



our land, our people
and our place
in the future

NORTH SUTHERLAND AREA STRATEGY 2001



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Our Land, Our People and Our Place in the Future

Our Vision for North Sutherland

For there to be:

- Sustainable employment
- Improved services
- Vibrant confident communities
- Resource utilisation for local benefit
- Young people returning to the area
- Understanding and care of natural and cultural heritage



To the People of North Sutherland



Over the past three years, many people in North Sutherland have become involved in the Dùthchas Project, including the three hundred and sixty five individuals who responded to the initial community survey and the seventy who have taken part, at one point or another, in the numerous discussion and consultation meetings which ensued. The purpose of this massive exercise has been to create a strategy, **powerfully informed and influenced by local people**, for the sustainable future development of North Sutherland. A key mechanism in that Strategy will be collaboration with the development agencies which are active in the area and, like the locals, these have, over the last three years, responded magnificently to the challenge of Dùthchas with representatives of the twenty two partners involved playing a full part in the marathon round of research and debate.

Locals and partners alike are to be commended for their whole-hearted commitment to the Project which, as well as formal meetings, workshops and seminars, gave rise to some very enjoyable ceilidhs, together with the traditional hospitality associated with such events. Some people took time off work to join in exchange visits to various parts of Scotland and England while others ventured further afield to visit developing communities in Norway and Jutland. All this was accomplished voluntarily by people with a deep interest in, and commitment to, the future of the North Sutherland community.

On behalf of the Dùthchas team – our local workers, their contemporaries in North Uist and Trotternish, and the central organisation in Inverness – I would like to thank all those who have participated in the very considerable effort which has given rise to this document and pay tribute to your perseverance over the duration of the project. The vision it contains is of our own making and clearly charts a pathway forward for this, our community.

However, as Winston Churchill famously said in his Mansion House speech: *'This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. It is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.'* We must ensure that, unlike so many previous exercises in community planning, the Dùthchas initiative moves from rhetoric to reality and that our vision is achieved. That challenge remains.

Jim A. Johnston, Chairman,
North Sutherland Area Advisory Group

The Dùthchas Project

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

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

The Pilot Areas

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

The Partners

Dùthchas is co-funded by the EU LIFE Environment Programme and 11 Partner agencies.

The Project has 22 Partners in total:

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



The North Sutherland Area Advisory Group

Ralph Throp, Scottish Homes; **John Toal**, Crofters Commission; **Gordon Todd**, Highland Council; **Jim Tough**, Scottish Arts Council; **David Webster**, North of Scotland Water Authority.

Stuart Baird, Scottish Environment Protection Agency; **Willie Beattie**, Forestry Commission; **Harry Bremner**, Melvich Community Council; **Joan Campbell**, Caithness & Sutherland Enterprise; **Sidney Campbell**, Strathly & Armadale Community Council; **Bill Cattanach**, Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Department; **Ron Celli**, Bettyhill, Strathnaver & Altnaharra Community Council; **Jackie Fairweather**, Scottish Natural Heritage; **Sarah Fox**, Tongue Community Council; **Margaret Fyfe**, Highland Council; **Jasmine Grant**, North Highland College; **Barbara Jardine**, Councillor; **Jim. A. Johnston**, Chairman; **Francis Keith**, Councillor; **Fiona MacKay**, Durness Community Council; **Janette MacKay**, Strathly Village Hall Committee; **Thomas Mackay**, Scottish Crofters Union; **William MacIntosh**, Skerry Community; **Kenny Macrae**, Eriboll Pier Association; **Graeme McLaughlin**, Highland Council; **Neil Money**, Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise; **Sandra Munro**, Bettyhill Community Council; **Sandy Murray**, Strathhalladale Community; **Chris Nixon**, Forest Enterprise; **Sandra Peterkin**, Highlands of Scotland Tourist Board; **David Polson**, Highland Council; **Marlyn Price**, Highland Archaeology; **Jon Priddy**, North Highland Forest Trust; **Joan Ritchie**, Highlands of Scotland Tourist Board; **Wilma Robertson**, Melness Crofters Trust; **Pat Rodlin**, North West Council for Community Action; **Eann Sinclair**, Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise; **Pat Thompson**, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds;



1. The Area Strategy What is the Strategy?

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

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

What is a Sustainability Strategy?

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

The Strategy and Action Plan identifies:

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

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



our land, our people...

Who is this Strategy for?

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

How was the Strategy developed?

This Strategy and Action Plan was developed through a comprehensive planning process involving many people and organisations. The Strategy is based on all the information gathered from the local community survey and the 22 Partner agencies. This information was then shaped into the Strategy by members of the local Dùthchas Strategy and Advisory Groups, in consultation with other specialists in their field. The Strategy and Action Plan was written by the Dùthchas Staff team, working closely with local Area Advisory Group members. Figure 1 illustrates this.

Figure 1 (opposite)





1. SURVEY

Community Survey

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

Agency Survey

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

Data Search

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

Strengths, Challenges & Ideas for change

Key Trends for sustainability



2. SUSTAINABILITY PROFILE of North Sutherland

Goals, Objectives & Indicators

Sustainability goals, objectives & indicators developed
Consultants & Partners

Issues & Priorities

Based on the Profile, 10 Sustainability Issues & 5 immediate priorities were identified
Consultants & North Sutherland Advisory Group



3. SUSTAINABILITY PLANS

Strategy Groups

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

New Ideas, Information & Support

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

Develop Plans

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



4. ACTIONS

First Demonstration Projects started

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



5. IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

Partners & Support

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

Organisational Framework

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

Monitoring & Reviews

A Guide to Using the Strategy

Figure 2

SECTION	PURPOSE	PAGE	DUTHCHAS REPORTS
VISION	Our Vision for a sustainable North Sutherland	1	4
NORTH SUTHERLAND NOW	Summary of the Strengths, Challenges and Ideas for change from the Initial Review findings	10	4,5,6
SUSTAINABILITY PROFILE	Our Goals, Objectives and Priorities for the sustainability of North Sutherland	16	5
SUSTAINABILITY PLANS	Priority Actions for achieving our vision	18	4,5,9,11 12,13,14 15,16,17
IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY	The Organisational Framework for carrying out our actions	26	
MEASURING OUR PROGRESS	Measuring the Impact of our actions in achieving our vision and objectives	27	5
REVIEWING THE STRATEGY	Making Changes to the Strategy in the light of our progress and changing circumstances	27	5
MAKING LINKS	Strategic Links and information	27	5
ACTION PLAN	Detailed plans for implementing the First Phase of the Strategy	Back Pocket	4

Dùthchas Reports

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

Figure 3

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

2. North Sutherland Now Introduction

"Co a chi e nach mail e?"

"Who can see it and not praise it?" Rob Donn

The first stage of the work was to ask communities and agencies about the strengths and challenges facing North Sutherland and their ideas for change. This section documents the main points raised through the following:

- North Sutherland Initial Review
- North Sutherland Agency Data Search
- North Sutherland Area Sustainability Profile
- North Sutherland PAAG and Strategy Groups
- Consultation with Partners
- Reference Group Feedback
- Information Seminars

For further details, please refer to the publications mentioned in Figure 3.



The Land We Live In

North Sutherland forms part of Duthaich Mhic Aoidh, The Land of Clan Mackay. The Dùthchas area stretches along the alternately sandy, rocky coast from Durness in the west to Melvich in the east and southwards down the fertile Strath Halladale and Strathnaver to Altnaharra.



Natural Heritage

"It's great to walk in the wild, clean and unspoilt countryside and be so close to nature"

The "patterned lands" of the Flow Country are one of the few near natural habitats remaining in the UK. The blanket peat bog – some 4000 km² across Caithness and North Sutherland – is of global significance, being the largest remaining habitat of this sort in the world. It is the combination of flow systems, unique vegetation, open water and breeding sites for birds and insects which make this "patterned land" so special.

Our natural heritage is recognised world-wide:

- 47% of the land area designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest
- 28 Sites of Special Scientific Interest's are candidates for Special Areas for Conservation's (SAC) or Special Protection Area's (SPA), (SAC's & SPA's are designated under EC Habitats & Species or EC Birds Directive)
- National Scenic Area designations: 241km²+ or 12%
- Total area of important natural heritage designations - 52%

The beauty and diversity of these landscapes – beaches and cliffs, flows and lochs, mountains and moorland – is a source of great pride. This variety of habitats supports an impressive diversity of flora and fauna. These things are part of our





everyday lives and are an important resource for locals and visitors alike.

Natural Assets

"We have the best views in the country... that's what brings the tourists up here"

We have the tranquillity and scenery, which so many others crave. These precious assets have an economic value. They draw visitors to this area. The potential to develop "Green Tourism" is enormous. An opportunity also exists to create a Ranger Service, supported by knowledgeable Guides.

Developments at the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds' Forsinard Visitor Centre, since 1995, illustrate strongly the potential of niche market green tourism. In 1998, 5,000 visitors were attracted to the Centre. These visitors spent £185,000 in total on their holiday in North Sutherland, including accommodation and transport. These are new visitors attracted by a new opportunity.

Archaeology, History & Historic Sites

"We must go forward but at the same time respect our environment, culture and heritage"

Archaeological evidence shows that there has been human settlement here for some 7000 years. There are some 2,059 recorded sites and monuments, including hut circles, chambered cairns, brochs, hill forts, castles and deserted townships. Of these 64 are Listed Buildings and 106 are Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

This part of the world is perhaps best known for some of the sadder moments in our history - the 19th century Clearance of Strathnaver and the brutality of the Sutherland Clearances in general. Landscape and settlement patterns are monuments to those times. Now, these events are being interpreted for present and future generations, by the development of sites like Rossal Village and The Strathnaver Trail. It is hoped that this idea will be extended throughout North Sutherland.

Woodlands & Forestry

"I'd like to see more trees in my village"

Past and present land uses have almost eliminated the native woodland cover in this part of the world. Improved and increased forest and woodland resources will have environmental and economic benefits. A number of initiatives are helping to redress the balance:

- Crofter Forestry
- North Highland Forest Trust
- North Sutherland Community Forest Trust
- Woodland Grant Scheme

Community involvement in woodland and forest management is a form of landholding, which is of great interest.

Marine Resources

"Improvements to the pier would be great for the community"

The coastal marine environment of North Sutherland is unique. It provides income through in-shore fishing and shell-fish growing, and is an important visitor attraction in its own right.

Coastal tourism will provide additional jobs, but harbours need to be repaired and refurbished. An infrastructure encompassing recreational diving, water based sports and sport sea fishing has to be devised. Every effort should be made to retain the coastal marine environment in a pristine condition. Native fish and shellfish populations must be protected.

Land Ownership

"Community land ownership is a must for the people"

Much of our natural resources are beyond the control of local people. Most of our land is in large 'holdings' – traditional highland estates. Private ownership accounts for 85% of the land area. The 5 biggest estates cover 31% of land area. Estates generate income and some employment by letting out stalking, fishing and shooting. Certain estates such as Hope, Altnaharra and Loyal, run farms, mainly rearing sheep and cattle and growing winter fodder. The Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Department is also a significant land owner. On the coast The Melness Crofters Trust now have 10700 acres of land, excluding sporting rights, formerly belonging to Hope Estate, in community ownership.

Changed ownership patterns have a strong impact on environmental and economic conditions. We have already noted the impact of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds management of the Forsinard Estate. This new landowner has not only brought new visitors, but has also created new kinds of local jobs.

Access to the Countryside

"You can go for a walk without worrying about trespassing"

Access is important and people value the 'right to roam'. So long as this need is responsibly recognised by landowners, and responsibly exercised by walkers, peace prevails. Happily there are few problems in North Sutherland. Most of the large estates actively encourage access and the majority of hillwalkers act responsibly. Nevertheless, an irresponsible minority, on both sides, sometimes create problems. The community need to be aware of these situations and, through discussion and consensus, resolve them amicably.

Ideas like a sign posted coastal walk, the North Sutherland Way, from Melvich to Cape Wrath, would further enhance visitor numbers and provide an outstanding outdoor adventure. The opportunity exists to increase access across this beautiful area by further developing trails and walks.

Game Fishing

"We need to look after wild salmon stocks"

North Sutherland has some of the finest salmon, brown trout and sea trout fishing in Europe. Much of this sport is readily available to local and visiting angler alike. As stocks of wild fish decline elsewhere this asset will become evermore important to the economy of the area.

The Caithness and Sutherland Trout Angling Group (CASTAG) is addressing this issue, supported by local anglers, hotels and fishery owners. Sport angling tourism is a growing activity. There are estimated to be upwards of 4 million anglers in the UK. Our aim is to encourage more of them to spend time fishing in North Sutherland.

Crofting

"I would like to see crofts back in rotational cropping and divided out to bring young families back to the area"

Crofting has traditionally focused on low impact, environmentally friendly production. It is this system which created and maintained many of the landscapes and habitats which we prize so highly. Over the years traditional crofting practices have changed. We have seen a reduction in cattle numbers and a reduction in the cultivation of inbye ground. If traditional crofting practices were reintroduced, and developed imaginatively, this could benefit both the crofter and the land. We would also like to see more schemes developed which encourage young people to consider crofting as the basis for a sustainable way of life.

Agricultural Change

"It's a hard life when it costs less to buy one of our sheep than it does to buy a leg of lamb in the butchers"

The late 1990s have been characterised by a severe crisis in the agricultural economy. Individual crofting households need assistance in finding new ways to make the croft pay. We need to look at our crofts and think hard about how best to manage them for environmental and financial gain. Organic production may provide some answers, and horticulture may offer some

opportunities for diversification, but relevant support and capital will be necessary to start this process.

The People Who Live Here

"We who are fortunate to make a living in North Sutherland must see to it that the next generation are never forced into a leaving that is not of their own making. We must grasp this opportunity for those who belong, and want to continue to belong to North Sutherland, be they a generation native to the land or the children of those who have come to live among us, who want, along with us, only the best for the future of what is now their land too."

Scattered Communities

"What I love about it here is the peace, quiet and remoteness of it"

This is a huge land with a small population. This area has a population density of less than 1 person per km². We seek to keep people here and to make North Sutherland a vital and sustainable place for the future.

Community Spirit

"The people here are friendly, there is helpfulness, kindness, honesty and community spirit...if anyone has any problems people help and rally round."

It is often said that the people here are our best asset. There is a strong sense of community in North Sutherland. People are kind, friendly and helpful and there is a true sense of togetherness in the way the community pull together and in the way they continue to drive for improvements in the area.

Safety

"You don't need to lock your doors"

Crime here is the exception, rather than the rule. We trust each other. It is a great place to bring up children because you don't need to worry about them the way you might have to in more urban areas.

Working Together

"A good thing about Dùthchas is how we have got together, and in doing so, have talked to each other and discovered we all have the same hopes".

Our communities are similar but unique. The long distances between communities made it difficult in the past to get together to discuss opportunities and problems facing the wider community. Through Dùthchas we have come together to do this and are finding ways forward for the individual



communities and the wider community. Opportunities for this include the work of the Sutherland Partnership and the more recent contributions from the Social Inclusion Partnership and Initiative at the Edge, which were established during the course of the Dùthchas Project. We must ensure that we find a way of continuing to achieve this.

Young People

"Year after year, our young people leave – for work, for education, for more choices"

The health and balance of a population is important to the economic well being of an area. The population at the 1981 census was 2,054. At the time of the 1991 census the population was 1,950. This represents a decline in a 10 year period of 5%. This kind of decline, which is mainly created by out migration of young people, leads to an imbalance in the age structure of our communities; with 5% more than the Highland average in the 65+ age group.

One of the priorities identified in the Initial Review was recreation for young people. The Social Inclusion Partnership has enabled a start to be made on addressing this issue. Through the Social Inclusion Partnership, transport to take young people to events has been provided, and this is making a difference.

The challenge is to reverse the philosophy from "...there is nothing for me here..." to "...everything I want is here...". This means listening to young people and bringing them on board as decision makers, to encourage individual talent and enterprise.

Volunteers

"Some people are at meetings every night ... it becomes their whole social life and it is very difficult to keep the pace up."

There are many voluntary groups and individuals active in North Sutherland. People here give a great deal of their time in order to provide social events, fundraising events and to create beneficial development and improved facilities for our communities.

Voluntary effort is the backbone of the community. However there are limits on the voluntary time available - everyone in our communities is over committed.

There is no shortage of ideas, to improve our economy, environment and social life. People's time is not an infinite resource. The contacts we make through our voluntary commitments help to take things forward, but we need help, support and development workers to act as a one-stop-shop to give advice and help source funding.



Everyday Life

Culture

"The Gaelic language is important ... it's the language of the country. The people were robbed of their language. It is good that children can grow up now learning their own language."

North Sutherland has a valuable tradition in story telling, piping, poetry and music. The establishment of Feis Air An Oir has provided access to these traditions for local children and adults. This has come out of the Dùthchas Project funded by Dùthchas Partner, The Scottish Arts Council. Without access to tuition and instruments, young people cannot possibly carry on these traditions and make music of their own. At the Feis, Gaelic is used in games, songs and tuition so everyone learns and uses the language.

Village Halls

"Everything happens in the hall ...weddings, dances, old folks dinners, meetings, ceilidhs and art classes"

Community halls provide venues for a huge variety of events. The Dùthchas community survey indicated that many people would like to see more use made of these halls. Some need renovation, whilst other communities might even need a new hall. With the scattered population audiences can be quite small, but are supportive and enthusiastic. Dances are popular, as are sports activities. A decent hall makes more things possible. The more opportunities we have for people to meet and socialise - the better.

Sport & Leisure

"Tongue village football park could be used effectively for school and community activities"

North Sutherland has few conventional leisure facilities. There is an excellent swimming pool and health suite in Bettyhill and many village halls have badminton clubs. There is a nine hole golf course in Durness. With improvements underway to the old football pitch in Tongue, leisure facilities are improving. The Social Inclusion Partnership and Initiative at the Edge have helped in providing funding for the Tongue Football Pitch.

Transport

"We have had the bus shelter for years, but when are we going to get the bus?"

In the past, lack of transport made it difficult for many people to attend events. This is being tackled on a community wide basis, through the Social Inclusion Partnership. This will be of enormous benefit to all.

Local Services & Access

"... school buses should be used as community transport too"

People in North Sutherland value their local amenities but feel many of these are threatened. The local shop, Post Office and school form an integral part of community life. They provide a focal point and a meeting place and they need our support. To ensure that everyone has access to essential services a reliable public transport service is vital.

Health

"More and more we have to go to Raigmore for treatment"

Despite the good clean air and healthy environment many health issues still need to be addressed. While the health facilities we have are adequate, with new health centres being built and enhanced travelling health care facilities, there are areas where the quality of health care could be improved. A lack of services means that patients have to travel to Caithness or often as far as Inverness. Where possible, services should be delivered locally. Where this is not possible, the potential to create an emergency heli-pad in the area could be re-assessed. We need a comprehensive range of health care and health education in our local communities.

Specialist Care & Support

"It would be nice to grow old at home"

An area of concern is care available for elderly people. Many elderly wish to remain in their own homes and communities for as long as possible. We must care for our elderly and those with special needs. In doing so, this will create valuable employment and training opportunities for younger people.

Housing

"Affordable housing for young people and young families is a must"

Poor housing conditions can be a factor in poor health. Existing housing stock presents some problems as a proportion of it is below an acceptable standard. There are schemes to help people with this problem but it is difficult to take advantage of them. The fact that a number of shepherds and estate workers, live in tied housing and that many houses in North Sutherland are used as holiday homes, often creates concern.

Although a lack of affordable housing has been a problem for many years, this is now being addressed by housing agencies working with communities to provide housing to rent or buy. Where a need has been identified, positive steps are being taken to provide appropriate homes. Armadale and Melness are good examples of this, with projects going ahead through Albyn Housing and the Armadale Project which was supported by funding from Initiative at the Edge.

Working life

Economy

"We need jobs or income generating opportunities"

People are keen to see economic development which will create a more diverse local economy. In the long term this would create a greater choice of jobs, increased local services and markets and ensure a more robust economy. We want to see more small businesses starting up and thriving. Community ownership and community businesses can be a good way to create employment and encourage tourist activity.

Import/Export

"...market our own produce from hill to table.."

North Sutherland is currently reliant on imported goods. People here already produce high quality products, and making more of this would be a good way of reducing 'food miles'. We want to know more about what sort of goods are imported into the area and what is currently produced here. A focus on using local produce would help producers and crofting incomes. It would also benefit tourism if B&Bs and Hotels could advertise and use high quality local produce. We can then look at outside markets and investigate how to sell into them, trading on our clean, high quality environment.



Work

"Employment is needed locally...not just short term or seasonal"

A more diverse economy would provide varied employment. Work opportunities are currently concentrated in the agriculture, forestries and fisheries sector, which employs about 27% of people. Approximately 26% of people are employed in other services. Hotels, catering and distribution employ 17%. A mere 2.5% are employed in manufacturing. To attract young people back to North Sutherland this area needs not just more jobs, but more quality jobs and a greater diversity of jobs.

Education & Training

"There is a lack of further education facilities close by"

We are very proud of our schools and feel our children get a great start in life here. Additional access to further education and training opportunities would benefit us all. Young people leave to seek these opportunities. As the years go by, and in the face of change, we will all have new training and education needs.

Information Technology

"We need equal access to the advantages Information Technology can bring"

Information Technology offers great potential in reducing problems for remote communities. E-mail provides fast and cheap communication but most don't have access to it. Information Technology can also provide opportunities for distance learning. We need more access to the benefits Information Technology can bring.

Tourism

"We need more attractions and facilities so that tourists will stay in one place for more than a day"

Tourism is important and provides income through B&B, shops and other services, but with the pound being so strong and cheap holidays abroad readily available, the number of visitors coming this far north has been in decline in the last few years. We have world class scenery, outstanding flora and fauna, unique history and archaeology, peace and quiet – an unspoilt environment. A survey of visitors revealed that 77% of visitors to Sutherland have described the scenery, natural environment and wildlife as the area's greatest assets. We believe we could cater for more visitors without damaging the things we cherish. More could be done to attract visitors and extend the tourist season. Given the distance visitors have to travel to get here, we may never be a cheap destination, but we are and can be a rewarding one. We should trade on that.



Energy

"The north coast mainland and the Western Isles are two of the areas in the world with the greatest potential for wave power."

We have wind, weather and waves. It would be valuable, and environmentally friendly to produce energy from these resources. Scotland currently leads the world in wave power technology. This is a growth sector. The North Coast could benefit from this significant alternative energy potential.

Waste & Pollution

"It's terrible they can't sell their house because they have an old septic tank"

We have limited access to public sewerage systems. Increasing interest in the environmental impact of waste and changing regulations covering sitings of septic tanks are causing concern. We need to find sustainable and affordable solutions to sewerage disposal.

Our scattered communities and low population makes it very difficult to run successful recycling schemes. We need to find out what we can usefully do to reduce levels of waste produced and make safe disposal possible in this area.

3. Sustainability Profile



Sustainability Goals

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

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

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

Goal 2: Retaining a viable and empowered community

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

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

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

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

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

Sustainability Priorities

Using the information on key issues created through our community survey and agency data search, we identified a range of topics which we need to take action on if we wish to make progress towards sustainable development. This list was identified by comparing current circumstances in North Sutherland with the Sustainability Goals and Objectives. In this way it was possible to identify crucial ‘gaps’ in current development provision and action. These priorities will change over time, as circumstances change.

From this list, the Area Advisory Group selected five topics for immediate action. Strategy Groups were set up for these five topics, while the other issues were identified as areas for future action. These are very important to the sustainable future of North Sutherland, and to progress these topics detailed discussion will be needed in the future to identify the best way forward.

The Strategy Groups comprise both community and partner agency representatives. They have created plans for each of the five selected topics. A central task in working towards sustainability is maintaining an awareness of the potential positive and negative impacts. The Groups have developed plans in order to maximise positive impacts, achieve added value and reduce or eliminate negative impacts.

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

SUSTAINABILITY PRIORITIES Topics selected for immediate Action	SUSTAINABILITY PRIORITIES Topics for future Action
Young Returners Local Produce Cultural and Natural Heritage Essential Services Sustainable Landuse and Renewable Energy	Improve habitat and species management Develop Trails, paths, walkways and Interpretation Increase local involvement with planning Reduce reliance on imports Waste reduction



4. Sustainability Plans **“We can make it happen”**

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

- Their **Vision** for the topic
- Their **Objectives** for meeting the vision
- Their **Priorities** for action
- The **Actions** required to deliver the objectives

This section presents the plans developed by the five Strategy Groups and their achievements to date

Young Returners

GROUP VISION: “To create a vibrant and enterprising community which will be inherently attractive to all age groups”

A clear area of concern in North Sutherland is the number of young people that now leave and do not return. With an increase in school leavers going on to further education, it is very important that they feel there is something to come back to. However nice it is to come home, young people will not return if there are no good jobs or no decent social scene to come back to. Improved facilities and a wider spectrum of employment possibilities are musts if people are going to stay here or return. We need to involve young people in decision making for their future.

The lack of affordable housing for young people is an issue of concern. With high costs and little availability, renting or buying a house can be difficult.

The Strategy Group proposes to hold seminars on the potential of North Sutherland for young people. Interesting jobs and the chance of making a decent living are crucial. Solving these problems will provide a better quality of life.

Sustainability issues include:

- Creating a more balanced age structure
- Creating more jobs and a wider diversity of employment choices
- Ensuring the presence of a peer group and recreation
- Involving young people in planning and decision making

PRIORITISED OBJECTIVES & IDENTIFIED ACTIONS:

1. To encourage a commitment to devolved jobs in the public sector and ensure employment and development agencies have a local presence.

- Agency workers to be employed locally
- Agencies to make more use of local bases
- Develop the opportunity for the partnership members to join in and help create full time posts
- Compile a local skills and facilities database to assist this progress
- Lobby to achieve this, armed with appropriate facts and figures

2. To sustain and improve current recreation provision for all ages.

- Co-ordinate activities & link them with the transport
- Involve young people in planning and implementation
- Recruit volunteers and train them
- Improve village halls

3. To promote the availability of old housing for renovation as well as new build, to allow young families to rent.

- Housing audit of availability and demand
- Ask Scottish Homes and local housing agencies for advice and assistance
- Look at the potential of extending the tourist season to allow for more than summer use of holiday cottages

Other objectives identified were:

- To encourage private and community enterprise through training and access to financial assistance
- To provide 'life long' learning opportunities from nursery to tertiary within the community, tailored to the needs of the individual
- To ensure the imaginative use of resources and upgrading of existing facilities, including village halls

Demonstration Project

This Group are holding a seminar for young people in North Sutherland. The Seminar will address the challenges of employment, housing, recreation and other issues which young people have raised.



Local Produce

GROUP VISION: "To process, package and add value to local produce"

In the face of falling farm and croft incomes, Common Agricultural Policy reform, food scares, overproduction and environmental concerns, it is clear that diversification is a possible answer. Organic farming is one of the few areas that has enjoyed success in the past few years. With so much potential in our area, it is essential that we make better use of our local produce and reduce 'food miles'. We need to establish a reliable customer base and diversify what we currently produce, based on sound knowledge of our potential markets. Representatives from the Group visited Cumbria to look at the potential of adding value to local produce, through a co-ordinated project.

One area which could be developed is the existing craft production of ceramics, weaving, printing and knitting. The Dùthchas Local Produce Seminar held here in North Sutherland in September 2000, raised a number of important issues. We do not have enough information at present about what is being produced, and what could potentially be produced. We need to explore the potential markets both locally and further afield. All of us need to be more aware of the benefits of buying local produce. Speakers at the Seminar stressed the need to:

- Work together because we will never ALL become marketing experts
- Work together to reduce costs of marketing, research, packaging and delivery to customers
- Build a database of local producers and consumers – accurate information helps decision making
- Take control of local food production and consumption from croft gate to plate

Sustainability issues raised by Adding Value to Local Produce are:

- Reduce transport costs and travel time for producers and consumers
- Increase profits through finishing and direct sales – cutting out the middle men!



- Improve the quality of the product
- Reverse the falling nutritional value of pasture
- Trade on our 'green' credentials
- Create a distinctive market identity
- Craft producers making use of local raw material

PRIORITISED OBJECTIVES & IDENTIFIED ACTIONS:

1. Identify, improve and add value to the primary product.

- Identify existing products/potential products & possible providers
- Relevant visits to learn from the experience of others (UK)
- Develop skills & improve resource management, to produce an economic mass of goods
- Apprenticeship schemes/target training

2. Establish marketing and promote an identity.

- Logo/label for north coast – corporate identity
 - Open competition for logo design
 - Design a strategy for marketing and distributing the logo
 - Design a strategy for retaining long term use of the logo and labelling
 - Website of local product/produce availability
- Gain a reputation for local produce through local hotels & shops
- Evaluate & emphasise the environmental qualities of the area
- Access/employ a top notch marketing person
- Establish a marketing company
- Explore strategy for quality control

3. Adding value to produce/training

- Bring training into the area
- Training for managing a business & dealing with expansion
- Develop & promote craft industries & establish links
- Develop co-operative methods/co-operative approach to quality control, packaging and transport
- Research & development
- Explore potential processing facilities
- Seek out appropriate people to provide training

Demonstration Project

This Group are to run an open competition in the area to design a logo for local produce. The Group have arranged to meet representatives of Orkney Island Marketing and Orkney Gold. Through publicity surrounding the logo competition they aim to make customers aware of the potential of local produce.

Cultural & Natural Heritage

GROUP VISION: “To establish a viable community for people of all ages, through building on aspects of our natural and cultural heritage.”

People in this part of the world pride themselves on their unique natural and cultural heritage. North Sutherland has some of the most fantastic scenery, wildlife, beaches and significant historical sites imaginable. These assets must be utilised for the future, but must also be cared for and preserved. Tourism is one of our main industries and more needs to be done to encourage people to visit, and to extend the tourist season, by looking at imaginative solutions and getting more local people involved.

The Gaelic language, story telling and song are all traditional aspects of our heritage and must be encouraged and regenerated throughout the area. People feel strongly about the importance of keeping the Gaelic language alive and feel it should be encouraged.

Websites can be used to promote our area to others and to provide information about local events for ourselves. This challenge has been taken up by the Culture and Heritage Strategy Group.

If we apply sustainability principles to action we take:

- We can ensure sensitive design of buildings, information dissemination and trails
- We protect AND promote our assets through green and cultural tourism
- We maintain our living traditions
- Jobs will be created

PRIORITISED OBJECTIVES & IDENTIFIED ACTIONS:

1. To develop a strong and active social culture for the mutual benefit of residents and visitors.

- Developing the Feis movement in the area
- Lobby for Gaelic and music in primary schools
- Lobby for more investment in village halls
- Ceilidh events for visitors
- Lobby for better radio reception

2. To improve the quality of interpretation of the natural and cultural heritage of the area with the involvement of all the community.

- Encourage local people to get involved in wildlife & cultural tourism
- Ranger service for the **whole** area
- Resource audit and gap analysis for the whole area
- Look at community priorities in Initial Review



- Talks by local experts
- Pooling of knowledge/reassessing funds
- Make full use of Europe
- Convince funding bodies of the benefits of small projects
- Linking projects to improve visitor experience

3. To promote and enhance the area and it's high quality culture, archaeology, scenery, wildlife and outdoors activities.

- Local tourism marketing group
- Publications - Portal Website (with links)
- Training of local people in interpretation
- Genealogy database
- Develop “green” tourism businesses
- Promote appropriate architecture and design in new buildings

Other objectives identified were:

- To protect our marine resources.
- To maximise local employment based on the natural and cultural heritage

Demonstration Project

The Group's first step towards their goal of creating a portal website for North Sutherland was a training day. The Group aim to start small and build up the website to meet a range of needs e.g. information on local culture, 'what's on', archaeology, wildlife and outdoor activities.

Essential Services

GROUP VISION:

“To capitalise on existing facilities and skills by developing them imaginatively and creatively to provide sustainable services”

In spite of improvements in the level of services available in North Sutherland there is still a long way to go. Transport is a problem in this part of the world. We suffer from lack of a regular and reliable public transport system. The price of fuel is a serious disadvantage. Groups and Community Councils should be lobbying for lower fuel prices.

There is a lack of access to Information Technology in the area. People do not have decent television or radio reception. Many areas do not have the latest services supplied by British Telecom.

Emphasised in the Initial Review is a lack of child and dependent care in the area. If parents wish to go out to work few childcare options are available. There is a severe lack of help, for people caring for dependants. An extension of the Crossroads Care scheme across the area is a request from many people.

Causing most concern, is the substantial lack of mains sewerage systems in parts of North Sutherland. With many homes and businesses still connected to original septic tanks, now below the regulation standard set by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, it is becoming an increasing problem, which needs immediate attention.

Sustainable issues, which can be addressed through essential services are:

- Reducing disadvantages of distance and rural locations
- Reducing the environmental impact of sewerage and waste disposal
- Raising awareness of the environmental impact of waste
- Tackling exclusion
- Improving social life for the entire community

PRIORITISED OBJECTIVES & IDENTIFIED ACTIONS:

1. Sewerage - To provide sustainable public sewerage systems in communities and give assistance in upgrading individual septic tank systems.

- Lobby for funding for small scale and individual systems such as reed beds
- Lobby North of Scotland Water Authority & Scottish Environment Protection Agency
- Lobby MP/MSP/MEP to fund research into sustainable utilisation of effluent from sewerage plants
- Set up a demonstration project with the Environmental Research Unit and North Highland College

2. Transport - To develop regular, accessible public transport to link communities and to provide access to essential services and recreation.

- Acknowledge the developments so far in community transport but lobby for a long-term sustainable community transport system
- To lobby for a reduction in tax on all fuels

3. Information Technology - To provide an integrated telecommunications Information & Communications Technologies network for the area.

- Lobby British Telecom to provide equality of service
- Provide Information Technology equipment and training in every community
- Co-ordinate systems throughout the area and provide professional support

4. Child/dependent care - To provide an adequate child/dependent infrastructure in order to release community potential.

- Provision of training for child minders
- Development of Crossroads Care

Other objectives identified were:

- Roads -To upgrade all public roads, with regular maintenance and improved pedestrian facilities
- Water- To ensure the provision of a modern water treatment plant providing supplies to all north coast communities
- Elderly- To provide genuine care which includes social interaction with their own community
- Health -To ensure a comprehensive range of health care and education centred on communities

Demonstration Project

The Group Demonstration Project is to investigate possible sewerage system upgrading options. The Environmental Research Unit at North Highland College have completed a survey for the Group on this subject. This survey looks at the sustainability of twelve potential systems. Three were found to be particularly suitable for our area. These are reed beds, peat filters and wetland eco-system treatment systems.

Sustainable Land Use & Renewable Energy

GROUP VISION: “Wise stewardship of the land with long term benefits for local communities, achieved through integration of current land management practices.”

Our distinctive landscape is very valuable. In our landscape we see that cultural and environmental values go hand in hand. Now is the time to think about our ecological assets. We need to know how we can enhance these through the land use and land management practices we choose to pursue now and in the future.

There is a need in North Sutherland for integrated sustainable land use. This should encompass forestry, agriculture, marine, sporting management, conservation, landscape and recreation. One example of a positive management scheme is the Peatland Management Scheme launched 8 years ago by Scottish Natural Heritage. This encourages traditional environmentally friendly land management in the peatlands of Caithness and Sutherland. The scheme covers acceptable levels and practices for management of grazings and grazing animals, muirburn, domestic peatcutting and use of all terrain vehicles. The Scheme currently contributes £170,000 per annum to the rural economy of Caithness and Sutherland.

There is a need to promote and support socially and environmentally beneficial land management practices. For example, forestry which requires long term planning and commitment, now and in the future, should be looked at in terms of developing the forest resource for multiple benefits - community participation, ownership, landscape and ecological diversity.

The Group is looking at the need to promote and support a balance of energy/resource conservation and develop appropriate renewable energy with adequate community controls and benefits.

The main sustainability issues focussed on by this group are:

- The potential social and economic benefits of biodiversity
- Community involvement in management and use of natural resources
- Reduction of tensions between competing land uses and policies
- Energy production from renewable, low impact sources

PRIORITISED OBJECTIVES & IDENTIFIED ACTIONS:

1. Renewables: To promote and support a balance of energy/resource conservation and development of appropriate renewable energy with adequate community controls and benefit from renewables development

- Examine feasibility of resources that could be developed in North Sutherland area and undertake a sustainability cost-benefit analysis
- Develop an information directory on funding, technology and operational structures and procedures
- Improve building insulation
- Promote and install solar/wind generation equipment on a household basis
- Develop appropriate wind/wave/hydro renewable energy schemes

2. Forestry: To develop forest resource that is based on multiple benefits including: community participation/ownership; landscape diversity; ecological diversity etc.

- Look at best practice examples elsewhere
- Develop a woodland network within the area (now set up)
- Develop woodland training education and interpretation within the area
- Demonstration of integrated community woodland within North Sutherland
- Improve public access with themes put in place e.g. mountain bikes, picnic areas etc.
- Develop a timber utilisation centre to add value to the local timber resource
- Work to secure community involvement in forest design, management and utilisation

3. To promote and support socially and environmentally beneficial land management practices:

- Look at and identify best practice examples of sustainable land use
- Better resource targeting – promote zonal areas for support
- Promote/reward cattle ownership and management
- More funds for agri-environment initiatives – clear links with marketing of healthy, environmentally sound product
- Add value by linking traditional land management with tourism, recreation, local marketing etc.
- Review options for retirement schemes and start-up incentives for younger entrants to agriculture or alternative land uses
- Payment to reflect environment instead of numbers – this would encourage better finished product and promote a shift away from production based subsidy
- Draw up a Dùthchas Area (N. Sutherland) sustainable land use management plan (blueprint) with a recommended delivery mechanism (i.e. support and funding in place)

4. Sporting management: To harmonise sporting management with other land uses (e.g. recreation, access, agriculture, forestry, conservation) and encourage and support wider ownership of sporting interest with benefits for the whole community.

Other objectives identified were:

- **Agriculture:** To promote and support diversification within the agricultural sector
- **Landscape:** to recognise the inherent value of natural and cultural landscapes through a process that involves local people
- To encourage appropriate grazing levels (stocking density) and stock management practices in harmony with the natural environment
- **Recreation:** To promote and support the development of access opportunities/facilities in harmony with other land uses
- To use natural resources for local economic benefit, in preference to imported resources
- To harmonise this strategic plan with other mainstream plans

Geographical Information Systems

This Group have also made use of a GIS or Geographical Information System to help with their work. This showed how useful this system is for communities in planning their own development. If such a system was available locally or via the Internet it would be a great bonus. However at present there are specific barriers to achieving that. These include access to data sources, copyright issues and the cost of software and equipment. The Group are keen to see these barriers overcome in the future.

Demonstration Project

As a Demonstration Project this Group are organising a seminar which will address radical new approaches to sustainable land management. Recommendations from this workshop will form the basis for future action.



Task Groups

It was clear from the Dùthchas Initial Review process that all eleven communities in the area wished to move quickly on a project that was important to their community. The projects were selected, at village meetings, from the priorities established through local voting in the Initial Review Survey. The enthusiasm locally, for these projects, is evidence of the importance of community consultation and involvement in decision making. The communities took ownership of these projects. They accessed funding and support available through local initiatives – in particular Initiative at the Edge. Some Groups have applied for, and gained funding, from other sources too. These diverse community projects all make an impact on the Sustainability Priorities, Goals and Objectives described in this Strategy. They all contribute towards the realisation of the Vision and for this reason it is important to be aware of the added value which can be gained from taking a strategic approach. In the future further gains could be made through linking such projects in a strategic way.

The 11 Sub areas and projects highlighted through the Initial Review are:

Altnaharra:	Carpark and information point, befitting this community's status as the "Gateway to North Sutherland"
Armadale:	Energy efficient social housing
Bettyhill:	Tourist Information Centre, potential orientation centre and to carry this forward, a Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee
Durness:	Plans and funding for a new hall
Melness:	Extending and upgrading the pier
Melvich:	Refurbishing the Village Hall
Skerry:	Sales of local produce
Strath Halladale:	Village Hall improvements and children's play area
Strathnaver:	Hall renovations and children's play area
Strathy:	Toilet and Information Point using alternative energy
Tongue:	Renovation of the football pitch

5. Implementing the Strategy

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

The main elements are:

The Organisational Framework

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

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

Through a detailed consultation process, the Area Advisory Group for North Sutherland has recommended the main elements of this implementation framework. In brief, these are:

- As a first step, a Partnership Agreement will be drawn up between the community and agency Partners needed to implement the Strategy
- A Management Group will be responsible for overseeing and directing the Strategy implementation and review, and line managing the project staff
- A new post will be created to support the implementation work. One of the funding agencies will act as employer, on behalf of the Partnership. The post will be line managed through the Management Group
- A community based organisation for North Sutherland will be established in due course to act as the fund-raising and delivery organisation for the Strategy
- Initiative at the Edge will support the work

Resource implications:

It is recommended that funding for the new post and associated costs should be provided for the first 2 years by key local Partners. Beyond this period additional funding will be sought.

The Practical Implementation

The actual work of implementing the Strategy will be undertaken on a phased basis, as capacity allows. Regular reviews will be required to allow for progress to be monitored and alterations or updates to the Strategy to be made. More details about implementation and phasing is available in the attached Action Plan. In brief, this is based on a 2-3 year cycle of implementing projects, monitoring progress and identifying the priorities for the next phase. Approximately every 5 years a full review of the strategy and its impacts on the area will take place.



Measuring Progress

The first step for each Strategy Group will be to:

- recognise current circumstances
- identify a measure or indicator which adequately describes current circumstances – an example for Young Returners might be current ‘rate of return’

When the Groups review progress and plan further actions, they will look again at these ‘measures’ and see if they have changed.

In this way the groups will be able to assess how their actions have made an impact. Help will be sought, in measuring progress at an area level, through impact on our Sustainability Goals and Objectives. Each Group may also wish to set clear practical targets for implementing their workplan e.g. Dates for completing activities

Reviewing Our Strategy

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

Such a workshop would deal with:

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

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

Making Links

Access to Information

A key part of the work of building this Strategy was assessing the information about the area held by the many organisations, both public and otherwise, who collect data in our area. In doing this we discovered that this information is very extensive, but is difficult to find out about and difficult to access. We also discovered that the particular information which we need to develop and assess meaningful sustainability indicators, is often not available at all. Accessing the information and resources required to establish a local Geographical Information Systems is equally problematic.

We will work with our Partners to help identify the kinds of information we need to have access to, and the gaps which presently exist in that information and to look into ways in which Geographical Information Systems could be made more available to us.

Strategic Links

It is not enough for us to have produced a Strategy which meets our own local needs. For this Strategy to be successful and lead to meaningful change it must be linked to the plans and strategies of other bodies, both within and outwith the area, whose work influences our area. Each of the Dùthchas Partners has their own strategic plans and policies. These need to take account of our Strategy, so that these agencies can do their best to help us meet our vision for the area.

In a strategic context we must ensure that our strategy plays a robust role in the strategic plans of our Partners and local organisations. We must be aware of what our Partners and local players are doing, and take every opportunity to work with them. The way in which the community views on the need for local transport have been translated into action through the Sutherland Social Inclusion Partnership is an excellent example of how this can work. Among these other strategies some are key, and the links with our Strategy will be essential. In particular these links include:

- The Highland Community Plan
- Highland Council Structure and Local Plans
- Initiative at the Edge
- Local Agenda 21
- North Highland Forest Trust
- Social Inclusion Partnership
- Sutherland Partnership
- The Wellbeing Alliance.

Relevant emerging initiatives include:
Local Economic Forum, Leader +

We will work with all of our Partners and local organisations to ensure that the links are made between our Strategy and theirs.

Moving Forwards

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

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

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

Now it is time to put one foot in front of the other and together, beat a path towards a sustainable future for North Sutherland.

"We are on the edge, and what a beautiful edge we're on!"

Janette Mackay, Strathg





our place in the future



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