

Annual Report

Aithisg Bhliadhnaile



October / An Dàmhair

2023

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A word from our chair

I hope you find this report informative and that it gives you an insight into the work of the Urras.

Just when we thought the island was emerging from the effects of Covid 19 it became apparent that another major challenge awaited us as a community. The possible impact of the cost of living crisis was far from clear, but the Urras agreed several initiatives as a matter of urgency which it was hoped would help families and vulnerable people in the community. More information on these initiatives is available later in this report.

Looking ahead you can read about a number of potentially impactful projects including the Butt of Lewis Lighthouse proposals and an opportunity to think anew about the on-going need for affordable housing.

It is worth mentioning that 2024 will mark the centenary of the creation of the new crofting township of Galson following the legislation contained in the Land settlement of 1919. Families arrived from villages along the west and north coast of Lewis between Carloway and Eoropie. There will be more information on this programme of events in the months ahead.

I'd like to record my sincere thanks to all staff at the Urras, to my colleagues on the Board who give of their time so willingly and to everyone in the community who help and participate in many ways.

Please call in to the office in Galson or contact us using the usual email and social media.

Everyone is welcome.

Agnes Rennie
UOG Chairperson



Aithris bhon Chathraiche



Tha mi 'n dòchas gu faigh sibh fiosrachadh san litir seo a bh' air uinneag dhuibh air obair an Urrais thairis air a' bhliadhna ud.

Bha sinn mar eilean dìreach ag èirigh bho sgàile Còvid 19 nuair a dh'fhàs e follaiseach gu robh dùbhlàn às ùr romhainn le pris a' bhidhe agus pris connaidh ag èirigh aig astar. Bha sinn fortanach gu robh teachd a steach aig an Urras a leig dhuinn mar bhuidheann taic a thoirt dhan choimhearsnachd far an robh feum air. Gheibh sibh fiosrachadh nas mionaidich nas fhaide air adhart.

A' coimhead romhainn tha cothrom againn pròiseactan a thoirt air adhart a dh'fhaodadh cruth-atharrachadh a dhèanamh san sgìre m.e. obair leasachaidh an taigh-sholais agus sùil às ùr air taigheadas.

'S fhiach ainmeachadh cuideachd gum bi ceud bliadhna an ath bhliadhn' 2024, bho thàinig sluagh às ùr a dh'fhuireach a bhaile ùr Ghabhsainn san tac air a bristeadh le òrdugh an Riaghaltais. Cò is urrainn tuigsinn cò ris bha sin coltach agus teaghlaidhean tighinn bho bhailtean eadar Càrlabhagh agus Eoropaidh. Cluinnidh sibh tòrr a bharrachd mun seo 's na mìosan tha romhainn.

Bu mhath leam mo thaing thoirt dhan luchd-obrach air fad, dha buill a' bhùird a tha an sàs gu saor-thoileach agus dhuibhse, muinntir ar choimhearsnachd. Feuch gun tadhail sibh san ionad an Gabhsann no cuiribh fios uair sam bith.

Bidh fàilte romhaibh.

Agnes Rennie

Cathraiche UOG



The People of Galson Estate

Muinntir Oighreachd Ghabhsainn

Board of Directors

Bòrd - Stiùiridh



AGNES RENNIE
CHAIR



MURDO MACRITCHIE
VICE-CHAIR



CAROLA BELL
DIRECTOR



AGNES MACDONALD
DIRECTOR



DONALD MACSWEEN
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CHRISTOPHER SMAIL
PROJECT MANAGER
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CATHERINE THOMSON
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
APPRENTICE



MARIE GILLIES
COMMUNITY INVESTMENT
OFFICER



CHRISTINE MURRAY
CROFTING ADMINISTRATIVE
OFFICER



JOANNE MATHESON
FINANCE OFFICER



JEN ADIL-SMITH
ADMINISTRATOR



CALUM MACKENZIE
AMENITY SITE SUPERVISOR



JON FRECK
AMENITY SITE OPERATIVE

Our Vision For The Future

Ar Lèirsinn

Vision



Ar Lèirsinn

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

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





Crofting & Land Use



Croitearachd agus Cleachdadh Fearainn

To promote collaborative working in the stewardship of our land. Offering enhanced horticultural facilities benefiting from expert guidance and tuition.

Health & Wellbeing



Cùram agus Soirbheas

To promote overall well-being through the encouragement of wellness, accessibility, and engagement.

Exceptional Place



Aite air Leth

To facilitate activities that will draw individuals to the locality while fostering an environment that enables families to flourish.

Tourism



Turasachd

To improve our facilities and focus on providing a unique experience for our visitors.

Crofting & Land Use

Croitearachd agus Cleachdadh Fearainn

Housing – Rural Housing Status

Work has been ongoing to plan a variety of housing options for the estate. Scottish Ministers have recently given their approval for Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn to have Rural Housing Body status. This will allow conditions to be attached to future affordable housing developments to support them to remain affordable and give the community control over what happens to that property in the future.

Currently, we have a partnership working group in place with CnES, HHP and TIG to explore the option of developing a housing site with additional care housing in the Upper Barvas area. We are also looking at releasing two crofts with house sites in the Ness area. This will give local young people rare access to a working croft. This is just the beginning of an exciting new phase considering a number of impactful housing projects. A housing needs analysis will be carried out over the coming months and we welcome community involvement in shaping these plans.



Credit: Ali Finlayson

Deer Management Plan

We are working in partnership with three shooting syndicates across the Estate with the aim of creating a Deer Management Plan. Working with our neighbouring estates, our plan will feed into the wider plan for managing the deer herds of Lewis. We are grateful for the voluntary effort from our syndicates in sustainably managing the deer herd. Particular effort has been made to clear problem herds from roadsides between Galson and Dell to prevent road traffic accidents. Extended licenses from Nature Scot have been granted to allow shooting outwith the season and at night to tackle the problem. Again we are grateful to our volunteers who have taken on this role to shoot in these challenging conditions.

Land management plan

Work has begun to engage partners who can help shape our land management plan. We are working closely with RSPB, Bumblebee Conservation, John Muir Trust, Peatland Action and local users of the land to create a long term strategic plan. This will ensure the landscape and biodiversity is protected.

How to get involved - volunteer on our working group.



Wind Energy

The Ballantrushal Wind Farm has continued to perform well, generating 8,736 MWhs of energy for export to the island grid.

As it reaches the mid point in it's life cycle, a novel partnership has been created with neighbouring estates to investigate the potential for a new community owned windfarm to benefit residents of the west coast of Lewis.

A CARES grant has been awarded to the group to investigate the feasibility of this project over the coming year.



OVER 30 WORKSHOPS, EVENTS, MARKETS, SEED SWAPS AND OPEN DAYS HOSTED AT THE HEBRIDEAN COMMUNITY GARDEN

Gunnera

We are working in partnership with Community Land Outer Hebrides to address the problem of Gunnera throughout the Estate as part of a wider project across the Outer Hebrides.

Gunnera, often called 'Giant Rhubarb', entered our ecosystem about 20 years ago as an ornamental plant. While it hails from South America, our mild and wet climate has allowed it to thrive beyond gardens, encroaching onto crofts. With heights of up to 2 meters and sprawling leaves, it out-competes native flora, blocks ditches, and even access tracks. Left to spread in the wild we are likely to see increasing areas of land lost to grazings as well as significant impacts on our biodiversity. We are taking a proactive approach to control the spread of Gunnera.

Care & Wellbeing

Cùram agus Soirbheas

Supporting the Community Amidst a Cost of Living Crisis.

As the Covid-19 pandemic continued to shape our new normal, we recognised the impact of the cost of living crisis on our community. To help mitigate this, we established a Hardship Fund to provide aid where it was needed most. We began by subsidising all activities on the estate to just £1 for children and £2 for adults, as we knew that hobbies were often the first expense to be cut. This allowed people to remain active through our winter Sunnd programme. The success of this initiative, particularly among kids clubs, led us to extend the support year-round to invest in the health, wellbeing, and provision of opportunities for our youth.

As heating costs continued to rise, we sought to ensure that those who were unable to stay active were still able to stay warm in their homes, without having to choose between heating and eating. We consulted with health professionals and decided to invest in heated blankets for those over the age of 80 and those with health complications. Recipients of the blankets reported feeling much more comfortable in their homes and did not have to use additional heating to keep warm, thus preventing their fuel bills from increasing. We also subsidised lunch deliveries from Comunn Eachdraidh Nis to just £2, making it more affordable for those attending the day club and providing a warm meal and companionship to those in need in our community.



The laundrette faced a price increase due to rising gas prices, but instead of passing this on to our community during the winter months when the service was most needed, we absorbed the cost ourselves. This allowed us to keep prices at just £1 per use, providing a valuable service to our community throughout the long, harsh winter.

Thanks to the success of these initiatives, additional funding was secured from the National Lottery Communities Fund. This allowed us to distribute £60 vouchers to every household in the estate area for use on food or fuel at local shops. This not only helped families facing rising expenses, but also provided a much-needed boost to our local businesses.



Bha Sunnd 2023 air leth agus tha mi dha-rìribh taingeil airson nan cothroman a fhuair mi rudeigin ùr fheuchainn a-mach agus a dhol air ais gu rudan a bha mi air a dhèanamh roimhe. Le cho reusanta 's a bha prìsean, cha robh cosgais na bhacadh nas motha. B' fheàrr leam gun leanadh co-dhùì cuid den phrògram rè na bliadhna!

SUNND 2023

Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn initiatives have been helping the Galson Estate residents through the cost of living crisis.

£74,194 of UOG funds have been spent on local initiatives.



Local Shop Vouchers

With additional funding received from The National Lottery Community Fund, we were able to issue £60 local shop vouchers to 942 households

**£54 835
Total Spend**



HEATED BLANKETS

Delivered to all over 80's on the Galson Estate

**200
Heated Blankets**



£1 Kids Club Subsidies

FUNDED BY 4 DAYS OF COMBINED INCOME FROM OUR TURBINES



Cost of Living Hardship Subsidies

FUNDED BY 11 DAYS OF COMBINED INCOME FROM OUR TURBINES

- Free nappies for all babies on the estate
- 42 sets of cold weather clothing for all nursery children
- 91 weekly subsidised lunch deliveries to over 60's on the Galson Estate
- 10 families supported through Social Work requests
- 90 weekly subsidised laundrette uses
- 46 adults attending £2 exercise classes

Exceptional Place Aite air Leth

This year's activity calendar has been packed with an array of festivals and events.

Plòigh Plòigh MHÒR!

The Plòigh programme had another successful year, expanding to offer 44 fun-filled sessions, up from last year's 34. The sessions are held during Easter, Summer, and October holidays.

The activities ranged from gardening and candle making to exciting adventures such as mountain biking and surfing. The success of the Plòigh programme is due to a collaborative effort by our partners, including Sporsnis, Taigh Dhonnachaidh, CnaG, RSPB, Clan MacQuarrie Community Centre, and Barvas & Brue Community Centre.

Preparations are already underway to further enhance the diversity and scope of the 2024 programme.



In April, we hosted a celebration of our Maritime Heritage, Fèis na Fairge.

Highlights included a moving talk by Jim Wilkie on the 100th anniversary of the Metagama emigration. The Falmadair, Boatlines and Sunwise presentations kept attendees engaged with their knowledge and storytelling. Attendees of all ages enjoyed stone balancing and sand art.

We also explored the maritime heritage of our region with Professor Frank Rennie and the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust. We are looking to review this for 2024, details of which will be announced in the New Year.



Sunnd, now in its sixth year, has firmly established itself as a cherished tradition in our community.

With a diverse array of events catering to various interests and skill levels, Sunnd continues to brighten the winter months.

This success is a result of our collaboration with 16 partner organisations, making this endeavour a community-wide effort.



Dùthchas: (Doo- Khas)

1. The place, land or country one was born in/feels akin to
2. Custom, tradition, manner, or language that has been passed down through generations

Introducing na Dorsan

In 2024, we will proudly unveil a brand-new monument, “na Dorsan”, a tribute that commemorates a century of our incredible journey from the resettlement of Galson village to community ownership.

Crafted by Will Maclean and Marian Leven, the artists behind the iconic Iolaire and Sùileachan memorials, this new work of art promises to capture the essence of our community's journey.

We hope you will join us in celebrating this remarkable milestone and honouring our rich history through a programme of curated local events.



“
This is the best week, I
don't want it to end.
Cathlin, P7
JMT Transition 2023



296 Total Sessions Delivered
2542 Total Attendances



Tourism Turasachd

Visitor Management Wardens

The Urras was one of seven community partners involved in Community Land Outer Hebrides Visitor Warden Project this summer. Claire and Iain were appointed for a three month period. Their role was to engage with, and advise visitors on points of interest in the area, to reinforce the outdoor access code and promote the 'Outer Hebrides is a special PLACE' message. They also surveyed visitors for valuable insight into what they enjoyed most from their visit to the Galson Estate area.



Claire Fisher & Iain Farrell, Visitor Management Wardens

Cruise Market

Completion of the Stornoway deep water port coming next year, there is an opportunity through the projected increase in cruise passengers looking for interesting and authentic experiences during their visit. In response, the Urras has supported local community organisations and businesses to build a varied itinerary giving an authentic experience of island life to visitors. This would allow additional income stream to our four main community partners; Clan MacQuarrie Community Centre, Comunn Eachdraidh Nis, Taigh Dhonnachaidh and Sporsnis, as they continue to deliver valuable services to the community.



5464 Website Visits

80 Visitor Surveys

Galson Campsite

2023 marks the first full year of operation for the Galson campsite, and it has been a busy one with occupancy at 51% throughout the year and 75% through the summer months.

Galson Campsite has been awarded a four star Visit Scotland rating with many positive reviews. Thanks to staff for keeping the facilities clean and being on hand to welcome guests and give advice on all there is to enjoy in the Galson Estate area.

The campsite works towards two main aims; giving visitors a place to park away from the fragile machair landscape and extending their stay to enjoy more of the varied experiences on offer in the Galson Estate. The campsite has generated sufficient profit in this year to provide additional visitor facilities on the Estate.



428 Campervan Stays

397 App Downloads

Butt of Lewis Lighthouse

Following the feasibility study completed last year, work is underway to negotiate a lease agreement with the Northern Lighthouse Board to move ahead with the redevelopment plans. As a first phase, in conjunction with funding from HIE, public toilets are planned to be installed at the Butt of Lewis in the coming months. This is the initial step in plans for a full redevelopment of the Butt of Lewis site over the coming years to meet the needs of the growing visitor market.

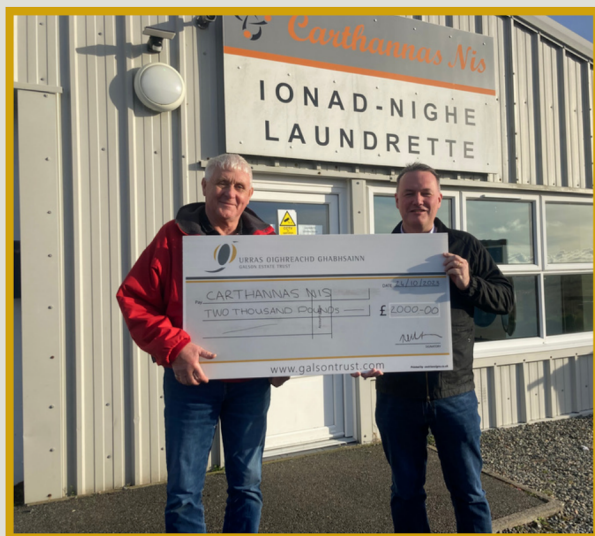
Community Investment

Maoin-airgid na Coimhearsnachd



The Community Investment Fund regained its momentum following its relaunch in the summer of 2022.

Through the delivery of 19 grants amounting to £69,563, the fund has successfully levered in an additional £260,665 towards projects that significantly benefit our local community.



The Community Investment Fund was created to invest funds generated from the renewables project back into the Galson Estate community.

The programme also provides valuable advice, training, guidance, and aftercare to support the development and success of various projects.

The Urras aims to fund a diverse range of community projects, focusing on skills development, health improvement, poverty relief, environmental conservation, citizen engagement, promotion of local heritage and culture, and growth in industry sectors.

The Community Investment Fund is here to support your initiatives and make a positive impact on our community.

Community Investment Fund

FUNDED BY 12 DAYS OF
COMBINED INCOME FROM
OUR TURBINES



If you have an idea for a project that aligns with our goals, we encourage you to submit an application!



Financial Overview

Àrd-shealladh Ionmhais



Wind energy income is critical for funding the activities undertaken throughout the year. A combination of high wind speeds and a newly negotiated sales tariff have resulted in a record year for Galson Energy. £1,000,000 has been drawn down during this financial year in comparison to the previous year total of £450,000.

This additional income, although only for a short timeframe while electricity prices are high, will allow a springboard for the Urras to move ahead in the coming years with major development projects. The additional resources will assist to lever in further funding to deliver a variety of housing projects; the Galson Resettlement Centenary of 2024 and the Butt of Lewis Lighthouse redevelopment to name a few.

All of these developments will require community participation and direction. If any of these are of interest, it is the ideal time to get involved either as a member on a working group or by joining our board as a voluntary Director.

	2021/22	2022/23
Revenue	£820,063	£1,246,441
Expenses	£678,003	£801,936
Surplus	£142,060	£444,505

External funding for projects amounted to £33,224. Other main sources of income came from commercial land leases and agreements £77,908, land sales £14,376, consultancy fees £23,374 and croft rents £8,473.

The main expenditure this year has been in staff costs of £317,255, administering our cost of living projects £99,194 and the community investment fund at £53,700.

The Urras is now in the fortunate position where core staff costs are fully funded through our own income, allowing job security for our staff with permanent contracts, the ability to fully align our work to that of our strategic plan and ensuring we meet the requirements of being a fair work employer.

Future Opportunities

Cothroman San Àm Ri Teachd

At the Urras, we deeply appreciate the contributions of our young workforce. Their fresh perspectives and skills have proven invaluable to our organisation. We take great pride in the accomplishments of the current young professionals working with us, as well as those who have moved on to pursue their chosen paths. Our doors are always open to young individuals seeking to advance their careers through placements, apprenticeships, work experiences, and volunteering opportunities.

We strive to tailor their experiences to align with their ambitions, benefiting both the estate and their future endeavours.

Catherine Thomson

I started working at Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn in the summer of 2021 on a summer placement. A lot has changed since then and I am now the first Apprentice in Community Development at the Urras.

It is always nerve wracking starting a new job and that is exactly how I felt on my first day. My first day was spent attending the John Muir Trust Transition Programme, helping with the bushcraft session. I was thrown straight into the deep end, but it was for the best to get me stuck in straight away otherwise, I don't think I would have settled in as quickly as I did.

I have learned so much about my community, the work of the Urras and even learned I had skills that I never thought I had.

My job varies in different aspects of the organisation; from development, finance, admin, and media. Working and gaining experience in these areas has made my job more enjoyable as it's something different every day.

Working here has opened many doors for me and has given me opportunities that I never would have imagined being able to do. I have seen a change within myself with confidence levels and personal skills. The team are a great support and made the journey easier.

If I knew working here would be this amazing when I started, then I would have had nothing to worry about on my first day.



BECOME A MEMBER BI NAD BHALL DEN URRAS

Are you a resident of the Galson Estate for over nine months each year? Are you eager to play an active role in your community's growth, support local initiatives, and stay in the loop about all things community land trust related?

Membership Perks:

- **Voting Power:** Have your say and vote at the AGM
- **Your Voice Matters:** Opportunities to voice your opinions
- **Get Involved:** Take part in various local working groups
- **Stay Informed:** Register for our E-Newsletters

Becoming a member is easy and costs just £1 for a lifetime membership!

If you're 16 or older and fall into any of the following categories, you're eligible:

- Live within the Galson Estate area
- Reside on the Isle of Lewis and registered with the Crofting Commission as a tenant of a croft within the Galson Estate area
- Live elsewhere but registered with the Crofting Commission as a tenant of a croft within the Galson Estate Trust area and actively work on that croft

Join us today and help shape the future of our ambitious Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn!

Become a member at www.galsontrust.com, visit us at our office in South Galson or call us on 01851 850393



Contact

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