

ADAPTATION IN THE OUTER HEBRIDES

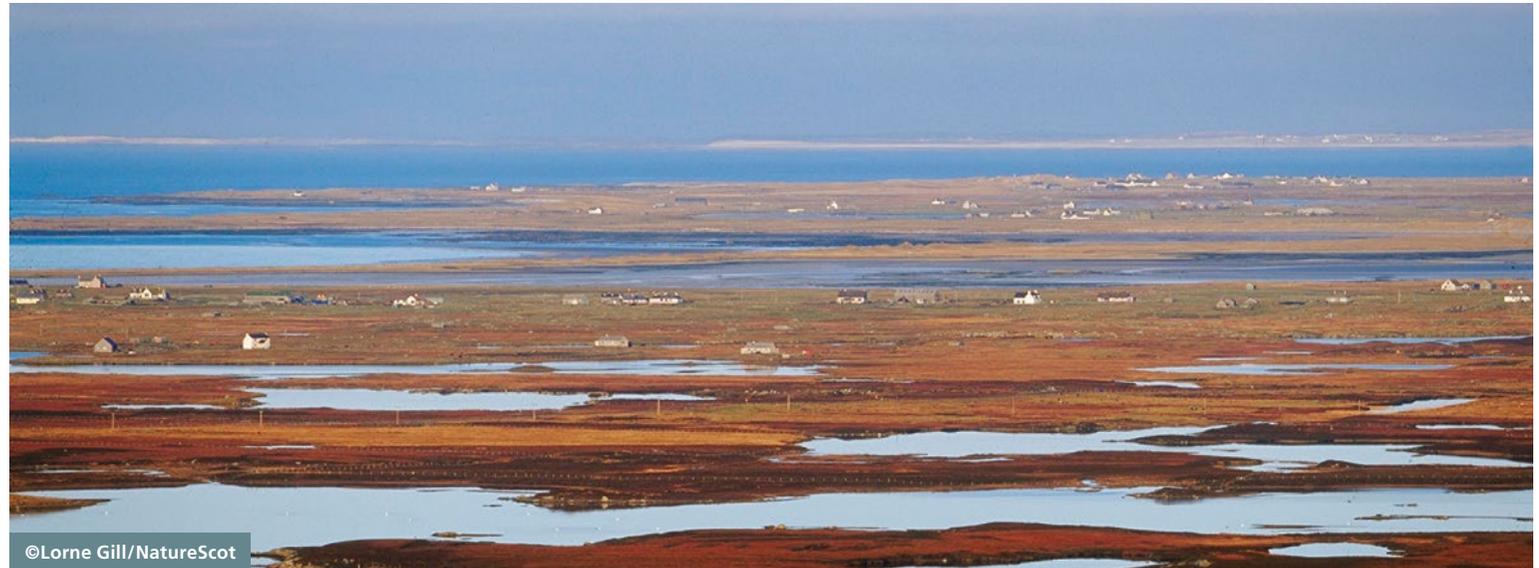
A Community Planning Partnership-led response

Adaptation Scotland and the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership's Climate Change Working Group have been working together since 2019 to develop adaptation planning in the islands. This summary tells the story of our work together and provides links to the resources and projects that we've developed. We finish off by sharing some key insights and lessons learned.



Adaptation Scotland

supporting climate change resilience



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Background

In June 2019, the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership (OHCPP) set up a Climate Change Working Group (CCWG) tasked with improving understanding of climate change in the Outer Hebrides, building collaboration across organisations, and developing plans and priorities to embed in the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP). The CCWG recognised climate adaptation as a priority due to the threat climate

change poses to the islands' built and natural heritage, economy and culture, and invited Adaptation Scotland to help develop its approach to adaptation planning.

Geography & scale

The Outer Hebrides are an archipelago of 15 inhabited and 50+ uninhabited islands off the west coast of Scotland with a population of c.26,500 people. Communities across the islands are

mostly rural, with the main townships in Stornoway (Lewis) and Balivanich (Benbecula). The islands hold a wealth of unique natural environments that are an important part of Scotland's history and identity, such as machair (fertile, low-lying grassy plains), kelpbeds and peatland, although individual islands each have distinct topography, terrain and ecosystems. The Outer Hebrides are also a stronghold of Gaelic language, heritage, and culture in Scotland, which is being impacted by out-migration and population loss.

Partners involved

The CCWG recognise that a joined up, partnership approach is required to build resilience to the impacts of climate change. The group is chaired by Nature Scot, and current member organisations include: Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council), Community Energy Scotland, Community Land Scotland, Hebridean Housing Partnership, NHS Eilean Siar, Police Scotland, Scottish Youth Parliament, Fire and Rescue Service, SEPA, Tighean Innse Gall, Third Sector

Interface Western Isles, University of the Highlands and Islands, Western Isles Libraries, and the Western Isles Emergency Planning Group.

In May 2021, Adaptation Scotland supported the CCWG to widen its network through the formation of the **Làn Thìde partnership** as part of Creative Carbon Scotland's **Climate Beacons for COP26** initiative. Làn Thìde partners include: An Lanntair, Ceòlas, Lews Castle College, Taigh Chearsabhagh, and Western Isles Libraries, in collaboration with the CCWG.

Funding

Support to the CCWG and Làn Thìde is provided under the Adaptation Scotland programme, funded by the Scottish Government and delivered by the sustainability charity **Sniffer**. Partner time is contributed on a voluntary basis. Nature Scot also secured funding for a graduate placement to assist with delivery of activities from September 2020 to September 2021.

Local climate change challenge

The remote location of the Outer Hebrides increases their exposure to more frequent storm events, changes in rainfall patterns, and temperature and sea level rise, although individual islands are very distinct, and climate impacts therefore vary across the region. The presence of fragile ecosystems, rural communities and a reducing population combined with an ageing demographic increase vulnerability to climate impacts. These climate impacts are highly interconnected with local priorities including land ownership and

rights, poverty and fuel poverty, jobs and businesses, digital connectivity, transport, and housing.

Without adaptation, the changing climate will exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, and tackling challenges such as poverty reduction and attracting/retaining people will be increasingly difficult as climate change impacts on ecosystems, health, economy, tourism, food production, infrastructure and livelihoods, affecting water, fuel and food security.

A Climate Rationale document was developed to support a shared understanding of the climate challenge in the Outer Hebrides, based on evidence gathered from OHCPP organisations and local communities. The Rationale and accompanying Case for Action will be used by all of the partners to support engagement and action on adaptation.



[Download the CCWG's Climate Rationale here](#)



[Download the CCWG's Case for Action here](#)



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Activities and outcomes

The key projects and milestones include:

► Gathering evidence to co-create local climate change knowledge

As part of an initial focus on background evidence gathering and understanding the challenge climate change poses across the Outer Hebrides, Adaptation Scotland assisted the CCWG to conduct climate impact interviews with 19 different OHCPP organisations. A semi-structured interview format was used to explore short and long-term impacts of climate change on priority projects, organisational climate change strategies and understandings of adaptation.

The CCWG also used the climate impact interview results to develop a draft list of climate risks for the Outer Hebrides. This informed the development of a potential future climate risk assessment process, which Adaptation Scotland helped to guide whilst exploring with the CCWG how the approach could be made more accessible for local communities and incorporate lived experience of climate risks and impacts.

This process helped the CCWG to:

- Build relationships with organisations by learning about the projects and initiatives that matter to them, and engage people in a discussion about climate change and adaptation by considering how climate and weather impacts relate to their areas of knowledge and expertise.
- Build collective knowledge about the different ways that major projects and priorities in the Outer Hebrides are being impacted by current weather and climate change.

 [View the Climate Impact Interview question set and template here](#)

Adaptation Scotland worked with the CCWG and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar to help develop a series of interactive ArcGIS maps illustrating natural habitats, historic environment, public facilities, transport and infrastructure in the islands. These maps include layers which can be toggled on and off to visualise historic, modern and future coastal and inland flood risk, coastal erosion and high tide levels. These maps are now live, but the intention is that they will act as a tool to be used by the CCWG

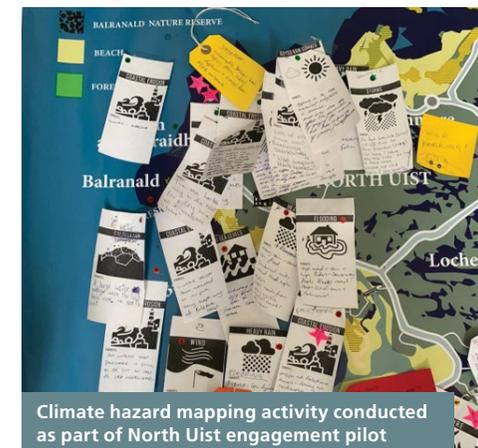
and others to help visualise exposure to climate hazards across the different places and islands of the Outer Hebrides and gather inputs from communities on what they value and want to protect about their place.

Results from the impact interviews and the ArcGIS maps have helped develop a local evidence base which has been analysed by the CCWG alongside community insights (see below) as part of the development of its Climate Rationale.

 [View the maps here](#)

► Involving communities and gathering local lived experience

Meaningful community involvement is essential to ensuring local voices and people's lived experiences are embedded in the work of the CCWG and help ensure that local adaptation actions are effective. Learning from local people whilst also helping them identify their own capacities to adapt and take ownership of actions helps ensure those engaged feel listened to and motivated, and longer term can help ensure adaptation action is shared between communities and organisations.



During summer 2021 Adaptation Scotland supported the CCWG and Làn Thìde partners to run a community involvement pilot in North Uist. Adaptation Scotland helped develop workshop and engagement materials, provided technical and facilitation support, and ran capacity building sessions with Làn Thìde partners to ensure they were able to improve their own awareness of local climate impacts and the importance of adaptation.

The pilot connected with c.50 community members through a series of participatory mapping workshops to identify key climate hazards and impacts, local priorities, and capacities to adapt. Drawing on volunteer support coordinated by Adaptation Scotland, ArcGIS base maps of North Uist were then developed which displayed the

community's insights from the mapping workshops alongside scientific datasets of climate impacts such as flooding and coastal erosion. It was very powerful to be able to visualise the extent to which the community's inputs both validated and enriched the scientific data, demonstrating the depth and nuance of knowledge and insights local people have about how climate change affects their place, and the importance of valuing this alongside other forms of evidence.

These insights have formed an important part of the CCWG's evidence base and were analysed together with CPP inputs from impact interviews to develop the group's Climate Rationale.



View the Mapping Our Place case study for more information on this project



See our guide to running a similar mapping activity in your own community here

► Strengthening the partnership by connecting with creative partners

Working with creative partners can bring different insights and perspectives

to adaptation action and help to develop new ways to inspire and engage people, making conversations about climate resilience more accessible and contributing to addressing inequalities. By supporting a successful application to Creative Carbon Scotland's **Climate Beacons for COP26 initiative**, Adaptation Scotland has helped the CCWG strengthen its network and connect with creative partners through the formation of the **Làn Thìde partnership**, an interdisciplinary collective of arts, heritage, environmental and third sector organisations established to create a programme of public engagement focused on climate change, with community collaboration at its core.

In addition to delivering a **range of exhibitions and events** Làn Thìde has also successfully applied for further grants to strengthen the CCWG's community engagement work. This has included successful applications for funds from the Scottish Communities Climate Action Network (SCCAN) for community action planning workshops and the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) to support the rollout of a creative Climate Storyline for winter storm events, co-led by Adaptation Scotland and the Met Office in collaboration with a commissioned local artist.

Being part of Làn Thìde has strengthened the capacity of the CCWG, highlighted the importance and power of community voices and provided practical networks and approaches to sensitively gather and validate community insights and local knowledge. The partnership is continuing to explore opportunities to access grants for further cooperative climate action with communities across the Outer Hebrides.



Find out more about the Climate Beacons Project

► Taking stock of successes/ challenges and understanding enablers of adaptation

At the end of 2021, Adaptation Scotland used the **Traction Framework** to assist the CCWG to take stock of work so far and prioritise next steps together. Adaptation Scotland facilitated a series of online focus group discussions with small groups of CCWG members to explore enablers of adaptation and provide recommendations on group goals, governance, policy and strategy, how data and information is collected and used, cooperation between



organisations, community engagement, and ethics and justice. Adaptation Scotland then collated and analysed the CCWG's recommendations and held an online workshop with the group to turn priority recommendations into an action plan for next steps.

The Traction Framework provided a helpful lens for the CCWG to reflect on progress so far and enabled space to explore emotions, group purpose and dynamics, and galvanise energy for the group's next steps. Using the framework also enabled a deeper analysis of governance and climate justice issues, with the importance of enhanced representation of local groups and their voices in planning and delivering climate actions emerging strongly.



View the Traction Framework here

Adaptation Scotland's role

Adaptation Scotland made significant staff time and small amounts of funding available to support the CCWG over the past 2 years, helping to:

- Strengthen local partners' understanding of climate impacts and resilience, and the importance of a partnership approach for adaptation planning and action.

- Support the local partners to co-develop their local evidence base on climate trends, projections and impacts and make complex information accessible.
- Expand engagement and partnership working, helping to build relationships between local organisations as a trusted intermediary and facilitating connections to creative partners and

other national and regional networks and opportunities.

- Create mechanisms for different types of organisations and communities to explore together how the changing climate will impact their place, what is important to protect and why, and the co-benefits of adaptation.
- Explore ways to gather, validate and visualise community voices and local knowledge, and build these into adaptation planning activities.
- Facilitate events and workshops and develop communication and engagement resources such as handouts, mapping activities and stakeholder maps.
- Draw in additional partners, research, and funding including a collaboration with the Met Office to develop the climate storyline project.

Building on the local evidence gathered, and the stocktake and reflection done as part of the Traction process, Adaptation Scotland has more recently been supporting a subgroup of the CCWG to consolidate and analyse the evidence it currently holds in order to develop a Climate Rationale, setting



out the shared climate challenge for the Outer Hebrides, and an accompanying Case for Action, to help the OHCPP identify, agree and implement locally led actions and explore opportunities to establish sustained, long term resources to support the work in the islands moving forwards.

Impact

Work in the Outer Hebrides to date has built a strong, collaborative partnership, which recognises the importance of linking climate adaptation and resilience to societal issues, moving beyond sectoral responses, and acknowledging the environment as the support network underpinning meaningful resilience action.

Developing the local evidence base and producing a local Climate Rationale



means partners now have a stronger shared understanding of the climate challenge in the Outer Hebrides across different organisations, islands and groups, and can articulate this from a perspective of their place, and how this relates to other important priorities for the islands. The accompanying Case for Action provides a set of priority areas for action to improve climate resilience across the islands, grounded in what is important locally. The formation of

the interdisciplinary partnership Làn Thìde has also widened the governance space, providing stronger connections with creative, non-governmental and third sector organisations, allowing knowledge and resources to be pooled and shared, better enabling joined-up planning and providing a strong and legitimate platform to apply for funding to deliver projects.



It should be acknowledged that the CCWG and wider Làn Thìde partnership has shown huge resilience during the uncertainty of the COVID 19 pandemic. Partners are now moving from evidence gathering, capacity building and awareness raising activities to focus on developing and delivering actions, and accessing resources to enable a safer, healthier and flourishing Outer Hebrides.

“We have worked very closely with Adaptation Scotland since 2019 who have given us clear direction and support as we have collated evidence, considered risks, engaged with communities and produced our Climate Rationale and Case for Action. Putting it simply – we would not be in the position we are in today without the advice and support we have received from Adaptation Scotland. There is still much to be done, but with our increased understanding of the issues and risks we are in a much stronger place.”

David MacIennan, CCWG chair/ NatureScot

Acknowledgements/Copyright

Write up content was produced in collaboration between Adaptation Scotland and Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership Climate Change Working Group partners.

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Adaptation Scotland is a programme funded by the Scottish Government and delivered by Sniffer

