

Dùthchas

Working for the sustainable development of rural areas

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This newsletter has been produced in-house to minimise production costs. It is printed on environmentally friendly paper.



Norwegian apples at the latitude of Shetland

International intrigue!

Vanessa Halhead, Project Manager, considers the benefits of links with our European neighbours

Does Norway hold the secret of sustainable rural development ?

- **Why are thriving communities found all along Norway's vast and isolated coastline?**
- **How do the tiniest strips of land, north of Shetland, produce a huge range of crops, which are also processed in isolated communities ?**
- **How come the very modern transport system serves every tiny place and is fully integrated ?**
- **Why is the natural forest flourishing and benefiting local communities?**
- **Why are small communities growing rich from hydro-power ?**
- **Why is it that the communities are so confident of their own abilities ?**

Such questions were constantly on the lips of the 15 strong Dùthchas team which visited Norway in September. Six of the communities taking part in the Rural Development Programme in the County of Sogn og Fjordane tried to provide the answers. Some big differences between Scotland and Norway emerged:

The Commune system

Communes have most functions of local government, but cover very small areas of 1,000 to 10,000 people. So key decisions are taken very locally - education, health, services, planning, jobs for 500-1000 people, including professionals, are provided by the Commune; income and property tax are collected by the Commune with around 14% of GDP managed at Commune level.

The County Governor

All the government ministries are grouped together at County level under a County Governor, whose job it is to focus their work to meet local need.

Land tenure

Land is owned in small units - on average 6 ha. arable and 27 ha. forestry. Under the Udal system land is inherited within the family and cannot easily be sold outwith the family, then only to those who commit to occupy the property for 5 years. Land above the tree line is owned by the Government. This system retains local people in close association with the land.

Community Control

These small local landowners have rights to all the natural resources of their area - forest, game, rivers, sea-bed, minerals, etc. Local owners co-operate to manage the bigger resources and to process and market produce. Businesses which wish to use natural resources (eg. power companies) must have a financial agreement with the landowners, may be subject to a Commune property tax and often enter into partnership with the landowners or Commune. In this way the financial benefits of Norway's natural resources accrue directly to the local people.

Norway, it appears, is organised for rural development, and the results of this are clear for all to see. The Dùthchas group felt strongly that The Scottish Parliament would do well to regard the lessons of Norway in considering how to implement their policies for rural Scotland.

Inside you can read about the ideas brought back from Norway by the Uist, Sutherland and Skye teams. A full report of the visit is available from the Project Office.

Trotternish Peninsula

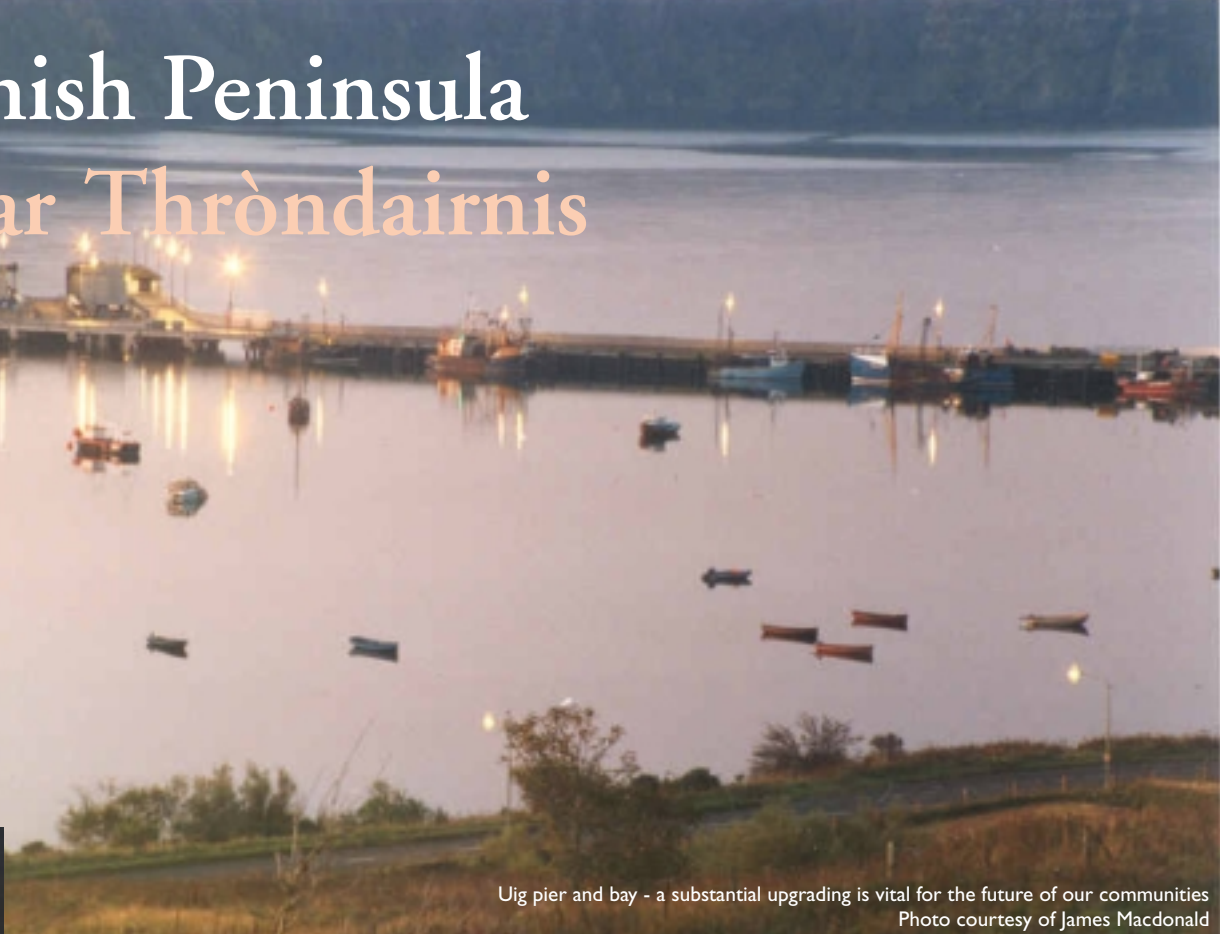
- Iochdar Thròndairnis



Donald Macdonald- chairman

Introduction

Dùthchas is bringing your local priorities to the agenda of the agencies. We've all got to keep a broad vision. Local projects are not necessarily sustainable on their own. No man is an island. That's why strategic thinking is essential. We have to create better links within and between our communities. And it's very important that we begin to marry all local projects into the Dùthchas strategy which is about to get underway.



Uig pier and bay - a substantial upgrading is vital for the future of our communities
Photo courtesy of James Macdonald

A Word From the Chairman

Donald Macdonald is the new local Chairman

At the local Advisory Group meeting of Dùthchas in November 1999, five topics were selected to be the focus of the area strategy and these will be brought forward by community groups over the next few months.

Trails and interpretation

This topic was chosen, acknowledging the potential to develop our tourism industry by providing recreational facilities. The Trotternish Ridge is common to all our communities and was once the highway which linked us together. Let's revive this tradition, and create coastal, industrial and cultural walks. Our peninsula offers people the chance to enjoy the most accessible landscape in Skye.

Renewable energy

Also selected, was 'renewable energy' with **wind power** being a particularly feasible attraction. The potential of producing our own power to sell to the National Grid or, better still, for our own use, must be attractive to us all. **Our own energy** would be safe and completely sustainable, and it needn't cause damage to the environment.

Reduction of waste

The group targetted this as another strategy issue here. We need to protect our environment and look at the image we

present to the outside world. The picture postcard of the thrush nesting in the old abandoned tractor may appeal but the reality is that most of our rubbish, large and small, is harmful.

Diversification

Due to the declining market for lamb and beef, the group decided to look at **diversification** with a mind to encouraging the **production of local and organic products**. This growing market could be further developed with a focus on local branding and quality control.

Transport

Finally, we should all applaud the strong campaign by the residents of Uig to retain their ferry service. **Integrated transport and better infrastructure** has been identified by the group as a strategy issue. We should realise the importance of such vital links - not only for the people of Uig, but for everybody in the Trotternish peninsula.

Project update...

Public meetings were held in each community to pick an initial project to take forward, from those voted for in the Initial Review.

Duntulm castle was chosen by the Kilmuir community as the project most people want to take forward. The fact that local people are helping to save a 2,000 year old historic building is only one aspect to a fascinating development, which may also involve interpretation, trails, landuse etc.

The Staffin community recently got a boost when it secured funding for a new slipway. On account of this, **an upgraded hall at Staffin** has been chosen as the priority project of the Dùthchas task group.

The Uig Community Development Association have had a busy year, working very hard to secure a future for the ferry service in Uig. Local decision making is an important feature of sustainability, and the local task group will be linking with the Dùthchas strategy team to take forward their **plans for the pier and bay development**.

Kensaleyre and Borve communities will be nurturing old links between townships **to make a cycle and bridle path from the old road**. Horse riding is popular, particularly with young local teenagers, and the task group will be improving access to our countryside.

Partnerships are important to get the most out of initiatives. For example, we are working up a pilot arts project for our peninsula with the help of the **Scottish Arts Council**. This project will include harvesting together original local artistic material, offering tuition of this material in our schools and boosting our local cultural events. A group is being set up to take this forward. Another example of partnership is the role that Dùthchas is playing in co-ordinating a consultation between communities and agencies concerning a possible nature and history trail to the **Columba loch** site at Kilmuir.



One local strategy team is looking at ways to diversify on the land
Photo courtesy of James Macdonald

Visit to Sogn og Fjordane

Alaistar Nicholson from Borve reports...

As we headed up the coast from Bergen by express boat I was immediately made aware of the importance placed on good communications. These aircraft style boats operate a very efficient service linking communities up and down the coast and into the interior via the fjords. Other local ferry, train and bus services all appeared to integrate with ease.

The value placed on infrastructure was further reinforced during the rest of the visit as we were driven along good road networks with many tunnels, bridges and ferries making it relatively easy to travel around this difficult coastline.

As well as the obvious beauty of the area I was impressed by the organised visual appeal of the many villages that we passed through. Individual farmers cropped small areas and collaborated with neighbours in the shared forestry resource. Overall they appeared to be working in 'tune' with their environment.

As we met and spoke with representatives from the local communities it was obvious that here people felt that they could make a difference. Due to higher levels of decentralisation, local services are locally controlled and developed to meet their particular needs thus encouraging people to stay.

Individuals appeared to be aware of the overall community needs and were keen to promote local culture as well as local produce. This vibrant community confidence was evident in the areas visited where communities had agreed to the development of natural resources. This had been carried out on their terms with ongoing financial returns to the communities.



The Trotternish team deep in discussion

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North Uist - Uibhist a'Tuath



Lochmaddy bay



Uisdean Robertson, Chairman

North Uist consists of a complex mosaic, which combines the people, the land, the sea, history and culture. When we begin to make a plan for the future of North Uist we must look closely at all these factors.

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A Word From the Chair

Uisdean Robertson introduces the strategy groups

At a recent Advisory Group meeting four topics were selected which will form **sustainable strategies** for the future of North Uist. A group will be formed for each topic, **involving community members** and appropriate agency or national groups who also have an interest.

The land – marketing of local produce

Many people find it hard to understand why we import so many goods when in the past we actually exported many of them. For instance North Uist lamb is praised for its delicate taste yet every week lorry loads of meat cross the Minch bound for our shops. At a time when sheep prices are so low should we not be marketing our stock as something special – it's from Uist, it's machair fed, it's heather fed, it's free range. Why are people not **buying locally grown fruit and vegetables** since it is now more readily available? Why are more people not growing their own machair potatoes? Visitors who get to taste our local produce are amazed that all the hotels and B&B's do not use this fresh and tasty produce. There are also many other **local handicrafts and skills** which we should be proud of and could market as they something really special. These are only some of the issues which this strategy group will address.

The sea – sustainable use of marine resources

Fishing has been a main stay industry for centuries yet how often **do the local people eat local fish?** Visitors to the island see the fishing boats but find it hard to purchase the catch. With quotas and restriction on some of the more traditional catches should we look

at diversifying? How do we ensure that young people are encouraged to keep fishing? Should locally caught fresh fish and shellfish not be **served in our hotels and restaurants?** Generations ago seaweed was harvested by every crofter and more recently many skilled cutters were employed in this industry. The community have many ideas of how this important natural resource could be used - fertiliser, health foods and alginates. Are any of these ideas feasible and if so how do we progress them? These are some of the issues facing the marine resources group.

Renewable energy

People mentioned the weather when they were asked what they disliked about North Uist. Why not see this natural resource in a positive light? **Think of the energy that must be produced** every time a storm crashes in from the west. Could this not be used to create renewable energy? **Must we rely on the mainland supply?** Could we produce enough to export? Would it produce jobs to attract our young people to return? There are so many questions, it is time that we answered them and created some action.

Tourism - using North Uist's unique features

There is so much to know about North Uist and there are so many interesting places - but do the visitors who come here find them? How will people know where to go if we don't point them in the right direction and how will they know about **the generations who have been here before us** if we do not provide them with this information? Telling some of this story might help attract visitors in the first instance. The tourism group will have to think creatively about these issues.



Pillow fight at the North Uist Games

North Uist Update - *Caitriona reports*

In addition to the strategy work described opposite by Uisdean Robertson, the Advisory Group has chosen several projects which link in with two of the strategy topics.

Box delivery scheme

Duthchas will support the Horticultural Association in setting up a **box delivery scheme** which will coordinate local growers and buyers, to be up and running by next spring. Growers will supply a list of what harvest they expect in a given week which is sent to buyers and orders taken. Orders will be assembled centrally and delivered to **homes, hotels or collection-points**. Links have been made with box schemes in Skye and the Black Isle to learn from their experiences. A logo competition was

held in local schools before Christmas, which will be used to market Horticultural Association produce.

Interpretation of Carinish Township

This will involve the renovation of old buildings in the area to house interpretation material about **Teampull na Trianaid** and archaeology, local history and traditions, and the natural environment and crofting. This facility will be a resource available to local people, schools and visitors. A local task group to take this project forward has been set up which includes local people and agencies.

Arts Project

A legend trail around North Uist is being developed with funding from the Scottish Arts Council. Visitors or locals will be guided round the island using a **CD/tape and a booklet**, which will include tales from oral tradition, traditional music and information about archaeological or interesting sites. It is hoped that this first booklet could lead to a series about North Uist. We are looking for people who are interested in local legends and traditions to form a group to progress this project.

Norway : lessons for North Uist

Helen Forbes sums up . . .

We learnt many lessons from the Rural Development Programme and from talking to local people in Sogn og Fjordane. Perhaps the most important lesson for North Uist is that **we need to lobby for greater control at a local level**. It was clear that the system of government in Norway lends itself to a greater degree of community involvement and a sense of control over the future.

The importance of diversification for small farmers was obvious when we visited Steinar Myrøld's farm. He was producing crops of strawberries, apples, potatoes and Christmas trees, ensuring he had a summer and winter crop. People in the surrounding community believed in **supporting their local producers**. Small farmers are also diversifying into other areas including tourism accommodation using traditional buildings.

A problem common in both countries is the loss of young people. We often attribute the problem to a lack of employment and education; yet in rural Norway there seems to be no shortage of jobs but the young still prefer to move to the cities. The Norwegian rural communities are committed to **teaching their young to value rural life**. Although we need more employment in our area we must also encourage the young to be proud of their rich cultural heritage and to appreciate the many positive aspects of living in a small rural community.

Community development works best when it takes place at a very local level. Many of the communities we visited

who were taking part only had a population of 150, however they believed that they could achieve success to the same degree as larger communities. People **feel a sense of community within their own immediate area** and on our return we felt that local task groups should be set up in North Uist to take small local projects forward.

Other important factors contributing to the success of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) included: government's commitment to ensuring the survival of rural communities; the RDP funding is given to the communities with no restriction on how it is spent - **the community can decide** if they want to spend it on a project worker or on a particular project; The community feels that they are trusted to make decisions for themselves and that they have some control of the future.

A full report of the Norway study trip is available from the local office or the library.



The North Uist team on a short break!

North Sutherland

-Duthaich MhicAoidh



Loch Eribol

North Sutherland Update *Meg and Anna report...*

Task groups up and running

During the summer we held meetings asking each of 11 communities to choose their own project. Task groups have now been set up:

- **Melvich: village hall improvements.**

The hall committee now has a constitution and are looking for funding.

- **Skerryray: availability of local produce.**

Invited Michael Wiggin to talk to the group about marketing lamb and Mary Beith to talk about medical vetch.

- **Strathy: Log cabin information point**

Using logs from Borgie, natural energy source, local knowledge and skills. Plans now being drawn up and seeking funding.

- **Armadale: Shop to sell local produce**

plus heritage display. Housing to attract more people was needed - feasibility study going on, possible funding identified.

- **Melness: Upgrading community**

centre/ pier/ youth café. Publicity campaign planned to get more people involved.

- **Bettyhill: Interpretation centre at**

Clachan - Feasibility study is being carried out with funding from CASE. Duthchas funded 2 people to visit Taigh Chearsabhagh, arts centre in North Uist.

- **Durness: new village hall.** Money granted by the Lottery.

- **Altnaharra: shop/café/information centre** - investigating buying a building.

- **Strathnaver: more use of the village hall and a children's play area.** Task group have carried out a local questionnaire.

- **Halladale: children's educational play area** in woods adjacent to the hall and a community display in the hall.

- **Tongue: Ewen Robertson history museum.** Currently looking into ownership of the building believed to be his home.

Traditional Music in North Sutherland project

With funding from **The Scottish Arts Council** a project has been developed that will offer **monthly expert tuition** in fiddle, chanter/pipes, accordian/keyboards, whistle, Gaelic singing and language at venues throughout the area. The session will be open to people of all ages and will be run with a ceilidh atmosphere. The project is planned to start in January 2000.

Social Inclusion Partnership

Yvonne Mackay, Durness, has now been appointed to co-ordinate the project and we will continue to be involved.

Iomairt aig an Oir

A steering group has been set up to take forward the **community forestry initiative**. They will discuss with Forest Enterprise a management agreement for Borgie Forest. Sandy Murray (Halladale), Rowan van Mycen (Durness), Simon Mitchell (Scourie) and Anna MacConnell gave presentations at the **laaO conference in Harris**, highlighting some of our particular problems, and some of the solutions the communities have come up with.

Strategy topics chosen

The Advisory Group chose to draw up strategies for the following topics. The first meeting of the strategy groups was 14 Dec:

1. **Interpretation, access and marketing of natural and cultural heritage**
2. **Development and marketing of local natural produce**
3. **Young Returners**
4. **Essential Services**
5. **Sustainable Land Use/Renewable Energy**

Please get in touch if you want to get involved.

Introduction

Dùthchas is just passing through. We are on to the final year of the Project during which we will facilitate the writing of sustainable development strategies for North Sutherland which will be in operation long after the Dùthchas Project is just a memory. We hope that the people in the communities and the local agency staff will continue to work together this year and into the future in the spirit of Dùthchas.

A Strategy for development and marketing local produce

Ron Celli, Bettyhill, Strathnaver and Altnaharra Community Council raises some questions:

- **Resources** - what resources do we have and are we using them effectively?
- **People** - what skills do we have, are they being best used, what is the potential there?
- **Transport / distribution** – what transport is available and where to? How can that be improved?
- **Marketing** – what is the potential for marketing eg. trade fairs, advertising locally and nationally, brochures etc.
- **Quality control** – how will this be carried out? Should market forces judge quality or should it be in-house?
- **Accommodation** – are there places for businesses to expand into or start up in? Is there housing available for returning families?
- **Training** – what training is available and what in? Does this need to be improved? Does it meet the needs of the our communities?
- **Confidence** – do we have confidence in our produce, in ourselves?

When we have answered such issues we can work out collectively a method for getting a better deal for our local producers.

“Fear nach seall roimhe seallaidh e as a dheidh” – “He who does not plan ahead will have cause for regret” – old Gaelic proverb courtesy of the late Joseph Mackay, Melness.

A Strategy for our cultural and natural heritage

Pat Thompson, RSPB makes some suggestions...

So what is the point?

Quite simply, our cultural and natural heritage is so special that we can ill afford to destroy it. **Our cultural heritage** tells us a great deal about how we once lived our lives. Hut circles, brochs, burial chambers and even a solitary gravestone tell us so much about where we have come from and who we are. Life in the past has shaped who we are today. **Our natural heritage** is also a vital ingredient of today's life. Golden Eagle, Atlantic Salmon, Freshwater Pearl Mussel and Scottish Primrose are good examples of the special wildlife found in North Sutherland. All of this wildlife is supported by the **land and water**, both of which are vital resources.

It is vitally important to plan for the future. We need to identify what is special at a local, national and international level and take steps to conserve and use these resources to our best advantage. Balance is the key here.

It is widely accepted that Sutherland is a special place - testament to how we used our resources in the past. Surely, it is wise to take a fresh look at how we live our lives, if only to say we did our best for future generations.



Native woodland, North Sutherland



Timber yard, Haugen, Norway

Lessons from Norway

Sandra Munro, Marty Mackay, Sandy Murray and Anna MacConnell give a short report of their visit...

It was good to see people in a similar situation as ourselves accomplishing things through their Rural Development Programme. We found in many ways the communities there are so like our own here in Sutherland - we have many of the same problems and none of us have answers to them all. The Norwegians are adept at using local natural resources and their right to do so is protected by law.

One of the best used resources in the Norwegian communes is **timber**. Almost all the buildings we visited were built from and fitted out in wood, harvested locally. The Norwegian Forestry Department's top priority is to build roads to access timber. After the visit we agreed that timber processing

at or near source is something that could be done in Sutherland to bring local economic benefit.

Almost all the food we ate in Norway was locally produced - **fish, jams, fruit, honey, cheese, milk, butter, lamb, beef, game, vegetables and home made bread and rolls**. The Norwegians benefit from strong import controls which reduce their need to compete with world markets. We agreed that in the UK there should be encouragement for local producers to market and sell their goods locally and make it easier for the smaller units to compete on the national/international market.

One of the benefits of a study trip like this is that as well as seeing other communities and learning about them, you come back and **see your own country with fresh eyes** and see where we have gone wrong and the things we have done right. We can build on that.

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Anna MacConnell is leaving Duthchas in January to take up her new post as Community Initiatives Manager with Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise. We wish her well for the future.

DUTHCHAS PARTNERS

Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

Crofters' Commission

Forestry Commission

Forest Enterprise

Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Historic Scotland

North of Scotland Water Authority

Scottish Arts Council

Scottish Environment Protection Agency

Scottish Homes

Scottish Museums Council

Scottish Natural Heritage

Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Department

Scottish Tourist Board

Scottish Environment LINK

Skye and Lochalsh Enterprise

The Highland Council

The Scottish Council Development and Industry

University of the Highlands and Islands

Western Isles Enterprise



Fjordane Primary School

Our place in Europe

Norway is just one example of how inspirational it can be to look at other countries. Duthchas is a European Project and has a remit to share its findings and make links with other parts of Europe. How can this benefit us here in Scotland? Each region has thought out its own ways of tackling the same problems, and many of them could work for us. Several practical, local benefits of our European links have already been felt - local links have been made re. blueberry production, wild salmon interpretation, community forestry and horticulture. **Inter-community links** are being planned between the Norwegian and Dùthchas communities.

Dùthchas held a **transnational conference** in April (see Newsletter 1) more such gatherings are planned on topics such as organic agriculture, local produce, young returners. We are building a **network of international contacts** to make it easier to link with people in other places working with similar issues. We hope that some of you will have the chance to benefit in the coming years.

Project update - Lorna Walker, Project Officer, explains

The last few months have been a busy period. We've been finalising the **information gathering** stage of the work and have started on the next - **developing local strategies**.

Newsletter 1 told the story of how Dùthchas sought the views of around 1000 local people and 22 agencies on the strengths, challenges and ideas for the future of the three pilot areas. The next step was to **gather together the facts and figures** behind all of this to give a 'profile' of the area's sustainability. Reports of both of these stages are available (see below).

The findings of this work were presented at the Area Advisory Group meetings, where the groups chose the **5 topics** most important to the future of their area. These are all extremely challenging topics and will be the focus of the local strategies. We will organise **information seminars** on these topics, giving vital information on the agencies responsible, and funding opportunities.

At a local level, **21 projects** have now been chosen, across the three Dùthchas areas (see area pages for details). Three of these are community arts projects – made possible by a £5000 grant for each area from the Scottish Arts Council. Please see area pages for details.

In August, 80 people attended an event on '**Information for Communities - you know I.T. makes sense**'. An important part of Dùthchas' work is to make information held by government bodies available to communities through a computer mapping system - with help from the Highland Council.

Dùthchas will soon be consulting with communities on a **Sustainable Communities Scheme**, which will provide support, recognition and benefits to communities for their hard work.

Dùthchas Publications

Initial Review Report: North Uist
Initial Review Report: North Sutherland
Initial Review Report: Trotternish

Each report draws together the views of 300 local people and 22 organisations on the strengths, challenges and ideas for the future

Sustainability Profile: North Uist
Sustainability Profile: North Sutherland
Sustainability Profile: Trotternish

Pulling together the facts and figures on each pilot area to give a picture of how sustainable the area is at present

Value Statement: North Uist
Value Statement: North Sutherland
Value Statement: Trotternish

Colourful images of people and places in the pilot area along with sentiments gathered during the Initial Review (limited copies)

'Our place in the future': video
'Looking after the future': Conference Report
'You know I.T. makes sense': seminar report
'Scotland /Norway exchange': a report of the study visit
Dùthchas Newsletter 1: Summer 1999

The video contains images of people at work and play in the pilot areas, along with music, voices and sayings which capture the spirit of the areas - an honest portrayal of how local people see their future

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