

our land, our people  
and our place  
in the future

**NORTH UIST AREA STRATEGY 2001**



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Date: March 2001  
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## Our Vision for North Uist

- To have a clear and strong sense of identity
- To have confidence and believe in ourselves
- To value everybody in the community
- To provide the opportunity to earn a living
- To be positively engaged in creating its own destiny
- To be guardians of our surrounding natural and cultural inheritance
- To consider the effects of our actions on future generations
- To aim to deliver local needs locally

## To the People of North Uist

On behalf of the North Uist Area Advisory Group, I am very happy to present our Strategy for the future of North Uist.

The Advisory Group would like to thank everybody in North Uist for helping with the Dùthchas process since it started in October 1998. During the survey you gave up your time to tell us what you felt were North Uist's strengths, challenges and opportunities. You also helped in many other ways, such as welcoming people from the other Pilot Areas or from other countries, and you entertained the Partners with songs and music. Some of you agreed to represent Dùthchas on exchange visits to Norway and Jutland or go to events in the UK. Many, many people gave up lots of voluntary time to attend meetings and workshops and we are very grateful to everyone. Dùthchas could not have completed this strategy without your help, therefore once again – Thank You.

## To the Agencies and Partners of Dùthchas

The Advisory Group would like to take this opportunity to thank you for all the help and support that you have given since the start of the Dùthchas process. You have given up a lot of time to attend meetings and events in North Uist and also on the mainland. We also presented you with a mountain of paper during the consultations and we are very grateful that you were able to find the time to respond to them so thoroughly. You have been very understanding of short timescales or when we have needed an answer sooner than expected. However most of all we would like to thank you for all the valuable time outside your working day that you have donated to the project. We hope that in the future you will continue this Partnership with the community of North Uist.

*Le faing mhòr dhan a h-uile duine againn*

*Uisdean Robertson, North Uist Area Advisory Group  
Chairman*

*Caitriona MacCuish, North Uist Area Co-ordinator  
On behalf of the North Uist Area Advisory Group*

# The Dùthchas Project

The word 'Dùthchas' is an old Gaelic term that speaks of strong, united, self-sufficient communities who actively look after their people, their heritage and their environment.

The Dùthchas Project is a demonstration project working to achieve sustainable local development in remote areas of the Scottish Highlands and Islands. It is doing this through the participation of the local communities in planning their own future, with support from the many agencies whose remit impacts on these areas.

## The Pilot Areas

Dùthchas has been working, since 1998, with 3 pilot areas – North Uist, North Sutherland and Trotternish in Skye.

## The Partners

Caithness & Sutherland Enterprise, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Crofters' Commission, Forestry Commission, Forest Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Historic Scotland, North of Scotland Water Authority, Rural Forum Scotland (1998 – 1999), Scottish Arts Council, Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Scottish Homes, Scottish Museums Council, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Department, Scottish Tourist Board, Scottish Environment LINK, Skye & Lochalsh Enterprise, The Highland Council, The Scottish Council Development and Industry, University of the Highlands and Islands Millennium Institute, Western Isles Enterprise.



## The North Uist Area Advisory Group

**Donald Campbell**, North Uist Community Council; **Archie Campbell**, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar; **Gwen Evans**, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; **Morag Ferguson**, Uist 2000 Ltd; **Helen Forbes**, Uist Council of Voluntary Organisations; **Sally Foster**, Historic Scotland; **Nick Ingledeew**, Western Isles Fisherman's Association; **John Love**, Scottish Natural Heritage; **John Angus MacCuish**, Berneray Village Hall; **Gina MacDonald**, Urachadh Uibhist; **Roddy MacDonald**, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar; **George MacDonald**, North Uist Estates; **Donald MacDonald**, Scottish Crofters Union; **Helen MacDonald**, Southern Isles Amenity Trust; **Isabel MacDonald**, Western Isles Enterprise; **Isa MacKillop**, Comann Eachdraidh Uibhist a Tuath; **Donald MacKillop**, Berneray Community Council; **Donald MacLean**, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar; **Helen MacLean**, Lochmaddy Village Hall; **Norman MacLeod**, Taigh Chearsabhagh; **Lucy MacLeod**, Scottish Environment Protection Agency; **Mary MacLeod**, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar; **Kathleen MacLeod**, Ceum air Adhart; **Angus MacMillan**, Western Isles Tourist Board; **Ena MacNeill**, Scottish Crofters Union; **Maire MacPhail**, Carinish Village Hall; **Anne Shepherd**, Scottish Natural Heritage; **John Stewart**, Western Isles Fishermen's Association; **Ralph Throp**, Scottish Homes; **Jim Tough**, The Scottish Arts Council; **Gordon Wells**, University of the Highlands and Islands Millennium Institute; **Ken Wilson**, Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Department.





# 1. The Area Strategy What is the Strategy?

The Dùthchas Project has been working in North Uist for 3 years. The main purpose of this work has been to create a Strategy for the sustainable development of North Uist, based on the ideas of local people and supported by all of the agencies whose work influences the development of the area.

This is a different kind of Strategy to those normally produced. It is not a 'technical' strategy, it is a Community Strategy, embracing the views and aspirations of the local people, and linking these with the key issues being tackled by Partner agencies. In the course of a process to which consensus is central, compromise has of course been important too. Every individual will not achieve exactly what they want, but together we can make meaningful progress which meets a range of agreed needs and aspirations.

## What is a Sustainability Strategy?

A Sustainability Strategy provides the framework and essential building blocks for the area to take forward sustainable development, both now and in the long term future. It takes into account the social, economic and environmental needs and resources of the area, in relation to every activity. It also takes into account the effects of the things we do in this area on other places and people and on future generations. An essential part of this Strategy and Action Plan is that it brings together the activities of many interest groups and organisations, and links them around a common goal.

### *The Strategy and Action Plan identifies:*

- our **vision** for the future development of our area,
- the **objectives** which will help us to meet that vision,
- the **actions** we need to take to make it happen,
- the **roles** of all the different players involved,
- the **measures** which will tell us that we are making progress,
- the **framework** through which it will all be organised
- the **resource** implications

The Strategy takes a long term view. The Action Plan concentrates on the implementation of the first set of prioritised objectives. For this reason, the Action Plan is likely to be changed and updated more often than the Strategy itself. The Action Plan is to be found in the 'back pocket' of this Strategy document. This Strategy and Action Plan has been put together to help all the communities in Uist to work towards a successful, sustainable future. The following pages document the ideas and work of the many Dùthchas Groups and public agencies. This Strategy and Action Plan provide a framework for the future development of North Uist, a basis for planning 'what to do next' and for gaining support and funding by setting projects within the 'bigger' picture. The Strategy and Action Plan will help you to identify your role in helping to work towards a vibrant, sustainable future for North Uist.

## Who is this Strategy for?

This Strategy and Action Plan is for everyone who lives and works in North Uist and who cares about its future. It will help community groups, voluntary sector organisations, townships and individuals, as well as public agencies work together for the future. This Strategy and Action Plan will also show others what we are working towards. If we are all committed to working in Partnership we can make it happen – therefore, this Strategy is for you.

## How was the Strategy developed?

This Strategy is based on all the information gathered from the local community survey and the 22 Partner agencies. This information was then shaped into the Strategy by members of the local Dùthchas Strategy and Advisory Groups, in consultation with other 'expert' contacts. The Strategy itself was written by the Dùthchas Staff team, working closely with local Area Advisory Group members.

*Figure 1 (opposite)*





# 1. SURVEY

## Community Survey

An extensive community survey was carried out involving everyone who wished to be involved  
**296 people contributed**

## Agency Survey

A similar survey of the Partner agencies, at local & national levels, was carried out  
**22 Partner agencies**

## Data Search

An assessment of the statistical data sources held by the agencies was undertaken  
**Partners & Consultants**

**Strengths, Challenges & Ideas for change**

**Key Trends for sustainability**



# 2. SUSTAINABILITY PROFILE of North Uist

## Goals, Objectives & Indicators

Sustainability goals, objectives & indicators developed  
**Consultants & Partners**

## Issues & Priorities

Based on the Profile, 14 Sustainability Issues & 4 immediate priorities were identified  
**Consultants & North Uist Advisory Group**



# 3. SUSTAINABILITY PLANS

## Strategy Groups

Strategy Groups were set up for each of the priority issues  
**North Uist Advisory Group**

## New Ideas, Information & Support

Links were created between the Strategy Groups & other similar initiatives across the UK & Europe through exchange visits & seminars  
**Strategy Groups, Peer Communities & initiatives**

## Develop Plans

Each Strategy Group developed a plan of action for its topic  
**Strategy Groups & Partners & Reference Groups**



# 4. ACTIONS

## First Demonstration Projects started

The Strategy Groups identified & started one immediate action to implement their plan, with the help of a Seedcorn grant  
**Strategy Groups**



# 5. IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

## Partners & Support

Partner Agencies consulted to identify their future role in supporting the Strategies  
**Partners & Area Advisory Group**

## Organisational Framework

The Area Advisory Group was consulted to determine the appropriate framework for taking the actions forward  
**North Uist Advisory Group**

## Monitoring & Reviews

# A Guide to the Strategy

Figure 2

SECTION	PURPOSE	PAGE	DUTHCHAS REPORTS
VISION	Our Vision for a sustainable North Uist	1	4
SETTING THE SCENE	Summary of the Strengths, Challenges and Ideas for change from the Initial Review findings	10	4,5,6
SUSTAINABILITY PROFILE	Our Goals, Objectives and Priorities for the sustainability of North Uist	13	5
SUSTAINABILITY PLANS	Priority Actions for achieving our vision	15	4,5,9,11 12,13,14 15,16,17
IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY	The Organisational Framework for carrying out our actions	26	
MEASURING OUR PROGRESS	Measuring the Impact of our actions in achieving our vision and objectives	27	5
REVIEWING THE STRATEGY	Making Changes to the Strategy in the light of our progress and changing circumstances	27	5
MAKING LINKS	Strategic Links and information	27	5
ACTION PLAN	Detailed plans for implementing the First Phase of the Strategy	Back Pocket	4

# Dùthchas Reports

The work of Dùthchas is recorded in the publications listed in Figure 3. These are useful reference documents which give a better understanding of what lies behind the Strategy. All of the Dùthchas Partner agencies hold copies of these reports. Copies have also been placed in local libraries in the Pilot Areas and with Urachadh Uibhist.

**Figure 3**

1	The Dùthchas Project CD Rom	Contains all of the information and reports produced by the Dùthchas Project - March 2001
2	'The Dùthchas Handbook'	How to develop a sustainability strategy - March 2001
3	Dùthchas Project Final Report	Covering all of the work done in the Project - June 2001
4	Initial Review Report and appendices	One for each pilot area - Winter 1998-1999
5	Area Sustainability Profile and appendices	One for each pilot area - November 1999
6	'Our Place in the Future'	A statement of what the local people most value about their area - Spring 1999
7	The Dùthchas Project Tape/Slide on video	Documents the ideas raised by the community in the Initial Review - Spring 1999
8	3 Project Newsletters	Spring 1999/ Winter 1999/ Autumn 2000
9	'Looking after the Future'	Report of the first transnational conference held in Sutherland - April 1999
10	'Dùthchas Project Final Conference'	Report of the second transnational conference held in Skye - March 2001
11	'IT - You Know it Makes Sense'	Report of the conference on using IT with local communities - August 1999
12	Natural and Cultural Heritage	Seminar report. June 2000
13	Renewable Energy	Seminar report. July 2000
14	Local Produce	Seminar report. September 2000
15	Norway - Scotland exchange programme	Reports of the exchange visits looking at rural development in remote areas - September 1999 & October 2000
16	Jutland Study Tour Report	Study tour on renewable energy in Denmark - May 2000
17	Cumbria Study Tour Report	Study tour on processing and marketing of local meat produce - November 2000
18	Geographical Information	Report of the findings of the GIS Project - March 2001

All 22 Partner agencies have copies of these reports. In addition the local library at Sgoil Lionacleit also has copies.

## 2. Setting the Scene

The first stage of the work was to ask the community and agencies about the strengths and challenges facing North Uist and their ideas for change. This section documents the main points.

### Our Island

North Uist, or Uibhist a Tuath as it is in Gaelic, lies at the centre of the chain of islands called the Outer Hebrides or the Western Isles as they are often called. North Uist has many distinct communities, for instance, Bayhead and the Westside, Sollas, Lochmaddy, Carinish and Claddach, and the two islands of Grimsay and Berneray, which are joined to North Uist by causeways. At present North Uist has a population of approximately 1,500.

### Our People

*"Community spirit is so strong here"*

Although there are very distinct and independent communities within North Uist, the extensive community survey, shows they feel that they have the common thread of belonging to the island of North Uist, which ties them together. People feel they belong here because there is such a strong community spirit, with friendly, helpful people who are welcoming to others. Many people also enjoy the fact that they are surrounded by an extended family of aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents as well as close friends. However it must not be forgotten that to others this close family and community can seem suffocating or that they feel excluded from it. Some people may also feel isolated by life in North Uist as services may not always be as accessible as on the mainland.

One of the challenges facing the community of North Uist is a decline in population. As can be seen in the sustainability profile, the census figures for 1991 show a small increase from the previous decade, however local people feel that this does not show the whole picture and is now out of date. Young people leave the island for further education and many never return as they feel they would not have the same work or social opportunities as they do on the mainland. This leads to a population imbalance with an ageing community. If we do not find a solution to this, the imbalance will only increase. To have a viable community in North Uist we need to ensure that we have a mix of people of all ages – therefore North Uist must have a range of jobs and careers, and a good variety of social activities and amenities.



## Our Culture & Heritage

### Language

*"Tha Gàidhlig fhathast air a' bruidhinn an seò"*

It would be impossible to live here and not recognise the strong local culture and sense of history that is such an important thread of the way of life. The most obvious sign of our unique culture may be the use of the Gaelic language in day to day life. The 1991 census shows that 81% of the North Uist population are Gaelic speakers. Therefore, it is not surprising that Gaelic can be heard every day in shops, schools and work places. However there is a worry that the language could be in decline. To keep the language alive it must be used by the younger generation – therefore the community is pleased that there are now Gaelic Medium schools in three areas of North Uist, with many Gaelic playgroups or "croilleagan" also in operation. It is also hoped that the new Colaisde Bheinn na Faoghla in Benbecula, which is running a course in Gaelic Language and Music, will help increase the interest in Gaelic.

### History

*"We are surrounded by our history"*

North Uist has 49 archaeological and historical sites that are of national importance but there are also 629 known sites, which are of regional or local importance, some dating from as early as 5,000BC. There are many duns, wheelhouses, chambered cairns and forts dotted around the island. Some have been excavated but there are many other sites that have not yet told us the stories which they hold. We must protect these sites from the elements, livestock and human damage, if they are to survive for future generations to have this learning opportunity and link with the past. If interpretation and access is done sympathetically then these sites can also benefit the local area by attracting visitors who are interested in finding out more about the past. Taigh Chearsabhagh and Comann Eachdraidh Uibhist a Tuath (the local historical society) have helped to create an interest in our history both for local people and for visitors. They have themed exhibitions and an outstanding photographic archive, which helps people tracing their ancestors.

### Traditions

*"I think it's good how people of all ages come to the ceilidhs here"*

Donald Angie MacLennan told delegates at the Culture and Natural Resources seminar, which was held in Carinish, that his childhood consisted of a string of "memorable cultural experiences". Whether they be cutting the peats, shearing sheep, ceilidhs, thatching or collecting cockles they are all activities that are at the heart of traditional life in North Uist. Although we are always looking for ways to go forward and to develop the island we must not forget that these activities are an important part of life here also.

Music, songs and storytelling are another strand of our unique culture and the techniques and skills involved with them need to be recorded or passed on to the younger generation. Many of the songs and traditional oral tales contain important historical information that will otherwise be lost as the older members of the community pass away. This year many of the townships held workshops based on these traditional skills – Berneray Community, Sgìre Sholais and Grimsay & Kallin Community had events ranging from seaweed cutting to butter churning. Urachadh Uibhist have also started having demonstrations of traditional skills, with the live 'luadh' (waulking the tweed) being very popular. Feis Tir an Eorna has now been running for over ten years and has helped enormously in keeping youngsters involved in traditional music and skills. However we must ensure that we sustain this interest, both in visitors and locals, and keep building on it in the future.

## Our Island Economy

Traditionally crofting and fishing have been the main industries on the island however responses during the survey show that many people in the community feel that tourism and fishfarming are just as important nowadays. Diversification of these traditional industries is important for the future. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, the local council, are another important employer giving work to people of varying skills. Although the military has now largely withdrawn from these islands the missile testing range is still an important source of employment. Taigh Chearsabhagh and Urachadh Uibhist have created new and interesting employment opportunities in the last few years as have a number of other projects. The amount of voluntary time that is dedicated to community projects, like Urachadh Uibhist and Taigh Chearsabhagh is critical to the local economy. This summer also saw many townships or communities organise cultural events or activities, based solely on voluntary effort, which attracted many tourists and locals.

North Uist, like many rural areas, has a high cost of living with goods such as food, fuel, animal feedstuffs and building materials being more expensive than on the mainland. Ferry and plane fares and the Skye Bridge tolls contribute much to the additional costs for islanders and mean that in many cases it is not viable to export goods from the islands.

Parents feel that children at island schools get a very good education – this might be linked to the small class sizes, which mean that teachers can give them more individual attention. In 1998/99, 71% of the school leavers from North Uist went on to further or higher education. Urachadh Uibhist, Taigh Chearsabhagh and Colaisde Bheinn na Faoghla have helped to provide local training and education opportunities. This must be continued and extended in the future, to allow young people to remain at home if they wish, rather than join the exodus to the mainland. This will also give older people in the community the opportunity to retrain or gain new skills in an ever-changing job market. Many community and agency representatives feel that the

islands have an opportunity to take advantage of the growing Information Technology industry which is not dependent on being based in towns or cities. The provision of a nursery at Urachadh Uibhist in the last year has been applauded by parents as this gives them greater freedom to gain employment, which would have not been possible before. However it is felt that after school care is still needed in some communities.

## Our Island Environment

About 54% of North Uist has environmental designations including Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Special Areas of Conservation, RAMSAR sites, National Scenic Area and Special Protection Areas which highlight the high environmental quality of the island. North Uist has some of the best examples of machair-land in Europe, over 1,000 fresh water lochs, miles of white shell sand beaches, heather moor and hills, and is surrounded by rich untainted inshore waters. Both agencies and members of the community feel that these designations should be viewed positively and used to market North Uist nationally and internationally as a green tourism location. It is also suggested that the suite of designations could also be used to market local produce by showing that they are grown or produced in an area, which has high environmental quality. The island economy is already boosted through payments to crofters who help protect the environment. For example, the Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme contributes £0.5 million annually to the economy of the Uists.

Environmental interests already attract many visitors to North Uist. Some visit purely because the island is seen as a clean, unpolluted 'get away' from the fast pace of city life, where they can relax and enjoy nature, while others have more specific interests. Diving is becoming increasingly popular and the waters surrounding North Uist or the off shore islands are clean and clear with many unique habitats and protected species. Watching seals and otters in their natural environment proves to be another favourite pastime for visitors. Many others visit for the outstanding bird watching opportunities that are available here. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds interpretation centre at Balranald Reserve has been very successful in attracting visitors and has been renovated recently. It is an excellent spot to view the rare corncrake for example. North Uist boasts 12% of the entire British population. A warden is in residence from spring to autumn and offers information and guided walks to schools, locals and visitors alike. There are plans to extend this to a year round post. Management schemes are available which enhance habitats for threatened species. Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and Scottish Natural Heritage have also worked in partnership with other local agencies to create employment by using local trappers to protect the ground nesting bird population, fishing interests and small scale poultry industries from the threat of mink predation. Southern Isles Amenity Trust (SIAT) Countryside Ranger and the Woodland & Countryside Officer provide information to visitors, schools and local people about various

environmental issues. New native woodland areas have been planted in North Uist at Carinish and Sponish through a partnership between the Forestry Commission and the Millennium Forest Programme.

Some environmental issues that worry the local community and local agencies are the growing erosion problems along the dunes, overgrazing or degradation of the machair, hill and wetlands caused by a large population of sheep, deer, rabbits and geese. Also, the problems associated with the introduction of alien species such as mink and hedgehogs and the problem of litter blown in from the sea. Concerns have also been raised as to the effect the decline in crofting will have on the environment as it is recognised that it is the low intensity crofting methods that have helped to preserve the high quality of the North Uist environment. If we are to use our environmental resources to market the area and our produce then we must protect and conserve them.

## 3. Sustainability Profile



## Sustainability Goals

Having identified the key issues for North Uist, we were able to develop our 'Sustainability Goals' from which we could work for the future of the area as a whole. We tried to fit our Goals with those, which have been agreed, both nationally and internationally, but to make them appropriate to the needs of North Uist. For each Goal we also developed four Sustainability Objectives. We will use these Goals and Objectives to steer the way and to measure our progress towards the sustainability of our area in the coming years. These Sustainability Goals and Objectives have already been used to identify this area's Sustainability priorities. The Sustainability Goals and accompanying Objectives are:

### Goal 1: Making the most of natural and cultural resources without damaging them

- Protecting and enhancing natural resources and protecting their value
- Protecting and enhancing cultural resources and protecting their value
- Promoting sustainable and innovative use of natural resources
- Promoting sustainable and wise use of cultural resources

### Goal 2: Retaining a viable and empowered community

- Retaining a balanced and healthy population
- Supporting community empowerment
- Ensuring equal access to employment
- Ensuring equal access to essential services

### Goal 3: Reducing problems of remoteness by delivering local needs locally and reducing dependence on external inputs

- Improving the local market for goods and services
- Promoting equal and effective access to goods, services and markets
- Providing an adequate Information Technology resource
- Reducing reliance on imports and subsidies

### Goal 4: Avoiding harmful effects on other people, places and future generations

- Supporting the wise use of energy
- Promoting waste minimisation and management
- Supporting 'green' business and community initiatives
- Promoting co-operation with other communities

## Sustainability Priorities

Using the information on key issues, created through our community survey and agency data search, we identified a range of topics, which we need to take action on if we wish to make progress towards sustainable development. This list was identified by comparing current circumstances here with our Sustainability Goals and Objectives. In this way we identified crucial 'gaps' in current development provision and action. These priorities will change over time, as circumstances change. The Area Advisory group met to consider these Sustainability Priorities and to select the top four for immediate action. The selection was based on which priorities were seen as most important and which could be usefully tackled by the community now. Four Strategy Groups were created to develop plans of action for our four selected topics while other issues were identified as areas for future action. The other Sustainability Priorities remain just as important for the future of North Uist and will be considered for the second phase of Strategy implementation. They are discussed further in the section – Other Topics of Importance to North Uist.

These are the Sustainability Priorities we have identified:

The Strategy Groups comprise both community and agency members, drawn from those with a special interest in the topic. They have created plans for each of the four selected topics.

While the four Strategy Groups have been concentrating on their own specific topics, they have also been aware that their topics are only a small piece of a much larger picture which makes up life on North Uist. Therefore the Groups have appreciated that their own topic will link into many other issues and that any ideas they have suggested will probably have an effect on these issues.

A central task in working towards sustainability is being aware of the potential positive and negative impacts and altering plans in order to maximise positive impacts, achieve added value and reduce or eliminate negative impacts.

*For further detail on the role of these Sustainability Goals and Objectives on our Strategy, please refer to the 'Sustainability Profile for North Uist' referred to in Figure 3. For more detail on Sustainability and Sustainability Priorities for North Uist, please refer to the 'Sustainability Profile for North Uist, Appendix 2: Gap Analysis' as referred to in Figure 3.*

### Topics selected for immediate action

Renewable Energy  
Sustainable Use of Marine Resources  
Marketing of Local Produce  
Tourism using our Unique Features

### Topics for future action

Transport  
Community, Recreation & Sporting Facilities  
Essential Services  
Making better use of natural resources  
Waste & Recycling  
Health  
Erosion  
Young Returners  
Community Planning  
Employment Opportunities for young & old

## 4. Sustainability Plans

Following the extensive community and agency survey in North Uist the Area Advisory Group selected four topics, which were felt to be of greatest importance to the island and required detailed discussion in order to progress. A Group was then set up for each topic - from local agency representatives, local groups or organisations and community people.

These Strategy Groups worked in co-ordinated meetings to develop action plans for their topics. Along the way they consulted with specially selected 'Reference Groups' made up of 'experts' on the topic from home and abroad, including Partner agencies. The Groups identified:

- Their **vision** for the topic
- Their **objectives** for meeting the vision
- Their **priorities** for action
- The **actions** required to deliver the objectives

This section presents the plans developed by the four Strategy Groups.



## Renewable Energy

### Vision:

**“ To use proven and experimental renewable energy technology to the advantage of North Uist and make the island more energy efficient in the future without damaging the environment.”**

Although renewable energy is no longer a new concept, it has not previously been seriously considered in North Uist. Maybe that is why, although a number of community members put forward various suggestions during the initial survey, only a few were prepared to get involved in the Strategy Group. This is why the Group feel that small demonstration projects are needed in the first instance to build the communities' confidence in this new technology and to educate them about the opportunities that it could create for them.

At present much of the energy that is being used is in fact being wasted. The Group feel that it is important to educate businesses and homeowners in North Uist about energy efficiency and its benefits. Conserving heat within our buildings is as important as how we heat them.

As the community and the agencies are aware, North Uist has very diverse weather patterns. There are gales, which affect the land and the surrounding seas, throwing up huge waves, interspersed with bright and sunny days. This therefore gives North Uist the choice of a variety of technologies. Wind turbines are a proven source of electricity and, as was discovered by a member of the Strategy Group on a fact finding trip to Jutland, many future sites can now operate off-shore. This could also be viable for North Uist as it would have much less of a visual impact on the area.

North Uist would also be potentially suitable for the production of wave power as many areas of the west coast are continually battered by waves that have built up an enormous force by the time they hit land. There are also a number of causeways, linking the Uists, which produce strong currents. These could be suitable for the use of water turbines. Photovoltaic and solar panels are other options that may be open to the area for producing electricity. However if any of the technologies are to be used on a large scale then a consumer to utilise the power would have to be sought. At present the National Grid connection across the Minch, between the Western Isles and the mainland, does not have much extra capacity and would therefore need upgrading before it could be used. Connection to the Grid is also expensive and at present Scotland is capable of producing more electricity than it can use. The other option, which the Group favours, is to use the energy locally to power new or existing industries, therefore creating additional local employment.

At present North Uist has many national and international designations because of the high quality of the environment. Any renewable energy development would

have to be sensitively progressed so as to limit the impact to our natural surroundings. However the group feel unobtrusive offshore developments would be welcomed and could be used to attract visitors to the area by promoting the island's green image.

### **PRIORITY OBJECTIVES & ACTIONS IDENTIFIED:**

#### ***To identify possible uses for renewable energy in North Uist at present and for the future which would not damage the environment***

- Undertake background research - internet search/ contact universities & power companies, etc
- Carry out a feasibility study to identify and investigate the most viable options for North Uist (including the development of bio-oils)
- Involve conservation bodies in identifying possible sites
- Develop a small scale pilot project to demonstrate the potential uses of renewable energy technologies (e.g. solar or photo voltaic panels for underfloor heating in horticulture, water turbines on causeways, etc)
- Undertake research and development with a view to building a wave generator which would produce power for local industries (e.g. for drying seaweed)

#### ***To promote energy efficiency on North Uist***

- Carry out research into options and support for improving energy efficiency in North Uist
- Use the media to raise awareness and provide information and advice on achieving home insulation
- Lobby for building warrants to be tied into energy efficiency and for building regulations to better reflect energy efficiency
- Investigate and introduce electricity use monitors for use in homes and commercial premises

#### ***Other Objectives identified***

- To investigate methods of taking the projects forward
- To lobby the Government for support
- To investigate funding opportunities
- To look at renewables as a possible tourist attraction
- To overcome grid infrastructure restraints
- To gain technological expertise

#### **Demonstration Project**

At the time of writing this Strategy, this Group are still researching a project for their seedcorn funding. The Group has been working closely with Comann na Mara, the local community organisation which has been set up to forward plans for a marine centre in Lochmaddy. At present they are researching the possibility of using renewable energy sources within the proposed centre.

## Sustainable Use of Marine Resources

### Vision:

**“To establish locally managed, sustainable, long-term, diverse fisheries and aquaculture sectors of an appropriate scale to nurture and benefit from the quality marine environment.”**

As North Uist is surrounded by the sea it is not surprising that generations of the same families have been employed in the fishing industry. There are four fishing harbours in North Uist – Berneray, Lochmaddy, Griminish and Kallin. At present there are approximately 50 –60 people employed - fishing for prawns, lobster, scallops, and crab. The fishfarming industry is also a major employer in North Uist with at present three companies – North Uist Estates, Stolts Seafarms and West Minch Salmon having a combined workforce of approximately 45.

However this generation of fishermen are facing problems that were not challenges in the past. Reduced fish stocks, reduced quotas and increased competition from boats outwith their local area have all made fishing a less attractive industry. The Group feels there is also a need for improved facilities for the repair and maintenance of fishing boats. At present boats must travel to Uig, Oban or Stornoway, which takes extra time and money. Boats are usually repaired in winter when the weather is poor and therefore it is felt that there are also safety issues to having a local facility, which would not involve travel.

This Group has also been looking at ways to benefit sustainably from our quality marine resources. The Group feel that fishermen and fishfarmers throughout the Western Isles are in need of a focal point where they can go to get easy access to information or expertise on issues that are critical to their businesses – for example marketing, fisheries management, environmental assessment data, etc. The Strategy Group therefore support the proposed development of a marine resource and development centre in Lochmaddy which would combine the above with an interpretation and display area to educate schools, local people and visitors about our surrounding marine environment.

Although the Group recognise the work done by companies such as Uist Fish Marketing and Hebrides Harvest in reaching the European markets, they feel there is still a need to improve or diversify our marketing strategies. It is important to learn valuable lessons from other places that have been successful in marketing their goods using the name or reputation of the area. There is also still room for local marketing to encourage local people or businesses to use fish and shellfish. The Uist2000 markets and the stall at Kallin pier have helped go part of the way in achieving this.

While we must look to future development within the marine sector the importance of preserving our marine life must also be stressed. Lochmaddy and Lochport lagoons are Marine Special Areas of Conservation, which highlights the high quality of our resources. The Group feel that a local inshore fisheries management scheme would help to protect our surrounding waters from overfishing and ensure maximum economic returns are achieved locally. Although oil exploration in the Atlantic may be an economic boost to the Western Isles, the Group feel that concerns regarding pollution should be highlighted and resolved before the work begins.

### **PRIORITY OBJECTIVES & ACTIONS IDENTIFIED:**

#### ***To create a marine resource and development centre which will benefit marine producers as well as the wider community***

- Assist in the development of the current local Marine Centre proposals
- A building which would include a resource library, interpretation and display areas with tanks
- Marketing information and information to support fisheries management
- Environmental assessments for fishfarms
- To research the facts/info that fishermen need
- To investigate local inshore fisheries management

#### ***To develop local facilities for the marine industry***

- To investigate local needs and attitudes with regard to local repair and maintenance facilities for boats under 12 metres
- Investigate boat yards within Public Sector categories
- Promote economic and safety case for a local maintenance facility
- Ensure that skills and work is made available to local workforce

#### ***To diversify marketing strategies***

- Pilot project in local seafood marketing at Kallin Pier, with outreach to local markets and hotels
- Link with the local produce group
- Co-ordinate marketing attempts
- Investigate marketing by a species by species basis
- Encourage adding value to produce locally
- Vacuum packing/canning to ensure all year round market
- To learn from other places (eg Shetland & Orkney)
- Food fair

## **Other objectives identified**

- Diversification in aquaculture sector – new species and better use of existing species (monkfish, halibut, sea urchins, mussels, etc)
- Investigate new market opportunities in order to restart the seaweed industry – drying and processing in North Uist
- Stress concerns regarding oil exploration versus retaining quality marine environment
- Investigate restocking some areas

## **Demonstration Project**

This Group concentrated on the marketing of fish and shellfish locally. It is well known that people often unsuccessfully wander around Kallin Pier trying to find someone to sell them shellfish. Therefore, Grimsay Community Association in co-operation with Uist Fish Community Association in co-operation with Uist Fish Marketing, organised the selling of fresh seafood directly from the fishermen on a twice weekly basis, with a small staffed stall. This proved to be very successful and Grimsay Community Association hope to organise a similar project in 2001, providing they receive some financial support.



# Marketing of Local Produce

## Vision:

**“To produce healthy, good quality agricultural and horticultural produce, using environmentally friendly techniques, thereby providing local training and marketing opportunities, and minimising the problems of distance from markets”**

Crofting has been one of the main industries in North Uist for centuries – as recently as 100 years ago crofters here were fighting for their rights to use the land. However nowadays, for various reasons, crofting is seldom seen as a full time occupation – many croft on a part-time basis or even as a hobby. Traditionally there are close links between crofting and conserving the environment, by the use of low intensity practices. Therefore many areas in North Uist are now designated as of national and international environmental importance and there are a variety of conservation management payments available which help to make crofting that bit more economic. This is seen as one form of diversification.

Through the survey it emerged that many people do not see crofting as financially viable at present and feel that it is in severe decline. Plummeting sheep and cattle prices, scares such as BSE and mounting paper-work have resulted in some families in North Uist selling up all their stock. This has also led to younger people being reluctant to become involved in crofting, which is felt will mean that a whole generation will lose the skills that are traditionally associated with crofting and are an integral part of island life. If this decline continues and there is a severe reduction in crofting activities, it could result in a negative impact on the environmental quality of the island. Therefore this Strategy Group has been looking at creating opportunities for crofters in North Uist to overcome these problems.

Diversification could mean a move away from keeping stock but instead using the land for horticulture. The Horticultural Association of the Uists, which was set up in 1999, has succeeded in creating an interest in locally grown fruit and vegetables. Through the Uist2000 markets they have found that the demand for fresh locally grown produce exceeds supply – therefore there is a need to encourage and train crofters or individuals to grow for the local market. The Scottish Agricultural College has already offered some useful courses, but they must be continued. More producers would also allow the Group to expand to a box delivery system for customers who are unable to attend markets.

The Group also see the opportunity to enter the organic market as a positive step that could be taken by crofters in order to add value to their products. Although many people see Uist products as being “nearly organic”, they cannot be

marketed as such because they have not gone through the registration process. Therefore there is a need to educate people so that they can decide whether to go through the organic process or whether to continue to market, using the clean environmental image of North Uist and the fact that the products are fresh and locally grown.

At present the slaughtering facility in North Uist is only licensed for home consumption. If a crofter wishes to slaughter his animals and sell them locally he must transport them to Stornoway, Barra or Dingwall and back. The costs incurred make this unviable in most cases. This Group strongly feel that a locally based licensed slaughtering facility with a processing and packaging facility would help crofters to add value to their produce. There is also the need for facilities to teach the traditional skills of butchery and meat preparation to community members. Another method of adding value could be to positively use our many designated areas to market our products as coming from a place of high environmental quality.

At present all of the fruit, vegetables and meat available in the local shops are imported from the mainland or further afield – therefore a move towards the island becoming more self-sufficient would be welcomed by many.

*“It is better to stay here than any place in the world. The crofters are more kindly to help each other, than in any other corner.”*

*A comment made by a local crofter during the initial survey*

## **PRIORITY OBJECTIVES & ACTIONS IDENTIFIED:**

### **To encourage people to grow a wide range of horticultural produce**

- Education of growers (ideally local training)
- Encourage producers to target local markets
- Learn from experiences elsewhere and from each other
- Investigate suppliers of quality varieties suitable for growing in Uist

### **To encourage organics and environmentally friendly techniques**

- Encourage crofters to become organic (registered)
- More education and training about organics (how to become) through Colaisde Bheinn na Faoghla or Scottish Agricultural College
- Encourage more people to produce their own winter feed
- Encourage machinery rings
- Increase the use of seaweed instead of artificial fertiliser
- Control deer, geese, rabbit numbers and reduce overgrazing/crop problems
- Reduce sheep overgrazing
- Encourage an increase in cattle numbers



***To investigate and pursue a locally based licensed slaughterhouse with full processing and packaging facilities (either as present set-up or as a limited company)***

- Appraisal/assessment on slaughter house and processing and packaging facility
- Find funding for feasibility study
- Investigate the advantages/disadvantages of establishing a limited company
- Investigate costs of having the present facility licensed
- Encourage crofters to finish stock on the island
- Investigate pet food canning

***To research and set up specific mechanisms to sell into defined markets for all local produce***

- To have a Uist identity label
- Initiative to encourage people to eat Uist produce
- Establish a local market through shops, hotels and stalls, and encourage people to attend
- Develop a box system idea and identify customers
- Appoint a co-ordinator who will market the produce for the producers
- Use the Urachadh Uibhist facilities to develop quality food products

- Attend exhibitions and shows on the mainland (e.g. Highland Show, Aviemore)
- Look into the buying policy of the Co-op regarding local produce

***OTHER OBJECTIVES IDENTIFIED***

- Improve the quality and health of our cattle and sheep
- Provide local training in crofting and horticultural skills
- Reduce transportation costs
- Lobby for the Croft Entrant Scheme to be extended to North Uist

***Demonstration Project***

This Group felt that their top priority was to address the issues surrounding local slaughtering facilities. However after looking at the feasibility of various projects it was found that they could not achieve this in the time available and without a substantially larger funding package. Therefore the Group, working with Uist2000, decided to concentrate on encouraging local people and visitors to buy local produce. A leaflet will be published by March 2001 which will advertise the range of local produce available and also the Uist2000 produce markets.



## Tourism using our Unique Features

### Vision:

**“ To attract visitors to come to North Uist and share our way of life, creating a memorable cultural experience, while protecting our inheritance.”**

North Uist has a wealth of unique features and experiences to offer travellers who make the journey across the Minch. Often the obstacle facing tourism on the island is that it is difficult to attract visitors here in the first place. It is felt that many people do not know where the Western Isles are and therefore there is the question of how we raise awareness of the area. Visitors to North Uist must be prepared to spend extra time and effort organising their trip if they are to enjoy their time here. You must book the ferries and often accommodation in advance. Further more, the cost of travelling to the island can dissuade potential tourists.

This Group have been looking at marketing opportunities to overcome these obstacles to attracting visitors to North Uist and also how to benefit from our cultural and natural resources by giving visitors a “memorable experience” which will persuade them to extend their stay or to return another time.

North Uist has many designations, which highlight the high environmental quality of the island. However those areas not designated are still as beautiful and as outstanding and as diverse. The community survey highlighted how much the local population value their surroundings – long white beaches, the lacework of scattered fishing lochs, the purple heather moorland, the peaceful hills, the abundant flora and fauna that can be observed, and the clean, clear blue seas that hide an underwater world. With such varied and bountiful available resources, the Group feel it is important that they are presented in such a way as to educate all levels of visitors. Whether one is already familiar with the topic or are new to it, everyone should leave the island having learned something new.

North Uist is an area in which, as was said during the community survey, “we are surrounded by our history.” However some archaeological sites are dangerous or in poor repair, therefore visitors need to be guided to less sensitive sites or have the sites interpreted for them from a distance. The community feels that the most fragile sites need to be conserved for the future.

Many learners of Gaelic benefit from hearing the language used in an everyday context. However for many this is difficult to find. In North Uist visitors can get a truly Gaelic welcome. It should be possible for them to find accommodation with Gaelic speaking hosts, Gaelic speaking guides and hear the language in shops and at ceilidhs. Gaelic songs and traditional music and the crofting life are a unique part of our culture and are interesting and

enjoyable to visitors whether they are learning Gaelic or not. However there is felt to be a need to make it more accessible for them. One thing we must not forget is a comment made at the Culture and Natural Resources seminar –

*“You don't put on a show for tourists. You put on a show for your community, and you invite your visitors to join in.”*

This gives a truly memorable experience, which is informal and natural.

The Group feel that the interpretation of our cultural and natural resources is immensely important, as it would make a deep impression on the visitor. The community survey found that interpretation is needed for our archaeological sites, our environment, our cultural heritage and our present lifestyle to ensure visitors can learn more about their interests and encourage them to explore the island. The Strategy Group feel that live interpretation is the best method, whenever possible, but that guides must be trained in order to keep our distinctiveness – warm, friendly but informative.

North Uist can be marketed as the ideal location for an abundance of activity holidays – offering; walking, cycling, surfing & wind surfing, diving, canoeing, angling & shooting, painting & photography, bird-watching, wildlife-watching, language & music and much more. However, if we are to continue to benefit from our cultural and natural resources then we must protect them all and look after them for the future.

*“I enjoy walking along a white, sandy beach with no-one else in sight listening to the call of the sea birds”*

*“There are wide open spaces as far as the eye can see – the sky and the horizon are ever present and there is a quality of light that no photo can do justice to.”*

## Over-riding Objective:

*To increase the number of visitors closer to the capacity of the North Uist area, to lengthen the stay of visitors and to lengthen the tourist season.*

### **PRIORITY OBJECTIVES & ACTIONS IDENTIFIED:**

*To better protect, enhance and increase understanding of all of our unique features in an appropriate and sustainable manner, in light of our over-riding objective*

- Show tourists something of our world the way it is today (e.g. Crofting, fishing, fishfarming) as well as interpreting archaeology, history and the natural environment
- Develop and train local guides
- Create resources for local schools – e.g. packs about local history and archaeology, aimed at children to heighten their awareness of our unique features
- Present information about our unique features (e.g. archaeology or environment) at different levels to allow everyone to gain from it
- Bring history and the arts together – e.g. Blàr Chàrinis play or legend trail
- Develop new and package existing activities for people to do

*To know the customer market and target accordingly using locally based packages, in light of our over-riding objective*

- Support partnerships with Caledonian MacBrayne, British Airways and the Scottish Tourist Board
- Support target marketing
- Aim local marketing efforts to the top end of the package holiday market
- Develop a distinctive identity for North Uist which can be marketed
- Build linked web pages which highlight local attractions and activities

### **Other Objectives identified**

- To promote our local living experience
- To provide a reason for visitors to come out of their vehicles and explore the whole island
- To continue to provide a variety of types of accommodation and facilities
- Carinish Township Interpretation Cottage project followed through to completion

## Projects

### **Demonstration Project**

This Group decided to use their seedcorn funding to encourage visitors who have arrived on the island to extend their visit by showing them the range of activities that are available. The Group, working with Uist2000, designed a leaflet which shows activities in North Uist for all interests and age groups. This leaflet will be printed by March 2001 so that it will be readily available from the start of the tourist season.

### **Arts Project**

The Scottish Arts Council offered £5,000 to each Dùthchas area to fund an arts project which had been identified during the community survey. The initial idea was for a legend trail and Comann Eachdraidh Uibhist a Tuath, the local historical society, were approached as an appropriate community group to progress the idea. Comann Eachdraidh Uibhist a Tuath applied for match funding from other sources, including Western Isles Enterprise, to allow the project to be successfully carried out. The final project was to produce a CD-ROM, tape and booklet, which includes legends and tales, historical and archaeological data, photos, music and sounds.

### **GIS: Geographical Information Systems**

The Tourism Strategy Group has been working with a Dùthchas representative on a Geographical Information System Project. The Group feels that it is important that local knowledge is represented on the maps as well as data collected by agencies. The Group thinks this sort of system would be useful in local schools and also in local tourist information offices as an easy to use touch screen device. In the future, once problems of copyright are sorted out, the Group would like the information to be available over the web, as this would make it more accessible to everyone.

## Other Topics of importance to North Uist

Although Strategy Groups were only set up for four topics, there were many other issues identified during the Initial Review that are of as much importance to the future of North Uist. The issues discussed below are comments made during the Initial Review or debated in the Strategy Groups. To progress these topics more detailed discussion would be needed in the future to identify the best way forward.

### Transportation

Transportation is one of the key issues that is highlighted by the community and the agency survey. However as it is more an agency or government issue, the North Uist Advisory Group felt that it would be difficult for them to influence any major changes in the time available. Nevertheless, many of the Strategy Groups discussed transportation, at differing levels, as it has an affect on much of island life.

A plane fare to Benbecula from Glasgow Return can amount to more than the cost of a foreign holiday. Arriving by sea can also be expensive for families who wish to take their car across, especially in addition to paying toll fees on the Skye Bridge in two directions. These transportation costs affect businesses such as crofting and tourism and also all local people. The timetabling of ferries and to some degree planes was also raised as having an effect on the island economy.

*"It takes less than two hours to cross the sea between Uig ... to Lochmaddy. In time, the crossing compares to the ferry run Kaupanger to Gudvangen. But the ferry ticket for a car is five time higher than here at home, expensive in a country where the average income level is lower than in Norway."*

This is the reaction of the communities who visited North Uist from Sogn og Fjordane in Norway.

Although it is recognised that there has been a huge improvement in the public transport service in the last few years, it is suggested that there is still a need for improved timetabling to take into account the times that people need it. For example; to get to and from work, or to get to essential services, or to social events. This is especially true for community members who may not have access to a car and can therefore feel isolated – the elderly or infirm, young people and the unemployed.

Roads are highlighted, through the survey, as needing improvements in many parts of the island. In some areas these are small improvements such as verging or a blind summit which is dangerous. In other areas it is felt that larger projects are needed – for example to make the road double track. Cycle tracks are also suggested along some stretches of road, as at present it is dangerous for cyclists

on single-track roads especially when passing larger vehicles.

### Community, Recreation or Sporting Facilities

There are probably many more recreational activities available in North Uist now than there were ten years ago, but it is still one of the issues which came top of the survey among the young and not so young. People want to feel that they have choices and opportunities equal to those living on the mainland. Therefore although there are now such diverse clubs as canoeing, karate, athletics, ceramics, yoga and drama we must ensure that everyone has the chance to access them by having a public transport system that allows efficient evening travel throughout North Uist and also to Benbecula and back.

"There's nothing to do" is often repeated by teenagers – but are they fully aware of all the activities? Maybe we need to do more than put up posters to let everyone know! Young people also want to have the chance to show that they can organise things themselves, therefore maybe those who attend should set Youth Club programmes. One problem facing Youth Clubs in many districts is that there are a lack of adult volunteers to help out – how do we make this more attractive to people?

It is also essential that each community has access to facilities that they themselves can use – community events are an important part of island life and help to build our community spirit. Lochmaddy and Carinish Village Halls have recently been renovated which will allow a wide range of activities to take place. However other communities still highlight community facilities as a need in their area.

Community events are held throughout the year in all districts of North Uist. These events need to be recognised and supported as important to the island economy as well as community well-being. Events this summer attracted visitors who were interested in their personal history from our neighbouring islands, Scotland, Europe and further afield. Community events give visitors and locals a warm welcome and give an opportunity to experience the music and the arts, history and also sporting or outdoor activities.

It was stressed in many of the communities that there is a need for North Uist as a whole to have sports facilities. For example the local football team do not have a pitch in North Uist where they can have home games and so must travel to Benbecula. North Uist Athletics Club, which is run by volunteers and parents, has been very successful over the years. Some North Uist Athletics Club members have been competing and winning medals at national level, where they meet other competitors who have the opportunity of proper facilities and training. Therefore, it would seem that the North Uist athletes would surely benefit from having equal opportunities to mainland competitors by having a local sports facility, including a running track and support towards training and travel to competitions.

## Essential Services

People in all the communities in North Uist value their local amenities but many feel that there is a threat to their local school, church or Post Office. They feel that these services should be available to everyone, locally, and that they are a focal point and a meeting place for many people. Small village shops and mobile shops are as important to some villages as the larger supermarkets and should be supported. However to ensure that everyone has access to these essential services, a reliable and regular public transport service is needed which ties in with times when supplies arrive in the shops.

## Making better use of our Natural Resources

The Renewable Energy Strategy Group has already highlighted using our natural resources to produce energy. Other ideas were also suggested during the community survey. The idea to market bottled Uist water was suggested as another way to benefit from the many environmental designations that proclaim the island's clean image. Older people still remember where many of the underground wells and springs are to be found – some are said to have special health benefits.

Using seaweed to produce organic fertiliser was also suggested following the upturn in the organics industry. Many community people feel that it is a waste not to search for new markets which would sustainably use the seaweed resource that is so plentiful around our shores. Some people suggest the reopening of a factory to dry and process the seaweed, while others think the homeopathic industry might offer some openings.

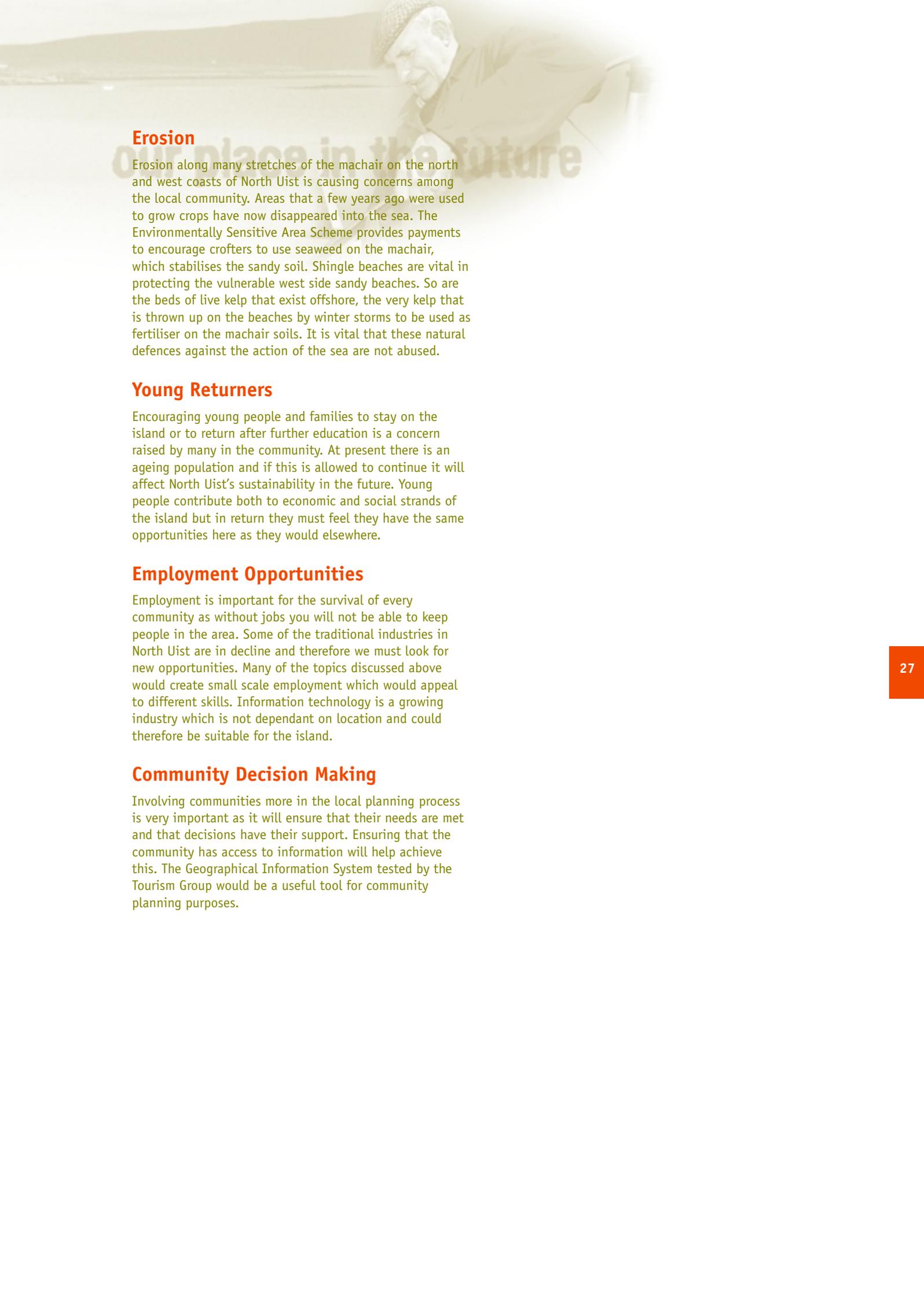
## Waste & Recycling

As North Uist is seen in many respects as a 'green' place it is thought by the community that a recycling plant would help boost the image and encourage people to think more about the waste that is produced. At present it appears not to be cost effective for such a small area but the local community would like to see a recycling area for glass, paper and metal. Minimising packaging on local produce or promoting reusable containers is also suggested as a way to reduce waste and would work alongside the marketing of our high quality environment. The community also feel that a tidy up of the island is needed and should be encouraged. This would improve the view that is presented to visitors not detracting from our outstanding natural environment.

## Health

The islands are often seen as a healthy place because we have lots of clean unpolluted fresh air. During the community survey it was felt that we also have good health care at present with GP's, dentist and physiotherapist housed in Lochmaddy Surgery. However many people in North Uist are worried about the effects of closing Lochmaddy Hospital, once the new Uist and Barra Hospital opens in Benbecula. Many are especially worried about elderly care as the new hospital will not accommodate as many as the present facility. Some people feel there is a need for a nursing home in Lochmaddy once the hospital closes. This would give elderly patients and their families the opportunity to remain in North Uist nearer their home and friends. There is also room for more health education within the community to encourage healthy eating and exercise to prevent problems such as heart disease in the future.





## Erosion

Erosion along many stretches of the machair on the north and west coasts of North Uist is causing concerns among the local community. Areas that a few years ago were used to grow crops have now disappeared into the sea. The Environmentally Sensitive Area Scheme provides payments to encourage crofters to use seaweed on the machair, which stabilises the sandy soil. Shingle beaches are vital in protecting the vulnerable west side sandy beaches. So are the beds of live kelp that exist offshore, the very kelp that is thrown up on the beaches by winter storms to be used as fertiliser on the machair soils. It is vital that these natural defences against the action of the sea are not abused.

## Young Returners

Encouraging young people and families to stay on the island or to return after further education is a concern raised by many in the community. At present there is an ageing population and if this is allowed to continue it will affect North Uist's sustainability in the future. Young people contribute both to economic and social strands of the island but in return they must feel they have the same opportunities here as they would elsewhere.

## Employment Opportunities

Employment is important for the survival of every community as without jobs you will not be able to keep people in the area. Some of the traditional industries in North Uist are in decline and therefore we must look for new opportunities. Many of the topics discussed above would create small scale employment which would appeal to different skills. Information technology is a growing industry which is not dependant on location and could therefore be suitable for the island.

## Community Decision Making

Involving communities more in the local planning process is very important as it will ensure that their needs are met and that decisions have their support. Ensuring that the community has access to information will help achieve this. The Geographical Information System tested by the Tourism Group would be a useful tool for community planning purposes.

## 5. Implementing the Strategy

The detailed actions to be taken in implementing the first phase of the Strategy are set out in the 'Action Plan' enclosed at the end of this document.

### Organisational Framework

In order to implement the Strategy, the right organisational framework needs to be put in place. This will aim to:

- retain the partnership links required;
- provide a community-based, legally constituted organisation to raise and hold funds and employ staff;
- employ project staff to support the work in the community.

Through a detailed consultation process, the Area Advisory Group for North Uist has agreed the main elements of this implementation framework.

In brief, this may consist of:

- Urachadh Uibhist, an existing community based organisation, taking on the main role in co-ordinating the implementation and review of the Strategy.
- This will require the establishment of a new post within Urachadh Uibhist.
- A Partnership Agreement will be drawn up between the community and agency partners needed to support the implementation of the Strategy.
- Uist 2000 will take on a linking and networking role between the North Uist Strategy and work being undertaken in other parts of Uist.

Resource implications:

Additional resources will be required for Urachadh Uibhist to undertake this work.

### Practical Implementation

The actual work of implementing the Strategy will be undertaken on a phased basis, with regular reviews to allow for progress to be monitored and alterations/updates to the Strategy to be made. This is based on a 2 - 3 year cycle of implementing projects, monitoring progress and identifying the priorities for the next phase. Approximately every 5 years a full review of the strategy and its impacts on the area will take place. This is set out in more detail in the Action Plan.

## Measuring Our Progress

The first step for each Strategy Group will be to:

- recognise current circumstances
- identify a measure or indicator which adequately describes current circumstances - e.g. a measure for local produce could be "number of local produce outlets"

When the Group reviews progress and plans further actions, they will look again at this 'measure' and see if it has changed. In this way the Group will be able to assess how their actions have made an impact. Each Group may also wish to set clear practical targets for implementing their workplan e.g. Dates for completing activities.

## Reviewing Our Strategy

For the Strategy to remain relevant and useful to the community of North Uist it must be an accurate and up to date statement of what is needed for a sustainable future. Therefore it is important that the Strategy is reviewed regularly and updated as necessary. It will be the responsibility of the lead organisation, in implementing the Strategy, to ensure that the process is reviewed. One suggestion is that every 3 years a Strategy Review Workshops is held in North Uist, to which all relevant Partners, organisations, community groups and community members are invited.

Such a workshop would deal with:

- Reviewing our progress in North Uist
- Revising our Strategy in view of reported progress and change
- Revising our Action Plans in view of progress and change
- Committing to our new Strategy and Action Plan

A full community survey would also be necessary in the future – possibly every 5 years – as the communities needs adjust to new circumstances. An annual meeting between the 3 Dùthchas areas, in order to share experiences and assess progress may also be of benefit.

## Making Links

### Information

Much information has been gathered from community and agency sources during the life of this project. However in many cases it is difficult for community groups to access information from agencies. Local information needs to be freely available to communities so as they can make informed decisions about the future of their areas. This information must be accurate and up to date to be useful. It is important that agencies gather data which enables the measurement of change in relation to sustainability indicators.

## Links and Support

As this Strategy moves into the future it is important that it continues to keep up the links that have been created so far – Partners, local groups, and other communities and projects. However it must be remembered that new initiatives may also be set up which should be linked into the Strategy. One link that should be encouraged is with Community Planning within the local Council. Communicating with other groups will help support the Strategy projects and hopefully avoid duplication of effort.

The community of North Uist has put a lot of time and effort into giving their thoughts and ideas and producing strategic plans for the future. They have worked with local agency representatives and have also consulted widely with Dùthchas Partners and with experts, from the UK and Europe. Therefore it is extremely important that the Dùthchas Partners continue to support the community's ideas, and incorporate the community's plans into their organisation's future strategies. This will ensure that the hard work over the last two and a half years has been worthwhile and will be able to continue to fruition.

## Moving Forwards

This Strategy marks 'the end of the beginning'. Every long journey begins with one small step. The attached Action Plan will help us with those next early steps. Many issues and ideas have been raised. Still others will emerge as implementation progresses.

There are many difficult issues to be tackled and a lot of hard work ahead. To make meaningful progress we must never lose sight of the value of partnership and the need to 'speak with one voice'. A strategic approach will help us achieve that and maintain unity. We should keep in mind the challenges presented by our Sustainability Goals and apply these Goals to every decision we take.

As implementation progresses, we shall have to find ways to meet the resource needs which will arise. Organising ourselves in a way which makes it possible and practical to 'lever in' funding from a range of suitable sources will be crucial. Strategic decision making and the framework provided by the Strategy and Action Plan will be pivotal to this challenge. Using suitable methods for measuring and hence illustrating impact, progress and change in everything we do, will strengthen our ability to find ways to meet future resource needs.

Now it is time to move forwards, a step at a time, so that together we can create a sustainable future for North Uist.



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