

Whalsay Community Council Area Statement

See Whalsay Proposals Map

Background

1.1 The island of Whalsay, lying off Shetland's east coast is known locally as "the bonny isle", the island is 5 miles (8 km.) long by 2 miles (3.2 km.) wide. The main hub of activity is round the harbour area at Symbister. There is some crofting, but Whalsay is heavily dependent on fishing for its economic survival. The island has a thriving and dynamic community.

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, Skerries, Yell & Fetlar. Local planning aims for Whalsay 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

3.1 The exposed nature of the island has formed a rugged and windswept landscape, generally low-lying with rocky shores and dramatic cliffs. There are no designated nature sites on Whalsay.

3.2 Whalsay's main settlement is Symbister, with most of the other dwellings clustered around the NW coast in crofting townships, principally Brough and Skaw, with Isbister on the east coast.

• Built Heritage

3.3 Whalsay's heritage is rooted in the fishing industry. The harbour at Symbister has developed over centuries and is at the heart of the community. Historic trading links with Europe have left a legacy of many fine and interesting buildings.



Symbister Harbour

3.4 Symbister House, a category B Listed Building, dominates Symbister. Constructed of Nesting granite in the early 1800s, this substantial building is one of the best examples of Georgian architecture in the north of Scotland. The building has been used as the island's school since the 1960s and has recently been extensively refurbished by the Council.



Symbister House

3.5 There are 5 other Listed Buildings on Whalsay, 2 category B (Ness Kirk and Symbister Pier House and New Dock) and 3 category C(s) – all in Symbister: Harbour View, Skeo and the SW Dock and Sheds.

3.6 There are currently 74 known archaeological sites on the Island, 7 of which are scheduled.

3.7 The Community Council has identified several sites as requiring environmental improvements: the Fish-House/Cooperage and Small Dock area in Symbister, the Yoxie & Beenie House (which needs paths/signage and interpretation) and the site between the school playground and the new sports pitch (which would be improved by hard surfacing).

Local Protection Area (LPAs)

3.8 Local residents have identified an area at Kirk Ness as a LPA in order to retain the view of the Kirk and its surroundings. The Local Plan policy **LP NE11** and the Proposals Map provide further details.

Coastal Management

4.1 Coastal protection works have been carried out at Bayview, Kirk Ayre and Symbister Ness. In general the Island has a "hard" coastline, but sea level rise is a cause for concern and care needs to be taken when planning waterfront developments.

4.2 There is also a need for further coastal protection works at Symbister North Voe, Suther Ness Ayre and Kirkness Ayre.

Recommendation 1

It is recommended that a survey be undertaken to identify problems arising from sea level rise and coastal erosion at Symbister, North Voe, Suther Ness Ayre and Kirkness Ayre.

Water and Drainage

5.1 The island's water supply originates from Bu Water and the Loch of Huxter. The supply is more than adequate to meet the island's needs.

5.2 There are existing wastewater schemes at Saltness, Clett and Brough. Many of the houses have individual septic tanks. Scottish Water completed a new septic tank at Huxter in 2001 and a new sewerage system for Isbister in 2000, at a cost of over £250,000. To comply with national wastewater and pollution legislation, Scottish Water will be constructing a new septic tank at Saltness before 2006 and implementing a first time wastewater scheme at Marrister.

5.3 There is a need to extend the fire hydrant system, particularly in the Brough to Skaws area and in Lower Isbister.

Waste Management

6.1 In addition to the domestic refuse collection service, a skip is provided at Crugafirth, Marrister, giving residents convenient disposal for bulky household items. There are collection points for used batteries at two of the shops and there is a glass recycling collection bank at the ferry terminal.

Energy

7.1 The exposed nature of Whalsay makes it a potential site for wind or wave energy schemes. A scheme to provide power for the island may be feasible at sometime in the future. Sustainable energy efficiencies and reduced energy consumption can be achieved through good design and siting of buildings.

Minerals

8.1 Redgrind Quarry, Brough, is the only operational quarry on Whalsay supplying most of the rock for local building needs.

Business and Industry

9.1 Employment figures from 2000 show that 384 people on Whalsay were employed; of those, 296 were in full-time and 88 in part-time employment.

- **Fishing**

9.2 Fish catching and processing is the mainstay of the Whalsay economy. To sustain the industry it is important to protect the surrounding waters from pollution or anything that endangers the rich, clean water around the Island. The recently expanded modern harbour supports a fleet of 'state of the art' commercial fishing boats. Current changes and difficulties in the industry have placed the economy of Whalsay under severe pressure. Whalsay Fish processing factory in Symbister, is one of the largest employers on the island.



Three of Whalsay's pelagic fishing fleet

9.3 Improvements have been carried out by the Council to improve facilities for small fishing boats at Symbister harbour.

9.4 Apart from deep-sea fishing, there is a salmon farm at North Voe. Some potting for crustaceans also takes place around the inshore rocky areas. There is a perceived need within the community that there needs to be more of a balance between the economic aspect of fish-farming and its effects on the natural environment.

• **Other Employment**

9.5 There is a need to diversify the economic base of the island, as about half of all the jobs are directly connected to the fishing industry. There is only a limited amount of agricultural and crofting activity. The regular and affordable ferry service enables Island residents to commute to work. Manufacturing and service jobs account for the majority of the other jobs, which include, home-knitting, shops, office workers, school staff and ferry crew.

9.6 There is a need for a small industrial / business site, possibly at the Loch of Houll, for small start-up-units to be developed.

Proposal 2

Land north of the Loch of Houll as shown on the Whalsay Proposals Map is identified as an area for industrial/business development.

Tourism

10.1 Whalsay has many interesting sites and activities. The Island has been inhabited since 3,000 BC and there is a wealth of buildings and artefacts dating through the ages. Neolithic remains, standing stones, Bronze Age mounds, an Iron Age fort and Viking implements all track the development of the Island. In more recent times the development of the harbour and trading links with Europe have left several fine buildings around the harbour. The Hanseatic Booth, converted in 1984 to a museum and interpretative centre, is a prime tourist attraction.

10.2 There is a wealth of wildlife on land and sea. Trout fishing is available on the fresh water lochs.

• **Tourist Accommodation**

10.3 A camping böd and several self-catering units provide accommodation for visitors.

10.4 There is a restaurant/bar with 2 holiday chalets at Livister.

10.5 The island also has the UK's most northerly 18-hole golf course, which is fully registered and has a clubhouse and all modern facilities.

Recommendation 3

To help diversify Whalsay's economy, it is recommended that additional tourist facilities, for example additional B&B accommodation, trout fishing and a café are developed.

Commercial Development

11.1 There are four general stores and one electrical retailer on Whalsay. All are in Symbister; two of the general stores sell fuel and one operates the post office. SHOARD (Whalsay Disability and Special Need Support Group) run a charity shop on three afternoons a week at the old Brough primary school.

Transport

12.1 Frequent and affordable ferry links to the mainland are vital for the social and economic well being of the community.

12.2 Ferries to Whalsay (Symbister) run from Laxo on the mainland (or Vidlin in extreme weather) approximately 16 times/day.

12.3 Whalsay has a gravel airstrip, but there are no scheduled flights.

12.4 The Community Council has requested footpaths and/or street lighting on the road from **Saeter to Sandwick** and from **Symbister to Hamister**, but no date for the work has been confirmed. There is general dissatisfaction with the state of the roads on Whalsay, the Community Council has drawn-up a list of their priorities.

12.5 The Council's current programmed annual road maintenance schedule includes the following projects; Symbister School crossing, Isbister Hall Summit, Harlsdale passing place, Symbister, Brough crossroads visibility improvement, Hillhead Road new footpath, Marrister road widening.

Population and Housing

13.1 The population of Whalsay combined with Skerries increased very slightly from 1,113 in 1981 to 1,116 in 1991, but by 2001 the number living in Whalsay had fallen to 1034. In the past ten years Health Board patient figures show the population has started to decline, but projections suggest that the population should remain fairly stable. This trend may be reversed if the fishing industry is subject to further setbacks.

13.2 New housing has been relatively buoyant over the past decade, with an average of 6 house completions per year since 1994.

13.3 The Council has an existing stock of over 40 general needs houses on the Island. In early 1998, Hjalmland Housing Association completed 14 new houses for rent at North Park. Two of the houses are in shared ownership.

Housing Zones

13.4 All the populated areas of Whalsay have been designated as housing Zone 1, where housing development is encouraged. The rest of the Island is designated as Zone 4; new housing development in this zone is strictly controlled. Further details of the housing zone requirements are set out in policy **LP HOU 4** and shown on the Proposals Map.

Community Services and Facilities

Schools

14.1 Whalsay School formerly known as Symbister House, comprises a primary school with nursery unit and a junior high school. In 2001, there were 189 pupils. The school roll has increased slightly in recent years, and has been fairly stable for the past fifteen years.

Leisure Facilities

14.2 Whalsay has a modern leisure centre and swimming pool with viewing and refreshment areas. A multi-court is located next to the centre. In addition, there are two children's play areas on the island, one near Whalsay School at Charlestown and one at Brough. There is also a Youth Centre in Livister and a Snooker Club in Symbister.



Leisure Centre and Primary School Buildings

14.3 Whalsay has a Boating Club and there is also a Marina run by its Users Association. The marina has recently been extended and provides berthing for over 70 craft.



Whalsay marina, Symbister

- **Community Facilities**

14.4 In Symbister there are two halls, the community hall and the church hall. The community hall at Isbister, built in 1907, was refurbished and extended in October 2000 at a cost of £355,000. The island's Kirk and burial ground are at Brough.

14.5 The doctor's surgery is located in Symbister. The Fernlea (Anderson Wishart) Care Centre at Marrister provides short-term and long-term residential care and day care for older people and adults over 16.

14.6 The police station and the fire volunteers are both based in Symbister.



Fernlea Care Centre, Marrister

14.7 A new synthetic sports field developed next to the leisure centre, was completed in 2002.

14.8 The Midden Court, a Listed Building forming part of the Symbister House complex is unused and in need of restoration. When resources allow, the Whalsay History Group would like to see the building restored as a local history museum.

Proposal 4

Shetland Amenity Trust will undertake the project to restore the Midden Court on behalf of the Whalsay History Group. The first phase of this three phase project is the refurbishment of the North Range of buildings including the Farmer's House.



Midden Court

14.8 The local community has identified a need for an adult education centre with special needs facilities for both adults and children. There would also need to be access to computers to help facilitate long distance learning.

Recommendation 5

It is recommended that the community investigate ways and means of establishing an adult education centre to provide distance learning and special needs facilities for both adults and children.

