Nort Natters

Working together: new ways
of addressing shared challenges

February 2023

Foreword

In early 2022 Shetland Islands Council and partners have been working with Hub North Scotland and Scottish Futures Trust (SFT) to undertake a Place-based Review to take stock of activity, align existing and future plans and resources to collectively consider outcomes with communities.

The work described in this document builds on Phase 1 of the Place-based review programme, which identified four **strategic principles**

Transition: delivering a just transition to Net Zero for people, communities and businesses
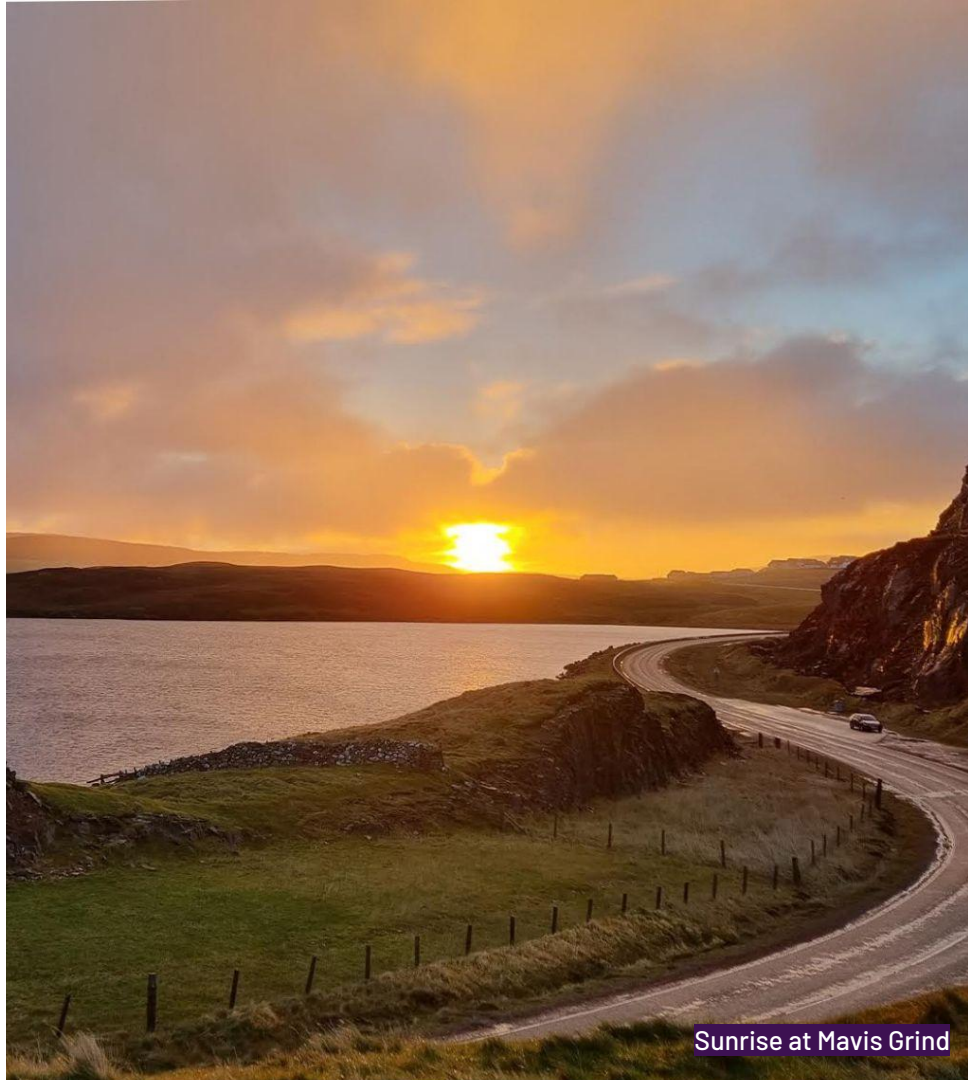
Retention: attracting and keeping people who want to live, work and invest in Shetland

Growth: building an inclusive and sustainable economy that works for everyone, where no one is left behind

Living Well: supporting people of all ages to live healthy, productive lives in every part of Shetland

People Powered Results

hub North Scotland

Sunrise at Mavis Grind

Foreword

We are delighted to share with you the summary from the Nort Natters community engagement, Nort Natters Working Together: new ways of addressing shared challenges. A huge thank you, to the Nort Natters Co-Design group, and everyone who has supported this work to date, by taking time to attend meetings, events and share their thoughts about the future of Shetland and the north mainland. This summary tells a wonderful story of the things that you love and cherish about living and working in the north mainland as well as insight into what could change. There is now an opportunity for individuals, groups, communities and organisations in the north mainland and wider Shetland to use these insights to **work together** in a more collaborative and collective way. By taking **a place-based approach** to how we look at local challenges, we have opportunities to develop and try new ways of working which:

→ listen to and address local challenges collaboratively

→ improve outcomes for people, by building on what's strong locally

Next steps
Over the next few months, we will be building on the learning from Nort Natters by:

→ sharing what we are learning about place-based approaches with other stakeholders across Shetland and our elected members

→ working with and supporting local communities and agencies to move into action on what matters to people locally

This is a unique opportunity to celebrate the collective assets of communities across Shetland, build on their strengths and resilience, and work to create longer-term sustainable solutions to respond to local challenges collaboratively.

Emma Macdonald, Leader of Shetland Island Council and Gary Robinson, Chair of the Shetland Partnership
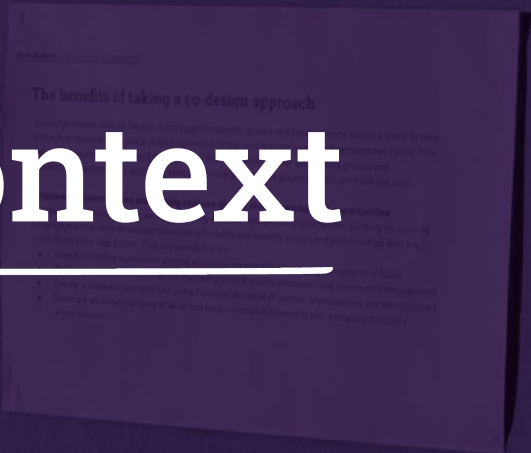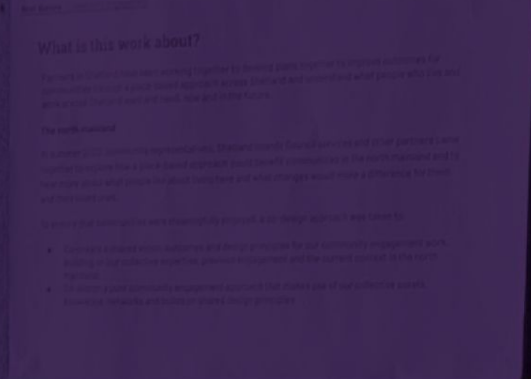
Contents page

→

Overview & context

Executive summary

In autumn 2022, Shetland Islands Council, partners across public services, voluntary organisations, and **over 500 community members** came together as part of 'Nort Natters', to test out a different way of collectively shaping long term plans for Shetland's north mainland, through a place based approach.

At the heart of 'Nort Natters' was an effort to understand what people who live, study and work in the north mainland want and need, now and in the future, so that people and services can work together collaboratively to improve local outcomes.

The insights shared by local communities paint a picture of what matters to people in the north mainland. We heard about the strong community spirit and sense of identity in the north mainland, as well as community members' hopes for the future. We heard stories about how interconnected the north mainland is, showing how challenges on different issues - like transport, education, jobs, or health - interact with each other simultaneously in people's daily lives.

There is now an opportunity for people, communities, organisations, and leadership in the north mainland and wider Shetland to use these insights to work together in a more collaborative and collective way. This means taking a place-based approach of continually listening and addressing local challenges together, improving outcomes for people by building on local strengths, assets and networks.

Across the north mainland, how can we...

1. Build on what **works well** locally?

2. **Work together** differently to approach local challenges?

3. **Grow well** together towards a sustainable future?

These questions can't be answered in isolation, and there is opportunity to build on and continue the 'Nort Natters' conversation to create solutions to local challenges in collaboration with local communities across Shetland.

What do we mean by a place-based approach?

Throughout this work, it's been critical to take a 'place-based approach'. This means recognising that every place is **unique**, and that where we live has a **significant impact** on our life, work and wellbeing. Taking a 'place- based approach' means thinking in a **joined-up, holistic way** about how people live, work and experience the place where they live. It can include:

→ Giving local communities more **opportunities** to make or influence **decisions**

→ Understanding **priority outcomes** for local communities (such as improving health or addressing climate change)

→ Collaborating **across organisations** and **alongside communities** to achieve priority outcomes using collective resources more effectively and efficiently

Working in a place-based way means that different policy areas - like health and wellbeing, infrastructure, or Net Zero - are seen as interconnected, and addressed in a way that makes **best use of collective resources**.
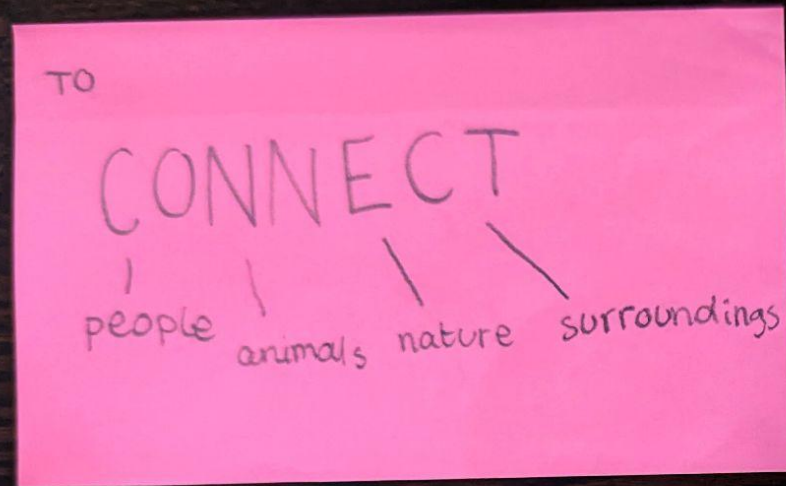
Thoughts on what changes would make a difference, from one pupil at Brae High School.

7

What did we do?

Hearing from communities who live, work and study in Shetland's north mainland
to shape a long-term future vision for their area

Nort Natters: what happened?

To better understand what communities in Shetland's north mainland **want and need, now and in the future**, a range of partners across education, health and care, emergency services, enterprise, housing, and community and voluntary organisations **co-designed** a shared community engagement effort. This was supported and facilitated by People Powered Results (a Nesta Specialist Enterprise). This co-design approach brought people together to:

→ Co-create a **shared vision** and **design principles** for community engagement in the north mainland, based on the group's collective expertise of the local context;

→ Deliver a **shared community engagement approach,** drawing on the group's collective networks, relationships and knowledge, and shared design principles.

Find out more about our approach in the Appendix.

The group then worked together to bring this shared community engagement approach to life, and over a three-week period in November 2022, more than **525 people took part** in Nort Natters. Nort Natters asked what people **liked** about living in the north mainland, what **changes** would make a difference for them and their loved ones and what would help these changes to happen.

People participated in four ways:

→ **In-person sessions** in community spaces, including schools, clubs and scrap stores, as well as at a follow-up session where initial insights were shared and ideas for action were gathered

→ **Locally-facilitated conversations** enabled by Conversation Cards

→ **Minecraft** event held for children and young people

→ **Online survey**

9

Who participated in Nort Natters?

525 people took part

305 were children and young people

20% had a disability or long-term health condition*

Based on demographic data shared through online survey (n=67; 13%).

Northmavine: 36%*

Mossbank: 15%*

Brae: 25%*

Lunnasting: 6%*

Nesting: 9%*

Wider Shetland: 9%*

How did people feel about being heard?

We heard **very positive feedback** from people who took part in Nort Natters. People appreciated the **opportunity to reflect** on the many good things, as well as the challenges, of life in the north mainland, and **wanted their voices to be heard** by Shetland Islands Council and other organisations. People told us it was useful to have different options for participating, e.g. in-person or online.

Children and young people were especially enthusiastic about their experience of taking part, both through **facilitated sessions**, and online using **Minecraft** to express their ideas.

There was also some **scepticism** and **uncertainty** about the value of this work. This was especially the case for people who have lived with transport or housing issues for some time; have already experienced the closure of shops and services; or have taken part in other surveys and consultations over recent years without seeing this lead to **action**. Understandably, there is **frustration** with the **slow pace of change**.

11

What did we learn?

Hearing stories of people's lives in the north mainland highlighted that challenges needed to be addressed in collaborative ways

What did we hear?

We asked communities what they like about living in the north mainland, what changes would make a difference for them and their loved ones, and what would help these changes to happen.
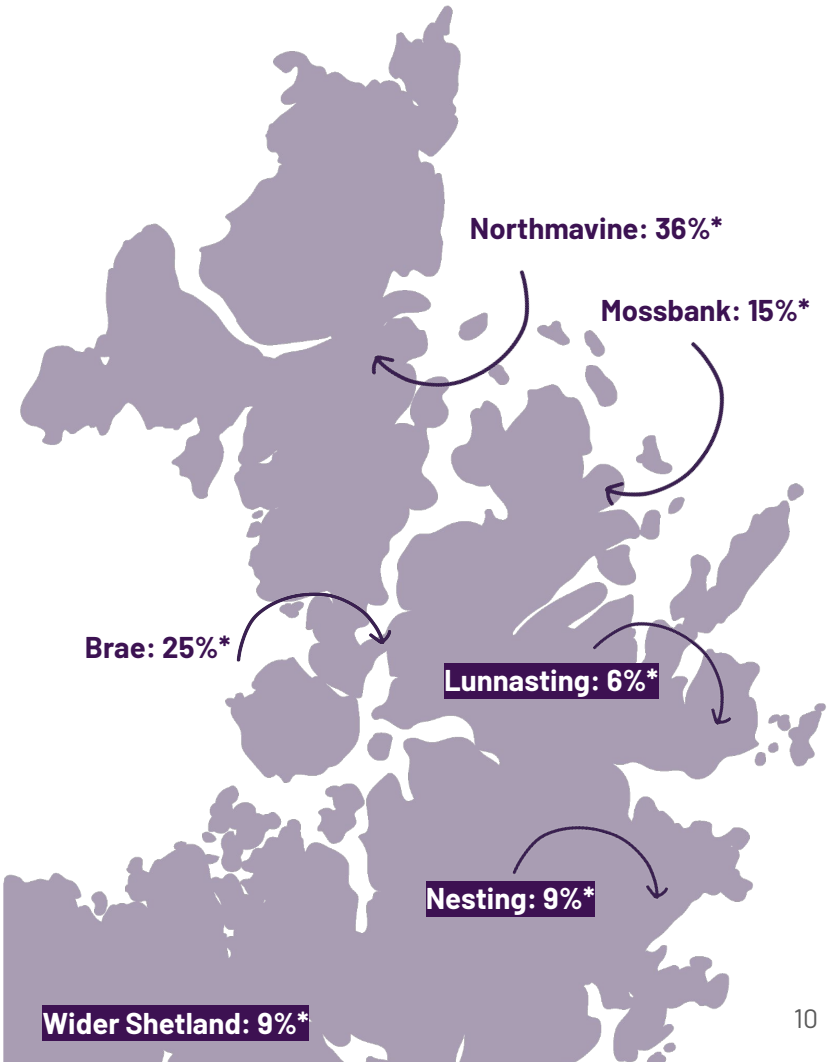
These insights came together under **four main themes** established through the previous work to establish a place-based approach

Transition

Lack of insulation is heightening cost of living pressures and preventing a net zero transition. Infrequent public transport in rural areas, and a lack of safe walking and cycling routes, is impacting people's lives, relationships and opportunities.

Growth

People value local schools, and want more capacity and transport to make full use of these. While there are some great local shops, people want increased access to cheaper produce, career opportunities and digital connectivity locally.

Retention

People love the north mainland's community spirit, sense of peace and safety and its unique natural environment. They are concerned about ecological damage, and the availability of affordable and high-quality housing to retain local young people.

Living well

People want more leisure and socialising options, and better transport to get there. There are concerns about local health services' distance and staff turnover. There are some great community initiatives and a desire to help others, but many don't know how to get involved.

See more about what we heard in the Detailed Insights section.

13

Interconnected places

We heard people's stories that show how challenges on different issues – like transport, education, jobs, or health – **interact with each other simultaneously** in people's daily lives. Although organisations and services might focus on one issue at a time, these stories show that there is a need to think in a **place-based way** about how services, amenities, opportunities, and assets work together to shape people's lives and opportunities.

Photo taken during a Nort Natters session at North Haven care centre

Interconnected places and people

Rory* is 17 and goes to college. He lives with his parents 5 miles from the nearest bus stop. Both his parents work odd hours so can't always drive him to the bus stop. Luckily, his neighbour Shona* is sometimes around to give him a ride when needed. Rory is excited about getting his driving licence and becoming independent. He's keen to start working locally, but unsure about whether he'll be able to find affordable housing nearby.

Mhairi* is 65 and lives on her own. She has a medical appointment in person, but doesn't drive at the moment. Her appointment is only 8 miles away, but she will need to travel 100 miles on public transport to get there and back. This will take her all day. Mhairi is concerned about whether she'll be able to find the time or energy to do this journey, and hasn't talked to anyone whether she could attend her appointment in a different way.

Eann* is 41. His two children **Rosie*** and **Keith*** go to primary school, a 20 minute walk away. They used to get the bus, but the timetable changed. They heard anecdotally that this was to support tourism. They now have to walk to school - not easy in all weathers when pushing a buggy! Eann and his partner are juggling shifts and because of school day changes they have turned down work. Juggling shifts, school pick-up, and cost of living pressures are all piling up and causing them stress and worry.

* These are anonymised personas that combine real stories we heard during Nort Natters.

Making sense of interconnected places

Although organisations and services might focus with the best of intentions on single issues at one time, people's stories show that there is a need to think in a **place-based way** about how services, amenities, opportunities, and assets work together to shape people's lives and tackle interconnected challenges.

Taking a **place-based approach** helps address these challenges in a more collaborative, and more efficient way. By considering people's whole experiences where they live and work, working with communities and discovering solutions collectively, we can:

- Address **multiple challenges** at once
- **Prevent** unintended consequences
- Improve **outcomes** for communities
- Make better use of **local resources**
- Increase people's **skills** and **confidence** to generate new solutions locally
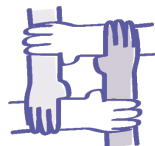

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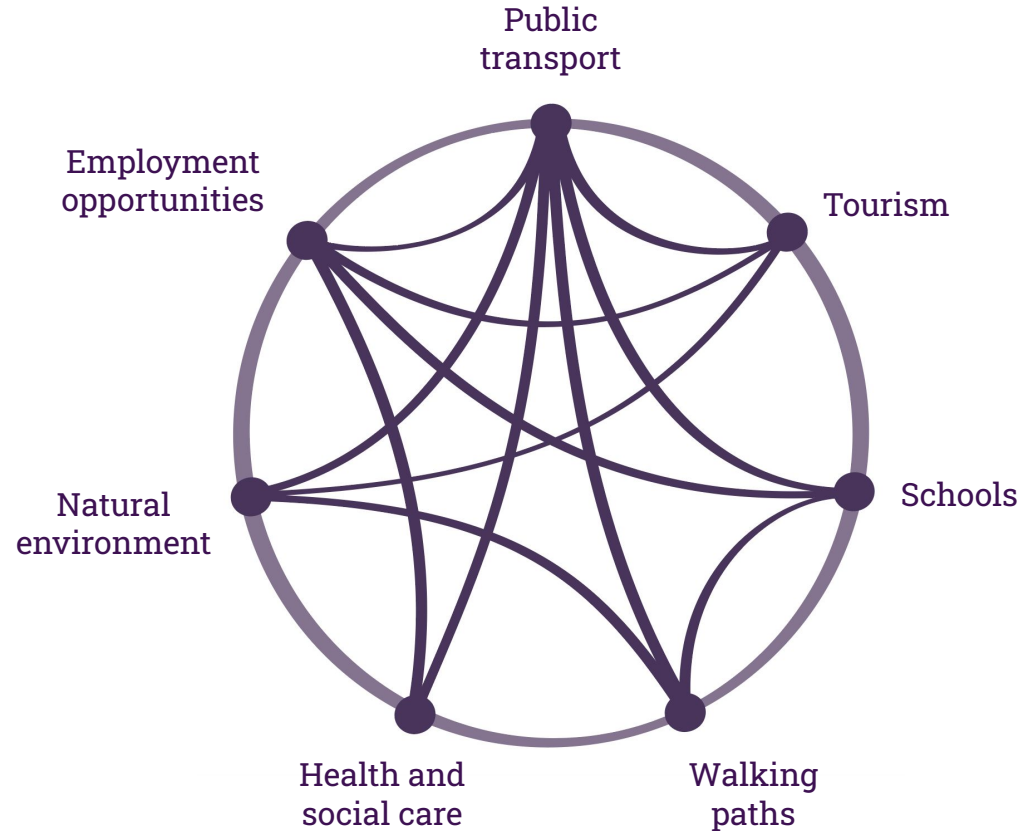
Overarching priorities

A number of interlinked priority issues emerged, which highlight how **interconnected people's experiences** of living and working in the north mainland are.

Moving around
More regular and flexible public transport, and safe walking and cycling routes are urgently needed to help people make the most of local opportunities.

Community cohesion
There is a strong community spirit and mutual support in the north mainland, and lots of opportunities to build on this to address local challenges.

Improved affordability
Affordability in the north mainland is a shared worry. Improved insulation, cheaper energy and food (e.g. through small-scale production) and sharing/reuse schemes are possible solutions.

Opportunities for young people
Young people and their parents want more opportunities for kids to play, learn, and develop, including through sports, cultural and social activities, apprenticeships and career pathways.

Community engagement
People want more opportunities to have their voice heard on matters relating to the north mainland. There is an opportunity to do similar engagement efforts more often.

Growth vs. quiet
People really value the area's rurality and peacefulness. At the same time, many young people also wish for more shops and amenities, better connectivity, and possibly a boost in tourism.

Moving to action

The interconnectedness highlighted in these stories point to an opportunity to think differently about local challenges and priorities. How could these **people's stories** be different? How could we take a **preventative approach** that **builds on local relationships?** How could we work together to find **creative solutions** across the north mainland?

Bringing together local communities' challenges and priorities, a number of questions emerge.

How can the north mainland...

1. Build on what works well locally?
We heard that people in the north mainland are proud of its strong community spirit, how resources and skills are shared amongst neighbours, and its natural environment. There is an opportunity to build on these local assets, celebrate them, and use them differently to tackle local challenges, as well as continuing to share knowledge, skills and learning.

2. Work together differently to approach local challenges?
To respond to communities' needs, it's important to consider the whole experience of living and working in the north mainland. There is opportunity to test out new ways of how services and organisations can work together to approach challenges in a way that responds to the complex and interlinked needs of the area.

3. Grow well together towards a sustainable future?
There is a challenge in the north mainland to retain and build on what people love about their place, while also responding to new and changing needs. Through regular community engagement and collaboration with services, there is opportunity to further explore and test out with communities what growing well looks like for them, and to enable people to shape this future themselves.
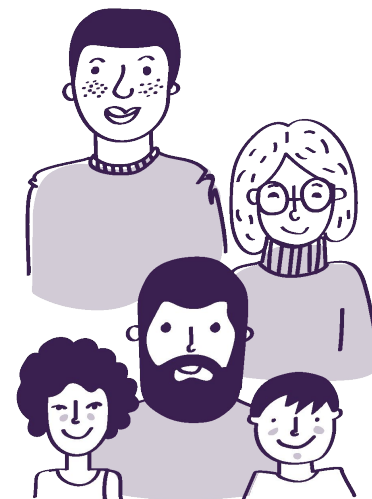
Approaching these questions

The questions that emerge from this engagement can't be answered by just one person, or organisation, and require working together across the community.

At the heart of a place-based approach is the voice of communities. An important part of creating the outcomes that matter to local communities is creating spaces for meaningful conversations to happen locally.
By building a **rhythm of engagement around identity and change in a the north mainland**, and supporting people closest to the issues to be part of this, places become better equipped to build on what works, and find new solutions together.

There is opportunity to build on the engagement to date from 'Nort Natters', and draw from the feedback on the process.

What did we learn from the process about engagement in north mainland?

→ Overall, there was **positive feedback** on this approach. Young people in particular engaged very well in 'Nort Natters' – but they also told us they wouldn't know where to start or what they could do to help. This suggests that there's an **opportunity to support people**, and especially young people, **to take part** in their communities in ways that work for them.

→ At the same time, it is important for leaders, services and organisations to **build trust and confidence with communities in engagement efforts.** It's important for communities to see how their voices are being heard, and how their views shape outcomes in their community. Stories and perspectives that we heard during Nort Natters suggest that it's difficult for people to trust or engage if they don't see **timely action.**

What could this look like in practice?

During 'Nort Natters' we began to hear ideas for new initiatives or ways of working that would begin to address the challenges and priorities that matter to people locally.

"There are many people that will help others but people need direction and someone to lead."

"A community housing association for the north mainland."

"I think it was good, but not sure how I can make a difference and because of the location of Shetland I'm not convinced much will change. Prove us wrong!"

"Someone to listen to what is in this questionnaire. We have been highlighting the lack of transport links [...] for at least 25 years"

"Avoid cliques - everyone should have their say"
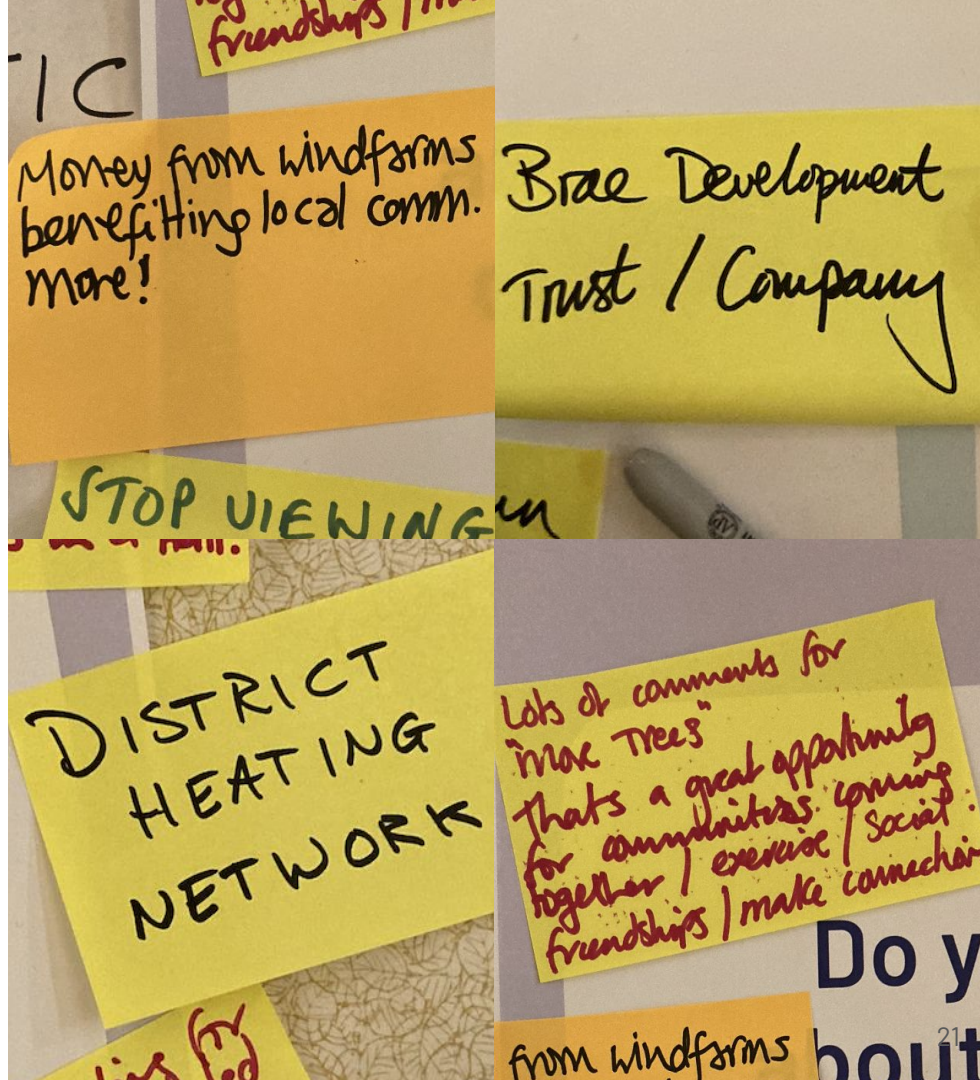
In more detail: what did we hear?

Hearing from communities who live, work and study in Shetland's north mainland to shape a long-term future vision for their area.

Retention

→ Identity and community

→ Natural environment

→ Housing

Identity & community

People value the great community spirit, sense of peacefulness, and safety in the area.

> "Best thing about Nort is that folks look out for each other"

What did we hear from people in the north mainland?

Generally, people had positive things to say about the community spirit and way of life in the north mainland. Overall there was a **strong feeling that the north mainland was a safe place to live**, where people are not concerned about crime and enjoy bringing up children.

At the same time, the impact of living in a remote, sparsely populated area brings particular benefits and challenges, as has been noted in previous reviews. On the one hand, we heard that small, local communities meant good **social connections**, a supportive atmosphere and a sense that 'everyone knows everyone'. On the other hand, the highly rural nature of the north mainland presents challenges around **isolation** and loneliness, suggesting variability in people's experiences. This risk of isolation can be compounded for people who are less digitally connected.

While there are distinct and variable hyper-local communities across the north mainland, several people said that their local areas lacked a **social hub**, or had suffered from local closures that had impacted the feel of their area. There was a feeling that people needed support, more amenities and better transport in order to stay in the north mainland and avoid gravitating to Lerwick for shopping, socialising, and housing.

Although many people said they felt safe in the north mainland, we did hear many requests, especially from teenagers, for better **street lighting**. A previous report highlighted that improving young people's influence and sense of Control for young people was a priority.

Natural environment

There is huge love and appreciation for Shetland's unique natural environment, and concern for its future

"Open spaces and the peace and quiet. It helps with mental health and wellbeing."

What did we hear from people in the north mainland?

Shetland's **unique** and **rugged natural environment** was mentioned repeatedly as one of the best things about living in the north mainland, both by people who have lived here all their lives, and those who have moved here to enjoy it.

The beaches, coastal walks, open spaces, scenery and wildlife (especially the puffins!) were all mentioned again and again by people of all ages. The opportunity to spend time with loved ones in nature was an important aspect of life here for many people we spoke to, as were the mental health and **wellbeing benefits** of such unique access to nature.

At the same time, there were some concerns about **environmental** or aesthetic **damage**. There were worries about litter and plastics, especially on beaches. Others were concerned about the effects of **light pollution**, including from the energy industries, on the wildlife of the north mainland.

Many people, particularly school children, told us that they would love to see more trees on Shetland, and we heard some suggestions around tree planting and **edible forests**. Others told us they would like to see more polytunnels, and suggested more skill-sharing around **food growing**.

Housing

There's concern around the availability of affordable housing, and how it is maintained

"(We need) more social/affordable housing, which would allow local young folk and incoming workers to settle here rather than moving to Lerwick"

What did we hear from people in the north mainland?

It was clear that housing is a major concern for many people in the north mainland, second only to concerns about getting around.

Many people told us that there's a lack of available **affordable** and **social housing** in the north mainland, describing this problem as "absolutely obvious". This includes housing for an **ageing population**, such as stair-free homes with fewer bedrooms. Some were concerned about the impact on **young people** moving away to Lerwick or further. This in turn has a knock-on effect on **workforce** in the area. Some noted that key workers, such as NHS and social care staff, are struggling to find places to live. This adds to other recent findings about the lack of appropriate housing in the north mainland.

The private rental market was described as 'non-existent' by one participant; and some attributed housing pressures partly to **second homes** and **AirBnBs**. Some said that more one- and two- bedroom homes were needed, while others described housing pressures on families.

We also heard many comments about current needs in Council-managed social housing. These concerns centred around two key topics: **maintenance** and **insulation**. Some told us that social housing was in **poor repair**, and that it was taking too long for problems such as plumbing issues to be fixed. Some also told us that Council homes were **poorly insulated**, such as drafty doors and windows, and that this was contributing to their worries around the current **cost-of-living crisis**.

"Shetland is absolutely desperate for **housing**, when there are NHS and social workers who can't find anywhere to live, there should be incentives for places like this [vacant building in Nesting] to be turned into housing"

"The **beaches**... I love collecting sea glass and shells with my family"

"Shetland is the most wonderful place to live in and to work in. We must value its uniqueness, its wildness and its beauty. Folk value it because of its **natural wonders** and want their representatives to value it too"

"It's a **safe place** for my daughter to grow up"

"It's a really **tight community**. No matter what time, someone will help"

"Council housing needs to be insulated properly, there is no point in putting heating on if there is no **proper insulation** on doors and windows"

What do you like about the place you live in?

Write or draw your answer below, and remember to write the drawing title & your name.

'I have a beach near my house'

What do you like about the place you live in?

Write or draw your answer below, and remember to write the drawing title & your name.

Home

What area do you live in? _voe_

Transition

→ Insulation and energy use

→ Getting around: public transport

→ Getting around: walking, wheeling, cycling and driving

Insulation and energy use

A lack of insulation and poor maintenance, especially in council homes, is heightening money worries.

"The cost of living crisis is having a huge impact on our lives"

What did we hear from people in the north mainland?

We heard repeatedly that people are worried about the cost of living crisis, which poses heightened challenges for people in the north mainland and wider Shetland. Children and teenagers we spoke to were also concerned about **energy use** and costs, reflecting the strain that **rising bills** are putting on households. With a recent report finding a high percentage of people in Shetland living in extreme fuel poverty, and the highest average electricity bills in Scotland, the cost of living crisis is particularly acute here.

In particular, we heard that Council homes in the north mainland are not well insulated. One person told us that doors and windows are **drafty**, making it expensive and wasteful to turn the heating on.

With SIC's 2021 Climate Change Survey finding that tackling fuel poverty was a priority area for communities across Shetland, this is emerging as a critical part of the response both to the cost-of-living crisis and to climate change. As well as insulation, community members suggested more **small-scale energy production**, such as domestic wind generators, to support people in Council-owned homes.

We heard mixed opinions about the **wind turbines**, with some celebrating their arrival and others worried they were ruining the landscape. However, as Shetland supports the energy industries in a unique way, some felt that energy bills for people living here should be lower.

Getting around: public transport

Living in rural areas, with infrequent and inflexible public transport options, is impacting people's lives and opportunities

"More buses, on Sundays and at night would really help."

What did we hear from people in the north mainland?

Issues getting around the north mainland and beyond repeatedly came up, with **travel** being one of the most-mentioned topics.

It was clear that an infrequent public transport **timetable**, and a lack of **safe routes** for walking and cycling, were impacting multiple areas of people's lives. For those who can't drive or don't have access to a car, limited bus timetables curtail access to social opportunities, health services, and after-school clubs. People in many local communities of the north mainland told us they need better ways of getting to **Brae**, to other **hubs** in the north mainland, and to **Lerwick**.

In particular, many said that that travel options on **Sundays**, as well as later into the **evenings**, would make a real difference for them.

The social and cultural impact of having no transport on Sundays was particularly apparent among **young people**, unable to drive and reliant on others to get around.

We also heard from many people that they would like to have better **connections** to more **rural areas** and **isles**, including Eshaness, Yell, Unst and Whalsay. People suggested tunnels, NorthLink ferry improvements, and that bus timetables could be better integrated with ferry sailings.

Transport issues have been identified as a challenge for years in previous consultations, and these voices suggest there is a need for a fresh approach to providing **flexible and sustainable transport solutions.**

Getting around: walking, wheeling, cycling and driving

Inflexible public transport options are compounded By a lack of safe routes for walking and cycling – and increasing worries about the cost of fuel

"Foot/cycle path from Hillswick shop to Valladale road is extremely dangerous for pedestrians and especially bairns to walk/cycle on"

What did we hear from people in the north mainland?

With limited public transport options and limited access to driving, there is a **significant appetite** for walking and cycling to be made easier for all.

We heard that the current infrastructure across the north mainland does not support people to **walk** and **cycle safely** between areas. People commented on feeling squeezed onto the sides of roads, and said that the lack of safe cycle routes was off-putting. Children and young people said that cars drove **too fast** in their areas and that this put them off. There was significant interest in **e-bikes**, but we heard that they're expensive to hire and not widely available. Some walkers wanted to see better **signposted routes**.

We also heard that there was a need for greater consideration of, and design for, people with access needs. In particular, **boardwalks** in the right places would help **wheelchair users** get around more easily. Disabled access to a **beach** was one suggested improvement.

With the rising cost of living on everyone's minds, we also heard worries about **fuel costs** and how these will impact everyday life. Some people who have previously been able to run a car are now very concerned about the cost of continuing to do so. Some drivers also want to see a more extensive **electric charging network**, so they can use an electric car with confidence.

"I thankfully have my driving license now, but growing up in a rural area with absolutely no bus service that ran through within 5 miles [..] was really hard. (For college) I had to **find someone to drive me** to a bus stop, to then catch a bus. This was not always possible as my parents both worked full time and odd hours.

Having a bus service that is somehow able to flex towards picking up people in the 'in-between' areas would be amazing[..]. I would love to see a **bus or taxi service for children and young people** [..], as parents and neighbors are not always there, especially with the need for work in this cost of living crisis."

"Public transport is a problem for getting my **children back from school**... (More buses) would be a major help to a lot of parents up north"

"There have been consultations about the bus service. It was held at the Voe hall in the evening - but **there were no buses** for the users to get there and back!!"

"Add **electric bikes**, widely available for the older generation that loves to bike but there are too many hills"

"**Slow down**... Someone was telling me that they couldn't cycle to school because the cars weren't careful and they were scared to do it in the rain"

"I would love **disabled access** to a beach"

34

What do you think would make the place you live in better?
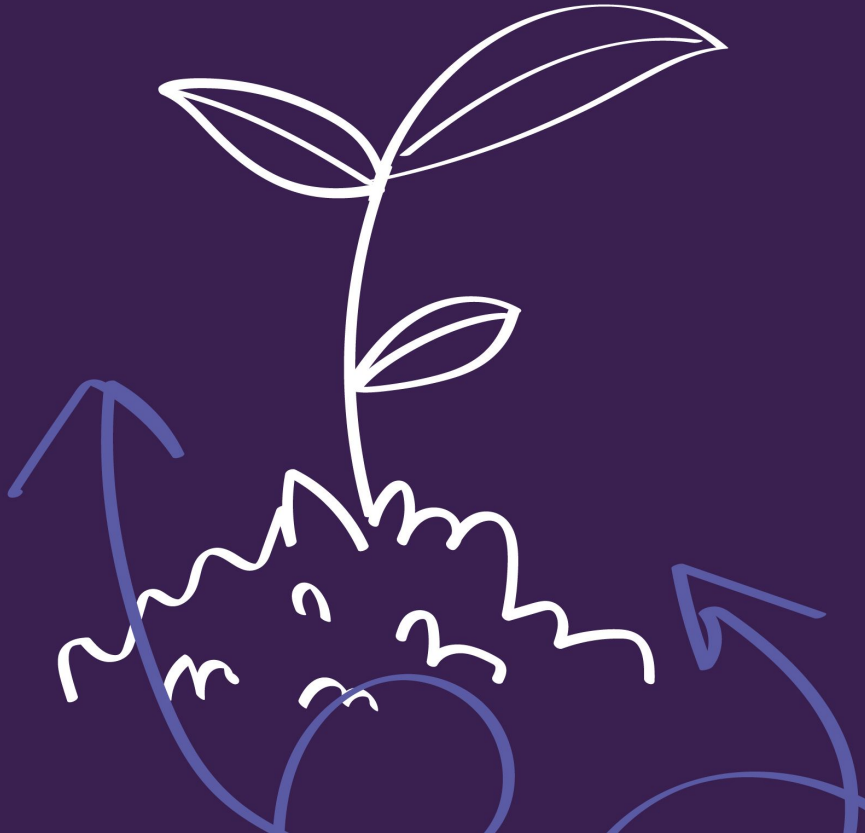
Write or draw your answer below, and remember to write the drawing title & your name.

TOO MUCH FOSSIL FUEL.
GET RID O' IT.

What area do you live in? VOE

Growth

→ Education, schools and opportunities

→ Digital connectivity

→ Wellbeing economy

Education, schools and opportunities

Generally, education and schools are good, but there are challenges related to space, capacity, and transport

"The bus timetable was changed a few years ago, so there is now no school bus for Mossbank Primary school. I've seen my husband do 5 runs to and from the school to take home bairns who would otherwise have to walk home in the wind and rain."

What did we hear from people in the north mainland?

People also said that they would like more **after-school activities**, with some people noting that good programmes have been closed.

There was also strong interest in more economic opportunities and **clearer career paths** to encourage young people to stay in the area, and reduce dependence on agency workers in the future. Some felt this could begin at school, e.g. through **work experience placements**, **apprenticeships**, and more **practical vocational classes** in schools.

Some parents shared with us the particular importance of improving **childcare** provision across the north mainland, which would open more **job opportunities** for parents.
This may intersect with previous findings about the gender employment gap in Shetland.

Generally, stakeholders felt that the schools were good, and that young people were happy and safe at schools. However, people also told us about the need for more **capacity** and bigger schools. This was shared by a range of people, including young people who would like more space and smaller classes.

People's experience of schools, education and other amenities are highly dependent on transport links and their location - many people wished for better **bus services** to help with school pick-up and ease pressures on parents.

Young people shared some improvements that they would like to see in their schools, particularly around improving **catering**, and **facilities**, such as the Brae football pitch**.**

Digital connectivity

People feel that the north mainland is 'lagging behind' when it comes to digital connectivity, which is hampering people's opportunities.

"[We need] better mobile phone coverage - huge problem"

What did we hear from people in the north mainland?

We heard from many people that the north mainland needed better mobile phone coverage, broadband and digital connectivity in general. This was apparent across both young people and adults, particularly those living in more rural areas. We heard from young people about the importance of comfortable places they could go to **work and study together**, including places with Wi-Fi such as a **cafe** or **library**.

Several people commented that the lack of reliable, fast internet was hampering their economic, social or creative opportunities. This illustrates the **human impact** of limited connectivity in Shetland, which has previously been found to be **significantly below** UK and Scottish averages.

Some people suggested that Shetland Islands Council and other organisations with caring responsibilities might be able to deliver their services more effectively if they made better use of digital technologies and improved connectivity.

At the same time, there was concern throughout this engagement that relying on digital means of communication would **exclude** some people, especially elderly people, multiplying their risk of becoming **isolated**.

Wellbeing economy

While people recognise local provision includes some great local shops, people want more options for cheaper produce, increased amenities and local job opportunities.

"Better prices within the shops - it is significantly more expensive in Brae than in Lerwick for groceries and fuel. This was apparent even before the cost of living crisis."

What did we hear from people in the north mainland?

Local provision and amenities are an important part of people's experience of the north mainland. People recognised that provision locally is better than in other rural places, and shared examples of several **great local shops**. However, we also heard about the need for more access to **cheaper produce** and amenities, as well as more local **job opportunities**, especially for young people.

While young people told us about some of their favourite takeaways and shops, they also told us a lot about the sort of highstreet they'd like to see. They would like more options for cheaper convenience food and clothes, especially familiar chains and high-street stores, as well as **cafes** for working and socialising in. More free **water fountains** was one specific ask.

Access to cheaper local shops was important to many groups, with lots of people travelling to Lerwick for cheaper shopping. People wished there were more local **community shops**, which could provide socialising and employment opportunities, as well as independence for people who rely on others for grocery shopping. Some people shared innovative ways to improve provision, such as a **mobile 'bus shop'** that delivers food, more **second hand** shops and **scapstores**, and food-growing schemes.

Other provision like buses and more childcare options were also important interconnected themes to support communities and the local economy. The lack of **childcare** impacts people's access to job opportunities, and was seen as a priority for many parents.

"I would love it if school buildings were **open after school** hours for adult learning and computer access"

"There are many people that will help others but people need direction and someone to lead. Often I shop for 3/4 families from Brae or Lerwick. A good **local shop** will give some people more independence and provide some more community socialising."

"My children are **safer to go out and play**, up north we have more of a community spirit. Living in Brae means my work is a small walk away my children go to Mossbank school so I'm also close enough to get them if I need too, the public transport is a problem for getting my children back from school so I do **rely on lifts.** If the 3.15 bus back from Mossbank was still available I would be a major help to a lot of parents up north"

"**Childcare for under 2s** (would really make a difference). Work opportunities are so hampered by no childcare. SIC would in my view make a good profit and solve a lot of its workforce challenges [..] Until something is done about the childcare crisis families cannot work themselves out of financial difficulty, because they cannot work."

"We had a perfectly accessible **Out of School club** which was used by many parents and working families. [..] this facility was **closed down** leaving working families without sufficient childcare. We were then informed that a similar facility would be offered in Brae! Why close down one fully attended group to open the same thing 8 miles away. "

What do you think would make the place you live in better?

Write or draw your answer below, and remember to write the drawing title & your name.

more shops

Drawing by a young person in Brae Primary school.

Living well

→ Social and cultural life

→ Health and social care

Social and cultural life

There are much-loved leisure opportunities and people want more, with improved transport to make the most of existing opportunities.

"I have heard of exercise classes that I would love to be able to attend if they were closer to home"

What did we hear from people in the north mainland?

We heard about many **much-loved leisure** and **cultural activities** in the north mainland, from children's soft play, to Ability Shetland clubs, the Halloween disco, Up Helly Aa, and more. At the same time, there was noticeable enthusiasm for a greater range of things to do, and better connectivity to ensure people, including children, teenagers and the elderly, can make the most of opportunities.

We heard a huge number of **imaginative ideas** for activities across sports, music, arts and culture. There was significant enthusiasm for new facilities such as a **skate park** (this was very popular) and a **trampoline** club. Both adults and children wanted to see upgraded **play equipment**, and more activities for **families** in general.

Young people and adults told us that they'd like more opportunities to socialise. Improved transport options were an important factor in their social lives, such as being able to get to Lerwick and back in the evenings for drinks or nights out. Some felt that parts of the north mainland lacked a **social hub** - but, at the same time, people acknowledged that some community halls were underused.

A number of adults said that greater availability of **indoor exercise** opportunities would benefit them. Specific suggestions included yoga and pilates classes. A number of people wanted more **out-of-school learning** opportunities and **skill-sharing** schemes, such as shared food growing.

Health and social care

We heard positive comments about the services available in Brae, as well as concerns about availability, staff turnover and distance.

"A more permanent GP… and a NHS dentist in the north or another one in Lerwick, as the current one isn't enough"

What did we hear from people in the north mainland?

We heard **positive views** about health and social care services in the area, including health centres and the North Haven care centre in Hillswick and Brae. At the same time, we heard some concerns that concentrating services on Brae or even Lerwick led to **access issues** for people in other areas of the north mainland.
Some suggested that services could be more **mobile**, or that **transport options** could be better integrated to support access to health services.

Given the rural and spread-out nature of the north mainland, people talked about the risk of **isolation**, particularly for older residents.

Older residents with access to opportunities that combined **socialising alongside care** - at North Haven Care Centre, for example - greatly valued this.

There was a desire for greater **permanence** of **healthcare practitioners**, with some concerns that GP services were dominated by locum doctors. A number of young people told us that they would like to have more access to **orthodontic treatment**, and an additional **dentist** in the north mainland was suggested.

"I've seen the loss of the old school centre that was a great **youth club** for [..] children, the youth club only runs once a month now in the hall. We had a great leisure centre that is also closed, family centre, also closed, child care service, also closed. Sad to see **so much loss** in the community."

"**Somewhere to eat and drink** in the north mainland... would be a great thing for Shetlanders all year"

"More workshops locally - **sharing skills** such as agriculture and resources - vegetable plots..."

"A **polytunnel** like in school but for everyone to grow stuff"

"**Not much to do** for older teens or young adults other than pub or sport, especially relying on public transport"

"**Locum doctors** are causing real issue with appointments / test results / referrals not being chased up, standard of care has gone down"

"**Dial-a-ride transport** for doctor's appointments would help"

What do you like about the place you live in?

Write or draw your answer below, and remember to write the drawing title & your name.

FootBoll

My House

SWimming Pool

School

Drawing by a young person in Brae Primary school.

TheHub32659
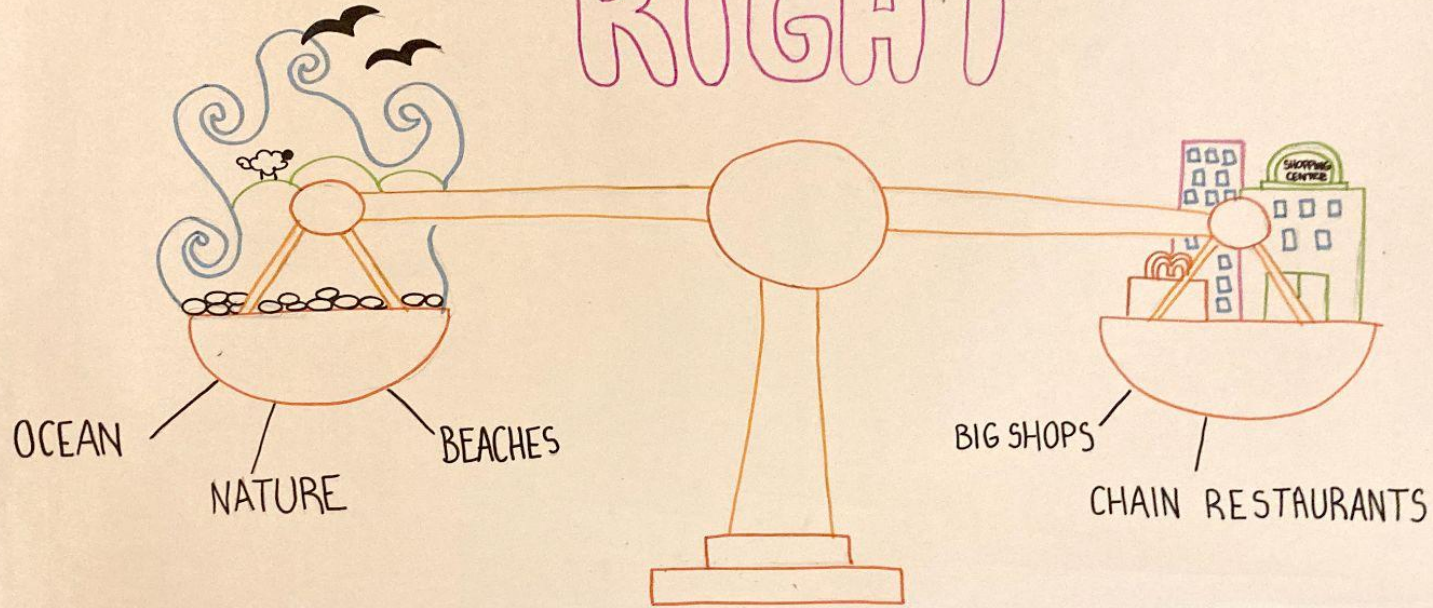
New football pitch
in Brae
We want more
sports in brae

A young person from the north mainland using Minecraft to share
their views on what could make the place they live in better.

GET THE BALACE RIGHT

OCEAN

NATURE

BEACHES

BIG SHOPS

CHAIN RESTAURANTS

Its important to get the balance right between improving Shetland through big shops and big chain restaurants ect whilst keeping the beauty and peacefulness of our surroundings alive!

Appendix: our engagement methods

Find out more about our approach to co-designing this community engagement effort, co-created Design Principles and more detail on how people participated

Our approach to co-design

Co-design means that we brought together people, groups and organisations across the north mainland to take and shared ownership of the Nort Natters community engagement approach. This was shaped by bringing together multiple groups and organisations across the public sector, community groups and development companies, voluntary sector and local people.

This enabled us to:

→ Create a **shared vision** and **design principles** for this work, informed by a wide range of organisations and perspectives

→ Reach **collective agreement** around questions we need to answer, e.g. geographical focus

→ **Refine** our **approach** together to develop a community engagement plan that works for people locally

→ Understand together what **role** local communities want to play alongside statutory organisations

To understand what people who live, work and study in the north mainland want and need, now and in the future, we collectively agreed to ask **three key questions** . These formed the basis of the Nort Natters engagement:

→ **What do you like** about living or working in the north mainland?

→ **What changes would make a difference** for you and your loved ones?

→ **What would help** these changes happen, and what could you do?

The next pages outline how we asked these three questions, who we heard from and how people found this process.

Design Principles for Nort Natters

As part of the co-design process, a set of design principles were developed to guide us as a group.

Representation

Doing everything we can to reach a **diverse** and genuinely **representative** sample of the community, including people with protected characteristics

Clarity

About **what** we're asking, and **why**

About the **geographical focus**, and using the right words

Using **plain English** and de-jargoning

Asking simple questions people can **easily answer**

Being **transparent:** managing expectations and being honest
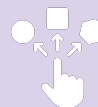
Variety

Giving people **options** to participate in a range of **ways that work for them**, e.g. digital, in-person, using public computers, a range of in-person events and considering students and others who are living away

Efficiency

Agreeing a shared focus on **what** we want to know and **why**

Joining the dots with **existing** work that's happening in and around the area

Using the **same questions** across all engagement activities, so we can manage data

How did people participate, and how many people took part?

Informed by our co-design approach, we provided multiple ways for people to take part. This helped us reach different groups and made sure no one was excluded by the way we had designed 'Nort Natters'.

→ 435 people participated through **in-person sessions** at Brae and Mossbank schools; North Haven care centre; Brae Fire Station; the Community Development Company of Nesting; Northmavine Community Development Company; at a Community Sports Hub fayre at Brae Games Hall; and other community group meetings.

→ 20 people participated through **a conversation toolkit** to enable locally-facilitated conversations held by different organisations across health, care and community groups

→ 32 young people participated through a **Minecraft** event for children and young people to express their ideas through Minecraft

→ 67 people participated through **an online survey**
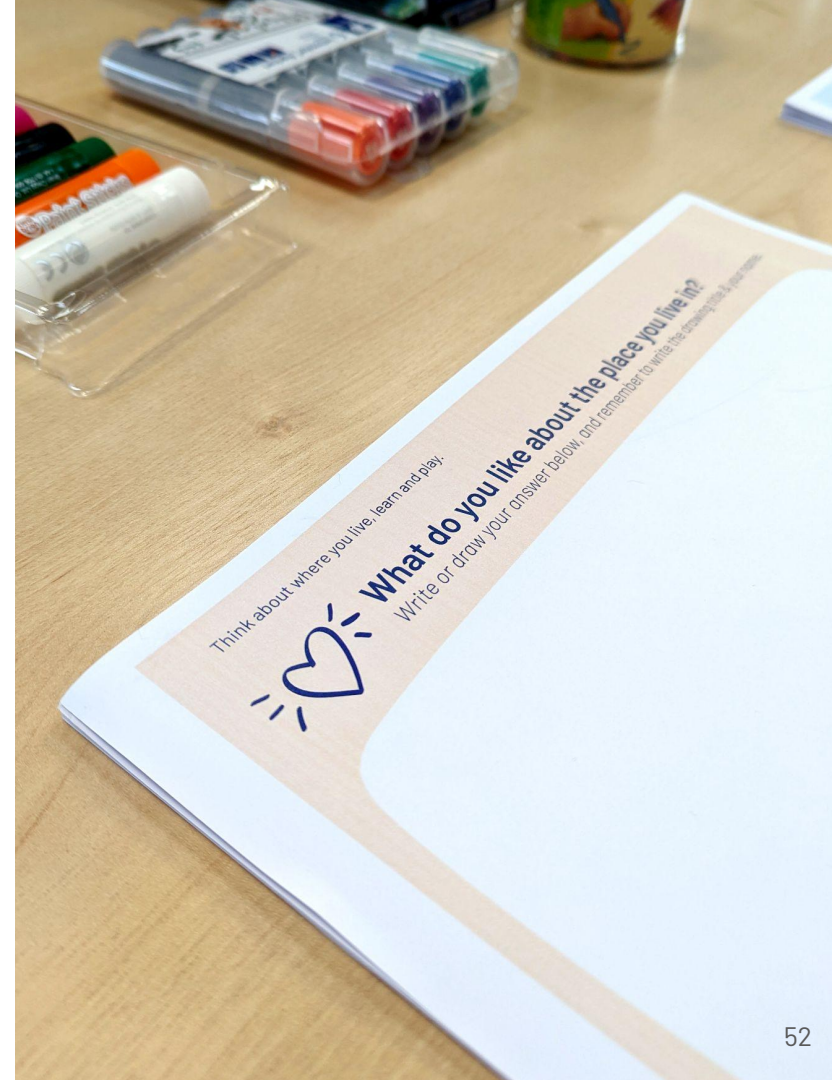
References to previous reviews & consultations in this report

Identity & Community
- SIC, ZetTrans, NHS Shetland, 'Shetland Place Standard Report' (2017)
- NHS Shetland, Population Health in Shetland and its Determinants (2018)

Housing
- SIC, Main Issues Report (2022)
- Audit Scotland, Best Value Assurance Report: Shetland Islands Council (2022)

Insulation and energy use
- Audit Scotland, Best Value Assurance Report: Shetland Islands Council (2022)
- SIC, Shetland Climate Change Survey (2021)

Transport
- SIC, ZetTrans, NHS Shetland, 'Shetland Place Standard Report' (2017)
- SIC, Main Issues Report (2022)
- SIC, Shetland Physical Activity Consultation (Adults) (2021)

Education, schools and opportunities
- SIC, Place Based Review (2022)
- HIE, Occupational Segregation in Shetland (2017)

Digital connectivity
- SIC, Our Ambition – 2021-26 (2021)

Get in touch with any questions about this work

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