BETTER PLACES FUND

CONSERVING OUR ISLANDS

A collaborative ranger project on Uist: Sustainable visitor management and infrastructure

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rspb giving nature a home Scotland

Stòras Uibhist Going forward together

North Uist Development Company

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

NatureScot Scotland's Nature Agency Buidheann Nàdair na h-Alba

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SUMMARY

The increasing tourism in Uist each year, the high number of visitors expected in 2021 and local community concerns about visitor management and conservation of the natural environment, inspired the formation of a partnership between community organisations on Uist seeking to find solutions to these concerns - landowner Stòras Uibhist and the development company North Uist Development Company (NUDC), the local council Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (CnES) and RSPB Scotland. The combined effort resulted in a successful NatureScot funding bid (NatureScot Better Places 2) that provided the opportunity for two Seasonal Rangers to work on the islands and actively improve infrastructure and visitor management with the help of all project partners and local communities.

The Rangers were focused on applying a friendly information and educational approach with awareness raising, creating materials to inform visitors about the environment, responsible access to the islands and why it is important to work together to protect the environment, referring to the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. The Rangers also managed a variety of local events including beach cleans and citizen science events as a way to engage both local communities and visitors to the islands, encouraging ecotourism. The project also aimed to carry out numerous infrastructure improvements across the Hebridean Way; however, due to exceptionally short deadlines to complete such works, the Rangers were only able to carry out emergency repairs using local resources, as well as provide the information boards across the islands. Furthermore, the Rangers surveyed visitors and engaged people in visitor hotspots providing very useful information for future visitor management projects.

All this work makes a positive impact to a changing landscape that is faced with higher visitor numbers and climate change.

This project demonstrates how the role of a Ranger on the island supports local communities in protecting the natural environment and can implement visitor management operations that will be necessary in the years to come to alleviate the impact of increasing footfall. We have had significant ongoing support from the community and people have joined us both in person and online to highlight the environment of these islands and the need to protect it. We have had a total of **122** people join us for the beach cleans and Facebook posts have reached out to over a **1000** people regularly, with over **14000** people reached with social media posts combined.

The visitor management has shown that while people come here primarily for the remoteness of the location, the practicality of staying here comes with challenges that need work going into the future. We have talked to over **280** people and our regular visits to hotspots have been a great opportunity to communicate directly with visitors, see the challenges they face on a day-to-day basis. Furthermore, our visitor survey demonstrates that there is a need for improvement in facilities and information provided. There are **15** Information boards that will provide environmental education and highlight the Scottish Outdoor Access Code for responsible access to the islands. There is a definitive need to continue monitoring the experience of visitors on the island and adjust visitor management to support locals in the changing environment as well as improve access for visitors to Uist. We fully recommend a Ranger to work on Uist to continue this work and will take steps to secure funding for this role.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the Calmac ferry statistics, passengers increased by 4.81% in 2019 from the previous year on the Uig-Lochmaddy route and 38.07% on the Mallaig-Lochboisdale route, with other associated island ferry routes such as Oban-Barra, Berneray-Harris and Eriskay-Barra all showing increasing number of passengers. From 2013 to 2017, the overall value of the tourism economy in the Outer Hebrides has increased from £53.5m to £64.5m per-annum and the 'Tourism Outer Hebrides 2020' Strategy aimed to grow this economy to £74 million/annum. In 2019 the Hebridean Way attracted around 7,500 people to the Outer Hebrides adding around £3 million to the islands' economy.

The Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership Single Outcome Agreement to 2023[1] states '*Our natural and cultural heritage are amongst our greatest assets. They support a wide range of economic activities, and help to define the Outer Hebrides as an attractive place to live and work. A well-managed and well used environment helps to support and deliver outcomes for economy, employment, strong communities, education and health. The quality of the natural environment in the Outer Hebrides is outstanding. The Outer Hebrides is an isolated, peaceful and unspoilt archipelago, with a wide variety of species and habitats in a relatively compact area. The diversity of the landscapes in the islands helps to define the character of the Outer Hebrides. The importance of the environment of the Outer Hebrides extends beyond the land into the seas around the islands. Not only is the coastal landscape of the islands unique and beautiful in its variety, but also the coast and coastal waters are important for a range of species and habitats*.' 13.1% of the Outer Hebrides is designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest, 31% Special Protection Areas and 116,600ha of National Scenic Areas. Birds, Coast, Freshwater and Uplands are the most significant at the EU level; with Earth Sciences, Marine, and Wetlands at the national level.

The ecosystem across the Outer Hebrides is delicate, with rare species such as Great Yellow Bumblebee and the Hebridean Spotted Orchid. The rich biodiversity in Uist is unique due to local sustainable practices by those living and working on the land and sea. The fragile machair is a unique habitat that supports beautiful wildlife. Its abundance of wildflowers and calcium-rich ground provides for both wildlife and local communities. The machair is specially protected and areas are designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, Special Protection Area, and Designated Special Area of Conservation. However, visiting campervans are increasingly seen parking overnight on these fragile habitats. Increased visitor numbers to the Outer Hebrides are certainly encouraged from an economic development perspective, but there is recognised increasing concern across Scotland about the potential damage to environments which are of course a reason why many tourists visit these areas. A study in Ireland recognised the increasing damage to sand dunes along a protected area of coast due to tourism and vehicle movements disturbing the habitats, recommending management options for visitors to protect the area (Kindermann & Gormally, 2010[2]). Visitors may visit the Outer Hebrides for its natural heritage but do not necessarily understand the environment they are visiting and why their actions may have a detrimental impact.

1 https://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/strategy-performance-and-research/single-outcome-agreement/

2 Kindermann, Gesche & Gormally, Michael. (2010). Vehicle damage caused by recreational use of coastal dune systems in a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) on the west coast of Ireland. Journal of Coastal Conservation. 14. 173-188. 10.1007/s11852-010-0102-7.

Tourism Outer Hebrides 2030 was developed in response to the publication of Scotland's National Strategy in March 2020[3], stating '*The Harnessing the passion, energy and drive of our islands to create authentic experiences from more of our unique, natural, and cultural assets - to grow tourism sustainably*' with sustainable tourism increasingly being recognised. However, there is not an associated strategy for how to actively manage the pressures and impacts of increasing visitors in locations with fragile natural environments.

Rising visitor numbers increases pressure on the unique fragile natural environment of Uist, and the impact of such is being recognised by the local community, including damage to the machair, irresponsible wild camping and litter. Climate change will increasingly exacerbate these impacts, including increasing the risk of wild fires. To manage protected environments there is a need for increasing staff/people resource and a wide range of infrastructure improvements. In previous surveys carried out by North Uist Development Company for the community needs analysis of the new North Uist Environment Centre, the community has identified the environment as one of their top priorities. Quotes included:

"We need to be aware of environmental problems"

"*This is needed to educate visitors about the amazing environment here and encourage all to protect it."*

The Nature Scot Our Better Places Green Recovery Fund was launched to help communities and destinations develop plans for pro-active visitor management in nature 'hot spot' locations across Scotland. Round 2 of the fund was issued to ensure that services and infrastructure are in place to manage visitor numbers and behaviours during the 2021 season.

This project 'Conserving our islands: sustainable visitor management and infrastructure', funded by the Nature Scot Better Places 2 fund, aimed to be pro-active and mitigate this before impacts reach the extremes as seen on the neighbouring Isle of Skye. Bringing the experience and knowledge together of a community land owner (Storas Uibhist), a community development company (NUDC), the local authority (CnES) and RSPB Scotland has resulted in an island-wide plan. The project aimed to provide Uist with two Seasonal Ranger to help with the management of visitors, at key hotspot pressures and associated outdoor services. It was aimed at enthusing the local community and visitors alike to conserve the natural environment through carrying out engagement activities across the island and encouraging responsible behaviour to protect these islands for future generations. In addition, the project aimed to provide much needed infrastructure improvements to ensure all can access available walking routes, to minimise potential health and safety incidents in areas of the path that have fallen into disrepair, and to provide communication platforms enabling the provision of up-to-date outdoor information. The Ranger role helps mitigate the impact of rapid changes and supports the island at a crucial time to ensure that the environment and people are prepared for the impact of higher visitor numbers.

3

[3] https://www.visitouterhebrides.co.uk/dbimgs/Outlook2030%20Final%20April%2021.pdf

2. OUTCOMES

2.1 Educational Engagement and Events

"Communities and interested parties see, or are involved in positive action to address issues and visitor impacts leading to improvements to local and visitor experiences and place."

"Communities, including landowners, land managers, businesses and visitors are motivated or empowered to help deliver plans and action in a collaborative way."

2.1.1 Beach Clean Events

Engaging the community as well as people visiting the islands and highlighting the unique environment of Uist has been one of the main targets of the Ranger role. Uist has many beautiful beaches. With increasing numbers of people visiting the beaches, plus the high volume of ocean litter, there is a visible need to carry out beach cleans, both from an environmental and health and safety perspective. This provides a great opportunity to invite people to obtain hands on experience of environmental management, nurture a connection with the local environment, learn more about the local environment and to take care when travelling, providing positive motivation to pick up litter outdoors and leave a place in a better condition than when they arrived.

Figure 1. Flyer distributed across the islands at campsites, in shops and shared online using social media.

The Rangers carried out a series of weekly beach cleans throughout the season (Figure 1). They took the time to ask the community for beaches that needed cleaning, checked access for volunteers and decided on locations across North Uist, Benbecula, South Uist and Eriskay. Furthermore, the Rangers inspired collaborative working by signing up with Surfers against Sewage and ordered their beach clean kit to support the activities. They also got in touch with Clean Coast Outer Hebrides and arranged for them to share the series of beach cleans on social media to raise the profile of the project and reach out across the islands. Several local community groups shared the list of beach cleans across social media reaching over 4000 people just in the first social media post and receiving many positive responses from the community and visitors alike.

The first beach clean attracted 24 volunteers in Polochar, which was a great turnout and included both visitors to the island and locals. The numbers dropped slightly for our two beach cleans on Baleshare, but after a new boost by the Rangers on Facebook, numbers rose again for the other beach cleans. One highlight was that a few locals became regulars on the beach cleans, joining whenever possible. Another was the positive experience recognised by visitors, feeling part of the community and really pleased with achieving so much in such a short period of time, providing a positive contribution while on holiday.

"It feels good to get to know the community and make a difference to these beautiful islands. It feels like I've done something useful on holiday". Visitor to the island.

It was also great to see so many children brought along to the beach cleans and the Rangers used a Beach Bingo activity to engage them in the beach environment and notice all the wildlife around. One little girl was so excited to find a sea urchin.

Figure 2. Group photograph of volunteers with the rubbish they collected in South Uist and help from a local crofter to move larger items in Baleshare.

Additionally, local crofters helped with some of the beach cleans with tractors and 4x4s, carrying heavier loads that otherwise would have been impossible to move. One highlight was removing a number of old rusty barrels from Culla Bay. They had been placed there in the past to prevent coastal erosion but became exposed and a health and safety concern for locals.

"What a good idea. Do you do these all the time? We used to have beach cleans where I am from in Wales but it doesn't happen anymore. It's so nice to see communities and tourists coming together." Campervan visitor.

A surprising amount of litter was collected, even on beaches that were considered clean. The vast majority included fishing gear and rope, with a lot of small plastic pieces hidden between the rocks or partially buried. There was a variety of plastic materials to be found, from crates, to wellies,

including a high number of plastic shotgun cartridges. In total, everyone collected an estimated **25x** 1-tonne bulk bags full of litter.

Figure 3. Close up image of over 4 tonnes of rubbish collected at 1 beach clean event, and group photograph of volunteers with some of the collected rubbish at the Hosta beach clean.

The beach clean engagement has attracted a lot of positive interest, raising the profile of environment issues. Facebook posts have reached many people and our beach clean pictures are well liked and often shared across social media. This provides a great opportunity to increase the profile of this role and also to share simple environmental action that anyone here on the islands can do. This series of beach cleans can easily be replicated in future years and establish a long-term monitoring of the litter found on Uist beaches. A document detailing the steps to set this up is available and can be updated as necessary.

Beach Clean			
Location	Number of Adults	Number of Children	Total
Polochar	15	9	24
Eriskay	16	2	18
Baleshare #1	13	3	16
Baleshare #2	9	0	9
Stoneybridge	10	4	14
Culla Bay	12	3	15
Udal	8	0	8
Hosta	12	6	18
TOTAL	**95**	**27**	**122**

Table 1. Table showing the number of participants at beach clean events across the islands.

2.1.2 Citizen Science Educational Events

The Rangers organised a series of events and activities leading up to COP26 in collaboration with a range of organisations to nurture enthusiasm for environmental science, act as educational activities to embed understanding of environmental conservation and encourage people to help increase their knowledge and understanding through citizen science. A beach clean with a demonstration showing how marine plastics can be recycled, seaweed & rockpools event and a beach walk focused on coastal erosion and geology were all aimed at engaging people with the environment and highlighting the need to protect this special landscape.

Figure 4. Flyer distributed across the islands and on social media for the Big Uist Green Week in October.

The weather was not kind to us and prevented many to come along, but the engagement online was very successful, and our posts advertising events reached over **5000** people on Facebook. This was used as an opportunity to highlight and reference the Better Places Fund and involved organisations such as Surfers Against Sewage, Studio Vans, Clean Coast Outer Hebrides, NatureScot, as well as the support from local seaweed cookbook author Fiona Bird for the seaweed event.

Figure 5. Close up of seaweed washed up on the shore on Uist, and a mix of plastics on top of a plastic sheet press used to turn marine plastics into new usable sheets for van conversions.

"Citizen science like this provides an opportunity to connect with wider research, for children and adults to feel part of something much bigger." Local development worker.

The Rangers also assisted local activities on invasive species management carried out by the RSPB on their reserve at Loch Druidibeg, with an invasive rhododendron survey, highlighting the importance of the removal of invasive species and providing detailed information about the management required.

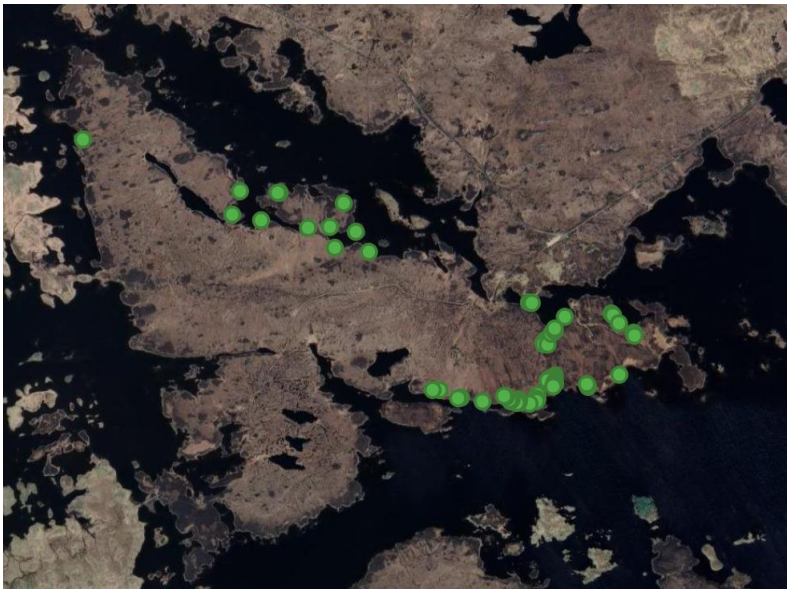


Figure 6 RSPB Loch Druidibeg Rhododendron map

2.1.3 Environment Centre

The Environment Centre in Lochmaddy is aimed at supporting environmental education and will be a community hub to engage locals and visitors to Uist, to help embed understanding on why it is important for everyone to protect the Uist natural environment. The building is an old school currently in the process of being converted to an inviting space to host exhibitions and encourage people to learn more about the unique environment of the islands.

The Rangers supported a Volunteer Day which attracted 14 volunteers on the day – both visitors and locals working together on practical tasks such as painting, fencing, clearing space for the exhibition and tidying the outside areas. A lot was achieved and everyone felt a part of something which will support the sustainable development of the islands. Using the experience and knowledge gained from talking to visitors and working with the partners on the project, the Rangers imparted their knowledge by contributing to one of the exhibition panels, aiming to provide the educational information on the machair and the interconnected rich biodiverse flora and fauna across the islands. This information meets a knowledge gap identified during the Rangers conversations with visitors.

Unfortunately, there have been delays in opening the Environment Centre, but once this is opened, it will be an ideal base for any future projects and any positions such as Rangers to support sustainable visitor management and conservation efforts across the islands.

2.2 Visitor Management

"Places under pressure and suffering negative impacts from increased visitation are managed in a sustainable way that supports lower impact responsible enjoyment."

2.2.1 Visitor Conversations

Higher numbers of visitors on the island provide challenges and opportunities both for local communities and the environment. A major focus of the Rangers' role has been to visit visitor hotspots around Uist, to identify potential challenges and open a dialogue with visitors to gain a better understanding of why these challenges exist and what actions can be taken to avoid such challenges in the future.

The Rangers identified hotspots that entice a higher number of visitors and carried out two surveys of these hotspots, as well as noting ad hoc observations and taking an active role in opening visitor conversations throughout the project (Appendix A & B). Hotspots include well-known beaches that have easy to access, such as Hosta beach on North Uist, areas with larger parking areas and points of interest such as the RSPB reserve Loch Druidibeg on South Uist. These two Uist wide surveys were carried out over two days. The dates are highlighted so the survey can be repeated in future years on the same dates. The first survey was carried out during the day on 12/08/21 (South Uist) and 13/08/21 (North Uist). The second survey was carried out in the evening on 17/09/21 (South Uist) and 18/09/21 (North Uist). It should be noted, Uist is a long chain of islands and therefore, there is a lot of ground to cover in a day for only two Rangers, so there were large areas that could not be covered in any detail.

"The area used to be covered in beautiful flowers here, but now they are all gone. You can see where the vehicles go…the coastline is disappearing too…you can see where people walk to the beach and damage the dunes." ***Concerned local resident.***

One of the major concerns regarding visitors is that people park on the fragile machair and leave a negative impact on the local environment. The machair roads used by crofters attract visitors to leave car parking areas accessing important habitat for wildlife and flora. This appears to compact the tracks left by vehicles, especially by heavier campervans. During this survey, there were **26** vehicles recorded outside of parking areas, **14** of which were campervans. Vehicles were seen to drive off-road over fragile machair areas to park along the coastline, next to the beach. Deep vehicle tracks can be seen across numerous machair areas across the islands. Some vehicles were seen to park overnight near the dune edges, with the occasional residues of campfires.

Figure 7 Vehicle impact on the machair and dunes, North Uist. Visitors parking in this area were interviewed and were unaware of the habitat they were parking on.

Furthermore, the Rangers engaged people, introduced topics such as wildlife and responsible access, and noticed a general lack of knowledge about the local habitats and the unique landscape. It was interesting to find a number of visitors who were return visitors - visiting Uist in the past and had been on the islands for more than a week on holiday this season, did not know any information about the machair or why it is important; which raises questions about how many visitors find out more specific information about the islands before they decide to travel. The same visitors believed they were parking on simple grass. They also noted there was very little information available about the natural environment on the islands. In total the Rangers spoke to **183** visitors by prompting conversations across the islands. Most were happy to engage.

"The best things about being here is the beaches and wildlife. We liked going on a boat trip to see the wildlife". Visitor to North Uist.

Where some visitors appeared to appreciate the lack of information, exploring un-marked lands, others certainly noted the need for directions to the beaches, improved walking routes and general infrastructure needs such as parking and toilets. Many are certainly en-route to other islands; therefore, consideration needs to be given to island-hoppers, especially for staycation travellers from the UK looking for more adventurous travelling routes but who may not carry out as much research as someone travelling from overseas.

2.2.2 Visitor Survey

In addition to ad-hoc visitor conversations, the Rangers carried out a more detailed Uist Visitor Survey, gathering **93** responses (Appendix C). The Uist Visitor survey was directed at both locals and visitors and was used to find out what kind of visitor management the people living on Uist, and visiting Uist, believe is necessary and would be supported. It can be challenging to balance visitor management measures to protect the environment and support increasing visitor numbers while maintaining positive experiences, especially in areas such as the Highlands and Islands where visitors are attracted to 'wilder' experiences. The survey was designed to provide a brief number of questions so it did not impose too much on people's time, and provide an overview of what people enjoy seeing, such as visiting the beaches, places they like to visit such as the RSPB nature reserves, and infrastructure needs they would like such as more public toilets.

The survey provided an overview of infrastructure needs such as more public toilets and bins. There is an obvious lack of facilities across the islands. This is a concern both for visitors who desire more facilities for improved access and a concern for locals who deal with the impact of these facilities missing in many areas. Improved access to the beaches and the hills was mentioned. Furthermore, there is a clear interest in more information about wildlife, history and people of Uist. However, the lack of signage and the remote feeling of this place was often highlighted as a positive, so the impact of developments should be considered carefully. A contradiction is noted in the survey responses - a strong need for information but with a low number of respondents asking for increased signage. When delving a little more deeply into people's answers, the Rangers determined there were some concerns of too many enforcement signs i.e. don't do this, and do that, and over signage so the islands start to become very 'touristy'. Therefore, it is important that signage focus on key aspects such as access to the beaches and walking paths, as well as dedicated information based signage explaining the different habitats, wildlife and importance of such; and enforcement signage is kept to a minimum. Suggestions of alternative ways of communication included a leaflet or an app. An app could use novel ways of communication, such as image-recognition apps which could then provide detailed explanations of the specific locations.

"I'm more of a hill person. My husband likes the beaches, but I like the hills. I'm not getting any younger and I wish there were some proper paths and routes up to the hills." ***New resident, South Uist.***

QUESTION 05 | MULTIPLE CHOICE

What type of visitor management do you support?

Answered: **93** Skipped: **0**

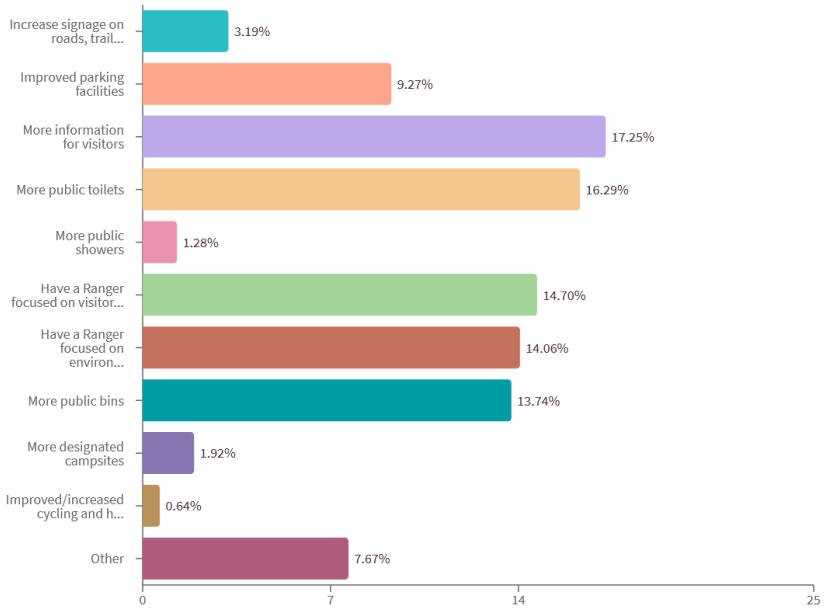


Figure 8 Survey question: What type of visitor management do you support?

The survey highlighted that the majority of people connect Uist with beaches and wildlife. The remoteness and wild atmosphere of the islands was often mentioned in this context.

QUESTION 07 | MULTIPLE CHOICE

What do you connect with Uist?

Answered: **93** Skipped: **0**

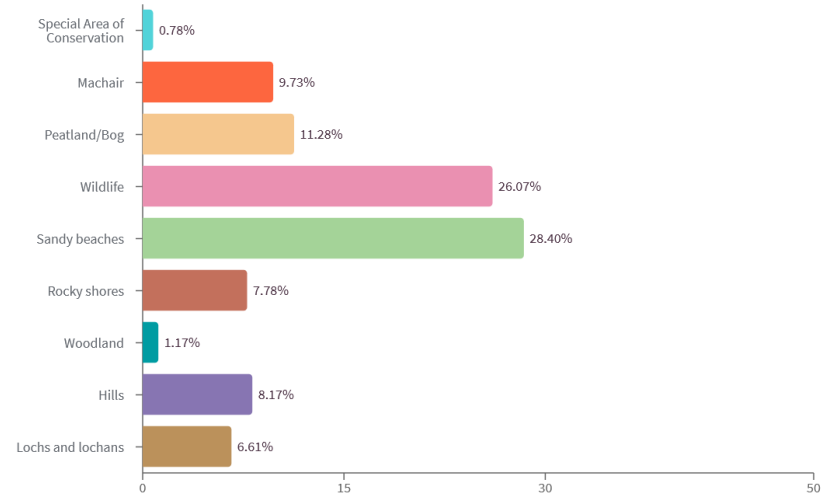


Figure 9 Survey question: What do you connect with Uist?

However, there is much scope to encourage people to shift attention to other areas, especially the rare machair. Almost 25% of people spoken to either did not know what the machair was or were unable to describe the habitat. As the machair is specially protected and of concern regarding irresponsible parking and access, this clearly shows a need for further education about the local environment.

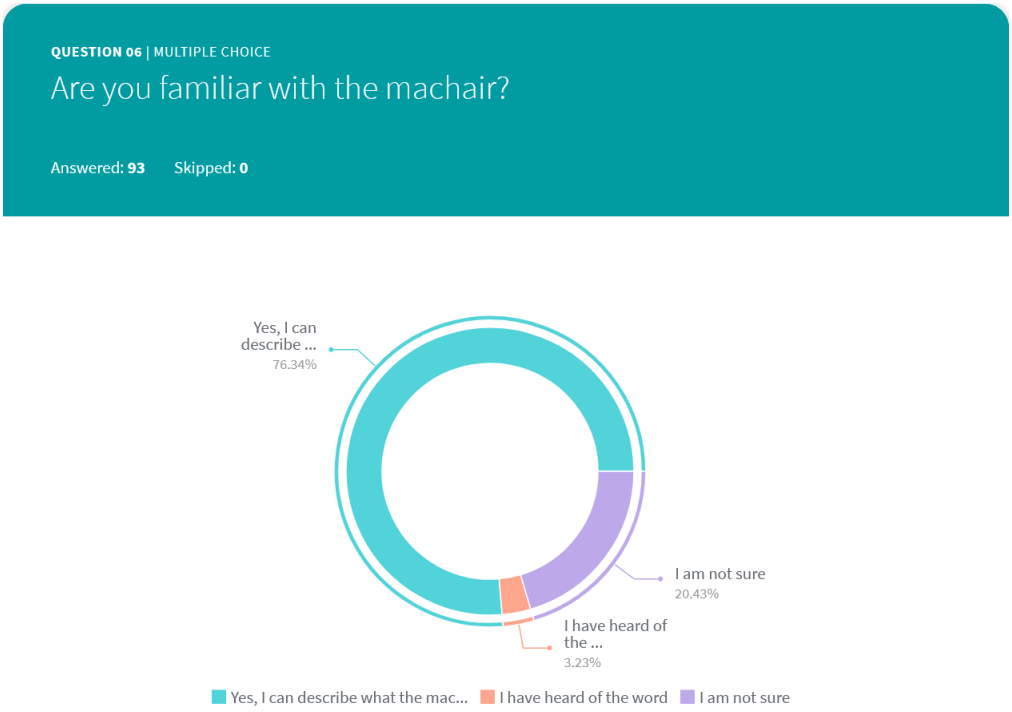


Figure 10 Survey question: Are you familiar with the machair?

The comment section of this survey varied and included points the Rangers are working on and suggestions for future development of this role. For example, a need for better signposting along paths was mentioned, which the Rangers worked on during this project. Several people suggested a leaflet with information about local amenities and suggestions of places to visit, which the Rangers created. One person mentioned that there "Could be bigger parking places" and requests like "a suggested route for places to see in a day" were noted. Locals raised issues such as "Campervans park in front of doors preventing access to shops". Altogether, there were many positive comments remarking the welcoming atmosphere on Uist, various wildlife seen, and visitors remarking that they "Definitely will be back!".

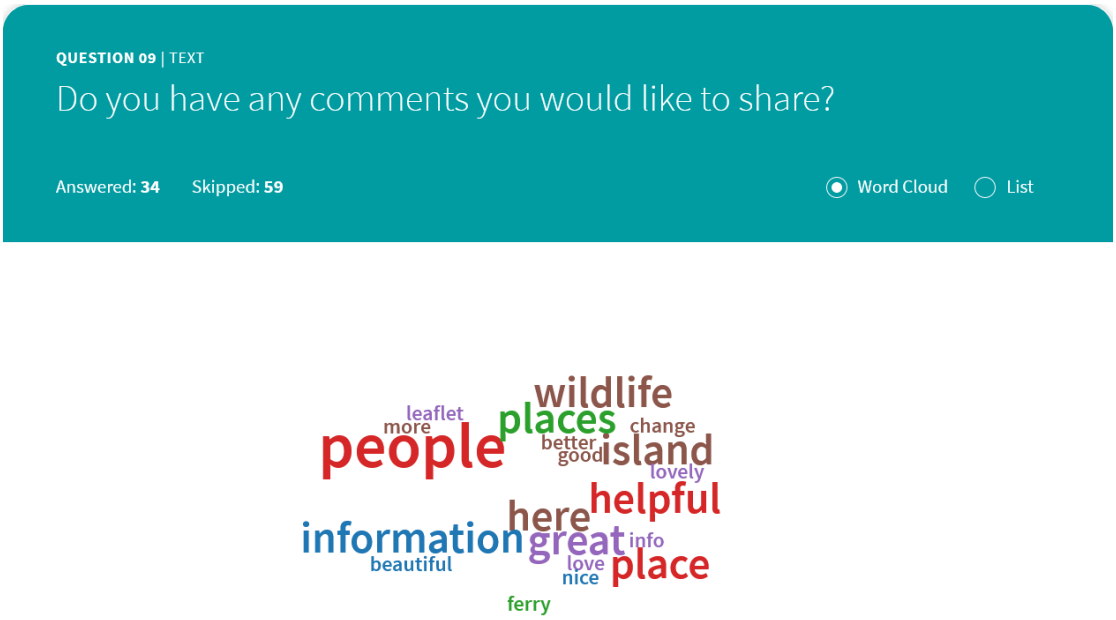


Figure 11 Survey question: Do you have any comments you would like to share?

2.2.3 Visitor Leaflet

Acting in response to both visitors and locals highlighting a local need for improved and increased visitor information, the Rangers decided to create a leaflet highlighting the special landscape and responsible access specific to Uist (Appendix D). This was distributed in the community for feedback on the information provided. The response has been very positive, both from visitors and locals and this leaflet will reach a wide audience, providing useful information for visitors.

The numerous positive responses leveraged additional funding from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar to cover the cost of professional printing of 1000 leaflets and these have now been professionally printed and distributed at key points for local accommodation providers and businesses to collect for wider distribution. The North Uist Estate will also be printing some themselves to distribute across the Estate. Please see attached in Appendix D or scan the QR code below.

Figure 12. QR code to download new Uist information leaflet and map.

2.2.4 Visitor Information Boards

Funding was also received for 15 information boards to display key information, including health and safety information such as path closures, information on ticks, the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and specific information at each location including how to protect the local environment. This will form an important way of educating visitors to Uist about how to responsibly stay on the island and explaining why some measures such as keeping your dog under control are necessary; using an educational and informed approach, rather than signage enforcing a policing approach.

These information boards were provided by Greenbarnes UK and have been located across the islands (Appendix E). A range of organisations will have access to manage and update the information

held within the notice boards, including the local community councils, the local landowners, the local council, RSPB and the North Uist Development Company. Time has been taken with the craftsmen to place the hinges in a position to avoid potential wind damage in the future. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has agreed to maintain the information boards in the longer-term which will include annual inspections, applying wood protecting stain when needed and any associated repairs. The manufacturers are also interested in being updated on how the information boards are withstanding the Hebridean weather conditions, so they will be provided with updates in the future.

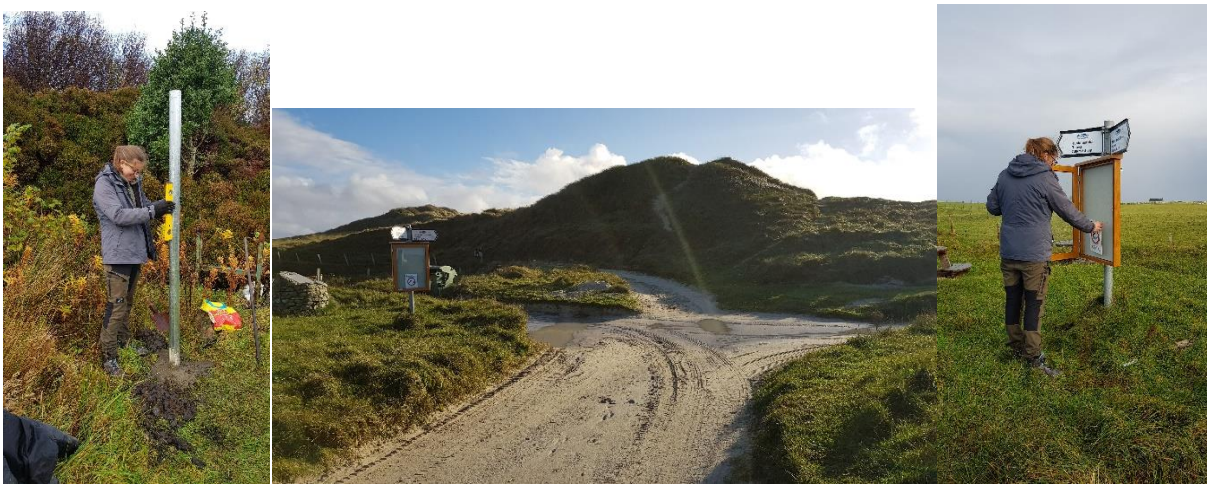


Figure 13 Rangers installing Information Boards

2.2.5 Infrastructure

The main focus was to repair and improve sections of the Hebridean Way working together with Environment Officer Peter Coldwell. As the majority of the infrastructure was unable to be used due to time constraints, the Rangers concentrated on emergency repairs only. Using resources from the local Nature Scot office and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, emergency repairs were carried out on two Hebridean Way footbridges. Two footbridges at Lochskipport unsafe to use were repaired in South Uist (Appendix E). Further funding is required to repair the path infrastructure as noted in the original funding application.

Figure 14 Footbridge repairs along Hebridean Way

All the off-road walking sections of the Hebridean Way were surveyed to identify places in need of repair, in addition to those sections previously noted in the funding application. This was also used as an opportunity to assess the way markers and note where additional posts or signs are necessary to mark the path. The survey reports will be used to secure future funding for repairs.

Location	Additional boardwalk (metre) sections needed	Waymarkers missing and required	Notes
Lochmaddy	33	5	
Langass	3		Urgent work needed on bridge
Rueval	46	7	
Hosta		1	
Liniclate		1	
Windfarm	26	4	Report excludes planned boardwalk
Howmore		3	
Polochar		5	
Eriskay		2	Metal Hebway sign missing
Total	**108**	**28**	

Table 2 Summary of Hebridean Way survey

2.3 Collaborative working and Partnership building

"Communities, including landowners, land managers, businesses and visitors are motivated or empowered to help deliver plans and action in a collaborative way."

2.3.1 Partnership work

This project developed with a partnership between landowner Stòras Uibhist and the development company North Uist Development Company (NUDC), the local council Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (CnES), and RSPB Scotland. Working together on this project, the Rangers arranged a regular exchange and input from each of the partner organisations through meetings and events. The communication for this project was extremely positive and all organisations provided additional support and extra capacity for the Rangers.

Working together with RSPB on both reserves has provided great opportunities for engaging people with an interest in wildlife, for example the volunteers who come to help on the reserve and visitors who joined their guided walks. Also, it provided an opportunity for the Rangers to learn more about the wildlife and environment here on Uist, which has been vital for engaging visitors. Both Jamie Boyle and Claire Bird shared much of their knowledge, enabling the Rangers to learn more about crofting and land management, which was very important especially arriving as newcomers to the islands.

The collaborative approach of this partnership leveraged additional opportunities, for example by engaging locals and visitors to collect feedback for the 'Welcome to Uist' leaflet at the Lochboisdale Food & Drink Festival organised by Stòras Uibhist. Also, the Rangers were able to connect with people invested in promoting environmental awareness, such as Cycling UK who provided free test drives with electric bicycles for the community.

Figure 15 Rangers at Lochboisdale Food & Drink Festival and taking part in Cycling UK event at Stòras Uibhist

Furthermore, the partnership levered additional funding for the ranger leaflet to be printed. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar funded the printing of 1000 leaflets to share across Uist. This has been an excellent addition for this project and received very positive feedback directly from the community.

The project has highlighted how one overarching Uist Ranger service, working across the islands, can unite groups and organisations to work together on environmental concerns and visitor management and shows the benefits of collaborative projects.

2.3.2 Community

Connections were established with community organisations to support this role. For the beach cleans, the Rangers were working together with Clean Coast Outer Hebrides and Surfers Against

Sewage to raise the profile of the beach cleans and connect to the wider community on the Outer Hebrides. They also worked together with Cothrom Learning Hub to reach out to younger people on the island and support their environmental education.

The community provided great support for this role, such as providing equipment when needed. Local geologist Jean Archer provided a rock collection for educational purposes. NatureScot provided boardwalk panels to assist with infrastructure repairs on the Hebridean Way. Taigh Chearsabhagh Museum & Arts Centre joined in our beach cleans to talk about their art project Message in a Bottle, raising awareness of climate change ahead of COP26.

Studio Vans is a local business based on Benbecula. Their team asked to join the beach cleans and a partnership developed with them helping on the beach cleans and taking the plastic they could use to recycle it. One of their current focuses is the reduction of plastic waste shifted off the islands for landfill, utilising a granulator and a sheet press to process suitable plastic and construct a beneficial material that can be used locally. This has been an amazing opportunity to engage with the local community and support a growing business on Uist.

A dedicated email address was created for use across the islands, acting as a single point of contact for visitor management and environmental concerns. By the end of the project this was widely used, with positive responses about having a single point of contact to raise concerns, ask questions or discuss collaborative ideas.

One key topic, coastal erosion and the protection of the machair and coastline, was repeatedly raised as a concern, with questions regarding what measures can be carried out to address these concerns. It is widely recognised Uist is suffering from coastal erosion and the impacts of rising sea levels associated with climate change. There are many people being impacted by this, yet there is t a dedicated programme of work assisting the community in understanding and adapting to these impacts. Any environmental based role will also be approached about these ongoing and increasing concerns. Climate change increases the fragility of the local natural environmental system; therefore, it is important visitor management concerns are also addressed with wider environmental concerns. A Uist ranger service can help to bring together the various different environmental projects as the single point of contact, and work alongside dedicated monitoring, adaptation measures and a dedicated nature based solutions programme. Such climate change and coastal erosion concerns also offer an opportunity for visitors to be more engaged with impacts that are happening at more vulnerable areas across the UK – such visitor education could have global environmental benefits, as people experience first-hand the environmental impacts humans are having.

2.3.3 Media coverage

Social media content is effective and can reach a wider audience online. The Rangers have been sharing pictures and information about events online with useful feedback in the form of likes, comments and sharing on Facebook. People responded to the beach clean effort and supported it online. The beach clean poster with all the information was shared numerous times, reaching over 3900 people (05/10/21). Compared to the lower turnout in person on the day, 9 helpful volunteers, this demonstrates the massive interest in this project and shows how a wider audience can be reached.

Social media can also be used to connect to other organisations such as Clean Coast Outer Hebrides and Studio Vans and highlight their involvement in community projects. Supporting locals by sharing information about their work has been a great way to communicate combined efforts. Additionally, raising the profile for this role involved a newspaper article in Am Pàipear, highlighting efforts to

support the local community and explain the work the Rangers were doing. All communications referenced Nature Scot and the Better Places 2 fund.

OCTOBER 2021 AM PÀIPEAR

NEWS

Rangers make an impact over summer

Local environment and nature reserves received a boost over the summer from rangers Anna and Emma

IAIN STEPHEN MORRISON

Figure 16 Copy of Am Pàipear newspaper article published in October

2.4 Assessment of project aims and the intended outcomes

Outcome as listed in funding application	End of Project Assessment
Visitor management measures are in place and operational at visitor "hotspot" locations in time for summer 2021.	Several "hotspots" have been identified across Uist and visitor surveys have been carried out with a focus on ensuring methods can be replicated on longer term monitoring. The Rangers have held discussion with visitors at these sites and information boards have been provided for visitor information.
Communities and interested parties see, or are involved in positive action to address issues and visitor impacts leading to improvements to local and visitor experiences and place.	A series of events have been organised which both locals and visitors attending. The purpose of the events were environmental action, for example by collecting litter and marine plastics at beach cleans and to encourage people to interact with the environment in a positive way, such as rockpooling.
Communities, including landowners, land managers, businesses and visitors are motivated or empowered to help deliver plans and action in a collaborative way.	As above, planning has been undertaken in conjunction with RSPB, CnES and NUDC to deliver a series of events and activities to motivate the community and visitors. There has been positive collaboration across Uist. Furthermore, the Rangers directly contacted local crofters to help at beach cleans and they supported the

	project with their help using tractors. The Rangers have also acted as a single point of contact across Uist to support addressing concerns.
Places under pressure and suffering negative impacts from increased visitation are managed in a sustainable way that supports lower impact responsible enjoyment.	Information on sustainable practices and outdoor access have been provided through sharing and engaging people with a Welcome to Uist leaflet. Direct contact has been made with crofters suffering from increases in visitors and measures are in place to support their concerns, for example by putting up information boards where necessary. Infrastructure improvements are needed (i.e. Hebridean Way) to reduce visitor impacts but at present resources are unavailable.
Solutions provide a source of visitor generated income which helps to sustain the infrastructure or service provision.	Project too short to deliver sustainable income source.
Solutions are implemented that encourage a low carbon impact, particularly in areas prone to high levels of car based access.	Travel has been carefully considered; wherever possible, journeys were combined to cover several purposes, and car sharing was practiced by both Rangers.
Projects and activity align with strategic plans for the area or location and help deliver priority actions.	Protection of the natural environment is a focus of all local strategic plans, including the Outer Hebrides Locality Planning Partnership.
Projects and activity support national communications activity for visitor management.	Sustainable responsible tourism is promoted through direct discussion between the Rangers and visitors, as well as provision of written information, in line with the aims of Outer Hebrides Tourism. Rangers worked together with wide-reaching organisations such as Clean Coast Outer Hebrides and Surfers against Sewage to support responsible access to the islands.
NatureScot and its strategic partner agencies, including Scottish Government and VisitScotland are better informed about visitor management activity and action applied in 2021 for managing impacts and developing opportunities linked to green tourism.	This report highlights the effort undertaken by the Rangers on Uist and provides recommendations for effective management strategies going forward.

2.5 Any significant challenges encountered and actions taken to address them

2.5.1 Settling in

Neither of the Rangers has been to Uist before, so the first couple of weeks were a steep learning curve getting to know the islands and the community. Both Rangers made an effort to familiarise themselves with Uist both during and outwith work time, travelling a lot to different places to get to know points of interest, popular car parks and learn the names of places. The project partners provided great support and helped them with directions and tips on where to go. They explained community life on the islands, talked about crofting and townships, told stories about life on the islands and improved their ability to connect with locals.

2.5.2 Income generation

The Rangers were unable to generate income as part of this role. There was a very short timeframe and the Rangers focused their work on other parts of the role. It is recommended a Ranger service is required all year round, with additional seasonal staff as required. A year would have been more suitable to consider how to generate income. A Ranger service in a Countryside Trust or similar organisation could attract income from a range of activities such as ecotourism holidays, donations from newly established parking areas, seasonal events, working with common grazing committees on dedicated areas for campervans and general donations such as through the co-op fund. However, this would need further investigation.

2.5.3 Infrastructure

Infrastructure repairs on the Hebridean Way were limited due to lack of funding which restricted the work the Rangers were able to carry out. They managed to use some materials available from partner organisations to do the most urgent bridge repairs. It was decided to use some of the time available to survey all sections of the Hebridean Way in order to document repair work needed for future funding. The Rangers surveyed all off-road sections of the walking route on Uist and the reports are detailed in this report.

It is important walking paths are not underestimated in visitor management programmes in the future. Dedicated paths keep visitors in managed areas and minimise the impact of visitors wandering in more fragile locations. To minimise visitor impact on fragile habitats and ecosystems, it is important funding supports repairs, maintenance and new path infrastructure. Paths also have economic benefits as they can direct people to new locations and maintain people's interest so they stay for longer. The Hebridean Way walking route would be more enticing if it veered off-road for longer to new locations. Additionally, islands are very different than mainland settings, hence why there is an Islands Act. You cannot deliver infrastructure in a few weeks on an island, especially after the consequences of COVID-19 and Brexit. Local contractors are important on projects such as this, as they understand how to work with the local environment. Even a year can be challenging to deliver something significant, especially when contractors are so busy. Costs are also higher. It is important both the need for path improvements and the need to consider the unique attributes of islands to ensure to remove any mainland bias are considered by funders in future funding rounds

2.6 Any additional or unintended benefits as a result of the project

2.6.1 Outreach

One of the benefits was to have a direct point of contact for the community on Uist. The Ranger email was shared on social media as a way to contact the Rangers and people reached out to them on topics relating to the post.

For example, StudioVans are a business based on Benbecula. They asked to join in the beach cleans, keeping plastic litter for them to recycle. They also shared content by the Rangers on social media, increasing the reach of this role and directly having a positive impact on the local business. This has supported the local business to increase their profile, in turn supporting local economic development.

2.6.2 Social media

Social media is used to raise the profile of this role and other organisations the Rangers worked with. Facebook is used frequently to communicate on the islands. Sharing the beach clean flyers and pictures of volunteers helping with the beach clean invited a great support for this role.

2.6.3 Leaflet

Creating a Welcome to Uist leaflet was used as an opportunity to connect with locals and ask for feedback regarding content and design. Reaching out at events such as the Lochboisdale Food & Drink Festival allowed the Rangers to share a draft of the leaflet and they got very positive feedback as a response, with all the comments built into the final version. Additionally, the Uist survey showed how people on the islands are interested in having a leaflet available. This leveraged some additional funds from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

2.6.4 Collaborations

The project brought together a range of organisations with common goals and has sparked many conversations across Uist about potential future collaborations. The project has highlighted the benefits of island-wide working. Many organisations have been in touch about environmental based projects many of us had not heard of before as a result of having that easily identifiable single point of contact.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

The negative environmental impact of visitors is evident at various sites around Uist. Fragile habitats are widespread and the current infrastructure leaves the environment particularly vulnerable, despite receiving fewer visitors than some other nearby islands. Facilities appear to be operating at capacity; cafes, restaurants, ferries and accommodation (including campsite pitches for motorhomes) are often fully booked in advance and difficult to come by at short notice. There are very few organised attractions with designated car parks or entrance fees etc. In general, the main attraction to visitors is the natural environment but clear access points are fairly limited; there are few car parks or circular walks. Furthermore, facilities are scarce, with toilets limited to ferry terminals and additional five public toilets across the whole of Uist. This does not encourage visitors to spent time away from their accommodation and leads to limited access outdoors, as well as a disregard for the natural environment. Many visitors look out their campervan window at a beautiful landscape, but due to the limited access and limited facilities remain indifferent to the environment.

In order to reduce the impact of current numbers of visitors and to prepare for possible increases in visitor numbers, the infrastructure can be improved. There should be toilets available at points of interest, car parks can be improved to provide more space for bigger campervans and bins provided at picnic areas. Dedicated beach access and more paths to minimise footfall impacts in vulnerable areas. Further information needs to be provided for visitors, with a full-time Ranger position created to cover these activities.

The role of the Rangers highlights that there is a plenty of work to do and tasks could be accomplished all year round. Improvements to infrastructure such as path repairs, preparing events such as beach cleans and guided walks and educational materials for school children could be put together during the winter. Visitor engagement, events and habitat surveys as well as infrastructure work can be carried out during the summer. The leaflet created by the Rangers can be improved and shared with more visitors in future years. Ramps can be secured or cleared to maintain access. There are many opportunities to develop this role to best support the community, such as assisting with problems arising from higher visitor numbers and supporting community efforts such as beach cleans.

Practical work can include providing support for infrastructure, such as the work carried out on the Hebridean Way. Our report outlines the amount of work that can be done to improve sections. Additionally, there are many opportunities to improve signage and car parking and update information such as is shared in the Information Boards. This could include providing activities such as a geocaching trail.

Future events could reach a variety of audiences. For example, guided walks can be focused on wildlife and the environment and could also cover topics such as climate change and coastal erosion. It would be important to consider timing and location, as other organisations such as RSPB run regular walks successfully. Furthermore, there could be more events focused on family activities such as rockpooling and pond dipping during the summer holidays. Alongside this could be science workshops in collaboration with universities and Natural History groups based at the Environment Centre. Ecotourism holidays could focus on aspects such as invasive species management, supported by a Ranger, to encourage positive visitor related environmental impacts.

The Environment Centre can work as a community hub and point of interest for visitors once opened. It would provide opportunities to engage visitors and be a location to meet for events and

workshops. It would also be a designated point of contact for the community to ask questions and engage in the protection of the environment here on Uist.

In terms of visitor engagement, it is vital to continue monitoring the rising numbers of visitors on Uist. The visitor survey carried out by the Rangers this year can be repeated and begin a long-term monitoring project to support the management. The impact of increasing numbers of vehicles could be further investigated with monitoring the changes in machair tracks, for example with fixed point photography. There is a great opportunity to improve infrastructure along with the rising numbers, adjusting methods for visitor management as appropriate. It is important to maintain visitor engagement and continue to communicate with both visitors and the community about the level of management and invite suggestions for improvement.

3.1 Some considerations when employing future Rangers:

I. Employ two Rangers to reduce lone working and increase the safety and efficiency of practical maintenance and conservation tasks in remote areas.
II. Provide a vehicle for Ranger(s); the role requires a lot of driving, often on poorly maintained roads.
III. There is enough work for two Rangers all year round, but one option may be to employ one full-time Ranger year round and then employ an additional Ranger for the season.
IV. Ensure they have an appropriate background in nature conservation as well as the necessary communications skills, with a passion for the environment, wildlife and outdoors. Their passion and skills makes a big difference when communicating with visitors and the local community.
V. For seasonal roles, consider accommodation needs and source in advance. This could be simply a caravan in an appropriate location. One of our Rangers stayed in a tent as she was unable to find any alternative accommodation.
VI. Consider a competitive salary to attract strong candidates.

3.2 Suggestions for future improvements:

I. A local Countryside Trust of some form which would operate across the Outer Hebrides and employ a dedicated Ranger Service and other associated staff, both for environmental management and visitor management. A visitor tax, as suggested by some, could be one option to fund such operations.
II. Provide additional campsites and designated areas for motorhomes including facilities such as waste disposal, water and electrics; while maintaining the feeling of staying in the great outdoors. This could be something for townships and common grazing committees to consider.
III. Provide designated parking areas at beaches and attractions, to help concentrate parking in one place. Donations could be acquired to help support longer term maintenance.
IV. Provide more facilities for people. As stated in the visitor engagement survey, the most asked for are public toilets and additional bins. Again, donations could be acquired to help support longer-term maintenance.
V. It appears that the majority of visitor in motorhomes tend to spend the night at campsites, but park elsewhere during the day, as the motorhome is their only mode of transport. It is suggested that motorhome users should be encouraged to hire bikes on the island. Also consider working with campsites to provide e-bike hire or possibly even car hire options for motorhome users.

VI. To continue to enhance information provision for visitors and the local community. This should also include awareness raising of the local and global benefits of working together to protect the natural environment.

VII. People have shown concern about increasing signage but also state there is a need for more information. When asked specifically, people have expressed negative comments about signage which says you should or should not do something i.e. do not camp here. Therefore, it is recommended communities do not carry out a 'policing' approach to visitor management. An information based approach, with on-the-ground staff such as Rangers, explaining why responsible actions are needed, is more acceptable and maintains a welcoming visitor environment. Therefore, it is recommended there are dedicated staff and signage to provide education information on the natural environment and why it is important to protect it – both at a local scale and at a global scale.

VIII. Where there is a concern about visitors and their pets, dedicated off-lead walking areas may be appropriate, such as along beaches where livestock fences are in place. NatureScot advise fencing along the coastline to help protect the dunes and these measures could work hand in hand.

IX. Improved access. Consideration of access for all to the outdoors, including provision of accessible ramps to beaches and longer term maintenance of such. Additionally, improving paths to the hills and other less accessible areas would re-direct some visitors attracted to the more accessible machair areas.

X. Increasing the walking route of the Hebridean Way. There are large sections that are on the main road and improving walking areas helps keeps visitors on public paths rather than roaming freely across protected sites, potentially disturbing wildlife and impacting habitats. Also increasing path infrastructure generally to improve access and encourage people to use paths.

XI. The sensitivity of the natural environment in Uist is evident and this sensitivity is likely to increase with ongoing climate change. The number of visitors or population in a defined area should not be a focus for deciding the level of environmental or visitor management funding, instead it should focus on the fragility and international importance of the location. Additionally, short delivery timescales for project funding are inappropriate for many communities with limited capacity, especially those in remote island locations and the impact of funding is reduced when time is limited. This has been evidenced during this project by the inability to acquire bins or materials for infrastructure and a much longer lead in time is required. Dedicated environmental and visitor management funding programmes with multiple years of funding are required to protect the islands' fragile natural environment for the wildlife and communities who depend on it.

4. CONCLUSION

This project provided many opportunities to engage visitors to the islands and locals alike in the unique environment of these islands and put forward ways to improve the infrastructure. The work of the Rangers has made a significant impact with the local community and raised awareness of the special habitats, wildlife and people that live here. The beach cleans and events, creating the leaflet and providing direct support by repairing sections of the Hebridean Way have been hugely beneficial for Uist and as such the Rangers have demonstrated how this role can support the islands.

Uist is faced with challenges through climate change and increasing pressure of tourism, but this role demonstrated how positive connections are possible and how steps can be taken to face some of those challenges. A mixture of visitor engagement and practical improvements of the island's infrastructure have paved a way for this role to establish a useful support system on the islands. It is therefore without question that funding Rangers on Uist would majorly benefit the local communities and provide support for challenges that will continue to be a source of conflict on the islands. Raising the profile of this role through social media highlighted how keen people are to support the effort of the Rangers throughout this project and provided many opportunities to engage people in environmental action and community engagement.

Most of all this project has been about connections – connecting visitors with the local environment through direct engagement; connecting locals and visitors at events such as the beach cleans; connecting paths that needed repairs by building bridges; connections between local organisations that worked together; connections between partner organisations of this project. It has brought people together and raised the profile of Uist as a beautiful place with a unique environment in need of protection.

5. APPENDIX

Visitor surveys

Island	Date	Time	Weather	Vehicles parked inside parking areas			Vehicles parked outside of parking areas		
				Cars	Campervans/ Motorhomes	Total	Cars	Campervans/ Motorhomes	Total
North Uist	13.08.21	09:35	Windy/ damp	1	0	1	0	4	4
North Uist	13.08.21	11:35	Windy/ damp	2	3	5	2	0	2
North Uist	13.08.21	12:15	Windy/ damp	0	4	4	0	1	1
North Uist	13.08.21	12:40	Windy/ damp	2	0	2	0	0	0
North Uist	13.08.21	12:55	Windy/ damp	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Uist	13.08.21	13:15	Windy/ damp	1	0	1	0	0	0
North Uist	13.08.21	13:45	Windy/ damp	3	2	5	3	0	3
North Uist	13.08.21	14:15	Windy/ damp	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Uist	13.08.21	14:40	Windy	5	1	6	2	1	3
North Uist	13.08.21	15:20	Windy	0	0	0	1	1	2
Berneray	13.08.21	16:00	Windy	3	4	7	0	0	0
Berneray	13.08.21	16:30	Windy	0	0	0	3	5	8
South Uist	12.08.21	14:15	Stormy	2	1	3	0	0	0
South Uist	12.08.21	14:26	Stormy	0	0	0	1	0	1
South Uist	12.08.21	15:10	Stormy	0	0	0	1	0	1
South Uist	12.08.21	16:10	Stormy	1	0	1	2	0	2
South Uist	12.08.21	16:45	Stormy	1	1	2	0	0	0
South Uist	12.08.21	17:15	Stormy	3	1	4	0	0	0
South Uist	12.08.21	17:30	Stormy	1	0	1	0	0	0
						0			0
Benbecula	12.08.21	17:50	Stormy	0	0	0	2	0	2
North Uist	18.09.21	18:15	Windy	0	3	3	0	1	1
North Uist	18.09.21	18:30	Windy	4	21	25	0	0	0
North Uist	18.09.21	18:35	Windy	0	0	0	1	0	1
North Uist	18.09.21	19:00	Windy	0	0	0	0	3	3
North Uist	18.09.21	19:10	Windy	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Uist	18.09.21	19:20	Windy	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Uist	18.09.21	19:25	Windy	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Uist	18.09.21	19:30	Windy	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Uist	18.09.21	19:40	Windy	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Uist	18.09.21	19:45	Windy	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Uist	18.09.21	19:55	Windy/Damp	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Uist	18.09.21	20:15	Windy/ Damp	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Uist	18.09.21	20:20	Windy/ Damp	0	0	0	0	3	3
North Uist	18.09.21	20:25	Windy/ Damp	0	0	0	0	0	0
North Uist	18.09.21	20:25	Windy/ Damp	0	0	0	0	0	0
Eriskay	17.09.2021	17:00	Windy	0	0	0	0	0	0
South Uist	17.09.2021	17:15	Windy	0	0	0	0	0	0
South Uist	17.09.2021	17:30	Windy	0	0	0	3	1	4
South Uist	17.09.2021	18:00	Windy	0	0	0	2	0	2
South Uist	17.09.2021	18:30	Windy	0	0	0	1	0	1
South Uist	17.09.2021	18:35	Windy	0	0	0	2	0	2
South Uist	17.09.2021	19:00	Windy	1	6	7	0	0	0
South Uist	17.09.2021	19:10	Windy	0	1	1	0	0	0
Benbecula	17.09.2021	19:45	Windy	0	0	0	1	1	2

Visitor Interaction			General Comments
People spoken to	Demographic	Subject	
0			
2		Machair/ crofting	
2	Family, campervanners	Parking on Machair track	
0			Area just in front of gate is frequently used for parking
0			Doesn't need to be monitored, clear signage and CCTV
0			Area is used for parking for the start of a walk but there
3	Adults, campervanners	Wildlife/ walking	
0			
3	Family, campervanners	Beach Cleans	
2	Adult, cyclists	Wild Camping	
2	Adults, campervanners	Beach Cleans, Wildlife	
3	Family, campervanners	Beach Cleans, Wildlife	
2	Adults, walkers	Beach cleans	
2	Adults, fishers	Beach cleans, wildlife	
1	Adult with dog	Wildlife	
2	Adults, boat	Wildlife, fishing	
5	Adults, walkers	Beach cleans, wildlife	
2	Adults, walkers	Wildlife	
0			
0			
2	Visitors in motorhome	Staying on campsite vs wild camping	"We'd rather have use of good facilities and look after the environment. We walk around the nature reserve in the evening but we don't need to sleep on it- you can't see anything when you're asleep anyway!" - campsite users out for evening walk
1	Young visitors, surfers	Surf/ Machair	Car parked far from track, tucked away in dunes. Visitors were unaware of machair and looking to get "away from the crowds"
4	Family with campervans and tents	Environment	"We know about the Machair but we assumed this part was fine to use, it's well trodden, you can see that people park and camp her all the time... and why wouldn't you, the view is amazing" - Family camping on dunes overlooking beach
0			
0			
0			
0			
0			
0			1 tent wildcamping close to water
0			
0			1 tent wildcamping
0			
0			
0			
0			
0			"It's a two-way thing, we spent money and enjoy our st
2	Adults, walkers	Environment	"It was obviously used for parking, easier than driving u
0			
0			
0			
4	Visitors in motorhome	Wildlife, Access	"There is no sign saying overnight stays not allowed!" ;
0			
0			

Ad hoc Engagement

Location	Island	Date	Time	Weather	Vehicles parked inside parking areas			Vehicles parked outside of parking areas		
					Cars	Campervans/ Motorhomes	Total	Cars	Campervans/ Motorhomes	Total
Polochar	South Uist	14.08.21	10:00	Damp	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bornish	South Uist	19.08.21	16:40	Sunny	2	0	2	0	0	0
Stoneybridge	South Uist	19.08.21	17:00	Sunny	0	0	0	0	0	0
Valley	North Uist	22.08.21	14:30	Sunny	4	1	5	0	0	0
Udal	North Uist	23.08.21	16:30	Sunny	3	1	4	0	0	0
RSPB Balranald	North Uist	24.08.21	10:00	Sunny	3	3	6	0	0	0
RSPB Balranald Beach	North Uist	24.08.21	12:30	Sunny	1	2	3	0	0	0
Scolpaig	North Uist	24.08.21	13:30	Sunny	3	0	3	0	0	0
Malaclait	North Uist	27.08.21	17:30	Sunny	0	0	0	2	0	2
Baleshare, during beach clean	North Uist	28.08.21	11:00	Sunny	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hebridean Way, between Locharnan and MOD road north of Loch Druidibeag	South Uist	31.08.21	15:00 - 18:00	Sunny	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hebridean Way, between Daliburgh and Howmore	South Uist	01.09.21	10:00 - 16:30	Sunny	0	0	0	0	2	2
Lochboisdale Food Festival	South Uist	05.09.21	12:00 to 16:00	Damp	0	0	0	0	0	0
RSPB Loch Druidibeg	South Uist	08.09.21	11:30 - 14:00	Cloudy	8	5	13	0	1	1
Lochskipport	South Uist	08.09.21	14.00-14.30	Cloudy	3	1	4	0	0	0
RSPB Loch Druidibeg	South Uist	13.09.21	09:00	Cloudy	5	3	8	0	1	1
Hosta beach	North Uist	14.09.2021	11.00 - 11.15	Cloudy	1	1	2	0	1	1
Smerclait	South Uist	20.09.2021	12:30	Sunny	2	2	4	0	0	0
Loch Druidibeg	South Uist	23.09.2021	15.30	Cloudy	2	1	3	0	0	0
Hosta beach	North Uist	27.09.2021	12:30	Sunny	1	0	1	0	1	1
Berneray - Leverburgh ferry	North Uist	06.10.2021	9.15 - 11.30	Sunny	0	0	0	0	0	0
Eriskay - Barra ferry	South Uist	08.10.2021	10.00 - 12.00	Foggy	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hosta beach	North Uist	09.10.2021	12:00	Sunny	0	0	0	0	0	0
Taigh Chearsabhagh Museum and Arts Centre	North Uist	19.10.2021	12:30 - 13:30	Rainy	0	0	0	0	0	0

Visitor Interaction			General Comments
People spoken to	**Demographic**	**Subject**	
11	Various, Visitors	Beach Cleans, Toursim, Campervans	
2	Adults, walkers	Beach cleans	
0			
2	Adults, cyclists	Beach cleans, walking	
2	Adults, camper	Beach clean	
15	Families, adults	Wildlife	
5	Adults, cyclists	Beach cleans, wildlife, attractions	
7	Adults, wildlife group	Wildlife	
3	Adults, visitors	Wildlife, access	"We've heard of Machair, but wouldn't recognise it...it would be great if there was more information around" - visitors parked on Machair
2	Adults, campervan	Wildlife, access	"We haven't been staying at Campsites beacuse of the risk of Covid"..."We'd love to go out for dinner but the car parks aren't big enough for our motorhome" -Visitors in motorhome
0			No other people seen throughout walk
2	Adults, campervan	Wildlife, keeping dogs under control	2 campervans parked outside Howmore on Machair, close to Hebridean way signpost
100	Roughly equal mix of visitors and locals	Leaflet, tourism, wildlife, attractions, beach cleans	"There needs to be more information for visitors; the local shops become informal tourist information centres which is hard when they're trying to run a business" - local shop owner "We've been looking for a good map with attractions, its hard to know where to start when you get off the ferry" - visitor, just arrived from Barra "Tourists just park all over the Machair and leave litter, there needs to be more facilities or somebody to move them on" - resident of North Uist
8	Adults, dog walkers, cyclists	eaflet, Beach clean, wildlife, acces	"We come here for the wildlife" Visitor going for walk
3	Adults, walkers	Leaflet, Wildlife, beach clean	"A map is great" Visitor
4	Adults, walkers	, trails, outdoor attractions, beach	"This is confusing" About trails in both directions
0			
2	Adults, campers	Dogs, wildlife	
0			
2	Family, campers	Wildcamping, wildlife	"It's such a nice view closer to the water"
16	Various	Visitor engagement Survey	
24	Various	Visitor engagement Survey	
2	Various	Visitor engagement Survey	
11	Various	Visitor engagement Survey	

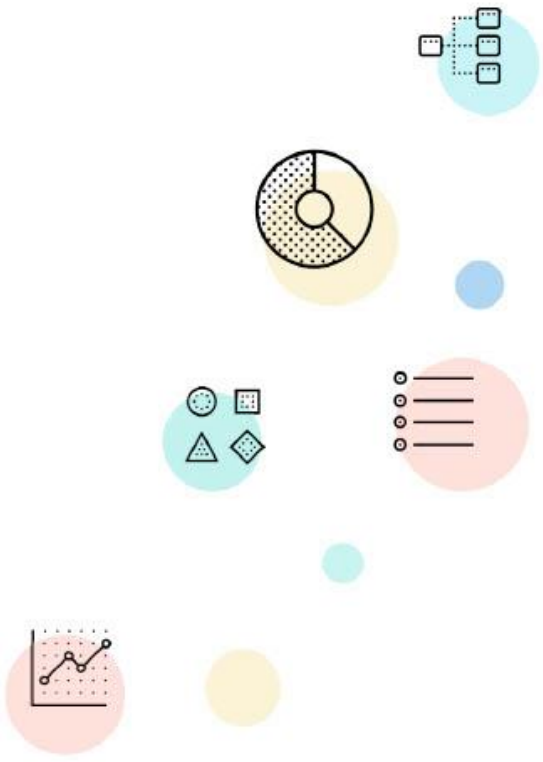
uist | Uist Visitor Engagement

Uist Survey

A survey aimed at both locals and visitors to Uist to evaluate the need for infrastructure improvements and management of higher visitor numbers on the islands.

Completed
93

Completion Rate
100.00%



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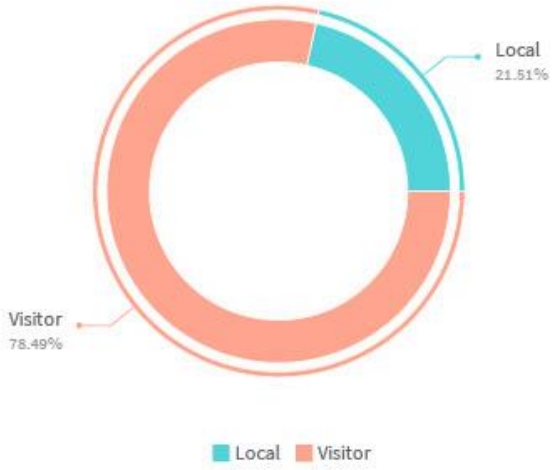
QUESTION 01 | MULTIPLE CHOICE

Are you local to Uist or visiting the islands?

Answered: 93 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	RESPONSE PERCENTAGE
Local	20	21.51%
Visitor	73	78.49%

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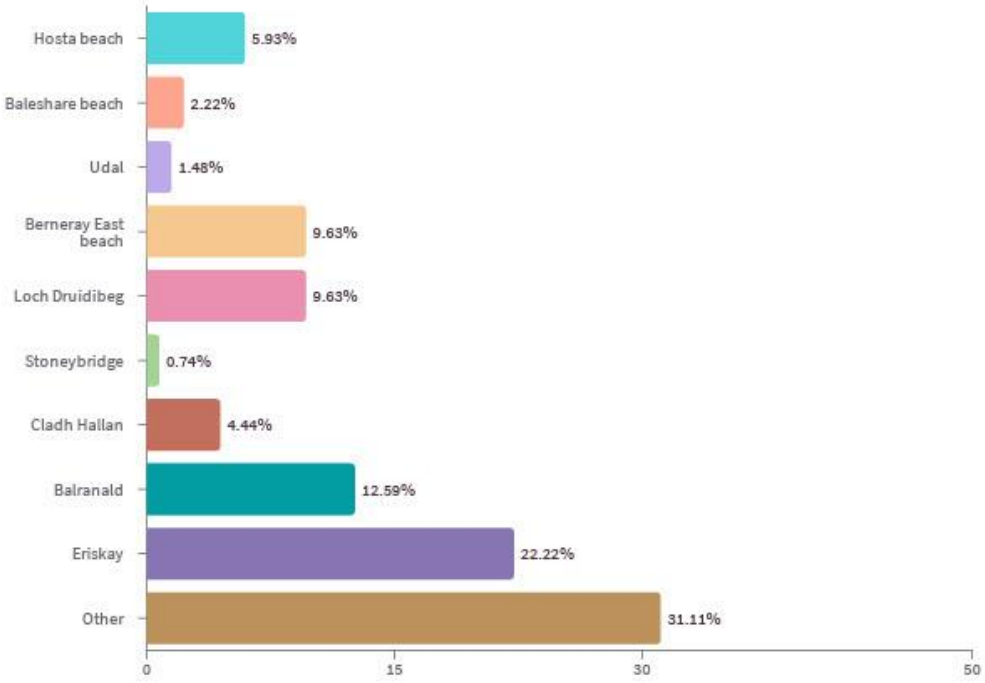
QUESTION 02 | MULTIPLE CHOICE

If you are a visitor, where have you been? If you are a local, where are visitor hotspots?

Answered: 93 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	RESPONSE PERCENTAGE
Hosta beach	8	5.93%
Baleshare beach	3	2.22%
Udal	2	1.48%
Berneray East beach	13	9.63%
Loch Druidibeg	13	9.63%

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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	RESPONSE PERCENTAGE
Stoneybridge	1	0.74%
Cladh Hallan	6	4.44%
Balranald	17	12.59%
Eriskay	30	22.22%
Other	42	31.11%

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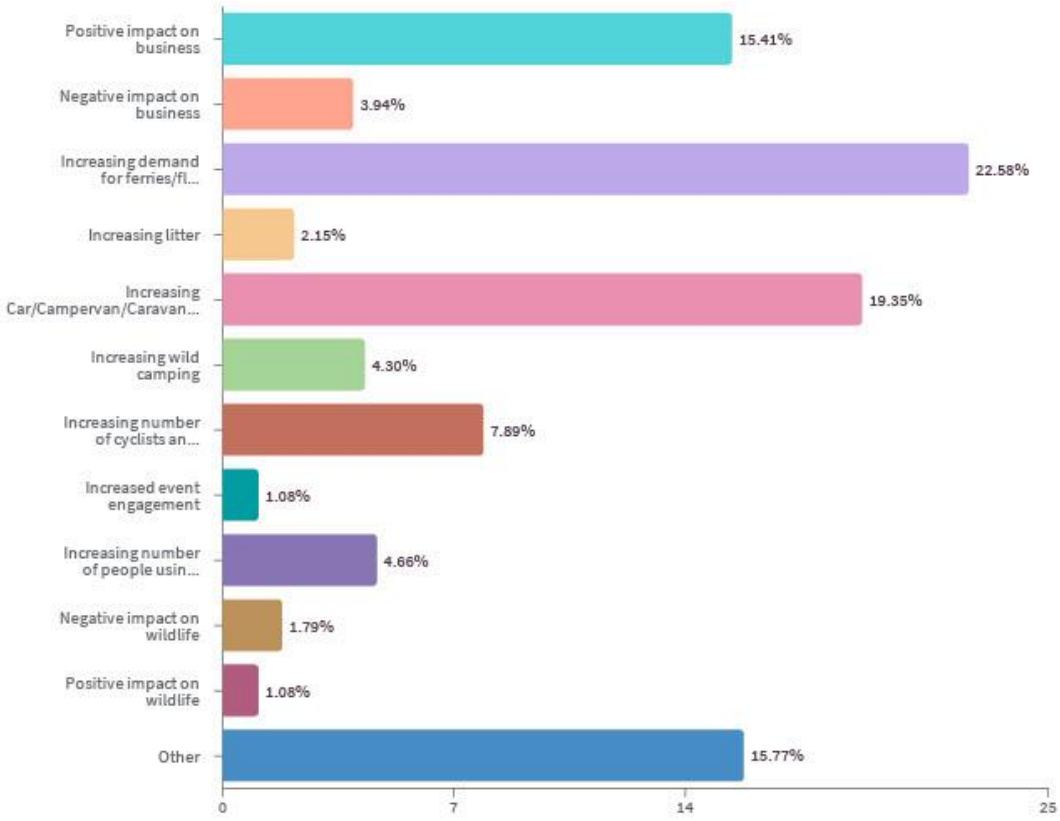
QUESTION 03 | MULTIPLE CHOICE

The number of tourists visiting Uist are increasing every year. What do you think are the THREE biggest changes related to that?

Answered: 93 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	RESPONSE PERCENTAGE
Positive impact on business	43	15.41%
Negative impact on business	11	3.94%

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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	RESPONSE PERCENTAGE
Increasing demand for ferries/flights/public transport	63	22.58%
Increasing litter	6	2.15%
Increasing Car/Campervan/Caravan parking	54	19.35%
Increasing wild camping	12	4.30%
Increasing number of cyclists and hikers	22	7.89%
Increased event engagement	3	1.08%
Increasing number of people using beaches	13	4.66%
Negative impact on wildlife	5	1.79%
Positive impact on wildlife	3	1.08%
Other	44	15.77%

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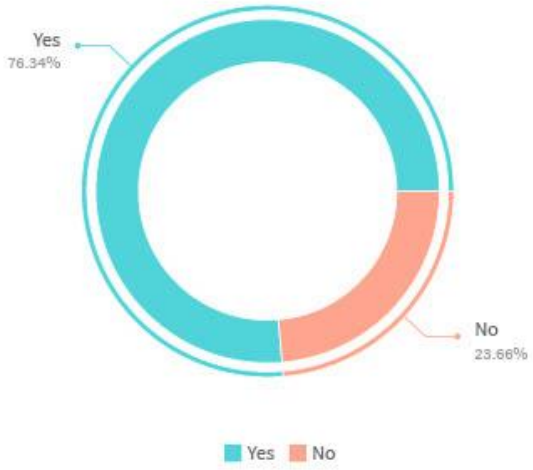
QUESTION 04 | YES OR NO

Do you think more visitor management is needed?

Answered: 93 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	RESPONSE PERCENTAGE
Yes	71	76.34%
No	22	23.66%

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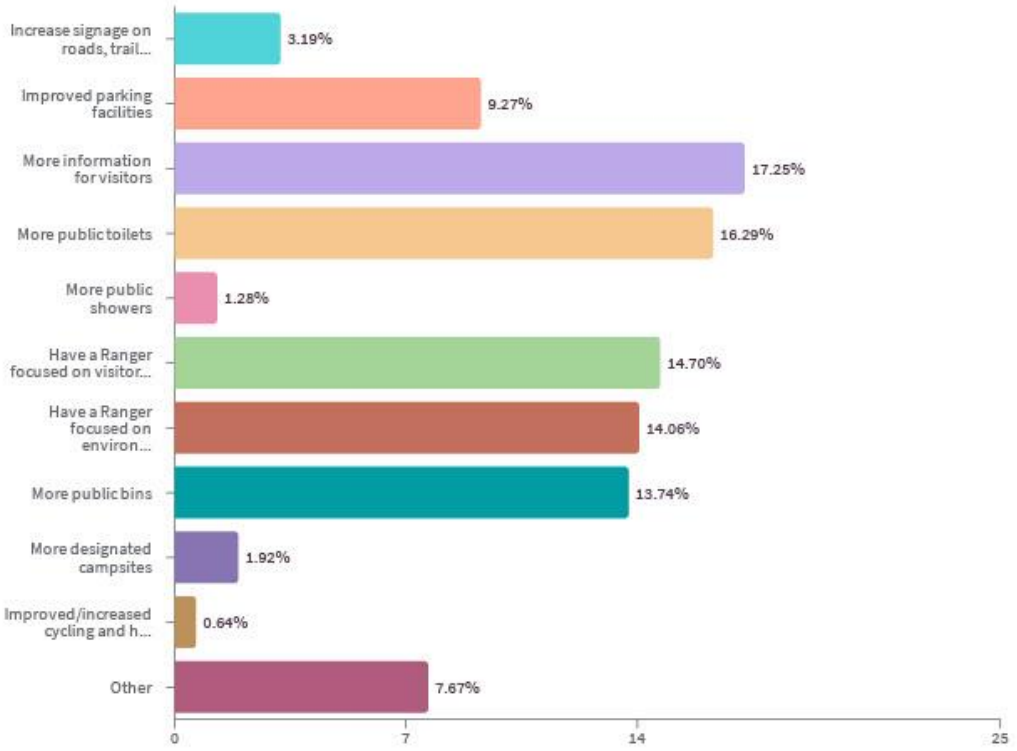
QUESTION 05 | MULTIPLE CHOICE

What type of visitor management do you support?

Answered: 93 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	RESPONSE PERCENTAGE
Increase signage on roads, trails and cycling routes	10	3.19%
Improved parking facilities	29	9.27%
More information for visitors	54	17.25%
More public toilets	51	16.29%
More public showers	4	1.28%

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ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	RESPONSE PERCENTAGE
Have a Ranger focused on visitor management	46	14.70%
Have a Ranger focused on environmental conservation	44	14.06%
More public bins	43	13.74%
More designated campsites	6	1.92%
Improved/increased cycling and hiking trails	2	0.64%
Other	24	7.67%

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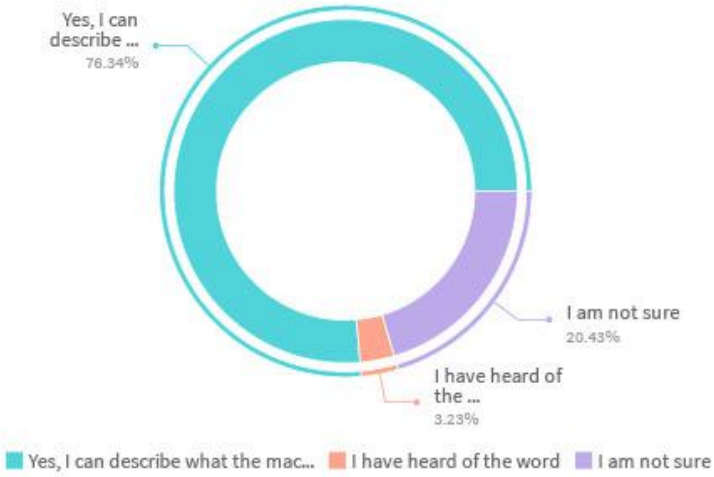
QUESTION 06 | MULTIPLE CHOICE

Are you familiar with the machair?

Answered: 93 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	RESPONSE PERCENTAGE
Yes, I can describe what the machair is	71	76.34%
I have heard of the word	3	3.23%
I am not sure	19	20.43%

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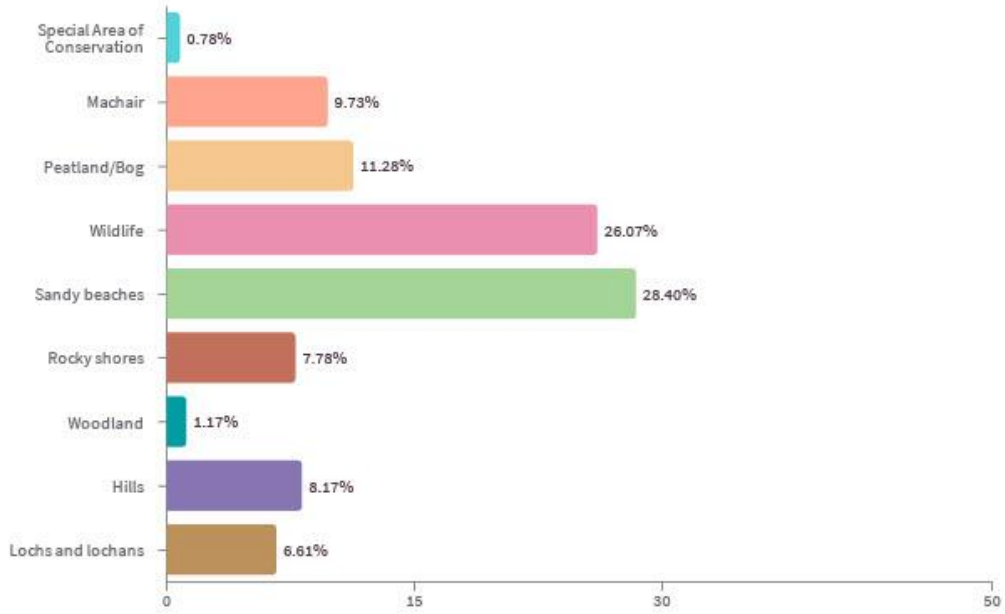
QUESTION 07 | MULTIPLE CHOICE

What do you connect with Uist?

Answered: 93 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	RESPONSE PERCENTAGE
Special Area of Conservation	2	0.78%
Machair	25	9.73%
Peatland/Bog	29	11.28%
Wildlife	67	26.07%
Sandy beaches	73	28.40%
Rocky shores	20	7.78%
Woodland	3	1.17%

Made with SurveySparrow

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	RESPONSE PERCENTAGE
Hills	21	8.17%
Lochs and lochans	17	6.61%

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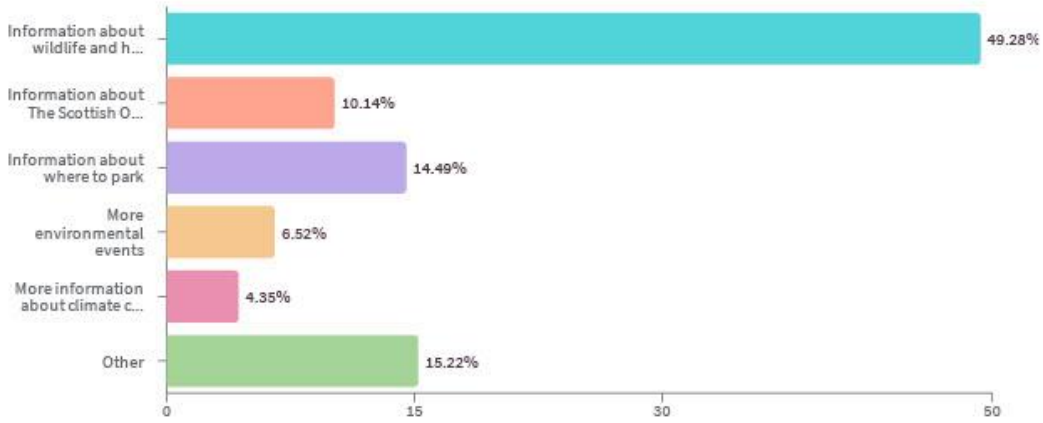
QUESTION 08 | MULTIPLE CHOICE

When thinking about information about the Uist natural environment and how to look after it, would you like there to be more of?

Answered: 93 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	RESPONSE PERCENTAGE
Information about wildlife and habitats	68	49.28%
Information about The Scottish Outdoor Access Code	14	10.14%
Information about where to park	20	14.49%
More environmental events	9	6.52%
More information about climate change, pollution and what we can do to help	6	4.35%
Other	21	15.22%

Made with SurveySparrow

QUESTION 09 | TEXT

Do you have any comments you would like to share?

Answered: **34** Skipped: **59**

(•) Word Cloud ( ) List

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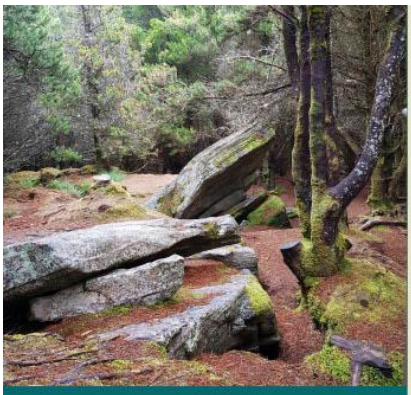
Welcome to Uist leaflet



Not just a stepping stone

Uist provides an incredible variety of landscapes and biodiversity. Explore the paths off the main road and you will be rewarded with unique views and experiences that shape these beautiful islands. Incredible white beaches stretch for miles along the west coast. Hidden among moorland and machair are historical sites of archaeological interest that speak of times past. And many artists have a home here, creating unique crafts connected to the land. We welcome you to take your time to explore Uist and make memories that last!

Find out more about places to explore responsibly with the map included.

Emergency contacts

Emergency Services
Call 999 in case of emergency. Download the app what3words in advance as phone signal can be patchy and locations can be hard to pinpoint!

Coastguard
If you see someone in difficulty on or around the shore DIAL 999 and ask for the Coastguard

BDMLR Hebrides (British Divers Marine Life Rescue Outer Hebrides)
In case of marine wildlife emergency contact Head Office 01825 765546 or Area Lead Coordinator Sara directly on 07531910952

Scottish SPCA (Scotland's animal welfare charity)
In case of any animal emergency 03000 999 999

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar · rspb giving nature a home Scotland · NatureScot · Stòras Uibhist Going forward together

WELCOME TO UIST

A ranger's guide for visitors to the islands

Map inside

Scan me for a digital copy

FÀILTE GU UIBHIST

Machair & Crofting

The gaelic word machair describes a rare habitat of fertile low-lying grassy plains that only occurs in Scotland and Ireland! The formation of sandy ground, made primarily of calcium-rich shells, and historical land use called crofting has shaped this special landscape along the western coast of Uist. It supports nationally rare species such as the great yellow bumble bee, Irish lady's-tresses and corncrake.

The Machair land is part of the traditional agricultural system of crofting, and the low input techniques used by crofters help maintain the habitat. Traditionally, crofting includes rotating land-use between crops, as well as using seaweed as fertiliser! This allows more species to thrive and increases biodiversity.

Increasing numbers of visitors on Uist has become a major pressure on this fragile habitat. The sandy soils are vulnerable to erosion, which is caused by traffic and camping. Please help us to take care of this special environment and enjoy it responsibly!

EXPLORE, ENJOY AND PROTECT OUR BEAUTIFUL ISLANDS

Ranger tips

Familiarise yourself with your compass and map before heading out for a walk!
Stick to paths where possible. Keep an eye out for waymarkers!

Take care of ground nesting birds and seals by keeping dogs on the lead or under close control. Please keep at least 50m distance from marine wildlife. For more information contact BDMLR Hebrides or SSPCA.

Remember to keep an eye on tides when exploring the islands! Tide timetables can be found online at www.tidetimes.org.uk

Choose designated parking areas where possible to protect the environment!

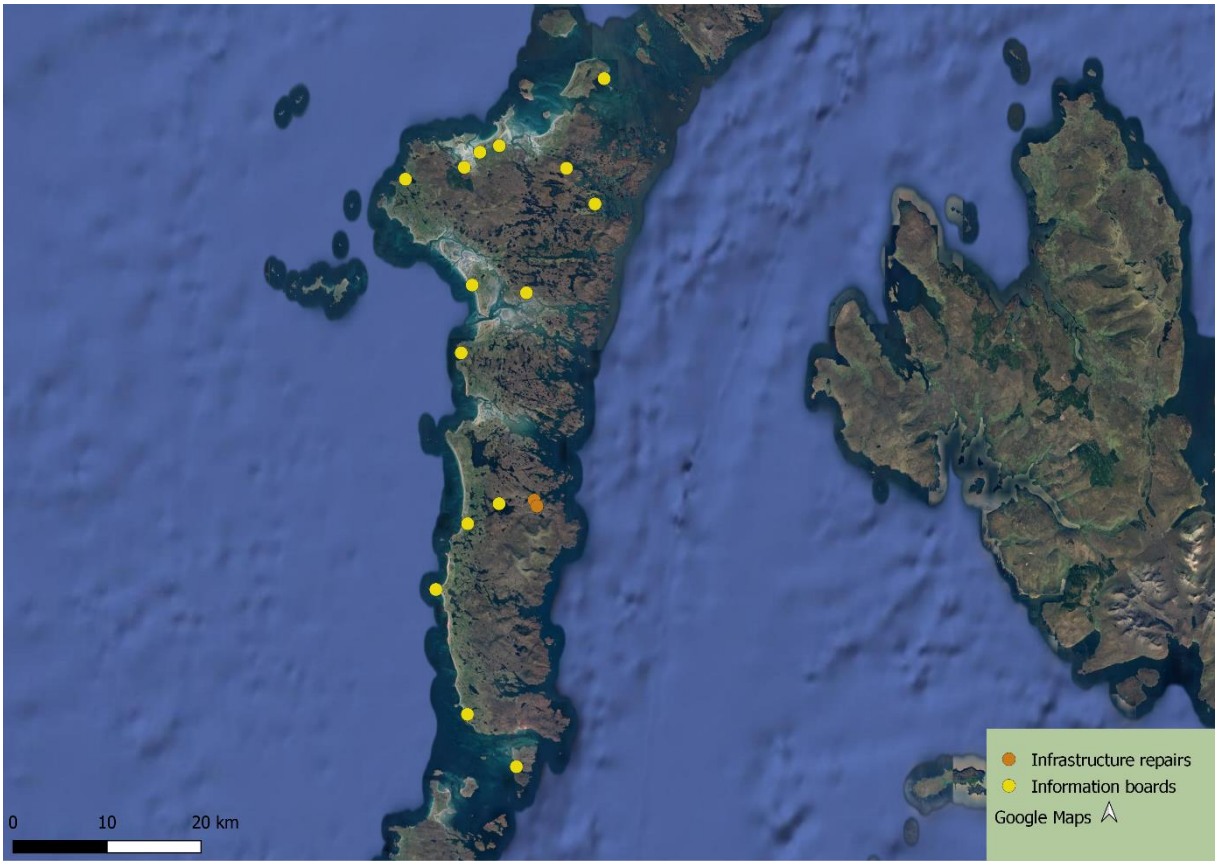
Oceans & Lochs

There's no avoiding the water in Uist! Sandwiched between the Little Minch to the East and Atlantic Ocean to the West, the island landscape is a patchwork of peat bog and lochs, with water making up over half the surface area.

The varied waterways provide a home for a vast array of wildlife. Rare carnivorous plants bloom on the squelchy bogland, uniquely adapted sticklebacks are concealed within freshwater lochs, while hardy ancient stonewort algae thrive in the changeable habitat of tidal sea lochs. The shores and tiny loch islands are important nesting sites for wading birds, divers, and even eagles.

Off the coast, dolphins, whales and basking sharks can be seen; take your time to watch the water from a rocky peninsula or book a boat trip for a different perspective.

And whether you are near ocean or loch, keep your eyes peeled for charismatic otters; they tend to hunt in the sea but return to freshwater lochs for regular baths!

Explore Uist...
Cafés
Berneray Shop and Bistro
The Wee Cottage Kitchen, Malacleit, North Uist
The Dunes Cabin, Balranald, North Uist
Taigh Chearsabhagh Café, Lochmaddy
Claddach Kirkibost Café, North Uist
Ceann na h-Airigh, Grimsay
NAMARA Seafood Café, Grimsay
Hebridean Jewellery Café, Eochar, South Uist
Kildonan Café, South Uist
Croft and Cuan, Lochboisdale
Skydancer Roastery and Art Café, Lochboisdale
Kilbride Café, South Uist
Public Toilets
Berneray Ferry Terminal
Berneray Harbour
Lochmaddy Ferry Terminal
Taigh Chearsabhagh, Lochmaddy
Balranald Nature Reserve
Balivanich Hall
Liniclate Sports Centre, Benbecula
Kildonan Museum, South Uist
Lochboisdale Marine
Eriskay Ferry Terminal
Camping and Touring Sites
Balranald Hebridean Holidays, North Uist
The Tractor Shed Bunkhouse, Paible, North Uist
Moorcroft Holiday, Cairinis, North Uist
The Creel Yard, Grimsay
Otters Edge Campsite, Liniclate, Benbecula
Gleanndal Campsite, North Glendale, South Uist
Kilbride Campsite, West Kilbride, South Uist
If you're camping or in a motorhome, please book into organised campsites or overnight spots and get rid of your waste at chemical disposal sites
Please never park in passing places, in front of gates, or on the fragile machair!
If you have to wild camp, please don't stay near the road or houses, only stay one night per spot and leave no trace of litter or fire debris
Berneray
Sollas
North Vist
Lochmaddy
Grimsay
Balivanich
Benbecula
South Vist
Daliburgh
Lochboisdale
Eriskay
Chemical Toilet Disposal
Berneray Ferry Terminal (free)
Lochmaddy Ferry Terminal (free)
Balranald Campsite (charge, organic)
Moorcroft Campsite (Site users only)
Otter's Edge Campsite (Site users only)
Lochboisdale Public Toilets (free)
Eriskay Ferry Terminal (free)
Showers
Berneray Harbour
Berneray Ferry Terminal
Lochmaddy Ferry Terminal
Liniclate Sports Centre, Benbecula
Lochboisdale Marina, South Uist
Eriskay Ferry Terminal
Opening hours of small businesses can be variable, please check ahead to avoid disappointment!
Pubs and Restaurants
Westford Inn, North Uist
Hamersay House, Lochmaddy
Lochmaddy Hotel
Langass Lodge, North Uist
Temple View Hotel, Cairinis, North Uist
Charlie's Hebridean Bistro, Benbecula
Stepping Stone, Balivanich
The Chinese Takeaway, Balivanich
Dark Island Hotel, Benbecula
Isle of Benbecula House Hotel
Orosay Inn Restaurant, South Uist
Borrodale Hotel, South Uist
Lochboisdale Hotel
Burnside Chip shop, South Uist
Polochar Inn, South Uist
An Politician, Eriskay
Fuel
Lochmaddy Shop
Bayhead Shop, North Uist
Westside Fuel, Balivanich
Creagorry Motors, Benbecula
McAulay Askernish, Lochboisdale
Burnside Filling Station, South Uist
Groceries and Local Food
Berneray Shop and Bistro
Co-op, Sollas, North Uist
Lochmaddy Shop, North Uist
Bayhead Shop, North Uist
Hebridean Smokehouse, Clachan, North Uist
MacLean's Bakery, Benbecula
MacLennans, Balivanich
Lovats, Balivanich
Co-op, Creagorry, Benbecula
Lovats, Carnan, South Uist
Solar Smokehouse, Lochcarnan, South Uist
Co-op, Daliburgh, South Uist
Eriskay Community Shop
Please keep your dogs under control at all times, to avoid disturbing wildlife and livestock
Museums and Craft Shops
Coralbox giftshop, Berneray
Solles Bookbinding, North Uist
Taigh Chearsabhagh Museum and Shop, Lochmaddy
Environment Centre, Lochmaddy
Shoreline Stoneware, Lochcarnan, North Uist
Hebridean Candles, Grimsay
Grimsay Boat Haven
Uist Wool, Grimsay
Uist Yarn Studio, Benbecula
MacGillivrays Gift Shop, Benbecula
North Uist Distillery Co, Benbecula
Puffin Studio Crafts, Benbecula
Hebridean Jewellery, Eochar, South Uist
Kildonan Museum and Shop, South Uist
Uist Gifts and Information, Lochboisdale
The Hebridean Woolshed, South Uist
Eriskay Community Shop
Recycling and Waste Points
Berneray Ferry Terminal
Co-op, Solles, North Uist
Taigh Chearsabhagh, Lochmaddy, North Uist
Clachan, North Uist
Bayhead Shop, North Uist
Market Stance, Benbecula
Balivanich, Benbecula
Isle of Benbecula House Hotel
Lay-by off main road nr Howmore, South Uist
Angus MacDonald Joinery, Daliburgh, South Uist
Lochboisdale Hotel, South Uist
Eriskay Hall
Eriskay Ferry Terminal
Medical Facilities
Hospital
Doctors
Vet
Please help keep Uist clean: bin your litter or take it home. And remember: reduce, re-use recycle!
There are some amazing spots for a cold-water dip on Uist! For safety tips check www.rnli.org/safety
Wildlife Trails
Whale Trail sites (www.whaletrail.org)
Bird of Prey Trail sites (www.visitouterhebrides.co.uk)
Ranger Recommendations
Enjoy exploring Uist responsibly and stick to the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, visit www.outdooraccess-scotland.com for full details, including tips on low impact wild camping
1-Berneray circular walk take in the island's beautiful beaches and highest point
2-Dun an Sticer investigate the remains of an impressive Iron Age broch
3-Udal Peninsula walk enjoy the machair, monuments and beaches from every angle
4-Valley Island walk explore the ruins on this uninhabited island and race the tide home!
5-Scolpaig Crofter walk check out the dramatic crater (careful not to slip!) and watch for whales
6-Hosta Beach relax on this white sandy beach, with a good chance of waves - beware of riptides!
7-RSPB Balranald a great spot for wildlife watching, for birds, otters and cetaceans
8-Trinity Temple a short walk from the road to the remains of Scotland's oldest University
9-Baleshare Beach a beautiful long beach on a tidal island with good parking
10-Eaval walk to North Uist's highest point on a clear day for stunning views
11-Langass Woodland a rare opportunity to wander through the trees on North Uist!
12-Barpa Langass discover the 5000-year-old burial chamber and stone circle beyond
13-Ruaval an easy walk with great views of the surrounding moorland and lochs
14-RSPB Loch Druidibeg woodland, lochs and moorland with a good chance of spotting eagles
15-Lochshipport a historic port, wild ponies and the start point to several big walks
16-Tobha Mhor Ancient Chapels a remarkable collection of ruined churches and chapels
17-Arinaban Woodland a lovely patch of woodland with lots of paths to explore
18-Rubha aird a'Mhuile the most westerly point on South Uist, good for spotting cetaceans
19-Cladh Hallan an archaeological site where Britain's only mummies were discovered!
The Hebridean Way walk or cycle from Vatersay to Lewis, see www.visitouterhebrides.co.uk

Infrastructure Map