

## Walls and Sandness Community Council Area Statement

See Area Proposals Map.

### Background

**1.1** The Walls and Sandness Community Council area covers almost half of the area of Shetland known as the “Wastside”. The inhabited islands of Foula, Vaila and Papa Stour are also included.

**1.2** This predominantly crofting area, with large areas of open moorland studded with hundreds of freshwater lochs, has seen limited development pressure over recent decades. Consequently, the Community Council is anxious to treat new development in a positive manner.

**1.3** The principal settlements of Walls and Sandness are located in areas of improved grassland. Much of the remaining population live in houses scattered in the landscape or in small crofting townships.

### Planning Context

**2.1** The previous Local Plan that covered the Walls and Sandness Community Council area was the West, South and Central Interim Local Plan that was approved in 1992. Local planning aims for Walls and Sandness area are:

- **To seek ways to diversify the local economy**
- **To improve transport links with the rest of Shetland**
- **To conserve and enhance the natural and built environment**

### Natural and Built Environment

**3.1** The village of **Walls** is the largest settlement in the area and acts as a small service centre providing the local needs of a largely scattered rural community. There are 7 listed buildings in Walls, 3 B listed and 4 C(s). There is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) at the Lochs of Kirkigarth and Bardister.

**3.2 Sandness** is a small crofting township of approximately 130 people that enjoys a

spectacular setting overlooking St. Magnus Bay and the island of Papa Stour. Sandness has Shetland’s only wool spinning mill. There are 5 B listed buildings in Sandness and a number of archaeological remains including several burial cairns and a ruined broch. An SSSI has been designated for geological reasons along the Sandness foreshore. The foreshore at Sandness is also part of the Papa Stour marine candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC) (see below).

**3.3** There are also SSSIs notified at Sel Ayre for geology interests, Fidlar Geo to Wats Ness for geology reasons and the Lochs of Kirkigarth and Bardister are noted for aquatic plants.

**3.4** The island of **Papa Stour** is located 2 miles (3.5km) off the west coast of the Shetland mainland. The waters around Papa Stour are identified as a cSAC and recognised as being of international conservation importance due to their rocky reefs and sea caves. For thousands of years powerful waves and tides have battered and scoured the rugged coastline of the island. The sea has sculpted the volcanic rock, creating dramatic cliffs, voes and geos, natural arches, teetering stacks and clusters of skerries. The sea caves here are amongst the best in the UK.

**3.5** Papa Stour has a small crofting population of less than 25 with housing and cultivated fields concentrated around Housa Voe and the south-eastern corner of the island where there is a dirt air-strip. There are 2 listed buildings, a category B and category C(s). Much of the uninhabited part of the island is designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA) and also as a SSSI for botanical, geological and ornithological reasons. The intertidal part of Papa Stour has also been designated as a cSAC. See *Coastal Management section*.

**3.6** There is a pier in Housa Voe for the ferry from West Burrafirth. The remainder of the island consists of moorland and small lochs. In addition to crofting, some people fish part-time in their own boats or on other Shetland vessels. A small number of visitors come to the island for ornithology, walking, canoeing and sub-aqua diving.

**3.7** One of the UK's remotest islands, **Foula** lies approximately 20 km to the west of the Shetland Mainland. Cliffs, stacks and geos dominate its magnificent rocky coastline. The cliffs are largely sheer along the most exposed north and west coasts where, with a vertical drop of 360m, some of the highest sea cliffs in the UK are to be found. Its seabird population is of international importance with 18 species breeding on the island. There are two SSSIs on Foula: one for biological interest covering the whole island, with the other overlapping site restricted to the coastline and is notified for the geology of its dramatic coastline. Foula also lies in Shetland's National Scenic Area (NSA) and is a Special Protection Area (SPA) for birds.

**3.8** The small resident population of less than 30 live on the narrow eastern coastal strip in a number of small crofting townships. Foula has a small pier in Ham Voe for the ferry from Walls. There are 2 C(s) listed buildings on Foula and numerous archaeological remains. Crofting and fishing still play an important role in the islanders' way of life, but tourism and modern technology are becoming increasingly important.

**3.9** **Vaila** is a privately owned island that lies off Walls. The island enjoys a spectacular natural setting and the current owner has successfully restored the 3 category B listed buildings on the island.

- **Local Protection Areas (LPAs)**

**3.10** At the "Plan Ahead" meetings held in 1999 a number of LPAs were identified by local residents to help preserve certain aspects of the local environment. In Walls, 2 LPAs were identified to protect important local views and one to protect the open area in the centre of the village around the War Memorial. In Gruting, 3 LPAs were identified, to protect the setting of the Staney Dale Temple site and at Gruting Ness to protect another important archaeological site. In Sandness, a LPA was identified at Little Bousta to preserve the view (see proposals map).

## Energy

**4.1** There is tremendous renewable energy potential in the Walls and Sandness area with its many miles of

exposed coastline and open moorland. Although, as yet, no interest has been expressed in developing commercial wind farms there have been indications that a wave power scheme may be developed at Dale of Walls. With any renewable energy scheme it is vital that the impact on the environment and local residents is minimised. The lack of a connection to the national grid does, however, limit the potential for further development.

## Coastal Management

**5.1** There are a number of shore bases within the area where further expansion and development of the aquaculture industry would be the preferred first option. However, not all of the existing bases are suitable for expansion and advice should be sought.

- **UK marine candidate Special Areas of Conservation**

**5.2** A management scheme has been developed for the Papa Stour marine Special Area of Conservation (cSAC) was identified due to the unique reefs and sea caves found within the site. Papa Stour's coastline and surrounding waters and part of the Sandness coast and adjacent sea are also included (see proposals map). Further information on the unique qualities of the site can be found in the Sandness Coast Interpretive Plan.

**5.3** Local input into this project has been guaranteed through the marine cSACs Advisory Panel. It is intended that this panel will continue to play an important role in future marine cSACs throughout Shetland.

**5.4** **The Vadils in West Burrafirth** has been designated as a Marine Consultation Area.

## Water and Drainage

**6.1** Both Walls and Sandness have wastewater collection schemes although the scattered nature of the settlements means that many properties still use private septic tanks. In order to comply with the Shellfish Directive Scottish Water proposes in 2004/2005 to undertake improvements to existing wastewater collection in Vaila Sound. A new septic

tank will be constructed at Walls pier before 2006.

#### Proposal 1

**Scottish Water proposes to undertake improvements to the existing wastewater collection in Vaila Sound during 2004/2005.**

**6.2** Scottish Water has also implemented improvements to water quality and supply in recent years. Scottish Water also propose to undertake a number of water quality improvements on **Papa Stour** and **Foula** and at **West Burrafirth**, where the area will be connected to the supply from Eela Water, and.

#### Proposal 2

**Scottish Water proposes to undertake improvements to water quality at West Burrafirth in 2002/03 and Papa Stour (phase 2) in 2003/2004.**

**Scottish Water proposes to undertake improvements to water quality at Foula (WTW) in 2005/2006.**

#### Waste Management

**7.1** Rural skips are provided at Walls, Breibister, Gruting, West Burrafirth and Sandness. There is also a glass recycling collection point at Walls, Foula and Papa Stour and a collection point for used batteries at Walls.

#### Minerals

**8.1** At present there are no operating commercial quarries in the Walls and Sandness Community Council area. However, considerable potential exists to reinstate a number of unsightly roadside borrow pits that have been established in the past. This is particularly important where the sites have been used for fly tipping.

#### Business and Industry

**9.1** In common with much of Shetland, crofting helps to underpin the local economy and social fabric of the Sandness and Walls area. With crofting incomes declining, croft diversification is

becoming more necessary if a sustainable future is to be realised.

- **Fishing**

**9.2** Fishing activity in the area is now limited to a few small inshore boats.

- **Knitwear**

**9.3** In Sandness, Shetland's only spinning mill employs a number of local people. In 1996 the mill was expanded with assistance from the Council and Shetland Enterprise. The mill also contains a shop that sells knitwear products.

**9.4** Several small craft businesses are located throughout the area.

- **Aquaculture**

**9.5** As in other areas of Shetland, aquaculture has become an important industry in helping to diversify and sustain the local economy. In recent years, the village of Walls has developed as a local centre for the aquaculture industry with a number of salmon farms located in nearby voes. Mussel farming has now become established on a number of sites. There is also considerable potential for the farming of other species as and when technology develops.

**9.6** Whilst this new industrial activity is welcomed, its future development has to be considered with regard to the amenity of local residents and the effects on the natural environment. In particular, further on-shore investment in the industry needs to be concentrated at suitable existing shore-base sites.



**Aquaculture Shore Base and Mussel Depuration Plant at Walls**

- **Industrial Estates**

**9.7** Walls has a small industrial estate with one building constructed on it that is being extended to house a mussel processing unit. This site is the preferred location in the village for land based industrial development. There are no proposals to provide additional industrial land in the area for the life of the Plan. There is also an industrial estate in Sandness that is largely occupied by the Sandness Spinning Mill.

- **Home Working**

**9.8** Further business or industrial developments that help retain the local population and generate additional job opportunities are welcomed throughout the area, provided they do not conflict with other policies contained in the Development Plan. In particular, given the significant distance to Shetland's main employment centres at Lerwick and Sullom Voe, home working and the use of modern technology needs to be encouraged where residential amenity is not compromised.

- **Sandness Crofting and Development Association**

**9.9** Sandness Crofting and Development Association was established in 1999. The main aim of the Association is to try to ensure that Sandness remains an active crofting community into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A number of environmental projects have been promoted including a coastal community walkway, tree planting, and completing the restoration of the Huxter water mills. There are also longer term plans to develop a marine interpretation centre in the Sandness community hall. See *Community Services and Facilities section*.

<b>Tourism</b>
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**10.1** The area's outstanding natural environment attracts significant numbers of day visitors. However, tourist accommodation is limited within the area and there are few wet weather facilities available to encourage longer stays. Despite this, there have been some improvements in recent years. Notable examples include:

- **Voe House**

**10.2** Voe House, a category B listed building, now forms part of Shetland's extensive camping Böd network. The building, fully restored by Shetland Amenity Trust in 1998, now offers affordable accommodation for visitors. A particularly attractive feature of Voe House is the restored rear garden that offers an important recreational resource for visitors and the local community alike.

**10.3** Shetland Amenity Trust intend to rebuild and restore the derelict southern wing of the building providing accommodation for the Shetland Working Textile Museum, which is being re-located from the Weisdale Mill. It is anticipated that the Trust will be able to start the building work sometime during 2004.



**Voe House and Garden at Walls**

<b>Proposal 3</b>
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<p><b>Shetland Amenity Trust proposes rebuilding and restoring the southern portion of Voe House to provide premises for the Shetland Textile Working Museum. Work on site will begin during 2004.</b></p>
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- **Mid Walls Equestrian Centre**

**10.4** The new Equestrian Centre at Mid Walls was opened in 2001. This purpose built facility offers Shetland's only indoor riding school for use by local residents and tourists.



**Equestrian Centre at Mid Walls**

**10.5** In 1995, Burrastow House, the area's only hotel and a category C(s) listed building, was extended to offer additional high quality tourist accommodation.

**10.6** In addition to the above, there are also a small number of self-catering cottages and bed and breakfasts operating in the area.

**10.7** Visiting sailors are also welcome to berth at the Walls marina and make use of the Walls Boating Club and swimming pool facilities

#### **Commercial Development**

**11.1** In 1992 a new bakery was constructed at Walls, together with a new village shop, petrol pumps and post office. This important development in the heart of the village received significant financial support from the SIC Development Department and Shetland Enterprise.

**11.2** Papa Stour has a part-time post office.

#### **Development Opportunity**

The building formally occupied by the bakery lies in the heart of the village of Walls. Despite being in a poor condition this building has considerable potential for re-use. Possible new uses could include a restaurant/café or small museum. Alternatively, the building could be converted for business or residential use.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**An opportunity exists for the refurbishment of the former Walls bakery building. Possible new uses could be a small museum,**

**restaurant/café, craft centre, business or residential use.**

#### **Transport**

**12.1** A bus service operates three times daily between Walls and Lerwick and feeder services connect to it from Dale of Walls and Sandness. This service forms a vital link to Lerwick. Given the scattered nature of the population there seems little prospect of significantly improving this service during the life of this Plan.

#### **Proposed Major Road Schemes**

**12.2** It is proposed that the **A971** road will be upgraded to a two lane standard between the **Park Hall** and **West Burrafirth** junctions. This work is intended to commence in 2002 and be completed by 2003/4.

#### **Proposal 5**

**The Council proposes to upgrade the A971 road to a two lane standard between the Park Hall and West Burrafirth junctions.**

**12.3** In the longer term, improvements are also planned for the **A971 West Burrafirth Junction to Bridge o' Walls**. This uncommitted scheme involves the realignment and widening to a 2-lane standard of a 2.5-km. stretch of roadway.

#### **Footway/Lighting Improvements**

**12.4** In order to improve pedestrian road safety the Council proposes to construct a new footway with street lighting to link a number of community facilities in Walls.

#### **Proposal 6**

**The Council proposes in 2004/2005 to construct a new footway and street lighting to improve pedestrian access and safety in the centre of Walls.**

#### **Ferries**

**12.5** The ferry to and from Papa Stour operates from West Burrafirth. The ferry to and from Foula operates from Walls pier and on certain days to Scalloway.

## New Pier for Papa Stour

**12.6** The Council proposes to construct a new pier on Papa Stour in 2003/4 to accommodate a new ferry. As part of the development public toilet have been provided and some additional tourist interpretation is proposed. Ro-Ro facilities will also be installed at the pier at West Burrafirth.

### Proposal 7

**The Council proposes to build a new pier with Ro-Ro facilities and public toilets at Housa Voe on Papa Stour.**

#### • Internal Air Links

**12.7** Both Papa Stour and Foula have dirt airstrips that are served from Tingwall airport.

### Population and Housing

**13.1** The population of the Sandness and Walls Community Council area is in gradual decline. In 1981 the population was recorded at 775 persons. By the 1991 census this had fallen by 8.25% to 711 people. Recent population projections by the SIC Planning Service show that, should this trend continue, by the year 2011 the population will have further fallen to around 573 people. Consequently, new house building in the area has been slow over the past decade with an average of only 3 completions per annum since 1994.

**13.2** Local Authority sheltered housing units (now also available for general needs) are located in Walls and Sandness. There are also a number of general needs Council housing units in Walls.

**13.3** Hjaltland Housing Association constructed 6 new houses for rent in Sandness in 2000. These affordable, modern housing units have been a welcome addition to the village.

**13.4** In Walls, planning permission was granted in 2000 for the erection of 4 Hjaltland Housing Association homes for rent. Following consultation with the local community regarding the level of housing need, Hjaltland constructed the 4 houses which are now occupied.

#### • Housing Zones

**13.5** The village of Walls has been designated as Housing Zone 1 together with the settled areas of Foula, which means housing developments are actively encouraged in these areas. Zone 2 areas have also been created at Walls, Mid Walls, Dale of Walls, Bridge of Walls, Gruting, West Burrafirth, Sandness, Foula and the east side of Papa Stour. In Zone 2 new housing development is favourably considered where it reflects existing settlement patterns.

**13.6** The rest of the area 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** Currently there are 4 community halls/centres in the Walls and Sandness area. These are located in Gruting, Walls (Walls Hall and Gerमतwatt Centre) and Sandness. Foula and Papa Stour utilise their primary schools for community activities.

**14.2** The Sandness Hall committee hopes that their hall could be refurbished and extended in the near future. This initiative is subject to sufficient funding being available. An important addition to the Hall could be the provision of a small marine interpretation centre to assist the interpretation of the Papa Stour Marine cSAC. See *Built and Natural Environment section*.

### Recommendation 8

**It is recommended that the Council work with the Sandness community and all other relevant funding agencies to progress the modernisation and extension of the Sandness Hall**

**14.3** It is not considered necessary to expand the Foula or Sandness primary schools in the life of this Plan. It is intended that the Papa Stour school will be mothballed in 2002 if no families with children settle on the island. The Council also proposes to extend the Wall's Happyhansel School and assess the future use of Sandness School in line with

the findings of the Best Value Review of Education.

**14.4** In 1992/3 the Wastview Care Centre was constructed on a site adjacent to the new Walls Health Centre that was itself built in 1991. The new care centre incorporates residential and day care facilities and performs a major service in the area as well as being a significant local employer.

**14.5** The new Wall's swimming pool is owned and run by the local community and is a well used facility which is available for private hire. The village of Walls also has a 30-berth marina and boating club.

**14.6** Public toilets are located at the pier in Walls and the former Papa Stour ferry terminal at Sandness. There is a current proposal to construct a new public toilet in Papa Stour as part of a new pier development. The building will also include a multi-purpose room for use by the Doctor etc. *See Transport section.*

**Development Opportunity**

The **Huxter Mills** at Sandness were partially restored by Shetland Amenity Trust in 1997. There is, however, a need for further work to be undertaken in order to secure the buildings' future.

**Proposal 9**

**Shetland Amenity Trust proposes to complete the restoration of the Huxter Water Mills in Sandness.**

