



Photo credit: Murdanie MacLeod



Galson Estate

Community Climate Action Plan

Author: Catherine Thomson

March 2025

Carbon
Neutral
Islands



Credit Phillip Walker



**Community
Energy
Scotland**



**Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba**

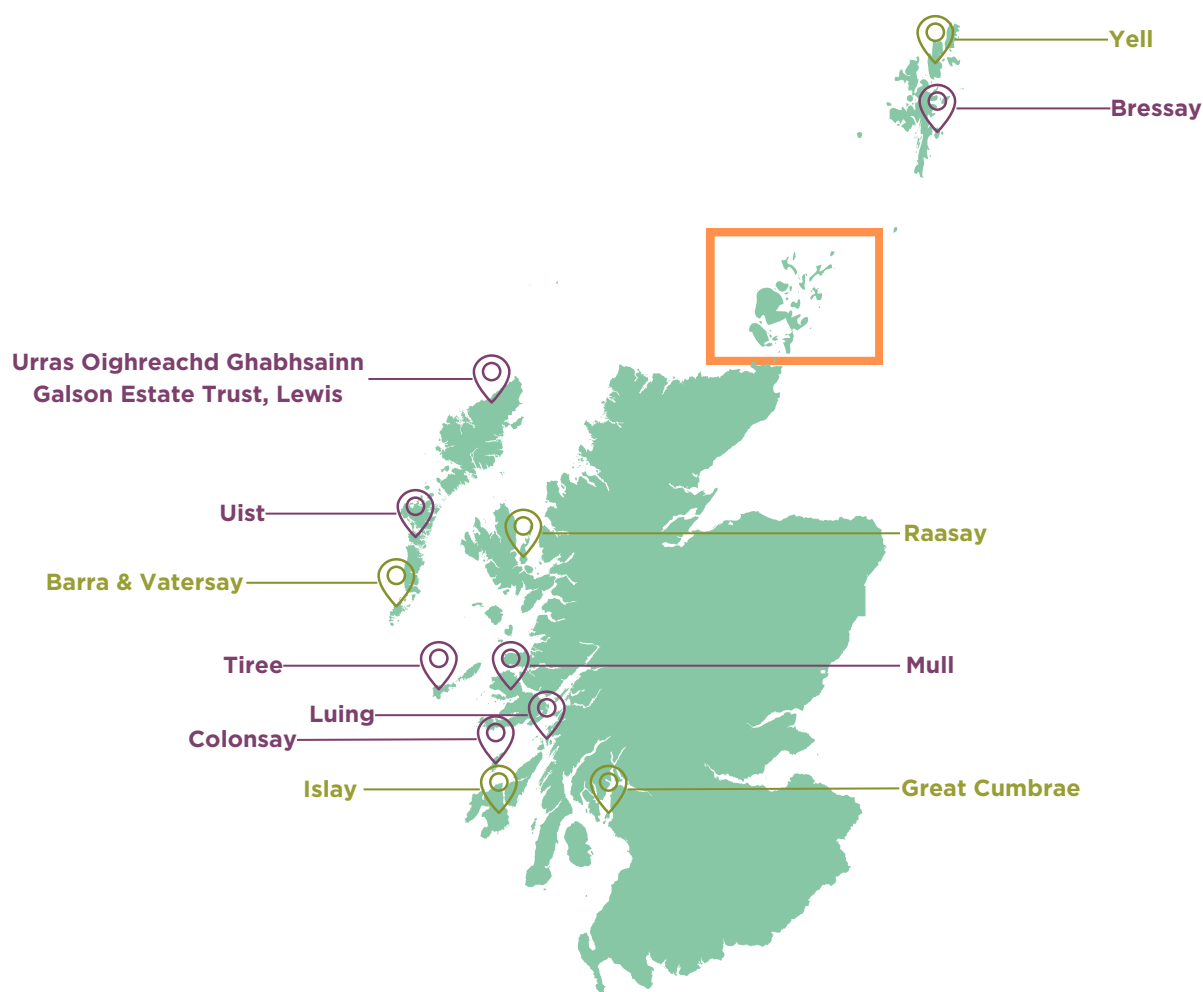


**URRAS OIGHREACHD
GHABHSAINN
GALSON ESTATE TRUST**






**THE ISLANDS
SCOTLAND ACT 2018
ACHD
NAN EILEAN
ALBA 2018**

The Carbon Neutral Islands



Key

-  **Original Six Islands**
-  **Community of Practice**
-  **Community of Practice: Orkney Cluster**



The Carbon Neutral Islands Project

The Carbon Neutral Islands (CNI) project started in 2022 to support six island groups—Barra & Vatersay, Hoy & Walls, Cumbrae, Islay, Raasay, and Yell—become carbon neutral by 2040 using a community-led approach. These islands are seen as examples for others, and the lessons from their work will be shared with all Scottish islands and beyond.

In 2024, the Scottish Government provided funding for 15 more islands to join communities of practice, led by Community Energy Scotland (CES), to engage with their residents, complete carbon audits, and create climate action plans. The project supports broader efforts to achieve net zero emissions and contributes to Scotland's legal goal of reaching net zero by 2045.

What is carbon neutral?

A carbon neutral island is an island where the greenhouse gas emissions are in balance with what the 'sinks' can absorb. Sinks can be natural resources that absorb CO₂ (like trees or soils) or technological solutions that do the same thing (carbon capture and storage). If an island's sinks—such as its forests—remove more CO₂ than the emissions produced by activities on the island, then it becomes carbon-negative.

Decarbonisation means reducing or stopping carbon emissions. For example, by walking or cycling instead of driving.

Decarbonisation is a big part of tackling climate change globally, but it also brings local benefits. Community climate actions can lower costs for households and businesses, improve health and living conditions, create new job and training opportunities and help create more resilient communities.

What we're working on

Galson Estate in North Lewis are engaged in the community of practice, represented by Catherine Thomson from Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn.

The outputs for Galson Estate's involvement in this project are:

- Community Climate Action Plan
- Investigating into more sustainable and energy efficient opportunities to improve the housing stock.



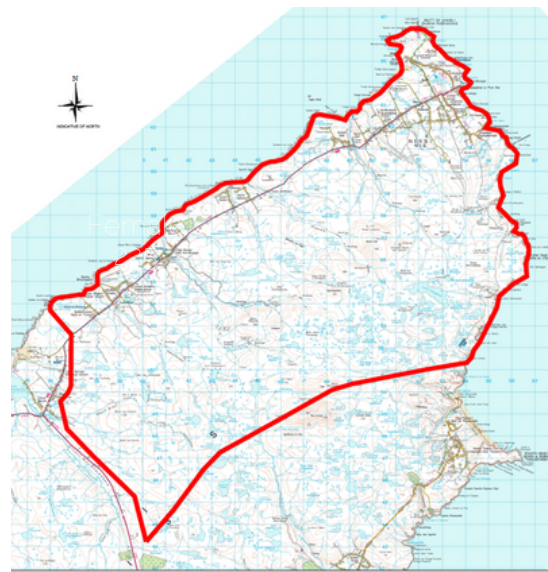
Photo credit: Alex Thomson

Our island context

Galson Estate

Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn was established in 2005 to undertake the community buyout of the Galson Estate, and to manage the land, for the benefit of the community and the environment.

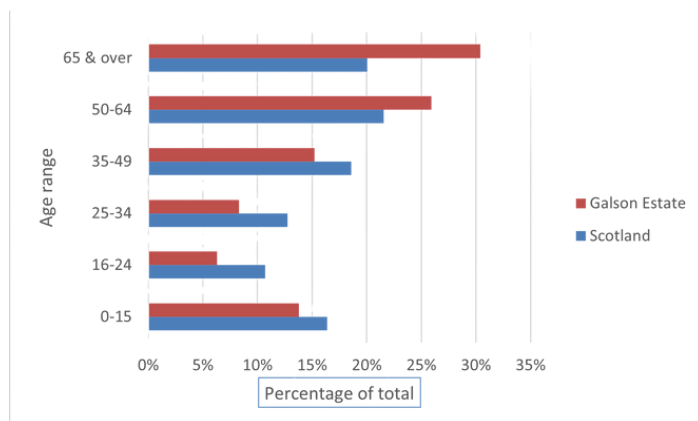
The Galson Estate, which passed into community ownership on 12th January 2007, consists of 56,000 acres of coast, agricultural land and moor in the North West of the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland. The estate is home to 22 villages, running from Upper Barvas to Port of Ness, with a population of nearly 2,000 people. We work to ensure that the community of Galson Estate benefits from community ownership, and we manage all estate businesses, whilst also overseeing a range of projects, to support and develop the area.⁴



Key issues

- Lack of transport links
- Fuel poverty
- Lack of energy efficient housing

Population and age



Main Industries

- Tourism/Hospitality
- Creative Industries
- Crofting
- Community Development

The Outer Hebrides face one of the highest levels of fuel poverty within the UK due to a combination of low incomes, high fuel bills and poor energy efficiency of properties. In addition, the lack of mains gas, a high proportion of older and detached houses (leading to higher heat loss) all increase the prevalence of fuel poverty.⁵



4. Galson Estate Trust (www.galsontrust.com)

5. <https://adaptation.scot/app/uploads/2024/08/ohcpp-climate-rationale-final.pdf>

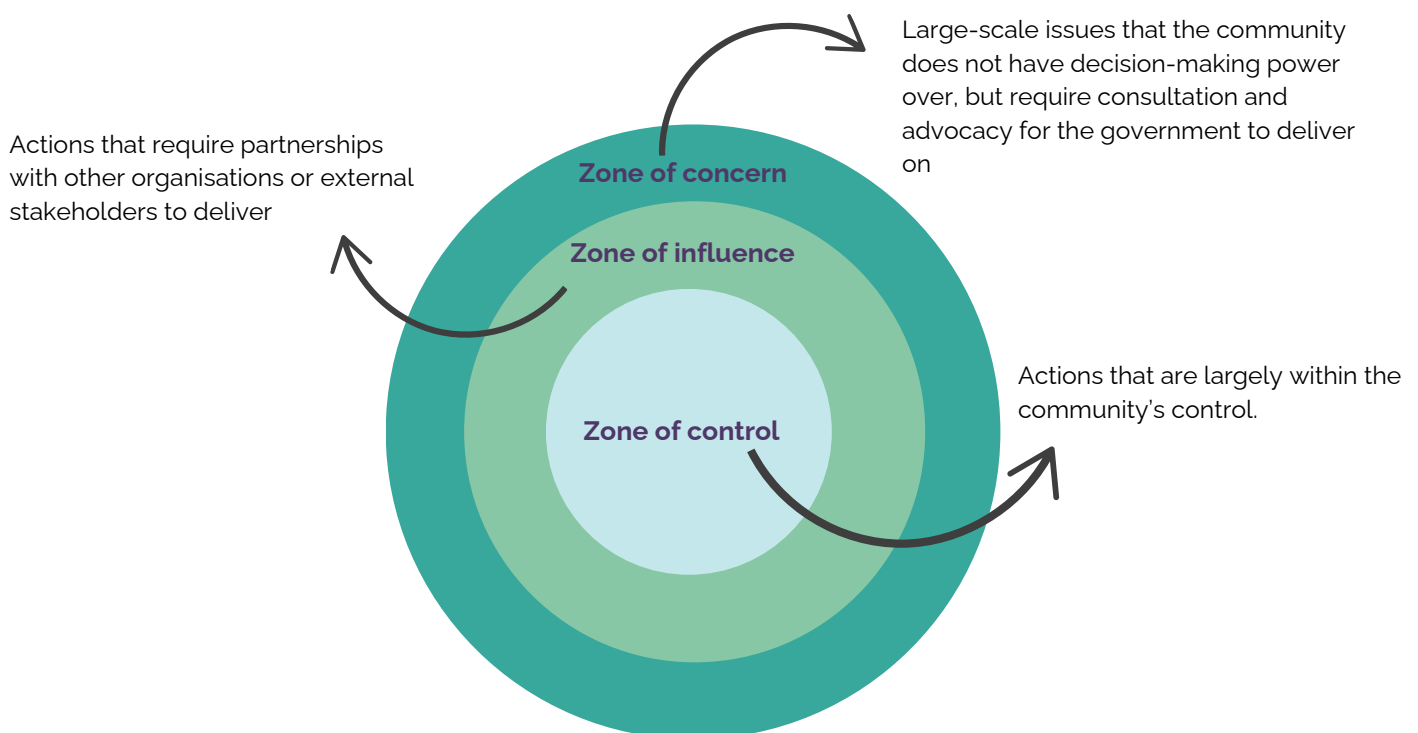
Community vision

The vision of the community of North Lewis is that everyone on the Galson Estate is able to heat their homes comfortably, and affordably and their homes meet energy efficient standards. Improve the connectivity within the community by having sustainable transport links which are accessible for the local commuter group to Stornoway, and for around the estate. Supporting people in the transition to electric vehicles to reduce carbon emissions and live in a sustainable way.

The Zones of Control

This action plan prioritises actions within the community's direct control while recognising areas we can influence or are concerned about. When we can separate and understand what level of influence we can have on an issue, it allows resources and energy to be more efficiently allocated.

For example, promoting cycling and walking instead of car use is within our control. Building new walking and cycling paths falls under our influence, while electrifying ferries is a national issue beyond the community's direct control but is still important to work towards and be involved in.



Based/adapted from Stephen Covey's Circle of Influence and Circle of Concern - "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People"

Climate change and Galson Estate

Changes to the climate are already being experienced in Scotland. These include increased average temperatures, warmer and drier summers, milder and wetter winters with reduced frost and snow, an increase in heavy rainfall events and rising sea levels, with the weather becoming more variable and an increase in the frequency of severe storms. On the Galson Estate, there has been sand dune erosion on Traigh Shanndaigh (Eorpie Beach) due to storms. The increasing severity of the weather has also affected lazy beds, beaches and rivers. The lazy beds are being eroded, and the health of the marram grass on top of the sand dunes, there to protect the beach and provide a home for certain species, has been negatively impacted. During the winter months, there has been increased rainfall leading to rivers overflowing, making it difficult to access land. The Outer Hebrides' location results in increased exposure to these changes while our fragile ecosystems, rural communities and reducing population combined with an ageing demographic further increase vulnerability to climate impacts.

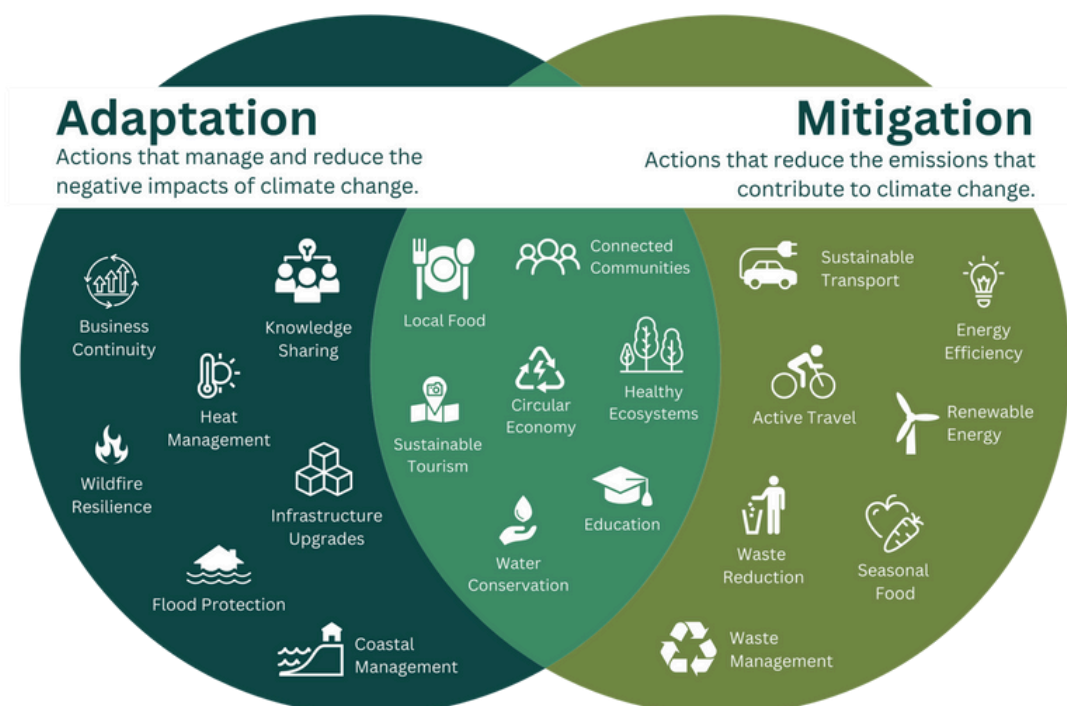
This plan includes action in two key areas:

Adaptation – Actions to manage and reduce the negative effects of climate change.

Mitigation – Actions to reduce the emissions that cause climate change.

The diagram below shows how adaptation and mitigation often work together. Both are essential for reducing risks from changing weather and building stronger, more resilient communities.

Scotland has declared a climate emergency and taken stronger action through the 2019 Climate Change Act, aiming for net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045. This law also ensures Scotland prepares for the impacts of climate change already happening, like rising sea levels and more extreme weather.



Community input

Planning
community
engagement
event

Delivery of
Climate café

Survey
distributed

Information
analysed and
summarised

Results shared
with the
community for
feedback

Our Climate Cafe took place on 28th November 2024 with 10 attendees. The focus of the day was to establish the community's views and opinions about energy and housing, and transport on the Galson Estate. To guide the discussions about each sector, we used a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis. The group then generated project ideas to address the 'weaknesses' or areas of concern (pg. 13-14).



Housing sector strengths

- There is multi-agency partnership (Home Energy Scotland, Tighean Innse Gall, Warmworks) who can help with the whole house approach regarding social and economic benefits. Social benefits being making homes are comfortable living spaces which improves health and wellbeing. Economic benefits refers to finding grants/loans to create a more energy efficient house to decrease the energy bills.
- Local contractors with the skills and experience to carry out home energy efficiency improvements.
- Free fuel from the local peatland as a back up source in case of power outages or in the winter months although this is seen as controversial.
- There is high potential for generating energy through wind on the estate.

Transport sector strengths

- There are four local shops which sell local produce and encourage people to shop on the estate.
- For those who don't live on the main road there is a feeder bus provided by a local bus company.
- There is a community transport service which can pick up those with mobility issues and the elderly, allowing them to get out and about and able to do their activities.



What does the data show us?

A household survey was distributed to collect data on residents' home construction and their heating and travel habits. There were 244 responses which represents 8% of the estate's population.

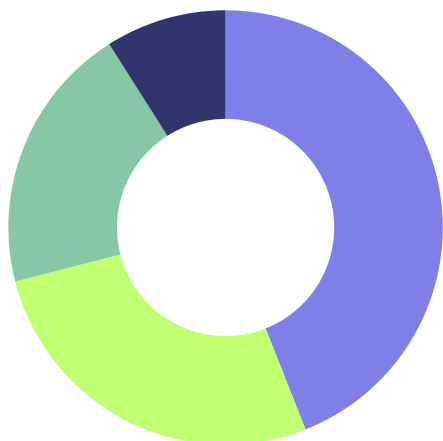
35%

Households reported that they weren't able to heat their homes adequately

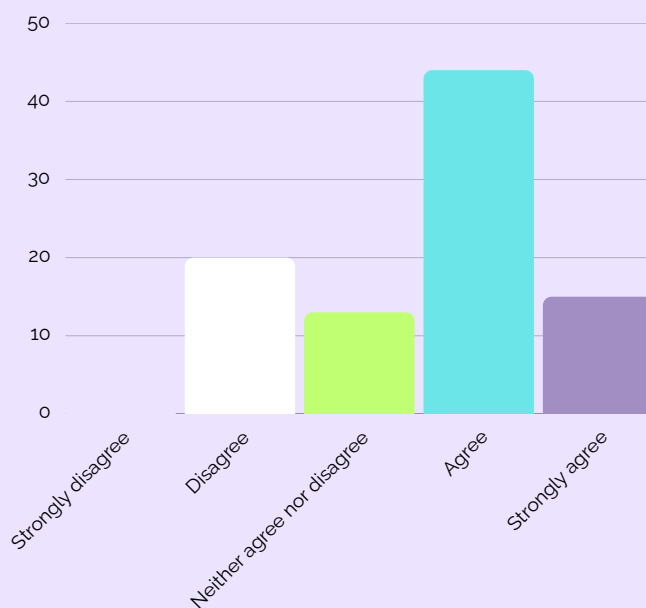


Why?

- Cost of fuel/energy
- Poor quality or lack of insulation
- Ineffective heating system
- Other



Your home is well insulated and ventilated



A horizontal bar chart with a white background and light gray vertical grid lines at 0, 20, 40, 60, 80, and 100. The y-axis lists six transport modes: Car, Bus, Cycle, Walk, Car Share, and Other. The x-axis represents the percentage of respondents. The bars are colored in a solid teal color. The 'Car' bar is the longest, extending to approximately 90%. The 'Bus' bar extends to approximately 7%. The 'Cycle', 'Walk', 'Car Share', and 'Other' bars are all very short, each extending to approximately 1%.

Transport Mode	Percentage of Respondents
Car	90%
Bus	7%
Cycle	1%
Walk	1%
Car Share	1%
Other	1%

90% of people travel by car

A pie chart illustrating the frequency of service use over the last 12 months. The chart is divided into five segments: 'One' (33%, light blue), 'Two' (44%, medium blue), 'Three' (11%, dark blue), 'Four or more' (7%, very dark blue), and an unlabeled segment (5%, cyan). The segments are arranged clockwise starting from the top right.

Frequency	Percentage
One	33%
Two	44%
Three	11%
Four or more	7%
(Unlabeled)	5%

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Areas of concern

Home Energy

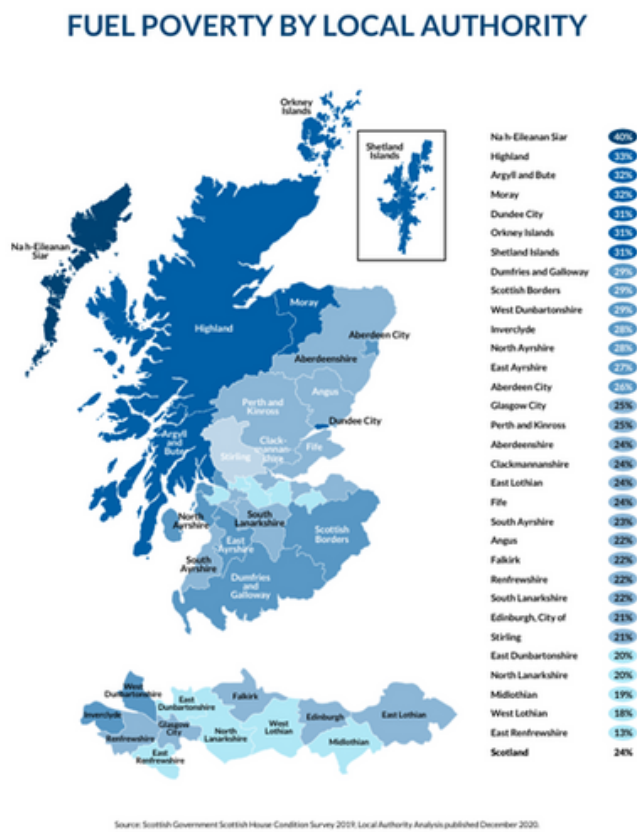
The weaknesses identified in the SWOT analysis from the Climate Café were mainly around the poor conditions of housing stock that we have on the estate. Specifically, the condition of roofs, windows and doors where the most heat escapes which means more people will be using more fuel to keep their homes warm. There is a heavy reliance on oil as 55% of survey respondents stated that their primary source of heating is oil, and it is seen as more efficient for the standard of housing that Galson Estate has. In comparison to the rest of Scotland, only 5% of households use oil to heat their homes, with most using mains gas. Detached homes make up the majority of the housing stock, at 88%, meaning all external walls are exposed to harsh weather conditions, which also degrade the ability to keep heat in.

According to the Fuel Poverty report by Tighean Innse Gall, the Western Isles have a fuel poverty rate of 40%, almost double the Scottish national average of 24%. The household survey that we distributed amongst estate residents confirmed the findings from this report, with housing conditions contributing to people's inability to heat their homes comfortably, people experiencing rising costs of energy. The survey results indicate that 85% of respondents have had their heating bills increase with the biggest causes being cost of fuel and lack of insulation.

Transport

There is a lack of convenient alternatives to driving on the estate - bus routes between Stornoway and Ness do not match the demand of people's working hours, and there is no infrastructure for safe cycling on the roads around the Galson Estate. This results in a high reliance on private vehicles, most of which are diesel. The survey shows that diesel is still the most used fuel because it's seen as more efficient which is important when the homes on the estate range between 13 and 28 miles from the local town, Stornoway. In terms of the transition to electric vehicles, uptake is low due to knowledge gaps such as comparisons in affordability and fuel consumption between petrol/diesel cars and EVs. There are only three charging points on the estate, and they are all located in Ness, which makes charging less accessible and convenient.

Image - <https://tighean.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Warmth-Booklet-2024.pdf>



Energy

Potential projects not only address the weaknesses that affect the Galson Estate, but also enhance and utilise the strengths that we already benefit from. We also look at opportunities that can be delivered. The main areas for concern were the condition of the housing stock and heavy dependence on oil as a heating fuel. Therefore the key areas for action are improving the energy efficiency of homes and exploring renewable energy and heating systems.

Activity	CO2 saving	Co-benefits	Cost
<u>Surveys</u> Target existing groups by using the multi-agency resources to provide home surveys and source thermal cameras. Can train someone up to provide this service.		   	  
<u>Small adaptation</u> Secure grants so we can assess buildings and act on small changes, for example changing doors, windows and adding insulation.		   	  
<u>Information</u> Provide resources and advice to make basic energy efficiency measures for people's homes and local businesses more accessible.		   	  
<u>Major adaptation</u> Utilising the wind and combining solar, heat pump and battery is a prime opportunity to move away from oil, gas, peat etc and live in a sustainable home.		   	  



Estimated carbon saving potential



Improves ecology



Builds resilience



Encourages economic sustainability















Enhances health & wellbeing



Estimated cost to implement action

Transport

There is an opportunity to reduce car usage on the estate through better public transport routes, and safe cycle paths. There is also a keen interest in supporting the transition to electric vehicles.

Activity	CO2 saving	Co-benefits	Cost
Investigate the acquisition of electric vehicles to be available for use by the community to complement existing provision.			
Support EV adoption with grants, salary sacrifice schemes, and local mechanic training for island-based servicing.			
A campaign to encourage efficient driving to help reduce costs and the need to refuel.			
Support for increased active travel and the take-up of e-bikes which has been supported through Sporsnis, our local sports centre.			



Estimated carbon saving potential



Improves ecology



Builds resilience



Encourages economic sustainability



Enhances health & wellbeing



Estimated cost to implement action

Photo credit: Murdanie MacLeod



Next Steps

This Action Plan is a tool for the whole community to use in order to tackle fuel poverty and ensure the long-term sustainability of home energy and transport within the Galson Estate. This is a living document and new priorities that emerge in the future can be added.

The next step will be to take two actions forward. The first is to support the installation of basic energy efficiency measures by providing resources and advice to make this process more accessible and appealing for people's homes and businesses. These can be relatively small adaptations, for example changing doors, windows and adding insulation. A more sustainable approach towards housing will improve energy efficiency and can help in the move away from solid fuel and towards renewable heating technologies. The second action, in relation to transport, will be to explore options to invest in an electric vehicle for community use and to act as an encouraging example, building interest and confidence in EVs for residents and other organisations and businesses. The implementation of these measures aim to reduce bills and improve well-being and resiliency in the community as well as helping to address the fuel poverty that the Galson Estate is currently facing.

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Photo credit: Colin Morrison

