

SCOTTISH ISLANDS FEDERATION

Community Learning Exchange Visit to Orkney 10 to 13 September 2017

Thanks to funding from the Community Learning Exchange, the Scottish Islands Federation was able to organise a group learning visit for its members. Over 10 to 13 September representatives from 10 Scottish islands visited Orkney and the island of Shapinsay to learn about tourism, island produce and branding, sustainable island transport and the range of projects and activities community trusts can deliver to release opportunities for their island.

BENEFITS TO ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED:

We packed a lot in to our learning visit to Orkney and some comments on the benefits are listed below.

Having time out from our own organisations and spending proper time with a group of people from other islands, seeing what they do in Orkney, learning from other Scottish and European islands and hearing and contributing to discussion has been hugely beneficial and inspiring.

We learned a lot, have taken away a number of tangible ideas, both individually and for collaboration through SIF.

The Shapinsay visit was an excellent idea and very interesting. Liked their idea of searching out the more unusual activities to bring to the island. Their projects are all good exemplars. Another key point was how islands offer an almost unique environment for innovative projects without many of the constraints found on Mainland – Dianne, Stronsay Development Trust.

Community engagement on Shapinsay was highlighted as being particularly good and something to take ideas from. Also, having income from the wind turbine makes a huge difference – they are more in charge of their own destiny and are able to take a strategic look at the whole island and develop a long term plan to fill the gaps and develop opportunities.



SIF Chair, Camille presenting our thank you gift to Shapinsay Development Trust

A Community Energy Scotland presenter reported that in some sense, The Isle of Mull's ACCESS Project effectively served as a rehearsal for successful collaboration to deliver Orkney's Tidal Hydrogen scheme, Mull & Iona Community Trust.

For Luig Community Trust, 'wider thinking about what new small enterprises might be possible' and for the Lorn Islands Partnership, 'the need for more projects in common to reduce costs for small communities'.

'We were very inspired by what can be achieved when there is an islands Council working with you, and hence the need for islands that are part of mainland councils to better supported by their Councils. We must push harder for better Council support in Argyll – councillors specifically for the islands' – Zoe and Alastair from Luig.

Reenie from Fyne Futures in Bute has written a blog about our visit:
<http://www.fynefutures.org.uk/blog/empowered-communities/>

It was good to spend time with SIF members and Directors. We do not get together often enough!

BENEFITS TO COMMUNITY

All the groups that took part in the learning visit are involved in community trusts. The learning, ideas and connections they have made will ultimately bring benefit their local communities through the work they do.

For the Small Islands Community Council, the eye opener on Shapinsay was how the community there got everyone engaged with the trust: I was impressed by our guide, Sheila, said about this: "when you ignite people, that's when they get engaged." I also thought that the idea of making available to all blank postcards addressed to the Shapinsay trust, with the other side saying "I had an idea.." was really good, as it shows how the trust actively welcomes ideas and suggestions.



School project display at the Saga Centre which is run by the Orphir Community Council

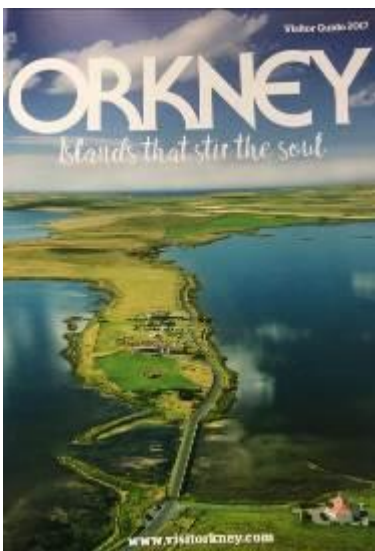
LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. How to use branding, marketing and collaboration to stimulate and support island tourism and produce including tangible projects that members could take forward.

Part one of our learning visit focussed on tourism and island produce. We wanted to learn how Orkney has done things and take away good examples and ideas for visitor attractions, island products, initiatives, business ideas, island-specific branding and marketing. Our visit definitely achieved this and it is fair to say that we were all very impressed and inspired by Orkney:



- John of the Orkney Tourism Group gave us good insight into the breadth of the tourism sector in Orkney, how it has grown and now underpins much of the local economy – 1 in 11 jobs are within the tourism industry and it continues to grow.



- Tourism has been developed into a professional, quality and authentic product that really sells the uniqueness of being an island very well. Small scale entrepreneurship in crafts, tourism, food & drink is also thriving in Orkney and we took away a lot of ideas for things we would like to try or see developed on our own islands.

- It was great to look at a range of visitor sites. Things are presented in a

professional, visual and artistic way in Orkney and it was good to see how the most can be made of island heritage and culture as well as the practical things like how things are displayed, the interpretation material, the information and material produced and the retail side of visitor sites. Everything appears much more joined up, with emphasis on quality and authenticity.



- We were also very taken with the number and range of Orkney products available. This not only enhances the visitor experience but it also has an important role island sustainability – there seemed to be genuine

opportunity to make a decent living through micro business and this is something many small islands, struggling with population decline, would like to see develop.



- Sarah from Buth Bharraigh was able to gather a number of ideas for new products – knitwear, modern island-themed prints for cushions, coasters etc, cards, labelling/branding of local products.



- Camille outlined a new and relevant tourism project, 'Slow Adventure' that the Isle of Eigg is taking part in. Slow Adventure is defined as a form of tourism which avoids the quick-fix adrenalin-pumping hits of convenient adventure experiences, in favour of slow, immersive journeys, living in and travelling through wild places and

natural spaces – experiencing nature in its timeframe, its seasons, its weathers and its variations. The project aims to work with micro-businesses to improve their promotion and marketing of slow adventure activities, helping to extend the tourist season and encouraging businesses to work together through marketing cooperatives. Slow Adventure is an ideal marketing route for islands and the group were keen to look at options for getting involved.

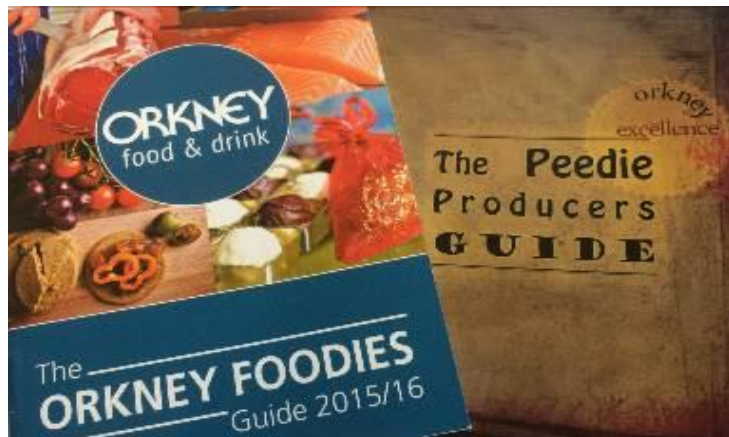
- We also learned about an island passport project in the Denmark which has literally put the small islands on the map! There are 37 small islands in the Danish archipelago and the idea behind the passport was to help grow the island economy through tourism. The passport contains a page for each island and people



can collect 'stamps' when they visit. A LEADER-funded project, 47k copies of the passport were initially produce and they were gone within a month. The project has since grown considerably and Lise, the Development Officer took us through, step-by-step how they did it – this is another project that SIF members would like to see develop in Scotland.

- Collaboration, joined up thinking and planning stood out as being the backbone of success in Orkney - tourism seems to have been embraced as an opportunity that can benefit the wider economy and has benefited from investment and working together across different sectors.
- We got a sense that lots of things are working together towards a common vision – to make Orkney a great place to live and visit. The rich heritage landscape sits easily alongside innovative renewable energy technology and there doesn't appear to be the same conflict between conservation and other land use/development that we often see in other rural areas.

- An understanding of how things have come together in Orkney came from Edgar Balfour of Taste Orkney and Made in Orkney.



- Edgar's post has been funded through LEADER and has included building a food and drink strategy for the island and planning ahead; taking the pain out of marketing and promotion for the islands small-scale producers; being able to react to opportunities that come up; developing Orkney events such as Food & Drink Awards, Island Master Chef, Parish Cup of Food Competition as well as taking Orkney produce to national events and Trade Shows (In 2017, funding was secured to create a new and enhanced Orkney display for the mainland trade shows)
- "Orkney the brand" is powerful because it sells Orkney first then its produce, both at local level and high level. It encourages our young people to stay and it encourages cooperation. It even encourages the ferry companies themselves to use local produce and invest in the Orkney the brand. This type of catalyst and support is something our members would like to see developed in their own islands.
- An important learning point made by Moira who promotes the Orkney Bere meal oatcakes is that "people sell to people." Another was that a traditional product like bere meal could be made really special and appealing to an

entirely new market of health conscious consumers, through preserving traditional milling processes by the continual use of the historic Birsay mill.

- Another important point was that all the produce and crafts are of the highest quality: island over costs and logistics means that margins are low and in order to earn a decent living, products must attract a premium price.
- The presentation about the new Kirkjyuvar Gin demonstrated that 80% of the value of the product is the brand. This can be achieved by bringing together a strong team involving talented local designers and photographers, as well as agriculture science through UHI Orkney, and the strong Norse heritage.
- Co-operation is key - it's a big world out there and the Orkney brand is about working together. Producers don't see each other as competitors but are working together to promote Orkney. Tourism underpins everything – sell Orkney first and then the individual products. A Taste of Orkney has 28 full members (primary producers and must be based in Orkney) and 69 associate members (B&B, restaurants etc). Made in Orkney (craft sector) has 41 full members.

- We heard of another Danish project that has developed an island speciality trade mark.
- Douglas Watson from the Scottish Government's Connect Local programme facilitated some discussion to help us take on board what we had learned and how we could use it to benefit our own islands.



- *How really important it is that island businesses cooperate to promote their products and services and that this really should be done in conjunction with a professional marketing campaign of the particular island. That this focused approach needs resource to coordinate and manage it. It is crucial that the people with the appropriate skills are elected to a Development Trust so they have vision, can employ the resources to support island businesses and island promotion. Small communities cannot survive and grow on volunteers alone – Dianne, Stronsay Development Trust.*

2. How to set up, run and the potential to integrate, a range of island transport projects including electric vehicles and community transport initiatives.



The second part of our learning exchange was a visit to Shapinsay to learn about island transport and the Shapinsay Development Trust.

The Trust has a wind turbine that generates £90,000 per year and this has really helped the island to fill gaps in its transport systems as well as many other important projects:

- With support from the wind fund the Trust provides a community mini bus and an electric car. The car is a great service and is free for local use – Eileen, the Trust’s Transport Co-ordinator can provide ferry drop-off/pick-up, take people to the dentist, doctor etc. Visitors can also use the car and are asked to provide a donation.



- The wind turbine also subsidises the Out of Hours Ferry Service which can run early in the morning and in the evening when the council ferry doesn’t run. This makes a huge difference to people living on the island as it means they can get home off the Aberdeen ferry rather than having to stay a night in Kirkwall, can go to Kirkwall for the evening, work later/early etc. The skipper from the council ferry lives on Shapinsay and the Trust charts a boat - £7 per ticket (subsidised by wind turbine) or £70 if hiring the boat.
- Shapinsay and Orkney has huge potential for renewable energy but is held back due to constraints within the national grid. We learned about the Big Hit project from Community Energy Scotland – it aims to take the excess energy and convert it into hydrogen which can be stored and used elsewhere e.g. school, surgery, ferry etc
- *The visit to Shapinsay showed how a community initiative scheme could manage and operate an integrated transport system that caters for the needs of its community rather than to the constraints imposed by the organisations out with their island. The Shapinsay Development Trust showed how they were able to offer a bus service, out of hours ferry service and the use of an electrical vehicle as a way of offering an enhanced transport system locally. This has allowed their community to be able to attend events on the mainland.*

It was also interesting to hear how other islands within the ESIN group were tackling transport concerns and looking



at reducing their carbon emissions as well as the use of hybrid ferries and public transport run on biofuel. Living on an island with a farming background I came back and spoke about the biofuel initiative and what a great idea it seemed – Diana, REW Development Trust & Heat Smart Orkney.

Providing free transport to all in the community via a minibus and an EV taxi as well as an Out of Hours ferry, all this funded by the revenue from one wind turbine, showed how transport issues can be successfully addressed locally through an original approach. It's motivating me to look anew at EV transport in the Small Isles, using spare capacity from our own renewables. Camille Dressler, Eigg Community Councillor, Chair Small Isles CC.

3. The types of development trust activity have been the most effective in tackling island challenges.

All the island groups taking part in the learning visit face similar challenges to Shapinsay – housing, jobs, transport, ageing population/population decline, higher cost of living. Much of our visit involved learning about the range of things the Trust has done to tackle these:

- Shapinsay has a population of 300 and its Development Trust is very proactive in bringing people together and looking for opportunities to bring people to the island that wouldn't normally come. For example, Sew Shapinsay, hand bell ringing, a session on nutrition, an end of life debate with University of Glasgow, women in farming, creative writing workshop and a kindness challenge.
- Installing the turbine and being able to generate their own income has been key for the island, not just in terms of money but also building confidence – is a major achievement to deliver and manage a big project like a wind turbine.
- Selling the benefits that will result from a turbine is very important in the early stages of the project as some people will object to a turbine – in Shapinsay there were objections from people that didn't live on the island as they didn't want to see the landscape/scenery impacted.
- The Boathouse was created as a community hub and as well as the Trust's office it houses visitor information, meeting room and laundry facilities.



Films can be shown which adds to the programme offered through the [Screen Machine](#) which visits the island every few months.

- A Shapinsay promotional leaflet is produced and a community newsletter. An oral history project captures the thoughts and memories of people living on the island. An artistic collaboration has been developed with the mainland – went on a study trip together and are now working together.
- As well as the direct benefit to the community part of the aim behind all these activities is to reach out beyond the island and give the island a stronger voice on wider issues.
- The Trust is always thinking ahead, looking to see what is happening in other places and looking for opportunities – how could Shapinsay get involved or benefit. One of the next projects it is looking into is a time bank/skills swap project.



Spending time together reminded us how much we have in common and how answers to some of our island challenges have already been found and just need to be shared. We made many new connections and friends and have generally come away feeling inspired, energised and part of something positive.

‘There may be large distances and big differences between islands and much diversity amongst islanders but we each share an irrepressible sense of community’ Terry Hearty, Mull & Iona Community Trust.

We would like to thank everyone that has helped make the trip so worthwhile:

- Community Learning Exchange
- Orkney International Science Festival
- Shapinsay Development Trust
- European Small Islands Federation
- All the Orkney groups that took part
- Taste of Orkney and Made in Orkney
- Orkney Tourism Group
- Connect Local
- Orkney Islands Council