

WESTERN ISLES LOCAL PLAN

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT SCOPING REPORT

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1 SEA CONTEXT

Statutory and Administrative Context

- 1.1 The assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment, commonly referred to as Strategic Environmental Assessment or SEA, was introduced by the European Parliament and Council through Directive 2001/42/EC. It is a process whereby the environmental effect of plans is considered as part of the plan preparation process. The EU Directive has been translated into UK and Scottish legislation. The relevant statutory context and administrative advice is as follows:
- ◆ European Council Directive No. 2001/42/EC;
 - ◆ Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 (which came into force on 20 February 2006);
 - ◆ Scottish Statutory Instrument 2004 No. 258 The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes (Scotland) Regulations 2004 (which implement the above Directive in Scotland);
 - ◆ Circular 2/2004 – Strategic Environmental Assessment For Development Planning; The Environmental Assessment Of Plans And Programmes (Scotland) Regulations 2004 (which provides guidance on the above Regulations);
 - ◆ The Environmental Assessment of Development Plans, Interim Planning Advice, Scottish Executive, August 2003.
- 1.2 Regulation 17 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes (Scotland) Regulations 2004, which deals with the scoping of plans, states that before deciding on the precise content and level of detail to be included in the Environmental Report, a scoping report must be prepared for the Consultation Authorities (Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, Scottish Natural Heritage and Historic Scotland) for their information and comment.
- 1.3 The Scottish Executive's Interim Planning Advice has been relied upon as providing the most comprehensive advice relating to the implementation of the Directive. The Scottish Executive intends to replace this Interim Advice with a formalised Planning Advice Note now the SEA Act is in force.

Objective of Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 1.4 The objective of the SEA Directive is “to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation of and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development”*. The Scoping Report, which is an integral part of the SEA process, is used to decide the scope and level of detail of an SEA and the assessment methods that are to be used. It also sets out the form and length of the consultation period. Any comments received from the Consultation Authorities must be taken account of when producing the Environmental Report (ER) to which it relates.

*Directive 2001/42/EC: Article 1

2 GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE WESTERN ISLES

Population and Demography

- 2.1 The Western Isles, also known as the 'Outer Hebrides', are a group of islands lying off the north-west coast of mainland Scotland. Part of the Gaelic heartland, they have a rich cultural heritage. Much of the economic and social activity is generated from within the islands, but they rely heavily on connections with the mainland for essential supplies and the export of goods.
- 2.2 In 2004, the Western Isles population was estimated to be 26,260 (GROS). Lewis, the largest of the Islands was the most populous with 18,383 residents; while the other five main island areas (Harris, North Uist, Benbecula, South Uist and Barra) each had populations of around 2,000 or below. The only large town in the Western Isles is Stornoway with approximately 5,600 people and is the only settlement which can really be described as having any 'urban' characteristics. Around 30% of the total population, some 8,000 people, live within Stornoway or the immediately vicinity encompassing Laxdale and Sandwick. The remaining population is scattered over 280 small townships.
- 2.3 The long term demographic trend is one of an ageing and declining population. Between the last census decades (1991-2001), the Western Isles lost 10.5% of its population, the greatest decline of any local authority area in Scotland. Demographic imbalance in the islands is a persistent concern for service providers in the Isles affecting the future provision of services such as education, housing and social care.
- 2.4 The Western Isles has a rich and diverse Hebridean culture with more Gaelic speakers than any other local authority area in Scotland (in 2001, 72% of the population had some Gaelic language ability).

Economic Structure of the Islands

- 2.5 The islands have a weak economic base concentrated on vulnerable sectors with a high reliance on primary industries and the public sector for employment. The main economic sectors in terms of employment are public administration, fishing and fish farming, distribution and construction. Unemployment is higher than the national average and most acute in remote rural localities and the estimated weekly wage is significantly below the national average.
- 2.6 By virtue of its proximity by sea, the Highland Council area provides the closest relationship to the mainland for the islands. The main sea-links from the islands are located at Ullapool, Uig (Skye) and Oban, with direct air links via Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Inverness airports. The physical remoteness from its main markets on mainland Britain and in Europe, coupled with the infrequency and cost of travel, places the islands at a distinct disadvantage in comparison to other rural parts of the country.
- 2.7 As a result, pressure for development is generally light with the real challenges facing the islands being how to sustain population levels and a diverse local economy.

Western Isles Environment

- 2.8 The natural environment of the islands is recognised internationally as being of global importance. A large percentage of land, areas of inland water and marine sites are designated for nature conservation purposes. The Islands are also home to a number of rare species such as the golden eagle, basking shark, whale, dolphin, otter and corncrake. The importance of the environment extends beyond the land to the seas around the Islands as the coast and coastal waters are also important for a range of species and habitats.
- 2.9 The following conservation designations are in place:
- ◆ 1 World Heritage Site - the Islands of St Kilda (the only site in the UK to have dual natural and cultural status);
 - ◆ Natura 2000 network consisting of 15 Special Protection Areas and 14 Special Areas of Conservation, including marine SACs;
 - ◆ 4 RAMSAR sites;
 - ◆ 1 Biosphere Reserve (Loch Druidibeg, South Uist);
 - ◆ 7 Marine Consultation Areas;
 - ◆ 3 National Scenic Area designations; covering over one-third of the Western Isles land area;
 - ◆ 53 Sites of Special Scientific Interest;
 - ◆ 4 National Nature Reserves;
 - ◆ 1 Local Nature Reserve (Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis);
 - ◆ 1 Designed Landscape and Historic Garden (Lews Castle Grounds, Stornoway);
 - ◆ 4 Outstanding Conservation Areas;
 - ◆ 213 Scheduled Ancient Monuments;
 - ◆ 260 Listed Buildings.

3 WESTERN ISLES LOCAL PLAN

Key Facts about Western Isles Local Plan

3.1 The key facts relating to this plan are set out in Table 1 below:-

Table 1 – Western Isles Local Plan key facts

Name of Responsible Authority	Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Title of plan/programme	Western Isles Local Plan
Legislative Requirement	The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997
Plan subject	Land Use and Development Control
Period covered by plan	Five Years
Frequency of updates	Five Yearly
Plan area	Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Boundary
Plan purpose and/or objectives	See Para 3.3 below
Contact point	Diane McPherson, Planning Officer

Local Plan Purpose

3.2 The principal purpose of the Local Plan is to set out the Council's detailed policies and proposals for the use, development, protection and improvement of land. The Local Plan provides the framework for the promotion of development opportunities and a basis for development control. As required by legislation, the Local Plan conforms to the Western Isles Structure Plan and is consistent with national planning guidance including Scottish Planning Policies (SPPs), National Planning Policy Guidelines (NPPGs) and Planning Advice Notes (PANs). This single island-wide Local Plan will replace the Local Plans which at present cover the Western Isles (see Appendix).

Local Plan Aims and Objectives

3.3 The Western Isles Local Plan along with Western Isles Structure Plan provides the statutory Development Plan. Working together their aim is:

- ◆ *to provide a land use strategy for sustaining the communities of the Western Isles.*

The Key Objectives of the Development Plan are to:

- ◆ *promote sustainability and improved quality of life*
- ◆ *encourage population retention, inward migration and address the imbalances in the demographic structure*
- ◆ *help support those who live and work in the Western Isles.*

Format and Scope of the Local Plan

- 3.4 The format of the Local Plan follows that of the existing Western Isles Structure Plan. The Local Plan has been set out so as to enable an easy transition to a single Development Plan in accordance with the Scottish Executive's proposal in the current Planning Bill.
- 3.5 The Local Plan comprises a Written Statement and Proposal Maps. The Written Statement establishes the context and sets down policies and proposals, along with the appropriate national or local policy context which justifies their inclusion. The plan contains policies and proposals as defined below:
- Policy: Statement of the Council's attitude towards the use, treatment or development of land. Policies indicate the way in which land use and change is to be managed. There may be more than one policy relating to an area or topic.
- Proposal: Represents a particular course of action (i.e. development or change) planned for a specific location, which is likely to be implemented during the life of the Local Plan.
- 3.6 The main subject areas that covered in the Western Isles Local Plan are:
- Development Management
 - Resource Management
 - Economic Development
 - Housing, Community and Leisure
 - Transportation
 - Stornoway.

Relationship with other plans, programmes and environmental objectives

- 3.7 A specific requirement of the Directive is to identify the Local Plan's relationship with other relevant Plans and Programmes, including European, national, strategic, local and community plans and programmes. A list of the plans, programmes and strategies that are being taken into account in the preparation of the Local Plan is provided in Table 2 (page 8) together with a summary of the purpose of these documents. Any conflicts between the provisions of the Local Plan and the provisions of any of the other relevant Plans and Programmes will be identified in the Environmental Report.

Significant Environmental Issues affecting the Western Isles

- 3.8 The significant environmental issues to be addressed in the preparation of the Local Plan are set out in Table 3 (page 10).

Table 2 – Plans, Programmes and Strategies

(to be analysed in the environmental report for their relationship with the Local Plan)

PLAN/PROGRAMME/STRATEGY	SUMMARY OF DOCUMENT	Originator
1. INTERNATIONAL and EUROPEAN		
LA21	Local Agenda 21 is the local community element of national and international initiative of the United Nations to protect and preserve planet Earth and the way of life of its people.	United Nations
Kyoto Agreement	UN Framework convention on climate change.	United Nations
EU Habitats and Birds Directives	Aims to protect the wild plants, animals, habitats and wild birds that make up our diverse natural environment. Allows for the designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA).	European Union
EIA Directive	This Directive shall apply to the assessment of the environmental effects of those public and private projects, which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.	European Union
EU Water Framework Directive	The purpose of the Directive is to establish a framework for the protection of inland surface waters (rivers and lakes), transitional water (estuaries), coastal waters and groundwater.	European Union
Convention on Biological Diversity	Convention commits signatories to develop national strategies, plans or programmes for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.	United Nations
2. NATIONAL		
National Planning Framework	Guides Scotland's spatial development up to 2005. This is currently under review.	Scottish Executive
NPPGs/SPPs and associated statutory instruments (Regulations, & Circulars)	Policy guidance, good practice advice notes, and guidance on policy implementation and procedure on planning issues of importance at a national level.	Scottish Executive
National Waste Plan 2003	Framework for the implementation of the National Waste Strategy.	SEPA
UK National Air Quality Strategy	Sets out health-based objectives for ambient air pollutants in the UK.	DEFRA
UK Biodiversity Action Plan 1994	Aims to conserve and enhance biological diversity within the UK.	UK Government
Scottish Biodiversity Strategy	Strategy for conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in Scotland	Scottish Executive
Scottish Biodiversity List 2006	List of Species and Habitats considered to be of Principal Importance for the purpose of Biodiversity Conservation in Scotland	Scottish Executive
Developing an Indicator Set (Report – May 2004)	A set of practical indicators of the state of Scotland's biodiversity, for which information is already available, and being updated on a regular basis.	Scottish Biodiversity Forum
Strategic Asset Capacity & Development Plan 2006/07	Identifies current capacity at water and wastewater treatment works and initial future plans for improvement	Scottish Water
Marine Fish Farming in Scotland	Guidelines on Siting Procedures and Principles	The Crown Estate
3. LOCAL		
Outer Hebrides Community Plan	Based around five forums – Sustainability and Environment; Lifelong and Community Learning; Gaelic Language and Culture; Community Wellbeing and the Local Economic Forum.	Outer Hebrides Community Plan Partnership (OHCPP)
Outer Hebrides Tourism Partnership Plan	Action plan for the development of tourism which works within the national framework	OHCPP

Western Isles Area Waste Plan (March 2003)	Framework for the management of municipal solid waste. Aims to reduce amount of waste and increase recycling and composting.	SEPA
Stornoway Regeneration Action Plan 2005-2008	Identification of detailed aims, objectives and proposals for tackling the regeneration of the main town in the Western Isles.	Stornoway Regeneration Group (SRG)
Stornoway Townscape Heritage Initiative 2006-2011	An initiative that seeks to use conservation of the built environment to secure the economic regeneration of an area.	SRG
Stornoway Conservation Area Management Plan 2006	A plan for the management of the outstanding conservation area and guidelines for development	CnES (Sustainable Communities)
CnES Corporate Strategy 2003-2007	A strategy to deliver the Local Authority's key aims and objectives	CnES (Internal Strategy)
Western Isles Structure Plan	A strategic vision for long term development of land within the Western Isles and the framework for the Local Plan.	CnES (Sustainable Communities)
Draft Local Design Guide	Setting out design guidance on detailed matters such as scale, form, setting in the landscape and the use of materials.	CnES (Sustainable Communities)
Considerations for Renewable Energy Developments in the Western Isles report	A framework to assist the assessment and determination of renewable energy development proposals in the Western Isles	CnES (Sustainable Communities)
Local Transport Strategy	Provides an integrated framework for the delivery of local transport policies and proposals.	CnES (Technical Services)
Local Housing Strategy	Sets the context for the delivery of housing needs in the Western Isles	CnES (Housing)
Outdoor Access Strategy (draft March 2006)	Provides the framework for the development of a core Path Plan.	CnES (Sustainable Communities)
Draft Outer Hebrides Cultural Strategy 2006	A framework for heritage, the arts, creative industries and Gaelic in the Islands	CnES (Sustainable Communities)
Western Isles Sports Strategy	A strategy for the provision of sports and associated facilities throughout the Western Isles	CnES (Sustainable Communities)
Contaminated Land Strategy	The identification of contaminated land within Western Isles	CnES (Sustainable Communities)
Local Air Quality Updating and Screening Assessment 2003	Update the findings of a previous report and assesses whether any of the air quality objectives will be exceeded in the Western Isles by 2010	CnES (Sustainable Communities)
Loch Roag Area Management Plans	For the management of fish farming within Loch Roag	SEPA, SNH, CnES and local fish farmers
Western Isles Landscape Character Assessment	An illustrated description and analysis of the landscape character of the Western Isles	SNH
SSSI Management Plans	Management Plans for each individual SSSI	SNH
Local Biodiversity Action Plan	Identification of habitats and species of value in the area.	CnES (Sustainable Communities)
Western Isles Woodland Strategy (November 2003)	The strategy provides the key objectives for the maintenance, enhancement and development of woodland in the Western Isles.	CnES (Sustainable Communities)
Loch nam Madadh EMS Management Scheme	Outlines the European importance of the site and how it will be managed to maintain its integrity	Loch nam Madadh EMS Management Group
Langavat SAC Management Plan	Outlines the European importance of the site and how it will be managed to maintain its integrity	Langavat cSAC Management Plan Steering Group
Loch Stiapabhat LNR Management Plan	Sets out why the site is important and details actions and projects which will contribute towards the LNR objectives	Loch Stiapabhat LNR Management Group
St Kilda Management Plan 2003-2008	An integrated approach to the management of the cultural and natural interests of the World Heritage Site	NTS, SNH, HS, CnES, MOD, QinetiQ

Table 3 - Significant Environmental Issues relevant to Western Isles Local Plan

Issue	Supporting data	Implications for plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Declining and ageing population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The census 2001 figures show a decline of 10.5% in the 10 years since the 1991 census. The breakdown of figures shows an imbalance in the age structure of the Western Isles in comparison to other areas in Scotland; ▪ GROS Population and Household Estimates / Projections and Vital Events ▪ Outer Hebrides Migration Study (due Aug 06). 	<p>Need to consider land use solutions to assist with attracting in-migration to the islands and ways to retain young people on the islands.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encouraging economic development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ National Planning Framework; ▪ Creating Communities of the Future; ▪ 2003 Western Isles Regional Accounts. 	<p>Need for positive policies which embrace the principles of sustainability and take account of the environment</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Need to accommodate growth in Greater Stornoway 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local Housing Strategy; ▪ Housing Needs Assessment 2006; ▪ Creating Communities of the Future; ▪ Stornoway Regeneration: Vision, Objectives & Actions; ▪ Stornoway Townscape Heritage Initiative ▪ Stornoway Conservation Area Management Plan 2006. 	<p>Need for policies to accommodate the regeneration of Greater Stornoway addressing pressure for housing and business sites while respecting the existing character of the town and minimising any detrimental impact on other areas of Western Isles.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Threat from coastal flooding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SEPA is to provide flood maps. Information is also being gathered through joint initiatives with SNH and with the EU Corepoint project; ▪ No of applications for planning consents below the 5m contour. 	<p>Need to put policies in place to take account of coastal flooding.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Water and Wastewater infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SW Settlement Wastewater Constraints list; ▪ SW Investment Growth Programme 2006-14; ▪ SW/CnES Wastewater Flow/Load Study (due Spring 2006); ▪ No. of new house applications in constrained areas; ▪ Scottish Water Asset Capacity & Development Plan 2006. 	<p>Need for policies to take account of constraints on development arising from need to upgrade the water supply and improve and extend waste water infrastructure throughout the islands.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Impact of development on the natural environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No. of natural heritage designations; ▪ LBAP Habitat and Species Actions Plans; ▪ MLURI Land Use Classification; ▪ Scottish Biodiversity List- habitats & species; ▪ State of UK BAP Priority Species & Habitats in the Western Isles. 	<p>Local Plan policies required to maintain and where possible enhance the natural environment to minimise any detrimental impact.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Impact of development on the built environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No. of designated outstanding conservation areas; ▪ No. of listed buildings; ▪ No. of archaeological sites and monuments; ▪ CnES Design Guidance; ▪ Stornoway conservation Area Management Plan. 	<p>Local Plan policies required to safeguard and enhance the built environment and to minimise any detrimental impact.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Impact of development on the landscape 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ NSAs; ▪ Landscape Character Assessment for Western Isles; ▪ CnES Design Guidance. 	<p>Local Plan policies required to safeguard and enhance the landscape and to minimise any detrimental impact.</p>

4 STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OF THE LOCAL PLAN

Proposed Timetable and Consultation Arrangements

4.1 While the Regulations require the SEA process to be fully integrated with the overall plan preparation process, this has not been wholly possible in this instance. With the preparation of the Western Isles Local Plan already underway the SEA of the Local Plan is being carried out during the remaining plan preparation stages. Accordingly a specific approach has been devised which still allows the SEA to inform and influence the preparation process through to plan adoption/completion. Details of how the Comhairle proposes to integrate the SEA process with the Local Plan process are set out in the Appendix.

4.2 The proposed timetable is as follows:

March - May 2006	Prepare Scoping Report and submit to Gateway
May - Aug 2006	Prepare draft Environmental Report (ER) Use to inform consideration of Finalised Local Plan representations, negotiations and modifications
August 2006	Comhairle approves draft ER for public consultation Comhairle approves proposed LP modifications (taking account of draft ER) for public consultation
Sept – Nov 2006	6 week consultation period on the draft Environmental Report (utilising the same period as the Local Plan consultation) Statutory 6 week consultation period for proposed Local Plan modifications
December 2006	Revise ER in light of consultation comments Taking account of ER consultation comments, Comhairle considers responses received on the proposed LP modifications prior to submitting final views to Public Local Inquiry (PLI)
early 2007	Hold PLI
2007	Post PLI modifications can take account of any further ER implications as appropriate
2007	Local Plan adoption

Strategic Environmental Assessment Methodology

4.3 SEA of the Western Isles Local Plan will be carried out in-house. The Comhairle will follow the guidance provided in the Scottish Executive Interim Planning Advice. A team consisting of staff drawn from a range of disciplines will assess the plan aims as well as each of the plan's policies and proposals. These will be assessed on an individual basis against the Environmental Objectives and Criteria as detailed in Table 4 (page 15). Comments received during consultation on the draft Local Plan will also inform the assessment process where relevant.

Adoption of Environmental Objectives

- 4.4 A key purpose of identifying relevant plans, programmes and strategies is to ensure that the environmental objectives of the Local Plan align with the environmental objectives of related policy statements.
- 4.5 The Interim Planning Advice states that a key part of the process is to adopt environmental protection objectives established at International, Community or Member State level, relevant to this Local Plan and to demonstrate the way those objectives have been taken into account during the plan's preparation. The Interim Planning guidance provides further specific advice on this matter and has translated the above requirement into a suggested list of environmental objectives and criteria.
- 4.6 The list of environmental objectives and associated criteria to be used in assessing the Local Plan follows those recommended in the Interim Planning Advice. They have been adapted to reflect local circumstances and priorities. The list is however not exhaustive and will be amended if necessary, during the process of undertaking this Environmental Assessment and Local Plan preparation.

Baseline Information

- 4.7 A list of baseline environmental data is shown in Table 5 (page 17). The table shows the relationship of the data to the SEA topics and environmental objectives. The majority of information that is presented is information already held and analysed in the context of the ongoing process of Development Plan preparation and monitoring. Any gaps or limitations in the baseline data will be highlighted in the Environmental Report. At present the major known gap in information relates to coastal flooding.
- 4.8 For the purposes of this SEA, and in accordance with the Regulations, this assessment deals only with environmental issues. The baseline data referred to in this assessment is therefore relevant to environmental considerations, although for the purposes of Local Plan preparation, social and economic indicators are also taken into account.
- 4.9 The Comhairle and its Community Planning partners are currently undertaking the collation of a 'State of the Environment' report, which will gather data on a wide range of environmental indicators to be updated every five years. It is hoped that once complete, this report can be used as a reference dataset to complement the baseline environment statistics gathered together for this SEA.

The Likely Evolution of the Environment without the Local Plan

- 4.10 The Strategic Environmental Assessment process involves an assessment of the significant environmental implications of implementing the plan as well as an assessment of the evolution of the environment without the Local Plan. It is generally accepted that in the absence of planning control the effect would be that development would occur in an ad hoc manner. This would result in inappropriate development in inappropriate locations. For the purposes of the Scoping Report the following sets out some of the potential consequences which might result from the lack of a planning regime for the Western Isles:
- ◆ the proliferation of poor quality development including the use of inappropriate building design and materials;
 - ◆ the likelihood that coalescence of settlements would occur resulting in the loss of community identity;
 - ◆ the concentration of development within areas of demand leading to decline in the more remote areas;
 - ◆ development likely to impact on available infrastructure resources and an inability to take a structured approach to service delivery;
 - ◆ uncontrolled development could lead to unacceptable levels of damage to landscape and natural heritage interests as well as quality agricultural land;
 - ◆ harm to significant cultural and built environment designations and resources;
 - ◆ loss of recreational green spaces;
 - ◆ new development in areas inaccessible by public transport could lead to continued and increasing dependence on car borne travel;
 - ◆ possibility of development in areas of high risk from flooding;
 - ◆ increased air pollution in the absence of land use and transport planning;
 - ◆ increased water pollution in the absence of control of discharges and sustainable drainage systems.
- 4.11 One of the main objectives of the land use planning system is *“to maintain and enhance the quality of the natural and built environment”*and its purpose is..... *“to resolve conflicts and manage change”* (SPP 1). It is reasonable therefore to assume that uncontrolled development would result in unmanaged change which would not meet the aspirations of the European Directive on Strategic Environmental Assessment.

Table 4 – Environmental Objectives and Criteria

* In applying the criterion the question asked in each case is as follows: “Assuming the aim/policy/proposal is implemented as intended; that the development plan is applied as a whole; and if a planning application was made and determined in accordance with this policy, does/is...”

No	SEA Objectives	Environmental Criterion *	SEA topics
1	Maintain the quality of the Western Isles as a place to live, work and visit	Is the aim/policy/proposal likely to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ promote sustainable development on the islands; ▪ provide infrastructure and locally accessible facilities and services; ▪ encourage appropriate in-migration and population retention ▪ improve the natural and built environment in urban and rural areas or is it likely to have significant adverse effects on them?	Population, material assets, cultural heritage, landscape, human health, climatic factors water, air, soils, biodiversity, fauna, flora.
2	Promote safe and healthy living in the Western Isles	Is the aim/policy/proposal likely to significantly help to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ provide local health facilities and services; ▪ encourage healthy activities; ▪ maintain the quality of the local environment (air, land and water); ▪ promote a safe and secure environment or is it likely to have significant adverse effects on them?	Human health, climatic factors water, air, soils, biodiversity, fauna, flora.
3	Improve the quality and liveability of settlements	Is the aim/policy/proposal likely to significantly help to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ respect aspects of urban form, settlement pattern and identity in ways that contribute to sustainable development; ▪ promote good building design; ▪ enhance the quality and range of open space in the main settlements; ▪ regenerate degraded environments or is it likely to significantly damage or diminish building character or townscape or its enjoyment and understanding?	Population, human health, material assets, cultural heritage, biodiversity, landscape.
4	Safeguard general landscape character and visual amenity	Is the aim/policy/proposal likely to significantly help to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ enhance general landscape quality and local distinctiveness; ▪ safeguard important views and the visual amenity of areas or is it likely to have significant adverse effects on them?	Landscape, biodiversity, material assets, cultural heritage
5	Enhance and promote the historic and cultural environment	Is the aim/policy/proposal likely to significantly help to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ protect and enhance the historic and cultural environments or is it likely to have significant adverse effects on them?	Population, material assets, cultural heritage.

6	Achieve effective stewardship of the Islands' ecology	<p>Is the aim/policy/proposal likely to significantly help to protect, safeguard, enhance or restore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ priority habitats and species as defined in the LBAP; ▪ sites designated nationally, regionally and locally; ▪ the Western Isles biodiversity <p>or is it likely to significantly damage or diminish their enjoyment?</p>	Biodiversity, flora, fauna, water, air, soils, landscape.
7	Protect and enhance the water environment	<p>Is the aim/policy/proposal likely to significantly help;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ reduce pollution; ▪ improve drinking water quality; ▪ conserve groundwater/surface water resources; ▪ minimise flood risk; ▪ protect the marine and coastal environment <p>or is it likely to have significant adverse effects on them?</p>	Water, biodiversity, fauna, flora, climatic factors, human health, population, material assets, landscape.
8	Protect the environment from pollution	<p>Is the aim/policy/proposal likely to significantly help to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ maintain air quality ▪ avoid and reduce harmful pollutants; ▪ reduce emissions from transport and industry; ▪ minimise noise pollution <p>or is it likely to significantly exacerbate risks from them?</p>	Population, human health, water, air, climatic factors, soils, biodiversity, flora, fauna, material assets.
9	Reduce energy consumption and the contribution to climate change	<p>Does the aim/policy/proposal significantly help to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ reduce travel by the private car and increase use of public transport where practical; ▪ promote walking and cycling; ▪ increase the use of renewable sources of energy; ▪ reduce energy inputs into the building process <p>or is it likely to significantly increase energy use?</p>	Air, climatic factors, water, biodiversity, population, human health, material assets.
10	Promote sustainable resource use and waste minimisation	<p>Is the aim/policy/proposal likely to significantly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ reduce the consumption of material assets e.g. fossil fuels, land, minerals, building materials; ▪ increase reuse and recycling <p>or is it likely to increase waste arisings?</p>	Human health, water, air, soils, material assets.

Table 5 –Baseline Environmental information - Topics, Objectives, Indicators and Source

No.	SEA Topic	Key Objectives	Indicators	Sources (see note of abbreviations at bottom of table)
1.	<i>Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna</i>	Objective Ref: 1, 2; 3; 4; 6; 7; 8; 9.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • number / area of international, national and local nature conservation sites and descriptions of relevant interest; • species & habitats identified as priorities in national /local biodiversity action plans; • reported condition / level of damage to designated sites; • net change in protected and priority species (identified in current Action Plans); • achievements of LBAP actions / targets; • relevant aspects of geology. 	SNH; CnES; DEFRA; SEPA; IEMA; NTS; SE; BSBI; BTO; DCS; JNCC; RSPB; FRS; Woodland Trust; Biodiversity Action Plans (UK BAP); National Biodiversity Network (NBN).
2.	<i>Water</i>	Objective Ref: 1; 2; 4; 6; 7; 8; 9; 10.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extent of lochs and other wetland including peat land; • coasts categorised as developed / underdeveloped and isolated; • quality of rivers and freshwater bodies (biological and chemical); • quality and quantity of aquifers / groundwater resources; • river catchments and water courses; • number of new developments incorporating sustainable drainage techniques; • areas of future fluvial or coastal flood risk; • water use and availability – storage capacity and associated infrastructure. 	BGS; CnES; SEPA; SE; SNH; DTI; MLURI Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH); Scottish Water; Water Industry Commissioner for Scotland; BGS Technical Report <i>Supply and demand of sand and gravel in the Western Isles ((1993)</i> ; HR Wallingford report <i>Survey of coastal erosion in the Western Isles (1995)</i> .
3.	<i>Soil</i>	Objective Ref: 1; 2; 6; 8; 10.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • amount of good quality agricultural land; • changes to soil quality; • amount of waste generated in the Western Isles and disposed of; • amount of waste recycled, composted or recovered in the area; • operational mineral workings; • preferred sites safeguarded for mineral extraction. 	SEPA; CnES; BGS; SE; ODPM; SNH; MLURI; Audit Scotland; Soil Resources Institute (SILSO).

4.	<i>Air and Climatic Factors</i>	Objective Ref: 1; 2; 6; 7; 8; 9; 10.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • locations where air quality thresholds of key pollutants have reached or are approaching unacceptable levels; • number / extent of Air Quality Management Areas; • traffic count on significant roads within the Western Isles; • modal split of travel to work or study; • car ownership / bus patronage; • improvements / extensions made to public transport systems and associated facilities; • number of planning consents and areas safeguarded for renewable energy projects. 	SEPA; CnES; SE; SNH; SCROL; DfT; Air Pollution Information System; Air Quality Archive; SHS: The Carbon Trust National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory; Air Quality Archive; Met Office; OFGEM; Renewable Energy Statistics Database (RESTATS); UK Climatic Impacts Programme; Scenario of Climatic Change for Islands within the BIC Region.
5.	<i>Population and Human Health</i>	Objective Ref: 1; 2; 3; 4; 7; 8; 9; 10.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • changes / trends in demography; • household characteristics / composition and tenure; • vital events and life expectancy for men and women; • mortality by cause; • percentage of population not getting minimum level of healthy exercise; • recorded crimes per 1,000 of the population; • number of road traffic accidents; • proportion of population living within consultation distance of notifiable industry; • number / concentration of people affected by ambient noise (noise complaints); • number of new building applications and builds; • housing association development completions; • housing register waiting list; • percentage of population in Fuel Poverty; • housing conditions survey; •crofting tenure and characteristics; • contaminated and derelict land; • extent of coastline/soft coasts vulnerable to erosion by the sea; • operational and closed waste disposal and management sites and any particular environmental problems associated with them. 	GROS; ONS; SCROL; SNS; CnES; SE ; SNH; BGS; NHS Health Scotland Department of Health; Health Education Board for Scotland; Home Office Research and Statistics; Health Protection Agency; Scottish Health Statistics (IDS); Health and Safety Executive; Royal Environmental Health Institute for Scotland; 2003 Western Isles Regional Accounts; Western Isles Community Well Being Plan.

6.	<i>Material Assets and Cultural Heritage</i>	Objective Ref: 1; 3; 4; 5; 7; 8; 9; 10.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • areas identified for townscape enhancement; • outstanding conservation areas; • number of listed buildings by category; • number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments on the Sites and Monument Register; • sites of national or local archaeological importance; • areas where archaeological interest is uncertain but potentially significant; • % of listed buildings and archaeological sites at risk; • historic gardens and designed landscapes; • concentrations of architecturally or historically interesting buildings or other cultural heritage interests; • number of art and community facilities. 	NTS; SE; ODPM; SNS CnES; SNH; Empty Homes Agency; ; Historic Scotland; PASTMAPS; Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS).
7.	<i>Landscape</i>	Objective Ref: 1; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • landscape character including any distinctive features or associations based on landscape character assessment; • areas designated for their national landscape importance and reasons for their designation / description of their special qualities and features; • important open areas identified to retain the distinctive setting of settlements / buildings. 	NTS; SNH; CnES; SE; ODPM.
8.	<i>Inter Relationship Between above factors</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cumulative effects of different development types; • areas sensitive to an accumulation of different environmental effects; • areas particularly sensitive or under particular pressure to change. 	

Abbreviations:

BGS British Geological Survey)	BSBI Botanic Society of the British Isles	BTO British Trust for Ornithology
CnES Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	DCS Deer Commission for Scotland	DEFRA Dept. for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DfT Department for Transport	DTI Department of Trade and Industry	FRS Fisheries Research Scotland
GROS General Register Office for Scotland	IEMA Institute of Env'n. Mngt. and Assessment	JNCC Joint Nature Conservation Committee
MLURI Macaulay Land Use Research Institute	OFGEM Office of Gas and Electricity Markets	ONS Office of National Statistics
RSPB Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	SCROL Scottish Census Results Online	SE Scottish Executive
SEPA Scottish Environment Protection Agency	SHS Scottish Household Survey	SNH Scottish Natural Heritage

5 SCOPE & LEVEL OF DETAIL PROPOSED FOR THE SEA

Proposed Assessment Tools and Techniques

- 5.1 The key stages in the process of undertaking an Environmental Assessment of the Western Isles Local Plan are those identified in the Interim Planning Advice.
- 5.2 The Plan's aims, policies and proposals will be generally assessed against the Environmental Objectives and criteria that the Comhairle intends to adopt as set out in Section 4 of this report.

Transboundary Issues

- 5.3 The SEA is required to take account of the transboundary effects on other European Member States, where appropriate. It is not considered that these effects are relevant to Local Planning matters. Copies of all relevant documents relating to the Local Plan, including the Strategic Environmental Assessment, will be circulated to neighbouring Local Authorities.

Consideration of Alternatives

- 5.4 The Strategic Environmental Assessment process will identify, describe and assess reasonable alternatives for the plan's policy framework and the plan's spatial strategy and choices about general locations of development. Planning practitioners have routinely been in the habit of considering policy options and alternative spatial development options during Local Plan preparation and monitoring work. The Strategic Environmental Assessment process now requires this to be documented explicitly. Where reasonable alternatives are considered, these will be documented within the Environmental Report, in accordance with the Interim Planning Advice.

Checking the Policy Range of the Plan

- 5.5 It is important that the Local Plan is checked to ensure that all the relevant environmental issues and objectives are covered by policies, before assessing the policies themselves. The recommended approach is to develop a checklist of all potentially relevant topic areas derived from SPPs, NPPGs and the Structure Plan. The list of Environmental Objectives and criteria will assist in this part of the process. It must be borne in mind however that, as stated in paragraph 3.4, the Western Isles Local Plan has been set out so as to enable an easy transition to a single Development Plan. Accordingly, issues covered in the approved Structure Plan that have no more local aspect are not repeated. Instead the Local Plan cross references with the relevant Structure Plan policy.

Assessing the Plans Policies and Proposals

- 5.6 The key objective of SEA is to assess each policy and site specific proposal in the plan to highlight any significant effects on the environment. The method proposed is to measure each policy and proposal against the adopted set of environmental objectives and criteria and present this in matrix form. A specimen matrix is shown in Table 6 (page 21).

Identification of Uncertainties and Mitigating Measures

- 5.7 Having undertaken the initial assessment of the Plan's aims, policies and proposals, potential negative significant environmental effects and key uncertainties will be identified. Any proposed measures to prevent, reduce or offset significant adverse effects of plan implementation will be identified at this stage and any difficulties such as a lack of technical information will be detailed.

Table 6 Example Assessment Matrix

Policy/Proposal: LP/				
Purpose of the Policy/proposal:				
Obj No	SEA Objective	Environmental Criterion	Summary score	Reasoning for score
X	XXXX	Is the aim/policy/ proposal likely to significantly contribute to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ XXXXX or is it likely to significantly exacerbate risks?		
Note of other effects eg short, medium, long term, permanent or temporary, secondary cumulative or synergistic:				
Summary of policy/proposal effects:				
Options for mitigation or modification:				

Key to scoring:

- +** Significant positive impact
- 0** Not relevant or neutral impact
- Significant negative impact
- d/k** Insufficient information available to take an informed view
- mm** Mitigation required

6 NEXT STEPS

Proposed Consultation Timescales and Methods

- 6.1 Regulation 17 requires the authority to give notice of the intended length of the consultation period allowed after the preparation of the Draft and Finalised Environmental Reports. The proposed timetable is detailed at paragraph 4.2 above. Details of the consultation arrangements and how the Comhairle proposes to integrate the SEA process with the Local Plan process can be found at Appendix 1.

Proposed Monitoring Measures

- 6.2 Monitoring is an integral part of Local Plan preparation. Planning authorities are required to ensure that statutory plans maintain their relevance by addressing current and emerging land use and environmental issues and that they contain robust policies for the promotion and control of development.
- 6.3 The Environmental Assessment Regulations require authorities to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the Western Isles Local Plan and to identify any unforeseen adverse effects at an early stage and to undertake appropriate remedial action.
- 6.4 It is intended that a set of indicators and targets are established that will enable effective monitoring of the plans environmental implications and the views of the Consultation Authorities are welcome on this and other relevant matters.

APPENDIX

PROPOSED TIMETABLE & CONSULTATION ARRANGEMENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In line with Scottish Executive proposals to modernise and streamline the planning system, the Comhairle approved a new approach to Development Planning. As part of this approach the Comhairle decided to amalgamate the existing five local plan areas into one and to prepare a single island-wide plan. (The status of the existing Local Plans at that time is set out below under Development Plan Framework). Preparation of the Western Isles Local Plan (WILP) began in June 2004 with the intention that it would closely follow the format of the Western Isles Structure Plan approved in December 2003.
- 1.2 The Comhairle agreed this approach on the basis that the extensive work carried out on the existing plan areas and in the preparation of the Structure Plan would not be lost. Consequently work on the new Local Plan has drawn heavily on earlier survey and research.
- 1.3 Given this focused approach it was anticipated that the new Local Plan would be prepared and adopted within a timescale that would not require a formal SEA. Informal SEA work was carried out during preparation of the draft Local Plan drawing on early engagement with key stakeholders, including SEPA and SNH.

2.0 CURRENT POSITION

- 2.1 A finalised version of the Western Isles Local Plan was put on deposit for the statutory six-week period from 31 October to 9 December 2005. Over 400 representations were received and while progress has been made in processing them a number of factors have emerged that have implications for the programme through to adoption.
- 2.2 The nature of objections received as part of the Finalised Local Plan consultation will require a lengthy negotiation period and will probably result in a PLI. The Scottish Executive has also notified all Local Authorities of a recent European Court of Justice ruling regarding the Habitats Directive. The implications of the ruling are being considered by the Executive but it is likely to result in delays to the progress of the Local Plan. A number of objections relate to the Habitats ruling and they cannot be resolved at this time.
- 2.3 As a result it has been necessary to re-programme the subsequent stages of the Local Plan process. As the Local Plan will not now be complete before 22 July 2006, legislation requires that a Strategic Environmental Assessment of it be undertaken.
- 2.4 A meeting was held with the Scottish Executive SEA Gateway representative and ways forward were identified. The Comhairle subsequently approved that a SEA be undertaken in parallel with the remaining stages of the Local Plan process and the Local Plan timetable will be adjusted to accommodate this.

3.0 TIMETABLE & CONSULTATION ARRANGEMENTS

- 3.1 The SEA process is linked to the associated plan process from the outset, allowing for consultation during the preparation of the plan (SEA Regulation 25). As the SEA for the Western Isles Local Plan is being undertaken during the preparation process it is proposed to accommodate it and appropriately incorporate outcomes through the remaining plan preparation stages. Following approval of the Scoping Report, the Environmental Report

will be drafted and it is intended that it be put out for public comment along with the proposed modifications to the Local Plan prior to a formal Public Local Inquiry.

3.2 The proposed Local Plan modifications will be framed to take account of the emerging Environmental Report as well as the representations submitted on the Finalised Plan. Any issues raised through consultation on the draft Environmental Report can be taken account of in the subsequent stages as the Local Plan is progressed through to completion.

3.3 The following timetable is proposed:

March - May 2006	Prepare Scoping Report and submit to Gateway
May - Aug 2006	Prepare draft Environmental Report (ER) Use to inform consideration of Finalised Local Plan representations, negotiations and modifications
August 2006	Comhairle approves draft ER for public consultation Comhairle approves proposed LP modifications (taking account of draft ER) for public consultation
Sept – Nov 2006	6 week consultation period on the draft Environmental Report (utilising the same period as the Local Plan consultation) Statutory 6 week consultation period for proposed Local Plan modifications
December 2006	Revise ER in light of consultation comments Taking account of ER consultation comments, Comhairle considers responses received on the proposed LP modifications prior to submitting final views to Public Local Inquiry (PLI)
early 2007	Hold PLI
2007	Post PLI modifications can take account of any further ER implications as appropriate
2007	Local Plan adoption

3.4 In line with SEA Regulations 17 and 24, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar now seeks the agreement of the designated consultation authorities to the approach they intend taking to meet the SEA requirements for the Western Isles Local Plan as set out in this statement.

Development Plan Framework

Western Isles Structure Plan approved December 2003

Broadbay Local Plan adopted January 2002

Uists and Benbecula Local Plan adopted January 2000

Barra and Vatersay Local Plan adopted May 1996

Harris Local Plan finalised January 2000 (not taken to adoption)

Finalised Western Isles Local Plan Oct 2005.

(A Consultative draft of the Rural Lewis Local Plan was produced in 1998, however it was not taken through a public consultation process.)