

Skerries Community Council Area Statement

See Skerries Proposals Map

Background

1.1 Standing in rugged isolation against the full force of North Sea storms, Out Skerries are a small group of islands and rocks lying about 9 miles (14 km.) east of the Shetland mainland and about 5 miles (8 km.) north-east of Whalsay.

1.2 Skerries has 3 main islands, Housay (West Isle) and Bruray (East Isle), which are joined by a bridge, and the presently uninhabited island of Grunay. The total land area is little more than one square mile. Skerries is a busy and industrious community which is heavily dependent on the natural resources of the sea for its economic survival.



The rugged Skerries coastline

Planning Context

2.1 The previous Local Plan that covered this Community Council area was the North Isles Local Plan, approved in April 1986. This Plan also covered Unst, Yell, Fetlar and Whalsay. Local planning aims for Skerries are:

- To seek ways to diversify the local economy.
- To conserve and enhance the natural and built environment.

- To sustain and develop the local population

Natural and Built Environment



Bridge (left) to West Isle

3.1 The exposed nature of these islands gives a rugged and windswept landscape, generally low-lying with rocky shores and dramatic cliffs. Gullies and geos break the low cliffs around much of the outer coastline West Voe lies between Housay and Bruray with a number of small sounds between the Islands, one of which broadens out to the east between Housay and Bruray to form the enclosed harbour.

3.2 The community on Skerries is scattered around the sheltered inner shores of the islands of Housay and Bruray, where the crofting townships are concentrated around the harbour. There are cultivated areas around the crofts, but much of the land is grazed moorland. There are no designated nature sites on Skerries.

Local Protection Areas (LPAs)

3.3 LPAs identified by residents are shown on the Proposals Map at the Old Village, the Battle Pund, the Burn, Bruray Hill and Lang Ayre. See policy **LP NE11** for further details.

Built Heritage

3.4 There are 3 Listed Buildings on Skerries, 1 category B (Bound Skerry Lighthouse) and 2 category C(s) (Bruray Harbour Shop and Grunay Lighthouse Keeper's House). Currently, there are 16 known archaeological sites in the area.

Coastal Management

4.1 The harbour has also been subject to recent dredging to allow larger fishing boats to use the pier. Navigation improvements in the form of buoys and beacons were installed at the harbour entrance in 2001, primarily to aid the ferry.

Water and Drainage

5.1 Skerries has a unique system of water collection using a man-made concrete collection area, bore holes and water storage tanks. Scottish Water has recently carried out enabling works to continue improvement of the water supply system.

5.2 Scottish Water plan to extend the outfall pipe from their existing septic tank to below the low watermark, sometime before 2006, to comply with various wastewater requirements and regulations. Other houses on Skerries have private septic tanks.

Waste Management

6.1 A community skip is provided on the islands for the disposal of bulky household refuse and there is a glass recycling point at the pier.

Energy

7.1 The exposed nature of these islands makes them a potential site for local wind and wave generated energy schemes. Sustainable energy efficiencies and reduced energy consumption can also be achieved through good design and siting of buildings.

Business and Industry

8.1 In 2001 a total of 40 jobs (21 full-time and 19 part-time) were available on Skerries. The main employers on the island are the industries connected with the sea, including deep sea and inshore fishing and aquaculture. Several fishing boats are based at the harbour and there are fish cages in the sounds, with associated on-shore facilities. The Council recently completed dredging of the harbour to allow it to be used by larger boats.

8.2 The salmon packing station is located at the island's ferry terminal and the salmon farm shore base is located at West Voe, West Isle. These two sites are the preferred, but not the only locations for further industrial development on the islands. (See *Local Plan policies LP IND4 and LP IND5*).



Fish cages

8.3 Currently, both the aquaculture and fishing industries are under intense pressure and highly vulnerable to external influences that are outwith the local community's control. The need to diversify the islands' economic base is clearly apparent, however, Skerries' remote location has in the past severely limited what could be achieved.

8.4 The increasing availability of new technology can help to change this situation, by allowing new activities that were previously impossible.

8.5 One successful initiative in Skerries is the small START centre at Parkside, West Isle. The centre offers IT facilities, including an archiving service that puts paper information onto computer discs. This type of work can bring important employment opportunities for island residents.



Staff at the START centre

Tourism

weekly from Lerwick and 10 times per week from Vidlin.

9.1 Ornithology plays an important part in attracting tourists to Skerries. Another attraction is the islands' very remoteness. The adventure of going to Skerries will always attract tourists to the islands. There are also good walks and interesting archaeology, fauna and flora for the enthusiast to study. Holiday accommodation on the islands is available with a number of private houses offering B&B accommodation, one self-catering unit is also available.

Development Opportunity

The old building known as the Waster Böd is of local historic interest and has potential to be developed as part of the network of Shetland camping böds.

Recommendation 1

It is recommended that ways and methods of bringing forward the development of Waster Böd as a camping böd are investigated with the community, Shetland Amenity Trust and other funding and interested parties.

Development Opportunity

Lowrie's Cottage has been suggested for restoration and possible conversion to a heritage centre/café. A number of artefacts from wrecks off the coast of Skerries are stored and on loan to the Shetland Museum. The residents are looking for opportunities and premises in which to display them.

Recommendation 2

It is recommended that Islanders are encouraged and assisted to identify ways and methods of bringing forward the restoration of Lowrie's Cottage.

Transport

10.1 Frequent and affordable ferry links to the Shetland mainland are vital for the economic and social survival of the community. Skerries is served by a passenger and vehicle ferry which departs from a pier in the harbour, running twice

Proposal 3

The existing ferry 'Filla' has insufficient passenger capacity to meet demand. A new ferry is to be built and it is planned to be brought into service by the spring of 2003. Some improvements works including dredging and a breakwater may be required to accommodate the new vessel.



The bridge between the East and West Isles

10.2 A short stretch of road, less than a mile (1.6km.) long, runs around the harbour, through the settlements and across the bridge connecting the East Isle and the West Isle. There are a number of blind bends on the road.

Recommendation 4

It is recommended that the Council carries out a road safety audit on Skerries to establish where and what level of road improvements are required.

10.3 New petrol pumps were installed in 1996 with assistance from Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the European Union.

10.4 There is a gravel airstrip on Bruray with regular flights from Tingwall Airport. The Skerries Airstrip Trust proposes to install lighting and extend the runway as soon as feasible.

Population and Housing

11.1 The population has been gradually falling, the 2001 Census records the population as 76 residents. Skerries future population is highly dependent on the success or otherwise of its local industries.

This makes future population forecasting very difficult.



Bridge (foreground) to West Isle (Housay)

11.2 There are 5 Local Authority houses on Skerries, including 3 "temporary" chalet units. In addition 2 new private houses have been built during the past decade.

• Housing Zones

11.3 The populated areas on the East and West Isles have been designated as Housing Zone 1, where housing development is actively encouraged.

11.4 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** and shown on the Proposals Map.

Community Services and Facilities

• Education

12.1 Skerries' Junior High School with its integrated Primary School has 13 pupils in 2001. The school plays a vital social and economic role in the community and is one of the main factors that helps to sustain the islands' population levels. Much of the school's accommodation is in temporary classrooms and there is a need for substantial upgrading.

Proposal 4

The school is currently subject to major improvement and refurbishment. A nursery unit is to be added, with additional improvements to teaching facilities for the secondary school curriculum, which include a new science room and a craft, design and technical room.



The existing Skerries School

- **Other facilities**

12.2 A multi-court and children's play area are adjacent to the school. The public hall, which was opened in 1981 and extended in 1986, to house a poolroom and bar area is on the West Isle. A feasibility study on extending and refurbishing the hall was undertaken in the Spring of 2003.

Proposal 5

In conjunction with the proposed building works at the school, the multi-court will be reinstated and the children's play area re-located to the east of existing site and refurbished.

12.3 There are 2 shops and a post office on Skerries. The islands' 18 berth marina is at Stringa Voe.

12.4 There is one church and a burial ground, which has recently been extended. The islands have a resident nurse and are served by the doctor based in Whalsay. The volunteer fire fighters are based next to the airstrip on the East Isle.

12.5 The community has expressed the desire for a community building in addition to the hall, which would provide premises which could be used for a community library, Community Council meeting place and document store, a video conferencing facility, possible heritage centre, history group meeting place and archive, children's art display and travelling exhibition space, local knitwear and craft display and marketing location.

Recommendation 6

It is recommended that the Council and the local community work together to identify accommodation on the islands for additional community activities.

