



## DEVELOPMENT CONTROL THATCHED BUILDING POLICY

**OBJECTIVE** To ensure the preservation, renovation and viable use of thatched buildings of the Western Isles.

### SCOPE

- 1.1 This Policy applies to buildings in the Western Isles (both listed and unlisted) which were built in a traditional style with a thatched roof. For the purpose of this Policy they will be referred to as “*thatched buildings*”.
- 1.2 The Policy will apply to thatched buildings which fall within the following categories:
- a) Building in good all-round condition, including a (“*Excellent*”) complete traditional thatched roof and inhabited (or reasonably capable of such).
  - b) Building inhabited (or reasonably capable of such). (“*Good*”) Roof timbering still basically sound but thatch deteriorating.
  - c) Building inhabited (or reasonably capable of such). (“*Partially modified roof*”) Roof modified with artificial underlay and thatch on top.
  - d) Building inhabited (or reasonably capable of such). (“*Fully modified roof*”) Modern replacement roof capable of taking a thatch covering (e.g. felt) and original form of building retained .
  - e) Building vacant, roof timbers collapsing and interior (“*Poor*”) beyond saving.
  - f) Roof collapsed but all original walls (and end stacks (“*Ruinous*”) of former houses) remain.
- a)
- b)
- 1.3 The Policy will **not apply** to former thatched buildings where,
- c) any of the outer walls have collapsed (and which may therefore be described as being “*derelict*”), or
  - d) a permanent replacement roof has been installed which would be incapable of being covered with thatch (e.g. tiles or slates).
- 1.4 For the sake of clarification, derelict buildings, or buildings which are unsafe, will be dealt with in accordance with the Comhairle’s Vacant House Strategy whereby the remains will be cleared and, wherever possible, stone will be recycled into dry stone walls or similar amenity projects.

## **GRANT AID**

- 2.1 To see that the terms of the objective are met, the Comhairle will seek to maximise the use of appropriate grant assistance through the following:-
- a) Staff in the Environmental Services Department will work with Historic Scotland to maintain and enhance the use of ring-fenced re-thatching grants. To this end the Comhairle will seek the allocation of block grants from Historic Scotland which will allow the Comhairle to administer re-thatching grant on a devolved basis.
  - b) The terms and availability of re-thatching grants will be publicised generally and made known, in particular, to the owners and tenants of thatched buildings.
  - c) The terms and availability of house improvement grants, and grants from Western Isles Enterprise, which may supplement re-thatching grants will also be publicised.
  - d) With regard to house improvement grants, the Comhairle will seek additional consents from the Secretary of State to offer grant on a higher approved expense for listed buildings and will seek to maximise the help it may offer through its "*Social Fund*" in accordance with the Comhairle's current housing grant policies.
  - e) The Comhairle will seek to improve the potential for grant aid through the designation of clusters of thatched buildings as Conservation Areas provided Historic Scotland would be prepared to classify them as "*Outstanding*" and be prepared, with the Comhairle, to establish Townschemes.
  - f) The Comhairle will encourage and, insofar as it is able, support the use of Trusts (e.g. The Garenin Trust and the Uists Building Preservation Trust) which are able to access grant aid for the restoration of thatched buildings.
  - g) The Comhairle will explore, and will seek to apply, any appropriate new or innovative forms of funding (e.g. the Heritage Lottery Fund's Townscape Heritage Initiative).

## **MONITORING**

- 3.1 To see that the terms of the objective are met, monitoring will be carried out on the following basis:
- h) All thatched buildings will be visited in the course of routine duties by staff in the Environmental Services Department. The condition of the buildings will be assessed in accordance with the categories defined above and records made. Such records will include details of ownership/tenancy. The information collected will be used to prepare a database of all thatched buildings in the Western Isles, which will be regularly updated. The information will be passed on to Historic Scotland for use in its periodic re-survey of listed buildings;
  - i) Where a monitoring visit reveals a deterioration in the fabric of the thatch, or other elements of a thatched building, staff in the Environmental Services Department will contact the owner and/or tenant and will encourage works to secure repairs and will remind the owner/tenant of the grant opportunities that are available.
  - j) Restoration or alteration works to thatched buildings will be monitored by staff in the Environmental Services Department to ensure conformity with any permissions or consents granted.

k)

## **APPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 Any applications for consents to restore, alter, extend or change the use of thatched buildings will be determined in accordance with the terms of the Objective and bearing in mind the advice and requirements of :
- e) National Planning Policy and Guidance (including Historic Scotland's Memorandum of Guidance on Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas and its Technical Advice Notes on thatched buildings).
  - f) The Western Isles Structure Plan and appropriate local plans.
  - g) The Development Control Conservation Policy.
- 4.2 In cases where a thatched building is not listed, the Comhairle will encourage proposals which involve the restoration or provision of a new thatched roof, albeit that the roof is not constructed in a traditional manner (e.g. involves thatch over felt rather than over turf). Sympathetic alterations and extensions to the original thatched building will also be considered acceptable where these will give it a viable future.

## **ENFORCEMENT**

- 5.1 In cases where it appears that work is being undertaken to a thatched building without any required consent, or contrary to the terms of any consent that has been issued, the Comhairle will, where expedient, take enforcement action in accordance with the terms of its Development Control Enforcement Policy and Development Control Conservation Policy.
- 5.2 Payment of any Thatched Building Maintenance Grant, Housing Grant, or any other grant administered by the Comhairle, will be strictly on the condition that all relevant consents have been applied for, granted and complied with.

## **SKILLS & MATERIALS**

- 6.1 The Comhairle is aware of a current shortage of skilled thatchers and cutters of thatch material (mainly muran and, less often, heather or reed). Accordingly, the Comhairle will:
- l) Encourage the holding of thatching skills training courses.
  - m) Maintain an up-to-date register of thatchers and cutters.
  - n) Identify suitable areas where material can be obtained with the consent of landowners/tenants.

## **WORKING WITH OTHERS**

- 7.1 To see that the terms of the objective are met, the Comhairle will liaise with, and seek the assistance of, Historic Scotland; Care and Repair; Cairdean nan Taighean Tugha (Friends of the Thatched Buildings); The Southern Isles Amenity Trust; The Garenin Trust; local building preservation trusts and other such organisations as appropriate.