

West Harris Community Survey

Final Report- May 2019



Introduction

A recent Community Engagement Survey was carried out from January to March 2019, to identify the population number, demographics of West Harris Trust estate. The survey asked questions about employment status and how the Trust can improve communication and engagement with the community. A section of the survey was used to find out how to engage the community in social and cultural activities. Since 2012 the Trust has improved the area through increasing the population, creating affordable rented housing, providing employment through three business units and improving camping and motorhome facilities for holiday makers. Positive developments are listed in the executive summary below.

Executive Summary

The population of WH has increased from 119 in 2012 to 151 in 2019.

In 2012, it was identified that there were 53 permanently occupied houses and no formal private rented housing or social housing. In 2019 there are 56 houses permanently occupied by owners, two still being built. There are 9 houses that are rented on a permanent basis.

The 2012 survey expressed a need for a **community centre**, and Talla na Mara was developed in 2017 to provide community events, a restaurant, open studios for local businesses to work from, an art exhibition in the foyer.

The Trust are still working to **improve communications** with West Harris residents, as acknowledged in 2012.

Progression has been made since 2012 to communicate with residents; there is a newsletter sent out twice a year, a West Harris Calendar competition for photography, updates of Trust meeting minutes, a monthly page in the De tha Dol about What's going on at Talla na Mara and in the following months more updates on the Trust.

The 2012 survey identified an important requirement to provide **more camping facilities**. There are now wild camping signs marked at five different camping sites to reduce erosion of the landscape from wild camping. Electric hook-up up provided at two sites in response to the number of travellers holidaying in motorhomes, providing an income to the Trust.

The 2012 survey identified two local residents who enquired about **business space**, the Trust now provide business space in three different sites, which has created employment in the area.



1. Household details

Demographics, housing, employment

The population of West Harris in 2012 was 119, 147 in 2017 and 152 in 2019.

Age bracket	Number interviewed through survey	Actual population demographic
65+	37	
55-64	11	
45-54	7	
35-44	1	
45-54	9	
25-34	7	10
18-24	1	2
5-17	4	12
0-5	3	7

From the 2012 report, there has been an increase in the number of children living in West Harris.

In 2012 there were ten children under eighteen and in 2019 it has been identified there are twenty two children under eighteen living in West Harris.



Of the 67 interviewed;

35 residents are retired, 13 are self-employed and 10 are in full time employment.

2. Impact of community ownership

22 households stated that the Trust has made a positive impact to community; due to having more control through community ownership, more affordable housing encouraging families to move to the area, good tourism promotion, increased employment opportunities, renewable energy and increased population.

Three households are unsure about the work of the Trust.

One household is not happy with the work of the Trust.

Three households said the Trust are beneficial to them but need to do more.

2.1 Trending future projects/developments raised by residents

Twenty households raised the issue of **improving speed of broadband**, which hinders progress for some residents working from home or who have their own business.

There is a general concern of **lack of employment** for younger people, with 4 households suggesting that the season be extended to benefit employment and income all year round.

Nine households expressed the need for **more restaurants** in the area, which are open all year round. One resident asked for a takeaway service from Machair Kitchen and one expressed the view that there should be a hotel in West Harris, as there are not enough Bed and Breakfasts.

Seven households expressed the need for **better environmental awareness and conservation** of the area, for example wildlife/ ranger walks, better gate access signs, signs/information for tourists to prevent accidents and damage to livestock and wildlife. One resident offered the idea of having electrical car hire system to prevent air pollution.

Four households suggested the need for **facilities for children** such as a play park or soft play area.

2.2. Satisfaction of living in West Harris

Twenty-five households are very satisfied living in West Harris, one resident mentioned it was the number one place to live in the world!

Seven households are quite satisfied living here, one household didn't answer, and one household is very unhappy.

3 Improved Communication from the Trust

Twenty-five households said that they are kept up to date the work of the Trust and are happy with the newsletter twice a year and checking the website/ Facebook page for events.

Six households do not feel kept up to date with the Trust and would like to see more information about the board meeting minutes and Trust accounts.

Twenty-nine households buy and read the De tha Dol. To engage with residents a regular update from the Trust will be placed on a page of the paper. Another page for Talla na Mara with events and different community projects will be featured more regularly.

A resident stated that showing updates of the Trust to other areas of Harris will encourage others to see the benefits of community land owning.

Eleven households would prefer an e- newsletter rather than a paper copy.

4 Community Emergency Plan

Of the 67 residents interviewed, 30 households stated that they do not feel vulnerable in a power outage or in extreme weather conditions.

Three residents said they do feel vulnerable; one resident is already on the vulnerable person's list with the electricity board, one resident is a wheel chair user and one resident feels vulnerable as he has a young child.

All residents interviewed have access to own transport and can get to places easily.

5 Crofting

Of the 33 households interviewed, 16 are tenants of a croft and two sublet to neighbours.

Four households use croft for horticulture, 15 for sheep, 4 for cattle and 4 for hens.

Fourteen use the common grazing share. One resident wrote on the survey that the Trust should have everyone's croft records as they pay rent to Trust.

6 Community Engagement at Talla na Mara



6.1 Use of Talla na Mara

The West Harris Trust want to make the community aware that the community owned enterprise centre- Talla na Mara, is as a place for them to use as a group to take part in activities of interest.

However only three households said they use the centre on regularly, nineteen households said they sometimes attend the Lunch Club, ceilidhs and go for lunch and ten households have never used Talla na Mara.

Some residents have commented that they are aware that they can set up community groups, however they don't know how to organise for someone to organise and run a group, for example three residents are keen to have a keep fit/yoga class at Talla na Mara.

6.2 Activities of Interest

Out of the 67 who took part in the survey, the majority expressed interest in the following activities, which identifies the need to set up an activities group for elderly people. The combination of activities could be arranged for a community group to be established in West Harris.

- **27% of residents would like ceilidh's**, to catch up and chat, tell stories and dance together. This would provide an entertaining and nostalgic get together of people and would promote a healthy lifestyle, therefore improving overall social betterment.

- **16% are interested in seeing films** (Archives 16%). Having a monthly screening of archive clips, which previously tied in with the monthly Pensioners Lunch club, would foster a shared bond of their lifestyles in Harris, and they can celebrate their rich culture and heritage together.
- **22% are interested in being part of a Horticulture Group.** 15 people interviewed mentioned that they enjoy growing their own vegetables, or they used to and find that now they do not have a suitable patch of ground or they are too frail to grow vegetables themselves. If a horticultural group started, everyone who wishes to grow their own vegetables to aid a sustainable lifestyle could take part. Those who are interested in gardening and growing could help those who were less able. A horticultural group would develop health benefits of the community group, as gardening improves; mental sense of wellbeing, cognitive thinking, life satisfaction, physical activity and engaging minds to a project. This activity will sustain the community in the long term, whilst maintaining friendly camaraderie in the local community group.
- **27% are interested in Music events such as a local choir, performances and Musical Memories** (27%). If we could have more of these ceilidh sessions taking place at Talla na Mara, more people would be able to enjoy listening to music, singing and chatting with their neighbours.
- **13% of the community expressed interest in knitting and art sessions,** alongside two members of the community who currently weave for Harris Tweed. There is definite potential to have workshops, as one member who has recently started looming tweed would like to carry out workshops in the summer period. These combined activities would allow everyone to come together to experience creative and engaging sessions, provided to entertain and stimulate those attending.
- **Interest in Archaeology-** This would cover guided walks and talks of the archaeological trail, a place to hear lectures and watch archival footage. 28% of people who took part in the survey expressed an extremely interested and enthusiastic attitude towards the heritage of West Harris, specifically reading about the sites of archaeological interest and sharing their knowledge of the landscape.

This overall interest of activities shows that a regular programme of events and activities for elderly people is required within the West Harris community. This will help to prevent social isolation amongst the largely elderly population of West Harris, and provide sustainable food growing, healthy lifestyle and improvement of mental health, to combat the problems of loneliness and isolation. Entertainment and nostalgia would improve the emotional wellbeing of the community group, and would establish a sense of community empowerment for elderly people in West Harris.

7 Tourism

The general consensus of tourism is positive within the community, due to boosting the local economy and creating a livelier atmosphere.

There are mixed reviews about motorhomes, the most prominent complaint is the lack of ferry capacity for local people when they use up all the space. Also, the single-track road into Luskentyre was the most common complaint for residents there, and one resident suggested a toll system to limit traffic jams. These issues are out with the Trust's control.

Seven households would like improved parking and more spaces available, particularly in Luskentyre.

Two households made the case for providing more facilities and activities for campers at Old Seilebost School, such as a game room for when school kids are on holiday.

Six households would like more public toilets, 6 households would like increased hook up areas.

Eight would like more chemical waste disposal units.

Seven would like more passing places with viewpoints and road information for those unfamiliar with single track roads and passing places.

Three households mentioned there needs to be better sign posted walking routes and one household suggested a bunk house.



Recommendations

From the findings of the survey, it is recommended that the Trust continue to communicate with residents on a regular basis, through website updates and minutes of Board meetings, newsletters and the De tha Dol. With the new houses at Pairc Niseabost being built, if the Trust were able to assist in providing an area for children play area, this would continue developments of attracting young families to the area. There is scope to create more engagement activities with residents, and a home baking and recipe club has been planned to start as a monthly community group. More action is required to fulfil increasing level of tourism, such as increasing chemical waste and hook up facilities for motorhomes and providing more activities and cafes for holiday makers.