



# Report

## Black Isle Repair Café: from passion to reality

March 2025



### Introduction

[The Black Isle Repair Café](#) (BIRC) was born from the passion of a few local residents who were dedicated to the environment and community building. They aimed to reduce impact on the world through local action, by helping make items last longer, and highlighting the impact of waste and consumption on the environment. Additionally, they sought to share their repairing skills with the community and teach others, promoting sustainable living and establishing repairing as the norm.

To gain support and recruit more local people with additional repairing skills, they partnered with the **Black Isle Men's Shed (BIMS)** and **Transition Black Isle (TBI)**, who shared their vision and values. TBI, as a partner of the **Highland Community Waste Partnership (HCWP)**, were in place to support the idea through their focus on the [Share and Repair](#) strand of the programme. This partnership provided the resources needed to support the Repair Café initiative, helping it to form and thrive.

Additionally, the group visited the [Boat of Garten repair cafe in Cairngorms](#) to learn more about processes and managing a community-led repair cafe. This exchange of knowledge, experience, and connection further enhanced the group's understanding and motivation, enabling them to transition from an idea to an on-the-ground service. The collaboration between organisations, and learning exchange with other repair cafes, was crucial to the inception and success of the Black Isle Repair Café.

The Black Isle Repair Café was launched as part of the Highlands and Islands Climate Festival in June 2022.

### Development

#### Setting up a Steering Group

A Black Isle Repair Café steering group was formed, including founding members and representatives from **Black Isle Men's Shed (BIMS)** and **Transition Black Isle (TBI)**, as part of the **Highland Community Waste Partnership (HCWP)**.



BIMS members contributed their knowledge on repairing skills, and tools, and widened the repairing skills on offer. TBI acted as an umbrella group, providing crucial elements such as insurance and banking setup for donations received.

### **Building local networks and support**

In addition, the TBI HCWP Officers provided links to wider partnership organisations, learning resources, and promotion through the TBI and HCWP communication channels. They built strong relationships with local groups, networks, and membership bodies, and encouraged local participation by promoting the initiative at long-established community events on the Black Isle. Their efforts were key in gathering support, embedding the initiative within Black Isle communities, sharing knowledge with HCWP partners, and promoting the repair cafe across the Highlands.

### **Roaming Repair Cafe: the BIRC model**

To meet the needs of smaller communities across a larger rural area, the Black Isle Repair Cafe created an innovative roaming model, visiting different locations on a monthly basis. This approach allowed more rural communities to benefit from the repair cafe's services, spreading the word about the importance of repair over disposal and helping to make repair the norm.

This also increased accessibility for disadvantaged groups and those unable to travel, particularly given the lack of public transport, and also lessening the need for car travel, making cycling and walking more viable.

Using familiar, well-known village and community halls helped to appeal to locals by being close to their homes, helping to build back a sense of community after the COVID 19 pandemic. This also helped build good working relationships with local community groups and councils

The Black Isle Repair Cafe regularly visits North Kessock, Culbokie, Munloch, Avon, Fortrose, Cromarty and Muir of Ord.

## **How it works**

### **Volunteers**

Since the start of the BIRC, **50 active volunteers** have been recruited to support delivery of the repair cafes, as well as the 6 steering group volunteers who contribute to planning and securing future funding. **Each event is supported by 15-20 volunteers.**

The variety of skills required appealed to people wanting to get involved and volunteer and the TBI and HCWP channels and networks were ideal for spreading the word to engage passionate people. Beyond repairing skills, other roles were essential to run the repair cafe, such as welcoming and supporting customers, developing paperwork processes and a database to collect important impact data, and to provide a welcoming space and cafe area serving hot beverages and cake.

**Among our volunteers we've identified 133 skills across the areas outlined below:**

<b>Repair skills:</b>				
Electrical	Computers	Mobile Phones	Garden Tools	Sharpening
Other Tools	Bicycles	Mechanical	Toys	Woodwork
Furniture	Crockery	Sewing	Knitting	General Repairs
<b>Support skills:</b> Welcome, Triage, Café, Local promotion, Administration, Steering group				

The volunteer repair team also provides valuable advice on responsible recycling for items deemed beyond repair and directs individuals to local businesses capable of handling repairs that are beyond the scope of the BIRC.

**Volunteer evenings** were set up and held quarterly to celebrate and socialise, plan future initiatives, shape the direction forward, and actively listen to and incorporate volunteers' thoughts and opinions. Valuing and including volunteers in planning processes, has been crucial to the success of the Black Isle Repair Cafe.

Volunteers have reported social benefits from being involved, finding it a fun social event and gathering, enjoying **meeting up** with others and **passing on valuable repair skills**. They have found it rewarding to see customers learning skills and gaining joy from having sentimental items repaired and being able to use them again.

They have further reported finding a new **sense of purpose**; feeling they are part of a group of like-minded people by taking local action on climate change and that they are really making a difference in their community and for the environment.

### **Data Collection and Paperwork Processes**

The BIRC developed data collection, paperwork processes, and spreadsheets to gather impact statistics and feedback, with the help of a dedicated volunteer. This was adapted from the Cairngorms repair cafe and further supported by a [Share and Repair Network](#) working group on qualitative and quantitative data collection. Aligning with other share and repair organisations helps to contribute data to the wider repair movement in Scotland and further afield.

A **check-in form** was developed to capture each visitor/item, detailing the issue and outcome of each repair. Additional data including customer demographics, repairer feedback, customer feedback and experience was also collected. The form was cleverly linked to a data spreadsheet to facilitate analysis.

Online forms for [volunteer sign-up](#) and [pre-registering repairs](#) were also developed, to streamline processes and reduce paperwork. The latter helps reduce waiting times and is more efficient than the [paper alternative](#) available on the day.

### **Promotion and Branding**

A **brand template** was created to make the Black Isle Repair Cafe's promotion instantly recognisable to the community. This template was used across social media channels, websites, and posters displayed across the small communities across the Black Isle. To

minimise waste, posters and postcards were created in batches with future dates listed. QR codes also helped reduce the amount of information displayed, whilst making it easier to access the website.

A **pop-up banner** was produced to display at the repair cafe and to use at promotional events, and a large outdoor **promotional banner** was created to highlight the repair cafe was coming to that particular village. A velcro strip with different village names was also created with help from the BIRC sewing group, so it could be changed for each village ensuring that the same, single banner could be used in different locations.



Finally, to help demonstrate what it's like to visit a repair cafe, the BIRC worked with local film producer Callum Barber to produce a [promotional video](#).

## Celebrating Community and Promoting Sustainability to Wider Audiences



The BIRC events are an ideal place to engage people with sustainability more widely, including other TBI and HCWP initiatives. This includes raising awareness, providing resources and promoting our events and workshops, relating to share & repair, food waste & composting and single-use items & packaging,

In September 2024, BIRC hosted the launch of the [Highland Repair Directory](#), a HCWP initiative developed to highlight, promote and facilitate access to a variety of commercial and community repair services across the Highlands, including the BIRC.

Since its successful [launch event](#) in June 2022, The Black Isle Repair Café has held an **annual birthday celebration** in Avoch. It also holds an additional annual celebration as part of the Highlands and Islands Climate Festival every September at The Black Isle Leisure Centre and Theatre. These events help raise the profile of BIRC and those involved, and provide an opportunity to highlight other waste reduction initiatives, such as finding value in second-hand items, promoting alternatives to single-use packaging, reducing food waste, and encouraging composting.

Some of the groups involved in this event included the Highland Good Food Partnership, Fortrose Guides, Avoch Primary School Clothing Initiative Unicycle, AlpKit, Red Hut

Furniture and the Highland Council Waste Team. Family-friendly activities were provided to attract more people, including natural crafting and printing sessions from local arts and crafts facilitators, face painting for children, and entertainment from local musicians and choirs. Additionally, one of the events was combined with a second-hand table top sale to promote the value of second-hand items and re-loving preloved clothing.



## Impact

### Waste reduction

Since the first repair cafe in **June 22 to March 25**, the BIRC team have held **23** roaming repair cafes.

- **744 customers** attended and booked in repairs, with over **1,200 visitors** across the 23 events. Each repair cafe attracts around **a third of new visitors**.
- An estimated **2,729 volunteer hours** have contributed to repair cafe events and steering group meetings. This figure doesn't include the time spent by steering group members following up actions.
- The team handled and provided advice for over **983 items** presented, with **734** of these successfully repaired and diverted from landfill.

Total items presented for repair:	Fixed by BIRC	Item fixed but retained / part needed	Not repairable by BIRC	Beyond repair
<b>983</b>	734	44	163	42

### Customer Experience

Of 877 responses from 23 repair cafes:

- **823 (94%)** reported having a 'great' visit to the BIRC
- **188 (21%)** visitors reported they felt more confident in handling their own repairs after their visit
- **549 (63%)** visitors reported they will bring more items to be repaired.
- **56 (6%)** visitors noted their interest in volunteering at the BIRC
- **190 (22%)** visitors noted their interest in joining other repair and mending workshops in the community



## Wider community links

Joining membership organisations such as the Circular Communities Scotland **Share and Repair Network** and the **Community Learning Exchange** has been invaluable in enabling the sharing of resources and learning with other existing or prospective repair café initiatives, as well as access to financial support.

For example, the BIRC was featured at the Circular Communities Scotland annual general conference in September 2023 as well as the 2024 impact reports for both [Circular Communities Scotland](#) and the [Share and Repair Network](#), with the latter highlighting the Highland region as having the highest per capita proportion of sharing & repairing initiatives.

*“The Share and Repair Network’s contribution to the Black Isle Repair Cafe exemplifies the power of community collaboration in fostering sustainable practices. The Network’s support has been pivotal in providing resources and networking opportunities, supporting the transformation of ideas into action. The learning exchange meetings and visits with other Highland organisations have not only facilitated the inception of new repair initiatives but have also instilled a sense of unity and accomplishment among existing volunteers. The proactive approach in connecting with other initiatives for best practice examples, and supporting the formation of the Highland Repair Network, is a testament to the commitment to creating a resilient Share and Repair community.” - Laura Donnelly, HCWP Project Officer for Transition Black Isle*

In September 2024, the BIRC steering group, with support from Circular Communities Scotland, led the development of a **Highland Repair Network**, to support existing and new repair initiatives in the area.

Prior to this, a number of knowledge exchange activities took place, including:

- With support from the CCS Share and Repair Network, a **learning exchange** was set up with Planet Sutherland who were interested in starting a repair initiative in their community. Project Coordinator, Anna Platfield along with representatives from the area, visited the repair cafe in September 2023 to see how a repair cafe worked, ask questions and gain experience and learning from BIRC volunteers. [Central and East Sutherland Repair Cafes - Planet Sutherland](#) Since then, they have started their repair cafe initiative in partnership with ReCirculate Sutherland, Dornoch Mens Shed, Lairg & District Learning Centre Makers Spaces, Lairg and District Learning Centre and local repairers and businesses. As they develop they are interested in the idea of the roaming repair cafe to reach more rural communities.
- More locally to the Black Isle, charity and social enterprise [ILM](#) are in the planning stages of delivering a repair cafe in their Alness base and have met with TBI/HCWP Project Officer and BIRC steering group member to learn more about the roaming initiative and good practice on delivering repair cafes to the community. Valuable knowledge was exchanged and a good working relationship has been built to guarantee support and share skills going forward. This relationship will build on the strength of the BIRC and ILM repair cafes, working in partnership by collaboration and not competition. ILM's future plans are to roam and visit villages and towns in the

Easter Ross area from Alness up to Tain and Balintore, and supporting the Central East and Sutherland repair cafe initiative in Lairg.

- The HCWP Project Officer has also held learning exchange meetings with other communities who are in the process of, or thinking about, setting up a repair initiative in their community, including the **Waterlines Heritage Centre in Caithness**, and the **Remake Argyll** project.
- The BIRC has fed into 'right to repair' research with the **Edinburgh University [Fixing the Future](#) project**, through focus groups and by providing repair data on electrical goods presented and the issues experienced when trying to fix such items.

*“Some citizens can afford to replace broken devices but others cannot and require support to repair them or face the impacts. The project will examine how equality issues from IoT arise across society, generations and geographies, and investigate how to create more repairable devices that respect citizens legal rights, provide long-term cybersecurity, minimise eWaste, and are supported by local community repairability networks.” - [Fixing the Future – The Right to Repair and Equal-IoT](#)*

- Finally, the HCWP Project Officer also contributed the repair cafes experience and findings at an interview session with **Strathclyde University's Sustainability & Environmental Students** focusing on the social and emotional barriers to the widespread use of community Repair and Share organisations. The contributions will help advance the understanding of what prevents people from using community repair and share projects and provide significant insights into what national and local government policy changes are needed to attract more users.

## The Legacy of the BIRC and Future Sustainability

The BIRC core costs are covered through donations from customers for repairs carried out, advice given and for teas, coffees and home-baked cakes. The donation model has been vital to ensure future sustainability and cover hall hire costs and any out of pocket expenses.

A large contribution comes from the volunteers themselves, who not only donate their time, many cover their costs to attend such as travel, tools, accessories and parts needed to repair items and provide home baked cake and sundries for the cafe. An expense form is available to reclaim out of pocket expenses, and the repair cafe steering group have accounted for these additional costs to plan and prepare for the future. However, volunteers who feel they can contribute, have so far preferred not to claim these back as they feel they are contributing to a valuable community initiative which provides long term benefit to their community and to the environment.

The HCWP resource, dispensed via TBI, has been crucial in setting up and overseeing the repair café over the past three years. In addition to the HCWP Officers' time, this has included promotional costs, activity costs and facilitation fees.

With this resource coming to an end with the end of the HCWP programme in March 2025, a Volunteer Coordinator post was created to support ongoing activity.

The BIRC have also formed a funding working group, to support their activities and the continuation of the volunteer coordinator post in January 26. Funding received will help the team explore more ways to expand and make current processes smoother. Donations support core costs such as hall hire, out of pocket expenses and promotion, and future fundraising through activities and grant applications will support the repair cafe to achieve their goal of purchasing a van to store equipment and make it easier for the repair cafe to roam around villages.

## Conclusion

The Black Isle Repair Cafe has demonstrated remarkable success as a community-driven initiative, showcasing the power of partnership working, collaboration, skill-sharing, and sustainability. Through its innovative roaming model, the BIRC has reached remote rural communities on the Black Isle, making repair accessible to those who need it most. By fostering a culture of repair and reuse, the BIRC has actively contributed to reducing waste, supporting behaviour change, and promoting circular economy practices across the Highlands.

The dedication of its volunteers has been the cornerstone of its achievements, with their skills, creativity, and generosity driving the initiative forward. Partnerships with organisations such as Circular Communities Scotland's Share and Repair Network and the Highlands and Islands Climate Hub, have amplified its impact, enabling knowledge-sharing and fostering a network of repair initiatives across the region.

With the creation of resources such as the Highland Repair Directory and Network, the BIRC has not only strengthened its own foundations but inspired and motivated communities near and far to embrace repair as the norm.

Looking ahead, the Black Isle Repair Cafe stands as a beacon of sustainable action, proving that community-led efforts can drive tangible change. Its ongoing commitment to innovation, inclusion, and environmental responsibility ensures that it will continue to make a meaningful difference to the environment and the lives of people in the Highlands for years to come.

**To learn more, visit:** <https://www.transitionblackisle.org/black-isle-repair-cafe.asp>

**Contact:** [nat@transitionblackisle.org](mailto:nat@transitionblackisle.org)

### **The Highland Community Waste Partnership (2022-2025)**

Funded by The National Lottery Climate Action Fund, and coordinated by Keep Scotland Beautiful, the Highland Community Waste Partnership brought together eight community groups in the Highlands to reduce waste and promote more sustainable consumption.

Learn more here: [www.keeptscotlandbeautiful.org/highlandcommunitywaste/](http://www.keeptscotlandbeautiful.org/highlandcommunitywaste/)



## What customers said about the Black Isle Repair Cafe

*"Brilliant, very reassuring that [the item] it is safe"*

*"Very happy to know it is past economic life for me. Really appreciate the time and effort taken to investigate the problem (dead battery) & let me know I can now have space in the cupboard rather than just keep holding on to it."*

*"My two items are wonderfully darned, thank you! And the tea, paradise cake and wee ginger biscuit were scrummy. Great craic!"*

*"Thank you for repairing my brown leather handbag. I was on the point of giving up on it when Steve said he thought you would be able to repair it. And now it's as good as new! You've saved me endless hours trailing round the shops looking for a replacement - I think I take longer to decide on a bag than buying a house! So big thanks from me."*

*"Fabulous idea - learnt a lot & really happy to have saved something from landfill! Thanks Gordie for the explanations too :)"*

*"Everyone is so helpful and I'll definitely come back. A much needed place for a sustainable Scotland."*

*"Superb and professional quality of work. Great atmosphere of a purposeful group for a more sustainable future. Really happy with my first experience of Repair Cafe"*

*"Repair done efficiently and tested and then tea and cake with friends not seen for a while"*

*"1/2 hr slots are good, however my sewing machine needs further investigation. The volunteer has kindly offered to take it home and investigate it further, which I appreciate. Also took advantage of the freebie cross stitch kits and upcycled files."*

*"What an amazing bunch of people! So warm and friendly and went above and beyond their problem solving to fix it! Thanks :)"*

*"A wonderful service by skilled repairers volunteering their time. Never made to feel foolish if repair (i.e. a replacement fuse the answer!) is simple."*

*"Friendly, affordable, with a range of repairs offered. Very 'green', making items last longer. Volunteer repairers are so helpful and patient. A really nice atmosphere where ignorant folk like me aren't made to feel foolish"*

*"After a patient attempt, it was found to be not possible. Many thanks for taking the time to check it out. Glad I've tried to fix it."*