range of habitats for its size, which in turn support a great diversity of wildlife. These rare and threatened habitats include: heather, woodland, peat bog, grassland and meadows, hay meadows, heathland, coastal habitats, marsh and reedbed habitats, hazel and willow scrub, woodlands, conifer plantations, inland cliffs, lochans and the surrounding sea. Breeding birds include golden eagle, red-throated diver, peregrine falcon and other rare species; while flowering plants include 12 species of orchid and nationally scarce arctic/alpine and other species.

Marine

The small size of Eigg means that it is entirely marine in nature and the sustainable management of the sea is vital to the wellbeing of Eigg.

A quality marine environment is of socio economic importance, providing direct jobs in the fishing and tourism industries, as well as providing the setting for Eigg which makes it a tourist destination.

Geology

The geology of Eigg is of national significance, with features of international importance. The island is dominated by the Sgurr ridge, a gargantuan lump of volcanic outflow which is the largest occurrence of 'columnar pitchstone' in the UK. At the north of the island, blocks of Jurassic rock hold nationally important fossils, which were first brought to attention by Hugh Miller, the eminent 19th Century geologist.

Archaeology

The island is rich in archaeological and cultural sites. More than 1200 archaeological sites have been recorded in a recent survey carried out by the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland. Dating from the Neolithic to the nineteenth century, some are of national and regional importance, (listing of scheduled monuments, ie Laig Pictish graves, Five pennies and Grulin field systems), but few of the structures have been specifically maintained or interpreted.

Built heritage

The built heritage is remarkable in the way it includes examples relating to each period of Highland history. Amongst the number of listed properties on the island, many have suffered from neglect under previous landlords, including Eigg Lodge, Laig farmhouse, the Manse.

Cultural Heritage

The island has a very strong cultural heritage, much of which relates to the historical vicissitudes typical of the islands that lie off the north west mainland of Scotland. Even though Gaelic is no longer the language of the community, many islanders are now Gaelic learners. Gaelic arts and traditions continue to play a central part in present day life: Feis Eige – a youth tuition festival, at which the tradition of music and dance pertaining to the Clanranald heartland are taught, has been held annually since 1995, ceilidh-dances are held all year round, bringing the best of traditional music to the island, whilst art activities are on offer throughout the summer months. The island history society also maintains a comprehensive photographic and genealogical database and takes an active role in heritage issues.

The People

The people of Eigg are a disparate population, with a declining indigenous core and a growing number of incomers. Most of these have been here for over 20 years and have raised families on the island. However, not all of those raised here have remained. With a lack of job opportunities and poor social provision for the younger generation, many have left for university or work and not returned. Although there is a thriving social life on Eigg, there is little focus for the younger generation.

Employment

The labour market on the island is unique in that underemployment is a much bigger problem than unemployment. Many of the working population on the island have several small jobs, perhaps only totalling 10 – 15 hours a week. The

employment on the island includes tourism, forestry, construction, public services, catering and retail and a number of small private enterprises.

Crofting and Agriculture

The crofting area on Eigg is confined to Cuagach and Cleadale at the North West part of the island. There are 16 registered crofts covering a total of 486 hectares, including common grazing. Ten of the crofts are actively worked, but there is scope for improvements in fencing and drainage, and for crofter forestry. The crofts on Eigg are relatively small and cannot be considered economically viable in purely agricultural terms.

There are three farms on Eigg; Sandavore, Kildonan and Laig covering around 2400 hectares. The farming system is based on a mixture of sheep and suckler cattle. One of the farms has had Countryside Premium Scheme approval, enabling the farmer to undertake fencing and other habitat management that would otherwise not have been viable in today's agricultural climate. There is much work still to be done to improve the farmland and the efficiency of farming on Eigg, including bracken control, fence repair, additional fencing and drainage of access tracks.

The Scottish Wildlife Trust co-ordinated a scheme, funded by the RSPB and SNH, to encourage corncrakes back to the island. Corncrakes last bred on Eigg in the mid 1980's, and a similar scheme on the neighbouring island of Canna has recently seen the successful re-introduction of Corncrakes. The scheme on Eigg involved farmers and crofters agreeing to fence off an area of land and manage it in a Corncrake-friendly way. This involves the planting of early cover for the Corncrakes and an agreement from those concerned that the fields will not be mown until mid-August, and that they will be mown from the centre outwards.

Forestry

There is a wide range of woodland types on the island, including extensive areas of semi-natural hazel scrub on the coastal cliffs and screes, areas of natural willow scrub particularly along inland watercourses, mature policy plantations of mixed hardwoods and conifers, and a substantial area in the centre of the island planted as commercial conifer crop in the mid 1980s. Some of these woods, especially the coastal hazel scrub, are remote and almost inaccessible, and really only visible from the sea. Others, especially the mature policy woods, form an integral part of the landscape of the island. Despite the extensive use of non-native species, these mature woods contribute significantly to the diversity of habitats and wildlife on the island. These woodlands are being managed and enhanced under an established woodland management plan for the island.

Housing

There are some 30 or so occupied houses on the island most of which are up to an acceptable standard. The estate-owned houses have suffered the most but are slowly being brought up to a high standard of accommodation. Although there is no housing shortage at present there is no available affordable housing for young persons wishing to leave the family home but remain on the island and for young families wishing to move onto the island. This is slowly being addressed with the renovation of estate properties and the identification of suitable building plots.

Energy

With no mains electricity supply to the island householders and businesses have to rely on individual diesel generators or in some cases small scale hydro electric plants to satisfy the demand for electricity. With a plentiful supply of water and wind there is scope for further small-scale renewable energy developments and also possibilities for biomass heating making use of felled timber from the forestry activities.

Waste Management

There is no waste collection service other than for recycled glass and aluminium, meaning that householders have to deal with waste disposal themselves. Organic waste is mainly composted, glass and tins are sent away for recycling, but plastics and other non-biodegradable materials are often simply incinerated. In the absence of an adequate council waste strategy, waste disposal and litter accumulation continue to be a problem.

Transport

Eigg is serviced by the Small Isles ferry from Mallaig which in 2003 will be able to offload freight and vehicles directly onto the island from the new ferry terminal. However the frequency of this service is likely to remain at its present level with the prospect of higher charges for the service. Smaller private vessels operate a timetabled passenger service during the summer months and an ad hoc freight service which can presently undercut the Small Isles ferry but has a limited carrying capacity. Although there is no shortage of vessels carrying passengers the service is often inflexible and unable to integrate with the public transport system on the mainland especially if inclement weather conditions delay or prevent sailings. At present children attending High School in Mallaig are unable to travel home every weekend and rely on a privately chartered vessel transporting them to and from Eigg on a fortnightly basis.

Tourism

Eigg attracts around 6,000 visitors a year who in the main come to experience the magnificent scenery, abundant wildlife and historical sites that Eigg has to offer. Tourism provides a seasonal income for the island through accommodation provision, bike hire, shop, tearoom and craftshop custom. Most of the visitors are only here for the day but of those many return at a future date for overnight stays. Presently there is only enough overnight accommodation for around 50 but there is room to expand this number especially in the self catering sector.

3. Sustainability profile

Sustainability Goals

The key issues for Eigg were identified from workshops and questionnaires and from these key issues Sustainability goals for the island were developed. With each goal come objectives to steer the island towards sustainability.

Goal 1. Making the most of natural and cultural resources without damaging them.

- Protecting and enhancing natural resources and protecting their value
- Protecting and enhancing cultural resources and protecting their value
- Promoting sustainable and innovative use of natural resources
- Promoting sustainable and wise use of cultural resources
- Promoting intellectual access to these resources

Goal 2. Retaining a viable and empowered community

- Retaining and increasing a viable and healthy population
- Supporting community empowerment
- Ensuring equal access to employment
- Ensuring equal access to essential services

Goal 3. Reducing problems of remoteness by delivering local needs locally and reducing dependence on external inputs

- Improving the local market for goods and services
- Promoting equal and effective access to goods, services and markets
- Providing an adequate Information Technology resource
- Reducing reliance on imports and subsidies

Goal 4. Avoiding harmful effects on other people, places and future generations

- Supporting the wise use of energy
- Promoting waste minimisation and management
- Supporting 'green' businesses and community initiatives
- Promoting co-operation with other communities

In pursuit of the preceding goals four basic themes emerge; Cultural and Natural Heritage, Economy, Community and Infrastructure. Within each of these themes there is a vision of how it should be, a main objective for that theme and further specific objectives and actions required to realise the vision. Although each theme is dealt with separately they are intimately interwoven and the vision for each can only be achieved if the island strategy is dealt with holistically.

Cultural and Natural Heritage

Vision

“to maintain a viable community for people of all ages, building on aspects of our natural and cultural heritage”

Primary Objective

To take all appropriate measures to conserve the natural and cultural heritage (being flora and fauna, the geological, physiographical and archaeological features, and the natural beauty and amenity) of the Isle of Eigg for the benefit of the community of the island and the public at large and to promote open public access thereto insofar as this is not detrimental to such conservation

Surveys have shown that the people on Eigg value the environment and the community equally, such that for the community to develop it should do so without jeopardising the integrity of Eigg’s natural and cultural heritage. There is widespread recognition that for the community to be viable it needs to take advantage of the tremendous natural and cultural heritage resource to attract more visitors to the island and to provide a sustainable economy.

It is Eigg’s wealth of natural and cultural heritage that attracts many visitors to the island. There is a consistent demand for more interpretation of the heritage and improved access to the most popular sites. The vagaries of Scottish weather also fuel a demand for ‘wet weather’ activities which should include interactive interpretation of Eigg’s geological, archaeological and living landscape.

In support and fulfilment of this overall objective are the following **specific objectives with associated actions**

To protect and where appropriate enhance the important landscape features of the island

- improve waste management through recycling initiatives and possible mainland disposal
- ensure that all future woodland proposals are sensitively designed
- ensure that all building restorations and new buildings are in keeping with the their setting in the landscape and promote sustainable house building practices.
- repair functional drystone dykes and sheep fanks

To maintain and enhance the woodland habitats on the island including hazel and willow scrub and policy and plantation woodland

- These areas are already being maintained and enhanced under an existing woodland management plan.

To maintain and enhance the full diversity of ‘farmed habitats’ within the estate and croft land including moorland, heath, grassland, freshwater, marsh and bog

- ensure that help and advice is available to farmers and crofters enabling them to combine farming and nature conservation interests.
- Continuing bracken control to improve grazing and wildlife and plant habitat.

To protect and where possible enhance the populations of notable species including rare arctic-alpine flora and rare breeding birds

- further investigate the possibility of eradicating or reducing the populations of vermin on the island
- educate visitors to the island on the sensitivities during the nesting season

To protect the marine environment

- in partnership with the other small isles, develop a strategy for the protection and sustainable management of the sea of the Hebrides

To protect and where possible enhance archaeological and historic features

- identify areas where historic landscapes are especially well preserved and encourage land management policies that ensure their long-term conservation.
- Identify the most significant archaeological sites and historic buildings and take all reasonable measures to ensure that they are fully conserved and protected for the future.

To promote and encourage the continuation of Gaelic culture

- Promote the annual Feis
- Promote and encourage the traditional music scene on the island
- Lobby the council to provide Gaelic tuition in the primary school
- Encourage adult learning classes in Gaelic
- Forge links with other Gaelic communities

To provide appropriate educational and interpretive material so as to foster an appreciation and understanding of Eigg's unique features within the community and to visitors alike

- provide interpretive facilities near the pier area informing visitors about Eigg's cultural and natural heritage as well as general information about island life
- support local heritage initiatives such as the Cleadale museum of crofting life and the Old Shop.
- provide where appropriate discrete signage to areas of particular interest
- provide where appropriate on-site interpretation at areas of particular interest
- promote the production of relevant literature (leaflets, monographs, videos etc)
- present the islands rich and varied natural and cultural heritage in a discreet manner, allowing visitors to retain the feeling of 'first discovery' in what they perceive as essentially a 'wild landscape'.

Economy

Vision

“a sustainable and economically independent year round economy”

Main objective

To promote sustainable development on the island including agriculture, silviculture, tourism arts and crafts and other economic activities compatible with the primary objective above

The economy of Eigg is based largely on the primary industries of agriculture and tourism with most people having a number of part-time or seasonal jobs to supplement their crofting activities. Many of these supplemental jobs are a product of the community buy-out which created opportunities in construction, forestry and conservation management directed at improving the generally depressed nature of the island. Although there is potential for these opportunities to continue for the near future the work involved is finite. There is still scope for further development of the woodland resource in terms of actual product such as firewood and chips but this is unlikely to sustain the current level of employment.

It is vitally important both that opportunities are created for existing islanders and for new people, to enable them to make a living on Eigg. Recent surveys have indicated that the preferred option for doing this is to establish a small scale business and workshop development possibly in the pier area. The provision of space needs to be supplemented by reduced freight charges, reliable power provision and improved IT capability to ensure that future businesses have the highest potential for sustainability.

Tourism is, and always will remain, one of the primary sources of income for the island. There is scope for further development in this sector with the provision of more Guest house accommodation and self catering units. The seas surrounding Eigg abound with wildlife but as yet the potential for marine tourism remains untapped.

In support and fulfilment of this main objective are the following **specific objectives with associated actions**

To encourage tourism and recreational use of the island

- Lobby for an improved integrated transport service to the island.
- Investigate the potential for wildlife tourism.
- Encourage development of low impact tourist activities.
- Improve and generate interest in marketing of tourism facilities.
- Ensure provision of interpretive facilities to offer a starting point for discovery and understanding of the island's natural and historical sites.
- Provide adequate access to the island's natural and historic features through a network of maintained tracks and paths
- Ensure that the exploration of the island's natural and historical features is a satisfying and enjoyable experience

- Encourage increase in the number of bed spaces available for visitors through sympathetic development.
- Market Eigg as a 'green' destination through the website and leaflets
- Link up with other historical sites, other SWT wildlife reserves and the rest of the Small Isles for mutual promotion.
- Develop Eigg as a demonstration site of the benefits of renewable technologies in so far as this is achievable without detriment to the natural landscape.
- Work towards Eigg as a 'green destination'.

To promote skills development within the community

- Promote skills training in skills presently lacking on Eigg.
- Retain the young population through provision of training on the island.

To encourage the continuing development of crofting and farming

- Support a reorganisation of the crofting lands to provide sustainable croft units and create new crofts
- Support crofting diversification (e.g. tree nursery, crafts, soft fruits, herbs & other specialised products)
- Develop Eigg as a 'clean and green' island adding value to local produce
- Investigate the availability of a slaughterhouse adding value to locally produced meat for resale

To promote small business development

- provide advice and encouragement to potential business start-ups
- lobby for reduced freight costs
- investigate the installation of broadband satellite
- develop power provision as part of an island wide energy strategy
- assist and encourage the development of affordable business premises

Community

Vision

“to create a vibrant, inclusive and enterprising community offering equal opportunities and be inherently attractive to all age groups”

Main objective

To attract and retain and viable population on the island providing them with opportunities and employment commensurate with those they can enjoy on the mainland

The community on Eigg is an ageing population with the majority of residents over 40. Children on the island have to leave for secondary education and often choose to go onto further education where they learn to enjoy and take for granted good facilities and opportunities as well as a stimulating social scene. It is important that they can come home to improved facilities and a vibrant social life if they are to consider returning to the island, and by the same token so do young families wishing to come to the island. However a social scene on its own is not enough: it has to work in conjunction with employment opportunities, equal opportunities, inclusivity and adequate housing provision. The lack of hostel accommodation for High School pupils in Mallaig puts families off becoming resident on Eigg.

In support and fulfilment of this main objective are the following **specific objectives with associated actions**

To provide or promote the provision of housing on the island

- Renovate existing properties to a high standard and make available at affordable rents for incoming residents.
- Identify building plots and make them available at affordable prices for incoming residents.
- Provide temporary accommodation for incoming residents prior to becoming permanently resident.
- Make available land for Housing Association to provide accommodation at affordable rents for incoming residents.

To develop social and sporting facilities

- Renovate the existing community hall to a high standard suitable for social functions, indoor sports and other events
- Develop an outdoor sports area suitable for multi-sports.
- Encourage and promote social events building on Eigg’s musical tradition
- Encourage provision of studio/work space to encourage the arts and crafts on the island.

To promote opportunities for lifelong learning

- Investigate the installation of rapid internet communication
- Develop links with UHI with a view to becoming a distance learning centre
- Develop a volunteer programme

Infrastructure

Vision

“all households and businesses on Eigg have access to affordable, reliable and sustainable 24 hour power, rapid internet access and are easily accessible”

Main objective

To develop or promote the development of infrastructure designed to improve communications, transport and energy provision

Eigg has no mains connection to the national grid, no fibre optic cable connection to the mainland, and some properties are only accessible by four wheel drive. The lack of reliable and adequate 24-hour power is a major block to business development with most businesses and households relying on individual diesel generation, although some demand is satisfied by hydro or wind power on a small scale. A recent energy study revealed that the cost of a mains connection to and a distribution grid on the island could cost in the region of 5 to 6 million pounds. Alternatively, the bulk of the electricity demand could be satisfied with hybrid renewable systems, working on individual household, small group or island mini-grid levels with the remainder and peak demands supplied by diesel back up. The capital cost of such a renewable system would be considerably less than a mains connection although ongoing costs and replacement could mount up over time.

The current BT exchange has a radio/microwave connection to the mainland and can only provide maximum connection speeds to the internet of around 28.8kps which prohibits a high level of online work given the slow download speeds. At present a wireless satellite broadband system is being trialled in the Highland Region and if this proves successful may be a viable alternative for online access and working online.

The main road from the pier to Cleadale and down to the Mill, Kildonan is the responsibility of the Highland Council. However many homes and businesses are served by private tracks which are either the estates responsibility or the householders'. Access to these properties is often only possible with a four wheel drive vehicle and in severe weather can be rough going on foot or bicycle. Upgrading of these tracks is essential if everyone is to enjoy equal access to facilities and opportunities for employment.

In support and fulfilment of this main objective are the following specific objectives with associated actions

To provide a consistent and reliable 24 hour power supply

- Investigate renewable energy developments - small scale and mains type.
- Lobby for a mains connection
- Investigate the development of biomass power and heating from the woodland resource

To promote island wide rapid internet access

- Register interest in broadband pilot projects
- Keep abreast of improvements in broadband technology
- Press BT for improvements to the current provision

To promote equal vehicular and pedestrian access to properties

- Seek funding for track and footpath improvements.
- Ensure that the Highland Council fulfil their responsibilities in maintaining and improving the metalled road.
- Ensure maintenance of old and new pier is carried out.
- Investigate provision of fuel through a co-operative/club.