

Unst Community Council Area Statement

See *Unst proposals Map*.

Background

1.1 Unst is the northernmost and third largest Shetland island with a total area of 47 square miles (75km). The highest point of Unst is Saxa Vord, one of the highest hills in Shetland at 285m. The island is approximately 12 miles (19km) long and 5 miles (8km) wide, its northernmost point, Out Stack, being about 60 miles (96km) from Lerwick. The largest loch is the Loch of Cliff, and the two largest islands lying off the coast of Unst are Uyea and Balta, both of which are uninhabited. There are many fine, sandy beaches, in particular Sandwick, Norwick, Skaw, Lunda Wick and Burrafirth. Geologically very diverse, Unst possesses commercial quantities of chromite plus serpentine and talc, which are presently exported from the pier at Baltasound. The land in Unst is reasonably fertile with significant areas of peat free flat land; agriculture is therefore important.

Planning Context

2.1 The previous Local Plan that covered Unst was the North Isles Local Plan that also covered Yell, Fetlar, Whalsay and Out Skerries. The Council adopted this plan in 1986.

2.2 The Unst Development Plan was prepared by the Unst Partnership (UP) in 2000 in response to the findings of the EKOS consultancy group. This plan provides a long term strategic view of economic regeneration and community development in Unst.

2.3 Local planning aims for Unst are:

- **To seek ways to further diversify the economy of Unst.**
- **To enhance transport links with the rest of Shetland.**
- **To maintain and enhance the natural and built environment.**

Natural and Built Environment

3.1 Unst is primarily grazed moorland, with small, dispersed settlements located at the heads of several of the voes or inlets.

3.2 The north and west coastlines of the island of Unst are extremely exposed along most of their length, and are dominated by cliffs. Hermaness, at the northern tip of Unst, is particularly scenic with cliffs of over 150m in height and numerous geos, arches, caves and stacks. The Muckle Flugga group of small islands and rocks, the most northerly point of the British Isles, lies a short distance off Hermaness.

3.3 The east and south coastlines of Unst are predominantly rocky; a number of voes, embayments, islands and sounds provide varying degrees of shelter. The coastline here is relatively low-lying although there are cliffs on some sections.

3.4 The largest settlement in Unst is Baltasound on the east coast. The two other main settlements are Uyeasound in the south and Haroldswick and Norwick in the north.

• Designated Sites

3.5 The headland of Hermaness has important bird populations and is designated as a SSSI for geological and biological reasons. It is also designated as a National Nature Reserve (NNR), a Special Protection Area (SPA) and is included in Shetland's National Scenic Area. Saxa Vord (western cliffs) has also been notified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and SPA (shared with Hermaness) for ornithological reasons and there are SSSIs at Tonga-Greff coast and Lunda Wick for geological reasons, Valla Field for ornithological reasons. Valla Field has also been classified as an extension of Hermaness and Saxa Vord SPA. The Keen of Hamar is a NNR/SSSI/cSAC (candidate Special Area of Conservation) (geological / biological). There are also a further 10 SSSIs notified in the island. The National Trust for Scotland owns land at Halligarth, Woodwick, Collaster, and Lund.

- **Built Heritage**

3.6 There are 19 listed buildings in Unst with 3 at category A, 7 at category B and 9 at category C (s). The category A listed buildings are Muness Castle which is also a Scheduled Ancient Monument in the care of the Scottish Ministers; Belmont House (*See Tourism Section*) and the Muckle Flugga (North Unst) lighthouse. Belmont House is also included in the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes in Scotland.

3.7 Currently, there are 441 known archaeological sites in Unst with 48 that are Scheduled.

3.8 The **Uyeasound Waterfront Group** was set up in order to promote the maintenance and improvement of the historic waterfront area of Uyeasound and highlight further development opportunities in and around the waterfront area. Potential projects include:

- The development of a new pier to serve the local aquaculture industry.
- The establishment of a defined walkway around the South Unst coastline.
- The refurbishment of Greenwald's Booth to form an information or interpretative centre.
- Environmental and public amenity improvements at Toorhill.

3.9 The waterfront area of Uyeasound, including the harbour, the shop and Greenwald's Booth, together with other buildings to the landward side of these including Gardiesfauld Hostel, may also be worthy of designation as a Conservation Area. Enhancement proposals could include the restoration of derelict buildings where practicable, a refurbishment of the historic waterfront and better interpretation of the history of the area.

Proposal 1

The Council proposes to investigate the possibility of the formal designation of the Uyeasound Waterfront as a Conservation Area, in full consultation with the local community.

3.10 Unst has also a considerable Viking archaeological legacy. Shetland Amenity

Trust (SAT) intends to develop this further with the Viking Unst project.

- **Local Protection Areas (LPAs)**

3.11 A LPA has been identified at Hulligarth, Skaw to protect the landscape from further development. For further details please refer to policy **LP NE11**.

Coastal Management

4.1 Coastal protection work has been carried out at Muckle Flugga Shore Station and at Brookpoint in Haroldswick.

Water and Drainage

5.1 The Unst water treatment works sources water from the Loch of Watlee and Helliars Water. Scottish Water have recently undertaken water quality improvement works.

5.2 Wastewater collection schemes in Unst are located at Belmont and Baltasound.

5.3 Remaining households in Unst have private septic tanks.

Waste Management

6.1 Rural skips are provided at Uyeasound, Baltasound and Haroldswick. There are recycling collection points for glass and cans at Skibhoul Stores, Baltasound, and for glass at Uyeasound, Haroldswick & Baltasound Public Hall car parks. Used battery collection points are located at Skibhoul Stores

6.2 There is no longer any licensed landfill site on the island.

Energy

7.1 Unst has considerable potential for the exploitation of its wind, tidal and wave resources. The Unst Partnership is committed to supporting the development of renewable energy projects on the island. Their PURE Hydrogen Energy Company is about to become a PLC.

Minerals

8.1 Unst is rich in mineral deposits with commercial quantities of chromite present, plus serpentine and talc. The latter is

occasionally exported via the pier at Baltasound. Setters Quarry is still providing road metal extraction. Surveys have also suggested that a range of precious metal deposits could potentially be exploited in parts of the island in the future, although the cost of doing so has always proved prohibitive.

Business and Industry

9.1 For many years two large employers, the airport at Baltasound and RAF Saxa Vord, dominated Unst's economy. Both of these have now departed and Unst faces serious challenges in rebuilding its economy.

- **Unst Airport**

9.2 Unst Airport was expanded in 1978 to accept oil-related traffic to help relieve pressure on Sumburgh. At its peak of operation during the early 1980s, the airport employed 76 people. Following the downturn of the oil industry in the mid 1990s the oil industry pulled out and the airport was only used by the inter-island service. Since 2001 the airport was operating only on a care and maintenance basis with the removal of the inter-island service. It is only in use for private flights and the Air ambulance service.

RAF Saxa Vord

9.3 Unst received a further major blow when the Ministry of Defence announced in 1999 that the RAF base at Saxa Vord would be dramatically scaled down by April 2001. Whilst the initial drawdown estimates, from August 1999, proved to be too severe, the number of personnel employed at the base dropped to 92 from 250. In July 2005 the MoD announced complete closure from April 2006 when an automated radar system was finally introduced. The need to further diversify the Unst economy is therefore as great as ever. It is also important that the MoD undertake the demolition of redundant buildings, to avoid having derelict properties despoiling the landscape.

The camp has now been purchased by Military Asset Management who intend to develop the site as an up-market Tourist Centre. There are also plans by Blackwoods Distillers to produce a whisky distillery in the Stores buildings.

- **Ministry Of Defence Consultation**

9.4 The Ministry of Defence have to be consulted about planning applications for certain developments in the area around Saxa Vord, in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Ministry of Defence Technical Site) (Scotland) (Saxa Vord) Direction, 1980. The outer limit of the safeguarded area is shown on the Unst Proposals Map.

Policy Unst 1

The Council will consult the Ministry of Defence about planning applications in the safeguarding area around Saxa Vord.

- **Unst Partnership (UP)**

9.5 In response to the dramatic run-down of the Unst economy the Unst Partnership (UP) was established in 1999 to spearhead the regeneration of Unst. UP is a limited company with charitable status. Its Directors represent the three principal partners (the Unst Community Council, Shetland Islands Council and Shetland Enterprise). Its vision is to "maintain a viable, vibrant community on Unst through the encouragement, support and facilitation of new opportunities for social and economic development for its residents."

9.6 Following the establishment of the Unst Partnership, EKOS consultants were commissioned to prepare an economic development strategy for the island. Its strategic objectives are:

Objective 1: Broadening and deepening the economic base;

Objective 2: promoting the distinctiveness of Unst;

Objective 3: maximising the benefits of continuing activity at Saxa Vord; and

Objective 4: supporting economic regeneration.

1.

After the MoD announcement in July about full Closure of RAF Saxa Vord, the Unst Partnership was superseded by the Unst Response Team, with 2 full time paid officials and 1 admin assistant, funded via Shetland Enterprise and the SIC. This is a three year project to help regenerate Unst and get the most from the remaining RAF/MoD buildings. Unst Response team is also there to assist any other businesses in the North Isles with their development.

- **Field Research Centre**

9.7 The UP had proposed to establish a research and education centre within the RAF camp, for the study of Unst's natural environment and archaeology. The University of the Highlands and Islands together with Shetland College, could potentially be the main drivers of the project. Further input could also be forthcoming through Shetland Amenity Trust (via their Viking Unst Project) and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). UP prepared a business plan for a European funding application in September 2001. This is still a possibility, using premises at RAF Saxa Vord

9.8 The main industrial estate in Unst is the HIE and SLAP owned site at Hagdale, Baltasound. This site has a number of new build business units on it that are all presently occupied.

- **Unst Airport**

9.9 The airport is owned and operated by Shetland Islands Council and remains an important asset for the community of Unst. The Council offered the airport to the Unst community in 2000. At present, the airport is under consideration as a possible means of bringing in tourists to Unst. Military Asset Management and the SIC are in discussion about this.

9.10

The airport is also a suitable site for further industrial activity given the

presence of existing infrastructure. Any new uses must not interfere with the current and future operation of the airport. The airport also has sufficient land to expand the runway in the future to accommodate different types of plane.

9.11

At present, a printing company, North Isles Industries, has been set up in two of the airport buildings

- **Aquaculture**

9.12 Unst is now an important local centre for the operation of the aquaculture industry, especially in Uyeasound. Over 30 people are currently employed on three salmon farms, a hatchery and two mussel farms. An innovative approach is being taken there and in other areas, with one farm in Baltasound achieving organic status. There is also an oyster farm at the south end of Baltasound.

- **Business Diversification**

9.13 A successful example of business diversification in Unst is the Valhalla Brewery at Baltasound which brews beers for sale in Shetland and the UK Mainland.

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Valhalla Brewery; Baltasound

9.14

Another example of business diversification is Unst Inshore Services who design, manufacture and maintain salmon farming equipment. They have now diversified into producing aluminium inshore boats ("Fluggaboats") This firm is located at the Hagdale industrial estate in Baltasound and offers its services throughout Shetland and beyond.

9.15

Other Unst businesses include the Hogan's Chocolate Factory and Café at Burrafirth, the Northern Lights Café at Uyeasound, the Baltasound Hotel, North Isles Pork who have a pig farm in Baltasound and Nornova Knitwear at Muness.

- **New Technology**

9.16 Telecroft 2000 had been operating in Unst at units 1 and 2 in the Hagdale Industrial Estate since 1991 Telecroft closed in 2005. Shetland College opened a Learning Centre in 2004 at Hagdale Industrial Estate this provides Adult Learning courses in a variety of subjects. It is also a study centre for online UHI courses.

- **Service Sector Jobs**

9.17 A considerable proportion of jobs in Unst remains in the service sector. These include jobs at the two remaining schools at Uyeasound and Baltasound, the ferry service, Nordalea Care Centre and the leisure centre. With the development of new technology and different ways of working, there remains considerable potential to expand this sector of employment within Unst. This could take the form of home working or the opening of satellite offices on behalf of the Council. Such initiatives will be welcome subject to other policies contained in the Development Plan.

early date, to provide a reasonable depth of water, and safe berthing to allow commercial activity to be undertaken. The newly formed Uyeasound Waterfront Trust regards this as its principal objective.

10.4 Housing

With a large number of vacant houses at Setters Hill Estate, there are opportunities here for development and population growth. The houses are owned by the MoD and are the subject of discussion with the SIC and Hjaltland Housing Association, who lease and sell some of the properties. There are three playparks on the estate which are locked at present as the MoD feel unable to maintain them.

Commercial Development

10.1 The three shops on Unst are all in Baltasound, with a post office there too. At present, neither Haroldswick nor Uyeasound has a local shop, although there is a café at Nornova Knitwear in Muness and in the Uyeasound Hall.

- **Henderson's Shop**

10.2 A recent development is the renovation of "Henderson's Shop" in Baltasound to provide additional retail space with three small craft units for rent.

10.3 To sustain and promote aquaculture in South Unst it is essential that a suitable breakwater/pier be constructed in Uyeasound, at an

Transport

11.1 The Council's inter-island ferry service offers a frequent and affordable connection to Yell and onwards to the Shetland Mainland. Without this level of service the social and economic future of Unst would be very bleak. The Bluemull Sound crossing has been free since September 2005 for a two-year period, in an attempt to encourage mobility in the North Isles.

- **Baltasound Pier**

11.2 Baltasound, a magnificent natural harbour, has a pier built by the SIC and a marina for local boats with one visitor's berth. The Voe is also used as a safe anchorage.

11.3 The new pier now allows for the future development and expansion of Unst's emerging fishing and aquaculture industries.

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Baltasound Harbour

- **Road Improvements**

11.4 Significant improvements are proposed for the A968 road at **Setters Quarry** and **Brookpoint** Phase 1, The Brookpoint section, was completed in April 2006

11. Bluemull Sound Fixed Link

11.8 Currently, there are few opportunities for Unst residents to commute to jobs outwith the island. This is due to the high cost and distance involved in commuting to Shetland's main centres of employment at Lerwick or Sullom Voe.

11.9 A recent survey of the Unst population determined that 85% of Unst residents were in favour of a fixed link to Yell. The joining of Unst and Yell by a fixed link could allow both islands to share a larger labour pool and industrial infrastructure. A detailed feasibility study is required to examine the possibility of constructing a fixed link across Bluemull Sound. This study will be dependent on positive results arising from an extensive geological study of the area. At this early stage it is anticipated that a tunnel would be the most cost effective option.

- **Public Transport**

11.10 There is a daily return bus service running from Unst through to Lerwick, except on Sundays.

Tourism

12.1 Unst has great potential for further tourism development with its rich wildlife, unique geology, extensive nature conservation areas and significant archaeological interest.

12.2 The bulk of tourists spend little time (and therefore money) in Unst and there is a need to encourage visitors to stay longer in the island. Whilst wet weather visitor facilities are limited on the island, there has been a number of improvements in recent years.

12.3 One example is the establishment of the Unst Boat Haven in Haroldswick. This community-run museum provides a splendid insight into Unst's maritime heritage.

12.4 Another example is the conversion of the former Haroldswick School by Shetland Amenity Trust (SAT) forming a New Heritage Centre, which opened in 2001. Another attraction is the visitor centre (summer only) for Hermaness National Nature Reserve at the head of Burra Firth in the old Muckle Flugga lighthouse shore base.

12.5 Baltasound now has considerable potential to attract specialised cruise ships during the summer. The North Isles Nature Ranger is to be based in Unst.

12.6 Unst is known for its traditional hand knitting (especially of fine lace shawls).

This is seen to offer considerable potential for the future development of tourism - for activity holidays, for specialist residential training courses and for retail sale to tourists. The Nornova sale room and workshop at Muness provides a focal point for the knitwear industry in Unst.

- **Visitor Accommodation**

12.7 Unst enjoys a wide range of tourist accommodation. These include a recently refurbished youth hostel in Uyeasound, a number of B&Bs and self-catering chalets/cottages. There is also a guesthouse and hotel in Baltasound. The Baltasound Hotel also provides the main restaurant and public bar on Unst.

12.8 Following the opening of the Unst Heritage Centre, SAT now propose to convert The Hamars at Haroldswick to form a new Camping Böd.

Proposal 3

Shetland Amenity Trust proposes to convert the Hamars at Haroldswick into a new Camping Böd in 2001/2002.

Development Opportunity

The Unst Community Council supports the establishment of a **campsite**. If a campsite is to be created, new public toilets will also have to be constructed. The area will also need some environmental improvements.

Development Opportunity

The Belmont Trust proposes to restore **Belmont House**, a category A listed building that occupies a prominent location overlooking the Belmont ferry terminal. It is anticipated at this stage that the building will provide high quality holiday accommodation and that there may be scope to use part of the building in ways that would maximise its potential as an asset to the community. Phase 1 is now complete. A funding package for Phase 2 is currently being assembled to allow the project to proceed.

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Belmont House

Recommendation 4

Subject to continuing funding being made available, it is proposed that Belmont House be restored to provide high quality holiday accommodation and an element of community use.

Development Opportunity

The establishment of an **Academic Research Centre**, in part of the existing RAF camp that is no longer required, has been suggested as a worthwhile economic and tourism development. The centre hopes to build on Unst's unique archaeological and natural heritage. It also has the potential to develop into another cultural tourism facility.

Recommendation 5

The feasibility of establishing an Academic Resource Centre in disused buildings at the RAF base needs to be taken forward by Unst Partnership, in consultation with Shetland College.

12.8 Further information on tourism in Unst is available on the following web site www.unst.org

Population and Housing

13.1 Unst’s resident population has been subject to fluctuation and decline since the early 1980s. This trend appeared to have accelerated during the 1990s with a fall of more than 11% in Unst’s population between 1992 and 1998. This situation was exacerbated with the virtual closure of Unst airport in 1996 and the recent drawdown of RAF Saxa Vord. It is now estimated that the island’s population is around 550.

13.2 This dramatic loss in population has resulted in a surplus of housing in Unst. One particular problem is Setters Hill housing estate that is situated in Baltasound and consists of 62 high quality homes. Due to the drawdown of RAF Saxa Vord approximately 24 of these houses are surplus to requirements and available for other uses. There are also 16 houses at Nordabrake and 5 at Taftens in Haroldswick. The Nordabrake and Taftens houses are now owned by Military Asset Management who intend to use them for tourist accommodation.

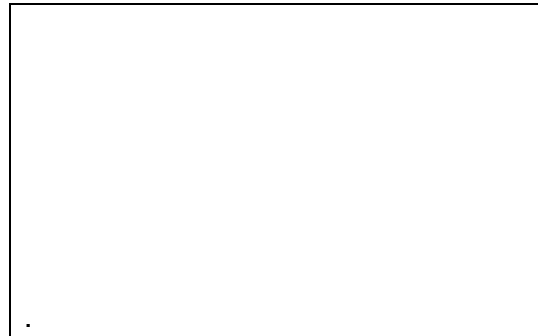
13.3
The rapid disposal of the houses in Setters Hill, Baltasound could undermine local property values and subsequently the local economy.

In 2000, Hjalmland Housing Association drew up an agreement with the MoD to lease 24 of the older houses and take possession for sale of another 14 at the front of the Estate. Six of these have now been sold. Hjalmland would now like to give up the older properties at the back of SHE and move their tenants into some of the more modern houses at the front. This is still under discussion with MoD.

The SIC is currently proposing to treat the houses at SHE as an addition to the existing housing supply in Unst. This effectively means that a minimum price will be attached to each, based on the assessed property value of the houses that are for sale to protect the local market.

The housing in Haroldswick is part of the Saxa Vord sale package purchased by Military Asset Management. There are Planning restrictions on these houses to prevent their open Market sale.

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Setters Hill Housing at Baltasound

- **Housing Zones**

13.4 Large areas of Haroldswick and Baltasound have been designated as Housing Zone 1, which means housing development is actively encouraged. Zone 2 areas have also been created adjacent to these Zone 1 areas and at Burrafirth, Westing and Uyeasound. In Zone 2 new housing development is favourably considered where it reflects existing settlement patterns.

13.5 The rest of the island is designated as Zone 4, where new housing development is strictly controlled. Further details of the housing zone requirements are set out in policy **LP HOU4**.

Community Services and Facilities

14.1 Unst’s fluctuating population and reduction of employment opportunities threatens the level of services available on the island. One of the island’s three schools closed in recent years and the level of pupils in the two remaining schools has dropped considerably with the draw down of the RAF base.

14.2 Nevertheless, Unst still has a Primary School at Uyeasound and a Junior High School with integrated Nursery/Primary School and Library at Baltasound.

14.3 Unst has 3 Community Halls located at Haroldswick, Baltasound and Uyeasound.

. See *Business and Industry section*.

14.5 There is a well equipped Leisure Centre at Baltasound with outdoor pitches.

