

# The North Highland Initiative

*Embraces the Built Environment*

The built environment not only affects the environment and appeal to tourists but also, directly, quality of life of all inhabitants. The NORTH HIGHLAND INITIATIVE in collaboration with THE PRINCE'S FOUNDATION FOR THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT and THE PRINCE'S REGENERATION TRUST now launches a series of initiatives within the arena of the built environment.

Previous generations, from distant antiquity until much more recent times, have bestowed the North Highlands with a rich built legacy. Over the last 50 years, however, development has generally been piecemeal and often out of character with its surroundings.



# The North Highland Initiative Embraces the Built Environment

*The built heritage of the area has great underdeveloped potential. However, much of it currently lies neglected and under appreciated. Also, as with other places across the UK, the use of the car in the North Highlands has been put before the comfort of the pedestrian in recent decades, social housing has been separated from private residences, and work, shopping, education and health have become increasingly disconnected from the places where people live. Traditional materials have mostly been replaced by cheaper but less durable alternatives and the general proportions of buildings have made them alien to the beauty of the natural surroundings. In a flat, exposed setting, single new buildings can have a disproportionately big impact on the landscape. There are, however, different ways of building and planning that can positively enhance the environment whilst meeting the needs of residents.*

**North Highland Products Limited**, trading under The Mey Selections brand name, formed the first venture of the Initiative, and it has already successfully helped to raise the profile of produce from the area. This year NHP Ltd is on course to achieve an annual turnover of £9 million and now has over 300 farmer members.

In July 2006 the tourism brand was launched, which has since brought together through the **North Highland Tourism Operators Group** over 150 bed and breakfast owners, hoteliers, cruise-ship operators, retailers and others to help realise the great potential for long-term tourism growth in Caithness, Sutherland and Ross-shire. This model of broad representation and pooled experience has been developed together with VisitScotland, the local enterprise agency, HIE Caithness and Sutherland, and the Highland Council.

**The Prince's Regeneration Trust (PRT)**, founded to help breathe new life into redundant historic buildings, has been active in Scotland for several years and had a number of considerable successes with buildings such as Stanley Mills in Perthshire and Anchor Mills in Paisley. The Regeneration Trust will be working collaboratively at Castletown and elsewhere in the North Highlands as part of the Built Environment Programme to help find viable new uses for key heritage buildings and to raise partnership funding to bring about their restoration, particularly where there are wider benefits to local communities.

**The Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment (PFBE)** is an educational charity which exists to improve the quality of people's lives by teaching and practising timeless and ecological ways of planning, designing and building.

The Foundation believes that if we can understand and apply time-tested principles, building in a sustainable way, we will reap improvements in public health, in livelier and safer streets and in a more affordable lifestyle for families and individuals. We also believe that neighbourhoods exhibiting these sustainable characteristics will increase, rather than decrease, in value over time.

LEFT TO RIGHT: Scoping Day held at Castletown. Anchor Mills Paisley, a The Prince's Regeneration Trust project





THE NORTH HIGHLAND INITIATIVE was launched in August 2005 at the Castle of Mey, to promote the produce, tourism and built environment of Caithness, Sutherland and Ross-shire.

## BUILT ENVIRONMENT ADVISORY GROUP

Following on from the successful ventures established by the North Highland Initiative to promote the produce and tourism of Caithness, Sutherland and Ross-shire, a **Built Environment Advisory Group** has been established including representatives from The Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment and The Prince's Regeneration Trust. The Advisory Group will work with PFBE and PRT to accomplish a series of projects and studies to creatively explore the potential of the remarkable built heritage of the area and to improve the quality, character and sustainability of contemporary development.



Castlehill, Caithness

## NORTH HIGHLAND INITIATIVE PROJECTS

### A Pattern Book for the North Highlands

As an initial part of the programme, the Advisory Group, in collaboration with PRT and PFBE is working stakeholders towards the creation of a regional **Pattern Book for the North Highlands** to reflect local urban, architectural and landscape traditions, as suitable guidance for future developments. This will be prepared with the intention that a Kite-mark will be awarded as an incentive for excellence in new developments that meet the aspirations of the Pattern Book. Similarly, the Advisory Group is developing a scheme to recognise excellence in the restoration of heritage and vernacular buildings.

### Inventory of Disused Vernacular Buildings

The solidly-built but neglected shells of many farm buildings, cottages and other buildings are to be found scattered across the region. Working with farmers and landowners, a project to record an **inventory of disused vernacular buildings** has been initiated. This inventory is essential, as until the full extent of the situation is known we will not be able to fully ascertain the potentially huge economic potential of these buildings and the skills and resources that may be required for their restoration.

The Built Environment Programme hopes to work with other agencies and businesses to promote the development of craft skills, without which the restoration and continuing development of a quality built environment will be hard to achieve. In addition to working towards more accredited training, the development of apprenticeships will be fundamental to plans for the expansion of skills and the creation of rewarding jobs.





A former grain mill

### St Mary's Church as a Centre for Glass in Architecture and the Built Environment

The Prince's Regeneration Trust is working collaboratively across the region as part of the Built Environment Programme to help find viable new uses for key buildings and to raise partnership funding to bring about their restoration, particularly where there are wider benefits to local communities. In May 2007, a workshop was held in Lybster with local parties to explore the potential for reuse of **St Mary's Church as a Centre for Glass in Architecture and the Built Environment.**

### Dunbeath

At **Dunbeath**, a design competition has been organised by the Built Environment Group that will hopefully inspire an exemplary small-scale development. This competition will demonstrate the added value of considering a number of individual dwellings as part of a coherent composition, where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

### Castletown & Castlehill

At **Castletown** and **Castlehill** a broad range of residents, business people, farmers, planners and others with an interest in the village and the area, have combined forces to forge a new holistic vision for the village through an Enquiry by Design (EbD™) workshop, which will help strengthen the bonds between the rich heritage of the village and its aspirations for the future. The radical approach being taken at Castletown, to forge a long-term plan for sustainable growth and regeneration will hopefully become a model for the entire region and beyond.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

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HRH The Prince Charles, Duke of Rothesay, launched the North Highlands Initiative (NHI) in August 2005 to promote and develop the economy and to support the rural communities of the North Highlands. The NHI was formed as a direct result of The Duke's involvement in bringing together members of the community, local businesses and the tourism industry to address some of the challenges facing communities in the far north of Scotland by creating a powerful regional identity. Its three main objectives are: firstly, to improve distribution and access to UK markets and beyond; secondly, to encourage sensitive and sustainable tourism; thirdly, to breathe new life into the rich and diverse built heritage and to improve the quality, sustainability and character of new development.

HRH The Prince Charles, Duke of Rothesay launched the Built Environment Programme of the North Highland Initiative in Caithness on 31st July 2007.



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The Prince's Charities is a group of not-for-profit organisations of which The Prince of Wales is President; 16 of the 18 Charities were founded personally by The Prince. The group is the largest multi-cause charitable enterprise in the United Kingdom, raising over £110 million annually. The organisations are active across a broad range of areas including opportunity and enterprise, education, health, the built environment, responsible business, the natural environment and the arts. The charities reflect The Prince of Wales's long-term and innovative perspective, and seek to address areas of previously unmet need.