



Ulva Church Development Plan

North West Mull Community Woodland Company

September 2025

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Purpose of the Plan

This plan sets out the case for the conservation and reuse of Ulva's Telford-designed church. It describes the building's current condition, heritage significance, and community value, and provides a framework for phased action to stabilise the building, explore viable new uses, and secure its long-term sustainable future.

The plan will:

- Guide the North West Mull Community Woodland Company's (NWMCWC) decision-making.
- Provide a baseline document for funding applications.
- Ensure alignment with community priorities and statutory requirements.

Executive Summary

Ulva Church is officially recognised by Historic Environment Scotland as a Category B listed building (LB13729), part of the Parliamentary Churches programme designed by Thomas Telford. Completed in 1828, it remains a significant part of Scotland's architectural heritage and an important feature of Ulva's cultural landscape.

The building is now at risk, with falling slates, water ingress and parts of the site already cordoned off for safety. The church also contains the only public toilets on this side of Ulva, which would be lost if the building were closed.

Residents have long called for the church to be brought back into use, both to preserve its heritage and to provide Ulva with an indoor gathering space. This plan outlines NWMCWC's phased approach: commissioning surveys, undertaking urgent stabilisation, developing a restoration programme, and ultimately reopening the church as a sustainable hub for both community and heritage use.

The Building and Its Context

Ulva Church stands at the heart of the isle of Ulva – located off the west coast of Mull – and is visible across farmland and along the walking paths that draw many of the island's 6,000-8,000 annual visitors.

It is one of five Parliamentary churches built on Mull and Iona, and was completed in 1828 alongside its manse. Designed by Thomas Telford, it conforms closely to Telford's published plan for a T-plan church with tall pointed windows, a slate roof, and a modest bellcote. Internally, the church retains features such as its pulpit and original joinery, though alterations in the 1950s adapted part of the building as a hall.

The Ulva Social and Economic Development Plan¹, prepared at the time of the community buy-out, highlighted the church's "great potential as multi-use community space hosting concerts, exhibitions and social events, including occasional services." This recognition reinforces the role the building could play as a flexible and meaningful space for residents and visitors.

Although regular worship services no longer take place, the church remains deeply symbolic for residents. Its heritage significance and simple architectural character make it an ideal candidate for sensitive restoration and adaptive reuse.

Current Use and Facilities

From the 1950s through to the 2000s, the church was regularly used to host community events and occasionally for church services. However, as the island population declined, so did the frequency of use.

Since the community buy-out in 2018, the population on Ulva grew from five (three adults and two children) to 19² (13 adults and six children).

Unfortunately, due its poor condition, currently the church is rarely used. Occasional community activity has been possible, but only thanks to volunteer effort to manage water ingress. This is increasingly unsafe and unsustainable.

The building does provide some essential infrastructure: it houses the only public toilets on this side of Ulva, which are heavily relied on by both residents and visitors. If the church were to close, these facilities would be lost, leaving the nearest alternative almost a mile away at the ferry pier. The church also contains a small kitchen, but this is locked and in an unusable state, and therefore not contributing to current activity.

At present, the church is both an asset and a liability – valued for its heritage and potential, but deteriorating and unsafe in its current state.

Condition and Risks

Although the structural condition of the building appears intact, its fabric is in a very poor condition – roof slates are falling, water is penetrating the building, windows are missing glass, floorboards are collapsing, and part of the site has been cordoned off for safety. Without urgent intervention, this nationally important building will deteriorate beyond repair and be lost to both the community and the nation's heritage.

¹ [Welcome to the Isle of Ulva: a community island](#)

² As of September 2025

The risks include:

- **Public safety** – falling slates are hazardous.
- **Loss of facilities** – essential amenities would no longer be available if closure became necessary.
- **Escalating costs** – delay will make restoration increasingly expensive.
- **Heritage loss** – Scotland risks losing one of its Parliamentary churches.

Doing nothing is no longer an option.

Vision and Opportunities

NWMCWC's vision is to revive Ulva Church as a sustainable, accessible hub for both community and heritage.

We envisage residents gathering for music, events, learning, and family activities; visitors exploring exhibitions and heritage interpretation; and the building itself restored with dignity, continuing to embody Ulva's cultural identity.

Community support for this vision is strong. Residents describe the church as having "great potential to become a true community hub – a welcoming space for gatherings, meetings, events, and local initiatives, while still preserving its original purpose as a place of quiet reflection and spiritual connection." This alignment of heritage value and community demand presents a unique opportunity: to save a nationally significant building and adapt it to serve present and future needs.

Phased Approach

To deliver this vision, the project will progress through the following phases:

1. **Feasibility & Viability (2025–26):** commission professional surveys, measured drawings, options appraisal, and community engagement.
2. **Urgent Stabilisation (2026):** carry out targeted works to secure roof, windows, and ventilation; protect public toilets.
3. **Project Development (2026–27):** develop detailed designs, obtain statutory consents, prepare business plan and fundraising strategy.
4. **Capital Works (2027–28):** undertake full restoration, including roof and fabric repairs, adaptations for flexible use, and internal refurbishment.
5. **Open for Community Use (from 2028):** launch programme of community and visitor activities, with governance and income model in place.

Each phase builds toward the next, ensuring momentum and reducing project risk.

Funding Strategy

The funding approach will be phased, with each stage building credibility for the next and reducing project risk.

- **Phase 1:** support will be sought from heritage development funds and local improvement programmes to cover surveys, feasibility and community engagement (revenue).
- **Phase 2:** Funding will focus on development grants and targeted support for urgent stabilisation works to safeguard the building envelope and essential facilities (capital).
- **Phases 3–4:** significant capital investment will be required. The strategy will combine heritage and community infrastructure funders, charitable trusts and foundations, and public grant programmes, alongside community fundraising (revenue and capital).
- **Phase 5:** long-term sustainability will rely on a mix of earned income, local fundraising, and small-scale grant support for programming and activities.

This approach ensures each stage builds toward the next, increases deliverability, and maximises funder confidence.

Outcome and Benefits

If successful, this project will deliver:

- The preservation of a Telford Parliamentary church
- A safe, year-round community hub for Ulva
- Retention of essential public toilets
- New opportunities for tourism and local enterprise
- Social value through inclusion, wellbeing, and cultural activity
- Climate benefit through adaptation and reuse of an existing building.

About the Charity

North West Mull Community Woodland Company (NWMCWC) was set up in 2006 to purchase and manage the Langamull and West Ardhu forests in the north west of Mull. To date, the company has successfully set up nine forest crofts which are all now let as well as building a forest school. As soon as the harvesting was finished in Langamull North, an all-access path – along with signage – were created for the archaeological site at Kildavie. A micro hydro scheme has been developed at West Ardhu, and in 2013 the company purchased Crannich woodfuel to form Island Woodfuels.

In 2017, the island of Ulva came on the market. Working with the tenant residents, NWMCWC submitted a Community Right to Buy registration over the estate to secure its future in community ownership. The overall objective of the buy-out was to manage the estate to provide sustainable benefits for the community in the short- to medium-term, and in the long-term for future generations, including the repopulation and economic regeneration of the island. Since its purchase, the company have refurbished six residential properties, upgraded the pier to make it safer for local fishermen and other users, facilitated the establishment of two new businesses, and reintroduced agricultural activity. The number of residents grew from five in 2018, to 19 as of September 2025.

Next Steps

The immediate priority is to secure development funding (revenue) to commission surveys and produce a viability report. This will shape the stabilisation works and provide the foundation for capital fundraising.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Photos of the church



Photos taken in May 2025.



Two months later – photos taken in July 2025 – fallen slates in front of the church, and cordoned off area around the building.



One of the broken windows.



Inside of the church – main room with pulpit in the back.



Inside of the church – entrance with toilets on either side. There is a small kitchen as well, but it is not in a working condition and therefore not in use.

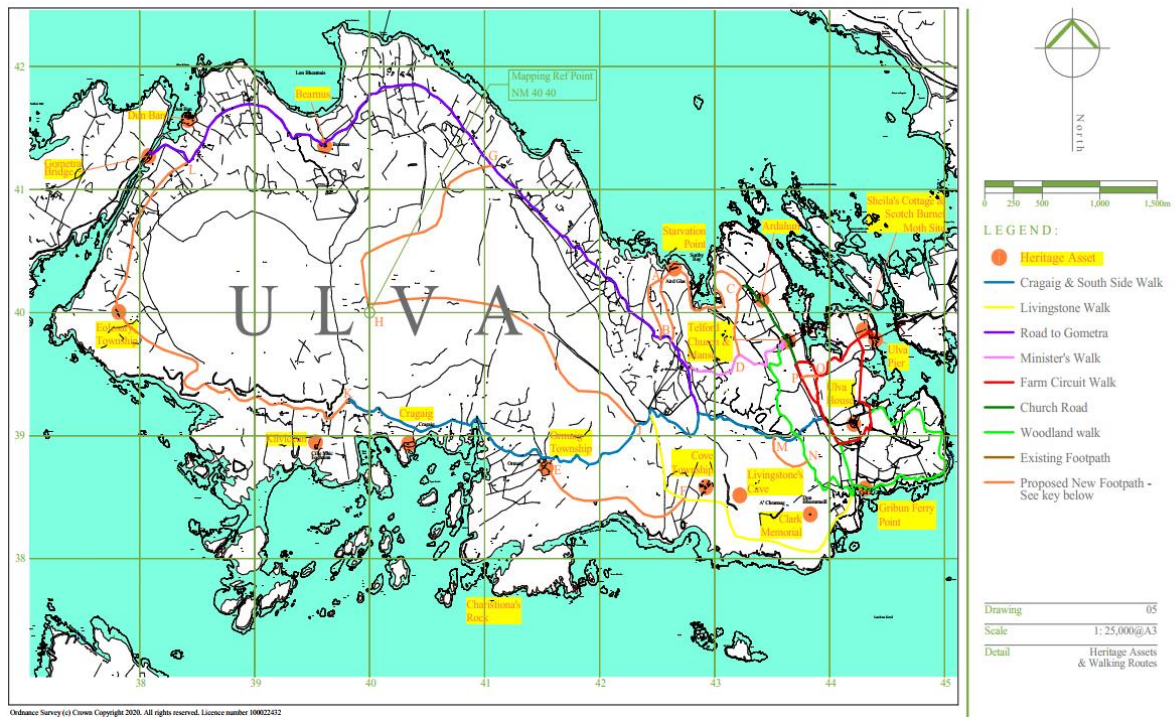


View of the church from the main track ('Farm Circuit Walk'), across a field.

Appendix 2. Church location



Isle of Ulva is located off the west coast of the Isle of Mull, within the Argyll & Bute council.



Map of Ulva's heritage assets and walking routes. The church is located c.1 mile from the ferry pier, at the junction of the Church Road and Minister's Walk – also clearly shown below.



Appendix 3. Architect's Expression of Interest

From: Ronnie Neil
Sent: 06 August 2025 07:12
To: Alicja Newbrook <alicja@nwmullwoodland.co.uk>
Subject: Re: Ulva Church

Hi Alicja

Many thanks for your email.

I would certainly be interested in becoming involved in any project to bring the church back in to use. There was previously a lot of discussion with Wendy Reid on this, with various potential uses identified. Most recently a Heritage use was identified, particularly after the Storax Ulbha project failed to proceed at the big house. Unfortunately, the project never moved ahead and the church building clearly continues to deteriorate.

I was Property Consultant to the Church of Scotland Presbytery of Argyll and a similar role is currently being created for the newly enlarged Presbytery covering the north and west of Scotland. In that role, I was involved in advising individual congregations on the care of their buildings and I carried out almost 200 inspections on church buildings. I also have a particular interest in Thomas Telford Parliamentary churches like Ulva and have travelled across the country to visit those that remain.

We would be able to prepare the types of inspections and Feasibility Studies you described as well as developing the project through more detailed design stages, Statutory Consents and Contract Management. Costs would obviously depend on the level and type of input required, but I can give you some indicative costs if you can detail specific funders requirements. Please give me a call if it would be helpful to discuss this further.

With best regards

Ronnie

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Appendix 4. Statement from volunteer who helps with church maintenance

From: Jennifer melling

Sent: 03 June 2025 19:52

To: Alicja Newbrook <alicja@nwmullwoodland.co.uk>

Subject: Proposal for Restoration and Community Use of the Church on Ulva

Hi Alicja,

I know it's past the deadline but wondered if this statement would be helpful...

I wanted to share some thoughts about the future of the church and the opportunities it holds for the community. I believe the building has great potential to become a true community hub — a welcoming space for gatherings, meetings, events, and local initiatives, while still preserving its original purpose as a place of quiet reflection and spiritual connection.

The church is already equipped with toilets and a small kitchen, making it well-suited for community fundraising activities such as tea parties, bake sales, and traditional music events. These could not only help bring people together but also contribute toward the building's ongoing upkeep.

There is also real potential for the space to support local culture and tourism. It could serve as a venue for local artists and crafters to exhibit their work and as an information point for visitors to the island. A dedicated children's corner with books on local wildlife and history would enhance its appeal to families and young learners.

Additionally, I believe a small library or reading room — possibly housing the rescued books from Ulva House — could become a valuable resource, especially with a section for those researching local or family history.

All of this could be achieved while maintaining the church's simple, functional design — which I believe is key to its charm and historical significance.

At present, I clean the facilities weekly, and voluntarily the main building. I also do my best to limit further deterioration by regularly emptying containers that collect rainwater from the leaking roof. However, without urgent repairs, the building will eventually become too unsafe to use and could be lost altogether.

I would love to see the church made structurally sound and brought back to life for the benefit of both the local community and visitors. It's a building with deep roots and quiet dignity, and I believe a sympathetic restoration could help preserve that while giving it a renewed purpose.

I'd be more than happy to be involved in any next steps to support this vision and help secure funding. A revitalised church could truly become a shared asset for the Isle of Ulva and beyond.

Warm regards,

Jenny