

Unlocking Ulva: A Community Barge to Connect, Create and Thrive

A community-owned barge enabling cultural, economic and social regeneration on Ulva – supporting markets, restoration, farming, and events through vital, year-round access.

1. What do you want to do?

North West Mull Community Woodland Company (NWMCWC) proposes to purchase and operate a multi-use community barge to serve the Isle of Ulva. The barge will be a transformative asset for this fragile island community, enabling a wide range of place-based regeneration initiatives that are currently limited by lack of reliable marine access.

Ulva is a roadless island off the west coast of Mull, with no bridge and only limited ferry service. This poses a significant barrier to regeneration. While the island has several ongoing and planned community projects – including the revival of Ulva House, restoration of the Telford-designed church, and development of a community garden – all face significant logistical challenges when it comes to transporting materials, tools, livestock, equipment, or goods.

Currently, the island is entirely dependent on the goodwill of the local fish farm, which has been generously providing ad hoc barge support over the last few years. This help has been invaluable and is greatly appreciated, but naturally restricted, as the fish farm must prioritise its own operations. The community has no transport independence, and future projects rely heavily on continued informal support, which affects its independence and sustainability.

The barge will enable a number of exciting projects, which to date remain an aspiration – not due to lack of ideas, but lack of access:

- A community-led Ulva Producers' Market, bringing together growers, makers, and visitors in a shared island space.
- Cultural and community events, including pop-up festivals, exhibitions, and open days that require heavy or bulky equipment.
- Heritage restoration, such as moving scaffolding, stone, and equipment to restore Ulva's historic Telford church and other community buildings.
- Sustainable land management, assisting crofting and farming by enabling the transport of livestock, feed, and supplies.
- Launch of new local businesses, including plans for a community-run Ulva Venison initiative, offering affordable, sustainable meat and land-based employment.
- Contractor access, so that construction, infrastructure, and environmental projects can proceed efficiently without paying prohibitive private transport costs.

- Emergency resilience, providing an alternative logistics route in the event of ferry failure.

One island resident reflected, *“A community barge would secure the long-term future of the farm and ensure we’re no longer totally reliant on a third party to move livestock or machinery on and off the island. It would also open up opportunities for diversification. On a personal level, it would create a more sustainable and flexible connection between Ulva and Mull—helping our community grow, thrive, and engage more with the wider community of north-west Mull.”*

The barge will be community-owned, maintained by NWMCWC, and operated in partnership with local residents and businesses. It will have multiple uses – transporting vehicles, goods, livestock, building materials and people as needed – and be key to unlocking Ulva’s long-term vision as a thriving, resilient and welcoming island.

2. Why is your project needed?

Ulva is a remote, fragile island community with an increasing population and growing tourism interest. However, progress on regeneration and community-led development is severely hampered by lack of transport access. The island is not served by any road or bridge; the passenger ferry is limited to carrying smaller goods only, and chartering private boats is prohibitively expensive and unsustainable for ongoing development.

The barge offers a foundational, long-term solution. It will allow NWMCWC and the community to unlock their shared vision for Ulva, support the island’s economic and cultural growth, and build resilience for the future.

3. What positive changes will your project bring about?

The barge will act as a catalyst for community transformation. Key benefits include:

- **Regeneration:** making heritage restoration, community growing, and placemaking possible through reliable transport access.
- **Economic opportunity:** supporting island-based enterprise, including food production, land management, and tourism.
- **Cultural connection:** enabling events and community activity that draw together Ulva, Mull, and wider Argyll and Bute communities.
- **Sustainability:** reducing reliance on costly, infrequent external transport and enabling more efficient, lower-impact logistics.
- **Inclusion:** supporting residents who are otherwise isolated and ensuring access for disabled people, tradespeople, and volunteers.
- **Resilience:** ensuring year-round community function in the face of climate or infrastructure disruptions.

- Empowerment: giving the island's residents and stakeholders control over how and when key projects can progress.

This project will not only allow Ulva to develop its potential, but also showcase how small island communities can lead on creative, sustainable, and inclusive regeneration.

4. How long will your project run for?

The barge project will run for 12-18 months, including procurement, compliance (licensing and insurance), training, and formal launch. The project is expected to begin once capital funding is confirmed



Photo shows an example of a barge which NWMWCW hopes to purchase. This particular barge was hired recently to support with a renovation project on the Isle of Ulva. The hire cost was c.£2,700 (3 hours of usage).