



URRAS OIGHREACHD GHABHSAINN
GALSON ESTATE TRUST



MEASADH FEUMALACHDAN TAIGHEADAIS CEANN A TUATH LEÒDHAIS NORTH LEWIS HOUSING NEEDS & DEMAND ASSESSMENT

AN T-IUCHAR JULY 2025

A housing needs assessment was carried out across the Galson Estate area during summer 2025. There were 50 respondents for a residential survey issued and 12 respondents for an employer survey. Benchmarking has been carried out where practicable with an Outer Hebrides wide housing needs survey undertaken by Hebridean Housing Partnership (HHP) in 2021.

In terms of the residential responses, results reveal there are a mix of 13 active movers who are seeking alternative housing solutions at present and another 15 potential movers who expect to need alternative properties over the next five years. Reasons for moving are varied but include lack of space, property condition, health challenges and greater security of tenure. There is demand from families for larger properties but there is also a noticeable cohort of single people requiring housing as well.

The long term preference for those seeking to move is broadly to secure ownership of homes in good condition but various barriers have been highlighted, such as the suitability of properties on the market in the area. Unfortunately, the purchasing power of those seeing to move is generally low due to household incomes. It is clear that cheaper properties on market to buy require significant improvement, whereas the improved/newer properties are unaffordable for many.

Employers have indicated a very high turnover of staff in recent year and, whilst housing is not the primary cause, it does create problems for recruitment on occasion. Hospitality and care are two sectors where recruitment challenges are most prevalent. Employers have a preference for rental accommodation with private rental and social housing the two options that feature highest in their requirements.

Various recommendations have been provided relating to the mix of any new house types and tenures to be built, creating opportunities for young people to remain in the area, advice for croft tenants to support first time buyers, increasing rental options for employers and delivering a promotional campaign to attract more people to live and work in the North Lewis area.

Beachdan Còmhnaidheach **Household Responses**

The age profile of those planning to move is varied but broadly falls within the 25-64 year old groupings and slightly more orientated towards couples with children. This is somewhat different to the HHP results which are more skewed towards single people (25% compared to 36%).

The most common size of property required is a three bedroom house, jointly followed by two bedroom and one bedroom houses. Future developments should cater for 2-4 bedroom properties with possibly a small number of 5 bedroom houses included in larger sites.

Demand for 1 bedroom properties comes predominantly from single people; from couples and single people for 2 bedroom properties; from couples with children and two or more adult generation households for 2 bedroom homes; and, from couples with children for 4 bedrooms and beyond. Those who wish to find a 1 bedroom property are generally downsizing from 3 bedroom properties at present, whereas those seeking 2 bedroom properties are both downsizing and upsizing. Households requiring 3 bedroom properties are upsizing or remaining the same, whilst those looking for 4 bedrooms or more are all upsizing. In terms of age, those seeking to downsize are all in retirement age groups, whilst those wish to upsize are generally families with school age children and households of more than one adult generation.

The most popular long-term options for households were buying on the open market and self-build (both croft/non-croft). In general, renting was more of a short-term aspiration and buying more of a long-term desire.

The most typical amount that movers would be able to borrow lies broadly in the £80,000-£140,000 range which reflects the lower income levels across the area with the most common household income band of £28,000-£39,999.

Sadly, those households living within the Estate seeking larger properties will generally not have the necessary purchasing power unless they have significant capital to hand.

There is not much difference in preferences between areas in North Lewis, Habost to Port of Ness is marginally the most favoured area. For those planning to move into the Estate, Habost to Port of Ness is the only area identified.

The main reasons for households based in the Estate wishing to move are overcrowding and properties in poor condition; for external households, the reasons are more related to security of tenure and location issues. In the 2021 HHP report, the primary reason given was housing conditions, followed by location factors and greater security.

Beyond this, there were 15 respondents who indicated that their houses would not meet their needs in five years' time and 19 (37%) require adaptations to be carried out to their homes to continue living there (compared to 23% in HHP report).

In terms of timescales, there are a range of expectations across active and potential movers. Active movers have more pressing timescales in mind clearly, selecting 'immediately' or 'within a year' as their responses, whereas potential movers are more inclined to relocate anywhere between 3 and 5 years from now (50% of respondents).

There are 8 households (40%) indicating that a solution is required within a year (HHP survey identified 33%) and 10 households (50%) stating they are looking to a timeframe of 3 years or beyond (HHP survey 38%). The largest segment in the HHP survey responses was the 1-3 year timeframe whereas this was the smallest portion in the UOG survey responses.

The overwhelming barriers to moving for existing residents are the lack of suitable properties, affordable options and properties available in preferred locations, which is all very similar to the conclusions from the HHP report. External households' reasons are varied and include a change in household circumstances and waiting to sell existing property. Most respondents are prepared to wait until other options arise, some are planning to move away if nothing improves.

There is strong support for new affordable housing to rent and to buy. There is a very strong preference for ownership across a number of possibilities, such as rent to buy, buying a low cost shared equity property and self build housing. Of the renting options, HHP tenancies are the most preferable.

The active movers based in North Lewis tend towards looking elsewhere, whereas the potential movers are more inclined to wait until alternatives appear (two of these households will look elsewhere).

In both the current UOG survey and the HHP survey in 2021, various common themes come through from the responses. Specific comments made by respondents are matched to the overarching themes identified by HHP in 2021. There is a strong correlation between the frustrations expressed by respondents across this survey, the HHP exercise and a Young Islanders Network report on housing challenges completed in 2024.



Stress and anxiety caused by the insecurity of not having a home base is detrimental to both physical and mental wellbeing.



HHP Survey Themes	Respondent Testimonies
<p>Prices for houses in good condition on the open market are too high</p>	<p><i>"Currently renting, a young couple with pre-school children, both working but unable to save enough for a deposit to buy."</i></p> <p><i>"My husband and I have a house, and my daughter lives with is. She is looking for a suitable house but is unable to find one. So we may all move from the area."</i></p>
<p>Cheaper houses that are on the open market tend to need a lot of refurbishment before the property can be lived in</p>	<p><i>"There is housing available, but some of it is in a poor condition. Money would be better spent on bringing it up to standard instead of building new estates. There should be restrictions on holiday homes."</i></p>
<p>Movers are being out-bid by others (often people moving from the mainland)</p>	<p><i>"We have looked for houses coming to the market as we wish to stay here. However, these are outwith our price range or have been sold quickly (mainlanders offering cash offers), before we could even get a viewing booked."</i></p>
<p>There are no suitable properties available for private rent</p>	<p><i>"Private rent but none of any big enough."</i></p> <p><i>"Looking at places to rent from local estate agents, and looking at private rentals posted on social media, doesn't seem to be that much available."</i></p> <p><i>"Private rent – couldn't afford it."</i></p>
<p>Difficult to move up the HHP housing waiting list if you are single, working and have no dependents</p>	<p><i>"Transfer via HHP but only offered one in really poor condition. Private rent too high."</i></p> <p><i>"Asking HHP to build bigger homes in Ness- they say there's no demand for it."</i></p> <p><i>"We've been told by HHP that if we want a bigger house to leave Ness, we don't want to do that as our kids are settled here, we love it and would not want to move anywhere else but the house is too small for us especially now as the kids are growing up and need more space."</i></p>
<p>Self-building on a croft is difficult due to the length of time it takes and the rising costs of building</p>	<p><i>"Not started but would like to build. Costs spiralled after Covid so that put us off."</i></p>

Beachdan Luchd-Fastaidh **Employer Responses**

Responses were received from 12 businesses and organisations either based in Galson Estate or serving the area from outside. The number of employees per respondent ranged from 1 to 30 with an arithmetical average of 8.5 staff. Employees are generally a mix of full-time and part-time, with smaller levels of seasonal and occasional employment. The majority of employees travel by car, a small number walk to work and travel by bus.

Only one employer offers accommodation to long-term staff but another three usually make arrangements for temporary or seasonal staff. Only a few make any arrangements to support travel to the workplace. Half of the respondents engage in some form of assistance for staff in finding accommodation, primarily involving finding accommodation and providing annualised salaries, but there are a wider range of mechanisms also used. Half of respondents do not provide any assistance for new staff.

Over the last 3 years, respondents have attempted to recruit 40-50 staff in total across a spectrum of full-time, part-time and seasonal positions in North Lewis. It appears that only one individual recruited has remained with the employer, the remainder have left their positions, roughly half staying in north Lewis and half departing the area. Three employers advised that new staff who had previously been offered positions were unable to accept directly due to housing challenges. Respondents indicated that there could be 15 positions becoming available in North Lewis over the next year – only one is a new role.

Ten employers stated that they have had various recruitment difficulties over the last two years, some around skill sets and location challenges. There are clearly wider sectoral issues in hospitality, education and care. Seven employers responded that their ongoing recruitment problems will potentially result in them reducing activities and downscaling the organisation. The biggest factors in recruitment and retention challenges are the lack of suitable candidates and loss of access to the EU marketplace. A lack of accommodation (generally or affordable) was cited by five respondents.

Respondents were asked to identify which housing solutions would best tackle accommodation challenges : 5 employers did not consider housing to be critical to their problems but 7 provided responses. Unsurprisingly, the main choices are private rental and social housing.

The sizes of accommodation required varied with 2 and 3 bedroom properties referred to most often. Overall, 4 employers regarded their workforce as key workers.

Co-dhùnaidhean Conclusions

North Lewis faces a range of demographic challenges currently and in the years ahead. Creation of employment opportunities in the area will be as important as housing solutions. Investment in affordable housing, which includes social housing, has significant economic impacts which include promoting inclusive growth by creating jobs, increasing GVA and providing large multiplier effects.

Increasing the supply of affordable housing helps to tackle inequalities by reducing child poverty and homelessness and by providing inclusive, sustainable housing options. Social housing providers support the delivery of affordable and good quality homes which can improve health and wellbeing, contribute to successful placemaking and strengthen community resilience, (including rural community resilience). Social housing providers are important community anchors which are well placed to support anti-poverty strategies and lead economic and social cohesion at a community level. Housing interventions can be preventative if they offer savings in non-housing budgets (e.g. health care, justice, social security) however evidencing this preventative spending and translating to cashable savings is generally challenging.

UOG desires North Lewis to be a place where everyone can live long and healthy lives; an inclusive and innovative society that not only supports older population to live healthy lives but ensures they have opportunities to participate, contribute and thrive. If people live longer, but not healthier lives, then more will spend a greater proportion of their lives in some form of ill-health. Whereas the pressing issues in the last decade were around 'repatriating' former residents housed in care elsewhere across the islands, and improving respite opportunities, the focus has subsequently widened out to include wellbeing. The ambition for closer-at-hand care accommodation and respite facilities remains, however, delivering this will be far more complex than expected and will take considerable time.

Housing remains at the top of many people's list for rural regeneration. Publicly funded housing has been accelerated over recent years but still has a tendency to produce the wrong product and community groups are beginning to look to other solutions. UOG needs to augment public agency provision by delivering the homes needed in the right places and of a quality and type to meet people's changing household needs, including those created by an ageing population. Areas of population decline experience problems as housing developments are less likely in these areas without the economic investment alongside.

Community Wealth Building should be an important part of housing proposals in order to ensure wealth is generated, circulated, and retained within the local community. Centring an approach that proactively democratises land ownership, use and management can help tackle the crises and inequalities facing communities today. With the role of land and property being one of five core pillars, UOG is well placed to deliver against CWB aspirations.

Creating a place for all generations and families to live well and flourish locally is fundamental to retaining and attracting people. UOG wishes to encourage families and people of working age to remain here and also to come and build their lives here, to make a positive contribution to the North Lewis economy and community.

Molaidhean Recommendations

The following are recommendations arising from the survey findings.

- Development planning should reflect the need for larger family houses, potentially a small number of 5 bedroom properties, but particularly 3 and 4 bedroom houses as well as smaller properties.
- Low cost purchase options should be provided as part of developments in light of long-term demand shown.
- Young people seeking independent living should be facilitated to remain in the Estate where possible.
- Allocation policies for any new housing provided should reflect the priorities identified in the responses as far as practicable.
- To limit the impact of cash purchases on changes in croft tenancies, croft tenants should be provided with advice on benefits of decrofting houses, ensuring succession plans are in place for crofts or renouncing crofts so that UOG can reallocate, bequeathing homes to UOG, etc.
- Consideration could be given to assisting employers with recruitment to the area, perhaps through promotional material and co-ordination of activities as part of a *Live-Work-Visit North Lewis* campaign.



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AR LÈIRSINN / OUR VISION

“Coimhearsnachd a tha soirbheachail le deagh cheanglaichean anns a bheil sàr sheirbheisean agus ghoireasan ionadail, a’ cleachdadh a stòrasan nàdarra gus cultar agus àrainneachd a tha sònraichte a dhèanamh seasmhach.”

“A thriving and well-connected community with excellent local services and amenities, harnessing its natural assets to sustain a unique cultural and social environment.”

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