

Sustainable Textiles Outer Hebrides:

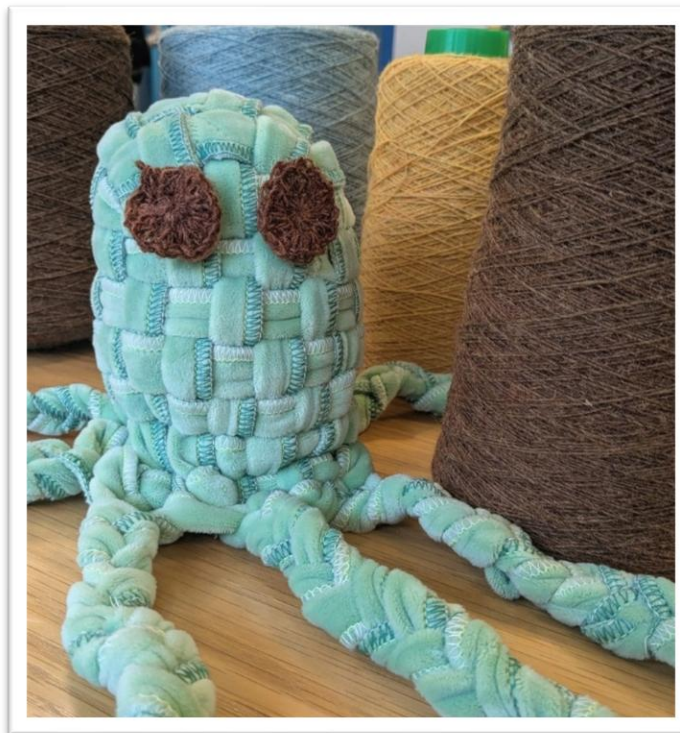
Collaboratively unlearning our commodified world through island approaches to clothing reuse.



Summary

Understanding approaches to clothing reuse in the Outer Hebrides is getting increasingly important, as textile collections that once transported unwanted clothes to the mainland are no longer operating. It currently costs the municipal waste services for the islands more to send these clothes away to be reused/recycled, then it does to landfill them. Clothing charity groups throughout the islands are increasingly seeing unwanted clothes piling up with nowhere to go. The concern is that decent quality clothing will flow out of people's homes into municipal waste streams in the Outer Hebrides, adding to landfill tonnages with subsequent increases in council tax payments to accommodate rising operational costs.

The Sustainable Textiles Outer Hebrides project was set up to explore the potential of a locally-educated circular economy approach to support the reduction of the islands' textile waste. The project received £2,500 from the KE Land and Communities Challenge Fund at the end of January 2026. This allocated 45 hours each of staff time for two members of UHI NWH's staff, sustainability lecturer Rebecca Smith and fashion lecturer Netty Sopata to explore practical solutions for the ongoing challenge of managing textile waste throughout the islands. This was a new approach for the NWH Stornoway campus, combining (for the first time) the fashion and sustainability expertise that the campus is well known for.



Background

Rural island communities present a unique opportunity for innovation when it comes to managing waste, as their smaller scale positions them well to observe the impacts of a growing waste problem. Although relatively remote and low in population, the Outer Hebrides are experiencing the accumulation of huge and increasing volumes of unwanted clothing. With more online shopping and internet-raised children, purchasing new clothes is easier and more addictive than ever before (De Koning et al., 2024; Frick et al., 2020). Clothing charity groups throughout the Outer Hebrides have been increasingly aware of and concerned by the amount of unwanted clothes their volunteer-run stores have been receiving. This is particularly so since 2025, when the transportation of clothes from the islands to the mainland for onward distribution reached an abrupt end with the closure of all the islands' textile banks. Blythswood, the charity group that transported the clothes to the mainland for onward distribution, claim the equivalent of 10 articulated lorries (approximately between 120-140 tonnes) of unwanted clothes previously left the Outer Hebrides annually. That route to market has gone amid increasing saturation in the international second-hand clothes trade and growing awareness of the impacts of these unwanted clothes (The Orkney News, 2026).

Clothing and textile waste has become a significant global problem over the past few decades due to the rise of fast fashion, increased consumption, and a throwaway culture (UNEP, 2025). The trend has seen unwanted clothes and textiles from high income countries being shipped abroad to dumpsites in lower-income countries, polluting lands far away from where the products were bought and used (UNEP, 2025; Changing Markets Foundation, 2023). It is rare to see this unsustainable practice being challenged on a regional level. More than 80 per cent of textiles discarded by households are said to be incinerated, landfilled or abandoned in the environment because of this current resource-extractive, linear economic system (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2024). Increasing fuel costs are adding to the costs for transporting textiles, making it more economical for local authorities in remote rural areas like the Outer Hebrides to landfill them. The Sustainable Textiles Outer Hebrides project provided a platform for the voices of those most aware of the problem throughout the islands to be heard. The project explored how clothing reuse skills and practices delivered through local education might help to address this problem regionally, whilst supporting relevant, creative and place-based work. Providing space for creative practices that help to explore, promote, encourage and educate for the reuse of textile waste material on the islands holds potential for building ecological practices that can support the ambition of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. These once resourceful island communities are best served by a local education that supports them to develop the skills they need to protect their land.

Project Overview

The Sustainable Textiles Outer Hebrides project led discussion about clothing waste in the Outer Hebrides, marking it out as relevant to the consideration of decarbonisation solutions for the islands. The build-up of unwanted clothes throughout the islands does not appear to feature highly on the priority list for local representing institutions, despite expressed concern from the islands' Municipal Services; Zero Waste Western Isles; and Third Sector charity groups dealing with increasing volumes of unwanted clothes. Whilst groups such as the Islands Centre for Net Zero; Community Energy Scotland; Carbon Neutral Islands; and Climate Hebrides keenly took part in the discussions, they recognised that a lack of allocated funding specifically for dealing with textile waste restricted their capacity to find more sustainable solutions. The Knowledge Exchange team at the NWH Stornoway campus was there to:

- 1) Facilitate discussion about the islands' approach to unwanted clothing following the removal of the textile bank services throughout the islands in 2025.
- 2) Explore the potential for a local , place-based circular economy approach for this build-up of unwanted clothing.

The project team combined the expertise from two different programme areas that run from the Stornoway campus, the NC in Fashion (Creative Industries) Programme and the BA (Hons) Sustainable Development Programme. This facilitated an informed space for deciding on the best end uses for the textiles, with a commitment to the most sustainable outcomes within the time, resource and capacity constraints of the project period.

Other organisations taking part in these discussions have included representatives from: Comhairle Nan Siar's Municipal Services; Zero Waste Western Isles; Barra and Vatersay Environmental Services; the Islands' Centre for Net Zero; Community Energy Scotland; Carbon Neutral Islands; Climate Hebrides; as well as Third Sector charity groups from the Uists; Barra and Benbecula including:

- Cothrom: <https://www.cothrom.org.uk/> ;
- the Barra Thrift Shop;
- the Uists Council of Voluntary Organisations <https://ucvo.org.uk/> and;
- Benbecula Thrift Shop.

The Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Islands Entrepreneurial Network have also been present at the meetings to show support for the project and assisting with putting together a co-piloted business plan and connecting the project to Just Enterprise for one-to-one business support.

The project personnel were Rebecca Smith and Netty Sopata each paid for 45 hours of their time to work on the project. Rebecca brought her background in sustainable development to collate data on the clothes and think critically about the best sustainable end uses for them, investigating potential local market spaces to develop. She also led the discussions between the Third Sector, Municipal Services, and other local agencies, connecting these to relevant policy areas such as community wealth building; the circular economy; heritage futures; and sustainability. Netty brought her curriculum development and sewing expertise to explore best ways for incorporating zero-waste product development and textile reuse activities into the curriculum. She also developed and encouraged student participation in creative clothing deconstruction/reconstruction projects.

PROJECT ACTION AND ACTIVITIES:

The project had two parts: **Part One was spent engaging with the relevant industry partners.** These engagements were aimed at identifying the key challenges the partners faced when managing the islands unwanted clothing. **Part Two was spent setting up a workshop space** on the NWH campus to explore how the clothes can be deconstructed, understood and re-imagined, to create useful outlets for the local economy and surrounding culture and environment, which includes the land.

PROJECT OUTCOMES AND RESULTS:

PART ONE

Engaging with Industry Partners: this has involved three meetings. The first two of these meetings were in November and December 2025 before we received confirmation of KE Land and Communities funding (end of January 2026). These established that there was a problem with the build-up of unwanted clothes and textiles on the islands which is not currently being adequately addressed. The islands face challenges having their unwanted textiles removed as the collection and transportation of them to the mainland, once provided by Blythswood has stopped. Municipal Services for the islands are increasingly concerned about these textiles gathering in landfills across the islands.

‘We don’t want to see this in our waste stream at the end of the day. Our whole ethos is diversion from landfill. Ultimately, if there are no other options, these bits of textiles are likely to end up in people’s landfills. We don’t want to see that. We are trying to reduce our waste arisings, not increase them, so anything that is available to reduce the amount of waste we handle is greatly received. Textiles going to landfill is not good. Textiles going through our machinery is not good’

Municipal Services – Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

Community groups shared their own experiences dealing with the textile waste problem; how they have tried to promote local reuse practices; and the challenges they have faced when trying to support the aims of the Scottish Government's (2010) Zero Waste Plan and its accompanying mantra 'Waste is a Resource not a Problem'. The burden of work to deal with the problem was recognised, with the difficulty to get a handle on it due to the lack of 'resource' allocated to deal effectively with the problem. It was not clear at this stage who oversees the problem.

In March 2026 a news item was circulated across the islands' media networks drawing attention to the ongoing discussions and appearing in welovestornoway.com; Orkney News; and the Stornoway Gazette. A third meeting was held in April 2026, revealing the economic challenges for the Outer Hebrides when trying to participate in global circular economies and have clothing moved onto useful destinations.

'One of the areas we haven't touched on is the cost of transportation, whether it is from Barra to Stornoway or from Stornoway to the mainland. Costs and associated transportation are going through the roof because of the cost of fuel and everything else. It is not just the textiles market but also the haulage market is very volatile now, so that is something that must be taken into consideration'

Zero Waste Western Isles – Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

It was expressed that the Local Authority were under increasing financial strain to deliver more expensive services due to rising costs each year.

*'In terms of getting funding from the Local Authority, it is going to be very difficult as it is challenging enough just keeping the services that we have operational. We are expected year on year to make savings and cuts from budgets, whilst delivering better and more expensive services as the costs are increasing year on year as well. We have been including mixed textiles in the quarterly pricing for **recycling that is sent away**, just to get a price so we can determine what the market is doing. **Pricing for this quarter (April to June 2026) is a negative gate fee price of £145 per tonne**, the best price to be offered this year. That is more than what it costs to currently landfill scrap textiles. **The landfill charge for this year is currently £130.75 per tonne**. It is more cost effective for the local authority to landfill this. Until such time as the landfill tax increases above the cost to recycle or until we are unable to landfill it, which is possibly as short as in the next 18 months because there is legislation coming in to ban non-municipal waste to landfill. It was meant to start January 2026, however due to our unique geographical location we have been granted a two-year extension. Once that expires, we won't be able to put anything at all into the landfill. It will have to be sent away for recycling at that point, regardless of what the cost will be*

Zero Waste Western Isles – Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

Clothing waste is becoming increasingly expensive and problematic to deal with. There is a significant and growing economic cost just to get rid of something that could potentially bring more economic value to the islands. It is suggested that **storage options** for this amount of clothing would potentially be more economical over time. Space for storage and sorting was recognised as a restriction for third sector community groups deriving more value from clothing donations, leaving them no option but to get rid of potentially valuable items.

“The donations coming in can be overwhelming, and the volunteers are sometimes struggling to keep on top of it. It is a big issue. While there are good quality donations coming in, we are at times getting a lot of stuff coming in that is not clean or unusable. There have been instances of entire wardrobes of clothes having been emptied, still on hangers, stained, pockets filled with tissues, left in our donation room. If we had a bigger shop that might help because we are at full capacity. We now have got a container that is starting to fill with clothes that are on rails, so they can go back in when we have got space, but it is tricky. We started to sell on vinted as well, but it is just hard to keep on top of it with current stock levels and at the same time needing another space where you can sort that stuff. It is very difficult to manage it in a voluntary way. We don’t have solutions; we are just trying lots of different things”

Sorcha Monk, Uist Council of Voluntary Organisations

How clothing is stored and transported was also recognised as important for ensuring more value from the clothing. It takes a certain amount of time and space to ensure clothing quality does not deteriorate excessively to become something valueless.

“The sooner you deal with textiles as you get them, the more likely you are to benefit from them. If stuff from Barra was going to get sorted in Stornoway, the chances of it deteriorating in travel are high. We even see stuff deteriorating when someone is bagging it in their house to come to the charity shop. It is very easy to contaminate textiles if there is damp stuff among them. I personally wonder if there would be benefit from some support for even part-time paid employment on each of the islands when people were doing the initial sorting of the clothes. Even for ragging and whatever, in each local area. The more we transport clothes the more we add to the carbon footprint and lose value from the clothing”.

Mary Ann Ferguson, Barra and Vatersay Environmental Services

Comparing Costs

In this section we consider the financial implications of clothing waste for the local authority and compare this with storage options. Providing more storage space for the clothes rather than landfilling them or transporting them off island for hopeful recycling is considered a better option environmentally, with the potential to also be developed into a solution that could become socially and economically beneficial as well.

This would require an adaptive skills base being supported across the islands to help sort and process these high volumes of clothing waste. It would also require the allocation of identified community assets for locating either these storage units or through the provision of other public building space.

A representative from Blythswood provided us with the estimate that:

*1 articulated lorry carries approximately between 12-14 tonnes of clothing and on average 10 of these were filled and taken off the islands annually. **This gives us an annual estimate for unwanted clothes in Outer Hebrides being in the region of 120-140 tonnes.***

As Donald from Zero Waste Western Isles highlighted above, to send these textiles away for 'hopeful' recycling the pricing for the quarter (April to June 2026) was a negative gate fee price of £145 per tonne. That is more than what it currently costs to landfill these textiles. The landfill charge for this year is currently £130.75 per tonne.

Currently it therefore costs the islands between **£15,690-£19,005 annually to landfill** the estimated 120-140 tonnes of clothes each year (120-140 x £130.75).

To participate in global circular economies by sending it away for hopeful recycling, it would cost the islands approximately between **£17,400 - £20,300** (120-140 x £145.00).

To consider storage as an alternative for this volume of clothing and textiles a quote from [Storage in Stornoway](#) was found to work out the costs to compare with revealing that:

To accommodate for 120 tonnes of clothing waste: It would cost £20,100.00 to purchase out right the containers needed to store this amount of clothing. 4 x 40-foot container = (4 x 4200) = £16,800; 1 x 20-foot container = £3300

Total = £20,100.00: Compares to year-on-year annual costings for Landfill at **£15,690** and Sending Away at **£17,400**.

To accommodate for 140 tonnes of clothing waste: It would cost £24,300.00 to purchase out right the containers needed to store this amount of clothing. 5 x 40-foot container = (5 x 4200) = 21000; 1 x 20-foot container = £3300

Total = £24, 300: Compares to year-on-year annual costings for Landfill at **£19,005** and Sending Away at **£20,300**.

A future where these clothes are stored and our skills base on the islands adapt to find ways to accrue value from these clothes holds potential to be a more economical way of handling these volumes of unwanted clothes.

The next stage of the project was to consider, in the near term, what could be possible market outlets for these unwanted clothes to start such a journey. Bearing in mind the expensive costs, transport emissions and potential loss of value associated with transporting textiles we decided to only focus on local market outlets. We also needed to focus on only a restricted amount of clothing donations, so we could scope out possible solutions within the time and resource we had to deliver the project.

PART TWO

Deconstruction Workshop: This part of the project focussed on a restricted amount of clothing donations, enabling us to capture from a sample: where the clothes were made; what they were made from; and what end uses they would best serve within the constraints of the project timeline and resource. **23.02 Kg** of donated clothing was taken in.

Where the clothes were made

It was felt that understanding where the clothes were made was a relevant part of the story for better understanding the sustainability implications of the clothing. As expected, most of the clothes had already travelled many air and road miles, with over half the clothes (12.1 Kg/ 52.6%) having been made in China and Bangladesh. Only 2% of the clothes were made in the UK. See Chart A.

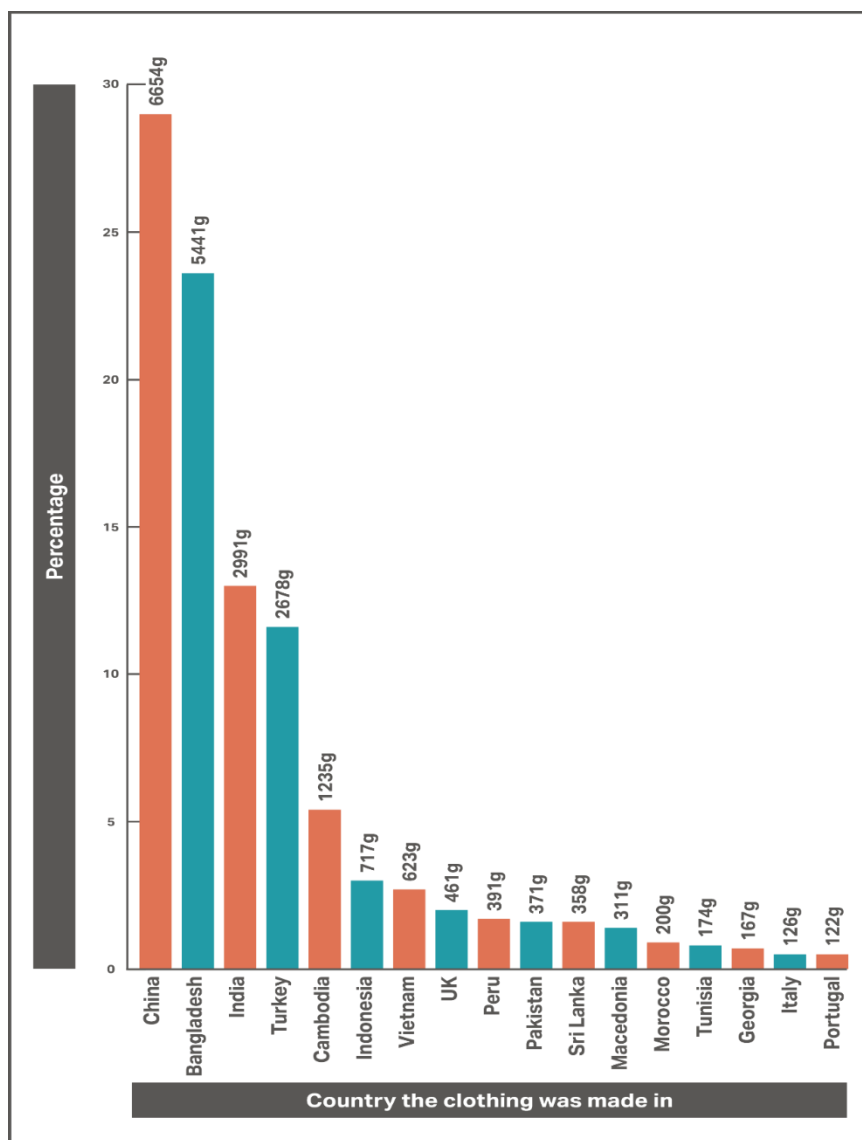


CHART A: Country the clothing was made in

What the clothes were made from: Understanding what the clothes were made from was considered a critical part for understanding the sustainability implications of the clothes and the best practical environmental options when it comes to deciding on the best end uses for them. For example, synthetic fibres like polyester and elastane fibres are considered environmentally problematic clothing fibres due to their oil-based composition and shedding of micro-plastics into waterways and air when washed and worn. Other clothing fibres like cotton and viscose, although they incur environmental problems when being produced, once produced the clothes are less environmentally problematic as the material is more natural and bio-degradable and does not shed microplastics when worn and washed.

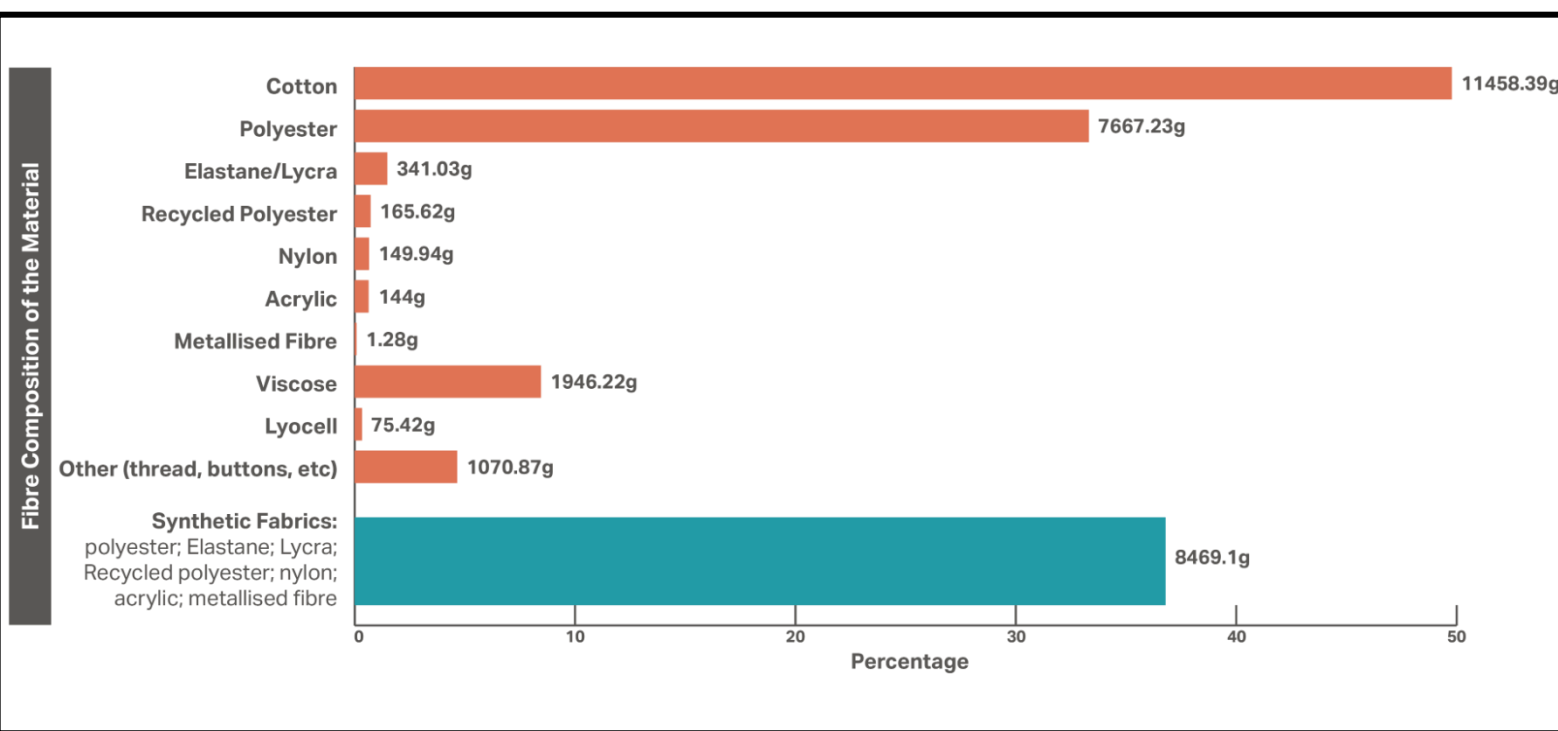


CHART B: Fibre Composition of the Material

As Chart B shows, cotton fibres represented 50% of the fibre composition of our sample of clothes. However, it is important to bear in mind that most of these cotton fibres were mixed in with other fibres in blended fabric compositions. Overall, only 23% of our clothing sample (5372g) was made from 100% cotton. Polyester was the second most dominant textile fibre in our sample representing 33% of the fibre composition for this sample of clothing. Again, most polyester fibres were blended in with other fibres like elastane, cotton and viscose to produce mixed composition fibre blends. Only 8% of our sample (1883g) was made from 100% polyester. However approximately 24% (5493g) of our sample was made from blended fabrics where at least 50% or more of the composition was polyester. Viscose was the third most dominant fibre in our sample representing 8.45% (1946g) of all the fibres. Only 3.28% (755g) of the sample was 100% viscose and only 3.5% (816g) made from blended compositions with viscose being the dominant fibre. Elastane was the fourth most dominant fibre in our sample representing a smaller 1.48% (341g) of the sample. It was highly prolific in small amounts throughout the sample appearing in 30.78% (7085g) of the mixed composition fabrics blends (ranging from only 1-16% of the fabric composition).

Deciding on the best end uses for the clothes: Having ascertained where the clothes were made and what they were made from we then moved on to consider the best end use for the clothing material in our sample. It was quickly quite clear that the clothes could be sorted into three main categories, either material for: **Ragging; Remake Projects;** or kept as clothing for **Resale & Reuse**.

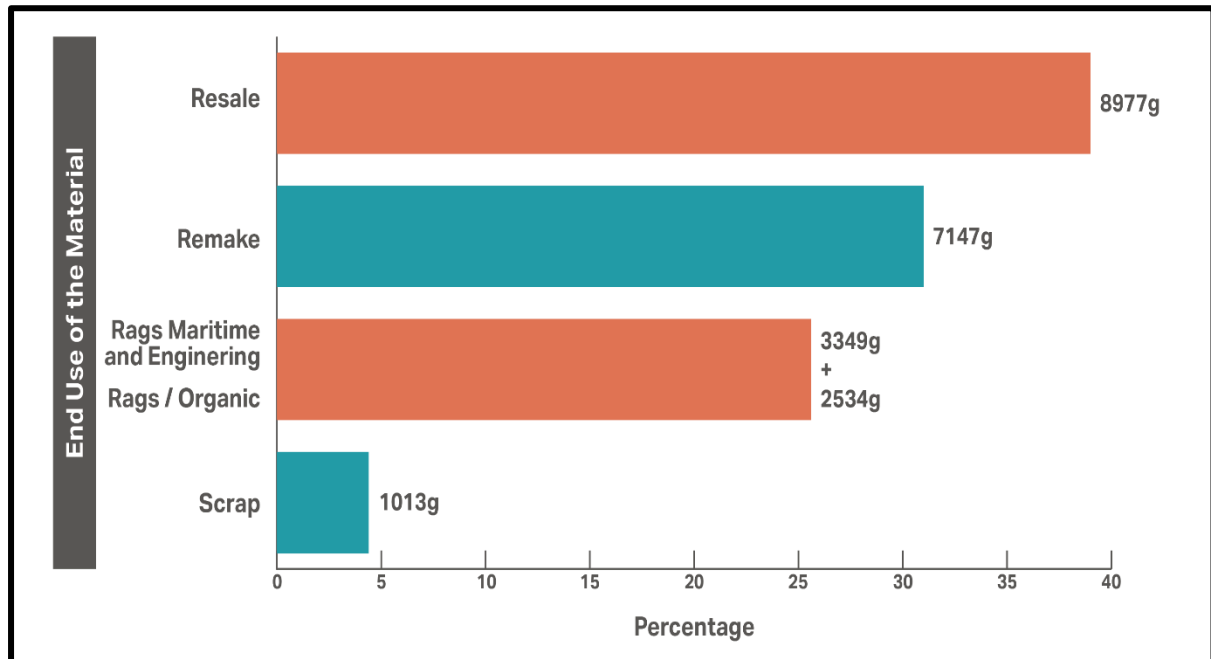


CHART C: End Use of the Material

When making decisions about what end use category the clothes were best suited for it became relevant to think about the quality of the clothing and what the clothes were made from. As the above section shows, the material composition from our sample was mostly restricted to four key materials: cotton; polyester; viscose; and elastane. Each of these materials have known environmental impacts, however synthetic fibres like polyester and elastane are well known for shedding substantial amounts of microplastics into our water systems when washed.

Low-quality clothing that was not suitable for resale or reuse and contained high percentages of synthetic fibres like polyester and elastane (also acrylic, nylon, Lycra; recycled polyester, metallised fibre) were considered best used for disposable rags rather than further clothing remake projects. It was considered better to mop up oil spills, paint, white spirits, and other types of industrial and construction work with synthetic oil-based fabrics like polyester, keeping problematic material together for immediate disposal. These were therefore ragged and sent to be used by the Maritime and Engineering departments on the Stornoway campus.

Category 1: Ragging (26%): this category explored the options for clothes that were not suitable for resale, reuse or remaking projects. This was considered the **best end use for 26%** of the sample of clothing (5985g) we worked with. Three outlets for rags were identified on the NWH Stornoway campus for piloting the use of the rags produced from the low-grade clothing: the Engineering department; the Maritime department; and the Gunnera project. In some instances, low-quality clothing with high percentage blends of cotton and viscose were also ragged but rather than going to the Maritime and Engineering departments for mopping up paint and oil-based mess they were generally kept aside for organic use in the Gunnera Project, where it was considered better to use more biodegradable, less synthetic options.



Photo: Disposable Rags from clothing with heavy polyester composition.

The Engineering and Maritime department testimonials

"The rags work well and are a good size. We have been using them for material pre-cleaning, wiping up spills, cleaning tooling when needed and helping with clean-up during painting activities. So far, they have been beneficial for general workshop tasks and housekeeping"

Christine MacNeil: Engineering Lecturer

"Thanks so much for the rags, the timing was fantastic as we are in the process of painting the college boat with the school students. The rags were ideal size and every student had one in their boiler suit pocket to clean up any mishaps asap. As they are learning how to paint the rags are required a lot. They are also used along with white spirit to clean up tools, hands etc at the end of the session as keeping clean takes experience which doesn't happen overnight. I have been buying cotton rich rags for engine rooms all my working life but the materials in these ones were better for painting. Ideal for the job"

Iain Angus Macaulay: Maritime Lecturer

The Gunnera project testimonial

"The textiles' repurposing project has been able to provide us with biodegradable bags for a trial - to aid effective Gunnera seed pod removal and easy heat treatment. The 'pod bags' present a really effective way to remove seed pods with no risk of the seed dispersal and would be especially useful for any Gunnera seed pods with viable seeds. This collaboration is a great example of where human cooperation links directly to 'One Health' benefits"

Charlie Main: Sustainability Lecturer and Gunnera Project Lead



Market Forecasting for Rags

Rags were identified as a key local market growth area for poor quality clothing and textiles. The islands have much industrial and construction activity occurring meaning rags are in high demand all year round. Currently rags are being sold locally at: [MacGregor Industrial Supplies in Stornoway](#) and [Stornoway Fishermen's Chandelers Limited](#). After some investigation it was found that rags being sold at both these places are not made locally but are shipped over from the mainland through industrial suppliers.

- In store at MacGregor's: 8Kg bags of towelling rags sell for £25.24 (including VAT); 10 Kg of ragged polycotton sells for £19.67 (including VAT); and 10 Kg of ragged white wiper cotton sells at £30.77 (including VAT). MacGregor's claimed they were unable to share details regarding how many bags of rags they sell.
- In store at Fishermen's Chandelers **10 Kg bags of cotton rich rags sell at £30 per bag.** After some further investigation it was found out that **Fishermen's Chandelers sell approximately 80 x 10 Kg bags of rags every 6 weeks.**

Using the figures from Fishermen's Chandelers we can aim to ascertain an approximate **estimate of half of this market share.**

80 x 10 Kg bags of rags @ £30 per bag = £2400

Annually this equates to **approximately £20,800**

80 x 10,000 grams = 800,000 grams

800,000 grams every 6 weeks = 6,933,333 grams (6.93 tonnes) annually

It is recognised that producing rags locally could bring positive economic gain to the islands, rather than just incurring costs. A market has been identified for **6.93 tonnes of rags every year from Fishermen's Chandelers** which could not only reduce the costs of these unwanted textiles but generate some local economic revenue for those with the job of sorting and ragging the clothes and textiles.

To landfill 6.93 tonnes, it currently costs island authorities £906.10 (6.93 x 130.75); to transport off island for hopeful recycling it costs them £1004.85 (6.93 x 145). Through supporting the development of this market locally the council could potentially turn these current negative costs into a positive local economic gain of £21,706 - £21,805, supporting the local multiplier effect and generating some part-time green job employment.

Ragging could also potentially be an activity carried out by Community Services through the winter months. It would be timely to generate more discussion with the local authority to see if we can widen the scope of this market share through the adoption of community wealth building principles through the new [Community Wealth Building Act \(2026\)](#). The next stage of the project seeks to develop further links with Fishermen's Chandelers to see if they will pilot the use of island made rags and support us in trying to capture some of this market share locally.

Category Two: Remaking (31%): this category was for clothes that were considered suitable for textile remaking projects and could therefore support local craft industries in the community. This was considered the **best end use for 31%** of the sample of clothing (7136g). The NWH Fashion expertise was called upon to work on this category, exploring remake projects and inviting students in to produce ideas for new remake projects.

The approach used in the remaking process was to limit the stages of production required to produce new products from the items of clothing selected. Waste creation was also a consideration as was the ability to reuse sections of the garment, for example zips. Remaking is a fun and enjoyable process and evidence is showing that craft-based interventions can improve mood and life satisfaction (Bukhave, Creek, Linstad and Frandsen; 2025).

The Hoody Case Study the Hoody Case Study was developed by NS over the course of the reporting period. After developing prototypes 1-5 (see below) a workshop was held with students from the NC Fashion course.



Remake projects from the hoodies



Within the clothing there were two hooded tops: a pink one and a green one. Both were made from 100% Polyester. We decided to remake the hoodies into something fun, useful and ornamental, as in its current clothing use it is likely to be laundered, shedding more microplastics into waterways. These tops were unpicked to provide the sections of the garments as they would have been prior to the garments original production. For each hoody this resulted in the following sections: 1 x Back, 2 x Front, 2 x Sleeves, 1 x zip, 2 x wrist cuff jersey ribbing and 1 x length of waist jersey ribbing.

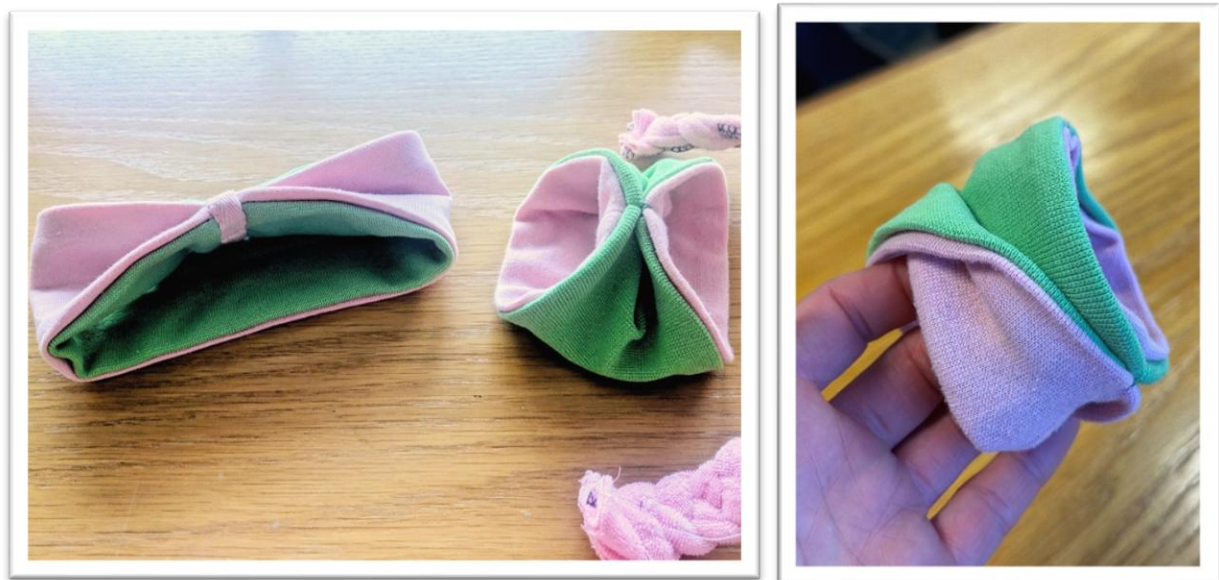
Prototype 1

The hood of the top was only unpicked around the collar area. Upon examination of the sections, it became apparent that if one side of the hood was sewn shut, the hood could become a draw-string bag, potentially with an end use as a washbag / makeup bag.



Prototypes 2 & 3

The wrist cuff and waist jersey ribbing required two lines of stitching to create each hair band or headband. 2 x Hair bands and 1 x Headbands were made from each hoody.



Prototype 4

The remaining panels were cut into strips of equal widths, then overlapped and stitched into lengths of cord. Experimentation took place with these lengths to develop a **weave** structure. During this experimentation a shape evolved that resembled an octopus. This technique was developed further and the waste product from each hoody was used to fill the octopus.



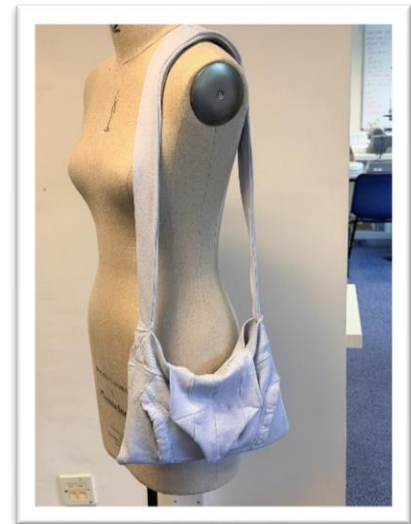
Prototype 5

Although not a 'new' product, re-using the zip from the hoody in another product works towards / supports the development of a prototype of **REUSE**.



NC Fashion Student Workshop: Monday 25th May 2026 1000-1300

Only one student was able to attend the workshop, but the results are of a high quality. The hoody case study was explained to them, and they were provided with a hooded sweatshirt to work with. They were not directed to follow the prototype examples above, instead they were directed to follow their own intuition and develop alternative products. Unfortunately, due to branding display we cannot share images of the bag made from the top part of the hoody, but we can show the bag made from the bottom part.



Further Remake Projects - Prototypes 6 and 7

In addition to Netty's Hoody Case study and the student workshop some further remake projects were experimented with. These include eco yarn and t-shirt bags; both products being made from t-shirts. It is felt both these products have scope to be built upon in interesting ways.

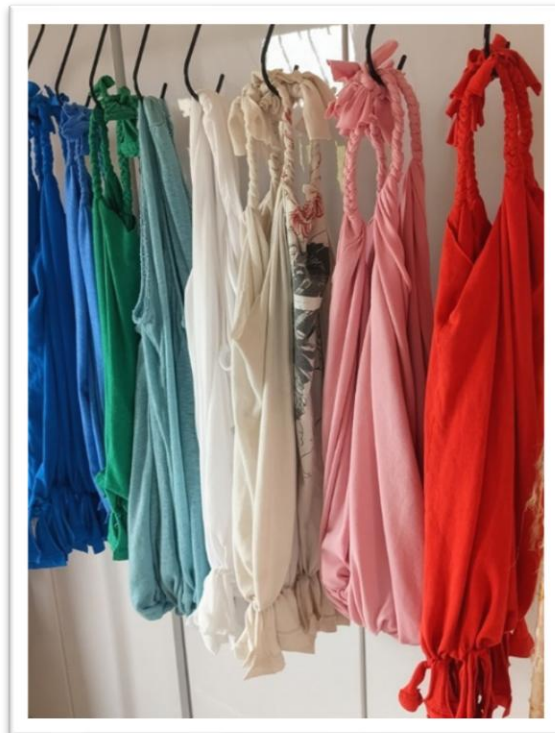
ECO-YARN

The eco yarn works well for weaving and crochet projects, an interesting, and fun activity to engage young people with when exploring weaving practices. Activities around making your own loom and yarn to practice weaving could be used in schools and social care settings to encourage an interest in weaving and well-being.



T-SHIRT BAG

The t-shirt bag (made simply with one t-shirt, a pair of scissors and some knotting) produces a strong and durable reusable grocery bag that can be washed when required. As bags are a popular product it was felt there may be scope to work with the local community to promote the use of t-shirt grocery bags and develop a market-opening for them in local supermarkets. As they are easy to make, they also are a good activity for introducing textile reuse to young people.



Category 3: Resale or Reuse (39%): this category was for clothes considered to be in exceptionally good condition for either selling on through local charity shops or online platforms like Vinted. This was considered **the best end use for 39%** of the sample of clothing. From our restricted sample (23.02 Kg) therefore, up to 61% of the clothing could be brought out of the pile for a use beyond clothing, which indicates great potential for developing useful products on the islands from unwanted clothes. The resale and reuse items were considered a useful resource for services throughout the islands working to support families, by accommodating for a lower cost of living.

It is recommended that the public sector recognises the economic potential of clothing resales and the cost savings that can be made for families through encouraging more platforms and avenues for reuse opportunities. If all children clothes were taken in, washed and kept in good condition and placed in accessible public spaces, then the island authorities could guarantee all children throughout the islands had the clothes they needed. Paid and supported outreach programmes to schools to promote clothing reuse and raise awareness of the problems being caused by textile waste, whilst engaging young people in fun textile reuse activities, could be a good way to address stigmas around second-hand clothing.

Charity shops struggle to find enough space to store the clothing they are receiving. The limited space restricts organising for textile reuse and finding alternative market outlets for the clothing. It is suggested that the public sector thinks about how it can provide more public space to help charity groups organise and store clothing more effectively. This would help promote more textile sorting and potential reuse and could therefore be a positive approach for the public sector to take, better supporting the low cost (voluntary) work that charity groups and the third sector are providing, while helping to improve opportunities for accruing more economic value from the clothes.

Planned accessible spaces for clothing reuse projects with room to be creative with regards to textile reworking has scope to become a beneficial way to promote textile reuse activities with potential spin offs for creative jobs, craft enterprise and waste reduction. These spaces could also be a social benefit for young people. Spaces that demonstrate ecological activities with a proactive approach to material fixing and mending could have positive mental health and well-being impacts too. Studies are showing that mood and life satisfaction improves with craft-based interventions (Bukhave, Creek, Linstad and Frandsen; 2025) so textile reuse projects like these could also help support well-being in the community.

They could also be seen as advantageous for promoting heritage futures. At a time when concerns are being expressed about the ageing demographic of the weaving population (Wilson, 2026) textile reuse could help regenerate an interest in weaving amongst the younger generations. Encouraging young people to explore ways of using textile waste to experiment with weaving practices, offers scope and potential to develop with interest the connection between clothing waste, land use and island life, and the maintenance of a weaving heritage future. Combining clothing resale with some textile reuse workshop space could be a great way to support young person green job employment on the islands, whilst taking some of the burden off the more elderly voluntary run third sector organisations struggling under the weight of high volumes of unwanted clothes. Given the increasing expense of transportation and landfill for the public sector and households (through council tax payments), it is considered that the public sector could be brought in more to support textile reuse practices to the islands' advantage and facilitate free or low-cost clothing provision for groups throughout the islands that can benefit.

What have been the benefits derived from the project? The opportunity to work collaboratively with another person and think creatively about ways the textiles can be reused. It was particularly good to have a second opinion on the quality of the clothes and what end uses they would best serve. The hoodie deconstruction project shows the potential for engaging and fun workshops for young people, enhancing skills for textile reuse and remaking. It was interesting to see the potential for 'weaving' projects from old clothes. Textile reuse projects like these present an engaging way to encourage interest in weaving skills for young people throughout the islands, with the potential to support ongoing interest in weaving skills for the Harris Tweed legacy of island communities. Raising more awareness amongst students about the RESELL-REUSE-REMAKE formula. Although only one student was available to attend the workshop in May, they were all aware of the project and ongoing research due to the location of the project sampling area.

The stakeholder meetings were beneficial for getting a wide view on the problems being witnessed with regards to textile waste across the islands. There has not been much public discussion to raise the issues which is surprising given that it causes problems for many in the public and third sector. The project helped to reveal the full impacts and costs involved in managing high volumes of textile waste, costs that are rising alongside transportation and landfill costs. The project revealed the growing burden of work being experienced by the Third Sector, raising issues of fairness and the pertinence of job creation for young people to replace the heavy burden of work being placed on the often-elderly voluntary sector.

What are the planned follow-up projects? Looking to use the Hoody Case Study / Prototype formula as part of a two-day autumn workshop at UHI NWH. Embedding some of the material-led design methods into the NC delivery for 2026/27. Also, to continue to explore the potential for small-scale ragging industry locally as this could represent a solution for a significant amount of low-grade clothing waste (our sample indicated that 26% of clothing waste could be ragged). When applied to the larger annual estimate for clothing waste on the islands (120-140 tonnes) this percentage estimates that annually between 31-36 tonnes of these unwanted clothes could potentially be ragged for the local industrial market and beyond. Discussions have started with Just Enterprise to gain Business Support to further develop these ideas. Arrangements are also being made for a Textile Sustainability Innovation Challenge Day event in mid-September 2026 to share the results of the project and widen the discussion on how to best support island communities to build sustainable, circular, and creative economies rooted in their distinctive heritage.

What impacts and benefits has the project generated? The project provided space for the issue of textile waste to be raised as an important issue requiring local action. Through the project the impacts of textile waste throughout the islands became clearer and local opportunities for these unwanted textiles better understood. As a scoping study, the project revealed the limitations of the global circular economy solution for textile waste from the islands, pointing instead to the need for developing more skills throughout the islands to support bringing these unwanted textiles back into the local economy. The potential for a localised ragging industry was identified as a starting point for this direction, to help support bringing a significant amount of lower-grade textile waste into back into the local economy. The project also led to a closer working relationship with regional business support agencies like Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Just Enterprise supporting direction towards a business development approach to the islands textile waste.

What are the next steps? The Islands Entrepreneurial Network are organising a Textile Sustainability Innovation Challenge event for Mid-September 2026 (tbc) and 4 days of business development support with the Scottish Government funded Just Enterprise Programme has been secured. Both these steps will continue building awareness and support for textile reuse as a relevant place-based approach for addressing global challenges and supporting regenerative rural economies with sustainable, well-being and heritage focused futures. On campus at UHI NWH, we are hoping to establish a larger and more accessible and defined working space for the project so that the remake projects can be further developed and more firmly embedded into the NC Fashion delivery for 2026/27 as well as being included in the networked NC Creative Industries Programme.

What were the learning points from the project? Product development always takes time and when you are developing products from a zero-waste perspective there is an added layer of thought and analysis that must be considered. The scope for what can be achieved is greatly limited by the uncertain climate for continuing the scope of the activities. The project needs secured area space to build up production capacities, promote the work and develop with more certainty potential routes to market. Also, the project came later in the academic year (Feb/March 2026) and so was not developed as part of the NC Fashion course meaning workshop attendance could not be enforced. Embedding these workshops into the curriculum delivery to support module outcomes would be more effective.

What were the benefits of working collectively/collaboratively? Time and space to imagine and plan for a more relevant and place-based curriculum. The different skill sets that NS and RS bring strengthen the project outcomes and provide a rich ground for discussion.

“Weaving our way back”

Clothing waste demonstrates a high ecological footprint by consumers and service providers across the islands. However these island communities can still remember a resourcefulness once held by the local populace. Strong connections to the land through livelihoods supported by fishing, crofting and Harris tweed production remain a valued part of island life in the Hebrides today and a crucial part of the cultural heritage supporting the islands’ tourist economy. When we see our land piling up with wasted and unwanted clothing, we are reminded of the islands valued land, heritage and resourceful ecological practices once again.



A collaborative community enterprise approach to reduce textile waste throughout the islands represents an opportunity to reignite interest in a community heritage value system that appears to be losing ground in a fast paced, constantly changing and increasingly AI-led world. Supporting a textile reuse culture that helps to reduce textile waste is urgent given the increasingly expensive costs for managing this waste, as we see in current costings for landfill and transportation. The burden of work required to manage this waste currently seems unjust, relying heavily on voluntary (often elderly) unpaid work, at a time when we need to be creating jobs for young people throughout the islands. Reducing the social, economic and environmental burden of textile waste requires investment in the provision of assets to develop the skills base for clothing and textile reuse, through local education and micro-enterprise support. This requires a meaningful and properly funded programme that can support the work of both the municipal services and the third sector (Fowlie, 2025). Through this process we build a social infrastructure that is more supportive of the creative innovation that can protect the heritage and well-being of our islands’ communities and the environmental quality of their land.

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