

IGD Food & Drink Projects Update (23 January 2025)

The specific project outputs are as follows:

- Harbour and pier infrastructure improvements at:
 - Acarsaid, Eriskay (delivered 2024).
 - Brevig, Lewis.
 - Lochboisdale, South Uist.
 - Vatersay.
- Food Hubs at:
 - South Uist.
 - Harris.
 - Lewis (x2).
- Capital investment in processing facilities.

Current projects status is as follows:

Pier & Harbour Projects

Isle of Vatersay

Vatersay is a strategic location for accessing fishing grounds to the East and the West of the southernmost part of the Hebrides. Vessels going from the East side to the West side target lobster and crab from the western slipway during the summer months, and prawn and crab from the eastern slipway during the winter months. With access to distinct species fishers require two sets of gear to target the prawn, crab and lobster with the result that gear storage is an ongoing issue at this exposed location near Vatersay causeway. Improvements relating to landing and gear storage are required.

Update: Planning consent has been granted. There has since been some uncertainty surrounding the ownership of the development area and we are currently awaiting confirmation of who holds title over the development area.

Lochboisdale, South Uist

Lochboisdale is situated to the southeast of South Uist and is considered an ideal port of entry to the islands. The harbour was newly constructed in 2015 and is part of the community owned estate managed by Stòras Uibhist. Improvements including a drying out berth on the slipway for painting and maintenance to take place, as well as visual inspections of a vessel's hull will reduce the need to steam to other areas for vessel inspection. A secure area to store gear will help to reduce marine litter and health and safety risk. The facilities would be owned and operated by the users themselves with ongoing operating costs the responsibility of users. Detailed operating costs and throughput are currently being assessed.

Update: Storas Uibhist intends to locate a blast freezer unit in the harbour to store and freeze fish for further processing including using equipment and expertise from the Salar Salmon company. Storas have leased a building to Salar for a number of years and the company is now relocating to new premises and some of the equipment will remain with Storas for the purposes of this project. There is now the option to progress this project via UKSPF funding and not through the IGD.

Brevig, Isle of Lewis

Brevig is the only all-weather harbour on the Northeast coast of Lewis and is home to a number of fishing vessels. It is home for much of the winter for crab and prawn vessels working the coast up to the Butt of Lewis and in recent years a significant Razor clam fishery has developed out of Brevig. The approaches to the harbour are narrow and a degree of dredging would significantly improve access at all states of the tide.

Brevig Pier Users Group have proposed several projects that could potentially be progressed subsequently if sufficient funding/ match-funding was available, that is: the provision of a concrete hard standing; provision of gear-storage compounds; removal of the rock face on the West side of the harbour approach; and undertake an assessment of the legalities around dredging requirements.

Proposed Project: Provision of Gear Storage Compounds.

To properly develop a large area of ground to the west of the harbour, a significant percentage of this area would require to be concreted. In addition to safety improvements for vehicle manoeuvring, a concrete platform forming the base of a dedicated storage area for each commercial fishing boat working from Brevig, together with galvanised security fencing for each bay, would not only greatly enhance the security and efficiency of their operation but would remove the current practice of storing fishing gear along the harbour edges. One compound could be clearly labelled by CnES as dedicated to the storage of end-of-life fishing gear. Not only would this reduce the incidence of abandoned end-of-life fishing gear currently scattered around the harbour, but it could also be a location for any unauthorised vessels left at Brevig which may be identified by the Harbourmaster for disposal.

On-going benefit: better working practices, improved harbour-edge safety, and better visual amenity.

Proposed Project: Removing the rock face to reduce wave motion impact.

Ever since its construction, Brevig Harbour has had one major design flaw - which results in very unsafe berthing conditions during and following a period of strong northerly winds, with an accompanying deep wave motion. The removal of a vertical rock face to the west of the harbour entrance would dramatically reduce the violent wave motion created at mid-to-low tide by the deep northerly swell hitting the rock face and then surging into the harbour box with potentially damaging force. Not only would this result in safer approach and berthing conditions but could also help reduce the amount of sand being brought into the box harbour with the violent wave motion. Safer berthing conditions could potentially allow for a pontoon for small boats to be positioned in front of the rock armour from the slipway to the steps. Currently, locating a pontoon in this area would be unrealistic due to the surging effect within the box harbour caused by a northerly wave motion.

On-going benefit: Less risk of damage to boats berthed in the harbour during periods of northerly winds. With safer berthing conditions, potential for additional CNES revenue from harbour dues resulting from increased berthing.

Proposed Project: Professional assessment of dredging requirement legalities and proposed methods.

For quite some time, the build-up of sand and silt in the harbour has resulted in larger vessels having to wait for favourable tidal conditions to avoid the risk of grounding while entering the harbour. Vessels have routinely been witnessed sitting on the seabed at their berths during exceptionally low tides.

On-going benefit: A professional study of the harbour seabed conditions should at least confirm, or otherwise, that (after a quarter of a century) the harbour requires to be dredged.

Update: Currently exploring options for rock removal and dredging at Brevig. Tenders are currently being sought for undertaking a wave study at the harbour and it is hoped to have the tenders returned in February.

Proposed Food Hub Projects

Discussions and meetings to develop a range of proposed food hub projects are currently being held.

Uist Food Hub

This project requests capital investment in the region of £300,000. The proposal is to renovate an existing building in Askernish where a meat processing facilities will be installed. There is no such facility anywhere on Uist, and once installed this facility will be capable of processing locally produced high quality venison, other game, lamb, and beef. This facility will create employment opportunities, provide a service to local livestock producers, local food businesses, increase choice for local consumers, and it will reduce the food miles caused by importing meat from off island sources. It could also create market ready cuts of locally produced premium meat products to the external market – thus generating external monetary inflows to the Island economy.

Update: – A business case project proposal was submitted for IGD Food & Drink Project Board review/ discussion. This took place in September 2024 and work to develop the proposal further continues.

Harris Food Hub - [See separate paper]

A meeting was held with Michael Hunter of North Harris Trust to discuss plans for provision of a second polytunnel in the community garden area in Tarbert. They have also discussed creating their own compost through installation of a biodigester to process garden waste into usable compost for use in the garden and sale to other growers. There is also a proposal to provide a small venison-processing unit close to NHT shop – which would be in the form of a small chiller and butchery unit.

West Harris Trust was also approached, and they intimated a desire to install a second poly tunnel and further outdoor growing space alongside potential stalls to sell the grown produce and potentially investigating the use of walking tractors.

There is also the possibility of locating a polytunnel/ polycrub in Leverburgh for the use of the community and the produce will we sold in the local shop.

Update: - A draft proposal has been submitted by the Harris forum for IGD Food & Drink Project Board review/ discussion - and a project proposal paper has been circulated to facilitate this.

Lewis Food Hub Projects

Stornoway Abattoir

It is proposed that use could be made of a large chiller and additional space available to the rear of the Stornoway abattoir for a venison-processing facility. Currently the Tain Chiller located within the abattoir is little-used and is thought to be ideal to serve as a chiller for venison. The additional space could be used to house a butchery facility for processing venison. All relevant licencing and permissions for this to happen are already in place. It is considered that its location and existing infrastructure could make this a quick project to develop, which could have a significant impact. Stornoway Trust has intimated for several years that it would like to place such a facility such in the Stornoway area, so there could also be link-up potential and match-funding available in addition.

Update: Further discussions are required to develop the project further, to investigate costs and requirement for IGD funding. The proposal will also require to be further reviewed by the IGD Food & Drink Project Board at the right time. The Comhairle's 'Abattoir Member Officer Working Group' (MOWG) was positive about the proposal and has offered its assistance to support a venison processing facility at Stornoway abattoir.

Machinery Club

Discussions with Lewis Crofters Ltd have taken place regarding the establishment of a machinery-sharing club for horticultural purposes. The project being to purchase machinery to enable more planting/ harvesting of produce in a less labour-intensive manner, without the need for a large outlay for participating individuals. Discussions to-date have been fruitful, with the Crofters agreeing to provide funding for the venture - and for a subgroup to be set up to manage and administer a Machinery Club.

A proposal to house the equipment and hold the sale of produce at the Auction Mart in Stornoway was also put forward - given the premises is only in use on several occasions each year and is thought to be a good fit for the proposed project. Further discussions will take place to set up a properly constituted group and develop the concept to the stage where a project proposal can be formally submitted for further consideration.

Update: Discussions are required to confirm project details and investigate costs and IGD 'ask.' A proposal will then be submitted for further review by the IGD board. Meetings were held with Lewis Crofters LTD as well as the Stornoway trust and the crofters have agreed to assist with financing of the Machinery Club and the Stornoway Mart have agreed to house the equipment. A group needs to be formed to drive the project forward and manage the club once established.