# HebCelt festival drives economy and sustainability while tackling depopulation on Lewis and Harris



Ahead of this year’s HebCelt Festival, set to unfold from 16 to 19 July, the event has garnered attention for not only its cultural offerings but also its crucial role in addressing the depopulation concerns of the Isle of Lewis and Harris. At the heart of this celebration lies a commitment to local culture and sustainability, as shared by the festival's dedicated team, including Operations Coordinator Carol Ferguson and Chair Iain Macphail.

Ferguson, who has been involved with HebCelt since relocating to Lewis in 2014, expresses her excitement about the festival's return, noting the unique camaraderie among its volunteers from around the globe. “There’s that buzz that something is coming,” she shares, highlighting how preparations revitalise Stornoway as local businesses adorn their storefronts in anticipation.

Macphail, a festival veteran who began volunteering at just 14 years old, echoes Ferguson’s enthusiasm. Since taking over as chair of the board last September, he speaks of the festival’s significant contributions to the local economy, boasting an impressive £4.1 million generated for businesses last year alone. This highlights the festival's consistent trajectory of growth, with last year witnessing a record attendance of 19,500, particularly when combined with its attendance figures from previous years.

The festival provides a platform not only for established artists but also for local talent. In its commitment to nurture homegrown musicians, 45% of the performers at the festival in recent years were from Lewis and Harris. For example, Elias Alexander, a local artist who began his journey volunteering on the tech team, will return as a performer, showcasing the festival’s role as a launchpad for local talent.

Sustainability has increasingly become a cornerstone of the HebCelt Festival. In a bid to reduce its environmental impact, the festival has implemented innovative energy solutions, including hydrogen power, which has gained commendation within the festival industry. These sustainability efforts have not just been about meeting conditions; they reflect a deeper commitment to reducing carbon footprints and pioneering greener event practices.

HebCelt is addressing the pressing issue of depopulation, particularly among younger generations. Ferguson notes that the organization strives to inspire a sense of opportunity and creativity in the community, aiming to show that life on the islands can be vibrant and fulfilling. Macphail adds that the festival encapsulates the spirit of collaboration and community pride, elements that are vital as the local population grapples with these changes.

Despite the challenges posed by the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, the festival has maintained a forward-looking approach, supported by a three-year funding commitment from Creative Scotland, which allows for strategic planning. This assurance of funding enables the team to keep operational costs manageable, ensuring that ticket prices remain accessible. For this year, they have committed to keeping 2025 ticket prices aligned with 2024 rates, showcasing their sensitivity to the community's economic conditions.

Looking ahead, both Ferguson and Macphail are eager for this year's lineup, which features a mix of local youth performances alongside well-known acts like Lulu and Skerryvore. As Ferguson notes, there are exciting initiatives planned, particularly in deepening community ties and exploring international collaborations through programmes such as Celtic Connections.

In a time where connection and creativity are paramount, HebCelt stands as a beacon of hope, not just for music lovers but for the future of the islands themselves. Ferguson captures this sentiment perfectly: “We’re always shaped by our people and their belief that culture and connection transforms communities.” With the festival set to celebrate its 30th anniversary in 2027, its commitment to inspiring the local population and enhancing the economy continues to forge a path for a vibrant and creative future in the Outer Hebrides.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25218083.hebcelt-festival-fights-depopulation-lewis-harris/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.hebceltfest.com/news/news/3/hebcelt-2022-marks-record-attendance-and-42-million-boost-lewis)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25218083.hebcelt-festival-fights-depopulation-lewis-harris/?ref=rss), [[5]](https://www.hebrides-news.com/hebridean-celtic-festival-boost-lewis-economy-61123.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.hebrides-news.com/record-attendances-hebcelt-2023-19723.html), [[6]](https://www.edf-re.uk/news-and-views/lewis-wind-power-sponsorship-boost-for-popular-hebcelt-2023-music-festival/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.eventimpacts.com/research/hebcelt-2023), [[5]](https://www.hebrides-news.com/hebridean-celtic-festival-boost-lewis-economy-61123.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25218083.hebcelt-festival-fights-depopulation-lewis-harris/?ref=rss), [[6]](https://www.edf-re.uk/news-and-views/lewis-wind-power-sponsorship-boost-for-popular-hebcelt-2023-music-festival/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25218083.hebcelt-festival-fights-depopulation-lewis-harris/?ref=rss), [[7]](https://www.feast-magazine.co.uk/business/hebcelt-celebrates-triple-awards-win-35978)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25218083.hebcelt-festival-fights-depopulation-lewis-harris/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.hebceltfest.com/news/news/3/hebcelt-2022-marks-record-attendance-and-42-million-boost-lewis> - The HebCelt 2022 festival achieved a record attendance and provided a £4.2 million boost to the local economy. The event featured 70 performances, including 40 in the main arena, and attracted over 19,500 music lovers to the Lews Castle Grounds. The festival's success highlights its growing popularity and significant impact on the Outer Hebrides' economy.
3. <https://www.hebrides-news.com/record-attendances-hebcelt-2023-19723.html> - HebCelt 2023 celebrated record attendances of 19,500, showcasing over 35 musical performances and cultural activities. The festival's success underscores its growing popularity and significant impact on the local community and economy.
4. <https://www.eventimpacts.com/research/hebcelt-2023> - HebCelt 2023 demonstrated a commitment to sustainability by adopting hydrogen power solutions to replace fossil fuels for powering parts of the event site. This eco-friendly approach garnered positive media attention and set a progressive example within the festival industry.
5. <https://www.hebrides-news.com/hebridean-celtic-festival-boost-lewis-economy-61123.html> - HebCelt 2023 provided a £3.6 million boost to the local economy, with over 19,500 tickets sold for the main shows at Lews Castle Grounds. The festival's success highlights its growing popularity and significant impact on the Outer Hebrides' economy.
6. <https://www.edf-re.uk/news-and-views/lewis-wind-power-sponsorship-boost-for-popular-hebcelt-2023-music-festival/> - Lewis Wind Power sponsored the Islands Stage at HebCelt 2023 for the sixth consecutive year, supporting the festival's commitment to community benefit through sustainable sources and enhancing its green credentials.
7. <https://www.feast-magazine.co.uk/business/hebcelt-celebrates-triple-awards-win-35978> - HebCelt received three prestigious awards, including the Cuach Comunn Leòdhas agus na Hearadh Ghlaschu award, the Best Green and Sustainable Business in Lewis and Harris, and the Outstanding Cultural Event award at the Highlands and Islands Thistle Awards, recognising its contribution to the local area, green credentials, and cultural significance.