



BIRSAY LOCAL PLACE PLAN

Birsay Community Council



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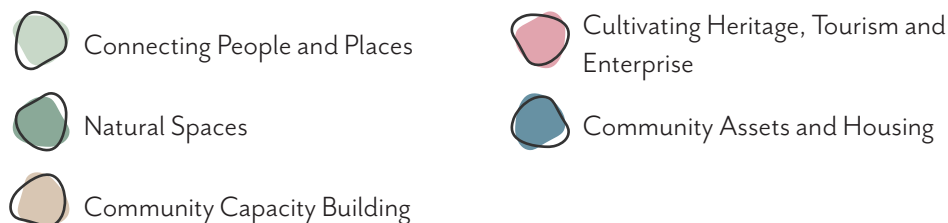
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

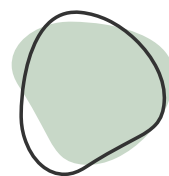
The Birsay Local Place Plan sets out a shared community vision for a sustainable and thriving future, one that celebrates the parish's unique heritage, supports its people, and protects the landscapes that define its character. Developed through wide-ranging local engagement and overseen by a committed Steering Group, the Plan reflects what matters most to the people who live and work here, combining practical aspirations with a strong sense of place.

Birsay is a parish rich in history, natural beauty, and community spirit. Yet, like many rural areas, it faces challenges: a changing population, pressure on infrastructure from tourism, and limited opportunities for younger generations to live and work locally. This Plan responds to those challenges with clear and community-led priorities across five key themes:



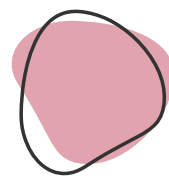
Through these themes, the Plan puts forward practical ideas, from creating a Rural Transport Hub and improving access to walking routes, to supporting local businesses, developing housing that fits the rural setting, and investing in community capacity. Each action is grounded in local knowledge and shaped by the voices of residents, businesses, and partners.

The Plan is both a roadmap and a rallying point. It strengthens Birsay's voice in planning directions, helps unlock funding opportunities, and encourages collaboration. Above all, it shows a community ready to grow forward, protecting what makes Birsay special, while making space for new ideas and possibilities.



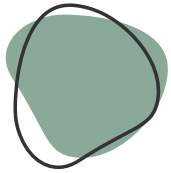
THEME 1 CONNECTING PEOPLE AND PLACES

1. Create a Birsay Rural Transport Hub
2. Make Roads Safer for Pedestrians and Cyclists
3. Review and Improve Parking Across the Parish
4. Make Public Transport More Attractive and Flexible
5. Improve Walking and Cycling Infrastructure
6. Better Signage, Information and Interpretation



THEME 2 CULTIVATING HERITAGE, TOURISM AND ENTERPRISE

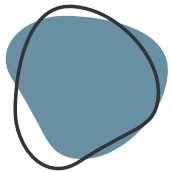
1. Promote Birsay as 'More Than a Day Trip'
2. Develop a Heritage and Visitor Centre
3. Support Local Businesses and Social Enterprise



THEME 3

NATURAL SPACES

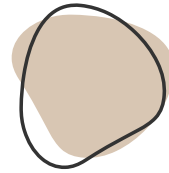
1. Managing access to sites and places
2. Improving amenity services for all
3. Nature Trails and lesser-known heritage walks



THEME 4

COMMUNITY ASSETS AND HOUSING

1. Asset mapping and feasibility work
2. Consider community intervention in key sites
3. Explore housing models that reflect local needs
4. Make use of vacant or underused properties
5. Improve access at buckquoy slip



THEME 5

COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

1. Employ a Community Development Officer
2. Strengthen Volunteer Engagement
3. Establish a Heritage Partnership
4. Create a local economic, business, and tourism forum
5. Improve Communication and Involvement

SETTING THE SCENE

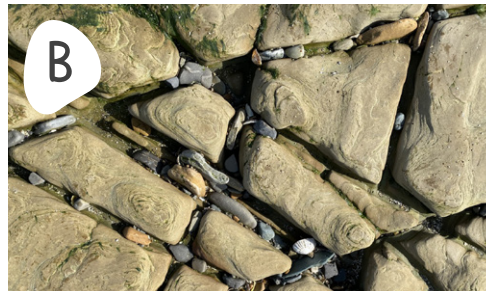
THE PARISH OF BIRSAY

Birsay is a welcoming rural parish located on the northwest edge of Orkney Mainland, where land meets the Atlantic Ocean. Though tucked away on the edge of the mainland, Birsay is home to a lively and active community, surrounded by a striking landscape rich in heritage and history.

THE LANDSCAPE, FLORA AND FAUNA

Birsay's landscape is beautifully rural with a patchwork of fertile farmland, open heathland, lochs and coastal cliffs. It's a place well known for its dramatic coastal scenery, seascapes and birdlife. At RSPB Marwick Head, the largest cliff-nesting seabird colony on the Orkney Mainland, you can spot fulmars, razorbills, kittiwakes, guillemots and puffins.

Agriculture has long been at the heart of life in Birsay, shaping both the landscape and the community. Places like the Kirbister Farm Museum and the Barony Mill are a reminder of the importance of this proud rural heritage for the parish.



BIRSAY HAS A RICH HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

There are many important historic sites around Birsay. Once a stronghold of Norse power in Orkney, the area is home to the striking ruins of the Earl's Palace. Just offshore, The Brough of Birsay, a tidal island, features remains of Pictish, Norse and early Christian settlements. The St Magnus Church dates back to the 12th century and is closely linked to the story of Norse Earl Magnus. Because much of Birsay remains relatively undeveloped, ancient Bronze Age burials and tombs still mark the landscape.

The parish also has strong wartime connections, from HMS Tern, a former WWII air station, to the poignant Memorial to Lord Kitchener, who died when the HMS Hampshire was torpedoed and lost off the coast at Marwick Head.



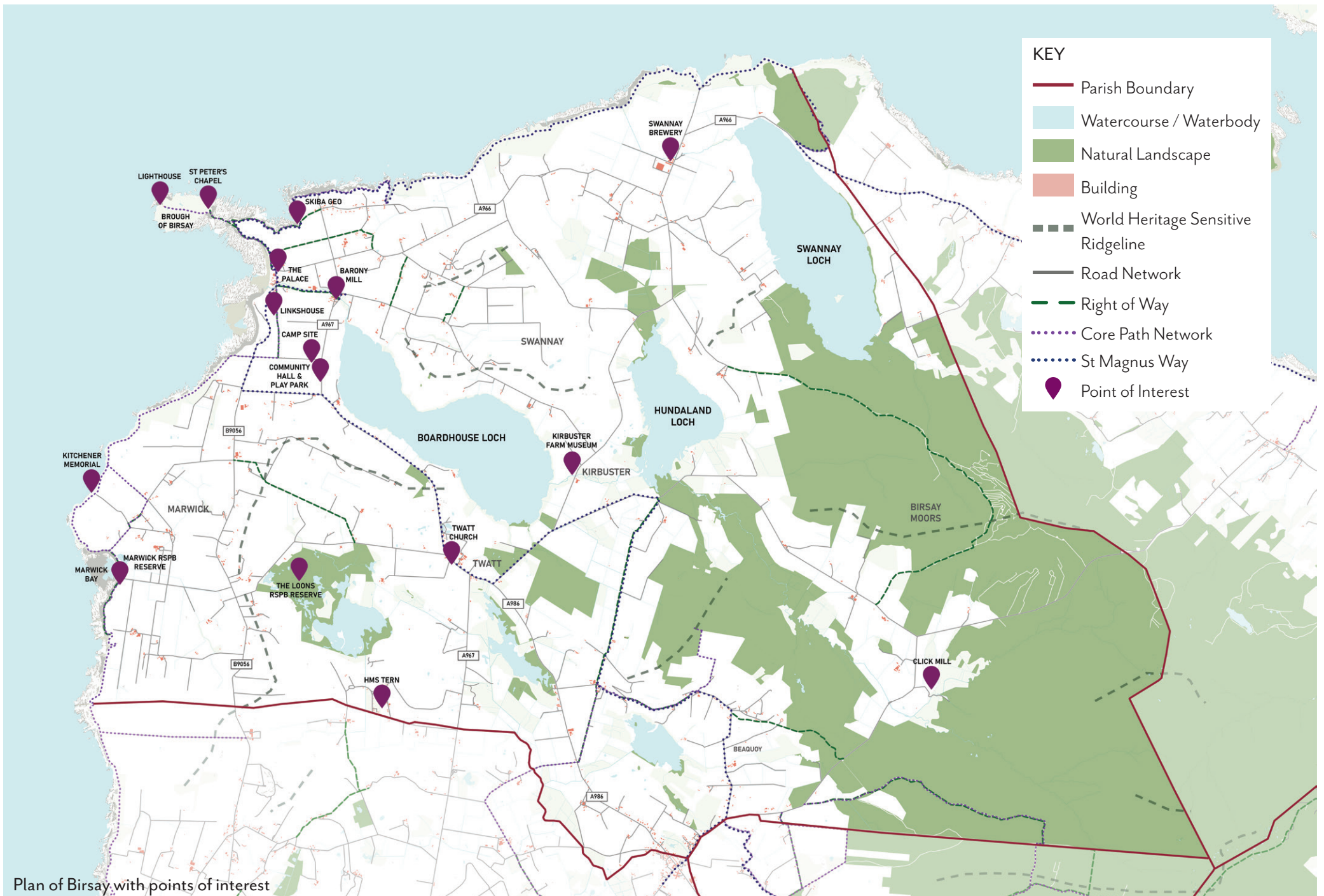
A - Photo of Skiba Geo

B - Photo of Rock formations along the coast

C - Photo of underwater flora at The Brough

D - Photo of The Barony Mill

E - Photo of The Earl's Palace

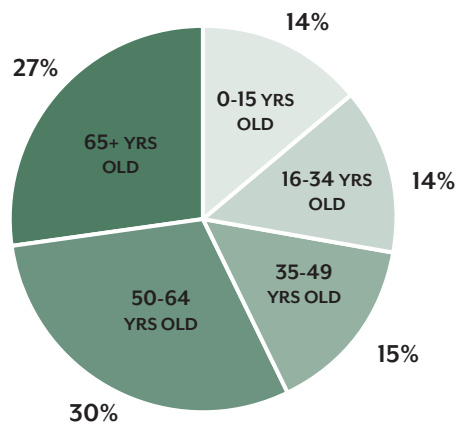


DISPERSED POPULATION ACROSS A LARGE AREA

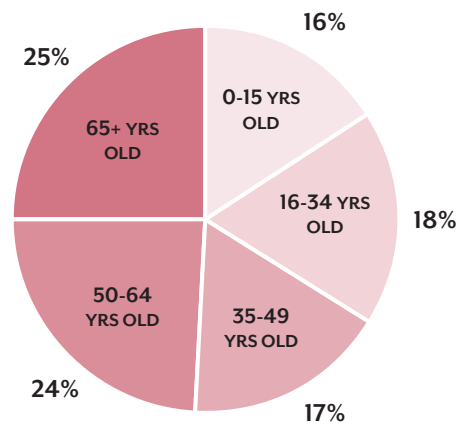
Birsay is the largest parish in Orkney, stretching across around 12 square miles; it sits 19 miles from Kirkwall and 13 miles from Stromness, offering a peaceful setting that's still within reach of the main towns.

The main settlements in Birsay are The Village (known as The Palace, or simply Place) and Twatt, but most of the 965 residents in the parish (2022 Census) are spread out across the countryside, living in around 430 households.

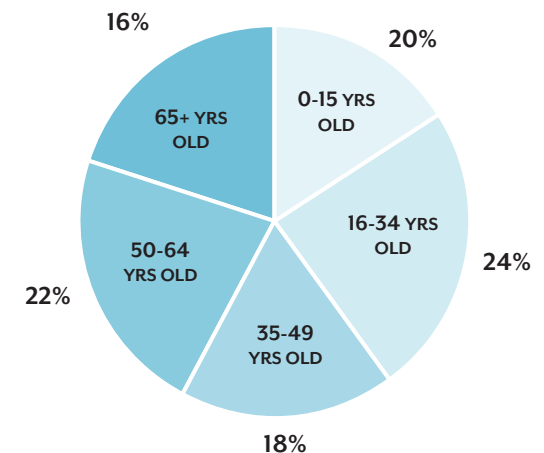
Like many rural areas across Orkney and beyond, Birsay faces the same demographic challenges. Over half of the population is aged 50 or older; and around 27% are aged 65 or over – noticeably higher than the national average of 20%. At the same time, there are fewer younger people living in the parish, with just 14% aged between 16 and 34, compared to 24% across Scotland. These trends raise important questions about future sustainability and opportunities for younger generations



Polulation breakdown: Birsay parish



Polulation breakdown: Orkney



Polulation breakdown: Scotland

TRADITIONAL RURAL ECONOMY COUPLED WITH MIX OF UNIQUE ENTERPRISE AND TOURISM OFFER

As well as a strong farming presence there are many small businesses providing products and services for the community and visitors; together they help keep the local economy strong and varied.

Farming has always been a big part of the parish's economy. Tourism plays an important role in Birsay's economy and has seen steady growth in recent years — not only in the number of visitors coming to enjoy the area's stunning landscapes and heritage, but also in the range of local businesses offering tourism-related services and experiences.

Birsay is full of culture and is a destination in its own right, thanks to its history, archaeology, wildlife and stunning coastal scenery – with highlights like The Brough, Marwick Head, the Earls Palace, and the many walking routes including the St Magnus Way. Other places of interest have emerged over time that give Birsay an extremely diverse and unique appeal, over and above its physical charm.



- **Barony Mill** is the only place in the world where bere is still milled – a tour of the working mill is a rare and fascinating experience.

- **HMS Tern**, the former military airfield, is a well-preserved wartime site with strong local significance.

- Local silversmiths and artists open their studios and galleries to visitors, showcasing Birsay's creative talent. Birsay is also home to the **Linkshouse - Orkney Arts Residency**, part of the Pier Arts Centre, which supports arts and creative projects in the area.

The area offers a warm welcome to visitors, with a range of local shops, cafes, and small businesses providing fresh produce, handmade goods, home baking, and other treats that are well loved by both residents and tourists. Birsay is supported by a variety of visitor services, including guided tours, local experiences, and hospitality options that help people make the most of their time in the area. It's a favourite destination for independent travellers, and its dramatic landscapes and coastal views often feature on tour and cruise itineraries. Locals also enjoy heading there on Sundays or sunny bank holidays to cross to the Brough, search for groatie buckies, or simply enjoy a scenic walk.



A - Photo of HMS Tern

B - Photo of Birsay Bay Tearoom

C - Photo of Swannay Brewery and Taproom

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Birsay Local Place Plan has been shaped through wide-ranging and meaningful engagement with the local community, ensuring that the Plan reflects the voices, concerns, and aspirations of those who live and work in the parish.

A dedicated Steering Group made up of local representatives met regularly throughout the process, working closely with the consultant team to guide the development of the Plan and to help coordinate engagement activities.

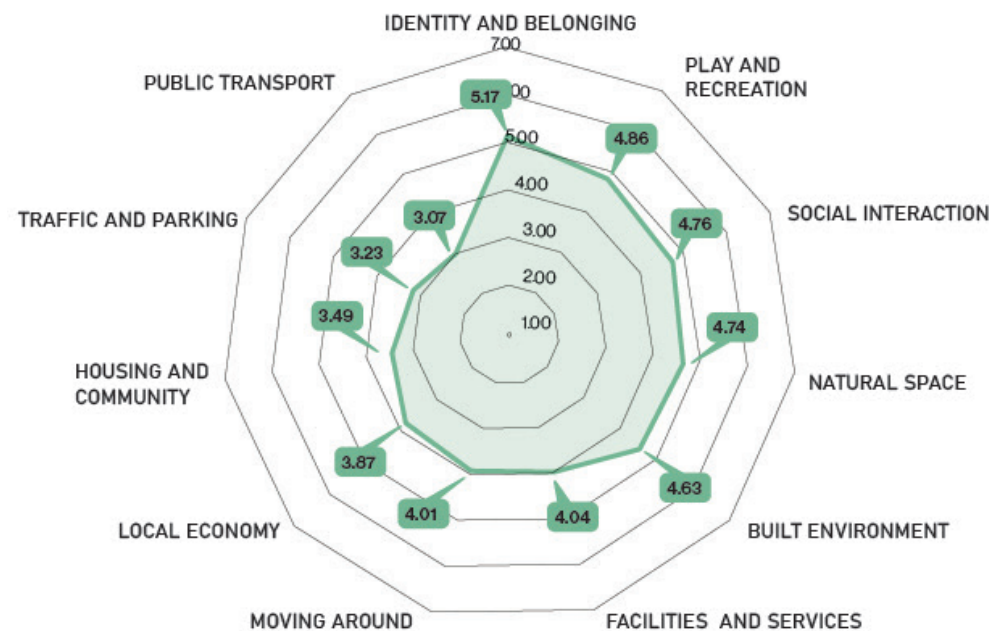
A community survey was promoted both online and in paper form, generating a strong response with 150 submissions. The survey asked residents to rate Birsay across 14 themes, highlighting what was working well and where improvements were needed. Respondents also had the chance to comment in more detail, sharing their ideas and insights. The survey findings provided a valuable foundation for the Plan.

To reach a broad cross-section of the community, the team attended several local group meetings and events, including sessions with the Adult Social Club, Toddlers Group, Drama Club, and Lunch Club, as well as setting up a stand at the spring Car Boot Sale. These informal conversations helped gather further feedback and raise awareness of the project.

Local businesses were also invited to contribute. Of the 28 businesses contacted, 14 took part in discussions either in person or by phone. These conversations offered a valuable perspective on the opportunities and challenges facing local enterprise in Birsay — from tourism and retail to creative industries and hospitality.

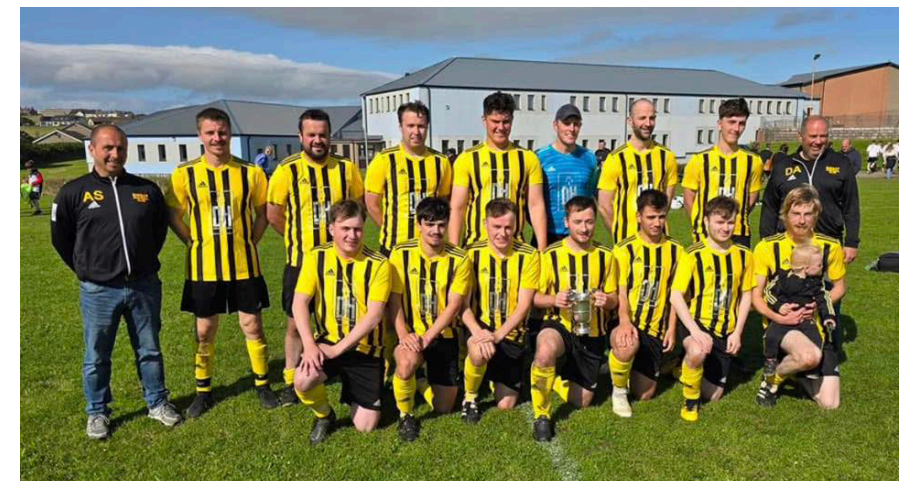
In addition, a series of meetings were held with key stakeholders, including representatives from Orkney Islands Council and organisations such as Orkney Health and Care, Historic Environment Scotland, RSPB, VisitScotland, and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. These discussions provided both context and support for the community's aspirations, while also opening the door to future collaboration.

Through this combination of surveys, events, direct outreach and stakeholder engagement, the Birsay Local Place Plan has been firmly rooted in local voices and priorities. The result is a Plan that not only reflects community views but also builds the foundations for action and partnership in the years ahead.



Radar diagram of Place Standard Tool results





Photos of Birsay community events and groups

WHAT IS A LOCAL PLACE PLAN?

A Local Place Plan (LPP) is a community-led plan that sets out local priorities, ideas, and aspirations for the future of a place. It's a way for communities like Birsay to have a stronger voice in how land and resources are used, and to influence decisions that affect the area.

Introduced through the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, Local Place Plans are a formal part of Scotland's planning system. When prepared properly and submitted to the local authority, they must be taken into account in the preparation of Local Development Plans — the documents that guide how our towns, villages, and countryside change over time.

For Birsay, the Local Place Plan is a valuable opportunity to shape how the parish moves forward. It reflects what matters to the community — from protecting the natural and built heritage, to supporting local business, to improving transport links and opportunities for young people. It helps put local knowledge and ambition at the heart of planning.

Importantly, the Birsay Place Plan doesn't just focus on planning and land use. It brings together wider hopes around community wellbeing, resilience, and sustainability. By setting out a clear, shared vision — based on what people have said matters most — the Plan becomes a useful tool for guiding investment, encouraging collaboration, and making progress on the things that matter locally.



View north-east from The Brough towards the northern coast of Birsay

BIRSAY LOCAL PLACE PLAN VISION

The Birsay Local Place Plan is grounded in the values, ideas, and ambitions shared by the community throughout the engagement process. At its heart is a vision that reflects what people love about Birsay — and what they hope to see protected and improved in the years ahead.

VISION STATEMENT:

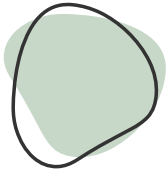
A **SUSTAINABLE** AND **THRIVING** BIRSAY, WHERE THE COMMUNITY'S **RICH HERITAGE**, STUNNING **NATURAL LANDSCAPES**, AND VIBRANT LOCAL LIFE ARE PRESERVED AND **CELEBRATED**, WHILE FOSTERING OPPORTUNITIES FOR **GROWTH**, **ACCESSIBILITY**, AND **INCLUSIVITY**. BIRSAY WILL BE A PLACE WHERE RESIDENTS AND VISITORS ALIKE CAN CONNECT WITH NATURE, HISTORY, AND EACH OTHER, BENEFITING FROM THOUGHTFUL DEVELOPMENT THAT SUPPORTS LOCAL BUSINESSES, ENHANCES THE ENVIRONMENT, AND PRIORITISES **THE WELL-BEING OF ALL**. A PLACE WHERE **INNOVATION**, **SUSTAINABILITY**, AND **COMMUNITY** PRIDE **FLOURISH TOGETHER**.



WHAT FOLLOWS NEXT:

The following sections of the Place Plan set out the key themes and priorities identified through local conversations, survey responses, and input from community groups and stakeholders. These reflect the practical steps and shared goals that will help bring the vision for Birsay to life — now and into the future.





THEME 1

CONNECTING PEOPLE AND PLACES

Connecting people and places is essential to life in Birsay — for those who live and work here, and for the many visitors who come to experience its unique landscapes and heritage. Improving how people get around can bring wide-reaching benefits: socially, economically, and environmentally.

For residents, it's about making it easier to access work, services, and activities without needing to rely on a car. For visitors, it's about supporting more sustainable travel and easing the pressure that tourism can place on roads and infrastructure, especially in peak seasons.



View across the Bridge towards The Palace along narrow road

GETTING AROUND – WHAT'S WORKING AND WHAT'S NOT

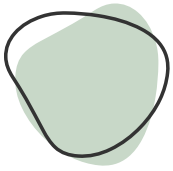
Public transport plays an important role in Birsay, and services like the school buses and the weekend night bus are highly valued by the community. Scheduled buses connect Birsay to Kirkwall and Stromness via Dounby, with early morning services aimed at workers and limited options later in the day. While a full-day or half-day trip to Kirkwall is possible, the low frequency means public transport is often seen as a risky or impractical choice — especially for those with appointments, onward travel, or unpredictable schedules.

For visitors, current services don't offer easy ways to move around Birsay itself, limiting sustainable travel options within the parish. The result is that very few people use the bus — with less than 1% of residents relying on it for commuting — and car ownership is almost universal, with only 3% of households not having access to a vehicle. That's significantly lower than the Orkney (17%) and national (20%) averages.

More than 500 people in Birsay are in employment, and a large number commute to Kirkwall, Stromness, or elsewhere. Around 40% of residents travel over 10km to work — a figure far higher than average for Orkney or Scotland. While 34% work from home, the rest mostly travel by car, pointing to a clear need for better, more flexible transport options.

ROADS, TRAFFIC AND TOURISM PRESSURES

Tourism brings welcome economic benefits, but it also places real pressure on Birsay's rural infrastructure. Over the summer months, there's a significant increase in through-traffic and parking demand, with narrow roads struggling to accommodate campervans, tour buses, and cars. Popular areas such as The Brough, The Palace, and Marwick Head often see cars parked on verges or in unofficial spaces, causing safety concerns for drivers, pedestrians, and cyclists alike.



Local people expressed frustration about congestion, informal parking, and the impact this can have on everyday life, especially in The Palace. In contrast, during quieter times of the year, parking is not an issue — and spaces like The Palace car park are seen as important community assets.

PATHS, CYCLING AND ACTIVE TRAVEL

Birsay is blessed with an outstanding network of walking routes. These include the dramatic clifftop trail to Marwick Head and The Kitchener Memorial, the long-distance path to Stromness, and part of the St Magnus Way — as well as local links between key sites like The Brough of Birsay, The Earl's Palace, and Barony Mill.

However, many of these routes need maintenance, and where paths follow roads, safety can be a concern — particularly with large vehicles and no pavements or protected verges. There's also limited cycling infrastructure, making it harder for families and less confident cyclists to enjoy the area safely. Inland walking routes are limited, and more could be done to connect the wider parish with walking and cycling-friendly links.

Community suggestions included clearer signage, more bins and benches, improved access between sites, and promotion of walking routes — especially those that could be linked with public transport or local attractions.

IN SUMMARY

From all the engagement work, a consistent message emerged: people want to be able to move around Birsay safely, sustainably, and enjoyably — whether they're heading to work, going for a walk, or visiting key heritage sites. While residents appreciate the services that do exist, they recognise the need for better infrastructure, more responsive public transport, and sensitive traffic management that supports both community life and tourism.

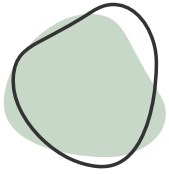


CASE STUDY - LOCH NESS HUB

Located in Drumnadrochit, the Loch Ness Hub is a community-owned facility that supports both transport and tourism in the area. Opened in 2021, it provides services including e-bike hire, baggage transfer, shuttle transport, EV charging, and visitor information. The hub supports popular walking and cycling routes such as the Great Glen Way and the Loch Ness 360, acting as a key point for sustainable travel. Established as a Community Benefit Society, profits are reinvested locally, helping to maintain and grow services that benefit both residents and visitors. It stands as a model of how rural communities can take ownership of mobility infrastructure to support local needs and sustainable development.



<https://www.visitinvernesslochness.com/listings/loch-ness-hub>



COMMUNITY ASPIRATIONS: CONNECTING PEOPLE AND PLACES

The following aspirations reflect the ideas and priorities raised through community engagement. Together, they aim to improve how people move around Birsay, support sustainable travel, and make the area safer and more accessible for everyone.

1. CREATE A BIRSAY RURAL TRANSPORT HUB

There is strong support for a new Rural Transport Hub to be located near The Palace and The Brough — central to key visitor attractions and close to the heart of the community.

The Hub could include:

- Additional parking for cars, buses, coaches and campervans.
- Safe turning and waiting areas for scheduled and tour buses.
- Bike and e-bike hire and storage.
- Bus stop improvements and a waiting shelter.
- Interpretation, wayfinding, and visitor information.
- Toilet facilities, recycling and waste disposal points.
- EV charging points.

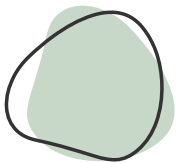
The Hub would be a base for new local transport services and an access point to walking and cycling routes, reducing congestion and encouraging active, low-carbon travel. Similar Rural Transport Hubs have been successfully delivered in Shetland — Birsay could lead the way for Orkney.

CASE STUDY - ANGUS RURAL MOBILITY HUB

The Angus Rural Mobility Hub is a forward-thinking transport project located at Brechin Business Park, strategically positioned on the A90 corridor. Designed to serve rural communities, the hub combines electric vehicle charging infrastructure with clean fuel options such as hydrogen and biogas. It aims to support multimodal transport by integrating logistics facilities, on-demand bus services, car-sharing, and active travel options. The project also incorporates local energy generation and storage, enabling a smarter, greener transport network. Supported through the Tay Cities Deal and academic partnerships, the hub is intended to drive rural decarbonisation, boost local skills, and support economic growth.



<https://investinangus.com/tay-cities-deal/the-angus-fund/low-carbon/why-brechin-angus/>



2. MAKE ROADS SAFER FOR PEDESTRIANS AND CYCLISTS

There's strong community support for making Birsay's roads safer, particularly for people walking or cycling. Roads in the parish are often narrow, with limited visibility, few pavements, and increasing pressure from larger vehicles — all of which affect the comfort and safety of both residents and visitors.

Improving road safety is not just about infrastructure — it's about encouraging active travel, supporting tourism, and improving quality of life for everyone. A safer road environment can help older residents stay mobile, make it easier for families to explore the area, and support more sustainable transport choices.

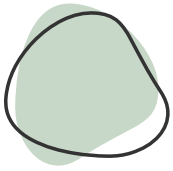
Key proposals include:

- Reducing the speed limit in Birsay Village from 30mph to 20mph to improve safety where pedestrians and vehicles share the road space.
- Reviewing the local road network to identify areas where passing places could be upgraded, visibility improved, or sections widened — especially on popular walking and cycling routes.
- Exploring the creation of new pavements or improved verges along key walking routes where space allows, particularly between clustered settlements and key destinations such as The Brough, car parks, and visitor facilities.
- Introducing clearer road markings and signage for shared road use, taking inspiration from good practice in other rural areas such as the Outer Hebrides — helping to raise driver awareness and encourage respectful road sharing.

- Considering seasonal restrictions or route guidance for large coaches during peak visitor periods to reduce congestion and protect the safety of those on foot or bike.
- Promoting awareness and shared responsibility through local campaigns or visitor information that encourages slower, more considerate driving across the parish.

These measures, taken together, would help ensure that Birsay remains a safe, accessible, and welcoming place for all — whether travelling by car, on two wheels, or on foot.





3. REVIEW AND IMPROVE PARKING ACROSS THE PARISH

Peak season parking pressures are a major concern. Alongside new parking provision at the proposed Hub, a review of parking throughout Birsay is needed.

This could include:

- Improvements at key hotspots such as The Kitchener Memorial, Marwick Head, and the Point of Buckquoy.
- Designated campervan parking to better manage the demand for such parking in a way that is sensitive to the environment and the wider community use of the natural asse.
- Consideration of paid parking in high-demand areas.
- Ensuring access is maintained for locals, businesses, and key sites such as the graveyard.



View of coaches and traffic at The Brough

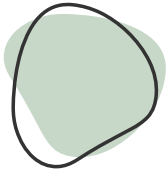
(<https://www.orkney.gov.uk/latest-news/birsay-ideas-out-for-consultation/>)

4. MAKE PUBLIC TRANSPORT MORE ATTRACTIVE AND FLEXIBLE

The community would like to see public transport services that better reflect real travel patterns and visitor needs.

Ideas include:

- More frequent and better-timed services to Kirkwall, Stromness and Dounby.
- Smaller, possibly electric buses more suited to rural roads.
- A dedicated seasonal ‘hop-on hop-off’ tourist shuttle service to reduce visitor car use.
- A community-run minibus service offering fixed routes around the parish and links to key transport connections.
- Improved signage and bus stop infrastructure, and more visible promotion of “bus + walk” itineraries.
- Timetable displays at key visitor points.



5. IMPROVE WALKING AND CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

Birsay's walking routes are one of its greatest strengths — offering stunning views, rich heritage, and a peaceful rural setting. However, the current network needs investment in connectivity, safety, and maintenance to ensure it remains usable, accessible, and appealing for both residents and visitors.

Improving the walking and cycling infrastructure will support active travel, encourage healthier lifestyles, and help reduce reliance on cars for short journeys. It also ties directly into Birsay's tourism ambitions, allowing visitors to explore more of the parish safely and sustainably. Proposals include:

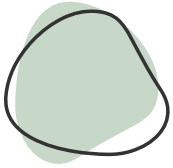
- Restoring and maintaining existing paths — such as the well-used route between The Village and Barony Mill — to improve surface quality, wayfinding, and year-round usability.
- Creating new connections to close gaps in the network — for example, linking the campsite to The Village or providing off-road links between key visitor sites, accommodation, and amenities.
- Making roadside walking safer by improving verges, adding refuge spaces, or creating dedicated footways along stretches of road with no pavement, especially where routes are used by children, older residents, or visitors.
- Promoting walking routes from key access points — including bus stops, car parks, and any future transport hub — with maps, signage, and waymarkers to encourage more people to explore on foot.

- Designing routes for all abilities, ensuring that key paths are accessible to people with limited mobility, families with pushchairs, and those using wheelchairs or mobility aids.
- Developing circular routes and heritage trails that link up lesser-known sites, natural features, and local stories — adding depth to the visitor experience and encouraging longer stays.

With modest investment and community input, Birsay's walking and cycling network could become one of its defining assets — offering safe, scenic, and well-connected options for everyday use, leisure, and tourism alike.



John O'Groats signpost
Photo by K vin et Laurianne Langlais



6. BETTER SIGNAGE, INFORMATION AND INTERPRETATION

Clear, accessible information is essential to help people explore Birsay more easily — whether on foot, by bike, or by public transport.

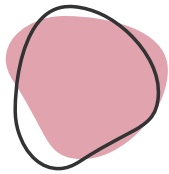
Suggestions include:

- A central information point at the Hub.
- Consistent signage for walking routes, attractions, and local services.
- Visitor etiquette information (e.g. responsible parking, wildlife protection, dog walking).
- Tide times and safety guidance for accessing tidal areas like The Brough.

Together, these aspirations set out a practical, community-informed path to a more connected Birsay — one that supports everyday life, encourages sustainable tourism, and enhances the experience for everyone who lives, works, or visits here.



Photo of bench overlooking The Brough of Birsay



THEME 2

CULTIVATING HERITAGE, TOURISM AND ENTERPRISE

Birsay's identity is shaped by its rich cultural heritage, thriving small business scene, and growing tourism offer. From its agricultural roots to its creative industries and historic landmarks, the parish holds a unique position in Orkney's cultural and economic landscape.



STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Agriculture remains at the heart of Birsay's economy, accounting for around a quarter of jobs in the local area. Alongside this, many residents work in education, health and care, or commute to nearby towns — with a high proportion travelling significant distances for work.

The parish also hosts a diverse range of small enterprises — from shops and cafés to accommodation providers, artists, and food and drink producers. Larger attractions such as Barony Mill, Kirbuster Farm Museum, HMS Tern and Swannay Brewery bring in visitors while also acting as important employers. Together, these businesses create a sense of local pride and economic resilience, even in the face of workforce and housing challenges.

The community values these assets highly, recognising the importance of local businesses like The Palace Stores and Birsay Tearoom, not just for what they provide, but for the vibrancy they bring to parish life.

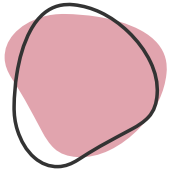
Looking ahead, significant investment is planned across Birsay's key heritage sites, public assets, and tourism infrastructure. These developments offer exciting potential — to support employment, attract more visitor spend, and build a stronger, more diverse local economy.

Birsay is already a favourite destination for independent travellers and a regular feature on tour and cruise itineraries. It's also well loved by Orkney folk, who visit for a walk to The Brough, a Sunday picnic, or a quiet coastal stroll. But there's more to Birsay than a quick stop — and the community recognises that better promotion and more joined-up visitor experiences could encourage people to stay longer and explore further.

A - Photo of Kirbuster Farm Museum - Fire Hoose

(<https://www.orkneymuseums.co.uk/our-museums/kirbuster-farm-museum/>)

B - Photo of Birsay Bay Tearoom



CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

Many local businesses face challenges in recruiting and retaining staff — an issue closely linked to the lack of affordable housing. There's a clear need to support younger people to live and work locally, and to make Birsay an attractive place to build a livelihood.

Visitors currently lack a central source of information about what to do in Birsay. While individual attractions like Barony Mill or Swannay Brewery are well promoted, there is no single, cohesive message that presents Birsay as a destination in its own right.

Overall, the community sees tourism as a real opportunity, but one that needs to be managed in a way that is sensitive, sustainable, and locally driven.

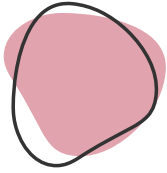
CASE STUDY - BARONY MILL

Barony Mill is Birsay's iconic working water mill — the last in Orkney and the only place in the world still grinding ancient bere barley. In winter, it runs at full power; in summer, it opens for guided tours that showcase its historic machinery and rich story.

Birsay Heritage Trust aims to bring the mill into community ownership, restore nearby buildings for retail and exhibitions, and improve visitor access and parking — securing its future as a vibrant heritage hub.



Image - View of The Barony Mill
(<https://watchmesee.com/blog/things-to-do-in-orkney/>)



COMMUNITY ASPIRATIONS: HERITAGE, TOURISM AND ENTERPRISE

The following aspirations reflect the community's vision for a thriving local economy — one that supports businesses, celebrates heritage, and offers visitors a richer and more meaningful experience.

1. PROMOTE BIRSAY AS 'MORE THAN A DAY TRIP'

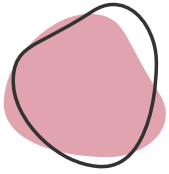
Birsay offers far more than can be experienced in a single visit — from ancient archaeology and wartime history to dramatic coastlines and rural life. However, many visitors currently only stay for a few hours, focusing on one or two key sites. There is a clear opportunity to promote Birsay as a place worth exploring more deeply — and staying longer to enjoy.

By developing a joined-up, place-based visitor experience, Birsay can encourage longer stays, wider exploration, and more meaningful connections with the area's culture, heritage, and landscape — while spreading visitor benefits more evenly across the parish.

Key ideas include:

- Developing a strong Birsay identity and tourism narrative — working with VisitScotland, Destination Orkney, and local businesses to define and promote what makes Birsay unique, from its layered history to its active crofting landscapes and rich nature.
- Creating physical and digital marketing materials — including brochures, display boards, social media content, and a dedicated web presence that showcases Birsay's story and offerings across seasons.
- Promoting a "Birsay Trail" or themed itineraries — linking key attractions such as The Brough of Birsay, Barony Mill, Kirbuster Museum, HMS Tern, and other hidden gems through suggested walking, cycling, or driving routes.
- Using the proposed Rural Transport Hub as a central point for visitor information — with maps, interpretation panels, local products, and transport links to support sustainable travel and longer stays.
- Developing interactive digital tools — such as apps or QR-coded signage — to highlight Bronze Age sites, Norse landmarks, wartime heritage, and natural features using maps, storytelling, and multimedia.
- Collaborating with local accommodation providers to promote overnight packages or thematic stays (e.g. heritage weekends, walking retreats, wildlife watching).
- Creating content tailored to different visitor groups — including families, history buffs, slow adventurers, and cruise passengers with limited time, encouraging return visits or longer bookings.
- Enhancing and promoting Linkshouse as a destination for International artists who are attracted to Birsay's unique setting who will in turn spend money in local businesses.

Together, these efforts would help position Birsay not just as a place to see, but as a place to stay, explore, and return to — strengthening the local economy and celebrating what makes the area so special.



CASE STUDY - HMS TERN

HMS Tern: Preserving the Past, Shaping the Future

HMS Tern was built in 1939 to defend the Royal Navy at Scapa Flow. Once home to 1,500 personnel across 564 acres, it's one of Orkney's most significant but overlooked wartime sites. Today, just a few buildings remain — but the heritage is powerful.



Birsay Heritage Trust is seeking support to bring this historic airfield back to life. The vision: a Visitor Journey — an immersive experience across the site, linking restored buildings, exhibitions, and interpretation points through guided and self-guided routes.

Plans focus on five key locations: the Control Tower, Cinema, Generator Building, Fire Station, and new Nissen-style glamping huts. To turn this vision into reality, support is needed — from funders, partners, and volunteers — to protect the site, share its story, and create a unique, community-led destination for Orkney.

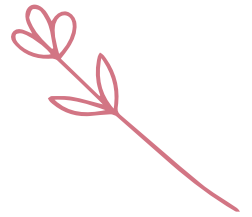
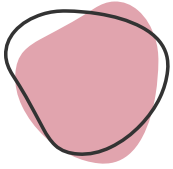
2. DEVELOP A HERITAGE AND VISITOR CENTRE

There is strong community interest in creating a small-scale heritage and visitor centre in Birsay to celebrate the area's rich history, landscape, and culture — while also supporting the local economy and enhancing the visitor experience.

Key ideas include:

- Exploring the development of a dedicated Birsay Heritage Centre — a space that could include displays, interpretation, and hands-on heritage activities.
- Including a café or social hub as part of the centre to provide a welcoming year-round space for both locals and visitors.
- Learning from successful models elsewhere in Orkney, such as Sanday's well regarded Heritage Centre, which combines exhibitions with community engagement and visitor services.
- Ensuring the centre links in with wider efforts to promote Birsay as a year-round destination — connecting to walking trails, archaeology, natural heritage, local crafts, and stories of the sea.
- Considering multiple location options — with further work needed to assess the most suitable and sustainable site, whether through repurposing existing buildings or exploring community land opportunities.

This could become a focal point for learning, local pride, and economic activity, and offer a welcoming gateway for those keen to understand and experience all that Birsay has to offer.



3. SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESSES AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

The community wants to see stronger support for local enterprise, innovation, and ideas that build economic resilience and year-round opportunity. This includes help not only to start businesses, but to grow and sustain them in the long term.

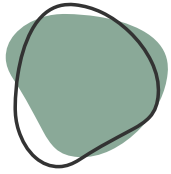
Priorities include:

- Better access to grants for rural businesses — including existing support like Orkney Islands Council’s Farm Diversification Fund or Rural Shop Grant.
- Working with the Council and other partners to ensure funding and policies are tailored to small, rural communities like Birsay — including planning processes that support appropriate local development and diversification.
- Developing “pop-up” trading locations for local producers, makers, and food businesses, helping them reach customers without major upfront costs.
- Creating flexible “incubator” or shared-use space where new and small businesses can test ideas, collaborate, and build confidence.
- Promoting and supporting a local network of Campervan Aires — simple, low-impact parking areas that provide facilities and bring trade to nearby businesses. A model like that used in the Western Isles could offer a sustainable, community-led solution to campervan pressures, while generating income and custom for the parish.
- Ensuring that any local business showing appetite for development or growth receives support, signposting, and recognition — including technical advice, mentoring, and access to planning or funding expertise where needed.

Together, these actions support a thriving, place-based economy that honours Birsay’s heritage, encourages community-led tourism, and opens up long-term opportunities for local people to live, work, and prosper.



View towards The Kitchener Memorial, Marwick



THEME 3 NATURAL SPACES



The richness and variety of the natural landscape across Birsay is one of the unique and most loved things about the parish. Finding ways to celebrate and welcome people to explore and interact with natural spaces, while ensuring that they are protected and respected is key to the area.

For the community and visitors alike it's about improving access and opportunities to experience the natural world; encouraging sustainable and positive interaction with places while ensuring that visitor demand is managed appropriately to protect the landscapes that we are trying to enjoy.

STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Birsay is home to some of the most dramatic coastal walking routes in Orkney, incorporating highlights such as Marwick Head, The Kitchener Memorial and The Brough of Birsay. The St Magnus Way - which follows the northern coastline before heading inland towards Dounby - is well regarded and enjoyed by both residents and visitors. These routes, set within Birsay's unspoilt and captivating landscape, are a big part of why the area is so highly valued by the local community.

There was strong support for celebrating and protecting this natural environment. Ideas from the community included providing additional bird hides, offering interpretation about the landscape and its features, and developing a visitor etiquette code – all aimed at encouraging positive, respectful interaction with the land, wildlife and heritage of Birsay.

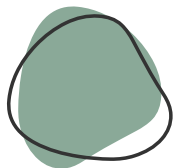
CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

The very things that make Birsay so special to residents and attract thousands of visitors each year, are increasingly at risk without careful planning and action to manage current pressures and protect them for the future.

The impact of tourism was a recurring theme through the Place Plan Engagement. Each year, the number of coaches, campervans, and visitor traffic appears to grow, placing increased pressure on Birsay's rural roads and path network. The Point of Buckquoy and the view across to The Brough are iconic and closely associated with Birsay's identity. However, the coastal road leading to The Brough is vulnerable, with coastal erosion posing a serious risk to its long-term stability. A detailed assessment is needed to understand the current condition of the access route to The Brough and parking provision, providing the evidence base required to inform future improvements and decision-making.

There was broad consensus during consultation that, in time, some form of vehicle restriction may be necessary to protect both the Point and The Brough, and to ensure public safety.

In addition to access concerns, many residents suggested opportunities to improve visitor management and amenities, changes that would also benefit local people. These included more benches, bins and toilets at scenic spots, as well as better signage and information to help spread visitor numbers more evenly across the parish, including to some of the lesser-known sites.



COMMUNITY ASPIRATIONS: NATURAL SPACES

The following aspirations reflect the ideas and concerns raised through community engagement. Collectively they aim to respond to the pressures facing Birsay's natural environment, while exploring opportunities and creative solutions to protect and enhance access to landscape. The goal is to ensure that residents and visitors alike can continue to enjoy and connect with Birsay's natural heritage – now and into the future.

1. MANAGING ACCESS TO SITES AND PLACES

Develop Access Management Plans for Birsay's most sensitive locations, supported by traffic and movement studies, to help protect important sites while improving how people move through the parish. Key ideas include:

- Exploring the future of access to the Point of Buckquoy, including whether restrictions on certain types or volumes of vehicles may be needed to safeguard the site. This will require survey work of the area to assess the scale of erosion.
- Considering how a Rural Transport Hub could support more sustainable and long-term access to The Brough and surrounding areas.
- Investigating options to “re-green” parts of the Buckquoy access road — improving walking and cycling access while enhancing the landscape and reducing vehicle pressure.



Photo shows erosion along road to Point of Buckquoy

2. IMPROVING AMENITY SERVICES FOR ALL

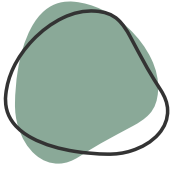
Enhancing basic amenities across Birsay can benefit both residents and visitors, helping to make outdoor spaces more welcoming, accessible, and environmentally responsible. These improvements also support efforts to promote Birsay as a year-round destination.

Key ideas include:

- Installing more benches and rest points at scenic locations and along walking routes to reduce the distance between resting opportunities. This helps make longer walks more accessible for people of all ages and abilities, while also creating spaces to pause and enjoy the views.
- Increasing the provision of bins throughout the parish — particularly at busy visitor hotspots during the peak season — to help protect the natural landscape from litter and waste.
- Improving access to public toilets across Birsay, including exploring options for upgraded or additional facilities in key locations. Clean, accessible toilets are a basic need for both visitors and residents and support inclusive, longer stays in the area.
- Considering environmentally friendly solutions for new or upgraded amenities, such as water-saving toilets, recycling bins, and materials that reflect the local character of Birsay.

Together, these upgrades can help create a more welcoming and sustainable environment that meets the needs of both the local community and those who come to experience Birsay's natural and cultural heritage.

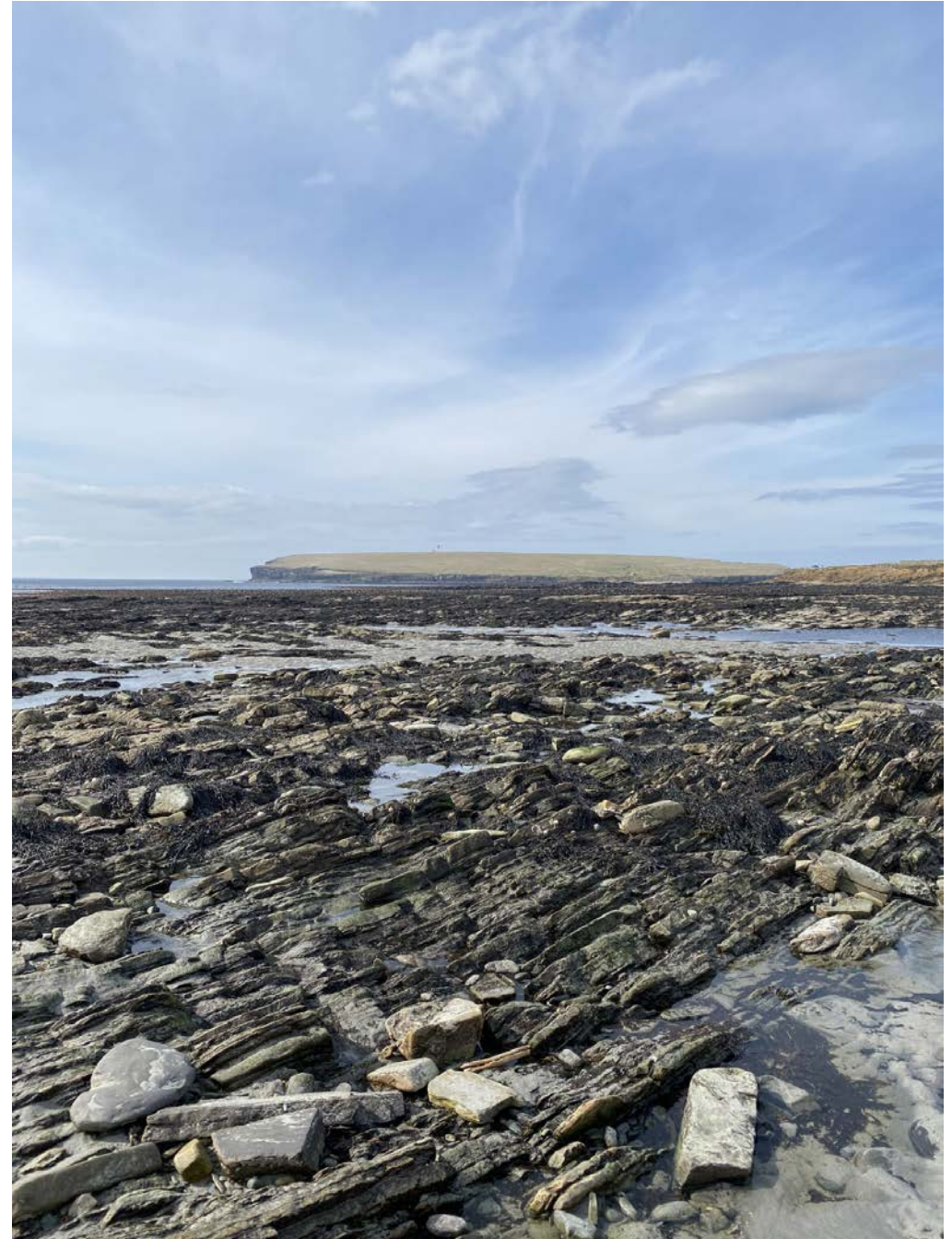




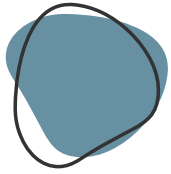
3. NATURE TRAILS AND LESSER-KNOWN HERITAGE WALKS

Creating new opportunities to connect with Birsay's natural and cultural heritage can enrich the visitor experience while supporting sustainable tourism and local pride. Key ideas include:

- Developing nature trails along existing walking routes, with signage highlighting local flora, fauna and landscape features – helping people engage with the natural environment and encouraging responsible countryside behaviour.
- Promoting access to lesser-known heritage sites across the parish to support visitor dispersal and increase awareness of Birsay's rich physical and social history.



View towards Brough of Birsay



THEME 4

COMMUNITY ASSETS AND HOUSING



CONTEXT

While a vibrant community, Birsay's future is dependent on the long-term sustainability of community and visitor facilities, infrastructure and housing. This means investing in renewal, maintenance and enhancement of buildings and infrastructure so that they can be futureproofed to meet the needs of the community.

There is currently no community housing in Birsay, and the community has identified a pressing need for a wider range of housing options to support the future sustainability of the parish. Housing is seen as essential not only to retain young people but also to attract individuals and families with the skills and experience needed to strengthen the local economy and enrich community life. A diverse mix of housing tenures is supported, including affordable homes for rent and purchase, as well as innovative models that combine ownership, rent-to-buy, or shared equity. These options are viewed as necessary to meet the differing needs and circumstances of local people.

However, it is widely felt that current planning policies and interpretations may hinder locally appropriate development. In particular, young residents have found it challenging to gain approval for homes on family-owned farming land, due to restrictions on location, design, and infrastructure requirements. The Palace area has been flagged by the local authority as particularly constrained, primarily due to flood risk, limiting its suitability for future development. Nevertheless, the community sees real potential in areas close to existing infrastructure and amenities such as around the Birsay Hall where modest, well-integrated housing would be more appropriate, subject to land availability and environmental assessments.

ASSETS ARE IMPORTANT FOR THE COMMUNITY

Birsay is a vibrant and active parish, but its future depends on the long-term sustainability of its facilities, infrastructure, and housing. Ensuring these vital elements are maintained, renewed, and enhanced is key to supporting a thriving and resilient community.

RATIONALE: KEY ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

COMMUNITY ASSETS MATTER

From the hotel, hostel, and campsite to the shop, tearoom, and visitor attractions, many facilities across Birsay — regardless of ownership — are seen as vital community assets. The community is keen to support the long-term viability of these places.

A RURAL PATTERN OF DEVELOPMENT

There is strong local consensus that Birsay's future housing should reflect its rural character. Rather than large-scale developments, people favour an organic approach aligned with the existing dispersed settlement pattern. Ideas such as small clusters of homes — similar to the traditional clachan — or individually designed houses that are sensitive to the landscape and heritage were well supported.

HOUSING FOR ALL AGES

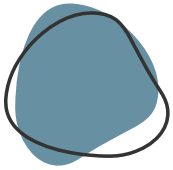
There's a desire to ensure housing meets the needs of people across all life stages — from young adults to older residents — so that people can remain in Birsay throughout their lives.

COMMUNITY-LED DEVELOPMENT

There's enthusiasm for exploring community-led housing initiatives, with fair and transparent allocation policies prioritising local needs. These could create long-term social and economic benefits, including income that can be reinvested into local services, social activities, or infrastructure improvements.

UNLOCKING VACANT OR UNDERUSED BUILDINGS

Several buildings around the parish are vacant, underused, or currently for sale. The community sees these as opportunities to create new homes or repurpose them for wider community benefit — including potential ideas for a heritage and visitor centre.



COMMUNITY ASPIRATIONS: COMMUNITY ASSETS AND HOUSING

The following aspirations reflect the community's vision on how to ensure Birsay is a thriving place for generations to come.

1. ASSET MAPPING AND FEASIBILITY WORK

Key ideas include:

- Undertake a parish-wide asset mapping exercise to identify vacant land, underutilised buildings, or potential sites for redevelopment.
- Engage with landowners and public agencies to explore opportunities.
- Undertake a review and options appraisal of key sites across the parish.
- Establish a short-life working group (e.g. a Housing and Assets Group) to guide and oversee this work.

2. CONSIDER COMMUNITY INTERVENTION IN KEY SITES

Key ideas include:

- Explore community ownership or partnership approaches to bring vacant or underused assets back into beneficial use.
- Engage with private owners where appropriate to discuss safeguarding existing businesses or buildings that are important to the local economy or identity.



<https://www.orkney.com/listings/birsay-whalebone>

ASPIRATIONS



THEME 1

-  Review of parking
-  Potential area for Transport Hub



THEME 2

-  Local business and Enterprise
-  Potential area for a Heritage Centre

THEME 3

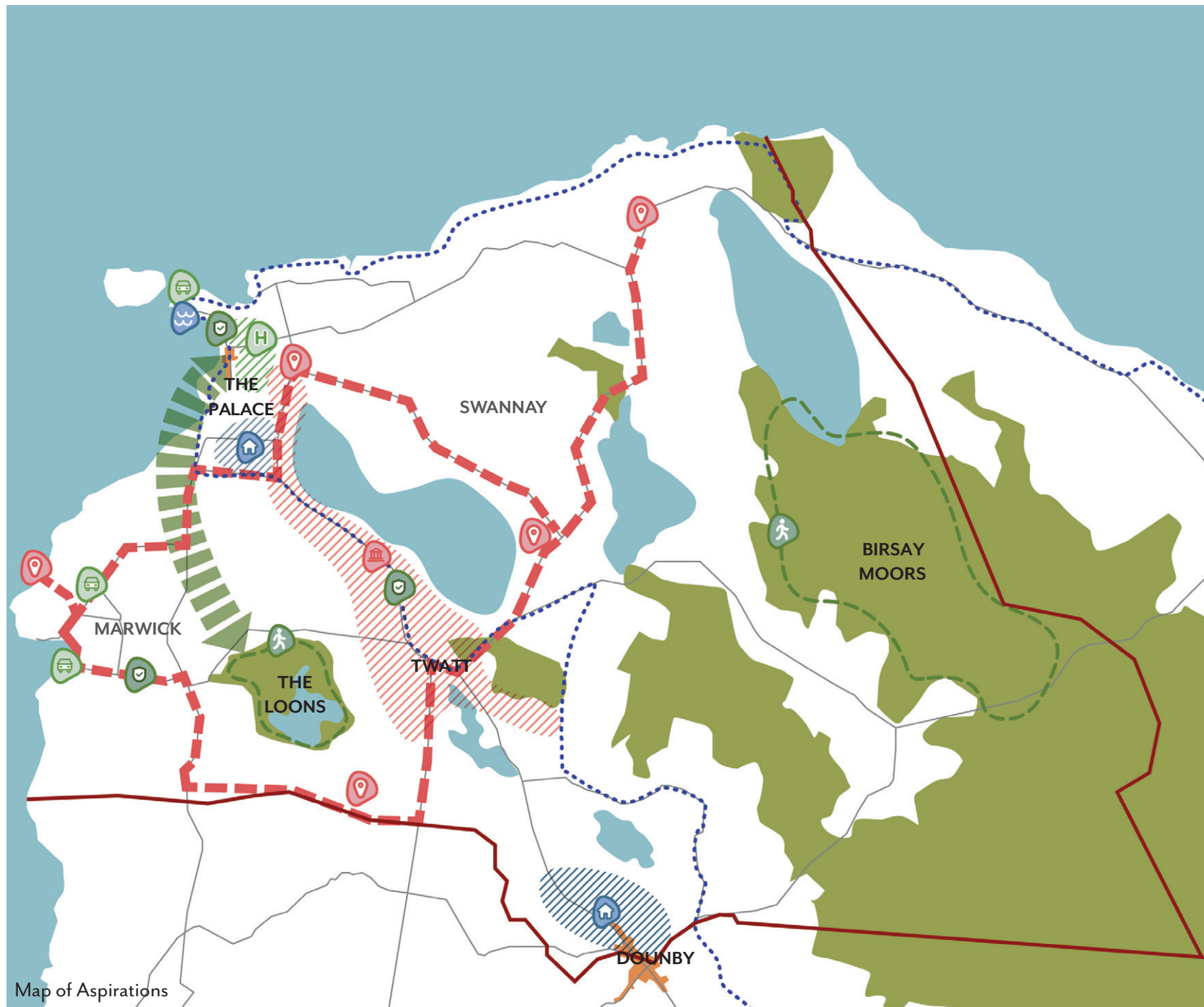
-  Local business and Enterprise
-  Potential area for nature trails

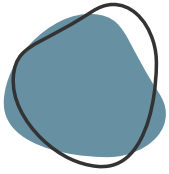
THEME 4

-  Potential areas for housing options
-  Buckquoy slip improvements

KEY

-  Parish boundary
-  Watercourse / Waterbody
-  Natural space
-  Settlement
-  St Magnus Way
-  Road network
-  Potential nature trail link





CASE STUDY - KIRBUSTER FARM MUSEUM

Kirbuster Farm Museum: A Rare Survival, Ready to Grow

Kirbuster is one of Orkney's hidden gems — a remarkably preserved farmstead offering a vivid glimpse into rural life across four centuries. Its medieval firehoose, peat hearth, neuk bed, and working kiln make it the only site of its kind in Northern Europe.

Now, plans are in place to take Kirbuster to the next level: a replica Viking Longhouse, upgraded interpretation, renovated outbuildings, and refreshed displays covering the 17th to 20th centuries. A new flexible indoor space will support events and year-round visits.

With 8,000 visitors in 2024 and growing interest, this is the moment to support Kirbuster's transformation into a major heritage destination.



Image - View of Kibuster Farm Museum

<https://www.orknymuseums.co.uk/our-museums/kirbuster-farm-museum/>

3. EXPLORE HOUSING MODELS THAT REFLECT LOCAL NEEDS

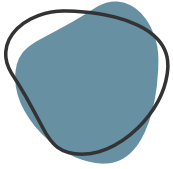
Key ideas include:

- Support the development of small-scale housing clusters or dispersed homes aligned with Birsay's rural character.
- Promote mixed-tenure and affordable housing solutions, including rent-to-buy, shared equity, and homes for older people and first-time buyers.
- Advocate for planning policies that enable appropriate rural housing development — especially for young people on family land.

4. MAKE USE OF VACANT OR UNDERUSED PROPERTIES

Key ideas include:

- Identify properties across the parish that are currently vacant, underused, or for sale, and assess their potential for community benefit.
- Explore opportunities to repurpose suitable buildings for uses such as visitor services, shared workspaces, cafés, or housing.
- Consider options for community ownership, partnership models, or temporary use to test ideas and respond to local needs.
- Prioritise sites that are well located and have potential to support wider community and economic activity — for example, those near existing facilities like Birsay Hall.



5. IMPROVE ACCESS AT BUCKQUOY SLIP

Improve Access to the Buckquoy Slip for Leisure and Small-Scale Fishing

There is local interest in enhancing the usability of the Buckquoy Slip to support leisure activities and small-scale fishing, both of which are important to community wellbeing and the local economy. Currently, access is restricted at certain tide states, limiting its effectiveness and reliability for users. A key priority is to investigate options for extending or adapting the slip to enable safer and more consistent access, regardless of tide conditions.

This work should explore technical and regulatory considerations, including design feasibility, environmental impacts, and potential funding sources. In doing so, the project can draw on successful examples such as the Deerness Slip project, which demonstrated how a community-led initiative—grounded in strong local support, practical design, and partnership working—can deliver valuable infrastructure improvements. Community involvement will be vital, both in shaping the design and in ensuring that the development reflects local needs and aspirations.

Key ideas include:

- Investigate options to extend the Buckquoy Slip to allow better access for leisure and small-scale fishing at different tide states.
- Use examples such as the Deerness slip project as a model for a community-led approach.



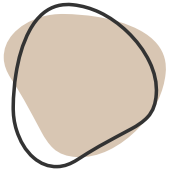
CASE STUDY - LINKSHOUSE ORKNEY ARTS RESIDENCY

Linkshouse is a unique residential arts space, gifted to the Pier Arts Centre in Stromness in memory of local artist Erlend Williamson. Since opening just three years ago, it has attracted artists and creatives from around the world to stay and create work inspired by the remarkable location while also supporting **homegrown talent**.

As part of the Islands Growth Deal's Creative Islands Wellbeing Programme, the Pier Arts Centre will redevelop Linkshouse from 2026. The project will expand studio and accommodation facilities enabling year-round use and multiple occupants at one time. It will provide flexible inclusive spaces that can be used by a range of users including local groups, schools and student groups. These spaces will be available to hire for workplace away days and training sessions. Essential building repairs will secure the future of the building for visitors and the local community.



Image - View of Linkshouse
(<https://www.pierartscentre.com/linkshouseorkneyartsresidency>)



THEME 5 COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING



Birsay is fortunate to have a strong tradition of volunteering, with dedicated individuals contributing to community groups, events and services. This voluntary spirit plays a vital role in making Birsay the vibrant and resilient place it is. From Community Council members to local organisers and heritage champions, volunteers are the backbone of parish life.

However, as highlighted during the Place Plan process, there is only so much a small group of people can take on. To deliver meaningful change — and to make the most of the opportunities identified in this plan — greater capacity is needed, especially around coordination, communication, project delivery, and community engagement.

In the past, Birsay benefited from a dedicated development officer, employed in partnership with Voluntary Action Orkney and the Birsay Heritage Trust. That role supported the successful revitalisation of Barony Mill, now a well-loved and sustainable local asset. This past success provides a clear model for what is possible when the right support is in place.

A renewed development role, or broader community anchor structure, could help unlock many of the ideas in this plan — by supporting local groups, coordinating projects, securing funding, and bringing people together. Such a role could also strengthen Birsay's voice in wider conversations and help the parish move forward with confidence and clarity.

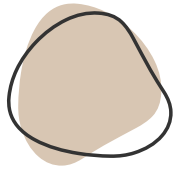
RATIONALE (KEY ISSUES / OPPORTUNITIES)

Across Orkney, the way communities approach development has shifted. Many islands and parishes now operate through local Development Trusts, which act as community anchor organisations with staff, governance, and funding structures to support long-term local action. These trusts often link into the Community Development Trust Network — a peer support forum that shares learning and strengthens the sector.

Birsay could benefit from similar support. A locally employed Community Development Officer — or an equivalent anchor structure — would provide the time, skills, and focus needed to turn good ideas into real outcomes. There is support available from organisations such as Orkney Islands Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), and Business Gateway — all of whom can assist with funding, governance, and planning.

Volunteer fatigue is a genuine concern. Many of those involved in local activities have served for years. Without new capacity and support, it will be difficult to sustain community initiatives or respond to emerging opportunities — including managing potential future community benefit funds from renewable energy developments.

Recruiting people for local employment is also a challenge in Birsay, and this could affect the delivery of community projects. Addressing these gaps now will help build a stronger, more resilient community in the long term.



COMMUNITY ASPIRATIONS: COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

The community is clear that more support is needed to help ideas take root and grow. These aspirations reflect a desire for enhanced coordination, wider participation, and long-term sustainability.

1. EMPLOY A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

- Explore funding options to support a part-time or full-time Community Development Officer who can work across the parish. This role would help coordinate projects, build partnerships, support volunteers, and secure funding to deliver on community priorities.

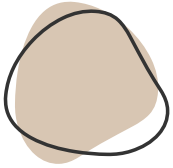
2. STRENGTHEN VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

- Develop a more structured and inclusive volunteer programme to support local events, projects, and services. This could include volunteer matching, recognition schemes, and flexible roles for people of all ages.

3. ESTABLISH A HERITAGE PARTNERSHIP

- Explore the opportunity to create and support the creation of a new partnership bringing together individuals, groups, and organisations with an interest in Birsay's history, archaeology, and heritage.
- This group could act as a collective voice for heritage in local planning, coordinate activity, and strengthen funding bids and project delivery. By connecting existing efforts and encouraging new ideas, the partnership would help ensure that Birsay's heritage is actively supported, shared, and safeguarded for the future.





4. CREATE A LOCAL ECONOMIC, BUSINESS, AND TOURISM FORUM

- Establish a space for local businesses, social enterprises, and community members to collaborate, share knowledge, and shape future strategies for economic development in Birsay.

This forum could:

- Provide a platform to respond to challenges such as staffing, marketing, and infrastructure.
- Act as a coordinating voice in delivering other aspirations identified in the Place Plan.
- Empower the community to play an active role in how Birsay is presented to visitors, shifting tourism from something that “happens to” the area to something shaped and guided by local priorities.
- Explore interest in forming a tourism subgroup with representation from businesses and residents.
- Engage with external partners like VisitScotland, Orkney Islands Council, and Destination Orkney.
- Define its role — from light-touch coordination to developing promotional materials or managing local tourism offerings.

By bringing together economic and tourism interests under one umbrella, the forum could help ensure that development is community-led and benefits local people.

5. IMPROVE COMMUNICATION AND INVOLVEMENT

- Explore new ways to keep people informed and engaged — particularly younger residents. This could include reinstating a regular community newsletter, more use of social media, and developing creative ways to involve more people in local decision-making.



NEXT STEPS

The Birsay Local Place Plan marks a starting point — a shared vision for the future, shaped by the voices of the community. It captures what matters most to local people and sets out practical aspirations for how Birsay can grow in a way that is sustainable, inclusive, and true to its character.

While some ideas in this Plan can be progressed locally by community groups, businesses, or individuals, others will need collaboration with external partners or longer-term investment. Some actions may be quick wins, while others will require persistence and planning over time.

What's important is that the Plan gives the community a stronger voice. By submitting it to Orkney Islands Council, it becomes part of the official planning process, ensuring that local priorities are considered in future decisions about land use and development.

The Place Plan can also be used to support funding bids, spark new projects, and help local groups and agencies work more effectively together. It provides a clear picture of what the community wants — and why.



ACTION PLAN



This Action Plan sets out the practical steps needed to deliver the community's shared vision for Birsay. It reflects priorities across transport, tourism, heritage, housing, local economy, and community development.

The first step in moving forward will be to understand the community's capacity — who is able and willing to lead or support delivery — and to explore what delivery mechanisms might work best. That could include community groups, partnerships, volunteers, or new roles such as a Community Development Officer.

Each action in the plan outlines what needs to happen next, who might be involved, and whether it's likely to be a short-, medium-, or long-term goal. Some actions are ready to begin now; others will require coordination, funding, or further work to scope out feasibility. A first step will be to explore the roles and responsibilities for each of these actions.

This is a working document — a framework to guide progress, align partners, and attract investment. It can evolve as new opportunities emerge or priorities shift. With strong local involvement and collaboration, Birsay is well-placed to grow forward — building on its heritage, landscape, and community spirit to create a thriving and resilient future.

THEME	ACTION	NEXT STEPS	TIMESCALE
Transport and Access	Create a Birsay Rural Transport Hub	Identify site, engage transport bodies, explore integration	Medium
Transport and Access	Make Roads Safer for Pedestrians and Cyclists	Conduct road safety audit, propose traffic calming measures	Short
Transport and Access	Review and Improve Parking Across the Parish	Map provision, identify pressure points, propose improvements	Short
Transport and Access	Make Public Transport More Attractive and Flexible	Coordinate with OIC, explore flexible transport options	Medium
Transport and Access	Improve Walking and Cycling Infrastructure	Identify key routes, plan upgrades, link key sites	Medium
Transport and Access	Better Signage, Information and Interpretation	Audit signage, design cohesive and accessible materials	Short
Tourism and Economy	Promote Birsay as 'More Than a Day Trip'	Develop marketing strategy, highlight overnight options	Short
Tourism and Economy	Develop a Heritage and Visitor Information Centre	Carry out feasibility and site assessment, secure funding	Medium
Tourism and Economy	Support Local Businesses and Social Enterprise	Improve access to funding, create incubator spaces, support campervan Aires	Medium
Land, Heritage and Natural Environment	Manage Access to Sites and Places	Identify priority sites, work with landowners and conservation bodies	Medium
Land, Heritage and Natural Environment	Improve Amenity Services for All	Install benches, bins, toilets; use sustainable materials	Short
Land, Heritage and Natural Environment	Develop Nature Trails and Heritage Walks	Map routes, connect trails with interpretation	Medium
Land and Housing	Asset Mapping and Feasibility Work	Map assets, commission feasibility studies	Short
Land and Housing	Consider Community Intervention in Key Sites	Identify priority sites, explore asset transfer options	Medium
Land and Housing	Explore Housing Models That Reflect Local Needs	Engage community, identify suitable housing sites	Medium
Land and Housing	Make Use of Vacant or Underused Properties	Map empty properties, support reuse or intervention	Medium
Land and Housing	Improve Access at Buckquoy Slip	Assess condition, identify and plan improvements	Short
Community Capacity and Partnership	Employ a Community Development Officer	Secure funding, define role linked to plan delivery	Short
Community Capacity and Partnership	Strengthen Volunteer Engagement	Create volunteer hub, promote opportunities	Short
Community Capacity and Partnership	Establish a Heritage Partnership	Convene meeting, agree remit and structure	Short
Community Capacity and Partnership	Create a Local Economic and Business Forum	Facilitate business coordination, identify shared needs	Short
Community Capacity and Partnership	Improve Communication and Involvement	Update communications tools, hold regular events	Short

