

Mentoring support for island communities

What is the Island Communities Place Programme?

The [Island Communities Place Programme](#) is a training and capacity building programme providing placemaking and planning support for island communities. Free mentoring support is available as part of the programme, alongside webinars, resources and a peer support network.¹

What is mentoring?

Rather than a single piece of advice, mentoring is a working relationship. It is about your needs and how you would like to be supported.

Your community will be matched with a planner or placemaking professional from our network of volunteers. Your mentor will provide ongoing, one-to-one support with regular checkups as your project develops.

Who would benefit from mentoring?

Mentoring is open to any island community group working on placemaking or planning. You could be an established community council, a development trust, or an informal group coming together for the first time.

You do not need any prior knowledge of the planning system to take part.

Common queries about mentoring

- ***"We don't know what we'd actually get."***

Mentoring is shaped around your group, not a fixed package.

- ***"We don't have time for another commitment."***

Sessions are built around your group's needs. We may be able to help move forward your current commitments.

- ***"We're not sure we need a planner."***

We can help with engagement and planning technicalities. This can be beneficial if you want to validate your Local Place Plan.

✓ How does mentoring work?

- A volunteer mentor will be matched with your community
- They will provide regular (usually monthly) support sessions to suit your group
- They will give practical help to progress a Community Action Plan or Local Place Plan from first steps through to a finished document
- They will provide support on digital tools such as mapping, surveys and data analysis
- They will provide guidance on how to engage with your community, understand planning processes and connect local priorities to policy

✗ What mentoring is not:

- We do not write a plan for you – the mentor supports and advises while the community group leads and decides
- It is not a one-off session – it is an ongoing relationship that continues for as long as it is useful to your project
- It is not only for groups starting from scratch – communities with existing plans or experience can also benefit

¹The programme is funded by Scottish Government through the National Islands Plan and runs until April 2027. We are looking for additional funding to continue support in 2027/2028.

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Case study: Local Place Plans in Shetland

Shetland shows what the mentoring offer looks like in practice, and what it can achieve for an island community.

Background

Shetland Islands Council appointed Planning Aid Scotland to deliver a Local Place Plan Capacity Building Programme, funded through the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund.

The programme began in September 2024 with a series of launch events, followed by a mix of training, mentoring and peer learning sessions.

25 community groups expressed an interest in finding out more about Local Place Plans. 15 communities took on the mentoring offer. They plan on publishing their Local Place Plans by the end of 2026 and are currently working on their public notices.

Mentoring in practice

By September 2026, mentoring sessions had been delivered to groups across Shetland. Alongside training and in-person visits, these sessions supported groups at every stage of their journey.

Some groups needed more support than others due to resources available:

1. **Fetlar** is a small island with a population of just 61 people. They were supported to carry out community engagement through a paper and online survey which was coordinated by the local shopkeeper. The survey and resulting comments formed proposals for housing, reuse of buildings, infrastructure around the possible tunnel, renewable energy sites and active travel routes.
2. **North Yell** Development Council is a well-established organisation that owns land and develops community housing. They needed less support and built on previous community-led plan experience. We supported them in planning a second phase of engagement on a proposed substation. The proposal indicated that up to 100 new homes may be needed in the area.

What it meant for communities

For many groups, this was their first time engaging directly with the planning system to prepare a plan of their own.

Mentoring gave them a consistent point of contact to turn early ideas into a Local Place Plan, while keeping the plan led by the community itself.

- *"I found it relevant since we are currently going through the [Local Place Plan] process."*
- *"[I enjoyed] speaking to others; the relaxed atmosphere and ability to ask questions without feeling stupid!"*

Why this matters for your community

The Shetland case study demonstrates that mentoring works for dispersed, island communities, not just densely populated areas.

A similar offer is now available to all island communities through the Island Communities Place Programme.

The offer includes mentoring support, training webinars and help with engagement, mapping and the planning system.

Get in touch to discuss how we can support you: anne@pas.org.uk