

Fetlar Community Area Statement

See Fetlar Proposals Map

Background

1.1 Fetlar is one of Shetland’s North Isles, a fertile green place known as the ‘Garden of Shetland’. The island is generally low-lying, the highest point being Vord Hill at 158m, and the coastline is largely cliffs. Tresta Bay, however, has one of the best beaches in Shetland. Fetlar covers an area of 15 square miles (24km). The island is approximately 6 miles (10km) across and varies from 1 to 3 miles wide. It is situated 2 miles (3.2km) to the east of Yell.

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Lamb Hoga and Papil Water

Planning Context

2.1 The previous Local Plan that covered the Fetlar Community Council area was the North Isles Local Plan 1986 (which also covered Unst, Yell, Skerries & Whalsay). Also published in 1986 was the Fetlar Integrated Development Plan, which contained detailed proposals for linked projects across the whole island. The most recent development plans for Fetlar have been - Fetlar: The Way Ahead in 2000 and the North Isles Development Plan in 2005, compiled by Initiative at the Edge. Local planning aims for Fetlar are:

- To seek ways to diversify the local economy
- To counter de-population and encourage the growth of the community.

- To conserve and enhance the natural and built environment
- To develop further the tourism potential of the area
- To improve Fetlar’s marine infrastructure

Natural and Built Environment

3.1 There are 5 SSSIs on Fetlar. They are at Tressa Ness and Virva, which are notified for their geology, and Lamb Hoga, North Fetlar & Trona Mires which are notified for their botanical interest and birdlife. North Fetlar is now a full Special Area of Conservation. Lamb Hoga, North Fetlar and Trona Mires comprise the Fetlar SPA. A large area of North Fetlar is also designated as an Area of Special Protection (formerly Statutory Bird Sanctuary), which was established in the 1960’s for snowy owls. This area is being considered further to see if the designation is still legally valid.

3.2 The lack of a suitable pier in Fetlar means that there is no natural sheltered harbour, which has greatly hindered the island’s development. There is a small harbour at Houbie but this is limited, mainly to summer use due to its lack of shelter.

3.3 The population of Fetlar is scattered over the south and east of the island, with most services in Houbie, the largest settlement.

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Houbie

- **Built Heritage**

3.4 There are 6 Listed Buildings on Fetlar, 3 category B and 3 category C(s). Brough Lodge is included in the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes in Scotland. Currently there are 125 known archaeological monuments with 13 of them scheduled.

- **Local Protection Areas (LPAs)**

3.5 The local community has identified LPAs at Tresta beach and its foreshore, and at the beach of Aith, where development will be restricted to protect important local landscapes and public amenity. The beach at the Banks of Funzie has also been identified as a LPA. A LPA around the entire coastline of Fetlar has also recently been finalised to help regulate marine development.

Coastal Management

4.1 The entire coastline has been designated as a LPA and only development of facilities, which benefit the community as a whole will be considered.

Water and Drainage

5.1 Scottish Water's quality improvement scheme was completed in 2005.

5.2 There have been numerous problems experienced with the sewerage scheme at the Stakkafletts in recent times. The Community Council are presently investigating ways and means of overcoming these problems with the local authority. All other properties have their own private septic tanks.

5.3 The lack of a mains water supply at the new terminal is a major deficiency.

Waste Management

6.1 Waste skips are available at the Fire Station at Baela - also at Cunningsgarth and the junction at Northdale/Velzie on a rotational basis, giving residents a convenient disposal point for bulky household refuse. There is also a glass & can recycling point at the Community Hall.

Energy

7.1 The exposed nature of Fetlar would recommend it for the use of renewable energy sources such as wind or wave power, but these must not conflict with the conservation issues (e.g. SSSIs) that arise in much of the island. There would also be problems in connecting to the Shetland grid. There is, however, considerable potential for domestic scale wind generators. 6 kW wind turbines are to be erected at the Community Hall and Fetlar Interpretive Centre.

Business and Industry

8.1 **Public sector employment – there is a need to diversify the local economy, which in the past has been heavily dependent on crofting/agriculture and is currently dependent on public sector jobs. Because of the low population levels, it is difficult to generate large-scale enterprise, but, inward investment has gone some way to overcoming the problem. Given the rise in administrative and computer infrastructure and skills in Fetlar in the last 5-10 years, decentralised work could provide an immediate short-term answer and a sustainable long-term solution in providing employment.**

8.2 **Agriculture -** with crofting incomes in decline, there is a need to diversify the local economy. There may also be potential in providing high quality agricultural products that could be sold locally in Shetland and further afield. Taking advantage of the "Garden of Shetland" brand name in marketing initiatives could help promote Fetlar produce and products. Development of potential agricultural adventures is hindered by poor infrastructure, ferry timetables, high transportation costs, etc. Future possibilities exist in making land /crofts available for lease/development. This issue is currently being considered by the local authority and Community Council, alongside ways in countering depopulation. Land issues are central to life on Fetlar, with many problems raised by issues of land use and under-used crofts.

- **Aquaculture**

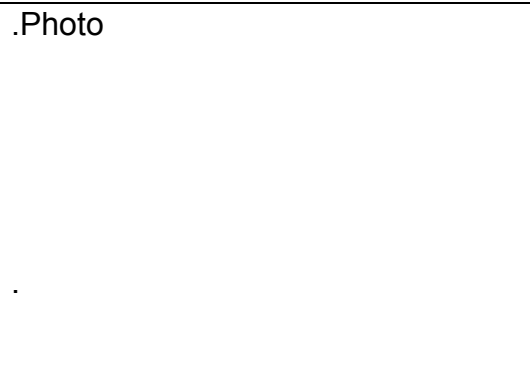
8.3 At present aquaculture is a relatively under-developed industry, with the only

licensed sites off Hamars Ness and smolt rearing in Pabil Water. The lack of a suitable pier is a necessary infrastructural requirement for further development in the growth of aquaculture. Whilst further development of this industry is welcomed, its impact on the amenity of the community and on the environment must be carefully considered.

- **Industrial Estate**

8.4 There is one designated Industrial Site at Baela, the building has recently been purchased by H & I Fire and Rescue Service. Sites for industrial development alongside the existing building are owned by the SIC.

There is a need for some form of remote working space/"hot desks" on the island, to help generate small businesses or provide office space for de-centralised work.



Industrial/Commercial Building

- **Modern Technology**

8.5 Working at home can also be an important economic factor for remote and isolated communities. Advances in new technology such as the Internet/ Broadband and e-mail can replace the need for centralised office working, a prospect that could bring enormous benefits to communities such as Fetlar. Fetlar already has a small number of businesses that make use of modern technology and this needs to be encouraged by utilising new advances in technology as and when they develop and by encouraging central public agencies to de-centralise work. Unless present Broadband facilities can be upgraded in the near future, development opportunities

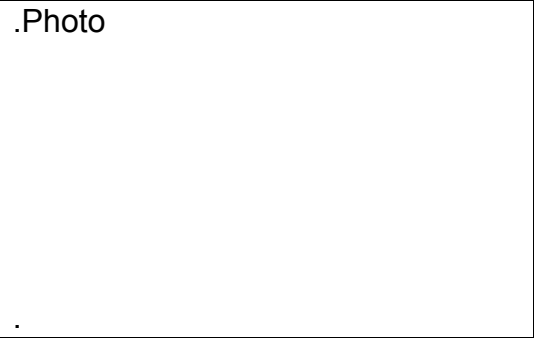
could be lost as a result of current exchange infrastructure.

8.6 Video conferencing could help provide economic opportunities and deliver services to the communities without the need for expensive transport. The video conferencing unit is located in the school. This unit is currently underused and could provide an invaluable link to the outside world without the need for extensive travelling.

Tourism

9.1 The island's natural environment and ornithology are the major draws for tourists to Fetlar. Of particular importance is the unique community of birds that breed there. The RSPB reserve on the island with its resident warden therefore plays a very important role in attracting tourists to Fetlar. The North Isles ranger has developed guided walks during the summer months, which have helped to attract day visitors and provide additional tourism opportunities, the Ranger Service could be developed further to provide increased economic benefit.

Self-guided walks and trails are also being developed in close consultation with the community. It is hoped that this will also be further developed.



Tresta Beach

- **Tourist Accommodation and Facilities**

9.2 Fetlar has 2 B&B,s (1 with a disabled unit), 2 self-catering units, campsite accommodation and a recently refurbished Camping Bød. There could be scope for increased tourist accommodation if tourist numbers rise, or if projects emerge which create a need for increased and/or dedicated accommodation.

9.3 The Fetlar Interpretive Centre won an award for the best Scottish Museum of the Year in 2000, in the Educational Initiative category. As such it has an important role to play as a tourist attraction and cultural archive for Fetlar and has a central role to play in marketing and tourism promotion. The Centre has an automated tea and coffee facility for the public. It is also a Neighbourhood Information Point and remote call answering centre for Visit Shetland.

9.4 A retreat complex run by an order of nuns (SOLI) at Tigh-Sith on Aith Ness also attracts large numbers of visitors to the island and could provide further development opportunities.



Fetlar's award winning Interpretive Centre

9.5 A telescope will shortly be operating on Fetlar for planetary observation, run by Fetlar Astronomical Society, to take advantage of the clarity of the night skies on the island. A site has been chosen adjacent to the Hall.

9.6 There is potential for a model croft: a working 'model croft' is an option that has been considered to utilise under-used croft land. It could provide a test bed for new management techniques and demonstrate good agricultural practice as well as being another visitor attraction.

9.7 The annual midsummer Foy attracts large numbers of visitors to a music and activity weekend on Tresta foreshore.

9.8 Interpretation Sign-boards: There is a need for more sign-boards, pointing out places of interest and explaining them. It is hoped that signage and interpretation will be added at various places of interest

in Fetlar, with the Round House at Gruting being considered further in the longer term.



10.1 There is a shop and Post Office at Gord. There is no petrol for sale on the island.

Transport

11.1 Affordable and frequent ferry services to and from the mainland are a vital factor in maintaining the future economic and social viability of Fetlar. The ferry service is also an important local employer and any cutbacks would have a significant impact on the local community. Better use of resources and an improved timetable would enhance all aspects of the economy.

11.2 The new ferry terminal complex remains unfinished. The design agreed upon over a 3 year process of studies and consultation involving all interested parties and external experts was not completed. This has left an under provision in desperately needed infrastructure on the island. Furthermore, the omission of the planned breakwater continues to cause more problems with berthing in winter than at the previous terminal in Oddsta.

Public Transport

11.3 The Post Car operates a limited public transport service between the Post Office and ferry. Ways of improving internal transport on the island are currently being investigated.

11.4 There is an airstrip on Turra Field, which is used for charter flights or for medical emergencies. The airstrip's surface dressing has recently been improved. There is potential for further development of chartered flights to the island and the airstrip could be placed on the Council's new flight schedule on a

bookings only basis. There is currently no fire cover and would need to be provided to a standard in line with provision in other areas.

Population and Housing

12.1 The population of Fetlar is in decline. In recent years the population has been up above 100 but has steadily declined to its current figure of only 60 in 2006. Out of 60, only around 30 are economically active. There are 13 active community groups, most of which are necessary to the islands management or development. It is no longer feasible to undertake major economic projects on a voluntary basis.

There is great potential to create paid part-time jobs especially within tourism, decentralised administration and economic development. There is tremendous potential for decentralised work which could bring in young families, maintain current residents both in the short and longer term.

Continuing depopulation is of great concern on the island and ways of countering this need to be investigated fully. Decentralisation of SIC work would provide an immediate opportunity for well paid employment for people living in the isles and would allow more people to have the option to be based in Fetlar.

12.2 New house building has been very limited over the past decade. This is the result of population decline leaving a number of vacant properties, thus reducing the demand for new ones. Another factor is the continued economic uncertainty, which means that people are unwilling to commit themselves to the financial burden of expensive mortgages. A scheme to remedy this could be of potential benefit. New builds should be encouraged and everything possible done to remove any obstacles which might arise. In addition, properties that are empty are generally in need of major repair. The Community Council are currently investigating possibilities for addressing housing issues, alongside other issues facing the island.

12.3 Of the total housing stock of 51, 36 (71%) are occupied, 15 are Council

rented properties (7 special needs/sheltered). There are no Housing Association units on the island.

Housing Zones

12.4 Houbie is designated as Zone 1, where new housing development is actively encouraged. Aith, Herra and Funzie are designated as Zone 2 where new housing development will be favourably considered where it reflects the existing settlement pattern. The areas around Houll and Everland have been redesignated from Zone 4 to 2. All other areas are designated as Zone 4, which is open countryside where housing development will be strictly controlled. Further details of the housing zone requirements are set out in policy **LP HOU4**.

Community Services and Facilities

13.1 There is one Community Hall and a primary school with nursery school facilities in Houbie. The school is well resourced.

13.2 The primary school roll is 4 in 2006, with 0 nursery places. The school could face closure in 4 years time if no new young families come to live on Fetlar.

13.3 Play areas are located at Stakkafletts and the primary school. There are limited amenities/facilities available for children.

13.4 The road up to the school is unsafe for children's pedestrian access, so the installation of a verge-path on one side and possibly a crash-barrier on the drop side would be beneficial.

13.5 There is a church and burial ground at Tresta.

13.6 There are public toilets at Hamars Ness and the campsite at Tresta, all but Hamars Ness having limited access.

Development Opportunities

14.1 Following an extensive community consultation and household survey, the Fetlar Development Project was established in January 2000 in partnership

with Fetlar Community Council and Fetlar Museum Trust. On 25th March 2000, the Fetlar Conference brought together the island's residents with Council and other agency representatives, politicians and community groups from within and outwith Shetland to identify and discuss the key issues concerning the island. Following this in 2005, a consultation by Initiative at the Edge, North Isles, produced a North Isles Development Plan. This document can be seen in combination with Fetlar's specific aspirations from the 2000 Development Plan. Fetlar's full aspirations can also be seen in the full length version of the development of the North Isles Development Plan, alongside the generalised version.

14.2 Basing the ferry in Fetlar is essential to the islands economic future. It would bring job security to existing employees and provide some additional employment on the island. The timetabling advantages would be huge and would improve the economic opportunities in many different areas, as well as opening up access to a range of facilities and services that are currently difficult to access and enjoy. In addition to an improvement in ferry facilities and infrastructure, this would also provide Fetlar with its first small boat pier, essential for development of aquaculture and fishing industries.

Recommendation 1

The breakwater and pier is highlighted as being the major infrastructural requirement for economic development on the island, alongside the need to overcome current berthing problems experienced during the winter months as a result of the lack of appropriate shelter. A Fetlar based ferry and crew and breakwater/pier facility, would also help overcome problems with resources and timetable constraints currently shared with Unst. The lack of a suitable pier and no sheltered harbour has also greatly hindered economic development on the island.

It is therefore recommended that the Council provide a breakwater and pier facility to enable a ferry to be based from the island, alongside a dedicated Fetlar crew, in full consultation with the

local community and all other relevant partners.

Recommendation 2

It is recommended that the Council investigate ways of decentralising work to Fetlar, alongside additional inward investment opportunities to counter depopulation and attract young families to the island.

Recommendation 3

It is also recommended that the Council helps the community in the development of at least 3 remote working spaces to help counter continued depopulation from the island and in order to be able to attract prospective incomers.

Recommendation 4

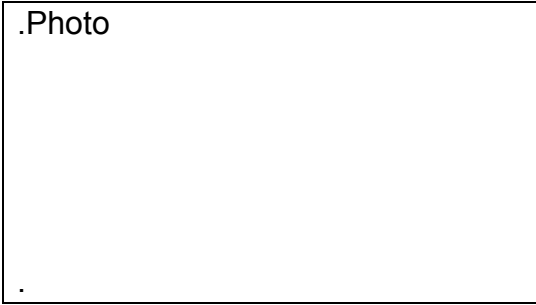
Any future upturn in the island's development, will facilitate the need for additional housing.

In order to facilitate inward investment, there is a need to progress with some form of housing strategy and further discuss land availability options.

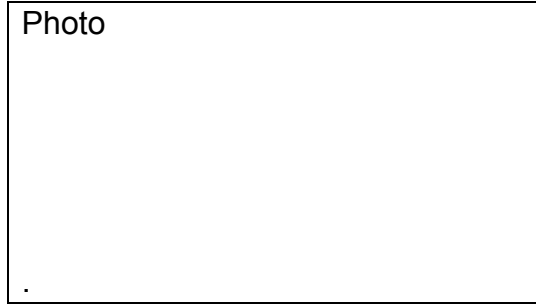
Recommendation 5

There is a need for some form of Community Development Officer on the island to help address and investigate ways to overcome issues currently faced.

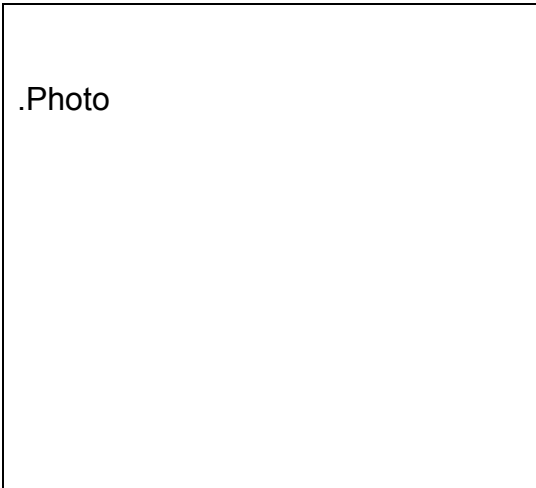
14.3 Brough Lodge and the Brough Lodge Trust. The Lodge dates from 1820 and was the home of the Nicholson family; the last Lady Nicolson died in the late 1980s. Her descendants gave the historical contents of the house to Fetlar Museum Trust, and in 1997 Brough Lodge Trust was set up. The aims of the Trust are to acquire and restore the Lodge and to develop it for use by the community and tourists on Fetlar. In the past, the Trust has been supported by the Shetland Amenity Trust, Shetland Community Enterprise Network and the Fetlar Development Fund.



Brough Lodge



Fetlar Community Hall



Brough Lodge Observatory

14.7 Aithbank has recently been converted into a Camping Böd by Shetland Amenity Trust, and as such will be a part of the Shetland Camping Böd Trail, offering budget self-catering accommodation in heritage properties throughout Shetland.

Recommendation 6
It is recommended that the garden grounds at the Camping Bod at Aithbank are maintained.

14.4 The Fetlar Interpretive Centre has an important role to play as a tourist attraction and as an educational centre. Any expansion and/or development would enhance this role and should be encouraged.

14.5 Tourism - facilities for tourists should be improved to encourage more visitors. The amount of accommodation could be expanded. Sensitively designed signposts and interpretation boards are also required to guide and inform tourists. The proposed improvements to signage and interpretation/self-guided walks and the North Isles Ranger Service, could be developed further and formalised in the longer term so that tourists can access a variety of sites of interest and importance,

14.6 Fetlar Hall: was granted a £27,000 award under the Local Capital Grants Scheme to extend the hall on the south side to provide a multi-purpose community social room.

.Hamars Ness ferry terminal and pier site

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14.11 "www.fetlar.com/brough" is the website for Brough Lodge Trust, with a history of the house and the aims of the trust.

14.12 www.watson-cheyne.com is a website dedicated to Fetlar Interpretive Centre's award winning exhibition. The website contains valuable medical research material.

Aithbank

14.8 The local community has identified a need for additional car parking facilities, a picnic bench and toilets at the Loch of Funzie, one of the most important bird watching sites on Fetlar.

Recommendation 6

It is recommended that the Council investigate ways and means of bringing forward recreational improvements at the Loch of Funzie in full consultation with the local community and all other relevant funding agencies.

14.9 Sports facilities are lacking on Fetlar and a multi-court, possibly located near the school, would provide an all-weather venue for a variety of activities.

14.11 The pier/slipway at Houbie, which is well used by small craft and fishers, is falling into disrepair and in need of refurbishment.

14.12 The installation of a pedestrian path up to the school road would be beneficial by introducing a safe route to school.

14.13 The community and RSPB warden have noted interest in tree-planting on Fetlar, for habitat and landscape enhancement.

• Useful Websites

14.10 "www.fetlar.com" is the website for Fetlar Interpretive Centre with interesting pages on their facilities and what they do, exhibitions, projects, publications and archives.

