Eriskay Community Climate Action Plan

Background

Climate change in the Western Isles of Scotland

Climate change is affecting the ways we live and work in a range of ways. The most obvious and visible ways include increasingly regular and extreme weather events, including storms and uncertain temperatures including both very hot and very cold periods, as well as sea level rises. These factors affect the Western Isles, and Uist in particular, in ways which are often more marked than other areas. Uist is the lowest-lying land mass in the UK and is therefore particularly vulnerable to sea level rises. Storms have affected the islands for a long time and their increasing ferocity threatens critical infrastructure including roads, ferry connections and both electricity and internet connectivity.

Without action, it is likely that these conditions will worsen and increasingly affect those living in the Western Isles, threatening their homes and livelihoods. Action can be taken in a range of ways, including through reducing carbon emissions and adapting to extreme weather events. Some of these aspects can be undertaken by public and private actors on a large scale. However, there are a range of activities which can be undertaken at the community level, which is the focus of this report.

Community climate action

Carbon emissions can be reduced through fundamental changes in industrial processes and moving away from our reliance on fossil fuels. However, the majority of the changes we need to make to achieve a transition to lower emissions are societal and rely on individual behaviour change. While national governments may be able to incentivise certain actions through both encouraging good practice and punishing those who do not conform, ultimately these measures are punitive and may not lead to long term changes in attitudes towards the environment. Rather, it has been found that such behaviours are best encouraged and changed at a community level.

The presence of respected community organisations publicly promoting climate action and behaviour change introduces a peer-led element which has a far greater chance of leading to improved climate behaviours. Further, when developing a plan for reducing emissions, community organisations can be cognisant of factors within the community which may render some forms of action harmful to other facets of sustainable development, such as curbing certain industries. Through connecting environmental aspects to social and economic ones, community organisations can ensure a ‘just transition’ to net-zero through reducing emissions without negatively affecting the local economy or community. For these reasons, the community level is increasingly being looked to as one of the most important actors in tackling climate change.

Eriskay

Eriskay is an island towards the southern end of the Western Isles. It has a population of around 120 permanent residents predominantly working in the sectors of fishing and agriculture. The island has been connected to South Uist via a causeway since 2001 and has a regular ferry service to the island of Barra.

Eriskay has a small number of community organisations, managing the community hall and shop, the community council, football team and Eriskay Pony Society. The main anchor organisation is the Eriskay Historical Society (Comann Eachdraidh Eirisgeidh- CEE) which has one permanent member of

staff. CEE recently purchased the mothballed Eriskay Primary School via a Community Asset Transfer and is in the process of developing the building into a Community Hub which will house CEE as well as providing a number of services for residents and visitors alike.

Eriskay Community Climate Action Plan

CEE recognise the potential impact of climate change on the island, its people and economy and have been proactive in encouraging greater local climate action. The first stage of this was the development of a Community Climate Action Plan to promote the importance of local action while generating support and identifying priorities. The development of this plan was made possible by a Highlands and Islands Community Climate Grant, funded by the British Science Association and UKRI and coordinated by Science Ceilidh. The grant paid for the time of a researcher, Dr Bobby Macaulay of the University of the Highlands and Islands, to collaborate with CEE in the development of the plan.

The following sections will outline the plan, developed between 2022 and 2024. First, the methods will be outlined, taking into account the range of activities undertaken to identify and prioritise actions. Following this, the findings of the survey relating to the perceptions and attitudes of local people towards climate change will be presented. Next, each area of climate action will be outlined in turn, outlining actions relating to: energy, transport, food, consumption and waste, carbon sinks, adaptation and the development of a dedicated local climate committee. Finally, following the prioritisation of these actions, this report will outline ten actions for immediate focus and the responsibility for enacting these. Appendices contain details of research methods and data collected.

Methods

An information sheet on climate change and climate action was developed in order to provide a basic level of information on the problem and possible solutions. This information sheet was accompanied by a survey requesting feedback from local people on what they felt could be done to take action against climate change in Eriskay (see Appendix for information sheet and survey).

Surveys were distributed by hand to every household in Eriskay in mid-July 2022. One survey response sheet was given to every resident over the age of sixteen, although some responses were given on behalf of the household. A deadline of the 31st August was set for the return of surveys – a time period of around six weeks – which could be submitted at a number of local drop-off points.

During the last weekend in August, shortly before the deadline for survey submission, a series of community workshops were staged in the Eriskay Community Hall. Run in conjunction with a coffee morning and raffle to encourage and incentivise attendance, workshops sought to engage a wide range of residents, as well as specific groups and individuals within the community. Workshops involved a range of presentations and information sharing on climate change and climate action, followed by discussion and encouragement to share ideas on the mitigation and adaptation to climate change on the island. It also encouraged residents to complete and return their surveys due to having the opportunity to gain more information, as well as recognise the collaborative community-led nature of the project.

Data gathered through the survey and workshops was analysed and condensed in order to identify specific climate actions and which stakeholder is responsible for enacting it. A total of 39 actions were identified, as well as 5 specific measures for the ongoing coordination of climate action in Eriskay. These actions are outlined below, structured by areas of climate action, and are presented in a table in the Appendix.

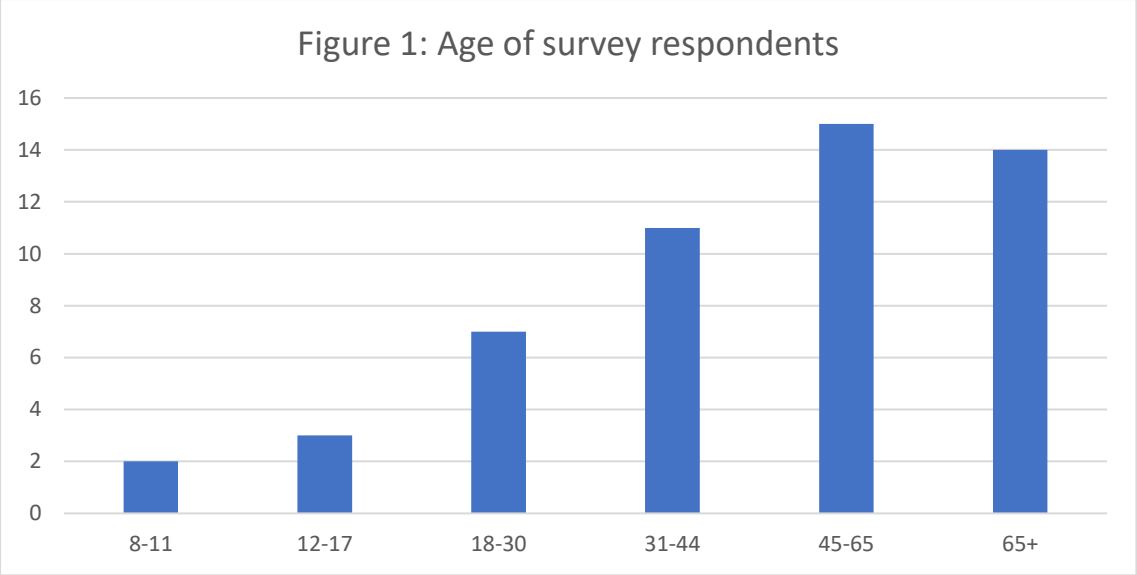
The researcher returned in summer 2023 to host a second round of climate workshops. During these events, the results of the previous methods were presented back to local people to assess whether these represented an accurate and relevant representation of mechanisms for local climate action, or whether any had been missed. Residents were then asked to indicate which actions they felt were the top priority to address. The results of this process are indicated in the table in the Appendix. Following this process, the top ten priorities were identified and are presented below.

Sample

Survey

58 survey responses were received: 37 of which were from Eriskay residents, 11 from residents of neighbouring islands, and 5 from visitors to the island. The response from Eriskay residents represents around 30% of the total population, although as some responses were submitted on behalf of a household, it is likely to represent a significantly higher proportion of the population.

The demographic character of respondents tended to be skewed to older residents, although this may be broadly representative of the demographic structure of the island's population (see Figure 1).



Focus groups

A total of four focus groups were held, involving a total of 36 individuals. Two workshops were open to the public and combined with a coffee morning. These consisted of a presentation on the impact of climate change in Eriskay and more broadly on Uist and the Western Isles, followed by a presentation on community climate action and ways in which the effects of climate change could be mitigated and adapted to. Participants were encouraged to discuss and present possible solutions, which were recorded on sticky notes and paper, as well as taking notes on discussions and suggestions at each table.

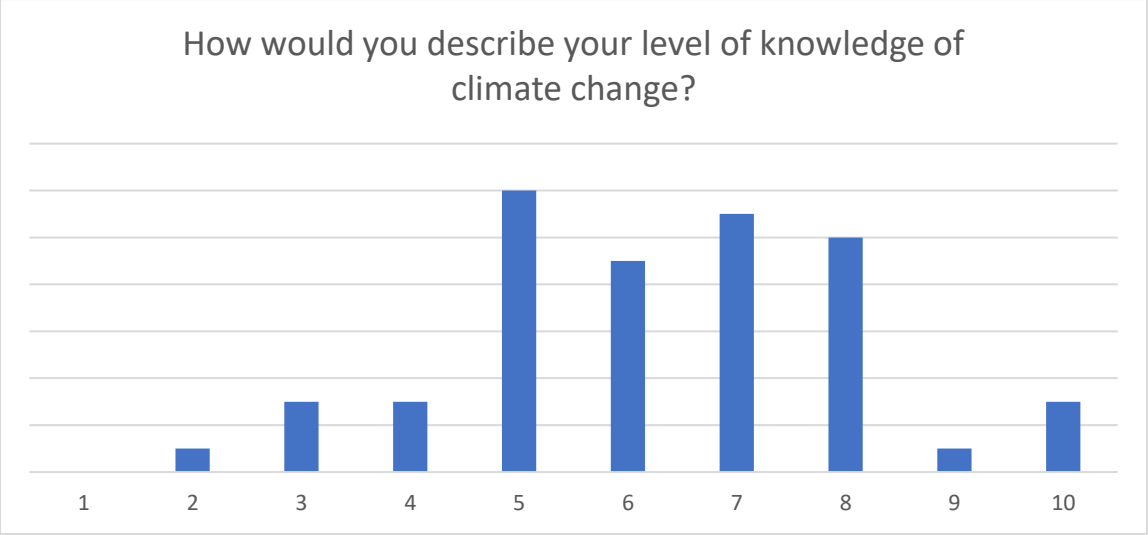
A specific focus group was organised for invited stakeholders within the community, including representatives of community groups, businesses and other local institutions. This focus group was more directly considering the role of each of these groups in tackling climate change, and what role they could play in encouraging others to do so. In addition, there was a focus on the creation of some form of climate committee within the community, considering ways in which this could be structured and implemented.

Finally, a focus group specifically organised to gather and consider the views of younger people was organised. These views were considered vital to gather with regard to including the voices of young people within these efforts, both to harness their knowledge of the topic, and to ensure that they felt included in conversations on tackling the climate emergency. This was considered especially important in avoiding simply placing responsibility for solving these issues at the feet of young people.

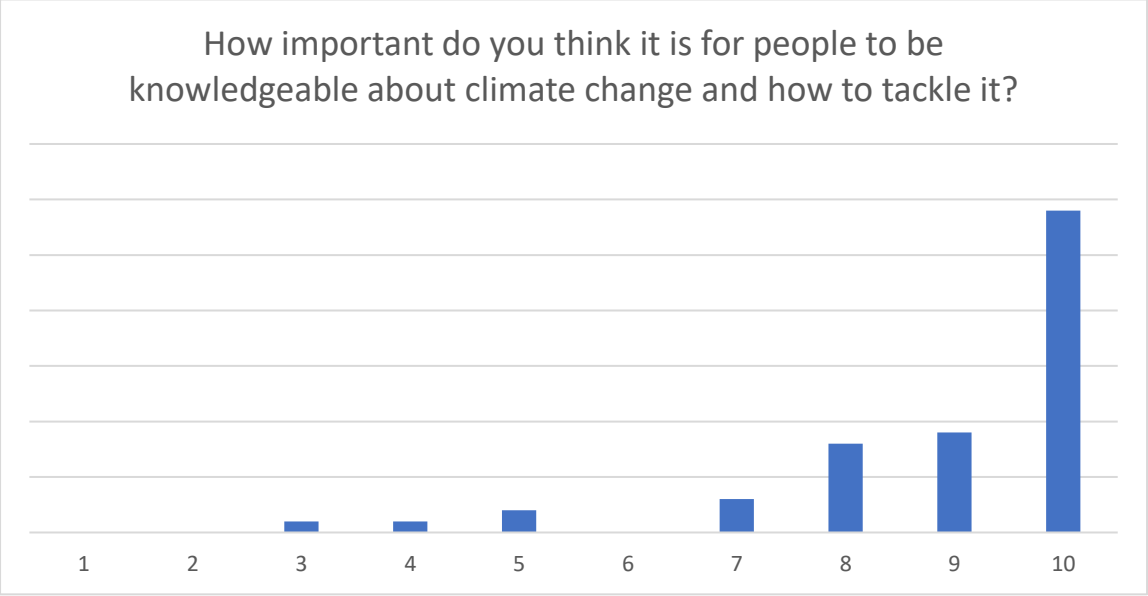
Feedback and prioritization event

Attitudes to climate action

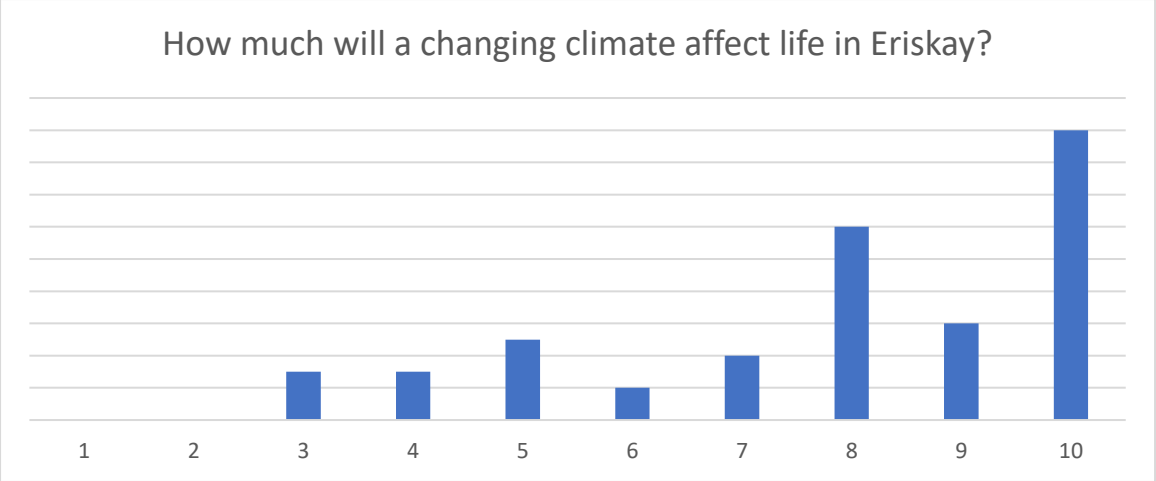
Of those who returned surveys, there was a perception of a reasonable level of knowledge of climate change.



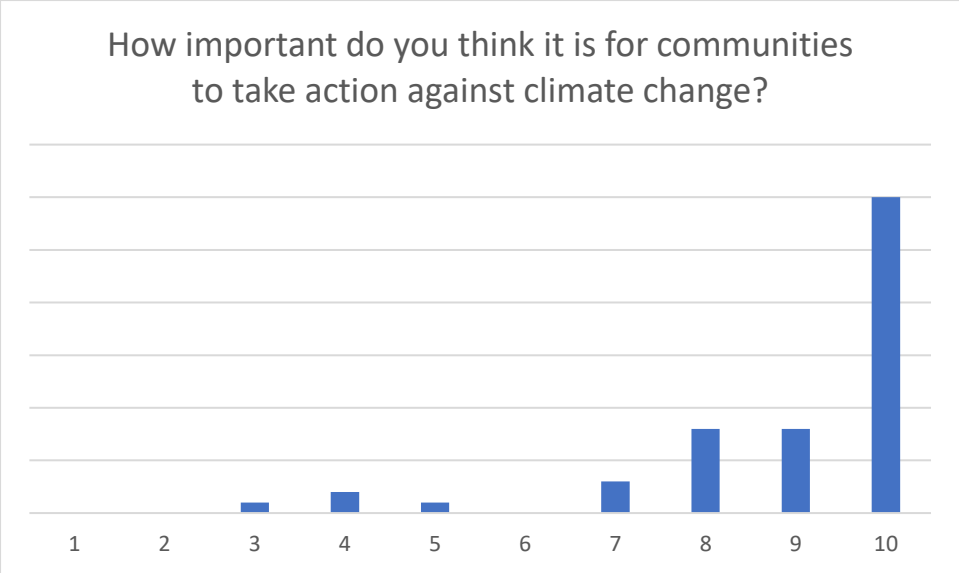
Respondents saw an expansion of their knowledge of climate change as very important:

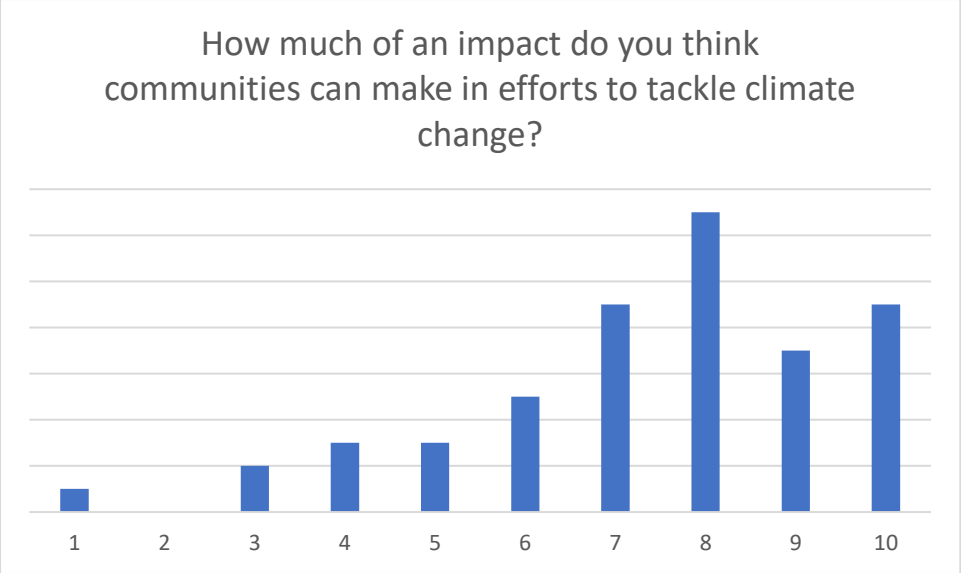


This was associated with a general perception among respondents that climate change will affect their lives on the island. This was generally thought to be weather-related effects, which could lead to knock-on impacts on tourism and the local economy.

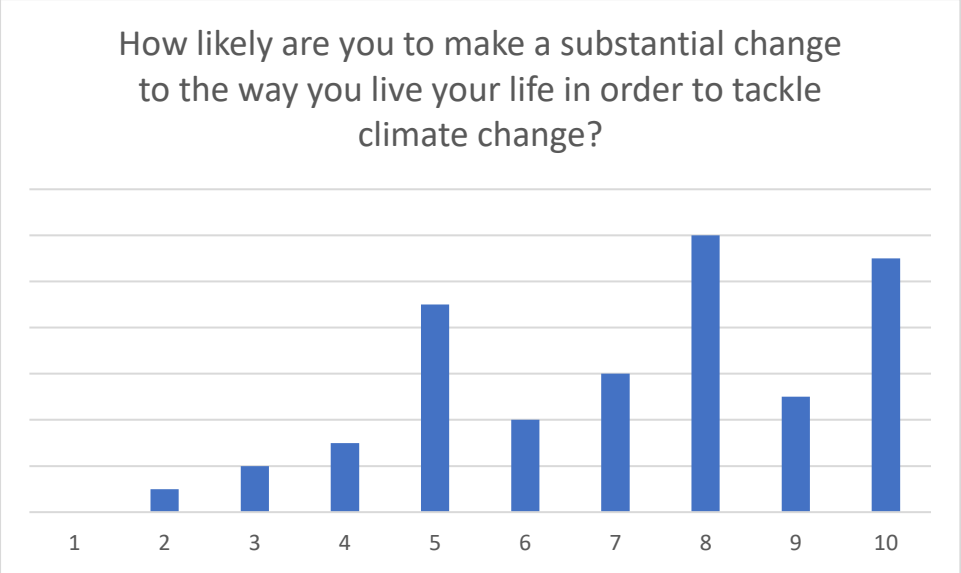


While there was a strong feeling that communities should be engaging in climate action, there was less faith in the extent of the impact that such community climate action would result in. There was a recognition that people don't feel that an individual or community could make a difference in the grand scheme of things, especially when residents of a small island are attempting to change factors which affect the island.





At an individual level, there were mixed feelings about respondents' likelihood of making any significant behavioural changes in order to tackle the climate emergency:



Areas of Community Climate Action in Eriskay

Climate action was divided into different areas and themes, which are presented in turn below. Within each theme there were specific topics of focus and proposed actions in each.

Energy

Suggestions for action on energy focused on individual behaviour change, efficiency and renewable energy generation. As well as actions of community members, there were calls for broader actions from governments. Suggestions including challenging reliance on foreign fossil fuels, and indeed the countries which produce them, acknowledging the impact that international relations can have on energy consumption and use in Eriskay. The government was challenges to increase tax on fossil fuel producers and incentivise their transition to green energy sources in a way which is gradual and

sensitive to the barriers faced by island communities in achieving this transition. Moreover, they were urged to help subsidise such a transition to affordable green energy sources and usage behaviours for communities currently penalised by higher energy costs, such as Eriskay. This was considered crucial in a context of very high fuel poverty rates, where caps were required on fuel costs and incentives were needed to help people to transition from cheap but harmful fuel sources, such as peat.

Consumption behaviour change

Reducing energy consumption was predominantly pursued through altering personal behaviours.

Many of these were considered fairly easy to alter but required thought and action in order to reduce energy consumption. Suggestions including switching off lights, heating, appliances and sockets when not in use, putting the lid on cooking pots, and turning devices off rather than on standby were considered a matter of improving discipline and routine around energy use.

More conscious decisions around changing the way individuals live their lives included suggestions to reduce the temperature of thermostats and washing machines, using mobile signal instead of wifi, and showering instead of running a bath. The recent steep rise in the cost of energy, in addition to increases in energy usage due to home working, were seen as an added encouragement for individuals to reduce their consumption, and consequently, their bills.

ACTIONS

- Increase awareness and encouragement of energy-saving behaviours

Energy efficiency

Respondents identified the inefficiencies and costs of powering and heating homes and businesses in Eriskay. Investing in energy-efficient technologies in appliances and lighting, including the use of motion sensors, were seen to reduce overall energy consumption. However, the main issue was perceived to be around heating.

The reliance on immersion heaters and other forms of inefficient systems was seen as a barrier to reducing consumption. While it was suggested that this could be tackled by some behaviour change around warming the individual and not the space through the use of blankets and hot water bottles, there was an acknowledgement that this was a short-term solution and that heating systems needed to be tackled.

The other side of this coin was in insulating homes properly so that the heat that less heat escapes from buildings and thereby requiring less energy to warm spaces. The installation of insulation is difficult and expensive, with respondents requesting public funding to support this investment in energy efficiency. One aspiration was for all houses on the island to be insulated to a Passive Haus standard.

ACTIONS

- Source funding to encourage energy-efficient investments such as motion-sensors, heating systems and insulation.

Energy generation

There was considerable interest in the generation of renewable energy, with additional calls for public funding to support islanders and community groups to develop solutions which were currently considered prohibitively expensive. There was interest in both privately and community-

owned generation methods, with the central intention to retain energy within the island, instead of selling it to the grid and having to buy back energy at greatly inflated prices. This may require some form of energy storage system to ensure reliable supply, with hydrogen storage (possibly as part of a local network) suggested as one possibility.

A number of methods of generating energy were identified. Wind turbines were identified as the most viable due to the plentiful wind resource, with the caveat that they needed to be sturdy enough to cope with extremes in the supply of that resource and not blow away! Solar panels were widely favoured, with only one respondent claiming that the sun was not sufficient to render them viable. Both wave and tidal energy were cited, noting other similar communities using these technologies. Methods of heating such as ground/air source heat pumps were favoured by many with further calls for subsidy.

ACTIONS

- Investigate potential for individually and community-owned renewable energy generation
- Investigate the potential for local grids and storage solutions

Transport

Solutions to transport-related emissions focused on the reduction of individual car journeys, with a number of means suggested through which to do this. In addition, low-emissions vehicles and other behavioural changes were proposed. Due to poor public transport provision and an expectation that car journeys are essential, a culture of individual vehicle reliance has developed. While some respondents commented that, due to the price of fuel, no journeys were being made unnecessarily, there were suggestions for how their need could be further reduced.

Active travel and local services

One means through which to reduce car journeys was to replace the car with active alternatives, including walking and cycling more. While a potential solution for some, a number of caveats were noted, including poor weather and a lack of safe routes or paths for walking and cycling. Investments in paths were proposed as a solution, as were electric bikes for hire, financial incentives such as the cycle-to-work scheme and having more businesses welcoming of cyclists.

While some journeys on the island may be possible to replace with walking or cycling, travel off the island is difficult and dangerous to attempt walking or by bike, mostly due to the aforementioned lack of paths, or even pavement, on neighbouring islands. A related solution to reducing individual car journeys was therefore to provide services on the island itself, thereby creating a form of ’20-minute neighbourhood’ negating the need to drive elsewhere. This would require supporting local businesses and lobbying for local public services to reduce reliance on more distant alternatives, but may lead to more jobs available on the island and allow people to live and work locally. In addition, a central car parking location could allow visitors to the island to park in one place and explore on foot.

ACTIONS

- Develop safe walking and cycling paths
- Incentivise and normalise the ownership and use of bikes for everyday travel
- Support local businesses and lobby for the provision of services on the island
- Develop central parking location for visitors

Shared transport

Where journeys have to made to neighbouring islands and communities, it was recommended that these were shared with others to reduce the number of individual vehicles on the roads. The majority of respondents felt this could be achieved with a simple car sharing/pooling system, however formally organised, in order to coordinate visits to common services. Similarly, coordination of the delivery of products to the island, including shopping and prescriptions, would reduce individual journeys. While reduced use of online delivery services was suggested, it is also plausible that this function may be coordinated with others.

While the above suggestion still relied on at least one private vehicle to be utilised, public or community transport was also considered vital to reducing individual journeys. The public transport system was criticised for being unfit for purpose, with very little community input into the needs of local people and therefore their usage of public buses. A frequent and reliable public bus service was proposed, integrated with ferries and links across Uist. Further, a community vehicle based in Eriskay could serve both of these purposes, transporting people and goods based on local needs. A suggestion that both public and community vehicles be electric, and provided at a subsidised price, could reduce the community's vehicle related emissions to near zero, and links closely to the next theme.

ACTIONS

- Develop community-based car sharing/pooling system in order to coordinate travel
- Coordinate deliveries to the island to reduce individual journeys
- Lobby for improved public transport provision across Uist
- Purchase low-emissions community vehicle

Green travel

The widespread adoption of electric or hybrid vehicles was proposed as a means to reduce vehicle emissions while recognising the difficulty of reducing individual journeys. While islanders could be encouraged to purchase electric vehicles, there was a recognition that their price, and ongoing charging costs, were prohibitive to many. Further, charging infrastructure is necessary across the isles to incentivise and facilitate the widespread ownership and use of electric vehicles. In addition, there were suggestions that low-emissions ferries and lorries, both of which are necessary in island settings, would further reduce transport-related emissions.

Finally, individuals were advised to consider the carbon implications of their transport choices, with encouragement to reduce the number of foreign holidays and air-based travel.

ACTIONS

- Source funding to encourage and subsidise the purchase of low-emissions vehicles
- Lobby for improved electric charging infrastructure and the use of low-emissions ferries and lorries
- Increase awareness and encouragement of low-carbon transport choices

Food

Reducing food-related emissions tended to focus on both producing and purchasing local food. There was a lot of support and demand for buying local food, but the practicalities of that were slightly more challenging.

Local food network

There was great belief in the ability to grow local dietary staples, including potatoes, vegetables and grain, as used to be done in the past. There was encouragement to use more of the land on the island for farming and cultivation, and to incentivise an increase in the number of local producers. One barrier to achieving this was seen to be in absentee crofters and others not using their land for food production, while leaving little space or opportunity for those who may wish to do so. A move towards a structure of family farms was proposed, with households 'growing their own' and expanding their range of available products through developing skills in areas such as butter and cheese-making, further enhancing the potential value of such local produce.

There was also a recognition that the island had a great seafood resource, with numerous boats catching fish and shellfish, all of which is exported. There was interest in retaining at least a percentage of these catches for local consumption, thereby making the most of the island's food production potential. There were suggestions that this may be possible through reviving a form of 'communal fishing'. In addition, greenhouses, poly-tunnnels or 'poly-crubs' were proposed to grow fruit and other products not usually possible in the island's climate. Such 'indoor' spaces could be formed into a 'community garden' at a central location, sharing both cultivation and consumption of produce.

Each of these products – from the land, the sea and in specific conditions – could be produced, consumed and sold within the local community, whether at the shop or through a regular farmers' market or form of barter economy. The addition of a shared abattoir and processing facilities could further localise the island's food network and provide huge opportunities for local businesses.

However, while there was interest in returning to a form of self-sufficient farming and fishing, there were concerns about the viability and sustainability of this community-led approach in the face of a globalised food system. There was recognition that there was good quality beef, lamb, fish and shellfish produced locally, but that very little was available in local shops, instead being replaced by foods produced abroad. While apparently logical to produce and sell locally, the financial viability may not be able to justify the reduction in 'food miles', and without subsidy, little may be available or affordable in local shops. Regardless, there was a lot of focus on buying local produce from local shops where possible, and to incentivise a more local and internal food system instead of relying on similar, and often lower quality, products imported from elsewhere.

ACTIONS

- Investigate and increase awareness of arable capabilities of land with regard to diversifying agricultural activities towards local food production
- Work with stakeholders including the landowner and Crofting Commission to reduce absentee ownership and encourage cultivation of croft land
- Adopt a communal approach to expanding knowledge of food processing and investing in shared processing equipment and facilities
- Investigate potential for larger share of locally-caught seafood to be sold and consumed within the community
- Develop communal indoor growing space
- Look into ways of subsidising or incentivising producers to sell locally

Food consumption behaviour change

While there was a recognition that a certain amount of food miles may be inevitable due to the reliance on the transportation of food from elsewhere, there were other suggested means of

reducing food-related emissions. Reducing consumption of red meat, replacing processed food with organic alternatives and buying seasonal foods can all reduce the carbon produced in the production and transportation of food. Reducing food wastage and donating any excess to foodbanks will also help to reduce unnecessary production and consumption of food, linking to the next theme on consumption and waste.

ACTIONS

- Increase awareness of the emissions associated with certain types of food, and encourage behaviour change in order to reduce food miles and wastage.

Consumption and waste

As any production process creates emissions, a reduction in this need will, in turn, reduce them. The solutions to this were perceived as a combination of buying less, repairing and recycling older items, and reducing the amount of single-use plastic packaging which accompanies products. As well as the community-focused actions below, a broader call to legislate against planned obsolescence and make products last longer was considered to further reduce this need to buy more. There was a perception that Eriskay had a strong culture around reducing waste on the island, but that there was a need for more public bins to help locals and visitors alike to reduce litter.

Reduce consumption

This fairly simple message focused on challenging the societal pressure to buy things we don't need and reduce the waste associated with these unnecessary products. Where products are necessary, there were suggestions that the initial focus should be on purchasing them second-hand, both to reduce costs and the need for new products. Local charity/swap-shops, 'bring and buy sales' and bartering initiatives, whether online or as a form of community event, can facilitate the reuse and 'new life' of such products, including clothes and white goods. These initiatives could be shared amongst different communities in order to increase the number of buyers and sellers. Buying clothes made of sustainable natural materials was also considered to reduce the production-related emissions.

If new products have to be bought, it was encouraged that they were not single-use and could be recycled, reused and repaired, as opposed to cheap throwaway alternatives. Recycling was encouraged, with signs that behaviours had changed regarding the reuse and recycling of items as a matter of course. Some respondents requested additional local facilities including the reuse of food, organic and garden waste in a community composting initiative, or the ability to recycle larger items such as furniture and white goods (which may be possible to combine with efforts to repair and sell 'salvageable' items). Finally, there was uncertainty as to whether recyclable materials uplifted by the council was actually recycled in Lewis, with the suggestion that additional pressure should be put on the council to fulfil their commitments in this area.

ACTIONS

- Build awareness and encourage the reduction in consumption and the option of second-hand, sustainable and repairable goods
- Host thrift shops/'swap-shops' locally, as well as in collaboration with neighbouring communities
- Develop local recycling and food waste initiatives
- Investigate the extent to which recycling is effectively carried out by the council

Repair and restore

For products which are broken or in need of repair, there was a desire to repair, restore or 'upcycle' these as far as possible. Community-based initiatives and resources to provide this service and either charge for the job, or re-sell the repaired product, are favoured, including so-called 'men's sheds' or small repair businesses. It is recognised that it is often difficult to get things repaired in an island setting and such skills are highly valued to reduce the need to transport things back and forth to the mainland, or be required to buy a replacement. One such initiative exists in South Uist, with a number of respondents recommending its further use, with profits going back into charitable purposes. The ability to pass on these skills to others is also encouraged in order to build a pool of individuals able to do so. Unfortunately, the distance required to travel from Eriskay to this facility renders it prohibitive to some, and at least inconvenient for others.

ACTIONS

- Develop community-based repair and restoration initiative

Reduce waste

While much of this theme focused on reducing the products being bought, there was also a recognition that packaging around products in shops was unnecessary and often single use. Calls to reduce packaging on a larger scale were accompanied by a demand for the ability to 'refill' existing containers in order to reduce wastage. Further, a move away from buying single use products and those wrapped in plastic, and a focus on buying in bulk were further considered to reduce packaging and other waste.

Another product which was unfortunately becoming seen as waste is sheep's wool. Due to falling prices being offered for wool, and increasing transport costs, the product is no longer profitable, or even viable, to sell. This has led some to burn or bury this potentially highly useful and profitable product.

ACTIONS

- Encourage local shop to investigate 'refill' options and other measures to reduce packaging
- Investigate other uses for local wool, including shared processing facilities

Carbon sinks

There were three suggested means of 'sinking' carbon – afforestation, peatland restoration and marine solutions – with uncertainty as to the viability of any of them.

Trees

There was general support for planting trees and shrubs to act as a carbon sink, with the suggestion to combine this effort with the action on food by planting fruit trees in gardens, on croft land and in other designated areas, including on common grazings land. However, there were concerns as to the viability of this plan due to poor soil and windy conditions restricting growth, and the potential for forest fires posing an additional risk. The need for management and nurture of trees was considered important to ensure their growth and safety, and there was uncertainty as to the carbon-sinking capacity of other plants and grasses. However, as seen in neighbouring islands, trees can be restored to provide an adequate carbon sink while also enhancing biodiversity and the unique ecosystem of the islands.

ACTIONS

- Investigate the viability of planting different types of trees on the island, considering their likelihood of survival and carbon-sinking capacity
- Investigate the considerations for land availability and ongoing management of trees

Peatland

There was also uncertainty regarding the viability of peatland restoration on the island. Some were in favour of preserving peatlands as a carbon sink and replacing it with another energy source, such as wood. However, as the cost of energy increased, it was becoming a more popular source of fuel and any restriction to its production would result in additional costs for more expensive alternatives. Therefore, one solution to increase support for peatland restoration and restriction in its use over the long-term is to reduce the cost of alternative energy sources. Further, as there was not considered to be a huge amount of peat in Eriskay, it was in higher demand and its restoration may not have a significant impact on carbon sinking. Aside from its use as a fuel source, there were calls for an end to its use in horticulture.

ACTIONS

- Find clarity as to the potential viability of peatland restoration in Eriskay, as well as the impacts that such restoration may have on local people and alternative energy sources

Other potential carbon sinks

Finally, other solutions for carbon sinking, such as seaweed and seagrass, were suggested as more viable alternatives to afforestation and peatland restoration within the Eriskay context.

ACTIONS

- Investigate the potential for seaweed and seagrass to act as carbon sinks, and the potential for their expansion

Adaptation

The theme of adaptation focuses on the acceptance that climate change is happening and has already happened, and understanding what those changes are and how to live with them. Within the Eriskay context, this can broadly be broken down into two areas- increasing knowledge and awareness of these changes, and preventing coastal erosion due to rising sea levels and increasing extreme weather events. While it was noted that local people were prepared for, and used to, extreme weather, this was becoming more concerning when combined with rising sea levels.

Increase education and knowledge

An integrated approach to informing and appealing to all people and age groups was promoted in order to encourage the whole community to become involved. Publicity and information on the problems and consequences of climate change, and actions which can be taken to tackle it, was considered key in encouraging local people to do so. Relatable community-focused information focusing on tangible impacts of climate change on daily lives in Eriskay is more likely to encourage and motivate people to change, which can be challenging, and in turn will increase their chances of taking action. Public facing information including posters and leaflets detailing what is happening, why, how it will affect the community and what can be done about it were suggested in order to maintain knowledge and understanding, with QR codes providing links to further information. Emphasising the importance of seemingly small changes, and the personal responsibility of individuals to make them, was considered crucial to encouraging others in the community.

Community events such as meetings, consultations, presentations, evening classes and workshops were favoured as a way of gaining awareness in a public forum with the chance to discuss and learn from others in the community around individual and community efforts to reduce carbon footprints. A community-focused approach including tangible and applicable examples of personal actions to mitigate or adapt to the effects of climate change may encourage others to adopt the same actions. Commitments made at such events can then hold people accountable for their actions going forward, through a form of peer pressure. These community events can be tied in with other efforts on the island to encourage engagement, such as linking in with quiz nights, bake sales and ceilidhs to encourage attendance, fundraise and ensure that climate action is fully integrated into the life of the community, and not a separate 'niche' interest.

ACTIONS

- Develop wide range of community-focused information, emphasising manageable behaviour changes and tangible impacts of climate change and climate action
- Host regular climate-focused events within the community, while acknowledging the role of climate action within existing community activities

Reduce costal erosion

The related issues of coastal erosion and rising sea levels were identified as a major problem on the island, directly affecting people's homes, as well as fragile and important ecosystems such as the machair and vital road infrastructure across the isles. There was uncertainty as to the extent of the impact and the pace of erosion, with calls for a combination of: detailed technical modelling of the shoreline to assess further erosion; and community-driven self-monitoring, encompassing local knowledge and informal data gathering to ensure that baselines were set and change measured.

With the majority of damage being seen to be where there were no current sea defences, large-scale infrastructural reinforcement was proposed by some, while natural solutions such as planting particular types of grass on dunes was also favoured. However, the majority of respondents saw the solution in restricting people from driving, parking, camping, quad-biking, lighting fires and even walking on the machair in order to prevent erosion of the terrain, and in turn, coastal defences. While information notices could help with this, there were further calls for the development of footpaths in order to divert walkers from fragile environments, while simultaneously restoring dunes and other areas to mitigate against further erosion.

There were criticisms that no one organisation or agency wanted to take responsibility for these actions, some of which were acknowledged to be very expensive.

ACTIONS

- Record extent and impact of coastal erosion
- Investigate options and viability of sea defences
- Implement range of measures to restrict activity on the machair and prevent further incremental erosion
- Seek clarity as to which agency is responsible for funding and implementing these measures, and lobby for their further involvement

Eriskay Climate Committee

There was interest in forming a climate committee in Eriskay, with the suggestion that it could be formed of representatives of existing community groups. This would ensure that organisations and residents across the island were involved in climate action and it was not seen as an 'optional extra', and also act as a peer-led effort which could hold local people to account for their actions. This group could work with others across the isles to conduct projects of common interest, and perhaps be mentored by more developed island-based climate actions, such as those underway in Gigha, or proposed 'carbon neutral islands' such as neighbouring Barra.

The climate committee could have ultimate responsibility for many of the actions identified above. They would be tasked with communicating the actions and events of the group, utilising both online and in-person methods. A dedicated space to house the materials and activities of the committee was favoured, emphasising the educational role that a permanent space could have for local people and visitors alike.

In addition to community-based climate action there were calls for broader engagement with policy, demanding action from elected representatives. There was particular emphasis on ensuring that recent difficulties with electricity connections to the mainland were not repeated, especially considering its effects on the generation and export of renewable energy from the Western Isles. As well as requesting support on local schemes, MPs and MSPs should challenge large polluters, whether industrial such as the oil industry or state-based such as China and the USA. It is the continued climate inaction of these polluters which is contributing to making life increasingly difficult and dangerous in Eriskay.

ACTIONS

- Form climate committee to coordinate and oversee climate action from individuals, businesses and community groups throughout the island, publicising ongoing community events and initiatives
- Investigate dedicated space for use by the climate committee
- Lobby local and national politicians to support climate action nationally and internationally

Young people

An interesting dynamic emerging in discussions related to the role of young people in climate efforts. Many older residents laid the responsibility of addressing climate change in the hands of young people, with strong support for "harnessing the youth to protect the island?". The importance of education in schools was noted, with an emphasis on informing young people.

However, it was also acknowledged that young people are often the best informed on this subject and are generally more active and willing to adopt good environmentally-conscious behaviours in their daily lives. They resented the focus being on young people to solve this issue, which is so big, and which they did nothing to create. Indeed, younger residents accused older people of absolving themselves of responsibility and being more resistant to making changes in their lives, despite their generation having been responsible for causing much of the damage in the first place. They recommended that information and encouragement for behaviour change should rather be directed at older residents.

This was also set in a context where young people are facing numerous other challenges their parents did not have to, including a lack of opportunities for housing and employment, which are increasingly leading them to leave the island. Young people can't afford to buy houses due to the

growth in holiday homes and a growing disparity between income and house prices. Further, with building or retrofitting houses prohibitively expensive, accommodation is often inefficient with little opportunity for funding to reduce household emissions. Young people wanted to be able to enjoy their lives, while adopting environmentally-conscious decisions, without having the responsibility for saving the world from imminent disaster with few tools and little influence with which to do it.

A solution was proposed in that, due to the intrinsic intergenerational nature of climate change, it was encouraged that age-groups work together to pool knowledge and enthusiasm, co-mentor and design sustainable solutions.

ACTIONS

- Ensure that the voices and knowledge of young people are included in ongoing climate discussions
- Emphasise that climate action is the responsibility of everyone, not just young people.

Prioritisation of suggested actions

Following the presentation of the suggested climate actions, participants indicated which they considered priorities. The number of votes for each action are recorded in the table in the appendix, and the top ten priorities are presented below:

Infrastructural developments

- Develop central parking location for visitors
- Develop safe walking and cycling paths
- Implement range of measures to restrict activity on the machair and prevent further incremental erosion

Community initiatives

- Develop local recycling and food waste initiatives
- Purchase low-emissions community vehicle
- Develop communal indoor growing space

Research and collaboration

- Investigate potential for larger share of locally-caught seafood to be sold and consumed within the community
- Investigate arable capabilities of land and potential for local food production
- Investigate potential for individually and community-owned renewable energy generation
- Record extent and impact of coastal erosion

Summary

The above ten actions represent the top priorities of Eriskay residents for the next steps of climate action in the community. It is hoped that through having conducted this research in collaboration with CEE and local people, that there will be broad support and encouragement for these actions to be taken forward, and that residents will play a role in the enaction of them. For some actions, wider collaboration and support will be required, for example with researchers and the public and private sectors. It is hoped that these partners will recognise the thorough process which has been undertaken to arrive at this point and the identified need for these actions within the community, thus encouraging their support in enacting them.

Appendix

	Area of climate action	Action	Responsibility	Ticks	Stars
Energy	Consumption behaviour change	Increase awareness and encouragement of energy-saving behaviours	Community initiative	4	0
	Energy efficiency	Source funding to encourage energy-efficient investments such as motion-sensors, heating systems and insulation.	External funding/lobbying	9	0
	Energy generation	Investigate potential for individually and community-owned renewable energy generation	External funding/lobbying	9	11
		Investigate the potential for local grids and storage solutions	Research	8	0
Transport	Active travel and local services	Develop safe walking and cycling paths	Collaboration	11	1
		Incentivise and normalise the ownership and use of bikes for everyday travel	Community initiative Individual behaviour	0	0
		Support local businesses and lobby for the provision of services on the island	Individual behaviour External funding/lobbying	1	0
		Develop central parking location for visitors	Collaboration	14	4
	Shared transport	Develop community-based car sharing/pooling system in order to coordinate travel	Community initiative	1	0
		Coordinate deliveries to the island to reduce individual journeys	Collaboration	0	0
		Lobby for improved public transport provision across Uist	External funding/lobbying	5	0
		Purchase low-emissions community vehicle	Community initiative	10	0
	Green travel	Source funding to encourage and subsidise the purchase of low-emissions vehicles	External funding/lobbying	9	0
		Lobby for improved electric charging infrastructure and the use of low-emissions ferries and lorries	External funding/lobbying	2	0

		Increase awareness and encouragement of low-carbon transport choices	Community initiative	1	0
Food	Local food network	Investigate arable capabilities of land and potential for local food production	Research	12	0
		Reduce number of absentee crofters and encourage cultivation of croft land	Collaboration	8	3
		Investigate shared food processing equipment and facilities	Community initiative	0	0
		Investigate potential for larger share of locally-caught seafood to be sold and consumed within the community	Collaboration	18	1
		Develop communal indoor growing space	Community initiative	18	0
		Look into ways of subsidising or incentivising producers to sell locally	Community initiative	3	0
	Food consumption behaviour change	Encourage behaviour change in order to reduce food miles and wastage.	Community initiative Individual behaviour	0	0
Consumption and waste	Reduce consumption	Encourage the reduction in consumption and the option of second-hand, sustainable and repairable goods	Community initiative Individual behaviour	4	0
		Host thrift shops/'swap-shops' locally, as well as in collaboration with neighbouring communities	Community initiative	2	0
		Develop local recycling and food waste initiatives	Community initiative	11	0
		Investigate the extent to which recycling is effectively carried out by the council	Research	0	2
	Repair and restore	Develop community-based repair and restoration initiative	Community initiative	6	0
	Reduce waste	Encourage local shop to investigate 'refill' options and other measures to reduce packaging	Collaboration	4	0
		Investigate other uses for local wool, including shared processing facilities	Research	4	1

Carbon sinks	Trees	Investigate the feasibility of planting different types of trees on the island	Research	4	0
		Source suitable land for planting and ongoing management of trees	Research	3	0
	Peatland	Clarify feasibility and implications of peatland restoration in Eriskay	Research	2	0
	Other potential carbon sinks	Investigate the potential for seaweed and seagrass to act as carbon sinks, and the potential for their expansion	Research	3	3
Adaptation	Increase education and knowledge	Develop wide range of community-focused information on climate change and climate action	Community initiative Individual behaviour	0	0
		Host regular climate-focused events within the community and encourage climate action within existing community activities	Community initiative	2	0
	Reduce coastal erosion	Record extent and impact of coastal erosion	Community initiative	10	0
		Investigate options and viability of sea defences	Research	7	0
		Implement range of measures to restrict activity on the machair and prevent further incremental erosion	Community initiative	12	4
		Lobby for the funding and implementation of these measures	Research External funding/lobbying	5	0
Eriskay Climate Committee	Climate group	Form climate committee to coordinate and oversee climate action from individuals, businesses and community groups throughout the island	Community initiative	N/A	N/A
		Investigate dedicated space for use by the climate committee	Research	N/A	N/A
		Lobby local and national politicians to support climate action nationally and internationally	External funding/lobbying	N/A	N/A
	Young people	Ensure that the voices and knowledge of young people are included in ongoing climate discussions	Community initiative	N/A	N/A

		Emphasise that climate action is the responsibility of everyone, not just young people.	Individual behaviour	N/A	N/A

Insert information sheet, survey and other research information