

West Harris Community Survey Report

April 2012

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West Harris Community Survey

Final Report - April 2012



Introduction

In order to plan developments with wide community support and to be able to measure the future impact of these developments it was decided to conduct a comprehensive survey of every household in the community. This would provide baseline information on: population; household make-up and economic activity; housing needs and croft use. The survey was also used to consult the community on future campsite provision, potential demand for business units, new business ideas, horticultural development and future community facilities.

The survey was carried out over a 3 month period from January to April 2012. Changes were occurring to the population as the survey was carried out so the information given in the report is that of the situation as of April 2012.

Executive Summary

There are 54 permanently occupied houses on West Harris Trust land of which 48 households (89%) completed the survey.

The population of West Harris Trust land is 119.

44 (92%) of the interviewed households are owned outright by the occupants. The remaining 4 are rented informally from relatives. There is no social rented housing or formal private rented housing available in the area.

109 residents of the total 128 were surveyed (85%). Of these, 10 (9%) are children aged 18 or under and 36 (33%) are retired. So, 42% of West Harris is economically inactive.

33 of the 48 households (69%) are linked to a croft.

Potential Developments

There is support for further housing opportunities with a range of locations suggested and the need for rented accommodation highlighted.

2 residents and 3 non-residents inquired about potential business accommodation.

39 households (81%) are in favour of improved/additional campsite facilities.

23 (48%) households would be interested in community allotments and a community poly tunnel.

18 households expressed an interest in training with horticulture and crofting skills being the most popular.

Community Suggestions

Although not a specific question in the interview 12 respondents said it was important to have a community centre or similar facility.

Other ideas included improvements to visitor infrastructure, a ranger service, a machinery ring, evening transport options and improved broadband services.

Several requests were made for improved communications from the Trust.



1. Baseline Information

West Harris encompasses Luskentyre, Seilebost, Horgabost, Borve, and Scaristavore.

There are 54 households (i.e. not holiday rentals) on West Harris Trust land. Of these,

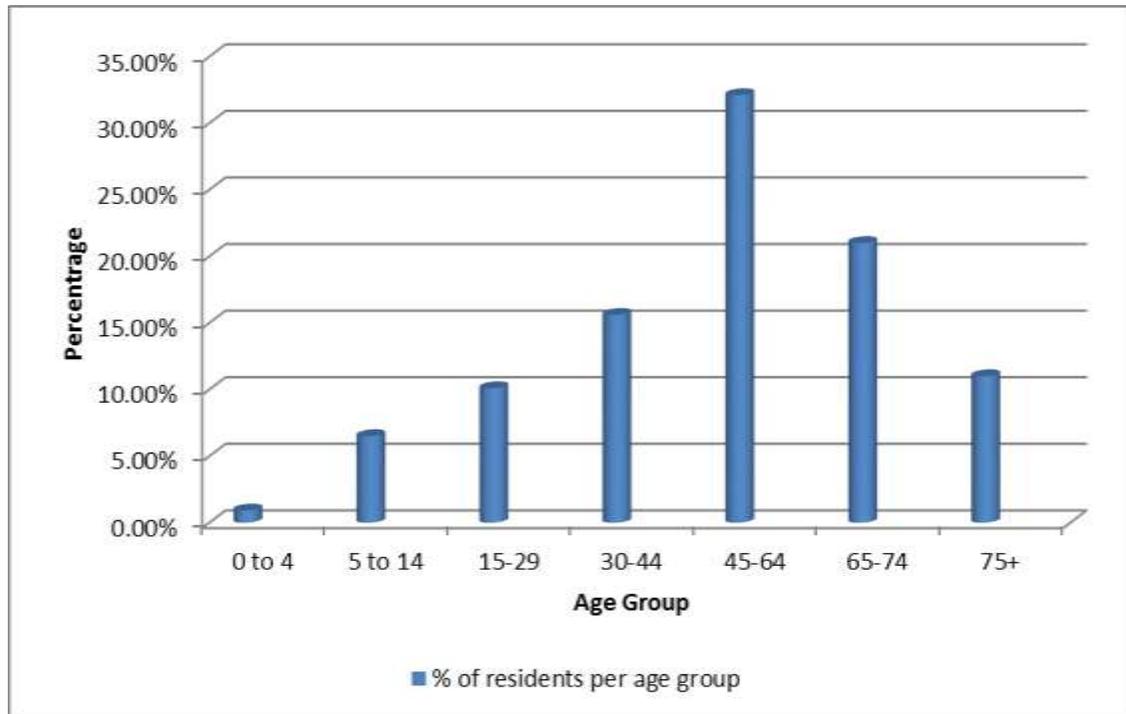
- 48 households (89%) completed the survey.
- 6 (11%) were unavailable at the time of the survey
- 3 (6%) declined to participate

The population of West Harris Trust land at the time of this report is 119.

Of the 109 residents who completed the survey the age distribution was as such:

Age Group	0-4	5-14	15-29	30-44	45-64	65-74	75+
Number Residents	1	7	11	17	35	23	12

This data is displayed below as percentages:



32% of the population is at or past age 65 (retirement age) and an additional 4% class themselves as retired. **More on Employment in section 3.** 56% of residents are ‘working age’, between age 18-64.

2. Housing

44 (92%) of the households are owned outright by the occupants. The other 4 are technically rented, but in casual, long-term agreements between family members.

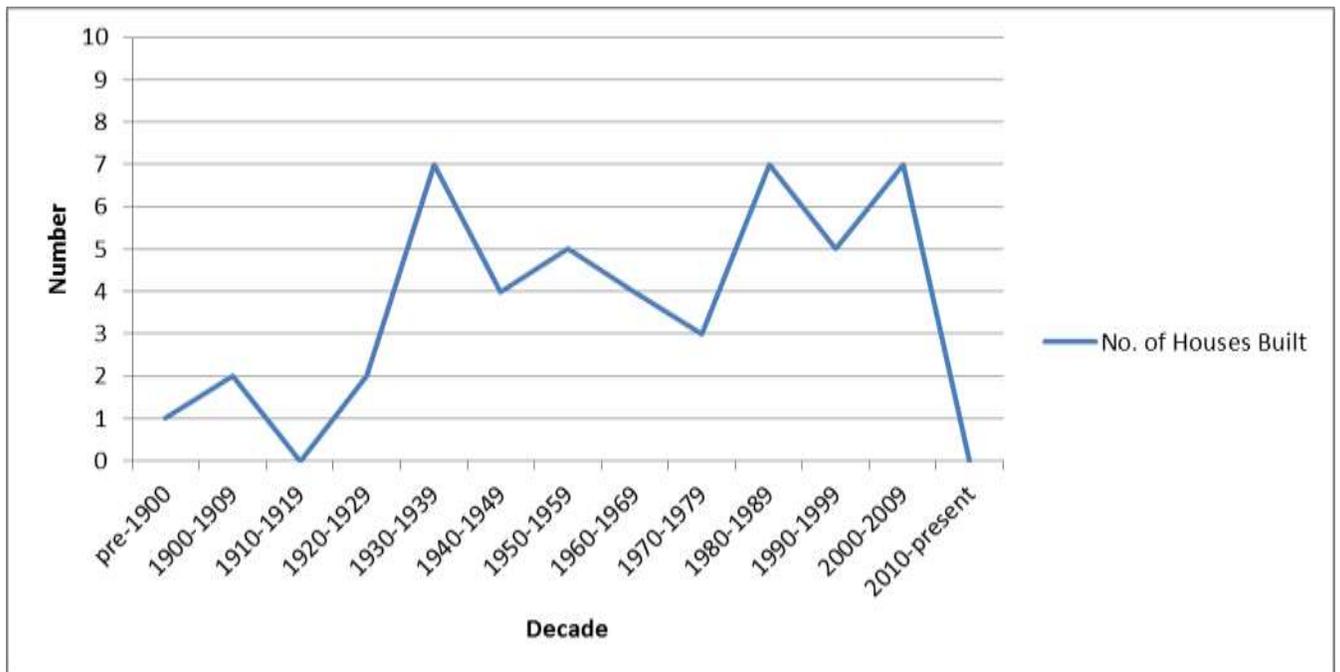
- 2 households rent permanently/until purchase from a relative.
- 2 rent permanently from a relative

There is currently no social or non-family private rented accommodation available in West Harris.

2.1 Age of Housing

Decade	No. Houses Built
Pre-1900	1
1900-1909	2
1910-1919	0
1920-1929	2
1930-1939	7
1940-1949	4
1950-1959	5
1960-1969	4
1970-1979	3
1980-1989	7
1990-1999	5
2000-2009	7
2010-present	0

These rise and fall in construction is shown below:



2.2 Renovation

- 30 of the 48 houses (63%) have been renovated (which includes insulation) at some point by the current occupants
- 20 of the 30 houses (67%) were definitely renovated after 1980 – others may have been but occupants were unsure of the dates.
- Of the 18 houses which have not been renovated, 7 (39%) pre-date 1980



2.3 Suitability, Heating and Insulation

3 (6%) households said that their house was unsuitable at the moment.

- 1 was in the process of purchasing the house and intended to commence renovations as soon as the sale was complete.
- 1 was in the middle of an interior renovation.
- 1 resident had trouble with mobility in the house.

None desired any assistance or a referral to any schemes. All said that if the current situation were resolved the house would be suitable for the next 5-10 years.

2 (4%) other households said that their house would not be suitable in 5-10 years without renovation (new boiler, in one case).

3 (6%) households were referred to Care and Repair and 5 (10%) were referred to the Universal Home Insulation Scheme.

- *34 of the 48 households (71%) have oil central heating as their main source of heat*
- 11 (23%) use electric, including 4 with storage heaters/White Meter electric and no oil
- 1 (2%) uses a ground source heat pump
- 1 (2%) uses an oil stove
- 1 (2%) uses gas
- 13 (27%) use a solid fuel fire in addition to central heat and 2 (4%) use electric in addition to oil

Every one remarked on the cost of fuel during the winter as a major expense, with many referring to it as 'crippling'.

2 households suggested a community oil purchase, citing rural areas in Southern England which have done so successfully. This would help, however minimally, with the cost of oil central heating.

2.4 Housing Demand

Participants were asked if anyone living in the house would prefer their own.

- 1 household would like to build rather than stay permanently in a relative's house. They would like to purchase or be assigned a croft, then decroft area to build house.
- 1 resident is in the process of assigning their croft to a relative who will then decroft and build a house.
- 1 resident currently lives with relatives but has planning permission to build a house.

46 households (96%) stated that they didn't know of anyone 'specifically' who had left West Harris due to a lack of housing, but that in general, young people leave the area due to a combined lack of housing and employment, with the emphasis on employment.

More on that in section 3.

1 resident cited a relative as someone who had moved elsewhere in Harris due to a lack of rented housing in West Harris, but would return were housing available.

2.5 Housing Development

When asked if there was an area in West Harris suitable for a small housing development,

- 17 (35%) said anywhere in West Harris.



- 9 households (19%) said the plots already identified by the Trust were the most feasible for housing.
 - 7 (15%) suggested it would be more beneficial to the villages and the eventual inhabitants of the new houses if the development was scattered throughout West Harris, or at least added on to an existing village rather than being isolated.
 - 1 household suggested ‘brownfield sites’, land that was once in use but is no longer. This tied in with expanding an existing village. 1 suggested derelict houses be title searched and the owner be encouraged to either sell or restore the house. Those who had no preference also voiced/agreed with these sentiments.
- 9 households (19%) said the ¼ mile at Luskentyre road end, where there are currently no existing houses.
 - 4 (8%) said near the Seilebost causeway, 2 (4%) near Seilebost School due to flat ground.

1 resident pointed out that a development in a village along the main road would be more practical than Luskentyre due to its lack of a bus service. An easily accessible transport link would appeal to anyone who shares a car or doesn't drive.

Regarding the feasibility of the existing Trust plots for sale,

5 households (10%) commented that although the West Harris Trust plots are discounted, they are still too expensive for most locals/young people and impossibly expensive when building a house is added on to the cost. Thus, affordable rented accommodation is essential to attract people to the area from Tarbert, Leverburgh etc.

1 household commented that even if one can afford to build a house, there needs to be somewhere to live in the interim and caravans are only conducive during summer months. Rented accommodation would assist in this way as well.

3. Employment

Of the 109 residents surveyed, 10 (9%) are children aged 18 or under and 36 (33%) are retired. So, 42% of West Harris is economically inactive.

- Of the 63 economically active residents, 14 (22%) are self-employed
 - Of the 14, 7 (50%) have a tourism-based business
- 7 of the 63 (11%) are self-employed in addition to other employment
 - Of those 7, 5 (71%) are part-time crofters
- Of the 36 retired residents, 6 (17%) do occasional self-employed work as a supplement



Of the 63 economically active residents, 31 (49%) have to travel outside of West Harris for employment.

- 4 (13%) travel to Leverburgh or Northton
- 15 (48%) travel to Tarbert or Scalpay
- 4 (13%) travel to Stornoway
- 6 (19%) work outwith Harris and Lewis (ex. offshore with 3 weeks on, 3 weeks off)

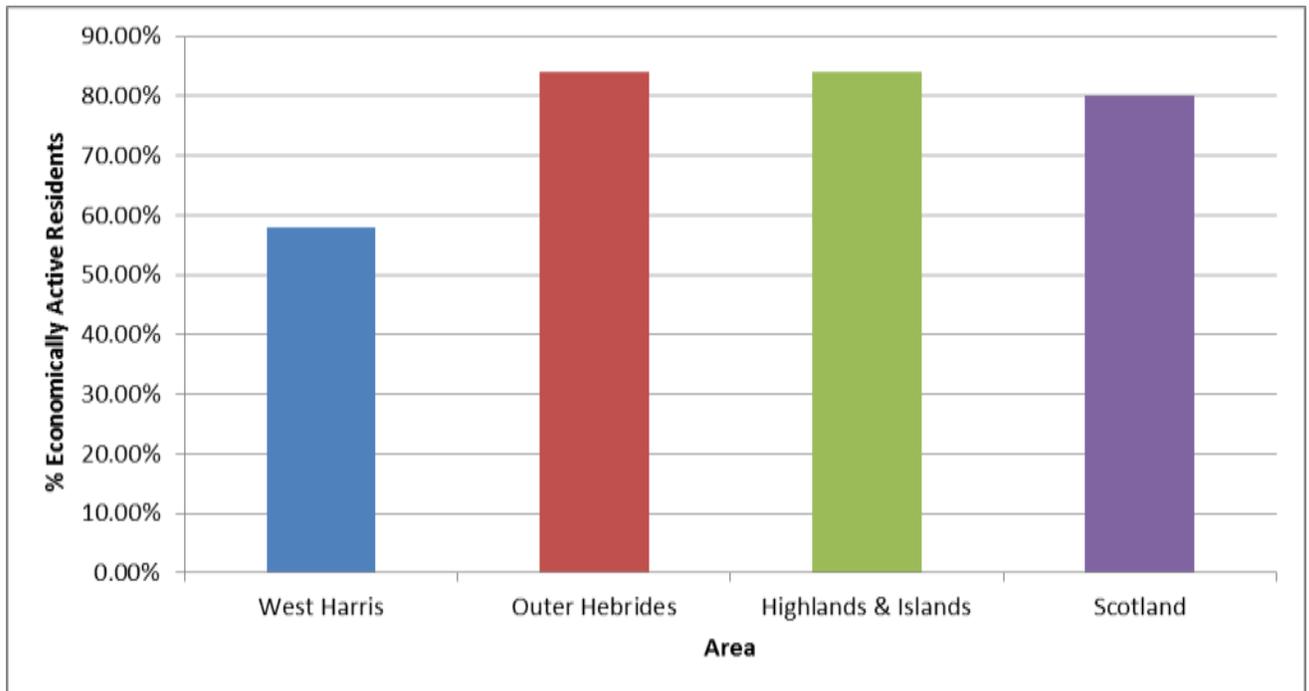
Of that 31% who must travel for work, 28 (90%) are partly employed/partly self-employed or fully employed and 3 (10%) are fully self-employed.

3.1 Economic Activity Comparison by Area

	West Harris	Outer Hebrides	Highlands & Islands	Scotland
% Economically Active Residents	58%	84%	84%	80%

❖ Our percentage was calculated using the total number of residents surveyed, 109, rather than the total number in West Harris, 119.

This data is displayed below:



3.2 Influence on Depopulation

In conversation, residents remarked that a lack of employment options is the main obstacle to young people staying in or returning to West Harris, especially young families with children to whom reliable long-term employment is a necessity.

1 former resident of West Harris still owns her house but had to relocate to the mainland because her husband couldn't find permanent employment.

22 of the 48 households (46%) had either children or siblings native to West Harris but living outwith the area, having moved away for education and/or employment opportunities.

100% of these households cited employment as the children's/siblings' reason for not returning to West Harris. Many pointed out that especially if young people leave to attend university, they will be unlikely on Harris to find a degree-related position or one with a salary comparable to what they could get on the mainland.

3.3 Special Skills and Business Ideas

When asked whether they had any special skills that could translate into a business, most people answered no, but in response to the open-ended question that concludes the survey would mention a skill or interest that could indeed either be volunteered or used in business.

Residents suggested the following as potential developments:

- guided walks involving archaeological and geographical sites of interest
- a Horticultural business run from the community poly tunnel/allotments (see section 5.2)
- As a tie-in, a Food & Catering business that uses local produce from the Horticulture business.
- a mobile Food & Catering facility during the April – October tourist season.
- a Building & Construction business, as well as a garage, because there isn't one in West Harris and the majority of residents own cars.
- a local shop
- 7 households (14%) expressly suggested a shop, with 1 stating it would 'fill a gap in the community'.

- 1 resident spoke of the lack of proximity to a shop: 'As a retired person, I'm lucky my husband still takes the car to work every day and so can bring home the shopping we need. If he couldn't drive, we'd have to rely on the mobile shops, which are expensive and don't have much.'

In conversation many others supported the idea of a shop, especially as a hybrid community hub. **More in section 5.**

Interest was expressed for the following business units by 2 residents and 3 non-residents:

- Light Industrial & Commercial
- Food & Catering
- Arts & Crafts

4. Crofting

In 33 of the 48 available households (69%) one of the occupants is the croft tenant.

- 3 of the 33 (9%) have an informal arrangement with another crofter
- 1 has a sublet to another crofter
- 1 household has no current activity on their croft and none planned



5 (15%) are used solely for sheep, 18 (55%) for sheep and horticulture, 2 (6%) for sheep and cattle, 3 (9%) for cattle and horticulture, and 1 (3%) just for horticulture

Of the 29 crofts which aren't sublet or part of an informal arrangement, 17 (59%) use their common grazing share.

- 4 of these are in Luskentyre
- 6 are in Seilebost
- 3 are in Horgabost
- 2 are in Borve
- 2 are in Scaristavore

When asked if they knew of anyone, including themselves, who was interested in becoming a croft tenant, 2 residents were identified by 12 households (25%).

When asked if they knew of anyone, including themselves, who was interested in assigning or sub-dividing their croft,

- 1 resident would like to assign to a long-time sub-tenant
- 3 other crofts had been recently assigned to relatives

5. Potential Developments

5.1 Campsite

- 39 households (81%) are in favour of a new or improved campsite facility
- The remaining 9 (19%) either thought Horgabost was enough on its own or were unconcerned by informal camping.
- Of the 39 'Yes' households, 7 (18%) said they would prefer an extension to Horgabost and an improvement of its existing facilities rather than a new, separate campsite.
- Of the remaining households, 3 (33%) went on to say that they would prefer an extension to Horgabost rather than a new site.

- 1 Horgabost household said 'not Horgabost'
- 4 of the total 48 (8%) suggested that updating Horgabost's facilities should be a priority ahead of an extension or new site, specifically because there are currently no waste disposal facilities at Horgabost and as a result campers are emptying caravan septic tanks into the ocean.
- 1 resident said, 'Making the existing site larger rather than creating a new one will mean better scope and opportunities for local businesses, such as a shop, because a large number of campers will be concentrated in one area.'

In terms of a site other than Horgabost,

- a total of 9 households (18%) said anywhere in West Harris would be fine
- 15 (31%) suggested Luskentyre, either at the road end or at the dunes
 - 7 Luskentyre households either supported a Luskentyre site or one anywhere in West Harris
 - 3 Luskentyre households said 'not Luskentyre', stating that it's too busy already in summer/road would suffer
- 8 (17%) said the area surrounding Seilebost School
 - 4 Seilebost households either supported a Seilebost site or one anywhere in West Harris
- 4 households (8%) wouldn't suggest a location, having said not in favour of expansion or new site

5.2 Community Allotments and Poly Tunnel



The community allotments and especially the poly tunnel were very popular ideas, with 23 (48%) households saying they would be interested in using these and a further 7 (15%) saying they were in favour but

wouldn't personally have the need to use either one.

Of the 23 interested households,

- 13 (57%) are in Seilebost
- 3 (13%) are in Luskentyre
- 3 (13%) are in Scaristavore
- 2 (9%) are in Borve
- 0 are in Horgabost

A Luskentyre resident expressed a keen desire to manage the poly tunnel and allotments, as well as a Horticulture business or group.

Residents suggested salad boxes, fresh veg and fruit, jams and chutneys with a label that emphasised their local origin and production were all things that could be sold to tourists from April – October. Residents could either grow for fun/to eat or also to sell. There would also be administrative tasks such as budgeting, so even someone not into gardening could get involved.

All of the households in favour/interested in the poly tunnel spoke of the potential social benefit to the community.

5.3 Community Centre Hybrid

Many residents spoke of the benefit a community centre would have on West Harris and thought it should be a priority.

- Speaking unprompted, 12 (25%) households suggested a community centre that could also act as a shop/cafe etc. This could be tied in with the poly tunnel.
- Basically, a venue that would attract seasonal tourist business but could also be the core of the community and affordable/useful to the locals – people said the high prices at some cafes keep them away.

1 resident suggested that a bakery would be popular in the community.

1 resident summed up the idea, 'Business development is paramount – the poly tunnel, café/pub, shop, and community hub could all be combined into one great area and could all feed each other, i.e. the cafe and shop sell produce grown in the poly tunnel/allotments.'

5.4 Training

18 households (38%) said they would be interested in training in Horticulture, Harris Tweed, Forestry and/or Crofting.

- Horticulture was the most popular with 13 (72%).
- Crofting had 11 (61%).
- Harris Tweed and Forestry had 4 each (22% each)

8 households (44%) answered 'yes' to two or more.

6. General Feedback

The survey finished with an open-ended question asking for comments and feedback.

- Since tourism is the main economy, small improvements to popular sites could go a long way.
 - an actual bench at the parking spot at Nisabost, rather than 'the backless broken thing currently in place'.
 - a footpath to Macleod's Stone, which would also help protect the maram grass, the trampling of which contributes to erosion.
 - proper facilities at Horgabost campsite (waste disposal specifically)
- The Trust could put regular articles in the De Tha Dol. This would also combat the perceived lack of dialogue between the Trust and the residents, some of whom do not use computers and so cannot read the Trust blog, as another resident pointed out.
- A ranger for West Harris would be popular with tourists and locals alike, not for guided hikes so much as walks. Two residents have expressed an interest in doing this (**see section 3.2**).
- The Trust should generate income through tourism-based business.
 - an archaeology site at Nisabost
 - a shop/cafe at Horgabost campsite
 - watersports at Horgabost and Seilebost
 - glass-bottomed boat rides



- Taransay trips
 - shooting holidays like the one Pairc an t-Srath hosted in November 2011.
- A machinery ring for the crofters in which the Trust owns a tractor, a trailer and other large items and rents them out to the crofters who can not afford to buy their own. The comment was made that for the ring to generate income or be self-perpetuating at least a handful of crofters is required.
- A solution to the transportation problem for people wishing to socialize in the evenings. ‘Socializing is severely limited by the lack of a taxi service. People can’t just go out for a few drinks, because then you’re stranded in Tarbert. So people stay in their homes. A taxi or minibus service would be hugely beneficial,’ said one resident, suggesting a volunteer system within the community. Others mentioned this in conversation as a problem affecting their social lives.
- 2 households wanted broadband and required it for their jobs but were unable to receive either Connected Communities (due to the situation of their house) or BT (because there is no exchange in their village). Another household who also require the internet for their business commented on the sluggishness of the service and wondered if the Trust could push for better broadband for the whole area.