



Highlands and Islands Enterprise  
Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd 's nan Eilean



# Raasay Development Partnership

## Isle of Raasay- Growth at the Edge Project

### Facing the Future



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# 1. Executive Summary

Isle of Raasay-Growth at the Edge Project is a joint initiative involving all the community based organisations on the island in working together to develop a growth plan for the future. Its key aims are to increase employment on the island and strengthen the local economic infrastructure. In doing so it is hoped that increased social cohesion and a consolidation and growth of the island's population will be the successful outcomes.

One of the main tasks of the work was to undertake a local audit which included a log of the island's community groups and their key objectives and activities. In addition a review of community facilities, community assets, local businesses and local services was completed.

Whilst some of the main themes to emerge during the consultation impact on other similar communities on Scotland's West Coast other challenges regarding future developments were specific to Raasay. Depopulation, inadequate transport links, the dearth of local employment opportunities and a lack of affordable housing are all regarded as major issues facing the island. Future development opportunities were often associated with the substantial assets now in community ownership. Further development of the existing businesses on the island, harnessing the enthusiasm and skills of local residents and exploiting the rich natural, literary and historical aspects of Raasay are all seen as potential economic growth areas and these are described in more detail in section 4.2 of the report.

There was a comprehensive and creative response to the question on how it might be possible to increase local employment opportunities from all the groups and individuals that took part in the community consultation. The initial list was extensive and it was felt that to group ideas together thematically might provide a good starting point to critically examine all the potential options. In considering the different suggestions the following themes emerged-Developing Trading and Retail Activity, Tourism and Marketing, Agriculture and Forestry, Natural Environment and Renewable Energy, History and Cultural Heritage, Transport and Infrastructure

Following on from this the key recommendations of the report are set out below

- As the overarching economic development body on the island, Raasay Development Partnership should consider constituting itself as a development trust. This would enable it to access financial support, business loans and grant funding from a variety of sources presently not available to it
- A series of project development groups should be established to progress the key priorities identified by Raasay Development Partnership. See 5.1 and 5.2
- The membership of these groups should be drawn from as wide a range of organisations and individuals as possible utilising the skills, enthusiasm and interests of local people.
- Action plans should be drawn up by these groups in conjunction with the local development officer and endorsed by the Raasay Development Partnership and should be realistic and timebound.

The priority groups for the first phase of this development programme should be:- **Community Shop and Post Office Development Group, Tourism and Marketing Group** and a **Renewables and Natural Environment Group** These group should be established within a 3 month period following the appointment of the local development officer for Raasay's "Growth at the Edge Project"

## 2. Introduction and Background

Isle of Raasay-Growth at the Edge Project is a joint initiative involving all the community based organisations on the island of Raasay working together to develop a growth plan for the future. Its key aims are to increase employment opportunities on the island and strengthen the local economic infrastructure. In doing so it is hoped that an associated increase in social cohesion and a corresponding decrease in net emigration will result. The Scottish Government's Economic Strategy (GES), set out the ambitions of the



Government and laid the foundations for how Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and other agencies work towards meeting these ambitions. The strategic objectives are to make Scotland wealthier and fairer, smarter, healthier, safer, stronger and greener, with the ultimate aim being to increase sustainable economic growth. The objective of HIE's Strengthening Communities team is to tackle cohesion and regional equity. The GES states that:-

*"Sustainable growth and prosperity need to be shared across Scotland. ... Increased participation and enhanced quality of employment across our cities, towns and rural areas will enhance our performance and deliver a more inclusive Scotland so that, no matter where people live, opportunities are open to them."*

Funded by Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and LEADER the initial stage of this process was the employment of a community development worker on a short term consultancy basis whose remit was to consult widely with local people, businesses and community groups. The focus of the consultation was to gather views on the major challenges facing Raasay, collate residents' ideas on possible strategies to meet these challenges and identify the key priorities for the community. These in turn informed the compilation of a project list for potential short and medium term economic developments for the island. A further task was to conduct an audit of community resources, community owned assets, local businesses and an overview of local service provision. In tandem with this comprehensive community consultation HIE undertook an independent postal household survey, the results of which will also feed into an overall economic development plan for the island to be finalised by mid 2012. (See Appendix 7.3)

A total of 9 meetings were held with community organisations including 3 with Raasay Development Partnership and 8 with local business interests including the island's sheep stock clubs. An open invitation was sent to all residents on the island to contribute to the consultation which many of them chose to do. In addition to meeting with HIE staff a number of telephone conversations were held with other organisations and individuals over the contract period.

The work took place during November and December 2011 and this final report was presented to the Development Partnership group on the 12 January 2012. Throughout my time on the island I was made welcome in many different settings by everyone I met and I experienced Raasay hospitality at its best. I would like to express my sincere thanks to everyone who participated in meetings and who contributed in other ways to the consultation. I would also like to thank David Carslaw for the use of some of his excellent photographs in this report.

### 3. Results of Local Audit

One of the main tasks of the work was to undertake a local audit which included a log of the island's community groups and their key objectives and activities. In addition a review of community facilities, community assets, local businesses and local services was completed.



#### 3.1 Community Organisations

##### 3.1.a Log of Community Organisations

Meetings were held with the chairs of the organisations listed below and of which Raasay Development Partnership is comprised.

##### **Raasay Heritage Trust**

Raasay Heritage Trust is involved in a range of social cultural and economic activities. These have included guided tours, organising an annual feis, celebrating traditional song, dance, art and literature and attracting performers and visitors alike from far afield. Other economic activity that the Trust has been involved in is working with the Forestry Commission in developing a heritage trail the 'Emigrants Path' which has involved the building of a number of footbridges. The Trust has also published a number of interesting and informative books and booklets on a range of topics. Currently the Trust relies heavily on the voluntary input of its trustees and many supporters drawn from a range of academic and other organisations with an interest in promoting and supporting the rich heritage of Raasay and other parts of Scotland. The Trust plans to open a heritage centre for the island to be housed in the old meal mill in Inverarish which would act as a focal point for many of the activities that the Trust is currently involved in. It would also house a range of traditional craft activity such as knitting, spinning and pottery and exhibit and sell the work of these and other local artists. The costs of developing the former mill into this high quality community asset and major tourist attraction are considerable and it will be challenging for the Trust to raise the necessary monies to progress this worthwhile project.

##### **Raasay School Parent Council**

Working in partnership with the School the Parent Council makes a major monetary contribution to the school through the annual fundraising day which this year raised the sum of nearly £2500. This is a remarkable figure for such a small school with a current roll of 12 pupils. This reflects the energy and enthusiasm of both school staff and parents to ensure that the interests of the children always come first. This strong community involvement on the part of the school brings benefits to the wider island community. A good example of this is the recent installation of a defibrillator, and associated training in its use, on the island and the central role that the school played in achieving this. Both the chair of the Parent Council and the head teacher perceive the school as being influential in promoting positive developments on the island.

### **Raasay House Community Company (RHCC)**

The Community Company's overarching aim and responsibility is to maximise the economic and social benefit to the whole island community from all the assets held by RHCC on behalf of the community. Currently these include Raasay House, its grounds, walled garden and other parcels of land in different parts of the island. The company plans to use the rental income from Raasay House and its other assets to support further economic activity on the island. Examples might include supporting a new business start up or by offering a wage subsidy for a community created job. The company feels it is important to have flexibility in approach as this is the first time that the community has held such significant assets in its own right. In addition to maximising the rental income from Raasay House the company plans to develop the walled garden as a working market garden which will benefit island residents and create employment for local people. In addition the board has a good working relationship with the Forestry Commission and is currently exploring ways to develop new economic activity based on the island's forestry resources.

### **Raasay Community Association (RCA)**

The Association has responsibility for another very valuable community asset, Raasay Community Hall, which was built at a cost of around £1m and opened in 2009. Key economic objectives for the committee are to establish a steady income stream from the various user organisations and to maximise income from social and arts events. A current priority is to get the ground around the hall landscaped and planted to enhance the immediate hall environment. RCA currently employs a part time cleaner for the hall and it is hoped to employ both a part time gardener/handyperson and a part time administrator/bookkeeper in the future. This would ease some of the day to day workload for committee members and office bearers enabling them to focus on future strategic developments. The administrator could also offer support to other community organisations with their administration, book keeping and other duties.

### **Raasay Community Council**

Whilst not engaging in direct economic activity itself the Community Council has a crucial role to play in Raasay Development Partnership. As the sole statutory community organisation on the island the Community Council has the right to receive and respond to any planning issues currently being considered by Highland Council. There is also an obligation on the local authority to support community councils where they exist and to resource their adequate functioning. Community councils are seen as the primary channel for local representation and consultation by local authorities and it is therefore important that Raasay Community Council is fully integrated in and supportive of the Development Partnership's work and objectives. Community councils are not subject to The Representation of the People Act and consequently the minimum voting age of 18 years does not apply and opens up possibilities for young people to engage in civic life. Community councils also have the power to co-opt a young person between the ages of 14-18 years to represent youth interests on the council. Co-opted members do not have voting rights. The process of forming a new community council on Raasay is currently underway with elections taking place in January 2012 and this creates opportunities to both consolidate its links with Raasay Development Partnership and potentially offer a younger generation of islanders a "hands on" role in helping shape the future of the island.

### **3.1.b Organisational Objectives**

Whilst the island's community organisations have different aims and objectives in relation to their day to day activities there is a shared ambition to improve the overall social and economic conditions of the whole island community and all are in some way actively involved in promoting economic and social development. They all have clear ideas about what they hope to achieve over the next two years although the approaches that they are taking differ in some respects.

### **3.1.c Organisational Strengths**

All the organisations interviewed view their members as their most valuable resource and highlighted the individual and collective strengths that exist within the island's community. The wide range of skills and knowledge of those involved, along with their energy and commitment, were recurring themes from the consultation.

## **3.2 Community Facilities and Local Businesses**

### **Shop and Post Office**

Situated in the village of Inverarish the island's only shop also houses the post office. One of the main challenges for the shop is the low number of regular customers which directly impacts on stock levels and the variety of goods carried. Consequently the shop currently stocks only basic commodities which means people tend to shop elsewhere. There are currently less than 20 houses in the village that are permanently occupied and only 3 out of 16 in the row that the shop is situated. A further downside for trade is that when new regulations were introduced in 2009 regarding the sale of alcohol there were associated increased costs for small retailers. This made it uneconomic for the shop to comply so it no longer sells any alcohol products which in turn has a knock on effect on other sales as people travel off the island to purchase beer wine and spirits. The extra carriage costs incurred in bringing goods to Raasay, which are 3% higher than those of equivalent businesses on Skye, only add to the difficulties already faced by the shop. The relocation of the ferry landing to a new pier in Churchton Bay has also resulted in a decrease in trade due to a reduced footfall of visitors passing through the village en route to the North End of the island, Clachan, Raasay House or Borodale House where the hotel is located. The planned re-opening of the old footpath along the shore from Clachan to Inverarish which is part of the original route from the North End to the village will hopefully mitigate this to some extent. Another factor that helped to mask the low residual demand for goods from the shop was that whilst the new pier and community hall were being built there was a significant influx of construction workers for these projects which did bring extra business to the shop.

### **Post Office**

In line with many other small rural post offices Raasay Post Office currently operates under the "community contract" ie. 15 hours per week with a salaried position of postmistress/master. Further income comes from a fixed annual rent for providing premises and mail sorting facilities. The post office also employs 2 part time counter staff. However Post Office Services want to move to a commission based payment system in place of the current arrangements and this would have a detrimental effect on the financial viability of maintaining services at their current level and is creating uncertainty and concern for the future. There is a universal view amongst islanders that it is absolutely essential to ensure that both the shop and the post office remain open. They provide vital services for many of the island's residents and businesses. The post office operates an ATM

service for most of the high street banks and also handles the island's businesses banking interests including the ferry.

The Scottish Government has in past years funded a Post Office diversification scheme of £1m with individual grants available up to a maximum of £25k. The current postmistress has enquired about this scheme and whilst this financial year's monies have been fully allocated assurances were given that Raasay Post Office met all the eligibility criteria. There has been no announcement that this scheme is to continue in financial year 2012-2013 at this time. The current postmistress is planning to retire in the near future but has shown her strong commitment to the future of the island and in particular the retention of the shop and vital post office services by offering to train some local people to take on the role of designated postmistress/master. The retention of the shop and post office services is one of the key priorities for the island and a number of people have raised the issue of whether it could be run as a community business. The current postmistress has also indicated her willingness to lend support to any community based initiative to explore the viability of developing a community owned shop and post office. The lack of accessibility of the current shop and post office premises is also a major issue and it may be that a new build or relocation of the core business to a more suitable building would present new opportunities to expand the range of goods that are sold in the shop to include local arts and crafts products. This would have the added advantage of enabling local craft workers to market their products in an expanded retail outlet providing a wider range of goods and services. If a cafe and heritage centre facility could be incorporated into such a development or sited in close proximity then it would create a significant "economic hub" servicing local residents' needs and increasing visitor numbers and corresponding trading activity.

### **Raasay Primary School**

In many rural communities the local school is a focal point and Raasay is no exception to this. Education is important to the economy of any community and the island is fortunate to have a dynamic head teacher at the helm of the local primary school. The school has recently undergone an HMIE inspection and has received a very positive report.

As mentioned previously the school has excellent links with the community and the raising of nearly £2500 at a recent fund raising day for a school with a current roll of 12 is testament to that. The school's approach is very much a "can do" one, and this is reflected in view that the school has a lot to offer the community, with the staff and children working together to promote the welfare of all the islanders. There is strong belief that the school and its associated activities can be a catalyst for positive change and development on the island. The key concepts of the curriculum for excellence, those of responsible citizenship, instilling confidence, effective learning and contributing positively to school, family and the wider community are all clearly evidenced. There is a strong emphasis on the environment and the school works closely with the local outdoor activity centre and the John Muir Trust to deliver its award and enhance pupils' awareness of and respect for the island's natural heritage. It is very much a community school and whilst not a designated Gaelic medium school the head teacher is a fluent Gaelic speaker and the use of conversational Gaelic is encouraged and is programmed into the school day in a structured manner. The school is also working towards gaining Green Flag status in terms of its environmental work.

In a school pupil consultation which focussed on what they felt was good about living on Raasay and what they wished for in the future it was clear that the children felt positive about their school, their families and living on the island. They made numerous references to a wide range of school based and extracurricular activities that they enjoyed and looked forward to. These included baking, knitting, drama club, art club, football in the village

hall and in the park and talked of the summer outdoor activities that they had taken part in including water sports and kayaking. They also talked about the environmental activities that they were involved in including a clothing recycling initiative and holding a “swap it” day at the school. In addition they spoke of their international links with a recycling project in the Phillipines. They also showed a good awareness of many of the wider issues on the island stating that the paths and trails in the forest should be repaired and new trees planted, following a recent clear felling operation by Forest Enterprise, and spoke about the new emergency services arrangements that have been put in place for the island.

### **Youth Club**

A number of issues were raised by members of the youth club during a consultation meeting held with some members of the club who were all students currently attending Portree High School. Some of the many positive aspects of living on Raasay were that the island is seen as a safe place with not too many cars and where everyone knows everyone else, that all age groups (of young people) mixed well together, taking part in outdoor activities at Raasay House and getting days off school when bad weather prevents the ferry running! There was an awareness of the wildness and beauty of the natural environment. Some of the disadvantages of island life for teenagers that were mentioned included the difficulty in pursuing sports and interests outwith the island due to the ferry times particularly at weekends and the lack of those opportunities on Raasay itself. The issue of the Hall not being available on Sundays and the general lack of social activity on a Sunday was raised. When asked about the challenges facing the wider Raasay community members talked about the lack of jobs available for young people and the need for more housing. In terms of personal career aspirations there was a wide range of jobs mentioned including doctor, lawyer, butcher, professional footballer and working on the ferry. The lack of any shelter or changing facilities at the playing field was seen as problematic and improvements to the playpark and football pitch would be welcomed. In terms of the best way forward for the island club members were very creative and realistic. Ideas to improve things and create jobs included a community mini bus that would provide a driving job and which could be used for different purposes including visitor tours and youth club outings. The opening of a visitor centre at Calum’s Road along with getting the roads repaired and the development of renewable energy to help power the new ferry were other suggestions. Everyone was keen to see Raasay House reopened and also wanted the toilets in the hall to be open when playing football and when out and about generally.

### **Visitor Accommodation**

In Borodale House the island has one operational hotel which in 2008 had a 3 star rating from Visit Scotland. Currently the hotel is the only licensed premises on the island and the only place serving food to the public. In the past Raasay Outdoor Centre provided visitor accommodation in Raasay House outwith the times of their core business activity. Raasay House is currently undergoing a complete internal rebuild scheduled for completion at the end of 2012. Raasay Outdoor Centre has since relocated into the hotel premises at Borodale House and operates a similar business model in those premises.

The island also has a 4 star bed and breakfast business in a central location and there is the potential for further similar businesses on the island.

The Scottish Youth Hostel Association has confirmed that Raasay Youth Hostel will re-open on 5 April 2012 for that weekend and then on 1 May for the summer season. The youth hostel is a twenty bedded unit located just over a mile north of the village of Inverarish and stands alone in a commanding position overlooking the Sound of Raasay.

There are also a number of self catering properties on the island which provide visitor accommodation, predominantly in the summer months.

### **Community Hall**

Completed in 2009 the hall is a result of a concerted campaign and fundraising effort going back over a long period of time. It is a major community resource and hosts a wide range of community uses including the youth club, yoga classes, primary school activities, a drama group, an arts and crafts group, social functions, community meetings, the island's lunch club, touring theatre shows and music concerts. It is hoped that a part time administrator post will support further programme development and increase usage levels.

### **Trading Activity**

Businesses currently trading on the island include the shop and post office, Raasay Home Farm, Allt Arais B&B, Raasay Engineering Ltd., Raasay Outdoor Centre, DDK. Design and Construction, Hugh Mackay plant hire, a number of self catering holiday units, three sheep stock clubs, Oscaig Sheep Stock Club, North Raasay Sheep Stock Club, Balachuirn Sheep Stock Club and a number of individual crofters.

### **Churches**

There are two churches on the Island and regular services are held in both of them. There is also a monthly service held in the Hall.

### **Public Services**

A doctor's surgery is held in the medical centre weekly, on a Wednesday morning, and there is community nursing cover on the island on at all times. Following the retirement of the last resident community nurse the current cover is provided on a rota basis with duty nurses "sleeping over" in accommodation provided within the medical centre. There is also an ambulance based on island. There is no permanent police officer based on the island but the local farmer is a special constable. There is a fire appliance based on the island with a current complement of seven retained fire fighters out of a total of 10 positions. In the event of a serious incident back up is available from Skye.

Library services are provided by a mobile van that visits the island on a three weekly basis on a Wednesday. Refuse collection on the island is carried out on alternate weeks with materials for recycling collected one week and household waste collected the following week. Personal and business banking services are provided by the Post Office. There is a glass recycling facility provided by Highland Council at the old pier at Suisnish and there is a well equipped children's play park situated next to the playing field in the village. Whilst there are no public bus services or taxis operating on the island the majority of houses are accessible by road although the standard of these varies significantly with some road surfaces and associated drainage being in very poor condition.

## **3.3 Community Achievements**

There was widespread agreement on what had been the recent major achievements for the island amongst those taking part in the consultation. The acquisition of Raasay House with its gardens and ground by the local community and the completion and opening of the community hall along with the new ferry terminal were all regarded as successful milestones for the community. The improvements to the school building, health care, including the new emergency services arrangements, and the continuation of Raasay Engineering Ltd. as a successful island business under new ownership were also cited as positive recent developments.

Many people mentioned the high quality of the local primary school emphasising the strong links between the school and the wider community. The cross generational nature of these links encourage children to become aware of all aspects of island life and a consequence of this is that children develop a strong sense of identity with their school and with Raasay as their home.

The principle that local people are most effective when working together for a common cause was a recurrent theme mentioned by nearly everyone and as one person put it:-

“having a shared sense of purpose, common agendas and a consensus of what is of benefit to the whole community must be put before individual interests”

The development of a “shared vision” for the future of the island will be a major strength of the community in meeting the challenges ahead.

## 4. Main Findings from Community Consultation

Whilst some of the main themes to emerge during the consultation impact on other similar communities on Scotland's West Coast many of the future challenges were specific to the Isle of Raasay. Depopulation, inadequate transport links, the dearth of local employment opportunities and a lack of affordable housing are regarded as the major challenges facing the island. Future development opportunities were often associated with the substantial assets now in community ownership. Further development of the existing businesses on the island, harnessing the enthusiasm and skills of local residents and exploiting the rich natural, literary and historical aspects of Raasay are all seen as potential economic growth areas and these are described in more detail in section 4.2 of the report.



### 4.1 Issues and Challenges

#### Population and Employment

There was a clear consensus amongst nearly everyone that took part in the interviews that the falling population and the lack of employment opportunities were major concerns facing the community at the present time. Agriculture is acknowledged historically as being one of the main reasons that people of working age stayed on the island although nowadays almost everyone involved in crofting needs to supplement their income with additional employment to sustain a viable livelihood. The current age profile of the island's population is also of concern with the number of people of retirement age or over exceeding those under it.

#### Housing

The lack of affordable housing is seen by some people as a major impediment to increasing the population of the island and its future development and an associated issue is that there is very limited access to suitable land for building new houses. The very low permanent occupancy level of houses in the village was a major concern for a number of people. Whether some of the absent owners might be willing to rent their properties on a short term basis to people looking for accommodation on the island was something that was felt to be worth exploring. There is general agreement that the majority of holiday home owners do contribute, in some way, to the island's economy either through employment generated for local businesses through building repairs and maintenance or by patronising the local shop and hotel.

#### Transport Infrastructure

A serious concern for almost everyone was the extremely poor condition of the island's roads. There is a strong feeling that this issue is already impacting on the island's fragile economy and that any further deterioration in their condition would have a catastrophic effect on tourism, one of the island's most important industries and one that is set to grow over the next few years. In what is perceived as wilful neglect, the steady withdrawal of routine maintenance work by Highland Council, is seen as a forerunner of even more major problems and false economy on the part of Highland Council.

There is a concern that the current ferry timetable can have an adverse effect on some job opportunities as the present sailing times do not allow people working in the construction and retail industries to travel to Skye in time for the start of the normal working day. The current timetable is also felt by some people to restrict the cultural and social opportunities islanders can participate in and fares are seen to be expensive by many residents. The importance of the ferry service as one of the main sources of secure full time employment for islanders was emphasised by a number of people.

### **Maximising Community Assets**

Raasay House is seen by the majority of residents as one of the island's most important assets and came into community ownership in 2008 as a condition of the significant public financial support awarded to the recently formed Raasay House Community Company for the complete renovation of the building. Prior to that the house had been owned by Highlands and Islands Development Board and subsequently by Highlands and Islands Enterprise since its purchase from its last private landlord in 1979. In 1984 it became the base for a new business venture, Raasay Outdoor Centre, which ran its outdoor activities programme from there until the start of the first renovation of the house in 2007. In April 2009 the outdoor centre relocated into the island's only hotel in Borodale House where it has continued to operate its outdoor activities programme in addition to running the hotel business. However the directors of the outdoor centre have stressed that this has been extremely challenging in terms of the difficulties of using the same building for two quite distinct purposes and this begs the question of whether these inherent tensions would be replicated in Raasay House should the outdoor centre relocate back into that building.

The majority of the island's residents are of the view that it is vital for the island's economic future and associated job opportunities that Raasay can offer a choice of accommodation for visitors including good quality hotel facilities open all year round. Both Borodale House and Raasay House are seen as two of the islands most important assets and there is a clear consensus that both should be developed to their full potential as visitor accommodation in order to realise the maximum benefit for the community. There is also a view that a refurbished Raasay House offers an opportunity to develop a top quality hotel catering for a high spending clientele. The fact that Raasay House is now in community ownership under the aegis of Raasay House Community Company places a responsibility upon the company of ensuring that the house is let for an appropriate use whilst maximising the benefit to the community from this major asset and safeguarding its future. It will therefore be important to resolve these issues to the satisfaction of the community company when negotiating a lease agreement with the future tenant(s) of Raasay House. The current refurbishment of the house is due to be completed in December 2012 and there is a need to start planning now for the best use of the other community owned assets that Raasay House Community Company currently has responsibility for. These include the walled garden and 36 hectares of woodland along with some other tracts of land.

Because so many of the ideas for future developments on the island relate either directly or indirectly to one or more of these community owned assets it will be very important that the future development planning process of Raasay Development Partnership is tied in closely with that of Raasay House Community Company and also that of Raasay Community Association. Neither of these organisations has a current business plan. Given that under the terms of the "Growth at the Edge Project" Raasay Development Partnership is required to complete a development plan for the island within the next 6 months this creates an exciting opportunity for all the partner organisations to be an integral part of this process. The result would be an island wide business and economic development plan which would encompass individual organisations' aspirations and objectives and be both comprehensive and complementary. Very importantly this would help create a shared vision for the future of Raasay and facilitate a pooling of knowledge and resources.

## **4.2 Increasing Employment and Economic Activity**

There was a comprehensive and creative response to the question on how it might be possible to increase local employment options from all the groups and individuals involved in the community consultation process. The initial list was extensive and it was felt that to group ideas together thematically would provide a good starting point to critically examine all the potential options. This framework will enable the Development Partnership to discuss and identify the areas that are felt to be worthy of further investigation and research. This will be an important first stage in drawing up a more detailed development plan over the next six months. In considering all the different suggestions the following themes emerged.

### **Tourism and Marketing**

There was fairly widespread agreement, that in the recent past from the 1980s onwards, that the island's main economic drivers have been agriculture and crofting, forestry, construction and tourism. Whilst many of the consultees taking part felt reasonably optimistic about the future of agriculture and construction there was a view that the island could do more to increase visitor numbers and by offering a greater range of visitor attractions encourage them to spend longer on the island. The success of local journalist and author Roger Hutchinson's book *Calum's Road* has undoubtedly helped to increase visitor numbers. However there was a prevailing view that currently the island lacked certain basic amenities like a cafe and retail craft outlet or gift shop which many visitors would expect to find on a visit to a Hebridean island. In addition many felt that Raasay could sell itself as a tourist destination more effectively and in the words of one resident did not "blow its own trumpet" often enough. The question of whether the development of a Raasay "brand" that could be marketed collectively was raised by a number of people. The importance of having a good quality hotel open all year was seen by many to be vital to the island economy both in terms of attracting visitors and as a provider of jobs for local people. The completion and reopening of Raasay House in late 2012 will inevitably rekindle interest in this iconic building and consequently increase visitor numbers to the island. Given that the new "green" hybrid ferry will also come into service in 2013 this represents a prime opportunity to take advantage of the projected increase in visitor numbers by developing additional tourist facilities.

### **Agriculture and Forestry**

The re-establishment of the walled garden and its greenhouses was felt to offer a good opportunity to create employment and at the same time provide a source of high quality fruit and vegetables to islanders and local catering outlets both on Raasay and on Skye. There has been a decrease in direct employment in forestry in recent years but there is a view that there is scope to develop a small scale timber operation supplying wood fuel and other products both on Raasay and possibly further afield. Opportunities in developing biodiversity tourism and the potential to create a "forest ranger" job on the island were suggested by a number of people.

There was a view that the recent harvesting of timber by the Forestry Commission had detracted visually from the immediate environment and had also damaged the network of paths, a number of which were felt to be in need of re-instatement and repair.

In terms of agriculture and crofting there was a general feeling of optimism for the future although some people felt that the current sheep stock club arrangements could be improved upon. The stabilisation of market prices in recent times was felt to be an important factor. There was also support from those involved in agriculture for the idea of exploring how training and subsequent employment opportunities might be offered to young people

with an interest in developing a career in agriculture, possibly through the modern apprenticeship scheme or similar training initiatives. The importance of good land and stock management to the island's biodiversity, natural heritage and consequently tourism was also highlighted during the consultation. The re-instatement of the saw mill has been suggested and this clearly links with the island's industrial heritage.

### **History and Cultural Heritage**

There is widespread support for the establishment of a heritage centre on the island and the economic benefits that this would bring. Some respondents had a vision of a living museum where artists and craft workers could ply their particular skills and trades. In addition the provision of summer schools in traditional skills offering training and education would provide part time and seasonal employment for a small number of people. The development of heritage tourism as a concept was widely seen as building on existing strengths and offering further potential employment opportunities. The idea of organising an annual book festival perhaps in conjunction with a writers' summer school was raised and this could perhaps attract sponsorship from a publishing house or other literary or arts organisation possibly Creative Scotland or SEALL.

### **Community Transport**

A community mini bus was a recurring theme and people saw it having a number of different uses including visitor tours with a focus on archaeology, the island's wildlife, natural heritage and literary heritage. It was felt that the youth club would benefit and that it could also be used as a taxi for tourists travelling without a car and might be act as an incentive for people to leave their cars on Skye. It was suggested that it could provide a part time drivers job if marketed successfully.

### **Natural Environment and Renewable Energy**

The introduction of the first of a new generation of "green" hybrid ferries on the Raasay to Sconser run in 2013 offers a great opportunity to develop a community owned renewable energy initiative to help recharge the ferry's batteries overnight whilst it is berthed on the island and at the same time earn some income for the community. The fact that the chief executive of CMAL was extremely supportive of the idea at a recent public meeting on the island can only add impetus to progressing this at the earliest opportunity.

A number of people taking part in the interviews felt that the high quality of the island's marine environment was one of its main assets and offered new opportunities for economic development. The creation of new moorings for yachts and the opening of a seafood restaurant were two examples given.

The development of wildlife tourism and boat tours, possibly connecting with land based mini bus tours, were other examples of innovative thinking. Sports development in the form of sailing and mountain biking were felt to be appropriate specialist activities for the island to develop expertise in. The training of local young people as outdoor instructors was felt to be a good way of offering potential career opportunities for young people wishing to pursue a career on the island on leaving school.

### **Developing Trading and Retail Activity**

The lack of a craft retail outlet or gift shop was a recurrent theme and it was felt that a constructive way forward would be to consider a joint retail initiative where a number of new ventures could be developed together to form a viable project with shared savings on infrastructure costs. One possibility would be to incorporate a craft outlet and cafe within a new shop and post office operation. If a working heritage centre could be linked into such a development the advantages in attracting increased visitor numbers and mutual trading activity could be substantial. The natural location for such an initiative would be in Inverarish village which has seen the sharpest

decline in population and visitor footfall since the new ferry terminal was completed in August 2010. A development of this nature would encourage visitors to explore the island south of Clachan and the North End and experience more of the industrial heritage of the old meal mill and the more recent mining activity of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The idea of holding “Raasay Markets” to showcase and sell the work and products of the island was mooted. In addition to holding these on Raasay they could also travel to other similar markets on Skye, or further afield, which in addition to offering extra opportunities to sell Raasay based products, would be good publicity for the island. It was felt that the branding of these products as high quality and desirable would be essential. Products could include venison, mutton, fruit and vegetables (from the walled garden) books, arts, crafts, pottery and knitwear all bearing “Raasay’s (generic) brand of excellence”.

Advances in communication technology were felt by some people to offer new opportunities for remote working and internet based start up businesses.

### **Training**

In terms of further and higher education opportunities for adults and young adults there is a prevailing view that the historical academic excellence and achievements of its sons and daughters, primarily in universities and colleges in different parts of the country is something that the island is proud of and wishes to see continue in the future. There is a recognition that the majority of those adults who choose to pursue a career in the traditional professions will most likely have to leave the island to do so for at least some of their working lives.

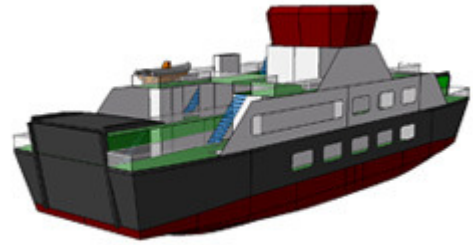
On the other hand those people of working age who wish to stay on the island are most likely to secure their livelihoods in traditional agriculture and crofting activity or other practical skills and trades, engineering, marine engineering and artisan related economic activity. This suggests that the type of training and skills most appropriate to population retention initiatives will be those of a practical nature. In addition tourism related and hospitality/catering jobs are set to increase and outdoor education instructor jobs will always be available whilst the outdoor activity centre is operating on the island. It will be important to identify future employment opportunities in advance in order that local residents can be informed of these opportunities and undertake appropriate training to best equip them for these positions. A coordinated approach that takes account of the full range of business development plans of community organisations and local employers would enable island residents to make informed choices about the most appropriate training for them.

### **Local Learning Centre**

The establishment of a local learning centre, possibly in conjunction with UHI or a college of further education, incorporating a resource base and office base would be an effective way to keep people informed of local developments. It would also serve as a central point for everyone involved in Raasay Development Partnership activity to access information, training, networking opportunities and distance learning opportunities. If the centre was linked to an internet cafe where visitors could access information not only about Raasay, but also research their next destination, book accommodation ahead, check weather, ferry times etc. that would help business and at the same time fulfil a tourist information function. It would be a good base for an electronic community newsletter to be coordinated. It would also be a valuable social resource especially for teenagers and the youth club and could be open all year round.

## 5. Recommendations

These are informed by the main findings of the community consultation and are intended to provide a clear and practical framework to progress the aims of Raasay Development Partnership based on the priorities identified by the community. By grouping development topics in a themed or project specific way the intention is to make individual developments focused and achievable. There will be overlaps and interconnecting themes and it will be the responsibility of the Development Partnership, in conjunction with the Local Development Officer, to maintain an overview of activity, to make links where appropriate and minimise duplication of effort to ensure the best use of resources.



- As the overarching economic development body on the island, Raasay Development Partnership should consider constituting itself as a development trust. This would enable it to access financial support, business loans and grant funding from a variety of sources presently not available to it
- Raasay Development Partnership should promote and publicise its core aims and values as widely as possible ie, “Raasay Development Partnership seeks to promote sustainable economic activity and social benefit for all the residents of the island of Raasay and in so doing will respect and protect the natural environment and community owned assets of the island”
- The overarching aim of these activities both directly and indirectly should be to retain existing residents and or attract incoming individuals and families to the island
- The development plans of the Partnership’s constituent organisations should be incorporated within its forward planning process as far as possible
- A series of project development groups should be established to progress the key priorities identified by Raasay Development Partnership. See 5.1 and 5.2
- The membership of these groups should be drawn from as wide a range of organisations and individuals as possible utilising the skills, enthusiasm and interests of local people.
- Action plans should be drawn up by these groups in conjunction with the local development officer and endorsed by the Raasay Development Partnership and should be achievable, measureable and time limited.
- The timescale for these groups should be established according to the priority and urgency of the issue

## **5.1 Project Development-Phase 1**

Given the high level of concern over the future of the island's **Shop and Post Office** it is proposed that a working group dedicated to the future sustainability of these essential island services be established as a priority. The projected increase in visitor numbers associated with the introduction of a new hybrid ferry and the re-opening of Raasay House, both scheduled for 2013, is an important opportunity to consolidate tourism as a future economic driver for the island. If this opportunity is to be fully realised then work must start now on identifying and developing the means to achieve this. It is therefore proposed that a **Tourism and Marketing** group is established to take this forward. It is also recommended that a **Renewables and Natural Environment** group be established to take advantage of the current interest in and support available for renewable energy projects. It is suggested that all 3 project groups are established within the first 3 months of the Local Development Officer being appointed.

### **5.1.a Community Shop and Post Office Development Group**

Preliminary work would include researching available financial support for a new accessible building and making links with other community groups who have successfully achieved their aims eg. Kirkmichael Community Shop is hosting an open day on 13 March 2012. Engaging with other interests on the island to assess the commitment to developing a joint venture incorporating a cafe, craft retail outlet, heritage centre and researching what business models might be the most appropriate to take this forward would be other important initial tasks.

### **5.1.b Tourism and Marketing Group**

The introduction of the new hybrid ferry in 2013 and the completion and re-opening of Raasay House will offer a linked opportunity to further market the island as a desirable tourist destination and increase visitor numbers. It will be important to plan ahead for increased demand in terms of accommodation, catering, retail and leisure activities to take full advantage of these opportunities for future sustainability. There are many associated openings including the development of wildlife and heritage tourism and in the hospitality sector including the promotion of Raasay quality branded ingredients for restaurants and cafes. An internet cafe would offer tourists and visitors somewhere to eat and drink and also access information not only about the island itself but also their forward destination(s) and enable them to book accommodation ahead, check weather, ferry times etc. One idea would be to run a pilot internet cafe and information point in the Hall in the summer of 2012. In addition it could host some of the island's heritage artefacts in a temporary display. A useful research project for summer 2012 would be a visitor survey perhaps in conjunction with UHI or another higher education institution that offers tourism related studies. Alternatively it could be an opportunity for some local high school students to undertake some basic interview training, increase their skills and earn some extra cash in the holidays.

### **5.1.c Renewables and Natural Environment Group**

The introduction of the new hybrid ferry in 2013 creates an opportunity for the island to develop a renewable energy source that would help to recharge its battery bank whilst berthed overnight on the island. This idea has been publicly supported by the chief executive of CMAL and offers a golden opportunity for the community to benefit from a resource that has been so important to other remote rural communities over the last decade.

The Scottish government's targets for reducing emissions and the national carbon footprint are entirely consonant with this type of community resource development and financial support and advice may be available.

There are also other opportunities for developing a greener economy for the island including wood fuel and one early piece of work for this group could be to research and produce a longer term carbon reduction plan for Raasay. A further action point for this group would be to research the potential to promote the pristine marine environment that is so much a part of the island. The development of marine and wildlife tourism along with improved moorings and services for visiting yachts are 2 areas worthy of early consideration. The development and maintenance of the island's trail and path network would sit well within the remit of this working group.

## **5.2 Project Development-Phase 2**

### **5.2.a Housing and Infrastructure**

A large number of people remarked upon the ineffective use of resources on the part of Highland Council with regard to road maintenance and associated infrastructure support. It would be worthwhile to explore an alternative model of service delivery that would entail the establishment of a Raasay based business that could act as a sub contractor for the Council. If such an arrangement could offer a more cost effective option for the Council whilst delivering a better level of service to local residents then the benefits for everyone are obvious. It would be useful to know just how much Highland Council currently spend on road maintenance on the island and whether they might consider a sub contracting option in the future.

The lack of affordable housing and the associated issue of a shortage of available land for housing development were highlighted in the consultation. Part of the solution might be the progression of the site at Henderson's Bridge, owned by the North Raasay Sheep Stock Club, where preparatory work has already taken place in respect of a mixed housing development. Another innovative and interesting concept is that of utilising local timber resources as a primary building material, and approaching Raasay House Community Company to consider releasing some the land they hold, for housing development. These initiatives in conjunction with each other have the potential to significantly lower the cost of new build homes on the island which are estimated to be up to 25% higher than on Skye. If a joint housing and employment package could be offered to potential incoming families then Raasay becomes a very attractive place to relocate to given its many positive aspects in terms of personal safety, high quality primary school, stunning natural environment and developing green credentials.

### **5.2.b Walled Garden and Island Produce**

There is clearly great potential in the development of the walled garden as a significant community owned resource both in terms of expanding the range of quality local produce for sale at local markets and in creating local employment. If the garden were to become efficient in producing premium fruit and vegetables, possibly utilising polytunnels, it is likely that the business could export surplus produce and generate further economic activity. There would also be further opportunities to grow bedding plants and or develop a tree nursery as part of its operation. This would support the branding of Raasay as a source of quality merchandise including existing products such as venison and mutton which could be sold and promoted at “Raasay Markets” held on the island or as Raasay produce at stands at other markets. If a viable craft industry base was established on the island then the marketing, promotion and selling of a wider range of products would be more cost effective in terms of transport, personnel and advertising.

### **5.2.c Agriculture and Forestry**

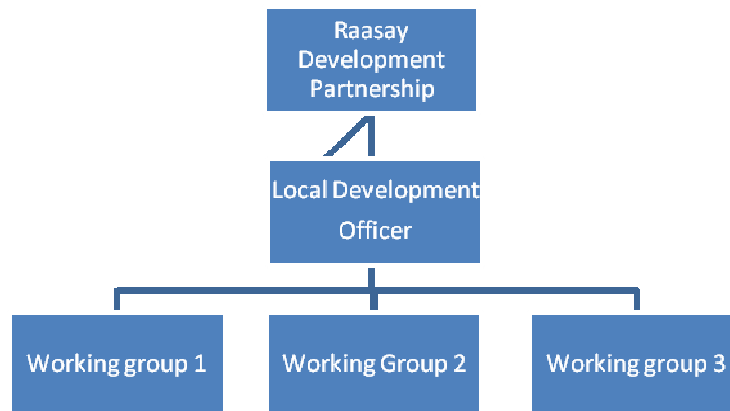
The notion that a wood fuel business on the island was a viable business proposition was frequently suggested in the course of the consultation and clearly this is worthy of further investigation given the scale of the island’s forestry and woodland resource.

A major challenge for the future of agriculture and crofting on the island was identified as attracting new and younger entrants into the sector. The current and historical land tenure arrangements and ownership patterns make it difficult for younger people to enter the industry with confidence for their personal long term future. There are however a number of short term initiatives that could open up opportunities for some young people to at least gain some initial experience of working in the field. eg by linking with Portree High School Guidance Staff for work placements in fourth year.

## 6. The Next Steps



It is the intention of the Development Partnership to appoint a local development officer early in 2012, initially on a two year contract. One of the key tasks within the first six months will be the creation of a longer term development plan for the island and the format and content of that plan are shown in appendix 3. The other key priority is to start work on the project list, to recruit the individuals who will drive this process forward and maintain the momentum of Raasay Development Partnership. One model that would maximise community involvement and individuals' enthusiasm for the specific projects that the Development Partnership identifies in the first phase of the programme is shown below:



This model shows the local development officer reporting to and being managed by the Raasay Development Partnership. The development officer in turn would be a member of and support the active project groups. Membership of the groups would be drawn from the wider community based on individuals' expertise and personal interests. The working groups would not necessarily be limited to the three shown in the diagram. Working collaboratively this model will deliver increased community ownership and accountability and enable people to participate in projects that they feel comfortable with and most relevant to their own particular skills and interests. Each working group would have its own development plan with timescales, milestones and resource implications which collectively would comprise a significant part of the overall development plan for the island. This model of separate but linked working groups each with its own clear aims and objectives has a further advantage in that it would enable different business models to be explored for different economic activities. It may be that some new initiatives might be better suited to development as social enterprises or cooperatives rather than a traditional business and vice versa.

The local community development officer would have a key support role to oversee and monitor the progress of the working groups. There should be an office base established in the Community Hall and this could tie in with the development of a learning and resource centre described in section 5. This model would promote the skills of local people and encourage entrepreneurship and innovation within the different working groups. The model would also encourage cross organisational cooperation as membership would be drawn from both existing community organisations and individual residents. It also offers opportunities for the island's young people to contribute in a clear and practical way. eg. by involving the school in the design of a Raasay logo or strapline for the Tourism and Marketing working group.

## **7. Appendices**

### **7.1 Questionnaires**

#### **Questions for Meetings with Community Organisations**

1. What are the aims of your organisation and what does it hope to achieve over the next 2 years
2. What economic development work is your organisation involved in or planning in the future
3. What are your organisations main strengths
4. How can the community best build on past success and how can it work together most effectively.
5. What do you see as the main issues facing Raasay today
6. How important is training and education for the future of the island economy
7. What are the main opportunities to increase employment on Raasay
8. What do you feel are the most important recent achievements for the island

#### **Topics for Discussion with local businesses**

1. What are the main reasons for the success of your business
2. What are your business goals for the next 3 years
3. What are the main ways that your business benefits the island economy
4. What are the main challenges that your business/livelihood faces over the next 3 years
5. What do you think are the most important factors for the future growth and sustainability of your business
6. What are the main opportunities to increase employment and job opportunities on Raasay
7. Are there other major challenges facing the Raasay community at the present time and what are your

#### **Questions for Meetings with Individual Residents**

1. What do you see as the main issues facing Raasay at the present time
2. How can the community best build on past success and how can it work together most effectively in the future.
3. What are the main opportunities to increase employment and create jobs on Raasay
4. What do you feel are the most important recent achievements for the island
5. If you had 3 wishes for Raasay what would they be

## 7.2 Resources and Links

Raasay website: <http://www.raasay.com/index.html>

International Voluntary Service: <http://ivs.gb.org/info/>

Big Lottery Fund: <http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/index>

SCVO: <http://www.scvo.org.uk/>

HIE: <http://www.hie.co.uk/>

<http://www.scvo.org.uk/> Skye and Lochalsh CVO: <http://www.slcvo.org.uk/>

Scottish Government: <http://home.scotland.gov.uk/home>

ScotLand News: <http://www.communityland.org.uk/>

Social Enterprise Academy: <http://www.theacademy-ssea.org/>

Highland Council: <http://www.highland.gov.uk/>

Community Energy Scotland: <http://www.communityenergyscotland.org.uk/>

Forestry Commission Scotland: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/>

## 7.3 Community Development Plan-Growth at the Edge Project-will include:-

- Vision for the community in 5-10 years time. This will include a range of factors, housing, employment, demographics etc.
- Intended SMART outcomes
- Milestones associated with each outcome
- Community carbon foot print assessment and reduction plan
- Project descriptions for each project including
  - Project outcomes, linked to overall outcomes
  - Intended funding packages
  - Community resource implications
  - Project implementation plans
- Overall community growth plan schedule summarising project schedules
- HIE postal survey 2011 results-(Snedden Economics Report)
- Risk assessment register
- Monitoring and benefit realisation procedure
- Communications/community engagement plan
- Development Plan review process