AREA SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIES FOR PERIPHERAL RURAL AREAS

January 1998 – April 2001

Dùthchas – The Final Report
June 2001

Dùthchas
Our Place in the Future

Contents

Introduction

This is the Final Report of the Dùthchas Project. Dùthchas was a demonstration project funded under the EU LIFE 97 Environment Programme for the period January 1998 – April 2001, with the aim of piloting an affordable, transferable process and framework for addressing sustainable development and integrated land management in peripheral rural areas.

The purpose of this report is to document the process and methods of the work undertaken and the results obtained. It builds on the Progress and Interim Reports delivered during the Project and provides an account of the main aspects of the work. The Final Report forms part of a suite of reports documenting the work, achievements and lessons of the Dùthchas Project. To obtain a full picture of this complex and extensive Project it is advised that this report is read in conjunction with the *CD-Rom 'The Dùthchas Story'*, which documents every aspect of the work and contains every report produced in the course of the work. A copy of the CD-Rom can be found inside the cover of this report. The same information can also be obtained from our *website: www.duthchas.org.uk*. For those who are interested in the application of the Dùthchas approach to their own work or community, or who have an interest in the methodologies employed, we would recommend the *Dùthchas Handbook ' ...Act Local, Community Planning for Sustainable Development'*. An abbreviated version of the Final Report is available as a leaflet for wider dissemination.

A full list of the Dùthchas reports is provided on the inside back cover.

Dùthchas

The name **'Dùthchas'** was chosen carefully, to reflect the central purpose of the work. An historical Gaelic term, Dùthchas speaks of strong, united, self-sufficient communities who actively look after their people, their heritage and their environment – the essence of sustainability.

What we aimed to achieve

The Project set out to tackle the very topical yet complex issue of enabling a participative approach to planning for sustainable development, in areas that are economically fragile but internationally recognised for the quality of their natural heritage. The stated aim of the Project was:

> **To pilot an affordable, transferable process and framework for addressing sustainable development and integrated land management in peripheral rural areas.**

Focused on three Pilot Areas in the Scottish Highlands and Islands the Project sought to address the following questions:

▶ *Is it possible to plan a development path for our most economically fragile rural areas that is based on and sympathetic to the natural and cultural heritage?*

▶ *Can this be done in a way that ensures the enthusiastic participation of the local people so that their vision for the future becomes a key part of the Strategy?*

▶ *Can the key public bodies be encouraged to support this process and adjust their plans and policies to ensure the success of the Strategy?*

To address these questions the work programme aimed to develop an area-based sustainability strategy for each Pilot Area, demonstration actions to pilot the implementation of the area strategies and an environmental quality mark to reward achievement. In support of this work, the Project would develop participatory methods for involving a wide cross-section of the local communities; partnership and alignment between the many relevant public authorities in support of the strategies; integrated local access to information and data; and networking, dissemination and evaluation involving other European regions.

What we did achieve

The main challenge and particular success of this Project was in combining the discipline of a sustainability framework with the methods of community development, within the context of agency partnership and alignment. This was an ambitious task and the Project has received acclaim and support from Scottish Government Ministers and from many others involved in this field of activity, both in the U.K. and Europe, for the progress it made with this approach.

The Project was successful in attracting the support of twenty-two Scottish Agency Partners, eleven of which co-funded the Project, while others funded activities resulting from it. The **Partners** were involved in steering the work and in supporting its development and continuation in the Pilot Areas.

The work was carried out with the full involvement, support and co-operation of three **Pilot Areas:** North Sutherland, the Trotternish Peninsula in the Isle of Skye, and North Uist in the Western Isles, each home to between 1400 and 2000 people. The areas were chosen for their characteristics of remoteness, economic and social fragility and their important natural and cultural heritage.

Dùthchas involved each community in a highly participative process to create a strategy for the sustainable development of their area. Each **Area Sustainability Strategy** identifies the community vision, goals and objectives for the area and the practical actions needed to achieve these, now and in the medium and long term. The strategies were defined by the local people and agreed by the Agency Partners.

Innovative **Participatory Methods** were developed and used for facilitating the involvement of local people and for bringing public and other agencies around the table to agree the way forward and relate this to their own plans and resources. We succeeded in involving a high percentage of the local people in each area (approximately 1,500 out of a total of 4,500). We involved those whose voices are not normally heard. We enabled communities and agencies to work together, share ideas and information, develop strategic thinking and initiate action and showed that obstacles can be overcome in working together towards common goals.

One of the biggest challenges was to set the Strategies firmly within the context of sustainability. This involved the creation of new methods, including the development of **Area Sustainability** Profiles incorporating sustainability goals, objectives and indicators; the identification of area sustainability priorities and sustainability criteria through which to assess the Strategy objectives and actions.

Through the application of these methods local people and agencies were successful in identifying the **Priorities for Sustainability** in their area and in building a strategic plan and actions around each priority. The priorities identified were forward looking, far-reaching and innovative within the regional context. They were of a different order of magnitude from the project-focused development approaches that are more normal. The topics included sustainable land and marine use, renewable energy, local produce development, interpretation and access, green tourism, transport and services and young people.

The existence of Area Sustainability Strategies, developed and agreed through such a participative process, has already been proved to carry significant weight with funding bodies. As was stated by the Director of one Government Agency, "we could not possibly ignore a strategy that had such local consensus".

The Strategies led to many innovative **Demonstration Projects** being started on the ground during the three years, with many others scheduled to start under phase 1 of the Strategy implementation: 2001-2004.

Each area was assisted to set up the **Organisational Framework** needed to enable them to carry on with the implementation, monitoring and review of the Strategies beyond the life of the Project. Support was given to raising funds for establishing community development companies and employing local development workers to enable the on-going implementation.

The Project placed great emphasis on developing connections and facilitating the **sharing of experience and expertise** in support of the development of the Strategies. The aims were to give local people access to cutting-edge expertise on their priority topics, to widen their vision as to what could be achievable and to increase confidence by sharing experience with similar initiatives and communities. Links were established not only in Scotland, but also across Europe. The Project hosted many visits from other countries, communities and initiatives. Many local people were assisted to travel to see at first hand

the ways in which others have tackled similar issues. Direct links were established with Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Portugal and Ireland. In particular, Dùthchas had a very strong partnership with the West of Norway, involving extensive communications and several visits.

Building capacity for developing and implementing the strategies was a core objective of the Project. We contributed to this by encouraging active participation in all parts of the work, building the know-how to carry out community surveys and planning, helping local people to get to know the agencies and break down barriers, building connections with 'experts', communities and initiatives across Europe, and raising the profile of the Pilot Areas and their issues with policy makers. Dùthchas succeeded in enabling communities to work together that had not previously done so.

Background research was carried out to determine the feasibility of an environmental quality mark. The concept was found to be very popular amongst local communities for its potential to add value to their produce. However, the complexities of developing a viable quality mark were found to place this work beyond the scope of the Project. In its place an alternative model was developed and agreed with the European Commission. This was a **Sustainable Communities Scheme**. The scheme was developed and piloted in the Highlands.

Dissemination was an important feature of the Project, involving many publications, video, CD-Rom, website, presentations, conferences, seminars and study visits.

Details of all stages of the work can be found in Section 2.1.

What we learned

Much was learned in the course of implementing this complex Project, both in respect of the methodologies applied and the products that were developed.

Our Core Values

The Project adopted some 'core values' to guide its work. Many of our core values reflect Government policy and therefore provide a useful practical learning experience.

Sustainability, the focus of our work, proved to be an elusive, challenging and complex concept to work with. It lacked clear definition, tended to mean 'all things to all people', and often masked important distinctions. Establishing any common understanding of 'sustainability' amongst our many partners was an enormous challenge. This should have been addressed as a first action, seeking to gain consensus as to the definition. Working with 'sustainability' as a framework also required a certain 'discipline' that challenged those involved. It is a very technical concept and much of the analysis required cannot be done fully at community level. However, at a general level, 'sustainability' also proved to be a very productive framework. It brought all parties together around the table. It helped to focus on the things that were really valued and the ways in which these could be protected. It allowed the identification of problems and the best solutions to these. It encouraged people to be aspirational and envisage a future in which a better quality of life could be identified and worked towards. Most of all we found that 'sustainability' provided the foundation for adding value and delivering multiple benefits from any activity or development project.

A Strategic Approach proved to be challenging to facilitate at community level but immensely rewarding in terms of the outputs it enabled. We learned many lessons about how to deliver a strategic planning process effectively at community level and that it is possible to do this. We also learned what local communities and agencies will and will not tolerate. We experienced the huge pressure from local people, supported by the agencies, to deliver outputs in the short term and the prevalence of the traditional focus on project-based approaches to development. However, it is significant that all three Pilot Areas value and wish to continue the more challenging 'strategic approach' and to implement its outputs. We saw clearly how this approach produced a different order of outputs from project-based approaches. People were able to build on their many ideas and shape these through a simple framework into major new platforms for development. They were able to work together to agree their vision and priorities, for now and the long term, and make sure that scarce time and energy was invested in the most important things. The communities were also able to gain the respect and support of the government bodies for their comprehensive approach. However, the challenge will be the ability of the Partners to continue to support this local strategic approach within a current operating framework which is not sympathetic to this.

Participation by communities and agencies was a key aim of the Project. Our aims were to be accessible, transparent, inclusive and democratic. We were very successful in delivering this objective. We discovered that participation roots the ownership of the Strategy within the area and produces support, energy and commitment. It also ensures that the Strategy meets locally identified needs. It enables appropriately targeted, cost-effective solutions and gives a human touch to plans and policies. It is essential to successful implementation of the work on the ground and builds awareness, connections and capacity for action. However, the level of participation demanded by this Project also challenged local support. It leaned heavily on people's scarce voluntary time and frustrated them by the slow delivery of outputs. Participation requires to be planned in order to ensure maximum effectiveness in use of voluntary time and to deliver tangible outputs in the short term, without compromising the strategic focus. Effective participation also requires co-ordination and skilled facilitation. Ideally it has independent or shared resourcing that will not compromise the process or outputs.

Partnership between the many agencies with responsibilities for the Pilot Areas was also central to our method. In the context of a sectoral administrative system, partnership is essential for integrating the issues relating to sustainability. It is important for gaining agency support for the work and local access to the information, support and resources required to develop and implement a strategy. It can also be helpful for disseminating information and ideas within and between organisations and communities. However, facilitating partnership presents huge challenges: a large partnership also greatly adds to the complexity of a project. Establishing and maintaining a common understanding of the work from the outset is critical, as is time spent in developing trust, shared vision and good relationships. Partnership working is on the edge of each agency's priorities and remits. It therefore requires focus, leadership and co-ordination to overcome the lack of mutually shared priorities and any in-built resistance to co-operation. It challenges partner organisations that may not be structured appropriately, may not have adequate time and resources allocated and may not have good internal links. As a result of these challenges, partnership was found to be resource hungry, taking significant time and energy of both Project and agency staff. Without strong and independent leadership, identity and possibly organisation, it may also be compromising

to the position of Project staff. There is a big question as to whom a partnership is ultimately responsible, and whether the partners can simply walk away from difficulties and commitments. Partnership is strongly promoted by Government, but without consideration or direction as to the organisational issues it raises. Greater direction and clearer protocols regarding partnership working would be a huge step forward.

Alignment between partners in support of the Strategy was probably the least successful output of the Project. This may be because it was the most unrealistic objective. The Dùthchas model assumed that it was possible to share the development of ideas and policies in the community. There is a question mark as to how viable this really is. Agencies are structured in different ways to meet different statutory objectives in different geographical areas. They cannot commit to resources ahead of time, are constrained by their own internal strategies and are often working to national priorities and direction. They are also more geared to responding to proposals. In terms of methods, we learned that an alignment process requires good preparation, long early warning to partners and recognition of the time and other constraints on partners. To predict the position of each organisation it is helpful to investigate each partner at the outset to determine the key parameters of their policies and operations. There is a need for clear internal systems and communication channels within agencies for linking actions on project outputs. Topic-based links between agencies are also needed, with mechanisms to bring the appropriate people together around each issue. Confidence is improved if early outputs can be achieved to demonstrate the benefits of alignment.

Building capacity for developing and implementing the strategies was a core objective of the Project. In this respect, we learned that there is significant capacity within any community if efforts are made to recognise and release it. There are also many things that require to be learned by communities that are not normally empowered to undertake their own planning and development. Key amongst these are the ability to frame the issues for community and group action, to develop and evaluate plans and projects, to gather and manage financial resources, to work and learn together as a whole community and to tap the resources of others. In the course of this Project we experienced that by working together and speaking with one voice, local people can carry significant weight with policy makers and make things happen. Most importantly, there is a need for the value of local knowledge to be recognised and a financial value given to the inputs from local people.

Transferability of this approach to other situations and places will be an important test of its success. However, it is difficult to pre-judge the potential for this as each operating context will be different. We recommend that the Dùthchas approach is not viewed as a blueprint but as a number of optional steps which may each be carried out in several different ways according to the context and the resources available. There are certain fundamental values that need to be preserved throughout this work, however, and that will themselves provide the foundation from which to build the process. The Dùthchas Handbook provides a full guide to designing the process and to the issues to be taken into consideration.

Details of our findings on our core values can be found in Section 3.2.

Our Sustainability Issues

The Dùthchas Project developed and worked with four goals for sustainability. These goals shaped the strategies and provided the foundation for analysing the status of the Pilot Areas and identifying their sustainability priorities:

▶ *Maximising benefit from natural and cultural resources by wise use and by protecting and enhancing these resources*

▶ *Retaining a viable and empowered community*

▶ *Reducing the problems of remoteness by delivering local needs locally and reducing dependence on external inputs*

▶ *Minimising the negative and enhancing the positive impacts of actions on other places and communities and on future generations*

Through this strategic process the following main topics were agreed to be the current priorities for the Pilot Areas:

▶ *Natural and cultural heritage*

▶ *Sustainable land management*

▶ *Local produce*

▶ *Renewable energy*

▶ *Transport and essential services*

▶ *Waste minimisation*

These topics formed the basis for the Area Strategies in the three areas. For each topic a number of key issues was raised by the Strategies, each of which presents an agenda for action by the local communities, the Agency Partners and the Government.

Details of our findings on these topics can be found in Section 3.1.

The Process

The Dùthchas process, while achieving considerable outputs, was perceived as complex by those involved. This was partly a result of the scale of the Project and the need to test and refine processes throughout the demonstration. However it is also an inherent problem of working with the demands of strategic planning and sustainability at local level. We learned that:

▶ *It is important to clarify the purpose, breadth and demands of the process at the outset and ensure understanding and agreement of this and of the commitments required of the different players.*

▶ *A communications plan is critical to a successful process to keep all parties fully briefed on the progress of the work.*

▶ *A pre-project development process would be beneficial to build the capacity, awareness and readiness of the different partners. One aspect of this is providing training for agency staff to prepare them for partnership working.*

▶ *The concept of sustainability should be explored as a first step towards reaching a mutual agreement as to its definition.*

▶ *Sustainability profiles are a critical component, best developed at an early stage by an expert body in consultation with the community.*

▶ *Voluntary time should be used efficiently and with respect.*

▶ *Process and outputs should be linked; early tangible outcomes are critical for maintaining confidence and support.*

> ▶ *It is important to be clear about those things that can be influenced locally and those that cannot, and to focus on the former whilst being aware of the power of a democratically agreed community strategy to influence wider policy.*

We experienced that it was difficult for people to take the Project in the spirit of a demonstration. There was an expectation that everything should work first time, and a fear of failure on the part of many partners. There was also a lack of perspective and understanding as to the main processes involved in the work and how to judge these. Contacts with similar initiatives have revealed many common experiences, particularly in respect of partnership working and community development. It is important that such initiatives are networked and evaluated together so that the patterns become clearer. It is unfortunate that, as a result of this lack of a wider perspective, the commitment to persevering with this important work has not been maintained and lessons may not be transferred.

The Policy Context

The core values of the Dùthchas Project closely reflect those adopted by current Scottish policy, and the practical lessons learned from this demonstration are relevant to several policy areas. This view has been endorsed by the current Minister for Environment and Rural Development. The change in Government administration and establishment of the Scottish Parliament since the start of the Project has resulted in a more sympathetic policy context and a more accessible political framework in Scotland. However, it also presented interesting challenges for the Project as the new administration rapidly introduced many new policy strands and initiatives. This led to confusion in the communities and agencies as to the multiple and over-lapping initiatives arising, some of which cut across our own work and diluted support from Partners. It also became clear that there was a lack of an effective framework for co-ordinating partnership and alignment at a higher level. Dùthchas was powerless to address either of these problems but had to find ways of working with them.

The Project sought to identify new mechanisms for achieving policy objectives by developing a locally based, strategic approach to the planning and implementation of sustainable development. Our work revealed some critical gaps in the provision of an integrated and locally sensitive operational framework. The lack of such a framework is reducing the ability of local communities to influence development decisions, to offer their substantial knowledge and expertise to the local development process and identify the kind of locally sensitive and targeted solutions essential for sustainable development.

Dùthchas experienced that it is challenging to tackle strategic planning and sustainability at community level, both concepts requiring structured processes and taking time to do well. It is also the case that in this country we do not have a tradition of strategic planning at community level, and local development has tended to be project driven. This is a culture that will take time to move on from. This is not to say that we do not recommend a local strategic approach to sustainability. On the contrary, the value that it can bring significantly outweighs the challenge of defining an appropriate methodology. *In the Dùthchas Handbook we recommend alternative approaches to addressing some of these issues.*

Our Recommendations

There are many circumstances in which the approaches developed by Dùthchas would be highly relevant. Indeed a similar approach would ideally be applied in all areas as the foundation for sustainable community planning. Some current contexts in which this approach would be highly relevant are: Community Planning, Local Agenda 21, Community Regeneration Schemes, National Park and Protected Area Plans. Ideally this approach should be carried out within the context of community-based local development organisations.

Dùthchas revealed the significant energy and enthusiasm of local people to address a more locally sensitive and sustainable development model. However, we also revealed many impediments to enabling this and to extending the Dùthchas model to other areas. The following ideas are presented for further consideration by policy makers and others at national, regional and local levels.

1. Local communities have an important role to play in planning and implementing sustainable development. An effective framework for local, integrated, sustainable development planning needs to be established within communities, at a scale that builds on traditional social cohesion and enables full local participation.

2. A continuing support framework of the kind provided by Dùthchas is essential to the delivery of a local sustainable development agenda. This demanding work cannot be facilitated entirely by volunteers. The internal organisation and resourcing of local communities requires to be addressed in this context. This involves, at its most basic, paid local development workers, an appropriate legal body to hold and manage funds and staff, partnership with the public bodies responsible for the area, access to non-targeted funding and support and networks between relevant experiences.

3. The structural position of local communities in respect of decision-making and control over the key sources of capital – natural, social and economic - needs to be addressed. Our connections with Scandinavia, in particular with Norway, revealed the significant advantages of a more locally responsible and responsive system.

4. Accessing and integrating diverse funding sources is a major problem for communities. A wide-ranging, collaborative approach is needed to provide integrated funding for the delivery of local strategies and to match funding sources with the variety of projects. Co-owned or partner projects is one option for easing the problem.

5. Community development requires an appropriate support framework and sensitive, professional approaches. The process must be at a level and speed with which the community feels comfortable. Agencies must believe in and trust communities to implement their own development, and greater confidence needs to be stimulated within the communities themselves through delegation of responsibilities.

6. Initiatives working with strategic planning, community development and sustainability should not be short-term. This is a long-term process, taking 5-10 years to deliver significant outputs. Stability over time is critical to developing the kind of long-term strategic planning demanded for sustainability. A plethora of short-term, isolated initiatives cannot provide a viable way forward for encouraging local effort and commitment; indeed they are likely to discredit attempts to pilot potentially beneficial approaches.

7. The natural heritage and resource base underpins the life and economy of rural areas, and its role in stimulating sustainable rural development should be fully integrated into both development and conservation policies. This involves consideration of land tenure, land use support systems and environmental protection, the ultimate aim being a locally sensitive, flexible and diverse system of resource use, grounded on environmental principles.

8. Current land tenure is an impediment to the sustainable development of areas such as the Dùthchas Pilot Areas. Links with Scandinavia revealed the potential that is unleashed through fine-grained systems of local ownership, coupled with community controls over land use. This delivers more diverse and locally sensitive use of natural resources, enables the benefits of those resources to accrue locally, retains significant levels of population in remote areas and increases local confidence and entrepreneurial ability. A process of land reform, crafted to meet a commonly agreed vision for the role of natural resources in sustainable rural development, is essential.

9. Dispersal of diverse employment opportunities to remote areas is required. Devolved administration and servicing and dispersal of industry can help to underpin diverse employment opportunities and hence a balanced rural population.

10. Economic strategies which have been shown to promote sustainable rural development in other places but which are poorly developed in the pilot areas include: increasing local added value through secondary processing of local resources, local and direct marketing to increase revenue to producers and reduce transport charges, and levels of protection to safeguard local, traditional and diverse production systems.

11. Promotion of social and cultural activity and traditional industries and skills help to found the economy on the heritage of the area and promote local identity and confidence.

12. An efficient, integrated, affordable public transport system is a corner stone for sustainable rural development. Current provision falls far short of meeting this agenda. Systems currently operating in other countries provide useful models.

13. Information Technology provides one of the greatest opportunities for removing the disparities caused by distance. Investment in the provision of up-to-date infrastructure is essential to unleashing this potential.

14. The fundamental principles of sustainability need to be thoroughly rooted in policy and its implementation at different geographical levels. One way of addressing this is through a system of 'nested' sustainability criteria, at local, regional, national and international levels, used to determine development and funding programmes.

15. An integrated framework is required to promote sustainability and the associated sectoral integration. This should recognise the very real problems of partnership as a delivery mechanism. Protocols and training for partnership working are needed, as well as other mechanisms to supplement the shortcomings of partnership.

16. One potentially viable policy framework that could meet some of the needs expressed above is Community Planning. However, there needs to be a stronger requirement to build Community Plans from the bottom up if they are to reflect the variety of local situations, knowledge and priorities upon which to base sustainable local development. Community Plans should also be grounded upon locally appropriate criteria for sustainability, nested within national and international criteria.

17. The Dùthchas experience provides a useful model for addressing many of these issues.

Future actions

Dùthchas was but a first step in a long and continuing process. It was a demonstration, and as such it is hoped that lessons will be learned and new actions developed on its foundation. In the short term, some key actions we would recommend are:

▶ *Continuing support for the three Pilot Areas to implement their strategies into the medium term, recognising that this will require the presence of local development workers, a local organisation and a supportive agency partnership*

▶ *Monitoring the progress of the Pilot Areas on an annual basis and a full evaluation in three years' time*

▶ *Networking between the Pilot Areas and other relevant initiatives and sources of expertise maintained*

▶ *A comparative study of similar initiatives at national and preferably EU levels to contrast lessons on our core values*

▶ *The findings of Dùthchas linked to Community Planning, National Parks and Protected Areas, Local Agenda 21 and other local strategic planning contexts.*

1.1 Project Summary

The Project was based on the foundation stones set out in the original aim, hypothesis, objectives and core values:

Aim

The aim of the Project was to pilot an affordable, transferable process and framework for addressing sustainable development and integrated land management in peripheral rural areas.

Hypothesis

The Project set out to test the hypothesis that the full participation of local people with public authorities would enable the development and implementation of integrated local strategies for sustainable development and achieve measurable social, economic and environmental benefits.

Objectives

To test its hypothesis, the Project identified the following objectives:

▶ *Pilot areas in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland will be used to develop an affordable and transferable process for addressing sustainable development and integrated land management in remote rural areas with high environmental quality and fragile economies.*

▶ *Participation by local people and public bodies will lead to agreement of integrated local strategies for land use and sustainable development.*

▶ *Demonstration projects will be used to pilot implementation of the strategies.*

▶ *An environmental quality mark will be developed to reward achievement and reinforce the link between economic development and environmental quality.*

Core values

A set of 'Core Values' was defined which became the central themes of the work, its monitoring and evaluation:

Sustainability

Making wise use of our resources in order to build a viable community for the future.

Strategic Approach

Creating a planned approach to local development, focused on agreed challenges and opportunities and identifying responsibilities for making things happen.

Participation

Enabling people to play a positive active role in building a viable community for the future.

Partnership

Local people and agencies working together for mutual benefit.

Strategic Alignment

Communities and agencies getting in tune with one another's visions, aims, plans and budgets.

Capacity Building

Gaining experience and confidence so that people can take advantage of opportunities and solve problems themselves.

Affordability

Making best use of available resources.

Transferability

Helping others to learn from our experience and enabling us to learn from theirs.

Task Objectives

The work of the Project was broken down into five Tasks, defined by the following Task Objectives:

1. Management

To ensure the effective management of all aspects of the Project and the achievement of project goals within the allocated time-scales.

2. Dissemination

At local, national and international levels, to promote awareness of the Project, enable analysis of outcomes, and share information and experience on good practice in respect of sustainable development.

3. Area Sustainability Strategies

To develop a local strategic framework and practical mechanisms for enabling the implementation of sustainable development.

4. Environmental Quality Mark

To research, develop and pilot an environmental quality mark that will recognise a high level of community/business commitment to sustainable development.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation

To undertake participatory monitoring and evaluation of the Project to assess its effectiveness in achieving the overall objectives.

The five Tasks formed the basis for monitoring the progress of the work and reporting to the European Commission.

1.2 Context

The Scottish Highlands and Islands

The Scottish Highlands and Islands was the target area for this Project. Located in the north west of Scotland, the Highlands and Islands are classed as a peripheral rural area within Europe. The area extends to approximately 39,000km^2 with a population of 370,000, giving an average population density of 9 people per km^2, with most of the area outwith the few towns being at a much lower density. This places the region as one of the most sparsely populated in the European Union, with the exception of parts of Scandinavia. Most of the population live in communities of less than 1000 people. These communities are inherently fragile, many with declining and ageing populations, low incomes and underemployment. Due to its problems of peripherality and economic decline, the area was an Objective 1 region and is currently under transitional status. The situation in much of the region has showed signs of improvement in recent years, with population levels and incomes increasing. However in some of the remoter areas the trends are still declining and this was true of the Pilot Areas selected by the Project. The economic base of the region is also changing. With agriculture and fishing in severe decline, communities are more dependent on tourism, service industries and increasingly on business related to information technology. The manufacturing sector is very small.

This is an area of mountains and islands of great natural beauty, but with poor soils and a harsh climate. Partly as a consequence of its social and economic characteristics this region is recognised, nationally and internationally, for its high environmental quality and has many protected areas. Despite this, the environmental quality is limited in comparison to its potential and is experiencing continuing decline despite protection measures. Environmental protection regularly comes into conflict with the local need to expand the economy and retain a viable population.

These were the factors which gave rise to the perceived need for this demonstration project.

The Pilot Areas

The three Pilot Areas chosen for the work were located in the northern and western parts of this area:

North Sutherland

North Sutherland occupies the western half of the north coast of mainland Scotland. It covers an area of some 2500km^2. In terms of population, however, it is home to only 2000 people. The Pilot Area contains eleven small communities scattered along the coast and two fertile 'straths'. The area has a strong history of settlement, with many archaeological sites. The land consists mostly of infertile and unoccupied peat lands and hill ground. However, along the north-facing coast and down the two narrow, but fertile glens of Strathnaver and Strath Halladale, people farm the land, mostly under the 'crofting system'[1] . Fishing has declined, with very little now practised. The few forestry plantations are owned and managed by the Government or by private companies. The land tenure system has led to most of this area being owned and managed by very few large estates. The area was also one of those most affected by the Highland Clearances in the 18th and 19th centuries, a key reason for the low population. The area is environmentally very rich, with a high percentage being covered by protected areas.

Trotternish

Trotternish is the northern-most peninsula in the Island of Skye, on the west coast of the Highlands. Its area is approximately 300km^2 and its population is 1400. Trotternish has four small communities. An area rooted in its history, it is still a stronghold of the Gaelic language and can trace the activities of its 'Clans' for over 1000 years. The area is full of historic sites and remains. The peninsula is geologically rich and topographically varied with spectacular views across the sea to the mainland and Western Isles. The area is environmentally important, much of it covered by protected areas. The population is mostly involved in crofting, with the majority of the land owned by the Government. One community has now purchased its own land and runs this as a community company. Sheep farming is the principle activity, though several small horticulture businesses have recently been started. Fishing has declined to just a few small boats, mostly catching shellfish. Tourism is an important industry in Skye, and Trotternish has the benefit of the ferry terminal to the Western Isles.

North Uist

North Uist and Berneray are islands within the southern part of the Outer Hebridean chain. The land area is approximately 450km^2. The population is 1500. North Uist is a tapestry of land and water, with over 1000 fresh water lochs, miles of white shell sand beaches, heather moor, hills and machair. It is surrounded by rich unpolluted inshore waters and bays. Traditionally, crofting and fishing have been the main industries on the island. However tourism and fish farming have become increasingly important industries. As in all crofting areas, a significant part of the local income is earned from activities outwith crofting, mostly in providing local services. Employment has also been found in the military base in Benbecula to the south. The islands are steeped in history and littered with archaeological remains. The community is Gaelic speaking, and traditional culture of music and dance is still strong.

The Project sought to address the particular issues of these peripheral communities by linking the planning of their development to the sustainability of their natural environment and resources. It set out to test the hypothesis that the full participation of local people with public authorities would enable the development and implementation of integrated local strategies for sustainable development and achieve measurable social, economic and environmental benefits.

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[1] Crofting is a system of land tenure established in the nineteenth century in order to stem the loss of population from the Highlands caused by the Highland Clearances and subsequent migrations. Crofting tenure provides families with a home and secure rights to small pieces of land for a small rent to the land owner. Crofting communities are arranged in 'townships', each of which has communal grazing rights to a wider area of hill land. Land use is restricted to agriculture, with the recent addition of forestry by permission of the land owner.

The European context

The circumstances motivating this Project are not confined to the Highlands and Islands. They are true of many rural areas throughout Europe and beyond. It was recognised therefore that our work would have relevance to many other places and would provide tested and documented practical mechanisms for addressing common objectives at a local level. It was also envisaged that the Project would establish a strategic framework for harmonising and integrating local, national and EU priorities at a local level.

The Project addressed some key issues identified internationally through Agenda 21 and the European Fifth Environmental Programme:

▶ *The need for local communities to be involved in partnership with agencies in identifying and agreeing the values, resources, objectives and actions for sustainable development of their areas and to be rewarded for their actions.*

▶ *The need for local participation to be supported by easily accessible and integrated information sources, training and awareness, upon which to base informed decisions.*

▶ *The need for greater sectoral integration and strategy alignment between public authorities in delivering integrated management that meets local needs as well as national and European policy objectives.*

The need to address the integration and acceptance of Natura 2000 sites is an important issue for Europe, particularly in respect of establishing socio-economic benefit and managed relationships with the surrounding area. The Project's work is directly relevant to this issue and also to the management of National Parks.

EU regional development policy aims to stem the trend of rural out-migration, address disparities between regions and the particular problems of peripherality. The Project is directly relevant to these aims whilst also reflecting the aims of EU environment policy.

Trans-national exchange of experience and peer review was seen as having a high priority in relation to addressing these issues at European level. Through this exchange it was anticipated that the Project would be able to present a body of evidence in relation to the evolution of European policy.

1.3 Issues Addressed

The issues addressed by the Dùthchas Project are not unique to Scotland. Nor is the context of the Highlands and Islands unique; the circumstances found here are reflected in many of the more peripheral and economically disadvantaged regions of Europe. The particular historical, political and cultural characteristics of this region are distinct however. A combination of these factors led to the relative importance and need for this Project in Scotland at this time. The political context has already moved on from when the Project was first developed, presenting new opportunities and challenges.

The particular concentration of characteristics within the Pilot Areas, their continuing social and economic fragility, coupled with the exceptional quality of their natural and cultural heritage, presented a very pertinent situation in which to develop and test a new approach to development. This was a situation in which all parties were likely to have a vested interest in a successful outcome.

The fundamental issue at the heart of the project is the need to reconcile the requirements of environmental protection with the very real social and economic development needs of the people who live in and close to areas of high environmental value. By definition such areas are usually subject to environmental protection measures but are very often socially and economically fragile - a combination of factors that has led to conflict and frustration on both sides.

Attempts to increase economic activity in these areas are often impeded by the lack of experience in identifying more sustainable development opportunities compatible with the environmental standards required for protected areas. As a result there is often a public and institutional view that environmental protection inhibits economic development. This can lead to conflict with environmental legislation and excessive development costs due to planning disputes. It can also lead to a decline in a primary economic asset of the region – namely its environment – in the long term.

The Project was also stimulated by the particular demands of the institutional framework in Scotland. There is a traditional lack of integration between sectoral policies, institutions and mechanisms. The 'voluntary principle' adopted by the UK Government in respect of environmental protection, presents particular challenges and requires the use of approaches that build understanding and agreement. There has been a lack of appreciation of the rapidly growing potential for economic benefits from investment in environmental quality. This has resulted in economic development approaches that do not fully reflect the unique attributes of the region and do not capitalise on its 'green' image.

Within this context, the Project sought to address some specific issues:

▶ *the forging of constructive links between social, cultural, economic and environmental issues*

▶ *local awareness, support and involvement in environmental stewardship*

▶ *better integration of Natura 2000 sites with the surrounding area and local economy*

▶ *the development of incentives for constructive environmental improvement across the wider countryside*

▶ *better understanding of sustainable tourism opportunities*

▶ *improved sectoral integration in land use policies and increased local flexibility and targeting of support mechanisms*

▶ *a local strategic framework through which to address specific land management questions*

The challenge was: to link inherent local pride and 'sense of place' with awareness of the socio-economic opportunities presented by the environmental resource, to test mechanisms designed to deliver both socio-economic and environmental enhancement founded on the environmental qualities of the area, and to mobilise greater support through local action and the democratic process for environmental enhancement and protection.

1.4 Anticipated Benefits

A range of outputs and longer term impacts, or outcomes, were anticipated to result from the Project:

Overall Outputs

The planned outputs of the Project were:

Sustainability	A strategic framework and improved capacity for implementing sustainable development Baseline audits, area data sets and sustainability indicators for each pilot area
Strategic approach	A statement of agreed aspirations for the development of each area Area based sustainability strategies for 3 areas Action plans setting targets for addressing key issues Area based information systems based on GIS with local access
Participation	Tested and documented methods for facilitating community participation
Partnership	Area and regional partnership structures and strategy alignment to support on-going delivery
Alignment	Locally targeted and aligned public policies to support on-going delivery of the Strategies
Integration	Constructive links between social, cultural, economic and environmental issues
Capacity building	Increased local awareness of sustainable development issues and approaches
Demonstration	Innovative demonstrations of integrated land management, green business and sustainable tourism capitalising on local environmental quality. New or expanded environmental management projects
Reward	An environmental quality mark, awarded in recognition of local commitment
Dissemination	Documentation and training materials to enable transferability to other areas A full report of process and outcomes, disseminated on CD Rom and Internet
Evaluation	Participative and transnational analysis of processes and issues

Anticipated Impacts

The anticipated impacts or outcomes of the Project were:

Environmental benefits

▶ *Improved management of the environment – flora, fauna, water, air, land, biodiversity, archaeology*

▶ *Improved integration of protected areas with the social and economic requirements of the surrounding communities*

▶ *Improved uptake of environmental support measures*

▶ *Incorporation of environmental objectives into the policies of public authorities and local planning*

▶ *Improved interpretation and sustainable access to the countryside and protected areas*

▶ *Improved environmental performance in relation to business, resource use and servicing*

Socio-economic benefits

▶ *A more diverse economic base*

▶ *Increased population retention and in-migration*

▶ *Lower rates of unemployment*

▶ *Increased employment opportunities related to natural and cultural heritage resources*

▶ *Increased use of local resources and produce*

▶ *Increase in local confidence and identity*

▶ *Greater community involvement in decision making*

▶ *Improved management of cultural heritage sites with local benefit*

Building awareness and capacity for action

▶ *Increased local understanding of the natural and cultural heritage and the impacts and interdependencies of land-use practices*

▶ *Increased capacity within partner organisations for implementing integrated sustainable development*

▶ *Strategic frameworks for delivering sustainable development*

1.5 Process Summary

The central challenge for the methodology was to combine the development and application of a sustainability framework with a community development approach and agency partnership and alignment. It is this particular combination of approaches which makes the Dùthchas Project innovative.

The methods developed were closely related to the planned outputs listed in the previous section and were designed to:

address the Project's Core Values:

▶ **Sustainability**
▶ **Strategic Approach**
▶ **Participation**
▶ **Partnership**
▶ **Strategic Alignment**
▶ **Capacity Building**
▶ **Affordability**
▶ **Transferability**

at each stage of the work:

▶ *Preparing the way*
▶ *Area Selection and Engagement*
▶ *Initial Review*
▶ *Area Sustainability Profiles*
▶ *Topic Strategies*
▶ *Information and Dissemination*
▶ *Strategy Alignment*
▶ *Demonstration Actions*
▶ *Continuing Support Strategy*
▶ *Sustainable Communities Scheme*
▶ *Monitoring and Evaluation*

The process for developing the Area Strategies was a logical, step by step, planning process.

This is set out in the table below.

A brief resume of the main principles of the methodology used at each stage, the results obtained and the lessons learned is presented in Section 2.1. More detailed information on the methods can be found in the Dùthchas CD-Rom and in the Dùthchas Handbook.

TABLE 1.1 THE STRATEGY PROCESS – OVERVIEW

Initial Review

qualitative community data
strengths
challenges
ideas

1000 people

Data Search

qualitative agency data
social
economic
environmental

21 agencies

Tasks

community priority
projects
1000 people

Area Sustainability Profiles

goals
objectives
status indicators
progress indicators

Sustainability Priorities

Monitoring & Strategy Review

targets
indicators

Priority Topic Strategies

vision
objectives
actions
targets
support package
14 strategy groups 14 reference groups

Implementation Phase 1

Demonstration Actons

feasibility
business plan
implementation plan
support package
14 local projects

Local Organisational Framework

This section describes the actual work and its outputs.

Full information on each aspect of the work can be found on the Dùthchas CD-Rom and website

2.1 Progress in our Tasks

This chapter documents the methodologies applied, the outputs of the work and the main lessons learned under each of our five Tasks:

TASK 1   Management

TASK 2   Dissemination

TASK 3   Area Strategies

> ▶ *Area selection*
> ▶ *Engaging the Pilot Areas*
> ▶ *Initial Review*
> ▶ *First Projects*
> ▶ *Area Sustainability Profiles*
> ▶ *Topic Strategies*
> ▶ *Strategy Alignment*
> ▶ *Demonstration Actions*
> ▶ *Continuing Support Strategy*

TASK 4   Sustainable Communities Scheme

TASK 5   Monitoring and Evaluation

As this was an extensive Project, it is unfortunately only possible to refer briefly to the main points of each Task in this report. *However, much fuller documentation is available in the many specialist reports which can be accessed on the Dùthchas CD-Rom and website. For a full list of these reports see the inside back cover.*

TASK 1   MANAGEMENT

The Management Task comprised three main functions:

▶ *Project administration and planning*

▶ *Services to partners*

▶ *Reporting to European Commission*

Method
Project Administration and Planning

The Project established comprehensive systems for dealing with the management of finances, people, offices, planning and reporting. This presented its own challenges. Because of the dual requirements of the European Commission and the Lead Partner, we had to operate two parallel financial recording systems. The large number of Partners required comprehensive systems for recording time and expenses contributed to the Project. We needed systems for communicating regularly with all players. The eight Project staff had to be recruited, trained, managed and supported. Staff were located in four separate offices, all of which had to be established, serviced and maintained. We were in effect running a small organisation.

Services to Partners

The Project was developed under the auspices of Scottish Natural Heritage and co-funded by a group of 11 public agencies. From among these, The Highland Council became the Lead Partner.

The Project was steered by a larger Partnership Group of 22 agencies (a full list of the Partners is included at the start of this Report). An independent, high profile **Chairperson** was recruited to head the Partnership. A **Management Group** was established, comprising representatives of the funding agencies and the Pilot Areas. A team of 8 **Staff** was recruited to manage and implement the work. Within each Pilot Area an **Advisory Group** was set up to guide the work. Smaller, topic-focused **Strategy and Task Groups** were established for each area to develop the Strategy and implement the projects. 'Expert' **Reference Groups** were set up to advise the communities on the main topics. *The structure of the Project is shown in Table 2.1 on page 14.*

Reporting to the European Commission

The Commission had basic reporting requirements that included an initial Inception Report, six-monthly Progress Reports, Interim and Final Reports. Alterations of more than 10% of the budget under any budget head required prior approval from Brussels.

Outputs
Project Administration and Planning

Project administration, despite its complexity, operated very smoothly. The financial recording system proved to be accurate, up-to-date, and satisfied the requirements of the Partners and auditors.

Staff   The implementation and management of the Project was the responsibility of a team of 8 staff. The staff were dispersed in 4 offices: 3 core staff in Inverness and one full-time post (2 job-shared) in each of the 3 Pilot Areas.

▶ *The core staff were responsible for: managing the Project, its staff and finances; developing the Project methods and training the Area Co-ordinators; servicing and involving the Project Partners; working with consultants to develop the 'expert tools', including the Sustainability Profiles and Sustainable Communities Scheme; developing external links and organising conferences and exchanges; monitoring and evaluating the Project work and preparing and disseminating information and reports.*

▶ *The Area Co-ordinators were responsible for: facilitating the involvement of local people and agencies; supporting the Area Advisory, Strategy and Task Groups; developing and implementing the Area Strategies; circulating information about the Project widely in the areas and monitoring the Project's work.*

The Core Staff were successfully recruited in time to take up post at the start of the Project period. It had been planned to recruit the Area Co-ordinators to start in July 1998. However this was delayed by procedures until October 1998. This had a knock-on effect for the work programme and the start of the work in the Pilot Areas. In all cases the staff selected proved to be well matched to the requirements of the work and worked as a close and happy team. Training took place at the start of each new phase of the work, and on-line networking and guidance was given on a daily basis.

Services to Partners

The Project involved large numbers of individuals and organisations. Among those directly involved were over 1500 members of the local communities, the staff of the 22 Partner organisations at local and national levels, interested and supportive 'experts' in a variety of fields and representatives of other European areas. The different players were organised into a number of inter-related working groups (see Table 2.1 on page 14). The effective management of such a large and diverse range of people was one of the biggest challenges of the Project.

The **Partnership Group** was established and expanded to a total of 22. They had responsibility for: steering and evaluating the Project; promoting the Project in their own organisations and elsewhere; ensuring good links to their local and national staff; providing information, advice and support; relating their work obligations to the needs of the Pilot Area communities and seeking ways to meet local needs and objectives; supporting the implementation of the Strategies. There were 7 Partnership Group meetings. Of these, 4 Partners attended 100% of meetings, 5 attended more than 70%, 6 attended 50-70% and the remaining 6 attended 25-50%. In addition, many Partners attended conferences and other events.

The **Management Group** initially comprised the 4 main funding bodies. In September 1999 this was extended to include the Chairs of each Area Advisory Group. This was intended to provide a central link between all of the groups working with the Project. The Management Group took charge of day-to-day management and implementation, including staff, finances, monitoring and evaluation, reporting to the Partnership Group and responsibilities to the European Commission. The group met at least 4 times a year, with 16 meetings in total. Of these, 1 Partner attended all meetings, 2 attended 15 meetings and 1 attended 11. From the date that the Area Chairs were included there were 7 meetings. Of these, one area attended 4 meetings, 1 attended 3 and 1 attended none. Time and distance to travel to meetings was a factor in this.

The **Area Advisory Groups** were an innovative step. Each Group comprised about 30 people, half local residents, selected according to the wishes of each community, the other half local staff of the Partner Agencies. This was the first time such an integrated 'forum' had been set up at local level. The Advisory Groups helped to link the many local communities and the Agency Partners. They had responsibility for: representing the local community and Partner interests; establishing local support for the Project; integrating it with other local initiatives; advising and supporting the Area Co-ordinators; providing information, expertise and resources; helping to create and implement the Area Strategy; encouraging local agencies to come together in support of the Strategy and providing advice and feedback between the local and regional levels.

Each Area Advisory Group met 11 times, starting with 3 early meetings of the initial local steering groups before May 1998 and 8 meetings of the full groups between June 1998 and April 2001, an average of 3 meetings per year.

▶ *North Uist had 16 community and 11 partner representatives.*

▶ *Trotternish had 15 community and 13 partner representatives*

▶ *North Sutherland had 19 community and 12 partner representatives*

The attendance at meetings showed the following (accurate figures are not available for North Uist):

% meetings attended	Trotternish		North Sutherland	
	Partners	Community	Partners	Community
70 - 100%	3	5	3	6
50 - 70%	4	7	3	5
30 - 50%	5	1	2	4
1 - 30%	0	0	3	4
0	1	0	1	0

Other groups Working on the specific topics within the Pilot Areas were:

▶ *14 Strategy Groups, responsible for the development of the Area Strategies, met 3 times in facilitated workshops, some groups also met outwith these workshops, some attended seminars.*

▶ *20 Task Groups, developing the actions arising from the work*

▶ *14 expert Reference Groups, providing guidance to Strategy Groups, were consulted 3 times and some attended seminars.*

The roles of these groups are referred to in other sections.

Lessons

The complexity of the Project is a recurring issue that inevitably impacted on project management. At times it was a bit like organising an army! Despite this, staff managed very well to keep all systems flowing. It was however difficult to keep everyone happy and ensure that all parties were aware of all activities and developments, without sending out too much paper, which everyone complained about. The main issues raised by project management were:

Project administration and planning

European projects have special demands in terms of satisfying the reporting and accounting requirements of both the European Commission and the lead partner. This undoubtedly complicates the task and takes more time and should be budgeted for at the outset. Setting up a comprehensive recording system from day 1 that meets the requirements of all parties is critical. Equally, the lack of flexibility in moving money between budget heads and adapting the workplan to changing circumstances is an issue.

Timescales

We encountered many issues regarding timing, the most important being the constraints of a three-year project with no in-built flexibility. This proved to be a big drawback in a process with a community development agenda. Having to set up the Project within the three-year period of the LIFE funding was also a drawback, taking time and energy that should have gone into the main work programme. However, we could not raise expectations in advance of receiving confirmation of funding. The time commitments required by the work were greater than expected. This was mostly a result of the large number of players and unexpected delays caused by staff recruitment and modifications to the planned process. The tight deadline did not allow for these to be absorbed by the Project, causing later work to be curtailed.

Staffing

All staff performed well and happily in their roles and rose to the challenge of the work. They committed huge amounts of overtime and most stayed with the Project until the end - and beyond. The level of commitment is a measure of their belief in the work. Despite periods of unrest among the various Partners, the staff remained a loyal and committed team who supported each other throughout. Due to the complexity of the work, the staff were probably the only people who knew the whole process intimately. This is both a strength and a weakness, but difficult to avoid when all other players engaged only occasionally and differentially. We learned that the staff are the frontline for any criticisms and tend to take the blame for failures. The lack of a champion for the Project from among the Partners also placed staff in a vulnerable position. However, the presence of local workers was hugely valued and the employment of local people a big success factor.

The employment position of staff working for a partnership is an important issue and should receive more consideration in relation to the protocols of partnership working. The 'ownership' of staff in this situation is, by definition, unclear. The Dùthchas staff were responsible to the partnership, through the Management Group. They were employed by the Lead Partner, but the Project Manager was line-managed by a second Partner and housed with a third. The staff found that they effectively 'belonged' to no one. This situation would have been improved if Dùthchas had been an independent organisation. There are issues here for accountability and staff employment and welfare. Staff can too easily become a political football in the partnership if no partner takes ultimate responsibility for them or for the work.
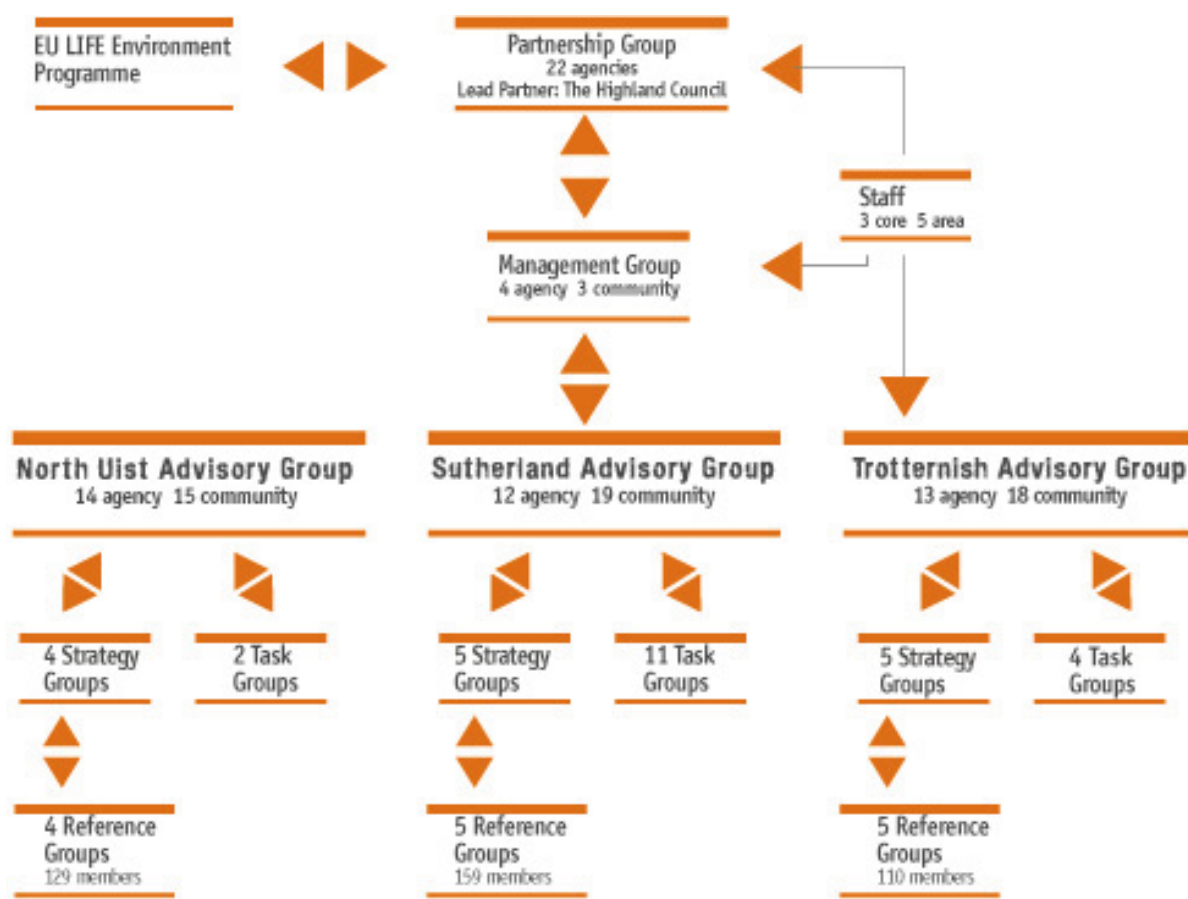
Management structure

Initially the Partnership Group was the overall decision-making body for the Project. In June 1999 this was realised not to be working, which led to a management review. Following this, Partners became advisors and contributors and the Management Group, which was expanded to include the three Pilot Areas, became the steering group. None of this was completely satisfactory. The Management Group became the lynchpin for the work and was theoretically to maintain communications to Partners and Area Advisory Groups. The latter function did not really work, leading to a communication block. Because of time and distance, area representatives were unable to attend many meetings, creating local perceptions of a top-down control system, added to by the fact that the Partner members did not attend local meetings. There were strong feelings that more autonomy should have been given to the Area Advisory Groups. This scenario is fairly representative of tensions that are a feature of the current administrative system as a whole. It is difficult to work out a process which effectively and acceptably joins the national, regional and local levels. Very importantly, the Project suffered from the lack of a real 'champion' prepared to represent it at national level and sort out tensions between the different levels. It is important that this job is not left to the Project staff who do not carry sufficient weight and whose neutrality may be compromised.

Maintaining effective links

It was hard to keep effective links between so many players. Everyone complained of too much paper. The Partnership Group was too large to engage fully in the work if the Partners themselves were not prepared to be pro-active (as some were). It was extremely difficult to keep them fully abreast of the work and even more difficult to get them to submit timesheets. However, no Partners dropped out and most managed to attend events at either local or regional level. Partners' internal communications were often not as good as they should have been, leading to some problems with local staff. However, as the Areas began to take the lead, many local Partners' staff became more pro-active.

TABLE 2.1 MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

TASK 2 DISSEMINATION

The Dissemination Task had four main functions:

▶ *Good practice network*

▶ *Exchange visits*

▶ *Seminars and conferences*

▶ *Project publications*

Method

Dùthchas placed strong emphasis on making connections and sharing experiences, both between the Dùthchas areas and with similar communities and experiences elsewhere. The LIFE funding gave us a special opportunity to make trans-national links.

This part of the Project's work focused firmly on capacity building. The information and experiences gained through this 'widening of horizons' played a pivotal role in the development of the Area Sustainability Strategies. It has also helped to inform a wider audience, throughout Europe, of the Project's work and progress.

The exchange of experience took place in a variety of ways:

▶ *We held and attended **conferences and seminars** on a wide range of topics involving relevant experiences from around Europe and the UK.*

▶ *We organised **study tours**, both within the UK and also to other countries. We also hosted many return visits, to enable others to look at and comment on the work of Dùthchas.*

▶ *We developed **trans-national links** with initiatives in several countries. In particular, we had a long and close partnership with the County of Sogn og Fjordane in Western Norway.*

▶ *We set up **Reference Groups** to make links between those who were developing different aspects of the Area Strategies and 'cutting edge' expertise on that topic elsewhere.*

▶ *Links were also maintained via the **Internet**, through our own Project website, through membership of relevant 'E-Groups' and through personal contact.*

▶ *We developed an experimental **GIS** (Geographical Information System) in each area to import useful information from agency databases to help local people in their planning.*

Outputs

This aspect of the work included many conferences, seminars, presentations, study visits, publications, contact networks, website, video, CD-Rom. A brief overview is listed below. Full reports and a description of each of these can be found on the *Dùthchas CD-Rom and website*.

Conferences and seminars

A wide range of conferences, seminars and other events was organised to inform different stages of the work, including:

September 1998
Preparatory seminar   'Participatory Strategy'
Preparatory seminar   'Environmental Quality Mark'
Preparatory seminar   'Geographical Information Systems'

February 1999
The Project and Initial Review Exhibition Launch with Scottish Minister, Lord Sewel

April 1999
'Looking After the Future' a three-day, trans-national conference

August 1999
'Information for Communities, you know IT makes sense' - Conference on community IT systems

June 2000
North Uist Information Seminar - 'Benefiting from our Cultural and Natural Heritage'

July 2000
Trotternish Information Seminar - 'Renewable Energy in Rural Communities: It Can Be Done'

September 2000
Sutherland Information Seminar - 'Good Enough to Eat: Adding Value to Local Produce'

February 2001
Sutherland Information Seminar - 'Sustainable Land Use'

March 2001
The Final Conference

Study Visits

Study visits and exchanges were seen as one of the most successful tools for enabling exchange of experience and building of vision, ideas and confidence. Due to the funding from LIFE, we enabled many people to visit many places in the UK and other countries. In return, many visited us to learn from our approach. In all we calculated that over 1000 people visited the Dùthchas Pilot Areas at different times to view our work and attend our events.

UK Visits

June 2000
Fair Isle – Sustainable development relating to cultural and natural heritage – 'Safeinherit' Seminar

September 2000
Oban – Waste Management

November 2000
Cumbria – Hill Farm Diversification & Direct Marketing
Findhorn – Sustainable Housing

Trans-national links

We developed a wide contact network throughout Europe. This came partly from the early connections made whilst preparing funding applications, partly from links to the European Network for Experiences in Sustainable Development and partly from links made as a result of our website, presentations and publications. We were able to support representatives from the pilot areas to travel to Denmark and Norway on study visits. The following were the main events:

May 2000
Denmark – Renewable Energy study tour to Jutland

July 2000
Visit from Swedish local development group

Visit from representatives of the Estonian Village Movement 'Kodukant'

Several exchanges with Norway – see below

Exchange of expertise occurred with the Swedish 'Big Lakes Project', an EU funded initiative on sustainable development

Norway - Our partnership with Sogn og Fjordane

As part of our preparation for making European funding applications we developed an informal partnership with the County of Sogn og Fjordane in Norway. Although they are not formal partners in the Dùthchas Project, our partnership has been strong throughout, with the Norwegians receiving funding from national sources to work with Dùthchas. The following is a summary of the events held. In addition to this there was substantial exchange of expertise on many topics. *Full reports of the Norway exchange can be found on the Dùthchas CD-Rom and website.*

September 1996
Initial study tour to Norway at the invitation of the County Governor

June 1997
Return visit to Scotland at the invitation of the original Steering Group

July 1998
Visit by the RSPB to Norway

April 1999
Norwegian delegation attended the Trans-national Conference in Sutherland

September 1999
Delegation of 15 community members from the Dùthchas areas visited Norway

November 1999
A group from Trotternish visited the Olden water bottling plant in Norway

September 2000
A group of 23 Norwegian community and agency members visited all 3 Dùthchas Areas

October 2000
Delegation of County Environmental Officers from all of Norway visited Dùthchas

April 2001
Dùthchas Project Manager invited to present the work of Dùthchas and lessons from the co-operation with Norway - to the agencies, academics and communities that had participated.

Presentations

Dùthchas placed emphasis throughout on communicating with those in authority in order to convey the messages coming from the Pilot Areas to decision makers. One of the ways in which we did this was to make presentations to the Boards and key staff of the many Partner Agencies, The Scottish Executive and Government Ministers. These were successful in drawing attention to the Project and in exploring the potential roles of the agencies in assisting both the Project and the needs of remote rural areas. Several presentations were given to Government Ministers and key Scottish Office and Scottish Executive officials. These included presentations to:

▶ *Lord Sewel – Scottish Office Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries*

▶ *Ross Finnie – Scottish Minister for Environment and Rural Development*

▶ *Rhona Brankin – Deputy Scottish Minister for Environment and Rural Development*

▶ *The National Rural Partnership*

▶ *The Rural Agenda Steering Group – an inter-departmental Scottish Executive group*

These have enabled us to explore the links and possibly influence national rural policy.

Many other presentations have been given on the Project, both in the UK and Europe, to conferences, universities and international gatherings, including:

1999
presentation to the ECOVAST international conference on rural development, Sweden

2000
invited presentations to the Swedish Rural Parliament, European Conference

stand at the LIFE Week in Brussels

presentation to the EU Northern Peripheries Programme ' Rural Transfer Network' Seminar

2001
presentation to the Scottish LIFE Conference

paper to Swedish Presidency Conference on Regional Depopulation as a Challenge for Structural Policies

Press

Press links throughout the Project were strong, and we achieved significant coverage in the papers, journals, radio and TV. The local press in the Pilot Areas followed the Project with interest and gave regular updates on activities. Feature articles and papers were published in:

▶ *'Economic Development Today', The Planning Exchange, December 1999*

▶ *Carrefour 'Update', July 2000*

▶ *International Institute for Environment and Development 'PLA Notes' 'Participatory Processes in the North', June 2000*

▶ *The Northern Peripheries Programme, Rural Transfer Network Bulletin, August 2000*

▶ *The Northern Peripheries Programme, Rural Transfer Network Bulletin, August 2000*

▶ *'Ecos' Journal, (to be published 2001)*

Publications

Forty-two publications were produced by the Dùthchas Project: these are listed on the back cover of this report and most are available in full on the Dùthchas CD-Rom or website.

Lessons

This was a very successful and rewarding part of the work. Making links between those in similar circumstances, those who have tackled similar issues and those who have relevant specialist expertise, was given a high priority. This was a demonstration project, and it was important that we used every opportunity to explore cutting-edge solutions to the issues we were addressing. The Pilot Areas, by definition, are relatively remote and may lack the benefit of close contacts with outside professional bodies or other communities. Normally these links would be much more difficult to make.

Networking and dissemination is strongly encouraged by the LIFE Programme. In this respect the LIFE funding proved to be extremely beneficial. In a national context it is difficult to raise funding for study visits, publications and other dissemination tools. This is especially the case when such links are international.

Good network links and careful use of resources enabled well over 1000 people to travel to see other relevant places, initiatives, and events. Over 40 publications of various kinds were produced through the Project. We were able to experiment with innovative tools for information dissemination, including GIS, CD-Rom, website, video-conferencing. This had a big impact on all of those involved both in the Pilot Areas and elsewhere. Many links and friendships were made, many of which will persist into the future. New visions and opportunities were opened up and new ways of addressing old problems found. An outcome of the Norwegian links is a future partnership between a Dùthchas Pilot Area and a Norwegian Commune.

Trans-national links provided inspiration as to successful and more sustainable ways forward for rural areas. The links with Norway provided insights into a system which had in many ways addressed the main issues raised by the Pilot Areas, namely - local control, land tenure and land use diversification, dispersal of employment opportunities, local secondary processing, effective transport links and high standards of welfare provision. Denmark had successfully addressed the provision of small scale, locally owned, renewable energy production. Sweden had addressed issues of local processing and direct marketing. The transferability of these ideas would, in many instances, be influenced by the differing national structural contexts. However they have provided a new vision of what is possible if these contexts are also addressed.

TASK 3 AREA SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIES

This Task formed the core of the Project's work. In effect it comprised the ten activities listed at the head of this chapter. These are described below.

AREA SELECTION

Method

Following approval of the LIFE funding, one of the first important tasks was to select the Pilot Areas with which the Project would work. It was critical that this process was as open, involving and accountable as possible, and that the candidate communities and local agencies were happy to be involved with the Project. The potential success of the work rested upon a successful outcome to this stage.

The selection involved a three-stage process:

1. The Partner Agencies agreed the main criteria, produced the relevant data and produced GIS map overlays to clarify the areas where the criteria overlapped. This enabled identification of a number of potential areas.

2. The communities and local agencies in these areas were consulted to test their support for the Project, identify local issues and define the areas which had local identity and in which local people could work comfortably together.

3. Finally, the other technical issues relating to the area boundaries were considered, including administrative boundaries, data units, bio-geographical units and scale, before the final areas were confirmed.

The selection criteria included:

▶ *fragile areas in economic and social terms*

▶ *areas with strong natural and cultural heritage significance*

▶ *areas which 'work' as units for their communities and in terms of their physical geography, management and political units*

▶ *no existing initiatives which may overlap with the Project*

▶ *a strong resident community with a population not exceeding 1500, to enable full participation in the process*

▶ *other criteria reflected the sustainability aims of the Project and the varying interests of the Partner Agencies*

Outputs

The results of the initial stages of this process showed that most rural areas in the Highlands and Western Isles, the area of search, met the characteristics of fragility and high heritage value. However the concentrations of these features varied, and when other characteristics were brought into the equation it was possible to focus on a more limited selection. Finally, the involvement of the local communities enabled a clear definition of the most appropriate and acceptable boundaries, resulting in North Sutherland, the Trotternish Peninsula and North Uist and Berneray being chosen and agreed as the Pilot Areas. This process took about three months to complete.

Lessons

The Partners debated the options of selecting Pilot Areas through an open competitive process or through an internal assessment. Previous experience of a competitive process in other projects had shown that many communities would apply and be unsuccessful, leading to disappointment and disenchantment. The Partners were keen to avoid this happening again. It was also felt that a more technical process would allow the application of more rigorous criteria. There was no clear conclusion as to the merits of the alternative approaches. The approach used probably caused less pain but did not succeed in all respects in selecting ideal areas. For instance, in two of the areas there was concern as to competing initiatives. With hindsight, the element of competition may well have increased the commitment of the areas to take on this challenge, rather than feeling that it had been in some way landed on them.

It would have been better if the Pilot Areas had been selected and settled in before the Project began, as this stage of the work took about three months to complete. The reason this was not done was because of the fear of raising expectations before the outcome of the funding was known. There was probably no way around this dilemma.

The geographical scale of the Pilot Areas selected did not match the areas covered by agency plans. This was seen by some agencies as problematic, making it unlikely that they would be able to work with a special plan for one part of their area.

ENGAGING THE PILOT AREAS

Method

The full participation of local people and agencies was a core value of the Project. This first step in engaging the local people was therefore critical to the future local ownership of the process. This period was one of transition. The challenge was to take a project created in a 'top-down' way and build community involvement and ultimately ownership. The introduction of the Project was done in six stages in each Pilot Area:

1. **Meetings with local agencies** to: introduce the Project, discuss the area boundaries, identify its relationship to existing initiatives, identify local stakeholders, shape the process for introducing the Project to the communities, gain agency nominations for the Area Advisory Group.

2. **Local publicity and open community meetings** to: explain the Project, answer questions and take ideas on how to go forward, gain an overview of the main issues for sustainability in the area, explain the criteria for Pilot Area selection and resolve the area boundaries, gain community nominations for the Area Advisory Group.

3. **Community consultation**: Following the community meetings, community representatives were asked to take the information about the Project back to their communities for discussion and to feed back responses to Project staff.

4. **Establishing the Area Advisory Groups** on the basis of the local nominations.

5. **Appointing the Area Co-ordinators** through a special process that ensured that the people chosen would be well received locally, as well as meeting the needs of the Project.

6. **Setting up the area offices** in locations which would open the Project to the community

The identification of key local 'stakeholders' was an important part of engaging the areas. Dùthchas developed a method for enabling local people to identify stakeholders.

Stakeholder Analysis

Local people and agencies were asked to identify:

▶ *individuals who would be a crucial resource to the project*

▶ *organisations and individuals who might be directly affected by project activities*

▶ *organisations and individuals who might be indirectly affected by project activities*

▶ *organisations who wished to be involved whom it was crucial to involve*

▶ *organisations and individuals who might feel threatened by Project activities*

▶ *key individuals whom the project should seek to involve*

Outputs

The introduction of the Project to these areas met with varying levels of acceptance from different communities and organisations. However each area agreed to become involved. Overall, the strongest community enthusiasm for the Project was in North Sutherland. In North Uist there were concerns that there were already too many initiatives taking up local time and that there was a danger of overlap with some of these. In Trotternish the initial reception was hesitant, but there were few competing initiatives.

The establishment of the Area Advisory Groups was a novel and quite successful process in all areas. The process was very open and democratic, resulting in strong community agreement as to their representatives. In one half of North Sutherland the communities decided to run their own election process to select their representatives. The final result was an innovative forum which succeeded in bringing the key players - community and agency - around the same table for the first time.

The selection of the Area Co-ordinators was similarly carried out in a very democratic way, with the community and agency members of the Advisory Groups identifying their own representatives to the selection panel. Advertising was restricted to the local press. The individuals selected through this process proved to be immensely popular locally and were one of the key assets of the Project.

Lessons

It is very important at this first stage to give an absolutely clear picture of what the Project is, what it is not and what it can and cannot deliver. It emerged later that we had not succeeded in doing this fully during the introductory meetings. This resulted in some confusion as to the potential of the Project, which persisted for many people. The sustainability focus was difficult to convey with any clarity at this stage, and the extent to which the Project was weighted towards environmental objectives caused some confusion. The dilemma for the Project was to allow an open enough agenda so that the participatory objectives were not compromised, while trying to provide sufficient clarity and focus to the aims agreed with the LIFE Programme. We also found that there had been strong expectations that EU funding would provide substantial funds for local projects, as had Objective 1 and Leader. There was great disappointment that this was not the case, although people did accept that the Project was developing an approach that could function under normal funding conditions.

The early involvement of the local agency staff, preferably in designing the Project, is very important. If these staff do not feel a strong ownership and approval of the Project before it is opened up to the communities, there is a strong chance that they will resist it. The job of involving the local staff should have been carried out by the regionally based Agency Partners. Dùthchas suffered resistance from some local staff throughout its life from this job not having been fully undertaken to the satisfaction of the local staff. There is an in-built local resistance to initiatives that are imposed from outside. There are also important issues relating to the preparation of the Agency Partners' staff for engagement in a project such as this. These include accurately estimating and planning for the time, inputs and resources that will be required to do the job well, and understanding the role of the Partner in the work.

The Area Advisory Group model was quite new. Whilst it had some problems, overall it provided a much needed forum for bringing community interests and agencies around the table to work and plan together at local level. In this respect it was a good model for Local Agenda 21 and Community Planning. One agency representative commented in the evaluation that it demonstrated that, given the opportunity "people will work with each other and with agency representatives; there are these skills in the community". It was noted that some stakeholders were missing from the process, in particular landowners and some agencies.

The choice of Area Co-ordinators is critical for the success of this kind of work. The skills required are broad and change over time as the focus of the work changes. The early stages of survey and planning require strong community facilitation skills and local knowledge. However, as the project progresses to planning and implementation, the skill needs become more technical to deal with professional agencies, technical information, project and financial planning and fund raising. This variety of skills is hard to find in one person; job-sharing or training may help. Partners felt that more experience in critical analysis and project management would have helped, as well as training in environmental and economic development. The choice of local people for these posts was rated a critical factor by everyone involved. Their knowledge of the area and community, their established relations with local groups and their ability to relate appropriately and sympathetically to local people were all factors raised in the evaluation by both the community and local agencies. The wisdom of job-sharing in this type of post was also praised

as giving greater flexibility, wider skills, mutual support and enabling people with other commitments to apply.

INITIAL REVIEW
Method

This was the first stage in which we sought the full involvement of the whole community and all of the Partners. The process began by carrying out a community and agency survey to establish a baseline picture of the Pilot Areas, their strengths, challenges and opportunities for change. In this stage of the work the Project aimed to:

▶ *Make it possible for local people to set the agenda for working towards a more sustainable future*

▶ *Encourage the emergence of local potential, ideas, realistic solutions and expectations*

▶ *Encourage the emergence of new faces and local leaders to support the work in the future*

▶ *Create a baseline picture of the areas and a framework to enable participative planning*

To gain a comprehensive picture and to root the work in the views of the local people, it was important to involve as many of the 4,900 people who live in the Pilot Areas as possible. We had to find methods which were welcoming yet economical. We wanted this stage to be open, relevant, democratic and empowering. To satisfy these aims we based the method for this stage on 'participatory rural appraisal' techniques and trained the Area Co-ordinators to facilitate the process. The process we used and the results it produced are documented in full in the three Initial Review Reports, the value statements and video, all of which can be viewed on the CD-Rom. In brief, the process included the following stages:

▶ *Open public meetings*

▶ *Going out to speak to people who did not attend the meetings*

▶ *Agency questionnaire and workshop*

▶ *Travelling exhibitions to communicate the results and to vote on priorities*

▶ *Full documentation of the process and results in a report, community leaflet and video*

What do you most value/ like about your area?	What do you most dislike/ not value about your area?	What ideas do you have for improving your area?
Peace & quiet	Population decline & imbalance	Development of tourism/green tourism
Beautiful scenery	Poor & expensive transport	Improved interpretation
Clean environment	High cost of living	Improved transport infrastructure
Natural environment & wildlife	Lack of facilities	Recreation facilities
Marine environment	Lack of employment options	Facilities for the young
Close, safe, friendly community	Over-dependence on sheep	Development of local natural produce
Strong culture & traditions	Declining agriculture	Marketing based on unique qualities
Gaelic language & culture	Lack of local processing	Harnessing of renewable energy
Historical sites	Lack of affordable homes	Development of local culture/history
Local natural resources & produce	Litter & pollution	Diversification of employment/land use
	Harsh climate & environment	

I love the storms in winter and the smell of plants growing in summer – hay, clover, grass

Scrap vehicles, tumble down sheds, rusting tractors – why do we tolerate these?

Locally co-ordinated transport so young ones see more, go to more, experience more

Outputs

Survey

The process used for the community survey proved to be extremely successful in engaging the imagination and involvement of local people. Approximately one third of the total population in each area (1500 in all) became directly involved. They produced a wealth of ideas that were retained in the exact words of the participants, prioritised by each community and fully recorded for later use. The Agency questionnaire was less successful and did not produce the required information, necessitating an extra step, to carry out a data search, to be inserted into the process.

The many individual responses to the three survey questions were collated and analysed. This revealed the following most commonly expressed themes in all three areas, reflected by both community and agency responses:

One of the biggest surprises was the strength of local feeling about the natural environment. Between 40-50% of all responses on the things most valued referred to the environment. This showed the strong foundation of local goodwill upon which to build a more environmentally sensitive development path. However, responses as to the things not valued revealed a corresponding lack of awareness of the threats to that environment. The second strong category of values related to the community, its closeness, traditions and safety. Economic issues and the provision of services and facilities dominated the dislikes, especially amongst the young.

Reporting back

A travelling exhibition of the Initial Review results was formally launched in each area. In Trotternish, Lord Sewel, the then Scottish Office Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries, launched the exhibitions. The exhibitions visited village halls in each community. In Sutherland, because of the number of communities and the distances involved, the exhibition travelled on a special bus. During the travelling exhibitions and in the reports of the Initial Review, every idea given to us was faithfully recorded in the exact words used. These ideas have proved an invaluable treasure chest for groups and organisations contemplating work in the area. Local groups have also found that the existence of this report, based on a very participative process, has given added weight to funding applications.

Dùthchas produced three very successful publications to help capture the spirit and report back on the Initial Review to the community and others:

▶ *A 'value statement' – a colourful leaflet containing the main reasons that local people value their area, circulated to every local household, public place and organisation*

▶ *An edition of the Dùthchas Newsletter*

▶ *A tape-slide and video – documenting fully, in the words and images of the local people and their area, the main findings of the Initial Review.*

Please see the Dùthchas CD-Rom and website for copies of the Initial Review Reports, Value Statements and video.

Lessons

The overall conclusions of the process were that:

▶ *it was extremely successful in engaging the local communities, with up to a third of each area involved*

▶ *it created great interest, energy and enthusiasm for the work of the Project*

▶ *it generated a wealth of ideas and revealed a very clear picture of how local people perceive their area*

▶ *all of these ideas were communicated to Partner Agencies and have been used to develop projects and justify funding*

▶ *the process was time-consuming, taking four months to complete*

▶ *it would be possible to curtail the methods, but the local staff felt that this would have greatly reduced its value*

▶ *there were some misunderstandings that the survey would result in the agencies making projects happen*

▶ *it is not advisable to undertake this process at one time in a community of more than 1000 people*

▶ *the agency survey did not meet the aims of the Project, gathering only superficial and variable information*

Community survey

This was a very successful stage in the work and met all of its original objectives. It was well received by the communities, who welcomed the relaxed and participative approach. It was successful in engaging a high percentage and wide cross-section of people in each area. It created great energy and enthusiasm. It succeeded in building a very detailed picture of people's views. The effort made to reach out to people in their homes and work places was greatly appreciated and was considered an essential part of the process. Though time-consuming, it succeeded in reaching those people whose voices are not normally heard. The tracking of participants was essential in enabling staff to target under-represented groups.

Although expectations were undoubtedly raised, it was felt that people were realistic about what the Project could achieve and that this sparked energy in the communities to take things forward. There was some concern from Partners that the questions should have been more focused on sustainability, but the Area Co-ordinators felt that this would have compromised the simplicity and ease of involvement. The recording mechanism was democratic and empowering – everyone's views counted – and at the end of the process most communities reported that the outcome closely reflected their views as to the main issues.

Agency survey

First a workshop and then a postal questionnaire encountered problems in soliciting the required information from Agency staff. The workshop process was not well received by those attending. The questionnaire was also unsuccessful in eliciting the depth of information required to complete a good profile of each Area. This was partly due to the internal difficulties in gathering and approving the information within the time allowed, also to the lack of time allocated in staff workplans. This is an important issue in defining the role of partners. This failure to gather the quality of data required led to the necessity of employing consultants to undertake an area profiling exercise and caused further delays to the work programme.

FIRST PROJECTS
Method

Following the Initial Review the pressure for tangible outputs was overwhelming. Although not originally planned into the process, we decided to support the emergence of a first set of local projects at this stage. This was done by holding public meetings in each of the 21 individual communities that make up the Pilot Areas. The meetings were presented with the results of the community voting process and asked to select from among the most popular ideas the project that they felt was most important for their community. Task Groups were formed to take forward each project, supported by as much time from the Area Co-ordinators as they could spare at this busy stage of the work.

Outputs

The voting process to determine community priorities showed a strong focus on the need to upgrade local services and facilities, with a few ideas relating to cultural heritage and employment creation among the top votes. The second stage of this process, in which each community selected its most important project, produced the following selection:

TROTTERNISH

Staffin	Village hall development
Kilmuir	Duntulm Castle consolidation and promotion
Uig	Uig pier and bay development
Kensaleyre/Borve	Old road, new use as a bridal way
Arts Project	Trotternish Fèis

SUTHERLAND

Strathay	'Sustainable' public toilet and information point
Armadale	Energy efficient, affordable housing
Melvich	Village hall upgrading
Halladale	Village hall improvements and play area
Bettyhill	Tourist information and orientation centre
Strathnaver	Village hall improvements and play area
Altnaharra	'Gateway' to North Sutherland
Skerray	Local produce production and marketing
Tongue	Renovation of football pitch
Melness	Extending and upgrading the pier
Durness	Village hall rebuilding
Arts Project	Traditional music weekends and Fèis

NORTH UIST & BERNERAY

North Uist & Berneray	Horticulture marketing and boxing scheme
North Uist & Berneray	Interpretation of Carinish Township
Arts Project	Legend Trail (interpretation project)

A Task Group was formed within each community to take forward these projects. In some cases an existing group undertook this. Not all of the groups realised their aims and a few projects are still in the early stages of planning. One difficulty was that the Dùthchas staff did not have the time to give full support to all of these groups, especially in Sutherland. This had not been part of the work plan and the work of supporting the Strategy development was the main focus of Dùthchas. In North Sutherland a parallel initiative, Initiative at the Edge, provided some staff support and seedcorn funding to assist the Task Groups.

The offer of £5000 funding per Pilot Area from Dùthchas Partner, the Scottish Arts Council, to implement one arts project identified through the Initial Review, resulted in three major new initiatives. These were well supported locally and very successful in taking forward some of the ideas raised in the Initial Review. The pro-active role played by this Partner provided a good model of how a partnership could work. It was far more difficult if the Partners adopted a reactive position and waited for hard-pressed Project staff and volunteers to persuade them to support an idea.

Details of these projects can be found on the Dùthchas CD-Rom and website

Lessons

We learned how important it is in a community-based approach to plan for early tangible results from the community involvement. Without this, enthusiasm and faith in the process rapidly diminish. Voluntary time is precious, should be valued and should lead to clear results.

The projects which emerged from the Initial Review process were those that were bubbling at that point in time in each community. They tended to be focused more on local facilities. It is interesting to note the difference between these projects and those resulting from the Strategy process. This is an important finding of the Dùthchas Project, as most attempts at community participation tend only to go as far as a basic community appraisal stage. Our experience shows that this will probably not produce the kind of long-term, large scale and far reaching actions that are required to meet a sustainability agenda.

AREA SUSTAINABILITY PROFILES
Method

The work to date had introduced the idea of 'sustainability' in an informal way. We now needed to establish a more rigorous sustainability framework within which the Strategies could be developed and monitored. The process we used to do this involved Project staff and consultants in:

▶ *reviewing the existing internationally agreed definitions of sustainability, as the overall context into which our local definition should be 'nested'*

▶ *relating these to the particular circumstances of our Pilot Areas and agreeing our own definition of sustainability*

▶ *defining our own sustainability goals and objectives*

▶ *identifying a set of draft area status and performance indicators*

▶ *using this framework to analyse the Initial Review results in each Pilot Area*

▶ *undertaking a data search with Agency Partners, based on the sustainability framework*

▶ *developing a Sustainability Profile of each pilot area which related the current status of the area to the sustainability goals, objectives and indicators*

▶ *undertaking a 'gap analysis' to determine the key sustainability issues in each area*

▶ *agreeing the Profiles with the Area Advisory Groups and identifying the sustainability priorities for immediate action*

Outputs

An Area Sustainability Profile was produced for each Pilot Area. These can be read in full on the Dùthchas CD-Rom and website

The profiles document:

▶ *the sustainability goals and related objectives – common to all three areas*

▶ *a set of draft 'area status indicators' to measure the current position of the area as a whole and to track progress in the area over time towards meeting the sustainability objectives*

▶ *a set of draft 'performance indicators' to measure progress on the actions taken to address individual sustainability priorities*

▶ *a 'gap analysis' identifying the most important issues for the sustainability of the area*

Table 2.2. below documents the sustainability goals, objectives and priorities agreed for each area.

The development of the Profiles was experimental. We were not aware of a similar method having been applied elsewhere at local area level. The information they contain was seen more as a 'draft' for consideration than as the final word. Ideally such profiles would be developed with full involvement of the local agencies and communities and would be modified and revised over time.

As work progresses the original draft Indicators are being amended in each Pilot Area to fit more closely to local circumstances and ensure that they do usefully measure the impacts of the work. The consultants have worked with each Pilot Area to agree the

most appropriate way in which these indicators can be shaped and measured within the community in years to come. This resulted in a range of possible approaches, ranging from work by local secondary schools and academic institutions, to Partner Agencies donating one indicator each and its measurement over time. A set of about six area status indicators was thought to be manageable for the future. Performance indicators should be developed by the Strategy Groups as a specific and meaningful measure of progress on each priority topic.
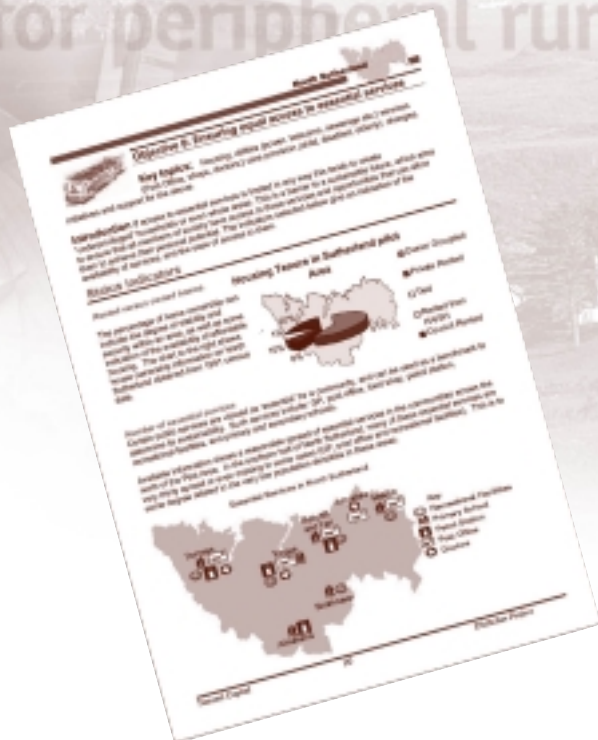
Lessons

This is a more technical part of the work. It was done to find a way of adding a more rigorous understanding of sustainability in the Pilot Areas. The resulting sustainability goals and objectives provided the essential framework from which the rest of the work was developed. They were found to be useful, relevant and meaningful, though somewhat complex. The priority issues identified by the gap analysis also met with local approval and formed a strong foundation for the strategic planning process. The draft indicators were less successful and will require substantial modification to be appropriate and meaningful for future use.

The work revealed the very difficult issues at the heart of creating an approach to defining sustainability at a local level. It showed the need to do this in a way that is rigorous, acceptable to professional bodies but meaningful to local communities, and that makes a real difference in our ability to act on, measure and monitor useful sustainability objectives. It also showed that such demands are by definition technical and time-consuming to fulfil. They are certainly beyond the scope of local volunteers to undertake. At the present time they are also beyond the willingness of public agencies to tackle in an

TABLE 2.2 SUSTAINABILITY GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES

integrated way. The work also revealed major gaps in our current systems of measuring and monitoring and in the data currently available that are relevant to sustainability at local level.

The work was experimental. It had originally been hoped that the agency Initial Review survey would have furnished all of the data required to produce a sustainability profile. With hindsight, this was a mis-judgement. For agencies to provide such information there must be very specific questions, ample time allowed and the will and commitment to undertake such a complex task.

Data are not easily accessible within agencies and take time and effort to locate. The data that are available have been collected for a variety of purposes, in differing formats and for varied geographical areas. This makes the task of relating data to specific areas and questions extremely difficult. Very often it was found that the particular questions raised by the Sustainability Profile did not relate well, if at all, to existing data. It became clear that the focus of sustainability will require quite new data collection systems that are more appropriate to the issues it raises, more integrated and locally focused, preferably within co-terminus boundaries.

If sustainability profiling is to be meaningful to local people they should ideally be involved in the process. However, because of its more technical nature, new ways need to be sought for making this possible. Dùthchas found this to be a difficult challenge and did not succeed in involving local people in the preparation of the Profiles, nor in the analysis of the official data. The result was that the community did not really take ownership of the Profiles and, whilst many people said that they found them interesting and useful, it is unlikely that most people fully understand their purpose. Community-based indicators can be a useful way of measuring those things that matter locally and have an important place in this approach. However these alone would not satisfy the technical requirements of a full Sustainability Profile.

Our conclusion was that Area Sustainability Profiles are an important tool for enabling local sustainability planning. The system requires to be worked with and perfected, particularly in respect of involving the community. Because of the technical complexities of handling the data we would recommend that it be done by organisations with the capacity to handle large amounts of data - agencies, consultants, universities etc. The most appropriate solution would be for such profiles to be created by local authorities for their areas. Even better, that they form the basis for the Community Plans for each area, linking this to Local Agenda 21. However, this should be done through a process that engages the community at critical stages and allows for locally generated information to be incorporated. This work is complex and time-consuming, and the challenge of doing this in a way that rigorously tackles the difficult issues presented by sustainability should not be underestimated.

TOPIC STRATEGIES

Method

Priority Topics

The sustainability priorities, identified firstly through the 'gap analysis' of the Sustainability Profiles and then through prioritising by the Area Advisory Groups, formed the basis for the development of the first phase of the Area Strategies. *The topics selected in each area are documented in Table 2.2 above.*

Strategy Groups

For each of these topics a 'Strategy Group' was formed: 14 groups in all. The Strategy Group members were identified from nominations of the Area Advisory Groups, from a notice posted to every household in the Pilot Areas and by ongoing recruitment. Each group consisted of an average of 8 people drawn from local relevant interests and the Partner Agencies.

The Strategy Groups had responsibility for:

▶ *carrying out a technical assessment of their own topic*

▶ *setting up a Reference Group of 'experts' to assist them*

▶ *agreeing a vision, objectives and actions for the topic*

▶ *developing action plans for implementing the work*

▶ *starting one innovative 'Demonstration Action' illustrating sustainable development*

Reference Groups

For each Strategy Group, a parallel Reference Group was established. These consisted of people with appropriate 'cutting-edge' expertise and experience in the topic drawn from the UK, and where appropriate, other European countries. The Reference Groups had an average membership of 28 people or institutions. The Reference Groups agreed to be consulted on the work of the Strategy Groups.

GIS

An experimental Geographical Information System was set up for each Pilot Area. The intention was to gather relevant data from the different Partners to assist in developing an element of the Strategy and to allow for local data to be inputted. The prototype was consulted at the Dùthchas Conference on Information Technology and developed by The Highland Council and consultants. A local 'Agent' was employed in each Pilot Area and trained to help the relevant Strategy Groups use and develop their GIS. A full report of the process and results was compiled. Full reports of the GIS pilot and the IT Conference can be found on the Dùthchas CD-Rom and website.

Strategy Process

The process for developing the Topic Strategies involved three

distinct steps spread over a six-month period. The method used was the same in each Pilot Area. This involved three facilitated workshops in which all groups came together to undertake the following work:

Workshop 1   Identify vision and objectives

Workshop 2   Prioritise objectives and identify actions

Workshop 3   Prioritise the actions and finalise the Strategy

Special methods were devised for facilitating this process and the Project staff were trained to carry it out.

▶ *Following each step, the Reference Groups were consulted and their responses fed back to the next workshop. Some Groups also held informal meetings and carried out investigations between meetings.*

▶ *Seminars and exchange visits to enable exchange of expertise on the topics were also organised between meetings.*

▶ *The results of the Strategy Group work were compiled and formed the core of the Area Sustainability Strategies which were published in full and also in a brief version disseminated to every household.*

Full details of the process can be found in the Dùthchas Handbook and the CD-Rom

Outputs

A vision, objectives and actions were identified for each topic by each Strategy Group, following consultation with their Reference Groups. These formed the basis of the Area Strategies. *These are listed in Tables 2.3 – 2.5 below*

An experimental, very basic 'Arcview' Geographical Information System (GIS) was compiled for one topic in each area:

North Uist   Natural and Cultural Heritage

Trotternish   Trails and Interpretation

North Sutherland   Sustainable Land Use and Renewable Energy

This was very successful and each area hopes to retain and take forward their GIS.

The full details of the Topic Strategies are published in the Area Sustainability Strategies for each area, which can be found on the Dùthchas CD-Rom and website.

Lessons

This stage of the work was successful in developing the Project's main aim - an Area Sustainability Strategy for each Pilot Area. The Strategies are essentially community strategies and would not meet the technical standards required by professional bodies. However, if this is understood, they are a remarkable achievement. They deal with big issues at the cutting-edge of thinking on sustainability. They have produced an order of outputs which is altogether different from that normally produced from community consultations. They were produced by many committed volunteers from the Pilot Areas who maintained their involvement and commitment throughout this long and rather complex process, attended many meetings, seminars and study visits and successfully agreed their visions, objectives and actions for these fourteen challenging topics. We are not aware of anything like this having been developed at grassroots level before. Not only did the communities follow a complex strategic process, they also grappled with the additional complexity of interpreting sustainability into their work. That said, this stage of the work proved to be more difficult than anticipated and raised several issues about the process that was used.

Workplan

The Dùthchas team tried hard to come up with a process that would meet the demanding requirements of the Strategy, whilst not being over-demanding on the Strategy Groups' members. In practice it was found to be difficult to cover effectively all that had to be done in these three meetings. The evening meetings were also long and came at the end of the working day. An option might have been to bring everyone together for two full days to complete the whole process. However this would not have allowed for external consultation and fact finding, nor for the ideas to gel and develop.

Meeting Structure

The meetings were structured and run according to participatory principles. This got the work off to a good start, but as the Strategy Groups gained momentum and cohesion this tight structure ceased to elicit the best from all participants. Applying a standard structure to all groups started to conflict with the individual group dynamic. As a result it was more productive as the work progressed to accept that each group would begin to take its own path. That path might not elicit all the outputs of a more structured approach, nor be as democratic, but it is also important that the groups are comfortable with the way they are working.

Consultations

Carrying out such an extensive consultation between each Strategy Group meeting involved a great deal of time and work. This meant that the progress of the Strategy Groups was dictated by the need to allow adequate time for carrying out this consultation. This consultation process generated a huge amount of information, all of which was useful and welcome. However it was difficult to incorporate absolutely all that information into each busy evening meeting and much undoubtedly was not fully used.

Voluntary Time

The Strategy Group members undertook this work in voluntary time. This is a big issue in designing a process of this kind. There are very real limits on the amount of time that people are expected to contribute without pay. We would recommend that payments for the time of the main group members be considered in future.

Geographical Information System

This was judged a great success by the Strategy Groups and local Agents and has great potential for use at local level, particularly in relation to the planning of land use. The potential for locally generated information to be incorporated into the GIS is very exciting, as much local knowledge is only held by local people. It could also provide a way of measuring the impacts of the Area Strategies through mapping of indicators over time. It was considered that the GIS would be most useful if it could be incorporated into a website, enabling access by anyone in the community and overcoming the barriers of distance. However, significant problems were identified in the local use of GIS at present. These relate principally to the cost and difficulties of utilising Ordnance Survey maps and to the many issues surrounding access to and ownership of the data held by different organisations. Lack of familiarity with computers and the complexity of Arcview is also a hurdle to overcome. These problems will undoubtedly be overcome in the future and Dùthchas has shown that this is an approach with great potential for use at local level. Because of its cost and complexity, local GIS would be most appropriately run through the local authority, probably in conjunction with a consortium of the key data-collecting agencies. It would be possible for the management of the GIS then to be contracted out to a locally -based organisation to run.

TABLE 2.3   NORTH SUTHERLAND - TOPIC STRATEGIES

TOPIC	VISION	PRIORITY OBJECTIVES	FIRST ACTION
YOUNG RETURNERS	To create a vibrant and enterprising community which will be inherently attractive to all age groups	1. To encourage a commitment to devolved jobs in the public sector and ensure employment and development agencies have a local presence. 2. To sustain and improve current recreation provision for all ages, including village halls, and to meet the particular needs of young people by involving them in the planning and implementation of the co-ordination of community transport, combining the school, social work and community transport across the area. 3. To promote the availability of old housing for renovation as well as new build, to allow young families to rent.	A seminar for young people, to address the challenges and opportunities facing young people who wish to remain in the area.
LOCAL PRODUCE	To process, package and add value to local produce	1. Identify, improve and add value to the primary product 2. Establish marketing and promote an identity 3. Adding value to produce/training	An open competition to design a North Sutherland logo for local produce and investigate a marketing strategy.
CULTURAL & NATURAL HERITAGE	To establish a viable community for people of all ages, through building on aspects of our natural and cultural heritage	1. To develop a strong and active social culture for the mutual benefit of residents and visitors 2. To improve the quality of interpretation of the natural and cultural heritage of the area with the involvement of all the community 3. To promote and enhance the area and its high quality culture, archaeology, scenery, wildlife and outdoor activities	Create a portal website for North Sutherland
ESSENTIAL SERVICES	To capitalise on existing facilities and skills by developing them imaginatively and creatively to provide sustainable services	1. Sewerage ~ To provide sustainable public sewerage systems in communities and give assistance in upgrading individual septic tank systems 2. Transport ~ To develop regular, accessible public transport to link communities and provide access to essential services and recreation 3. Information Technology ~ To provide an integrated telecommunications ICT network for the area. 4. Child/dependant care ~ To provide an adequate child/dependant infrastructure in order to release community potential	Carry out investigation into possible 'sustainable' sewerage systems appropriate to housing in the area.
SUSTAINABLE LAND USE & RENEWABLE ENERGY	Wise stewardship of the land with long term benefits for local communities, achieved through integration of current land management practices.	1. Renewables: To promote and support a balance of energy/resource conservation and development of appropriate renewable energy with adequate community controls and benefit from renewables development 2. Forestry: To develop forest resource that is based on multiple benefits including: community participation/ownership, landscape diversity, ecological diversity etc. 3. To promote and support socially and environmentally beneficial land management practices. 4. Sporting management: To harmonise sporting management with other land uses (e.g. recreation, access, agriculture, forestry, conservation) and encourage and support wider ownership of sporting interest with benefits for the whole community.	A seminar to explore a radical new approach to sustainable land management in the area.

TABLE 2.4   TROTTERNISH - TOPIC STRATEGIES

TOPIC	VISION	PRIORITY OBJECTIVES	FIRST ACTION
TRAILS & INTERPRETATION	To create Trails throughout the Trotternish peninsula for everyone to enjoy, highlighting what is special here along the way with interpretation, and creating benefits for local people, their economy and their surrounding natural world	1. To identify our key features and current provision and then to draw out a theme or themes for the Trotternish peninsula. 2. To identify and target the customers and the market. 3. To plan a series of Trails, to source funding and initiatives through which to promote our key features, protecting and enhancing our environment as we go.	Create an inventory of natural and cultural features in the Trotternish Peninsula as the basis for Trail themes and interpretation.
DIVERSIFICATION, LOCAL PRODUCE & MARKETS	To create a viable, social, economic environment to keep people on the land	1. To set up experimental horticultural units with diversification a priority, by building on what has already been achieved elsewhere on Skye. 2. To educate people about new opportunities and promote local produce to everyone. 3. To provide advice and guidance on processing.	Establish experimental horticultural units and provide training and advice through the Skye and Lochalsh Horticultural Development Association.
TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE	To support and develop the transport system (including public transport) which is cost effective and meets the needs of the indigenous and visiting population with minimum environmental impact	1. To effectively use existing and new sea routes for freight and passenger transport, bearing in mind the impact on fragile roads. 2. To effectively use and improve the circular road system around the Trotternish peninsula, incorporating side roads and with greater use of public transport. 3. To work towards a level European playing field, objectively to reduce fuel cost, road tax and the transport of all goods and animals. 4. To ensure integration of modes of transport including community transport schemes. 5. To develop Uig pier and bay area as a pivotal foundation of the transport system in Trotternish.	A study into local transport needs.
RENEWABLE ENERGY	To be less dependent on external energy by effective use of local resources, to the maximum benefit of the community	1. To investigate and develop the production of energy in Trotternish through power generated by a range of means - wind, wave, tidal, hydro, biomass, solar, waste to energy and fuel cells in a safe, sustainable and environmental way using existing sources. 2. To increase the awareness of energy efficiency including building methods and existing building stock; get HC to help us.	Design and build demonstration affordable, environmentally friendly housing within Trotternish.
WASTE REDUCTION	Trotternish as a shining example of a waste free environment	1. To raise awareness so waste reduction is an integral part of all our lives (industry included) and is seen as having value. 2. To set up composting and other local recycling schemes and develop local markets for recycled materials. 3. To raise the profile of litter reduction, including fly tipping.	Set up a community composting scheme, involving schools and households, in conjunction with Skye and Lochalsh Horticultural Development Association.

TABLE 2.5   NORTH UIST - TOPIC STRATEGIES

TOPIC	VISION	PRIORITY OBJECTIVES	FIRST ACTION
RENEWABLE ENERGY	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	1. To identify possible uses for renewable energy in North Uist at present and for the future which would not damage the environment. 2. To promote energy efficiency on North Uist.	Develop a small scale pilot to demonstrate the potential uses of renewable energy technologies.
SUSTAINABLE USE OF MARINE RESOURCES	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	1. To create a marine resource and development centre which will benefit marine producers as well as the wider community. 2. To develop local facilities for the marine industry. 3. To diversify marketing strategies.	Direct marketing of fish and shellfish
MARKETING OF LOCAL PRODUCE	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	1. To encourage people to grow a wide range of horticultural produce. 2. To encourage organics and environmentally friendly techniques. 3. To investigate and pursue a locally based licensed slaughterhouse with full processing and packaging facilities (either as present set-up or as limited company). 4. To research and set up specific mechanisms to sell into defined markets for local produce.	Publish a leaflet advertising the range of local produce available and where to find this.
TOURISM USING OUR UNIQUE FEATURES	To attract visitors to come to North Uist and share our way of life, creating a memorable cultural experience while protecting our inheritance	1. To better protect, enhance and increase understanding of all our unique features in an appropriate and sustainable manner, in light of our over-riding objective. 2. To know the customer market and target accordingly using locally based packages, in light of our over-riding objective.	Publish a leaflet showing the range and location of activities available in North Uist.

STRATEGY ALIGNMENT
Method

This was one of the key innovative aspects of the Project method, based on the aims o:

- ▶ *relating the Strategies to the policies and activities of the Partner Agencies*
- ▶ *identifying positive and negative links*
- ▶ *identifying the links with other strategies for the area*
- ▶ *identifying and harnessing sources of support from the Partner Agencies for implementing the Strategies*

This was undertaken in a 4-stage process.

1. An early workshop was held with Partners to identify the most appropriate methods for the alignment process.

2. A second workshop was held at a later date to do an initial investigation of the Partner Agencies' remits and activities.

3. The main functions and work of each Partner were documented on Briefing Sheets for circulation in the Pilot Areas.

4. A final written consultation was carried out with each Partner Agency in which they were asked to:

   - ▶ *identify the elements of the Strategy that most closely related to their interests and to which they might be able to contribute through: funding; other resources; current or planned initiatives; regulatory role and policy positions.*

- ▶ *prioritise those project/ policy actions that they would wish to support in the short, medium and long term and to state how.*

- ▶ *identify any elements of the Strategy with which their organisation might find difficulty – i.e. which might run counter to their regulatory role and policies, or which might conflict with existing initiatives.*

- ▶ *list any other issues or organisations that might be important for the implementation of the Strategy.*

Outputs

We succeeded in engaging most of the Partners in most stages of the process, and many engaged with the work in all three areas. Whilst the outputs of the formal alignment process were not all that had been envisaged, they were possibly all that we could have realistically expected. This was a new process and everyone was feeling their way.

Each Partner provided a Briefing Sheet on their organisation, which was printed and displayed at our exhibitions. The Briefing Sheets helped the local groups to understand better the remit and resources of each body. *Copies of these are available in the Dùthchas CD-Rom and website.*

In particular, the involvement of the Partners in the Strategy Groups led to strong relationships developing with the Pilot Areas and many contributions to the thinking and development of projects. In two cases Partners were pro-active in offering financial support for local projects and succeeded in stimulating local action.

All Partners were involved in the questionnaire and we elicited responses from most. The responses were more cautious and less extensive than we had hoped, but they were all recorded and incorporated into the Area Strategies. Each area holds a complete set of responses and has found them to be encouraging and useful.

Lessons

The lessons of this process are documented under the 'Core Values' Section 3.2.

DEMONSTRATION ACTIONS
Method

The demonstration actions were drawn from the actions prioritised by the Strategy Groups. Each group was asked to identify a first action that could be undertaken within the lifetime of Dùthchas – fourteen projects in all. *These are listed on the three area tables (2.2-2.5) under the 'Topic Strategies' section.*

The actions were chosen as the most appropriate first steps in implementing the Topic Strategies. They had to meet criteria for feasibility and sustainability. Dùthchas developed and applied two checklists to aid project selection.

Dùthchas also developed a seedcorn grant scheme to act as an incentive to starting the projects. This amounted to £5,000 per Pilot Area and acted as a lever for other funding to be raised.

Outputs

The selection of projects was determined by:

- *the most relevant first step in implementing the Topic Strategies*
- *the requirement to satisfy the original commitments to the LIFE Programme*
- *the need for the project to be feasible to implement within the limited timescales of Dùthchas*
- *the requirement that it meet sustainability criteria*

Dùthchas developed and implemented two sets of criteria to assist this process:

1. Feasibility Criteria

How realistic is it that the project will win funding?
- *Does it have support from funding bodies?*
- *Would a large amount of money have to be raised?*
- *Would the community need to raise any money?*
- *Would the project provide value for money?*

Are there people ready/willing and able to make the project happen?
- *Does the project have sufficient community support to provide the inputs needed?*
- *Are the people who would need to be involved available?*
- *Are the required skills and knowledge available?*
- *Are time requirements for local project staff and volunteers reasonable?*

Does the project fit well with other initiatives?
- *Does the project duplicate existing/planned activities?*
- *Does the project build on existing/planned activities?*
- *Does the project have multiple benefits?*
- *Does the project bring together different groups and agencies?*

Any obvious impediments/delays to the project
- *Are there any legislative/policy barriers?*
- *Are there any potential conflicts of interest?*
- *Is there likely to be lobbying against the project?*
- *Are there likely to be any significant delays in the funding process?*
- *Would any permissions be required – planning consent etc?*

2. Sustainability Criteria

ECONOMY
Creating additional spending, wages & profits in local area

Creating/safeguarding local jobs & training opportunities

Linking local production & consumption (recycling local income)

Supporting jobs of suitable quality eg. skills, longevity, year round, diverse

Using & promoting local resources & reducing use of imports

Involving affordable long-term maintenance costs

COMMUNITY
Involving local people in managing & maintaining the project

Using/developing local knowledge & skills

Increasing co-operation & decision-making in the community

Providing benefits for all sectors of the community

Supporting local services, amenities & infrastructure

Strengthening the local cultural heritage

ENVIRONMENT
Avoiding loss of natural resources

Minimising negative impacts on landscape & wildlife

Promoting energy efficiency & recycling

Raising awareness & enjoyment of the environment

Protecting threatened species

Enhancing wildlife & landscape

These criteria were applied by the Strategy Groups in their workshops. *The outcome was the selection of the projects listed in tables 2.2 – 2.5.*

Each Strategy Group applied for funding from the Dùthchas Seedcorn Fund, providing an average of £1000 per project. As part of the application process groups had to demonstrate how their project would meet the sustainability criteria.

Funding was also raised from other sources to complete the projects. *Full details of the Projects and their funding are available on the Dùthchas CD-Rom and website.*

Despite the time constraints most groups succeeded in completing their projects within the time limits set. The work of further implementing the Strategy actions will take place during phase 1 of the implementation period, but beyond the life of Dùthchas.

Lessons

The original intention had been to implement more ambitious demonstration projects arising from the Area Strategies. However, due to the delays in finalising the Area Strategies,

the time available for undertaking these first projects was extremely limited. This influenced the project choice and was unfortunate in that the projects were only the first step in what could have been more ground-breaking demonstrations. Time will tell if the areas succeed in completing what they have started. The lesson from this was that a mechanism for identifying early projects relevant to the Area Strategies, but not dependent on the completion of the Strategies, is an important part of the process. It may also have given inspiration and confidence to local people.

The sustainability checklist is one of the most valuable outputs of the Project. The application of sustainability criteria is a very useful tool for creating significant added value to projects. The checklist has already been taken up and used successfully in other places, including Sweden. One demonstration of the way in which this tool works was in one of the earlier Task Group projects:

> **In North Sutherland a public toilet for a local beach was selected as a priority for one community. However funding was not forthcoming for this project. By using a sustainability check the original idea was transformed. The toilet became an information point with displays on the local environment, tourist facilities etc. It was housed in a 'green' building, constructed as a training exercise for local people, using local timber and incorporating solar energy. It also had a toilet! This project was attractive to several funders and has provided a good demonstration of sustainability.**

Through using a checklist process everyone can think of some value to add to a project, and the satisfaction of seeing the additional benefits is satisfying to everyone. However we did experience some resistance to doing this more complex activity, with a tendency for some groups to make a rapid and intuitive judgement. The kind of analysis required to make a true sustainability assessment is technically demanding, including assessment of a wider range of possible outputs and effects, both on the immediate situation and also in a wider context. This cannot easily be done at community level and may require inputs from specialist organisations or consultants. Ideally this should be a role that agencies could play. However we did not find that they were geared up to do this kind of analysis outwith their own normal assessment procedures. It is also a time-consuming job to do well.

CONTINUING SUPPORT STRATEGY
Method

The Dùthchas Project was strictly time-limited and had always pledged to put in place the mechanisms, in each Pilot Area, necessary for implementing the Strategies into the medium term. To help identify the kind of mechanisms that would be needed in each area Dùthchas employed consultants to carry out a consultation with the Area Advisory Groups.

The consultants investigated the following issues:

▶ *The willingness of the communities to continue with the work*

▶ *The most appropriate organisational framework to take forward the work in each area*

▶ *The best mechanism for retaining the involvement and commitment of the Partner Agencies*

▶ *The roles of the different players*

▶ *The resource needs in each area to undertake the work and likely sources of funding*

▶ *The process for monitoring and reviewing the progress of the Strategies, including indicators and targets*

The outcome of the consultation involved further work to develop the documentation for Partnership Agreements and Memorandum and Articles for establishing community development companies.

Outputs

It was rewarding that each Pilot Area was enthusiastic to continue the implementation of their Strategy. Each was also keen to continue to use a strategic process in the future. However it was recognised that none of this could happen without a support framework. Agency representatives noted that the key for moving forward would lie with the community, for no agency has a broad enough remit to do justice to all aspects of the Strategies. They acknowledged that local project officers would be essential in helping the community make progress on the Strategy and to provide a link to the agencies.

The consultation identified the following needs in each Pilot Area:

▶ **In North Uist** it was felt that the greatest potential lay in working with existing community organisations to find homes for the Strategy and projects. An existing local organisation, 'Urachadh Uibhist', was identified and agreed to take on the lead role of implementing the Strategy but would need extra staff capacity to do this. A successful funding application was submitted to the Rural Strategic Support Fund to enable this.

▶ **In Trotternish** the community wished to have a local organisation that could take an integrated view of the Trotternish Peninsula provide local leadership and explore future development opportunities, as a direct legacy of the Dùthchas work. An appropriate organisation did not exist so the area determined to establish a community company. Funding applications were submitted for core funding to support a three-year implementation phase.

▶ **In North Sutherland** the community wished to form their own organisation to take forward the approach developed by Dùthchas. However it was felt that more time was needed to build local capacity to do this. In the short term there was an opportunity to continue the work through one of the local Partners and work towards a local solution to match the aspirations of the community. The Local Enterprise Company undertook to continue the employment of the Area Co-ordinators for a further two years, with co-funding from The Highland Council. A new local development committee was formed to take the place of the Area Advisory Group.

Lessons

The three-year period of the LIFE Project was insufficient to implement the scale of work originally envisaged and to develop innovative projects that resulted directly from the Area Strategies. The first phase of implementation should have been included in the plans, taking the work to a five-year period. This would have had many benefits including: building confidence in the approach and its ability to deliver; refining the methods and building on the experience of the pilot; continuing the support network and partnership to ensure the delivery of strategy alignment objectives and retain the expertise to advise on implementation.

This type of strategic development process cannot be undertaken without resourcing at the local level. It is not a job for volunteers alone. The work is time-consuming, technically demanding, and requires considerable building of contacts and expertise. The presence of the Dùthchas Area Co-ordinators was absolutely essential to the delivery and will also be essential for the on-going implementation. It is our belief that investment in a long-term Area Co-ordinator working to the local community will bring local benefits far in excess of the costs involved in employing such a person. Yet this seems to be the hardest of all things to find funding for on a continuing basis.

If local development is seriously to be taken more into the hands of local people this will require an appropriate local organisation to support the process. Such an organisation requires to have the correct legal structure through which to raise funding, employ staff and implement projects. This is likely to be a Company Limited by Guarantee, possibly with Charitable Status.

The presence of a local partnership that has formally committed itself to supporting the work is also important. Each agency operates to its own plans, and it is only when these agencies are brought together to work with the community that any element of integration of objectives will occur. Partnership in itself is not enough though, and stronger requirements to build more integrated local community plans will be required from Government. We also experienced the difficulty of getting public bodies to sign up to a formal partnership agreement involving local communities. This might have to do with perceived problems relating to the statutory remits and operating procedures of agencies.

All of these components of a competent, locally based organisational framework to support local sustainable development need to be recognised by Government and resources channelled accordingly. When compared to the Commune system that is traditional in many parts of Europe, where up to 500 workers may be employed locally to deliver local services, one development worker does not seem an excessive demand.

TASK 4 SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES SCHEME – NETWORK 21

This task, which was revised from the original Environmental Quality Mark, comprised:

▶ *Background research*
▶ *Development of the Sustainable Communities Scheme*
▶ *Piloting the Scheme*
▶ *Evaluating the Scheme*

Method

It had originally been intended to develop an experimental 'Environmental Quality Mark' to recognise high environmental standards in an area and its produce. This was to be based on early work undertaken in Ireland in a previous LIFE Project, 'Eco Lipead'. However, investigations revealed that this work, while much needed and strongly supported by the Pilot Area communities, would be beyond the scope of Dùthchas to deliver in the time and resources available. The Irish also discovered that such a Quality Mark would require European recognition to carry weight in the market place.

The agreed alternative was to develop an award scheme for communities that recognised their efforts, achievements and progress on implementing sustainability. This was developed by Dùthchas in conjunction with consultants and piloted by The Highland Council throughout the Highlands as 'Network 21'. A full evaluation of this pilot will be completed after the first year.

The process of developing the Scheme involved:

▶ *consultation with communities, agencies and potential funders at an early stage*
▶ *development of the criteria and mechanisms through which to implement the scheme*
▶ *development of a support network*
▶ *investigation of potential funding sources including public sector and potential private sector sponsors*
▶ *development of the application and assessment procedures*
▶ *development of publicity materials and organisation of a launch event*
▶ *implementation and monitoring of a pilot in Highland*
▶ *investigation and development of options for the future continuation of the scheme*

Outputs

Network 21 was developed and launched in October 2000. It was then piloted by The Highland Council in conjunction with the Wellbeing Alliance and the Community Plan for Highland. The Network 21 scheme aims to offer:

▶ *Immediate access to £2000 towards an aspect of any community project*
▶ *Guidance from the Network Co-ordinator*
▶ *Access to advice, technical information, training and facilitation*
▶ *A network of local advisors*
▶ *A helpline and website*
▶ *Exchange of ideas and experience between communities*
▶ *An annual meeting of Network members*

To date the work has focused on administering one round of the grant scheme. This will be used to build the network members. Consideration will then move to deciding on the most appropriate forms of support for these groups. For the pilot phase, Network 21 raised £10,000 from Scottish Natural Heritage, £20,000 from The Highland Council plus in-kind contributions from the Council covering staff time and overheads.

Sixty applications were submitted to the Network 21 grant scheme and grants were awarded to 28 projects. These were fairly well distributed around the Highlands. The Dùthchas Pilot Areas of North Sutherland and Trotternish featured strongly among the applicants. A total of £24,230 was actually awarded, giving an average grant of 52% of the amounts requested. Leverage on most projects was from 2-4:1. The Network 21 applications were split into nine main types:

Project Type	Total	Successful	Unsuccessful
Woodland	5	4	1
Environment	10	4	6
Tourism/Access	6	4	2
Community Capacity	16	5	11
IT	3	1	2
Horticulture	3	2	1
Culture/Heritage	11	3	8
Waste/Recycling	4	4	0
Transport	2	1	1

Lessons

The following are the experiences of the lead partner in piloting the scheme during an eight-month period. The full evaluation will not be completed until the one-year pilot is finished.

Network 21 set out to be an innovative scheme that brought the supporting partners into a new collaborative way of working. Although funding was secured for a pilot and broad support achieved for the scheme, gaining the commitment to follow this through proved to be one of the hardest things to achieve. This was particularly so in terms of getting the operational staff of agencies to follow through on policy commitments. It is interesting to note that the Management Group felt able to question and re-define the purpose of the scheme as well as oversee its management and development.

We clearly underestimated the skills and time involved to support a network. This was more than a full-time job for an experienced community worker. The arrangement of seconding Highland Council staff to the scheme on a part-time basis (time given up by The Council's Sustainable Development Officer and a Strategic Planner) was far more successful in organising the grant aid than in providing continuing support. The lack of practical partner support compounded this difficulty.

The Network 21 pilot did set new standards in the way sustainable development is addressed in a new project and allowed a number of innovative projects to go ahead. Network 21 has genuinely encouraged a 'joined up' approach to community projects and demonstrated that to build sustainability into projects is of practical advantage. The availability of seedcorn funding was an important component in encouraging a wide range of groups to apply.

Network 21 also revealed the lack of co-ordination between existing grant schemes. Other emerging community networks seemed to be less well founded or researched than Network 21 and similarly underestimate the resources required for effective networking. We recognise the sophistication of some of the participating groups and hope that some may have valued the information and generic support provided. However, many had precise needs which could only be met by bespoke advice or training in topics such as: marketing, volunteer management, presentation skills, business plans, project management and strategic planning and evaluation. At the same time some mature organisations have a significant range of skills and experience which could be shared far more widely - Network 21 has helped to enable this, but there is still much work to do. The evaluation of the pilot will point the way to the most appropriate next steps.

The consultants who developed the Sustainable Communities Scheme also undertook a range of meetings with potential sponsors in the private, charitable and public sectors. This established that the Scheme did have appeal to many such sponsors but that they would only be prepared to support a national level Scheme. The population of the Highlands was seen as too small to satisfy the needs of major sponsors. It would now be useful to investigate the possible application of such a scheme at national level, building on all the lessons of Dùthchas.

Further information and publications on Network 21 can be found on the Dùthchas CD-Rom and website.

TASK 5 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

This Task comprised:

▶ *Establishing the framework for monitoring and evaluation*

▶ *Monitoring the project against the planned objectives*

▶ *Evaluating the Project*

▶ *Reporting on the evaluation*

Method

It was planned to undertake a process of participatory monitoring and evaluation of the Project. The aim was to help all those involved to evaluate their work in meeting the aims of the Project and in meeting the needs of the different stakeholders. Participative evaluation is not normal practice and the challenge was to find an appropriate method. Research into appropriate methods was carried out and suitable consultants appointed. Due to difficulties with these consultants, however, the process was severely delayed, resulting in a more standard final stage evaluation being carried out.

The final evaluation process involved:

▶ *facilitated workshops with the Area Advisory Groups, Partnership Group and Dùthchas staff team*

▶ *interviews with key players in the Pilot Areas, Management Group and Project staff*

▶ *a questionnaire to each of the Partner Agencies at central and local levels and to the Project staff*

Unfortunately, as the evaluation was completed six months before the end of the Project it does not incorporate the many Project outputs. Nor can it take account of the longer-term outcomes that will be the real test of this Project.

Outputs

The Executive Summary of the evaluation is included in the CD-Rom. The following are the main points:

▶ The LIFE application was very detailed and ambitious as to what would be delivered. This acted as a 'strait jacket' on the work and forced a pace on the communities. The size and number of groups involved in the Project also greatly exceeded original expectations, creating management, dissemination and consultation challenges and causing slippage in some of the outputs. There were difficulties in retaining the focus on the LIFE requirements, and communities may have had expectations which lay outwith its scope to deliver. Attempting to address these expectations diverted energy and time from the core objectives of the Project and created additional complexity. It was an outstanding achievement, however, that most of the activity components were actually completed within the tight three-year time-scale.

▶ All three Pilot Areas met the criteria for involvement in the Project. However, the communities started from different baselines in their capacity to deliver the Project and would have benefited from a more flexible approach. The Initial Review was essential in the undoubted success of motivating the communities to become involved in the Project.

▶ The Dùthchas Project has tested and documented methods for facilitating community participation. The processes have since been reviewed at community workshops and best practice documented in the Dùthchas Handbook.

▶ Because the 'expert tools' (Area Data Sets; Sustainability Indicators; Sustainability Profiles; Gap Analysis; Sustainable Communities Scheme; and Geographical Information Systems) were not developed at the start, the delays caused in developing them caused local frustration and put back the delivery of the Area Sustainability Strategies and consequent Demonstration Actions. These 'tools' are comprehensive, most are relevant to local and central agencies and the information will support further policy alignment.

▶ When the communities were provided with clear alternatives from the Gap Analysis they were able to progress these through their own agreed objectives for development. The resulting Area Strategies were not intended to be comprehensive in the manner that experts might conceive, but as community aspirations for development of the Pilot Areas, that have a reasonable chance of being delivered through community involvement, supported by Partner Agencies. The Area Strategies that have evolved from these aspirations are seen as being owned by the communities - as such they are almost uniquely 'bottom-up' inspired.

▶ Thirty-six projects have been pursued in the Pilot Areas, fourteen of these adopted as Demonstration Projects. The LIFE proposal specified three demonstration projects would be delivered by each Pilot Area during the Project, addressing integrated land management, green business and sustainable tourism and capitalising on local environmental quality. The demonstration projects were not identified until the final year, however, and will require to be monitored to ensure that they continue to meet sustainability criteria.

▶ The Dùthchas Project promoted many new or expanded environmental management projects covering a wide range of sustainability issues. Progress in this area has been good, with many specific actions materialising or having funding agreed. The projects identified and since pursued by the communities will support employment opportunities; retention of young people; promotion of cultural heritage and community capacity building and decision making.

▶ Short-term employment opportunities have been less than proposed for the Project, but £268,810 of the Project budget has been spent within the Pilot Areas and has generated levered funding of £69,220 plus indirect spend by 1000 visitors through interest in the Dùthchas work.

▶ The Dùthchas Project has been successful in developing local capacity, especially in North Sutherland and Trotternish, where community organisations were less well developed. The communities and agencies have noted the power of the community speaking through the Area Strategies 'with one voice' and see that as a way of gaining agency involvement and support for implementation.

▶ Progress has been made in furthering community decisions and aspirations through accessing other programmes. There is some concern, however, that the Dùthchas process has encouraged local people to create a vision for the future that is unrealistic, given the current agency remits and budgets.

▶ The learning process for the Partner organisations has been a valuable achievement. This includes the realisation that there is no one specific way to approach sustainability processes for communities; that communities need more than money to progress and local area co-ordinators are required to ensure a bottom-up process is successful and that expert 'tools' require to be in place before involving the communities.

▶ Many benefits from the Dùthchas Project will take time to mature. There is now a greater awareness of the need to manage the environment, as well as enhanced understanding in the agencies of the needs and challenges of the communities. Access to the countryside should be enhanced and green energy will be pursued. The concept of sustainability is now more clearly understood. The Sustainability Checklists will continue to reinforce the process implemented by the Dùthchas Project in sieving and adding value to projects.

▶ The consultees consider that the Area Strategies will have a major impact on the sustainability of the Pilot Areas, especially in terms of development of the local communities and their cultures and also for their economies and the environment. The enthusiasm engendered in the Pilot Areas should ensure that many of the proposed projects are delivered in the future.

Lessons

The evaluation suffered from the lack of a clearly defined process for on-going monitoring. The staff did their own setting and monitoring of objectives for each stage, however others did not share in this. Events were evaluated by participants, as was attendance at meetings etc. However we lacked an overall monitoring framework into which to fit this information. This omission was largely due to the false start with the original evaluation consultants. At an early stage, Dùthchas engaged consultants who had developed and tested an innovative and successful model for participative evaluation in Northern Ireland. Unfortunately the work was never properly completed due to internal difficulties in the consultancy. This set back efforts to put in place a suitable model until we were able to identify extra funding and employ a second consultancy. By this stage it was too late to operate an on-going monitoring process. The ensuing evaluation was more traditional and limited in its ability to work closely with all players and have a perspective over time. It was only able to make an assessment at one point in time before the Project was completed.

The evaluation produced a limited snapshot of experience. It will be much more important to evaluate the work once the first phase of implementation has been completed, in two to three years' time. It is our hope that the Partners will be sufficiently committed to make sure that this happens. It is another limitation of the three-year funding package that post-hoc evaluation is not allowed for. This would seem to be an important consideration for all funders including the LIFE Programme, enabling the real success and outcomes of a demonstration project to be tested.

2.2 Outputs, Impacts and Challenges

The LIFE proposal outlined a number of anticipated Outputs and Impacts which it was hoped would come from the Project. These are set out in Section 1.4. A more extensive analysis of outputs and impacts is documented in the Evaluation reports.

Outputs

We were successful in achieving all of our desired outputs and the delivery of the outputs is well documented in Chapter 2.

▶ *We succeeded in attracting a record partnership of twenty-two agencies and NGOs, who supported our aims and work.*

▶ *The Project was very successful in developing participatory methods and engaging local people fully in the process.*

▶ *Through this process we developed a baseline study of each area, incorporating the views of the communities and Partner Agencies.*

▶ *An innovative framework for assessing sustainability was created, including goals, objectives and indicators, from which we were able to determine the current status of each Pilot Area and their priority issues for sustainability.*

▶ *The priorities linked the information from the community surveys with the statistical data from the agencies.*

▶ *The priority topics identified were critical and cutting-edge sustainability issues.*

▶ *We facilitated several Strategy Groups in each Pilot Area to produce a strategy for the priority topics including their visions, objectives and priority actions.*

▶ *Thirty-six projects were begun as a result of the Project's work, fourteen of these being the first priority actions for each topic, the rest being the priorities voted for in each community within the Pilot Areas.*

▶ *A sustainability checklist was developed and applied to each project by the local groups. This proved its effectiveness in adding value to project proposals and raising awareness of sustainability issues.*

▶ *We facilitated the Partner Agencies to align themselves to support the Area Strategies and to make policy links.*

▶ *A completely new scheme for encouraging community action on sustainability was developed and piloted across the Highlands as 'Network 21', resulting in support for twenty-eight projects.*

▶ *We developed a wide network of contacts across Europe and took every chance to make links between our Pilot Areas and other communities, initiatives and people with expertise in the priority topics.*

▶ *We ran twenty-five events – conferences, seminars, study visits and training – to help build capacity, share our experiences and learn from others. We also gave many presentations, wrote articles for journals and had significant press coverage.*

▶ *Finally we produced no fewer than forty-one dissemination tools, including reports, video, CD-Rom, handbook and website and circulated these widely.*

Impacts

Many outcomes from the Dùthchas Project will take time to mature and most of the impacts will not be known until some time into the future. However, we can make some early observations on those that we can see evidence of now. Outcomes from the work include negative as well as positive learning.

Environmental impacts

Concern was expressed in the evaluation that we had not had sufficient direct impact on habitats and species conservation. However, we would argue that the very real achievement of the Dùthchas Project was in setting this issue within a contextual framework in which environmental priorities are strongly integrated and rooted in the priorities of local people. This has identified many ways forward which will significantly alter the development model to be more environmentally sensitive.

▶ One of the most important findings of the Project was the extent of the value placed on the natural environment by local people. 40-50% of people listed this as one of their three most valued aspects. This information provides a strong foundation from which to build greater local support for environmental protection. The same survey revealed a corresponding lack of awareness as to threats to that environment, showing the need for promotion of environmental awareness both within communities and the staff of the Partner Agencies.

▶ There is now a greater awareness amongst those engaged in the Project of the need to manage the environment and of the opportunities for gaining social and economic benefits from this. The environmental agencies have also gained greater understanding of the needs and challenges of the communities. One case study, St. Columba Loch, piloted a model for round-table negotiation of differing objectives for an area with protected species and historic monuments, resulting in an acceptable outcome for all.

▶ The development of the Area Sustainability Profiles has enabled a clearer understanding of sustainability among communities and agencies and provided a sound basis from which to plan and monitor development. The Sustainability Checklists will continue to reinforce the process implemented by the Dùthchas Project in sieving and adding value to projects. Through the application of these tools, environmental concerns were brought into all issues discussed and people were helped to consider this aspect alongside social and economic issues.

▶ The priority topics identified for the Area Strategies were strongly rooted in environmentally sensitive development opportunities and based on the awareness that an internationally recognised environment was one of the strongest assets of the Pilot Areas. Quite radical topics were seriously embraced and promoted by local communities – renewable energy, waste minimisation, sustainable resource use, access and green tourism. The need for greater efficiency in transport and energy use was highlighted in all areas.

▶ Among the demonstration projects there were many examples of innovative, environmentally sound projects, eg. eco-housing, eco-loo, community composting, photovoltaics, local direct marketing, eco-sewerage systems, inventory and interpretation of environmental features, access to the natural heritage. The opportunities for 'niche' marketing based on the green image of the areas was a key theme of the work. These projects will go on to become models for wider activity in the future.

▶ We also earned how complex it can be to integrate environmental considerations properly into sustainability planning. These can be very technical and of a secondary nature in terms of their links to a development project. Also, information upon which to base some of this assessment and to measure indicators may not be currently available.

Socio-economic impacts

▶ The evaluation reported that: Dùthchas had been successful in developing local capacity, in giving communities a voice and an identity, and in bringing individual communities and interest groups to work together, sometimes for the first time. It was also successful in bringing those communities around the table with the many public and other agencies, and in developing good working relationships. The enhanced capability of North Sutherland, due to the Project, has placed it ahead of all other areas in the parallel 'Initiative at the Edge'.

▶ The strategy development process has revealed whole new agendas for more diverse, locally appropriate and environmentally sustainable development. It has created platforms from which this can be built and made significant headway in organising the local people and agencies to work together to achieve this.

▶ There is greater shared awareness between communities and agencies of the most important issues for local people and the many ideas for resolving these.

▶ The evaluation noted that the initial projects identified and since pursued by the communities will support employment opportunities, retention of young people, the promotion of the cultural heritage, and community capacity building and decision making. The potential for increased employment opportunities related to the natural and cultural heritage is evident in the Strategies, as is the potential for increased use of local resources and produce, though there are questions as to access to resources, appropriate supports and skills development.

▶ A strong focus was placed in all three areas on the retention of population, in particular young people. Strategies for enabling this have been thought out and work begun on the first steps in implementation.

▶ The Project has been particularly successful in enabling greater community involvement in decision making. The Area Strategies are community strategies, developed and agreed by local people and through local consultation. Both communities and agencies have noted the power of a strategy agreed through broad community involvement.

▶ The Project paid great attention to the organisational structures through which communities could be enabled to undertake local planning and development. Progress was made on defining the most appropriate vehicles for this, including the establishment of community development companies and partnership agreements. We also revealed the importance of local agents in facilitating involvement and supporting the development of plans and projects. These are key outcomes from the work.

▶ Local confidence and identity has greatly increased as a result of providing a strong focus on the Pilot Areas, raising their identity with the outside world, working together, linking with agencies and making connections to other places. In North Sutherland this was a particularly noted outcome.

All three communities have shown their desire to take the Strategies forward into the future. Only time will tell how successful they prove to be. The continuing support of the Partner Agencies will be important for this as they hold many keys to funding and expertise. However, the real measure of success will be the extent to which the communities will be prepared to take charge and to lead this process with confidence.

Challenges

The LIFE proposal had previously set out some foreseeable problems and risks, most of which we encountered:

▶ *Lack of confidence and high levels of dependency within local communities*

▶ *Wariness of external interventions and the role of public authorities*

▶ *Political structures at local, regional and national levels which currently inhibit local participation*

▶ *Lack of awareness within public authorities and elsewhere of the principles and methods of a participatory approach*

▶ *Sectoral organisation of the public sector, presenting structural, attitudinal and knowledge barriers to integration*

▶ *Lack of public finance to support local action and innovation and lack of major private sector investors*

▶ *A system of agricultural support which inhibits local flexibility and diversity*

▶ *The pattern of land tenure*

To these we would add:

▶ *the complexities and challenges of strategic planning and sustainability as a working framework*

▶ *the difficulties of bringing so many players together around such a complex concept*

▶ *the challenges of the partnership model*

▶ *the unrealistic timescales for successfully delivering this approach*

▶ *the changing political and structural context within which it had to work*

▶ *commitment to follow through and ensure continuity of the work*

During the course of the Project, progress was seen in relation to increasing local confidence, the development of better working relationships between public agencies and communities, awareness of participatory methods and partnership working and the beginnings of a more flexible approach to agricultural support. However, the main structural barriers still exist, namely sectoral agencies, lack of local access to finance, political structures, land tenure and agricultural support.

This section documents some of the main findings of the Dùthchas Project. These are documented according to:

▶ The main **Sustainability Issues** *raised as a consequence of the work of the Pilot Areas*

▶ The lessons on our **Core Values**

▶ The **Innovation** *achieved by the Project*

▶ The **Feasibility** *of the Project approach*

▶ The **Affordability** *of the methods piloted*

These lessons present many agendas for future action by a wide range of people and organisations. They are a significant achievement in mapping out the potential for a more sustainable development path for our rural communities. The core values of the Project were found to be a very useful, if not essential, framework through which to plan and evaluate this type of work. The lessons we learned about these should have wide implications for other situations, initiatives and policy.

3.1 Our Sustainability Issues

Natural and Cultural Heritage

Based on the goal of making the most of natural and cultural resources without damaging them for the future, the Strategy Groups working on this topic identified some key issues to be addressed:

▶ The natural and cultural heritage were identified by the local people through the community surveys as overwhelmingly their most important and valued assets. This provides a strong foundation from which to build development paths that are more sensitive to these assets.

▶ These assets hold the potential to build local identity, local marketing strategies and diverse employment opportunities. Many such opportunities were raised through the community surveys and the work of the Strategy Groups.

▶ The need for better and more imaginative management of the natural and cultural heritage was strongly revealed. The current systems tend to be too focused and lack a commitment to integration with other objectives of sustainable development. This is in large part due to the sectoral nature of the administrative system.

▶ Local communities stressed the importance of interpretation and awareness. This is seen not only as a resource for visitors, but also for local people, to help reinforce the bonds of local pride and cultural i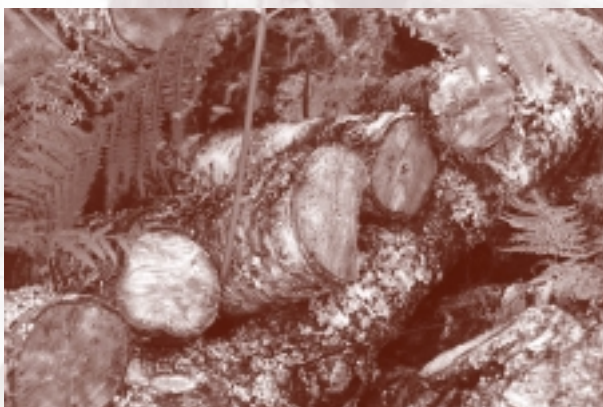dentity. The great resource of local knowledge should be well tapped in designing interpretation, building on local information and folklore and involving local guides and exponents.

▶ The strong local identity and environmentally sound image of the Pilot Areas was seen as their greatest selling point when marketing the areas and their products. This should be reflected through the development of recognised quality marking and labelling.

▶ It was also felt that more could and should be done to build on the significance of the many internationally and nationally recognised environmental designations in the Pilot Areas. So far these had only been perceived locally as a potential barrier to development rather than the great accolade they actually are. Government agencies responsible for the environment and for economic development should work together to build on this potential.

▶ The community surveys also revealed a lack of local awareness of the threats facing their natural heritage. This needs to be probed further and consideration given to imaginative ways of raising awareness, based on the value placed by local people on the environment and its potential for local development.

For more detailed information on this topic, please consult the three Dùthchas Area Strategies and the report of the information seminar, 'Benefiting from our Natural and Cultural Heritage'. Both are available on the Dùthchas CD-Rom and website.

Sustainable Resource Management

▶ The natural resource base of the Pilot Areas is one of their main economic assets. Despite the relative poverty of the resources in agricultural terms there is a great diversity of potential produce within the land, water, sea and life forms. A look at similar areas elsewhere in Europe, especially in Norway, revealed the poverty of the current resource management practices in the Pilot Areas and the potential for more integrated, diverse and locally beneficial systems. Visitors from other countries were amazed by the quantity of our land that is lying waste without even providing good environmental habitat.

▶ The community surveys and Strategy Group work identified a strong concern as to the inappropriateness of current land management practices, especially the lack of diversity, the over-dependence on sheep, lack of woodlands and forestry and lack of horticulture, fruit and basic food production for local consumption. There is a wealth of good ideas about new ways to manage natural resources within the local communities and an openness to learning from good practice elsewhere.

▶ The range of potential produce was thought to be very broad, encompassing all types of food, much of which had not previously been grown locally. With the aid of modern technology many new crops may be feasible, however this would demand a more flexible support system and new ways of marketing. There are considerations here for current agricultural support mechanisms and state aids.

▶ One fundamental reason for the current problems with resource management was identified as the land tenure system, which has removed local community access to land and natural resources and limited options for management, thereby reducing local skills in the diverse forms of land management. Visitors from elsewhere in Europe were quick to put their fingers on this deficit in our system and the corresponding loss of opportunity and income.

In all areas there was felt to be a need to reduce the dependence on imported goods. (The case of sheep meat being imported to North Uist from New Zealand, when local sheep farmers could not sell their animals, was quoted.) This was seen to have many benefits. It would create better links between local producers and consumers and remove the expense of the 'middle men'. It would encourage a greater diversity of local produce to be grown. It would increase the use of local produce within the area which it was considered would be welcomed by visitors and locals alike. It would reduce transport costs and damage to the environment.

▶ The second main reason given for the current situation was the inappropriateness of the agricultural support system and the interpretation of the Common Agricultural Policy. This was seen to limit many of the good ideas that local people had and to force them into land management practices which they know to be both uneconomic and unsustainable. A specific negative effect of this system was seen as the high level of over-grazing experienced in each area, recognised by local people. There was a great desire to be freed from these constraints and to have the opportunity to release local creativity and entrepreneurship.

▶ Local people asked for greater integration of resource management and support systems, including agriculture, forestry, water resources, sporting, landscape and recreation. They also wanted support for diversification and agri-environment management, with an emphasis on more zonal, locally targeted and flexible systems of support that favoured quality over quantity.

▶ The high environmental quality and 'green-ness' of much local produce was well understood to hold potential for adding value to local produce. Much produce was considered to be 'bordering on organic' and would not take a big step to become organic. However the particular constraints of the crofting system in respect of the regulation and the costs of organic conversion require to be taken account of to ease the transition.

▶ The contact with other areas and other production systems afforded by the Dùthchas seminars, study visits and links, provided new vision and confidence to promote new ways of land management and production. There was a wish to build upon this with programmes to raise local awareness, promote and demonstrate new systems.

For more detailed information on this topic, please consult the three Dùthchas Area Strategies and the 'Report of the Sustainable Land Use Workshop'. Both are available on the Dùthchas CD-Rom and website.

Local Produce

Based on the goal of 'reducing problems of remoteness by delivering local needs locally and reducing dependence on external inputs' and the potential for diversity of resource management linked to cultural and natural heritage, the Strategy Groups working on Local Produce defined their key issues as follows:

▶ The potential to produce a greater variety of local produce had been identified by the groups looking at sustainable resource management. This was reflected by the local produce groups. In addition to simply producing a wider variety of primary produce, it was well recognised that very little primary produce is converted to secondary products within the areas, causing considerable leakage from the local economy and loss of added value. Again, glimpses into similar communities in other countries had shown the far greater extent to which local produce was processed locally, often with strong support from the Government.

▶ There were seen to be considerable barriers to local processing, however, stemming from the system of regulation imposed through the European Union. A particular example, of great concern to all the communities, was that of local slaughtering. The loss of local slaughtering facilities has had the opposite effect to that advocated through the Project. It removed the traceability of meat, increased the costs to the producer, reduced revenue to the area, subjected animals to unnecessary stress and increased the effects of transport on the environment.

▶ Whilst it was recognised that these areas could not compete with prime agricultural areas, it was felt that they had great potential to target 'niche' markets, in particular the growing market for 'green produce'. This required the linking of primary production methods to secondary processing and marketing, to follow the chain of production in a clear and accountable way. Organic production was seen as important, linked to high quality processing.

▶ The strong local and green identity of the Pilot Areas requires to be built on for marketing purposes, preferably linked to recognised environmental standards. Again, this was felt to meet the needs of a growing sector of the market who wish to trace their food to the area and even the producer. Contacts with Cumbria and local food networks elsewhere in the UK endorsed these views and provided ideas about how to develop this approach.

- The marketing of local produce is a fertile area for new approaches. The main aim is to encourage direct marketing, preferably at a local level, in order to increase added value to the producer, improve the awareness of consumers as to the food production system and make produce more accountable and traceable. The Project heard about many schemes for direct marketing, including farmers' markets, box schemes and internet sales. Co-operative systems of production and marketing were also identified as essential.

- In connection with all of the ideas listed above there was a need for research, demonstration, training and awareness raising - locally and among the staff of the Partner Agencies.

For more detailed information on this topic, please consult the three Dùthchas Area Strategies and the report of the Local Produce information seminar, 'Good Enough to Eat'. Both are available on the Dùthchas CD-Rom and website.

Renewable Energy

All three Pilot Areas chose renewable energy as a priority topic offering major potential for their future. In the community survey people asked 'why can't we do something with all this wind and water?' At the information seminar on renewable energy the Pilot Areas heard that the Highlands and Islands of Scotland have some of the best resources in the world for wind, wave, tidal and water power. Through the expertise gained from the seminar, links with many expert bodies and a study tour to Denmark, the Renewable Energy Strategy Groups were able to assess the potential of their resources.

- In addition to wind and ocean power there was strong interest in smaller scale options including solar power and photovoltaics. North Uist have already purchased demonstration photovoltaic cells to raise awareness.

- The groups in each area also stressed the importance of energy conservation as an aim of their strategies. Trotternish are developing an 'eco-housing' project to demonstrate the potential for low energy, environmentally friendly construction.

- The potential of renewable energy sources to create not only cheap local power but also revenue to the communities from sales to the grid, were strong motivating forces. Having witnessed the systems of community-owned power generation in Denmark and Norway, local people were well aware of the huge scale of the potential revenue to local communities. However, several major obstacles were quickly identified to communities in the Highlands and Islands accessing the potential of this resource.

- The first obstacle is land ownership. It would be essential that any energy plant were established on community-owned land. Due to the current system of land tenure this would not possible for many communities without land purchase. One community in North Sutherland that has recently taken ownership of its land is now contemplating the renewables option.

- A second and more important barrier is presented by the technical arrangements of the national grid which do not permit the intake of power in most areas of the Highlands and Islands. Upgrading the grid for local access would be extremely costly and we were told is currently a subject of dispute between the Government and power companies.

- The final issue is to do with the capital resources required to set up the installations. This requires the Government to maintain and extend its support for the renewables option.

- Opening up the full potential of this important development and sustainability option will require political will and strong commitment from Government, land reform and a programme of promotion and awareness raising.

For more detailed information on this topic, please consult the three Duthchas Area Strategies and the reports of the Renewable Energy Information Seminar and the Jutland Study Tour.

Waste Minimisation

Waste disposal and litter came up in all three areas as a topic of concern. This encompassed several dimensions: the effective disposal of sewage from the many isolated crofts and villages, the elimination of scrapped cars, machinery, fencing etc. from the landscape, the reduction and recycling of domestic waste. A waste minimisation group was established in Trotternish and has already made progress on its first community composting project. In North Sutherland the Essential Services Group worked on the issue of sewage disposal. A range of issues was raised by the groups.

- The first aim was to minimise the production of waste materials at source. This requires a major programme of local awareness raising coupled with Government action on packaging etc.

- Closely linked with minimisation is recycling. There is a strong desire to see effective recycling everywhere, however the isolation of the Pilot Areas presents real problems in accessing markets for recyclable materials. One material that was identified as feasible for local recycling was organic waste. The Trotternish group was quick to establish a community scheme to pilot this, linked to local schools and feeding the local horticultural businesses. The fate of other materials - paper, plastics, glass etc. is less optimistic until progress can be made on improving the financial viability of recycling. However, the potential exists to establish local businesses based on recycling.

- To tackle the issue at source the use of locally produced, environmentally friendly and biodegradable materials was advocated, especially in respect of construction. This is where symbiosis between local produce, secondary production and waste products presents new opportunities for businesses.

- Environmentally friendly sewerage systems for sparsely populated areas were the subject of the demonstration project of the Essential Services Group in North Sutherland. Working with the North Highland College in Thurso, a feasibility study was completed. This identified three systems as particularly suitable for the area: reed beds, peat filters and wetland eco-system treatment systems. The local group and the College are now proposing to pilot these systems within the area. To achieve a widespread application of such systems in rural areas will require a clear commitment from Government and agencies to render them financially viable to low income families. *The full report of this project is available on the Dùthchas CD-Rom and website.*

Transport

The remote location of the Pilot Areas meant that transport issues were high on the agenda in each area. A wide range of issues was highlighted by many people in the community surveys. Foremost among these were the high costs of fuel, the poor state of local roads and the lack of adequate and affordable public transport, including bus, ferry and air services. The knock-on effects on the costs of transporting local produce and imported goods have serious consequences for the local economy as well as encouraging the use of private cars.

- An efficient, integrated, user-friendly and low cost public transport system was seen as essential to the sustainability of remote areas, important for the economy, environment and society. Visitors to and from Norway were quick to identify the Norwegian policy of investment in transport infrastructure as one of the most important foundation stones underpinning the viability of rural areas and reducing the disparities caused by distance. Norwegian visitors to North Uist noted that ferry and freight charges were four times higher than equivalent services in rural Norway.

- The second lesson learned from Norway was the importance of a fully integrated transport system in which all forms of transport are carefully timetabled to link with each other in a seamless pattern of local and national routes. Coupled with the low costs this provides a big incentive to use public transport.

- Community transport systems require to take account of the needs of young, elderly and handicapped people for whom public transport may be the only option. They should also take account of the needs of tourists, 25% of whom have no other mode of transport. A survey carried out by the Trotternish group revealed the high level of dissatisfaction among bus users as to poor timetabling, limited services, lack of services on minor routes, poor condition of the buses and overcrowding on school runs. Evening and weekend services are needed, especially to cater for social activities and young people. The use of mini-buses to provide a more frequent and flexible service was advocated. *The report of the Trotternish Bus Survey is available on the Dùthchas CD-Rom and website.*

Young people

Probably the most important issue of concern in all three Pilot Areas was the sustainability of the local population. In all areas this had been declining for many years, with losses taking place principally from among the young age groups and women. Many of the issues tackled by the areas had this fundamental problem in mind in terms of creating appropriate opportunities to encourage young people to stay or return. In North Sutherland one Strategy Group focused entirely on the topic of Young Returners. Strategies for addressing this issue include:

- Training and further education provided locally are critical to reducing the need to leave. The developing University of the Highlands and Islands should help to address this issue if the training is targeted to local need. Other options for less formal, varied and flexible vocational training need also to be considered.

- Increased numbers and variety of local employment opportunities are fundamental to retaining a balanced population. In this respect the decentralisation of many public sector posts to remote areas could provide an important option. Here it was noted that the existence of local Councils (Communes) in Norway, undertaking all of the duties of local authorities at a very local level, was a strategy that had enabled young people of all levels of ability to find rewarding employment in their own communities. A second policy of dispersing manufacturing throughout rural Norway had a similar effect.

- Adequate provision of affordable housing for starter homes is a major issue in remote areas. House prices are often determined by people retiring from other parts of the UK. Much of the traditional housing stock is sub-standard or lying empty. Planning regulations need to take full account of the local circumstances and needs.

- Lack of facilities for recreation, shopping and other basic services was probably the single biggest issue raised by young people in the surveys. It is likely that the lack of such facilities is a major factor in out-migration.

- Transport provision is a big issue in enabling young people to access what facilities there are in remote areas. This links to the recommendations on transport to provide more appropriate, flexible and adequate community transport. Greater local control of community transport services may help to address this issue. The group in North Sutherland has worked with local providers to develop targeted community transport related to the events and places to which young people require access.

3.2 Our Core Values

Our Core Values shaped the way in which the Project was carried out. These were central to our methods and formed the focus for the evaluation of the work.

Sustainability

'Making wise use of our resources in order to build a viable community for the future'

Sustainability, the focus of our work, proved to be an elusive, challenging and complex concept to work with. It lacked clear definition, tended to mean 'all things to all people' and often masked important distinctions. This was even more the case because we were trying to work with so many diverse partners, from multiple local community interests to sectoral national agencies. Establishing any common understanding of 'sustainability' amongst these partners, beyond a broad recognition of the concept, was an enormous challenge. It was also evident that, whilst a form of words could be found to define the concept, when it came to putting it into practice differing world views tended to re-assert themselves and people often interpreted it as the sustainability of a process or project. The challenge is to create the dynamic balance required by sustainability.

Working with 'sustainability' as a framework also required discipline. This was not just any kind of development strategy; everything had to pass through the sustainability check. What

form this check took and how it was applied was the subject of much debate and not a little frustration over the additional complexity and work it involved. Dùthchas did not have a clear model to follow; it was exploring new ground here. Sustainability can also require a very technical understanding of the real effects of different actions. Access to such technical information is not easy at community level. This leads to the danger of important issues being glossed over, to the frustration of expert bodies.

Despite these challenges we found that sustainability, if carefully translated, provided a framework which people everywhere could relate to. It brought all parties around the table. It helps to focus on the things that are really valued and the ways in which these can be protected. It also allows us to identify the things that cause us problems in our everyday lives and find solutions to these. Finally, it encourages us to be aspiring and to envisage futures in which our visions for a better quality of life can be identified and worked towards.

We found that sustainability provides the foundation for adding value and delivering multiple benefits to any type of project. It also forces a more thoughtful and disciplined approach to planning local development. Planning for sustainability just has to be strategic, it cannot be piecemeal. Ultimately this was found to be one of the biggest strengths of our approach – adding value and minimising inappropriate developments.

Dùthchas took significant strides forward in helping our many partners to work with the notion of sustainability. We developed a working 'discipline' in the form of our Goals, Objectives, Indicators and Checklists. By applying this framework we discovered the capacity of local communities to identify and work with the 'big' sustainability issues in a strategic way. Many of these issues were new and ambitious - renewable energy, waste reduction, organic production, local processing and direct marketing, community transport, eco-designed housing, socio-economic benefits from environmental protection, etc. We saw projects emerge that had added value through considering the dimensions of sustainability.

In all, we could recommend that others need not be daunted by the challenges of sustainability and that working with it will provide great rewards.

In summary, some of the key lessons of sustainability were that it enabled:

- *added value in delivering multiple benefits from each project*

- *innovation in opening up new solutions to old problems*

- *exciting new opportunities for our communities*

- *involvement in bringing differing interests together around the table*

- *integration in providing a platform to link social, environmental and economic interests*

- *challenges to established practices and sectoral thinking.*

Strategic Approach

'Creating a planned approach to local development, focused on agreed challenges and opportunities and identifying responsibilities for making things happen.'

This was the central focus of the Project – to apply a more strategic approach to planning sustainable development at a local level. Dùthchas was breaking new ground here. We did not know if it could be achieved within our current system or whether it would require special arrangements to be put in place. We were not sure if local communities would wish to engage with

this more complex approach. We did not know how the many agencies would react to working with this pilot in their midst. We did not know if the different players could be brought around the same table to negotiate and agree what would, by definition, require compromises and new approaches from everyone.

Strategic planning is inherently about integration, long-term thinking and a disciplined approach to decision making. It is also about careful fact-finding, involvement of differing interests and issues and agreement of priorities. None of this can be done effectively in a piecemeal or cursory way. It is not a rapid, nor a simple process to do well. For those who are not used to working with this approach, it can seem at times academic, tedious and time-consuming. It can also be frustratingly slow to deliver the tangible outcomes. Dùthchas was trying to develop an approach which would meet the quality requirements of professional bodies whilst at the same time being engaging, meaningful and do-able to local volunteers.

In the event we learned many lessons about how to deliver a strategic planning process effectively at community level. We also learned what local communities and agencies will and will not tolerate. We experienced the huge pressure to deliver in the short term and the prevalence of the traditional focus on project-based approaches to development.

Whilst local people fully appreciated the strengths of this approach in terms of the quality, relevance and scale of the outputs, it also generated concern as to the time and effort it took. Participants often became impatient for 'results' and viewed results as concrete actions, not paper based plans. It is worth bearing in mind that many people will tire of the 'process' unless it delivers tangible results along the way. This might involve starting small projects and making arrangements for early implementation of agreed aspects of the strategic plan.

However, with hindsight, those involved have come to realise the special gains from approaching development in this way. It is significant that all three Pilot Areas value and wish to continue the 'strategic approach' and to implement its outputs. We saw clearly how this approach produced a different order of outputs from the more usual community appraisal, as in our Initial Review. People were able to build on all of their myriad likes, dislikes and ideas and to shape these, through a simple framework, into major new platforms for development. They were able to work together for the good of all and to work out their priorities as a whole community, so that scarce time and energy was invested in the most important priorities.

The Pilot Area evaluation workshops revealed that local people understood the value and power of having a strategy that links shared vision and community assets to issues and strategies and follows through with projects that provide tangible results. They identified the main benefits of a strategic approach as being:

▶ *long term*

▶ *identifying linkages*

▶ *adding value*

▶ *enabling different interests to work together and creating synergy*

▶ *developing a common vision and objectives and agreement on priorities*

▶ *open and shared by the community and agencies*

▶ *tackling the most important things first*

▶ *addressing problems and barriers at an early stage*

▶ *avoiding wasting resources on inappropriate developments*

▶ *providing a powerful tool for working with agencies and achieving funding.*

Participation

'Enabling people to play a positive and active role in building a viable community for the future'

Dùthchas set out with the clearly stated aim of giving everyone who wished to, the chance to have a say in the process. This was an ambitious aim but was felt to be essential to rooting the Strategies firmly in the local communities, meeting the true needs of all sectors of those communities, and building the ownership and support essential to ensuring their implementation. We realised, in setting out to do this, that such a participative approach is not the usual way of doing business. We were aware of previous work that had been done on participatory approaches but not in the ambitious context of strategic, sustainability planning.

We set about to develop methods which we hoped would meet our aims for participation of being accessible, transparent, inclusive and democratic. We chose our Area Co-ordinators with great care to be the best facilitators of this process and we trained them in the different methods for each step in the process. All of this worked well and we were proud of this work. We succeeded in involving a high percentage of the local people in each area in the many events and activities (approximately 1,500 out of a total of 4,500). We were successful in involving those people whose voices are not normally heard. We enabled communities and agencies to work together, share ideas and information, develop strategic thinking and initiate action and showed that obstacles can be overcome in working together towards common goals.

All of those involved learned lessons about participatory approaches; what works and what does not. These approaches have gone on to be used by people in the communities and agencies. The difficulties that arose came not from the aim of participation, nor in most cases from the methods themselves, but from the amount of time taken before tangible results could be seen. The reasons for these delays were more to do with the complexity of the strategic process and the need to meet the differing demands of all players. It was estimated that local volunteers spent on average 2000 hours on Dùthchas work in each Pilot Area. Probably the strongest single lesson to come out of the Project was that the valuable and scarce voluntary time of local people must be used with respect and to the greatest effect, to give rapid tangible results. People need to think and do, to plan and to accomplish meaningful projects. Vision needs to be grounded in reality. Plans are best made by those who will carry them out; otherwise the culture of dependency is reinforced.

Local people will participate enthusiastically when they feel they can make a positive difference to the process and the outcome. Everyone, whether from communities or agencies, will respond better if they have a direct role in designing the process and can negotiate roles, responsibilities and timescales that feel right to them. Shared vision is essential – of what the process is, what it will produce, the steps and nature of participation along the way and any constraints or contributing factors. The more complex a voluntary process is, the more attention needs to be devoted to communication, so that people are clear about what is going on, what is expected of them and how they can influence the process. Mutually beneficial co-operation flows from genuine relationships forged over time; forced co-operation often results in resistance. Better results will be yielded by building from the foundation of where each

community is at the outset, rather than assuming the same starting place for all.

In a demonstration such as Dùthchas we have the opportunity to step back and observe the complex systems that are at work in our communities and what interventions may produce beneficial changes. If the programme itself is too complex it makes it difficult to keep track of what is going on and what has influenced what. Such complexity also makes the demonstration difficult to evaluate and replicate.

In summary, some of the key lessons of a participatory approach were that it:

▶ *roots the ownership of the Strategy within the area and produces support, enthusiasm and commitment*

▶ *ensures that the Strategy meets locally identified needs*

▶ *generates great energy but requires tangible outcomes in the short term*

▶ *is essential to successful implementation on the ground*

▶ *enables clearly targeted, cost-effective solutions*

▶ *gives a human touch to plans and policies*

▶ *builds awareness, connections and capacity for action*

▶ *requires co-ordination and skilled facilitation*

▶ *must have a user-friendly approach, including the use of clear jargon-free language*

▶ *requires independent resourcing that does not compromise the process or outputs*

▶ *leans on people's voluntary time and must be tailored for maximum efficiency*

Partnership

'Local people and agency people working together for mutual benefit'

Partnership is strongly promoted by Government as a means of integrating the many 'sectoral' organisations responsible for developing and implementing policy. When looked at in the context of 'sustainability,' partnership takes on an additional dimension. Sustainability is explicitly about the integration of social, environmental and economic issues. Dùthchas was founded on partnership in recognition of this and gathered its 22 Partners in response to the many issues identified as important to local sustainability. We were concerned to test the effectiveness of partnership as a delivery mechanism.

Working with a large partnership presents opportunities and also challenges. We had success in engaging so many Partners in all stages of the work. We facilitated them to work together on the issues of sustainability, to focus their attention on the Pilot Areas and participate directly in the work going on there. Partnership eased access to the partner organisations. It provided resources and agreement to support the Project in different ways. It also opened the way to explore the potential for greater 'alignment' between interests. Several of our Partners were pro-active in offering support and many invested significant time, attending meetings centrally and locally. Their involvement was welcomed by the local communities who got to know these distant bodies better and found out about their resources. The Partners learned how to work closely with local people and to begin to relate their interests to their statutory remits.

Partnership also presented big challenges both to the organisers and to the participants. We found that organisations are not well set up for partnership working, which is usually seen as being at the margins of their core work. Demands on time and other resources may not be adequately budgeted for and may be resented. Internal links between departments and areas may not function well. Most significantly the levels of commitment to partnership initiatives may be relatively low.

Partnership is a gentleman's agreement without a legally binding foundation. This has both advantages and disadvantages. Especially where partnerships are being used as the basis for extensive funding agreements it may be necessary to introduce a more legally binding form of agreement. The 11 Dùthchas core funding Partners signed a Memorandum of Agreement at the outset of the Project. This covered roles, responsibilities and procedures for dealing with potential difficulties. The Agreement was only put to the test once and proved not to be fully effective, with several funders refusing to meet their obligations to cover deficits as signed up to in the protocol.

Co-ordinating a large partnership is very demanding on time and resources, and many hours were spent chasing for information and organising meetings. A large partnership cannot manage a project but it can provide an advisory and support function. In particular, partnership does not work well without strong focus, leadership and facilitation. Ideally the facilitation and leadership will be neutral to any of the Partners to avoid any inter-agency politics.

There are issues regarding the position of staff employed by partnerships, who are in a fundamentally difficult position. If the partnership is not an organisation in its own right, staff employment will be handled by one of the partners. However the staff are, by definition, responsible to all partners. This requires completely different employment procedures than for staff working within one agency. This issue does not appear to have been either understood or addressed. As a consequence staff can find themselves in a kind of 'no-man's land' in which they are expected to maintain neutrality and play a facilitating role between the partners, without being compromised in relation to the employing agency. The Dùthchas staff found themselves employed by one Partner, line-managed by another and housed in a third. This was not a satisfactory employment position and left many questions unanswered with regard to employment rights.

The test of partnership will be its commitment to deliver the support required by the Strategies once the 'discipline' of the Project is no longer there.

In summary, some of the key lessons of partnership working were that it is:

▶ *essential for integration of the issues relating to sustainability*

▶ *important for simplifying access to support for communities*

▶ *good for disseminating information and ideas*

▶ *resource hungry*

▶ *requires focus, leadership, support and co-ordination*

▶ *challenges partner organisations who may not be structured appropriately*

▶ *requires good internal links*

▶ *on the edge of each agency's priorities*

▶ *compromises the position of staff employed by the partnership*

Alignment

'Communities and agencies getting in tune with one another's visions, aims, plans and budgets'

The logical extension of partnership is the process of drawing together, or 'aligning', the ways in which the different partners deliver their own activities, policies and supports in relation to the work in hand. Dùthchas called this 'strategy alignment' and made it one of the core principles of the Project. Having said this, we knew very little about how to make it work and could find little evidence of successful examples elsewhere. This then was another key element of the demonstration.

The Dùthchas Partners were aware of this aim of the work and signed up to it at the start of the Project. This enabled us to work with them to seek out ways of tackling this difficult area. Early in the Project we ran a workshop with all Partners to explore this question. This began to reveal the potential advantages to be gained from an alignment process in terms of lateral thinking about Partner's remits. It also cautioned about the constraints within different organisations.

The process used by Dùthchas involved initial training and exploration of the issues for the Partners, several written consultations at different stages of the Project and two workshops. A framework was developed for managing the alignment process. This referred Partners to the ways in which they could support (or otherwise) the Strategy recommendations through their:

▶ *direction of resources*

▶ *regulatory role*

▶ *focus of initiatives*

▶ *policy positions*

▶ *position now/medium/long term*

The information gained from Partners was incorporated into the Initial review, the Sustainability Profiles and the Area Strategies. Partners also responded directly and variously to project opportunities as they arose.

It rapidly became clear that the overall context within which we were working presented fundamental problems to achieving our aims. There was significant confusion in the communities and agencies about multiple and over-lapping initiatives coming from the various arms of Government. It also became clear that there was a lack of an effective framework for co-ordinating partnership and alignment at a higher level. Dùthchas was powerless to address either of these problems but had to find ways of working with them.

Upon reflection, strategy alignment was one of the least successful outcomes of the Project. There were many reasons for this, most of which were beyond our control. However, we did learn some lessons. In brief these related to a need for:

▶ *good preparation and early warning of the alignment process*

▶ *clear internal systems and communication channels in each agency for linking actions on project outputs*

▶ *topic-based links between agencies and mechanisms to bring appropriate people from different bodies together around each issue*

▶ *scoping of each Partner at the outset, to determine the key parameters of the agency's policies and operations*

▶ *recognition of the time constraints on Partners in designing an alignment process*

▶ *quick wins to demonstrate the benefits of alignment, bringing all Partners together to produce a rapid, integrated response*

▶ *recognition of the problems posed by the matching funding requirements of public sector grants, and the effect on the overall grant from a mixed funding package*

▶ *caution about dealing with issues in isolation - joined up thinking needed.*

Capacity Building

'Gaining experience and confidence so that community members can take advantage of opportunities and solve problems themselves'

One of the foundation stones for the approach adopted by Dùthchas was to assist in building the capacity of the local people to be active participants in local development. The assessment of our local staff was that we contributed to this in various ways, by:

▶ *encouraging active participation in all parts of the work*

▶ *enabling local people to participate in developing a 'strategic plan' for their area*

▶ *building the know-how to carry out community surveys and planning*

▶ *getting to know the agencies and breaking down barriers*

▶ *enabling understanding of the roles, remits and statutory responsibilities of agencies*

▶ *familiarising local people with the 'language' used by agencies and expert bodies*

▶ *building connections with 'experts', communities and initiatives across Europe*

▶ *raising the profile of the Pilot Areas and their issues with policy makers across Scotland*

▶ *experiencing that by working together and speaking with one voice, local people can wield power with policy makers and make things happen*

In order to build people's confidence and skills so that they are available to the community in future, there needs to be time and attention paid to learning together, in whatever ways people learn best – from instruction, experience or observation. Reflection on what has been experienced strengthens the learning. Dùthchas created many opportunities for learning in many different contexts, through hands-on experience, through observing the work of others, through interaction with other communities and agencies and through involvement in the many planning and action groups. Links with other areas and countries were especially useful for enabling people to stand back from their own situation and view quite different ways of approaching similar issues.

In the course of our work we identified some fundamental capacity building needs of local communities:

Framing the issues for community and group action

- ▶ *Knowing where a community can apply leverage*
- ▶ *Asking the right questions*
- ▶ *Developing shared vision*

Programme development and evaluation

- ▶ *Strategic planning*
- ▶ *Developing outcomes and indicators of progress*
- ▶ *Mobilising resources and getting work done*
- ▶ *Evaluating and translating learning into policy*

Gathering and managing financial resources

- ▶ *Fundraising and development of financial resources*
- ▶ *Budgeting and financial management*

Working together

- ▶ *Listening to one another*
- ▶ *Sharing ideas, facts, experiences and feelings*
- ▶ *Facilitation skills*
- ▶ *Decision making and consensus building*
- ▶ *Managing conflict to move towards shared interests*
- ▶ *Valuing diversity and community involvement*
- ▶ *Volunteer recruitment and management*
- ▶ *Team building*
- ▶ *Leadership development and delegation*

Learning together

- ▶ *Research skills*
- ▶ *Team learning and action research*
- ▶ *Organisational development*
- ▶ *Learning from other communities*

Tapping the resources of others

- ▶ *People and organisations within the community*
- ▶ *Partnerships with agencies and others*
- ▶ *Links to educational resources*
- ▶ *Working with the media*

3.3 Innovation

This was an innovative Project but at the right moment in history to provide much needed experience of implementing some key policy objectives. The main elements of innovation were:

- ▶ *A multi-sectoral approach to dealing with sustainability issues at local level*
- ▶ *The application of participatory methods to developing a strategic plan and a sustainability framework*
- ▶ *Integration of environmental, social and economic objectives into a common strategy*
- ▶ *Development of area sustainability strategies incorporating agreed statements of common values, objectives and indicators, derived from the participation of local people and public authorities*
- ▶ *Formation of non-statutory partnerships at local level, involving community and agency representatives*
- ▶ *Development and testing of a local GIS (geographical information system) within a community process*

- ▶ *Strategy alignment between key public bodies designed to deliver integrated, locally flexible and targeted objectives*

3.4 Feasability

Dùthchas succeeded in achieving its main aims and outputs within the time and other constraints placed upon the Project. In doing this we learned that the fundamental elements of the Project are do-able and produce the kind of results that had been hoped for. In assessing feasibility it is important to stress that we are not assessing the feasibility of the Dùthchas Project as a whole as this would never be undertaken in full under any other circumstances. It is more important to assess the feasibility of the different tools and processes it developed.

Overall, we showed that the aim of developing area-based strategies for sustainable development, involving local people and agencies, is quite feasible. We also found that this is a very creative process that holds the potential to identify quite major new approaches to development and gain the support of local players for these.

There are many circumstances in which this approach would be relevant. Indeed a similar approach would ideally be applied in all areas as the foundation for sustainable community planning. Some current contexts in which this approach would be particularly highly relevant are: Community Planning, Local Agenda 21, Community Regeneration Schemes, National Park and Protected Area Plans. The approach would ideally require to be set within a supportive institutional framework, as for instance could be provided by the contexts listed above. It could be set within the context of a local community-based development organisation such as those being set up in the Dùthchas Pilot Areas.

A range of scenarios could be envisaged as to how this approach would be promoted. One could for instance conceive of a model linked to Community Planning in which a central co-ordinator could effectively organise local teams across a county or region on a rolling programme.

At the local level, the workable scale of which should be determined by local circumstances, a more permanent strategic framework could be developed in which to plan and implement area strategies on a rolling programme linked to the regional level and sharing experience with other areas. The essential elements of the local package would be a paid co-ordinator with a budget to facilitate community involvement and service a local development organisation. This work should always be linked to implementation, and the most efficient way of funding project development is a factor. Partnership and alignment does not seem to provide an effective option; pooling of resources linked to the strategy objectives is likely to be more cost-effective.

We also learned that modifications to the process used by the Project would be necessary if it were to be implemented elsewhere. The Project budget could not be realistically replicated under most normal circumstances, nor could the inputs of in-kind time from local volunteers and agencies. Modifications to the approach would have to take this into account. Again, the answer to the feasibility question is that it all depends on the objectives and circumstances. *Guidelines are set out in the Dùthchas Handbook, available on the CD-Rom and website.*

Key issues to consider in relation to feasibility are:

▶ *Undertaking early preparation, training and awareness raising among key stakeholders to clarify the purpose, breadth and demands of the process and to explore the concept of sustainability*

▶ *Preparing agency partners well in advance to budget realistically for their inputs*

▶ *Keeping volunteer time inputs to a minimum and consider paying for time and expenses of main group members*

▶ *Linking the work of developing strategies to rapid implementation*

▶ *Providing a ring-fenced, integrated budget to support early outputs of the strategy*

▶ *Developing sustainability profiles through a competent local organisation, in consultation with the community*

▶ *Ensuring good communication links throughout to keep everyone on track*

▶ *Being clear about those things that can be influenced locally and those that cannot*

3.5 Affordability and Value for Money

As a demonstration project, Dùthchas aimed to develop methods that would be affordable in the 'normal' world – without the benefits of European funding. This does not mean to say that all of the methods we used would be advocated as affordable. The Project experimented with several approaches and assessed these in the light of experience. This is the advantage of a demonstration – it does not have to get it right first time – but further developments of the model would be very much cheaper to implement.

Affordability is a relative concept. It depends on many factors - the aims and scope of the work, the number of people to be involved, the scale of the area, the resources available etc. There are many options, and approaches can be more or less in-depth, involving etc. There is also the question of how such an approach could build to scale, i.e. should this kind of work be carried out in isolated local areas or in a linked programme across a region, or even nationally. Dùthchas spent a lot of its money on developing, co-ordinating, piloting and disseminating the process in line with its demonstration status. This element of the expenditure would be greatly reduced if this approach were to be rolled out across a wider area. If it is linked to existing programmes – eg. Community Planning/ National Parks the cost effectiveness could be increased.

Resources involved not only relate to the financial budget, they also include volunteer time and in-kind contributions (time, facilities, materials etc.). To give a realistic picture these should also be costed. It is inevitable that participatory processes will involve volunteer time. The critical factor is that the volunteer time is managed to produce the greatest output for the least input. It was estimated that the Dùthchas process involved about 2000 hours overall in each area. Costed at £10 per hour this is a contribution of £20,000 over three years. However this level of involvement could be greatly reduced by modifications in the process.

The work of developing an effective area sustainability strategy is demanding and takes time and inputs from many people. This fact should not be minimised. It is important that this kind of work is embarked on with an appropriate commitment to adequate resourcing. There are many options for short-cutting the methods tried by Dùthchas but equally, many short cuts would also reduce the quality of the outputs.

The experience of the Project taught us that this work ideally requires:

▶ *the involvement of a full-time, trained co-ordinator in the community*

▶ *a local partnership to guide and support the work*

▶ *technical backup from agencies to develop sustainability profiles*

▶ *12 months in which to develop the initial area strategy*

▶ *a targeted budget to enable community participation and communications*

▶ *an on-going programme of implementation and review*

It is difficult at this early stage to judge whether the Project has given value for money. Much depends on the perspective of the funding organisation. The spread of costs through partnership funding has probably meant that each funding Partner has received value for money for its own contribution, in that the elements they are interested in may not have been achievable through their contributions alone. £268,810 of the Project budget was spent within the Pilot Areas and generated levered funding of £69,220 plus indirect spend by 1000 visitors through interest in the Dùthchas work.

The proportions of spend on certain aspects of the Project may not have been value for money. Nevertheless, outputs and impacts have been substantial. Much has been learned about working with communities and providing them with expert 'tools'. The concept of sustainability has been explored and refined. Most importantly, the communities and Partners wish to build on the achievements to date and are enabling the continuation of local co-ordinators within the Pilot Areas. Policy alignment is happening and other programmes are being accessed to deliver the Area Strategies.

Chapter 4. Impact on Others

This section documents the likely impacts of the Project on those who participated and on others to whom this work may be relevant. Included in this assessment are the impacts on:

- ▶ *The Dùthchas Pilot Areas*
- ▶ *The Dùthchas Partners*
- ▶ *Scottish Policy*
- ▶ *EU Policy*
- ▶ *Transferability of the Dùthchas model*

4.1 The Pilot Areas

Local people became involved in Dùthchas because they hoped the Project would allow them to deal with important community issues and bring greater resources into their area. While many were engaged at the beginning, many also lost interest and enthusiasm when the process took too long and was not seen to be producing tangible results. People did not see the need for the Project to be so complex, with its emphasis on sustainability and strategic planning.

However local people welcomed the opportunity to help create the plan and saw the logic of moving from vision and community assets to issues and problems, to strategies and projects. They noted the power of the community speaking through the plan 'with one voice' and saw that as a way of gaining agency involvement and support in implementation. They noted that this was much preferable to being asked to comment on the plans developed by agencies, which often did not reflect local circumstances. Community participants felt that moving forward with implementation would build on what was learned and on the capacity developed locally.

They noted their:

- ▶ *Commitment to projects which emerged in the planning process*
- ▶ *Intention to make the strategy live, by revisiting, checking progress, updating*
- ▶ *Commitment to build on existing assets (people, natural resources) local pride, projects and plans*
- ▶ *Commitment to involving the wider community in the future*
- ▶ *Recognition of the importance of developing a plan and the capacity to plan*
- ▶ *Ongoing relationships (some of which existed before Dùthchas, some of which were created by Dùthchas) a network of community and agency representatives*
- ▶ *Intention to work with agencies, to help them recognise and act on opportunities in the area*
- ▶ *Intention to build on township level leadership, building capacity to plan for the future, carry out and manage projects, seek agency help*

Participants hope that the concept of grass roots involvement developed by Dùthchas will help to influence the way in which other plans are developed.

The main concerns that were raised in the community evaluation were:

- ▶ *The process was overly long and complicated and tried to do too much*
- ▶ *Sustainability and strategic planning were rather academic and complicated concepts to work with*

- ▶ *The process asked too much of volunteers both in terms of time and commitment over time*
- ▶ *People needed a clearer view of where they were in the process, what they had accomplished and what lay ahead. Greater local involvement in planning the process on an on-going basis would have helped*
- ▶ *The process took too long to produce tangible results - people prefer action to talking and need clear results to sustain involvement*
- ▶ *There was insufficient clarity as to the scope and focus of the work. Better publicity would have helped people to stay connected to the overall Project aims and activities*
- ▶ *Communications between the main Partnership and Management Groups and Area Advisory and Strategy Groups did not function well enough. It was also felt that the Area Advisory Groups should have had more control over the direction of the work in the Pilot Areas.*

Many people from the Pilot Areas were involved with the Project throughout its life. They contributed much and learned much. Communities that had not previously worked together have combined their aspirations and issues into one plan for a more sustainable future. It was observed that Dùthchas defined a new basis for several communities to work together. They have forged close relations with many agencies, some of which had not previously had a profile in the areas. They have made links across Europe and gained visions and confidence as to new ways for the future.

The Pilot Areas have been left with:

- ▶ *Their own Area Sustainabilty Strategy*
- ▶ *Partnership support to implement the Strategy*
- ▶ *The beginnings of local organisations through which to move forward*
- ▶ *Stronger links and working relations between the many small communities within the area*
- ▶ *Stronger links and understanding with the many agencies responsible for the area*
- ▶ *Capacity to undertake a strategic planning process*
- ▶ *An understanding of sustainability and the tools through which to check for, monitor and evaluate progress on sustainability objectives*

However, this process is quite new and fragile. There are few precedents for such a process being rooted in the long-term structures for local development. These pilot communities will therefore need on-going support to realise and continue to build on their objectives as set out in the Strategies. This will involve:

- ▶ *building the foundations for a viable community organisation with staffing to support the local volunteers*
- ▶ *ensuring that funding is targeted towards the objectives and actions of the Strategies*
- ▶ *agencies continuing to respect the objectives of the Strategies and align their own work programmes in support of them*
- ▶ *outside bodies not threatening the fragile foundations of the Strategy by introducing conflicting or over-lapping initiatives, but instead using the results of this process to inform other initiatives and strategies, particularly Community Planning*
- ▶ *the Partner Agencies to assist in the long-term monitoring and revision of the Strategies and to ensure that this is done*

4.2 The Partners

The Partners engaged with the Project for many reasons, ranging from a commitment to the Project's core values and interest in learning more about how to work with these, to the opportunity to promote the interests of their own organisations. At the outset of the Project motivation had stemmed from the lack of political commitment and action on these issues. Later, as the political context changed, Partners saw the topical nature of the Project in relation to current policy and the opportunity to try out approaches that could provide insights into how to implement these policies and initiatives. Involvement in the Project was also seen to reflect well on the Partners in terms of the close links to local communities and the chance to develop a more direct relationship and lessen the gap between communities and agencies.

Several issues emerged during the evaluation that had undoubtedly affected the involvement of the Partners. It was noted that, despite this being a demonstration project, 'learning' was not as high on the agendas of agency staff as 'doing'. Investment in 'process' as opposed to 'action' was also seen as difficult. This was a reflection of the action-based targets of the agencies, making it hard to justify investment without measurable hard outputs. There was some tension between what each agency expected to be delivered for their contribution and what was actually being delivered by such a wide ranging and democratic Project. Motivation and perception differed between agency staff at local and regional/ national levels and there was a notable resistance from several local agency staff towards the Project. The impression was that they did not see the need for it and felt it had been imposed from headquarters due to lack of understanding as to how things were working in the areas.

The following points came from the Partners' evaluation:

► Dùthchas was seen to be extremely successful in engaging local people, bringing new people to the fore and retaining relatively high levels of involvement throughout, despite the length and complexity of the process. It had given communities a voice and created local identity and co-operation. The value of local co-ordinators to animate and support the local process was well recognised.

► Partners could see the logic of the process, crystallising what people wanted into an overarching, common framework that was logical, fundamental and sustainable. The Area Strategies were seen to reflect the communities' aspirations and were praised as good examples of bottom-up planning. Agencies said that they would find it hard to ignore a strategy that had such strong local consensus.

► Partners realised that Dùthchas would fail if the Strategies were put on the shelf and recognised that Partners have responsibilities to help take them forward. It was recognised that it would require the continuation of an equivalent to the Area Advisory Group and paid staff to enable the implementation. It was also recognised that such broad strategies could not be co-ordinated by one agency and would have to be led by the community.

► The concept of sustainability was now better understood and it was thought that communities would build environmental initiatives on the back of their first actions.

► Partners benefited from learning about the communities' values and wishes and had been brought into contact with a much wider range of local groups and individuals than they would normally meet, broadening their awareness and contacts.

► As a consequence, Partners had learned more about how their organisations are perceived by the community and now have more sympathy for the problems presented to communities by the procedures of agencies, especially in respect of accessing funding from such a diversity of sources, through voluntary time.

► Partners now appreciate the ongoing need to modify the terms of a project to meet the community vision and wishes, and see that it is not advisable to impose a rigid three-year process.

► It was also thought that in future such extensive projects might be better delivered by an existing organisation rather than setting up the equivalent of an organisation, but without continuity.

The main concerns raised in the Partner evaluation were:

► It was felt that the Partnership Group had not been very successful. The Group had been too large to work effectively, let alone steer the Project. Not all Partners' staff had fully understood the Project at the outset which made the Project difficult to sell in their own organisations.

► Partners' staff had difficulty finding time to engage with the Project as they had to give priority to their own remits and work target. There was also some hostility to the Project within their organisations from people who questioned its relevance to agencies' own priorities and targets.

► As the Project developed its own momentum outwith the Partnership Group, it made it hard to retain a sense of ownership. It was difficult to move from a top-down start to a bottom-up process, especially for agencies that had to justify their involvement and funding.

► The Dùthchas model was thought to be too complex and academic and difficult to relate effectively to a three-year timescale. It was also thought that the original bid to Europe had been too complicated, had promised too much and had acted as a 'strait –jacket', reducing the flexibility to alter workplans and outputs as things evolved.

► Other reasons suggested for the complexity were the difficulties of introducing the concepts of sustainability and strategic planning and the numbers of people and Partners involved.

► Because of the many levels and groups involved in the work, effective communications and feed-back loops between core and area groups and staff were difficult, if not impossible to maintain, resulting in many misunderstandings.

► There was considerable frustration from the Partners' area staff that their managers had not involved them fully or early enough in making critical decisions about the Project.

► The Project demanded too much of the Partners' staff, who did not have this time allocated in their heavy workloads. Consequences of this were a lack of continuity in attending meetings and inadequate responses to consultations.

► The geographical scale of the Pilot Areas did not match the areas covered by agency plans and this was seen as problematic for future support and alignment from the agencies. Equally, the fact that the Area Strategies are very broad in scope means that no existing agency or organisation could take them forward; only the community could do this.

The Partner Agencies will have an important role to play as the work moves forward. This has been documented in the Area Strategies. Their ongoing partnership and involvement with the Pilot Areas will be crucial. Their expertise and funding will be required to help local groups shape up their ideas and projects and make them happen. However, the communities are anxious that the Strategy and its implementation should be in the hands of the community and that agencies should not play a dominant role in directing it. Perhaps an even greater concern is that the agencies ignore the Strategies completely in pursuing their own objectives.

4.3 Impacts on Scottish Policy

The work of Dùthchas has a very broad focus. The core of its work has particular relevance to rural development, environment, sustainability, community planning and social inclusion. The many sustainability issues raised by the work of the local groups relate to natural heritage, agriculture and fisheries, forestry, waste, energy, local services, tourism and heritage. It is not proposed to cover all of these here. Further policy issues are raised in Chapter 3.

The core values of the Dùthchas Project closely reflect those adopted by current Scottish policy and the practical lessons learned from this demonstration are relevant to several policy areas. This view has been endorsed by the current Minister for Environment and Rural Development. The Project sought to identify new mechanisms for achieving policy objectives by developing a locally-based, strategic approach to the planning and implementation of sustainable development. The change in Government administration since the start of the Project has resulted in a more sympathetic policy context and a more accessible political framework in Scotland. However, there are continuing needs in relation to providing an integrated and locally sensitive operational framework. The lack of such a framework is reducing the ability of local communities to influence development decisions, offer their substantial knowledge and expertise to the local development process and identify the kind of locally sensitive and targeted solutions that are essential for sustainable development. We offer the following thoughts on the links between our work and current Scottish policy. *Chapter 3 provides further details on our core values and sustainability issues.*

Sustainability

We found that sustainability presented an excellent though challenging framework through which to analyse local development needs and opportunities and to add value. Based on this experience we would advise that the principles of sustainability be consistently linked in policy and implementation at local, national and international levels, in a 'nested' system of sustainability criteria linked to funding. This is consistent with treating sustainable development as a horizontal theme as in the EU Structural Funds.

Local communities have an important role to play in planning and implementing sustainable development. An enhanced local role in decision making and control over resources, would give a more locally responsible and responsive system.

Our experiences and links with other places pointed to successful rural development as being based on the essential foundations of Natural Capital, Social Capital and Economic Capital and revealed a number of possible policy directions which build on these foundations:

Natural capital

The natural heritage is a core foundation stone of rural development. It underpins the life and economy of rural communities and its role in stimulating sustainable rural development should be integrated into both development and conservation policies including:

▶ *appropriate land tenure to retain people on the land and increase local opportunities from natural resources*

▶ *flexible public support for sustainable resource use to meet local need and recognise the potential for diversity*

▶ *appropriate, diverse and environmentally sensitive strategies for utilising natural resources in the most effective way*

Social Capital

If rural communities are to remain viable they must retain a strong and balanced population. This will require greater local autonomy in shaping development to meet local need, and a culture of support including:

▶ *strong local democracy, devolved decision making and resourcing to give greater local control and encourage local responsibility, confidence and capacity*

▶ *devolved administration and servicing and dispersed industry to underpin diverse employment opportunities and retain local people of all educational levels*

▶ *strong local services, affordable housing, efficient transport and IT systems to underpin social and economic activity*

▶ *promotion of local distinctiveness to encourage local pride and found the economy on the unique heritage of the area*

▶ *investment in social and cultural life to make rural communities strong and fun places to live in and to help retain young people*

Economic capital

Economic strategies should be supportive of sustainable rural development. This requires that they incorporate integrated social and environmental objectives including:

▶ *devolution of public funds and jobs to the local level*

▶ *community access to non-targeted funding and support*

▶ *dispersal of industrial production to remote areas*

▶ *added value from secondary processing of local raw materials*

▶ *local and direct marketing to increase revenue to producers and reduce the impacts of transport*

▶ *levels of protection to safeguard locally traditional and diverse production systems*

▶ *support for small scale, diverse agriculture and forestry*

▶ *support for an affordable and fully integrated transport system*

Dùthchas is clearly relevant to Local Agenda 21 and initiatives to promote it. Our methods could be successfully applied elsewhere in this context. We would see the importance of linking Agenda 21 to Community Planning and we have piloted effective methods for grounding community planning on sustainability principles.

Strategic approach

The work of Dùthchas to develop a local strategic approach was a great step forward. Strategic planning is normally carried out only within the context of individual sectors or to satisfy statutory planning requirements. These processes rarely involve local communities in anything but limited consultation. The Government is strongly committed to Community Planning; Dùthchas must be one of the best models for this at a local level in Scotland. Equally there are many other planning contexts which could benefit from the application of Dùthchas principles. To name just a few – National Parks, Natural Heritage Zones, Area Tourism Strategies, Forestry Strategies, Structure and Local Plans and Local Economic Fora.

Participation

Participation is a feature of many policy strands yet its implementation is limited. Dùthchas showed beyond any doubt how local people will rise to the opportunity if that opportunity is appropriately presented. It was noted by local people in our evaluation that Dùthchas was proving the need for a new philosophy about the role that communities play in planning: "This needs to be taken up by the Scottish Parliament and the Executive. Reform is needed, but it is awfully hard to do it piecemeal as Dùthchas was trying to do, without the policy makers changing the old, top-down models." Dùthchas proved that local people will engage successfully with more complex strategic processes but certain protocols need to be clearly established to support this. These include skilled facilitation and support, appropriate methodologies, realistic timescales, respect for voluntary time and adequate resourcing budgeted for at the outset. There are costs attached to facilitating participation but these are negligible in relation to the returns of local knowledge and support.

Partnership

Partnership is now applied regularly as a tool for promoting integration. Dùthchas discovered however that it is fraught with difficulties, many of which can only be solved by stronger Government direction. If partnership is to become an effective model for integration it needs to be less of a voluntary activity and more of a requirement. Clearer and more binding protocols for partnership are needed to promote stronger commitment, along with more appropriate allocation of resources and time to partnership working. Those who engage in partnership need training and preparation for this work.

Alignment

Alignment is an ambitious step beyond partnership, but ultimately partnership can only really work through greater alignment of the policies of sectoral bodies, not only with each other, but also with the needs of local communities. Very little progress has been made on this difficult area and the Dùthchas experience may serve as useful learning.

Rural development

The Minister and Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development have endorsed the Dùthchas approach and stated that the Scottish Executive share the same ethos as Dùthchas in respect of rural issues. The various rural policy documents published since the Project's inception have shown a clear link to our work and it is important that our experiences are fed into the developing policy framework. The Project will have the opportunity to do this through presentation of our findings to the inter-departmental Rural Agenda Steering Group.

Environment

The Project arose from the desire to link local development more closely to the natural heritage and to find ways of building on this special asset. Our findings as to the value placed on the natural heritage by local people and their commitment to basing the marketing of their areas on this value, are important foundations to be built on. Many of the ideas in the Strategies give good leads as to productive ways of working with the natural heritage to promote local well being. It is important that environmental bodies and policies are flexible enough to integrate these multifarious opportunities.

Some key issues arising from the work and endorsed by local communities are: the potential for diverse and integrated solutions to the management of natural heritage and resources; opportunities for more locally involving interpretation and access projects; added value from local and green-labelling and local and direct marketing; environmentally sensitive waste solutions, local renewable energy opportunities. The willingness of these areas to supply environmental quality, and the specific commitments of the Area Strategies, need to be related to better intelligence as to market value. The need to increase local awareness of the threats to their valued environmental resources was revealed, as was the need to increase the integration of environmental issues into sectoral agencies and policies.

Our work has particular relevance for the management of protected areas and their links to social and economic development. Our approach is especially appropriate for the development of National Parks and we would advise careful consideration of our methods and lessons in this context.

Community Planning

Community Planning presents an opportunity for creating a local strategic framework and its objectives are close to some of the objectives of the Dùthchas Project, namely: community leadership, strategic area vision, community involvement, partnership working. We believe that the Dùthchas Project has much to offer in the development of this important policy area and we would note the following points:

▶ **Local framework** - The inclusion of a strong local level in the community planning process is crucial, from which to build the regional level picture, rather than the reverse as is current practice in some of the Pathfinders. The Scottish Executive, in its consultation of November 2000, was seeking a more effective means for community involvement in the community planning process. Dùthchas is one of the few initiatives to have explicitly tackled strategic planning with local communities, and our methodologies and lessons are very relevant.

▶ **Strategic Planning** - Dùthchas showed that communities will engage in and value strategic planning. However it is a new activity and demanding of volunteers. This should not be seen as a disincentive to doing it as the local benefits are potentially too great. Dùthchas can provide many lessons and ideas as to how this activity can be best tailored to meet community needs.

▶ **Resourcing mobilisation** - However effective, local involvement in community planning cannot happen without clearly targeted resources for community mobilisation of the kind undertaken by Dùthchas. This does not have to be extensive but would require payment for skilled facilitation and support

- **Aligning policy frameworks** - The current geographical operational and policy frameworks differ greatly from one agency to another. Dùthchas found that this presented a major problem to developing a local strategic framework and to agencies being able to align their plans with those of sub-areas. The situation would be enormously improved if the local operational boundaries of the various agencies were co-terminus.

- **Ring-fenced funding** - targeted at the objectives of the community plan, rather than being dispensed through the sectoral agencies, would also help. Local communities struggle manfully to cope with the difficulties presented by having to raise funding for integrated projects from many sectoral bodies, each with their own targets and objectives.

- **Partnership** – Partnership is such a key plank of community planning that its success is dependent on this working. It is our experience that considerable thought and work need to go into preparing agencies for partnership working. This includes recognising the many shortcomings in their current working arrangements and targets, and training and resourcing the staff who will take part in partnerships. This almost certainly requires statutory direction.

Local Economic Fora fall within the same context and many of the lessons noted for Community Planning are relevant. It will be important to ensure the alignment of Local Economic Fora with Community Planning. The same applies to **Area Tourism Strategies** and other area-based strategies.

Social inclusion

Social inclusion is a crosscutting theme with implications for most areas of policy implementation. The focus of the Project was very much about reducing social exclusion for people living in peripheral areas. Rural areas suffer from significant hidden poverty and are often not categorised as 'deprived' as a result. There are major issues about transport provision and cost, limiting the ability of people in remote areas to access facilities and markets (our ferry services are four times as expensive as the Norwegian equivalent). The Dùthchas Strategies revealed the difficulties for particular groups. These relate principally to lack of access to facilities and affordable housing, especially for the elderly, disabled and young. These were key issues for young people and may be important 'push' factors in promoting out-migration.

Agriculture policy

Because of the close link to the Common Agricultural Policy, this is dealt with in the following section on EU policy.

4.4 Impacts on EU Policy

At the outset of the Project we identified several linkages to EU policies and programmes:

- *Fifth Environmental Action Programme, 'Towards Sustainability'*
- *Objective 1 and 6 regions – implementing sustainable development in peripheral rural areas*
- *Natura 2000 – integration of socio-economic benefit and managed relationships to the surrounding area*
- *Consultation on Sustainable Mountain Development*
- *Cork Declaration - Implementing sustainable development through co-operative local approaches*

The Project sought to address issues relevant to these policy areas, both through its work programme and through trans-national exchange and analysis.

Environmental Action Programme

The Project was established during the EU Fifth Environmental Action Programme, 'Towards Sustainability'. The relevant areas were integration of environmental considerations into economic and social policies, involvement of stakeholders and citizens and frameworks for addressing sustainability. It is also relevant to the new Sixth Environmental Action Programme. Our work is in line with the overall goal of contributing to sustainable development in a way that is most difficult for the Commission to achieve, namely by working with the people whose practical actions will shape the local environment. Our work is relevant to the following priorities:

1. **A strategic approach to meeting environmental objectives** - This priority has the objective of working with a wide cross-section of society. We have piloted a local strategic approach and framework for basing local development on sustainability objectives. Our work is relevant to the objective of:

- *Integration of environmental concerns into other policies – our strategies are fully integrated and have involved all public bodies in their construction.*

- *Working with the market through business and consumer interests for more sustainable production and consumption patterns – issues of sustainable produce, local processing and local direct marketing featured prominently in all areas.*

- *Empowering citizens and changing behaviour - through information, awareness and practical tool kits. We have tackled this issue effectively by raising awareness of the environment and sustainability among the local population, providing a model for assessing the sustainability of individual actions and working on practical issues like eco-building, waste disposal and recycling, renewable energy and energy saving and sustainable food production.*

- *Greening land use planing and management decisions – we have introduced a tool for planning at local level, including the use of GIS. We have focused on sustainable land use and involved land users and planners in the process and have created a platform in each Pilot Area for promoting action on this topic.*

2. **Sustainable use of natural resources and management of wastes** - Our work tackled both of these issues at the level of promoting action on the ground. We focused on sustainable land and marine use and management, management of the natural heritage for economic gain and waste minimisation.

3. **Policymaking based on participation and sound knowledge** - The objective is the broad involvement of stakeholders. Our work has provided a model and methodologies for engaging key stakeholders at regional and local levels.

Natura 2000

The Dùthchas areas contain many sites protected under Natura 2000. Whilst our work did not specifically address the management of these areas, it did focus on the issues of social and economic benefit from natural heritage and environmental quality. Our community survey revealed the exceptionally high level of awareness and value placed on the environmental assets of the areas. It also revealed the many ideas for building on this special asset in terms of economic gain. This provides a strong foundation for developing dialogue and practical actions to create positive linkages between environmental protection and the local economy. Dùthchas went a long way to building this awareness in the Pilot Areas.

Cohesion policy

Dùthchas was selected as a case study for the Swedish Presidency conference on Regional Depopulation as a Challenge for Structural Policies in June 2001. Our approach and situation were considered to be of relevance to other parts of Europe. The Highlands and Islands are relatively disadvantaged within the context of the UK and much of Europe. Many of the causal factors, bio-geographic circumstances, peripherality etc. will remain issues to be coped with into the future. Equally, these areas deliver significant public benefits to other areas in the form of high environmental quality, cultural heritage and opportunities for tourism and recreation. The special needs of these areas and the relatively high costs of maintaining their population should continue to be recognised and supported. The Structural funds provide a mechanism for this support. The Highlands and Islands have held Objective 1 status and are currently in transitional status. Dùthchas revealed that communities need certain types of support to achieve the things they aspire to. It will be an important test to see to what extent the structural funds meet these needs and the extent to which this support will be maintained into the future.

Spatial planning is another relevant policy mechanism. The Dùthchas areas have very special characteristics related to their peripherality, biogeography, population and culture. Our trans-national links with Norway and Sweden equally showed strong similarities with the north of Scotland and the issues we face. This supports the importance of more flexible and geographically targeted policies and programmes related to the specific needs of differing geographical areas even within one region. **Interreg** provides a valuable mechanism for exploring this. **Euromontana** is also a relevant framework and it would be useful to link the findings of the Dùthchas Project to this network.

Agricultural policy

Agriculture plays an important role in the life of our Pilot Areas. In real income terms it is now relatively less important than other income sources but crofting is the main fabric holding the communities together. Crofting is a multi-functional way of life within which agriculture plays an important part. The form of agriculture reflects the support systems derived from the Common Agricultural Policy rather than the wishes of the local people as to the diversity of potential land uses.

Multi-functionality and integration are key policy concepts. However the lack of integration of EU policies is as much a concern as it is for UK policies. The most outstanding example of this is the Common Agricultural Policy which absorbs a high percentage of the total EU budget but is not well integrated with other policy strands for regional development and environment. The support measures implemented through the CAP to date have severely limited the potential of our Pilot Areas and areas

similar to them, to make full use of their natural resources and to take an integrated approach to rural development. It has supported a limited and unsustainable form of production, promoted by the sheep meat regime, and has not encouraged diversification into the many other potential activities highlighted through our work. It has also promoted a culture of dependency rather than entrepreneurship. Greater emphasis is needed on diverse and quality products based on environmentally friendly production methods and the development of the rural economy. The quality of agricultural products should also be viewed in the context of the whole production process. Quality is reliant on three elements – **transparency** of the production process, **traceability** of the product and product **liability**.

Agriculture is the foundation stone for food quality, however secondary processing and marketing are equally important. The Pilot Areas want to be able to process food locally to quality standards, to have traceability in the market place for their products and to focus more attention on direct marketing, both locally and elsewhere - hence maximising benefits to producers, creating a direct link with consumers and ensuring quality. EU and UK regulations have also limited the potential for secondary processing of local produce, particularly through the restrictions placed on slaughtering. Important foundations for sustainability are local added value and local marketing. Regulations and supports should be geared to enabling this, rather than focused on quantity of production and international competitiveness.

The interpretation of the CAP at national level is also a consideration. Approximately 10% of the agricultural budget is earmarked for integrated rural development. The way in which this is taken up and applied locally will be critical. The **Rural Development Regulation** provides a positive linkage and a big step forward with the potential for supporting the kind of options for other rural industries identified by the Pilot Areas including tourism, crafts, knowledge-based and environmental options. This will require to be backed up by promotion and advice as to new ways forward. It is significant that organic production is practically non-existent in the Highlands and Islands and very minimal in Scotland and the UK as a whole, with the UK producing only 9% of its total requirement. This is a significant gap in such a potentially lucrative and sustainable form of agriculture.

Fisheries policy

Some outputs of our work are also relevant to the Common Fisheries Policy. Inshore fisheries are a declining activity in all three Pilot Areas. The extent to which this once viable source of income has been eroded by external competition, declining fish stocks, lack of on-shore facilities and expensive transport links is of great concern locally. Ways of addressing this were sought through the Project, with local direct marketing seen as a first step to boosting incomes. However, the bigger issues remain to be tackled at UK and EU levels.

4.5 Transferability

'Helping others to learn from our experience, and enabling us to learn from theirs'

Dùthchas was funded by the European Commission to demonstrate an innovative approach that could have application throughout Europe. The 'transferability' of the work was therefore an important factor in judging its success. As with affordability, however, transferability is a relative concept. It will depend on the differing contexts, objectives and resources. It would not be possible to advocate the transferability of the work without knowing those things.

Our contacts with other places and initiatives showed us that the demand for this approach is strong. We were tackling some very topical issues – internationally. It is reasonable therefore to presume that many aspects of our work would be seen as relevant to others. The issues addressed by the Dùthchas Project are not unique; they are issues that occur in rural areas throughout Europe and beyond. Nor is the context of the Highlands and Islands unique; the circumstances found here are reflected in many of the more peripheral and economically disadvantaged regions of Europe. The particular historical, political and cultural characteristics of this region are distinct, however, and this needs to be taken into account when considering transferablity of the model.

The methods we used were not specific to this Project. Many were generic and could be, indeed have been, used in other contexts and for other purposes. Our approaches to facilitating participation caused great interest to all those who visited the Project and have already been replicated in other situations. The work we did to develop structured frameworks for planning and assessing sustainability were seen to break new ground and were considered to be applicable in other countries. Our sustainability checklist, for example, has already been successfully used in Sweden.

The original horizontal themes or core values of sustainability; participation; partnership; alignment; capacity building; affordability and transferability remain valid values worth promoting elsewhere. It has not been easy to effectively promote these values. Nevertheless, despite the difficulties, the importance of these values has if anything increased and others can learn from the steep learning curve of the Dùthchas Project.

In a Scottish context we would advocate that our experiences are used to shape such areas as Community Planning, Local Agenda 21, National Park and protected Area Plans, Initiative at the Edge, local development and regeneration plans and local sectoral strategies. Further work is required to investigate the potential for national application of the Sustainable Communities Scheme. It would also be very useful to have a comparative analysis of a range of initiatives that reflect the core values of Dùthchas, both at national and European levels. This would be the only way to assess the significance of our findings overall.

The important thing is to see the work not as an homogenous whole, but as a collection of optional steps. Every community and every situation is different and projects must be tailored to their needs. We would not advocate that Dùthchas be seen as a 'blueprint', but that others make judgements as to which aspects are appropriate to their situation. *This is clearly spelled out in The Dùthchas Handbook which is available on the Dùthchas CD-Rom and website.*

4.6 Reflection

Dùthchas was an initiative of its time. It set out to open new visions for the future of some of our most precious yet fragile areas. It recognised the limitations within our current systems and approaches and bravely sought new ways of probing these. At its heart it placed some of the most topical values of sustainability, integration and participation. It sought to place the communities, for whom these peripheral areas are home, at the centre of the process and to bring the many public bodies whose activities impinge on these areas together in support. Its aim was to create a new framework for understanding and building local development on the principles of sustainability and the foundation stones of natural and cultural heritage. It gave itself three years to achieve a working model in partnership with three special areas.

During its short life Dùthchas involved many people, created much activity, linked with many other initiatives and places. It developed methods and tools for involving people, creating partnership with agencies and addressing the elusive yet critical concept of sustainability. Through these tools local people refined their visions and ideas for their future, linked these to their definitions of sustainability and agreed their strategies for the way ahead. They started work on many projects and addressed their own organisation for the future so that the work might go on beyond the lifespan of Dùthchas.

Through all of this effort we learned that local people love their environment, their community and their heritage and want to sustain them all in good heart. That they will work closely with outside agencies who share their values and wish to support their vision for the future. We learned of the huge untapped reservoir of local knowledge and wisdom and the willingness to act on this when given encouragement and support. We also learned of the enormous handicaps under which these communities suffer and the lack of control over the decisions and resources that shape their lives. Many give long hours of voluntary time to bring their good ideas to life, and negotiate the hurdles of the many organisations that determine policies and resources, without the aid even of a local paid helper to write the funding applications.

From this work emerged the flowering of a new vision for the future. A future in which each area grows with pride in its own unique identity. In which its natural assets become the foundation stones of its economy. Where its natural resources are used with imagination, diversity and respect and all possible value is accrued locally. Where all that wind and water is turned to productive use, generating the energy for a new economy. Where nothing is wasted and waste is turned to good use. A place where culture and social activity flower. A community which has control over its own resources and the decisions about its future. A future in which the young could say with honesty that 'everything I want is here'. *A Dùthchas community?*

Our thanks to all those who gave so freely of their time, ideas and energy to build this vision for the future and our sincerest hopes that one day this vision becomes your reality.

The Dùthchas Team

S e obair latha tòiseachadh ach 's e obair beatha crìochnachadh

It's a day's work to start, but a lifetime's work to finish

The Dùthchas Team – from left to right: Vanessa Halhead, Project Manager; Mikk Sarv, visitor from Estonian Rural Parliament; Sine Gillespie, Area Co-ordinator Trotternish; Ron Beard, visitor from the University of Maine; Caitriona MacCuish, Area Co-ordinator North Uist; Iain Macdonald, Area Co-ordinator Trotternish; Isobel Macphail, Project Officer; Visitor from Estonia; Kerry Conlon, Area Co-ordinator North Sutherland; Wilma Chestnut, Administrative Assistant; Neil Nicholson, GIS Agent North Uist; Meg Telfer, Area Co-ordinator North Sutherland.

Dùthchas Publications

Dùthchas
Our Place in the Future