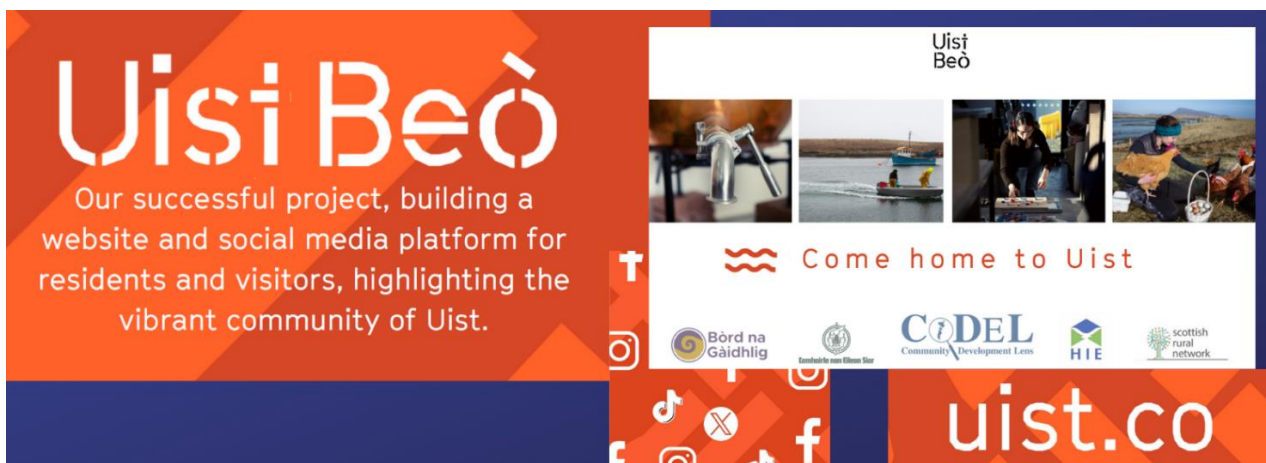


CASESTUDY: COME HOME TO UIST: VIBRANT AND DYNAMIC ISLAND LIFE

KEY INSIGHTS

- ✓ Uist Beò (Uist Life) is a digital platform that seeks to support repopulation in Uist, by sharing stories of young entrepreneurs, workers and families, the many job opportunities, events and other information. It is targeted primarily at informing local people, and encouraging young people and families to return or settle. It works closely with CnES' Repopulation Zone for Uist, funded by the Scottish Government.
- ✓ Websites, social media and marketing targeted at tourist audiences often do not serve island and rural communities well. Most portray so-called remote areas as empty wilderness with communities lost in the mists of time, as places to escape to, rather than as great places to live and work, as vibrant communities that can attract young people and families to return or settle.
- ✓ Uist Beò seeks to present an authentic perspective on local island life, including the dynamism, ingenuity and resilience of local communities and people, the many local assets, strengths and knowledge they can draw on, not just the obvious challenges like transport.
- ✓ Uist Beò is deeply committed to local Gàidhlig language and culture, featuring it prominently including in Gàidhlig only messaging. The platform has deliberately chosen an approach that does not provide parallel translations in Gàidhlig and English, but uses both languages separately and mixed together, reflecting the actual use of language in Uist communities.
- ✓ The narrative in Uist has for long been that there are no jobs, so that any economic development is justified by the need for more jobs. The Uist Beò platform, which features new jobs every week, has demonstrated that the challenge is not so much jobs, but recruiting to fill the many job opportunities available, with public sector employers like health and education, and with local businesses and community organisations.
- ✓ The lack of decent affordable housing is a key constraint in recruiting for jobs. This is a challenge demanding diverse strategies. One critical element is for digital media not to position so-called remote communities as attractive places to retire, whereby houses get bought up by cash-rich buyers who are retiring.



Uist Beò
Our successful project, building a website and social media platform for residents and visitors, highlighting the vibrant community of Uist.

Uist Beò

Come home to Uist

Bòrd na Gàidhlig | CODEL Community Development Lens | HIE | Scottish Rural Network

uist.co

CASESTUDY

The first ideas for a digital platform to reflect island life in Uist emerged in on-line sessions with younger islanders during Covid lockdowns. Initially it was a response to the Scottish Government opening up the islands for tourism after lockdown, with younger islanders wanting to position Uist differently for potential tourists and visitors. As the ideas crystallised, including during feasibility work, the priority quickly shifted to a focus on local island communities, as well as the Hebridean diaspora and others who might want to return or settle in Uist.

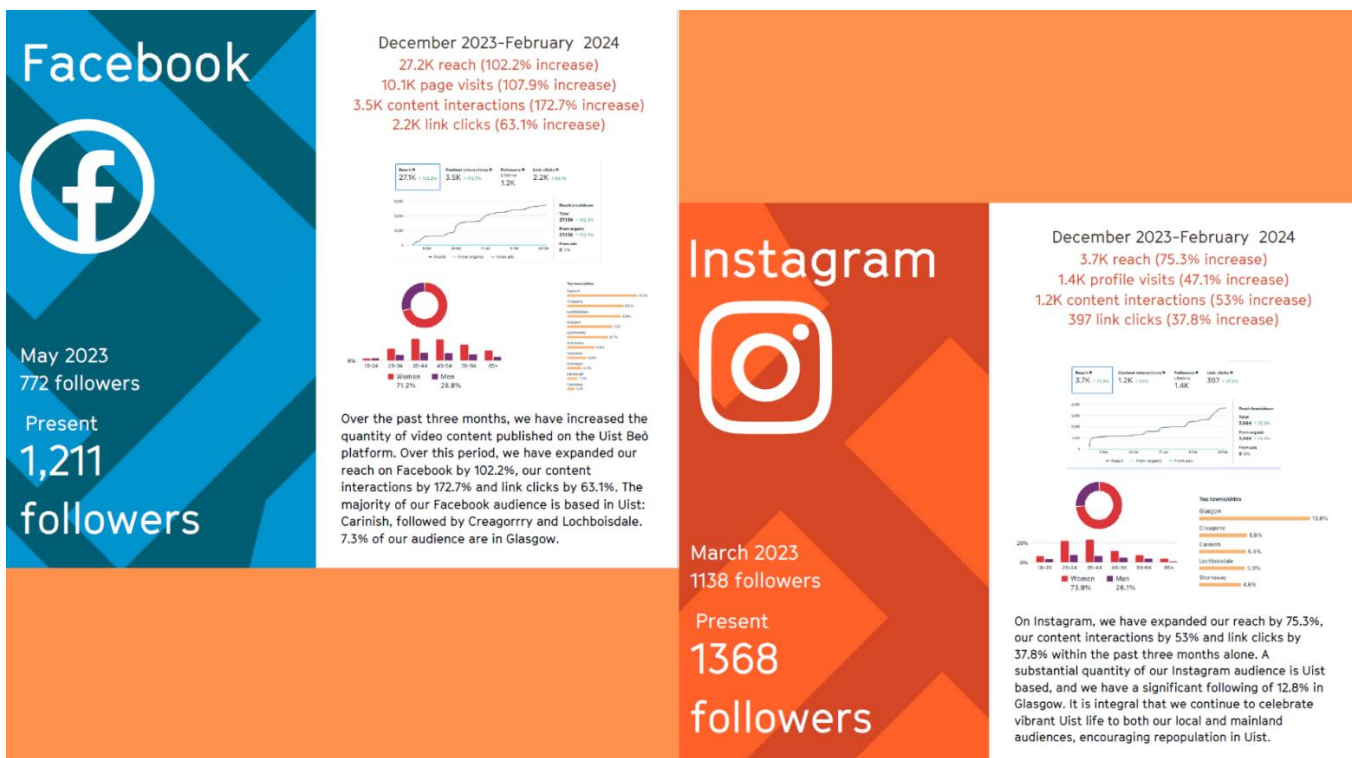
The purpose of the digital platform is to share, with islanders themselves more than visitors, the vibrancy and dynamism of island life in Uist, reflecting the experience of local people, especially young people; to demonstrate that the islands are a great place to live and work; and to attract young people and families to return, settle or stay in the islands. The Uist Beò platform is delivered by islanders in their 20s and 30s, with a website (www.uist.co) and social media on facebook, instagram, tiktok and X.

The original objectives of Uist Beò

“Connecting Uist residents of all ages, a portal/lens for common threads and interests, highlighting small and community businesses, resources, cultural experiences, places and activities.

Inviting visitors to take a slow, sustainable journey throughout Uist thereby supporting individuals and organisations which retain our rich culture, natural and carefully managed environment and strong community that makes Uist an unrivalled place to live, work, experience and explore.”

The platform was fully launched in March 2023, and continues to grow as the images reflecting the reach of the platform between December 2023 and February 2024 illustrate.



IMPACTS OF UIST BEÒ

The Uist Beò website and social media deliver a wide range of content and messages, including stories, events, job opportunities and practical information. Island maps of different activities, for example at Christmas or during school holidays have been welcomed and widely shared. The most popular aspects of the platform, that receive the most likes and views, are the stories and the job postings each Wednesday (Working Wednesdays).

The stories inspire and inform. They are based on interviews of workers, entrepreneurs and community groups, and crafted by the longest standing member of the Uist Beò team, a fluent native Gàidhlig speaker. These stories are critical in giving a feel for the place and the opportunities it provides, based on the experience of young people in particular. This is of value to people already living in the islands, and to those considering returning or moving here. In 2023 the Uist Repopulation Zone supported or knew about 23 families that settled in Uist,

“As a business owner, Uist Beò has provided me with valuable opportunity to promote my Business, Island Dreams, not only to highlight the work that I do but to attract new customers. I was very fortunate to feature in one of their stories which enabled my business to reach audiences that I may not have been able to reach otherwise. What's more, my own story of how Island Dreams evolved has gone on to inspire many other young islanders to pursue their own dreams and aspirations of setting up a new business. I am incredibly grateful for the support Uist Beò has given my business and I thoroughly enjoy reading about other people's stories.”

Sharon MacRury

Local accommodation providers also share Uist Beò with their guests, to give them an authentic insight into the place they are visiting that is rooted in local community experience and perspectives. Visitors are attracted by the authenticity of the stories and the deeper insight they provide into local life, services, events and opportunities. Some are also inspired to consider moving to the islands as a great place to live and work.

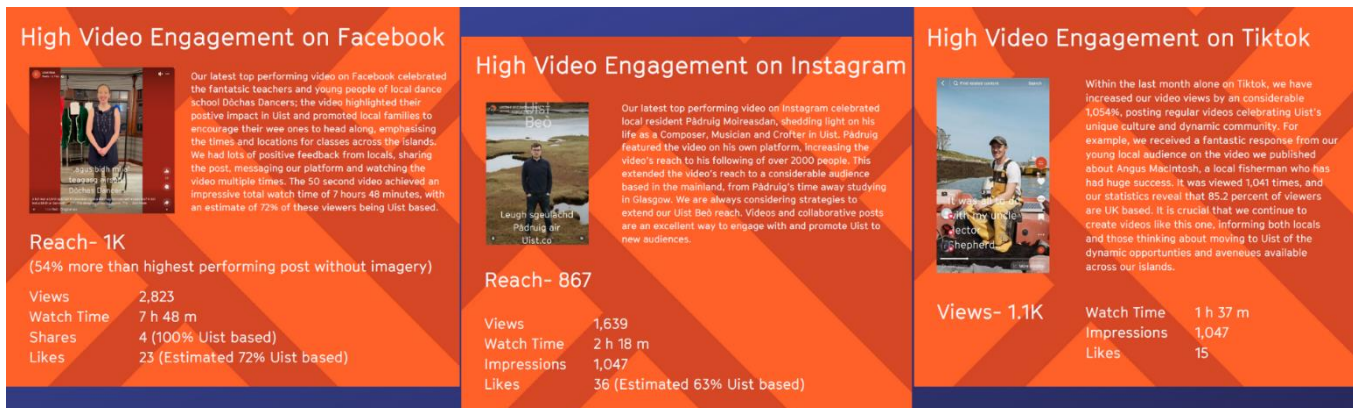
“It's just great to have a balance to show, particularly when guests show an interest, or are completely bemused / confused about what life must be like here. It gets great feedback. Couple examples - one couple mid 30's who put their house on the market after staying with us for 10 days in December (!!!) and two A&E Dr's from London who were inquisitive about island life to see if they had one last 'adventure' in them before they retired. I can't imagine more of a contrast in work! Plenty others but the platform has definitely earned its place in my mind.”

Business Owner, Uist Forest Retreat

Recruiting for vacant jobs is more of a challenge within Uist than generating more jobs. Since the beginning of 2024 Uist Beò has been adding 20 to 30 new jobs every week on its Working Wednesday. This means that during any one week, Uist Beò is listing up to 50 job opportunities. Feedback from within the community suggests young people are looking at the available jobs every week. Uist Beò has collaborated with specific employers to address specific recruitment gaps. For example, the platform has delivered high quality photography and stories to support the recruitment of desperately needed careworkers for the local charitable care provider, Tagsa Uibhist.

“What an unbelievable response I've had for the vacancies we advertised with you! All positions have been filled so I would be grateful if you could remove the advert from circulation. I have another position become vacant so I will email you that on Monday. Thank you so much for your support & help.”

Large local employer in Uist



Key ingredients for the successful development of the platform have been:

- ✓ How rooted it is within island communities in Uist, managed by a small local social enterprise and delivered by dynamic young islanders, which has given the platform a creative edge rather than just sharing information. Extensive deliberation amongst all those involved about the purposes and positioning of the platform continues in weekly team meetings, continually building a cohesive vision and ethos for the platform. This includes the deep commitment to Gàidhlig, with fluent Gàidhlig speakers as well as committed learners within the team.
- ✓ High quality branding and design inputs from a digital agency, Friendhood, who spent significant time in coming to understand the local community, and what those driving the innovative platform wanted, and designing both the brand and the platform accordingly.
- ✓ Well paid positions that attracted high quality applications from local young people. And the expertise and passion of these young people in delivering a dynamic and vibrant platform, from the initial feasibility study (that very quickly attracted over 300 responses from within the community and local businesses) through to the current daily delivery of the platform.
- ✓ High quality imagery by professional photographers and illustrators within the team, and high quality videos and posts on a range of platforms, especially facebook, Instagram and tiktok.
- ✓ A close partnership with the local Settlement Officers for the Uist Repopulation Zone. When the Zone was established the Local Authority CnES decided to run with Uist Beò as their digital platform. The Settlement Officers have attended the weekly team meetings, have requested that Uist Beò include specific topics and information on the website, and made many positive suggestions and contributions.

DELIVERING ON SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

The Uist Beò platform delivers on many Scottish Government Priorities, first and foremost around depopulation, but also directly on many other priorities, for example within the **National Performance Standards**, such as on communities that “are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe”: “We live in friendly, vibrant and cohesive communities which value diversity and support those in need.”

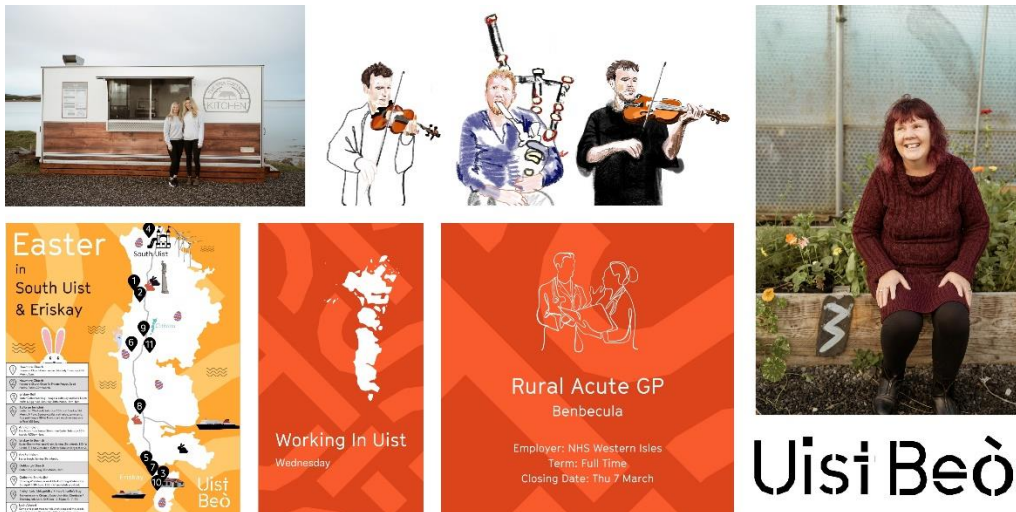
Uist Beò is a flexible platform that can respond to community needs. For example, the platform posted information to help during the cost-of-living crisis when that hit so badly. The platform has supported recruitment initiatives around key shortages within the community, for example of care workers.

The **Addressing Depopulation Action Plan (2024)** “endorses the importance of local leadership and seeks to exemplify the maxim ‘local by default, national by agreement’. We know that a place-based approach to applying national, regional, and local policies will be essential to sustainably and effectively address depopulation.”

Uist Beò is directly delivering a local place-based approach, building community confidence through sharing inspiration and information. By shining a light on local assets and strengths, especially people and culture, local entrepreneurialism and resilience, the platform contributes to policies like **Community Wealth Building** that “seeks to transform our local and regional economic systems to enable more local communities and people to own, have a stake in, access and benefit from the wealth our economy generates.”

The platform’s most important objective is to inspire young people and families to return, settle or stay in Uist. This focus on younger islanders, and the delivery of the platform by younger islanders themselves, is helping to empower a new more confident generation of Uibhistich.

CoDeL would like to thank Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Rural Network for their financial support for Uist Beò.



LINKS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

- Uist Beò website: <https://uist.co/>
- Uist Beò on facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/UistBeo>
- Uist Beò on tiktok: <https://www.tiktok.com/@uistbeo>
- CoDeL: <http://codel.scot/>
- Uist Beò on instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/uistbeo/>
- Uist Beò on X: <https://twitter.com/UistBeo>
- Tagsa Uibhist: <https://www.tagsa.co.uk/>
- Scottish Government’s Action Plan to address Depopulation: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/supporting-enabling-sustainable-communities-action-plan-address-depopulation/>

