

CONTENTS

The Vision	2
1. Aim	3
2. Introduction	3
3. Context	5
4. Western Isles Strategic Objectives	9
5. Priority Objectives	14
6. Implementation	16
Appendices	
1 Public Consultation	17
2 Uptake of Woodland Grant Scheme	17



The production of the Strategy has been jointly funded by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Scottish Natural Heritage.

Photographs courtesy of Forestry Commission, Lews Castle Trust, Frank Stark, Jon Hollingdale, Alastair Banks.



Opposite:
Vision of the future

Top left:
Existing woodland at Meall Mor, South Uist.

Bottom left:
Tree planting at Carinish, North Uist.

The strategy has been drawn up by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar in conjunction with representatives of the Western Isles Local Biodiversity partnership and Forestry Commission for Scotland



**“THE STRATEGY WILL ACT
AS A CATALYST FOR
POSITIVE MANAGEMENT OF
AND INCREASED
INVESTMENT IN
WOODLANDS WITHIN THE
WESTERN ISLES, AND IN
PARTICULAR IN OUR
CROFTING COMMUNITIES”**

*Councillor Archie Campbell,
Chairman,
Sustainable Development Committee,
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, 2003.*

THE VISION

The trees and woodlands in the Western Isles will contribute to the quality of life for local people by:

- Maintaining and enhancing the diversity of local wildlife and habitats
- Providing shelter and enhancing the landscape
- Providing recreational, cultural and educational experiences
- Stimulating community participation
- Maximising economic opportunities.



1. AIM

The aim of the Woodland Strategy is to move towards achieving the Western Isles vision encouraging the use of trees, shrubs and woodlands to enhance the environment and maximise a range of sustainable benefits to the Western Isles community.

To help realise the vision and to support delivery of the Scottish Executive's Scottish Forestry Strategy a series of strategic objectives have been developed for the Western Isles. They are based on creating sustainable woodlands and reflect the issues and priorities raised during consultation.

2. INTRODUCTION

Pollen records show that the islands had a naturally wooded landscape up to 8,000 years ago, with progressive disappearance of tree cover thereafter through grazing and burning, until the landscape was effectively treeless by the early 1st millennium AD.

Today woodland covers only very small areas in the Western Isles, and native and mature planted woodlands in particular, are rare and valued assets. In a windy climate, the shelter that shrubs and trees can provide for people and livestock is of great importance, and even small areas of woodland can bring great diversity to an otherwise treeless environment.

This presents great opportunities for the Western Isles to build on existing planting to develop a diversity of wooded areas which contribute to an even more interesting and diverse environment, with its moorlands, mountains and machair complemented by woodlands: the most suitable trees growing where they will thrive, giving pleasure and enjoyment as well as providing a range of social, economic and educational opportunities.

Growing trees in the Western Isles is on the margin in terms of physical factors, including wind exposure and soils. However, provided site and species are carefully chosen, as in much of upland Scotland and parts of Norway with similar conditions, trees can and do grow successfully.

Early public consultation, summarised in Appendix 1, found that a very high proportion of people believe that woodlands contribute positively to life in the Western Isles, with a lot of interest from the crofting community in considering planting. 70% of respondents said that they would be keen to be a member of a

group in their local area that might explore the scope for woodland development and subsequently help to take this forward.

Sections 4 and 5 of the strategy set out specific objectives and priorities related to the Scottish Forestry Strategy but focused on the opportunities in the Western Isles that have been identified through wide consultation. The strategy also sets out measures to ensure that new planting and woodland management complement other land uses and protect important habitats.

The strategy has been drawn up by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar in conjunction with representatives of the Western Isles Local Biodiversity partnership and the Forestry Commission. Its preparation has been informed by consultation with a wide range of local organisations and individuals including direct contact with local organisations, crofters and landowners with experience of woodland development in Western Isles.



*Above: Oak tree sapling
Opposite: Harebells*



*Above: Mature policy woodland,
Lews Castle, Stornoway.
Opposite: Birch woods at Meall Mor, South Uist.*



3. CONTEXT

3.1 Existing woodlands

As a result of the scarcity of woodland in the Western Isles, there is limited community or cultural connection to trees or woodland. Historically, buildings were constructed mainly of stone or turf with valued roof timbers, but today imported materials are used. Peat has been the traditional fuel source.

The surviving native woodlands are of particular importance as they provide a direct connection to the past landscapes. They are small and fragmented, and are characterised by locally native trees and shrubs: mainly downy birch, eared and grey willow and rowan. Aspen is found on mineral soils, hazel and juniper are scattered and rare. The total area of native woods is estimated at 200 hectares.

Mature policy woodland such as the Lews Castle policies is mainly the result of 19th century planting by landowners and is of mixed, mainly broadleaf species, with soil imported from the mainland to improve growing conditions.

After 1945, the Forestry Commission planted conifers (Lodgepole Pine and Sitka Spruce) on deep peat. Initial trial plantations at Balallan and Valtos were followed between 1968 and 1972 by other plantations in Lewis and in Uist. Attacks by pine beauty moth on the Garynahine and Aline plantations, however, has cast doubt on the wisdom of growing large areas of pure Lodgepole Pine on deep peat.

Following the Crofter Forestry Act of 1991 more recent plantings have been on common grazing



and estate land in Lewis, Harris and the Uists. The total area of crofter forestry land approved since April 1992 is 1,800 hectares which represents 50% of the total area approved under Woodland Grant Scheme in the Western Isles over the period (3,611 hectares), as shown on the graph at Appendix 2. Planted broadleaf woodland, predominantly of native species, has increased in recent years aided by the Millennium Forest Project to approximately 500 ha (with conifers used in a nurse role).

Sheltered settlements, particularly Stornoway, have trees that have been planted in gardens and public places. Protection of some areas is afforded by Tree Preservation Orders and listing within the Inventory of Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes.

3.2 Land Availability and Growing Conditions

For trees to grow well sites need to be carefully chosen. Exposure and soils are the key factors. The Western Isles is one of the windiest regions in Europe, and the wind is particularly detrimental to tree growth in locations 100 metres or more above sea level. Local shelter is crucial to early establishment. Soils that offer some drainage and nutrients are also essential.

A report on the Harris Woodland Initiative in 1996 by Andrew Campbell for the Forestry Commission demonstrates the importance of site selection and the need to learn from experience when establishing trees in the Western Isles. This report concluded that:

- Stocking densities for broadleaves, for silvicultural reasons, have to be above minimum numbers per hectare specified in the Woodland Grant Scheme
- Conifer nurse species are acceptable in areas with peaty soil, but should be removed within an agreed silvicultural timescale
- Landforms and site conditions dictate where planting is feasible. Experience indicates that mid-slopes are suitable, but that flat peat filled valley bottoms are not
- Pure broadleaf planting would be suitable on better quality sites, with a broadleaf conifer nurse mixture on poorer areas
- Seed source is vital in helping tree establishment.

Machair, coastal and wet heath on peatlands, and blanket bog are internationally important wildlife habitats. Protection of these and their associated hydrological systems are a priority consideration in selecting land for woodland expansion.



Deer numbers have rapidly increased over the past ten years and their range has expanded. They have moved into some of the woodlands and have caused damage to young trees. This highlights the importance of deer management in successful woodland establishment and makes protection an aspect which the Woodland Strategy should seek to address.

3.3 Scottish Forestry Strategy

The guiding principles of the Scottish Executive's strategy, as set out in *'Forests of Scotland – The Scottish Forestry Strategy'* 2000, are:

- sustainability – meeting international standards of forest management
- integration with other rural activities
- positive value – providing social, economic or environmental benefits that exceed costs
- community support, with mechanisms for community participation
- diversity and local distinctiveness – protecting, managing and enhancing the range of woodland habitats and species.

This strategy adopts these principles and reflects the priorities of the Scottish Forestry Strategy in the Western Isles context.

3.4 Rural Development

The policy document, *'Rural Scotland – A New Approach'* (2000) commits the Scottish Executive to key sectors, including forestry, meeting the needs of fragile crofting communities, and supporting natural and cultural heritage assets that are often valuable to the identity and lives of rural communities, including native woodland.

The crofting reform proposals being considered by the Scottish Parliament encourage further diversification into crofter forestry, including:

- Allowing multiple use of crofter forestry woodlands
- Facilitating partnerships between crofters and landlords, where the latter has established trees prior to the crofter forestry scheme.

3.5 Strategic Framework for Crofting and Farming in the Western Isles

The Strategic Framework for Crofting and Farming in the Western Isles was drawn up in 2002 by a Steering Group of the principal organisations involved in supporting crofting and farming in the Western Isles in response to Action 35 in the government's "Forward Strategy for Scottish Agriculture" to improve the prosperity of farming businesses in the Western Isles and develop alternative sources of income.

There will be scope for aspects of the implementation of this Woodland Strategy to dovetail with the implementation of the Action 35 Strategy – in particular in supporting the establishment of effective mechanisms in local areas to develop policy and implement it effectively, and in developing agro-forestry.

3.6 Access and Land Reform

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 aims to increase the extent of responsible access to land (both open and enclosed) and provide the public with greater opportunity and confidence to enjoy the countryside.

The Act will facilitate and encourage the purchase of land by crofting and other communities. This will tend to encourage communities to consider woodland development as an aspect of their estate planning, both as a potential source of future employment and income creation, and in terms of its links with other estate assets and activities.

The Working Draft of the Western Isles Countryside Access Strategy drawn up by the Local Access Forum includes the following objectives:

- Identify and establish a Core Path Network
- Improve access to existing paths and routes
- Develop new paths to link existing path networks or meet special needs.

Woodlands close to communities or on key path routes could become an increasingly important resource as walking, cycling, horse-riding etc. are encouraged by the Access Strategy.

Above top: Enhancing the range of species - primroses

Above: Woodlands can provide useful livestock shelter.

Opposite: Woodlands are an increasingly important resource for recreation.



3.7 Western Isles Development Plan

A key aim of the Western Isles Structure Plan is to provide a framework for sustaining and developing communities throughout the Western Isles. A positive development framework is considered important in combating the threat of further population decline.

The Plan includes a commitment to produce this Woodland Strategy, while croft diversification, biodiversity and good land management are also themes in the Plan. It also promotes the sustainable use of resources, a concept which is being encouraged through other Comhairle policy statements e.g. design guidance.

3.8 Biodiversity

The general thrust of action to increase biodiversity nationally is through defining priority action plans for species and habitats under threat or in decline. In 1998, the UK Biodiversity Action Plan set the following 15 year targets for native woodland habitats:

- To maintain the existing area of native woodland habitat and improve the condition of the woods
- To expand the habitat area by 10%.

A Habitat Action Plan (HAP) for native woodlands forms part of the Western Isles Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP), and complements this Woodland Strategy. The actions contained in the HAP will assist in meeting the objectives of this strategy and of Objective 5 in the SNH Natural Heritage Futures Report (2002) for the Western Isles: "To maintain the remaining woodland scrub and associated woodland species and encourage natural regeneration of native woodland species."

Furthermore, all woodlands and individual garden trees and shrubs can provide habitats for a wide range of flora and fauna and the opportunities this presents to increase the biodiversity of Western Isles are recognised in the LBAP.





Above: Hazel



4. WESTERN ISLES STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The strategic objectives have been developed to help achieve the Vision and to support the Aim as well as the delivery of the Scottish Forestry Strategy. They are based on creating sustainable woodlands and this will entail:

- Managing existing woodlands to maximise public benefit
- Developing new woodlands for a variety of purposes
- Involving the community in long term woodland development and stewardship.

The objectives of the Western Isles strategy are summarised under the five Strategic Directions of the Scottish Forestry Strategy.

(1) Maximise the value to the Scottish economy of the wood resource becoming available over the next twenty years

This national objective is of limited relevance to the Western Isles as its woodland base is small and difficult to access and as exporting timber as a bulk commodity is unlikely to be economically viable given this scale and transport costs.

Opportunities lie in developing the local use of small scale timber products such as fencing posts and rails, other countryside furniture and crafts. Research into woodfuel as an alternative renewable source of fuel may offer economic opportunities in the future, however, the issue of accessibility of woodlands needs to be taken into account.

OBJECTIVES

- **Maximise economic benefits from island grown timber**

(2) Create a diverse forest resource of high quality that will contribute to the economic needs of Scotland throughout the 21st century and beyond

In the management of existing woodlands the main opportunities for the Western Isles lie in increasing their social and environmental contribution. This could include the reintroduction of native species currently not growing on the Western Isles. In addition there may be opportunities to exploit non-timber forest products (e.g. fungi, foliage, venison) and for timber by-products such as creels and wood chip for horticultural use.

The availability of trees of a suitable species, provenance and origin* which are adapted to Western Isles conditions will be crucial to the success of developing woodlands.

The expansion of local nurseries would assist in providing such stock offering small business opportunities, potentially creating local employment. Other local employment opportunities exist in the establishment and management of woodlands, although the scale of woodland development may mean that employment will generally be part-time or periodic.

Woodlands provide shelter and habitat for deer. The impact of increasing deer numbers on woodlands needs to be addressed through effective planning and protection.

**The provenance is the place from which the seed or cutting was collected and the origin is the place where the trees from which seeds or cuttings are collected are deemed to be growing naturally.*

OBJECTIVES

- **Maximise the local economic opportunities arising from woodlands**
- **Support the development of forests of more mixed ages and species and which fit the surrounding landscape**
- **Encourage the production of trees of species, provenance and origin suitable to Western Isles conditions**
- **Identify value-added opportunities, including crafts, fungi collection, honey production, soft fruit production**
- **Address issues arising from increasing deer numbers and their expanding range.**



(3) To ensure that trees, woods and forests make a positive contribution to the environment

In much of the Western Isles, open crofted landscapes of peatlands, heathland and machair have developed. Woodland expansion into these areas needs to be carefully sited and designed to ensure that it is complementary to the distinctive landscape. The Western Isles Landscape Character Assessment can provide guidance in this respect.

A significant area of this open ground is internationally important in its own right, particularly for bird species with feeding and breeding patterns adapted to wide open landscapes with few mammalian predators. The integrity of these habitats should be maintained in selecting sites for woodland development.

Habitat, species and landscape designations need to be taken into account in planning woodland expansion in the Western Isles. However, designations can be used to support sympathetic woodland expansion and consolidation plans, while additional grant aid can be available to enhance conservation value.

Tree planting offers opportunities to increase the diversity of the landscape particularly associated with crofting townships, dwellings or transport infrastructures. Such woodlands would provide shelter for livestock, crops and dwellings and support croft diversification.

The emphasis, both in new planting and in restructuring existing woodlands, should be on selecting appropriate sites, tree and shrub species and scales of planting that will fit into the landscape and have potential to enhance biodiversity.

This will tend generally towards small scale plantings which include areas of open ground and woody shrubs (planted at high densities to provide mutual shelter within the woodland) as well as a mixture of tree species. Shelter can also assist with establishing a variety of fruit trees and bushes.

A continuation of learning from experience and support for appropriate research into successful woodland establishment will ensure that the emphasis placed above will continue to develop.

Native Woodlands

The Western Isles has had little tree cover for many centuries, and native woodland has survived only where it is out of reach of grazing

animals and fire. These areas of native woodland, with species adapted to the conditions, need to be identified and nurtured. Where possible, the fragments should be expanded and linked. The Western Isles Habitat Action Plan for native woodland supports the survey of existing remnant native woodlands and the establishment of a programme of seed collection to assist with the regeneration of these woodlands.

Riparian woodland of native species removes grazing pressure, helps stabilise banks, holds nutrients and provides invertebrate food for juvenile salmon and sea trout. Furthermore, healthier river systems can provide corridors for other wildlife. There are also opportunities to develop new riparian woodlands in existing conifer woods.

Archaeology

The archaeology of the Western Isles is very rich. Archaeological landscapes can have a significant economic value through attracting visitors and specialist researchers and educationalists. Also, there is cultural interest in sites connected with the more recent past, both local and in relation to the Western Isles diaspora. Woodland expansion should reflect this importance and ensure any planting protects and enhances archaeological sites.

OBJECTIVES

- **Promote woodlands which will increase the diversity of the landscape and provide shelter and other sustainable benefits**
- **Ensure design of new woodland takes account of scale, location and use of species of suitable provenance**
- **Maximise the benefits for biodiversity in plans for new woodlands and for management of existing woodlands**
- **Protect and expand native woodlands and work towards developing forest habitat networks**
- **Improve riparian habitats by expanding the area of riparian woodland**
- **Ensure protection & enhancement of archaeological sites are taken into account in planning woodland development.**



Top: Siskin
Above & opposite:
Schools involvement in
woodland projects



(4) To create opportunities for more people to enjoy trees, woods and forests

Woodlands accessible to the general public are still a rarity in the Western Isles, with notable exceptions such as Lews Castle policies. However the recent establishment of eight Millennium Forest projects has increased this opportunity.

Public access to woodlands can promote improved health. All-ability access to places close to where people live that are sheltered from the wind, such as might be found in a woodland setting, is highly valued in the islands. The Western Isles Countryside Access Strategy offers opportunities to focus on access provision in woodland settings, although the public needs to be well informed about the requirements of responsible access. Improvements to the amenity of and access to woodlands will benefit visitors to the islands as well as residents.

Woods are an important learning resource and their longevity offers ideal lifelong learning opportunities. The involvement of schools in woodland projects and ranger services throughout the Western Isles provide environmental education opportunities which would be supported by developing woodland-specific material. Small scale tree planting at a domestic level can provide a place for children to play and experience the magic of trees.

Woodlands can also play a role in developing the cultural heritage. Projects such as gaelic alphabet tree trails provide enjoyment and an understanding of the local culture and gaelic language.

OBJECTIVES

- **Engage with the Western Isles Countryside Access Forum to maximise all-ability access provision in woodland settings**
- **As part of life-long learning maximise the use of woodlands as an educational resource**
- **Investigate the availability of public owned land for tree and shrub planting in conjunction with any educational opportunities which such projects might offer**
- **Develop the recreational and cultural potential of existing woodland and maximise opportunities in new woodlands.**





*Above: Robin
Opposite top:
Community involvement in
woodlands has increased.
Opposite bottom:
Lewis Chessman at the Lewis Castle
Woodlands Centre, carved
from local timber*



(5) To help communities to benefit from woods and forests

Community involvement in woodlands in the Western Isles has increased over recent years through Crofter forestry schemes and the work of the Stornoway Trust and the Southern Isles Amenity Trust.

Through involvement in woodlands and woodland management, communities and individuals can identify and develop opportunities for recreation, conservation and stimulate local employment opportunities. This involvement can also contribute to wider community development.

Involvement in woodland projects can take many forms from inputting comments and ideas to working in partnership with other owners and agencies to establish and manage community owned woodlands.

In order to allow communities to participate fully and knowledgeably, it will be necessary to build capacity through skills acquisition, provision of technical information and networking between communities. Local training opportunities are currently limited. The opportunity to access appropriate training and networking of best practice/successful experiences within the Western Isles and beyond (e.g. Northern Isles) will further encourage community involvement and successful woodland management.

Although there is limited expertise and knowledge, the significant experience of locals involved in planting and growing in Western Isles can be built upon. Providing the means by which that base can be expanded will not only assist in achieving better managed woodlands but may also identify small community business opportunities.

OBJECTIVES

- **Increase opportunities for community involvement**
- **Ensure the provision of information, professional advice and training to landowners, crofters, individuals and communities on all relevant aspects of establishing and managing woodlands and trees**
- **Provide information to crofters, craft workers and other members of local communities on ways in which local forests and woods can provide small scale business development opportunities.**



5. PRIORITY OBJECTIVES

Following consultation, the eight objectives listed below have been highlighted as priorities. They are listed in the order in which they appear in section 4.

For each objective, priorities for actions have been indicated and these will form the focus for implementation by the partners involved in the steering group to work towards achieving the strategy Vision.

Objective	Priorities for action
Maximise the local economic opportunities arising from woodlands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▷ Encourage the expansion of local nurseries to produce trees of species, provenance and origin suitable to Western Isles conditions.▷ Investigate markets for timber by-products and other value added products.
Address issues arising from increasing deer numbers and their expanding range.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▷ Ensure that all woodland development proposals adequately consider and can implement appropriate deer management plans and protection methods.▷ Investigate opportunities for training and guidance on effective deer management.
Promote woodlands which will increase the diversity of the landscape and provide shelter and other sustainable benefits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▷ Ensure the scale and design of new woodlands complements the distinctive landscape of the islands and of crofting townships.▷ Encourage and provide support for woodlands on both in-bye land and common grazing, where appropriate. Preference will be given to sites that are capable of growing a range of species with an emphasis towards broadleaves or at least a mix of conifer and broadleaved species.▷ Encourage townships to liaise with the Crofters Commission in the production of township development plans that include woodlands as one of the projects.
Protect and expand native woodlands and work towards developing forest habitat networks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▷ Support the implementation of the Native Woodland Habitat Action Plan, in particular survey of the existing resource and establishment of a programme of seed collection.▷ Support expansion of native woodland to link fragments or at least provide larger patches which may link in the future.
Improve riparian habitats by expanding the area of riparian woodland.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▷ Encourage local angling interests to identify priority catchments and expand the area of riparian woodland within them.



As part of life-long learning, maximise the use of woodlands as an educational resource.

- ▷ Promote schools involvement in woodland projects through the LBAP process.
- ▷ Encourage the production of woodland information packs, particularly in relation to community woods.

Increase opportunities for community involvement.

- ▷ Encourage existing local groups or the formation of new ones to implement woodland projects.
- ▷ Identify opportunities for community woodland planting.
- ▷ Ensure effective community consultation is adopted in all woodland projects, giving neighbours and communities the opportunity to comment on plans and proposals.

Ensure the provision of information, professional advice and training to landowners, crofters, individuals and communities on all relevant aspects of establishing and managing woodlands and trees.

- ▷ Seek to provide locally based woodland advice and support through appropriate staff.
- ▷ Develop both short and long-term learning opportunities in woodland skills with local colleges/UHI.
- ▷ Establish local woodland networks for information exchange.

Below: The expansion of local nurseries is essential for the production of stock suitable for Western Isles conditions.

Below right: Deer numbers have increased over recent years.





Above top: Young sapling at Meall Mor, South Uist.

Above: Aspen leaves and catkins.

6. IMPLEMENTATION

6.1 Partnership

This strategy has been produced by a Steering Group, led by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and including representatives of Forestry Commission, RSPB, SNH, the Stornoway Trust and the Western Isles Fisheries Trust. The Steering Group will continue to work in partnership to:

- Lead on implementation of the strategy
- Raise awareness of the strategy and develop means by which it can be implemented
- Monitor the progress of the strategy
- Ensure liaison between implementation of this Woodland Strategy, the Action 35 Strategic Framework, the Western Isles Countryside Access Strategy, the Local Biodiversity Action Plan and other relevant strategies and programmes
- Facilitate community involvement and capacity building
- Build effective partnerships with other agencies, groups and individuals, as appropriate
- Continue to support learning from experience and support research and evaluation of best practice for woodland establishment and management in the Western Isles.

6.2 Local Considerations

Plans for new planting and other woodland development will need to take account of other priorities. In particular:

- Threatened, rare and internationally important species and habitats – especially within formally designated areas
- Land, including machair and peatlands, which is generally unsuitable for planting
- The conservation interest of geological or geomorphological features
- Archaeological sites and areas where archaeological investigations should be carried out prior to any development
- The need to maintain highly valued cultural landscapes.

Over the next fifty years, researchers are predicting a change in our climate to possibly warmer and wetter conditions, accompanied by a rise in sea level. In terms of the Western Isles, this is not likely to mean more rain but heavier winter rainfalls and less rain in summer. This could result in more violent floods in river

systems and a higher fire risk. The average annual temperature may well rise. The overall change in physical conditions could favour tree growth and increase the value of riparian woodland in stabilising riverbanks and preventing flood damage. Trees can provide shade to lower the water temperature in summer and raise it in winter.

Information, guidance and advice on these issues is available from Scottish Natural Heritage, the Forestry Commission and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

6.3 Financial Support

The availability and criteria of grant assistance will be critical in implementing the priorities for action set out in the strategy. The Steering Group will work together to ensure that details of appropriate schemes are brought to the attention of interested parties locally and that they can be utilised to best advantage in implementing the strategy.



APPENDIX 1

Public Consultation

Open days were held during July 2003 in Harris, Uist, Stornoway and Barra to allow the public to give their views on woodland development. Of the 96 people who completed a questionnaire, 93% agreed that woodlands contribute positively to life in the Western Isles at present or could do in the future.

The main benefits of woodland planting were considered to relate to:

- shelter (71%);
- contribution to the landscape (62%);
- biodiversity (57%);
- croft diversification (54%).

The main obstacles to successful planting were considered to be:

- adverse weather conditions (54%);
- poor soil conditions (38%);
- lack of local expertise and advice (29%).

43% of those who participated in this early consultation said that they would be very likely to consider woodland planting themselves, 32% said that they might consider this and 20% said that it would be unlikely.

70% of those who responded said that they would be keen to be a member of a group in their local area that might explore the scope for woodland development and subsequently help to take this forward.

Further consultation was carried out on a draft strategy in October 2003, in particular to gather views on the objectives identified as priorities for Western Isles. 62 individuals and groups, mainly grazings committees, submitted comments.

The main issues on which comments were received related to:

- the need for local support and advice;
- the importance of deer management in developing and managing woodlands;
- the scale, location and impact on the landscape of planting new woodlands.

The strategy has been informed by the views gathered through both consultation exercises as well as those expressed by local organisations, crofters and landowners with experience of woodland development contacted during preparation of it. The draft strategy has been amended in the light of the views expressed during consultation.

APPENDIX 2

Uptake of Woodland Grant Scheme

Area approved under WGS in Western Isles 1 April 1992 to 31 July 2003



