

our land, our people  
and our place  
in the future



**BENEFITING FROM OUR CULTURAL & NATURAL HERITAGE**

**Dùthchas Information Seminar  
North Uist  
June 2000**



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## Welcome and Introduction

Roddy MacDonald, Chairman

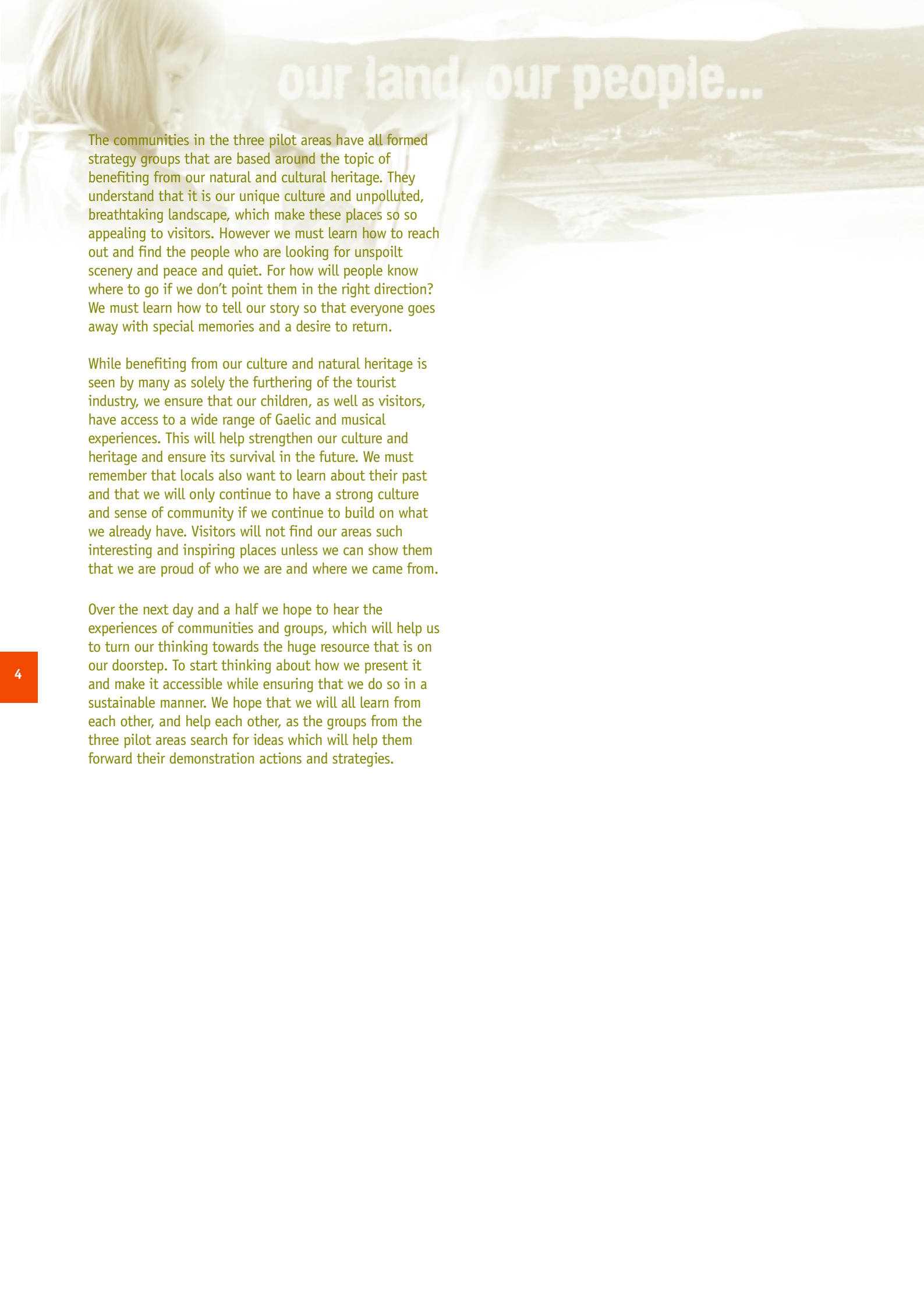
Madainn mhath agus fàilte gu Càirinis. Tha sinn gu h-àraidh toilichte fàilte a chur air na daoine a tha air siubhal á Tìr Mòr agus tha sinn an dòchas gum faigh iad beagan a-mach mu Uibhist a Tuath agus na tha againn ri thairgse dhaibh. Tha sinn cuideachd an dòchas gum faigh sinn beagan de bhlas air de a tha a tachairt ann an coimhearsnachdan eile agus gun obraich sinn comhla airson ionnsachadh fhaighinn air mar a bhuannaicheas sinn bho na dileaban nàduir agus dualchais a tha mun cuairt gach duine againn.

Hello, and a warm welcome to North Uist and the first of the Dùthchas Information Seminars. We give an especially warm welcome to those who have travelled from Sutherland, Skye and Inverness and we hope that you enjoy your visit to North Uist and that you get a chance to experience some of our cultural and natural heritage. We also hope that you have come with your own experiences and ideas so that we can all share our knowledge, and in this way learn from each other in order to develop and benefit from this special and unique resource without damaging it for future generations.

Over the last two years the communities of North Sutherland, Trotternish in Skye and North Uist have worked very hard in the development of local strategies for the future of their areas. Dùthchas is now into the final stage of the project where the strategies will be written up and presented to the partners and it is time for the communities to take forward the actions that they have carefully selected.

Throughout the Dùthchas process one topic has been prominent at each stage – cultural and natural heritage. All three pilot areas were chosen because they possess remarkable environmental and cultural heritage. The community consultation revealed that people value the scenery and landscape, the machair flowers, the birds and wildlife; they feel a very real connection to the land. They also feel a sense of belonging because they can see our links to the past, through genealogy and archaeology and the rich history of the Gaelic language and the music and tales that go hand in hand with it.

In North Uist the uniqueness of the environment may be measured by the number of national and international designations, which protect our machairs, moorland and seas. The island, including Grimsay and Berneray, supports a population of approximately 1500 people. Many of these people are employed, on a full or part time basis, in the indigenous industries of crofting and fishing – which means that they rely on the land and the sea as generations before them have. However, we now find that more and more people are also involved in tourism related sectors.



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The communities in the three pilot areas have all formed strategy groups that are based around the topic of benefiting from our natural and cultural heritage. They understand that it is our unique culture and unpolluted, breathtaking landscape, which make these places so so appealing to visitors. However we must learn how to reach out and find the people who are looking for unspoilt scenery and peace and quiet. For how will people know where to go if we don't point them in the right direction? We must learn how to tell our story so that everyone goes away with special memories and a desire to return.

While benefiting from our culture and natural heritage is seen by many as solely the furthering of the tourist industry, we ensure that our children, as well as visitors, have access to a wide range of Gaelic and musical experiences. This will help strengthen our culture and heritage and ensure its survival in the future. We must remember that locals also want to learn about their past and that we will only continue to have a strong culture and sense of community if we continue to build on what we already have. Visitors will not find our areas such interesting and inspiring places unless we can show them that we are proud of who we are and where we came from.

Over the next day and a half we hope to hear the experiences of communities and groups, which will help us to turn our thinking towards the huge resource that is on our doorstep. To start thinking about how we present it and make it accessible while ensuring that we do so in a sustainable manner. We hope that we will all learn from each other, and help each other, as the groups from the three pilot areas search for ideas which will help them forward their demonstration actions and strategies.

A photograph of John Love, a man with grey hair, wearing a dark jacket, holding a crofting staff. The background is a blurred landscape of a croft in South Uist, Scotland. The text 'Oh Dear what can the machair be?' is overlaid in orange on the left side of the image.

## Oh Dear what can the machair be?

John Love,  
Scottish Natural Heritage,  
South Uist

John Love has worked for SNH in Uist for a large number of years and has an extensive and interesting slide collection, which he shared with us.

### Topics covered by slides included;

**Monarch Isles (NNR)** – habituated until after WWII, still visited by fishermen and used to graze sheep. Good example of machair-land are seen here. Second largest grey seal colony in the world. Fulmers and Cormorants nesting on the dunes.

**Berneray** – No rabbits as yet making it one of the best machair-lands. Thatched buildings (hostel) and a wonderful sense of history.

**Boreray** – Island used as common grazing by Berneray. Take animals on and off in small boats.

**Lochmaddy(SAC)** – Unique sea and land structure – tidal rapids, sea creatures, otters & common seals. Proposed as a Special Area of Conservation. At present management plan being drawn up between community, users and agencies. Area in past has seaweed industry with many people employed. It is a credit to the industry that it is still such a high ranking site.

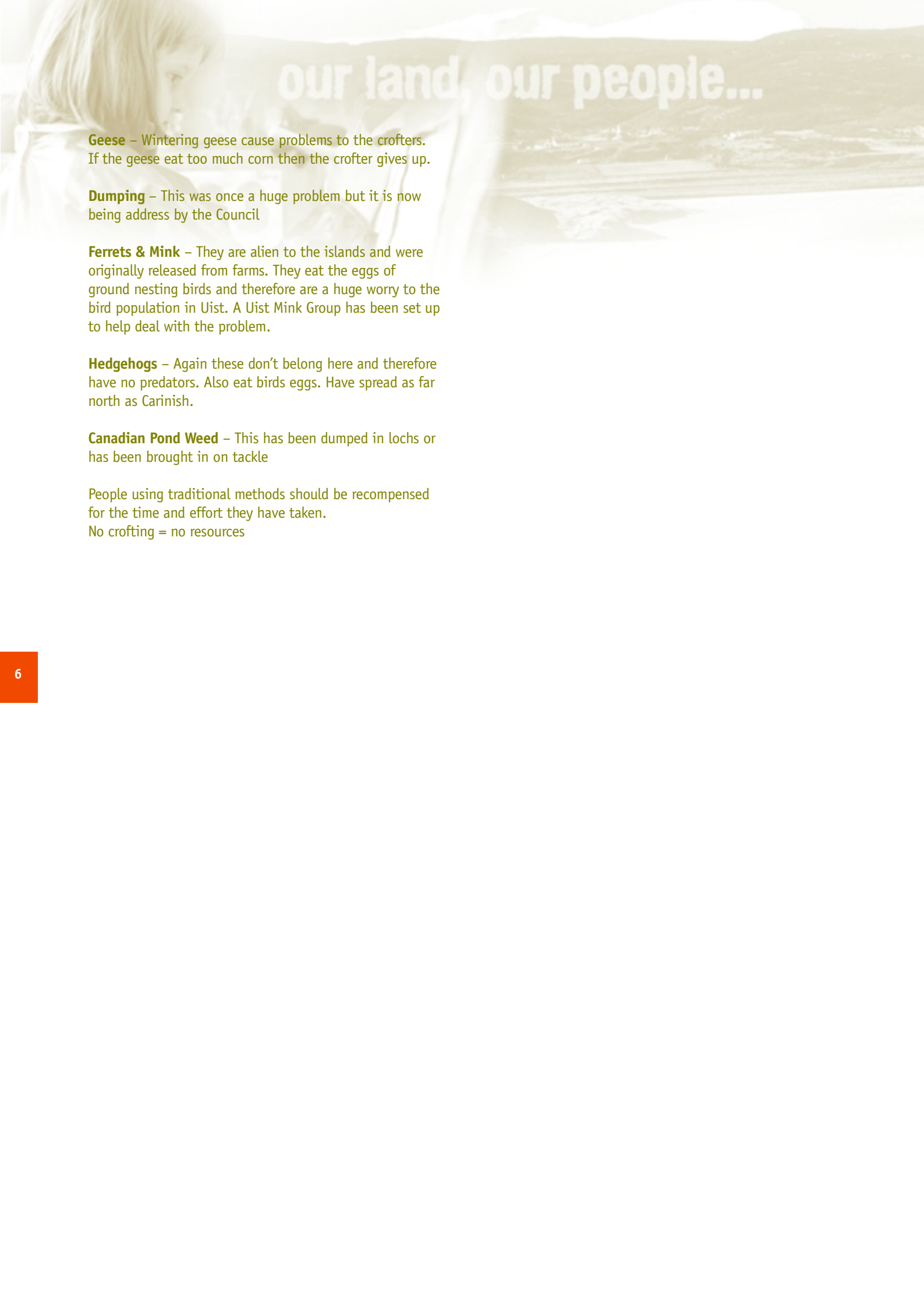
**Vallay Island** – House built by Erskine Beveridge. Island has had many owners but at present owner leases it to a local crofter who is converting to organic.

**Balranald (RSPB)** – attracts many of the visitors that come to Uist - many especially to see the corncrake. Old centre was in bad repair then local agencies got together in partnership to renovate and to add toilet facilities.

**Loch Druidibeg** – traditional crofting practices are present throughout the Uist's. This has supported species such as the corncrake and allowed them to survive here when they have disappeared from other places. This depends on the crofters using low intensity methods. Keeping cattle numbers up is also important to SNH as that helps to conserve the machair-land. There are 20 sheep to every cow in Uist but there is 200 sheep to every cow in Lewis.

**Erosion** – Can be a big problem although it is not as bad as in Harris. Vehicles, tracks and rabbits add to the problem. In winter storms the wind and the sea can eat away many feet of land. Crofters are encouraged to gather kelp and put it on the land as it adds minerals to the ground which helps to bind it together.

**Birds & flowers** – Hebridean Orchid which is a sub species of the Marsh Orchid, Ringed Plovers (1/3 of UK breeding population), Oyster Catchers, Corn Buntings, Lapwings, Dunlins (1/3 of UK breeding population), Redshank, Snipe



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**Geese** – Wintering geese cause problems to the crofters. If the geese eat too much corn then the crofter gives up.

**Dumping** – This was once a huge problem but it is now being address by the Council

**Ferrets & Mink** – They are alien to the islands and were originally released from farms. They eat the eggs of ground nesting birds and therefore are a huge worry to the bird population in Uist. A Uist Mink Group has been set up to help deal with the problem.

**Hedgehogs** – Again these don't belong here and therefore have no predators. Also eat birds eggs. Have spread as far north as Carinish.

**Canadian Pond Weed** – This has been dumped in lochs or has been brought in on tackle

People using traditional methods should be recompensed for the time and effort they have taken.

No crofting = no resources

A photograph of Donald Angie MacLellan, a man with grey hair, wearing a dark jacket, standing outdoors in a coastal setting. He is holding a large, curved object, possibly a piece of driftwood or a traditional fishing tool. The background shows a body of water and distant hills under a bright sky.

## What is a memorable Cultural Experience?

**Donald Angie MacLellan,  
Iomairt Chalum Chille**

Donald Angie was brought up in Lochportain in North Uist. He went to school here until he went away to university and now has his first job, which is on Skye. He works for the Scottish end of the Iomairt Chalum Chille Project, which is trying to extend links between Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. He is based at Sabhal Mor Ostaig which stands as a centre of excellence for education and offering a cultural experience through the medium of Gaidhlig.

Although he now lives in a community with a healthy school roll, soaring property prices and a very cosmopolitan feel he still thinks of Cheesebay as home. He often thinks about how he might be able to help encourage the features of Sleat in North Uist so that he can return home.

### What does he remember as being “memorable” about North Uist?

- Lifting lobster creels with his father having first spent time fishing for bait and to eat at home.
- The annual ritual of cutting the peats with the work gradually getting easier as the weather got better.
- Year round “experience” of tending sheep – lambing, dipping, shearing, and in every instance having first to gather them from the hill.
- The real sense of close extended family of aunts, uncles and cousins
- The freshness and total joy of home cooking and baking
- Going to the local church twice every Sunday and to Sunday school in between
- The friendliness and hardworking nature of the people.
- And common to all this, as the glue to stick the experience together, was the natural use of Gaidhlig. Not only have these elements gelled into making a “memorable cultural experience” but one, which increasingly affects my own life on Skye today.

My point is that a genuinely memorable cultural experience has the local people of that community as its heart. The trick is to give such people the recognition as their way of life is precious and of immense interest to others. However this should not be as part of a heritage centre or museum but as an everyday occurrence, taking place out of necessity.

### Creating a memorable cultural experience in North Uist

Over recent years there has been remarkable progress, in the social and cultural amenities of the Uist’s and Benbecula – Taigh Chearsabhair, Sgoil Lionacleit and Colaisde Bheinn na Faoghla, Nunton Steadings and the newly opened Urachadh Uibhist, plus the encouraging plans for a traditional music and language centre in South Uist.

# our land, our people...

This increasing number of beacons of hope and enthusiasm all have one thing in common – they were brought about by local people and continue to employ and rely on local people to contribute to promoting their unique and precious way of life. Visitors to these facilities then inject valuable money to help the way of life continue.

## Putting a strategic plan in motion

So, we need more such facilities and amenities if we are to help reverse the severe economic impact of the downturn in fishing, crofting and the textile industry – the erosion of the very way of life which gave me my “memorable cultural experience”. However before many more such facilities can be commercially viable in North Uist, in particular, I strongly feel that a positive and conscious effort needs to be made to attract many more working families back to the island – ie year round consumers.

I stand before you as the exact example of the people who need to be attracted back in order for the Uists to maximise the huge potential in offering the world a “memorable cultural experience”.

I would say, in considering a return to North Uist; “but what will I do and where are the jobs?” However, in accepting that the crofting and fishing industries which supported myself, my brother and 2 sisters to adulthood are fast disappearing people need to be encouraged to come back – people like me, who have an idea on what they would like to do and might just be waiting for a chance to come and do it.

## The Irish Experience

Such positive discrimination is very much practised by the Government in the Republic of Ireland with Udaras na Gaeltachta. It recognises the same fragile, economic and depopulation challenges of our own islands and applies a specific budget and team of experts to encourage and develop tourism opportunities in rural areas. It also offers inward investment schemes to companies wishing to set up an administrative or manufacturing base in any of the Gaeltacht areas.

It is by virtue of the fact that this programme of “positive discrimination” by the Irish Government is so established, together with an excellent track record of targeting and accessing significant amounts of European Development funding that it is often dangerous to make comparisons with our own islands situation. We should not assume that what works well for them will also work for us.

Taking on board the previous observation there are excellent examples of “cultural experience” projects in

Ireland, both North and South, which would be more than delighted to make contact with and assist similar projects through the Dúthchas Initiative.

## Partnerships

Through such contacts, models of best practice and experiences can be shared and valuable partnerships struck. These partnerships can help projects to offer the memorable cultural experience. Other partnerships between public bodies can help attract back the crucial year round consumers to such facilities and projects. Dúthchas and Iomairt Chalum Chille partnerships can be struck to allow people to meet so the information sharing process can take place.





## An Tir, an Canan 's na Daoine: Outdoor Learning and more

John White,  
Whitewave Skye's Outdoor Centre

John White has had 30 years experience of outdoor recreation, 20 years experience of outdoor education and has spent the last 10 years on the Isle of Skye building up Whitewave Outdoor Centre.

### I'll start by telling a wee story if I may?

Some of you will know the "Fairy Glen", a magical sort of place, often described as a "miniature Quiriang" above Uig in Trotternish. There is a small lochan, " Castle Ewan", a unique natural hill that has the appearance of a fortification, birch woods, and lots of small valleys and hummocks with a few remains of settlements.

A couple of weeks ago I took my 4 year old daughter and her friends up there. We climbed Castle Ewan, having to be careful at the top, it is narrow and the drop is big enough. We found the cave, result of a bubble in the cooling lava when the rock formed. All four children could just stand inside.

We explored the woods and discovered "death valley", named so by the kids because of there being so many dead sheep. We ran and jumped and chased.

I'd taken a picnic and a tent. With a bit of help the kids erected the tent themselves and the picnic was munched inside. A bit more persuasion to get them to take the tent down before running off down the glen, to be back home.

If I were to review that wee adventure in educational and learning terms I could probably use every buzz word in every document. The experience itself and its use as a stimulus for classroom based learning.

Lets go back to the "Fairy Glen", or any square kilometre in the Dùthchas areas – a group of adults could have a team-building course there, problem solving tasks, saving caches of whisky from the Castle. Disadvantaged youngsters could have a personal social development programme based there, a kayaking skills session on the loch, to increase confidence, and group responsibility. Orienteering and navigation helps develop most cognitive skill, as well as physical. A 50 metre climbing rope could be stretched out down "death valley" represent the 5000million years age of the earth, how far along the rope are the dinosaurs of Jurassic Park? How far along it is the landslide of heavy basalt lava crushing the softer shale and landstone, which actually caused the tortured landscape of the Fairy Glen and the Quiriang and the Storr. Bringing Geology to life and trying to put it in perspective.

The remains of cleared houses, I have often thought it would be good to take a group with sleeping mats and bags, camping stoves, but instead of tents, some tarpaulins to re- roof an old building and then sleep in it. Try and

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bring to life and re-connect with culture and history. Inspire and stimulate – that is what I believe my job is.

The poet John Nicholson better known as the Skipper came from this glen his house I believe still exists as a ruined tote. What a great project for any body to go and find his house while reading his poems, putting them into place. Stimulus for the arts, language, a resource to aid all sorts of development. Personal social development, strategic planning, environmental education – the list is endless.

These are just a few examples of the types of things we do in outdoor learning or outdoor education. And there is nothing wrong with climbing mountains or going kayaking for its own sake its all physical, emotional and spiritual development

## **What has this got to do with this meeting?**

Benefiting from our cultural and natural heritage – the theme of this seminar. I hope I've given a few examples of how the landscape can be used as a resource for learning and I could argue that learning is the crux of the matter.

I am delighted that the seminar has brought together cultural and natural heritage – for too long now we have concentrated n separate issues, but environmental, economic, cultural and sociological, they are all so related and can never be looked at in isolation.

I took the title of this talk from the Highland Land League motto – An Tìr, An Canan 's na Daoine; The Land, The Language and the People. I'd like to show you how I think they all fit together.

I would like to put the model on all the walls of the offices of all the agencies to remind people of the greater picture and if I had a vision for all development, it would take into account this model, whilst being creative and inspirational.

## Traditional Music

# our place in the future

*"Today nostalgia rules in our culture reducing much of our cultural heritage to the pathetic level of popular kitsch"*

**Alexander Moffat**

There is a fine line between exploiting and benefiting – if we want to benefit from our cultural heritage. Beware, have pride and respect and don't pander to the purist.

Dust bin man

Secretary

Doctor

Community worker

Tree planter

Festival organiser

Odd jobber

Post office worker

What's the connection?

All jobs held by some of the Highlands finest musicians

Obviously there are personal situations, not all musicians want to make a living from music, but as a society shouldn't we strive to allow our artists to make a living.

For example musicians are still expected to play for beer or nothing. STB/HOST (among others) are flagging up traditional music as an attraction but will not address payment.

However I want to be positive so I looked for a good example and heard about Quebec. In Quebec bands can get sponsored by the government to go out and play. I contracted the Cultural Attache for the Government, Colin Hix, who told me that in 1961 they started to set up the infrastructure that supports artists today. This does not happen overnight and involves a big investment but in the long run is worth it. 400million dollars per annum is allocated to the Ministry of Culture. This ensures training, employment, resources (theatres, record companies, etc), and distribution.

Political will must come from the top and the bottom.

## It's the way you tell them -What's in a Story?

Rona Gibb, Highland Interpretive Strategy  
Project

There are hundreds of ways of interpretation. Often numerous leaflets and panels tell people the same thing but interpretation is also music, art, theatre, environment and culture. We should however look at the broader scale of things and make links with other areas. People are not interested in "who done it" logos (list of funders), all they want is easy access to the information.

For panels there should be a really good reason before you stick one in the ground - good practice is approximately 150 words and lots of pictures so that it is easy to translate for all nationalities. The fewer words you have the better. Large, clear lettering should also be used and complicated maps or diagrams should be avoided. If you are going to use Gaelic it should not be added in a box at the end as an after thought. (Likewise for leaflets)

Panels should not be intrusive but should blend in and compliment the surroundings. Panels are there for people who want to look at them but should not be visually intrusive for those who do not want to read them. Think about using trail panels in strainers – they fold away when someone isn't using it.

When you think about putting up a panel you should also think about how you are going to maintain it and upgrade it. If you apply for funding then also apply for money to keep the panel looking at its best and up to date. Old and out of date information is no use to anyone. It is cheaper to buy two panels at the start rather than get one later. When you apply for funding it should be set out who's responsibility the up keep of the panel is.

Sometimes no panel is better than an old, damaged, out of date panel – this gives visitors the impression that no one cares about the area.

However although some panelling is good, first person interpretation is the best way to communicate with visitors; rangers, tour guides, historians, etc. However it is costly and therefore not always possible.

### You want to interpret...

1. Firstly you need an idea – what do you want to tell people?
2. Then you throw it around, and work on the bits you think are most important
3. Communicate with others to get more ideas
4. Plan how you will do it – leaflet, panel, guide?
5. Action (getting it down onto paper or panels)
6. Finally then main thing is giving people the thing they want and allowing them to get what you want them to get from it.



## What is our wildlife worth?

Pat Thompson, RSPB, Sutherland

Pat was brought up in Culraive, then went to Paisley Tech, to London, to Durham and then to Sutherland. Work gave him the chance to come back to Sutherland.

The word “worth” means something different to us all – to some it is economic and to others aesthetic.

### So what is the economic value of our wildlife?

Pat showed slides to illustrate.

Shooting parties come for the **Red Deer** and spend money in the area – however red deer also damage the land by overgrazing.

**Salmon** and Brown **Trout** also attract many people to the area to fish.

**Puffins** – Sea Parrots – visitors visit the area especially to see the puffins; therefore they too have an economic value.

**Sea Eagles & Red Kites** – again attract visitors

**Dolphins** – attract large numbers to the Moray Firth

**Scottish Primrose** – survives through existing land management practices.

**Machair** – unique to our west coast

**Corncrake** – huge economic value

### Black Throated Diver –

Appalling to hear that Cal Mac is not more customer friendly – in Sutherland Scot-Rail have special packages and rates and encourage eco-tourism. There are also Landrover Safari’s and many guided walks. There are 2 full time staff and several seasonal jobs now compared to 5 years ago when there were none. SNH now have 16 jobs in Caithness and Sutherland.

Forsinard has produced an additional spend of £200,000 pa due to visitors who come especially to see it.

Another economic value that we receive from our environment is money given to crofter or landowners for looking after the land. For example ESA, Countryside Premium Scheme, Peatland Scheme, Corncrake payments

Therefore many jobs are created from our wildlife and environment in the Highlands and Island and many visitors are attracted here because of this unique environment and wildlife – therefore we must look after it wisely if it is going to be worth anything in the future.

**Ceolas**  
**Deirdre Morrison & Will Lamb,**  
**South Uist Traditional**  
**Music Summer School**

Ceolas is a music summer school, which is held each year in South Uist. It is based on revitalising and revamping the culture that has existed for many generations; traditional music, Gaelic songs, house ceilidhs etc

Hamish Moore visited Cape Breton and was impressed with how alive the culture was. He decided to bring some of the people back to their roots in the islands and have them as tutors at the summer school. It brings people from all over the world together – many from Canada, America and Europe. Many people usually find it difficult to find Gaelic language and song in it's natural setting but this makes it possible and this means they come back year after year.

There are classes in many activities. For example Gaelic language, fiddle, piping and step dancing. Many of the tutors come from Cape Breton but many are also local people, however all are of a very high standard and could fill a hall anywhere in the world.

Ceolas continues to expand and there are plans to have a Ceolas day at the Celtic Connections Festival in Glasgow. Also want to create a year long programme and Ceolas days in North Uist to encourage people in the north to get involved. There are already step dancing and fiddle evening classes in South Uist throughout the year and twice monthly session where musicians can get together. St Peter's Dance Club has approximately 100 people from South Uist attending regularly, as the craic is so good.

This year sees the first year of the new Foundation Course in Gaelic Music and Language at Colaisde Bheinn a Faoghla. There is also a proposal to build a Traditional Music Centre in South Uist, this would give people a physical structure to look for – visitors would know where to get information.

People who visit here want to find out more about the area and the traditions and through Ceolas they can do this. They also get a chance to build a relationship with the people, the community and the area itself. The community have been involved with Ceolas from the beginning and they hope to continue to have a strong relationship in the future.

## Tourists tell us what they want, what they really, really want

Mary Ann MacIver,  
Western Isles Tourist Board

The WITB contracted Macpherson Research to undertake a Visitor Study in the 1999 season. One of the advantages of doing this for the islands is that you can genuinely catch every visitor since they all must take a ferry or a plane to get there.

### Who Comes to the Western Isles?

The summary results are as follows:

Total Visitors (all purposes)	165,000 people
Total Spend	£32.9 Million
Purpose of Trip	Holiday 66% Business 18% VFR 16%
Origin	Scotland 38% Other UK 38% Overseas 24%
Length of Stay on Islands	Average 6.37 nights
Length of Stay – Highlands & Islands	Average 9.70 nights
Total nights away from home	14.1 nights
Average spend per person per trip in W Isles	£203
Average Party Size	2.12 people
Party Type	Couple 38% Family 21% Individual 16% Friends 15% Group/ tour 7%
Main Transport on islands	Private car 48% Hire car 17% Public bus 9% Private bus/ coach 8%
Main Accommodation on Islands	Hotel/Guest house 26% B&B 20% VFR/own property 20% Self catering 10% Camping 9% Hostel/ Bunkhouse 7%
Proportion of Visitors Visiting:	Lewis 71% Harris 56% North Uist 35% Benbecula 35% South Uist 29% Barra 19%

## What motivates the visitors?

For holidaymakers, 60% were on their main holiday and 40% were taking a second holiday or short break. The most common reason, among holiday makers, was the natural environment (44% mentioned this) and the cultural environment, which was mentioned by 6%. Commonly used phrases were: peace and quiet, remoteness, wildness, wilderness, isolation, getting away from it all, scenery, landscape, nature, the sea, birds, marine life. Cultural reasons included: crofting way of life, Gaelic, friendly and hospitable people and the way of life in general. Special interests were mentioned by less than 4%.

## Influences on making the decision to visit:

- Previous visit or knowledge - 31%
- Advice from friends and relatives - 29%
- Guide books and brochures (especially overseas visitors) - 14%
- Internet (especially for overseas visitors) - 7%

## Sporting Activities

- More than half took part in one or more sporting activity:
- Low level walking, rambling of under 8km - 51%
- Hillwalking or low level walking of more than 8 miles - 20%
- Cycling or mountain biking - 10%
- Swimming/leisure centres - 8%
- Fishing - 8%
- Sailing/ boat trips - 7%

## Other Activities

- General Sightseeing & Touring - 71% (Main pass-time for 37%)
- Photography - 45%
- Shopping for local products - 31%
- Bird watching - 30%
- Nature watching - 24%

## Visiting Sites of Interest

- Beach/ coast - 60%
- Archaeological site - 51%
- Museums, heritage centres & galleries - 39%
- Historic buildings or monuments - 34%

TICs were used by over half of ALL visitors and by 67% of holiday makers, while overseas visitors made the most use of this facility. Some 52% expressed an interest in cultural or Gaelic events, when planning their visit and among these people, overseas visitors (75%) were the most interested.

B&Bs were the most popular form of accommodation for overseas visitors, while hotels and guest houses were

most popular (26%), especially with business visitors (51%). Self catering was used by 10% and this category stayed the longest in any one place. Though the majority of visitors stayed in the main towns, a significant number were also dispersed in the rural areas. In North Uist some 44% stayed outwith Lochmaddy. Among those who had paid for accommodation, 66% booked all their accommodation before arrival and 10% booked some of their accommodation in advance.

## In terms of information about accommodation, the following sources were significant:

- Western Isles brochure - 27%
- Previous knowledge - 18%
- STB brochure - 15%
- Advice from others - 15%
- Calmac brochure - 8%
- Internet/website - 8% - especially overseas visitors (13%)

## Spending

### Foods

- Fresh shellfish - 17%
- Smoked salmon - 17%
- Other seafood - 21%

### Non food products

- Books & publications - 34%
- Pottery/ceramics - 15%
- Jewellery - 11%
- Harris tweed, photos, traditional or local music - 10%
- All of these products were most popular with overseas visitors

### Expectations

- Had expectations met or exceeded - 60%
- Expectations not met 3% - most common reasons weather, poor fishing, poor airline services, lack of facilities or specific and personal reasons.

### Suggestions for Change

- Transport – cost quality and frequency of services - 8.7%
- Air - same - 4.4%
- Signposting & information for attractions - 5.8%
- Road signs - 4.2%
- Public transport on the islands - 3.1%
- Quality of local roads - 1%

### Highlights

- Outdoor environment, especially scenery, landscape, atmosphere, coast, nature and weather - 40%

This information is useful in guiding business development and the development of green tourism.





**Come and Join the Party  
– but who is it for?**  
**Duncan MacInnes, Promoters Arts Network  
and SEALL Community Arts**

I have had some Memorable Cultural Experiences in North Uist. Your new 'Passing Place' Signs merely deserve the attention of a hacksaw; I was kept awake by my borrowed alarm-clock only to find next morning it was corncrakes outside the bedroom window. I was woken by the wind in the trees, to remember only later there are no trees. Our cultural experiences are largely dictated by where we come from, both geographically and in life.

I have been asked what SEALL community arts in south Skye does to meet visitors needs and what visitors are looking for. The simple answers are 'nothing' and 'authenticity.' But to explain why, I need to tell you where I come from.

We have heard about 'making connections.' With strong Skye connections I was finding the North Uist unfamiliar territory, until I remembered while walking around the bay that I had some distance connections with the island. We have heard that we should 'appreciate' what we have and that sometimes visitors can 'appreciate' more than residents. A well known Highland musician once told me the best thing that happened to him was being sent away from the Highlands to school – he only then appreciated what he had left behind.

We have heard of Anne Martin's desire for 'respect' for our culture, music and those who nurture it. We have heard a lot of 'personal experiences' particularly from Donald Angie MacLellan. My own particular attitude to all this comes from my personal experiences.

For 16 years I worked at the Clan Donald Centre in south Skye, the area's main visitor centre. There I did everything from make the sandwiches to attending trade fairs before becoming the first Countryside Ranger in the Hebrides. I learned the need for personal interpretation. I learned that the 'naming' can sometimes get in the way of the understanding. I dislike lists for lists' sake, as a means of measuring the success of a project. Bill Lawrence suggested that we can help visitors (and ourselves) re-learn the use of our ears, eyes and noses in understanding what goes on around us. I see in your new Ranger, the excitement of learning how stimulating good interpretation is. This post seems to be a prime example of how effective a Ranger Service can be in community development, reaching residents and visitors in different ways. It also reminds me how short-sighted the Clan Donald Trust has been in its recent axing of its Ranger Service. The Service in the Southern Isles deserves to succeed.

During the past day, I have empathised in various comments: that 'what we do everyday is a cultural experience'; that 'heritage is living' and that 'what is a memorable cultural experience for the visitor is normal life for the resident'.

# our land, our people...

This leads to a fundamental point in how I try and approach things: do what you believe works for the benefit of the community, and the visitor will gladly come and be part of it. Focus the same activity on the supposed needs of the visitor and the effect will be superficial.

About ten years ago I left the Visitor Centre and Tourism and became self-employed. I now provide arts event administration in various ways. In Skye this is through SEALL community Arts and its associate performance festival: Fèis an Eilein; in the Highlands and Islands through the Promoters Arts Network, and further afield in Britain through various development projects.

Most of the local promoters in the Highlands and Islands connect with each other through PAN: over 60 members support over 900 events for a total of over 130,000 of an audience, in village halls and other venues. Promoters may be anarchic individualists; well organised hall groups or funded arts centres – but whether paid or voluntary they all provide the same ‘professional’ support. PAN is a true network, supporting and providing the needs of its members without being dictatorial about what each group does.

The events that these groups promote are wide ranging in art-form, eclectic in the programming and bring in the best of touring events to perform alongside high quality local talent. I firmly believe that our own culture flourishes in this, rather than being diluted. Gaelic song is strong enough to be enhanced by contact made with other musical forms. However it is essential that any cross fertilisation is built on a strong understanding about the roots of the local culture. Heritage, as John White told us yesterday, is not a resource like coal to be dug and exploited. I see it more as a garden of flowers where the strong growing native species are enhanced by the mixing of some bright exotic imported colours. Both sit well side by side and can occasionally cross-fertilise to produce something exciting and new.

It may seem daunting to get involved in events promotion but there is plenty of advice and support to be had and PAN is currently working on a ‘Don’t Panic Pack’. At the early stage it is more important to realise that you should aim to creating a programme that you and your community want. Here you may find other voices singing different tunes to your own: that of the agencies and the visitors.

Visitors may want instant gratification – don’t give it to them! They may want informality at a moment’s notice: but you cannot organise spontaneity. They may have preconceived ideas about the culture they believe they will find: often that of the tartan ceilidhs in tourist literature. Encourage them to discover local reality and be part of it.

The Agencies may work to agendas that appease their need for figures, but not support community aspirations. Is the quality more important than the size of the audience? Is a healthy mix of visiting events more exciting than focusing on the ‘local product’? Is expanding the horizons of the resident audience more important than providing for the pre-conceived tourism market?

Do what you feel is right for the community, gain the confidence to do it and invite your visitors to come along and enjoy being part of it. In very simple marketing terms it makes sense – information about an event organised and supported by the community will soon be dissipated into the tourism market, through the local Bed and Breakfast houses, hotel bars, and shops. However an event focusing purely on the visitor as an audience will achieve just that – no locals in the hall.

Work within the community to help each other. Arrange events to allow hotel diners to attend; persuade bed providers to be flexible in their arrangements, after all, a happy visitor who stays another night for a village event will need another bed. Inform teashop owners, guided-walk leaders, and of course, the tourist offices, so they can tell their visitors what they can do that night. Finally tell everyone that events promoted in the village hall are ‘professional’: - the Traverse Theatre is still Scotland’s professional best, whether in their Edinburgh theatre or Lochmaddy Village Hall.

Market your events like your own house ceilidh: be proud of what you want to do, treat your visitors like friends and above all, enjoy it all.



## **The World Dot Com**

**Vladamir Dasiukevich & Jessie MacNeill,  
Isle of Barra Website**

IsleofBarra.com started in September 1999 and is a community based website which utilises local resources in hardware and software support. It identifies and develops new skills in the community as the site grows. At present there are 240 pages but it is still being developed. Its purpose is to develop a world wide awareness of Barra.

### **What are the costs involved?**

- PC with modem
- Web programme (approx £30-40)
- Buying web space
- Buying Domain name (key to success)
- Phone line
- Classes??
- Time (takes 4 -5 months to kick off & must up date regularly – must always be open for e-commerce)

Shop around for the best deal! The Barra website costs approximately £700 - £800 annually. However you can take money in by selling advertising space or e-commerce (market local goods – CD's, books, foods, crafts etc). In Barra a CD that was only advertised on the internet sold out in weeks.

### **How will a website benefit the community?**

- A website will reach a wide spread of people – remember that it is world wide!
- You can educate people about your community – culture, language, tourism etc
- You can divide the work between different people in the area – no high consultancy fees
- You can teach local people new skills – computer courses, etc. (now 4 students on HNC IT course in Barra)
- You can market local produce, accommodation, businesses and events
- A website must be active if it is going to benefit you! Therefore you must update it regularly.
- It is flexible so you can keep changing it

To begin with the Barra site got 4,000 hits per week, it now gets between 5,500 and 12,500 hits a week. This however excludes people who have put the site into their favourites list – therefore the site is reaching a great number of people each week.

WIE gave support to businesses who wanted to build their own page to link to the site. Some businesses paid it off in weeks, as they were able to take booking directly – deposits paid on internet for B&B's etc.

A young child with blonde hair is looking at a tablet. The background is a scenic landscape with mountains and a body of water. The text "our land, our people..." is overlaid on the image.

# our land, our people...

## Ideas

- Be sure your site is colourful but not overpowering
- Have pictures and graphics but not so many that it will affect the download time
- Be sure and add your site name and relevant words to search engines
- Link to other relevant pages. Maybe businesses and people in your area already have their own webpages.
- A map or virtual tour of your area
- Emails – give people the chance to get emails with your domain name or find people with Barra connections
- Musical Xmas e-cards from your area
- Genealogy pages are very popular and can encourage people to then visit your area if they discover relations
- Gaelic language classes and tutorials (most visited page)
- Community newspaper/newsletter
- Discussion page – something of importance to the community, up to the minute.
- Try and have something new regularly!



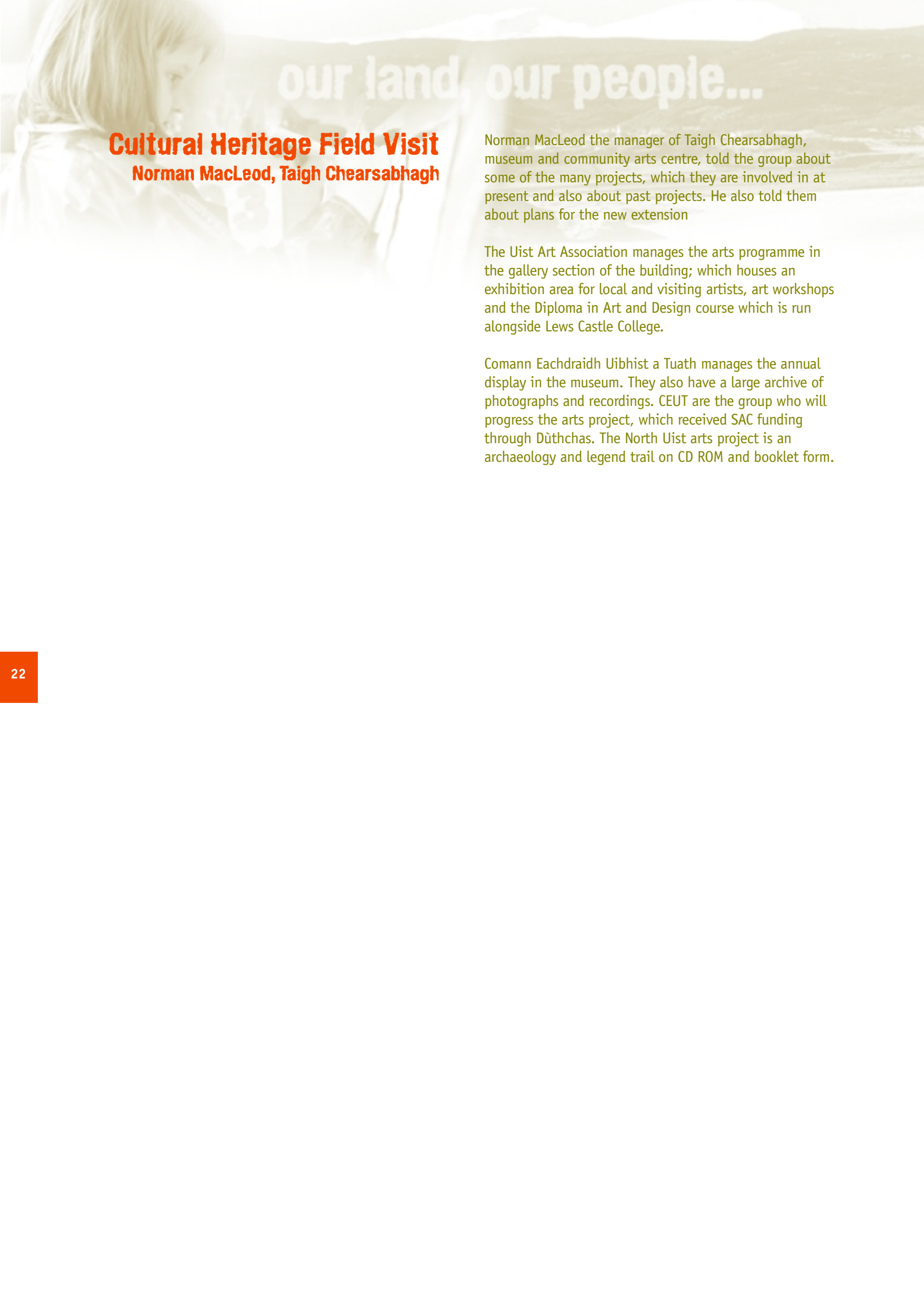
## Wildlife Heritage Field Visit

Gwen Evans, RSPB Balranald

Gwen Evans is the RSPB conservation officer for Uist and Barra and is responsible for over-seeing the management of Balranald Nature Reserve, she took delegates on a guided walk around Balranald to show them the some of the wildlife and environment which attracts visitors.

Balranald Reserve covers 658ha and was established in 1966 with the agreement of local landowners and crofters. The RSPB still work alongside the local crofters and homeowners in Balranald who carry out the day to day management of the land using traditional crofting techniques.

Balranald has many nesting Waders, Corncrakes, Twite and much, much more. The walk along the machair also shows the long white beaches and the masses of wild flowers.



our land, our people...

## **Cultural Heritage Field Visit**

### **Norman MacLeod, Taigh Chearsabhagh**

Norman MacLeod the manager of Taigh Chearsabhagh, museum and community arts centre, told the group about some of the many projects, which they are involved in at present and also about past projects. He also told them about plans for the new extension

The Uist Art Association manages the arts programme in the gallery section of the building; which houses an exhibition area for local and visiting artists, art workshops and the Diploma in Art and Design course which is run alongside Lews Castle College.

Comann Eachdraidh Uibhist a Tuath manages the annual display in the museum. They also have a large archive of photographs and recordings. CEUT are the group who will progress the arts project, which received SAC funding through Dùthchas. The North Uist arts project is an archaeology and legend trail on CD ROM and booklet form.



## Archaeological Heritage Field Visit

Mary MacLeod & Uisdean Robertson,  
Carinish Township

Dr Mary MacLeod CnES Archaeologist led the group on a guided walk around the rich history of Carinish township. It is predicted that Carinish has more archaeological sites than any other district in North Uist. Interesting sites include the twin temples of Teampull na Trianaid and Teampull Clann a' Phiocair, the site of the Battle of Carinish and the long cairn.

Uisdean Robertson explained the plans of Carinish township. The group hope to renovate a ruined thatched cottage to use as an interpretation centre which will house general archaeological information about the area, social history, crofting history as well as folklore and Gaelic songs and verse.

This proved to be a very interesting field trip as we all walked up to the chambered cairn and looked across the moor to where other cairns form a line going into the distance. This was definitely a cultural experience with a difference for it was compulsory for everyone to get wet feet from tramping across the peat bogs – however everyone still thoroughly enjoyed it and will remember it.

## Workshops

### Workshop 1: What is our heritage resource?

#### Why do we need to know what our heritage resource is?

#### Workshop answers included:

- It is different things for different people
- Tensions were identified regarding heritage resources:
- Designations – what is their aim and do they produce positive discrimination?
- The power and position of custodians – scale & influence
- Does a resource have importance if it does not or cannot generate income?
- If we don't know what heritage is, then we don't know what to promote
- We might not realise that everyday chores are a resource and can be promoted
- Got to understand yourself and the way of life
- Being proud and self confident is fundamental
- If you don't have pride, heritage becomes sterilised although it may have economic benefits
- Heritage is special because it's so real
- It's very fashionable to move to rural areas and go back to traditional ways

#### How do we assess our resources?

Aspects to bear in mind when assessing and accessing heritage resources included:

- Provide things for people to spend money on
- Respect
- Develop for locals, not specifically for tourists
- Encourage ethos of communication
- Development should be community driven
- Returners bring new experiences
- Change brought about by change in work practises & changes in how and where people meet
- People and communication are important

Valued heritage resources included:

- People
- Land
- environment (machair, birds, sea, beaches)
- language
- Traditions – music, boat building
- History
- archaeology
- Ways of working – watching fishermen
- Festivals – Feis, Kallin Boat day



- Food – diet – good food is important

Sometimes it take someone from outside to come in and see what our resources are and give the people here confidence to do something with them. Usually people find their own work, whether it's fishing, cutting peats or working a computer boring, and hard work. Others think of it as therapy

It makes a difference if you are showing people you value them and therefore building confidence.

### Where can we get help in assessing and accessing our resources?

One group thought that we should consider whether the problem is ourselves and changes over time? Examples included the rise of formal gatherings instead of informal ones. It was suggested that we need to look at the losses against the gains. In some cases, perhaps things haven't been lost but retained and continued in different ways and forms – music was one example.

In working towards retention and access the following were agreed to be important:

- Need local base
- Integration of local culture and progress
- Tap into local knowledge
- 'experience' the feeling – introduce heritage back to our own people
- raise awareness of what is special to others – often things which are commonplace to yourself
- multiway respect
- talked about benefiting instead of exploiting
- easier to access funding for centre based interpretation but should be people based
- change in political lobbying
- interpretation of 'real' world – not necessarily technology based
- need to take a long termed approach
- make a distinction between marketing and interpretation
- how will it be managed?
- 'niche' markets
- targeted education
- tourism development

## Workshop 2: How do we interpret our heritage?

### Important issues discussed were:

- It needs people – live interpretation programmes/ guides
- Have to pay sometimes for – ie musicians
- Market forces – danger of trap – economic
- Where does the money come from
- Enthusiastic amateurs
- People want to spend money on the 'experience' as well as crafts etc
- It all comes back to income generation

People need to earn money from it or it's no good. The example used was the RSPB seasonal job. There is low interest in it because it is low paid. It could be a job for a student or a job share. If the job is not economically viable, then the students don't come home for summer and don't run ceilidh etc.

### Why do we need to interpret our heritage?

Other places have lost a lot of what we have at present (music, language) and once you've lost it, it is hard to get it back. Other places may envy North Uist. Young people are important and are a resource. Some people may not be aware of how easy it is to get to North Uist.

Inward investment must be directed at making traditional skills worth peoples' time – reward them for the hard work. We must promote our best points and create and sell on identity. We can't wait for the government to do something - we must start ourselves.

In Ireland people in agencies/government jobs had to speak Gaelic – this has been a policy for many years. Also school children are sent to Gaelic speaking families. Young people in Ireland expect you to speak Gaelic

Ireland has built confidence in their people and made the language fashionable. Sometimes we might be kidding ourselves about the strength of our culture since we have managed to retain the language. It must be natural and there is a need for investment. The language shouldn't be dealt with in isolation - Tha gaelic agam – the gaelic language must be included with the music and craic. Gaelic youth clubs in Ireland have done much to encourage the language and make them be proud – drama, poetry etc.

People and lifestyles are changing and there is a danger that we don't notice that we are losing the old ways and the warmth. Cultural, social and economic change is having an effect. We are beginning to have an indoor culture. People's home lives are changing and working lives is taking soul out of people. Work is becoming our focus.

# our land, our people...

We must remember that arts and language are included in the environment. We must encourage our children to enjoy the outdoors. We should be showing children that there is more to the language than singing and the Mod. They need to feel buzz and feel alive.

If we start paying people to keep traditions then it won't be so real. Lifestyle today means that we don't communicate and find time to talk to each other. We should value 'living at your own pace'.

## Other reasons for interpreting local heritage included:

- People want to see how things are really done
- Corncrake is the best alarm clock
- People think they're not good enough – attitude maybe taken from history – don't push themselves forward- shy nature
- We need to know what we have
- We need to understand it
- We need to sell it
- It is important to the world
- It is an opportunity to educate people and ourselves
- We might miss variety of things around us because of ignorance/lack of knowledge
- Interpretation is not just for visitors – it is for all of us
- If we know what we have in our area, we can have pride in it
- We can work in association with RSPB, SNH etc and appreciate the area more
- We need to spread the word
- Interpretation leads to self confidence and economic development
- It will bring pleasure for ourselves and others
- We need to pass things down to young people
- It is a productive way of bringing people together
- It can bring forward new talent
- Interpret now to retain record of past – living record

## Who are we interpreting for?

### The answers given were:

- Our youth
- For each other to rekindle pride and confidence

### The impacts of community interpretation were agreed to include:

- Making and building bridges
- Bring people together
- Making friendships/bring communities together
- Economic return – leading to community benefits
- Interested outside parties – contribute economically
- Economic benefit to area and community

## Interpretation Methods

### Methods discussed included:

- Summer schools
- Festivals
- Teaching children
- House ceilidh
- Live interpretation – relating music and environment
- Physical centre of interpretation – eg Balnain House
- Recording music
- Use of internet

### The interpretation issues discussed in relation to methods included:

- People want to participate – encourage this
- Decide which themes to tackle
- Discuss through workshops
- Persevere and present in different ways to wider sector
- Promote amongst youth

## Where can we get help?

### Sources of financial help discussed included:

- Funds: SNH, Council, RSPB,
- Plenty funding if there is time to access it – Lottery

### Sources of help in the Community:

- Volunteers – though the same ones are sometimes on every committee
- But - Dùthchas gets more voices heard

We can meet demand if we know what visitors want – especially with the help of agencies for form filling etc.



## Conclusion

All agreed that the seminar was inspiring and useful. Many present felt that it was a huge step forward to discuss cultural and natural heritage together.

### The seminar posed three key questions:

- What is our heritage resource?
- How do we interpret our heritage?
- How do we market our area and its heritage?

The presentations, fieldvisits and debate made valuable contributions to finding answers to those questions. Here is a summary of our findings to date.

### What is our heritage resource?

In terms of culture the need to be aware of the intrinsic value of local traditions, working lives, crofting lives, language and craic was raised often. These everyday things are an important resource for local people, though we often have to leave a place to appreciate the 'memorable cultural experiences' back home. For visitors these everyday experiences and sights are of great value. We should be proud of these aspects of our local areas and be not only prepared but active in inviting visitors to share in that. The economic returns will help to maintain much of what we value and facilitate appropriate sustainable development through cultural and green tourism. There is a fine line to be found between exploiting and benefiting – each area needs to consider this and identify what is appropriate for them. The trick is to keep things natural but maximise the economic and social spin offs. When it comes to cultural events, the advice is to organise events for local people and warmly encourage our visitors to participate and attend.

Music and the arts is a good example. Too many of our top musicians are still expected to perform for a pint of beer – this is not a sustainable cultural strategy. In this instance, we can learn from the Quebec example where government funding pays artists wages.

The environmental resources identified are equally rich and diverse. The unique machairs, distinctive geologies, corncrakes, black throated divers, peatland flows, world renown landscapes and seascapes and the species to which these places are home all got a mention. The crofting agricultural practises which have created and maintained some of these habitats were recognised as fundamental to future survival of these distinctive environmental assets. Survival of traditional agricultural practises and the increase of cattle were identified as important and worthy of financial support. The role of environmental designations in making the wider world aware of the high environmental quality of these places was discussed. It will be a challenge to use these designations as a marketing tool and to see them as an opportunity in themselves.

Significant income has already derived from these designations. The Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme has contributed £0.5 million annually to the Uists economy. The role of green and wildlife tourism in creating new jobs and new kinds of visitors was highlighted too. In North Sutherland, the RSPB Forsinard Estate has produced an additional £200, 000 spend per annum and supports 2 full-time staff and number of seasonal posts. Specific species are known to attract visitors – sea eagles, red kites, puffins, dolphins, brown trout and salmon – and often the economic impact can be quantified.

The worth of the environmental and cultural assets is both economic and intrinsic or aesthetic. In local landscapes it is clear that landscapes – and the ‘great outdoors’ – is both cultural and environmental. Through interpretation we must cultivate pride and judicious use and development of our heritage resource.

## How do we interpret our heritage?

Having recognised the diversity of heritage resources, delegates turned their minds to interpretation of these. It was noted that interpretation undertaken by real, live people – rangers, B&B owners, guides, boat trip skippers, ghillies, waitresses – could not be beaten.

There are hundreds of ways to interpret the heritage resources. Choices have to be made, but it should be remembered that interpretation is not just about panels, brochures and guided walks. Music, theatre, songs and painting are also forms of crucial local interpretation.

The first decision is – what are you trying to tell people – and who are you trying to communicate with? Once these matters have been discussed, the way in which interpretation will be done can be considered. Is it panels or leaflets or guides or exhibitions – or perhaps a combination of these and more.

When it comes to panels, it is important to plan for maintenance because tatty damaged panels do more harm than good. The publication ‘A Sense of Place’ is a very useful guide and planning tool.

Beware of cluttering places with too many signposts and panels. There are some innovative ways of avoiding this – interpretation panels that fold into strainers, for use of those who to choose to read them. Getting together to consider everyone’s needs and choosing approaches which meet local interest and visitor needs will help to avoid this.

## How do we market the area and its heritage?

Some of the answers are contained in consideration of the first two questions. Another key step in answering this, our third question, is to investigate what our visitors want. The WITB survey was very illuminating in this and the experiences of accommodation providers and other local people with everyday contact with visitors is also crucial.

Interpretation led and run by the local community can be designed to do this job. Outsiders can often see in our own home areas, things which we have come to take for granted. Research and informal information is crucial in elucidating important aspects of our heritage to market. Word of mouth, guidebooks and brochures and the Internet are three of the key mediums for getting a message across to actual or potential visitors. The internet appears to be even more important for overseas visitors, who are also the group which tend to book all or at least some of their accommodation in advance.

Markets, customers and marketing technologies are changing. Interpretation will help to clarify the main messages to get across. Market research clarifies the current customer needs and highlights existing and emerging niche markets. Local growth of use of websites and e-mail for marketing and booking is important to encourage and support. Community based approaches – as illustrated in Barra – can help local people to learn new skills, reduce marketing costs and produce a vibrant local resource.

## The Road Ahead

Getting together to share experiences and challenges through this seminar has proved inspirational and productive. All who attended left with new ideas and approaches to try in their own area. The introduction to North Uist and the warm welcome on arrival were greatly praised by the attendees. The hosts in North Uist were pleased to hear about the experiences elsewhere and were inspirational ‘local guides’, practising live interpretation. In conclusion, this seminar has contributed to our knowledge and ideas and those attending look forward to putting ideas into practise on the road ahead and following up the useful contacts made during the seminar.



**our place in the future**



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