1. It is stated “This Plan should set out the main objectives and strategy of Scottish Ministers in relation to improving outcomes for island communities that result from, or are contributed to by, the carrying out of functions of a public nature.”
2. It is also stated “The Plan has a duration of five years with a requirement for annual reports in progress and a review at the end of the five-year period.”
3. Important proposals, so far as this community is concerned, included in the Plan are:-
   - Increasing population levels
   - Improving and promoting sustainable economic development
   - Improving transport services
   - Improving digital connectivity
   All of these are long term projects which will take much longer than 5 years to establish let alone to confirm whether successful. It would seem that an initial period of 10 years would be more realistic rather than the proposed 5 year period.
4. To give an example, the local community in South Harris has been involved in setting up a community Hub for the past 4 years and we are now only at the stage of applying for funding which is likely to take a further year to process. We have been speaking with other communities who have been involved in similar projects and it has taken them about 8 years to complete the project.
5. It is difficult to envisage how a population increase could be achieved to any great extent in 5 years as it would take longer than that just to get through a housing project to provide added accommodation in South Harris. At the present time the main reason for adding accommodation is present demand and there would be little or no demand without job creation. It would also be very difficult to imagine how the economy of South Harris could be changed in 5 years so as to provide additional jobs without a complete overhaul of the whole of Harris economy.
6. It is also noted that there is no detailed explanation given in the Plan as to the provision of the finance necessary to undertake the economic development nor is there any detail as to what the economic development would be.
7. One of the first things which would be necessary would be an Islands Fund which could be accessed directly by local communities with development projects. There is no mention of such a facility.
8. It is also noted that one of the main points of the Plan is that it hopes to be “Inclusive” which is defined as “… will promote genuine community empowerment at the local level enabling decisions to be taken as close as possible to where their impact will be felt.” In reality this means that a decision can be taken locally if the funds are available locally to complete the project but if they are not and an
application for funding has to be made to the Government the decision will not be made locally but will be made centrally.

9. We would refer to the quote at page 60:-

“Listen to the people in EACH community. No two island communities are the same, even within the same island group. We often have the best solution to our own unique problems, but we MUST have legislation and funding to allow us to help ourselves.”

We would agree wholeheartedly with this statement.

SPECIFIC OBSERVATIONS ON OBJECTIVES


We think the paper is right in suggesting that many of the items with significant negative effects in the Islands can be seen in the context of breaching Human Rights. Immediately evident in that context are :-

(1) Problems with ferry space availability during the tourist season and gradually extending into the winter season. We respond in the context of the Uig-Tarbert link. While there is a modicum of encouragement in the prospect of a slightly larger ferry, this will not solve the problem as the slightly increased capacity will be taken up immediately particularly during the tourist season. The only way to solve the problem is to have two ferries on the Triangle route, especially during the months of peak demand.

It is also evident that larger ferries are more susceptible to timetable disruption by (a) adverse weather because of windage and (b) greater draft causing problems at low tides. Apart from the Stornoway and Castlebay routes, a greater number of smaller ferries would go a long way to reducing these disruptions AND avoid the necessity for multi-million pound infrastructure reinforcement as is currently being undertaken at Tarbert and Lochmaddy (We acknowledge that the Uig terminal does require modernising).

(2) Digital connectivity is also a particularly sore point. While some progress has been made, e.g. in the provision of Fibre-Optic cable provision, it is very evident that the cable route in Harris followed not the areas of highest population, but the easiest route for cable laying. While “Community Broadband” options are being offered, this in itself is a demonstration of inequality in that some are provided with connectivity without any effort on their part, while others, arguably the already most deprived areas must expend their own energies to achieve what is sometimes a second-rate and unsupported service.

It has also been very noticeable that in what we understand was a national contract to provide national connectivity for emergency services, with
consequent public coverage, that coverage has not been universal. It is apparent to us that at least some of these anomalies may have been caused by poor initial research. We further find it puzzling that a number of the masts for this project are on less than ideal sites, some even in geographic hollows, where the use of higher terrain, currently limiting coverage, could have been used to optimise effectiveness.

(3) Medium to long-term sustainability is of great concern to Community Councils serving areas fragile in economic activity and population age range. We do acknowledge that funding has been made available to local authorities for house-building, but it is disconcerting to see such provision used mostly to increase housing in the already well populated and economically active areas and thereby increasing the population and economic imbalance in our islands.

It is a natural fact that areas with sound and stable active population levels are those which find it easiest to develop their resources and aspirations. One would have thought that at least a part of the role of the development agencies would be to encourage and resource areas with potential but without the personnel power to achieve their potential. In practice, the reverse is the apparent case, where agencies concentrate on already developed areas and not always with success.

(4) National Marine Plan. Most islands’ economy is completely naturally derived from the sea. However, those whose livelihoods are dependent on the sea are becoming increasingly frustrated at the increase of “Designations” around our shores. Fishing has been a natural island activity for many generations, and the fact that “areas of special interest” exist, is evidence of the sustainability of fishing methods employed. It can also be argued that “single-species” organisations, far from conserving nature, are in fact unbalancing nature to the severe detriment of a balanced ecology.

Objective 2 Sustainable Economic Development

It is acknowledged that Tourism is a major part of the economy of South Harris but we are very short on infrastructure to cope with any increase in visitors. There is no public chemical disposal point in South Harris but we do have a lot of campervans which do not use camping sites. We are also very short of restaurant facilities and, since the closure of Rodel Hotel, very short of this mode of accommodation.

Objective 3 Transport Services (Ferry services have already been dealt with under Obj. 1)

Local Bus Services on islands are generally contracted out by and funded through the local authority. While it is obvious that bus services are required where demand demonstrates that, it is also true and arguably even more necessary that
bus services serve the areas of lower usage. Low usage of bus services does not mean that the service is not required and withdrawal or threat of withdrawal should be deemed as discriminatory against those who require the service even if infrequently.

**Objective 4** Digital Connectivity has been dealt with under Obj. 1

**Objective 7** Health and Wellbeing.

It is disappointing when local authorities plan new care facilities that they so often plan only for the current needful population and do not seem to project necessary capacity forward to a calculable future.

It is also disappointing where the introduction of IJ Boards has produced no benefits to the populace but appear to just as autocratic as the previous systems it was designed to replace.

**Objective 12** Education.

While remote learning opportunities such as E Sgoil are innovative in their approach and useful in some contexts, we do not think “playing with innovation” can ever replace the person or personality of the teacher in getting across the common sense so frequently hidden in impersonal discourse.

11. Finally we would like to point out that owing to the Community Council elections the South Harris Community Council was only reinstated with an inaugural formal meeting on the 21st October 2019. We would have liked to have had more time to consider and discuss the issues involved in what is a highly complex and important matter to this, and every other, island community. If we can assist further we will happily do so.