

HARRAY & SANDWICK LOCAL PLACE PLAN

Two Rural Parishes. One Shared Future.

A community-led plan for the future of two rural parishes and their shared hub



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Harray and Sandwick are two distinct rural parishes in the West Mainland of Orkney, each with its own landscape, history and community networks. They are connected through Dounby, which functions as a shared hub at the centre of a tri-parish area, linking Harray, Sandwick and Birsay, and serving a wider West Mainland catchment.

This Local Place Plan sets out how the community would like to see the area evolve over the next 10–15 years. It reflects what residents value, where pressures are emerging, and how change can be managed positively.

Dounby plays a critical role in supporting daily life across the West Mainland, providing access to shops, services, healthcare, education and community facilities. Maintaining and strengthening this role is central to the long-term sustainability of the area.

The Plan identifies a number of key challenges, including road safety and movement, housing availability, loss of local services, and constraints relating to transport and digital connectivity. These challenges are particularly visible in Dounby, where infrastructure does not always match the level of activity and demand placed upon it.

Across all engagement, residents emphasised the importance of balance – supporting growth while protecting agricultural land, open views, heritage settings and rural character.

Community Priorities

Engagement – including a detailed survey, Steering Group meetings, community and business discussions and youth input – identified five consistent priorities:

- Movement and everyday safety.
- Housing supply and community retention.
- Village vitality and community infrastructure.
- Public transport provision.
- Digital connectivity and economic resilience.

Movement and Safety

Traffic through Dounby, particularly around the school and centre, emerged as a key concern. Residents support 20mph enforcement, ongoing monitoring and evidence-led interventions to ensure safer crossings and pedestrian routes. On rural roads, damaged verges and vehicle speeds affect walking safety and comfort.

The ongoing Walk, Wheel, Cycle Trust “Getting Around Dounby” project provides a strong foundation for embedding active travel, improved crossings and clearer walking routes within the village centre.

Safe movement is closely linked to independence. Calmer roads and reliable transport enable children to travel confidently, support older residents to remain active locally, and reduce daily stress for families.

Housing and Retention

Housing is central to sustaining the parishes. Residents expressed concern about limited access to social housing beyond Dounby and Quoyloo and challenges faced by young people seeking house building plots. The community supports modest, locally-needed housing growth that strengthens the school roll and reinforces existing centres of activity.

Expansion near the school and community facilities is viewed as practical and sustainable. Smaller clusters, including the concept of a “Hall hamlet,” reflect an ambition to reinforce community anchors. There is interest in exploring community-led serviced plots to support long-term affordability.

Growth should remain proportionate, well-designed and respectful of agricultural land, landscape setting and rural identity.

Public transport and digital connectivity

Current bus provision does not fully reflect dispersed rural travel patterns. Residents support exploration of more flexible, demand-responsive models capable of linking effectively with established corridors such as the X1. Improved connectivity is essential to

employment access, social participation and independence. Digital connectivity emerged as essential enabling infrastructure. Patchy mobile signal and inconsistent broadband reliability affect businesses, home working and access to services. As communication systems become increasingly digital, resilient connectivity and power supply are critical to long-term sustainability.

Vitality and Community Infrastructure

Dounby plays a critical role as a shared hub. Residents want it to function as a welcoming, safe and connected centre. There is particular opportunity around the Smithfield Hotel, which is currently on the market. Community discussions identified this as a pivotal site within a wider cluster including the school, shops, bus stop, green space and walking routes.

There is a clear desire to examine whether community acquisition of Smithfield could secure long-term influence over its future role. Any progression would require detailed feasibility work, appropriate governance and sustainable financial planning. The experience of community ownership elsewhere in Orkney demonstrates that such ambitions can be realised where robust preparation and capacity underpins delivery.

The surrounding area offers scope to integrate movement improvements, green space enhancement, multi-generational outdoor areas and well-designed recycling provision into a strengthened village heart.

The halls in the parishes, at Harray, Sandwick, and the Old School at Quoyloo remain vital anchors.

The site of the former Corrigall Museum was identified as a heritage opportunity. Residents support exploring how parish heritage, farming traditions and local stories could be made more visible and accessible, strengthening identity and intergenerational connection.

A Spatial Framework for the Future

The Plan identifies a coherent spatial framework:

- Dounby as a strengthened shared hub.
- Smithfield Hotel as a strategic village site.
- The Community Halls as local anchors.
- Corrigall Museum site and coastal heritage assets as heritage and community nodes.
- Housing clusters supporting infrastructure.
- Safe routes linking homes, services and facilities.

By thinking spatially and planning proactively, Harray and Sandwick can support housing growth, strengthen independence and sustain the rural character that defines both parishes.

Delivery and Review

Delivery will require partnership between the Community Council, local groups, Orkney Islands Council and external agencies. Some elements can be progressed locally; others will depend on planning decisions and infrastructure investment programmes.

Annual review by the Community Council will ensure it remains responsive and up to date.

This Local Place Plan reflects the commitment and practical insight of the community. It provides a clear, community-led direction for managing change with purpose.

INTRODUCTION

Harray and Sandwick are two distinct rural parishes in West Mainland Orkney. Each has its own character, history and geography. Each has its own networks, and community groups. Dounby sits within a tri-parish setting, connecting Harray, Sandwick and Birsay, and functions as a key service centre for the wider West Mainland..

This Local Place Plan sets out how the community would like to see the area evolve over the next 10–15 years. It reflects what people value, where pressures are emerging, and how change can be shaped positively. It provides clear direction so that future decisions about land use, infrastructure and investment are informed by the people who live here. This Plan has been prepared in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Place Plans) (Scotland) Regulations 2021 and has regard to the Orkney Local Development Plan, National Planning Framework 4 and the Orkney Community Plan 2025–2030. It is intended to form part of the evidence base for future planning, land-use and infrastructure investment decisions.

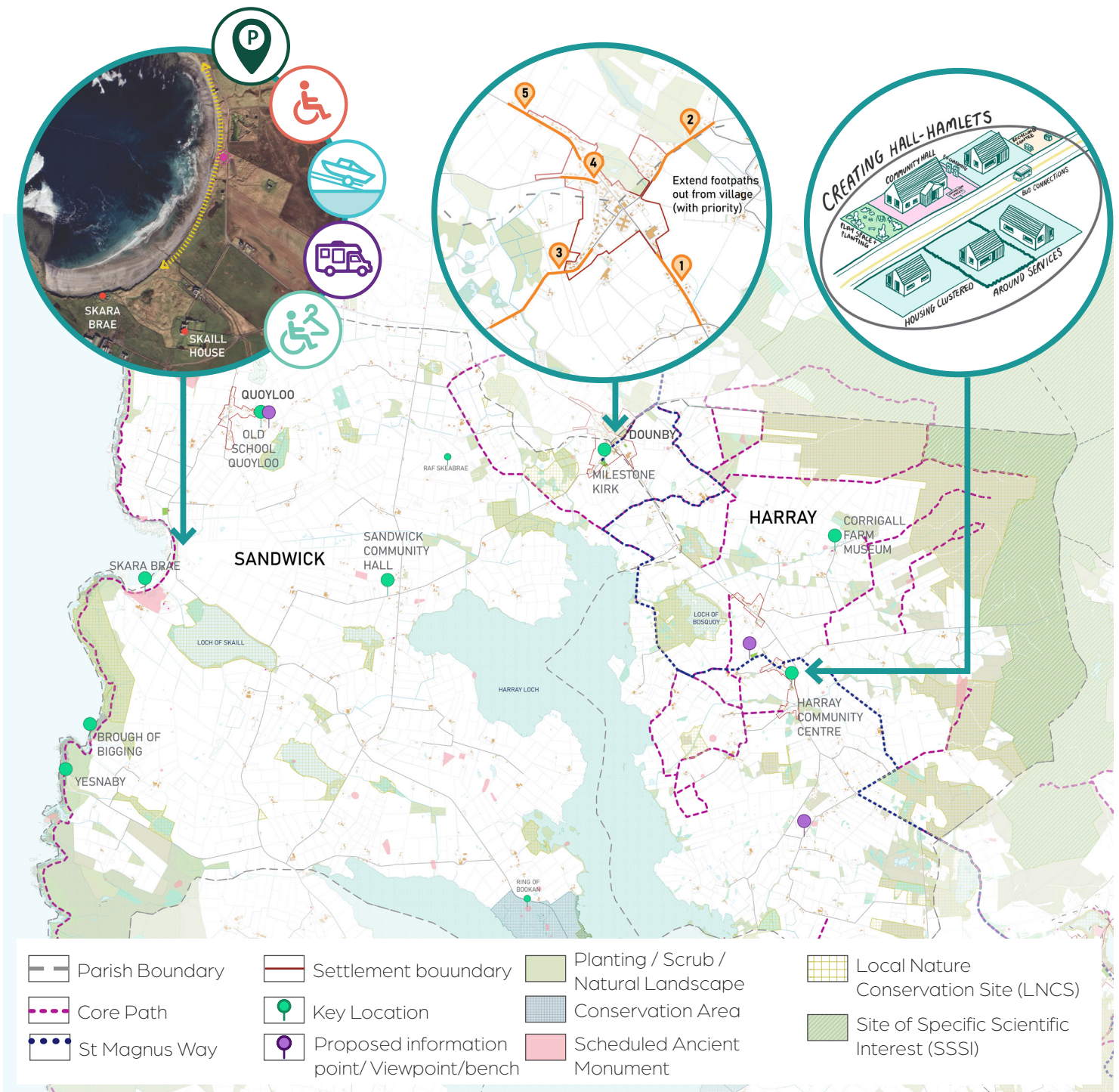


Figure 1: Map of Harray & Sandwick showing constraints and locations with inset maps for Dounby, Harray Hall and Skail Beach.

ABOUT HARRAY AND SANDWICK

Harray and Sandwick are rural parishes defined by working land, freshwater lochs, long views and dispersed homes. Farming remains central to daily life and to the stewardship of the landscape. The fields, loch shores and open skylines are both productive and deeply valued. Informal walking routes, historic paths, heritage sites and strong social traditions contribute to a sense of belonging that was repeatedly expressed during engagement. Community life centres on parish halls, churches, sporting activity and seasonal gatherings, reinforcing connection across generations.

Quoyloo forms an important part of this wider geography. While smaller in scale, it has a distinct identity and its own patterns of movement and daily life. Residents there spoke about road safety, connectivity and the relationship between local roads and visitor traffic. Quoyloo illustrates the dispersed nature of settlement across the parishes and the importance of ensuring that planning decisions reflect the needs of smaller clusters as well as shared hubs.

Dounby sits at the heart of this geography. It is where children attend school, where people shop, where buses pass through, where sport

and activities take place, and where churches meet. It is also where movement, housing and service pressures are most visible. As the functional centre for both parishes, its vitality and safety are central to the sustainability of the wider area.

The wider Orkney context is equally important. The Orkney Community Plan highlights slowing population growth, an ageing demographic profile, workforce pressures, housing challenges and transport constraints. These island-wide trends are evident locally. Residents spoke about retaining young people, recruiting staff, sustaining volunteers and enabling practical housing growth that supports the school roll and local businesses. This Local Place Plan translates those wider demographic and economic pressures into locally grounded priorities for Harray and Sandwick. Dounby functions as more than a shared centre. It operates as an interconnected local ecosystem, where the surgery, care home, pharmacy, shops and community facilities collectively support daily life across a wide rural area. Its vitality is therefore critical not only to Harray and Sandwick, but to the wider West Mainland.



1. Skail Beach
2. View over Harray Loch
3. Corrigall Farm Museum
4. Yesnaby
5. Skail House

HOW THE COMMUNITY SHAPED THIS PLAN

This Plan has been shaped through a detailed community survey, Community Steering Group meetings, open discussions, stakeholder engagement, activities with young folk and business conversations. The survey provided the quantitative foundation. Meetings and workshops with the Steering Group and others added depth, lived experience and practical insight.

Survey analysis showed variation in emphasis across age groups. Younger respondents placed greater priority on housing availability, digital connectivity and transport flexibility, reflecting the importance of work to support retaining young families and supporting employment. Older respondents emphasised road safety, accessible local services and the importance of maintaining independence within the parishes. Across all age categories, however, there was consistent support for strengthening Dounby as a shared hub and protecting the rural landscape that defines Harray and Sandwick. This intergenerational perspective has informed the balance of priorities within this Plan.

There was agreement that the existing Dounby Place Plan should be brought into this wider parish-level framework so that there is one coherent direction for the area. At steering group meetings, residents explored key local priorities including village vitality, traffic and safety concerns, housing opportunities and the future of transport provision. These discussions were constructive and detailed. Questions were asked about liability, staffing, licensing, governance structures and long-term sustainability. The approach was practical and measured.

Across all engagement activity, five consistent and evidence-based themes emerged: movement and safety, housing supply, village vitality, public transport and economic resilience.

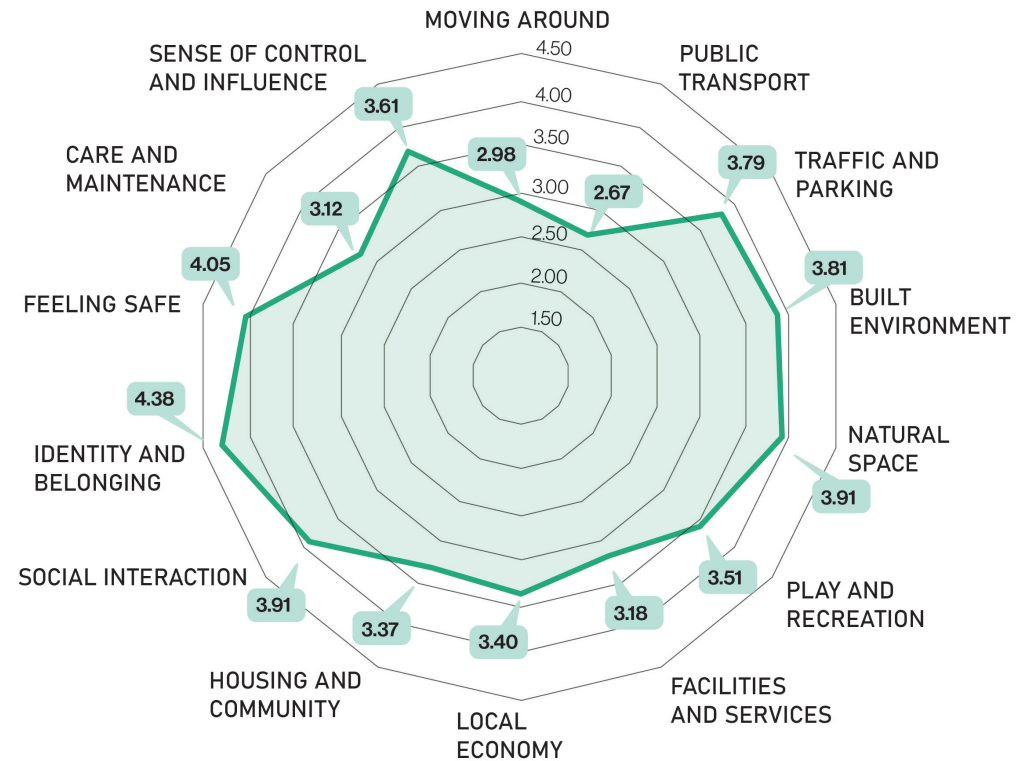


Figure 2: Spider Diagram from engagement analysis

WHAT THE COMMUNITY VALUES

Residents spoke with pride about the strength of community life across both parishes. Active halls and community centres, well-attended events and long-standing traditions create a strong sense of belonging. From seasonal gatherings and sporting activities to informal social events, there is a clear commitment to coming together. People value knowing their neighbours, supporting one another and feeling part of something rooted and enduring.

Farming remains central, as an economic activity, and as part of identity and stewardship of the land. The fields, lochs and open views are working landscapes as well as places of beauty. There is a shared understanding that agriculture shapes both the economy and the character of Harray and Sandwick.

Residents also value the feeling of safety that comes from living in smaller rural communities. Children playing outside, familiar faces in local shops and informal conversations at the hall all contribute to wellbeing. Informal walking routes, historic paths and heritage sites form part of daily life and connect people to the landscape and to the past.

What emerged strongly from engagement is that Harray and Sandwick are not communities seeking reinvention. They are communities seeking to protect what works well and strengthen it for the future. The focus of this Plan is to build on that foundation and address the practical pressures that risk weakening it over time.



Figure 3: Diagram of community values following engagement meetings and survey

OUR VISION

We want Harray and Sandwick to be places where families can stay, children can walk safely to school, businesses can thrive, and the landscape that defines us is protected for generations to come.

This Vision reflects the balance the community is seeking. It recognises that change is part of rural life and that growth is needed to sustain schools, services and businesses. It also recognises that change must feel proportionate, carefully located and rooted in local identity.

For families, this means housing that is accessible and achievable. For young people, it means opportunities to build or remain locally. For older residents, it means safe streets and services that are within reach. For businesses and farms, it means infrastructure and policy that support viability. For everyone, it means a village centre that feels welcoming and a rural environment that continues to feel open and cared for.

This Vision is grounded in daily experience — school runs, shop visits, community events, farm work, walks along familiar routes. It reflects a shared desire to strengthen Dounby as a vibrant hub while safeguarding the wider parish landscape that gives Harray and Sandwick their identity and economic basis.



The sections that follow translate this Vision into practical direction. They set out how movement can be made safer, how housing can support retention, how amenities can be strengthened, and how growth can be managed in a way that protects what people value most.

MOVEMENT AND EVERYDAY SAFETY

Movement through and across the parishes shapes daily life. Whether walking to school, driving to work, cycling between halls, or travelling to Kirkwall, how people move affects how safe and connected they feel.

The strongest and most consistent message from engagement was concern about traffic speeds through Dounby. Residents described vehicles travelling quickly past the school, the shop and along routes that children use daily. Parents spoke about feeling anxious during busy periods. The introduction of 20mph areas is welcomed, and there is support for continued monitoring to ensure they are effective. There was interest in gathering clearer before-and-after data where speed indication devices are installed so that decisions are informed by evidence and shared transparently with the community.

Outside the village centre, the issue is different but related. Rural roads are narrow and exposed. Verges are often damaged where larger vehicles pass, reducing safe walking space. While improvement plans linked to coach routes and passing places are underway in some areas, residents experience the everyday impact of traffic along local corridors. Walking between houses, to bus stops or along informal routes can feel uncomfortable when vehicles pass at speed. During the summer months, coach tours add additional pressure to the road network. There is a strong community view that these vehicles are not well suited to the narrow rural roads, increasing safety concerns and reducing comfort for everyday users.

The priority is balance, that is roads that work for local people as well as through traffic and visitors. Safer crossings, clearer pedestrian routes, maintained verges and visible speed management all contribute to that sense of balance. There is also strong support for extending footpaths radiating out from Dounby, aligned with 30mph limits, to improve safety and encourage walking between homes, facilities and the village centre.

Current Project: Walk, Wheel, Cycle Trust – Getting Around Dounby

The Walk, Wheel, Cycle Trust, working in partnership with Orkney Islands Council and the local community, is progressing the “Getting Around Dounby” project to improve everyday movement within the village. Building on earlier Market Green work and informed by a recent Mobility Audit, the project focuses on safer pedestrian crossings, improved bus stop access, clearer and more continuous walking routes, and measures to support appropriate vehicle speeds through the centre. The aim is to create a village environment that feels safer and more accessible for people of all ages, strengthening connections between the school, shop, green space and surrounding residential areas. This project provides a strong foundation for embedding active travel and safer movement within the wider spatial framework set out in this Plan.

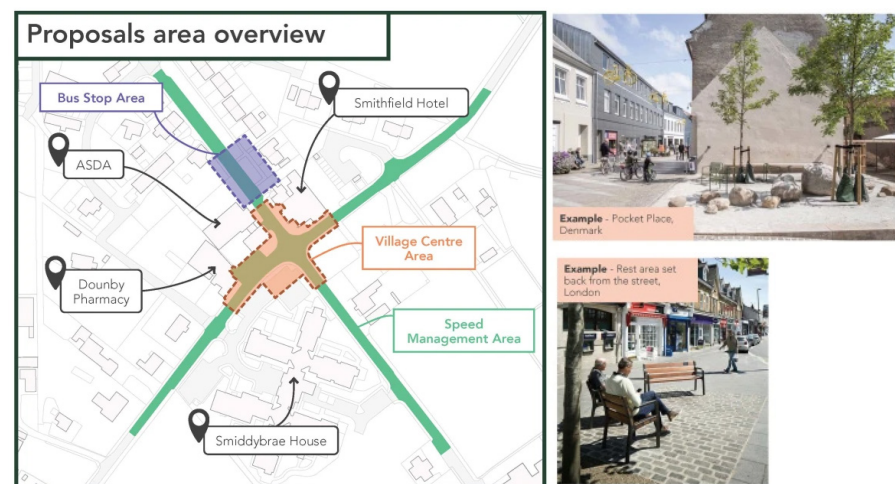




Figure 4: Map of key bus routes serving Harray & Sandwick

There is also a strong link between movement and independence. For older residents, safe walking environments support wellbeing, and quieter roads make it easier to continue accessing local services and facilities as mobility changes over time. For young people, calmer roads support confidence and active travel. For families, reliable and safe routes reduce daily stress.

Public transport is widely described as insufficient for a dispersed rural area. Many residents live too far from existing bus routes to use them easily, and services do not always align with working hours, school activities or everyday errands. For those without access to a car, this can limit employment opportunities, social participation and access to essential services. The issue is not simply frequency, but coverage and flexibility. The community supports exploring more responsive models of provision that reflect rural travel patterns and link effectively with established routes such as the X1 corridor. Improving connectivity is central to retaining residents and strengthening independence across all age groups.

This Plan supports a continued, data-led approach to traffic management within Dounby and along key rural corridors. It supports collaboration with Orkney Islands Council and Police Scotland to reinforce safe speeds around the school and village centre. It also supports the development of safer pedestrian infrastructure where practical and the integration of movement considerations into all future housing and land-use decisions.

Movement is not simply about transport. It is about everyday safety, confidence and quality of life.

Concerns were also raised about road surface quality, particularly along the route between Dounby and Sandwick Hall, where deterioration is reported to affect safety and comfort for everyday users.

HOUSING AND KEEPING FAMILIES HERE

Housing is central to the long-term sustainability of both parishes. Without homes that local people can access, schools become vulnerable, businesses struggle to recruit and community life thins out over time. Residents were clear that housing is not simply about buildings. It is about whether families can stay, whether young people can return after study or training, and whether older residents can remain in the place they know.

There is currently no social housing beyond Dounby and Quoyloo, and young people face real challenges in securing building plots or navigating a planning system that is widely described as lengthy and complex. For some, the time and uncertainty involved can be enough to look elsewhere. This has implications not only for individual households but for the long-term resilience of the parishes.

The community supports modest, locally-needed housing growth that strengthens the school roll and helps retain families. Expansion adjacent to Dounby, particularly near the school and community facilities, is seen as practical and sustainable because it makes use of existing infrastructure and supports daily activity within the village. Smaller clusters of homes in appropriate locations are also supported, including opportunities around the halls. The idea of a "Hall hamlet" reflects an ambition to build gently around existing community anchors, creating small groupings of homes that reinforce rather than dilute social connection.

There was strong interest in exploring community-led serviced plots with mechanisms to support long-term affordability. Such an approach could allow land to be prepared collectively and sold at cost, with safeguards to ensure homes remain accessible over time. This reflects a desire to think proactively and creatively about housing supply, rather than waiting for external delivery.

Housing is also closely linked to independence. For older residents, the ability to remain locally depends on having appropriate homes within reach of services and on being able to move safely between home, hall, shop and social activities. As mobility changes over time, access to

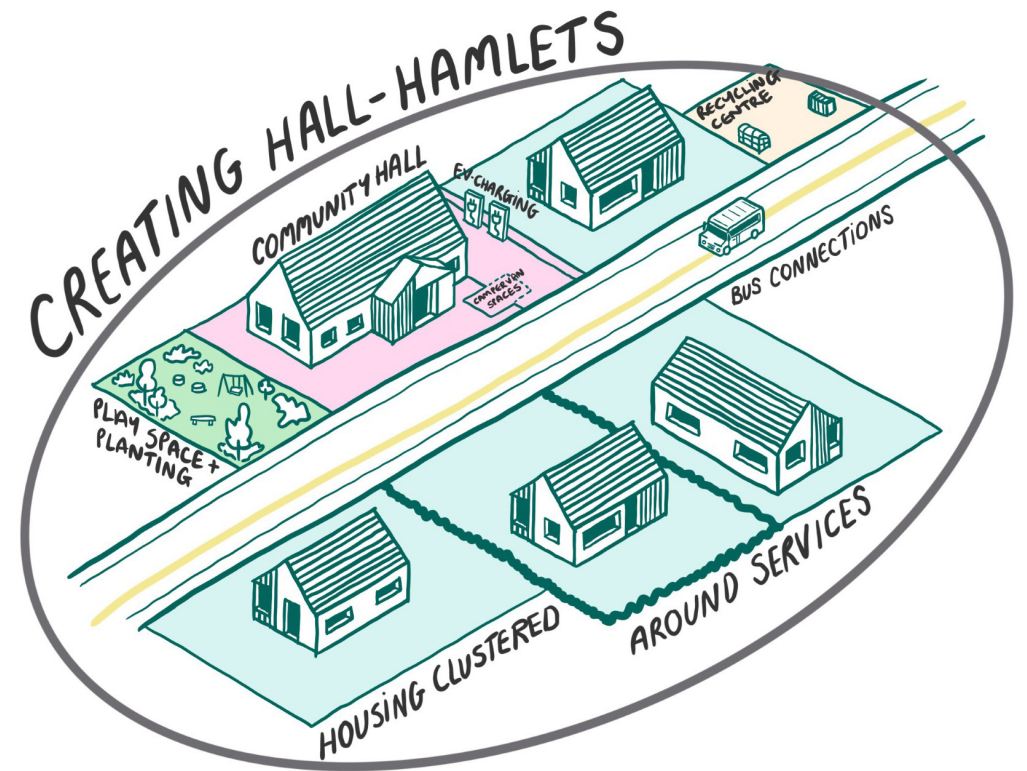


Figure 5: Concept diagram of Hall-Hamlets, with housing, transport connections, services, play space and tourism opportunities such as EV parking and Campervan facilities

nearby facilities becomes more important. Well-located housing supports continued independence and reduces the need for longer journeys.

Residents emphasised that growth should be proportionate in scale, well designed and integrated with infrastructure capacity. Prime agricultural land, open landscape and heritage settings are valued and should continue to be safeguarded. Development should respect views, topography and dark skies. New homes should sit comfortably within the rural character of Harray and Sandwick, strengthening the parishes without altering their identity.

In summary, the community supports housing growth that keeps people here, supports independence at every life stage and reinforces existing centres of activity. Managed carefully, housing can be a positive force for long-term sustainability and community resilience.

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

The survey and community discussions made clear that infrastructure in Harray and Sandwick is not just about buildings. It is about whether daily life feels connected, welcoming and sustainable. Residents value strong social networks and active halls, but they also spoke about the gradual loss of everyday amenities and the impact this has on everyday life.

The absence of a café or pub in Dounby was mentioned repeatedly. Small changes in local provision can have disproportionate effects in rural areas. When informal meeting spaces disappear, the sense of energy and “buzz” in an area can fade. People described missing a place to gather casually, to meet after school events, to host visiting family or to hold small fundraisers. These conversations led to discussion about the future of the hotel and the possibility of community involvement if a viable and carefully structured model could be developed.

The emphasis throughout was on realism: any exploration of ownership would require a robust business plan, appropriate governance arrangements and long-term sustainability. More broadly, there is a sense that Dounby has lost some of its previous vibrancy as local services have reduced. The community is keen to see this rebuilt, strengthening the village as a place to live, work and gather. Opportunities such as the future of the Smithfield site, improved green space, and better integration of services and facilities form part of that wider ambition.

The parish halls at Harray, Sandwick and Quoyloo remain vital community anchors. There is an opportunity to strengthen their role further through improved car parking, small-scale EV charging and campervan hook-up facilities that could generate income, and exploration of additional revenue streams.

There is also a need to reduce operational costs through improved insulation, renewable energy solutions and other efficiency measures.

Outdoor space around halls could be enhanced to support informal play and community use, using play-led design and landscaping rather than large-scale equipment.

Community Success: Milestone Kirk, Dounby

The development and continued use of Milestone Kirk in Dounby provides a strong example of community-led regeneration in practice. Delivered through local initiative, volunteer effort and partnership working, the project has created a new facility that supports worship, events and wider community activity.

Milestone Kirk demonstrates how new community infrastructure can be developed in a way that responds directly to local need while contributing to village vitality. It reflects the capacity within Harray and Sandwick to mobilise skills, commitment and collaboration to deliver valued facilities for the long term.

This experience provides confidence that future projects, whether related to village facilities, heritage or community assets, can be approached with the same care, structure and community leadership.



There is also wider potential in places such as the Smithfield Hotel and the surrounding area in Dounby. Residents expressed interest in thinking more strategically about how green space, footpaths, play areas, recycling provision and community uses and facilities, shops and services could connect more coherently. The aim is a more joined-up approach that makes the village centre more welcoming, accessible and practical for all generations.

Orkney Dance & Fitness Ltd has acquired the former Dounby United Free Church and is developing Thrive Studio Orkney as a health and wellbeing hub, delivering inclusive programmes and hybrid outreach to improve accessibility and reduce social isolation across rural and island communities.

Corrigall Museum was also mentioned as an opportunity. Residents see value in exploring how parish heritage, family histories and farming traditions could be more visible and accessible locally. A renewed heritage focus could strengthen identity and intergenerational connection, while complementing wider visitor activity linked to Skail House, Skara Brae and the surrounding coastline, and in turn supporting other visitor-focused offers across the parishes.



Figure 6: Dounby Village Centre improvement ideas sketch

PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND CONNECTIVITY

Connectivity in Harray and Sandwick is about more than movement. It is about independence, opportunity and resilience. For a dispersed rural population, physical transport and digital access are equally important foundations of daily life.

Residents were clear that current bus provision does not fully reflect the realities of rural living. Many households are located some distance from established routes, and timetables do not always align with working hours, school activities or healthcare appointments. For those without access to a car, this can limit employment opportunities, social participation and access to essential services. Existing services are primarily oriented towards Kirkwall, with more limited connectivity between West Mainland communities and into Dounby itself. The challenge is about frequency, coverage and flexibility.

There is strong interest in exploring more responsive models of rural transport, including demand-responsive services that could operate across Harray, Sandwick and neighbouring parishes. A flexible service capable of linking to the X1 Kirkwall-Stromness corridor, supporting and serving community events could strengthen independence across all age groups. A pilot approach could support long-term decisions to be evidence-based and sustainable.

Digital connectivity in Dounby and across the parishes remains inconsistent and, in places, poor. This affects businesses, public services and everyday life, limiting opportunities for remote working, access to services and economic resilience. Given Dounby's role as a service hub, these constraints are particularly significant.

Digital connectivity emerged consistently through survey responses and Steering Group discussion as a cross-cutting issue affecting daily life in Harray and Sandwick. In the community survey, residents repeatedly highlighted patchy mobile signal and inconsistent broadband reliability, particularly in the more rural parts of both parishes. For households and businesses operating beyond Dounby, connectivity can be uneven and unpredictable.

Reliable broadband and mobile coverage underpin the ability to work locally, run small businesses and reduce the need to travel to Kirkwall. Several respondents expressed interest in shared or community workspace in Dounby, and the reuse of existing buildings, noting that these ideas depend entirely on dependable digital infrastructure. Connectivity is therefore closely linked to employment opportunities and the long-term viability of housing growth.

Digital access also affects participation and resilience. Survey responses suggested that uneven connectivity and varying levels of digital confidence influence how well residents stay informed and engaged. For older residents and those less confident online, this can create barriers to accessing services or information.

The planned transition from traditional copper landlines to broadband-based digital voice services by 2027 further reinforces the importance of resilient infrastructure. As communication systems become dependent on electricity and internet access, power outages can disrupt essential contact unless appropriate backup arrangements are in place. For rural communities, such as Harray and Sandwick, connectivity must therefore be considered alongside power resilience and emergency planning.

The evidence supports treating digital connectivity as essential enabling infrastructure within this Local Place Plan. Improving coverage, reliability and resilience will support local employment, strengthen community resilience, improve access to health and public services, and enable fuller participation in community life.

Taken together, transport and digital connectivity form the backbone of independence. Safe and quiet roads, a denser public transport network, strong broadband and resilient mobile networks enable people to work locally, access healthcare, run businesses and remain socially connected. Without them, rural communities become increasingly isolated.

This Plan therefore supports continued improvement in both physical and digital connectivity. It supports exploration of flexible rural transport solutions, engagement with broadband rollout programmes, improved mobile coverage, and greater attention to power resilience for essential communication systems. Connectivity must be planned as a core utility for the long-term sustainability of Harray and Sandwick.



Photo of Dounby Bust Stop on West Mainland Show day

A SPATIAL FRAMEWORK: STRENGTHENING OUR PARISHES

Across the survey responses, meetings and stakeholder discussions, a consistent spatial pattern emerged. Harray and Sandwick are thinking in terms of places – how key sites, routes and facilities connect to each other, and how investment in one area can strengthen the whole.

At the centre of this framework sits the role that Dounby plays for both parishes. It is the shared hub: home to the school, daily shopping, bus routes and many informal social interactions. Residents want Dounby to function well, with calmer movement, clear pedestrian routes, safe crossings, attractive green space and housing growth that supports the school and local services. The Bowling Club and associated recreational facilities also provide opportunities to strengthen multi-generational wellbeing.

Alongside this, there is an opportunity to support small, new and growing businesses within Dounby as the shared hub of the West Mainland. Community feedback highlights the importance of creating space for enterprise, including flexible business units, workshop space and opportunities for local services to establish and expand. Locating such provision within or close to the village centre would reinforce Dounby's role as a service hub, increase footfall to existing businesses and support



Photo of Smithfield Hotel from Junction of Dounby

a more resilient local economy. This could be explored in conjunction with wider development at key sites, including the Smithfield Hotel and surrounding area, ensuring that economic activity is integrated with community life.

Within Dounby, there is significant opportunity centred on the future of the Smithfield Hotel and its surrounding area. The Smithfield Hotel, which is currently on the market, occupies a prominent and strategic position within the village. Community discussions and the Walk, Wheel, Cycle Trust Mobility Audit highlight the importance of thinking about this part of Dounby comprehensively, recognising it as a key node within the wider parishes of Harray, Sandwick and Birsay.

The Smithfield Hotel sits within central Dounby and its cluster of assets that include the school, shop, main bus stop, green space and established walking routes. Viewed together, these create the foundation for a strengthened village heart and wider community beyond Dounby. With the Smithfield Hotel currently on the market, residents have identified that there may be an opportunity for a potential community acquisition which could secure the long-term future of the Hotel. There is a clear desire to examine this option carefully and constructively, recognising that ownership could provide greater alignment between the hotel's future use and wider community priorities. Any such step would require detailed financial appraisal, governance planning and partnership working, but the opportunity is recognised as significant. The future of the Smithfield Hotel is of key importance to the community in Dounby and the wider West Mainland. The West Mainland currently has a limited cafe, pub and visitor accommodation, especially when compared to previous years and the current offering in the East Mainland, Burray and South Ronaldsay. The Smithfield Hotel is recognised as a strategically important site within Dounby. The community has expressed strong interest in seeing the site contribute positively to village life and the wider economy.

Based on community feedback and identified demand, there is confidence that additional provision could be supported without undermining existing businesses across the West Mainland. The Local Place Plan supports exploration of options for the future of the site, including potential community involvement, subject to detailed feasibility, governance and financial planning.

Any purchase of the Smithfield Hotel would provide economic benefit in a number of ways. There would be the retention and development of local employment, as well income generation through local and tourism markets. The income that could be generated from a community owned asset could be reinvested in other community initiatives, such as housing, recycling, capacity building and other community priorities. This mirrors the model utilised by a number of island development trusts across Orkney that have income from community turbines.

Learning from Elsewhere: Community Ownership of Stronsay Hotel

The community purchase and reopening of the Stronsay Hotel provides a recent Orkney example of how local ownership can revitalise a key village asset. Through structured governance, external funding support and a clear operational model, the hotel has been re-established as both a hospitality venue and an important social hub.

The Stronsay experience demonstrates that successful community acquisition requires robust feasibility work, appropriate legal structures and realistic financial planning. For Harray and Sandwick, it illustrates the level of preparation and partnership required should community involvement in Smithfield be progressed.



The ongoing Walk, Wheel, Cycle Trust work provides a strong platform for linking movement, green space and community infrastructure in Dounby. Proposals focus on safer crossings, bus stop improvements, clearer pedestrian routes and speed management through the centre. This provides a strong platform for a wider spatial approach linking movement, green space and community infrastructure.

The core path network and the St Magnus Way are valued assets, however there is a perception that some sections are deteriorating. There is an opportunity to prioritise maintenance, improve connections into Dounby, and enhance signage and interpretation.

Strengthening these links would help bring people into the village and support local businesses, while also improving everyday access for residents. Future improvements should consider path design approaches that minimise long-term maintenance requirements, including appropriate surfacing, drainage and alignment suited to local conditions.

There is also an opportunity to improve wayfinding and interpretation across the parishes. This could include clearer signage for walking routes and local points of interest, alongside the introduction of interpretation boards at key community locations such as halls. Together, these measures would improve accessibility, strengthen sense of place and support a more connected network of routes linking community assets and heritage sites.

Learning from Elsewhere: Community Stewardship of the Tomb of the Eagles

The community acquisition of the Tomb of the Eagles in South Ronaldsay provides an Orkney example of heritage stewardship at parish level. Through structured governance and phased investment, the site is being conserved, interpreted and managed for long-term sustainability.

The project demonstrates how community leadership, supported by professional expertise and external funding, can secure the future of a heritage asset while strengthening local identity and education. For Harray and Sandwick, this illustrates how a renewed future for Corrigan could be explored through partnership and clear long-term planning.



Learning from Elsewhere: Bruckland Community Recycling, Northmavine, Shetland

Bruckland SCRAN Recycling Centre, operated by the Northmavine Community Development Company (NCDC), demonstrates how a rural community can build on the standard local authority recycling offer to deliver enhanced local value. Centrally located within the community, Bruckland provides a dedicated space for residents to reuse, recycle, and responsibly dispose of household items. Since opening in 2019, it has developed into a well-used community asset with clear environmental and social benefits. It also attracts visitors from a wider area, with many travelling to browse and repurpose items from the 'bruck'.

What Bruckland Does

Bruckland provides a flexible, community-focused service including:

- Reuse hub – Residents can drop off surplus household goods, including furniture, toys, and tools, for others to take in exchange for a donation.
- Recycling and disposal – The site accepts materials such as scrap metal, waste plastics, and bulky household waste, reducing the need for long-distance trips to alternative facilities.
- Membership model – Users can opt for an annual membership (approx. £60) for unlimited skip use, or discounted volunteer membership, or pay-as-you-go access.

The facility currently includes three shipping containers and a portacabin housing a wide range of reusable items. Due to increasing demand, there are plans to replace these with more permanent shed structures. Between September 2022 and September 2023, the centre diverted over 9 tonnes of material from landfill.

Bruckland operates on a part-time basis, typically open two days per week (one weekday and Sunday), and is supported by a part-time staff member alongside volunteers. While not a full-time facility, this model balances accessibility with operational sustainability in a rural context.



Taken together, the Smithfield Hotel and the surrounding area offer a clear opportunity to strengthen the shared hub of Harray and Sandwick, improving movement, supporting community life and creating a Dounby that feels safe, functional and connected.

The concept of strengthening housing near existing anchors features strongly in community feedback. There is a clear and evidenced need for additional housing across the West Mainland, with current availability and choice not meeting the needs of local households or supporting workforce retention. This is particularly important in sustaining school roll, local services and everyday community life.

Expansion adjacent to the school and community facilities is viewed as practical and sustainable. There is a need to deliver a balanced mix of housing, including private, affordable and social provision, to meet a range of needs and support a resilient and sustainable population.

Around the halls, the idea of small 'Hall Hamlets' reflects an ambition to reinforce community hubs through modest clusters of housing that sustain activity and social connection. This approach supports proportionate, infrastructure-led growth that aligns with the character and capacity of the parishes.

The halls in both parishes remain key anchors. They host events, sport, seasonal gatherings and everyday meetings. Survey responses consistently highlighted their importance. There is support for enhancing their long-term sustainability through energy improvements, adaptable internal spaces and better-designed outdoor areas, including looking at mini play parks.

Heritage and visitor assets form another important layer of this framework. The closure of Corrigall Farm Museum represented a loss to the West Mainland heritage offer. There is an opportunity to consider how heritage provision could be re-established or reimagined, potentially through a facility that provides interpretation and information on the history of the parishes and West Mainland. A renewed focus here would

strengthen local identity and deepen intergenerational connection while complementing wider visitor activity.

Skaill Beach represents an important asset for both the local community and visitors, and there is an opportunity to enhance access and amenity at this location. This could include improvements to parking, provision of appropriate toilet facilities, and better connections between the road, the beach and access to the water. There is also potential to strengthen links with surrounding assets, including Skaill House and Skara Brae, to support a more coordinated visitor experience. Any future work would be progressed in partnership with relevant stakeholders and landowners, ensuring that improvements are sensitive to the landscape and local context.



Figure 7: Skaill beach plan showing aspiration for improved accessibility and facilities.

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Photo of Skaill Beach from edge of existing toilet block and potential location of accessible access

The lochs are also highly valued, both for local use and for fishing tourism. Improving access, signage and promotion of the lochs would enhance both visitor experience and community benefit. At the coastal edge, Skaill House, Skaill Beach and Skara Brae form an internationally significant heritage corridor. The community supports improved path connections, orientation and well-integrated infrastructure that strengthens links with Harray and Sandwick while safeguarding landscape character. Thoughtful integration of visitor access can enhance local economic benefit and reinforce quality of place.

Movement ties all of this together. Footpaths, safer routes to school, calmer traffic through Dounby and on rural roads, and well-maintained verges connect homes, halls, heritage sites and green space. This will enable, for example, the school children to safely access the world around the school as part of a wider learning landscape around them. The 'Getting Around Dounby' project presents an opportunity to embed active travel within this wider spatial framework, making it easier and safer to move between key destinations.

Throughout engagement, residents emphasised that growth should be proportionate, well integrated and respectful of context. Prime agricultural land, open views and heritage settings continue to define the parishes. Future development should respect topography, dark skies and rural character.

Taken together, these places of opportunity form a coherent network: Dounby as a strengthened hub; halls as local anchors; Smithfield Hotel as an integrated village social space; Corrigan and Skaill as heritage and visitor nodes; housing clusters located to support infrastructure; and safe routes linking them all.

By thinking spatially and building on what people value, Harray and Sandwick can support housing, vitality and independence while sustaining the character that defines both parishes.



Photo of Skara Brae, Skail

DELIVERING THE PLAN, PARTNERSHIP AND REVIEW

This Local Place Plan sets out a clear community-led direction for Harray and Sandwick. Delivery will depend on partnership, coordination and sustained commitment over time.

Some elements of the Plan can be progressed locally. The Community Council and local groups can support feasibility work, coordinate discussion around housing opportunities, explore options for community asset development, and advocate for infrastructure improvements. Community-led initiatives, particularly around more major facilities, halls, heritage, green space and local engagement, will continue to play a central role in shaping how places evolve.

Other priorities require collaboration with Orkney Islands Council and external partners. Movement and traffic management measures depend on continued partnership with Roads Services and Police Scotland. Some housing growth and land-use decisions sit within the planning framework and must align with the Orkney Local Development Plan and National Planning Framework 4. Improvements to public transport, digital connectivity and some other elements will rely on local and national investment programmes.

The Walk, Wheel, Cycle Trust project in Dounby provides an example of how partnership working can translate community aspiration into design proposals and delivery on the ground. Similar collaborative approaches will be important as other elements of this Plan progress.

This Plan is intended to inform future Local Development Plan reviews and should be considered in relevant planning and infrastructure decisions affecting Harray and Sandwick. It provides spatial clarity on where growth is supported, where landscape protection is valued, and how community infrastructure can be strengthened.

Delivery will take place over time. Some projects will be short-term and incremental; others will require longer-term funding and coordination. The Community Council can review the Plan annually to monitor progress, identify emerging priorities and respond to changing circumstances. This will ensure that the Plan remains a live document.

Above all, delivery depends on maintaining the strong community involvement that shaped this document. The Vision set out in this Plan reflects everyday experience and shared ambition. Continued engagement will ensure that future decisions remain rooted in that same collective understanding.

The development of this Plan has been supported by a committed Steering Group alongside external consultancy input. To deliver its ambitions, there is a need to build and sustain local capacity within the community, including leadership, project delivery capability and organisational resilience.

ACTION PLAN

The action plan sets out a phased approach to delivery, recognising that change will take place over time and will require coordination between partners, funding and community effort. Actions are grouped into short, medium and long-term priorities to reflect both early opportunities and longer-term ambition. Short term (0–2 years) focuses on quick wins, planning and early delivery. Medium term (2–5 years) reflects developed projects, partnerships and capital works. Long term (5+ years) captures transformational, infrastructure-led change that will support the long-term sustainability of Harray and Sandwick.

	THEME Movement & Safety	THEME Housing	THEME Community Infrastructure
SHORT TERM (0-2 YEARS)	<p>Improve safety in and around Dounby, including extending footpaths aligned with 30mph limits and addressing rural road conditions and verge safety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify priority safety and path improvements. 	<p>Support delivery of modest, locally-needed housing in and around Dounby and appropriate small clusters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage on housing sites (inc. Hall Hamlets). 	<p>Strengthen sustainability of halls and wider community infrastructure through improved facilities, energy efficiency and potential income-generating opportunities. Enhance outdoor space around community facilities to support informal play and community use, and explore opportunities to develop a new, integrated approach to recycling and reuse provision in Dounby, potentially replacing existing facilities and drawing on models such as Bruckland to create a more accessible, well-designed and community-led space.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review community facilities and recycling provision. Explore Bruckland-style recycling/re-use model.
MEDIUM TERM (2-5 YEARS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver footpaths, crossings and safety improvements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See the development on mixed-tenure housing and small clusters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upgrade Halls and community outdoor spaces. Develop integrated recycling/re-use facility proposals.
LONG TERM (5+ YEARS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver a connected, low-maintenance path network. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustain housing delivery to support the population and workforce. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a community-led recycling and re-use facility. Support a resilient, thriving local economy.

THEME

Dounby & Village Centre

Strengthen Dounby as a hub for shops, services and community activity. Explore future use of key sites, including the Smithfield, as part of a coordinated approach to village centre improvement. Review access and movement within the village, including potential improvements to back road circulation, and building on the Walk, Wheel, Cycle Trust work considering movement within the Dounby.

Transport & Connectivity

Explore more flexible and demand-responsive public transport options linked to existing routes, and support improvements to broadband and mobile coverage, recognising connectivity as essential infrastructure

Heritage & Natural Assets

Explore opportunities for future heritage provision following the closure of Corrigan. Improve access to assets including Skail Beach. Explore options for enhanced facilities, subject to feasibility, including access to the beach and the water and working with partner and landowners to develop proposals.

Core Paths & Wayfinding

Improve connections between villages, community hubs and key assets through upgraded paths, low-maintenance design, enhanced signage and interpretation.

Delivery & Capacity

Build local capacity to support the delivery of projects and maintain momentum following the Plan.

Engage on Smithfield and village centre opportunities, exploring the business case.

Develop project ideas, working with community and stakeholders, explore funding opportunities.

Project development, engagement and feasibility work.

Audit core paths, signage and wayfinding.

Explore opportunities, and work with neighbouring West Mainland parishes to secure capacity support

SHORT TERM
(0-2 YEARS)

Progress Dounby and key site improvements.

Expand flexible / demand-responsive transport.

Deliver Skail Beach access and amenity upgrades.

Improve paths, signage and interpretation.

Build local capacity to support delivery of projects and maintain momentum following the Plan.

MEDIUM TERM
(2-5 YEARS)

Realise a strengthened Dounby village centre.

Long term plan, review and development

Delivery reimagined heritage provision.

Maintenance approach

Secure sustainable future for officer capacity to support ongoing projects

LONG TERM
(5+ YEARS)

CONCLUSION

This Local Place Plan reflects the time, thought and commitment of many people across Harray and Sandwick. It has been shaped by survey responses, open discussion, community meetings and the work of the Steering Group, who have given their time to consider evidence, explore options and refine direction. The strength of this Plan lies in that collective effort.

Residents have shared their experiences of daily life – what works well, where pressures are felt and how change could strengthen the future of both parishes. From conversations about safer routes to school and housing for young families, to discussions about halls, heritage and village vitality, the input has been practical, measured and forward-looking.

The Steering Group has played a central role in guiding the process, ensuring that evidence is considered carefully and that proposals remain grounded in what the community has said. Their contribution, alongside the many individuals and groups who engaged through the survey, discussions and workshops, has created a Plan that is both realistic and ambitious.

Harray and Sandwick are strong rural parishes with a shared hub at Dounby. This Plan sets out how they can continue to evolve in a way that supports independence, strengthens community life and protects the landscape that defines them. It provides a clear, community-led framework to guide future decisions and investment.

The work does not end here. This Plan provides direction, and its success will depend on continued partnership and engagement. The commitment shown throughout this process provides confidence that Harray and Sandwick will continue to shape their future together with clarity and purpose.



Photo of Harray Loch, West Mainland

